

The Killing of Wagner

One of the most efficient character assassinations in cultural history

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When I frequented the Copenhagen Conservatory of Music in 1968-72, it was not the done thing for pianists to play Rachmaninov or Gershwin. Nor was Liszt quite “the right thing to play” if you considered yourself “decent”. Chopin was passable, but only just. Otherwise, you would choose the classical composers as well as Brahms and Schumann along with more contemporary music. My wonderful teacher of musical history, Jens Østergaard, told me what many others would later confirm, that in the first part of the 20th century, the Conservatory and the universities were not seriously concerned with music composed by Wagner, Bruckner, Mahler, Richard Strauss, Tchaikovsky, etc. Their music was too sentimental. This rubbed off on the contemporary concert life. Still, it was peculiar that even in our musical history lessons these composers were treated lightly.

My piano teacher at the Conservatory, Professor Herman D. Koppel, was interviewed in the radio several years ago, and he reminisced about his time as a student at the Conservatory in the 20ies when Carl Nielsen was the director. Koppel wanted to rehearse Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto in b-minor, but his teacher thought it was a bad idea. However, Koppel insisted and later came to play the whole concerto – with his teacher playing the orchestra part on a second piano. Well into the second movement, Koppel was interrupted by his teacher who said they could not possibly continue. This music was *of such poor quality* as to be unacceptable at The Royal Danish Conservatory of Music. The story was printed in Flemming Behrendt’s *Fra et hjem med klaver – Herman D Koppels erindringer* s. 26-27 (Hans Reitzel 1988). (*Born to a Home with a Piano – Memoirs of Herman D. Koppel* (Hans Reitzel Publisher, 1988).) In this book, the choice of words is somewhat more low-key as far as Tchaikovsky is concerned. To the contrary, Rudolph Simonsen (Koppel’s teacher) thinks that Liszt and Rachmaninov are too virtuosos, and when Koppel expresses his desire to play Debussy, Simonsen exclaims rather bluntly: “Why would you want to play such poop-music?”

In my youth and throughout my years as a student, the attitude towards Wagner was that his music was far too loud and “high-flown”, as one of my conservatory teachers said. And Wagner was a bad guy – he hated the Jews, he owed money to all and sundry, and he slept with other men’s wives. Also, his operas were *far too long, because Wagner did not master the art of limiting himself*, as even our dear Prince Henrik once said in a TV interview.

As far as I am concerned, this attitude cost me a trip to Bayreuth. In my capacity of clarinetist, I was asked to join a youth orchestra who would rehearse *Die Feen* translated into a concert that would serve as a parallel to the Bayreuth Festival. Actually, I even believe Pierre Boulez was the conductor. However, I declined, because I had heard that Wagner’s music was horrible. I have never recovered from this – in the same way I have never recovered from being invited to meet David Oistrakh after a concert at the Odd Fellow Palace in Copenhagen, where he performed with Frida Bauer. An acquaintance of mine who knew his family asked my brother and myself if we would like to meet this wonderful violinist, but for some reason I did not think it would be appropriate to disturb the artist in this manner.

So, musical life and musical history are riddled with prejudice and peculiar opinions which often arise because we do not investigate matters sufficiently – as in my two examples concerning Bayreuth and Oistrakh. As regards Wagner, apparently, we have at our hands a character assassination of an extremely rare and insistent brutality. The huge number of

fabulous performances given of Wagner's works seem to indicate that some people think they are well worth listening to – but quite a few of these people still believe that Wagner himself was horrible. Apparently, those who think like that do not find it at all difficult to sustain that a horrible man may compose deeply loving, liberating, caring and compassionate music – as if it were possible to separate the man from his art – or rather, as if it is a law of psychology that a ruthless person is perfectly capable of composing empathetic music (which he then hides behind, because he is “a clever sheet music magician”). Perhaps you need to try it in order to know that creating great art is not something “you do” – it is something “you are”. So, if you want to know something about Wagner, you need to start from what Wagner *actually* writes in his text and music, and you need to start from the material that has factually been handed over to us – instead of responding to “what you think it looks like”. It should not be difficult to read what Wagner writes, but a superficial approach is easier, as it seems. Or, as the Danish comic author and vignettist Storm P observes in his drawing of a man who comments on a missing person's announcement on the radio: “Long coat and black gentlemen's bike – they'll find him before evening.”

In her prize-winning book, *Liszt – The Artist as Romantic Hero* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1974, p. 346), the American writer Eleanor Perény offers the following “suggestion of a diagnosis” with regard to Wagner:

”Yet flogging Wagner is poor work. As egotists go, he is so much without alloy, the perfect specimen, that one must rejoice to watch him in action, as one may feel pleasure in watching a leopard execute a kill: he was every bit as unconscious of evil intent.”

And in his book *Wagner – liv, værk, politik* (*Wagner – life, work, politics*, Copenhagen 2008, p. 497), Danish author Henrik Nebelong writes: *“In many ways, the full-blown Wagner is so scary that it would be totally reckless for any opera management to stage him without a certain amount of camouflage...”*

Let us leave this hanging for a bit.

The problems concerning Wagner and the attitude toward him seems to centre on the idea that Wagner was “the father of Nazism”. To this regard, the accusations against Wagner are so overwhelming and so well documented (the accusers themselves seem to believe) that no one reverses their opinion about the matter. Also, such a change of heart might appear disrespectful of the Jews – you cannot suddenly plead the case that Wagner – who is not well liked in Israel – actually did *not* have an anti-Semitic attitude. **However, this becomes clear if you study the source material conscientiously.** At this point, I consider the matter serious to a degree that I want to take on the part of Wagner's defence lawyer who summarizes an imaginary trial. So, I would plead common law practise where the defendant is considered innocent until the opposite has been proven, and where it is the duty of the prosecutor as well as the defence lawyer to present evidence based on truth and not just on rumours of dubious origin.

In order to clear up some details, I have just re-read an extremely enlightening book which is a sort of counterpart to Joachim Köhler's *Wagner's Hitler: The Prophet and His Disciple* (Polity Press, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge, UD, Malden, MA 2000). The book in question is entitled *Hitler's Wagner, a very thin book – Every Word the Disciple Said about His “Prophet”* (Monte Stone, Steinberg Press, NY 2019). My intention was to investigate the matter further or trace the reason why Joachim Köhler would write that **the effect of Parsifal is holocaust** – for this is indeed an extremely seminal and truly, *truly* devastatingly judgmental statement.

