

Studies in Musical Genesis, Structure, and Interpretation

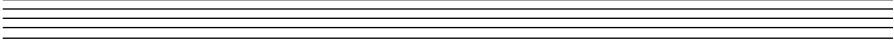
Wagner's

Parsifal

A detailed oil painting portrait of Richard Wagner, shown from the chest up. He is wearing a dark, textured beret, a white collared shirt, a dark tie, and a dark jacket with a prominent brown scarf. He has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the left of the viewer.

William Kinderman

WAGNER'S *PARSIFAL*



STUDIES IN MUSICAL GENESIS, STRUCTURE, AND
INTERPRETATION

Terry Riley's In C

Robert Carl

Beethoven's Diabelli Variations

William Kinderman

Beethoven's "Appassionata" Sonata

Martha Frohlich

Richard Strauss's Elektra

Bryan Gilliam

Wagner's Das Rheingold

Warren Darcy

Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E, Op. 109

Nicholas Marston

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Vaughan Williams's Ninth Symphony

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Debussy's Ibéria

Matthew Brown

Berg's Wozzeck

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WILLIAM KINDERMAN

WAGNER'S
PARSIFAL

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SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

The Oxford series *Studies in Musical Genesis, Structure, and Interpretation* originated under Lewis Lockwood's editorship in 1985, with Philip Gossett's volume on Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*. Each volume since then has sought to elucidate the detail of musical creation in a single work by a major composer. Around the turn of the millennium the series expanded its purpose to give more emphasis to issues of interpretation, with a view to placing these individual masterworks within a continuum not just from sketch to score but also to première and reception. From an original base in the central canon of classical and romantic repertory, the series has now well engaged with key works from the twentieth century, most recently Berg's *Wozzeck* and Terry Riley's *In C*.

This volume reinforces the strong representation of opera in the series. With its inter-relationship between music, words, and staging, opera is a particularly fertile ground for genetic investigation and speculation. Wagner's *Parsifal* also introduces highly distinctive issues of ideology and interpretation, which remain contentious even in the twenty-first century. It was, after all, Hitler who reportedly said: "From *Parsifal* I build my religion, a sacred service in ceremonial form without theological trappings."

William Kinderman has already featured in the *Genesis* series in 1987 with a volume on *Beethoven's Diabelli Variations*. This was reissued in 1999 with an accompanying CD of Kinderman playing the work. By 2009 the book, along with Kinderman himself, had scored Broadway fame, through Moisés Kaufman's play *33 Variations*. The play tells about the genesis of Beethoven's work as revealed by the fictional musicological character, Katherine Brandt (played by Jane Fonda), who is loosely modeled upon Kinderman. This is one of the arts' few representations of the musicologist as hero!

Wagner's Parsifal begins with key aspects of interpretation (Prelude) before going back to the work's genesis as word and music (Part 1), and then tackling the opera from structural, stylistic, and dramatic perspectives (Part 2). Building on Kinderman's existing studies of *Parsifal*, and with sustained reference to the ubiquitous *Parsifal* literature, this volume fulfills all the aims of the series. It presents the enigmatic final masterwork of a composer who, two centuries after his birth, still fails to gain "classic" status. The interpretational legacy remains volatile. Through his free-ranging approach to the multiplicity of sources, Kinderman engages with many profound themes:

How much can a work of art validly stand aside from biographical circumstances? Is it possible for the musical component of such a heady dramatic synthesis to be considered “autonomously”? What are we now to make of the collective, sometimes self-serving, interpretations—the “hypnotic depiction of collective identity,” as Stephan Mösch says—that have so persistently haunted Wagner’s *Parsifal*?

Malcolm Gillies
London Metropolitan University

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The idea of a dark visor concealing the protagonist fits to Parsifal's quest for the Grail realm, as well as to other elusive meanings lodged in Wagner's mysterious final drama. Wagner's own search for sources extended beyond the Middle Ages to the ancient Greek period. This Corinthian bronze helmet dates from the 5th century BC and is held by Samuel Merrin, The Merrin Gallery Inc, New York City. Photograph by Stefan Hagen. Printed with permission.

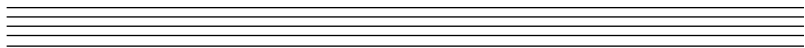
ABOUT THE COMPANION WEB SITE

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Oxford has created a password-protected web site to accompany *Wagner's Parsifal*, and the reader is encouraged to take advantage of it. This website contains color images of the following illustrations from the book:

- 1) Plate 2: Poster showing Hitler as Parsifal-like “Lichtgestalt” figure Karl Stauber (1935).
- 2) Plate 14: Franz Stassen, illustration of Parsifal holding the Holy Spear, from his 15 Illustrations for Wagner’s Sacred Stage Festival (*Bühnenweihfestspiel*).
- 3) Plate 15: Franz Stassen, illustration of Parsifal holding the Grail, from his 15 Illustrations for Wagner’s Sacred Stage Festival (*Bühnenweihfestspiel*).
- 4) Plate 16: Philipp Veit and Edward von Steinle, *Germania*, March 1848. Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg.

WAGNER'S *PARSIFAL*



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PRELUDE

Parsifal as Art and Ideology

For much of his life Richard Wagner was captivated by legends of the Holy Grail. His pair of dramas centered on the Grail myths—*Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*—occupy key positions in his oeuvre. In the mythic sources, Lohengrin is the eldest son of Parzival and succeeds him as king of the Grail.¹ *Lohengrin* is in this sense a sequel to *Parsifal*, but Wagner wrote these works in reverse order, regarding *Parsifal* as his “last card” once it became clear that his plans for the Buddhist drama *Die Sieger* (*The Victors*) would never be realized. *Lohengrin*, the last of the Romantic operas from his years in Dresden, was completed in 1848, not long before Wagner’s extended period in political exile. *Parsifal* was finished more than thirty years later, and the successful performances during the summer of 1882 of this “stage consecration festival play” placed the Bayreuth Festival on a firm footing, enabling it to prosper after the composer’s death the following year.

The present study of the genesis of *Parsifal* considers the position of this work in the context of Wagner’s developing career. The music and drama of *Parsifal* display points of connection not only to *Lohengrin* but to most of Wagner’s major works, from his first opera *Die Feen* (*The Fairies*, 1834) to the monumental *Ring* cycle. In important ways, *Parsifal* is his culminating work. From time to time, his deliberations over the *Parzival* material intersected with his work on other projects. For instance, his preoccupation with Parzival as wanderer seeking the Grail surfaces in his labors on the last act of *Tristan und Isolde* in the mid-1850s. At that time, Wagner perceived a strong affinity between the wounded Tristan and the anguished Grail King Anfortas. Wagner

¹ The original spelling of this name in Wagner’s principal source, Wolfram von Eschenbach’s epic poem *Parzival*, is Loherangrin. Wagner often changed the names that appear in the medieval epics, altering Anfortas to Amfortas, and Cundrie to Kundry. Since Wagner employed Wolfram’s spelling Parzival until the last stages of his labors on the opera, that version of the name has been retained in reference to the sources and genesis of the work.

even weighed the possibility of an encounter between Tristan languishing at Kareol and Parzival searching in vain for the Grail, and he sketched music for “Parzival’s Refrain,” which remained unused but foreshadows the musical style of *Parsifal*.

