"A GUIDE TO NATIONAL SOCIALISM"

THE THIRD REICH AND RICHARD WAGNER

by

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This dissertation is submitted
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted towards fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music at the University of Cape Town, has not been submitted by me previously for a degree at another university.

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INTRODUCTION

This study of Richard Wagner's life and works and their supposed influence on Adolf Hitler and the founders of the Third Reich was prompted by the readily available amount of extremely divergent opinion on the subject. Remarks such as the following are common:

> As long as Wagner's operas continue to be performed there remains the possibility of a return to some National-Socialist doctrine of salvation.[1]
>
> German intellectuals would not have opened their arms quite so readily to Hitler if they had not been prepared for it by Wagner, Bayreuth and the Wagnerians.[2]
>
> Wagner was a self-centred egotist of the worst kind. He cared for absolutely nobody. He was an anti-Semitic monster who took other men's wives and money — he should prove fascinating to play.[3]
>
> The music of the Nazis is not the Prelude to Die Meistersinger but the Horst-Wessellied, they deserve nothing better and no other respect can be paid them.[4]

The mere mention of Wagner's name in this connection often is enough to provoke considerable hostility, particularly amongst Jews, and an almost inevitable reference to the Nazi regime.

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1 Hans Rothe, quoted in Martin van Amerongen, Wagner: A Case History, trans. Stewart Spencer and Dominic Cakebread (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1983), p. 145.

2 Erich Kuby, ibid.

3 Richard Burton, interview in Jerusalem Post, 9 April 1982.

4 Van Amerongen, p. 146.

In the mind of the public, the name Wagner generally conjures up images of loud, brassy music and generously proportioned blonde women extolling the virtues of the German Fatherland, brought to a rousing conclusion by choruses of "Deutschland über Alles" and, as such, the direct link with the Nazi regime, which is implied, is clear for all to see. It would be easy to ignore these popular misconceptions for the nonsense they so obviously are if it were not for the numerous well respected authors and musicians[5] who not only entertain serious misgivings about Wagner in general, but who also insist that he does stand as one of the antecedents of the Third Reich and, because of this, consider a study of the "political" and ideological concepts supposedly contained in the works as well as a complete reassessment of the composer necessary.

The nature of this thesis has made necessary a study of Wagner's views on Judaism and their role within the growing tide of anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century Germany which reached its culmination in the race theories put into practice during the Third Reich. It is also a study of music within an overtly political context and investigates the degree to which a musical work can exert political influence, or its meaning be manipulated to the extent that the original meaning has been totally negated. The Third Reich is in this respect one of the most interesting periods in

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5 Sir Georg Solti on Wagner: "I don't read his pamphlets, I don't acknowledge his Rassenhass (race hatred); perhaps you can call it an ostrich attitude. Perhaps I sometimes close both my eyes, otherwise I could not conduct Wagner." (Jerusalem Post, 16 September 1983)

the history of the arts in general.

It is my intention to investigate in this paper how Wagner's artistic legacy, which became an important part of the German Nationalist cult in the years preceding World War I, was misunderstood and misused by the members of the Nazi hierarchy. I intend also to demonstrate how Wagner's critics — whose outright condemnation of the composer since the end of World War II has been based on Hitler's genuine love of the music, hardly the composer's fault, and Wagner's undeniable anti-Semitism — have ignored the contents of the operas, which, in the case of the Ring cycle, Die Meistersinger and particularly Parsifal, is the antithesis of everything the Third Reich stood for.

It is important to note that original source material for this thesis has been difficult to obtain and that in some cases, e.g. Wagner's letters to Röckel, only translations were available.

CHAPTER ONE

VIEWS AND REVIEWS

Although Richard Wagner has lain in his grave in the garden of Wahnfried for little over a century, he has become one of the most influential and controversial composers in history. The impact he made on the artistic world, particularly of the nineteenth century, was considerable. Many writers, artists and particularly composers of the Romantic era considered him the single most important artistic influence in their lives. Every aspect of Wagner's life has been the subject of exhaustive analysis, yet some writers still maintain that an adequate interpretation of both his prose works and his music dramas is still to be made. Some still regard him as a musical charlatan of the worst kind and a profligate who made free use of the money (and women) of those who befriended him.

During the last decade there has been a considerable increase in the amount of literature on Wagner. This was mostly precipitated by the anniversaries of the first Bayreuth Festival (1976) and of his death in 1883. Numerous excellent biographies and studies of Wagner's works have appeared during this time, although they have been somewhat eclipsed by the long-awaited publication of Cosima Wagner's diaries. The diaries have unfortunately proved disappointing in that they do not supply answers to the many questions that exist about Wagner's life and works and the way the latter should be interpreted. They are, however, a remarkable document of the daily life of an artistic

and intellectual nineteenth-century family.

Since the end of World War II, however, the discussions of Wagner have gained an added dimension because of the influence he is said to have had on Adolf Hitler. No study of the rise of Nazism, or of either Wagner or Hitler, is presently considered complete without a reference to the composer's possible influence on the politician.

Hitler categorically stated that he considered Wagner his only predecessor[1] and this has caused much debate as to whether the operas do contain the essence of National Socialist ideology in a disguised form, as is maintained by several of Wagner's critics. Post-war opinion on this particular issue has been extremely divergent. Historians habitually emphasize the extent of Wagner's influence on Hitler; Wagner assumes in their writings an overwhelming importance in the evolution of the Third Reich. An example of this can be seen in William Shirer's study of this period:

> It was not his [Wagner's] political writings, however, but his towering operas, recalling so vividly the world of German antiquity with its heroic myths, its fighting pagan gods and heroes, its demons and dragons, its blood feuds and primitive tribal codes, its sense of destiny, of the splendor of love and life and the nobility of death, which inspired the myths of modern Germany and gave it a Germanic Weltanschauung which Hitler and the Nazis, with some justification, took over as their own.[2]

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1 Herman Rauschning, Gespräche mit Hitler (New York: Europa Press, 1940), p. 215.

2 William Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (Secker and Warburg, 1961), p. 101.

Others, particularly musicians, regard the issue as superfluous and insist that Wagner's work should be assessed in purely musical terms. They contend that a musical work such as an opera cannot exert influence on its audience, particularly influence of a socio-political nature, whatever the content may be. Wagner's admirers often seem to regard detailed studies of his psyche, anti-social behaviour and vehement opinions on a variety of subjects as unpalatable and unnecessary, maintaining that they have no real bearing on the full appreciation of his musical works. They hold that such an approach to the works of a great man seldom results in a proper understanding of his achievements and that it is a useless impertinence on the part of scholars to make that sort of study because it ignores the value of the artistic contribution to culture.

Public opinion on Wagner's association with the Third Reich has always been quite emotional — particularly so in Israel where his music, even in purely instrumental form, goes unperformed because of immense public disapproval.[3]

In historical perspectives of the years leading up to World War II, Wagner is constantly associated with Hitler. He is regarded as an example of the close connection that exists between liberalism,

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[3] The widely-held belief that the Israeli government has banned Wagner's music is incorrect. Vehement public reaction, such as the incident at the Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv in 1981 where a performance of the prelude to Tristan and Isolde provoked a riot, has proved that it is dangerous to schedule performances of his works.

nationalism and the traditional "völkisch" ideology that has always been particular to Germany. His operas are seen as an attempt to create national symbols based on evocations of the heroic and barbaric German past. His writings are regarded as examples of "anti-civilatory myth-making nationalism."[4] Wagner's racial theories, which have much in common with those of Count Arthur Joseph de Gobineau — the first recognized race theorist of the nineteenth century — are seen as first in a line that follows through to Houston Stewart Chamberlain, author of the book The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century[5] and Alfred Rosenberg, the race specialist of the Third Reich.

Wagner's ardent nationalism and theories about the advancement of the German State are seen to have stimulated German arrogance and his anti-Semitism is regarded as an important source of inspiration to the architects of National Socialism. In its extreme form this means that Wagner becomes the most significant intellectual antecedent of the Third Reich. He emerges as a worshipper of brute force who in his music dramas stresses the primitive and irrational forces present in man.

During the course of this century commentators on this subject have displayed a considerable amount of blatant antagonism toward Wagner in his role of possible spiritual mentor to Hitler. During

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4 Karl-Dietrich Bracher, The German Dictatorship: the Origins, Structure and Effects of Nationalism Socialism, trans. I. Steinberg (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971), p. 58.

5 Trans. J. Lees (London: The Bodley Head, 1912).

1941, reviewing the third volume of Ernest Newman's biography of Wagner, Carl Engel, the editor of The Musical Quarterly, wrote:

> Today we are openly waging a war of ideas against contrary ideas; our only "peace-aim" can be the survival of our ideas. And these ideas can never be brought into accord with the Hitlerian ideas, which are in principle those proclaimed years ago by the anti-Semitic, pro-Germanic Richard Wagner. That is why the Nazi leader likes the composer of "The Mastersingers of Nuremberg" while promulgating the Nuremberg laws that have shaken to its foundations the whole civilized world . . . and are threatening it with utter destruction. . . .We should . . . ban and burn every scrap of Wagner's music and writings, and every book written about the amazing wizard, beginning with the books of the Anglo-Wagnerian Ernest Newman. What a small price it would be to pay, if it could help to fight and finally extinguish the Wagner-fanned fire of Nazism.[6]

It is extremely ironic to think that Engel's solution to the problem is similar to the book-burning purges conducted by the Nazis during the early years of their regime. Engel's vehemence is understandable considering how shocking the Nazi excesses were and how much distress they caused, but his article does tend to seem somewhat hysterical.

A strange attempt at linking the intellectual pretensions of Wagner to those of Hitler was made in 1957 by Professor Louis Snyder of Princeton University. In a book designed primarily for undergraduate study he presents his reader with two columns of quotations — Wagner's and Hitler's respectively — the idea being to make clear the correlations that exist in the thinking of the two men (see Ex.1).

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[6] Carl Engel, "Views and Reviews," The Musical Quarterly XXVII (January 1941), 244-245.

EX. 1.

The State

WAGNER: In the State the unit must offer a part of his own egoism for the welfare of the majority.

—The intrinsic object of the State is stability, the maintenance of quiet.

HITLER: The State is only a means towards an end. Its highest aim is the care and maintenance of those primeval racial elements [Urelemente] which create the beauty and dignity of a higher civilization.

The Volk

WAGNER: The Volk consists of those who think instinctively.

—The Volk deals unconsciously and, for that very reason, from a Nature-instinct.

HITLER: The dead mechanism [of the old State] must be replaced by a living organism based on the herd instinct, which appears when all are of one blood.

The Leader

WAGNER: We must now seek the Hero of the future, who turns against the ruin of his race.

—Barbarossa-Siegfried will some day return to save the German people in time of deepest need.

HITLER: One must never forget it: the majority can never replace the leader. It [the majority] is not only stupid but cowardly. You cannot get one wise man out of a hundred fools, and a heroic decision cannot come out of a hundred cowards.

German Superiority

WAGNER: The true foundation of continued renovation has remained the German nature.

—In something EVERY German is akin to his great masters.

Genius and the German people have a certain something in common.

HITLER: It ought to be a greater honor to be a street-cleaner of the German Reich than king of a foreign power.

The Jews

WAGNER: The Jew is the plastic demon of the decline of mankind.

HITLER: The Jews are parasites on the bodies of other peoples; they make states within the State.

Anti-Rationalism

WAGNER: We must be brave enough to deny our intellect.

—The Volk must burst the chain of hindering consciousness.

HITLER: The educational system of the Folkish-State finds its crowning work in burning into the brains and heart of the youth intrusted [sic] it to an instinctual and understanding sense of race and race feeling.

Democracy

WAGNER: Democracy is totally un-German, a translated thing from elsewhere.

—Franco-Judaico-German democracy is a disgusting thing.

HITLER: Democracy is a rule by crazy brains.

—The German Republic is a monstrosity of human mechanism.

France

WAGNER: Germany's mission lies in extricating the world from the materialistic civilization of the French.

HITLER: France is and remains the inexorable enemy of Germany.

—France has made so much progress in her Negroisation [in seiner Vernegerung] that one can in fact speak of the creation of an African state on European territory.[7]

Although an affinity exists between some of the quotations, they do not really present anything new. Hitler consciously modelled himself on Wagner and was well acquainted with the contents of his writings. There is every possibility that he took over many of Wagner's ideas as his own. The fact that Professor Snyder does not specify his sources exactly does make it extremely difficult to discover in what context the quotations originally appeared. They are in any case fine examples of the pseudo-philosophical jargon both Hitler and Wagner produced so copiously.

Thomas Mann, a consistent and ardent admirer of Wagner until the early 'thirties, tries to maintain a sense of objectivity and balance in his dealings with the composer, but a study of his speeches and essays over a period of time reveals a growing sense

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7 Louis L. Snyder, Basic History of Modern Germany (New York: Princeton, 1957), pp. 170-171.

of disillusion. He eventually almost sorrowfully admits that a comparison of the two men — Hitler and Wagner — is justified. In earlier essays, notably "Ibsen and Wagner" (1928)[8] Mann acknowledges the "genius", "refinement" and "titanic morbidity" reflected in the creative work of these two men and to him they represent the apotheosis of the nineteenth-century "Kunstgeist." In a speech made in 1933 he referred to the "passion of Wagner's works since [Mann] first became aware of them and was captivated by them,"[9] but at the same time voiced his misgivings about Wagnerian morality and the fact that the Nazis had taken seriously Wagner's strange theories, particularly those concerning the Jews and the supposed mission of the German race. Mann's post-war attitude was considerably different and Wagner clearly did not receive the benefit of the doubt. In a letter to an acquaintance in Munich (1949) he had the following to say:

> There is in Wagner's bragging, his eternal ranting, his allein-reden-wollen, his desire to enter every discussion about everything, a nameless insolence which foreshadows Hitler; clearly there is much "Hitler" in Wagner.[10]

Two years later, in his review of the Burrell Collection of Wagner's letters, he again refers to the unpleasant correlations with Nazism:

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8 Thomas Mann, "Ibsen und Wagner," Gesammelte Werke, X (Oldenberg: S. Fischer Verlag, 1960), 227-233.

9 Thomas Mann, "Leiden und Grösse Richard Wagners," ibid., p. 373.

10 Thomas Mann, "Wagner und kein Ende," ibid., p. 926.

> We have Wagner again before our eyes, and there is too much that is repellent, too much "Hitler", really too much latent and even manifest Nazism for one possibly to have real trust, admiration with good conscience, love of which one need not be ashamed.[11]

Mann does not attempt to investigate the extent of Wagner's influence on Hitler more thoroughly. He does, however, draw attention to the psychological similarities which certainly exist between Wagner and Hitler. These obvious similarities (which have been alluded to by several writers) are really of no importance in a discussion on Wagner's works; yet they have been a rich source of information for Wagner's more irrational critics since the end of World War II.

Theodor Adorno, in his book In Search of Wagner, is the first post-war author who seriously considers that Wagner had a direct influence on Hitler and that the operas contain anti-Semitic references and caricatures: Alberich, Mime and the whole Nibelungen clan are supposed examples. Adorno bases much of his point of view on the aversion Siegfried displays towards Mime in the first act of the opera of that name. He quotes from the opera and concludes that it is reminiscent of the description of Jewish speech Wagner gives in his essay "Judaism in Music," (1850) and he maintains that it leaves no doubt as to the sources of "such monstrous beings as Mime and Alberich."[12] This opinion of Adorno's has always

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11 Thomas Mann, "Briefe Richard Wagners: The Burrell Collection," ibid., 797.

12 Theodor Adorno, In Search of Wagner, trans. R. Livingstone (London: NLB, 1981), pp. 19-24.
Siegfried, Act I, scene i: "When I watch you standing, shuffling

been regarded as radical and speculative, since no letter or essay of Wagner explicitly declares that these characters were modelled on Jewish prototypes. However, a comparison of the first draft of the Ring scenario (1848) and an excerpt from "Judaism in Music" shows how Wagner conceptualized the Jews and the Nibelungen race in similar terms;[13] this does make Adorno's theory more plausible.

Adorno is equally severe in his condemnation of Parsifal which he considers as depicting a "glorified blood-brotherhood" and a "prototype of the sworn confraternities of the secret and Führer orders of the later years, which had so much in common with the Wahnfried circle - that clique held together by a sinister eroticism and its fear of a tyrant, with a hyper-sensitivity that bordered on terrorism toward everyone who did not belong."[14]

Adorno's opinion of Parsifal is shared by Robert Gutman, whose book on Wagner[15] is a penetrating and generally vitriolic study

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and shambling, servilely stooping, squinting and blinking, I long to seize you by your nodding neck and make an end to your obscene blinking."

13 Martin van Amerongen, Wagner: a case history, trans. S. Spencer and D. Cakebread (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1983), pp. 42-43: "In the Ring the Nibelungs move around the bowels of the earth like 'vermin' on a dead body. In 'Judaism in Music' the Jews are likened to vermin: 'only in real life can we too rediscover the spirit of art, not in its vermin-infested corpse'."

14 Adorno, p. 141.

15 Robert Gutman, Richard Wagner: the Man, his Mind and his Music (London: Victor Gollancz, 1968).

of the composer's character and works. Gutman maintains that a true picture of Wagner's position as a creative artist within the context of nineteenth-century Romanticism — and hence his musical and political influence on the twentieth century — cannot be achieved without a complete understanding of his character and writings, the latter being dismissed as irrelevant far too often. According to Gutman those who maintain that the genius who could produce a Christian Parsifal and a benevolent Hans Sachs should not be linked with Nazism, have either not bothered to read in Wagner's essays and letters the political programme he advocates or have carefully ignored what they have found there. Gutman also makes the point that Wagner's stageworks are sublimated projections of what he could never achieve as a socio-political reformer, a role in which he had cast himself very early in his life.

Gutman gathers all his venom for Parsifal and a large part of his book is a systematic annihilation of this opera at all levels. He rejects the long-held view that Parsifal is an attempt by Wagner to come to terms with the concept of faith (with its many psychological implications and intellectual problems) and the view that the opera may have been conceived within the framework of the Christian ethic. He dismisses the opera as "hocus-pocus", as anti-Christian and as a vehicle for the "religion of racism,"[16] and maintains that Parsifal

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16 Ibid., p. 432.

> is an enactment of the Aryan's plight, struggle, and hope for redemption, a drama characterized not only by the composer's natively obscure and elliptical literary style, but also by the indigenous circumlocutions of allegory, the calculated unrealities of symbolism, and, especially, the sultry corruptions of decadence.[17]

Like many other writers, notably Ernest Newman, Gutman has (as can be seen in the extract given above) no regard for either the literary aspect of the opera or its symbolic content, but, on the other hand, admires the music enormously. Lucy Beckett criticizes Gutman severely for this attitude in her study of Parsifal,[18] maintaining that the work was conceived as a whole and should be appreciated as such. She insists, perhaps correctly, that anyone who attempts to separate the music from the drama for critical purposes is sure to fail and would "convey in the end a clearer picture of the critic's prejudices than the work's qualities."[19] Beckett and Gutman both draw attention to the dilemma that is always attached to the appreciation of the music and the poetry of Wagner's operas. Many erudite commentators agree that the literary quality of the poetry is often questionable and equally often hinders appreciation of the sometimes magnificently crafted music which accompanies it. The problem becomes much more complex when Wagner's obscure and often confusing symbolic intentions are taken into account.

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17 Ibid.

18 Lucy Beckett, Richard Wagner: Parsifal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

19 Ibid., p. 123.

If, as Beckett maintains, Gutman is displaying his prejudices, he has perhaps allowed his critical faculties to be clouded by his contempt for what he considers to be artistic posturing and arrogance on the part of Wagner. This is evident throughout his book. Wagnerites accuse Gutman of outright malice in his dealings with the composer and regard his damning remarks on Wagner's life and works as speculative and biased to the utmost degree.

Of the more recent commentators on Wagner, Professor Hartmut Zelinsky of the Institute for German Philology at the University of Munich surpasses Gutman's complete denigration of the composer. His diatribes about the supposedly malicious content of the operas have provoked much anger, particularly at Bayreuth. Zelinsky stresses the importance of understanding the role Wagner has played in the genesis of German political consciousness during the last 150 years and insists that this role has been far greater than most would care to admit, particularly in the case of the Third Reich. He accuses Wagner of being an "artistic terrorist" and maintains that the operas are examples of Wagner's sublimated revolutionary ideals. His opinion that Wagner used and intended his music as a kind of drug is considered almost heretical and critics of Zelinsky hold that it draws attention to the fact that he does not have a musician's specialized understanding of the operas. Zelinsky considers Parsifal Wagner's most dangerous opera because it contains, according to him, "an inherent desire for destruction: a brutal ideology which was recognized and taken up by Hitler." [20] He maintains that Parsifal has nothing to do

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[20] Hartmut Zelinsky, "Zu schönen Klängen eine brutale Ideologie," interview in Der Spiegel (9 August 1982), 132-138.

with religion, its religious content being the disguise under which Wagner brilliantly expounds and celebrates the "concept of a blood-brotherhood, racial purity and total allegiance to the state."[21]

Zelinsky concerns himself primarily with Wagner's anti-Semitism, maintaining that Wagner was the only race theorist of the nineteenth century who proclaimed that the Jews could only be redeemed by their own annihilation. He attempts to prove this by citing passages from early letters, the essay "Judaism in Music" and Cosima Wagner's diaries. Zelinsky seems to be on the point of suggesting that Wagner's operatic works are of such a dangerous nature that if they continue to be performed, the German nation could conceivably descend to the barbarism of the Third Reich for a second time. If Zelinsky has perhaps stumbled upon the correct interpretation of Wagner's concept of Jewish redemption, then a correlation does exist between this concept and the "final solution" put into practice by the Nazis with such devastating results. The storm of controversy Zelinsky seems to have unleashed in Germany with his different understanding of Wagner's works does mean that in some quarters his opinions have not been simply dismissed as sectarian nonsense.

