Cambridge Opera Journal, **22**, 2, 235–255 © Cambridge University Press, 2011
doi:10.1017/S0954586711000188

Review Article
Wagner Studies and the 'parallactic drift'

Richard Wagner: Self Promotion and the Making of a Brand, by Nicholas Vazsonyi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. [xii, 222 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-51996-0. £55.] Music examples, bibliography, index.

Wagner's Ring *Cycle and the Greeks*, by Daniel Foster. Cambridge: Cambridge: University Press, 2010. [xx, 398 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-51739-3. £55.] Music examples, bibliography, appendices, index.

Wagner and the Erotic Impulse, by Laurence Dreyfus. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. [xvi, 266 pp. ISBN 978-0-674-01881-5. £19.95] Appended music examples, index.

Early in 1854, Franz Liszt noted proudly that 'there is already a "Wagner literature" – I have contributed to it myself'.[1] Twenty-eight years later, when Wagner received the first volume of Nikolaus Oesterlein's *Katalog eine Richard Wagner-Bibliothek*, the composer himself dismissively chortled: 'now I can relish all the fuss and bother that'll be made about me fifteen years after my death'.[2] By 1937, however, the quantity of literature accruing led Ernest Newman to begin his four-volume biography defensively by anticipating the 'superfluity' of yet another contribution to the field.[3] Newman's caveat – ostensibly polite throat-clearing – was widely parroted; but given the lack of scholarly rigour in much of the writing about Wagner over the course of the twentieth century (a flipside of the composer's notoriety), the vastness of the literature rapidly became a misleading cliché.

Carl Dahlhaus eyed the problem as one of quality as early as 1971, opening his study *Richard Wagners Musikdramen* with the withering statement that 'the literature on Wagner is legion'. And – as though warning off would-be contributors by instilling an element of paranoia – he deemed the majority of it worthless: 'compounded of wide-ranging, historic-philosophical speculation, insatiable delight in the minutiae of his life, however far-fetched or trivial, and a curious complacency when it [comes] to the study of the music'.[4] Such sentiments were amplified during a hiatus that saw the founding of the *Sämtliche Werke* project, where the relentless empiricism from scholars such as John Deathridge and Egon Voss successfully reoriented the *Wagnerbild* away from 'scores of mediocre biographies'.[5]

[1] Franz Liszt to Eduard Liszt, 29 March 1854, Gotha, in *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. Adrian Williams (Oxford, 1998), 355. Helmut Kirchmeyer corroborated Liszt's statement by reprinting 3,257 periodical publications that appeared prior to 1855. See *Situationsgeschichte der Musikkritik und des musikalischen Pressewesens in Deutschland; dargestellt vom Ausgabe des 18. Bis zum Beginn des 20. Jahnhunderts*, vol. 4 'Das zeitgenössische Wagner-Bild' (Regensburg, 1967).

[2] *Cosima Wagner: Die Tagebücher*, 2 vols. (Munich and Zurich, 1976–77); cf. *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, 2 vols., trans. Geoffrey Skelton, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack (New York and London, 1978), 11 July 1882.

[3] Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, 4 vols. (New York, 1966), 1: vii.

[4] 'Views [on Wagner] were stated in one of two tones of voice: emphatic or outraged. And even today . . . people who write about Wagner veer to one pole or the other: to polemics or apologetics.' Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagners Musikdramen* (Velber, 1971), 1.

[5] John Deathridge, 'Cataloguing Wagner', *The Musical Times*, 124 (1983), 92–6, here 92. In 1986, furthermore, Deathridge rued the fact that, despite containing 'some of the most brilliant

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Despite this steer, numerous others have chimed in. Most recently, and from outside the academic corridor, Tony Palmer's aside that 'much of what passes as Wagner "scholarship"' could be burned, however tasteless, raises the troubling notion that a saturation point was reached long ago, but that misinformation still abounds.[6] This combination is hardly an enviable motif for a scholarly field, and it presents new voices with a particular set of challenges.

The difficulties of skirting the saturation problem are numerous: to the left, the Scylla of irrelevance; to the right, the Charybdis of repetition. But neither of the first two authors whose books are under scrutiny here – Nicholas Vazsonyi and Daniel Foster – works in a music department, and the conviction invested in venturing outside disciplinary boundaries yields a welcome result, namely: deviation from traditional narratives. Along with the third author under consideration, Laurence Dreyfus, Vazsonyi and Foster offer specialised, if divergent, conceptions of Wagner as a historical figure: as a market-savvy entrepreneur; as a dilettantish, yet passionately politicised Hellenist; and as a 'sex-obsessed' innovator of audio-erotic stimulation. While not quite contradictory, this divergence – a result of radical specialism, ultimately traceable to the saturation issue – can raise eyebrows: after all, readers of these monographs might expect to be able to synthesise perspectives from historical criticism into a recognisable whole.

The narrative diversity I am talking about in modern Wagner studies was identified as a condition – perhaps a peculiarly modern one – in that most narratologically diverse of novels, Joyce's *Ulysses*, where, with a flicker of self-doubt, Leopold Bloom gazes aloft and speaks of the 'parallax or parallactic drift of *so-called* fixed stars' – instantly confirming his implied scepticism – 'in reality *ever-moving wanderers* from immeasurably remote eons to infinitely remote futures'.[7] Parallax refers to the apparent displacement that occurs when viewing the same star simultaneously from two positions. That is, the star looks to be in two places at once, and Joyce's parallactic drift is the faceless gap between two or more lines of sight that invalidates – for Bloom – the putative fixity of any singular object, whether stellar constellation, concept or (composer) figure. The monographs we are considering similarly establish very different lines of sight to their central figure. Far from seeking to reconcile the 'parallactic drift', this divergence is precisely what fascinates. For the picture of Wagner emerging – in a crescendo of publications as we approach the bicentenary – is one of a fragmented cultural figure whose constitutive shards have been isolated and magnified, perhaps never to reintegrate, jigsaw-like, since each shard is idiomorphic, in effect forming a new mini-lens through which to access that former whole anew.

Marketing to win: or *The Five* [*sic*] *Habits of Highly Effective Composers*

The first shard of the three I am considering, perhaps the clearest example of this deliberate specialism, is Nicholas Vazsonyi's investigation of Wagner as 'architect of the industry that

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interpretive writing ever lavished on a major composer', Wagner scholarship continues to be 'clouded by hagiography, dilettantish scholarship (much of it influential), and intellectual pretentiousness'. Deathridge, 'A Brief History of Wagner Research', in *The Wagner Handbook*, ed. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapenwski; Eng. trans. ed. John Deathridge (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 202.

6 Tony Palmer, 'Forward', in *Wagner & Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman (Bloomington, 2010), xiii.

7 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Teddington, 2009), 464. Emphasis added.

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today bears his name' (p. 1). While Wagner's loquacious prose, saturated with self-awareness, is familiar to scholars of all stripes, Vazsonyi seeks to open our eyes to the sheer professionalism and calculation with which Wagner marketed, exported and protected his creative and commercial agenda:

> First, as opposed to most of the so-called 'great masters' who became commodities, Wagner not only participated in, but pioneered his own merchandizing. Second, beyond creating a recognizable public persona, he also presented his works as distinct creations unlike all others . . . he claimed they belonged to a new category. Building a special theater where they were to be performed exclusively constituted only the most visible gesture in a larger enterprise that stamped his works with the markings of a brand. Third . . . he resisted and attacked those very forces of modernity that had set the conditions for self-promotion, celebrity, and product branding in the first place. (p. 1)

To structure his claims Vazsonyi divides his book into five chapters, each of which circumscribes one activity that contributed to the upward zigzags of Wagner's career. The opening three chapters address Wagner's public image, his publicity apparatus and product 'branding'; the fourth explores how the plots of *Tristan* and *Meistersinger* can be read as vehicles for conditioning audience response towards Wagner appreciation; the fifth investigates the Bayreuth Festival and the emergence and proliferation of international networks of Wagner societies.