Since the evolution of the text and music of *Parsifal* is documented in extraordinary and unique detail—more so than for Wagner’s earlier operas—this work offers itself as an especially promising subject for study of the creative process. The dramatic ideas that came to fruition in *Parsifal* occupied Wagner for half a century; the music involved a much more concentrated genesis. Wagner’s second wife, Cosima, wrote copiously in her diaries about his progress in composing the music, which was written mainly between 1877 and 1879. Of all his works, only for *Parsifal* do so many early musical sketches survive in addition to the complete drafts that he typically made before beginning an autograph full score. These manuscript sources provide a detailed platform for investigation, allowing us to reevaluate earlier studies as well as the untrustworthy account Wagner himself provided in his autobiography *Mein Leben* (*My Life*).

An interdisciplinary context for such study of the creative process has become known in France as *critique génétique* or “genetic criticism.” The term relates not to the field of human genetics but to the genesis of works of art, regarded in a broad and inclusive manner.² This approach represents a promising alternative to narrowly focused methods of analysis, which concentrate in a restricted way on the structure of the final text of an artwork. The most intensive study hitherto devoted to formal analysis of the music of *Parsifal*—the last of the four monographs on Wagnerian works by Alfred Ottokar Lorenz—belongs to this latter category. A conductor at Coburg until 1919, Lorenz subsequently devoted himself to music theory and analysis; he taught at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich from 1926 until shortly before his death in 1939. Lorenz dubbed his analytical undertaking “the secret of form” (“Das Geheimnis der Form”) in Wagner, and confidently claimed to have solved this issue through the segmentation of Wagner’s vast musical continuities into a succession of symmetrical forms. There are serious difficulties with his analyses, which frequently fail to reveal “secrets” about the musical form and often ignore the evolving dramatic context of Wagner’s

² Recent interdisciplinary studies of genetic criticism include *Genetic Criticism: Texts and Avant-Textes*, ed. Jed Deppman, Daniel Ferrer, and Michael Groden (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), and *Genetic Criticism and the Creative Process: Essays from Music, Literature, and Theater*, ed. William Kinderman and Joseph E. Jones (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009). For a broad application of this approach to music, see Kinderman, *The Creative Process in Music from Mozart to Kurtág* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

music. The inflexibility of Lorenz's formal methodology is by no means the most serious shortcoming in his work. The second part of the present book explores the musical form and dramatic meaning of *Parsifal*, while building on insights gained through the study of the genesis of the work.

This brings us to an important third dimension of the Oxford series title in which the present volume appears: interpretation. The reception history of Wagner's *Parsifal* raises far-reaching issues that are bound up with German cultural and political history. Only in this context can we reassess the deep controversy that still surrounds *Parsifal*. To an unusual degree, this work continues to provoke contradictory responses that conform to divergent assumptions and preconceptions. Such polarization has been fueled in part by the religious aura of the work, which concludes with a utopian scene of redemption as Parsifal returns the Holy Spear to the shrine and miraculously heals the wounded leader Amfortas. Although Wagner assimilates many Christian elements in *Parsifal*, the name "Christus" never appears, and some aspects of the work draw substantially on pagan and Buddhist traditions.³ Wagner's main source for the text, the thirteenth-century epic poem by Wolfram von Eschenbach (1170–1220), shows deep piety but scant evidence of formal religion. The work is far from a straightforward exemplification of Christian doctrine, and Friedrich Nietzsche's comment that "Wagner... sank plötzlich, hilflos und zerbrochen, vor dem christlichen Kreuze nieder." (Wagner... sank down suddenly, helpless and broken, before the Christian cross.), is misleading.⁴ Here, as elsewhere, Wagner was not subservient to a single religious framework in his shaping of the text and music.

In his essay "Religion and Art" of 1880 Wagner wrote that

da, wo die Religion künstlich wird, der Kunst es vorbehalten sei, den Kern der Religion zu retten, indem sie die mythischen Symbole, welche die erstere im eigentlichen Sinne als wahr geglaubt wissen will, ihrem sinnbildlichen Werte nach erfaßt, um durch ideale Darstellung derselben die in ihnen verborgene tiefe Wahrheit erkennen zu lassen.⁵

³ Gurnemanz declines to answer Parsifal's question "Who is the Grail?" in act 1. Some commentators force an explicitly Christian interpretation, as does Peter Hofmann, who regards the word "I" in the prophecy "Knowing through compassion, the pure fool, wait for him, whom I ordain!" as designating "who else but the redeemer Jesus Christ himself!" *Richard Wagners Politische Theologie: Kunst zwischen Revolution und Religion* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), 252.

⁴ This comment appears in the 1886 preface to the second volume of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (*Human, All Too Human*), sec. 3, in *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Moninari, 4:3 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967), 6.

⁵ Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1912–14), 10:14.

[When religion becomes artificial, it remains for art to rescue the essence of religion by perceiving its mythical symbols—which religion would have us believe to be the literal truth—according to their figurative value, enabling us to see their profound, hidden truth through idealized representation.]⁶

As this statement indicates, Wagner was not interested in glorifying orthodox religion through art. On the other hand, the highly tensional relation of this artwork to religious issues rewards detailed attention. Commentators have offered wildly divergent interpretations. Robert Gutman for instance describes it as a “*pasticcio* of freakish elements—at first glance a seemingly serene and ample frieze whose figures under closer examination reveal themselves as grotesques, moving puppet-like before backgrounds realized in a strange discontinuous perspective” and finds it “amazing that *Parsifal* was ever considered a Christian work,”⁷ whereas Lucy Beckett finds that “The Good Friday scene is the most moving of all modern celebrations of, precisely, ‘the world as created without the poet’s intervention’” and that “The Grail in *Parsifal*... demands to be taken in its full Christian sense as the perpetually renewed chalice of the Last Supper which represents Christ’s continuing presence among men.”⁸

Such contrary views support Dieter Borchmeyer’s assessment that “As a rule, artists who were violently controversial in their own day sooner or later achieve classic status, no longer sparking dissent... Wagner’s works, together with his artistic personality, continue to provoke disagreement and militate against their becoming classics.”⁹ Another writer, Michael Tanner, has commented that “Difficult as it is to believe, *Parsifal*, Wagner’s work of peace and conciliation, has been and remains the subject of even more bitter contention than any of his other works.”¹⁰ Particularly pertinent to a balanced appraisal of *Parsifal* is an evaluation of its disturbing reception history in Germany during the first decades of the twentieth century, where the response to the work was closely bound up with nationalism and anti-Semitism.

⁶ All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Robert W. Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), 432, 439.

⁸ Lucy Beckett, *Richard Wagner: Parsifal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 148, 140. A comparable interpretation is contained in Heinrich Reinhardt, *Parsifal: Studien zur Erfassung des Problemhorizonts von Richard Wagners letztem Drama* (Staubing: Donau, 1979). Claus-Dieter Osthöener, in *Erlösung: Transformationen einer Idee im 19. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), writes more cautiously about the “redeeming power of [Wagner’s] musical drama” (177).

⁹ Dieter Borchmeyer, *Drama and the World of Richard Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), vii.

¹⁰ Michael Tanner, *Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 184.

The association of the Wagnerian legacy at Bayreuth with National Socialism began long before Adolf Hitler seized power, and had to do with two British-born in-laws of the Wagner family: Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Winifred Wagner. In this regard, it is hardly surprising that *Parsifal* has remained the subject of “bitter contention,” even if the composer died a half-century before Hitler’s rise to power in 1933.