Musicologists also display a sense of unease in dealing with Wagner because his works and his influence on his successors cannot be judged solely in musical terms.

Paul Henry Lang, in his study of Western music, regards

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21 Ibid.

the Wagnerian dramas — with the exception of Die Meistersinger, which he calls an "old-fashioned opera" — as "preposterous", and is one step short of condemning Wagner as an artistic and intellectual poseur. He does not specifically refer to Hitler or to the Third Reich, but does refer to the operas as "a world of unnatural passions" under the guise of "mythological untruths." He also indicates an awareness of Wagner's "latent nihilist tendencies" and "ardent nationalism."[22]

Alfred Einstein also makes it quite clear that he has a low opinion of Wagner and considers him to have lacked integrity as both man and artist. He has the following to say:

> He was one of the revolutionists who consciously took up a position against the world, a power-politician in the arts, who wished to conquer the world and who really did conquer the 19th century. . . .He was the first to use music as a means of influencing, of entrancing, of intoxicating, of conquering.[23]

Einstein continues by condemning Parsifal as a "repulsive" opera, referring to it as a "horrible dramatic phantasmagoria." He calls Die Meistersinger a "National Socialist" drama but neither explains nor makes any further reference to this extremely provocative suggestion. He does however point out that Wagner considered music a means towards an end and that one can never consider him a musician alone. Einstein regards the composer as a kind of musical hypnotist and is extremely suspicious of Wagner's sup-

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22 Paul Henry Lang, Music in Western Civilization (New York: W. and W. Norton, 1981), pp. 846-853 and p. 926.

23 Alfred Einstein, Music in the Romantic Era (New York: Dent and Sons, 1980), pp. 226-250.

posed attempts to "intoxicate" and capture his listener, using music as the medium.

There is no doubt that the world has still to recover from the effects of Nazism, and that a strangely morbid and voyeuristic interest in the excesses of the Nazis is still prevalent. A post-war generation of artists is working at Bayreuth now, yet Wagner's heirs continue to display considerable sensitivity about problems of race and connections with the Third Reich. When the first "black" Amfortas (the American bass, Simon Estes) was quite legitimately asked what it felt like to be the first black to sing at Bayreuth, Wolfgang Wagner displayed considerable anger at what he thought was a sensationalist and completely unnecessary question. His rage is understandable, but employing a black singer to do a leading role in what some — with questionable foundation — regard as Wagner's most racist opera, could be seen by many as an attempt to atone for the sins of his predecessors.[24]

The few opinions given in this chapter, culled from the vast amount of literature on Wagner and the Third Reich, demonstrate that as the Nazi era recedes into history, interest in Wagner's work as a possible blueprint for a political ideology has increased considerably. This controversy, ably fueled by people such as Hartmut Zelinsky, shows no sign of abating.

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24 van Amerongen, p. 142.

CHAPTER TWO

HITLER AND BAYREUTH: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Hitler first encountered Wagner's operas during his boyhood in the small Austrian town of Linz where he had his schooling. His fanatical attachment to the operas is well documented by August Kubizek, his only boyhood friend. In his memoirs Kubizek graphically illustrates how Hitler became totally caught up in the Wagnerian ethos:

> From the very first moment when Wagner entered his life, Wagner's genius held him in thrall. With unbelievable tenacity and will-power he immersed himself in his life and works. I'd never seen anything like it before. He completely identified with Wagner's personality. His heart beat faster as he read everything he could lay his hands on about the Master, whether it was good or bad, adulatory or critical. . . .Adolf knew of no greater desire than to go to Bayreuth, the national shrine of the Germans, to see Wahnfried, to linger a moment beside the Master's grave . . .and to attend a performance of the latter's works.[1]

Kubizek also recalls that during their stay in Vienna, Hitler made a point of attending as many performances of Wagner's operas as his slender means would allow; he seems not to have minded indifferent performances and that a Jew, Gustav Mahler, was the conductor in most instances. Kubizek relates how Hitler, fired with Wagnerian enthusiasm, unsuccessfully tried to write an opera

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[1] August Kubizek, Adolf Hitler, Mein Jugendfreund, cited in van Amerongen, p. 116.

based on Wagner's sketch of "Wieland der Schmied". During these early years, the opera Rienzi made a particular impression on Hitler. He saw himself as the tribune Rienzi and much later recalled how the music and story of the opera inspired him to believe he would succeed "in unifying the Reich and in making it great."[2]

Hitler's complete infatuation with Wagner was not an uncommon phenomenon during the closing years of the nineteenth century. Wagner symbolized for many young men the revolutionary artist successfully overcoming the struggle with the bourgeousie. Hitler was perhaps more susceptible to Wagner's magnetism than most because of his stultifying provincial upbringing and, more obviously, his complete identification with the composer. In his autobiography[3] Hitler maintains that he had become a fervent German "nationalist" at an early age; there is no doubt that his growing political awareness was influenced considerably by the ostensible nationalist message Wagner's works can have if interpreted in a particularly auto-suggestive way.

Wagner's recurring use of Teutonic legends and figures in his operas was symptomatic of the fact that they had become unusually important to the adherents of the new pan-Germanic cult which came into being during the nineteenth century. The German people had always been extremely proud of their Teutonic forebears who

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2 William Carr, Hitler: a Study in Personality and Politics (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), p. 138.

3 Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, trans. J. Murphy (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1938), pp. 18-19.

were usually stereotyped as a blond, blue-eyed race of majestic physical proportions. The men were idealized as warriors or hunters; the women epitomized fertility and motherhood. The unification of the German states into the Reich in 1871 engendered a great deal of national pride, and consequently, this Romantic interest in Germany's heroic past gained considerable momentum. Over a period of time the Germanic cult became part of a political issue which, towards the end of the century, clearly had a racist element to it.

Because they were always interpreted in a particularly idealistic and representational manner and their Germanic content often was stressed disproportionately, Wagner's dramatic works were always assured of a place within the Germanic cult. This was particularly so in the case of the Ring cycle which, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, was regarded as a gospel for the Germanic race; Wagner's graphic illustration in the cycle, of how the lust for power and the abuse of trust are inherently self-destructive, was either ignored or misunderstood. It does not take much imagination to realize that several of the characters in Wagner's operas — Wotan, Siegfried and Hans Sachs are good examples — could symbolize Germanic hero-dom with all its ramifications and, as such, could have had a marked effect on an intelligent but undisciplined personality like that of Hitler.

The holding up to veneration of legendary national heroes has always been a recognized way of fostering genuine national unity and pride, but if it is taken to extremes — as it was in nineteenth-

century Germany — it could have devastating results. It inculcated in the German nation a tendency to arrogance which, in those classes whose prospects could not hope to match their social and political aspirations, became perverted into an exhibition and misuse of military might. This had its obvious culmination in the Great War of 1914-1918. It also fostered a sense of spurious racial superiority amongst the Germans and this, over a period of time, made respectable the anti-Semitism which had long been prevalent in Germany. Ironically, the unification of Germany had also seen the full political emancipation of the Jews. The very fact that they now could take part in all spheres of German life meant that, in the eyes of the more chauvinistic Germans, they were an even greater threat to German cultural homogeneity than before and, as such, became the target of growing and often violent anti-Jewish agitation.

The Vienna in which Hitler found himself during the first decade of the twentieth century was the scene of particularly virulent anti-Semitism. There is no doubt that he was profoundly influenced by the almost official anti-Semitic stance taken by the then mayor of the city, Dr. Karl Lueger.

Houston Stewart Chamberlain, whose pseudo-scientific race theories had a profound influence on the adherents of the Germanic cult, is a key link in Hitler's associations with Wagner and Bayreuth. Chamberlain had for many years been an intimate member of the Wagner family circle, eventually marrying Eva, the daughter of the composer. Chamberlain considered the awareness of race as

vitally important;[4] his theories provided the framework for those put into practice during the Third Reich. Chamberlain also made the point that the Germanic tribes could be considered the saviours of culture and civilization because of their inherent racial superiority.[5] He also repeatedly stressed that unyielding loyalty to the leader is a particularly Germanic characteristic and a proof of racial purity.[6]

It was by visiting the aged Chamberlain at Bayreuth that Hitler eventually gained an entrée to the Wahnfried coterie, something he had aspired to since his early youth. Chamberlain was aware of Hitler's political aspirations and, in a letter to Hitler following the visit, made it quite clear that he approved wholly of Hitler's intentions and considered him to be a German "messiah":

> You are not as you were described to me; you are not a fanatic. I could almost say the opposite. A fanatic wants to persuade people. You want to convince them — and that is why you succeed. . . .Your eyes have hands, they capture people and hold them in their grip. . . .Such a man can administer peace to a poor tortured soul. My belief in Germany never wavered, but I confess that my hopes were at a low ebb. You have transformed my state of mind with one stroke. That Germany should give birth to Hitler in her hour of need proves that she is still alive.[7]

This amazing endorsement from one of Germany's most influential

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4 Chamberlain, p. 494-522.

5 Ibid., p. 542-550.

6 Ibid., pp. 558-559.

7 Colin Cross, Adolf Hitler (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), p. 68.

intellectuals and race theorists was echoed by Siegfried and Winifred Wagner who became enthusiastic supporters of Hitler's National Socialist Democratic Worker's Party. Winifred Wagner was particularly impressed by Hitler and his vision of an omnipotent Germany. She is reported to have said: "Believe me, Hitler is the coming man in spite of everything and, for all that, he will pull the sword out of the German Oak."[8] One presumes that Hitler was particularly gratified at being regarded as a latter-day Siegmund.

The Wagner heirs had tentatively courted the Nationalist cause which had made its presence felt in Germany since the end of World War I. Much of their interest in the fledgling party of which Hitler was to become leader was a product of personal political conviction, but there is also the possibility that monetary considerations played a part.

Both Siegfried and Winifred Wagner were acutely aware of the fact that over the years Bayreuth had assumed the status of a national shrine; it epitomized for many Germans the artistic pinnacle of an era which had been summarily destroyed by World War I. Bayreuth and all its associations stood as a monument to the enduring greatness of the German nation. The German nationalists displayed great willingness to uphold all the great Germanic values supposedly present in the operas of Wagner and obviously could be counted on for financial support. The Festival received funding from the National Socialist Party from 1925 onwards and, because of this,

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8 John Toland, Adolf Hitler (New York: Doubleday, 1971) p. 154.

became a solvent concern. The financial situation improved considerably when, shortly after the Party came into power in 1933, Hitler passed a new law forcing all theatres in Germany to pay two per cent of box office takings into a Bayreuth Festival account. This meant that the Festival could be mounted annually and that the best singers and conductors could be hired. The only jarring factor was that, in most cases, Jews happened to be the best artists available.

Winifred Wagner was undoubtedly the most important figure at the Festival during the Nazi era. She is considered to be directly responsible for the "moral bankruptcy"[9] which is said to have descended on Bayreuth during those years. She remained a staunch supporter of Hitler until the end of her life in 1980. Her praise of the Führer was always an embarrassing reminder to her two sons of the pre-war era, although they had succeeded in divesting the Festival of its Nazi connotations reasonably quickly. Winifred Wagner found herself in a curious predicament when Siegfried died suddenly in 1930. She now had the onerous task of carrying on an artistic tradition which had assumed the stature of a national cult and also had the misfortune of having to do so under the extremely critical eyes of the entire Wagner family. She had inherited a theatre which was completely behind the times from an artistic point of view. Cosima Wagner is certainly to be blamed for the ossification that had taken place over the years: during her imperious reign at Bayreuth she insisted that the Master's

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9 Van Amerongen, p. 111.

original ideas and stage directions be adhered to absolutely literally. No originality from either producers or singers was tolerated at all. Cosima's uncompromising loyalty coupled with financial problems meant that the sets for the original production of Parsifal (1882) were still in use. Winifred had Hitler to thank for the new sets: these he had promised Bayreuth many years before his assumption of power in 1933.

Winifred soon realized that she had put herself into an extremely compromising position because of her public and certainly sincere support of the National Socialist Party. The more rabid supporters of the Party considered it their right to turn the Festival and Bayreuth into a national shrine and to use it as the propaganda vehicle for the highest ideals of National Socialism which, according to many of them, were embodied in the works of Richard Wagner. As far as many of them were concerned, it was not only their right but their moral duty to rescue this sanctuary of German Art from contaminating elements such as foreigners and, even worse, Jews. Winifred was in a precarious position. Her alliance with the National Socialist Party and its leader had cost her many friends, and the fact that she had accepted money from the Nazis meant that it would be foolish to ignore their demands. She realized that the Festival and Bayreuth should remain out of Party hands as much as possible or great harm would be done artistically and especially in so far as its international image was concerned. Shrewdly assessing the threat the Nazis posed to Bayreuth, Winifred turned to Hitler for help and obtained his protection. It soon

became known that Hitler considered Bayreuth and the Festival his own preserve and that, as far as artistic matters were concerned, it would operate with complete independence. Hitler made it quite clear to Goebbels that the Festival was not within the jurisdiction of the Propaganda Ministry and that the Festival committee was autonomous in every respect. Bayreuth took on the features of a rival government with Winifred at the helm with Hitler's blessing.

During her trial as a Nazi collaborator at Nuremberg in 1948 Winifred made a statement which supports the contention that the world in fact has Hitler to thank for the preservation of the Festival in its original form and for allowing Jewish artists to perform there as late as 1935:

> A completely new and unexpected danger threatened us after the Nazis seized power, since most of their leading figures adopted a negative attitude towards Richard Wagner and his art. Those who proclaimed the heroic Nordic ideal had nothing in common with the idea of redemption brought about by a woman's self-sacrificing love, because the Superman towards which people were striving served the very thing that he himself was keen to overcome by his own efforts. Wagner's works were accused of having an intoxicating effect and the composer was said to have a Near-Eastern racial soul. Even Rosenberg explained in his "Mythos" that Tristan was not a drama about love but a drama about honour; and he felt that the Ring needed rewriting. Parsifal was regarded by the National Socialists as "ideologically indefensible." In the educational centres of the Hitler Youth Movement and the Association of German Girls, there was a deep hostility towards Wagner, and young people used to say, commiseratingly, "All right, then; let's not begrudge the Führer his perverse obsession with Wagner." And the Gauleiter who was responsible for the Bayreuth area threatened "to smoke out the international Wahnfried rabble." Hitler was aware of these hostile currents and he agreed with me they posed a definite threat to the Festival. The most effective solution

> seemed to him his annual visit to Bayreuth, which he hoped in the long term would set an example.[10]

Winifred's assessment of the Nazi hierarchy given above is generally accurate. Goebbels had a cursory interest in music and only enthused about the operas of Wagner because Hitler liked them.[11] Goering only liked music which he could dance to and for entertainment preferred hunting and women.[12] Rosenberg, who took his role of Party ideologist extremely seriously, came to Bayreuth under duress. His opinion that the operas were irrelevant to National Socialist ideology was sharply criticized by Hitler.[13]

It must also be remembered that the Nazi party was drawn from the lower working classes who were, as in most societies, deeply suspicious of anything even vaguely intellectual. The Party openly declared war on anything that was not defensible within the context of National Socialist ideology. They promoted the disregard and wanton destruction of anything that had intellectual pretensions or possibilities and was not within the grasp of the common man. This was of course part of the grand plan to create a class of people who would follow orders unquestioningly. Winifred's contention that the general public was hostile to Wagner and regarded their Führer's love of his music as a perversion

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10 Ibid., pp. 121-122.

11 Helmut Heiber, Goebbels, trans. J.K. Dickenson (London: Hale, 1978), p. 169.

12 Helmut S. Ziegler, Adolf Hitler: aus dem Erleben dargestellt (Göttingen: Schütz Verlag. 1964), p. 176.

13 Ibid.

is corroborated by the following extract from an article written by Heinz Tietjen who had been the producer at Bayreuth just before the war:

> It would be overstating the case to say that the Party was sympathetically disposed towards Wagner. In reality, the party leaders wanted to have nothing to do with Wagner. The party big shots came to Bayreuth only "under orders", and even then very rarely. They all turned out once a year, pretending to be fanatical about Wagner; not in Bayreuth, however, but after the Festival, during all the hullabaloo surrounding the Party rallies at Nuremberg, where a performance of Die Meistersinger was staged every year and people pretended to be favourably disposed towards Bayreuth. I've never produced an opera there [Nuremberg] myself but I've heard that the performances were so badly attended that people wearing brown and black uniforms were dragged in from the streets, on a somewhat impromptu basis.[14]

Posterity has dealt harshly with Winifred Wagner because of her involvement with the Nazis. Forbidden after the war to set foot in the theatre she had ruled with an iron hand, she had to look on as her two sons mounted productions of their grandfather's works which were thoroughly purged of all the traditions previously associated with Bayreuth. She was also perturbed by their attempts to disinfect the operas of their "dangerous" Germanic connotations and to stress the universality of the messages they contain.

It would seem that Winifred was in a far more vulnerable position than most of her critics realized or cared to admit; it was only through her friendship with Hitler that she was able to maintain her inviolate position. As has already been indicated, the Nazi party was not particularly well-disposed towards Bayreuth. When

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[14] Ibid., p. 121.

her daughter Friedelind fled Germany for political reasons in 1940, Winifred was forced to threaten her with "extermination" if she did not return to Germany. It is difficult to believe that a mother would threaten her child in such a manner if she herself had not been driven to do so by fear of retribution. She must have been fully aware of the extent of her compromise with the Nazis and that her high ideals about Bayreuth and its supposed inviolability could only be retained by sacrificing her own integrity and principles.

There is no doubt that a measure of affection existed between Winifred Wagner and Hitler and that he had a genuine love of Wagner's works. It is difficult, however, to know how well he understood music as an art form because his appreciation of the arts in general was highly coloured by his political and philosophical beliefs. His biographers are generally extremely deprecating about his knowledge of and taste in music. They take great pains to point out that, after Wagner, his tastes ran to German folk music and light Viennese operetta. He apparently had no enthusiasm for the intellectual demands of either chamber or symphonic music; the only exception being the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony which was sometimes used to round off his speeches. Hitler had an instinctive understanding of Wagner's emotional hold over his audience and the way spectacular effects could influence its mood completely. This is affirmed by Joachim Fest who maintains that "Music meant little more to him than the extremely effective means to heighten the theatrical effects. . . .

It was indispensable as drama without music had not the slightest interest for him."[16] It is a misconception, however, to think that the massive Party rallies organized at Nuremberg each summer were derived from the operas, particularly the Ring cycle. Louis J. Rather has pointed out that Hitler and Goebbels based their concept of the rallies on scenes from the film Die Nibelungen, which was made by the German film director Fritz Lang, and had no connection whatsoever with the Ring cycle.[17] There is no doubt, however, that some of Wagner's more theatrical effects were copied in these rallies.

The Festivals at Bayreuth were regarded as the high point in the German cultural calendar and remained so until at least the second year of World War II. There is much written and photographic evidence which demonstrates how seriously Hitler took his role as guardian of the most important German cultural shrine. Although there is no doubt that he was completely overwhelmed by the operas, it must be stressed that his zealous pursuit of the arts was part of a determined effort to bring some respectability to the Nazi Party and to inculcate a measure of cultural awareness amongst his followers. He was acutely aware that his social background and education did not compare with that of the other European statesmen of the time. This is, of course, also true of the other members of the Nazi hierarchy. His followers were

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16 Joachim Fest, Hitler, trans. C. and W. Winston (New York: Verlag Ullstein, 1973), p. 520.

17 Louis J. Rather, A Dream of Self-Destruction: Wagner's Ring and the Modern World (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 169.

known as political bully-boys who intimidated the public and used unscrupulous ways of gaining the advantage over their opponents. The Nazi Party had to contend with much fear, distrust and even disgust from many of their countrymen because of the questionable tactics they employed.

Bayreuth represented to Hitler the finest opportunity: his clear support of the Festival — which over the years had established an international reputation — could adequately help dispel the idea that the Nazi Party was a group of cultural philistines and political amateurs. Wagner's anti-Semitism, which was made very public during the Third Reich, was in any case seen by the Party as an endorsement of the racial policies they were to initiate with such devastating results. The annual pilgrimage to Bayreuth became, in effect, a gigantic public relations exercise proclaiming the majestic benevolence of National Socialism to all the world.

The post-war reaction against Bayreuth and the works of Wagner was severe. Winifred Wagner was banned by the Nuremberg Tribunal from taking an active part in productions and had to hand over the reins to her two sons, Wieland and Wolfgang. They both were aware of the antagonism towards the Wagner family stemming from its association with the Third Reich and, because of this, had misgivings about the future of the theatre. Wolfgang commented on this in a letter to his brother in April 1947: "It is in any case perfectly clear to me that our family is no longer

in a position to become involved in the Festival."[15]

Fortunately prejudices were overcome and financial support was found. The Festival theatre re-opened its doors with a thoroughly disinfected production of Parsifal in 1951. But despite all the "de-Nazification" that had taken place, the spectre of Nazism still made its presence felt. The brothers felt obliged to put up notices requesting patrons not to discuss politics in the precincts of the theatre because, after all, only art mattered there.[16] This request

Im Interesse einer reibungslosen Durchführung der Festspiele bitten wir von Gesprächen und Debatten politischer Art auf dem Festspielhügel freundlichst absehen zu wollen.

