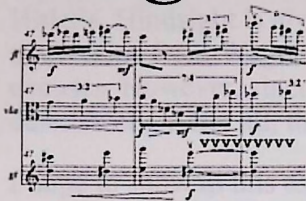


Wagner +
Hitler

Wagner and Hitler



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Wagner's Racist Operas, the Blinding Truth



All Jews should be burned at a performance of Nathan the Wise. {1}

Only one thing can redeem you (Jews) from the burden of your curse: the redemption of *Ahasverus* -- total destruction. {2}

"cursed Jew-scum" {3}

I have cherished a long repressed resentment about this Jew money-world, and this hatred is as necessary to my nature as gall is to blood. {4}

By removing [Jewish] vermin, I don't necessarily mean destroying them . . . There are many ways, systematic, and comparatively painless, or at any rate bloodless, of causing races to vanish . . . We may take systematic measures to dam their great natural fertility . . . By doing this gradually and without bloodshed, we demonstrate our humanity. {5}

The Jew is the parasite in the body of other nations. {6}

The Jew must not be destroyed, because then "we should have to invent him. It is essential to have a tangible enemy, not merely an abstract one." {6b}



hich of the above statements were by Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) and

which were by Richard Wagner (1813-1883)? Most would agree that all of these statements share the brand of racism, and they use "Jew" as an expletive. It would come as no surprise if we discovered that they were all Hitler's. Hindsight is always the best sight, but the fact is that all but the last three came from Wagner. If they were Hitler's no one would be offering excuses. However, since they were Wagner's statements, his apologists react defensively. After all, they say, what actual harm did Wagner really do?

I hope to show in this essay how devastating Wagner's legacy was, and in some ways still is. The evidence comes from the composer himself, from his "music dramas", diaries, letters, and essays. The fact is, that although Hitler was responsible for ordering the destruction of millions of innocent Jews and other "aliens", it would be difficult to find public statements by him calling for greater destruction than the above by Richard Wagner. In fact, scholars are still trying to find Hitler's order for the Holocaust, and most of his public statements were more moderate than those cited by Wagner.

Wagner apologists have had to acknowledge Wagner's racism, since there is no way to deny something that was so well documented by Wagner himself. Recognizing that they cannot defend him on that ground, they then deny that any racism is expressed in his "music dramas". Some, after peeling away the veneer of fairy tales, are horrified at what they discover in the dramas, as was Thomas Mann in 1940. So, they then try to defend the music by divorcing it from the drama, which is completely contrary to the mandate of the composer's *Gesamtkunstwerke* [Total Works of Art], which will be respected here. They naively claim that music alone is amoral, i.e., that it cannot communicate any moral or political messages. As such, the operas are stripped down to mere tone relations in order to prevent and insulate them from the identification of possible racist propaganda.

"Genius", "masterpieces", and "greatness" have also been used as excuses for Wagner and his music, terms that came out of the very romantic-nationalist *Kultur* that claimed the superiority of German music in the first place. This value-ridden rhetoric can no longer be presumed justified or meaningful without a convincing argument.

With all that is now known, it is clear that under the spell of compelling, emotionally charged music, Wagner's apologists are deluding themselves and insist on wearing critical blinders. Compare the following two citations:

... in all of Wagner's innumerable commentaries on his own works, there is not a single statement which would entitle us to interpret any of the characters in the music dramas or any of the details of their plots in anti-Semitic terms, or even to interpret them as allusions to the Jews. The attempt to interpret the Nieblungs, and especially the figure of Mime, as mythic projections of the Jews -- an interpretation based on Wagner's description of the physical appearance and speech patterns of Jews in his 1850 essay -- is no more than an unverifiable hypothesis. {7}

No less an admirer than the Jewish composer Gustav Mahler freely admitted the Jewish nature of Mime: "No doubt with Mime, Wagner intended to ridicule the Jews with all their characteristic traits -- petty intelligence and greed -- the jargon is textually and musically so cleverly suggested; but for God's sake it must not be exaggerated and overdone as Julius Spielmann does it... I know of only one Mime and that is myself... you wouldn't believe what there is in that part, nor what I could make of it." {8}

The first is a statement from a Wagner apologist in the 1990s. Mahler (1860-1911), on the other hand, was a contemporary of Wagner and was intimately familiar with both the operas, which he conducted (Hitler himself saw Mahler's productions {8b}), and the cultural sensibilities of the time in which he lived. Not only does Mahler's statement demonstrate an immediate recognition of Wagner's stereotypical Jew, it also shows his submission to these stereotypes, and a willingness to deprecate himself in a pathetic act of self-hatred. It is known that Jews who witnessed productions at that time immediately siezed upon what they believed to be their invidious representation by Wagner, especially after his freshly published essay, *Judaism in Music* in 1850. They rose up in protest when they identified Wagner's Beckmesser as a mocking depiction of Jews at the premiere performances of *Meistersinger* in Vienna and Mannheim {9}.

The racist agendas of Wagner's operas is revealed in the detailed and faithfully kept diaries of his wife, Cosima. She frequently referred to Wagners' friend, Arthur de Gobineau, the French racial theorist and author of *The Inequality of the Races*, which gained widespread acceptance in European communities, thanks to Wagner's assiduous promotion. Gobineau's theories corroborated what he himself had already decided about the "noble and ignoble" races. In Cosima's diary entry of October 17, 1882, she reported:

... in the evening the third act of *Siegfried*, well played by Herr Rubinstein, pleases both

him and us. "That is Gobineau music" Richard says as he comes in, "that is race. Where else will you find two such beings looking at each other! Here is just forest and rocks and water and nothing rotten in it." {10}

Wagner himself is here pointing out a racial metaphor in his own music! Thus, on the authority of the composer himself, it is no longer possible to deny that racial ideas have a direct and purposeful connection to his music. This opens up the entire field for such interpretation, which will be pursued here.

This statement also verifies the composer's race distinction based on appearance. According to Gobineau {11} and Wagner, it is by recognizing similarity through appearance that enables Aryans to bond together and separate themselves from the inferior races.

Wagner was too clever to identify Jews in his music dramas, especially after he had received critical reactions to his essay *Judaism in Music*, which he first published under a pseudonym. Of course, the reason for using a pseudonym was due to a justified fear of reaction. At the same time he was engaged in writing the anti-Semitic Ring cycle. After that, he backed off somewhat from offending his Jewish patrons, conductors, and performers, because they provided a substantial part of his support. But he was not about to abandon his virulent racism either (he republished *Judaism in Music* in 1869 under his own name), which permeates all aspects of his music dramas through metaphorical suggestion. Wagner is always just a step away from actually calling his evil characters "Jews", even though it was obvious to his contemporaries.

Nevertheless, his hatred was so profound (and thus bound to appear in his operas), that he let it slip in his essay *Know Thyself*. He wrote, ". . . if the Jew comes tinkling with his bell of paper [money], (our nation) throws its savings at his feet, and makes him in one night a millionaire. . . ." {12}

Clever though be the many thoughts expressed by mouth or pen about the invention of money and its enormous value as a civiliser, against such praises should be set the curse to which it has always been doomed in song and legend. If gold here figures as the demon strangling manhood's innocence, our greatest poet shows at last the goblin's game of paper money. The Nieblung's fateful ring become a pocket-book, might well complete the eerie picture of the spectral world-controller. By the advocates of our Progressive Civilisation this rulership is indeed regarded as a spiritual, nay, a moral power; for vanished Faith is now replaced by "Credit", that fiction of our mutual honesty kept upright by the most elaborate safeguards against

loss and trickery. What comes to pass beneath the benediction of this Credit we now are witnessing, and seem inclined to lay all blame upon the Jews. They certainly are virtuosi in an art which we but bungle. {13}

Here Wagner indicts the Jews and metaphorically links them to the Niebelungs, the curse, demons, goblins, and the lust for gold in the Ring drama. Thus, according to Wagner himself, it is Alberich, the greedy merchant Jew, who becomes the power-crazed goblin-demon lusting after Aryan maidens, attempting to contaminate their blood, and who sacrifices his lust in order to acquire the gold (his "pocket-book"), which would make him the "spectral world-controller".