Scholars have long accepted that Wagner was savvy.[8] But can we really see Wagner as part media baron, part spin doctor, i.e. a precursor to a Rupert Murdoch or Peter Mandelson and the kind of world view associated therewith? In his early essay 'The Artist and his Public' (1841), the twenty-eight-year old composer satirically outlines the ambivalence of the artist's position:

> You urgently want a *success*, do you not? Well, here it is guaranteed. You have only to make this and that slight adjustment: there is the singer, there the dancer, there the great virtuoso – go and arrange things with them. There they are standing by that wonderfully curtained doorway through which you have to pass in order to reach the great public.[9]

A corollary of refusing to compromise a work of art is refusing to reduce it to a form of merchandise. While scholars such as Dieter Borchmeyer have argued that Wagner's 'repeated attempt to free art from the vicious circle of a market mentality' was a rare constant in his writings, Vazsonyi's Wagner is nothing short of a nineteenth-century marketing czar.[10] These views are not mutually exclusive, for even if the work of art cannot be reduced to a form of merchandise, it can be treated as such.[11] 'Wagner's special skill',

[8] Even during the early 1850s, Johann Christian Lobe wrote of Wagner's 'unmistakable art and political savvy', see 'Letters to a Young Composer about Wagner', trans. David Trippett, in *Richard Wagner and His World*, ed. Thomas Grey (Princeton, 2009), 276. More recently, John Deathridge credits Wagner as 'the practical man of the theater' in *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2008), 70. For a discussion of Wagner's commercial awareness, see Dieter Borchmeyer, 'The Work of Art and the Market Place', in *Richard Wagner: Theory and Theatre* (Oxford, 1991), 3–13.

[9] Robert Jacobs and Geoffrey Skelton (trans. and eds.), *Wagner Writes from Paris* (New York, 1973), 108.

[10] 'On one point, at least, [Wagner] remained consistent, and that was his repeated attempt to free art from the vicious circle of a market mentality, and hence to destroy its mercantile aspect . . . The sponsorship scheme devised to finance the Bayreuth Festival tried to retain certain features of the private character of patronage; as such, it was a conscious denial of the anonymity of the mercantile mentality and the audience associated with that mentality.' Borchmeyer, *Theory and Theatre*, 5.

[11] Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Neuwied and Berlin, 1968), 181.

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Vazsonyi argues 'was the ability to preserve the artistic integrity of his towering works amidst the blaze of commodification to which he in the first place had subjected them' (p. 204). This is the self-protective paradox Vazsonyi locates at the heart of Wagner's modernism. The result is a splitting of Wagner's identity, between pose and lived conviction, public persona and implied inner belief, to which we will return.

In the opening chapter Vazsonyi argues that Wagner's public image was a literary creation, fabricated in lieu of any plausible event equivalent to Liszt's *Weihekuss* ('an endorsement of the kind that . . . money cannot buy', p. 34). Instead, Wagner's autobiographically wishful novella 'A Pilgrimage to Beethoven' (1840), itself a prime example of self-marketing, contains a 'three-part *Weihekuss*', wherein Wagner's Beethoven creates the conditions for music drama that Wagner alone will be able to realise; or as Vazsonyi frames the essay: 'a public relations vehicle, produced, directed and starring Richard Wagner, with a special guest appearance by Ludwig van Beethoven' (p. 32). Such a conception of media-consciousness remains critically grounded; Vazsonyi's stance leans heavily on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, for whom the 'charismatic ideology of "creation"' conceals the very elements, agents and agendas that effectively create the creator's identity.[12] Accordingly, Vazsonyi identifies and historicises narratives that Wagner's image tapped into for this purpose, and which are still perpetuated – often unwittingly – in the Wagner literature: resounding Germanness, the poverty of authentic artists who suffer for their art, and apparent indifference to money (i.e. Kant's disinterestedness) configured as a condition of German art (p. 19) from both a modernist avant-gardist perspective and that of the Christian topos of martyrdom. Wagner's documented extravagance (in his wardrobe, apartment decor and lifestyle habits) sits uncomfortably alongside the association of fiscal poverty with artistic riches only if we require Wagner to be an unfractured subject; equally his urge to provide for Minna after his Dresden salary ceased in 1849 (a recurring point in his entreaties to Liszt) reveals the extent to which Vazsonyi is right to see Wagner's willingness to forgo wealth as a pose. At root, it signals the composer's 'interest in disinterestedness', which therefore builds on the disposition outlined by Martha Woodmansee and Bourdieu, among others.[13]

Perhaps most challenging for readers who may be hesitating over such a view of Wagner is Vazsonyi's provocative rereading of *Das Judenthum in der Musik* (1850). He repositions Wagner's much-debated text in cool, capitalist terms as an 'act of professional sabotage, integral to the marketing initiative he undertook at this time' (p. 91). However partial this perspective may seem, the logic is sound: Wagner dealt a crushing blow to Meyerbeer's standing (and Parisian profiteering) not at the level of style but of biology, which could not be disputed rationally. This created a gap in the market for receiving the new ideas in *Oper und Drama:* 'it functions to clear Meyerbeer and his products out of the way so that the resulting void may be filled by none other than Wagner's own artworks of the future'

[12] See, for instance, Bourdieu's view that: 'It is enough to pose the forbidden question to perceive that the artist who makes the work is himself made, at the core of the field of production, by the whole ensemble of those who help to "discover" him and to consecrate him as an artist who is "known" and recognized – critics, writers of prefaces, dealers, etc. Thus, for example, the merchant in art . . . contributes to making the value of the author he supports by the sole fact of bringing him or her into a known and renowned existence.' Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, 1996), 167.

[13] Martha Woodmansee, 'The Interests in Disinterestedness: Karl Philipp Moritz and the Emergence of the Theory of Aesthetic Autonomy in Eighteenth-Century Germany', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 45 (1984), 22–47; Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* [1994], trans. Randall Johnson (Stanford, 1998), 75ff.

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(p. 96). The two essays thus functioned in combination: a 'one-two punch' (p. 93). In this reading, Wagner's diatribe becomes just as much a calculated, self-interested political attack as the (racist) product of glandular frustration.

