

# Wagner and Nietzsche

**'He wounded me who made me awake'**

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## Introduction

Why should we be interested in the relationship between Richard Wagner and a young academic, Friedrich Nietzsche? One answer would be 'Because it's a classic story of a friendship that ended in bitter enmity'. But apart from a compelling narrative, there are more serious reasons to pay attention to the Wagner/Nietzsche relationship. The years when the two men were closest was 1868 - 1876. These were the years when Wagner was completing the music of *The Ring* and preparing for the first Festival at Bayreuth. During these momentous years in the composer's life, Nietzsche was a close associate of Wagner's, his confidante in many hours of conversation and an ardent advocate of Wagner's genius.



The relationship is also of interest because Nietzsche became one of the most original thinkers of the 19th century and a huge influence on many intellectual trends in the twentieth century. Nietzsche famously declared that 'God is Dead' and then attempted the huge task of the 'revaluation of all values'. Wagner was a significant influence on the young Nietzsche and although he escaped from the tutelage of Wagner, the composer continued to influence his thought and writings right up to his collapse in 1889.

## Reputations

By the time of Wagner's death, the two men had separated personally and philosophically, yet they were later to be linked in ways they would never have anticipated. The link was that both were adopted by the Third Reich - Wagner because of his anti-Semitism and his nationalism and Nietzsche because of his ideas about the *ubermensch* or 'superman' - though he never intended the concept to be racially based - and 'the will to power'. Because of their posthumous association with the Nazis, both men have been much maligned and, by others, hero worshipped.

Secondly, the reputations and the immediate legacy of both men were closely controlled and falsified. Cosima Wagner jealously guarded and limited access to Wagner's estate. While Cosima was alive, no researcher who might speak ill of the master was given access to Wagner's papers. *Mein Lieben*, for example, which Wagner had begun dictating to Cosima for Ludwig II in 1860, had only a limited circulation and even those copies were retrieved by Cosima and burned. It was only published for the public without the cuts imposed by Cosima in 1963.

In Nietzsche's case it was his sister Elisabeth Foerster-Nietzsche who published, amended and falsified Nietzsche's writings. Nietzsche disagreed violently with his sister, especially when she married an anti-semite Bernhard Foerster, and the couple went to Paraguay to start a supposedly racially pure Teutonic colony. But when Nietzsche became a helpless invalid, his sister acquired exclusive rights to all his literary work and was able to take advantage of his growing reputation to publish severely edited versions of his writing which fitted her limited and distorted understanding of his philosophy.

Though Cosima and Elizabeth are both culpable of distorting Wagner's and Nietzsche's reputations, neither can be held responsible for the way the Nazis misrepresented both men. This required a far greater level of deliberate falsification and myopic misunderstanding than even Cosima and Elizabeth achieved.



## Who was this young man Professor Nietzsche?

We begin this story at the obvious place, where Friedrich Nietzsche was born, on October 15th 1844 in Rocken, Saxony. So he was just 24 when he met Wagner in 1868 (who was 55 at the time).



Nietzsche's father, a Lutheran pastor, died when he was only 36 and Friedrich was just five years old. The pastor's fatal illness was described as 'softening of the brain'. Six months later Friedrich's younger brother, Joseph, died before he reached his second birthday.

Nietzsche had a tough, puritanical and academic education. He was precocious, brilliant and hard-working and gained a place at Pforta, a high status Lutheran secondary school.

He was a good musician as well as a classical scholar and in 1860, while still at school, his friend Krug bought a copy of the vocal score of *Tristan und Isolde*. This made a huge impact on him.

Later in 1888, looking back on this key moment in his life, he wrote:

'the moment there was such a thing as a piano reduction of *Tristan* (my compliments Herr von Bulow) I was a Wagnerite.' *Ecce Homo* (Nietzsche, 1979 (1906))

From 1864, he studied philology at Bonn then at Leipzig under Professor Ritschl. While at university, he rejected the Christianity of his upbringing and abandoned the idea of becoming a pastor.

His studies were interrupted by a year's military service, The young Nietzsche was an energetic horse rider and swordsman, but he suffered a riding accident and was discharged from the military.

In 1865, at age 21, he became a devoted disciple of Schopenhauer, who had died only five years earlier. As Nietzsche commented ironically,

'I was perhaps the only person in Germany who loved these two (Wagner and Schopenhauer) with equal ardour.' (Hollinrake, 1982, p71)

## The First Meeting - 8th November 1868

In July 1868 Nietzsche saw a production of Tannhauser and on 28th October 1868 he heard, for the first time, an orchestral performance of the Tristan and Mastersinger Preludes (Hollingdale, 2001, p39). He wrote to his friend Rhode,

'I find it impossible to keep a critically cool head where this music is concerned, I am quivering in every fibre.'

Then, just ten days later, it happened that Wagner was staying incognito with his sister Otilie who was married to a Leipzig academic Hermann Brockhaus. Frau Ritschl, wife to Nietzsche's tutor and mentor, was a friend of Otilie, and she mentioned that a student of her husband's admired Wagner's music and so Wagner asked to meet him.

We know the details of what happened because Nietzsche described the meeting in a letter to his friend Rohde, (Leipzig, Nov, 9th, 1868 in (Clive, 1965, p78)

Nietzsche had returned to Leipzig after a spell of military service and received the message 'If you want to meet Richard Wagner, come to the Theatre Cafe at 3.45'. He missed Wagner on that occasion, but was invited back the following day a Sunday.

Assuming it was a formal occasion, Nietzsche decided to wear the evening dress due to be delivered by his tailor. He had to wait till 6.30pm for an old man to deliver the suit. The man wanted money on receipt of the goods, but Nietzsche said he would only pay the tailor directly.

There ensued an unseemly tussle over the package, which the old man won, leaving Nietzsche empty-handed. Nietzsche rushed off late and flustered, but discovered that it was an informal occasion and he was the only guest. Wagner received him warmly and proceeded to tell stories of his student days, read from 'Mein Leiben', played extracts from Meistersinger singing all the roles himself, and expressed his admiration for Schopenhauer.

At this time it would have been common for people to become acquainted with music through piano reductions. Let us try to imagine Nietzsche hearing a piano version of Maestersinger.

**Music extract 1:** Piano reduction. Dag Achatz and YukieNagai (1998) : Die Meistersinger Prelude for two pianos

## Nietzsche's account of the meeting

The young Nietzsche was bowled over - both by Wagner's personality and also his love for the philosopher Schopenhauer.

In the letter to Rhode he wrote:

'He is a marvellously lively and animated man who speaks very fast, is very witty and makes such a private party get-together very cheerful. I had a longish talk with him about Schopenhauer; and you imagine what a joy it was for me to hear him speak of

him with quite indescribable warmth, saying how much he owed to him and how he was the only philosopher who understood music.' (Hollingdale,2001, p40)

Nietzsche was invited to visit Tribschen to play music and talk philosophy.

Much later in 1888, Nietzsche wrote:

'My first contact with Wagner was also the first time in my life I ever drew a deep breath: I felt, I revered him as a being from outside, as the opposite, the incarnate protest against all 'German virtues'.... Wagner was a revolutionary - he fled from the Germans. The German is good natured - Wagner was by no means good natured.' (Ecce Homo,1906).

### First visit to Tribschen 15 May 1869

At this time Wagner was in exile, pursuing an adulterous relationship with Cosima von Bulow, daughter of Liszt, and wife of a close colleague of Wagner's, Hans von Bulow. In November 1868, she had only just left von Bulow and settled with the children at Tribschen, racked with guilt but devoted to her 'master'.