In his recent detailed study of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in its first decades, Stephan Mösch describes the problem as follows:

The Bayreuth Circle was protected by its “master” against the reproach of using the aesthetic object as a means of projecting ideology. Now Wagner’s enthroning of *Parsifal* backfired as it became a medium for utopian politics. Art, understood not as an aesthetic experience but as an direct religious force, could be turned to pragmatic purposes. One could speak about religion and mean race. One could speak of style and mean the self-realization of the nation. In short: *Parsifal* proved fruitful for the hypnotic depiction of collective identity.¹¹

Fortunately for Wagner’s reputation, the reception of *Parsifal* was not limited to Bayreuth or German-speaking Europe. It is instructive to realize that already in 1903–04, two American opera companies offered more than two hundred performances of *Parsifal* in North American cities, whereas the original Bayreuth production of *Parsifal* was performed just 205 times in the entire period from the 1882 premiere until 1933.¹² Since the Second World War, performances of Wagner and scholarly studies of his works have displayed an increasingly international character, and productions of Wagner’s works in Germany have often engaged with problematic aspects of their reception history.

The German cultural context still looms large for a study of the genesis, structure, and interpretation of *Parsifal*. Many earlier writings on the subject are in German and often reflect the chauvinistic attitudes prevalent when they were written. This situation is further complicated by the lines

¹¹ Stephan Mösch, *Weibe, Werkstatt, Wirklichkeit: Wagners ‘Parsifal’ in Bayreuth 1882–1933* (Kassel: Bärenreiter/Metzler, 2009), 362–63. The red-and-black dust cover of Mösch’s book reminds the reader of the blood-and-soil ideology promoted by National Socialism. On the “Bayreuth circle,” the group of Wagner admirers associated with the Bayreuth Festival and the *Bayreuther Blätter*, see among other sources Winfried Schüler, *Der Bayreuther Kreis von seiner Entstehung bis zum Ausgang der wilhelminischen Ära: Wagnerkult und Kulturreform im Geiste völkischer Weltanschauung* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1971).

¹² Katherine Syer, “*Parsifal* on Stage,” in *A Companion to Wagner’s ‘Parsifal’*, ed. William Kinderman and Katherine Syer (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 282–83.

of connection between members of the Wagner family and Hitler. In the 1940s, Peter Viereck perceived a causal relation between the artistic legacy of German Romanticism and the rise of fascism in Germany; the case of Wagner would seem to present perhaps the strongest evidence for his argument.¹³ Still, much about *Parsifal* resists this interpretation. As we gain some critical distance from the central years of the twentieth century, certain of these problems appear in a new light. As a springboard to our investigation, let us examine some of the ways *Parsifal* was regarded during the first half-century of its existence, up to the period in which the failed artist and racist demagogue became Germany's *Führer*.

* * *

The special position of *Parsifal* among Wagner's works is closely bound up with the renewal of the Bayreuth Festival in 1882. Plate 1 shows the program of the festival that year, with the first public performance of *Parsifal* held on 30 July. The first Bayreuth Festival with the *Ring* cycle in 1876 had left a crippling deficit, placing the future of the enterprise in jeopardy. The festival's resumption with *Parsifal* involved an unusual performance restriction. For a generation thereafter, staged performances of the work were confined to Bayreuth. It is revealing, then, to set the plurality of the medieval versions of the Grail myth against the singularity of Wagner's final opera.¹⁴ In some ways, *Parsifal* represents an extreme embodiment of the autonomous work-concept, in that its author not only devoted unusual attention to the drama and music but also specifically designed the work for the special conditions of the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth, reserving performances for this unique theater. The notion of *Urtext* (original text) applies here not only to the relation of verbal text and music but also to the staging, and after Wagner's death his widow, Cosima, sought to preserve the memory of the original production for decades. Like a guardian of the Grail, she vigorously resisted change and asserted for as long as possible the exclusivity of the performances at Bayreuth. Only with the so-called theft of the Grail to New York in 1903 and the formal expiry of copyright a decade later was this monopoly broken.¹⁵

¹³ Viereck's book *Metapolitics: From the Romantics to Hitler* (New York: Knopf, 1941) was published in revised and expanded form as *Metapolitics: The Roots of the Nazi Mind* (New York: Capricorn, 1961, 1965) and most recently as *Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2004).

¹⁴ For a survey of versions of and responses to the Grail legends, medieval and modern, see especially Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ *Parsifal* was also given staged performances in Amsterdam in 1905. Holland, like the United States, was not bound to the Bern Copyright Convention.

Bühnenfestspielhaus Bayreuth.

Am 26. und 28. Juli

für die Mitglieder des Patronat-Vereins,

am 30. Juli, 1. 4. 6. 8. 11. 13. 15. 18. 20. 22. 25. 27. 29. Aug. 1882

öffentliche Aufführungen des

PARSIFAL.

Ein Bühnenweihfestspiel von RICHARD WAGNER.

Personen der Handlung in drei Aufzügen:

| | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Amfortas | Herr Reichmann. | Kundry | Frau Materna. |
| Titirel | „ Kindermann: | | Fräulein Brandt. |
| | | | „ Mitten. |
| Gurnemanz | „ Scaria. | Erster } Gralsritter | Herr Fuchs. |
| | „ Siehr. | Zweiter } | „ Stumpf. |
| | „ Winkelmann. | Erster } Gralsritter | Fräulein Galfy. |
| Parsifal | „ Gudehus. | Zweiter } | „ Keil. |
| | „ Jäger. | Dritter } Knappe . . | Herr von Habbenet. |
| Klingsor | „ Hill. | Vierter } | „ Mikorey. |
| | „ Fuchs. | | |
| Klingsor's Zaubermädchen: | | I. Gruppe | Fräulein Horson. |
| Sechs Einzel-Sängerinnen: | | | „ Meta. |
| | | II. Gruppe | „ Pringle. |
| | | | „ André. |
| | | | „ Galfy. |
| | | | „ Belee. |

und Sopran und Alt in zwei Chören, 24 Damen.

Die Bruderschaft der Gralsritter, Jünglinge und Knaben.

Ort der Handlung:

Auf dem Gebiete und in der Burg der Gralhüter „Monsalvat“; Gegend im Charakter der nördlichen Gebirge des gothischen Spaniens. — Sodann: Klingsor's Zauberschloss, am Südschange derselben Gebirge, dem arabischen Spanien zugewandt anzunehmen.

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Beginn des ersten Aufzugs | 4 Uhr. |
| „ „ zweiten „ | 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ „ |
| „ „ dritten „ | 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ „ |

On 1 January 1914, just eight months before the outbreak of the First World War, the exclusive claim of Bayreuth officially expired, and in that year a flood of *Parsifal* performances took place in many of the world's leading opera houses.¹⁶

This breaking of the floodgates was lamented by the Wagner family, which had benefited handsomely by their exclusive hold on *Parsifal*. The resulting situation was paradoxical, if we recall Wagner's original motivation for a festival. While at Zurich in 1852, he envisioned a festival of his *Ring* cycle to be given by a progressive artistic community to a freely admitted audience on a simple wooden stage to be consigned to flames after the performances. With the fading of this antimaterialist vision came the recognition that works so elaborate and expensive to perform as the *Ring* or *Parsifal* required a paying audience and sponsorship of a more conventional kind. A dozen years later, a solution seemed to fall into Wagner's lap through his avid admirer the young King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who summoned the composer to Munich and paid off his debts. Yet Wagner himself put the brakes on Ludwig's enthusiasm for an elaborate new theater in Munich, in part because the *Ring* cycle was not yet ready. After the collapse of his chances at Munich in 1865, Wagner had little direct contact with the king, but Ludwig, whom Wagner dubbed "Parzival," continued to lend indispensable support to the Bayreuth undertaking, enabling the impressive run of performances of *Parsifal* in 1882, a half-year before the composer's death.