But Wagner was not the only PR man. A close reading of literary contributions from Uhlig, Liszt and Baudelaire in Chapter 3 reveals that these figures function here less as friends or dupes, more as 'publicity agents' propelling 'the Wagnerian steamroller' (p. 122). Vazsonyi's discourse analysis builds on similar work by Susan Bernstein on the mutual exploitation of journalist and virtuoso; his command of the sources in all their linguistic subtlety is always appealing (almost all translations in the book are the author's), and allows him to explore the symbiotic development of each writer's literary ideas as well as uncleave their differing roles within Wagner's loosely coordinated publicity strategy.[14]

Turning to Wagner's compositions, Vazsonyi puts forward the notion that certain operas explicitly market their creator, that they condition audiences-as-consumers to appreciate Wagner's genius by dramatising his music's mesmeric, overpowering properties (Isolde) and modelling understanding and engagement with his creative process (Sachs, Walther). The result: 'audiences of the future' (p. 128). The interpretations are often compelling, occasionally over-bold. Consider the following: Vazsonyi draws attention to the fact that Walther's Prize song – Wagner's 'product launch' – effectively occurs three times: 'The constant replaying . . . anticipates mechanical and now digital reproduction which, like a form of brain-washing, lends music a sense of inevitability' (p. 161). Creating desire through repetition is the topic of Robert Fink's study into the 'media sublime' or shared territory between (TV) advertising and American minimalist music,[15] but whereas Fink's approach is bounded by the 1960s, Vazsonyi traverses the gap between historian and historical subject. Stridently so. Sachs's 'pseudo-technical information to Walther . . . delivers a short course in song appreciation', meaning that nineteenth-century theatre audiences relate to the art of composition at the same level of comprehension as 'today's ordinary consumer really understands how "High Definition" or "Bluetooth" or "fuel cells" work' (p. 161). Over and above claims for opera's self-marketing, the subtext is that we are still within the limits of a discourse established for us by puppeteers like Wagner.

The argument that *Tristan* is 'a work about "letting go" of critical faculties . . . [one that] promises and delivers an authenticity of experience (orgasmic ecstasy) . . . being modeled on stage [by Isolde]' (pp. 149–50) is less persuasive, if only because it requires the consumer experience itself to become a commodity. Nowadays this is common enough (one thinks of sky diving, IMAX cinema, even space travel, where intensity of experience is principally the product marketed). But can we see Isolde's music-driven 'orgasmic ecstasy' in these terms? Vazsonyi argues so, identifying Wagner's strategy as 'product placement ("I want what that woman is having")' (p. 150). Reservations aside, we are familiar with the (ostensibly metaphorical) seduction of audiences through operatic music that 'carries the burden of the sexual discourse', wherein certain listeners maintain scopophilic contact with the stage activity.[16] I wonder about the extent to which such titillation may ever be verifiable as an

[14] Susan Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century: Performing Music and Language in Heine, Liszt, and Baudelaire* (Stanford, 1998).

[15] 'Minimal music appears at the precise moment when advertising, the dominant discourse of the consumer society, switches decisively over to the low-involvement model of desiring-production. The critical year is 1965 . . . The dubious triumph of the consumer society is that desire can be processed and thus endowed with meaning thanks to the same kind of total control that governs industrial production.' Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2005), 158.

[16] Samuel Abel, *Opera in the Flesh: Sexuality in Operatic Performance* (Boulder, CO, 1996), 105.

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enticement for attending the opera in Wagner's day. Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself' (1855) might suggest vicarious eroticism was a draw for some ('It wrenches such ardors from me I did not know I possess'd / them ... Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes of death'), and in opening an erotic channel between viewer and work, Vazsonyi's analysis begins to enter the penumbra of Laurence Dreyfus's monograph, which we will turn to presently.[17]

'The breathtaking modernity of the Bayreuth venture' (p. 197) forms an inevitable culmination to Vazsonyi's study, underscoring the extent to which Wagner's business acumen was every bit as impressive as his pioneering aesthetics. His pecuniary talents ran from the sourcing of funds ('both medieval and modern', p. 185), to the establishment and maintenance of international financial networks, both of which expose the 'hypocrisy' of Wagner's enterprise: 'he was a tireless critic of modernity' – yet – 'depended on the disposable income of the modern bourgeoisie' (p. 185).

Bayreuth's dual image as a commercial national festival and an elite shrine for serious artistic activity mirrors the splitting between Wagner's public persona and (implied) private self that persists throughout this study. Wagner the idealist was 'created' (p. 41) in Paris, yet Vazsonyi's rereading of the Paris essays as pure marketing implies the composer knew he was selling an image calculated for success (under the not-so-ambiguous pseudonym 'R'), but that it was a deliberately fabricated image he did not genuinely believe. Some readers may be left questioning the extent to which Wagner was aware of the significance these essays would assume for his later development; they may also wonder what distinguishes what Vazsonyi sees as the essays' marketing strategies – Wagner as Beethoven's heir – from a mere public wish-fulfilment or even from an expression of genuine conviction.[18] Where, to evoke the unknowable realms of intentionality, does Wagner's own sense of authentic identity lie? When, equally, does a deliberate pose become a lived persona? Vazsonyi acknowledges the occasional overlap between Wagner's strategic identity and his personal convictions (p. 45), but we may still wonder when exactly the marketing he identifies in Wagner became self-conscious career building, when it congealed into an informed agenda for self-promotion from what probably began as a symbiosis of cultural imitation and wilful fantasy. Nietzsche's critique of the Wagnerian 'actor' effectively historicises the scepticism of these irreal binaries as the view that, in Wagner's poses, 'what is meant to have the effect of truth must not be true'.[19]

Another way of framing this question is to ask whether Vazsonyi's Wagner is cynical. Taking Peter Sloterdijk's definition of modern cynicism as 'enlightened false consciousness' (an oxymoron for the condition of being fully aware of the illusions shaping one's conscious awareness, and yet ignoring this in order simply to get ahead), was Wagner cynical about his professional successes from the Paris essays onward?[20] Did he believe his fame was engineered largely through publishers and concerted PR, or was it also based on his fundamental aesthetic worth? Wagner's comments – as so often – can be read either way:

[17] Walt Whitman, *'Song of Myself': A Sourcebook and Critical Edition*, ed. Ezra Greenspan (New York, 2005), 166.

[18] Freud identified the processes of wish-fulfilment in fantasies and day-dreams outside nocturnal dreams, wherein: 'the wishful purpose that is at work in their production has mixed up the material of which they [day-dreams] are built, has rearranged it and has formed it into a new whole'. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1900], trans. James Strachey (London, 1954), 492.

[19] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 2000), 629.

[20] Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritik der Zynischen Vernunft*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), 1: 37ff.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586711000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the deceased [dramatist Karl] Gutzkow has divulged to us the unholy secret that the unbounded popularity of Goethe and Schiller is due simply to the energetic venture [*Spekulation*] of their publishers. Though this explanation should not hold water in the present case, its very advancement will teach us at least that our writers hold it possible for their own publishers to engineer a like success.[21]

Whether or not Wagner's authorial distance is a euphemism ('our writers hold it possible') would seem beside the point.

Strengthening his case, Vazsonyi offers persuasive evidence that Wagner did deliberately manipulate the press to engineer a musical success for Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on Palm Sunday 1846 (through four anonymous personal announcements in the *Dresden Anzeiger*, pp. 66–73). This is presented as a smoking gun:

[In *Mein Leben*] Wagner admits that 'the performance [of Beethoven's Ninth in 1846] provided me with very influential experiences for my entire subsequent development'. . . . We should not underrate his all but explicit admission that successful marketing was Wagner's 'secret' agenda lifelong. (p. 77)

Such media manipulation can appear singular, and is not consistently traceable, but if we accept it as representative of Wagner's outlook ('very influential . . . for my entire development'), we risk turning him into an unknowably secretive figure. If, on the other hand, Wagner is not to be seen as a thoroughly modern cynic, calculating his reception at every turn, how might we reseat his naivety? A matter that may give us pause is the fact that Wagner did not settle on a single (brand) name for his creations after the Zurich writings. We have: *Gesamtkunstwerk*; *Bühnenfestpiel*; *Handlung*; *Bühnenweihfestspiel*. Ostensibly this undermines the trademark concept.[22] Vazsonyi dexterously turns the argument on its head, however, claiming that 'making his works nameless and un-namable only added to their mystique' (p. 107). But Wagner was apparently aware of the mnemonic power of a name; his joke to Liszt about the flurry of confused commentaries accorded to both *Sonderkunst* (Theodor Uhlig's term) and *Gesamtkunst* (Wagner's term) attests it.[23]

