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# Wagner, Hitler, and Germany's Rebirth after the First World War

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## **Abstract**

This article examines German national renewal following defeat in the First World War. It emphasizes the importance of a 'unique' German culture, particularly the music dramas of Richard Wagner, in the politics of pan-German nationalists, Hitler, and the National Socialist Party. Hitler believed national revival depended on the rebirth of German culture, a concept that predated the war and was popular in *völkisch* circles and the radical right. Hitler owed his rise from obscurity as much to his appeal to cultural longings, which enabled him to attract the attention of Bavaria's elite, as he did to his political ideas and abilities.

## **Keywords**

First World War, German national rebirth, Richard Wagner, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Adolf Hitler, German culture

The end of the Great War came as a shock to most Germans, and while the armistice stopped the fighting, it did not end their suffering. Wartime hardships continued and were worsened by domestic political turmoil, revolution, and violence. The Kaiser and the traditional conservative political order were gone. In their place the extreme politics of communist revolutionaries and right-wing paramilitary groups vied with each other to fill the void created by the war's end and the peace settlement. Neither offered lasting solutions to the deep divisions and multitude of problems that beset post-war Germany. Many Germans were bewildered by the extraordinary turn of events, and they questioned how all of this had happened. The left and the right exploited the *Dolchstoßlegende* (stab in the back legend) to explain defeat in 1918 and the harsh peace imposed by the western democracies. Germany's failings were also seen by some, pan-German nationalists and conservative south German Catholics, as resulting from metaphysical or spiritual illness. They believed a deep cultural malaise along with miscegenation accounted for both defeat in the war and the many privations that accompanied the 'shameful peace treaty' of Versailles. Solipsistic in their collective misery, many Germans yearned for the emergence of a strong leader—a *Führer*—

who would revive the German spirit, end their humiliation and suffering, and restore Germany's strength and greatness.<sup>1</sup>

Germany's military defeat was accompanied by a political and social revolution which had profound if unexpected effects on national revival. Recovery would not come from the political and economic elites. It would not be the result of an intensified and revised Prussian militarism or public support for a policy of aggressive imperialism, but rather the rebirth of an exclusive German national community founded on a commonly shared ethnocentric culture. Public interest in the old German past had surged before the war, reflecting a rise in German nationalism and a growing belief, especially among the radical right, that a unique German culture defined the German nation and strengthened the German state. These views, loosely interpreted, attracted Germans of many different political persuasions and social-economic circumstances after the war.<sup>2</sup> One early post-war advocate of German cultural regeneration was Adolf Hitler, an obscure ultranationalist politician in the confusing and fluid political milieu of 1919 Munich. Hitler believed Germany would be great again once it became a truly united country, in his view, something it had never fully been either during the 1914-1918 war or even after unification in 1871. Class, confession, party and regional divisions all had to be swept away and replaced by a German national consciousness that had inner spiritual strength capable of uniting the people. For Hitler, this was attainable only through a revered and widely shared German culture, beginning with core German artistic values, as portrayed in the great music dramas of Richard Wagner. Harnessing *Kunst und Kultur* (art and culture)—German art and German culture—in the service of national regeneration and unity was a significant part of Hitler's answer to solving Germany's historical weakness and establishing a solid spiritual foundation on which to rebuild the country after the disasters of 1918 and 1919.<sup>3</sup>

As early as November 1919, Hitler argued forcefully in the newly formed Programme Committee of the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (DAP, German Workers' Party) for Germany's spiritual rebirth before any renewed military mobilisation.<sup>4</sup> Initially, Hitler received muted support from his new political colleagues for his radical ideas on cultural rebirth as an essential pre-requisite for national revival. Undeterred he persisted with his firm belief that by concentrating first on spiritual regeneration Germany would not only recover from her recent failures, but would also emerge stronger and better prepared to achieve her historic destiny as a great power, in much the same way that Richard Wagner transformed his early career failure in Paris into national and international triumph in Bayreuth and around the world. Hitler saw in Wagner a pure German nationalist of unbending will and a genius whose art had the power to unite all Germans through a shared *Deutschtum* (Germanness). Hitler's views on national rebirth first found enthusiastic support amongst post-war Munich's cultural elite and later political endorsement from the guardians of Wagner's legacy in Bayreuth.<sup>5</sup> This article examines the role of Wagner and his concept of spiritual regeneration in Hitler's *Weltanschauung* (world view) and the importance of art and culture in Germany's rebirth after the First World War. It also demonstrates that Hitler owed his rise from obscurity as much to his appeal to cultural longings, which enabled him to attract the attention of influential members of Bavaria's elite, as it did to his political ideas and abilities.

The historiography on the Wagner-Hitler nexus is extensive but, as Celia Applegate and Hans Rudolf Vaegt have demonstrated, it is not representative of the highest standards of scholarship.<sup>6</sup> Applegate is so distressed by the 'various ill-considered, assumption-ridden theories of musical *Sonderweg* (special path),' explaining Hitler through Wagner, that she has called for 'a moratorium on all discussions of the *Meister* [of Bayreuth] and the *Führer*.'<sup>7</sup> The

problem for both Applegate and Vaget is that too many historians have taken considerable shortcuts in their eagerness to draw a direct causal link between Wagner's concepts of German musical superiority, Germanness, and his vituperative anti-Semitism, and Hitler's aggressive racial and military policies that ended with the Holocaust. Vaget states that this 'scapegoating' of Wagner began in 1939 with the work of Peter Viereck, and has continued almost unabated with the work of such established historians as Robert Gutman, Hartmut Zelinsky, Paul Lawrence Rose, Marc Weiner, Joachim Köhler, and Alexander Schmidt.<sup>8</sup> Köhler has the added distinction of taking this argument to its most extreme conclusion, by claiming that Hitler was merely the executioner of Wagner's ideas, who turned his idol's operatic mythologies into a hellish political and social reality.

Given the clear warnings noted above, how does this article avoid the errors committed by previous historians writing on Wagner and Hitler, and what new contribution does it make? One of its objectives is to explore how Hitler's fascination with Wagner influenced his early political career. Instead of looking for Hitler in Wagner, this article examines how Hitler and his supporters embraced and then reconstructed Wagner for their own purposes. It also examines the right-wing nationalist interpretation of Wagner's doctrine of regeneration as articulated by Houston Stewart Chamberlain. This process began before the Great War commenced and intensified after its conclusion. Wagner's family, the disaffected right, and the cultural elite ('intellectual aristocrats')<sup>9</sup> in Munich and Berlin also played their part in promoting German art and German culture, particularly Wagner's art, as the essential factor in restoring German greatness after the calamity of the First World War.

Richard Wagner's prominent place among the most significant composers is undisputed, even by his most ardent critics and enemies. His operas, as Bryan Magee declares, 'are among the

very greatest works of art that there are.’<sup>10</sup> Wagner had the highest intellectual ability, which, along with his many interests, led Ernest Newman to write: ‘Such a combination had never existed in a single individual before; it has never happened since, and in all probability it will never happen again.’<sup>11</sup> Newman’s praise was echoed more recently by Peter Watson, who agrees with Friedrich Nietzsche that ‘Wagner was by far the *fullest* human being.’<sup>12</sup> It was Wagner’s ability to cross many boundaries, in his life and his work, which accounts for why many people—past and present—have regarded him an incomparable genius.