A central problem of subsequent German *Parsifal* reception is lodged in the role of Cosima Wagner and the Bayreuth Circle as heirs and custodians of an ideological temple of art, a *Gralsburg* with a mission that seemed poised for fulfillment through political means. Did this undertaking convey the "profound, hidden truth" to which Wagner himself referred in his ambiguous formulation? Or did it abuse the artwork as nationalist propaganda during this period in which the political climate in Germany became increasingly reactionary? As we tread the minefields of art and ideology, it is important to try to restore a sense of the historical context of meanings of the work. In this regard, the components of genesis, structure, and interpretation can be seen to lie on a continuum, not sharply separated from one another.

The study of reception history shows that works of art can be regarded in antithetical ways, as inconvenient associations are ignored in favor of a political agenda. The use of pieces like Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture and his opera *Fidelio* during the Third Reich illustrates this tendency. At the pageantry of Nazi mass rallies, it counted for little that the martyrdom of

¹⁶ The first of these performances, in Barcelona, actually began as early as 31 December 1913. Nora Eckert explores the juxtaposition of these events in her book *Parsifal 1914* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2003).

Count Egmont is associated with resistance to arbitrary authority, or that the character in Beethoven's opera who actually mirrors Hitler is the tyrannical villain Pizarro. In this environment, it was the Nazi "martyrs"—brown-shirted activists killed in the struggle for power—who were glorified by the stirring close of Beethoven's overture, while the führer was celebrated through identification with the savior Fidelio.¹⁷ Observing the misuse of Beethoven's music at such ceremonial contexts in 1934, William Shirer wrote about the response of the masses that "critical faculty is swept away at such moments, and every lie pronounced is accepted as the truth itself."¹⁸ Shirer was astonished by the success of the "vulgar, uneducated, fanatically bigoted Austrian, who had risen from the gutters of Vienna...whom so many Germans hailed as a genius and a savior."¹⁹

In view of this problematic relation between art and ideology, we need to exercise caution in assessing Wagner's final work. Examination of the dismal history of the Bayreuth legacy clarifies how *Parsifal* became a vehicle for utopian politics and exposes some hitherto unperceived points of connection between the Bayreuth Circle and National Socialism. It would be a serious error to assume that the main ideological appropriation of Wagner began only in 1933. At the same time, the effort to claim *Parsifal* for National Socialism was a problematic endeavor. Although undertaken with determination by Lorenz in his 1933 book, *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner*, and a cluster of related articles, the recruitment of *Parsifal* for the Third Reich was complicated by the central role of compassion in the drama and the pacifistic attitude displayed by the title character in later stages of the work. Nevertheless, Lorenz could emphasize for his purposes the notion of prophecy, attributing to Wagner a vision of racial regeneration to be achieved through political means.

Wagner had not envisioned his wife to take over as director of the festival. After a period of shocked bereavement following her husband's death, Cosima Wagner took firm control. During the preparation of *Parsifal* in 1884, she followed the rehearsals while hidden behind a partition, passing notes with critical input to the stage director, Anton Fuchs, and to the conductor,

¹⁷ The examples in this paragraph are drawn from David B. Dennis, *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870–1989* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 163–64.

¹⁸ William Shirer, *Berlin Diary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), 18–19. In a recent assessment of participatory music in the Third Reich, Thomas Turino concludes that "the powerful semiotic potentials of music can be used in mass movements for dangerous ends." *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 210.

¹⁹ William Shirer, *20th Century Journey: The Nightmare Years: 1930–1940* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1984), 2:115–16.

Hermann Levi, who found her input valuable. On 7 August 1884, Levi wrote enthusiastically to his father that “Her observations were so pertinent and so sensitive, and contained such important information concerning the art of performance that I learned more in these few days than in twenty years as a practicing conductor.”²⁰ Nevertheless, her leadership of the festival came at a cost: she possessed a will to embalm the past but too little of the aesthetic discrimination important to an evolving theatrical enterprise. Moreover, Cosima Wagner and her son Siegfried saw themselves as pious guardians of the Wagnerian heritage, and a suspicion of unworthiness fell on those not regarded as sufficiently German. In the words of her biographer Oliver Hilmes, she and her circle succeeded “in stylizing the spirit of Bayreuth as a ‘German thing,’”²¹ an attitude vigorously promoted in the *Bayreuther Blätter*, the Wagnerian house journal edited by Hans von Wolzogen for sixty years, from 1878 until 1938.

As the original conductor of *Parsifal* from 1882—but the son of a rabbi—Levi’s involvement was tolerated yet precarious. Levi described his experience at Bayreuth up to 1894 as “twelve years of pain and joy,” whereby the order of adjectives is significant.²² Leading figures of the Bayreuth Circle around 1890, including Cosima Wagner, Felix Mottl, and Richard Strauss, all displayed a strong anti-Semitic bias. When Cosima congratulated Strauss on the birth of his son on Good Friday in April 1897, she wrote that “He could have chosen no more beautiful day to affirm his identity as a German and as a Christian,” a prophetically ironic observation in view of the later enthusiasm of Strauss’s son for Hitler. Strauss anticipated conducting *Parsifal* at Bayreuth by 1891, if Levi had been dislodged. When this did not occur, he complained that “Thus poor *Parsifal* will not be released from the Jewish torture chamber; why must this poor work atone for Levi’s ‘rewards?’” In the same vein, Strauss dismissed Lilli Lehmann as Brünnhilde in 1896 as an “old Jewish grandmother without theatrical talent or even a trace of feeling.”²³ The cutting edge of such comments stemmed not from aesthetic response

²⁰ Cited in Manfred Eger, “The Bayreuth Festival and the Wagner Family,” in *Wagner Handbook*, ed. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski, translation ed. by John Deathridge (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 494.

²¹ *Herrin des Hügels: Das Leben der Cosima Wagner* (Munich: Siedler, 2007), 284. Earlier biographies of Cosima Wagner already emphasized this aspect of her role, as is reflected for instance in the title of Ilse Lotz’s book from the period of the Third Reich: *Cosima Wagner: die Hüterin des Grals: Der Lebensroman einer deutschen Frau* (*Cosima Wagner: die Guardian of the Grail: The Story of the Life of a German Woman*) (Görlitz: Bokämper, 1935).

²² Mösch, *Weibe, Werkstatt, Wirklichkeit*, 279.

²³ These quotations are found in *ibid.*, 283–84.

but from crude prejudice.²⁴ That at Bayreuth such bias was widespread is conveyed in another letter of Levi's from 1894:

I believe that here as well everything can be grasped from a single standpoint: I am a Jew, and since in and around Wahnfried it has become a dogma that a Jew appears exactly so, and thinks and acts in a certain way, and that above all selfless giving... is impossible for a Jew, one judges everything that I do and say from this viewpoint.²⁵

Winfried Schüler describes the Bayreuth group as a "literarisch-weltanschaulicher Zirkel,"²⁶ a term best understood as "literary-ideological circle" in view of its uncritical devotion to Wagner. That the Bayreuth Circle soon assumed the character of a religious sect was encouraged by the religious aura of *Parsifal* as well as the preoccupation of this group with the notion of regeneration, a prominent theme in the composer's later writings. In a casual yet prophetic comment recorded by Cosima Wagner in her diary on 19 November 1879—a remark made perhaps not entirely in jest—Wagner quipped that "You just wait, I will found a new religion, and toss all the patronage money into it."²⁷ Even before Wagner's death in 1883, Eduard Hanslick observed about the Bayreuth cult and the early publications in the *Bayreuther Blätter* that "the admiration paid to a famous figure can be deserved... and yet through its exaggeration in form and content signal the need for protest."²⁸ This narrow outlook helps explain the limited involvement at Bayreuth of Anton Seidl, Wagner's favorite assistant during the 1870s, who had done much to promote Wagner's works in New York and whose engagement to conduct *Parsifal* at the festival in 1897 was described by Siegfried Wagner as a return of "a Knight of the Grail."²⁹ A few years later,

²⁴ Strauss waited until 1933 for his chance to conduct *Parsifal* at Bayreuth, when he substituted for Arturo Toscanini, who cancelled his involvement to protest the policies of the National Socialist regime.