Throughout the book, novel arguments are buoyed by the infusion of a vocabulary hitherto unfamiliar to Wagner studies. Its very foreignness spurs readers to rethink Wagner's activities as calculated measures: rather than Wagnerian 'myths' or 'fanciful accounts' we have instead the managing of a 'persona' or 'public image' that is expressly different from a private self. That which formerly appeared as convenient untruths belying the internal contradictions or insecurity within the Romantic subject, now becomes a professional agenda akin to 'an image carefully crafted by a [modern] PR firm, calculated to sell products or win approval' (p. 31). The risk in projecting corporate attitudes retroactively onto Wagner is that we must ascribe agency to a single vision from Paris to Bayreuth, so that he becomes a guru of media strategy *avant la lettre*. For this reader, Vazsonyi's case is persuasive, erudite, readable. Furthermore, it sheds a powerful new light on Wagner's unrelenting modernism. While some may hesitate to accept the extent of Wagner's commercial

[21] Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen, Volksausgabe*, 16 vols., ed. Richard Sternfeld (Leipzig, 1911–14), 10: 137 (hereafter SSD). Cf. *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols. (Lincoln, NB, and London, 1995), 6: 133–4 (hereafter PW).

[22] 'A product's brand name plays a major role in determining its immediate success upon introduction and its sustained prosperity as it matures.' Terence A. Shimp, *Advertising Promotion, and Other Aspects of Integrated Marketing Communications* (Mason, OH, 2010), 71.

[23] 'We [Liszt and Wagner] make great game of interpretations and commentaries accorded to the words *Sonderkunst* and *Gesamtkunst*. It was not he [Wagner] but Uhlig who invented the word *Sonderkunst*.' Liszt to Carolyn von Sayn Wittgenstein, 4 July 1853, Zurich, in *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters* (Oxford, 1998), 344.

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awareness and media cunning – we can, of course, never know Wagner's intentions in this regard – this study contains fresh insight and valuable reconception of some central topics, typically won through skilful examination of sources, and a healthy candour.

A hermeneutic wolf in historicist sheep's clothing?

Traversing the parallactic drift, shades of Wagner's cunning start to glint with amateurism as we turn to Daniel Foster's monograph *Wagner's* Ring *Cycle and the Greeks*. If Vazsonyi's Wagner was a coolly professional puppeteer of media discourse, Foster focuses on Wagner's 'dilettantish' engagement with Attic theatre, seemingly an untapped repository of cultural paradigms ripe for plundering. Studies of Wagner's love affair with neo-Hellenism within the context of German Idealism are oddly rare: since the work of Wolfgang Golther and Robert Petsch in the early twentieth century, Wolfgang Schadelwandt's three Bayreuth lectures (1962–4) have been followed by only a few studies in English, and a handful in German; all are largely ignored in the present text, in keeping with its selective use of secondary musicological literature in general.[24] Foster's book – an ambitious interdisciplinary tome – has two intertwined strands: a historical assessment of Wagner's engagement with Greek literature; and a rereading of the *Ring* as the lifecycle of Greek poetic genres (reflecting the stages of Hellenic civilisation they inhabit). The former nourishes the latter, though ultimately the woven strands unravel as Foster's impressive literary imagination increasingly pulls at – and occasionally severs – its historical restraints. To be sure, this is a genuine contribution to the study of Wagner as a facet of intellectual history. As such, it is rare; the three appendices – detailing Wagner's knowledge of Greek texts in translation, and secondary sources thereon by Wagner's acquaintances, and then by authors he did not know – are likely to prove useful for future historical study in this area which – it is to be hoped – this book will inspire.

Ever since Hanslick and Nietzsche characterised Wagner's youth as that of a 'many-sided dilettante',[25] and Mann – in 1933 – revisited this criticism of Wagner's early development,

[24] Schadelwandt's lectures were printed in 'Richard Wagner und die Griechen: Drei Bayreuther Vorträge', in *Hellas und Hesperien*, 2 vols. (Zurich, 1970), 2: 341–405. Notable secondary literature in English includes John Deathridge, 'Wagner's Greeks, and Wieland's Too', in *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2008), 102–12; Simon Goldhill, 'Wagner's Greeks: The Politics of Hellenism', in *Performance, Iconography, Reception: Studies in Honour of Oliver Taplin*, ed. Martin Revermann and Peter Wilson (Oxford, 2008), 453–80; Michael Ewans, 'Agamemnon's Influence in Germany: Goethe, Schiller and Wagner', in *Agamemnon in Performance 458 BC–AD 2004*, ed. F. Macintosh, P. Michelakis, E. Hall and O. Taplin (Oxford, 2005), 107–18; M. Owen Lee, *Athena Sings: Wagner and the Greeks* (Toronto, 2003); Neil O'Sullivan 'Aristophanes and Wagner', *Antike und Abendland*, 36 (1990), 67–81; Michael Ewans, *Wagner and Aeschylus: The 'Ring' and the 'Oresteia'* (London, 1982); and Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *Blood for the Ghosts* (London, 1982). Recent German literature includes: Oswald Panagl, 'Literatur und Mythologie der Griechen in Richard Wagners Ring-Dichtung: Eine kommentierte Dokumentation. IV: Die griechische Antike im Spiegel von Selbstzeugnissen Richard Wagners: Mein Leben und die Cosima-Tagebücher', in *Ring und Gral*, ed. Ulrich Müller (Würzburg, 2002), 129–37, and Ulrich Müller, 'Richard Wagner und die Griechen' in *ibid.*, 92–4; Karin Marsoner, 'Das Trojanische Pferd: Mythos im Spannungsfeld von Natur und Geschichte – Zur Kritik der griechischen Mythologie in Richard Wagners Schrift Oper und Drama', in *Das Trojanischen Krieg: Europäische Mythen von Liebe, Leidenschaft, Untergang und Tod im Musik-(Theater)*, ed. Peter Csobádi (Anif-Salzburg, 2002), 549–57; Dieter Borchmeyer (ed.), *Wege des Mythos in der Moderne: Richard Wagner, 'Der Ring des Niebelungen': eine Münchner Ringvorlesung* (Munich, 1987); and Arno Forchert, 'Droysen und Wanger: Zum Konzept des musikalischen Dramas', in *Neue Musik und Tradition*, ed. Josef Kuckertz (Laaber, 1990), 251–7.

[25] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, trans.Richard T. Gray (Stanford, 1999), 318, 346; Nietzsche expanded on the phrase 'many-sided dilettante',

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turning it into a reasoned critique of the mature composer,[26] the unleashing of arguments sympathetic to Mann's view has long since overwhelmed the initial opprobrium that first greeted his critique (opprobrium which indicated, for Adorno, the truth of Mann's assessment).[27] So Foster is on safe ground in claiming we should 'take Wagner's dilettantism seriously' (p. 11). (Adorno felt the only figure within Wagner mythology genuinely to have sprung from the prehistoric world was the horse.)[28] Despite being 'an extremely well-read artist' (p. 6), Wagner had almost no Greek and was 'less than scholarly' (p. 11) in his source evaluation, resulting – for the disorientated bedazzled historian – in 'an almost ceaselessly shifting kaleidoscope of perspectives' (p. 12). Mercifully, there is one constant: the extent to which Wagner's interest in Greek theatre was 'ineluctably connected to politics' (p. 19). While it was through his 'often over-simplified comparisons between Germany and ancient Greece that Wagner was able to justify some of his more creative and monumental ideas' (p. 11), it is precisely as a source of political camouflage – a 'Hellenization of politics' (p. 19) – that the history of Wagner's Greeks informs Foster's macro interpretation of the *Ring*. For better or worse, then, methods of historical study and literary hermeneutics are irretrievably entwined.