For several decades, Monte Stone has studied all available material about Wagner and Hitler – from first-hand and second-hand accounts through rumours and pure Nazi propaganda. It turns out that Köhler's idea comes from a Hermann Rauschning who in his *Gespräche mit Hitler* (1939) quotes page after page of Hitler's ideas and statements and also a long monologue where, allegedly, Hitler offers his interpretation of *Parsifal*. According to Rauschning, the main idea is that “a group of knights *of pure blood* control the Grail. The king's blood *has become tainted*, because he has had sexual relations with a woman of mixed, tainted blood [at that time, it was a common assumption that, from Wagner's hand, the key figure of Kundry was intended as a caricature of a Jew]. An uninitiated young man is tempted by Klingsor's magical garden that represents lust and a corrupt civilization, instead of joining the elite, who are the guardians of the secret of life: pure blood. ***There is no cure for tainted blood and everyone who suffers from this disease must die with Amfortas, their king.***”

The peculiar thing about these “Hitler quotes” is that Rauschning wrote the book *five years after* he had been thrown out of the Nazi Party. So, after five years he claims to be able to remember long conversations and Hitler's monologues *verbatim*, and he says that he has had more than 100 conversations with “Der Führer”. During the Nuremberg Trials (1945-49), Soviet prosecutors used Rauschning's book as testimony.

However, it is so that Hitler's whereabouts have been extremely accurately mapped, and according to this mapping, Rauschning has met Hitler only five times and never alone. Göring, who rarely left Hitler's side, remembers only two meetings with Rauschning.

Still, what is important here is that we know that on several occasions Hitler attended performances of *Parsifal*, so he would know that Amfortas *does not die*, and also that *he is not fatally ill*. Indeed, Parsifal heals him with the spear.

Just like Köhler, quite a few authors have adopted Rauschning's account while deftly avoiding to quote the last lines where it is revealed that it is quite impossible that Hitler might have known the opera so badly, considering that he watched it time and again. So, whichever way we look at it, *Wagner's Parsifal did not inspire holocaust*. Rather, ***Rauschning's fictive conversations*** may have played a role in the construction of this appalling delusion – especially as the Nuremberg Trials have undoubtedly passed on his “summaries of Hitler's inspiration and motives”.

If we study the narrative of *Parsifal*, nothing whatsoever is found to indicate that anyone's blood has been tainted at all, let alone that it needs purifying. Nor does it say that an inexperienced youth must learn to master sex by turning down a temptress. To the contrary, it says that Parsifal discloses Klingsor's evil by revealing the curse of Kundry.

But Köhler, uncritically building on Rauschning's tall tale, determines that ***Hitler did but carry out Wagner's programme*** – i.e., ***the extermination of the Jews*** – which is an allegation that is judgmental to a degree that its very presumptuousness makes it difficult for the reader to grasp that ***it totally contradicts the narrative of the opera*** (“Well, there must be something to it, seeing that musical authors claim it”). Indeed, Köhler has understood ***nothing at all***. **The actual plot:** Amfortas has been tricked into having sex under false pretences (Kundry has disguised herself as the woman he is longingly searching for – cf. the legend of Arthur that is behind the opera, a legend that has many variations – see for instance the film *Excalibur* (1981) with Helen Mirren as Morgana/Kundry) and the magician Klingsor seizes the opportunity to stab Amfortas in the side with the spear that was used to stab the crucified Jesus. After this, the wound will not heal, as, deep within, Amfortas feels that he has betrayed God by failing to protect the holy spear which must not fall into the wrong hands.

Anyone who has fallen victim to rape knows (and *sex under false pretences* should be considered rape – also males may be victims) that one may have “an inner wound that never heals and starts bleeding again every time the act of rape is recalled”. It may require huge efforts from psychologists to make the victim understand that she/he is not the guilty party. Only someone who finds the courage within themselves to emotionally go all the way back to the site of the crime may help themselves or a suffering fellow human being recover a normal life. Thus, in mythical terms, Parsifal represents that part within Amfortas who dares to venture back into the past to find out what really happened.

Allow me once more to call my witness – the American Wagner researcher Monte Stone. Upon going through *all available historical accounts*, he has been able to ascertain that **Hitler never expressed himself as Köhler claims to be the case. Hitler never quoted a single line of Wagner’s texts, nor did he mention the plot of any of his operas.** All we know is that Hitler once took interest in the scenery used in a performance of *Parsifal*. The alleged conversations with Hitler **cannot be verified**, and Hermann Rauschning, who wrote them, reveals his deceit by revealing his own ignorance, and thus also the fictive Hitler’s ignorance, as to *the actual narrative* of the opera.

However, Henrik Nebelong *agrees with Köhler*, when on p. 494 in the book I have mentioned, he writes that “*what it was all about [for Hitler], was to carry out Wagner’s programme*”. This passage inspires a critic at the Danish daily Politiken, Thomas Michelsen, to print on the frontpage the following sample from his article inside the newspaper (October 26th, 2008): “[Wagner was] *Hitler’s spin doctor – the opera master of 5’5” with a passion for silk sheets, flirtation and hating Jews.*” (At this point, I would like to interject that Wagner suffered from “Gesichtsrosen”, a skin disorder that made it painful for him to sleep in ordinary bedding material.)