As for the young Nietzsche, just after meeting Wagner he was appointed Professor at Basel - exceptionally without a doctorate - so he found himself in the vicinity of Tribschen where Richard and Cosima were living.

He called in unannounced when he was walking. He reports that he heard Wagner composing music: 'I stood still for a long time in front of the house and heard a painful chord repeated constantly' (Hayman, 1980, p107).

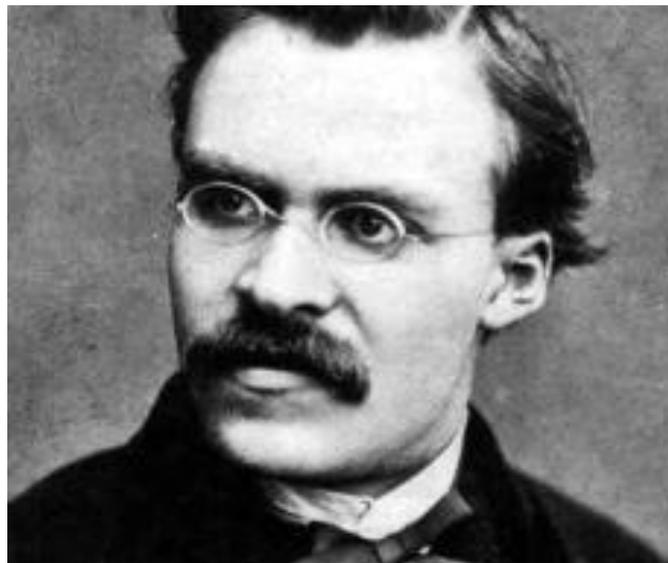
He was later able to identify the music as the third act of Siegfried, Brunnhilde's awakening, when she realises that in finding love she is also losing her status as a god and sings 'He wounded me who made me awake'. (The sub-title of this talk because Wagner also both wounded and awakened Nietzsche).

**Music extract 2:** Siegfried Act 3 from 'ich bin ohne und Schirm' (I have no defence, no shield). Astrid Varnay and Bernd Aldenhoff, in Bayreuth's 1961 Siegfried conducted by Rudolf Kempe.

Wagner could not be disturbed but the young professor was invited back. (Cosima in her diaries always refers to him as Professor Nietzsche).

### **Glorious Days at Tribschen**

Nietzsche was welcomed by both Richard Wagner and Cosima von Bulow. He returned 23 times to Tribschen. What was it that drew him back time and time again? Was Wagner a surrogate father to the young Professor? Was Nietzsche a little bit in love with Cosima (who was much closer to him in age)? Perhaps, but intellectually it was their mutual passion for Schopenhauer which brought them together.



Nietzsche's ambitions to be a composer also, in Nietzsche's mind but probably not in Wagner's, also gave them something in common.

A week after his first visit, on Wagner's birthday (May 22nd) he wrote the first of many letters and signed himself 'your most faithful and devoted follower and admirer.' (Hollingdale, 2001 (1965)) p57

Nietzsche's enthusiasm for Wagner can be gauged by this letter to Rhode, written four weeks after meeting him:

Wagner, as I know him, is a living exemplar of what Schopenhauer calls a genius...

And in a letter to Rhode on 4th Aug he wrote:

'There dwell in him such uncompromising idealism and deep and affecting humanity'

On 6th June 1870 while Nietzsche was staying at Tribschen, Siegfried was born, a momentous day in the life of Richard and Cosima, shared with the young Professor.

## War and Nationalism

In 1870 war broke out between Prussia and France.

Nietzsche felt duty bound to contribute to the war effort and so on August 11th he enlisted and became a medical orderly. He witnessed at first hand the horrors of war and shared the appalling conditions suffered by the troops. As a result he contracted dysentery and diphtheria and was invalidated from army by September 4th. These illnesses contributed to his continuing health problems in subsequent years.



By September 19<sup>th</sup> he was back at Tribschen but there was some tension. There was one incident, a row about vegetarianism, recorded in Cosima's diaries, which perhaps foreshadows later conflicts. Wagner was quick to lose his temper with people who disagreed with him but the young professor held his ground. (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978, p.148)

Cosima writes, on Sep 19th 1869,

Nietzsche 'vexes R very much with an oath he has sworn not to eat meat, but only vegetables. R. considers this nonsense, arrogance as well. When Prof. Nietzsche says it is morally important not to eat animals etc. R replies our whole existence is a compromise, which we can only expiate by doing some good. One cannot do that by just drinking milk. When, the Prof admits R. is right, yet nevertheless sticks to his abstinence, R. becomes angry.

(Wagner recalled the incident much later on Jan 15, 1882 'He came to our house, ate nothing, said I'm vegetarian' and I said to him 'You are an ass'.)

During the Franco-Prussian War, Richard and Cosima became very nationalistic and anti-French. Even in the presence of French guests, Judith Gautier and her husband Catulle Mendès, Wagner berated the French and declared that Paris should be burned to the ground!

We get a hint of Nietzsche's reticence about the war from Cosima's comment that she tried to arouse his enthusiasm for Prussia's right to represent Germany.

Ten years later Nietzsche made clear his dislike of nationalism in his work 'The Gay Science'. He calls nationalism 'falsified racial self-admiration and lewdness'. He describes himself as 'homeless' and 'mixed race' but 'we are good Europeans!' (Nietzsche, 2006 (1882))section 377.

'we are not nearly "German" (in the sense in which this word is used at present) to advocate nationalism and race-hatred, or take delight in the national heart-itch and blood poisoning on account of which the nations of Europe are at present bounded off and secluded from one another as if by quarantines. We are too unprejudiced for that, too perverse, too fastidious; also too well-informed, and too much 'travelled'.

We homeless ones are too diverse and mixed in race and descent for 'modern men' and are consequently little tempted to participate in the falsified racial self-admiration and lewdness which at present display themselves in Germany.....We are good Europeans! (Nietzsche, 2006 (1882) section 377).

In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) he mocks 'fatherlandishness' and sees nationalism as a form of insanity.

### **Siegfried Idyll Dawn 25<sup>th</sup> Dec 1870**



By late 1870, after his return from the war, Nietzsche had become a trusted friend of Richard and Cosima Wagner (they had married on August 25th), and was given the task of negotiating with the publisher of Wagner's *Life* which he had been dictating to Cosima (at the request of the King Ludwig II of Bavaria).

Their common debt to Schopenhauer undoubtedly brought them closer. Nietzsche, at this time, was working on drafts that became *The Birth of Tragedy*, his most Schopenhaurian work, while Wagner had published *Beethoven* in September, which relied heavily on Schopenhaurian ideas.

Nietzsche's comment on *Beethoven*, on 10<sup>th</sup> Nov, was that 'I fear that contemporary aestheticians will regard you as a somnambulist whom it would be not only inadvisable, but positively dangerous and even impossible to follow'. Wagner took this as a less than 100% endorsement and took serious offence as Cosima records (14th Nov, 1870).

Yet in a letter to his friend Erwin Rohde Nietzsche says, 'Wagner's new book says much of what I want of the future'. When Wagner writes in *Beethoven* that the 'breaking down of all boundaries of appearance must necessarily evoke in the inspired musician an incomparable sense of rapture' (Wagner, 1870 (2014),p.61) we can see a glimpse of the Dionysian as described in *Birth of Tragedy*.