Wagner is also renowned for controversy. Chronic financial difficulties, scandalous affairs, his apparent shift from left-wing revolutionary to right-wing nationalist, his much publicised anti-Semitism and hatred of the French (both crystallized during his early career failures at the Paris opera) illustrate a more complex and fallible side to Wagner’s character. His actions and his thoughts, however, at least in his mind, were predominantly cultural.<sup>13</sup> For example, his anti-Semitism was erratic, personal (a persecution mania that Jewish critics conspired to destroy his art and his career) and typical (in style, if greater in degree) of nineteenth century European society. Throughout his life Wagner maintained many Jewish friends. Hermann Levi, who conducted the premier of *Parsifal*, regarded him as “the best and noblest of men.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly broad parameters applied to Wagner’s thoughts on German nationalism. Romantic idealism shaped many of these thoughts, but so did personal and practical considerations. Wagner hankered after a proud and united Germany that conformed to his romanticized view of England and France, although he hated the latter because of Napoleon, French airs of superiority, and his own unsuccessful two and a half years in Paris from 1839 to 1842. He also appreciated the financial rewards that would come from an annual national festival dedicated to performing his music.<sup>15</sup>

National and international success later in Wagner's career confirmed his contempt and hardened his intolerance for Jews and the French. *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868) unintentionally became his answer to his Jewish enemies and the French. *Meistersinger* was an overt celebration of Germanness, and 'a glorification of German art, above all German music.' It was also a personal statement of salvation and regeneration and what Wagner hoped a new united Germany would become (through his art). Nietzsche saw in all of Wagner's music, but particularly in *Meistersinger*, a unique German cheerfulness, as well as the power to regenerate and unite. He perceived in Wagner's romantic music an uncanny ability to heal the emotional and psychological wounds of those who had suffered profoundly from life's injustices, a characteristic that Nietzsche found deeply disturbing. Nietzsche also fretted over the hypnotic mass appeal of Wagner's richly textured music.<sup>16</sup>

Wagner was enthusiastic about ideas, specifically the pessimistic, world-rejecting philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. He claimed to have read Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* ('The world as will and representation') four times in less than a year between 1854 and 1855. Nietzsche recognized the heavy influence of Schopenhauer's metaphysics in *Die Meistersinger* stating: 'we stand before a development in the innermost recesses of Wagner's own soul.'<sup>17</sup> Wagner's disillusionment with politics and the world led him to embrace Schopenhauer's philosophy wholeheartedly. He adopted Schopenhauer's argument that art, and specifically music, was a refuge from the world and a source of redemption and rebirth.<sup>18</sup> Music unlike any of the other arts is something that is felt, not represented as is a painting, a poem, or a sculpture. It is a metaphysical voice that has the power to transcend the everyday and transport us inwardly 'away from the struggle for life.'<sup>19</sup> Wagner did not, as Joachim Köhler contends, cease to be a left-wing revolutionary and become a right-wing proto-fascist. After absorbing Schopenhauer, he moved away from politics and

enthusiastically embraced metaphysics.<sup>20</sup> Politics, however, followed Wagner as he gained domestic and international popularity.

The first Bayreuth Festival from 13 to 30 August 1876 amplified Wagner's worldwide fame. Crowned heads of Europe, other luminaries, and leading artists from all over the world attended three cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ('The ring of the Nibelung'). Wagner was an undisputed national and international celebrity, and a symbol of Otto von Bismarck's triumphant new Germany. His official relationship with Bismarck and the future Kaiser, Wilhelm II, however, was short and unsatisfactory, because neither of the two Prussian leaders had much time for, nor understanding of, art.<sup>21</sup> This was not the case in pan-German societies and other nationalist groups. For them, Wagner was an exemplar of Germanness, and his works were testaments of German cultural superiority, which fed their fanatical ideas on Aryan concepts of race, a return to hereditary soil, and an aggressive German imperialism.<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche feared (and later detested) the mass appeal and misinterpretation of Wagner's art, particularly after 1861, when he heard the piano reductions of *Tristan und Isolde* (1865), an opera he thought would drive people mad because of its emotional intoxication. He understood what Wagner had done—the composer was philosophizing with sound.<sup>23</sup> Wagner's music had the power to move people's emotions, and in his later operas some heroic characters, such as Siegfried, in the *Ring*, and Parsifal, the pure, noble, and divine leader in the opera of the same name, were easily confused by ultranationalists with a more calculated political and German nationalist persona.<sup>24</sup> It was precisely this effect—providing inspiration and a sense of unity 'on the mass, on the immature, on the blasé, on the idiots, on *Wagnerians*'—that Nietzsche feared.<sup>25</sup>



After Wagner's death in 1883, the association of him and German nationalism continued and intensified, a process that was strongly encouraged by his family—mainly his widow Cosima and his son-in-law, author and *völkisch* philosopher Houston Stewart Chamberlain—as well as his close friends and associates in Bayreuth. For financial and political reasons they hailed Wagner's operas as national cultural treasures that had to be protected against foreign defilement. Between 1900 and 1913, a series of highly public and unsuccessful legal battles to extend the copyright of Wagner's earlier operas and to preserve Bayreuth's exclusive privilege to perform *Parsifal*, Wagner's last opera, not only raised the emotional temperature concomitant with notions of Wagner's unique Germanness but for the intellectual aristocrats also served as a portent of dark days to come for a spiritually weak nation surrounded by aggressive, avaricious, and unscrupulous enemies.<sup>26</sup> This in turn reflected how they viewed what it meant to be German.

The anxieties that many Germans felt over their national identity and national unity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries were salient features in the troubled history of their newly unified state and contributory factors to the causes of the First (and the Second) World War.<sup>27</sup> Irrespective of the reasons the Kaiser and his generals and government ministers had for going to war in 1914, most Germans believed the war was an act of self-defence, a struggle for the survival of Germany or, in words made famous by Thomas Mann, the inevitable battle between 'French *civilisation* and German *Kultur*.'<sup>28</sup> Germans believed the war they were fighting was for a just and noble cause. Defeat in November 1918 came as a severe shock. Even that shock was soon overshadowed by hardship and deprivation, unprecedented financial crises, national humiliation and international condemnation. Few would have believed Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, when he warned: 'There is a danger that this war that has been forced upon us may end in a peace that will do the utmost harm to our

people.’<sup>29</sup> Tirpitz was the Secretary of State of the German Imperial Naval Office until March 1916 when he resigned over the Kaiser’s decision to limit submarine warfare. In 1917 he along with Heinrich Claß, the leader of the Pan-German League and the editor of the *Alldeutsche Blätter* (‘Pan-German Journal’) and the *Deutsche Zeitung* (‘German Newspaper’), founded the conservative and nationalist Deutsche Vaterlandspartei (German Fatherland Party), which all of the members of the Wagner family joined.

As Tirpitz’s prophesied, the war and its immediate aftermath brought significant challenges and heartache to most Germans. In Bayreuth, Winifred and Siegfried Wagner, the British born Germanophile daughter-in-law and the only son of Richard and Cosima Wagner, struggled to provide for their young family.<sup>30</sup> They also watched nervously, as did most Germans, the birth of the new republic, and the direction it was headed under Friedrich Ebert, its first Chancellor and leader of the Social Democratic Party. Winifred, who no longer spoke English and had renounced Britain because of the war, could have been speaking for many of her new and disillusioned countrymen and -women when she described the political triumph of the left-wing republicans in a letter to her friend Helena Boy: ‘My God, who would have thought that such a turn of events was possible! How proud we were of our German Fatherland, and how ashamed we are that a worm at the core could produce such degradation.’<sup>31</sup> The ‘worm at the core’ was Ebert and the Social Democrats.

Support for Ebert’s government and the Republic was further weakened by the harsh conditions of the armistice, and by the Bolshevik revolutions and counter-revolutions led by the Freikorps and the Right.<sup>32</sup> Out of this turmoil emerged the *Dolchstoßlegende* (stab-in-the-back legend). It held that the undefeated army had been betrayed by Communists and Jews, that revolution, the unfair peace settlement, and the destruction of German traditions and

values had been brought about by enemies of the fatherland who had destroyed the German Reich to gain power themselves. Bolshevism quickly became a catch-all condemnation for left-wing politicians, pacifists, the liberal press, Jews, and anyone else who could be blamed for Germany's defeat and post-war problems. The term was also used to stigmatize new trends in art, architecture, literature, and music. Atonal music, Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism, anything that was modern and experimental was deemed to be an assault on traditional German cultural life. Art, 'all great art', as Hitler would later proclaim, 'is national' and therefore had to be protected.<sup>33</sup> Nationalists and traditionalists, as well as a growing number of middle-class Germans, feared the end of the German Reich and German art, and even the German nation writ large. These fears are expressed well by Ernst Hanfstaengl, the Harvard educated half-German, half-American art dealer, friend of Adolf Hitler, and later foreign press secretary in Hitler's National Socialist government. Hanfstaengl spent the war in America. When he returned to Munich in July 1921, the near destitution and political turmoil that he experienced left him 'looking back to the happier days of Ludwig II and Richard Wagner.'<sup>34</sup> Many Germans began to yearn for a return to a familiar *Heimat*, a sense of home and homeland, and there was a growing commitment to Germanness and the notion of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community).<sup>35</sup> Fighting against the Bolsheviks and the socialists became increasingly intertwined with fighting for the nation and its *Kultur*.<sup>36</sup>

The stab in the back legend also reinvigorated the anti-Semitic beliefs and exclusionist political agendas of German ultranationalists, conservative south German Catholics, and members of the various pan-German organisations.<sup>37</sup> They blamed Jewish Bolshevism from the east and Jewish dominated capitalism in the west for most of Germany's problems. Defeat and national disintegration following the armistice were viewed as the natural consequences of a moral and spiritual decline brought about by foreign influences and Jews.