So, we now find ourselves before the great question: is any of this really true? And allow me to add in the most capital of capital letters I can find: **accusing the composer Richard Wagner of having had for his objective to exterminate the Jews as a people and as a race, whether it be consciously, unconsciously, secretly, or openly, is a very, very brutal thing to do.** We are discussing *a fellow human being* who – in spite of being world-famous – is still exactly this: a fellow human being. Gradually, this accusation against Wagner – totally void of any substantiation as it is from the point of view of the defence – has become so effective and automatic a part of a worldwide mindset that, as a matter of course, Wagner’s music accompanies film sequences where war or Nazis are present, and (apparently) no one gets the idea of telling the filmmakers (*before* they use it in the movie) that the music playing is about something very, very different from violence, firefighting, and extermination of Jews. Oddly enough, it sometimes seems that Wagner may be used as a soundtrack to accompany “all things brutal” simply because he was incredibly adept at orchestrating and unafraid of using the entire range of sound that the feelings of the opera’s narrative demand. The most famous sequence is probably the one from *Apocalypse Now* (1979), where Francis Ford Coppola uses the “Ride of the Valkyries”, which is about *Wotan’s daughters rejoicing at the idea that perhaps it is possible to defeat “the devil himself” – represented by Alberich and his army* – so that a number of helicopters are bombing a Vietnamese village “back to the stone age” while Wagner’s music is booming from outboard loudspeakers. I think that perhaps Coppola simply wants to mock the total lack of culture of the brutal American army by using the music in a blatantly wrong way.

Even kindly Woody Allen cannot help himself. After a performance at The MET of *The Flying Dutchman* in the film *Manhattan Murder Mystery* (1993), he says to Diane Keaton: “*I can’t listen to that much Wagner, ya know? I start to get the urge to conquer Poland.*” Meanwhile, in the background we hear Hans Hotter who, in the part as the Dutchman,

laments his fate and tells us about his search for love. So indeed, Woody Allen's remark has no real connection whatsoever to the reality of the text or to that of the music.

The crucial essay of Wagner concerning the Jews, is the article *Das Judenthum in der Musik* published in 1850 in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. The facts collected by Monte Stone make it indisputably clear that **Hitler never read even one of Wagner's essays, and he has never quoted Wagner on any subject whatsoever** – and this has been confirmed by first-hand witnesses, second-hand witnesses, and by a thorough analysis of common gossip.

For the amateur of our time who allows themselves to be influenced by the repercussions of Nazism, it is almost impossible to read the article *Judaism in Music*. However, if you read the article carefully, through the eyes of a researcher, **Wagner expresses warm admiration for the Jewish culture and the Jewish people** – a fact that is normally disregarded – while observing a tendency among Jews when it comes to culture and money. If you listen carefully to what Wagner writes here, **it is all about money**, and the bad guys are neither the Jewish race nor the Jewish culture, but **culture-blocking, money-grubbing persons**.

Here, “money” stands for Wagner's *right to exist* along with the security of being able to live under circumstances that might make it possible for him to compose the works that his very being bids him materialize. Accounts about Wagner's later years and about his need to buy e.g. *beautiful* (the character assassination says *expensive*) fabrics for himself and his wife and to find an abode that felt like a home, as well as his idea of building an opera house and create a festival (the character assassination calls him boastful) – tend to drown out the fact that in his youth and far into maturity, Wagner was sometimes *actually destitute* because of the deplorable conditions for composers in Germany back in the day (more on this subject later).

In Wagner's times, it was quite common that Jews were in control of finances in various contexts. If you needed a money loan, you would go to “a Jew” and we have countless other accounts of this phenomenon besides those reported by Wagner. From Dickens' Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, Shakespeare's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, the pawnbroker from Rachmaninov's opera *The Miserly Knight*; the pawnbroker who is killed by Raskolnikov in Dostojevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* – along with the two Jews in Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Wagner is aggravated by the fact that apparently people exist in German society who in every way hinder all things innovative, and in his anger, he depicts unsympathetic, bossy, and manipulative Jews by means of a strong *and most certainly unkind* sarcasm. With his words, Wagner is able to paint figures in the same way Mozart did, when, in a letter, he described an organist he heard who, whilst playing, “has the expression of a little boy sitting on his potty”. Wagner describes the language of the manipulative Jews as ugly, and likewise, today many people perceive *the German language* as ugly – in the shadow of World War II.

Ruthless people speak in an ugly manner – in Danish, too. Try to pronounce the word *ambulance* with an aristocratic English accent, and then pronounce the parallel German word *Krankenwagen* as Bismarck would, growling through his beard.

Conclusion – and I repeat what I have already said because the following cannot be said too often: what Wagner is against – if you read what he writes – **is in no way** the Jewish people or Jewish culture or race – he is **exclusively** concerned with culture-blocking money hoarders who happened to be called “Jews” in his time. When I frequented primary school back in the '50s, I would hear remarks such as: “Who jewed my bag?”

The key to reading Wagner's writings is the detail of the culture-hostile financiers. Once you get this, everything else falls into place. In Wagner's essay *Erkenne dich selbst*, we read the following: “Nur aber, wann der Dämon, der jene Rasenden im Wahnsinne des

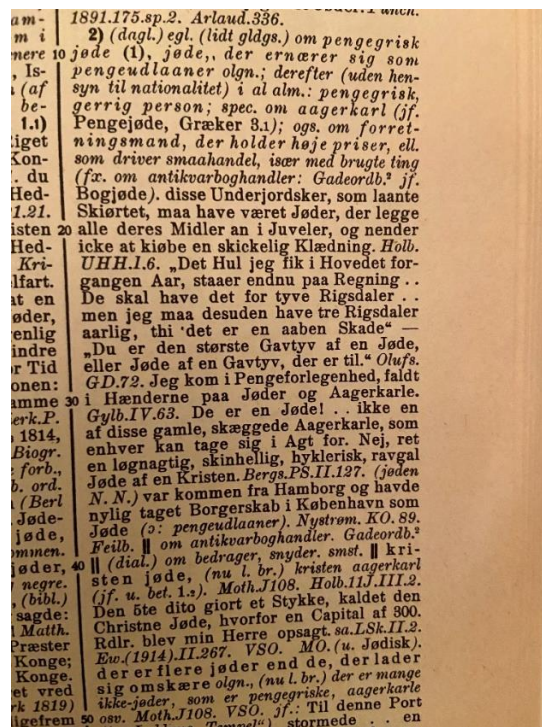
Parteikampfes um sich erhält, kein Wo und Wann zu seiner Bergung unter uns mehr aufzufinden vermag, wird es auch – keinen Juden mehr geben.” This has nothing to do with any extinction of the Jewish race. To the contrary, this sentence says that the world will be liberated from culture-suffocating fanatics if, in our political parties, we no longer back them up. (An attempt at an English translation: “*Only when that demon will no longer find support among us – the one who, in his madness, has seized the fanatics of party fighting – will the Jews finally disappear.*”)

Köhler quotes Wagner for thinking that Jesus was an Arian. I have never come across any such thing in my own Wagner research. On the other hand, Wagner did say the following about Jesus (I quote from memory): “*Er war nicht Jude aus Judäa, sondern Galiläer aus Galiläa.*” It is possible that Wagner may have had the impression that those Jews who were especially money-focused came from Judea.