The thesis is simple: the four operas of the *Ring* represent stages in the 'cultural evolution of a mythic world modeled in part upon the ancient Greek world' (p. xi). Each opera is patterned after a different poetic genre within Attic theatre; their progressive evolution through the cycle mimics the evolution of Greek civilisation, from early forms of epic in *Rheingold* ('cosmogony, theogony, and epigraph') through epic proper in *Walküre*, to lyric in *Siegfried*, and finally to drama (tragedy and parody). The sting is that 'something is wrong with *Götterdämmerung*' (p. 197). It is not the expected culmination – a modern embodiment of Athenian tragedy – but a parodic marker of the 'corrupted state of European opera' (p. 203). This approach appears to draw on Northrop Frye's celebrated Theory of Genre (though it bypasses the relationship between poet and audience that – for Frye – determines genre),[29] and Foster's view could be supported historically by citing Wagner's self-aggrandising claim that the *Ring* contains not 'a single phase in the world's evolution . . . [but] the very essence and significance of the world in all its possible phases'.[30] Thus bolstered, the only question remaining is whether *Götterdämmerung* pivots more towards the tragic or comedic.

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which occurs in his preliminary notes just cited, in Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge, 1997), 200ff. See also, Eduard Hanslick, 'Lohengrin', in *Music Criticisms 1846–99*, trans. Henry Pleasants (London, 1950), 59–61.

[26] Thomas Mann, '*Leiden und Grösse* Richard Wagners', in *Adel des Geistes* (Stockholm, 1945), 402.

[27] Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 18. Rebuttals of Mann's iconic statement continue to appear, as in Curt von Westernhagen's protest that the label dilettante: 'has been bandied about, not only by laymen but by musical scholars who ought to have known that his "miraculous scores", in Richard Strauss's phrase, could not possibly have been written by an amateur'. Westernhagen, *Wagner: A Biography*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge, 1981), 28.

[28] Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London and New York, 2002), 29.

[29] Frye argues that 'the basis of generic criticism . . . is rhetorical in the sense that the genre is determined by the conditions established between the poet and his public'. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), 247.

[30] '[ich folgte unbewußt einer ganz anderen Anschauung] . . . anstatt einer Phase der Weltentwicklung, das Wesen der Welt selbst, in allen seinen nur erdenklichen Phasen.' Wagner to August Röckel, 23 August 1856, Zurich, in *Sämtliche Briefe*, ed. Gertrud Strobel, Werner Wolf *et al.*, vols. 1–9 (Leipzig, 1967–2000), vols. 10– (Wiesbaden, 2000–), 8: 153 (hereafter SB).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586711000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This elaborate schema allows Foster – whose background is in comparative literature and classics – to explore in detail Wagner's view of Homer, the irreplaceable function (and foibles) of narrative within the *Ring's* poetic text and orchestra, and Wagner's Hellenic conception of German identity formation, as well as the influence on Wagner of key figures such as Johann Gustav Droysen (doyen of Alexandrian studies), and the Classicist Karl Otfried Müller, to whose *Dorians* Wagner continually returned. In some cases, Foster's work represents the only up-to-date study of these topics in English. By taking the 'dilettantism' of Wagner's prose seriously, Foster explores in pages of erudite commentary how Wagner's singular Hellenism may have informed his aesthetic decisions within the *Ring*.

Some may nevertheless find his mapping reductive. Is the vast terrain and heritage of the *Ring* to be locked exclusively into a matrix of poetic genres? What of the importance for Wagner – increasing during the later composition of the *Ring* – of Shakespearean tragedy, which 'unconditionally stands above that of Greece'?[31] What of the aesthetic and political gulf separating the revolutionary of the 1848 prose scenario (*Der Nibelungen-Mythus*) from the pragmatist of the 1870s? Beyond these lacunae, such a rigid poetic frame excludes an understanding of the wider sphere of potential Greek influence on Wagner that Foster would be well placed to discuss: the entire notion of ethics and virtuous behaviour, or the theme in Greek novels that life should be a formative test, where all events, misfortunes or fortune present life in this way, less about reconciliation with the Gods, more – as Foucault once argued – about the purity of the relationship with self and its preservation, referenced metaphorically through the protection of 'virginity'[32] (cf. the archetype of Isabella, whose character first inspired Wagner to adapt Shakespeare).[33]

It is arguably the very tidiness of Foster's reading that gives us pause, for the lingering implication is of an agent executing a plan uncompromisingly from 1848, and succeeding as planned. Historically we know this is wide of the mark.[34] Pondering the very 'many contradictory ways' the *Ring* has been produced or 'explained', Deathridge concluded that 'the skeptic may wonder whether the *Ring* can mean anything at all'.[35] Scepticism is certainly lacking here. While the historic over-determination of the *Ring's* 'meaning' should not preclude a new hermeneutics, it is difficult to accept Foster's reading, with its undercurrents of verificationism and intentionality (pp. 88, 215), as conclusive rather than merely possible. One of the explicit goals of the book is to 'open up opera to new hermeneutic practices' (p. xvii) where Wagner's own Hellenism informs a new reading of the *Ring*, and in this respect it succeeds, but by degrees, perhaps a little too well.

That said, this book excels in its enlightening parallels, whether at the level of language, argument or concept. Foster has a penchant for extended metaphors: historic artists passing on their inspiration are the beacons of fire in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, transmitting the news

[31] Wagner, SSD 3: 268. Cf. PW 2: 60. See also Borchmeyer, 'The "Redemption" of the Romance in Musical Drama', in *Theory and Theatre*, 128–60.

[32] 'All the tests these two characters [a generic boy and girl] are set, swept up in the series of trials and tribulations, all these episodes are constructed in order to know the extent to which they will be able to preserve [their] virginity, which in this literature, seems to me to be like the visible form of the relationship to the self in its transparency and mastery.' Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–82*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Frédéric Gros (New York, 2005), 450. See also the wider discussion of Classical topics in *The Virtuous Life in Greek Ethics*, ed. Burkhard Reis (Cambridge, 2006).

[33] 'Isabella war es, die mich begeisterte.' SSD 4: 254. Cf. PW 1: 295.

[34] See John Deathridge, Martin Geck and Egon Voss, *Wagner–Werk–Verzeichnis: Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke Richard Wagners und ihrer Quellen* (Mainz, 1986), 348–419, esp. 404–12. See also Deathridge, 'Finishing the End', in *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil*, 68–78.

[35] Deathridge, 'Finishing the End', 68.

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of war (p. 25); Mime's and Siegfried's differing smithing practice corresponds to alternative approaches to reforging a Germany splintered into states (pp. 28–9). Indeed, one conceit sees the very structure of the book – divided into three equal sections: Epic, Lyric, Drama – following the structure of the evolution that Foster avers takes place in the *Ring*.