„Hier gilt's der Kunst"

Die Festspielleitung

gez. WIELAND WAGNER gez. WOLFGANG WAGNER

Bayreuth, im Sommer 1951

15 van Amerongen, p. 126

16 Hartmut Zelinsky, Richard Wagner, ein Deutsches Thema: eine Documentation zur Wirkungsgeschichte Richard Wagner's, 1876-1976 (Frankfurt am Main: 2001 Verlag, 1977), p. 251.

is, ironically, even more to the point now than it was in 1951. Discussions of Wagner's possible political influence on the architects of the Third Reich have in fact increased over the last forty years. Wagner's heirs simply have to accept the fact that the history of Bayreuth will always be linked with that of the Third Reich and that there will always be criticism levelled at them because of this. It is their great misfortune to have inherited such a tainted artistic legacy, but, thanks to their imagination and endeavour, Bayreuth again stands as a monument to the magnificence of the German cultural tradition.

CHAPTER THREE

WAGNER AND THE JEWS

A survey of particularly Jewish opinion on Wagner demonstrates clearly that he is considered an important cultural and ideological influence on the Germans responsible for the Holocaust. The article in the Encyclopaedia Judaica on Richard Wagner is a good synthesis of the best material available on the subject of Wagner in respect of the Jews. It is, not surprisingly, generally hostile towards the composer, but does not advocate that his works should be banned because of the influence they had on the founders of the Third Reich. The author of the article does, however, explicitly maintain that "in ambiguous terms, under the guise of speaking for their redemption, he [Wagner] conceived the idea of the extinction (Untergang) of the Jews."[1]

Other authors, notably Artur Holde[2] and Alfred Low,[3] are generally disparaging and perhaps even slightly sympathetic towards Wagner because he embraced the stale concept of the Jewish stereotype as the source of all the ills that befell him.

Wagner's radical anti-Semitism is an undeniable fact and has long

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1 Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1972 ed., s.v. "Richard Wagner."

2 Artur Holde, Jews in Music: from the Age of Enlightenment until the Present (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

3 Alfred E. Low, Jews in the Eyes of the Germans (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1979).

been the cause of considerable argument. Several authors, particularly Martin Gregor-Dellin,[4] insist that it has gained notoriety which exceeds its importance. Wagner condemned the Jews vociferously during his adult life: he held them responsible for many of his personal failures and considered them an insidious threat to German cultural life. There are many letters which are evidence of his all but manic hatred of the Jewish race and a cursory glance at Cosima Wagner's diaries reveals that vilifying the Jewish nation was almost a daily ritual at Wahnfried. Yet his immediate circle of friends included many Jews who openly revered him although he continuously taunted them about their religion. Hermann Levi, the conductor of the first performance of Parsifal, is a notable example. Levi was treated extremely shabbily by Wagner despite the many protestations to the contrary of Wagner's more devout admirers. The relationship between Wagner and Levi is often cited as proof that Wagner's anti-Semitism is really a peripheral issue. It is sometimes conveniently forgotten that Wagner, who considered Parsifal the most Christian of all artworks, originally did not want Levi as conductor because he was a Jew. Having wheedled the performing rights of Parsifal out of King Ludwig, to whom he had originally bequeathed them in perpetuity, Wagner found himself in the curious position of having to request the use of the Royal orchestra and chorus for the premiere of the opera at Bayreuth. This of course meant

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[4] Martin Gregor-Dellin, Richard Wagner, His Life, His Work, His Century, trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn (London: Collins, 1983), p. 206.

that the Royal Kapellmeister, in this case Levi, was to conduct. Wagner objected to this strongly because Levi was a Jew.

During the early summer of 1881, when the preparatory discussions concerning rehearsals and artists took place, Levi was obliged to visit Bayreuth to confer with Wagner. Wagner made it his business to be as unpleasant as possible to Levi. He went so far as to suggest to Levi that he convert to Christianity (Wagner was prepared to undergo baptism with him) or hand over his directorship of Parsifal to a Christian. The friction came to a head when Wagner showed Levi an anonymous letter he had received accusing Levi of being Cosima's lover. Justifiably enraged, Levi summarily left Wahnfried and shortly afterwards requested to be relieved of his duties as conductor of Parsifal.

It came to Wagner's notice, however, that the King viewed his objections towards Levi with considerable disfavour and it was soon made clear to Wagner, via a message from the Intendant of the Court orchestra, that the orchestra and chorus were only at his disposal if Levi remained as conductor. Realizing that his attitude had jeopardised the chances of Parsifal being performed, Wagner felt it necessary to write to the King (22 September 1881) explaining that he would accept Levi unconditionally. In this letter Wagner eulogises Levi's "first-rate enthusiasm" and "burning devotion," and maintains that he would thankfully accept a conductor without questioning whether he is either Jew or Christian.[5]

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[5] Richard Wagner, König Ludwig II und Richard Wagner Briefwechsel, ed. O. Strobel (Karlsruhe: Braun, 1936-39), III, 223.

Ludwig's reply (11 October 1881) praises Wagner for his decision and the young King, displaying a tolerance far greater than Wagner's, clearly states that he found it gratifying that Wagner was prepared to accept Christian and Jew alike and that he (Ludwig) finds racist squabbles "loathsome" and "unpleasant." Ludwig continues, maintaining that "all men are intrinsically brothers, irrespective of their confessional differences."[6] Wagner objected to being chastised by the King (whom he considered his protégé) and responded with a fierce letter (22 November 1881) in which he raged that "the Jews are the congenital enemies of mankind and all that is noble in it."[7]

The sources of Wagner's anti-Semitism have always been open to debate. Some of his biographers maintain that it developed because he could not accept the fact that he might have been the result of an adulterous union between his mother and Ludwig Geyer, an actor of Jewish descent. Wagner's mother, Johanne, had had an affair with Geyer for some months before the death of her first husband, Friedrich Wagner. She later married Geyer and bore him a daughter six months after the wedding. It was this doubt surrounding Wagner's paternity that, in 1932, caused Winifred Wagner to establish a foundation whose sole aim was to trace and prove the pure Aryan descent of both Cosima and Richard Wagner.

A more plausible explanation is the idea that his anti-Semitism was the result of the unhappy and fruitless sojourn in Paris from

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6 Ibid., p. 226.

7 Ibid., p. 230.

1839 to 1841, during which time the city was culturally very much in Jewish hands. The operas of Giacomo Meyerbeer were extremely popular during this time and Wagner, who was undoubtedly envious of Meyerbeer's success, singled him out for the worst possible abuse some years later in the essay Das Judenthum in der Musik. Although Meyerbeer had provided him with various letters of introduction and arranged for him a meeting with the Director of the Paris Opera, Wagner held Meyerbeer entirely responsible for his failure in Paris.[8]

It is remarkable how radically Wagner's opinion of Meyerbeer changed even though he was greatly indebted to him artistically. Wagner originally had been an admirer of Meyerbeer, as can be seen in the following extract of a letter written to the older composer in 1837:

> Should I deny that it was just your works which showed me the new direction? It would appear here in any

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8 It is as well to consider what Meyerbeer actually thought of the abuse he suffered throughout his life because of his race. In a letter to Heine, another Jew who had to cope with much persecution, he wrote:

> Ninety-nine out of every hundred readers are Jew-haters, . . .No Pommade de Lion, no Griff d'Ours, not even the baptismal font can make the piece of foreskin grow again that was robbed from us on the 8th day of our lives; and all those who do not bleed to death on the 9th day as a result of the operation will continue to bleed for the rest of their lives and even after they are dead.

- van Amerongen, p. 63.

> case a very improper occasion to indulge in awkward praises of your genius; only so much that I saw in you fully solved the mission of the German who took the excellences of the Italian and French school to make the creations of his genius universal.[9]

Wagner's essay, Das Judenthum in der Musik, is rightly considered one of his more idiosyncratic literary efforts. Its publication, in the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik in 1850, met with much protest from both Jews and non-Jewish Germans. It was not only blatantly anti-Semitic; although many Germans tacitly agreed with him Wagner defied existing social conventions by committing to paper what is basically a vulgar diatribe. The essay did a great deal of harm to German-Jewish relations at a time when political emancipation for the Jews in Germany was in the process of becoming a reality. It is possible that Wagner did not anticipate the amount of antagonism the publication of the essay would arouse. This is evident in the following extract from a letter to Liszt:

> You ask me about the Judenthum. You must know the article is by me. Why do you ask? Not from fear, but only to avoid that the Jews should drag this question into bare personality, I appear in a pseudonymous capacity. I felt a long repressed hatred for this Jewry, and this hatred is as necessary to my nature as gall is to blood. An opportunity arose when their damnable scribbling annoyed me most, and so I broke forth at last. It seems to have made a tremendous impression, and that pleases me, for I really wanted only to frighten them in this manner.[10]

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9 Low, p. 332.

10 Richard Wagner, Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt, trans. by F. Heuffer (New York: Vienna House, 1973), I, 145.

This extract also indicates how insubstantial Wagner's reasons for writing the essay really were. However, it still remains surprising that he sanctioned its re-issue in 1869, when political emancipation for German Jews had become a particularly contentious issue.

The essay represents a remarkable retrogression in Wagner's opinion of the Jews. During his revolutionary phase he actively campaigned for their political emancipation, yet the essay passionately advocates the emancipation of Christians from the stranglehold of Jewish oppression. He explains this by suggesting that his former benevolent attitude towards the Jews had been the result of pure ignorance:

> Whilst we struggled to [free] the Jews we were, however, more properly to be regarded as combatants for an abstract principle than for a concrete case. All our Liberalism was likewise but a mere play of the mind, and that not of a very clear-seeing description.
> ...Our zeal for the emancipation of the Jews resulted more from a general upheaval of thought than from any real sympathy.[11]

It is difficult to accept that a "mere play of the mind" is responsible for his radical change of heart, but this questionable excuse is mild compared to the pseudo-scientific blustering which makes up the greater part of the essay.

Two central issues dominate Das Judenthum in der Musik: first, Wagner considers the emancipation of the Christians, i.e. non-Jewish Germans, from the financial power held by the Jews and

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11 Richard Wagner, Das Judenthum in der Musik trans. E. Evans (London: William Reeves, 1920), p. 4.

from the insidious Jewish plot to infiltrate and undermine German cultural life. He condemns the Jews because they had "exalted money to the level of nobility" and that they did not acquire their money by "personal labour, but by the trade of usury."[12] Wagner either conveniently forgot or was unaware that money-lending was one of the few professions open to Jews. It is thus not surprising that they eventually became renowned as excellent bankers and financiers.

The other vitally important point is the concept of the redemption of the Jews through their own annihilation. Although it is evident that Wagner meant only their spiritual annihilation, this idea became an entrenched part of the National Socialist credo and was, as is well known, directly applied. The Nazis were not interested in the subtleties of Wagner's argument. The last part of the essay is usually cited as proof that Wagner seriously advocated the destruction of the Jews as a race. The last sentence of the essay is usually quoted:

> But, remember that there is only one real form of deliverance from the curse which besets you — that of Ahasuerus — the "Untergang"![13]

This passage loses its intended meaning because it is usually quoted out of context. Wagner was in fact discussing Ludwig Börne, a writer of the young German literary movement who had attempted to gain "deliverance" by renouncing Judaism. According to Wagner, Börne

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12 Ibid., p. 18.

13 Ibid., pp. 48-49.

> came forth from his isolation as a Jew seeming to seek deliverance amongst us, but found it not; and had to convince himself, perforce, that only with our own deliverance as true men could he ever find it. But, to a Jew, the idea of becoming a man in common with us is pretty nearly the same thing as that of ceasing to be a Jew.[14]

If Wagner is to be understood correctly and the passage quoted above accepted for what it is, then the redemption of the true spirit of man cannot occur without a complete self-annihilation, because man, and not only the Jews, has grown away from his true humanity. The redemption of man has to take place first before the Jews can even hope to be "delivered" and assimilated. Wagner continues by appealing to the Jews:

> Join with us unquestioningly in this work of redemptive rebirth, which only self-annihilation can achieve and we shall be united and undifferentiated.[15]

It is clear that the Jews had a part to play in Wagner's Utopian dream, provided they relinquished their Jewish heritage completely and were prepared to undergo a spiritual catharsis. This is diametrically opposed to Nazi racial thought, a point both Wagner's critics and the Nazis seem to have ignored. This is particularly so if one considers the Nuremberg race laws. These clearly do not advocate assimilation of any kind:

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14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, September 15, 1935

> Inbued with the knowledge that the purity of German blood is the necessary prerequisite for the existence of the German nation, and inspired by an inflexible will to maintain the existence of the German nation for all future times, the Reichstag has unanimously adopted the following law, which is now proclaimed:
>
> ARTICLE 1. (1) Any marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are herewith forbidden. Marriages entered into despite this law are invalid, even if they are arranged abroad as a means of circumventing this law.
>
> (2) Annulment proceedings for marriages may be initiated only by the Public Prosecutor.
>
> ARTICLE 2. Extramarital relations between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are herewith forbidden.
>
> ARTICLE 3. Jews are forbidden to employ as servants in their households female subjects of German or kindred blood who are under the age of 45 years.
>
> ARTICLE 4. (1) Jews are prohibited from displaying the Reich and national flag and from showing the national colors.
>
> (2) However, they may display the Jewish colors. The exercise of this right is under State protection. . .
>
> ARTICLE 7. This law shall go into effect on the day following its promulgation, with the exception of Article 3, which shall go into effect on January 1, 1936.[16]

Many of these fine distinctions were swept away as the worst excesses of the Nazi regime were revealed at the end of World War II, and Wagner was held partly responsible because of the influence he had on Adolf Hitler.

Wagner's operas have since then been viewed with some suspicion because they allegedly contain caricatures of Jews and anti-Semitic references. A number of Wagner's critics, amongst them some

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16 Snyder, p. 176.

of the most erudite scholars, still persist in the idea that the operas are anti-Semitic allegories. Leo Stein makes the assumption that "the Nibelungs in the Ring represent, on the authority of Wagner himself, the Jews who have robbed the world of its gold and are determined to dominate it."[17] Stein does not produce any independent source to justify this but quotes Siegfried's philippic against Mime from the opera Siegfried to prove his point.

Theodor Adorno is the first post-war critic of Wagner who seriously considers the possibility that Wagner intended the characters Alberich, Mime, Beckmesser and Kundry as Jewish caricatures. He writes:

> The gold-grabbing, invisible, anonymous, exploitative Alberich, the shoulder-shrugging, loquacious Mime, overflowing with self-praise and spite, the impotent intellectual critic Hanslick-Beckmesser — all the rejects of Wagner's works are Jews. They stir up the oldest sources of German hatred of the Jews.[18]

It is difficult to embrace Adorno's point of view since Wagner, in a conversation recorded by Cosima Wagner on 2 March 1878, said that he had the greatest sympathy for Alberich, who represents the eternal longing for beauty felt by a loathsome being.[19] According to Dieter Borchmeyer, Wagner's original conception of the Ring (1845) contained the idea that Brünnhilde

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17 Leo Stein, The Racial Thinking of Richard Wagner (New York: New Philosophical Library, 1951), p. 73.

18 Theodor Adorno, In Search of Wagner trans. R. Livingstone (London: NLB, 1981), p. 21.

19 Cosima Wagner, Die Tagebücher, ed. M. Gregor-Dellin and D. Mack (Munich: R. Piper Verlag, 1976), III, 52.

should end the serfdom of the Nibelung race.[20] If Adorno's assumption is correct and the Nibelungs are supposed to represent the Jewish nation, this surely means that Brünnhilde, who often has been regarded as the epitome of Germanic womanhood, can be considered an agent for Jewish emancipation.

It is extremely difficult to prove that Alberich, Mime, Beckmesser and Kundry are caricatures of Jews, because there is simply no written evidence to substantiate such an allegation. Wagner was an extremely loquacious man with definite opinions on every conceivable subject, but no reference is ever made to anything of this nature. One of Cosima Wagner's diary entries even suggests that he objected to Mime's being protrayed as a Jew. The Wagner family had gone to Leipzig to visit the dentist and to attend a performance of Siegfried:

> Tuesday, May 3, 1881: At 11 o'clock we drive to the rehearsals, R. with Mimi, I with Lusch. First act Siegfried. Mime a "Jewish dwarf" R. says, but excellent.[21]

It is implicit that Wagner found the interpretation of Mime as a "Jewish dwarf" objectionable.

Kundry is the only figure in Wagner's entire output who could conceivably be of Jewish origin and there is nothing in the opera Parsifal to suggest, either musically or textually, that this aspect of her character has any relevance to the drama. Historically,

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20 Dieter Borchmeyer, "How anti-Semitic are Wagner's Music Dramas?" Bayreuth Festival Programme, August 1983, pp. 82-90.

21 Cosima Wagner, op. cit., IV, 734.

Kundry is the female equivalent of the wandering Jew, Ahasuerus. According to legend, Ahasuerus prevented Christ from resting on his way to Calvary and was therefore condemned to be an eternal wanderer, always seeking but never finding salvation. The myth of Ahasuerus increasingly became a symbol of the Jewish nation and has been used as such by numerous Zionist writers. It also was used by the Nazis for anti-Semitic propaganda during the Third Reich, in the form of a film entitled Der ewige Jude, made by Franz Hipper in 1940.

Legend also has it that Kundry is the reincarnation of Herodias, the wife of Herod. Wagner has Klingsor make reference to this in the second act of Parsifal: "Du warst Herodias, und wer noch?"[22] This legend of Herodias/Kundry as an equivalent to — or variation of — Ahasuerus had been current in European literature since the Middle Ages, and the nineteenth century saw the publication of numerous poems and novels on the subject.

In Heinrich Heine's Atta Troll (1847), which Wagner knew well, she is transformed into Herodias' daughter Salome, who is also denied salvation and eternal rest because of her complicity in her mother's plot against John the Baptist. Wagner obviously had Salome in mind when he conceived Kundry's role in the second act of Parsifal, hence Klingsor's remark.[23]

If one takes as a premise the idea that Kundry is Wagner's representation of the Jewish nation, then Parsifal may be seen as a

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22 Richard Wagner, Parsifal (New York: E.F. Kalmus, n.d.), p. 108.

23 Borchmeyer, p. 89.

work sympathetic to the concept of Jewish assimilation because Kundry does achieve the salvation and acceptance for which she had so desperately striven. This can be seen as in keeping with the programme of Jewish emancipation Wagner put forward in Das Judenthum in der Musik. On the other hand, however, Parsifal can be seen as satisfying the Nazis' "final solution" because Kundry does, at the end of the opera, die in the physical sense as well, having gone through the ultimate level of spiritual self-destruction to gain her place amongst the initiates.

Wagner's treatment of her arouses the deepest compassion because of her plight and the way she is abused by Klingsor; even the Knights of the Grail seem sometimes to regard her as despicable. This has led to the suggestion that Parsifal is an anti-feminist opera:

> Whatever else it may be, Parsifal is an anti-feminist tract — the accursed figure of Kundry crawls around the stage for three entire acts. In the first act she is hysterical, in the second on heat and in the third she reveals a quite appalling degree of servility — "Dienen! Dienen!"[24]

Van Amerongen's colourful perception of the Kundry problem (if indeed it is one) may be crudely amusing, but it hardly reveals an enlightened understanding of her character. His point of view reflects the continuing problem of Parsifal: i.e. an elusive work defying classification and understanding according to existing criteria. The opera is intriguing in a manner similar to a work

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24 van Amerongen, p. 85.

of sculpture, presenting ever-changing aspects and consequently interpretations depending on the position from which it is viewed and the experience and preconceptions of the viewer. Kundry is, however, the only female figure in Wagner's operas who survives the malevolent intrigue in which she has been an unwilling pawn. Brünnhilde, Sieglinde, Elsa — to name but a few of Wagner's heroines — obviously arouse similar compassion because of the way they are manipulated, and they are very clearly the sacrificial victims of the males who dominate them.

Borchmeyer puts forward the plausible suggestion that the personage of Ahasuerus whom Wagner reworked as the Flying Dutchman (Wagner once referred to the Dutchman as the "Ahasuerus of the ocean"),[24a] and as Kundry, is in fact the myth of Wagner's own existence. The fact that these two figures achieve in their respective operas the salvation they both had desired reflects, according to Borchmeyer, Wagner's constant quest for approbation as human being and as composer. Borchmeyer concludes that this is the reason there are no anti-Semitic references in the operas. He writes:

> If he held out to the Jews the destruction of Ahasuerus as their only possibility of redemption, then he included his own artistic and existential myth within that possibility. This may be one of the reasons for the remarkable fact that Wagner disowned his anti-Semitism in his dramatic works. His sympathy for so many Jewish artists, the belief in redemption which included the Jews, the absence of anti-Semitic tendencies in his music dramas — all this shows that in the holy of holies of his artistic personality there was no room for any hatred of the Jews.[25]

24a Ibid., p. 84.

25 Borchmeyer, p. 90.

Borchmeyer's opinion may be considered far-fetched but it would be foolish to dismiss the idea that Wagner, albeit perhaps unconsciously, left traces of his own personality in various figures in his operas. Borchmeyer unfortunately provides neither evidence nor examples to support his contention that Wagner felt sympathy for Jewish artists. This weakens his argument considerably simply because Wagner's behaviour always indicated the opposite. There is, however, clearly a theme which dominates the operas and this very much the story of Wagner' life: there is often an outsider who, having been rejected previously, rises to dominate those who had initially rejected him (viz. Parsifal and Walter von Stolzing). It must also be mentioned that Wagner was, as man and creative being, extremely involved in his own ego and creative consciousness, often with no regard for the feelings of others and to the exclusion of everything else. In this respect he epitomises the nineteenth-century artist. It would have been surprising if aspects of his character did not surface in his operas.