²⁵ *Leviana* III/7, letter no. 179 (23 January 1894), cited in Mösch, *Weibe, Werkstatt, Wirklichkeit*, 286. For further testimony of the strident anti-Semitism of Cosima Wagner in this period, see Nancy Thorndike Greenspan, *The End of a Certain World: The Life and Science of Max Born* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 50.

²⁶ Schüler, *Der Bayreuther Kreis*, 63.

²⁷ *Cosima Wagner: Die Tagebücher*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack (Munich: Piper, 1976–77), 2:446 (hereafter CT 1 and CT 2).

²⁸ Eduard Hanslick, *Aus dem Opernleben der Gegenwart*, pt. 3 (Berlin: A. Hofmann, 1884), 338, cited in Mary A. Cicora, *Parsifal Reception in the Bayreuther Blätter* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 21.

²⁹ On Seidl's somewhat tenuous relation to Cosima Wagner and the Bayreuth Circle, see Hans Rudolf Vaget, "Anton Seidl: 'Conductor of the Future,'" *Wagner* 19 (1998): 117–27, esp. 118–19.

in 1904, Guido Adler observed that “while compassion stands at the center of Wagner’s ‘regeneration doctrine’ and is only concealed and suppressed by delusion, among the Wagnerites hate, megalomania, chauvinism, and persecution emerge as the main motives.”³⁰ Yet another perspective was offered by the critic Wilhelm Matthes, who commented about the Bayreuth Circle that a “tendency to mysticisation made it inevitable that the much-emphasized idea of consecration gradually led to desecration.”³¹

In view of the advocacy of German nationalism by the Bayreuth Circle, it is ironic that the aforementioned in-laws of the Wagner family forged the link to Adolf Hitler. The key figure was the racial ideologist Houston Stewart Chamberlain, author of the popular 1899 book *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (*Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*).³² He first met Cosima Wagner, whom he addressed as “hohe Meisterin,” in 1888; their friendship is documented in a correspondence they maintained until 1908,³³ when he joined the clan by marrying Wagner’s daughter Eva. In 1916, the couple moved into a house next to the Wagner residence Wahnfried, a building Siegfried Wagner had acquired five years earlier. Chamberlain had written extensively on Wagner’s works, and his original multivolume plan for the *Foundations*, which had been encouraged by Cosima but remained unrealized, was to have traced the path of human history to its culmination in Wagner’s achievement.³⁴ Cosima was sorely disappointed by the lack of emphasis on Wagner in the published *Foundations*, in which Chamberlain indulged in another kind of specious megalomania, promoting a brand of racism according to which Jewish and Aryan principles were fundamentally incompatible. A German by choice, Chamberlain attacked liberalism, democracy, and the Jews. In Chamberlain’s

³⁰ “Während bei Wagner das Mitleid im Zentrum seiner ‘Regenerationslehre’ steht und nur durch den Irrwahn verdeckt und verschüttet ist, treten bei den Wagneriten Haß, Größenwahn, Chauvinismus und Verfolgungssucht als Hauptmotive auf.” Guido Adler, *Richard Wagner: Vorlesungen gehalten an der Universität zu Wien* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1904), 339.

³¹ The retrospective assessment by Wilhelm Matthes (1889–1973) appeared posthumously as *Was geschah in Bayreuth von Cosima bis Wieland Wagner?* (Augsburg: Bernd Wißner, 1996); quotation on 31.

³² H. S. Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1899; 4th ed., 1903); in English: *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Lees (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1911).

³³ Paul Pretzsch, ed., *Cosima Wagner und Houston Stewart Chamberlain im Briefwechsel 1888–1908*, (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1934).

³⁴ Roger Allen, “*Die Weihe des Hauses* (The Consecration of the House): Houston Stewart Chamberlain and the Early Reception of *Parsifal*,” in Kinderman and Syer, *A Companion to Wagner’s ‘Parsifal’*, 262.

view, neither assimilation nor conversion could make a Jew into a non-Jew. On the other hand, Chamberlain claimed that the question of race was not central to Wagner's thinking, and he defended himself from accusations from within the Bayreuth Circle that his racial theories involved unacknowledged indebtedness to the composer.³⁵ Nor did Chamberlain, the "evangelist of race," offer a racist interpretation of *Parsifal*.³⁶

Chamberlain stressed in the forward to the third edition of his book *Arische Weltanschauung* (*Aryan World-View*) of 1915 that "It matters not, whether we are Aryans, but whether we will become Ayrans. In this regard a huge labor awaits us all: the *inner* liberation from a pervasive and strangling Semitism." In fact, Chamberlain was concerned not just with "inner liberation" on a individual level but with coordinated political action. On account of his propagandistic writings, he received the Iron Cross from Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1916.

The very last sentence of the first volume of his *Foundations* depicts a struggle between the Jews and Germans as a "Kampf auf Leben und Tod" ("life-and-death battle"). Chamberlain's racism was not Darwinistic but religious in nature, and it exerted much influence on anti-Semitic religious organizations such as the *Deutsche Christen* (German Christians). The impact of Chamberlain's racist theology was mediated especially through circles in Thuringia, with a key figure being Adolf Bartels, who later belonged to the Eisenach *Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben* (Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life).³⁷ It is not possible to separate the atrocities against the Jews and other peoples from the National Socialist appropriation of the cultural and religious sphere. On 12 December 1941, shortly after massacres

³⁵ With Cosima Wagner's encouragement, Henry Thode, the husband of Daniela von Bülow, published a lengthy review of Chamberlain's *Foundations* in 1900 in which he accused Chamberlain of plagiarizing the main thesis of the book from Wagner's late essays and from Joseph Arthur de Gobineau. See Allen, "Die Weibe des Hauses," in Kinderman and Syer, 262–74.

³⁶ See Allen, "Die Weibe des Hauses," 273, who opposes the view of Chamberlain's biographer Geoffrey Field that *Parsifal* is a "racial odyssey." Chamberlain's explicit reception of *Parsifal* belongs to his pre-*Foundations* phase, but the *Foundations* surely influenced subsequent Germanic racist and anti-Semitic views of *Parsifal*.