An indication of how close Nietzsche was to Richard and Cosima, was that on the 24th December 1870 he was summoned to Hotel du Lac in Lucerne for secret rehearsal of *Siegfried's Idyll*.

Christmas morning, at 7.30 am, Wagner conducted the piece for Cosima's 33rd birthday. Nietzsche was the only guest.

**Music Extract 3: Clip** from Tony Palmer's film *Siegfried's Idyll*





### ***From Cosima's Diary for 1871***

Jan 5<sup>th</sup> 1871 R. said of Nietzsche, 'He is the only living person, apart from Constantin Frantz, who has provided me with something, a positive enrichment of my outlook.' (All quotes from (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978)

April 5<sup>th</sup> 1871 'Prof Nietzsche reads to me; in it one sees a gifted man imbued with R's ideas in his own way.'



May 22<sup>nd</sup> Prof Nietzsche tells me that he intends to found a periodical under R.'s auspices.

June 25th 'Read Prof Nietzsche's pamphlet with great interest, He is certainly the most outstanding of our friends.'

Aug 3<sup>rd</sup> 1871 'Prof Nietzsche is certainly the most gifted of our young friends, but a not quite natural reserve makes his behaviour in many respects most displeasing. It is as if he was trying to resist the overwhelming effect of Wagner's personality.'

### **Letter from Richard Wagner to Friederich Nietzsche**

Evidence of the high regard in which Wagner held the young Nietzsche is revealed in a letter dated 25th June 1872:

'Strictly speaking you are the only real gain that life has brought me, and, second only to my wife in that respect.'

### **Influence on composition of Gotterdammerung?**

The influence of Wagner on Nietzsche at this time is apparent, but is there any evidence that Nietzsche influenced Wagner who was composing Gotterdammerung at the time?

Hollinrake points out that at Christmas 1869 Nietzsche stayed ten days at Tribschen and comments: 'It looks as if the talks with Nietzsche had proved exceptionally rewarding, at least helping Wagner to clarify his thoughts and to cast them into a final form' (Hollinrake, p63).

This suggestion receives some confirmation from a letter to Nietzsche from Cosima (5th Feb 1870)

'The manuscripts you sent and our perusal thereof have brought a change of mood to Tribschen. We were so downhearted we couldn't even read in the evening: our pilgrimage, thanks to you, to the most beautiful era of humanity had such a beneficial effect on us that the next morning the Master, to the accompaniment of the boldest and merriest violin figure, had his Siegfried blow a cheerful theme on the Rhine, and the Rhine maidens hearing it, joyfully and hopefully sounded out their motif, broad and strong.' in (Fischer-Dieskau, 1974) p43 - 44

**Music Extract 4.** Siegfried's Rhine Journey, *Gotterdammerung*: Solti Vienna Philharmonic, recorded 1964, Decca

In June 1871 Wagner received Nietzsche's pamphlet on Greek tragedy while he was working on the composition sketch for *Gotterdammerung* Act 2.

More evidence of the disciple's commitment to the Wagnerian cause was that in 1871 Nietzsche transcribed in longhand the whole of the amended Siegfried's Tod (now *Gotterdammerung*).

Jan 1872 Composition of Act III of *Gotterdammerung* including the revision of the ending.

All this time Nietzsche was working on the final version of the *Birth of Tragedy* which he later claimed (in 1885) had 'inspired wonderful things in *Gotterdammerung*'.

11 April Nietzsche speaks of a projected lecture tour on the subject of the Ring.

## **Birth of Tragedy**

In Tribschen, Wagner had a painting Genelli's *Bachus among the Muses*. Perhaps Richard and Friederich had discussed this image of the Dionysian. At any rate the Dionysian ideal features strongly Nietzsche's first book '*The Birth of Tragedy*'.



I won't attempt a full summary of the *Birth of Tragedy*, except to say it suggests that Greek tragedy was composed of two elements the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Dionysus represents wild, orgiastic, narcotic (drunken) impulses while Apollo represents form, order and structure. Tragedy, he says, requires both elements.

He also asserts that the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon. When dedicating the book to Wagner, he says: ' I am convinced that art represents the highest task and the truly metaphysical activity of this life'.

He explicitly references Schopenhauer on the superiority of music over all other arts because it gives expression to the deepest metaphysical reality.

The latter part of the book is devoted to showing that Wagner's compositions are providing a rebirth of music which will be the salvation of current civilisation that has for too long has been under the influence of Socratic rationality and instrumentalism. Abstraction and logic are to be replaced by Dionysian myth which Wagner has given form in music

"Believe with me in Dionysian life and the rebirth of tragedy. The age of the Socratic man is over" .

In a departure from the cool, objective standards expected in academic publications, Nietzsche applauds the emotional force of *Tristan and Isolde* with hyperbolic rhetoric, which pleased Wagner but created a strong backlash against the book from his academic colleagues.

In Jan 1872 Nietzsche wrote in the Preface addressed to Wagner. 'I feel with pride that I have now been marked out and that I shall always be associated with you'. One author has said, 'It would certainly be difficult to imagine a more enthusiastic panegyric to the great maestro than Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*.(Lavrín, 2010).

## The Aftermath of Birth of Tragedy

The reception of *Birth of Tragedy* was a disaster for the young professor. It was seen as unscholarly, the work of a dilettante, with gross errors of fact, but the Wagner's read the book with great excitement. Wagner proclaimed, 'I have never read anything more beautiful than your book' and 'This is the book I have been longing for' Wagner, (Jan 1872).

But *Birth of Tragedy* effectively ruined Nietzsche's academic reputation. He wrote to Cosima, 'I have no students', 'I have suddenly got such a bad name among my professional colleagues' (Nov 1872). Cosima writes 'every one of his students has stayed away! So he has been excommunicated on account of his book; The news affects us very deeply' (Cosima's Diaries Nov 9 1872).

When Otilie (Wagner's sister and married to the academic Brockhaus) visits, Cosima writes, 'N has jeopardised his whole career for the sake of her brother. It is so insensitive of her to pass on to us the contemptuous and libelous opinions of the top academics (Cosima, Sep 1873).

Otilie Wagner



By 1886 when he wrote a new introduction to the book, Nietzsche, who had radically changed his view of Schopenhauer, was to say that the book was 'infected with the cadaverous perfume of Schopenhauer'.

## Goodbye to Tribschen

As well as suffering the repercussions of the publication of *Birth of Tragedy*, 1872 was a critical year in Nietzsche's relationship with Wagner. We begin to see evidence of an ambivalence which only slowly emerged. In early 1872 Nietzsche became seriously ill again, nevertheless, he paid a surprise visit to Tribschen in January.

Nietzsche was hurt when Wagner walked out abruptly while he and Cosima were playing his own composition *Eine Sylvesternacht*. Richter saw in this incident the seed which later led to the breakdown in the relationship. Yet in a letter to Rohde on 28 January 1872, Nietzsche writes, 'I have formed an alliance with Wagner. You can't imagine how close we are now and how our plans coincide.' He even contemplates giving up his career and devoting himself to Wagner.

But in this period, Wagner purchased land for his house, Wahnfried, and for the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth. On April 22 1872 the Tribschen years came to definitive end when Richard and Cosima left for Bayreuth. Nietzsche never took to Bayreuth and Wahnfried as he had to Tribschen and visited far less often.

Nietzsche's first visit to Bayreuth was on the occasion of the laying of the Foundation Stone in May 1872 on Wagner's 59th birthday in pouring rain.....