Nationalists and Catholics produced a flurry of pamphlets and popular books citing a Jewish and foreign contagion that had eaten away at German culture, German values, and ‘true Germanness’. To combat this disease, they called for a reawakening of spiritual idealism and, depending on the group, either a new monarchy or a new type of strong moral leader.<sup>38</sup>

Writing to Prince Ernst zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg, Cosima Wagner shared these views: ‘as always and everywhere it is the Semitic element that is responsible for agitation and subversion.’<sup>39</sup> The Wagners were nationalists and they provided support to those who fought for the old German values and order, in art and the state. They believed that a decisive leader and a strong authoritarian government were needed to halt the degenerative forces that were tearing Germany apart. After reading General Erich von Ludendorff’s memoirs, Cosima felt that he was the man to save Germany. In another letter to Hohenlohe-Langenburg, she wrote: ‘Ah, if only Ludendorff could be our dictator.’<sup>40</sup>

Cosima’s sentiments, though not her choice of a new national leader, were shared by the remnants of the general staff in Berlin as it struggled to rebuild the army and through it restore Germany to a great power status. General Walther Reinhardt, chief of the Army Command after the disbandment of the Great General Staff,<sup>41</sup> believed national renewal depended on the reform and regeneration of the army. Historical precedent supported his view. Reinhardt was inspired by earlier Prussian military reformers—Clausewitz, Gneisenau, and Scharnhorst<sup>42</sup>—who rebuilt the army and the nation following defeat in the Napoleonic Wars. He concluded that recovery would come from the state drawing on the power of the *Volk* (the people) united in a common purpose. The purpose was the ‘life-threatening struggle for [Germany’s] existence’ and this required large military forces capable of waging and winning a *Volkskrieg* (people’s war) as well as a government committed to supporting the army in its historic role. Reinhardt approved of the new Weimar Republic, and the significant

benefits that could be had from a competent civilian bureaucracy dedicated to assisting the army, particularly in raising and collecting taxes that would fund both military reforms and the army's expansion. What was required to make it all work, according to Reinhardt and many of his fellow generals in the clandestine general staff,<sup>43</sup> was a strong and charismatic leader who promoted military values and who could be trusted to provide decisive leadership in war.<sup>44</sup>

Cultural and spiritual rebirth and other *völkisch* ideas on national regeneration were not matters that occupied the generals' attention. Led by General Wilhelm Groener, deputy chief of staff, they focused their efforts on learning the lessons of the Great War and reconstructing the army.<sup>45</sup> Reinhardt, however, acknowledged the importance of national unity to Groener's reforms and the army's future expansion. He believed that army reform and national support for the army were the essential pre-requisites if Germany was to recover and regain its former glory and status in the world. Germans, he urged, had to count on Germans and not look to alliances or foreign elements within the Reich for their salvation. 'The danger of Bolshevism for Germany,' warned Reinhardt 'is not to be dismissed or underestimated.'<sup>46</sup> National unity for Reinhardt was based on military purpose and military service that generated the full militarization of German society. His views were more extreme than those of General Hans von Seeckt, chief of staff of the Truppenamt, but they were endorsed by other senior army officers, including General Groener and General Kurt von Schleicher, a protégé of von Seeckt.<sup>47</sup> Many nationalists and right-wing organizations loosely grouped together in the Völkischer Bund (German Nationalist League) also wanted a strong leader and a strong military, but they regarded the army more as a product of national unity, not the source of its creation. National renewal required cultural and spiritual regeneration. One of the leading promoters of this belief was Houston Stewart Chamberlain.

Chamberlain was one of Germany's most recognized and successful *völkisch* writers. Ironically he was the son of a British admiral, and the son-in-law of Richard and Cosima Wagner, having married their youngest daughter, Eva, in 1908. He was also the intellectual leader of Wahnfried, the Wagner's family home in Bayreuth, and the Bayreuther Kreis (Bayreuth Circle), an active and influential group of pan-German intellectuals, editors and writers who promoted Wagner's ideas and work.<sup>48</sup> Wagner's music converted Chamberlain into a spiritual idealist with a deep love of German culture. He repaid his debt to Wagner by writing a substantial and widely-read biography of him and other works that explained the unique German spirit that had been resurrected through his *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total art work).<sup>49</sup> Chamberlain's Wagner was an idealist and a Romantic, a purely German character who believed that German culture had a historic destiny, a destiny shaped by music, particularly Wagner's music. Writing about Wagner's dream before the war, Chamberlain claimed that what Wagner wanted most of all, and 'to which he devoted his life, was a single, strong Germany, in contradistinction to the impotent confederation' of little states and squabbling peoples. In this dream the glory of Wagner's united 'German fatherland was, not that it should rule the world, but that it should ennoble and redeem the world' through the superiority of German art.<sup>50</sup> The overt German nationalism and racial aspects of Wagner's dream, as told by Chamberlain, were misinterpreted by the pan-German societies and ultranationalists, intoxicated as they were with desires of military glory and imperial expansion. Chamberlain was a published authority on art, music and philosophy, but it was through his works on Wagner and the superiority of the Aryan race that he quickly became one of the radical right's nationalist heroes.<sup>51</sup>

The outbreak of war between Germany and Great Britain had a negative effect on Chamberlain. He was angry that the country of his birth was at war with the country he loved. He wrote essays and pamphlets which incited hatred against the English by claiming that Britain's support for the Entente was a betrayal of the Aryan race.<sup>52</sup> His *Kriegsaufsätze* ('War essays') was published in English and German, and was reprinted 11 times in 1915. It also led the British government to label him a traitor, revoke his British citizenship, and confiscate all of his British assets. Chamberlain also promoted anti-Semitism in his wartime writings. In 1915 he published a second edition of his anti-Semitic work *Zuversicht* ('Confidence'). The following year he republished a third and revised edition of *Arische Weltanschauung* ('Aryan world view'), in which he warned his adopted countrymen and -women to defend their German values and virtues against foreigners and Jews.<sup>53</sup> One of Chamberlain's proudest days was in 1916 when his application to become a German citizen was approved. He was, writes Brigitte Hamann, 'very proud to be a "proper German"'.<sup>54</sup>

Chamberlain's main intellectual contribution to the postwar debate on German national rebirth was the link he forged between Wagner's doctrine of regeneration—based on an authentic German culture that was shaped first and foremost by music—with an elimination of all things Jewish. Chamberlain described Wagner's doctrine of regeneration as being a construct of two parts: 'the negation and the affirmation'. 'The negative element,' he explained, 'is the recognition of the decadence; and this forms the foundation for the affirmation of the faith in the possibility of regeneration.'<sup>55</sup> Chamberlain and other anti-Semitic German nationalists blamed the Jews for all of Germany's problems. The Jews, Chamberlain and his followers believed, were the decadent and degenerate forces that had diluted the German *Volk* and curtailed the German spirit, stabbed the German army in the back, and conspired with the victorious powers after the armistice to destroy the German

people and state. Wagner, proclaimed Chamberlain, had warned of the need to protect the German *Volk* and the German nation from the destructive influences of Jews and foreigners. His recommendation was that Jews should ‘be assimilated in us,’ into the noble and redeeming German culture ‘in order to be men in common with us.’ Even Chamberlain, before the war, acknowledged that Wagner’s proposal for dealing with the ‘Jewish question’ was much milder than that demanded by Martin Luther, the German theologian and seminal figure in the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, who urged ‘that the Jews should cease to be Jews and if they will not, we will not endure or suffer them with us.’<sup>56</sup>

Chamberlain invested considerable time and effort identifying and explaining Wagner’s concept of regeneration and the unique national character of German art, efforts that were lauded after his death during the years of the Third Reich.<sup>57</sup> He drew most of his evidence from essays Wagner wrote between 1879 and 1881. Collectively they addressed Religion and Art, and they presented an optimistic outlook for both German regeneration and national rebirth. The principal works included: *Religion und Kunst* (‘Religion and Art’, 1880); *Wollen wir hoffen?* (‘Shall We Hope?’, 1879); *Offenses Schreiben an Ernst von Weber, über die Vivisektion* (‘On vivisection’, 1879); *Was nützt diese Erkenntniss?* (‘Of what use is this knowledge?’, 1880); *Erkenne dich Selbst* (‘Know thyself’, 1881); and *Heldenthum und Christenthum* (‘The heroic age and Christianity’, 1881). Chamberlain also made regular reference to three earlier works: *Was ist deutsch?* (‘What is German?’, 1865); *Deutsche Kunst und Deutsche Politik* (‘German Art and German Policy’, 1867); and the controversial *Das Judenthum in der Musik* (‘Jewishness in music’, 1850, revised 1869). These earlier essays encapsulated the three most important elements identified and reinterpreted by Chamberlain in Wagner’s doctrine of regeneration: the unique and regenerative character of