Siegfried chokes Mime at Bayreuth, c. 1900

Mime fares even worse, depicted as a stinking ghetto Jew. Siegfried, the Ring's hero, who knows no fear and is free of conscience, hates him merely for his appearance and smell: ". . . that shuffling and slinking, those eyelids blinking -- how long must I endure this sight? When shall I be rid of this fool? I'd like to catch you and end your shrinking and stop your blinking! So deeply, Mime, do I loathe you." After being nearly choked to death, Siegfried brutally murders Mime with the sword, *Nothing*. This is Mime's reward for having raised Siegfried, like a father, from birth. Since Siegfried represents the

conscience-free, fearless Teuton, he feels no remorse. Wagner's music would have us justify Siegfried's form of personal vengeance. He is glorified as the warrior hero of the Ring, the archtypal proto-Nazi.

Moreover, as with Beckmesser in *Meistersinger*, Wagner cast the voices of Alberich and Mime in an abnormally high register and gives them tritones and other awkward intervals to sing, which make their voices creak, shriek, croak, and buzz, just as he described the speech of Jews in *Judaism in Music*, "in an

arbitrary distortion of our national idiom." These characters are also typecast in the opera productions as small, humpback, sulphurous, crooked, drab, and warty, as Siegfried describes Mime. (Where and when have Alberich and Mime ever been cast as tall, blond, blue-eyed Aryans?)

Wagner knew very well that to use Jewish names for his evil characters, or to call them Jews, would reduce his high-minded *Gesamtkunstwerke* (Total Artworks) and "Artwork of the Future" to artless, obvious, and vulgar political tracts. His intent was far more artful and covert, but nevertheless still political: to reach his audience on an emotional, subliminal level, bypassing their critical faculties.

I shall within these four evenings succeed in *artistically conveying my purpose to the emotional -- not the critical -- understanding of the spectators.* (Wagner's italics) {14}

In other passages of *Opera and Drama* he cautions against arousing any critical reason in audiences. Thus, Wagner clearly reveals his covert and insidious program of bypassing any critical assessment, and appealing directly to the now vulnerable intuitive and emotional being. Just when "spectators" have lowered their guard and are open to powerful emotional suggestions, veiled political metaphors are compellingly enforced by larger-than-life voices and a huge orchestra heavy with brass and percussion. (One is here reminded of the emotional power of Hitler's speeches.) Wagner musters all his musical powers to convince us that Siegfried's brutal murders are completely justified and even glorious, and he succeeds, for rarely does anyone question Siegfried's violent actions.

There was no need to name names or identify the "Jew". Much of his contemporary audience of both Germans and Jews knew very well who he was depicting, and those who didn't would get the message subliminally. (Nowadays, the more powerful subliminal message dominates.) He did not want his audience to take a critical view, but to uncritically accept the more powerful emotional one. The same appeal to uncritical emotions and attempt to evade critical reason is promoted in Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*, where he describes how crowds are to be persuaded and manipulated.

Wagner's racist ideology is contained in letters, diaries, and essays such as *Modern, What is German?*, *Know Thyself*, and *Judaism in Music*, and reaches Nazi proportions in his last racist essay, *Heredom and Christendom*. Here, all

the racist historical models from Luther to Fichte, Feuerbach, Gobineau, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Chamberlain, come to full maturity, when he wrote:

We cannot withhold our acknowledgment that the human family consists of irredeemably disparate races, whereof the noble could rule the ignoble, yet never raise them to their level by commixture, but simply sink to theirs. Indeed this one relation might suffice to explain our fall. . . Whilst yellow races have viewed themselves as sprung from monkeys, the white traced back their origin to gods, and deemed themselves marked out for rulership. It has been made quite clear that we should have no History of Man at all, had there been no movements, creations, and achievements of the white man. . . Incomparably fewer in number than the lower races, the ruin of the white races may be referred to their having been obliged to mix with them; whereby, as remarked already, they suffered more from the loss of their purity than the others could gain by the ennobling of their blood. . . Nowhere in history do the root qualities of the Aryan race show forth more plainly than in the contact of the last pure-bred Germanic branches with the falling Roman world. . . .

It was a weighty feature of the Christian Church that none but sound and healthy persons were admitted to the vow of total world renunciation; any bodily defect, not to say mutilation, unfitted them. Manifestly, this vow was to be regarded as issuing from the most heroic of all possible resolves, and he who sees in it a "cowardly self-surrender" -- as someone recently suggested, may bravely exult in his own self-retention, but had best not meddle any further with things that don't concern him. . . .

It certainly may be right to charge this purblind dullness of our public spirit to the vitiation of our blood -- not only by departure from the natural food of man, but above all by the tainting of the hero-blood of the noblest races with that of former cannibals now trained to be the business agents of Society. {15}

These "cannibals now trained to be business agents of Society" were the Jews. Cosima recorded in her Diaries, in 1879:

Richard is in favor of expelling them entirely. We laugh to think that it really seems as if his article on the Jews marked the beginning of this struggle. {16}

Thus, Cosima exposes their glee at the influence of *Judaism in Music* and in expelling Jews entirely. When news of Russian massacre of the Jews in August 1881 reached Wagner, she recorded him saying:

That is the only way it can be done -- by throwing these people out and thrashing them. {17}

Wagner's ideology is not only violently anti-Semitic, it is anti-Christian, following the lead of Nietzsche. Christianity was vilified because it was

contaminated by Judaism. Wagner wrote:

Judaism is the evil conscience of our modern civilization. {18}

The significance of this proclamation is easily missed. Wagner here complains about a conscience, hence morality, with which the Jews have contaminated Christianity, and then German *Volk*. "Jews," he said, "are the evil conscience of mankind". This conscience is an affliction that must be cast off, because it has prevented the *Volk* from pursuing their *Noth*, i.e., the *need* to recognize their own racial superiority ("know thyself") and their destiny to rule the world. This is further clarified by Houston Smith Chamberlain, Wagner's son-in-law and racial theorist. Jews, said Chamberlain, are afflicted with a guilty conscience, a sense of sin, and this Jewish guilt infected Christianity. It was an evil influence on the Teutonic spirit, specifically on its *Noth*, or *need* of the "noble races to rule the ignoble". This idea of racial *Noth* (which can only be felt by the *Volk*) has its roots in Fichte, Hegel, and Feuerbach. Only Germans (*Volk*, not to be confused with "folk", is restricted to Germans) are privileged to feel the *gemeinschaftliche Noth* (the collective need). Thus, *Noth* takes the place of conscience and law, represents the righteousness of the German mob, and is similar to the American concept of "lynch law".

Wagner's statement was later echoed by Hitler:

Conscience is a Jewish invention. It is a blemish, like circumcision. {18b}

Once this conscience is swept away, the German soul is purified and becomes privileged to pursue desires and needs free of any guilt, later making possible the Holocaust. This is why Siegfried feels no guilt when he slays Mime. Wagner's personal life reflects this belief in action. He used people for his personal gain and seemed to love only himself. His lack of conscience is reflected in his appropriation of friends' wives and daughters, his many betrayals, his self-righteous flight from creditors, and his callous treatment of those who could not be of use to him. His hatred of people in general is expressed in the following citation:

My entire political creed consists of nothing but the bloodiest hatred for our whole civilization, contempt for all things deriving from it, and a longing for nature . . . In all Europe I prefer dogs to these dog-like men . . . Only the most horrific and destructive revolution could make our civilized beasts "human" again. {19}

Feuerbach's *Noth* finds expression in the Ring as the sword, called *Nothung*, or "Need-ung". Once more, this disproves the apologists' claim that Wagner's politics do not enter his music. The sword *Nothung*, a weapon exclusive to murder and war, is glorified in the Ring. Its motive is cast in the brightest key, C major, as a rising, optimistic, blasting arpeggio. Wagner tries to dazzle us with its blazing music. The music tells us how wonderful the instruments of war are, and the composer even closely allies it with the Nature motive, which implies that war and murder are, after all, only natural.

Only Siegmund can draw *Nothung* from the world ash tree, only Wotan can smash it to pieces, and only Siegfried can reforge it again. These are the German gods and their progeny, the *Volk* (called Volsungs in the drama), destined to rule all other inferior races, if only they would recognize their *need* (*Noth*) for racial purity. Mime's is a futile attempt of the Niebelung Jew who will never succeed in forging *Nothung*, because he is incapable of feeling the collective need.