**Music Extract 5:** Clip from Tony Palmer's Film



Yet Nietzsche recorded in a letter to Gersdorf on 5th April, 1873, the sense of optimism that the Bayreuth project evoked in him.

'I believe that these were the happiest days I have had. There was something in the air that I have never experienced anywhere else, something quite inexpressible but full of hope' (Hollinrake, 1982), p227).

He recounts in *Wagner in Bayreuth* (Nietzsche, 1876/2008, p3) how, 'on that dismal and cloudy day in May 1872', he shared a carriage on the return from the ceremony with Wagner.....

'Wagner was driving back to town with a small party of us, he was exceptionally silent, and there was that indescribable look in his eyes as of one who has turned his gaze deeply inward.'

A week later Cosima records on May 29<sup>th</sup> 'Certainly few people have so much feeling for our suffering and joys as he'.

### **Things (start to) fall apart**

After the Wagner's moved to Bayreuth, Nietzsche visited only four times.

His absence at the first Christmas at Bayreuth (Dec 1872) was noted with significant disapproval.

Nietzsche's exasperation with Wagner is plain in his letter to Gersdorff, Feb 1873, when he writes, 'God knows, how often I have given the Meister offence'.

The following year 1874, the first clear anti-Wagner comments appear in his notebooks (Hollinrake, 1982, p 238). But there is a suggestion that Nietzsche cultivated rejection. When, in August 1874, he took the Brahms Triumphlied to Wahnfried and left it on the piano where Wagner found it, the Meister saw this as a provocation and was furious. Cosima noted that on Aug 9th Nietzsche 'leaves after giving R. many difficult hours' (Cosima's diaries).

Nietzsche suffered a serious breakdown in his health and spent Christmas 1874 at Naumberg with mother. The following year, Wagner reprimanded him for declining his invitation to attend Ring rehearsals in 1875, and writes: 'Why do you scorn our assistance?'

### **'Wagner at Bayreuth' sent to Wagner on his birthday May 22nd 1876**

In advance of the first Ring Cycle at Bayreuth Nietzsche wrote an essay *'Wagner at Bayreuth'* which he sent to Wagner on his birthday May 22nd, 1876.

Although the essay is a flattering piece designed to promote Wagner, Nietzsche's description of Wagner's personality is somewhat double-edged - he admires Wagner's super-human energy and drive, but he writes of Wagner's 'restless and excitable spirit' that he is 'passionately fond of almost morbidly exalted states of mind' (*Nietzsche, 1876/2008, p5*).

He describes Wagner's passionate will as 'like a rapid mountain torrent', which 'end' endeavours to make its way through all paths, ravines, and crevices in search of light and power.



Such a will 'with such a tyrannical and boundless desire might have become fatal,' Nietzsche wrote, 'but the tyrannical and boundless desire is led by a good spirit....'

There was a spirit full of love and calm belief, full of goodness and infinite tenderness, hostile to all violence and self-deterioration, and abhorring the sight of a soul in

bondage. And it was this spirit which manifested itself to Wagner.' (Ibid, p7)

In the Nibelungen Ring, for instance, where Brunnhilde is awakened by Siegfried, I perceive the most moral music I have ever heard.(Ibid, p8)

He also refers to W's desire to dominate:

He wished to conquer and triumph as no other artists had ever done before him, and if possible, to reach that height of tyrannical omnipotence at one stroke for which all his instincts secretly craved. (Ibid, p38)

He recognised grand opera as the means whereby he might express his ruling thoughts.

'With him we ascend to the highest pinnacle of feeling.

'we can see ourselves and our fellows emerge as something sublime...' p35

'Wagner in Bayreuth' was published 12 July 1876 in time for the Festival.

### First Ring Cycle Nietzsche's ill-health

We move now to First Ring Cycle Festival conducted by Ritter, which Nietzsche, in his later publications, treats as a critical turning point in his relationship with Wagner. But this judgement is coloured by hindsight and, possibly, with a certain amount of deliberate mythmaking and exaggeration.



We do know that from 23rd July to 2nd August Nietzsche attended the rehearsals of the Ring. He stayed at private lodgings, but attended some receptions at Wahnfried.

He was, as Newman says 'lamentably sick', suffering severe headaches and retreated to Switzerland at Klingenbrunn but exactly when he left is unclear.

He returned on August 12th for the first performance of The Ring. but whether he saw the whole cycle is a matter of dispute, since Newman has challenge Elizabeth's account (Newman, 1947, p483ff).

His exact movements are a matter of contention but he certainly left **before** the second cycle.

As for his criticisms of the performances, Newman suggests:

'he was obviously suffering so atrociously that calm objectivity of judgement was not to be expected of him.' (Newman, 1947, p506)

However, Nietzsche also said 'It was the greatest victory that any artist has ever won ((Hollinrake, 1982, p27). Although he later reappraised the event, he had worked strenuously to achieve this triumph against all the odds.

**Music Extract 6:** Die Walkure Act 2 scene 4. Jonas Kaufman and Nine Stemme, Conducted by Valery Gergiev, Marinsky Orchestra, 2013

There was no doubt that he was hugely disappointed at the audience - the over-fed burgomasters, politicians, aristocrats. There was no revolution, no transformation of society through music. Nietzsche was horrified by the 'the pathetic crowd of patrons...all very spoilt, very bored and unmusical as yowling cats.'

Elizabeth describes 'the incurable Wagnerites' as follows:

....for the most part members of the various branches of the Wagner Society were to be found assembled every evening in Angermann's tap-room. But these were not the most delectable type of visitors, as they beat on the table with their fists, raised their beer glasses threateningly on high and were ready to engage in a hand to hand fight with anyone who presumed to express a thought that could be regarded as the slightest deflection from the strict Wagnerian code. Wagnerites of this kind seemed to my brother to be a parody on themselves (Foerster-Nietzsche, 1921), p273).

Ernest Newman responds to this description with a 'well, what do you expect'. He thinks that the nervous professor found at the tavern 'an excited, noisy, garrulous crowd, not all the members of which, perhaps, were strictly sober' and what's wrong with that'?

Newman suggests that Nietzsche approached the Festival 'with childlike professorial innocence', and that 'the professor had lived so entirely among his books that he had an imperfect notion of what the actual world of men is like' ((Newman, 1947, p507). It was entirely to be expected, Newman suggests, that there would have been some philistines present, but that does not mean the whole enterprise must be condemned.

Newman is contemptuous of Nietzsche's capacity to make any musical judgements of any lasting value - especially when Nietzsche was in the words of one observer (Schure) showing 'signs of the resigned sadness of a beaten man, I still remember the air of lassitude and disillusionment with which he spoke of the Master's coming work (Parsifal).'

## **Sunset over Sorrento - the last meeting in 1876**

After the trauma of the Bayreuth Festival, Nietzsche and his friend Paul Ree were invited to a villa near Sorrento owned by Malvida von Meysenburg, so that they could work on their writings over the winter.



Malvida von Meysenburg

Wagner meanwhile, was in a state of exhaustion and weighed down by worries about the crippling debts that had been run up during the Festival. By coincidence, they also went to Sorrento for a holiday.

We have Cosima's account of the holiday in her diaries where she touchingly talks about swimming in the sea and donkey rides, 'shooting stars and phosphorescent waves', watching the sunset captivated like any other holiday maker to Italy.

(Oct 14th) 'this spot becoming increasingly dear to me, the paths between two walls, with overhanging trees, the ravines and the rocks, the olive trees, it has all become so familiar to me, and I also hear nothing upsetting here'.