As Derrida has pointed out, however, the use of metaphor 'is never innocent. It orients research and fixes results.'[36] His point applies equally to audiences, for just as the sceptical historian begins to raise a hand Foster historicises the premise for reading such parallels into the *Ring* with an underappreciated truism, namely that 'the Greek myths were more recognizable to Wagner's audience than were the Nordic myths' (p. 94). It was to produce recognisable paradigms, he explains, that Wagner not only 'humanize[d] but Hellenize[d] his characters' (p. 95). The Nordic-Greco pairings work better for some characters than for others: Wotan and Zeus; Fricka and Hera; Freia and Aphrodite; Loge and Prometheus; Siegfried and Apollo; Brünnhilde and Hermes. Foster only explores the last relationship in detail, but does so commandingly by defining Hermes against Wagner's reading of the Roman candidate: Mercury, aka the 'god of merchants . . . cheats and sharpers'.[37] The context of Wagner's opposition to the 'mimetic', predominantly imported art of imperial Rome – i.e. Herder's anti-colonialism – goes unmentioned, and the historical inaccuracy of Wagner's equation of Jewishness with Mercury as the deity for commerce is also worth spelling out: as Isaiah Berlin put it, 'the Jews were crushed by the Romans'.[38] Equally, it is worth recalling that the linguistic underpinning of Wagner's adherence to Greek (and rejection of Roman, Latinate) culture was enabled by Jacob Grimm's philological enquires during the 1820s and 1830s.[39] Writing of Wagner's argument that one's artistic ideas must emanate from within one's racial heritage and national tongue, Foster points out that Wagner was obliged by his own logic 'either to claim that the Germans were somehow Greek or to admit that they were not Greek and thus accept responsibility for breaking one of his own aesthetic-political rules' (p. 23). But this genealogy occurs at the level of language. Grimm's insight was precisely that a historical interchange of consonants between cognate terms occurs between different historical languages; specifically he traced consonants – the 'bone and sinew . . . of the word'[40] – back from Old High German to Gothic to Greek. Thus, in Grimm's *Lautverschiebung*, Wagner had a tractable, scholarly means of arguing for the Grecian heritage of Teutonic culture, demonstrable through historical linguistics, comprehensible in the pairing of characters.

More specific parallels are found in the morphological resemblances Foster finds between Greek myth and the *Ring's* plot: Odysseus's childhood wound inflicted by a wild boar (the discovery of which, on Odysseus's clandestine return to Ithaca, would give away his identity) informs Siegfried's fatal attack. The boar is a metaphor for Hagen's menace, and Siegfried is indeed stabbed during a boar hunt. But the real significance is structural: Foster observes that Homer used Odysseus's wound as a literary device to access his protagonist's childhood, raising the past to the same level of importance as the present, much as the Wagner of *Siegfried's Tod* 'felt it necessary to reach back into the past, to a time before his hero was even born, in order to explain why his hero was wounded' (pp. 50–1). Hence,

[36] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London, 1978), 17.
[37] Wagner, SSD 3: 19. Cf. PW 1: 42.
[38] Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (Princeton and Oxford, 2000), 240.
[39] Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Grammatik*, 2nd edn (Göttingen, 1822), rpt Wilhelm Scherer (Berlin, 1870), rpt (Hildesheim, New York, 1989).
[40] John Kemble, *John Mitchell Kemble's Review of Jakob Grimm's Deutsche Grammatik* [1833], Old English Newsletter Subsidia 6 (Binghamton, 1981), 9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586711000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Foster compounds his historicist hermeneutics with the insight that the tetralogy 'is also epic in terms of process, that is, the way in which Wagner created the plot for the cycle by reaching further and further back in time to find the ultimate cause of the world's end in its beginning' (p. 45). To recap: the *Ring* charts the evolution of poetic genres (forwards), but was itself written 'backwards', thereby resembling a technique used in Homer's epic narrative. But however appealing the Homeric connection may be, it skates over the fact that Wagner had already conceived (and sketched) the structure of the full drama – *Der Nibelungen-Mythus: als Entwurf zu einem Drama* – before drafting the poem for *Siegfried's Tod*. And Wagner explains that it was principally to escape epic narrative through the need for sensory perception of drama (as well as the poor prospects for adequate performances in Weimar) that he expanded backwards in time.[41] To head off this rather obvious objection, Foster cites Wagner's continued use of narrative in the *Ring* alongside the composer's own comments about the sheer tangibility of Homer's narrative to argue: 'for Wagner Homer's epics were as true and immediately graspable by the senses as drama was' (p. 61). In other words, the attractions of Homeric narratives (for Wagner) exceeded their epic qualities. It is a typically neat tie-in, but one that may leave readers feeling constricted.

With characteristic humour, Umberto Eco once sought to illustrate the perils of what he termed 'hermetic semiosis' (the interpretive criterion that says: 'from a certain point of view everything bears relationships of analogy, contiguity, and similarity to everything else').[42] He fixed on the Renaissance practice of questing after visible clues that uncover occult relationships, specifically citing the orchis, with its two spheroidal bulbs, whose shape was seen as analogous to, and hence co-functional with, the testicles. They resembled reproductive organs, so the flower 'could not but have magical properties' that increase potency.[43] It was Francis Bacon, in *Novum Organum* (1620), who abruptly drew attention to the fallacy of confusing a morphological with a functional analogy.

While Foster makes his hermeneutic intentions clear and is therefore not in need of a Bacon figure, an exclusively comparative mind-set risks alienating readers if the approach is elevated to methodology: that is, where comparison tips over into *de facto* symbolism. This, arguably, is the case in Foster's reading of *Siegfried*, where determinism of interpretation almost turns the *Ring* into a *Roman à clef*:

> Wagner's theoretical essays . . . suggest to us . . . that Fafner symbolizes French theater, the Wood bird symbolizes German lyric, and Siegfried's transformation [after drinking Fafner's blood] symbolizes the rebirth of Greek tragedy as Wagnerian music drama (p. 173).

What began with the gentle rippling of metaphors develops into eddying currents of conceits, until we are caught in a vortex of a totalising reconception where, for example: 'to call him by his right name: Fafner is French' (166). Such interpretive boldness – reminiscent of Shaw's socialist allegory or Donington's Jungian reading – is appealing in its cohesion and

[41] Wagner's words are well known: 'Before I wrote the poem of "Siegfried's death" – I sketched out the entire myth in its imposing overall context: that poem was an attempt . . . to present a crucial turning-point in the myth by *hinting* at the overall context . . . [it dawned on me] as I began the scenic-musical realization of "Young Siegfried", that all I had done was to increase the need for a clearer presentation *to the senses* [*an die Sinne*] of the whole of the overall context. I now see that, in order to be fully understood from the stage, I must present the entire myth in visual terms [*den ganzen Mythos plastisch ausführen*].' Wagner to Theodor Uhlig, 12 November 1851, SB 4: 174; Eng. trans. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner* (London, 1987), 232–3.

[42] Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge, 1992), 48.