In one of her diaries, Cosima refers to a conversation in connection with a possible theatre fire, when Wagner says something like, “One hardly dares to think the thought” – that a burning theatre might perhaps be full of Jews. He is still talking about culture-blocking money hoarders. In present times, such a remark might sound: “One hardly dares to think the thought that lightning might strike the Kremlin, so that we can stop the Russian attacks on Ukraine.” Quentin Tarantino approaches this matter in a somewhat more consequent manner in his film *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), where he gathers all of the Nazi leaders – Hitler inclusive – in a cinema, whereupon he bars them inside and sets fire to the whole building. Also, in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019) he determinedly kills off one of Charles Manson’s killer girls before she gets around to killing Sharon Tate.

Wagner was wrong about the influence of the money-strong Jews in society as well as in music, and his essay about the Jews is unkind and out of place. However, an anti-Semite in the usual sense of the word, Wagner was not. He was simply angry, but this is certainly a most tricky matter. If Wagner said about the leaders of a theatre: “Now, we really must hope that Jewish blood is not there, too,” it would be understandable if we thought that Wagner was aiming at the Jews as a race. However, what he actually means, is *greedy and ruthless people*. It is a terribly unfortunate wording, but this is really all there is to it.

In the 1927 edition of *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* (*Dictionary of the Danish Language*), we find the following entry:



In this entry from an old Danish dictionary from 1927, various common uses of the Danish word for “Jew” – “jøde” – are explained. A few highlights: “[Jew] 2) (*colloquial, somewhat old-fashioned*) a money-grubbing Jew (1) a Jew, who earns his living as a moneylender or similar; thereafter (without regard to nationality) in ordinary language: a money-grubbing, greedy person, esp. about a usurer (cf. money-Jew, Grecian 3.1)... And later on: Gylb.IV.63. You are a Jew! ... not one of those old, bearded usurers whom anyone knows they must guard themselves against. No, you are simply a lying, sanctimonious, hypocritical, mad Jew of a Christian. Bergs.PS.II.127 (*the Jew NN*) had recently arrived from Hamburg and had acquired citizenship in Copenhagen as a Jew (*i.e., as a moneylender*). And on and on.

Nebelong concludes (as quoted above) that: “*In many ways, the full-blown Wagner is so scary that it would be totally reckless for any opera management to perform his works without a certain amount of camouflage...*”

By way of example, Nebelong mentions the opera *Rienzi*. **According to the plot of the opera and indeed Wagner’s text, Rienzi is a kind and just man who wants nothing more than to be a good leader of his country.** However, on strong request, he commits the error of letting his worst enemies out of prison whereupon they overthrow him in a coup and kill him by letting him burn to death inside the Capitol together with his sister. The opera is an attempt at making “a grand opera” in Meyerbeer’s style, and Wagner creates a spectacular scenario with an entire Roman army and their horses on stage. Nebelong thoroughly dislikes the incorporated marching rhythms, but how would one depict a Roman army entering the stage otherwise – *without* marching rhythms?

Actually, towards the end of *Rienzi*, we are presented with a preliminary study of the burning of Valhalla that concludes *Götterdämmerung*, when Wotan is confronted with the terror that in this world a kind of evil exists (the Ring), which apparently trumps love as well as any display of benevolence. Nebelong misses out on Rienzi’s divinely inspired loyalty and love for his people. He writes that Rienzi’s opting out of the royal title he is offered corresponds to Hitler’s (Mao’s, Mussolini’s, etc.) idea of “just” wanting to be called “Der Führer”, and “*there were elements in the young Wagner’s world of ideas that we must consider dubious when seen through the eyes of our times*”. According to Nebelong (p. 55), the latter conclusion we may “deduce from Hitler’s fascination with *Rienzi* – a fascination

which would gain *a horrifying ideological, historical significance* because Hitler perceived the opera *as his own personal initiation.*” Nebelong continues: “*Of course, this does not mean that Wagner, who in 1840 is living as a proletarian in Paris, should be held responsible for all the horrors connected with Germany under Hitler.*” No – I dare say he should not.

Hitler’s “fascination by *Rienzi*” is from a book by August Kubizek: *Adolf Hitler, Mein Jugendfreund* (1953). Kubizek writes (p. 256 in the English edition, 2006): “*I reminded Hitler of that memorable Rienzi performance at Linz in 1905. He related the events including the strange nocturnal experience and concluded with the unforgettable words, ‘In that hour it began!’*”

Kubizek writes that he and his friend Adolf Hitler both attended a performance of *Rienzi*, when Hitler was 16 (!), and that afterwards they went biking together to the nearby town of Freinberg. Hitler “almost had an epiphany – he was in a sort of trance by having experienced himself as the future saviour of Germany”. According to Kubizek, he met Hitler again in 1939 during the Bayreuth Festival at Villa Wahnfried, where he reminded Hitler of the episode, and this would be when Hitler pronounced the remarkable words, “*That was when it all began.*” This conversation was witnessed by Winifred Wagner, Kubizek says.

According to Monte Stone’s research this is all entirely imaginary. There were no performances of *Rienzi* in Linz while Hitler lived there and frequented Kubizek and thus there was no bike ride and no epiphany (performances were given in the early spring of 1905, but at that time Hitler lived in Steyr, not in Linz, and he does not meet Kubizek until the autumn of 1905). In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler does not mention *Rienzi*, nor any event of importance concerning this opera, only *Lohengrin* that he was excited to have attended in Linz. Nowhere does Winifred Wagner mention a conversation between Kubizek and Hitler – not even during the five-hour TV-interview with Hans Jürgen Syberberg from 1976. From a docuseries on Netflix entitled *How to Become a Tyrant* (2021), we may deduce that Hitler’s initial epiphany relates to an episode in a trench in 1918 when he suddenly hears the words “Move away”, which he obeys – thus avoiding a grenade that hits that precise spot, injuring and killing his fellow soldiers. *This makes him feel as if he is a chosen one.* At a later time, in Ypres, his platoon is attacked with mustard gas, and Hitler arrives at the hospital, victim of hysterical blindness. ***This is when*** – according to the documentary – his great vision of becoming the saviour of Germany awakens.