It is important to note that elements of "Jewishness" may be detected in Wagner's own style. This may with good reason be considered an outrageous assumption, but it is quite clear that several of his works, particularly the earlier ones, contain many of the elements he so vigorously denounced in the operas of Meyerbeer. His anti-Semitic ravings, which became so frequent during the last decade of his life, are seen as an attempt to divert attention from this issue. Theodor Lessing was one of several German authors who perceived "Jewish" elements in Wagner's works: He writes:

> The tendency towards exaggeration of accent, the inclination towards expressive pathos embodied in Wagner himself has been blamed on Judaism and Asiaticism. Modern culture, the prototype of which Nietzsche sees in Wagner, is supposed to be the after-effect of the Christian era, which was itself "the triumph of the Jews over Europe." Only one striking truth is lodged in this race — psychological construction. If we analyze those souls who today so readily play off the cultural into the race — biological or national question and embrace the just now prevailing dilettante's sport of fetching from all human greatness an Aryan-German element, we shall find that precisely those traits designated "Jewish" and "anti-German" are present nowhere in more purity than in the types who believe they are rejecting them.[26]

Lessing goes on to suggest that Houston Stewart Chamberlain can be considered a typical Jewish soul because of his fixation with the question of race.

Wagner's works obviously do suffer from an almost Oriental excess in terms of length, exaggerated emotion and pathos. It is sometimes difficult to accept the seemingly exaggerated (and arguably tasteless) means Wagner's works often exhibit. It can also be said that Wagner's indulgence in physical luxury, his love of perfumes and sensuous materials and his attitude towards women was far more "Asiatic" than Western European, and this does manifest itself in his operas. It does not come as a surprise that Nietzsche, as early as 1888, seriously questioned Wagner's "Germanness":

> Was Wagner a German at all?
>
> There are some reasons for this question. It is difficult to find any German trait in him. Being a great learner, he learned to imitate much that was German — that's all. His own nature <u>contradicts</u> that

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[26] Theodor Lessing, <u>Schopenhauer, Wagner, Nietzsche</u>, (1913), cited by Rather, p. 172.

> which has hitherto been felt to be German — not to speak of a German musician.[27]

The passage quoted above is particularly interesting when one takes into consideration that Wagner, accused by Nietzsche of being an artistic deceiver and a mere imitator, had denounced Meyerbeer in similar terms in the essay Das Judenthum in der Musik:

> A celebrated Jewish music-setter of our day has, in his productions, had a portion of our public in view whose entire confusion of musical taste was less a matter for him to accommodate than to exploit. . . . It could serve no useful purpose to describe in detail the array of artistic means which he has employed for the attainment of the object of his ambition. His success sufficiently shows that he thoroughly understood this form of deceit. . . .This deceiver amongst composers succeeds, in fact, so well that he deceives himself, and does so perhaps with an intention as deliberate as that which he applies to the deceit of his audience.[28]

It is a great misfortune that Wagner considered the Jews a source of evil and took it upon himself to commit to paper views about them which could be justified neither scientifically nor philosophically. Writing about Wagner's infamous essay, Gregor-Dellin neatly summed up the dilemma:

> By perpetrating these twenty pages of atrocious prose, Wagner. . . .alienated friendly critics, forfeited the trust of his friends, and incurred the implacable resentment of posterity.[29]

Not only did Wagner incur the "implacable resentment of posterity",

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27 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Case of Wagner trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 182.

28 Wagner, Das Judenthum in der Musik, pp. 40-46.

29 Gregor-Dellin, p. 206.

but with his misguided and emotional anti-Semitism provided a convenient foothold for his detractors who insist that he created the necessary climate for the emergence of National Socialism. His strong views on the mission of the German race and his anti-Semitism meant that he could easily be claimed as an intellectual antecedent of Nazism and could provide the National Socialist Party with the approbation it certainly needed. His works, however, were either deliberately misinterpreted by the Nazis to suit their own ends or completely misunderstood which, particularly as far as the Jewish nation was concerned, had calamitous results. It is hardly surprising that many Jews react extremely negatively towards Wagner, identifying the little they know and understand about the composer with the worst excesses of Nazism. This is most unfortunate because, as far as many of Wagner's detractors (particularly Jews) are concerned, the composer can be held responsible for the way his works have been interpreted by historians and politicians. Wagner is, however, responsible for many of the misconceptions and prejudices which have arisen because he thought it necessary to publish his numerous ill-conceived political philosophies. As this investigation will presently demonstrate, the symbolic content of his works negates the most basic tenets of the National Socialist ideology and his prose works are, when seen in the proper perspective, less important than previously imagined.

CHAPTER FOUR

MUSIC DURING THE THIRD REICH

In linking Wagner with the cruder elements of Nazism, his critics seldom take into account that his operas do not contain the pompous ideological formulae required of art in a fascist, totalitarian state. The operas are neither optimistic nor easily comprehensible. They do not blatantly draw attention to the more glorious aspects of Nazi ideology nor are they composed in the spirit of true German nationalism. As has been pointed out before, the bulk of the Nazi party — which was made up of a reasonably distinct socio-economic group — found the complex symbolism present in the operas abstruse and tiresome.

A survey of music in Germany during the years 1933-1943 demonstrates clearly that a regression took place. Many of the best musicians left the country, leaving a void which was soon filled by others whose political zeal was more apparent than was their musical ability. The rigid guidelines laid down by the Nazis also served as a deterrent to composers who were critical of the regime but who wisely accepted the fact that it was not in their best interest to produce work of a controversial nature. Hitler made it very clear from the outset that from an ideological point of view the Party was the State, and everything which could have any possible influence on the will of the people was subject to the dictates of the State. The Party, i.e. the State, was considered an "incorruptible judge" of all aspects of German life. As far as Hitler was concerned, the term "party" was a misnomer; he preferred the concept of a "new order" which

transcended the provincialism of a party political system and had a "fruitful relationship with the body of the nation."[1]

The ideologists of the Party realized that control over the cultural life of the nation meant not only that they would be able effectively to silence any criticism from intellectual circles, but that in doing so, they would acquire a valuable channel for the promotion of their political views. In 1928 they took over the Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur — an organization concerned with the preservation of German culture — and renamed it the Nationalsozialistische Gesellschaft für deutsche Kultur. All performing artists who were members of the Party were expected to join this organisation and to pursue their careers in a way that could be justified ideologically. The most important issue at stake, however, was to cleanse pure German music of the excesses of "Bolshevist-inspired atonality," "immoral popular music" and the Jewification (Verjudung) of the musical life of the country.[2] Works such as Alban Berg's Wozzeck, Bertholt Brecht's Dreigroschenoper and various works by Hindemith, Krenek and Weill were condemned severely because they depicted only the most negative aspects of mankind; they had no true ethos, no optimistic view of the future, and were considered destructive to the "völkisch" ideal.[3]

The following critique of Kurt Weill's opera Die Burgschaft gives

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1 Rauschning, pp. 184-187.

2 Fred K. Prieberg, Musik im NS-Staat (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1982), p. 35.

3 Ibid., pp. 36-38.

an indication of how vehement Nazi opposition was to this "contaminated" music:

> Concepts such as character, loyalty and honour, which have always been an integral part of German art, have been dragged through the dirt and mocked with cynical impudence. He has glued together the worst kind of backstreet melodies, dreadful jazz and nigger rhythms, completely unmotivated dissonances and hackneyed banalities without any obvious artistic ability. It is completely impotent music.[4]

It is interesting to note that the author of this critique, Hans Fleischer, was refused a performance of his concerto for flute, clarinet and strings on the grounds that it was composed "in the spirit of Hindemith and would provide the audience with everything except pleasure."[5] The fact that the Gesellschaft für deutsche Kultur was supported by the Party and the Minister of Propaganda, Dr. Josef Goebbels, meant that it was in a position to influence many decisions concerning artists and programmes. It could also tacitly support the more radical elements of the Party who created disturbances at performances given by non-Aryan artists and at performances of works which were supposedly un-Germanic in nature.

The Reichsmusikkammer was the most important official organisation dealing with music and musicians and came into existence in 1933 with Richard Strauss as president. Although it was supposed to be an autonomous body, it came under the aegis of the Propaganda Ministry. Strauss was appointed to the position of president without being consulted although he had little interest in politics

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4 Prieberg, p. 39.

5 Ibid., original author not named.

and no respect for the Nazi Party. He took it upon himself to do as much as possible for his fellow musicians — particularly Jews — but discovered to his cost that Goebbels had the power to veto any decision he made as President of the Reichsmusikkammer. Strauss made it his business to ignore the ideologically-based Party policy on music and related matters, but he was constantly thwarted by Goebbels, who ignored his opinions and suggestions and threatened to have his works either boycotted or withdrawn completely. Strauss finally fell from grace because of his collaboration with Stefan Zweig who, at the time, was writing the libretto of Die schweigsame Frau. Goebbels was particularly annoyed with this liaison between Jew and Aryan: it flagrantly contravened all Nazi racial principles. Both Strauss and Zweig were under constant Nazi surveillance and Strauss' secret promises to Zweig — of help and protection from the Nazis — were discovered, in the form of an extremely compromising letter. This was immediately brought to Hitler's attention. In the ensuing debacle Die schweigsame Frau was withdrawn after only a few performances and Strauss was forced to resign from the presidency of the Reichsmusikkammer.[6]

Josef Goebbels was undoubtedly one of the most powerful men in the Third Reich and one of the few who paid rigorous attention to the correct application of Party doctrine. His amazing gifts as an orator offset the fact that physically he did not conform to the Aryan ideal. His lack of interest in artistic and musical

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6 Pamela Potter, "Strauss's 'Friedenstag': a Pacifist Attempt at Resistance," Music Quarterly LXIX, 3 (August 1977), pp. 408-424.

matters was quite obvious, but then this was, to a considerable degree, typical of the entire Nazi hierarchy. Goebbels' biographers stress that he was only interested in a musical work or event insofar as it had value as material for propaganda, and that the actual content was of little importance to him. Although he outwardly adopted Hitler's enthusiasm for Wagner during the early years of the Party, his taste in music was of a commonplace level. After the Party came to power in 1933, Goebbels claimed Wagner as the "out-and-out embodiment of the Volk ideal"; in Wagner's works one found the "skillful mixture of German seriousness and Romanticism, of German pride and German diligence." His simulated adulation reached the ultimate in absurdity with the acronym — GRÖMAZ — which he coined for Wagner, meaning "Grösstes Musikgenie aller Zeiten."[7] Goebbels was not really interested in the operas or their supposed application to Nazi philosophy. His main concern was the removal of alien elements from German music. This in most cases meant Jewish musicians. It is the greatest irony that Bayreuth, where numerous Jewish musicians performed at the festival, was not within his jurisdiction.

A good example of Goebbels' disregard for the implications of content was his decision to withdraw Bizet's opera Carmen because gypsies — whom the Nazis considered a sub-human species — were represented.[8]

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[7] Ibid., pp. 169-170.

[8] Richard Strauss expressed his feelings about this issue in a letter to Julius Kopsch in October 1934:

I hear that the Aryan law is to be sharpened and that

The Nazis' ignorance about music is best shown by their attitude towards Carl Orff who, quite inadvertently, wrote in a style which conformed to the National Socialist ideal. His dramatic cantata Carmina Burana was hailed as a work composed in the spirit of National Socialism; its clear rhythms, simple melody lines and romantic poetry appealed to the Nazis considerably and the cantata was regarded as an example of what could be achieved without resort to atonality, free use of dissonances and 12-tone techniques. It must be stressed, however, that Orff did not write his works with a view to fulfilling the edicts of the Nazis. They were the result of a personal philosophy about the nature of music and its value within the greater social context; their simplicity belies a considerable degree of sophistication. Like so many other artists during this time, Orff was unsuccessful in his attempts to remain outside the political arena. Both he and Richard Strauss were accused, after the war ended, of having been Nazi collaborators. Orff did of course exploit the Nazi's untutored ideas about music to further his own career, as did many other German artists who were fortunate enough to be pure "Aryans".

> Carmen will be forbidden. I have no wish to participate in such embarrassing blunders. . . .My extensive and serious proposals were declined by the Minister. Time is too precious for me to participate in such amateurish mischief.

— Potter, "Strauss's 'Friedenstag': A Pacifist Attempt at Resistance," p. 410.

An instance of Nazi incomprehension occurred when Orff's opera Die Kluge was first performed in Frankfurt in February 1943. The opera is based on a fairy tale and Orff disguised within it a remarkable attack on the Nazi regime, using melodies and rhythms in the style of Carmina Burana. Although the opera's climax is a remarkable "indictment speech,"[9] it was celebrated as another triumph of National Socialist art and was chosen that year to be the premier attraction at the Kulturwoche held in the town of Cottbus. It was only in the following year, at a performance in the Austrian town of Graz, that its true meaning became clear and it was denounced as a premeditated attack on the State, which of course it was. When the Nazi regime collapsed, Orff was much praised for what was undeniably a courageous act of resistance.[10]

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Fides ist geschlagen tot.	Faithfulness has been beaten to death.
Justitia lebt in grosser Not.	Right lives in great need.
Pietas liegt auf dem Stroh.	Piety lies on a bed of straw.
Humilitas schreit mordio.	Humility cries murder.
Superbia ist auserkorn.	Pride reigns completely.
Patientia hat den Streit verlorn.	Patience has lost the battle.
Veritas ist gen Himmel geflogen.	Truth has flown to heaven.
Treu und Ehre sind übers Meer gezogen.	Fidelity and honour have gone overseas.
Betteln geht die Frömmigkeit	Piety has gone a-begging.
Tyrannis führt das Szepter weit,	Tyranny holds the scepter.
Invidia ist wordenlos.	Envy is at large.
Caritas ist nackt und blos.	Charity is naked and bare.
Tugend ist das Land vertrieben.	Virtue has been driven from the country.
Untreu und Bösheit sind verblieben.	Deceit and unkindness have remained.

— Carl Orff, Die Kluge: Die Geschichte von dem König und der klugen Frau (Mainz, Schott, 1957), pp. 139-147.

10 Prieberg, pp. 326-328.

When the celebrated case of Paul Hindemith erupted, it became abundantly clear that, as far as the Nazis were concerned, music had value only if it conformed to particular political and ideological prescriptions. Hindemith presented the Nazis with a problem: although they recognized his talent and international standing as a composer and the important fact that he was unquestionably a "true Aryan", he simply ignored the Party and its ideological dictates. He was accused of being "at home in all possible musical styles but not at home in the soul of the German nation," of "spiritual non-Aryanism," and "obscene dissonances for the sake of sensation."[11]

Using Hindemith as an example, Goebbels pointed out that artists of his standing were expected to maintain a personal artistic philosophy based on the precepts of National Socialism, and also had to demonstrate loyalty and obedience to the State in their works. He also stressed that mediocre artists who submitted to the discipline of the Party were more welcome than those who recognized their art only as a discipline.[12] This belief that all art should be subject to the dictates of the Party meant that committed National Socialists earnestly attempted to write works which expressed their total allegiance to Nazi ideology. Composers made constant reference to the idea that as soon as German art was purged of all the debilitating influences mentioned before, Germany would stand at the dawn of a new era. The new German

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11 Wilhelm Jensen, "Musik und Volksturm," Völkische Beobachter, cited by Prieberg, p. 63-65.

12 Prieberg, p. 68.

art, filled with "irrepressible vitality"[13] should at the same time be a political art practised within the framework of the creative consciousness of National Socialism. Public declarations of faith in the Nazi ideal, such as the following one made by Karl Böhm on the eve of the Austrian referendum in 1936, were common:

> National Socialism has presented musicians with a goal and a task in which it would be to their advantage to serve the highest cultural ideals of the German nation, using all their energy and knowledge. The artists owe thanks to the new State for allowing them to help with the rehabilitation of the new Germany and for regarding them as an integral part of this programme.[14]

Consequently, countless works were written in which all facets of Nationalist Socialist ideology were displayed and preached. Apart from a proliferation of march music, audiences had to cope with works such as the cantata O Herzland Böhmen written by Fidelio F. Finke. This work was considered a reputable example of serious National Socialist art, although it is almost a caricature of itself. Scored for organ, brass and massed choir, the cantata deals with the freeing of Bohemia from the Slavic yoke and its safe return to the bosom of Mother Germany. The composer made extensive use of whole-tone scales, much dissonance and quarter-tone techniques; one presumes his patriotic zeal compensates for these obvious examples of "cultural Bolshevism."[15]

Of the more serious composers, Hans Pfitzner was notably a zealous

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13 Ibid., p. 128.

14 Ibid., p. 131.

15 Ibid., pp. 232-233.

supporter of the National Socialist Party of which he had been a committed member since 1923. He inveighed copiously against jazz, atonality and, of course, the Jews, whom he considered a "dangerous puzzle."[16] His works, which are couched in the dated late-Romantic musical language of Brahms and Mahler — and particularly his operas, based on the most esoteric subjects — clearly had no value within the boundaries of National Socialist ideology. Having suffered an unofficial boycott of his works by Jewish singers and musicians because of his blatant anti-Semitism, he firmly expected to occupy an important position when the Nazis came to power in 1933, as a reward for having been an ardent and loyal supporter of the Party for such a long time. This was not to be, however, and he had to look on as Strauss was appointed to the prestigious position of President of the Reichs-musikkammer. It is extremely ironic that his works, particularly the operas, were performed even less during the Nazi era than during the time of the Weimar Republic.[17]

Church Music and National Socialism

The de-Christianising of Germany was extremely important to the Nazis for obvious reasons: both the Catholic and Lutheran Churches were a serious threat to their autonomy and had to be undermined as rapidly as possible. Hitler maintained that he could not see a future for Christianity in Germany and was determined to "rip it out by the roots."[18] He also regarded

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16 Holde, p. 300.

17 Prieberg, pp. 215-225.

18 Rauschning, p. 50-51.

Christianity as a "Jewish swindle"[19] and insisted that one was either Christian or German because the two concepts were totally imcompatible. The cleansing of church music of all contaminating influences was again an important issue. The programme was intense after the Nazis came to power and within a short time all religious works and hymns which admitted God as the only supreme being were forbidden. Many church musicians aligned themselves with the Nazis and made it known that they rejected any foreign, cosmopolitan elements which could possibly undermine the new National Socialist Church music. Although the actual hymn tunes remained the same, the verses were replaced by new versions which avoided any references to God, Jews, Zion and the compassion of Christ (see Example 1).

The intensely devout works of J. S. Bach were later forbidden in churches and concert halls, and were only allowed to be performed (with revised words of course) at the new pagan celebrations designed by the Nazis to replace Christmas, Easter and other important religious festivals. Even Christmas carols had to undergo change. "Silent Night" emerged as the battle hymn of a German soldier at the front:
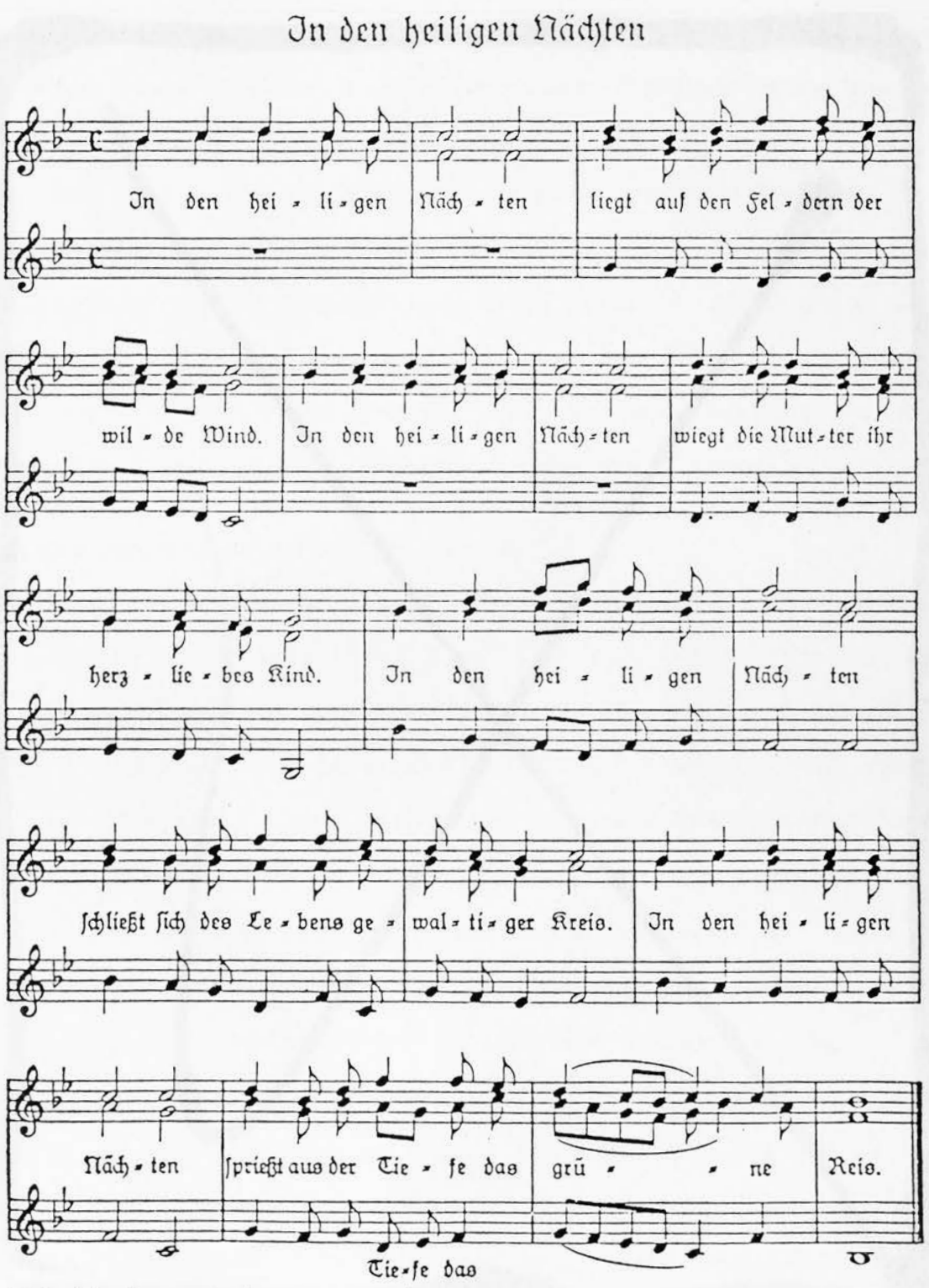
Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht.	Silent Night, Holy Night.
Deutschlands Söhne halten Wacht.	Germany's sons keep watch.
In dem Schützengraben verschneit	Under snow in their trenches,
Liegen wir Mann für Mann bereit	they lie side by side,
lauern bei Tag und bei Nacht.	ready day and night. [20]

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19 Ibid.