³⁷ Susannah Heschel gives attention to this institute in her book *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). Also see in this regard Barbara Christina Liedtke, *Völkisches Denken und Verkündigung des Evangeliums. Die Rezeption Houston Stewart Chamberlain in evangelischer Theologie und Kirche während der Zeit des "Dritten Reiches"* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012).

of Jews at Simferopol in the Crimea and elsewhere, Heinrich Himmler expressed concern lest the officers carrying out the “heilige Pflicht” (sacred duty) of mass killings suffer “damage to their soul and character,” recommending that their morale be sustained through “comradely get-togethers” on the evenings of such actions involving music and presentations of “the beautiful realm of German spiritual and inner life” (“die schönen Gebiete deutschen Geistes- und Gemütslebens.”).³⁸

In her 1935 study of German Hellenism, Eliza Marian Butler described Chamberlain’s writings on Goethe (along with Cysarz on Schiller) as involving the mythic shaping of “national heroes for the most part, transformed into supermen, many of them in the clutches of a daimon; still further mythologised during the last few years into prophets and forerunners of Adolf Hitler; not gradually and slowly by popular accretions and superstitions, but violently, willfully by highly intellectual if much-bedazzled minds.”³⁹ For the Bayreuth Circle, there was no doubt about Chamberlain’s own stature as a figure marked by greatness; no less than three of his death masks remain in the collection of effects in his former home next to Wahnfried, Wagner’s former abode.

Another German racial nationalist and frequent contributor to the *Bayreuther Blätter* was Ludwig Schemann, the founder of the German Gobineau Society, whose very first member was Cosima Wagner.⁴⁰ Schemann began his propagandistic activities during Richard Wagner’s lifetime. While Wagner was composing the music to act 1 of *Parsifal*, Schemann delivered a lecture at Goslar, which was issued soon thereafter as a short book. Schemann appealed to his audience that “by supporting Wagner’s art, you thereby promote a national culture in its most noble and sublime manifestations” and that this

³⁸ Himmler’s order is printed in *Einsatz im “Reichskommissariat Ostland”: Dokumente zum Völkermord im Baltikum und in Weissrussland 1941–1944*, ed. Wolfgang Benz, Konrad Kweit, and Jürgen Matthäus (Berlin: Metropol, 1998), 28–29; cited in Christopher R. Browning, “An American Historian’s Perspective,” *German Studies Review* 35/2 (2012): 310.

³⁹ Eliza Marian Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece Over Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 333. Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s influential idealization of Greek art already received decisive critique in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Laocoon, or the Boundaries between Painting and Poetry* of 1766. On Winckelmann’s role as an unempirical mythmaker, see Josef Chytrý, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 33–36. Goethe’s thoughts about the daimon/demon as creative force are recorded in the 11 March 1828 entry of *Conversations with Eckermann by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe* (New York: M. Walter Dunne, 1901), 252–53.

⁴⁰ Ludwig Schemann offers this information in his book *Gobineau und die deutsche Kultur* (Leipzig: Fritz Eckardt Verlag, 1910), 146.

art represented an “entire community of the chosen.”⁴¹ In 1907 Schemann became one of the founders of the volkish (hard-line nationalist) *Werdandi-Bund*, together with Wagner clan members Chamberlain and Henry Thode. Siegfried Wagner, Hans von Wolzogen, Franz Stassen, Adolf Bartels, and Hans Pfitzner were also members of this society, which aimed to combat international modernism and foster German style in the arts. By the 1920s, Schemann made various contributions to the National Socialist movement that were recognized by special awards during the Third Reich.

The Bayreuth Circle first became aware of Hitler in 1919 through two Munich Wagnerians, the writer Michael Georg Conrad and the music critic Josef Stolzing-Cerny, who soon thereafter became editor of the Nazi newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*. A decade earlier, Stolzing-Cerny had described the pilgrimage of visitors to Bayreuth as a religious experience, relating that “Just as the followers of Mohammad fall awestruck to their knees at the sight of Mecca, so are we Germans gripped at once at the sight of the old margraval residence town, when we contemplate the works of Richard Wagner as the peak and goal of German artistic creation.”⁴² Stolzing-Cerny’s characterization of this religious experience was typical of the ideology promoted at Bayreuth. In 1906 Conrad asked: “Do we Germans as a newly born people with Wagner’s spirit and art and moral principles representing our nation wish with an iron will to achieve mastery in the world?... May the master’s will and work remain holy: B a y r e u t h !”⁴³

The religious importance of *Parsifal* was advanced by members of the Bayreuth Circle as a primary justification for retaining an exclusive claim on the work as spiritual or intellectual property in the 1910 publication *Mehr Schutz dem geistigen Eigentum! Der Kampf um das Schicksal des “Parsifal”* (More Protection to Intellectual Property! The Battle for the Destiny of “Parsifal”).⁴⁴ In 1911 Leopold von Schröder, who had been recruited for

⁴¹ Schemann, *Richard Wagner in seinen künstlerischen Bestrebungen und seiner Bedeutung für eine nationale Kultur. Ein Vortrag gehalten zu Goslar am 21. Dezember 1877* (Wolfenbüttel: Julius Zwistler, 1878), 60, 59.

⁴² Josef Stolzing-Cerny, “Eine Pilgerfahrt nach Bayreuth,” in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 15 August 1909, cited in Susanna Großmann-Vendrey, *Bayreuth in der deutschen Presse*, Dokumentenband (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1977), 54.

⁴³ Michael Georg Conrad, “Erinnerung an den amerikanischen Gralsraub,” *Richard Wagner-Jahrbuch* 1 (1906): 455.

⁴⁴ This volume is edited by Reinhold Freiherr von Lichtenberg and Ludwig Müller von Hausen with illustrations by Franz Stassen, *Mehr Schutz dem geistigen Eigentum! Der Kampf um das Schicksal des “Parsifal”* (Berlin: K. Curtius, 1910). The publication advocated the extension of copyright beyond the thirty-year limit due to expire at the end of 1913.

the Bayreuth circle by Chamberlain, published his book *Die Völlendung des arischen Mysteriums in Bayreuth* (The Fulfillment of the Aryan Mystery in Bayreuth), according to which the Bayreuth Festspielhaus itself represented a miraculous Grail Temple, the culmination of a process extended over five thousand years, whereby “through Wagner, Bayreuth became the ideal center of all Aryan peoples.”⁴⁵

For a decade—from the outbreak of war in August 1914 until 1924—the frustrated custodians of the Grail Temple endured interruption of the festival. Their attitudes reflected a combination of provincialism and fervent racial nationalism. In 1915 Cosima Wagner observed that “war seems far better to us Germans than does a peace during which everything that is not German makes inroads.”⁴⁶ Chamberlain for his part extolled Kaiser Wilhelm II as an “Aryan warrior-king,” as Siegfried in “battle against the corrosive poison of Judaism.” For him, Germany itself represented a god-sent messenger against the diabolical Jewish race: “Siegfried against the dragon.” Hans von Wolzogen, writing in the *Bayreuther Blätter*, envisioned *Parsifal* as a work reserved for “the noblest celebration of victory,” a role it was denied because of the defeat of Germany in 1918.⁴⁷ A year later, Siegfried Wagner lamented that “at this dreadful time it must tear the heart of every one who feels themselves German how our poor people are dragged into the abyss by scoundrels of foreign race.”⁴⁸ By 1923, still beset by paranoia, Siegfried glimpsed light on the horizon: “The times of the Spanish Inquisition have returned. Oath and betrayal are declared holy and Jew and Jesuit march in step to destroy Germanness!... Should the German cause really fail, then I believe on Jehova, the god of revenge and hate! My wife fights like a lioness for Hitler! Wonderful!”⁴⁹ The “lioness” was his British-born spouse, Winifred Wagner, who befriended Hitler at this time.

⁴⁵ Leopold von Schröder, *Die Völlendung des arischen Mysteriums in Bayreuth* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1911), 211.