The only certain quote regarding *Rienzi* we have from Hitler is connected with a situation in 1930, when, along with an acquaintance, he must decide whether to attend *Der Rosenkavalier* or *Rienzi*. Hitler chooses *Rienzi* in order “to see which mistakes must be avoided”. Several years later (in 1938), Albert Speer tells us (in *The Secret Diaries*) that Hitler likens himself to *Rienzi* (who, as I said before, is a kind person and not a tyrant, which Hitler entirely misses) and “*recalls performances of the opera during his youth, and a vision that someday he will be able to reunite Germany and restore its greatness*”. However, according to historical documentation, it is impossible that Hitler attended the opera in Linz as a young man – at least with Kubizek for company. Also, never again does he mention *Rienzi*, let alone any epiphany. To be precise, there is nothing in *Rienzi* that allows for anything remotely resembling the visions of conquest of the Third Reich.

An important detail appertaining to the character assassination of Wagner, is Wagner’s research of the conditions of love in the world as a purely social aspect, as well as the complications connected with love within the consciousness of the single human being. Everywhere in Wagner’s universe we find people who doubt that love is for them to find, because social laws (written and unwritten) about how to behave if we love another human being or if we are simply searching for love, collide with love’s total neglect of all ruling

laws and such laws' frequent overruling of love. With the latter sentence, neither Wagner nor I mean to say that you may unblinkingly break into other people's marriages. However, as far as Wagner himself was concerned, he observed that he was married to a woman, Minna, whom he did not love with all his soul, and she had no capacity whatsoever to love anything but the social status, Wagner was capable of giving her. So, while being married to Minna – and for the rest of his life, actually – Wagner tries to find the answer to the question, “What happened to love?”

The nature of Wagner's relationship with Minna may be deduced from Wotan's relationship with Fricka in *The Ring*. Wotan is onto the fact that some horrible, unprecedented evil has been conjured forth because Alberich has forged the Ring and is now gathering his army. Today, such an incident might be illustrated by films called *Godzilla's Army*, *Zombies from Hell*, or similar titles. Wotan knows that ***something must be done***. This is why he initiates projects whose importance Fricka does not comprehend, and when he builds Valhalla as a defence against the Darkness and evokes the nine Valkyries in collaboration with the memory of the Earth, Erda, Fricka believes that Wotan has been unfaithful to her (this is ***a myth***, and Wotan has not slept with Erda, nor indeed with Siegmund and Sieglinde's mother. The Valkyries and the Wälsungen twins are ***ideas***). What Wotan has actually been doing, ***is taking measures that are so extremely important that Fricka cannot even begin to understand them***. We are now facing the forces of the Darkness and the very equilibrium of the universe is threatened. “Why can't you just stay at home with me, inconsiderate man?” “You only understand your usual pursuits. What I'm striving to do is to accomplish something never seen before.” So, if love itself is threatened – as is the case after Alberich's making of the Ring – Wotan must counteract this disaster by evoking an earthly twin couple who by their very origin illustrate that they have been ***created together at the same time*** and thus cannot be separated as may be the case with “ordinary” couples that love each other but whose love “does not reach all the way back to Creation”. By letting them find each other, Wotan hopes to be able to restore an equilibrium of love that will make it impossible for the forces of the Darkness to disrupt love's universal, eternal possibility of belonging together.

The common interpretation of this sense of belonging that is timeless – or rather, eternal – is that Wagner advocates incest. Nothing could be further from the truth, but even so researchers are trying to find significant precedents – for instance Wagner's prematurely dead older sister Rosalie.

But – as already said – *The Ring* is a myth, and in his meeting with Fricka concerning the twins Siegmund and Sieglinde, Wotan is tested as he meets the formidable demands of the Darkness: ***we cannot guarantee for a fellow human being to be victorious in their fight against the Darkness – everyone must prevail for themselves, without outside help***. So, albeit completely ignorant as to what she triggers, Fricka has got a point here: Wotan must let Siegmund proceed on his own without protection. Siegmund must die, and he must know it.

Some researchers think that in this case Fricka is the strong woman who wins over the weaker male. In reality, an almost superhuman strength is needed for Wotan to realize that Siegmund may prevail upon the force of the Ring only by facing a *factual* death threat (he cannot just say, “This is something we're playing at”) – whereupon he must choose ***love*** for his weapon ***and nothing else***.

The fact that Wotan (or, as many people think, Wagner himself) “will not let love live” is yet another point of criticism based on misreading that lives on quite happily, despite clashing with both text and music. What Wagner and his mouthpiece Wotan have discovered is that an enemy, who has blended together love and death so as to claim that death is life-giving (c.f. the expression “peace-keeping war” – or: “If you won't marry me, I'll jump from the 13th floor”, or: “I hurt just as badly as you when I beat you”, “Revenge may lead to

something positive”, and on and on). Not even Erda, the memory of the Earth, knows anything about the magnitude and origin of this enemy, so Wotan must take matters into his own hands and hope that Siegmund conquers the death threat by choosing to take up the fight against Hunding with no other weapon at his disposal than love, even if it is the last thing he does.

With excruciating grief, Wagner tries to depict how terrible it is for Wotan to witness that his only possible rescue attempt – Siegmund’s possible victory over a death threat – is thwarted by his own daughter Brünnhilde. It is particularly painful because he loses her, too, when she falls for Siegmund’s idea of killing her beloved and their child if he cannot have her. As mentioned, had Siegmund told Brünnhilde to go to Hell, because he wanted to beat Hunding – even without a weapon (love gives him infinite power) – he would have prevailed upon the Ring. And had she left him high and dry when he used a death threat to try to obtain love, *she* would have prevailed upon the Ring. However, by accepting the distorted conditions of the Ring, she blocks her own divinity and thus risks to fall for the first man who comes along (as does Queen Titania in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*). But, as a last resort, Wotan protects his daughter by taking care that only the most glorious of heroes may penetrate the flames he places around her.