20 Prieberg, p. 349.

EXAMPLE 1: New Hymn for the National Socialist Christmas Festival*
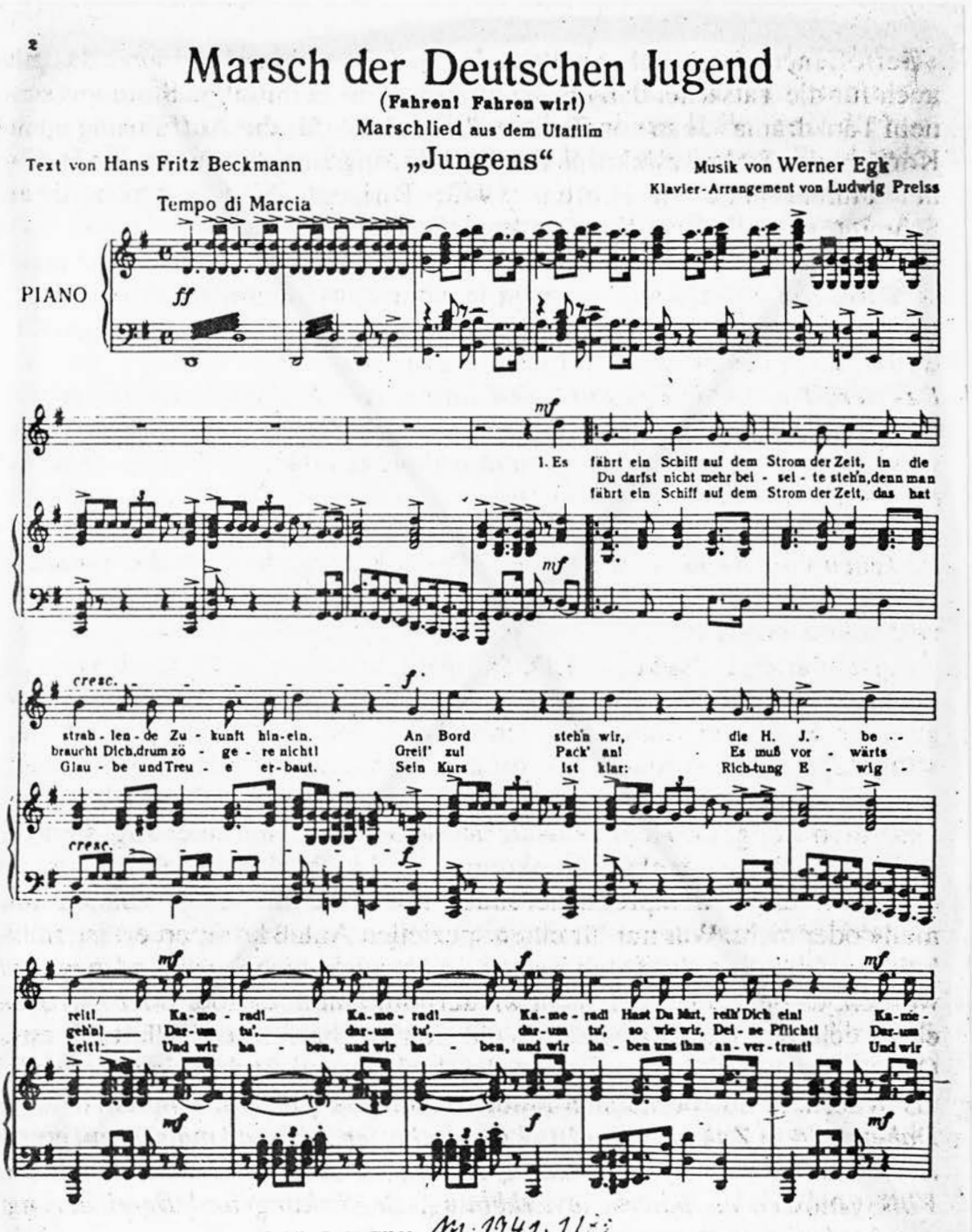


* Prieberg, p. 345

The Nazis effectively quashed all religious opposition by deporting dissenting religious leaders to concentration camps or simply having them arrested and shot, as happened to the less influential ones. Churches were desecrated and new pagan festivals were devised to take the place of Christian services. The Christmas festival, for instance, was replaced by a Summer Solstice Festival, and many composers took it upon themselves to write new worldly "hymns" to suit the occasion. All aspects of Christianity were rooted out with determination, and when the Third Reich reached its zenith in the years 1941-42, even Wagner's Parsifal met with disapproval because of its emphasis of Christian elements.

Popular Music during the Third Reich
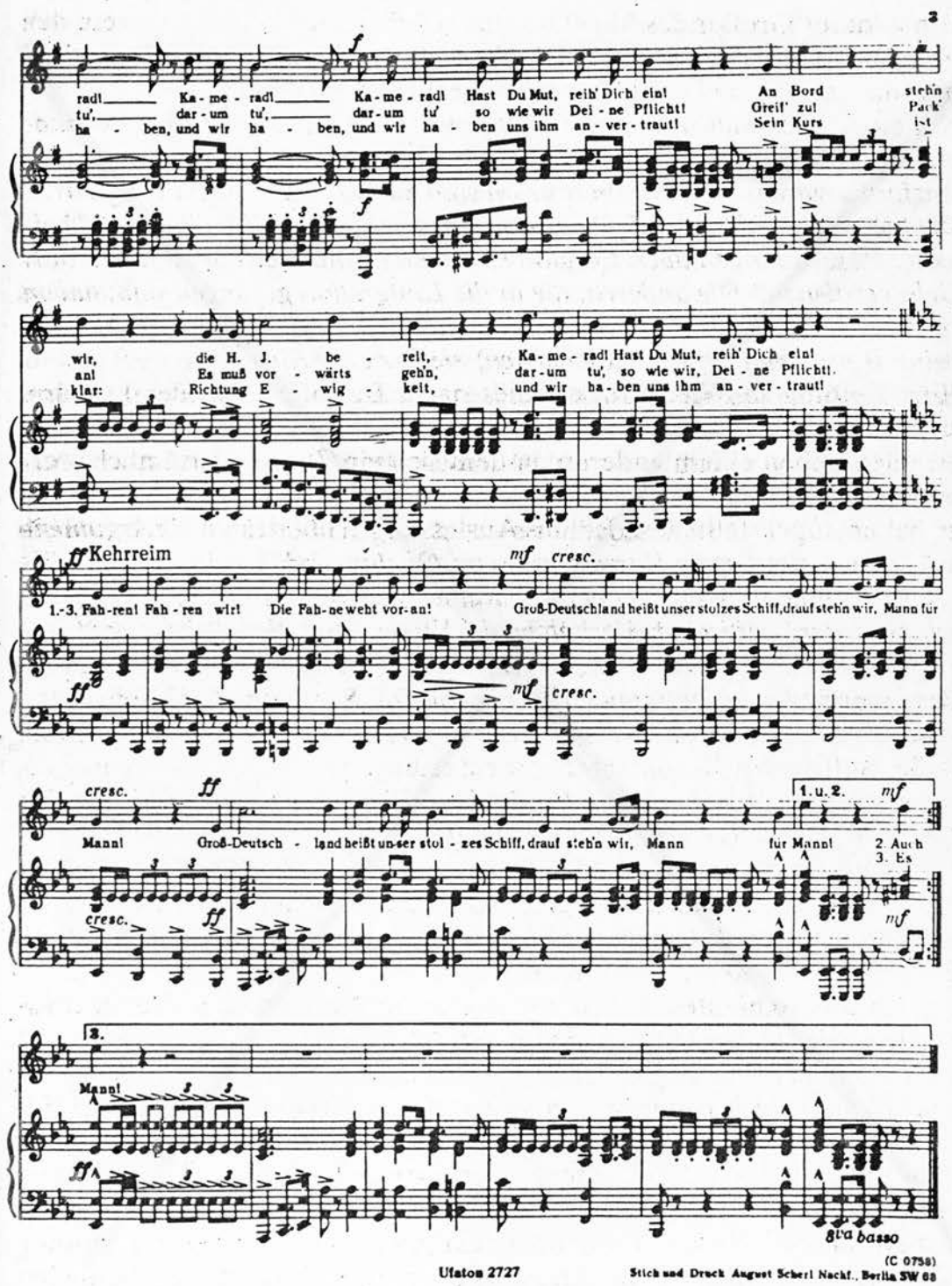
In the realm of popular music a quite new musical genre emerged which was extremely clear in its political content but of pathetically scant aesthetic value. This genre consisted of highly patriotic songs (generally community songs) intended mainly for marching and for use at the many rites and festivals established by the Nazis. They were more or less in the same form and, as far as both text and music were concerned, they were extremely simple. Their most obvious aim was to caress the patriotic feelings of listener/participant in such a way that belief and trust in the German Fatherland would be constantly reinforced. The songs also stressed how much the New Germany cared for the common people, and as Examples 2 and 3 show, this was done in the most unsubtle manner. Germany under siege from attack, both military and moral, was a common theme. Constant reference also is made to the new, awakening militant Germany preparing

EXAMPLE 2:



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EXAMPLE 2 (continued)



Prieberg, pp. 28-29.

EXAMPLE 3:
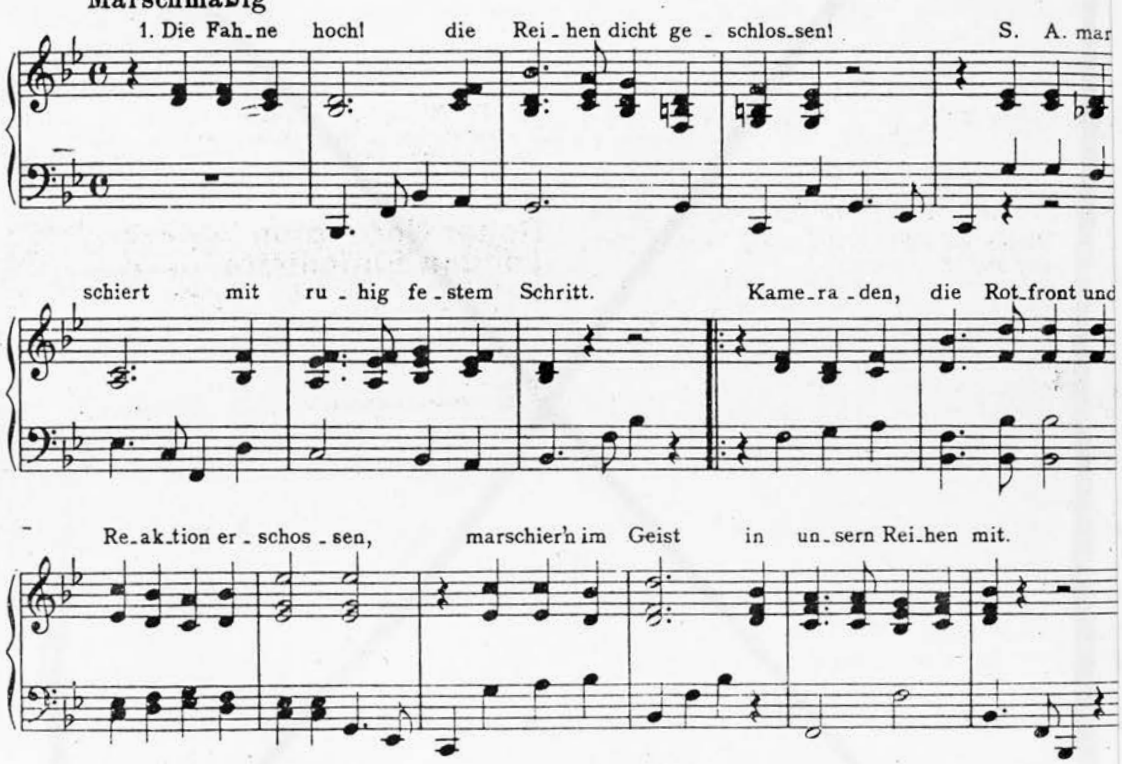
I. Lieder der N. S. D. A. P., Vaterlands- und Soldatenlieder

Das Horst Wessel-Lied*)

Der Abdruck erfolgt mit Genehmigung der Horst Wessel'schen Erben.

Satz von H.

Marschmäßig



2. Die Straße frei den braunen Bataillonen!
Die Straße frei dem Sturmabteilungsmann!
Es schau'n aufs Hakenkreuz voll Hoffnung schon Millionen,
Der Tag für Freiheit und für Brot bricht an.

3. Zum letzten Mal wird nun Appell geblasen,
Zum Kampfe stehn wir alle schon bereit.
Bald flattern Hitlerfahnen über allen Straße
Die Knechtschaft dauert nur noch kurze Ze

4. Die Fahne hoch! Die Reihen dicht geschlossen!
S. A. marschiert mit ruhig festem Schritt.
Kameraden, die Rotfront und Reaktion erschossen,
Marschier'n im Geist in unsern Reihen mit.

Marc Balkin, "Reichsmusik: an Aid to Fanaticism", Music and Musicians, XIX, 11 (November 1971), pp. 8-13.

itself for the coming conflict. The Nazis effectively created a seige mentality amongst their followers by being deliberately vague about the source of the threat Germany had to face. The two songs "Marsch der Deutschen Jugend" and the famous "Horst Wessel-Lied" (Examples 2 and 3) clearly illustrate that the Nazis expected these songs to be nothing more than vehicles for the most blatant emotional manipulation; no one was expected to contemplate them in a rational manner. The strong chauvinistic sentiments expressed in these songs are typical of their kind. Their sole purpose was to mould a collective mind, as Hitler made clear in Mein Kampf: "The road cannot be cleared for the movement by dagger or poison or pistol, but by conquering the man in the street."[21] Hitler was acutely aware of the fact that he could control the masses by constantly playing on their fears and by stimulating their hysteria and fanaticism. These songs, which contributed to that purpose, accordingly were played on the radio incessantly and sung at all Party occasions. The conscious de-intellectualization of the masses obviously meant that profound changes took place in Germany during the Nazi era. An entire generation of young Germans grew up believing that appreciating the treasures of Germany's superb musical heritage could be construed as a betrayal of the ideals of National Socialism. These treasures included the operas of Wagner, which the more zealous Nazis distrusted because they could be considered intellectual.

This is borne out by the following statistic: of the recorded

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21 Hitler, Mein Kampf, p. 217.

song "Du kannst nicht treu sein" 32 276 copies were sold within eight months compared to only fourteen copies of a recording of excerpts from Wagner's Götterdämmerung in the same period.[22]

The democratization Hitler forced on Germany established a vast class of people who could be manipulated at will and, to this end, all possible forces were employed. It is in this field that various superficial aspects of Wagner's operas had value. The outward trappings of the operas were used effectively in creating and maintaining the illusion that National Socialism was historically and culturally justified. The overture to Rienzi (which, it will be recalled, was Hitler's favourite opera) was played at the very first Party Day held in Munich in 1923, much to the approval of the intellectuals present. The Nazi propaganda film Der Triumph des Willens was also indebted to the dramatic effects that can be found in the Wagner operas. Hitler chose Nuremberg for the famous rallies because Wagner considered it a seat of German culture; the grandiose effects used in these rallies were intended to captivate and overawe the audience completely, much in the same way Wagner had intended with his music dramas.

This is, in fact, where the connection ends. With the exception of Hitler, who had his own personal interpretations of the operas, the Nazis were simply not interested in the actual contents of the stories or their allegorical possibilities. Wagner's anti-Semitism, his racial theories and the Germanic content of the operas did provide a precedent which, in the eyes of the Nazis, legitimized

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22 van Amerongen, Wagner: A Case History, pp. 113-114.

their regime and thus provided them with the measure of respectability they needed.

Superficially Wagner can be considered an antecedent to the Third Reich, but had the Nazis really bothered to understand his operas, particularly the Ring cycle, it would have occurred to them that in a truly Wagnerian view the political ideology of National Socialism could be perceived as carrying within it its own seed of destruction.

CHAPTER FIVE

An interesting fact to emerge from this study of Wagner, his works and their supposed connections with the Third Reich is that performances of the Ring cycle and Parsifal were prohibited in 1942 because, according to the Party, they would have had a detrimental effect on the morale of the nation. No reasons were given: opera houses were simply informed that performances of these two works were unwelcome (unerwünscht).[1] There was apparently nothing complex about this decision: according to Yehuda Cohen, the Nazis quite correctly saw the Ring as a prophecy of their own downfall and considered Parsifal unacceptable because of its overt Christian content.[2]

One presumes that, within the war situation, the Nazis could not allow a work such as the Ring cycle to be performed because of the obvious parallels between Hagen's regime and their own. Hitler's infatuation with Wagner's works and his protection of Bayreuth was now of secondary importance. The Germanic aspects of the works had by this stage served their propagandistic purpose more than adequately. The message of the Ring — prophesying the doom of those who rule by force — had absolutely no value for them as they tried to bolster the morale of the German

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1 Yehuda Cohen, "Wagner und Strauss im Giftschrank: Warum die Musik die beiden Richards in Israel noch immer tabu ist", Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 13 August 1977.

2 Ibid.

nation, then trying to fight a war on two fronts.

Only a superficial study of the Ring is necessary to show that it had a peculiar applicability to the Nazi regime. Many of Wagner's critics contend, however, that the Ring cycle is partly responsible for the rise of Nazism:

> Here [i.e. in the Ring] the supposed brutality of the German mind, its compulsion towards limitless power or total destruction and its pathetic inability to deal with reality except through murky symbolism, are said to receive the most revealing statements.[3]

There is a great deal of truth in this. What is described above is certainly present in the Ring cycle, but would have been equally applicable had the subject under discussion been the Nazi regime. In attempting to find scientific, historic and philosophical justification for their regime, the Nazis certainly did retreat into the realms of "murky symbolism" which the majority of Germans felt unable to question.

The Ring cycle was written during Wagner's exile in Switzerland and clearly contains elements of political symbolism. In it Wagner demonstrates that total ruin will most certainly be the result of the abuse of power and acquisitive greed. The cycle is in fact a socialist parable of the nineteenth century, couched in the abstruse language of Nordic mythology. George Bernard Shaw interpreted the work as a Marxist allegory and there is no doubt

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[3] George G. Windell, "Hitler, National Socialism and Wagner", Journal for Central European Affairs, 12 (1962-1963), p. 487.

that Wagner had been influenced by Marx's Communist Manifesto, published in 1848. Shaw also draws attention to the important fact that not only had Wagner's opinion of the value of political symbolism in opera changed during the musical genesis of the work, but Wagner was exceptionally naïve in his belief that a character such as Siegfried — modelled on the anarchist Bakunin — could halt the forces set in motion by Wotan's mismanagement and Alberich's furtive dealings. Shaw also considered the cycle a prophetic work and maintained that

> The Ring may, like the famous Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels, be an inspired guess at the historic laws and end of our capitalist-theocratic epoch, yet Wagner, like Marx, was too inexperienced in technical government and administration and too melodramatic in his hero-contra-villain conception of the class struggle, to foresee the actual process by which his generalization would work out, or the part to be played in it by the classes involved.[4]

It is interesting to note that Shaw's interpretation of the cycle, which had long been rejected as wild speculation by Wagnerites, received some support when the diaries of Cosima Wagner were published, for there we read:

> The other day R. said it gave him pleasure to have offered in the Ring a complete picture of the curse of greed, together with the ruin it entails.[5]

Like Shaw, Windell also stresses the political nature and origins of the work. He maintains that not only has the Ring

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[4] George Bernard Shaw, The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Niblung's Ring (London: Constable, 1929), p. 101.

[5] Cosima Wagner, Die Tagebücher, IV, 692-693.

been entirely misunderstood but that Wagner has been the unfortunate recipient of loathing and contempt, originally meant for Hitler. He also regards the cycle as an allegory of the nineteenth century, but more broadly philosophical rather than specifically socialist:

> The Ring is . . . a morality play in which mythological characters enact an allegory on the nineteenth century, and its theme is in no way incompatible with the main stream of Western moral thought. The central figure, the god Wotan, is a constitutional monarch whose lust for power, born, as is so often the case, out of fear, drives him to violate his moral obligation to justice upon which his legitimate authority rests. From the moment that Wotan conceives the idea of denying to the giants the payment agreed upon for the construction of Valhalla, his moral position is undermined. Expediency rather than justice further motivates his extortion of the ring from Alberich, for Wotan's goal is not to destroy the ring's capacity to confer limitless power on its holder by restoring it to the Rhinemaidens, but to acquire that power for himself. Before Rheingold ends, Wotan has twice violated the moral basis of his authority, and the doom of the gods has become certain. Henceforth he cannot control events without again acting unjustly. It is his ultimate comprehension of this moral dilemma that leads him to his own destruction.[6]

A search through the Ring cycle for elements of a Nazi political programme has proved fruitless with the exception of Siegfried who can be regarded, with some stretching of the imagination, as a prototype of the storm trooper or a member of the Hitler Jugend. Siegfried is indeed a splendid human being: unfettered by fear, quick to respond to his impulses and ruthless in dealing with his enemies. These aspects of his character are particularly evident in Act I of the opera. His impatience with Mime, his

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6 Windell, p. 488.

contempt for authority and for cowardice impressed Hitler and the Nazis considerably: Siegfried was to them the artistic embodiment and vindication of the superiority of the Aryan race. His heroism, strength of character and vitality epitomised the ideal to which they all could aspire.