German art, the need for a culturally enlightened national politics, and the constant threat to the fulfilment of German greatness posed by the Jews.<sup>58</sup>

Between 1850 and 1881 Wagner wrote numerous letters, essays and longer works in which he defined the unique characteristics of German culture, the significance of music to unlocking the inexpressible feelings of the *Volk*, and the political reform that was required to reunite the German spirit with the German people to bring about the regeneration and rebirth of the German nation.<sup>59</sup> There was an element of self-promotion throughout his prose works designed to secure fame and financial reward, yet he was genuinely passionate about what was noble, heroic, and German in his writing and his music. Wagner's *Deushtum* was an aesthetic born of genius and will—his genius and the indomitable German spirit. His essay, *What is German?* saluted the German spirit as the quest for what is beautiful and noble, but it also raised a warning that Germans needed to protect their culture from alien elements, particularly Jews, otherwise the German spirit would be extinguished.

Wagner also had a political purpose, reaching out to the *Volk* and providing an enduring foundation on which the small and squabbling German principalities and states could finally attain national unification. His warning against Jewish influences first appeared in *Jewishness in Music*. All three central themes—the German spirit, the *Volk* and national unity, and the Jewish problem—were repeated in a third major essay, *German Art and German Policy*. In it Wagner added the importance of having a national leader who felt the German spirit and understood the value of art in uniting both the people and the nation. He praised the artistic achievements of the Bavarian kings, particularly Ludwig I (1825-1848) and Maximilian II (1848-1864) for their contributions to German architecture and the plastic arts (painting and sculpture), and through the poetic genius of Goethe and Schiller he laid the foundation for his

own music dramas that Ludwig II (1864-1886) would subsequently finance in Munich and Bayreuth.<sup>60</sup> Wagner was certain that music, more than any of the other arts, was what enabled a German to feel German. His righteous and wise Master Singer, Hans Sachs, declared this aphorism in his final aria in *Die Meistersinger*: ‘Und gebt ihr ihrem Wirken Gunst, zerging’ in Dunst das heil’ge röm’sche Reich, uns bliebe gleich die heil’ge deutsche Kunst!’ (‘And if you favour their endeavours, even should the Holy Roman Empire dissolve in mist, for us there would yet remain holy German Art!’)<sup>61</sup> This was the German spirit that gave strength and substance to the German nation and would, if properly nurtured, guarantee Germany’s resurrection even after the most devastating crises.

A brief summation of Wagner’s ideas does not do justice to either their complexity or the variation in their nuances over thirty years of his thinking and writing. This partially explains the ease with which Chamberlain, and other anti-Semitic and right wing nationalists, interpreted Wagner’s doctrine of regeneration to meet their political needs immediately before and after the First World War. Even before the war ended in defeat for Germany, Chamberlain believed that it was his patriotic duty to draw on Wagner’s life work to save his beloved adopted fatherland. In 1917 Chamberlain along with Heinrich Claß and Georg von Below started a new journal, *Deutschlands Erneuerung* (‘Germany’s Renewal’), to provide a forum for German nationalists and anti-Semitic writers. Chamberlain was already famous in these circles for his *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (‘The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century’, 1899), which was an important text for the pan-German movement and *völkisch* anti-Semitism. In his postwar writing he added to his anti-Semitism an ultranationalist interpretation of Wagner’s doctrine of regeneration, but the combination of chronic ill health and a pessimistic disposition left Chamberlain wondering how even the indomitable German spirit could lift Germany out of its current state of chaos and

humiliation. He feared that art—even the metaphysical transforming art of Richard Wagner—was not enough to halt the rot that was destroying Germany. German rebirth was only possible, Chamberlain reasoned, in a regenerated society, but without the cooperation of art, regeneration was unlikely. The answer to his conundrum was an authoritative leader who understood the power of art to unite and regenerate. Chamberlain looked longingly, as did Cosima and the generals, and an increasing number of Germans, for a saviour, a strong man who would lead a renewed Germany back to its rightful position of prominence in the world. Chamberlain believed he had found his *Führer* when he met the Wagner-loving Adolf Hitler in October 1923.<sup>62</sup>

Hitler was a Wagnerian from an early age. He was only 12 when he saw *Lohengrin*, at the Linz Landestheater. ‘I was captivated at once,’ he wrote in the opening pages of *Mein Kampf*. ‘My youthful enthusiasm for the master of Bayreuth knew no bounds. Again and again I was drawn to his works.’<sup>63</sup> Hitler’s adolescent aesthetic experience of Wagner was an overwhelmingly emotional one, not the intellectual engagement pursued by Chamberlain. August (Gustl) Kubizek, Hitler’s boyhood friend in Linz and later his roommate in Vienna, recalled how Hitler ‘had a great depth of feeling for music’, and that ‘he preferred a mediocre Wagner performance a hundred times to a first-class Verdi.’<sup>64</sup> That Hitler shared a deep emotive response to Wagner’s music is neither surprising nor unique: it was the reaction Nietzsche feared would happen after he heard *Tristan und Isolde*. In terms of directing the fundamental attitudes and decisions in life, Hitler’s response to Wagner’s music was more extreme than perhaps anyone else’s, but the significance of Hitler’s youthful experience to his later politics should not be underestimated. Kubizek describes the effect that Wagner’s music had on Hitler:

Listening to Wagner meant to him not a simple visit to the theatre but the opportunity of being transported into that extraordinary state which Wagner's music produced in him, that trance, that escape into the mystical dream world which he needed in order to sustain the enormous tension of his turbulent nature.<sup>65</sup>

Kubizek further, and controversially, claimed that Hitler's political awakening occurred in Linz in 1905 following a performance of *Rienzi*, Wagner's opera about the rise and fall of a populist leader in late Medieval Rome. In his memoirs Kubizek devotes an entire chapter to his account of Hitler declaring that he was 'going to be a politician' on the heights of the Freinberg mountain, on the outskirts of Linz, shortly after the two teenagers saw *Rienzi*. Kubizek reminded Hitler of his epiphany when the two attended the Bayreuth Festival in 1939. Hitler subsequently retold the story to Winifred Wagner, ending it by paraphrasing *Rienzi* – 'It began at that Moment!' – and acknowledging the debt he owed to Richard Wagner for pointing him in the direction of his political career.<sup>66</sup>

Ian Kershaw writes that both Kubizek and Hitler embellished this tale and that there is little evidence that these events in Linz ever occurred.<sup>67</sup> It is entirely possible that, as Kershaw states, the bizarre account is a melodramatic fantasy, but other more substantial evidence exists. It confirms Hitler's early awareness of Wagner's political potential in the quest for a strong and united Germany. In 1908 Hitler sketched in pencil Wagner's portrait and beside it wrote 12 lines – the first 4 and the last 8 – from Hans Sachs's famous aria at the end of *Die Meistersinger* ('Verachtet mir die Meister nicht, und ehrt mir ihre Kunst!' – 'Scorn not the Masters, I bid you, and honour their art!'), directing any would-be viewer to respect their leaders and honour holy German art. Hitler signed this work: 'To my friend and Wagner admirer Gustl Kubizek, Your friend Adolf Hitler.'<sup>68</sup> These lines from *Die Meistersinger*

transposed by Hitler onto his artwork for Gustl were the same lines Wagner often used when he expressed his own beliefs on the German spirit and the requirements for national regeneration.