But what *Noth* does the sword represent? Siegmund's need seems to be for a weapon to defend himself against Hunding, but it is much more than that. And, what is Siegfried's need in forging *Nothung*? Marc Weiner most aptly expressed the answer:

Little wonder that the sword's name is *Nothung* or "Need-ung"; just as his Volsung father as a representative of the *Volk* had been driven to the sword in the hour of his "highest need", so Siegfried-as-*Volk* will claim *Nothung* in the hour in which he liberates himself from his foreign dwarf-father, a representative of the *Volk's* enemy, the Jew, and in so doing metaphorically raises aloft the Artwork of the Future, an instrument for the destruction of non-German art and of foreign presence in the realm of the future *Volk*.
{20}

For Wagner only German art was worthy of being called *Kunst* (Art), but even then only if it wasn't made by Jews like Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer. This could have been a cue for Hitler's "Degenerate Art" exhibit of the 1930s, when he vilified "non-Germanic art".

A denial of the importance of the political and racial metaphors in Wagner's operas reduces his dramas to mere fairy tales. Wagner himself would have laughed at such naivety. Symbolism and metaphorical representation have long been documented in these works. To deny that racist tracts, like *Judaism in Music*, have no representation in his operas is particularly naive. By the

same "logic", his other essays, such as *Opera and Drama* and *Artwork of the Future* would also have no bearing on his music, but no one claims that. In fact, Wagner himself stated the opposite. His prose works compile an ideology meant to bear upon and become manifest in his music.

In summary, the evidence shows that Wagner's racist ideology is not just expressed in his operas, but is strong enough to support the contention that this ideology is the very reason that Wagner wrote them.

Indeed, his mature, post-revolutionary music dramas, written and composed in conjunction with diverse social-aesthetic anti-Semitic tracts, constitute dramatic representations of the ideas found in his writings. Many Wagner scholars have been at great pains to dissociate his theories from the dramatic works for which he is largely remembered today, and especially to disavow any connection between his racism and his most celebrated Total Works of Art, but comparison of these works with motifs and arguments in Wagner's prose writings demonstrates that the former are dramatic enactments of Wagner's theories concerning the preservation of the German community threatened by the Jew in the modern world. {21}

Thus, Wagner's operas can be seen as tools of racist, proto-Nazi hate propaganda, written for the purpose of redeeming the German race from Jewish contamination, and for expelling the Jews from Germany. In 1993, Gottfried Wagner, the great-grandson of the composer, in an act of self-imposed moral obligation and great personal sacrifice, restored to his roots the conscience that Wagner and Hitler took away. He wrote:

Wagner himself misused music as a vehicle of propaganda. Where arguments about Wagner are concerned, Germans quickly lose their sense of humor. With Wagner the German soul becomes exalted! Woe betide anyone who questions Wagner . . . {22}

Richard Wagner, through his inflammatory anti-Semitic writings, was co-responsible for the transition from Bayreuth to Auschwitz. {23}

From the composer himself:

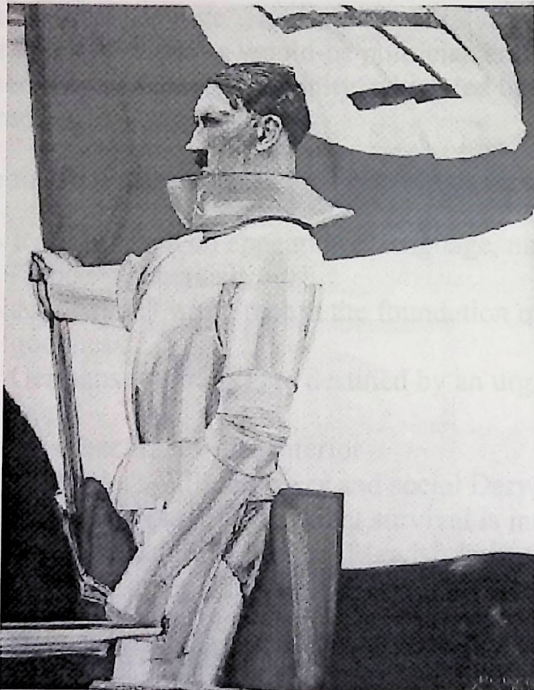
Consider well my new poem; it contains the beginning and the end of the world [referring to the Ring]. I shall have to set it to music, after all, for the Jews of Frankfurt and Leipzig; it will justly suit them. {24}

Why did Wagner write this "for the Jews"? And why does it "justly suit them"? How can this statement be construed as other than a racist agenda? After early denials, by 1940 even the ardent Wagnerite, German novelist and

essayist Thomas Mann, recognized Nazi propaganda in Wagner's operas.

I find an element of Nazism , not only in Wagner's questionable literature: I find it also in his "music", in his [creative] work, similarly questionable, though in a loftier sense -- albeit I have so loved that work that even today I am deeply stirred whenever a few bars of music from this world impinge upon my ear. ... The *Ring* emerges from the bourgeois-humanist epoch in the same manner as Hitlerism. With its...mixture of roots-in-the-soil and eyes-toward-the-future, its appeal for a classless society, its mythical-revolutionism it is the exact spiritual forerunner of the "metapolitical" movement today terrorizing the world. {24b}

Wagner's Influence on Hitler and the Holocaust



Hitler as Lohengrin, captured German painting U.S. army

I have an enormous desire to commit artistic terrorism.
[Richard Wagner] {25}

"With the exception of Richard Wagner", Hitler wrote, "I have no forerunner." {26}

Whoever wants to understand National Socialist Germany must first know Wagner. [Adolf Hitler] {26b}

There is probably no other composer in history who had a greater impact on world events than did Richard Wagner, and his devastating political legacy is second only to Adolf Hitler. The fact that racism was common in Germany, Austria, and other European countries has been used as an excuse for Wagner (and even for Hitler). But

Wagner was not just a musician. He was a national hero and powerful political

force to be reckoned with. Writers, philosophers, and politicians testified to his profound influence. His idolatry by King Ludwig II of Bavaria was an example of Wagner's political influence, an influence that was felt throughout Germany. (Among other things, Ludwig helped finance the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, which was designed specifically by Wagner for the performance of his operas.)

The circle closes here that Wagner had already begun to forge in 1850: the idea of the festival was realized as the Bayreuth Festival, which was very soon to have a propaganda effect all over Germany. Added to this were Wagner Societies springing up everywhere, that appeared in the German-nationalistic *Bayreuther Blätter*. From the beginning of the festival, then, anti-Semitism and racism were among the ingredients of the Bayreuth opera undertaking, whether implicit or explicit. Wagner's anti-Semitism was closely connected to this. {27}

Wagner and Adolf Hitler had so much in common, that it is difficult, at times, to keep them separate. They were both rabid racists. Both were artists and politicians (Wagner, a would-be politician and Hitler a would-be artist). Both feared they had Jewish paternity, which led to fierce denial and destructive hatred.

The following are other beliefs that Wagner and Hitler shared:

- Race is based on appearance, language, nationality, and "blood" (genetics).
- An "Aryan" white race is the foundation of racial purity, beauty, and goodness
- Germans (the *Volk*) are destined by an urgent need (*Noth*) to rule the world
- All other "races" are inferior
- Nietzsche's Will to Power and social Darwinism are axiomatic
- A *struggle (kampf)* for racial survival is inevitable (hence, *Mein Kampf*)
- Conscience (guilt) is an evil Jewish invention and must be purged
- Jews and other foreigners were contaminating German blood
- Jesus was not a Jew
- Jews have no religion
- Jews lust after money and power
- Jews are physically repulsive
- Jews are parasites
- Jews are demons and must be expelled or destroyed

- Wagnerian Art would save the world
- Condemnation of Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn and non-German art in general
- Theoretical tracts by philosophers would corroborate their bigotry
- Believed the world owed them a living
- Believed they were infallible
- Extreme egocentrism

As a young man Hitler fancied himself as a composer and artist, modeling himself after his idol, Richard Wagner. He attended Wagner opera productions obsessively and boasted that he had read everything that the master wrote. In 1904 or 1905, while attending the Linz Opera Theater, he met a young Czech musician named August Kubizek, who later published *Adolf Hitler -- Mein Jungenfreund (The Young Hitler I Knew, 1953)*. It presents one of the few portraits of Hitler's formative years, and much of it has since been documented. This book reveals how Wagner became a model for Hitler's ideas.

The young Hitler was aspiring to be an artist and managed a meager subsistence by painting postcards. Kubizek had attended the Linz School of Music, and so was a training musician. The two became inseparable during these early years, and shared their enthusiasm for Wagner's works. They experienced and discussed many musical productions that occurred locally. While Kubizek had broader musical interests, Hitler insisted on the superiority of Wagner's music. Hitler obsessed about attending every possible Wagner production, no matter how poor.