Wagner considered Siegfried the "ideal human being", having the ability to withstand the evil forces of the world and also capable of cleansing society from the effects of ill-devised laws and stultifying traditions. He is the nineteenth-century version of Rousseau's noble savage, "the man greatly desired and longed for by us of the Future."[7] Siegfried's greatest virtue is his flawlessness, which both Shaw and Windell perceive as naïvetè and consider the source of his ruin. Michael Tanner also alludes to this in his essay "The Total Work of Art":

> This "perfect human being" proves . . . to be helpless in dealing with the world of imperfect and evil beings and indeed to be himself either corruptible or very gullible.[8]

Siegfried can also be regarded, in Nazi terms particularly, as the representative of a new racial order. It must be stressed, however, before any conclusions are made apropos the Nazi regime, that he would not have been a good candidate for the new elite Herrenvolk that Hitler envisaged. Hitler had a vision of an exclusive, racially superior German aristocracy which would rule Europe and

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7 Richard Wagner, Letters to August Röckel, trans. E.C. Sellar (Bristol: Arrowsmith, n.d.), p. 101.

8 Michael Tanner, "The Total Work of Art," in The Wagner Companion, eds. P. Burbridge and R. Sutton (London: Faber, 1979), p. 163.

eventually the world. This noble race of Aryans had to be schooled, spiritually, physically and politically, to ensure they would always have complete awareness of their own superiority and would not succumb to the corrupting elements prevalent amongst the degenerate races they would have under their control. Hitler considered it unnecessary for the races under Aryan subjugation to be educated beyond what was required of them in their clearly defined subservient roles. Their education promised a heightened awareness of self: this was seen as potentially hazardous to the autonomy of the ruling aristocracy.[9]

Siegfried, dragonslayer and "Aryan", is unfortunately not the result of a selective breeding programme but the product of an incestuous union; a salient although perhaps trivial point. The more important consideration is the nature of his heroism which is only a small part of the whole Wagner had planned for him. Here the threads which entangle Siegfried with Nazism begin to unravel. Wagner makes it very clear in his great letter to Röckel that Siegfried must achieve true spirituality or awareness of self; this, in Wagner's terms, meant "full consciousness":

> I have sought in Siegfried to represent my ideal of the perfect human being, whose highest consciousness manifests itself in the acknowledgement that all consciousness must find expression in present life and action.[10]

We are witnessing in Siegfried the hero's progress towards full

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9 Rauschning, Gespräche mit Hitler, pp. 39-41.

10 Wagner, Letters to Röckel, p. 102.

spiritual enlightenment. Heroism is an intrinsic part of his character from the very beginning and very obvious in the opera, but it never assumes the stature claimed by both Nazis and the anti-Wagner propagandists. According to Wagner, Siegfried reaches the state of full consciousness in the scene with the Rhine maidens in Götterdämmerung:

> Here we see that infinite wisdom has come to Siegfried, for he has grasped the highest truth and knows that death is better than a life of fear: knowledge of the ring, too, has come to him, but he does not heed its power. . . . Confess, in the presence of such a being, the splendour of the gods must be dimmed.[11]

Siegfried is certainly Wagner's "man of the Future" who must not be tainted by greed nor by the fear of his own mortality and must have no desire to use others for his own benefit. Wagner's greatest requirement of him is that he "never ceases to love";[12] the achievement of this state is the ultimate concern. In achieving this, he provides a solution to Wagner's dilemma: how can Siegfried become a whole human being unless the feminine aspect of his character has evolved and matured to the fullest extent? The catalyst here is of course Brünnhilde:

> Moreover, Siegfried alone (man by himself) is not the complete human being: he is merely the half; it is only along with Brünnhilde that he becomes a redeemer. To the isolated being not all things are possible; there is need of more than one, and it is woman, suffering and willing to sacrifice herself, who becomes at last the real conscious redeemer.[13]

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11 Ibid., pp. 102-103.

12 Ibid., p. 97.

13 Ibid., pp. 98-99.

After Siegfried has woken the sleeping Brünnhilde, it is immediately evident that she is aware of her important mission, for she sings: "Was du nicht weisst, weiss ich für dich; doch wissend bin ich nur — weil ich dich liebe!"[14] True consciousness will therefore only be achieved by Siegfried through the love of a woman; She is the source of his knowledge about the world. Siegfried reaches true heroism when, according to Wagner, he can give and receive love in its most spiritual form. This is undoubtedly far removed from the shortsighted Nazi understanding of Siegfried's heroism.

Siegfried clearly represents a new order: this is certainly Wagner's intention. Siegfried, in Tanner's words, "combines heroic vitalism with an ethic of love."[15] The "ethic of love" is the more important aspect of the two mentioned above although, as Tanner points out, "it is inadequate as a defence against the forces that are concerned to triumph over it."[16] Another consideration which Tanner draws attention to is whether the boisterous youth of Acts I and II of Siegfried, whose hurried initiation into adulthood takes place at the end of the opera, really achieves the ideal state Wagner had aimed for. Tanner doubts whether Siegfried really learns to love at all in the manner Wagner requires of him. The excitement Siegfried displays during Act III of the opera when he instinctively realizes that his sexual desires are about to be

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14 Richard Wagner, Siegfried, III, iii, in The Ring of the Nibelung, trans. A. Porter (London: Faber, 1984), p. 236.

15 Tanner, p. 175.

16 Ibid.

satisfied certainly makes a mockery of Wagner's lofty intentions about the spiritual power of love:

> Es braust mein Blut
> in blühender Brunst;
> ein zehrendes Feuer
> ist mir entzündet:
> Die Glut, die Brünnhilds
> Felsen umbrannt,
> die brennt mir nun in der Brust!
> O Weib, jetzt lösche den Brand!
> Schweige die schäumende Glut![17]

Siegfried's existence understandably provided the adherents of Nazism with a considerable amount of propagandistic material: to them he was the exemplary Aryan youth. It is difficult, however, to envisage Siegfried as the prototypical storm trooper, particularly if one remembers that he has to learn the meaning of fear, hardly the emotion a self-respecting storm trooper would admit to nor concern himself about. It must have provided Hitler with an enormous amount of satisfaction to have discovered in one of the works of his beloved Wagner a character who, to all intents and purposes, fulfilled his ideological requirements as far as race is concerned. If, however, one considers how Wagner conceived of Siegfried as a potentially spiritual being (although it is debatable whether he achieved this), then it is obvious how auto-suggestive and misguided some critics of Wagner and the Nazis have been about the character of Siegfried.

Hitler has often been equated with Wotan since the end of World

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17 Wagner, Siegfried, III, iii, ibid., p. 238.

War II and in studies of the Nazi era the comparison between the end of the Third Reich and the Ring cycle, particularly Götterdämmerung, appears regularly.

A superficial comparison can of course be made as far as Hitler and Wotan are concerned: both were enslaved by a series of events they themselves had set in motion. Wotan, however, realizes that the exclusion of love and a preference for power politics brings with it its own downfall and that within his own destruction, which he brings upon himself, lies the salvation of those who are destined to take his place. He is also acutely aware of the dilemma in which he has placed himself and that he is powerless to do anything about it, as his explanation to Brünnhilde in Act II of Die Walküre demonstrates:

> Als junger Liebe Lust mir verblich, verlangte nach Macht mein Mut: von jäher Wünsche Wüten gejagt, gewann ich mir die Welt. Unwissend trugvoll, Untreue übt' ich, band durch Verträge, was Unheil barg.[18]

Wotan is clearly aware that he has acted wrongly and the remainder of the Ring is the history of his attempt to return the ring to the care of the Rhinemaidens. His good intentions are thwarted by the fact that this task can only be performed by an independent agent who is ignorant of, and more important, unmoved by the power the ring confers on the person who possesses it. Siegfried, the product of Siegmund and Sieglinde's brief love, is created to execute this mission but has to be sacrificed before Wotan's

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18 Wagner, Die Walküre, II, ii, ibid., p. 106.

return to grace is possible.

Hitler, on the other hand, had no qualms about the political programme he had formulated and put in motion and sincerely believed that when the war had ended, the thousand-year Reich he envisaged would last. The last two years of his life are marked by the pathetic belief that he would succeed and he created for himself a fanciful world in which the concept of failure simply did not exist. Any attempts by his generals and advisors to press upon him the reality and gravity of the situation were met by explosions of hysterical rage.[19] Hitler obstinately refused to discuss anything with any of his advisors if there existed the possibility that they might advocate capitulation.[20] His suicide was neither an act of free will in the Wagnerian sense nor a philanthrophic gesture like Wotan's. The concept of a future, and a Germany, without National Socialism was not within his comprehension:

> There is no need to consider the basis even of a most primitive existence any longer. On the contrary, it is better to destroy even that, and to destroy ourselves. The nation has proved itself weak, and the future belongs solely to the stronger eastern nation. Besides, those who remain after the battle are of little value; for the good have fallen.[21]

If there is any character in the Ring cycle who foreshadows Hitler it is certainly not Wotan but Alberich who, "consumed by hatred

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19 Alan Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny (London: Hamlyn, 1965), p. 764.

20 Ibid., pp. 774-775.

21 Speer's evidence at Nuremberg, Nuremberg Proceedings, Part XVII, p. 35, cited by Bullock, pp. 774-775.

and having renounced love for power, pursues his goal with fanatic single-mindedness."[22]

The Ring is the reaffirmation of Wagner's belief that man can be redeemed if he acknowledges love as the all-important creative force and eschews power which can corrupt and be abused.

It is also an outright condemnation of the kind of political tyranny instituted by the Nazis and it is impossible to believe that the adherents of Nazism, beginning with Hitler, did not see beyond the superficial trappings of the cycle. The Ring is Wagner's attempt to demonstrate how and, more important, why, the old order must make way for the new, especially when the old order is undeniably corrupt and has misused the authority placed in its care. He made this very clear, as can be seen in the following extract from the same letter to Röckel quoted previously:

> The development of the whole poem sets forth the necessity of recognizing and yielding to the change, the many-sidedness of life, the multiplicity, the eternal renewing of reality and of life. Wotan rises to the tragic height of willing his own destruction. This is the lesson we have to hearn from the history of mankind: to will what necessity imposes, and ourselves bring it about.[23]

This quotation proves adequately the elementary fact that the Ring is not a grand essay in pessimism, as so many would believe, but a work which celebrates the possibility that a cataclysmic state or event can be succeeded by something positive. The Ring cycle

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22 Windell, p. 489.

23 Wagner, Letters to Röckel, p. 97.

is, in Tanner's words, "a celebration of creativity";[24] it is a celebration of Wagner's belief that mankind can be redeemed by admitting to the healing power of love and by recognizing the evil of selfish ambition and a lust for power. The most tragic aspect of Wagner's consoling and healing love is that it cannot exist in a state of innocence and must admit to and be aware of the malevolent forces that exist in the world.

Parsifal and the Religion of Racism

Of all Wagner's works, Parsifal has been the subject of the most bizarre and exotic interpretations. It is almost impossible to decide, when sifting through only a part of the voluminous amount of literature on the opera, what can be considered sane, intelligible criticism and how much can be discarded as sensationalist nonsense. It is as if authors vied with each other in producing spectacular analyses which purport to solve the supposed mysteries of the opera.

The charges against the work are diverse: it has been called an anti-feminist tract,[25] and there is supposed to be a link

> between the monastic homosexuality of Parsifal, centered around the leadership of an intuitively inspired youth, and the not dissimilar fellowship of Ernst Röhm's troopers. Not the Ring but Parsifal was the Wagner

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24 Tanner, p. 175.

25 van Amerongen, p. 85.

> work whose mythology was powerful enough to leave an indelible mark on Germany.[26]

The opera is also considered a flagrant blasphemy because of Wagner's use of elements from the Roman Catholic Mass and their portrayal on a theatre stage. Nietzsche, on the other hand, railed against Wagner because the work owed so much to Christianity and, as far as he was concerned, was the ultimate proof that Wagner was an artistic poseur:

> Richard Wagner, apparently most triumphant, but in truth a decaying and despairing decadent, suddenly sank down, helpless and broken, before the Christian cross. Did no German have eyes in his head or pity in his conscience for this horrid spectacle? Was I the only one whom it pained? . . . As I proceeded alone I trembled; not long after I was sick, more than sick, namely, weary — weary from the inevitable disappointment about everything that is left to us modern men for enthusiasm, about the universally wasted energy, work, hope, youth, love — weary from nausea at the whole idealistic lie and pampering of the conscience, which had here triumphed once again over one of the bravest.[27]

It is interesting to note that Nietzsche, who had never heard Parsifal performed, considered it

> a work of perfidy, of vindictiveness, of a secret attempt to poison the presuppositions of life — a bad work. The preaching of chastity remains an incitement to anti-nature; I despise everyone who does

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26 Gutman, p. 300.

27 Friedrich Nietzsche, Nietzsche contra Wagner, trans. W. Kaufmann in The Portable Nietzsche, cited by Lucy Beckett, Richard Wagner: Parsifal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 113-114.

> not experience Parsifal as an attempted assassination of basic ethics.[28]

There is a clear connection between Nietzsche's well documented contempt for Christianity and his loathing of Wagner and, finally, of Parsifal. He objected to Christianity — and therefore Parsifal — because it was, according to him, the most corrupting of religions:

> I condemn Christianity. . . . To me it is the extremest thinkable form of corruption, it has had the will to the ultimate corruption conceivably possible. The Christian Church has left nothing untouched by its depravity, it has made of every value a disvalue, of every truth a lie, of every kind of integrity a vileness of soul.[29]

Nietzsche felt that Wagner had abandoned his artistic principles by writing a work which was conceived within the framework of Christian morality and which had a message and promise of salvation. Nietzsche considered Parsifal the noxious result of moral and religious reflection — a danger, he notes, of which Goethe had also warned artists:

> Goethe once asked himself what danger threatened all romantics: the fatality of romanticism. His answer was: "suffocating in the rumination of moral and religious absurdities." In brief Parsifal.[30]

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28 Ibid., p. 114.

29 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 186.

30 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Case of Wagner, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 162.

It is interesting to note that, while he consistently objected to the Christian content of the work, Nietzsche grudgingly admired the consummate skill with which Wagner duped his devotees. Wagner, he concludes, is "a seducer on the grand scale." Parsifal is therefore particularly dangerous because of the excellent way it conveys its corrupting message. He continues:

> His last work is in this respect his greatest masterpiece. In the art of seduction Parsifal will always retain its rank — as the stroke of genius in seduction. — I admire this work; I wish I had written it myself; failing that, I understand it. Wagner never had better inspirations than in the end. Here the cunning in his alliance of beauty and sickness goes so far that it casts a shadow over Wagner's earlier art — which now seems too bright, too healthy.[31]

Robert Gutman, whose study of Wagner's life and works is a diatribe of considerable proportions, bases much of his argument on Nietzsche's point of view. He ignores, for some curious reason, the fact that Nietzsche objected to Parsifal because of its Christian content. Gutman is clearly convinced that Parsifal is an anti-Christian work.[32] Gutman's contempt for Wagner is unbounded. He sees Parsifal as a foul concoction of racism, a bitter struggle for power and a comment on the evils of miscegenation. He considers the Christian legend on which Parsifal is based a mere diversion; the main object of the work, according to him, is to expound a "religion of racism":

> As a devout Christian he [Wagner] found unacceptable the Biblical explanation of mankind's origin in an

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31 Ibid., p. 184.

32 Gutman, p. 431.

> act of the Jewish God. Sweepingly, he declared Aryan and human history to be one, for, without fortifying themselves with an admixture of godly white blood, the colored races could achieve nothing. In this way, Wagner believed, inferior peoples had through the ages drained Aryans of an indigenous purity, their distinguishing godly features being sucked out. It was his purpose in Heldentum and its artistic counterpart, Parsifal, to confront Germany with the seriousness of its racial crisis — to outline the perfection, decline, and hopes for regeneration of the debased Aryan.[33]

Gutman interprets Parsifal accordingly:

> Surveying the world from the heights of Montsalvat, the Grail community in Parsifal was alarmed to observe natural selection working against its distinctive Aryanism. . . . Something was terribly wrong; the evolutionary machinery was malfunctioning, confusing the fit with the unfit. The knights were confronted with an enemy gaining upon them every day. Here was the decisive racial crisis that grew into an uncompromising struggle for power. Parsifal's false façade of Christian abnegation masks this almost insane conflict.
> . . . . . .
> Amfortas contrasts the divine blood of Christ in the Grail with his own sinful blood, corrupted by sexual contact with Kundry, a racial inferior, this criminal miscegenation epitomizing the Aryan dilemma.[34]

Gutman's radical views are echoed by Hartmut Zelinsky who has no doubts that the opera is an exercise in anti-Semitism cloaked in the acceptable raiments of Roman Catholicism. He also maintains that there is a definite line of "continuity between Parsifal's Erlösung ('Redemption') and Hitler's Endlösung ('Final Solution')."[35] Zelinsky considers this an obvious fact and has seriously suggested

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33 Ibid., p. 422.

34 Ibid., pp. 422-423 and 427.

35 van Amerongen, p. 88.

that performances of Parsifal be curtailed.[36]

Zelinsky claims to have found indisputable evidence in the diaries of Cosima Wagner that the work is in fact a "musical statement of anti-Semitic, pre-Facist racial theorizing"![37] He quotes the following mysterious passage from Cosima Wagner's diaries to prove his point (in this extract Cosima Wagner is reporting her husband's views on Parsifal):

> I know what I know and what is contained therein; it suggests more than it expresses, the content of this work — Erlösung dem Erlöser — and we are silent, after he has added, "It is a good thing we are alone together."[38]

It is obviously extremely difficult to decide what this quotation really means and whether it truly supports Zelinksy's thesis. If Parsifal was intended to be an anti-Semitic work, it is difficult to understand why Wagner, who seldom missed an opportunity for reviling the Jews, went to such lengths to disguise his purpose; why, that is, did he not simply make it clear that he was writing a work which celebrates the virtues of a Christian faith freed from the contamination of Judaism? Zelinsky is firm in his belief that Wagner has cunningly used a music drama as the vehicle for his new brand of Christianity undefiled by vestiges of its Judaic ancestry. According to Zelinsky, Parsifal represents Wagner's

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36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., p. 86.

38 Cosima Wagner, Die Tagebücher, IV, 866.

vision of the new Aryan Christ. He also scathingly attacks several German authors — notably Martin Gregor-Dellin, whose biography of the composer is presently considered one of the best in the German language — for being over-protective of Wagner and disdainful of his (Zelinsky's) opinion that Wagner is a central figure in the genesis of National Socialist ideology.[39]

Both Gutman and Zelinsky acknowledge a debt to Hitler who, early in his career as the self-imposed saviour of the German race, had formulated the concept of a racist Parsifal. As far as both Gutman and Zelinsky are concerned, Hitler had an expert and enlightened understanding of the opera. Both independently refer to the following passage from Rauschning:

> We must appreciate Wagner's Parsifal in a completely different way to the general conception. Behind the absurd externals of the story with its Christian embroidery and Good Friday mystifications, something altogether different is revealed as the true content of the drama. It is not the pure Christian religion that is acclaimed but the pure noble blood in the procreation and glorification of whose purity the brotherhood of the initiated have come together.[40]

Zelinsky maintains that research into Hitler's appreciation of Parsifal is far from adequate, and that once this is remedied the public's attitude to the work will change considerably.[41] If Parsifal is a work which provides an artistic justification of Nazi

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39 Hartmut Zelinsky, "Das erschreckende 'Erwachen', und wie man Wagner von Hitler befreit", Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, 144 (September 1983), pp. 9-16.

40 Rauschning, p. 216.

41 Hartmut Zelinsky, "Zu schönen Klängen eine brutale Ideologie", Interview in Der Spiegel, 36 (August 1982), pp. 131-139.

racism, then it is strange that it never occupied a more important position in the propaganda arsenal of the Nazis. George Windell also puts forward the idea that the infamous SS had as conceptual basis the Knights of the Grail, and that during World War II the Nazis tried to recruit an "international elite" of pure-blooded heroes who would be an asset to the Master Race.[42]

However, the fact that Hitler forbade performances of the work at the outset of the war — when it conceivably would have been at its most useful from a propagandistic point of view — is even more inexplicable. Zelinsky maintains that Hitler wanted to keep the work for the great victory celebrations that were to have taken place after Germany's expected triumph in the war.[43] Parsifal would then eventually be celebrated as the ultimate artistic justification of racism as a religion. This, as will be recalled, is in direct contradiction to the point of view held by Winifred Wagner and, later, by Yehuda Cohen, who maintained that the Nazis objected to Parsifal because of its Christian content.

According to the diaries of Cosima Wagner, however, Wagner himself repudiated race theories in favour of Christian doctrine. During the early summer of 1881, Gobineau — whose name is frequently linked to Wagner's in discussions on the origins of Nazism — spent four weeks as a guest at Wahnfried. This visit was marred by a considerable amount of rancour although Cosima Wagner does

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42 Windell, p. 492.