In addition to his love of Wagner's music, Hitler, like Chamberlain, was besotted with German art, culture, music, architecture, and everything else that was typically German. Whilst *Mein Kampf* cannot be taken as a factually accurate autobiography of Hitler's life, it does provide a glimpse into the Romantic and idealistic imagery that Hitler employed to give colour to his political development and passionate expression to his *Weltanschauung*. Hitler's description of his first visit to Munich illustrates his highly emotional and romanticized style: 'there was the heartfelt love which seized me for this city [Munich] more than for any other place that I knew, almost from the first hour of my sojourn there. A *German* city!' Hitler went further with rapturous praise for the city where his political career and National Socialism began, and later was venerated by the Nazis as the *Hauptstadt der Bewegung* (capital of the movement). Munich, Hitler claimed, was a 'metropolis of German art,' and one could not know Germany if 'one does not know Munich.' Moreover, 'one does not know German art if one has not seen Munich.'<sup>69</sup> Hitler was content in Munich. It was where he—an Austrian in Bavaria fantasizing about Germany—felt most German. He felt that the city had a German soul, and that it was the true manifestation of German culture.<sup>70</sup>

Defeat in the war and the unacceptable peace agreed to by Ebert and his Social Democrats were, for Hitler, obvious symptoms of decay brought about by a cultural decline that had to be arrested and reversed if Germany was to recover its greatness or even survive. To 'master this disease' Bolshevism in all its forms (politics, degenerate art) and all its proponents (leftists, socialists, and Jews) had to be resisted and destroyed.<sup>71</sup> Only a true

*Volksgemeinschaft* based on racial purity and imbued with an authentic German culture, led by a heroic leader, could see Germany successfully through this historic struggle.<sup>72</sup> Hitler saw himself as this leader, the combination of Wagner's mythical hero Siegfried and divine leader Parsifal.

It is unlikely that any Münchenerers recognised Hitler, an inconspicuous soldier guarding the Hauptbahnhof (the main train station in central Munich) in the summer of 1919, as having the potential to become one of Richard Wagner's Germanic heroes. Hitler's journey towards becoming their *Führer* began formally on 12 September 1919 at the Sterneckerbräu on the Tal in central Munich when he attended a meeting of Anton Drexler's DAP.<sup>73</sup> The account of this meeting is well known: Hitler's initial indifference, his explosive reaction to a fellow attendee (Professor Baumann) who advocated Bavarian separatism, and Drexler's alleged remarks: 'Mensch, der hat a Gosch'n, den kunnt ma braucha' ('Goodness, he's got a gob. We could use him').<sup>74</sup> Hitler went expecting to hear Dietrich Eckart, a well-known journalist, *völkisch* poet, and playwright, but Eckart was ill. He was replaced by Gottfried Feder, a pan-German economic expert, who spoke on 'the breaking of interest slavery.'<sup>75</sup> Hitler was familiar with both the speaker and his subject, having recently taken courses at the Ludwig Maximilians University where Feder lectured. The meeting, however, was much more important to Hitler's political future than the superficial focus on personalities that has attracted so much historical attention. Hitler had come to the attention of the leading political agitators in the Thule-Gesellschaft (Thule Society).

The DAP (German Workers' Party) was established as a new workers' debating society by Karl Harrer, a leading member of the Thule Society, to draw Munich's working classes away from Bolshevism and into the *völkisch* sphere of public politics. Drexler, 'a genuine worker,'

was a co-founder and the first ‘party leader.’ The Thule Society was a pre-war anti-Semitic *völkisch* secret society, but the Munich branch only began its formal activities in January 1918. Most importantly, it was the first influential organisation to give Hitler assistance.<sup>76</sup> Its founder and leader was Rudolf von Sebottendorf, an occultist, and its insignia was Siegfried’s sword *Nothung* imposed on a Swastika. The Thule Society was based in the luxury hotel *Vier Jahreszeiten* on the Maximilianstraße, one of the most exclusive streets in Munich. At its height membership exceeded 1,500, with influential and wealthy connections throughout the highest ranks of Bavarian society. Membership was strictly controlled and members had to prove they were of pure ‘Aryan blood.’ Future leaders in the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP), Hans Frank, Alfred Rosenberg, and Rudolf Heß, were members. The society’s mandate was to combat the Jewish-Bolshevik terror and promote the rebirth of a pure *völkisch* utopia. The Thule Society also had its own newspaper to promote its ideology and political programme, the *Münchener Beobachter*, which Hitler, with Eckart’s financial assistance, purchased for the NSDAP in 1920, and renamed the *Völkischer Beobachter (VB)*. The *VB* was the official paper initially of the party and up to the end of April 1945, when it ceased publication, of the National Socialist regime. Between January and June 1921, Hitler had 39 articles published in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, which, along with his many speaking engagements in Munich’s bierkellers and the Zirkus Krone, enabled him to present a more coherent manifesto and dominate the party. It was at one such public speaking event at the Salvatorkeller, in the brewery district of Au-Haidhausen, on 21 November 1922, that Ernst (Putzi) Hanfstaengl met and decided to support Hitler.<sup>77</sup>

Hanfstaengl and Eckart were the main associates in Hitler’s growing entourage who introduced him to the ‘intellectual aristocrats’ in Munich and Berlin. Hitler quickly gained the support of wealthy right-wing sympathisers such as Count Ernst zu Reventlow, the publisher

Hugo Bruckmann (Chamberlain's publisher) and his wife Else, and the famous piano manufacturer Edwin Bechstein (Winifred's guardian) and his wife Helena. Not all of the cultured elite appreciated Hitler's unrefined manners and populist sentiments but Eckart and Hanfstaengl convinced them that Hitler was exactly the hard, non-compromising, man-of-the-people leader that was required. Helena Bechstein never had any doubts. She was instantly captivated by Hitler from the first time Eckart presented him at her *salon* in Berlin in June 1921. From that moment she threw herself into supporting him in every possible way—her wealth, her contacts, and her reputation—and she did not hesitate to tell her many friends and acquaintances that there was hope for the future: at last 'Germany's young Messiah' had been found.<sup>78</sup>

The Bechsteins and Eckart also had summer homes on the Obersalzberg, one of the smaller mountains surrounding Berchtesgaden. Hitler was a frequent visitor. He mixed with the *völkisch* musicians, singers, artists and writers high up the mountain on the Vorderbrand, where he absorbed the many mythical legends of the region. It was on the Obersalzberg that he completed *Mein Kampf* after his release from Landsberg prison in 1924, and later built the Berghof, his private and later, when he was *Führer* and *Reichkanzler*, official country residence. Before these notorieties occurred, and encouraged by the comforting surroundings of this Bavarian mountain idyll, Hitler impressed his hosts with his knowledge and passion for Wagner's ideas and music. Hanfstaengl was impressed by Hitler's ability to whistle the prelude to *Meistersinger*, 'every note and completely in tune.' By 1923 Hitler had also read and absorbed Chamberlain's writings and could quote both the master, Wagner, and his biographer, accurately and with ease.<sup>79</sup> On 4 May 1923, during a political speech at the Zirkus Krone, Hitler quoted Wagner's rousing 'Wach auf' chorale from *Die Meistersinger* in an emotional appeal for the spiritual mobilisation of the German people in preparation for the



inevitable fight against France.<sup>80</sup> He was enraged by the French occupation of the Ruhr in January and the socialist German government's weak response. Hitler appealed to Helena Bechstein precisely because he was a folksy, man of the people whose zeal for Wagner and the nationalists' cause would inspire the masses. Having proven his Wagnerian credentials to his wealthy and culturally influential patron, Helena Bechstein, she in turn opened the door to Wahnfried, Wagner's family home and the spiritual headquarters of the Bayreuth Circle.<sup>81</sup>

Hitler's first visit to Wahnfried, at the end of September 1923, was an auspicious one. He was the principal speaker at German Day in Bayreuth, organised by nationalists and right-wing paramilitary groups to protest the French occupation of the Ruhr and the 'shameful Treaty of Versailles.' Bayreuth's nationalist mayor, Albert Preu, welcomed the attendees to his 'old town with a world reputation as a centre of art and the home of Wagner.' He said it was an honour to host the German Day but it also brought great responsibility. 'It is the spirit of Siegfried that we need,' urged Preu, 'so that like our Master, Richard Wagner, who triumphed over all hostile forces, we can once more achieve respect in the world.'<sup>82</sup> Hitler's speech was measured and without anti-Semitic slurs. His audience filled the town's Reithalle (riding school) to overflowing, and they applauded often and enthusiastically especially when Hitler told them that Germany needed an authoritative leader and that the nation would be better when the only German citizens were 'those who are and feel German.'<sup>83</sup> At the end of his speech Hitler made a hasty exit. He was expected by the Wagners at Wahnfried.