[43] *Ibid*., 50ff.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586711000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press

intuitive coherence within Foster's *Ringanschauung*. It is also far from arbitrary. But to what extent is it historical? An exclusive reliance on the Zurich essays with their Young Hegelian bias to support certain aesthetic decisions taken nearly two decades later, can make the fixity merely provocative. (We miss seminal sources for Siegfried's character such as 'Sigurd' in Fouqué's trilogy *The Hero of the North*, or space for competing interpretations, where the Wood bird, for instance, as Wagner's metaphor of choice for melody delivered without gesture, has equally strong ties to his view of Italian sopranos as it does to lyric poetry.)[44]

Turning to *Götterdämmerung*, Foster interprets the work as Aristophanic parody, specifically as a stage drama about failure: of French theatre to incorporate Athenian tragedy under Louis XIV; of European opera; of German society to receive and participate in a genuine rebirth of tragedy through music drama. Hence, Siegfried – loaded with the symbolism of culmination – must die; and the old accoutrements of grand opera resurface ironically. It is a clever reading of a long-standing problem that Deathridge once dubbed 'the riddle-infested shadow' falling at the close of the cycle.[45] But equally, it constitutes a PR disaster that Vazsonyi's realist conception of Wagner could not countenance, for it signals not the triumph but the prematurity of the music drama project. Foster's symbolism is typically neat: just as Fafner's 'French [theatre]' blood had infused with Siegfried's 'German [lyric]' nature, the magic miscegenation is undone by Siegfried's subsequent adulteration via the love potion and Gunther's *Blutbrüderschaft* oath. Somewhat less neat is Hagen's parodic role as both a failed dramatist (pp. 213ff.) and later as a 'Franco-Jewish choir master' (p. 224), in which capacity he 'lures German lyric to its doom' (p. 219). Empirically speaking, one might find the parodic elements, i.e. vestiges of the number opera – the Vassals' choral tableau, the vengeance trio, the *Blutbrüderschaft* duet etc. – more readily explicable through the fact that the libretto of 1848 (revised 1852) bore traces of a younger Wagner. Suffice to say that whether Foster falls foul of the 'log-jam' (p. 159) of symbolism by assigning fixed signification to seemingly protean elements within an interpretive frame will depend on readers' willingness to hold a wider context in abeyance. It will depend, in other words, on the narrowing of perspective within Foster's new hermeneutics.

Finally, one quibble: a consistent methodological crutch for Foster is his reliance on Hegel's *Aesthetics* for the progressive frame around poetic genres, for it is not so much Wagner's reading of Greek genres as Hegel's that is applied to the *Ring*, as Foster openly concedes (p. 220) and addresses (pp. 6–10). The fact that we must read Wagner's dismissal of Hegel's *Aesthetics* ('a dreary set of dialectical nothings', p. 7) against the grain in tandem with the composer's frequent energetic protests against extracting aesthetic 'systems' from his own writings casts doubt on Foster's apparent espousal of a firm borrowing. This, however, does not take away from the book's unimpeachable scholarly integrity.[46]

Sex, silk and music drama

Laurence Dreyfus's *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* sees Wagner and the Greeks from a quite different angle. Indeed, this is an altogether unusual portrait of the composer, one resting

[44] 'The wood bird, the animal which expresses its feelings most melodiously, lacks any capacity to accompany its song with gestures.' Wagner, SSD 4: 92. Cf. PW 2: 225.

[45] Deathridge, *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil*, 75.

[46] Two nits: a sentence is oddly repeated verbatim within the epilogue (pp. 258, 260), and there are some unfortunate errors of clef (ex. 2, p. 70) and pitch (ex. 4, p. 72) in the musical examples. Otherwise, the presentation is excellent.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586711000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on a platform of brazen sexuality. Dreyfus posits Eros both as a prism through which to access Wagner's biography and oeuvre anew, and as the impulse driving the latter into existence. The thesis, again, is uncomplicated:

> More than anyone else in the nineteenth century, [Wagner] made plain his relentless fixation on sexual desire … [he] was the first to develop a detailed musical language that succeeded in extended representations of erotic stimulation, passionate ecstasy, and the torment of love. (pp. 1–2)

While the subfield of Wagner's erotics is newly wrought here, it is also indebted to a longer history. Foucault cited the Victorians as those who first transformed sex into discourse through a medicalisation of perversity. This transformation proved only the latest manifestation in the West – over several centuries – of 'a certain inclination [that] has led us to direct the question of what we are, to sex'.[47] Indeed, the briefest of archaeologies of Eros – far wider than mere sex – reveals its propensity to engulf world views: Plato viewed it in the *Symposium* as a glue cohering the cosmos, driving the desire for good, for wisdom; by contrast, Rabelais co-opted it as the guarantor of physical health, a wholesome *thing* rather than a susceptible *thought*, a way to 'live by nature [and] instinct';[48] for Schopenhauer it was no less than 'the invisible central point of all action and conduct … the real and hereditary lord of the world' (p. 66); Freud transcended biological considerations to designate libido squarely as a life-drive; Marcuse saw its systematic repression as a basic cultural ill, envisioning a mode of social organisation where harmonious work is driven by primal urges rather than managed by the 'suppression of instincts'.[49] As this motley list makes clear, a history of Eros is a history of omission: the theme can infiltrate – whether partially or, as here, totally – almost any historical object of study. It becomes a riveting perspective, and we may wonder whether this opens up new vistas, or whether – adapting Shakespeare – it may be more of a red-eyed monster.

The hazards attendant on a study of Eros are offset by the strength of Dreyfus's argument. He elevates the erotic to a central paradigm for Wagner: its force is thematised in *Tannhäuser, Tristan* and *Parsifal*, documented throughout Wagner's writings, and substantiated by contemporary discourse, both passionate espousal and disgust. But as the author later explains, erotic impulse is also fundamental to the experience of music. It is not just Wagner's art at stake; Dreyfus – himself a Grammy-award winning viol player and director of viol consort Phantasm – provides a (pagan) hymn to Saint Cecilia that many readers will warm to:

> It is fundamentally music … that is heard as erotic … we recognize the potential for the erotic even when we don't share an artist's particular tastes. Our common humanity … allows us to cross borders that in ordinary life might never be traversed … What is remarkable in Wagner's erotics are precisely those aspects that are universal … some of the most enduring preoccupations of humankind: those connected with sexual needs and attractions … Music clutches at life's *aperçus* in myriad ways, and the feelings it sparks are surely a product of metaphorical acts of imagination grounded in lived experience … Wagner stumbled upon truths that celebrate the human condition, truths we love to hear repeated over and over again. For when thoughts of Eros no longer plague us, we might as well stop listening to music altogether. (pp. 6–7, 219–22)

[47] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1990), 78.
[48] François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* [1532–4], trans. and ed. M. A. Screech (London and New York, 2006), 373ff.
[49] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Enquiry* [1956] (Abingdon, 1998), 81.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586711000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press

However obsolete timeless truths may seem in a poststructuralist context, many performers as well as listeners will identify with Dreyfus's intuition. (The adherence to unconcealed meaning also puts a new spin on the Adornoean notion that 'every work of art is an uncommitted crime'.)[50] But what about the evidence?

The book's five chapters balance source criticism with discourse analysis and musical illustration. The first section, 'Echoes', explores an archive of concert reviews that fixate on the topic of erotic response; 'Intentions' asks boldly whether Wagner 'knew what he was doing in composing music representing "sexuality"' (p. xi); the third chapter primarily delves into Wagner's scores with detailed studies of both the mimetic and thematic depiction of sexual drive, in tandem with a search for this topic within the composer's literary sources. The final two chapters function as a pair: the largest and perhaps most fascinating section of the book, 'Pathologies', situates Wagner's erotics within the discourses of degeneration, interweaving the hawking voices of pseudo-medical commentary with those of *Parsifal* reception; finally, from a menu of late nineteenth-century pathologies, 'Homoerotics' zooms in on one (schematic) category and examines Wagner's apparent sympathy with same-sex relations.