Then one day the pair went to see a performance of Wagner's *Rienzi* (probably 1905-6). This became a decisive event for the teenaged Hitler, as he was to refer to it after he came to power. It is worth quoting Kubizek's entire account of this extraordinary event.



It was the most impressive hour I ever lived through with my friend. So unforgettable is it, that even the most trivial things, the clothes Adolf wore that evening, the weather, are still present in my mind as though the experience were exempt from the passing of time.

Adolf stood outside my house in his black overcoat,

his dark hat pulled down over his face. It was a cold, unpleasant November evening. He waved to me impatiently. I was just cleaning myself up from the workshop and getting ready to go to the theatre. *Rienzi* was being given that night. We had never seen this Wagner opera and looked forward to it with great excitement. In order to secure the pillars in the Promenade we had to be early. Adolf whistled, to hurry me up.

Now we were in the theatre, burning with enthusiasm, and living breathlessly through *Rienzi*'s rise to be the Tribune of the people of Rome and his subsequent downfall. When at last it was over, it was past midnight. My friend, his hands thrust into his coat pockets, silent and withdrawn, strode through the streets and out of the city. Usually, after an artistic experience that had moved him, he would start talking straight away, sharply criticising the performance, but after *Rienzi* he remained quiet a long while. This surprised me, and I asked him what he thought of it. He threw me a strange, almost hostile glance. "Shut up!" he said brusquely.

The cold, damp mist lay oppressively over the narrow streets. Our solitary steps resounded on the pavement. Adolf took the road that led up to the Freinberg. Without speaking a word, he strode forward. He looked almost sinister, and paler than ever. His turned-up coat collar increased this impression.

I wanted to ask him, "Where are you going?" But his pallid face looked so forbidding that I suppressed the question.

As if propelled by an invisible force, Adolf climbed up to the top of the Freinberg. And only now did I realise that we were no longer in solitude and darkness, for the stars shone brilliantly above us.

Adolf stood in front of me; and now he gripped both my hands and held them tight. He had never made such a gesture before. I felt from the grasp of his hands how deeply moved he was. His eyes were feverish with excitement. The words did not come smoothly from his mouth as they usually did, but rather erupted, hoarse and raucous. From his voice I could tell even more how much this experience had shaken him.

Gradually his speech loosened, and the words flowed more freely. Never before and never again have I heard Adolf Hitler speak as he did in that hour, as we stood there alone under the stars, as though we were the only creatures in the world.

I cannot repeat every word that my friend uttered. I was struck by something strange, which I had never noticed before, even when he had talked to me in moments of the greatest excitement. It was as if another being spoke out of his body, and moved him as much as it did me. It wasn't at all a case of a speaker being carried away by his own words. On the contrary; I rather felt as though he himself listened with astonishment and emotion to what burst forth from him with elementary force. I will not attempt to

interpret this phenomenon, but it was a state of complete ecstasy and rapture, in which he transferred the character of *Rienzi*, without even mentioning him as a model or example, with visionary power to the plane of his own ambitions. But it was more than a cheap adaptation. Indeed, the impact of the opera was rather a sheer external impulse which compelled him to speak. Like flood waters breaking their dykes, his words burst forth from him. He conjured up in grandiose, inspiring pictures his own future and that of his people.

Hitherto I had been convinced that my friend wanted to become an artist, a painter, or perhaps an architect. Now this was no longer the case. Now he aspired to something higher, which I could not yet fully grasp. It rather surprised me, as I thought that the vocation of the artist was for him the highest, most desirable goal. But now he was talking of a mandate which, one day, he would receive from the people, to lead them out of servitude to the heights of freedom.

It was an unknown youth who spoke to me in that strange hour. He spoke of a special mission which one day would be entrusted to him, and I, his only listener, could hardly understand what he meant. Many years had to pass before I realised the significance of this enraptured hour for my friend.

His words were followed by silence.

We descended into the town. The clock struck three. We parted in front of my house. Adolf shook hands with me, and I was astonished to see that he did not go in the direction of his home, but turned again towards the mountains.

"Where are you going now?" I asked him, surprised. He replied briefly, "I want to be alone." {28}

Hitler never forgot this decisive moment. In 1939, after he had become the German Chancellor, he visited Wagner's daughter-in-law, Winifred Wagner in Bayreuth. Upon recounting the event he exclaimed, "It was in that hour that it all began" {29}. Thus, we hear from Hitler himself how influential Wagner and his music was on his later life and political ideals. The prelude to *Rienzi* was often used at Nazi rallies and prefaced Hitler's speeches.



Hitler often visited Wagner's heirs at Villa Wahnfried (Wagner's home) in Bayreuth during his war years and rise to power. Bayreuth became a respite and Wagnerian shrine for him

and other Nazi leaders. Wagner's family made a cult out of Hitler and considered him to be Germany's savior. Hitler played with Wagner's grandchildren, of whom Wieland and Wolfgang later headed the Bayreuth Festival, and told them stories of his adventures. When he visited on September 30, 1923, Wagner's 86 year old widow Cosima embraced and kissed him. At the same meeting he was warmly welcomed by Wagner's son, Siegfried, his wife Winifred, and son-in-law, the racial theorist, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who called Hitler "God's gift to Germany". Chamberlain forms one of the living links between Richard Wagner and Adolf Hitler. He was friends with and revered them both. His racial theory of the destiny of superior Aryans to rule inferior races, as expressed in his *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), was embraced by both the composer, Cosima, and other Wagner heirs. Hitler found the approval of the Wagner family and Chamberlain to be a rally for his political goals. Chamberlain immediately wrote to Hitler:

With one blow you have transformed the state of my soul . . . that Germany, in the hour of her greatest need brings forth a Hitler that is proof of her vitality. {30}

Thus, Hitler was the Messiah that Wagner's legacy longed for. Wagner's son, Siegfried, and his wife Winifred, who ran Bayreuth during the Nazi era, were also anti-Semites and idolized Adolf Hitler. A special annex was built at Wahnfried for Hitler to welcome his visits. Winifred wrote:

For years we have been following with the greatest inner sympathy and approval the uplifting work of Adolf Hitler, this German man who, filled with ardent love for his fatherland, is sacrificing his life for his idea of a purified, united, national greater Germany, who has set himself the task of opening the eyes of the working class to the enemy within . . . {31}

And Siegfried wrote:

The times of the Spanish Inquisition have returned. Perjury and betrayal are sanctified, and Jew and Jesuit are working hand in glove to exterminate Germanness! But perhaps Satan has miscalculated this time. Should the German cause really succumb, then I'll believe in Jehova, the god of revenge and hatred. My wife is fighting like a lioness for Hitler -- first rate! {32}

The young Hitler was so taken with Wagner and his music that at one point, around 1907, he decided to write a "Wagnerian" opera. Although he had had no musical training, he did not consider this an obstacle. His plan was to have

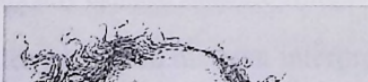
"Gustl" (Hitler's nickname for Kubizek) write down the notes as he (Hitler) banged out his conception on the piano. For some reason, Kubizek agreed to this. When he learned through his schooling that Wagner had written a sketch for the Edda legend *Wieland the Smith* as a topic for one of his music dramas (found in Wagner's posthumous notes), Hitler siezed on the topic and was determined to complete the project unrealized by his hero. "Listen Gustl, I am going to make *Wieland* into an opera." {33}

Wieland the Smith is a ghoulish Icelandic legend that was attractive to both Wagner and Hitler. Kubizek described it as follows: "King Nidur is entirely motived by avarice and greed . . . Wieland kills his sons out of vengeance, rapes his daughter, and drinks from beakers fashioned out of the skulls of his sons." {34} Hitler did not even flinch at this, but Wagner's version doesn't seem to bear much resemblance to it.

Hitler's conception was grandiose, with Icelandic erupting volcanos, glaciers, old Teutonic instruments, Wagnerian tubas, Walkures riding through clouds, winged metal helmets, etc. In spite of unrealistic determination and unrelenting energy, the opera eventually bogged down and was left unfinished, no doubt due to his lack of musical ability. Even so, it would be fascinating to see the notes and a production of this fragment for its historical significance. If it still exists, it would be a fitting Bayreuth production.