Long anticipation of this day made Hitler ill at ease, but when he arrived the Wagners gave him a very warm welcome. Winifred, Siegfried, and all the children were present, and they showed Hitler through the main rooms of the house. Hitler paused by one of Wagner's pianos, he was impressed by the large library, and he admired other precious mementoes that

celebrated the composer's career and life. Afterwards and alone he visited Wagner's tomb at the bottom of the large enclosed garden behind the house. Hitler spent a considerable time in contemplation at Wagner's grave before he returned to the house. Winifred recalled that he 'came back in a state of great emotion, saying, "Out of *Parsifal* I will make a religion."'"<sup>84</sup>

After tea, with the family in the garden, Hitler had his long awaited audience with Chamberlain. Confined to a wheelchair and too ill to talk, Chamberlain listened to Hitler's plans to change and rebuild Germany. A week later he wrote a letter to Hitler telling him that he had expected to meet a fanatic but instead he had found a saviour, the key figure of the German counter-revolution.<sup>85</sup> Chamberlain was more than satisfied that Hitler was the man to take forward Wagner's doctrine of regeneration.<sup>86</sup> He believed that in Hitler's hands pure German art, enriching and sustaining the indomitable German spirit, would bring about Germany's rebirth.

By the end of October 1923 Hitler had obtained Chamberlain's blessing and with it the full support of Wahnfried and the Bayreuth Circle. Their meeting in Bayreuth was memorialised by the Nazis:

Adolf Hitler and Houston Stewart Chamberlain clasped hands. The great thinker, whose writings went with the Führer on his journey and laid the intellectual foundations of the Nordic German world-view, the genius, seer and herald of the Third Reich, felt that through this simple man of the people Germany's destiny would achieve a glad fulfilment.<sup>87</sup>

Both Hitler and Chamberlain saw in Wagner a totemic figure that through his life's work could inspire the rebirth of the Germanic people. True national strength and unity, for Hitler, came from the cultural heritage of a common ancestry—the shared culture, language,

character and blood of the German people. Hitler and Chamberlain believed that Germany's rebirth depended on cultural regeneration. Consequently, Hitler's dream to create a *Kulturstaat* (culture state) as the first step in restoring Germany's greatness was both endorsed and legitimized by the guardians of Richard Wagner's life work.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, it was through Hitler's appeal to cultural longings, which celebrated and promoted Germanness, that he, and the NSDAP as a movement, was able to find a place for and support from all segments of German society.

Hitler, Chamberlain, and the cultural elites in Munich and Bayreuth who supported them, believed strongly that national unity required a strong national identity, which came from being and feeling German. Germany's failure in the Great War and the grievances and suspicions, real or imagined, which emanated from disillusionment with defeat, the humiliation of the Versailles Treaty, and the economic and political chaos of the immediate post-war years, were attributed by many Germans, as diverse as General Reinhardt and Thomas Mann,<sup>89</sup> to a lack of national unity. Reviving the German spirit, as Hitler told the Programme Committee of the new German Workers' Party in November 1919, not the total war ideology advocated by the generals, was the first and most important step to reversing the injustices of 1918 and 1919. If another war had to be fought, then Germany's future armies needed a compelling reason to fight if they were going to fight and win. German art and German culture were the crucial components in Hitler's answer to establishing a strong national identity that would also give the nation and the armed forces the necessary will to fight to change the political landscape of Europe and restore Germany to its rightful position as a great power.

Hitler's failed putsch in front of the Feldherrnhalle in Munich on 9 November 1923 merely delayed the implementation of his culturally based policy for Germany's rebirth. Germany's cultural heritage, for Hitler, Chamberlain, and the cultural elites in Munich and Bayreuth was not only evidence of a common ancestry and the foundation for national unity but also proof of German superiority. Throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, as National Socialism became a more potent political force in Germany, Hitler succeeded in moulding a truly mass movement by appealing to the *völkisch* traditions that attracted people of many different political persuasions, inspiring and enlarging his support through a deliberate focus on populist sentiments grounded on Germany's great cultural heritage. It is not a coincidence that after Hitler and his National Socialists gained power in January 1933, the first public building constructed was an art gallery, the Haus der Deutschen Kunst (House of German Art) in Munich. The monumental architecture of Albert Speer's Reichsparteitagsgelände (Nazi Party Rally Grounds) in Nürnberg, the annual exhibitions and festivities of the Days of German Art in Munich from 1937 through 1944, and Hitler's generous and unwavering support for the Bayreuth Festival are three of the most expensive and substantial examples of the importance Hitler ascribed to art and subsequently of art's service to the Third Reich.<sup>90</sup> Wagner's music, particularly the prelude to *Die Meistersinger*, was performed at virtually all important party and state occasions.<sup>91</sup> Hitler's Wagner was an ever present metaphysical voice aestheticizing political life in National Socialist Germany—first to regenerate and afterwards to sustain public support for the *Kampf* (struggle) that lay ahead.

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<sup>1</sup> Jost Hermand, *Old Dreams of a New Reich. Volkish Utopias and National Socialism* trans. Paul Levesque (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 74-99; Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials. The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

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1990), 108-148; and Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel. Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914-1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), 502, 534-537, and 553-566.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Mees, "Hitler and Germanentum," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no.2 (April, 2004): 255-270.

<sup>3</sup> Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (New York: Peter Mayer, 2003), 16-19; and Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 213.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Harrer, the DAP's national chairman, invited Hitler to join the party's inner circle on 16 November 1919. DAP internal memorandum by Hitler, 11 December 1919 cited in Milan Hauner, *Hitler. A Chronology of his Life and Time* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Konrad Heiden, *The Führer* (Edisen, NJ: Castle, 2002, first published 1944), 286-287; Charles Bracelen Flood, *Hitler: The Path to Power* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989), 11-12, 20, 171-172; Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Bayreuth Festival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p.156; "Adolf Hitler in Nürnberg," *Völkischer Beobachter* (VB), München, 10 January 1923, 2; and Adolf Hitler speech in Nürnberg, 3 January 1923 in Eberhard Jäckel and Axel Kuhn, eds., *Hitler Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen, 1905-1924* (Stuttgart: Deutsche, 1980), 779.

<sup>6</sup> Celia Applegate, "Music Among the Historians," *German History* 30, no.3 (2012): 329-349; and Hans Rudolf Vaegt, "The Political Ramifications of Hitler's Cult of Wagner," *Zum Gedenken an Peter Borowsky* (Hamburg: Hamburger Universitätsreden Neue Folge 3, 2003), 103-127.

<sup>7</sup> Applegate, "Music," 333.

<sup>8</sup> Vaegt, "Political Ramifications," 103-106. Cf. Peter Viereck, *Metapolitics: From the Romantics to Hitler* (New York: Knopf, 1941); Robert Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968); Hartmut Zelinsky, *Richard*

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*Wagner - ein deutsches Thema. Eine Dokumentation zur Wirkungsgeschichte Richard Wagners 1876-1976* (Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 1976); Paul Lawrence Rose, *Wagner: race and revolution* (London: Faber, 1992); Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the anti-semitic imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Joachim Köhler, *Wagners Hitler: der Prophet und sein Vollstrecker* (München: Blessing, 1997) and *Wagner's Hitler: the prophet and his disciple* trans. Ronald Taylor (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); and Alexander Schmidt, *Braune Brüder im Geiste? Volk und Rasse bei Wagner und Hitler – Ein kritischer Schrift-Vergleich* (Marburg: Tectum, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Hermand, *Old Dreams*, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 2001), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Magee, *Wagner*, 258; Stanley Stade and John Tyrrell, eds., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner* 4.vols (London: Cassell, 1933-1947).

<sup>12</sup> Peter Watson, *The German Genius* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 334.

<sup>13</sup> Magee, *Wagner*, 71.

<sup>14</sup> Derek Strahan, "Was Wagner Jewish?" *Limelight* Feb 2012, 59.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Wagner, *My Life* (Teddington: Middlesex: Echo, 2007; first published *Mein Leben* 4 vol., 1870-1880), 163-7, 175; Magee, *Wagner*, 71-73; Michael Tanner, *Wagner* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), 26-30; Oliver Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner. The Lady of Bayreuth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 120-127; Nicholas Vazsonyi, "Die Meistersinger: Performance, History, Representation", in *Wagner's Meistersinger* Nicholas Vazsonyi ed. (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 1; and Watson, *The German Genius*, 327-340. Cf. Richard Wagner, "Deutsche Kunst und Deutsche Politik", in *Art and Politics* trans. W. Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 36-148.