But Wagner was not enjoying the holiday and spent a considerable amount of time in bed. On October 20th, Cosima notes that 'R. still unwell - my own salvation bathing in the sea.'

Then 'in the afternoon, R. gets up, he is somewhat better, but still very weak.

I take a boat and float for a while on the sea'.



On Oct 27th she notes that they had a visit from Malwida, Dr Ree and our friend Nietzsche, 'the latter very run down and much concerned with his health.'

This meeting turned out to be the last time Nietzsche and Wagner met. It has become the stuff of legend, not least because of Elizabeth's reconstruction of the event (Foerster-Nietzsche, 1921, p293) which is worth quoting.

At first both Wagner and my brother gave unmistakable signs of joy at being thus reunited.

The festival was a tabooed subject, the reason being that it had closed with an enormous debt.

Letters from Bayreuth threw Wagner into a terrible rage and Malwida implored my brother to do everything in his power to prevent the conversation from turning upon the Festival, to which my brother readily agreed.

It was on the last evening they were together; my brother and Wagner took a walk along the coast and up the hill from which the famous view is to be had of the bay, the coves and the islands. It was a beautiful day, the air soft and mild and a certain melancholy in the light effects which betokens the approach of winter. 'A farewell mood' Wagner called it.

Suddenly he began to talk of his Parsifal (p294) and to my brother's intense surprise, spoke of it not as an artistic conception, but as a personal religious experience.

My brother's amazement may, therefore, be imagined when Wagner began to speak of his religious feelings and experiences in a tone of deepest repentance, and to confess a leaning towards the Christian dogmas. For example, he spoke of the delight he took in the celebration of the Holy Communion.

He (Nietzsche) could only regard Wagner's alleged sudden change of heart as having been prompted by a desire to stand well with the Christian rulers of Germany and thus further the material success of the Bayreuth undertaking.

Wagner said 'The Germans do not wish to hear anything about gods and goddesses at present, they are only interested in something of a religious character'.

p295 ...the sun sank into the sea and a light mist came up blotting out the fair scene...

He (Nietzsche) was made inexpressibly sad by the fact that Wagner, who once stood out for his principles against the entire world, should now weakly surrender to the spirit of the age and repudiate all his theories of life.

This makes a good story which clearly puts Nietzsche on the moral high ground, but is it what really happened? Newman, in Vol IV of his Life of Richard Wagner (1947), deconstructs (at length) Elizabeth's account of events and proves beyond doubt that they could not have been as Elizabeth describes. Yet it is her account which survives because, despite some fabrication, it dramatises a significant moment in the lives of both men.

### **The Great Excommunication - 'Human All Too Human' (1878)**

This event was not in fact the final breach between them. Nietzsche continued to correspond and maintain a relationship with Cosima and Richard by letter.

Elizabeth, though an unreliable witness, says of her brother that 'He spoke of Wagner in the warmest and friendliest tones.'

But Richard thought that Nietzsche was coming under Paul Ree's Semitic influence. Cosima notes, (Nov 1st, 1876),

'In the evening we were visited by Dr Ree, whose cold and precise character does not appeal to us; on closer inspection we come to the conclusion that he must be an Israelite.'

Then, Cosima's records, in an almost throwaway entry in her Diary on December 24th, 1876

'Nice letter from Prof Nietzsche, though informing us that he now rejects Schopenhauer's teachings.'

The very subject which had first brought them together, their enthusiasm for Schopenhauer, was now driving them apart.

When Nietzsche sent his next book, *Human, All Too Human*, to Wahnfried - perhaps because he anticipated that they wouldn't like it - he wrote a chirpy dedication to the Master and Mistress,

'a cheerful greeting from Friedrich Freemind in Basel'

and he tries to make light of what he calls his 'new child'. He says

'he desires that they with moved hearts examine the child to see whether it takes after the father - who knows? even with a moustache.'

But Richard and Cosima were not amused and soon after Nietzsche comments that the book had been banned.

'In Bayreuth it has been placed on a kind of Index: and in fact, the Great Excommunication seems to have been spoken upon its author'. (letter to Gast, May 31st, 1878)

Wagner thought that the book was evidence of Nietzsche's mental illness. He caused great offence by writing to Nietzsche's doctor suggesting that the young man's problem was due to too much masturbation. The doctor, Herr Eiser, in a clear breach of medical ethics, not only discussed Nietzsche's problems with Wagner, but also by revealing the correspondence to Nietzsche! Eiser was later to claim that the break with Wagner occurred at this moment.

'When I gave Nietzsche the letter (from Wagner) with the best intentions. An outbreak of anger was the result. Nietzsche was beyond himself - one cannot repeat the words he applied to Wagner - at that moment the breach was sealed'. (Gilman, 2008, p256)

In Sue Prideaux's book on Nietzsche 'I am dynamite', she also ascribes 'the final breach between two men who had loved each other so much' to Nietzsche's discovery of the correspondence between Wagner and Eiser.

Whatever the truth in this claim, there was much in *Human, All Too Human* that offended Richard and Cosima. Nietzsche sought to question the idea of the Schopenhaurian artistic genius that somehow has a direct source of 'inspiration' that guarantees 'truth':

The belief in great, superior, fruitful spirits is not necessarily, yet nonetheless is very frequently associated with that religious or semi-religious superstition that these spirits are of supra-human origin and possess certain miraculous abilities, by virtue of which they acquire their knowledge by quite other means than the rest of mankind. One ascribes to them, it seems, a direct view of the nature of the world, as it were a hole in the cloak of appearance, and believes that, by virtue of this miraculous seer's vision, they are able to communicate something conclusive and decisive about man and the world without the toil and rigorousness required by science. (Nietzsche, 1878/1986, p87)

Furthermore Nietzsche suggests that when the artist believes in his own genius and inspiration that this can be dangerous because:

...when a man is assailed by awe of himself, whether it be the celebrated Caesar's awe of Caesar or the awe of one's own genius now under consideration: when the sacrificial incense which is properly rendered only to a god penetrates the brain of a genius, so that his head begins to swim and he comes to regard himself as something supra-human. The consequences that slowly result are: the feeling of irresponsibility, of exceptional rights, the belief that he confers a favour by his mere presence, insane rage when anyone attempt even to compare him with others, let alone to rate him beneath them, and to draw attention to lapses in his work (ibid p87-88)

Although never mentioned by name, Wagner saw the references to the 'artist' has a direct attack on him. He had become used to King Ludwig's and Cosima's unqualified, we might say sycophantic admiration - he had become 'the meister' and was not likely to surrender his status as a 'genius'.

Wagner was not the kind of man with whom one could have a friendly disagreement. So it is no surprise that on July 27 Cosima records that Richard talks in disgust about Nietzsche's denial of inspiration,

August 2nd "That bad person has taken everything from me, even the weapons with which he now attacks me. How sad that he should be so perverse - so clever and yet so shallow."

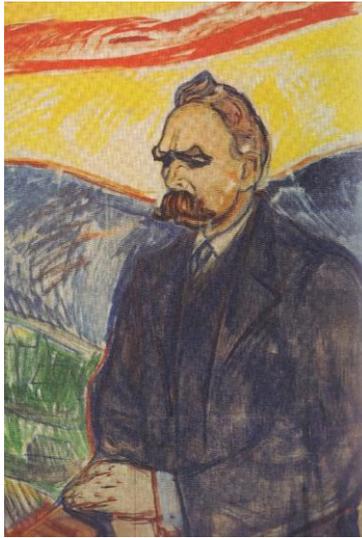
May 14th 1879, she writes 'How miserably they failed us'.