Years later, Hitler associates drew parallels between Hitler's studied methods of public speaking and Wagner's use of leitmotifs. Hitler used endless repetition, thundering crescendi, and rhythmic speech to mesmerize his audiences. He studied theories of mob control, such as Gustave Le Bon's *Crowd* (1895), and it is clear that he used Le Bon's theory to manipulate and control his audiences. Ernst Hanfstaengel, one of Hitler's political musicians, often played Wagner's music to Hitler on the piano, and he noticed that when he played the *Meistersinger* prelude, one of Hitler's favorites,

. . . whole interweavings of leitmotifs, of embellishments of counterpoint, and musical contrast and arguments, were exactly mirrored in the patterns of his [Hitler's] speeches, which were symphonic in construction and ended in a great climax, like the blare of Wagner's trombones. {35}



Hanfstaengel also referred to Hitler's arm movements while speaking as similar to those of a conductor swinging a baton.

Later, while in Landsberg prison, Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*) to the thunder of Wagner's music played on gramophone records. The paper for *Mein Kampf* was supplied by Winifred Wagner. She believed that Hitler would "pull the sword out of the German oak" and save Germany from Jewish corruption. {36} Thus, Winifred drew this political metaphor from Wagner's *Walkure*, when Siegmund pulls the sword out of the world ash tree. After the war and revelation of Hitler's extermination camps, she maintained that the Holocaust was a lie made up by American Jews. {37}

The influence of Wagner's music upon Hitler cannot be overestimated. For him, they were fantasies to be made real. During the rise of National Socialism, and before Hitler came to power, he predicted the end of the great world conflagration that was to come, and for which he would be responsible.

Hitler hummed *motifs* from Wagner's operas. He seemed to me preoccupied and moody . From having been communicative, he fell suddenly into a dry silence. The political movement was in danger. National Socialism was approaching one of its crises. The Party was in a well-nigh desperate position. But Hitler's every word rang with the firm conviction that he would soon be in power, and be able to lead the German people to a new destiny. We spoke of the result of the war, and the tragical turn of all German victories. "We shall not capitulate -- no, never," Hitler exclaimed. "we may be destroyed, but if we are, we shall drag a world with us -- a world in flames." He hummed a characteristic *motif* from the *Götterdämmerung*. {37b}

Parsifal, the last of Wagner's music dramas, is possibly his most racist opera. Hitler claimed:

"Out of *Parsifal* I have made a religion." [Adolf Hitler] {38}

What did Hitler mean by this provocative statement?

Wagner intended *Parsifal* to be a profound religious parable about how the whole essence of European humanity had been poisoned by alien, inhuman, Jewish values. It is an allegory of the Judaization of Christianity and of Germany -- and of purifying redemption. In place of theological purity, the secularized religion of *Parsifal* preached the new doctrine of racial purity, which was reflected in the moral and indeed religious, purity of Parsifal himself. In Wagner's mind, this redeeming purity was infringed by Jews, just as devils and witches infringed the purity of traditional Christianity. In this scheme, it is axiomatic that compassion and redemption have no application to the inexorably damned Judaized Klingsor and hence the Jews. {39}

Hitler explained his own interpretation



of *Parsifal* to one of his associates in 1934:

Behind the absurd externals of the story, with its Christian embroidery and Good Friday mystification, something altogether different is revealed as the true content of this most profound drama. It is not the Christian religion of compassion that is acclaimed, but pure noble blood . . . The king is suffering from the incurable ailment of corrupted blood. The uninitiated but pure [Parsifal] is tempted to abandon himself in Klingsor's magic garden to the lusts and excesses of corrupt civilization [Kundry] . . . For myself, I have the most intimate familiarity with Wagner's mental processes. At every stage of my life I come back to him . . . If we strip *Parsifal* of every poetic element, we learn from it that selection and renewal are possible only amid the continuous tension of a lasting struggle. {40}

Thus, Hitler clearly understood the racist agenda of *Parsifal*. Only Wagner apologists are left to wear blinders. The subtext of racist metaphors has not diminished in Wagner's operas, so they will continue to exert a subliminal influence. To deny this is akin to the same kind of denial that today's violent TV, movies, and subliminal advertising have no effect on young people.

The word "struggle" (*kampf*) is a code word that appears in the writings of Wagner, his heirs, and Hitler (*Mein Kampf*). It was not an abstract "struggle" against some unknown force, but referred specifically to the struggle against the Jews and other "aliens". Another code word was "Wolf", which referred to the god Wotan in the Ring operas, and to Hitler by Wagner's heirs, and even by Hitler as a reference to himself. Thus, we hear of the "Wolf's Lair" as a reference to Hitler's sanctuary during the war. *Barbarosa* was another code word shared by Wagner and Hitler. This word specified the "struggle" as war and has its root in the word "barbaric" or "barbarian", a metaphor for the proud return of the German people to their barbarous roots, free of conscience, and therefore free to wage war and havoc. *Barbarosa* was the ancient Teuton-hero/warrior, the original ruthless barbarian.

Of course, none of this proves that Wagner "caused" the Holocaust, yet there can be no doubt that he and his music were partly responsible. He wasn't there, but to speculate that he wouldn't have been a staunch Hitler supporter, as were his heirs of the Nazi years, is simply blind denial.

During the years of the Nazi rise to power in Germany, music history began to be rewritten by German musicologists to conform to Nazi political ideology.

Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, and Mahler were vilified and their music lost favor among audiences and performers. At the same time Wagner was elevated to a godlike status and his music was officially sanctioned. Musicologists began to quote from Wagner's racist essays as support for the Nazi agenda purging all Jewish and non-German influences. Since history is written by the victors, if the Nazis had won the war, one can only imagine what music history would be like today. Certainly, it would be a very different tale.

The historic significance of Wagner's racism would be much diminished if it had not been for Hitler and the Nazi Holocaust. Even then it could not be isolated and seen merely as the unfortunate aberration of a composer obsessed with bigotry. Nevertheless, that is how apologists try to excuse Wagner and his music from their consequences. History is rightfully and unavoidably seen through the lens of the present. Thereby, the horrific consequences of Wagner's racist legacy cannot be denied or diminished.

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3. Wagner, *Sämtliche Briefe*, (December 13, 1834) Strobel and Wolf, eds, 1987, 177
4. Wagner, in *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt*, April 18, 1851
5. Rauschning, 137
6. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1962, 305
- 6b. Rauschning, 237.
7. Borchmeyer, Dieter. "The Question of Anti-Semitism" in *Wagner Handbook*, Ulrich Muller & Peter Wapnewski, eds. Harvard, 1992, 183
8. Rose, 71
- 8b. Kubizek, 189
9. Weiner, 123
10. Wagner, C., *Diaries*, October 17, 1882
11. Gobineau, Arthur de. *The Inequality of the Races*, A. Collins, trans, London, 1915
12. Wagner, *Prose Works*, "Know Thyself"
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14. Wagner, *Prose Works* I, "Communication to my Friends", 391
15. Wagner, *Prose Works*, excerpts from "Herodom and Christendom"
16. Wagner, C., *Diaries*, October 11, 1879
17. Wagner, C., *Diaries*, August 14, 1881
18. Wagner, *Prose Works*, "Judaism in Music"
- 18b. Rauschning, 223

19. Wagner, letter to Kietz, December 30, 1851, in *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. Spenser and Millington, 243
20. Weiner, 90
21. Weiner, 65
22. Wagner, G., 239
23. Wagner, G., 256
24. Wagner, letter to Franz Liszt, February 11, 1853
- 24b. Mann, *Pro and Contra Wagner*, trans. London, 1985, 201f, also cited in Rose
25. Wagner, *Selected Letters*, 171
26. Zalampas, 60
- 26b. Waite, 113
27. Wagner, G., 66
28. Kubizek, 98-101
29. Kubizek, 101; Zalampas, 14
30. Rose, 48
31. Wagner, G., 70
32. Wagner, G., 71
33. Kubizek, 195
34. Kubizek, 194
35. Hanfstaengl, 87, 68; see also Zalampas, 42
36. Zalampas, 48
37. Wagner, G., 61
- 37b. Rauschnig, 5; this statement was recorded by Rauschnig as made in 1932, before Hitler came to power.
38. Zalampas, 48
39. Rose, 166
40. Rauschnig, 230

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Before proceeding to a complete descriptive account of the "Lohengrin" story and music I will give a brief summary of the plot and a similar characterization of the score.

Wagner appears to have become so saturated with the subject of his dramas that he transported himself in mind and temperament to the very time in which his scenes are laid. So vividly does he portray the mythological occurrences told in "Lohengrin" that one can almost imagine he had been an eye-witness of them. This capacity of artistic reproduction of a remote period would alone entitle him to rank as a great dramatist. But he has done much more; he has taken unpromising material, which in the original is strung out over a period of years, and, by condensing the action to two days, has converted it into a swiftly moving drama.