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<sup>16</sup> Magee, *Wagner*, 73, 307-308; Friedrich Nietzsche, “Richard Wagner in Bayreuth,” in *Untimely Meditations* Daniel Breazeale ed., trans. RJ. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 230-234; Friedrich Nietzsche, “Nietzsche Contra Wagner”, in *The Portable Nietzsche* ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Penguin, 1982), 662-664; and Vazsonyi, “*Die Meistersinger*”, 11. For a synopsis and performance history of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* see Barry Millington, ed., *The Wagner Compendium. A Guide to Wagner’s Life and Music* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 301-305. Cf. Nietzsche’s essays “The Case of Wagner” (1888) and “Nietzsche contra Wagner” (1888).

<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche as cited in Magee, *Wagner*, 307.

<sup>18</sup> Wagner, *My Life*, 415-416.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays* vol.2, trans. E.J.F. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 287. Cf. E.T.A. Hoffmann, ‘Kreisleriana’, ed. David Charlton, *E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings: Kreisleriana; The Poet and the Composer; Music Criticism*, trans. Martyn Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 97-98; and Watson, *German Genius*, 331-334.

<sup>20</sup> Magee, *Wagner*, 3 and *passim*; Michael Tanner, *Wagner*, 101-105.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Steinberg, *Bismarck. A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 418-419; and Giles MacDonogh, *The Last Kaiser. William The Impetuous* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), 75.

<sup>22</sup> Magee, *Wagner*, 77; and Hermand, *Old Dreams*, 59-60.

<sup>23</sup> Tanner, *Wagner*, 6, 152-154; and Magee, *Wagner*, 290, 307.

<sup>24</sup> Millington, ed., *Wagner Compendium*, for a synopsis and performance history of *Tristan und Isolde*, 298-301; *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, 285-298; and *Parsifal*, 305-309. Cf. Nietzsche, “Richard Wagner in Bayreuth”, 197-254. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*,

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*Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Gods and other writings* Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, eds., trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, "Contra Wagner," 664-667.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony J. Steinhoff, "Embracing the Grail: *Parsifal*, Richard Wagner and the German Nation," *German History* 30, no.3 (2012): 372-394; and Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner* 272-284.

<sup>27</sup> See Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Kriegsaufsätze (War Essays)* trans. Charles H. Clarke (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1915). Chamberlain was a prolific anti-Semitic and right wing nationalist writer who played a major role in shaping attitudes and ideas in Germany during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His regular contributions to the *Bayreuther Blätter* illustrate the idealism and German Romanticism that were at the heart of the very real philosophical conflicts in Europe that were largely responsible for both the First and the Second World War. For the historiography on Germany and the causes of the First World War see Annika Mombauer, ed., "Special Issue: The Fischer Controversy after 50 Years," *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no.2 (April 2013); Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012); and Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel. Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914-1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Applegate, *Nation of Provincials*, 127. Cf. Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 13-18; Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, trans. Walter D. Morris (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983); Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Wer hat den krieg verschuldet?* (München: Bruckmann, 1916) and *Der Wille zum Sieg und andere Aufsätze* (München: Bruckmann, 1918).

<sup>29</sup> Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz as quoted in Brigitte Hamann, *Winifred Wagner. A Life at the Heart of Hitler's Bayreuth* (London: Granta, 2005), 33-34. The *Deutsche*



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*Vaterlandspartei* was founded in Berlin on 2 September 1917 and dissolved on 10 December 1918. One of its founding members was Anton Drexler, later a guest member of the *Thule-Gesellschaft* (Thule Society) and a co-founder of the *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (German Workers' Party). Cf. Patrick J. Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011) 410-421; and Raffael Scheck, *Alfred von Tirpitz and German right-wing politics, 1914-1930* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1998), chapter 5.

<sup>30</sup> Siegfried and Winifred Wagner had four children between 1917 and 1920: Wieland (1917), Friedelind (1918), Wolfgang (1919), and Verena (1920).

<sup>31</sup> Winifred Wagner to Helena Boy, 17 November 1918, in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 35.

<sup>32</sup> For a detailed history of the *Freikorps* and its role in the revolutions and counter-revolutions in Germany after the Great War see Nigel Jones, *The Birth of the Nazis. How the Freikorps Blazed a Trail for Hitler* revised edition (London: Constable and Robinson, 2004). Cf. James M Diehl, "No More Peace: The Militarization of Politics," Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds., *The Shadows of Total War* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2003), 97-112.

<sup>33</sup> VB, München, 10 January 1923, 2. Cf. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 257-260. For a detailed examination of Hitler's attitudes towards art manifested as National Socialist policy during the Third Reich see Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1994).

<sup>34</sup> Ernst Hanfstaengl, *Hitler: The Memoir of a Nazi Insider Who Turned Against the Führer* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011; first published 1957), 30.

<sup>35</sup> Applegate, *Nation of Provincials*, 126; and Hermand, *Old Dreams*, xiii, 74-79.

<sup>36</sup> Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 298; and Hamman, *Winifred Wagner*, 36-41.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed study of the Pan-German League see Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1984).

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<sup>38</sup> Alfons Konzionatur, *Der kommende große Monarch und die unter ihm bevorstehende Friedenszeit* (Lingen: Druck und Acken, 1920); and Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 258-260.

<sup>39</sup> Correspondence between Cosima Wagner and Prince Ernst zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg, 14 February 1918 in *Briefwechsel zwischen Cosima Wagner und Fürst Ernst zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1937), 368.

<sup>40</sup> Correspondence between Cosima Wagner and Prince Ernst zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg, 11 September 1919, in Cosima Wagner, *Das zweite Leben: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen 1883-1930* ed. Dietrich Mach (München: Piper, 1980), 747f.

<sup>41</sup> This was one of the terms of the military restrictions imposed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty. Cf. *The Treaty of Versailles*, Part V (English version, HMSO, 1920).

<sup>42</sup> Gerhard von Scharnhorst, Carl von Clausewitz and Count August von Gneisenau were three of the most influential senior Prussian general officers responsible for reforming the army after the Napoleonic Wars. Scharnhorst and Clausewitz were the first to advocate the founding of a *Kriegsakademie* (war academy) where Clausewitz was the Director from 1819 to 1830.

<sup>43</sup> Overall command of the post-war German army was exercised by Gustav Noske, a civilian politician, and the new Minister of Defence. A new Army Command replaced the defunct Great General Staff. General Reinhardt was the senior officer in the Army Command but he was neither the Commander-in-Chief nor the Chief of the General Staff. His command consisted of four main branches: the Personnel Office, the Ordnance Office, the Army Administrative Service, and the *Truppenamt* (Troop Office), arguably the most important of the four because it was effectively the Great General Staff in disguise and it was responsible for planning and co-ordinating all functions of the army.

<sup>44</sup> William Mulligan, *The Creation of the Modern Germany Army. General Walther Reinhardt and the Weimar Republic, 1914-1930* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2005), 198-204.

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<sup>45</sup> Wilhelm Groener, *Der Weltkrieg und seine Probleme Ruckschau un Ausblick* (Berlin: Schriftenreihe der Preussischen Jahrbücher. Nr.1, 1920); and T N Dupuy, *A Genius for War. The German Army and the General Staff, 1807-1945* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1977) 185-186.

<sup>46</sup> Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, Nachlaß Walter Reinhardt, N 86/16 Reinhardt decree 11 February 1920.

<sup>47</sup> General Wilhelm Groener was the last Chief of the Great General Staff (3-7 July 1919). General Kurt von Schleicher, in addition to a prominent military career in the clandestine General Staff, was the last Chancellor of the Weimar Republic.

<sup>48</sup> For the Bayreuth Circle see Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 195-201.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Richard Wagner* (München: Bruckmann, 1895; 2nd edn, 1901; 3rd edn, 1907); *The Wagnerian Drama* (London: John Lane, Bodley Head, 1923); and *Political Ideals* trans. Alexander Jacob (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005; first published *Politische Ideale* (München: Bruckmann, 1915).

<sup>50</sup> Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Richard Wagner* trans. G. Ainslie Hight (London: Dent, 1897), 123-130.

<sup>51</sup> Eric H. Vieler, *The Ideological Roots of German National Socialism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999) 34-46; and Hermand, *Old Dreams*, 47-51.

<sup>52</sup> Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Kriegsaufsätze* (München: Bruckmann, 1915); *England und Deutschland. Sonderabdruck aus den Kriegsaufsätzen* (München: Bruckmann, 1915); *Deutschlands Kriegsziel* (Oldenburg: Stalling, 1916); *Deutsches Wesen. Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (München: Bruckmann, 1916); and *Demokratie und Freiheit* (München: Bruckmann, 1917).