Nietzsche's rejection of Schopenhauer was seen as a betrayal. Richard's increasing bitterness to Nietzsche shows itself in Cosima's diaries (January 1880).

He (Richard) comes to the subject of Nietzsche who, out of sheer malice toward him, distorts the passage he wrote in Beethoven.

## Solitude

From 1874 and through the 1880's Nietzsche's illness had an increasing impact on his life. As we have seen he left Bayreuth in 1876 because he could no longer cope with the vicious migraine's, vomiting and severe problems with his eyes. These severe health problems continued throughout the remainder of his life.



But he largely ignored warnings from doctors and worked on his writing in poor levels of light, and self-medicated with long walks and abstemious living.

Nietzsche famously said 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger'. He seems to think that one can emerge from any kind of distress or pain:

How much one is able to endure: distress, want, bad weather, sickness, toil, solitude. Fundamentally one can cope with everything else, born as one is to a subterranean life of struggle; one emerges again and again into the light, one experiences again one's golden hour of victory - and then one stands forth as one was born, unbreakable, tensed, ready for new even harder remoter things, like a bow that distress only serves to draw tauter.

(Nietzsche, 1886/1989, p44)

Yet despite his stoicism, in a letter to Gast on 20th August 1880, Nietzsche declared 'nothing can compensate me for having lost the sympathy of Wagner'.

From 1886 his health increasingly prevented his long walks and he spent days in darkness unable to work.

## Lou Salome

Lou von Salomé was one of the few women who had a significant impact on Nietzsche. She had left her home in Russia at age of 18 and had become part of Malvida von Meysenbug's circle. She was highly intelligent, attractive and ambitious.

In 1882 Paul Ree, Nietzsche and Lou Salome travelled together in Lucerne and Italy (Prideaux, 2018).

Nietzsche proposed but then withdrew his proposal. It turned out that Lou was already engaged to Paul Ree. But it seems they had not told poor Friedrich. (The three of them are seen in this posed picture below). The jealous sister Elizabeth did her best to disrupt the relationship.

Nietzsche took the rejection badly and threatened suicide.



Lou Salome saw the first Parsifal at Bayreuth where she had to stand throughout. She later became a novelist, psychoanalyst and was an influence on Rilke, Freud and Jung.

## Parsifal

Nietzsche had long been familiar with Wagner's plan for '*Parsival*'.

When Nietzsche received a copy of the text of Parsifal in 1878, his comment was:

Impressions after the first reading: more Liszt than Wagner, spirit of the counter-revolution. The whole thing is much too religious for me, bound as I am to the Greek and human. Nothing but fantastic sort of psychology: no flesh, and much too much blood. Moreover, I do not care for hysterical hussies! (Letter to Reinhardt von Seydlitz, 4 Jan 1876).

The first performance of Parsifal was on 26th July 1882. Wagner's death followed in Feb 1883.

The essence of Parsifal is the message of compassion and forgiveness (Dawson-Bowling), It is a message Wagner derived from Schopenhauer, Christianity and Buddhism.

But crucially for Nietzsche, Parsifal is also about overcoming desire (as represented by Kundry) and in true Schopenhaurian style, the triumph of the ascetic ideal, of suffering, over worldly pleasures.

It concludes with the idea of redemption - of redeeming the redeemer.

It was not just the Christianity in Parsifal that Nietzsche objected to, it was Wagner's transformation from social rebel to social conformist:

"Richard Wagner, seemingly the all-conquering, actually a decaying, despairing romantic, suddenly sank down helpless and shattered before the Christian cross... (1886 preface to Human All Too Human Vol 2) (Nietzsche, 1878/1986, p210)

Nietzsche had idolised the Richard Wagner who was the exiled bohemian dissenter, outcast from society, an independent and radical thinker.

I loved only the Wagner I knew, that is an honest atheist and immoralist who invented the figure of Siegfried, a truly free man' (Hollinrake, p44)

Nietzsche's response to Parsifal has to be understood in the context of his critique of Christianity.

The essence of his argument is that by positing the idea of sin, Christianity makes characteristics which are 'human, all too human', something that requires 'forgiveness' and 'redemption' and makes all of us objects of pity and dependent on religion to 'save' us.

Christianity is called the religion of pity. Pity stands opposed to the tonic emotions which heighten our vitality: it has a depressing effect. We are deprived of strength when we feel pity.

(Antichrist para 7) (Kaufmann, 1976, p572)

Conversely, the greatest sufferer, the man poorest in vitality, would have most need of mildness, peace, and kindness in thought and action: he would need a God who is specially the God of the sick, a 'Saviour'. Gay Science para 370.

(Nietzsche, 2006/1882, p187)

He criticised the 'ascetic' outlook, as a form 'resentment' by the weak of those with more talent and more strength. The ascetic life, Nietzsche argues, is a rejection of life itself.

For an ascetic life is a self-contradiction: here rules resentment without equal, that of an insatiable instinct and power-will that wants to become master not over something in life but over life itself, over its most profound, powerful, and basic conditions. On the Genealogy of Morals, Essay 3, section 12 (Nietzsche, 1886/1989)



Nietzsche never saw a production of Parsifal as it was only performed at Bayreuth where he was no longer welcome. But his philosophical objections to *Parsifal*, did not prevent him from appreciating the glories of the music. When he finally heard a performance of the Prelude in 1887 he commented to Gast:

Did Wagner ever compose anything better? ..... a clarity in the music as descriptive art, bringing to mind a shield with a design in relief on it; and, finally, a sublime and extraordinary feeling, experience, happening of the soul at the basis of the music, which does Wagner the highest credit,

Has any painter ever painted such a melancholy gaze of love as Wagner did with the last accents of his prelude? (Nietzsche 260)(Middleton, 1941) p260



Picture from the Film of Parsifal by Hans-Jurgen Syberberg

**Music extract 7:** Parsifal Act 3, Royal School of Music choir and the orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent garden, conducted by Reginald Goodhall, 197

## Wagner's influence on Nietzsche's philosophy



On the one hand Nietzsche continued to reject Wagner's final capitulation to Schopenhauer and Christianity but on the other his obsession with the Siegfried hero continued - for example in his idea of the 'ubermensch' and his rejection of conventional (especially Christian) morality.

In the *Genealogy of Morals* he expounds his views of the origins of 'good and 'evil'. According to Nietzsche, the morals of aristocratic nobles, whom he describes as being like birds of prey, have been overthrown by the 'herd morality' of the Judaeo Christian religions. The fearless have been replaced by the fearful.

The idea of the 'ubermensch' also harks back to a Siegfried-type hero, but taken up in a new context. Unlike Siegfried who never achieves self-awareness - the 'over-man' is one who has knowingly gone 'beyond good and evil' and freed himself of morality derived from the herd-instinct - the ubermensch is one who is a 'free spirit' independent of the herd.

'One must be very light...One must be freed from many things by which we Europeans of today are oppressed, hindered, held down, and made heavy. The man of such a 'Beyond' who wants to get even in sight of the highest standards of worth of his age, must first of all 'surmount' this age in himself'. *Gay Science* para 380.(Nietzsche, 2006/1882, p195)

By shattering Wotan's spear Siegfried had broken the old world of conventions and contracts.