43 Zelinsky, "Das erschreckende 'Erwachen' und wie man Wagner von Hitler befreit", p. 14.

her best to gloss over it. Gobineau and Wagner crossed swords on most of the subjects under discussion and their heated exchanges produced much ill-feeling. Finally Wagner, in Cosima's words, "positively exploded in favour of Christianity as compared to racial theory."[44] This significant statement certainly undermines the argument of both Gutman and Zelinsky and makes it still less plausible that Hitler made any such novel interpretation of Parsifal as those two writers attribute to him.

Classifying and interpreting Parsifal has always been a problem because of Wagner's haphazard use of elements from both the pagan and Christian versions of the Grail legend. The notion that Parsifal is a work of deep Christian significance has, however, existed since 1877 when the poem was first published and, to this day, audiences still react as if it were a quasi-liturgical work.

Hans von Wolzogen, the first German commentator on the work, was then at pains to explain that Parsifal was Wagner's representation of Christ. Wolzogen's position as one of the official Wagner historians gave this curious idea much credence, although (as is evident from Cosima's diaries) Wagner repudiated Wolzogen's point of view. Having read Wolzogen's essay "Bühnenweihfestspiel", Wagner maintained that Wolzogen "went too far" in suggesting that Parsifal was a representation of Christ. Wagner maintained that he "had never thought of Christ in this context."[45]

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44 Cosima Wagner, Die Tagebücher, III, 205.

45 Ibid.

Houston Stewart Chamberlain, on the other hand, steadfastly maintained that "Parsifal is not the glorification of religious dogma. There is no more Christianity in Parsifal than there is paganism in the Ring or Tristan."[46] If one considers Chamberlain's later role as a Nazi ideologue, and the influence he had on Hitler, then it is not surprising that opinions such as those expressed above could quite easily have prepared the way for Hitler's interpretation of the opera.

An attempt to circumnavigate the issue is made by Michael Tanner who has devised the idea that Parsifal is a work about religion and the psychological effects it has on people experiencing various states of mental anguish. He writes:

> As soon as we try to see Parsifal as a "religious work", it presents nothing else: for everything seems either irrelevant, blasphemous or banal. But seen as the most penetrating study we have of the psychopathology of religious belief in artistic terms, it is an incomparably involving experience.[47]

In Lucy Beckett's opinion, Tanner's principal endeavour merely results in "an imposed and arbitrary delimitation"[48] which, she believes, diverts attention from Tanner's inability to accept the weight of Christian symbolism in Parsifal. Tanner instead maintains that Wagner found Christianity "a handy mythology for expressing his own idiosyncratic, indeed epoch-making insights,"

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46 Houston Stewart Chamberlain, "The Wagnerian Drama," Revue Wagnerienne, 2 (1886-7), 225, cited by Beckett, p. 110.

47 Tanner, p. 209.

48 Beckett, p. 127.

and "reinforced his anti-transcendental, redemptivist vision by directing attention to Nature." He concludes his argument by insisting that "in the greatest art there has always been transmitted a sense of some fundamental inscrutability, and it has normally been attributed to fate, or God, or the gods, or something external to man."[49] It can of course be argued that "inscrutability" and mystery are fundamental to Roman Catholic doctrine; it is these very things which have kept faiths alive, whether they be pagan or Christian. Considering the numerous and vitally important elements of Christian lore present in Parsifal and the mystery that surrounds them, it must be conceded that the religious content of the work is no mere accident nor a matter of caprice on the part of the composer. Considering the power with which Wagner presents and invests his Christian imagery it is difficult wholeheartedly to accept Tanner's rejection of an underlying Christian intent.

It is vitally important to consider Wagner's attitude to Christianity when attempting to find a tentative explanation of Parsifal or to either prove or disprove the accusations levelled at the work. Wagner sincerely believed that he was one of the few true crusaders of the nineteenth century and, from an artistic point of view, this cannot be denied. He considered it his duty to replace barren Christianity with something (i.e. art, his art) for its own sake. This he states clearly in the opening paragraph of Religion and Art, the essay which was meant as a philosophical

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49 Tanner, pp. 215-216 and p. 218.

complement to Parsifal:

> One might say that where Religion becomes artificial it is reserved for art to save the spirit of religion by recognizing the figurative value of the mythic symbols which [religion] would have us believe in their literal sense, and revealing their deep and hidden truth through an ideal presentation.[50]

Art therefore was the central component of Wagner's belief: around it revolved the various concepts of religious belief, particularly compassion and renunciation, themes which are pervasive in his operas. In his study of Wagner's music dramas, Carl Dahlhaus analyses Wagner's concept of faith as follows:

> Wagner's faith was philosophical, not religious, a metaphysic of compassion and renunciation, deriving its essential elements from Schopenhauer's World as Will and Idea and — via Schopenhauer — from Buddhism. Wagner found these elements present in Christianity, and to that extent he was a Christian, but the predominant spirit of the nineteenth century had become alien to fundamentalist faith, and he too took an historico-philosophical view of the traditions of the religion as an evolving truth, changing its outer shape throughout history.[51]

According to Dahlhaus, Parsifal is the embodiment of the nineteenth-century religion of art:

> This does not mean that art should be venerated as a religion — or a pseudo-religion, for the holder of fundamentalist Christian views — and works of art worshipped as icons, but that religion — or its truth — has passed from the form of myth into the forms of art.[52]

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50 Richard Wagner, Prose Works, after trans. W.A. Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, 1897), *VI*, p. 213.

51 Carl Dahlhaus, Richard Wagner's Music Dramas, trans. M. Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 143-144, cited by Beckett, p. 124.

52 Ibid., p. 125.

The most important issue which arises out of this is whether the truth of the basic tenets of Christianity still holds within its new guise as an art. It is also important to decide whether Wagner's proposed metamorphosis of religion into art is not perhaps dangerous because it may distort the truths of religion in the process. It is possible that the religious truths Wagner so ardently wished to set free could emerge completely sterilized of their original meaning and, if this is the case, then Parsifal could perhaps be seen as having moved into the realm of blasphemy. Dahlhaus's analysis, excellent as it is, does not clarify these issues, although Dahlhaus does go so far as to assert that Wagner considered Christianity a relic from the past. We remain confronted by a stage drama which is not a religious work in the accepted sense of the word although recognisable concepts of Christian dogma are present in it.

The situation is made far more complex by the fact — of particular relevance to our inquiry — that Wagner attempts to separate Christianity from its Jewish inheritance. He sincerely believed that Christianity had, by the nineteenth century, become a debased and barren religion because, as he maintained in Heldentum und Christentum: "It is sufficient to derive the ruin of the Christian religion from its drawing upon Judaism for its dogmas."[53] Moreover, we read in Cosima's diaries that Wagner doubted the ancestry of Christ: according to him "Jesus did not speak Hebrew but a Syro-Chaldean language", and the Syro-Chaldeans actually were held

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53 Wagner, Prose Works, VI, 233.

in contempt by the Jews.[54] Wagner also believed that Christianity was far closer to Buddhism than Judaism, as the following extract from a letter to Liszt demonstrates:

> Let us admit that Christianity is to us this contradictory phenomenon, because we know only its mixture with, and distortion by, narrow-hearted Judaism; while modern research has succeeded in showing that pure and unalloyed Christianity was nothing but a branch of that venerable Buddhism which, after Alexander's Indian expedition, spread to the shores of the Mediterranean. In early Christianity we will see distinct traces of the perfect negation of the "will to life," of the longing for the destruction of the world: i.e. the cessation of all existence.[55]

As in the case of Das Judenthum in der Musik several authors have had difficulty in deciding whether Wagner meant destruction in the most literal sense, or an all-encompassing spiritual catharsis. The latter is really the more probable and, according to numerous passages from the New Testament, it is the only means of becoming a true Christian. St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews is but one of many examples: "Man's destiny is to die once for all; nothing remains after that but judgement; and Christ was offered once for all, to drain the cup of the world's sins; when we see him again, . . . he will be bringing salvation to those who await his coming."[56]

It is vital to have a broad overview of the sources Wagner used

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54 Cosima Wagner, Die Tagebücher, III, 242.

55 Richard Wagner, Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt, trans. F. Hueffer (New York: Vienna House, 1973), II, 99.

56 The Holy Bible, (London: Burns and Oates, 1963), p. 235.

in the creation of Parsifal: the fact that some of the sources are extremely divergent adds considerably to the confusion that exists about the work. On the one hand we have the inextricably interwoven pagan and Christian legends to contend with. There are the elements, mentioned earlier, of Buddhism, a doctrine that promises redemption through the attainment of compassion, which is to be achieved by the negation of the will to life. Elements of Buddhism are certainly present in Parsifal. This is not surprising: shortly before beginning the preliminary sketches for Parsifal in 1865, Wagner had read the Ramayana, one of the ancient Indian epic poems that deal with the search for a true spiritual Nirvana. Parsifal's life certainly does echo that of Gautama, who went out into the world seeking true spiritual enlightenment. The Buddhist influences on the genesis of Parsifal are closely linked to the Schopenhauer-based notion that the will to life — which at its most base is the sexual urge — is inherently destructive and that the denial of will is the true path to redemption.

It may of course be argued that the Schopenhauer concept of redemption, achieved through the denial of will, is the same as the Christian notion of redemption from sin, achieved through grace but by a different route. However, an intrinsic difference does exist: for Christians this redemption can only occur through the intervention of the divine, i.e. by God through Christ; whereas Schopenhauer (and Buddhism for that matter) eschews the concept of a divine presence and relies totally on the earthly endeavour

of humans towards accepting and rendering spiritually beneficial the misery of existence in the progress towards full enlightenment or redemption. Considering the importance Wagner assigns to the redemption of the Grail and how the various subplots revolve around this central issue, it becomes clear that Parsifal moves beyond Schopenhauer into the realms of Christian belief and, more particularly, Wagner's understanding of Christian belief.

Parsifal is therefore an uneasy conglomeration of numerous elements drawn from Wagner's divergent sources. These all are embodied in Parsifal: within him all the major conflicts occur; all the conflict situations are representations of his personal states of conflict, but are of vital importance in themselves or we would not have a "Stage Consecration Festival." He is "providentially drawn to the Grail and is its conscious rescuer, both the object of grace and a resolute Kundry-withstanding subject, both redeemed and redeemer, both Christian patient and Schopenhauerian agent."[57]

It is not surprising then that historians and critics of Wagner's works, faced with this incredibly complex operatic hybrid, have been almost forced to highlight some aspects of the work and ignore others and, like Zelinsky, come to the conclusion that Wagner's attempts at rejuvenating Christianity are a sham and that Parsifal is potentially a racist and anti-Semitic work. Zelinsky insists that Parsifal contains the seed of a "brutal, annihilatory

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57 Beckett, p. 132.

religion." He also considers Kundry Wagner's representation of evil Judaism in all its ramifications, always seeking but never finding salvation. Her baptism in the last act of the opera represents to Zelinsky the final victory of sterilized Christianity over Judaism and is, in essence, the apotheosis of Wagner's reconsecration of Christianity.

Zelinsky cites as proof an excerpt from Cosima Wagner's diaries where Wagner maintains that the entry of the tympani in bars 245 et seq. of Act III[58] was "the most beautiful sound he had ever created," while Cosima interpreted it as "a sound of destruction [Vernichtungsklang der Pauke]."[59] Wagner went on to say that it represented "the destruction of the whole being, of all earthly desire."[60] This passage surely records Wagner's expression of pleasure that Kundry's final release from subjugation to evil (sexuality) has eventually been achieved and that the denial of will as a means to redemption in the Christian sense has been vindicated as the ultimate truth.

Zelinsky also maintains that the last line of the opera, "Erlösung dem Erlöser", is the celebratory cry of the brotherhood at having witnessed the victory of the new Christianity over the debilitating

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58 Wagner, Parsifal, p. 245.

59 Zelinsky, "Zu schöne Klängen eine brutale Ideologie," p. 133.

60 Cosima Wagner, Die Tagebücher, III, 303.

influences of Judaism. This phrase, which has long been considered the most enigmatic in the work, has suffered several interpretations. Silke Beinssen-Hesse maintains that it is a plea for the redemptive death of Parsifal.[61] Both Beinssen-Hesse and Zelinsky make the error of divorcing the phrase from its immediate and broader context. By singing "Höchsten heiles Wunder, Erlösung dem Erlöser," the chorus is proclaiming the fact that the Grail's redemptive power has been restored. By introducing as subplot the pagan legend of the wounded king, along with a considerable amount of inconsequential dramatic clutter, Wagner has obscured the significant fact that the Grail should be taken in its full Christian sense, symbolic of Christ's presence on earth amongst those for whom he was sacrificed. Its rescue was the focal point of the drama; this is underlined by Gurnemanz's long explanations concerning the causes of its impotence and the manner in which it can be redeemed. If it is not assigned its full value as a symbol of perpetual spiritual regeneration in a world marred by misery and anguish, the constant references to it become totally meaningless — as, therefore, does the whole work.

The Grail's need for salvation is central to the anguish Parsifal experiences when he is kissed by Kundry:

> Des Heilands Klage da vernehm ich,
> die Klage, ach! die Klage
> um das entweihte Heiligtum:
> "Erlöse, rette mich aus schuldbefleckten Händen".[62]

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61 Silke Beinssen-Hesse, "The Ideological Implications of Wagner's Changes to Wolfram's 'Parzifal'," Miscellanea Musicologica: Adelaide Studies of Musicology, 14 (University of Adelaide, 1985), 131-147.

62 Wagner, Parsifal, pp. 188-189.

At the end of the opera the chorus is rejoicing that the Grail has been redeemed by Parsifal, who himself has been redeemed by his denial of will and has learnt true compassion. He has also rescued the Grail from the "guilt-defiled hands" of those who have yielded (and may still yield) to their self-destructive will.

The creative boundaries of Parsifal have always been Christian: in his memoirs Wagner wrote: "Out of my thoughts about Good Friday I rapidly conceived a whole drama."[63] Some years later, in a letter to Ludwig II, he again referred to the deep significance Good Friday had for him:

> Today it is once more Good Friday. O holy day! Most deeply significant for the world! Day of redemption! God in suffering — who can take in the tremendous scale of it? And yet, even as it lies beyond words, so it is the closest thing to all mankind. God the creator — he must remain entirely beyond the grasp of the world; God the living guide — he can be inwardly loved, but not understood; but God the sufferer — he writes himself in our hearts with fire; this tremendous anguish washes away the stubbornness of life. . . . God in our hearts — the God that is grasped in the deepest pain of Fellow-feeling.[64]

It would be foolish to deny that this passage unequivocally demonstrates Wagner's profound belief in the tenets of the Christian message. It is therefore not surprising that Wagner could write to Ludwig II:

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63 Richard Wagner, My Life (London: Constable, 1911), II, 662.

64 Wagner, Letters to Ludwig II, I, 82, cited by Beckett, pp. 137-138.

> Parsifal will be the crown of my whole creative endeavour. It seems to me as if the making of this work has been entrusted to me in order to uphold to the world its most profound mystery, the truth of the Christian faith — indeed, even to rekindle this faith.[65]

Wagner's belief in Christian doctrine is implicit in this passage although the fact that he considered himself a more modern version of St. Ignatius may be thought somewhat presumptuous. The following extract confirms that Wagner had not repudiated Christianity:

> Who can look through a lifetime, with an open mind and a free heart, on this world of murder and theft, organized and legalized by lies, deceit and hypocrisy, without from time to time turning away from it in horrified disgust? On what then do we turn our gaze? Most often on the void of death. But to him on whom a different call is made, who is picked out by fate, there then appears the true picture of the world, as a premonition from his innermost soul foretelling redemption. To forget before this picture, which is a dream of truth, the real world of falsehood seems the reward for the sad truthfulness which has forced him to recognize the misery of the world. Can he after this help himself in the formation of this picture with further lies and deceit? You must admit that this would be impossible.[66]

In this passage we perceive once more that Wagner's view of spiritual matters, at least in this period of his life, went beyond Schopenhauer's tenet that the evil will to life is totally destructive because there is no good which can either cancel it or overcome it. We are in the realms of Wagner's Christianity: he sincerely believes that evil could be countered if there were a belief in

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65 Wagner, Briefwechsel: Richard Wagner und König Ludwig II, IV, 211.

66 Wagner, Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen (Leipzig, 1883), X, 307-308, cited by Beckett, p. 138.

an equivalent good. In Parsifal all the ills of the world are displayed for what they are. The theme of redemption, applied variously to Parsifal, Amfortas, Kundry and, finally, to the Grail itself, demonstrates Wagner's profound Christian belief and hope for the future. When one considers the pessimism that pervades his earlier works, it is clear that he has turned an intellectual somersault which many of his critics have either ignored or completely misunderstood.

For the critic who in any circumstances has personal reservations about Christian doctrine (cf. Michael Tanner's sceptical reference to "handy mythology"), it obviously will be difficult to accept the hypothesis that Wagner may have been more devout than has generally been imagined and that he sincerely intended Parsifal as a representation of Christian philosophy freed from debilitating traditions and doctrinal restraints which had obscured its fundamental message. If one repudiates both Christianity and the possibility that Wagner believed in it, then it becomes necessary to seek such new interpretations of Parsifal as might supply a satisfactory explanation of it. Lucy Beckett makes a similar point in her criticism of Gutman's interpretation of the work:

> Parsifal can only be described as "obscure and elliptical" and full of "circumlocutions and unrealities of symbolism" if its plainly stated meaning is being ignored in favour of another imposed meaning.[67]

George Windell makes the same point:

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67 Beckett, p. 122.

> Many differences in interpreting the later Wagnerian works would be avoided if students were willing to deal with them on [Wagner's] own terms, rather than imposing upon him irrelevant terms of reference.[68]

It cannot be denied, however, that Wagner provided people like Zelinsky with more than enough material for a radically different point of view, particularly if Wagner's vision of Christianity — obvious, albeit unique — is found to be wholly unpalatable. But, as Martin Gregor-Dellin so clearly states in his perceptive study of the opera:

> If one is not too particular about particulars then it would be possible to spin a web out of Wagner's vocabulary on destruction, annihilation, redemption, and self-extinction (to be found in such various sources as the revolutionary articles by the anarchist in Röckel's Volksblätter, Dresden 1848/49, the prose-works on art written in Zürich and the adaptation of Schopenhauer) by means of parentheses, interpolations and repetitions, together with Wagner's anti-Semitic aberrations, that would look like a complete Weltanschauung, consistent from the "Jesus" fragment of 1848 up to Parsifal — I would call this the Zemlinsky [sic] effect.[69]

In attempting to understand the content of Parsifal we are faced with complex problems of actual belief versus aesthetic understanding. Wagner created an art work which is not definable within any familiar boundaries and we are forced (it is the present writer's conviction that this was Wagner's intention) to realign our aesthetic values and thoughts about Christian faith. It is also

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68 Windell, p. 489.

69 Martin Gregor-Dellin, "The Redeemer Redeemed — Reflections on Richard Wagner, a Hundred Years Later," Bayreuth Festival Programme, July 1983, pp. 50-51.

vitally important to point out that Wagner's vision of purity could only be achieved through the denial of will and the practice of non-violence, both concepts completely incompatible with Nazi ideology, which advocated violence as the only means for achieving anything and asserted that a superior will was an indication of racial purity.[69a]

Parsifal is therefore unquestionably a work belonging to the category of confessional poetry, a term Beckett culls from Erich Heller:

> Where beliefs embodied in poetry are as important as they are in what one may call confessional poetry, we cannot fully appreciate the poetry without being at least tempted to accept the beliefs as well. With such poetry before us, complete immunity from infection would prove either the bluntness of our perception or the worthlessness of the poetry.[70]

The "bluntness of perception" so many critics have displayed when dealing with Parsifal has resulted from their ignoring the salient fact that although Wagner may on occasion have questioned the basic tenets of the Christian faith, he never altogether repudiated them. It is unfortunate that, for all the beauty of its score, Parsifal does not have the cohesiveness of Tristan, and that commentators have been distracted by elements which have diverted attention from Wagner's deep understanding of the importance of the reincarnation of Christ, as symbolised by the Grail. Parsifal is the trump card of an artist who passionately believed in compassion, the redemption from sin and man's

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69a Rauschning, pp. 35-37.

70 Erich Heller, The Disinherited Mind (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), cited by Beckett, p. 139.

ability to achieve — through art — a real spiritual regeneration.

In summing up, it is clear that Wagner's desire to free Christianity from its Judaic ancestry was perceived by Hitler to be far more important than it really was. It is evident, moreover, that this aspect of Wagner's belief in Christianity is not present in the opera and is as unimportant as is Hitler's peculiar interpretation of the work.

A survey of Wagner's remaining works indicates that only two of them could conceivably have been of any use to the adherents of National Socialism: Lohengrin and Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. At a superficial level both operas do contain elements which could have had a direct influence on the Nazis, but again it must be pointed out that Wagner cannot be held responsible for the fact that the Nazis were fired by the nationalist sentiment prominent in these two works. A survey of opera by other nineteenth-century composers reveals that bellicose, nationalist chauvinism of the kind evident in Lohengrin was quite common. Several of Verdi's operas, for example, contain a significant proportion of overt nationalist sentiment. Nabucco comes to mind as one of the more obvious examples. It is is worth noting that neither Verdi nor his works have been condemned as having been partly responsible for the rise of Italian Fascism. The situation might have been remarkably different had Mussolini been as fanatical about Verdi as Hitler had been about Wagner. Italian Fascism does itself take on the character of Italian opera when compared to the ruthless and malevolent

patriotism spawned by National Socialism.