Those who have experienced the grief of losing a child understand what Wagner actually composes, when, at the end of *Die Walküre*, Wotan takes leave of Brünnhilde. However, a character assassination of Wotan seems to exist as a parallel to that of Wagner. Danish author Villy Sørensen writes in an article (published in the book *Sørensens Wagner*, Gyldendal 2005, p. 93) that “*Wotan is able to express his love [for Brünnhilde] although he must forsake same (as emphasized by Alberich’s Renunciation of Love theme)*”. What on Earth does Sørensen mean? Wotan does not forsake anything at all as far as love is concerned (see below) – **he is losing his beloved daughter!** The motif mentioned, which is actually **the Ring formula** – why on Earth it has been divided in two, leading some researchers to believe that the motif’s first part may stand alone as a “theme of renunciation”, I do not know, but the motif’s accompanying sentence **cannot be divided**: “Only he who renounces love has the power to find the formula that forges a ring from the gold.” Let us consider a sentence that goes as follows: “*He who kills children should be imprisoned and brought to justice.*” In such case, the abuse of Wagner’s *Ring formula* leitmotif – following along with Villy Sørensen’s interpretation – would lead to the conclusion that whoever is singing while the first part of the “child killing motif” is played by the orchestra, *is a potential child killer*.

So, the fact that the Ring formula is played by the orchestra during Wotan’s leave-taking of Brünnhilde means that **Alberich’s Ring is the villain**, and that the Ring has caused Brünnhilde to betray her own divinity by supporting Siegmund in his belief that love may be secured by means of a death threat. In the very moment Siegmund raises Notung in order to kill Sieglinde, **he himself splinters the sword**. *He puts it to the exact opposite use of its creation, its purpose, nature, and strength*, and this is what Wotan points out by letting his spear (the eternal laws) splinter Notung right there and then, *when Siegmund really, really needed it* – in his fight against Hunding.

Kasper Holten’s instruction of *The Ring* for The Royal Danish Theatre of Copenhagen (2003-06) is yet another example to underscore just how difficult it can be to understand that Wagner as well as Wotan are kindly people, people capable of loving. In this case, Holten finds it relevant to stage the exact opposite scenario to that which is conveyed by the music: when the orchestra describes how Wotan and Brünnhilde embrace each other in their deep love for each other as father and daughter – Holten lets Wotan brutally strap Brünnhilde of her wings. Some people even suggest that Wotan himself might be interested in “getting into the pants of his daughter”. Thus, Villy Sørensen writes in a programme article for the Danish National Opera of Aarhus’ performance of *The Ring* in 1987 (also quoted in Lars Ole

Bonde's *Rundt om "Ringen"* (1994), p. 143): "...in his leave-taking of Brünnhilde, whom he must leave for "a happier man" [to love], we may glimpse the possibility of the incest that his son Siegmund committed." Are we to understand Sørensen's assertion to the effect that what Wotan must "forsake" is a physical, sexual relationship with Brünnhilde?

Apparently, the character assassination of Wagner and his works is boundless.

However, with *The Ring of the Nibelungen* Wagner seems to be onto an energy constellation that is contained as a possibility within the human consciousness: the need to believe that destruction, self-destruction, violence, or war may lead to something other than loss of energy and grief for all parties involved. The only real enemy of this energy form is **communication with reality**, so when it is Siegfried's turn to combat the Ring's perversion of the definition of victory, his relationship with reality expands as he kills the dragon Fafner, who really represents all that the Ring is capable of transforming itself into – primarily fear and fire-breathing self-assertion. Siegfried's next step is that of retrieving the Ring from Fafner's cave, and in connection with his slaughter of the dragon, Siegfried experiences new layers of reality: he is able to read the dwarf-troll Mime's thoughts about "killing Siegfried in order to nearly become the master of the world". When Siegfried kills Mime instead of merely tossing him up into a tree, **the Ring has prevailed upon him** – he has used death unnecessarily as a means of "getting on" with his life.

Some researchers find Hitler's "purebred Arian" in Siegfried, "Siegfried the Conqueror". However, there is a catch: by killing Mime, Siegfried taunts his own powers, whereupon he loses his judgment – just like Brünnhilde. No Nazi-hero anywhere to be seen. By the way, Siegfried is not an invention of Wagner's – he is a medieval hero from German folklore and Norse mythology.

A pact with reality – corresponding to an act of communication – is stronger than the Ring's unreal, upside-down world vision that "death is life-giving". This is why Wotan gives Siegfried a second, fantastic chance: he can tell Siegfried the whole story that goes back several generations – but only on the condition that **Siegfried himself** asks about it and is interested in listening – *and* his interest in listening must defeat something that is similar to the death threat that Siegmund so urgently needed to overcome. So, when Wotan tells Siegfried that once his spear splintered Notung – the sword that Siegfried wields and that he himself has re-forged – this is the moment when Siegfried's must choose. He may destroy Wotan's spear – whereupon the Ring has prevailed upon him as in the case of the killing of Mime – or he may say something like: "I really hope you have a very good explanation, old man. You have two minutes!" An opening of this kind would unlock Siegfried's possibility of helping Brünnhilde regain her divinity, if only he gives Wotan the opportunity to tell his story. But will Siegfried listen? Nope, he will not. In an act of misunderstood vengeance, he splinters Wotan's spear, and, in complete ignorance of the paralysis of his own consciousness, he leaves in order to reach a similarly paralyzed woman who ends up killing him, because the Ring prevents her from seeing anything at all.

And so we are told that Wotan is a tyrant who does not want love to live. In reality, **no one but Wotan** has the faintest inkling about what is going on. "But Wagner," the character assassination says, "is rooting for the young rebel and rebellious Brünnhilde who reveal the abuse of power" – which is erroneously attributed to Wotan, **whereas the actual villains are Alberich, Hagen, and the Ring.**

Wagner becomes incomprehensible if we do not read what the text says and thus turn the symbols upside down.