“Whence comes all misfortune in the world?” Wagner asked himself. From “old contracts,” he answered, like all revolutionary ideologists. In plain: from customs, laws, moralities, institutions, from everything on which the old world, the old society rests. “How can one rid the world of misfortune? How can one abolish the old society?” Only by declaring war against “contracts” (tradition, morality). That is what Siegfried does. The Case of Wagner, Section 4.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (Kindle Locations 2827-2830). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

For Nietzsche climax of 'The Ring' is a triumph of two free spirits over the old world of morality.

Siegfried and Brunhilde; the sacrament of free love; the rise of the golden age; the twilight of the gods for the old morality— all ill has been abolished.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (Kindle Locations 2834-2835). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Unfortunately, from the later Nietzsche's perspective, Wagner 'ran aground on the reef of Schopenhauer philosophy' and abandoned the optimism which Siegfried represented. But Nietzsche sought to continue what Wagner had initiated in *The Ring* and to work through the implications of living without presuppositions about 'good' and 'evil'.

## Turning my back on Wagner

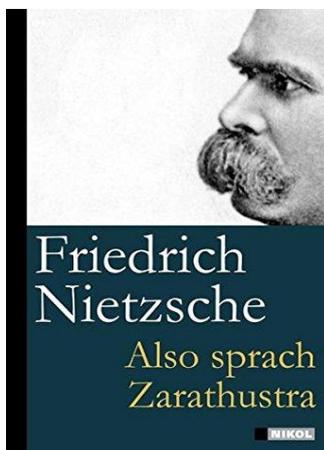
Although in private his views of Wagner were mixed - in his publications he mocked and rejected Wagner and all that the Wagnerians stood for.

In *Thus Sprach Zarathustra* published in 1883, Nietzsche represents Wagner as a 'sorcerer' and 'evil fabricator' and parodies Wagner's 'poetry'. Finally Zarathustra calls out:

Stop!" he shouted at him with furious laughter, "stop, you actor! You fabricator! You liar from the heart! I know you well!

You must deceive...You must always be ambiguous...(Nietzsche, 1883/1986, p268)

Nietzsche puts these words in the mouth of 'the Sorcerer' who speaks for Wagner



O Zarathustra, I am tired of it, my arts disgust me, I am not great, why do I pretend! But you know it well— I sought greatness! I wanted to appear a great man, and I convinced many; but this lie has been beyond my strength. I am collapsing under it. O Zarathustra, everything about me is a lie; but that I am collapsing— this is GENUINE!

(ibid, p269)

Nietzsche's final outburst of hyper-activity in 1888 resulted in him writing at high speed two anti-Wagnerian polemics, *The Case of Wagner*, and *Nietzsche contra Wagner*. In this year he also wrote *The Anti-Christ* and *Twilight of the Idols* (the title parodying Wagner's

*Gotterdammerung*) and his self-serving (and self-mocking) autobiography *Ecce Homo*.

In *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche's polemic against Wagner is at its most pointed.

And yet I was one of the most corrupted Wagnerian.— I was capable of taking Wagner seriously.— Ah, this old magician,

What a clever rattlesnake! It has filled our whole life with its rattling about “devotion,” about “loyalty,” about “purity”; and with its praise of chastity it withdrew from the corrupted world. (Nietzsche, (Nietzsche, 1888 (1976), Kindle Locations 2771-2773)

In *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* we find what remains of Nietzsche's admiration for the music of Wagner.

There is a musician who, more than any other musician, is a master at finding tones in the realm of suffering, depressed, and tortured souls, at giving language even to mute misery.(Kaufmann, 1976, p663)

Nietzsche claims that the greatness Wagner's music is because 'Wagner is one who has suffered deeply - that is his *distinction* above other musicians'.

His objection are couched partly in physiological terms - that Wagner's music is unhealthy - but also that it is false or dishonest. Nietzsche reserves his most vitriol for *Parsifal* which he accuses as promoting the same life-denial as Christianity:

Parsifal is a work of perfidy, of vindictiveness, of a secret attempt to poison the presuppositions of life - a bad work. The preaching of chastity remains an incitement to anti-nature: I despise everyone who does not experience Parsifal as an attempted assassination of basic ethics. (Kaufmann, 1976, p675)

His objection to Wagner are also personal and political. With some degree of self-justifying hindsight he claims that:

Already in the summer of 1876, when the first festival at Bayreuth was at its height, I took leave of Wagner in my soul. I cannot endure anything double faced. Since Wagner had returned to Germany, he had condescended step-by-step to everything I despise - even to anti-Semitism. (ibid, p675-6)

## Wagner v Bizet

Nietzsche first heard Carmen in 1880 and was much taken by it. In contrast to Wagner's orchestral tone which Nietzsche describes (In the Case Of Wagner 1888) as 'brutal, artificial, and “innocent” at the same time' Bizet's music 'liberates the spirit' and 'gives wings to thought'. Whereas Wagner's art is 'sick', Bizet's is healthy

This music seems perfect to me. It approaches lightly, supplely, politely. It is pleasant, it does not sweat. “What is good is light; whatever is divine moves on tender feet”: first principle of my aesthetics. Nietzsche, (1888 (1976) (Kindle Locations 2726-2727)



photo by catherine ashmore

It has been suggested that referring to Bizet as the 'cure' to nervous disease is a reference back to the sensitive question of Nietzsche's own neurological pathology. (Gilman, 2008, p247)

**Music Extract 8:** Bizet: Carmen: Parle-moi de ma mère! Placido Domingo (Don Jose) Kiri Te Kanawa (Micaela). Cond: Solti, Covent Garden (1973)

## Remaining affection for Richard Wagner

Yet even in this late period, Nietzsche continues to admire Wagner's music.

But I still today seek a work of a dangerous fascination, of a sweet and shuddery infinity equal to that of Tristan – I seek in all the arts in vain. All the strangenesses of Leonardo da Vinci lose their magic at the first note of Tristan. This work is altogether Wagner's non plus ultra;  
I take it for a piece of good fortune of the first rank to have lived at the right time, and to have lived precisely among Germans, so as to be ripe for this work. . (Ecce Homo, Nietzsche 1906/1979, p. 31)

And he looked back on the Tribschen days as an ideal period in his life.

I need to say a word to express my gratitude for that which of all things in it has refreshed me by far the most profoundly and cordially. This was without any doubt my intimate association with Richard Wagner. I offer all my other human relationships cheap; but at no price would I relinquish from my life the Tribschen days, those days of mutual confidences, of cheerfulness, of sublime incidents – of profound moments... I do not know what others may have experienced with Wagner: over our sky no cloud ever passed. (Ecce Homo, Nietzsche 1906/1979, p. 29)

**Music Extract 9:** Siegfried Idyll for small orchestra in E, Bruno Walter, Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra,

## 1889 insanity

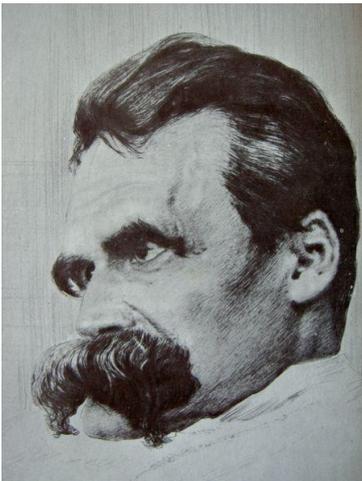
In 1888 there was increasing evidence of hyperactivity and manic episodes, and in January 1889 he suffered a complete breakdown. He was moved to a clinic and subsequently he was cared for by his mother (until her death in 1897) and then by his sister.