The story of "Lohengrin" is briefly as follows: The Hungarians have invaded Germany, and King Henry I visits Antwerp for the purpose of raising a force to combat them. He finds the country in a condition of anarchy. The dukedom is claimed by Frederick, who has married Ortrud, a daughter of the Prince of Friesland. The legitimate heir Godfrey, has mysteriously disappeared, and his sister, Elsa, is charged by Frederick and Ortrud with having done away with him in order that she might obtain the sovereignty. The King summons her before him so that the cause may be tried by the ordeal of single combat between Frederick and a champion who may be willing to appear for Elsa. None of the knights will defend her cause. She then describes a champion whose form has appeared to her in a vision, and she proclaims that he shall be her champion. Her pretence is derided by Frederick and his followers, who think that she is out of her mind; but after a triple summons by the Herald, there is seen in the distance on the river, a boat drawn by a swan, and in it a knight clad in silver armour. He comes to champion Elsa's cause, and before the combat betroths himself to her, but makes a strict condition that she shall never question him as to his name or birthplace, for should she, he would be obliged to depart. She assents to the conditions, and the combat which ensues

results in Frederick's ignominious defeat. Judgment of exile is pronounced on him.

Instead, however, of leaving the country he lingers in the neighborhood of Brabant, plotting with Ortrud how they may compass the ruin of Lohengrin and Elsa. Ortrud by her entreaties moves Elsa to pity, and persuades her to seek a reprieve for Frederick, at the same time, however, using every opportunity to instill doubts in Elsa's mind regarding her champion, and rousing her to such a pitch of nervous curiosity that she is on the point of asking him the forbidden question. After the bridal ceremonies, and in the bridal chamber, the distrust which Ortrud and Frederick have engendered in Elsa's mind so overcomes her faith that she vehemently puts the forbidden question to her champion. Almost at the same moment Frederick and four of his followers force their way into the apartment, intending to take the knight's life. A single blow of his sword, however, stretches Frederick lifeless, and his followers bear his corpse away. Placing Elsa in the charge of her ladies-in-waiting, and ordering them to take her to the presence of the King, he repairs thither himself.

The Brabantian hosts are gathering, and he is expected to lead them to battle, but owing to Elsa's question he is now obliged to disclose who he is and to take his departure. He proclaims that he is Lohengrin, son of Parsifal, Knight of the Holy Grail, and that he can linger no longer in Brabant, but must return to the place of his coming. The swan has once more appeared, drawing the boat down the river, and bidding Elsa farewell he steps into the little shell-like craft. Then Ortrud, with malicious glee, declares that the swan is none other than Elsa's brother, whom she (Ortrud) bewitched into his form, and that he would have been changed back again to his human shape had it not been for Elsa's rashness. But Lohengrin, through his supernatural powers, is able to undo Ortrud's work, and at a word from him the swan disappears and Godfrey stands in its place. A dove now descends, and, hovering in front of the boat, draws it away with Lohengrin,

while Elsa expires in her brother's arms.

Owing to the lyric character of the story upon which "Lohengrin" is based, the opera, while not at all lacking in strong dramatic situations is characterized by a subtler and more subdued melodiousness than "Tannhäuser," is more exquisitely lyrical in fact than any Wagnerian work except "Parsifal."

There are typical themes in the score, but they are hardly handled with the varied effect that entitled them to be called leading motives. On the other hand there are fascinating details of orchestration. These are important because the composer has given significant clang-tints to the music that is heard in connection with the different characters in the story. He uses the brass chiefly to accompany the King, and, of course, the martial choruses; the plaintive, yet spiritual high wood-wind for Elsa; the English horn and somber bass clarinet -- the instrument that had to be bought -- for Ortrud; the violins, especially in high harmonic positions, to indicate the Grail and its representative, for Lohengrin is a Knight of the Holy Grail. Even the keys employed are distinctive. The Herald's trumpeters blow in C and greet the King's arrival in that bright key. F sharp minor is the dark, threatening key that indicates Ortrud's appearance. The key of A, which is the purest for strings and the most ethereal in effect, on account of the greater ease of using "harmonics," announces the approach of Lohengrin and the subtle influence of the Grail.

Moreover Wagner was the first composer to discover that celestial effects of tone-colour are produced by the prolonged notes of the combined violins and wood-wind in the highest positions more truly than by the harp. It is the association of ideas with the Scriptures, wherein the harp frequently is mentioned, because it was the most perfected instrument of the period, that has led other composers to employ it for celestial tone painting. But while no one appreciated the beauty of the harp more than Wagner, or has employed it with finer effect than he, his celestial tone-pictures with high-

violins and wood-wind are distinctly more ecstatic than those of other composers.

The music clothes the drama most admirably. The Vorspiel or Prelude immediately places the listener in the proper mood for the story which is to unfold itself, and for the score, vocal and instrumental, whose strains are to fall upon his ear.

The Prelude is based entirely upon one theme, a beautiful one and expressive of the sanctity of the Grail, of which Lohengrin is one of the knights. Violins and flutes with long-drawn-out, ethereal chords open the Prelude. Then is heard on the violins, so divided as to heighten the delicacy of the effect, the Motive of the Grail, the cup in which the Saviour's blood is supposed to have been caught as it flowed from the wound in His side, while he was on the Cross. No modern book on orchestration is considered complete unless it quotes this passage from the score, which is at once the earliest and, after many years, still the most perfect example of the effect of celestial harmony produced on the high notes of the divided violin choir. This interesting passage in the score is as follows:

[Music excerpt]

Although this is the only motive that occurs in the Prelude, the ear never wearies of it. Its effectiveness is due to the wonderful skill with which Wagner handles the theme, working it up through a superb crescendo to a magnificent climax, with all the splendours of Wagnerian orchestration, after which it dies away again to the ethereal harmonies with which it first greeted the listener.

Act I. The curtain, on rising, discloses a scene of unwonted life on the plain near the River Scheldt, where the stream winds toward Antwerp. On an elevated seat under a huge oak sits King Henry I. On either side are his Saxon and Thuringian nobles. Facing him with the knights of Brabant are Count Frederick of Telramund and his wife, Ortrud, daughter of the Prince of Friesland, of dark, almost forbidding beauty, and

with a treacherous mingling of haughtiness and humility in her carriage.

It is a strange tale the King has just heard fall from Frederick of Telramund's lips. Henry has assembled the Brabantians on the plain by the Scheldt in order to summon them to join his army and aid in checking the threatened invasion of Germany by the Hungarians. But he has found the Brabantians themselves torn by factional strife, some supporting, others opposing Frederick in his claim to the ducal succession of Brabant.

"Sire," says Frederick, when called upon by the King to explain the cause of the discord that has come upon the land, "the late Duke of Brabant upon his death-bed confided to me, his kinsman, the care of his two children, Elsa and her young brother Godfrey, with the right to claim the maid as my wife. But one day Elsa led the boy into the forest and returned alone. From her pale face and faltering lips I judged only too well of what had happened, and I now publicly accuse Elsa of having made away with her brother that she might be sole heir to Brabant and reject my right to her hand. Her hand! Horrified, I shrank from her and took a wife whom I could truly love. Now as nearest kinsman of the duke I claim this land as my own, my wife, too, being of the race that once gave a line of princes to Brabant."

So saying, he leads Ortrud forward, and she, lowering her dark visage, makes a deep obeisance to the King. To the latter but one course is open. A terrible accusation has been uttered, and an appeal must be made to the immediate judgment of God in trial by combat between Frederick and whoever may appear as champion for Elsa. Solemnly the King hangs his shield on the oak, the Saxons and Thuringians thrust the points of their swords into the ground, while the Brabantians lay theirs before them. The royal Herald steps forward. "Elsa, without delay appear!" he calls in a loud voice.

A sudden hush falls upon the scene, as a slender figure robed

in white slowly advances toward the King. It is Elsa. With her fair brow, gentle mien, and timid footsteps it seems impossible that she can be the object of Frederick's dire charge. But there are dark forces conspiring against her, of which none knows save her accuser and the wife he has chosen from the remoter North. In Friesland the weird rites of Odin and the ancient gods still had many secret adherents, Ortrud among them, and it is the hope of this heathenish woman, through the undoing of Elsa, and the accession of Frederick whom she has completely under her influence, to check the spread of the Christian faith toward the North and restore the rites of Odin in Brabant. To this end she is ready to bring all the black magic of which she secretly is mistress into play. What wonder that Elsa, as she encounters her malevolent gaze, lowers her eyes with a shudder!