None other than Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson stated that Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* is about masturbation. Many years ago, the Norwegian author's point of view was mentioned in an article by Robert Naur, a music critic at the Danish newspaper *Politiken* back in the day. I have never forgotten this statement. Indeed, for me this is the equivalent to describing *Romeo and Juliet* or *Orpheus and Eurydice* as one long act of masturbation. I actually remember Robert Naur's statement word by word, and I think it should be included here, so that the reader may get an impression of what even great cultural personalities are able to let past their lips. Naur cited Bjørnson for believing that "*Tristan und Isolde* is merely Wagner lying on a beach, masturbating." To add to the difficulty of the situation, Naur seemed to agree with him.

Bjørnson's original text is somewhat different. In a letter to Edvard Grieg on 17th September 1874, he writes:

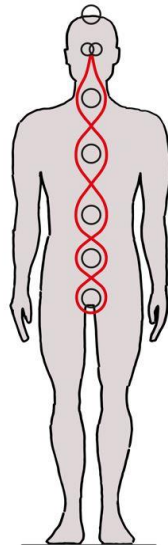
"So, I was in Munich where I saw 'Tannhäuser'. It pleased me far better this time, but sick is Wagner; entire keyboards of the mind are closed with him. In the autumn, I saw 'Tristan und Isolde'. It is the maddest performance I ever saw or heard, but in its insanity of manner it is so overwhelming that one is narcotically stupefied thereby. Even more immoral and relaxing than the story itself, is this soul-sick music in its very search for colours that dissolve any outline. In the end, one is but a glop of slime on the shore; one has become opium-masturbated away by the pig!"

Romeo and Juliet as well as *Tristan und Isolde* are probably the most significant love stories produced by our cultural history. In both works, the lovers find themselves in contrast to the rules of their society's written and unwritten laws, and both couples demonstrate that living life without love is impossible – rather not live at all. This says nothing about death, but a lot about love.

The choices made by the couples in both works exemplify *the importance of love*, and as far as I know, Shakespeare has suffered no character assassination as is the case of Wagner (except from the allegations that he did not write the works – "Someone else wrote them, who by the way also goes by the name of Shakespeare," as the Danish cartoonist and writer Storm P would have said). Some researchers think that Wagner's opera is "an acid trip" because a magical potion brings forth love, but in the text as well as in the music, we learn that the couple realize that they love each other at a far earlier stage of events, i.e., when Isolde heals Tristan's wound. *The potion merely makes it impossible for them to ignore the existence of their love*, and this causes Tristan to become so conflicted with his love for his uncle Marke – whom Isolde is supposed to marry – that he actually curses the potion. This act makes researchers believe that Wagner suffered from a death wish. People even attribute such a death wish to *Wotan*, whereas what he really means to say in the Second Act of *Die Walküre* when he states that now he desires but one thing: "Das Ende" – the end – is that life cannot go on if it turns out that "Satan is stronger than God". In that case all of us may just as well die. But this is not a death wish – we are dealing with the resignation that arises when we are faced with a superior power we cannot fathom. In *Parsifal*, Wagner is onto the distortion of divinely inspired love. By exposing Klingsor and Kundry, Parsifal reveals the trick of using self-destruction in order to obtain something *that is supposed to look like* love (Kundry lets herself down each time she is forced by Klingsor to seduce someone she does not want to seduce).

With the symbolic details featured especially in *The Ring* and later in *Parsifal*, Wagner approaches a particular short circuit in the human instinctive consciousness that it has taken me almost 50 years of research and the analysis of approximately 30,000 dreams to expose. An ultra-short summary: The phenomenon is called *kundalini* (snake, in Sanskrit) and it is the

expression of an subconscious internal war within the single human being – a war that arises if we remove the joy of life from the instincts (remove the gold from the water), whereupon the instinctive layer – if subjected to a violent emotional pressure – may short-circuit itself. This leads to processes within the consciousness which may appear in dreams in the guise of burning elevators, snakes, power-carrying wires, an anxiety-provoking lack of earth connection, etc. So, symbolically, and factually it forces up an energy form from the subconscious (the water layer) to attack our head, the core of our personality (the landscape of the gods) – and even love itself (Freja). When we are subjected to evil (the Devil/Alberich), a negative self-perception may arise that perpetuates itself (it “circles in a Ring”), and as the consciousness within the human structure is negatively influenced to such a degree that it short-circuits on the instinctive layer, the kundalini serpent moves upwards inside the body whilst twisting on itself five times to form a shape similar to the figure 8 (we are dealing with an actual physical phenomenon) in a way that resembles the transformation of the Ring theme into the Valhalla theme in the passage between the first and the second scene of *Das Rheingold* (illustration: Steffen Kjærulff):



By means of this short circuit, the denial of life becomes the expression of life. Actually, here we witness the making of ***the Midgard Serpent***: the gold is removed from the water conjuring up an all-consuming Ring which energetically (see the drawing) has the same extension of the mythological monster from Norse mythology that dwells in water and winds around the entire globe (the entire consciousness).

Kundalini philosophers claim that the annihilation of the individual personality is the highest wisdom in life, whereas the ultimate objective/course of Alberich and his Ring (of which he has lost control because it has become an independent, uncontrollable energy form) is the annihilation of the gods (of God), ultimately leading to the end of the world and to Alberich’s own undoing. The kundalini ideas’ version of the “blissful culmination” resulting from the final undoing is a bit different: nothing can possibly be more sublime than our impersonal dissolution into the mightiness of the universe – the annihilation of our very consciousness: God does not exist – ***I am/we are God.***

Instead, what Wagner does is to let several of his main characters decide to go straight through death ***because of love*** – i.e., they prove to be stronger than the death wish found within the short circuit (within the Ring). So, in reality Senta, Elisabeth, Tristan, Isolde, Wotan and Brünnhilde go straight through death with their eyes wide open. They challenge death – they challenge the allegation that love does not exist – by facing death directly,

carried by the strength of love. So, Isolde's *Liebeshod* is not inspired by an urge to die but rather by a need to be lovingly united with Tristan beyond the threshold of death. Or, to put it differently, she dies not in order to be extinguished (following the kundalini's nirvana recipe). To the contrary, she loves Tristan so deeply that becoming one with the universe becomes the same as *reuniting with Tristan in her feelings*.

However, this is impossible to understand if we get the peculiar idea that *Tristan und Isolde* is one long act of masturbation.