⁴⁶ Cosima Wagner, *Briefwechsel mit Fürst Ernst zu Hohenlobe-Langenburg*, 339; cited in Mösch, *Weibe, Werkstatt, Wirklichkeit*, 383.

⁴⁷ Chamberlain’s comments stem from *Deutsches Wesen* (1916) and Wolzogen’s from “Gedanken zur Kriegszeit,” both cited in Mösch, *Weibe, Werkstatt, Wirklichkeit*, 384–85.

⁴⁸ Siegfried Wagner, *Erinnerungen* (Stuttgart, 1923; new edition with commentary by Bernd Zegowitz [Frankfurt, 2005]), 145; cited in Mösch, *Weibe, Werkstatt, Wirklichkeit*, 385.

⁴⁹ Siegfried Wagner to Rosa Eidam, Christmas 1923, Nationalarchiv der Richard-Wagner-Stiftung Bayreuth, Sig. A 2545/I-65; Michael Karbaum, *Studien zu Geschichte der Bayreuther Festspiele (1876–1976)*, Dokumententeil (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1976), 65.

Winifred had been drawn into the Bayreuth Circle in 1915 to fix a problem: the lack of an heir to succeed Siegfried Wagner in view of his bisexuality and disinclination to marry, as well as his and Cosima's scandalous treatment of the composer's first daughter Isolde, who was conceived when her mother was cohabitating with Wagner but still married to Hans von Bülow. In 1914, Isolde sought to establish her true paternity in court in order to stake a claim to the Wagner inheritance for her twelve-year-old son Franz Wilhelm Beidler, Richard Wagner's only grandson at that time.⁵⁰ Since no biological test for paternity was then available, her case was dismissed; Isolde died embittered in 1919. Soon after the court case, the problem of the missing heir had found another solution. Winifred Marjorie Williams was a British-born orphan who was adopted at the age of nine by Karl and Henriette Klindworth in Berlin. Karl Klindworth was a pianist who had studied with Franz Liszt; he was busy at that time making a vocal reduction of *Der fliegende Holländer*. The young girl soon fell under the spell of that opera, and taking the first name of Wagner's redeeming woman, became Senta Klindworth. At the age of eighteen, Senta came to Bayreuth and found her destiny as the spouse of Siegfried Wagner, bearing him four children in the ensuing years. Two months before their wedding, on 7 July 1915, she wrote to Siegfried that marriage to him was a dream whose fulfillment seemed beyond her wildest hopes; the language of her message mimics the expression of love of the character Louise from his own opera *Der Bärenhäuter*.⁵¹ One week later, on 14 July, she wrote to Houston Stewart Chamberlain that

[m]ay heaven only give me the strength to fulfill the solemn and sacred, heavenly and sublime task of life that has come to me for the beloved man and for my own welfare and happiness. Heartfelt greetings to you and to your esteemed wife!

Senta Klindworth⁵²

The identification of Bayreuth as a site of cultic pilgrimage assumed an ominous character once the festival was resumed in 1924. Siegfried Wagner hoisted the black-white-red flag of the Second Reich above the Festspielhaus in place of the flag his father had honored—the black-red-gold tricolor from the 1848/49 uprisings that served again as the flag of the Weimar republic. The title image of the official festival program book (*Offizieller*

⁵⁰ For Beidler's own account of his severed relation to the Wagner family, see his book *Cosima Wagner-Liszt: Der Weg zum Wagner-Mythos*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer (Bielefeld: Pendragon Verlag, 1997).

⁵¹ Peter P. Pacht, *Siegfried Wagner: Genie im Schatten* (Munich: Nymphenburger, 1988), 275–76,

⁵² This source is held at the Nationalarchiv der Richard-Wagner-Stiftung as Hs 73/110.

Bayreuther Festspielführer) displayed the sword Nothung held with clenched fist against the background of the Festspielhaus, an image urging heroic recruits “as Knights of the Grail to join the great German battle for liberation.”⁵³ Hitler himself visited the festival in 1925, having by then received a lenient early release from prison following his treasonous actions against the Weimar Republic. By this point, it was obvious that the “Green Hill” at Bayreuth had turned brown. As Mösch puts it, “The Grail began to glow again in Bayreuth, as a symbol of resistance against conditions which from the standpoint of Wahnfried found their redemption only in 1933.”⁵⁴

Chamberlain’s action in hailing the Austrian political agitator in 1923 as Germany’s savior sprang from a recognition of their shared worldview or *Weltanschauung*. In his pamphlet for Hitler on New Year’s Day of 1924, Chamberlain described him in exalted terms as a “rare figure of light” (*seltene Lichtgestalt*) and a “true human being of the people” (*wahrer Volksmensch*). Winifred Wagner described Hitler’s personality as “grounded in the moral strength and purity of a human being who indefatigably sets forth an idea that he has rightly grasped and strives to realize with the ardor and humility of a sacred calling.”⁵⁵ Until after the outbreak of World War II, she maintained close ties to Hitler, who regularly visited Bayreuth, where the two addressed one another as “Wolf” and “Winnie.” Even in her later years, after full disclosure of the appalling consequences of Hitler’s dictatorship, Winifred Wagner never renounced her deep affection for the führer. To the end, she continued to play her Wagnerian role as Senta, remaining faithful unto death to Germany’s redeemer, as Hitler had been confidently hailed by Chamberlain. During one of Hitler’s visits to Bayreuth in 1932, a few months before his seizure of power, Winifred Wagner gave him for his forty-third birthday the page from Wagner’s composition draft of *Lohengrin* containing the words “Hab’ Dank! Erkenn’ ich recht die Macht, die dich in dieses Land gebracht.” (“Have thanks! I rightly recognize the power that you’ve brought to this land.”) She was surely keenly aware of the symbolism motivating this choice of offering.⁵⁶ Did Senta Klindworth grow into the role of Elsa

⁵³ This image by Franz Stassen is reproduced with commentary in Brigitte Hamann, *Winifred Wagner oder Hitlers Bayreuth* (Munich: Piper, 2002), 124.

⁵⁴ Mösch, *Weibe, Werkstatt, Wirklichkeit*, 386.

⁵⁵ The sources cited in his paragraph are reproduced in Hartmut Zelinsky, ed., *Richard Wagner: Ein deutsches Thema. Eine Dokumentation zur Wirkungsgeschichte Richard Wagners 1876–1976* (Munich: Medusa, 1976, 1983), 170, 169.

⁵⁶ As John Deathridge observes, the same page containing these words from King Henry also must have contained Lohengrin’s question to Elsa, “Wenn ich im Kampfe für dich siege, willst du, dass ich dein Gatte sei?” (“If I triumph in battle for you, do you want me to become your husband?”). This choice of text seems

Wagner? To her lasting discredit, Winifred Wagner remained truer to her redeemer protector than did Elsa.⁵⁷

Why did Hitler make such an impression on the Bayreuth Circle in the early 1920s? Brigitte Hamann's study of Hitler's early years at Vienna allows us to answer this question with confidence. To begin with, Chamberlain's main work, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, was written in Vienna, and its author was connected to factions that exerted potent influence on the young Hitler. Chamberlain was an honorary member of the Vienna *Richard Wagner Verein* cofounded by Georg Schönerer, and he stood in close contact with the so-called *Alldeutschen* (Pan-Germans). Chamberlain's racial anti-Semitism, with its insistence on an incompatibility of Jewish and Aryan principles, exerted impact on a variety of racist movements. As Hamann writes, "The mixture of nationalities, which in the Danube monarchy had been normal for centuries, was now suddenly seen as a threat to one's own community ("*eigene Volkstum*"), whereby racial supremacy was claimed by the Germans at the expense of other groups."⁵⁸

Hitler assembled his ideology, including gimmicks and political tricks, from a variety of sources in Vienna during the formative years he spent there as a struggling artist. The "Heil"-salute was drawn from the movement of another führer, Georg Schönerer; the age-old swastika symbol taken from the followers of Guido von List. The pretense of chastity on behalf of the people, as in Hitler's pet phrase "my lover is Germany," was modeled on the

hardly coincidental, particularly regarding the identification of Hitler with Lohengrin. See Deathridge, "Through the Looking Glass: Some Remarks on the First Complete Draft of *Lohengrin*," in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, ed. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 61.