Nietzsche's breakdown was occasioned by witnessing a horse being beaten in a Turin street. He rushed over to embrace the horse and collapsed. The most common theory is that he was suffering from syphilis, supposedly caught visiting prostitutes while a student in Leipzig.

Others like the French historian René Girard asserted that it was Nietzsche's philosophy that led to his insanity (Girard, 1988)

However, recent research suggest it was a tumour on his brain that was slowly growing throughout this period.(Matthews, 2003)

We won't go over the details of what ensued after Nietzsche's collapse (see (Prideaux, 2018), but in 1997 Elizabeth moved him to Weimar where she set-up the Nietzsche archive in Villa Silbernack.



This is the sister whom Nietzsche had condemned for her anti-Semitism, who with her husband Bernhard Forster had attempted to establish an Aryan colony in Argentina (which had ignominiously failed). She now controlled all access to his letters and writings and profited from the growing income from royalties as, at last, Nietzsche's works became better known and became something of a celebrity. Nietzsche had accepted his failure to win over a following.

I am not heard today, that no one today knows how to take from me, is not only comprehensible; it even seems to me right. I do not want to be taken for what I am not Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* (1906/1979, p. 39)

Like Cosima she protected his reputation, by being economical with the truth. She published notes which Nietzsche himself had not published under the title *Will to Power* and forged letters to her advantage.

It was ironic that, despite their differences, both Wagner and Nietzsche became linked to the Nazis. Both had written in ways which could be used (and misused) by purveyors of eugenics and racial theories. In Nietzsche's case, his talk of the *ubermensch* was taken over by the Nazis to justify their own beliefs in the superiority of the Aryan race - though Nietzsche had never liked the idea of the *ubermensch* with a racial group and was explicitly anti-German in much of his writing.

After the Second World War Nietzsche suffered by the association with Nazism, but his reputation was rescued by Walter Kaufman and a version of his philosophy became influential with many prominent thinkers in the mid twentieth century such as Sartre, Camus and Michel Foucault.

## Conclusion: Views of the separation

So what do we make of the Wagner-Nietzsche relationship? How do we explain the volte-face which transformed, in Nietzsche's case, idol worship into intransigent hostility and in Wagner's case expressions of loyal friendship into bitter recriminations?

Is it, as Wagnerians, such as Paul Dawson Bowling claim, a case of the young orphaned scholar Nietzsche, who found in Wagner, nearly 30 years his elder, a substitute father and then rejected him in a classic case of an Oedipus complex, to suit his own ends when he no longer needed that paternal substitute? (Dawson-Bowling, 2014)

Or was it, as Newman argues, that Nietzsche was a failed composer who, realising his inadequacy in comparison with the master, maliciously betrayed Wagner out of envy and resentment of his success? (Newman, 1947)

Or was it a case of someone whose ill-health and mental instability, sliding gradually into insanity, caused his judgements to become wildly unhinged, increasingly paranoid. self-serving, egotistical and influenced by Jewish interests – as Wagner himself seems to have thought?

Or was it, as Newman (ibid) suggests, that the young Nietzsche had impossibly idealistic expectations of the Wagnerian enterprise - expectations and hopes that were bound to be dashed when they hit the rocks of everyday financial realities which demanded a level of pragmatism and compromise that Wagner understood but which Nietzsche could not tolerate?

Or was it, as Elizabeth-Foerster-Nietzsche's would have it, that the philosopher remained true to the vision that the young man and the aging composer once held in common, and that it was Wagner who betrayed their shared ideals by succumbing to the servile attractions of fame and fortune, causing him to capitulate to the bourgeois capitalist classes and Christian church.

Elizabeth's view is supported by some of Nietzsche's own comments, for example when he says 'What was it I never forgave Wagner? That he condescended to the Germans - that he became reichsdeutsch.' (Ecco Homo II 5)

Or was the source of the breach, as Sue Prideaux (2018) has suggested, the correspondence, which Eiser revealed to Nietzsche, in which Wagner had suggested that Nietzsche's neurological problems derived from masturbation?

Finding a way through this maze of suppositions, psychologising and blaming is not easy, but a start would be to recognise that, despite his most provocative and polemical statements 'contra Wagner', Nietzsche remained under the spell of Wagner's music – especially Tristan and even of Parsifal (that he attacked so vehemently) – all his life. There was no absolute before and after, because even as he became independent of Wagner he continued to be fascinated by central themes of the Ring and arguably continued to develop ideas that he first found in Wagner's work. The ideal of the Siegfried character, without fear and without morals, yet a proud 'hero'- a blond beast - continued to haunt him (Hollinrake, 1982).

Secondly, it is necessary to recognise that to become 'Friedrich free-thinker', to attempt the daunting task of the revaluation of all values, to go 'beyond 'good' and 'evil', it was essential for him to move out of the tutelage of any 'master'. When the master was Richard Wagner, who was quick to fly into a rage as he did on several occasions – over Nietzsche's vegetarianism, over not replacing the score of Siegfried's Idyll, and finding Brahms's Triumphlied on his piano – when both Richard and Cosima demanded absolute loyalty (i.e. obedience) over matters such as joining them for Christmas – it is not surprising that Nietzsche felt the need to break free. Even in the generally fawning publication 'Wagner in Bayreuth' Nietzsche refers to Wagner's desire to dominate and to be tyrannical. Furthermore, Nietzsche could be excused for thinking he was being manipulated by Richard and Cosima. Nietzsche had worked hard to further the Wagnerian cause, propagandising for Wagner's music in the Birth of Tragedy, acting as go-between Wagner and the publisher for Mein Leiben, developing the idea of a journal that was to become the Bayreuth Blatter, copying out the whole of Siegfried's Tod and so on. On Cosima's own account, Nietzsche had sacrificed his academic career in support of the Wagnerian cause. It was therefore, doubly hurtful that they were suspicious of him for being 'reserved'! No wonder he exclaimed in exasperation, 'God knows how many times I have offended the Master'.

Although Elizabeth's reports are notoriously unreliable, the following has the ring of an authentic Nietzsche comment:

'I had recognised the fact that my faith in Wagner was based upon an error; we were too essentially different in our innermost natures and this was bound to cause a separation sooner or later. (Foerster-Nietzsche, 1921) p297

There is little doubt that Nietzsche's passion to provoke a reaction, and to challenge received ideas, to write polemically, led him to exaggeration which reached its pinnacle during the hyperactive year 1888, when his sanity was deteriorating. Nietzsche's final judgements are as much a reflection on his state of mind as they are a commentary on Wagner. However, I do not think it is right to say, as Newman does, that it was simply down to his 'half-crazed frame of mind' that 'he spat out the venomous nonsense of The Case of Wagner' (Newman, 1947, p519)

Nietzsche's rejection of Wagner was integral to his rejection of the prevailing culture in Germany - in particular his rejection of the Christian faith on which that culture was founded.

Wagner's rejection of Nietzsche was fundamentally because he could not tolerate any view that did not chime with his own - he saw disagreement as betrayal.

But I would like to leave you with a final image, which is not about the disagreements that drove them apart, but about the close friendship the two men shared at Tribschen, the long hours of discussion about Schopenhauer, the shared time when Wagner was composing Gotterdammerung, the birth of Siegfried and the day that Nietzsche shared with Richard and Cosima when Siegfried's Idyll was played on the stairway.

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