Apparently, Wagner's psychological profile seems to have been so firmly established by our culture that its conclusions are difficult to change. Not so long ago, a TV special on DR2 entitled *Operarejsen (The Opera Journey, 2021)* abundantly illustrated that the same old once-and-for-all established opinions are still very much alive. In the programme series, "the ordinary opera listener" is informed about what opera really is, so that anyone may kind of participate and perhaps begin to take an interest in opera. In the episode about Wagner, Frederik Cilius is the expert who guides composer Allan Gravgaard Madsen and opera novice Rasmus Bruun through Bayreuth, and we hear the following remarks [I have added the actual facts in brackets]:

At 09:50 minutes: Cilius: "He was an awful parasite." [*see below*]

10:31: Cilius (sings): "Winterstürme swischen [*wichen!*] den [*dem!*] Wonnemond"

11:20: Cilius: "He considered himself an enormous genius. Actually, he was a genius, but for example *Tannhäuser* was a resounding failure in Paris – at the third performance whistles were sold out front for people to bring inside and drown out the music because they thought it was such a load of shit."

[**The real facts:** *Already at the premiere of Tannhäuser, the performance had been sabotaged on purpose. The audience were booing because Wagner had inserted a ballet right after the overture, and some of the regular guests of the theatre, the Jockey Club of Paris, were used to the ballet appearing in the second act at the very earliest. The Jockey Club members had lovers among the ballet girls who were practically considered prostitutes at that time, and so the Club members used to arrive at the opera by the time that the girls went on stage. Consequently, at the second performance, they brought along whistles, and after the third performance Wagner saw himself forced to withdraw the opera!*]

12:00: Cilius: "Most of his patrons – with the exception, perhaps, of the prince of this area, Leopold II [*Ludwig II!*] – he repaid them by bedding their wives. He was not a particularly good person. Besides being extremely anti-Semite, he was also untrustworthy – and he owed money to all and sundry."

[**The real facts:** *There is no historic evidence that Wagner had a physical relationship with Mathilde Wesendonk, nor was she interested in any such relationship. Wagner did not steal Cosima from Hans von Bülow. Cosima had loved Wagner since she was 16, and her marriage to Bülow was a disaster – he beat her, and she tried to commit suicide. She left Bülow. Wagner did not seduce her.*]

14:18: Rasmus Bruun: "Holy shit, what a stingy wallet!" – Cilius: "Yeah, but he never used his own money." – "Get yourself a credit card, old sucker!"

[**The real facts:** *In Italy, a composer perceived royalties when someone performed their work. This was not the case in Germany (later on, Richard Strauss introduced royalties in Germany). Verdi and later on Puccini became multimillionaires as a result of the Italian royalty system. Wagner got paid only if he conducted a first performance (but not for rehearsals), or if he sold sheet music. Often the arrangers cheated him out of his fee, and one theatre went bankrupt, so that all Wagner's earnings went to the theatre. In 1861, after having composed *Die Feen, Das Liebesverbot, Der fliegende Holländer, Tannhäuser,**

Lohengrin, Das Rheingold, Die Walküre, *parts of Siegfried and parts of Tristan und Isolde*, **Wagner was left with no money at all.** *Other events point to actual financial sabotage – and this is what spurs Wagner’s anger towards culture-blocking money grabbers. Luckily, Ludwig II helped him.]*

14:18: Cilius (I repeat): “Get yourself a credit card, old sucker!”

14:37: Allan Gravgaard Madsen: “Kinky boots – you know what they say about men with small feet – they have a huge symphony orchestra.”

14:58: Cilius (by Wagner’s grave): “Here lies Richard Wagner – surrounded by parasitic ivy.” Allan Gravgaard Madsen: “Disgusting!”

We have taught our dogs that graves must not be pissed upon when our walks take us through the cemetery. Apparently, this does not apply to humans.

Conclusion:

Even though posterity has tried very hard to change the actual facts, from the existing material we can determine beyond doubt that Wagner was no anti-Semite. To him, “Jews” were the denomination for life- and growth-blocking people who handled finances in such a way as to block growth and life itself. This denomination was extremely unfortunate seen in the light of what happened later in history, but there is nothing whatsoever in Wagner’s conduct, writings or works that may be said to form the basis of Nazi racism. Nor did Wagner sleep with other men’s wives. Still, it is true that “he owed money to all and sundry”, but there was an explanation for this.

This leaves us with the difference between everyday language use at the time of Wagner and the Nazi conference on 20th January 1942 in Wannsee, Berlin, where 15 officers, medical doctors, and officials – Eichmann, Heydrich, Bühler and others – discuss “the final solution of the Jewish question”: how to exterminate approximately 11 million Jews so that no one is left alive. “How do we do this in practice?”

Personally, I consider it a disgrace to European musical culture that anyone is actually capable of comparing the two matters. You have not understood a single sound of Wagner if you claim that “Hitler simply carried out Wagner’s programme”.

Epilogue (from the website In Defence of Richard Wagner – link below):

Finally, let us see what Hermann Levi himself said about his relationship with Wagner. Levi’s father Benedict was a rabbi and just before the „Parsifal“ premiere Levi received a letter from him in which Benedict expressed satisfaction and pride that his son is a part of something so special and also added „I wish I could like Wagner as well“. To which Levi wrote in reply:

„You certainly could, and you should like Wagner. He is the best and noblest of men. Of course, our contemporaries misunderstand and slander him. It is the duty of the world to darken those who shine. Goethe did not fare any better. That he bears no petty antisemitism like a country squire, or a protestant bigot is seen by the way he treats me, [Joseph] Rubinstein, the late [Carl] Tausig whom he loved dearly...Even his fight against what he calls „Jewishness“ in music and modern literature springs from the noblest of motives. I am convinced that posterity will learn what we who are close to him know already: that in him we had just as great man as a musician. I consider myself very lucky to be working with such a man and I thank God for it every day.“

Hermann Levi was, sadly, horribly wrong in predicting that the world would know the truth about Wagner, but he truly believed that it would. His letters, however, are a testimony to that truth and a means to expose the lies of today.

<https://indefenseofrichardwagner.wordpress.com/2014/03/07/wagner-levi-and-parsifal-the-truth/>