⁵⁷ In her analysis of the "bizarre division in the mind" of her grandmother, Nike Wagner points out "disjunctions, aberrations and narcissistic identifications" yet claims that "Winifred handled her situation better than the hapless Elsa in *Lohengrin*, who had to know exactly *who* her protector was, and therefore provoked the catastrophe." *The Wagners: The Dramas of a Musical Dynasty*, trans. Ewald Osers and Michael Downes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 164–65. The sole member of the Wagner clan to reject Hitler's crude brutality and resist Winifred Wagner's blind complicity was her spirited daughter Friedelind, who chose the path of exile, receiving support from Arturo Toscanini. The account in her book *Nacht über Bayreuth* (Cologne: Dittrich-Verlag, 1997, with revised commentary by Eva Weissweiler), first published in English as *Heritage of Fire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1944), is important, although not completely reliable.

⁵⁸ Brigitte Hamann, *Hitlers Wien: Lehrjahre eines Diktators* (Munich: Piper, 1996), 288–89.

tactics of Vienna's anti-Semitic mayor Karl Lueger.⁵⁹ Having absorbed much from pan-Germanic, racist anti-Semitic sources that themselves owed a debt to Chamberlain, the young demagogue was bound to be well received by the Wagner family; Hitler's enthusiasm for Richard Wagner's works was the icing on the cake. The Wagners were disappointed by Hitler's failure to gain power at the time of the Munich Putsch in 1923, and an alliance of the Bayreuth Circle with the National Socialists—the browning of the “Green Hill”—was widely recognized by the time of the postwar revival of the Wagner Festival in 1924. New sources continue to surface that shed light on these connections. For instance, Hitler himself read not only writings by Chamberlain but other works from the Bayreuth Circle, such as Curt Richard Hohberger's *Werden und Schicksale von Wagners Parsifal* (The Genesis and Fate of Wagner's *Parsifal*) from 1913, a book that decries the “theft of the Grail” through the performances of *Parsifal* at New York in 1903 and cites authors including Henry Thode, the art historian who married Cosima's daughter Daniela von Bülow, and Michael Georg Conrad, one of those Munich Wagnerians who established the contact between Hitler and the Bayreuth Circle in 1919.⁶⁰ Siegfried Wagner's discouragement of nationalist demonstrations in 1925 according to the slogan “hier gilt der Kunst!” (“here it's about art!”), and his decision not to join the Nazi party (as did his wife, Winifred, and the Chamberlains) were pragmatically motivated decisions made in order not to undermine support for the festival, but did not reflect reservations about Hitler.

Discussions of anti-Semitism in *Parsifal* have focused mainly on the individual characters Kundry and Klingsor, who are sometimes regarded as Jewish caricatures. Marc Weiner writes that “Because debauchery in *Parsifal* is presented as a source of damnation, it is linked to the Jew through its association with the powers of Klingsor and of the instrument of his will, the wandering Kundry”; Gutman refers in this regard to “the temptations of racial pollution” and the “‘poison’ of Kundry's lips”; for Rudolf Kreis,

⁵⁹ Hitler kept his mistress, Eva Braun, carefully concealed from the public, just as did Lueger with his mistress, Marianne Beskiba. See Hamann, *Hitlers Wien*, 538.

⁶⁰ A well-thumbed copy of Hohberger's book from Hitler's personal library is now held at Brown University, according to Timothy W. Ryback, author of *Hitler's Private Library: The Books That Shaped His Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008) (private communication). Hohberger cites Thode's essay “Kunst und Sittlichkeit” (Art and Virtue) (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1906), 134, and Michael Georg Conrad's book *Wagner's Geist und Kunst in Bayreuth* (Munich-Schwabing: E. W. Bonsels Verlag, 1906), 125. One year later, Hohberger completed a longer version of his study that served as his doctoral dissertation titled *Die Entstehungsgeschichte von Wagners “Parsifal” auf philologisch-historischer Grundlage* (Leipzig: Verlag von Eduard Heinrich Mayer, 1914).

Kundry represents the “jüdische Weltwunde” (“Jewish wound of the world”).⁶¹ Such arguments are bound to remain inconclusive, since no Wagnerian characters are explicitly identified as Jewish, although the archetype of the “wandering Jew” plays a role with the heathen figure Kundry. As Richard Barber notes, the concepts of blood and purity (*Reinheit*) in *Parsifal* are rooted in the medieval texts, whereby in Wagner’s interpretation the contrast between divine and sinful blood is conveyed by the two wounds caused by the same spear.⁶² As John Deathridge has pointed out, Hartmut Zelinsky’s claim that Kundry is “the representation of everything that Wagner associated with Judaism,”⁶³ including the desire for its destruction, lacks foundation.⁶⁴ An awareness of the models for Kundry in Wagner’s sources sheds light on the complexity of this character: no fewer than three of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s characters served as prototypes for Kundry in each of the three acts, to which we must add the biblical Mary Magdalene in act 3. Another model is the character Cherestani in Carlo Gozzi’s *La donna serpente*, the play that provided the dramatic framework for Wagner’s first opera *Die Feen* and that exerted abiding influence on later works including *Parsifal*.⁶⁵ Yet Wagner’s prototypes for Kundry are more extensive still and include the wicked sorceress Circe and the pagan enchantress Armide.

An alternative approach to the issue of anti-Semitism in *Parsifal* is to view it in the historical context of German Wagner reception, whose cultic character encouraged a “hypnotic depiction of collective identity,” in Mösch’s words. The ceremonial aspect of Wagner’s final work has been emphasized recently in the idiosyncratic interpretation advanced by Alain Badiou, who

⁶¹ Marc Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 240; Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music*, 437; Rudolf Kreis, *Nietzsche, Wagner und die Juden* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995), 22. An earlier claim of this kind is Theodor W. Adorno’s comment, originally dating from 1938, that “all the rejects of Wagner’s works are caricatures of Jews.” Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Manchester: NLB, 1981), 23.

⁶² Barber, *Holy Grail*, 283–84.

⁶³ Hartmut Zelinsky, “Rettung ins Ungenau,” in *Richard Wagner: Parsifal*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (Munich: Text + Kritik, 1982), 102.

⁶⁴ John Deathridge, “Strange Love; or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Wagner’s *Parsifal*,” in *Western Music and Race*, ed. Julie Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 81; repr. in *National Traditions in Nineteenth-Century Opera*, vol. 2, ed. Michael C. Tusa (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

⁶⁵ This recognition stems from Katherine Syer’s recent research, to be discussed below (pp. 48–49). See Syer, “‘It left me no peace’: From Carlo Gozzi’s *La donna serpente* to Wagner’s *Parsifal*,” *Musical Quarterly* 94, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 325–80.