Up to the moment of Elsa's entrance, the music is harsh and vigorous, reflecting Frederick's excitement as, incited by Ortrud, he brings forward his charge against Elsa. With her appearance a change immediately comes over the music. It is soft, gentle, and plaintive; not, however, entirely hopeless, as if the maiden, being conscious of her innocence, does not despair of her fate.

"Elsa," gently asks the King, "whom name you as your champion?" She answers as if in a trance; and it is at this point that the music of "Elsa's Dream" is heard. In the course of this, violins whisper the Grail Motive and in dreamy rapture Elsa sings, "I see, in splendour shining, a knight of glorious mien. His eyes rest upon me with tranquil gaze. He stands amid clouds beside a house of gold, and resting on his sword. Heaven has sent him to save me. He shall my champion be!"

The men regard each other in wonder. But a sneer curls around Ortrud's lips, and Frederick again proclaims his readiness to prove his accusation in trial by combat for life and death.

"Elsa," the King asks once more, "whom have you chosen as

your champion?"

"Him whom Heaven shall send me; and to him, whatever he shall ask of me, I freely will give, e'en though it be myself as bride!" Again there is heard the lovely, broad and flowing melody of which I have already spoken and which may be designated as the ELSA MOTIVE.

[Music excerpt]

[Music excerpt]

The Herald now stations his trumpeters at the corners of the plain and bids them blow a blast toward the four points of the compass. When the last echo has died away he calls aloud:

"He who in right of Heaven comes here to fight for Elsa of Brabant, let him step forth!"

The deep silence that follows is broken by Frederick's voice. "No one appears to repel my charge. 'Tis proven."

"My King," implores Elsa, whose growing agitation is watched by Ortrud with a malevolent smile, "my champion bides afar. He has not yet heard the summons. I pray you let it go forth once more."

Again the trumpeters blow toward the four points of the compass, again the Herald cries his call, again there is the fateful silence. "The Heavens are silent. She is doomed," murmured the men. Then Elsa throws herself upon her knees and raises her eyes in prayer. Suddenly there is a commotion among the men nearest the river bank.

"A wonder!" they cry. "A swan! A swan -- drawing a boat by a golden chain! In the boat stands a knight! See, it approaches! His armour is so bright it blinds our eyes! A wonder! A wonder!"

There is a rush toward the bank and a great shout of acclaim, as the swan with a graceful sweep rounds a bend in the river and brings the shell-like boat, in which stands a knight in dazzling armour and of noble mien, up to the shore. Not daring to trust her senses and turn to behold the wondrous spectacle, Elsa gazes in rapture heavenward, while Ortrud and Telramund, their fell intrigue suddenly halted by a marvel that surpasses their comprehension, regard each other with mingled amazement and alarm.

A strange feeling of awe overcomes the assembly, and the tumult with which the advent of the knight has been hailed dies away to breathless silence, as he extends his hand and in tender accents bids farewell to the swan, which gently inclines its head and then glides away with the boat, vanishing as it had come. There is a chorus, in which, in half-hushed voices, the crowd gives expression to the mystery of the scene. Then the men fall back and the Knight of the Swan, for a silver swan surmounts his helmet and is blazoned upon his shield, having made due obeisance to the King, advances to where Elsa stands and, resting his eyes upon her pure and radiant beauty, questions her.

"Elsa, if I become your champion and right the foul wrong that is sought to be put upon you, will you confide your future to me; will you become my bride?"

"My guardian, my defender!" she exclaims ecstatically. "All that I have, all that I am, is yours!"

"Elsa," he says slowly, as if wishing her to weigh every word, "If I champion your cause and take you to wife, there is one promise I must exact: Never must you ask me whence I come or what my name."

"I promise," she answers, serenely meeting his warning look. He repeats the warning and again she promises to observe it.

"Elsa, I love you!" he exclaims, as he clasps her in his arms.

Then addressing the King he proclaims his readiness to defend her innocence in trial by combat.

In this scene occurs one of the significant themes of the opera, the MOTIVE OF WARNING -- for it is Elsa's disregard of it and the breaking of her promise that brings her happiness to an end.

[Music excerpt]

Three Saxons for the Knight and three Brabantians for Frederick solemnly pace off the circle within which the combatants are to fight. The King, drawing his sword, strikes three resounding blows with it upon his shield. At the first stroke the Knight and Frederick take their positions. At the second they draw their swords. At the third they advance to the encounter. Frederick is no coward. His willingness to meet the Knight whose coming had been so strange proves that. But his blows are skillfully warded off until the Swan Knight, finding an opening, fells him with a powerful stroke. Frederick's life is forfeited, but his conqueror, perchance knowing that he has been naught but a tool in the hands of a woman leagued with the powers of evil, spares it and bids his fallen foe rise. The King leads Elsa to the victor, while all hail him as her deliverer and betrothed.

The scenes here described are most stirring. Before the combat begins, the King intones a prayer, in which first the principals and then the chorus join with noble effect, while the music of rejoicing over the Knight's victory has an irresistible onswEEP.

Act II. That night in the fortress of Antwerp, the palace where abide the knights is brilliantly illuminated and sounds of revelry issue from it, and lights shine from the kemenate, where Elsa's maids-in-waiting are preparing her for the bridal on the morrow. But in the shadow of the walls sit two figures, a man and a woman; the man, his head bowed in despair, the woman looking vindictively toward the palace. They are

Frederick and Ortrud, who have been condemned to banishment, he utterly dejected, she still trusting in the power of her heathenish gods. To her the Swan Knight's chivalrous forbearance in sparing Frederick's life has seemed weak instead of noble, and Elsa she regards as an insipid dreamer and easy victim. Not knowing that Ortrud still darkly schemes to ruin Elsa and restore him to power, Frederick denounces her in an outburst of rage and despair.

As another burst of revelry, another flash of light, causes Frederick to bow his head in deeper gloom, Ortrud begins to unfold her plot to him. How long will a woman like Elsa -- as sweet as she is beautiful, but also as weak -- be able to restrain herself from asking the forbidden question? Once her suspicion aroused that the Knight is concealing from her something in his past life, growing jealousy will impel her first to seek to coax from him, then to demand of him his name and lineage. Let Frederick conceal himself within the minster, and when the bridal procession reaches the steps, come forth and, accusing the Knight of treachery and deceit, demand that he be compelled to disclose his name and origin. He will refuse, and thus, even before Elsa enters the minster, she will begin to be beset by doubts. She herself meanwhile will seek to enter the kemenate and play upon her credulousness. "She is for me; her champion is for you. Soon the daughter of Odin will teach you all the joys of vengeance!" is Ortrud's sinister exclamation as she finishes.

Indeed it seems as if Fate were playing into her hand. For at that very moment Elsa, all clad in white, comes out upon the balcony of the kemenate and, sighing with happiness, breathes out upon the night air her rapture at the thought of what bliss the coming day has in store for her. As she lets her gaze rest on the calm night she hears a piteous voice calling her name, and looking down sees Ortrud, her hands raised in supplication to her. Moved by the spectacle of one but a short time before so proud and now apparently in such utter dejection, the guileless maid descends and, herself opening the door of the kemenate, hastens to Ortrud, raises her to her feet,

and gently leads her in, while, hidden in the shadows, Frederick of Telramund bides his time for action. Thus within and without, mischief is plotting for the unsuspecting Elsa.

These episodes, following the appearance of Elsa upon the balcony, are known as the "Balcony Scene." It opens with the exquisite melody which Elsa breathes upon the zephyrs of the night in gratitude to heaven for the champion sent to her defence. Then, when in pity she has hastened down to Ortrud, the latter pours doubts regarding her champion into Elsa's mind. Who is he? Whence came he? May he not as unexpectedly depart? The whole closes with a beautiful duet, which is repeated by the orchestra, as Ortrud is conducted by Elsa into the apartment.

It is early morn. People begin to gather in the open place before the minster and, by the time the sun is high, the space is crowded with folk eager to view the bridal procession. They sing a fine and spirited chorus.