<sup>53</sup> Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Zuversicht. Zweite Auflage* (München: Bruckmann, 1915) and *Arische Weltanschauung* (München: Bruckmann, 1916).

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<sup>54</sup> Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 26-29.

<sup>55</sup> Chamberlain, *Richard Wagner* (1897), 165.

<sup>56</sup> Chamberlain, *Richard Wagner* (1897), 174-177.

<sup>57</sup> Karl Hermann, "Bayreuth und Deutschlands junge Generation," in *Bayreuther Festspielführer 1936* Otto Strobel ed. (Bayreuth: Niehrenheim, 1936), 83-86.

<sup>58</sup> For Chamberlain's detailed discussion on Richard Wagner's Doctrine of Regeneration see Chamberlain, *Wagner* (1897), 163-177.

<sup>59</sup> See the eight-volume English translation of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* by William Ashton Ellis, commissioned by the London Wagner Society (1892-1899) and *Richard-Wagner-Briefausgabe* [Richard Wagner, collected correspondence], 25 Volumes (20 vols completed), published by the Institut für Musikforschung, Universität Würzburg (1997-).

<sup>60</sup> Richard Wagner, *Was ist deutsch?* (1865); *Judenthum in der Musik* (1850 and 1869); and *Deutsche Kunst und deutsche Politik* (1867). Cf. Barry Millington, *Wagner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 253; and Hannu Salmi, *Imagined Germany. Richard Wagner's National Utopia* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 61.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Wagner, "German Art and German Policy," in *Art and Politics*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trübner, 1895), 35-135, and specifically 43.

<sup>62</sup> Martin Dippel, *Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (München: Deutscher Volksverlag, 1938) 3-30; Chamberlain, *Political Ideals*, 3-11, and *passim*; and Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 257-258.

<sup>63</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 17. Millington, ed., *The Wagner Compendium*, for a synopsis and performance history of *Lohengrin*, 282-285.

<sup>64</sup> August Kubizek, *The Young Hitler I Knew* (London: Greenhill, 2006; first published *Adolf Hitler Mein Jugendfreund*, 1953), 77, 185.

<sup>65</sup> Kubizek, *Young Hitler*, 185; Friedrich Nietzsche, "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth", 211, 238; and Bryan Magee, *Aspects of Wagner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 40-41, 327.

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<sup>66</sup> Kubizek, *Young Hitler*, 116-119; and Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 308.

<sup>67</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: Penguin, 1998), 610 n.128. Cf. Jonas Karlsson, "Richard Wagner and the Rise of German Anti-Semitism," Ph.D. Thesis, Yale University, 2012, chapter 6.

<sup>68</sup> Billy F. Price, Adolf Hitler. *The Unknown Artist* (Houston, Texas: Billy F. Price Publishing, 1984; German edition 1983), 353-355.

<sup>69</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 126-127. Cf. Peter Miesbeck, "Hitler und München 1913 bis 1918" in Richard Bauer, Hans Günter Hockerts, Brigitte Schütz, Wolfgang Till und Walter Ziegler, eds., *München—Hauptstadt der Bewegung. Bayerns Metropole und der Nationalsozialismus* (München: Minerva, 2002), 20-24.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Weber presents a dissenting though disappointingly polemical view on the unimportance of Munich to Hitler's political career and *Weltanschauung*. Cf. *Hitler's First War: Adolf Hitler, The Men of the List Regiment, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 257-263; and 300-327.

<sup>72</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 345; Kershaw, *Hitler*, 289-290; and Joachim Fest, *Hitler* (London: Penguin, 1974), 354 (Hitler's speech at the NSDAP Christmas celebrations 18 December 1926).

<sup>73</sup> The DAP was formed on 5 January 1919 and dissolved on 24 February 1920 when it was succeeded by the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP).

<sup>74</sup> Kershaw, *Hitler*, 126-128. Cf. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 221-223; and Fest, *Hitler*, 117-118.

<sup>75</sup> Feder's talk was entitled: *Brechen der Zinsknechtschaft*. Abrecht Tyrell, "Gottfried Feder," Ronald Smelser and Rainer Zitelmann, eds., *The Nazi Elite* trans. Mary Fischer (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1993), 31-32; Kershaw, *Hitler*, 126.

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<sup>76</sup> Rudolf von Sebottendorf, *Bevor Hitler Kam* (München: Deukula, 1933); Fest, *Hitler*, 115-117; Joseph Tyson, *Hitler's Mentor: Dietrich Eckart* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2008), 107-125; and Köhler, *Wagner's Hitler*, 147-151.

<sup>77</sup> VB, München, 1920—9 November 1923. Hanfstaengl mistakenly claims that he met Hitler for the first time at the *Münchner Kindl-Keller* in November 1922. Cf. Hanfstaengl, *Hitler*, 31-37; Hauner, *Hitler*, 37; and Kershaw, *Hitler*, 157, 186, 659 n.97.

<sup>78</sup> Heiden, *Führer*, 95-96; Hanfstaengl, *Hitler*, 38-54; Hauner, *Hitler*, 29; Kershaw, *Hitler*, 187-190; and John Toland, *Adolf Hitler* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 101.

<sup>79</sup> Timothy W. Ryback, *Hitler's Private Library. The Books that Shaped his Life* (London: The Bodley Head, 2009), 49-51; Ambrus Miskolczy, *Hitler's Library* trans. Rédey Szilvia and Michael Webb (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 23-33; Philipp Gassert and Daniel S. Mattern, *The Hitler Library. A Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001), 70, n.134; and Jehuda Wallach, "Adolf Hitlers Privatbibliothek," *Zeitgeschichte* no.1-2 (1992): 32-33.

<sup>80</sup> VB, München, 4 May 1923, 2.

<sup>81</sup> Obersalzberg Institut Archiv, Berchtesgaden, Dietrich Eckart Private Papers and Publications, and a copy of Hitler's 4 May 1923 speech at the *Zirkus Krone, München*. Cf. Hanfstaengl, *Hitler*, 49-50; and Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 51-52.

<sup>82</sup> *Oberfränkische Zeitung*, 1 Oktober, 1923.

<sup>83</sup> *Oberfränkische*.

<sup>84</sup> Flood, *Hitler*, 432-433. In March 1936, whilst listening to a recording of the prelude to *Parsifal* with his close associates in his special train following the successful reoccupation of the *Rheinland*, Hitler confirmed the vow he had made at *Wahnfried*: "I have built up my religion out of Parsifal." Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, 499.

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<sup>85</sup> Nationalarchiv der Richard-Wagner-Stiftung, Bayreuth (NRWB). Chamberlain, Briefe 3, ii.124-5 (letter from Houston Stewart Chamberlain to Adolf Hitler, 7 October 1923).

<sup>86</sup> NRW. Nachl. Chamberlain (Houston Stewart Chamberlain, diary entries 30 September and 1 October 1923); and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, “Der Führer und H.S. Chamberlain,” *Deutschland – England* (München: Bruckmann, 1943) 173-175.

<sup>87</sup> *Bayerische Ostmark*, 25/26 Juli 1936.

<sup>88</sup> Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 302-304; Fest, *Hitler*, 181; and Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 58-59.

<sup>89</sup> A lack of national unity is the key theme developed in Mann’s book *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (*Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*), published in 1918, to explain the main reasons why Germany lost the First World War and to account for the subsequent problems that followed on from defeat in the early 1920s.

<sup>90</sup> VB, München, 16 Oktober 1933, 1-2. Cf. Sabine Brantl, *Haus der Kunst, München* (München: Allitera, 2007); Ines Schlenker, *Hitler’s Salon. The Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung at the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich 1937-1944* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2007); Siegfried Zelnhefer, *Die Reichsparteitage der NSDAP in Nürnberg* (Nürnberg: Nürnberger Presse, 2002); Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth. A History of the Wagner Festival* (London: Yale University Press, 1994); and Robert S. Wistrich, *Weekend in Munich* (London: Pavilion, 1995).

<sup>91</sup> Pamela M. Porter, “Music in the Third Reich: The Complex Task of ‘Germanization’,” Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia, eds., *The Arts in Nazi Germany: Continuity, Conformity, Change* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), 87-88; Thomas S. Grey, “Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger* as National Opera (1868-1945),” Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, eds., *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 94-96; and Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 165.