Lohengrin was the first of Wagner's operas Hitler ever saw and he was completely overwhelmed by it. There are several extremely jingoistic passages in it which may, to a considerable degree, have fed the growing Nazi spirit. In Act I of the opera King Heinrich is heard singing to the assembled knights the following fiery call to arms:

> Wie fühl ich stolz mein Herz entbrannt,
> find' ich in jedem Deutschen Land
> so kraftig reichen Heer-verband.
> Nun soll des Reichen Feind sich nah'n,
> wir wollen tapfer ihn empfah'n:
> aus seinem öden Ost daher
> soll er sich nimmer wagen mehr![71]

At the end of the opera there is an even more fervent expression of nationalist sentiment:

> Nun ist es Zeit, des Reiches Ehr' zu wahren.
> Ob Ost? ob West? Das gelten allen gleich.
> Was Deutsches Land heisst, stelle kampfes scharen,
> dann schmäht wohl niemand mehr das deutsche Reich.
> Für deutsches Land das deutsche Schwert!
> So sei des Reiches Kraft bewährt![72]

There is no doubt that these "ferocious passages of nationalism" (Gutman's expression) had a profound effect on the young Hitler and that he resolved to take at face value the injunctions contained in these lines. It would, however, be foolish to suggest (as Gutman's remarks about the opera imply) that these few lines are evidence of a political programme in the making. The following

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71 Richard Wagner, Lohengrin, (London: Schott, 1913), p. 11.

72 Ibid., pp. 336-337.

extract from a letter to Röckel makes it very clear that Wagner was far more concerned with the humanist element of the work than with the dangers which threatened German honour:

> I maintain that my "Lohengrin", according to my own conception, symbolizes the most profoundly tragic situation of our age, namely, the longing which besets us to descend from the highest heights of mortal contemplation and to plunge into the depths of human affection — the desire to be immersed in feeling — that desire which modern reality is as yet powerless to satisfy.[73]

Die Meistersinger is Wagner's most idiosyncratic work. Its style and content are very different from those of all his other operas: Wagner had consciously set out to write a work which could prove that he was capable of writing an opera in the German Romantic tradition. It contains all the elements which made Weber's Der Freischütz a success. There is the reliance on a love story as the central plot element, typically revolving around lovers' problems. From a formal point of view it is also old-fashioned: there are several well-defined monologues and ensembles and each act ends with a massed chorus in the grand opera tradition. The most striking departure from the norm is the fact that the characters are not legendary Norse or Celtic figures symbolizing various psychological states, but are convincingly human beings from Germany's romanticized past.

The German — and hence nationalist — nature of the opera and, in Ernest Newman's words, "the pervading colour of gemüth-

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[73] Wagner, Letters to Röckel, p. 73.

lichkeit"[74] appealed to Hitler considerably and the opera had much to do with the fact that Nuremberg was chosen as the seat for the Party rallies held every summer. Hitler's appreciation of the work was based on Hans Sachs's exhortation to the assembled townsfolk to uphold the values of "holy German art" and to venerate those who are chosen to preserve it for posterity:

> Zerfällt erst deutsches Volk und Reich,
> in falscher wälschen Majestät,
> kein Fürst bald mehr sein Volk versteht
> and wälschen Dunst mit wälschem Tand,
> sie pflanzen uns in deutsches Land;
> was deutsch und echt wüsst keiner mehr,
> lebt nicht in deutscher Meister Ehr.
> Drum sag' ich euch; ehrt ihre deutschen Meister,
> Dann bannt ihr gute Geister
> und gebt ihr ihrem wirken Gunst.
>
> Zerging in Dunst
> das heil'ge röm'sche Reich,
> uns bliebe gleich
> die heil'ge deutsche Kunst![75]

During the Third Reich, this part of the opera was usually greeted with the Fascist salute and followed by a rendering of Deutschland über Alles.[76] It does not, however, require much imagination to realize that the passage above is not about honouring political leaders, but about Wagner's belief that German art could even survive when a particular political state ceased to exist. The word "Meister", depending upon context, is of course capable of assuming two separate meanings: although the intention here seems to us unambiguous, the Nazis clearly preferred their own interpretation

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74 Ernest Newman, A Study of Wagner, (New York: Vienna House, 1974), p. 312.

75 Richard Wagner, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, (London: Schott, n.d.), pp. 562-569.

76 van Amerongen, p. 75.

of the phrase "ehrt ihre deutschen Meister." Missappropriation of this nature was common during the Nazi era as the propagandists of the Party sought ways to justify their regime. This final passage is also an anti-climax which damages the dramatic unity of the work: a point also realized by Wagner. While busy with the composition of the work he decided to end the opera with the Prize Song although the full text (including Sachs's address) had been published in 1861. Cosima Wagner objected to this decision and it is because of Wagner's desire to comply with her demands that this passage has remained part of the work.[77]

A more profound study of the opera reveals that it is an essay about the conflict between musical conservatism, epitomised by Beckmesser and the Guild, and original creative genius, embodied by Walther von Stolzing. Taking this into consideration it becomes obvious that Die Meistersinger is an intensely autobiographical work: it is Wagner's defence against his critics, particularly those whose prejudice prevented them from realizing how deeply rooted in the German tradition Wagner's genius really was. Hans Sachs and Walther von Stolzing clearly represent the duality that existed in the creative nature of Wagner and he uses them to illustrate the fact that art should never remain static and, if it does so, by the constant recalling of outmoded rules and concepts. that is to its detriment.

Die Meistersinger is undeniably a nationalistic and patriotic work:

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77 Windell, p. 486, n. 35.

it celebrates one of the more glorious periods of German history. It must be remembered, however, that it was written during the years leading up to the 1848 revolution, in which Wagner took part. The opera had its first performance shortly before the Franco-Prussian war when German patriotic sentiment had reached fever pitch. Wagner took a great interest in and was greatly affected by the rising tide of German nationalism in both instances: his patriotic zeal found voice in Die Meistersinger and spilled over into essays like "Deutsche Kunst und deutsche Politik" (1868) and the farce "eine Kapitulation", written shortly after the end of the Franco-Prussian war. It is therefore perfectly understandable why the opera became so important to the Nazis, but to insist that it presages totalitarianism and National Socialism is forcing the connection beyond all credibility. The fact that Wagner wished to remove Sachs's anticlimactic address to the townsfolk of Nuremberg indicates once again how, when a choice had to be made, artistic considerations triumphed (or, but for Cosima, would have triumphed) over political aspirations and patriotic sentiment. It is, moreover, debatable whether the opera would have achieved similar notoriety had the passage in question been removed.

CHAPTER SIX

When I hear the word culture, I take the safety-catch off my Browning.[1]

This short sentence, spoken by one of the characters in the National Socialist drama, Schlageter, gives an indication of what the Nazi attitude to culture was, although it is certainly an oversimplification of their point of view. Nevertheless, recalling Heinz Tietjen's anecdote of how members of the public were forced to attend performances of Die Meistersinger, it could be concluded that many loyal supporters of the Party would have approved of the sentiment expressed in the citation above. It cannot be ruled out that some Nazis, particularly those in the hierarchy of the Party, had a genuine interest in and love of great art and music, their appreciation based on aesthetic principles only. But, as Ziegler shows in his memoirs, Nazi appreciation of all art forms was persistently clouded by ideological considerations.[2] To them an art form had only one purpose: it had to be a constant dithyramb celebrating the wonders of National Socialism. They were antipathetic to the idea that art could serve as a medium for social criticism. Their artistic and cultural ideals were far removed from the concepts of art as those are generally understood and, because of their political stance, could be perceived as a complete perversion thereof.

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1 Johnst, Schlageter, cited by John Willett, Expressionism (New York: World University Library, 1978), p. 203.

2 Ziegler, pp. 188-192.

Measured against the rigid requirements of art during the Third Reich, the Wagnerian ethos, with its condemnation of tyranny and its belief in the power of all-encompassing love, emerges as decadent and subversive. Wagner's works represent the highest level of the nineteenth-century cultural ideal and it is clear that no kinship could ever exist between the artistic philosophy of Wagner and that of the Nazis.

A study of the visual arts during the Third Reich provides a clear indication of how the Nazi ideologists saw the role of art in their society. Here they could specify to a considerable degree the content of the paintings artists were expected to produce. All paintings had to conform to specific requirements — guided by Hitler, who considered himself an expert in this field — and had to be ideologically justifiable. The nature of the art form meant that a sharp distinction could be made between the decadent excesses of Cubism, Expressionism, Dadaism and Futurism — the results of which Hitler abhorred — and the new Reichskunst which came into existence.

The paintings by Kamps and Adolf Ziegler reproduced in the following pages indicate the nature of Reichskunst very clearly (Examples 1 and 2). Ziegler was appointed president of the Reichskunstkammer in 1936; his position was comparable to that held by Richard Strauss in the Reichsmusikkammer. Unlike

EXAMPLE 1: Kamps: "Venus and Adonis" (1933)*



* from William Feaver, "Triumph of the Norm", Sunday Times Magazine, 5 January 1975, p. 18.

EXAMPLE 2: Ziegler: "Nude" (1933)*



* from William Feaver, "Triumph of the Norm", Sunday Times Magazine, 5 January 1975, p. 19.

Strauss, however, Ziegler was an ardent National Socialist. At Hitler's instigation he plundered Germany's art collections for what the Nazis considered degenerate art to show at an exhibition of "Entartige Kunst", eventually held in Munich in October 1936. The objective of the exhibition was to demonstrate the subversive nature of the art movements mentioned earlier and to inspire artists to produce works which had relevance to Nazi ideology. It was also intended as a warning to those who considered art a medium for social criticism that a change in attitude was necessary.

No lengthy commentary need be given about the neo-Classical and extremely academic paintings of Kamps and Ziegler. They do not demand great intellectual effort as far as the viewer is concerned; their propagandistic message is obvious, particularly that of Kamps's "Venus and Adonis". In this painting the figures represented are superb examples of the Nazi ideal towards which all patriotic National Socialists should strive: the woman soft, voluptuous and acquiescent; the man completely obedient and, physically, quite superhuman. It is significant that the figures dominate the canvas entirely. Kamps's Adonis, who could quite conceivably be a Nazi version of Parsifal rejecting the advances of Kundry, has clearly heard the "call of the father-land" and is prepared to do battle with all threatening evil, seen and imagined. The emotional impact the painting was to have had on the lay mind was of vital concern and aspects such as artistic merit were not really considered important. The shallow-ness of both paintings is evident when they are compared to Picasso's "Woman with Pears" which was one of the celebrated

examples of "decadent art" seen at the Munich exhibition (Example 3).

The major outcome of Ziegler's programme was the Degenerate Art Law which came into existence in May 1938. This stipulated that artists could be forced to paint works which celebrated the Nordic ideal (so clearly present in the paintings of both Kamps and Ziegler) and that artworks which showed signs of corrupting influences could be confiscated and their perpetrators punished.[3]

That there was no "Degenerate Music Law" is a highly significant fact. It draws attention to the salient point that music is the most abstract of the arts and that accurate assessments of its form and, more specifically, content, are exceptionally difficult. Ernst Fischer summed up the problem succinctly:

> The content of music is not so clear-cut as that of literature or the visual arts; that is why music lends itself so freely to abuse as a means of blunting the edge of consciousness.[4]

There is no doubt that the Nazis clearly understood the potential usefulness of music in their attempts to control the minds of the German nation: a considerable amount of abuse of musical works consequently took place. It is, therefore, important to consider the "power" of music when dealing with the extra-musical connotations of Wagner's operas and the abuse they suffered at the hands of the Nazis. It cannot be denied that Wagner

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3 Willett, p. 204

4 Ernst Fischer, The Necessity of Art, a Marxist Approach, trans. A. Bostock (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 183.

EXAMPLE 3: Pablo Picasso: "Woman with Pears (Fernande)"*



* From Picasso — A Retrospective (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980).

succeeded in creating a sound unique in its ability to encapsulate and forcefully convey to an audience an all but tangible experience of power. This element presumably was among those which Hitler recognized and embraced in the music. It is perhaps for this reason that Wagner's music has been considered evil and intoxicating, an assessment founded on Nazi exploitations of the composer's works. The problem lies in the fact that Wagner's detractors have preconceptions which, because of the connections with Nazism, prevent them from appreciating the works in the manner Wagner had intended.

Music is undeniably an extremely potent art form because of the tremendous emotional influence it can have on the listener, but its impact depends entirely on the emotional state and receptivity of the audience. It can be either progressive or conservative in terms of content and technical structure but even then remains powerless to postulate anything or state universal truths. The following remarks by Fischer are again extremely relevant:

> It was the purpose of music from the start to evoke collective emotions, to act as a stimulus for work, orgiastic gratification, or war. Music was a means of stunning or exciting the senses, spell-binding or spurring to action: it served to put human beings into a different state, not to reflect on the phenomena of the outward world.[5]

The last part of this citation is highly significant in respect of Wagner and the National Socialist attitude toward music. It is well known that Wagner considered it his duty to enmesh the

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5 Ibid., p. 187.

emotions of the audience entirely and then expected them to reflect upon and accept the various concepts expounded in the drama. It is at this point that the correlation between Wagner and Nazism breaks down completely. Wagner's works are interior dramas; they deal with the world of inward phenomena, with the world of the psyche and all the forces that may influence it. Donington's analysis of the Ring[6] seems very much to the point in this regard: he convincingly shows that the psychological states of man caused by various forces, both internal and external, were a basic subject matter of Wagner's cycle. The most important conclusion to be drawn from this is that the Nordic and Germanic legends Wagner used are mere vehicles for his mammoth essay on the corrupting forces of power and the potency of love. As far as the Nazis were concerned, the true basis of a real appreciation of Wagner lay in the Germanic aspects of his works. Nazi understanding of Wagner was thus, in Bryan Magee's words, obviously "an inversion as regards fundamentals."[7] It was through Nazi propaganda that Wagner's artistic legacy suffered the greatest abuse.

The greatest irony, however, is in the fact that the Wagner cult — which came into existence only after the composer's death and was responsible for establishing the link between the composer, German nationalism and, later, Nazism — was originally nurtured by a group of admirers none of whom were born Germans. It was brought into existence by Cosima Wagner (who was of French

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6 Robert Donington, Wagner's "Ring" and its Symbols: The Music and the Myth (London: Faber, 1963).

7 Bryan Magee, Aspects of Wagner (London: Granada, 1978), p. 84.

and Hungarian parentage) and the Englishman Houston Stewart Chamberlain. These two, and later Winifred Wagner (an Englishwoman) and Adolf Hitler (of Austrian birth), conscientiously set themselves the task of convincing the world that Wagner was the undisputed German artistic genius of all time and epitomised the Germanic spirit. If it had not been for them, particularly Cosima Wagner, the often questionable results of Wagner's intellectual forays into the realms of politics and philosophy would have remained relatively unknown and would not have been accorded an importance that, for the most part, they do not deserve. The music dramas would then have become the only aspect of his output by which he would have been judged. Ernest Newman follows the same argument in his study of Wagner and roundly condemns the fetish-worship (Newman's term) Wagner's followers instituted. He also acutely observes that "in social and political matters [Wagner] was but a preacher crying in the wilderness, more successful, as the preacher always is, in cursing than in diffusing new light."[8]

In conclusion it is important to consider what Wagner actually thought of the political leaders and statesmen of the nineteenth century. His opinions of them are extremely illuminating in that they provide us with an insight into what his opinion of Hitler might have been. He had, in his own words, "an intense dislike for all power-hungry, spiritually empty warriors, despots

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8 Ernest Newman, A Study of Wagner, p. 367.

and political adventurers."[9] In the following extract, from the letter to Röckel, Wagner's response to Röckel's views on Robespierre are particularly revealing:

> I deny to Robespierre the tragic significance he has hitherto had for you, or only admit it with considerable qualifications. This type is peculiarly unsympathetic to me because in individuals constituted as he is there is no trace to be discovered of that which constitutes the true end and aim of humanity since our degeneracy from Nature. The tragic element in Robespierre's character really consists in the spectacle he offers of utter helplessness, when, at the goal of his highest aspirations to power, he stands confronted by his own incapacity to make any sort of use of this power that he has attained. It is only in the confession of this hopelessness that he becomes tragic, and in the fact that his own downfall is brought about by his inability to achieve anything towards the happiness of mankind. I am thus of the opinion that his case is the precise converse of what you conceive it to be. He had no high end in view for the sake of which he condescended to unworthy means; on the contrary, it was to disguise this absence of any such end, and to conceal his own want of resource, that he had recourse to the ghastly paraphernalia of the guillotine, for it has been proved that the "Terror" was carried out purely as a means of government, and in maintenance of authority, without any sort of genuine passion; it was conducted on purely political grounds — that is to say, in an ambitious and selfish spirit. In the end, this miserable being, who at last had no other resource than to advertise his inept "vertu", put the means in place of the end, as happens with all these purely political heroes, who duly come to grief from their own incapacity with such uniformity that it is to be hoped the whole class is shortly destined to disappear from history.[10]

The most startling aspect of this relentless condemnation of Robes-

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9 Wagner, Gesammelte Schriften, X, 249.

10 Wagner, Letters to Röckel, pp. 91-92.

pierre is the fact that it could have been a description of Hitler. Hitler's priorities, like Robespierre's, soon altered as the war he had managed to engineer began to turn against Germany. The vision of the Herrenvolk, of the mighty Germany in control of Europe, had to give way to "unworthy means" in an attempt to justify the existence of the National Socialist ideology. The use of terror became, as it had become for Robespierre, a means of government. Hitler did not have a "high end in view"; his many biographers stress the blatant nihilism of Nazism and the fact that he was quite prepared to destroy Germany if he deemed it necessary. He is reported by Rauschning to have said:

> But even if we do not conquer them [Britain, France and Russia], we should drag half the world into destruction with us, and leave no one to triumph over Germany. There will not be another 1918. We shall not surrender.[11]

Would not this nihilism have disgusted Wagner, who wrote so feelingly against Robespierre's lack of goal? Would it not have prompted Wagner to the same wish — that such persons should "disappear from history"?

Wagner's attitude towards politicians hardened during the remainder of his life. In 1880 he railed against "despotic statesmen and rulers," whose main intention, he insisted, was to gain as much power as possible. The following remarks were directed against Bismarck whom he had originally admired considerably:

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11 Rauschning, p. 152.

> What such a one may have in mind to do with this power, we search in vain to discover. We see before us, as ever, the likeness of Robespierre, who, after all hindrances to the revelation of his Utopian ideas had been swept aside by the guillotine, had nothing to offer. . . . It now seems, however, that all statesmen are contending for Robespierre's prize.[12]

If one considers the events leading up to and including World War II, it is clear that Hitler also achieved "Robespierre's prize" of power that had no real substance and paradoxically was impotent. His attempt to fill the vacuum, with racist programmes, rampant militarism and, finally, the war, failed because they were intrinsically self-destructive.

Writing about Bismarck's treaty with the French after the Franco-Prussian war and the resultant rise of German militarism, Wagner made the following statement which was as relevant in the 'thirties as when it was written:

> Recognition of the need and possibility of the real regeneration of humanity caught in the toils of a war civilization could instead have prompted a treaty by means of which the path to world peace might well have been paved: fortresses would have been demolished, not conquered; pledges of peace security, not war security, would have been taken. But instead historical rights alone were weighed and brutally applied against historical claims; all was based on the right of conquest. It seems that, with the best of intentions, the leaders of nations can see no farther. They all have fantasies of world peace. Napoleon III also had peace in mind — provided that the peace would work to the benefit of his dynasty and France. For these men of power can conceive of peace in no other form than under the widely respected shelter of countless cannons.[13]

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12 Wagner, Gesammelte Schriften, X, 254-255, cited by Rather, p. 173.

13 Ibid., p. 174.

Considering this remarkable document and Wagner's contention that "the lust to dominate foreign peoples is un-German,"[14] one can only draw the conclusion that he would have had a deep contempt for the political philosophy of the architects of the Third Reich. This contempt would surely have extended to Hitler who, like Bismarck and Napoleon III before him, would have been condemned as another "Robespierre" whose relentless striving for power was inherently destructive.

Finally, blaming nineteenth-century Romanticism (and by inclusion Wagner) for the rise of National Socialism remains a questionable practice. Windell astutely observes:

> The Romantics, including Wagner, developed a vision of human existence which was sometimes genial and sometimes cataclysmic, sometimes humane and sometimes brutal. But they always strove to liberate the individual from outworn social patterns and from the dictates of a type of rationalism that saw the social order as nothing more than the sum of its parts.[15]

The fact that Hitler was influenced by — and himself nurtured — the evil possibilities of Romanticism rather than the good is a reflection on him and hardly the responsibility of the composers and writers of the nineteenth century; had they indeed been responsible, it would be the final vindication of Hitler and National Socialism. With regard to Wagner in particular, one is simply obliged to return to Ernst Bloch's succinct analysis

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14 Ibid., p. 173.

15 Windell, p. 491.

of the issue:

> It is quite senseless to let oneself be defrauded by the Nazis of any part of the German cultural heritage; it is no revelation even of the doubtful aspects of Wagner, that colossal musical phenomenon. For this purpose there are other means at hand, such as do not consist of exaggeratedly negative sophistry, and which above all do not accept the genius of Bayreuth and the recluse of Sils-Maria [Nietzsche] as Hitler would have them taken. The music of the Nazis is not the Prelude to Die Meistersinger but the Horst Wessel Song; they have no other honour and they can and should receive none other.[16]

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16 Ernst Bloch, Politische Messungen, Pestzeit, Vormärz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 381.

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