At the appointed hour four pages come out upon the balcony of the kemenate and cry out:

"Make way, our Lady Elsa comes!" Descending, they clear a path through the crowd to the steps of the minster. A long train of richly clad women emerges upon the balcony, slowly comes down the steps and, proceeding past the palace, winds toward the minster. At that moment a great shout, "Hail! Elsa of Brabant!" goes up, as the bride herself appears followed by her ladies-in-waiting. For the moment Ortrud's presence in the train is unnoticed, but as Elsa approaches the minster, Frederick's wife suddenly throws herself in her path.

"Back, Elsa!" she cries. "I am not a menial, born to follow you! Although your Knight has overthrown my husband, you cannot boast of who he is -- his very name, the place whence he came, are unknown. Strong must be his motives to forbid you to question him. To what foul disgrace would he be brought were he compelled to answer!"

Fortunately the King, the bridegroom, and the nobles approaching from the palace, Elsa shrinks from Ortrud to her champion's side and hides her face against his breast. At that moment Frederick of Telramund, taking his cue from Ortrud, comes out upon the minster steps and repeats his wife's accusation. Then, profiting by the confusion, he slips away in the crowd. The insidious poison, however, has already begun to take effect. For even as the King taking the Knight on his right and Elsa on his left conducts them up the minster steps, the trembling bride catches sight of Ortrud whose hand is raised in threat and warning; and it is clinging to her champion, in love indeed but love mingled with doubt and fear, that she passes through the portal, and into the edifice.

These are crucial scenes. The procession to the minster, often known as the bridal procession, must not be confused with the "Bridal Chorus." It is familiar music, however, because at wedding it often is played softly as a musical background to the ceremony.

Act III. The wedding festivities are described in the brilliant "Introduction to Act III." This is followed in the opera by the "Bridal Chorus," which, wherever heard-on stage or in church-falls with renewed freshness and significance upon the ear. In this scene the Knight and Elsa are conducted to the bridal chamber in the castle. From the right enter Elsa's ladies-in-waiting leading the bride; from the left the King and nobles leading the Knight. Preceding both trains are pages bearing lights; and voices chant the bridal chorus. The King ceremoniously embraces the couple and then the procession makes it way out, until, as the last strains of the chorus die away, Elsa and her champion are for the first time alone.

It should be a moment of supreme happiness for both, and indeed, Elsa exclaims as her bridegroom takes her to his arms, that words cannot give expression to all its hidden sweetness. Yet, when he tenderly breathes her name, it serves only to remind her that she cannot respond by uttering his. "How

sweetly sounds my name when spoken by you, while I, alas, cannot reply with yours. Surely, some day, you will tell me, all in secret, and I shall be able to whisper it when none but you is near!"

In her words the Knight perceives but too clearly the seeds of the fatal mistrust sown by Ortrud and Frederick. Gently he leaves her side and throwing open the casement, points to the moonlit landscape where the river winds its course along the plain. The same subtle magic that can conjure up this scene from the night has brought him to her, made him love her, and give unshrinking credence to her vow never to question his name or origin. Will she now wantonly destroy the wondrous spell of moonlight and love?

But still Elsa urges him. "Let me be flattered by your trust and confidence. Your secret will be safe in my heart. No threats, not even of death, shall tear it from my lips. Tell me who you are and whence you come!"

"Elsa!" he cries, "come to my heart. Let me feel that happiness is mine at last. Let your love and confidence compensate me for what I have left behind me. Cast dark suspicion aside. For know, I came not hither from night and grieving but from the abode of light and noble pleasures."

But his words have the very opposite effect of what he had hoped for. "Heaven help me!" exclaims Elsa. "What must I hear! Already you are beginning to look back with longing to the joys you have given up for me. Some day you will leave me to sorrow and regret. I have no magic spells wherewith to hold you. Ah!" -- and now she cries out like one distracted and with eyes straining at distance -- "See! -- the swan! -- I see him floating on the waters yonder! You summon him, embark! -- Love -- madness -- whatever it may be -- your name declare, your lineage and your home!"

Hardly have these mad words been spoken by her when, as she stands before her husband of a few hours, she sees

something that with a sudden shock brings her to her senses. Rushing to the divan where the pages laid the Knight's sword, she seizes it and thrusts it into his hand, and he, turning to discover what peril threatens, sees Frederick, followed by four Brabantian nobles, burst into the room. With one stroke he lays the leader lifeless, and the others, seeing him fall, go down on their knees in token of submission. At a sign from the Knight they arise and, lifting Frederick's body, bear it away. Then the Knight summons Elsa's ladies-in-waiting and bids them prepare her in her richest garments to meet him before the King. "There I will make fitting answer to her questions, tell her my name, my rank, and whence I come."

Sadly he watches her being led away, while she, no longer the happy bride, but the picture of utter dejection, turns and raises her hands to him in supplication as though she would still in implore him to undo the ruin her lack of faith in him has wrought.

Some of the most beautiful as well as some of the most dramatic music of the score occurs in these scenes.

The love duet is exquisite -- one of the sweetest and tenderest passages of which the lyric stage can boast. A very beautiful musical episode is that in which the Knight, pointing through the open casement to the flowery close below, softly illuminated by the moon, sings to an accompaniment of what might be called musical moonbeams, "Say, dost thou breathe the incense sweet of flowers?" but when, in spite of the tender warning which he conveys to her, she begins questioning him, he turns toward her and in a passionate musical phrase begs her to trust him and abide with him in loving faith. Her dread that the memory of the delightful place from which he has come will wean him from her; the wild vision in which she imagines she sees the swan approaching to bear him away from her, and when she puts to him the forbidden questions, are details expressed with wonderful vividness in the music.

After the attack by Frederick and his death, there is a

dramatic silence during which Elsa sinks on her husband's breast and faints. When I say silence I do not mean that there is a total cessation of sound, for silence can be more impressively expressed in music than by actual silence itself. It is done by Wagner in this case by long drawn-out chords followed by faint taps on the tympani. When the Knight bends down to Elsa, raises her, and gently places her on a couch, echoes of the love duet add to the mournfulness of the music. The scene closes with the Motive of Warning, which resounds with dread meaning.

A quick change of scene should be made at this point in the performance of the opera, but as a rule the change takes so long that the third act is virtually given in two acts.

It is on the banks of the Scheldt, the very spot where he had disembarked, that the Knight elects to make reply to Elsa's questions. There the King, the nobles, and the Brabantians, whom he was to lead, are awaiting him to take command, and as their leader they hail him when he appears. This scene, "Promise of Victory," is in the form of a brilliant march and chorus, during which the Counts of Brabant, followed by their vassals, enter on horseback from various directions. In the average performance of the opera, however, much of it is sacrificed in order to shorten the representation.

The Knight answers their hail by telling them that he has come to bid them farewell, that Elsa has been lured to break her vow and ask the forbidden questions which he now is there to answer. From distant lands he came, from Montsalvat, where stands the temple of the Holy Grail, his father, Percival, its King, and he, Lohengrin, its Knight. And now, his name and lineage known, he must return, for the Grail gives strength to its knights to right wrong and protect the innocent only so long as the secret of their power remains unrevealed.

Even while he speaks the swan is seen floating down the river. Sadly Lohengrin bids Elsa farewell. Sadly all, save one, look

on. For Ortrud, who now pushes her way through the spectators, it is a moment of triumph.

"Depart in all your glory," she calls out. "The swan that draws you away is none other than Elsa's brother Godfrey, changed by my magic into his present form. Had she kept her vow, had you been allowed to tarry, you would have freed him from my spell. The ancient gods, whom faithfully I serve, thus punish human faithlessness!"

By the river bank Lohengrin falls upon his knees and prays in silence. Suddenly a white dove descends over the boat. Rising, Lohengrin loosens the golden chain by which the swan is attached to the boat; the swan vanishes; in its place Godfrey stands upon the bank, and Lohengrin, entering the boat, is drawn away by the dove. At sight of the young Duke, Ortrud falls with a shriek, while the Brabantian nobles kneel before him as he advances and makes obeisance to the King. Elsa gazes on him in rapture until, mindful of her own sorrow, as the boat in which Lohengrin stands vanishes around the upper bend of the river, she cries out, "My husband! My husband!" and falls back in death in her brother's arms.

Lohengrin's narrative of his origin is beautifully set to music familiar from the Prelude; but when he proclaims his name we hear the same measures which Elsa sang in the second part of her dream in the first act. Very beautiful and tender is the music which he sings when he hands Elsa his horn, his sword, and his ring to give to her brother, should he return, and also his greeting to the swan when it comes to bear him back. The work is brought to a close with a repetition of the music of the second portion of Elsa's dream followed by a superb climax with the Motive of the Grail.