Telling details are often the gems in any history, and this book is richly studded. Consider the migration of half-diminished sevenths between Isolde's 'mild und leise' and Eva and Walther's 'einer Weise mild und hehr', contrasting the lovers of *Tristan* and *Meistersinger*, and the composer's rose-scent 'fetish' that literalises the metaphor of sensuality in the Flower Maidens (p. 152). Or consider Wagner's calculated play on *furchtbar / terrifiante* between himself, Judith Gautier, Amfortas and Kundry to sum up the awakening sensation of Kundry's long kiss in Act II, and Wagner's sharing with Mathilde Wesendonck an unofficial leitmotif for silk: 'etwas neues, seidenes' (p. 142). Still more revealing is Wagner's coded allusion in *Das Judenthum* to the career of Gentile actor Albert Wurm, whose celebrated renditions of German classics in parodic stage Yiddish (*Jüdeln*) form a literal enactment of the 'debased Jewish perversion' of German art (p. 171), which Wagner simply turned into an ugly metaphor.

Dreyfus's command of sources is impressive; all are newly translated, their contextual breadth forming a latter-day answer to Greenblatt's so-called new historicism. For much of the book he allows the voices of historical commentators to make his case, deliberately so: 'I aim to understand musicians and critics from their own vantage points, and try to traffic in concepts and categories contemporary with them' (p. xii). Schopenhauer, for instance, is the nineteenth-century lynchpin for equating Wagner's music with Eros, for while we are long familiar with his claim that music exhibits 'the Will itself', once music's capacity to evoke a gnawing metaphysical desire through prolonged dissonance is equated with what Schopenhauer calls the 'Will-to-live', an audio-biological conclusion becomes inevitable: 'that thing in itself which I have called the Will-to-live, is to be found . . . [in the] ecstasy of copulation. That is it!' (p. 67). Decades later, Nietzsche rubber-stamps the matter: 'it is one and the same force which is spent in artistic conception and in the sexual act. There is only one kind of force' (p. 133). Over and above our instinctive listening, then, this conflation is what lends credence to Dreyfus's historical argument that Wagner's musical physiognomy evoked the stimuli of sexual activity, and was recognised as doing so by his intellectual contemporaries.

Such links, as Jacques Barzun argued long ago, are the fabric of any cultural history, and the cat's cradle within Dreyfus's book does not disappoint. As compelling as this is, a

[50] T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* [1951], trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London and New York, 2005), 111.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586711000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reviewer must seek to probe. Given the reliance on literary sources – especially the writings of Hans Fuchs and Magnus Hirschfeld – some readers may gently question their selective treatment. The fact that no mention is made, for instance, of the astonishing misogyny at the centre of Schopenhauer's Will-to-live, or of Nietzsche's characterisation of Wagner as a symbolic predator who 'devoured' women ('He . . . robs our women and drags them into his den. Ah, this old Minotaur!'), amid the less familiar conflation of homosexual stereotypes that Dreyfus extracts from Nietzsche's critique of Wagner ('the gushing, effeminate sodomite and the preying pederast who un-mans innocent youths' [p. 127]), indicates that Dreyfus's reading is potentially incomplete.[51] After all, there is hardly a trace of Schopenhaurean woman-hating in Wagner's psychology, over and above the patriarchal sphere that determines Brünnhilde's sexual destiny (she is arguably raped twice), Kundry's existence as a function of male priorities (manipulated by Klingsor, rejected by Parsifal) and Elsa's vulnerability (forced into social and sexual dependency by a masculine immortal she is permitted to neither know nor question). Despite these lopsided erotic arrangements, Wagner's own conduct towards his confidantes suggests that he himself remained vulnerable to their opinion, that he took certain women very seriously indeed. Mathilde Wesendonck, Judith Gautier and Mathilde Meier (to name three obvious candidates) are unquestionably powerful in this respect. As Shaw famously pointed out, moreover, Wagner's statements can be shown directly to contradict Schopenhauer's: 'Love in its most perfect reality is only possible between the sexes' – Wagner avers, continuing – 'only as *man* and *woman* can we human beings truly love'.[52]

In a similar vein, this study leaves scope for future consideration of Wagner's anti-eroticism. Throughout the text, Dreyfus translates *Sinnlichkeit* as sensuality or sexual allure, limiting the resonance exclusively to Eros, the book's central domain. In doing so he remains undistracted by Wagner's explicit protestation – a 'panicked reaction' (p. 41) – that the term carries no sense of eroticism in his early writings, but rather indicates a philosophical materialism. For Dreyfus, such remarks are something of a PR move. He has a point, and Wagner has certainly been proven an unreliable witness more than once, but there may be more to it than this. A delicate coalescing of theology and anti-Hegelian materialism during the *Vormärz* is a preoccupation in Feuerbach's *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1841), which Wagner knew well; it is not unreasonable to set the correspondence between this sensualism and Wagner's Zurich essays alongside more overt erotic considerations:

> Although theism conceives God as a thinking or a spiritual being, at the same time it conceives him as a sensuous being. It directly links, therefore, sensuous and material effects with the thinking and willing of God . . . Such a material effect – consequently a mere expression of sensual power – is above all the creation or the bringing forth of the real and material world.[53]

[51] Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Über die Weiber', in *Parerga und Paralipomena: Kleine Philosophische Schiften*, 4 vols. (Zurich, 1977), ch. 27; Eng. trans. R. J. Hollingdale, 'On Women', in *Essays and Aphorisms* (London, 2004), 80–9; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 2000), 641.

[52] 'Die Liebe in vollster Wirklichkeit ist nun bloss innerhalb des Geschlechtes möglich: nur als *Mann* und *Weib* können wir Menschen am wirklichsten lieben.' Wagner to August Röckel, 25–6 January 1854, Waldheim, SB 6: 62. Cf. George Bernard Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite* (New York, 1967), 121. For a discussion of this letter and its wider resonance within Wagner's aesthetics, see Barry Emslie, *Richard Wagner and the Centrality of Love* (Woodbridge, 2010), 45ff.

[53] Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Manfred Vogel (Indianapolis, 1986), 16.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586711000188 Published online by Cambridge University Press

And later:

> If I make the tone divine, I also make the ear divine . . . What is light . . . without the eye? It is nothing . . . Only the consciousness of seeing is the reality of seeing or real seeing. But why do you believe that something exists apart from you? Because you see, hear, and feel something.[54]

In media-historical terms, *Sinnlichkeit* is simply the carbon-based process of stimulus reception. Feuerbach's anti-idealist outlook underpins Wagner's mid-century devotion to physical sensation as the incorruptible content of the roots of speech, and the only means of bypassing the cerebrum in favour of what is graspable by 'feeling',[55] which of course becomes his rationale for dramatic enactment over epic narrative in the *Ring*. Is there a feedback loop recursively linking this base back to sex and sexuality? Perhaps. But sexual culture and doctrines of sensation can also be seen as parallel rather than intrinsically connected: two sides of a Möbius strip, forever mirroring each other yet never actually meeting.

One might further consider the national indexing of *Sinnlichkeit*. Back in 1784, Herder had cited the capacity for sensation as part of a common humanity, yet drew on *Sinnlichkeit* as a variable within human physiognomy to differentiate race according to climate.[56] For Wagner, literary constructs of Italy must figure here: in his labelling of Italian opera as a whore, defined exclusively by a sensuous physicality; in his confession to Uhlig en route to Italy that he was 'a hot-blooded son of the south';[57] in his relocation of *Measure for Measure* from imperial Vienna to deck-chaired Palermo with a corresponding shift of emphasis from Shakespeare's scales of justice to *Vormärz* libertinism; and in his several eulogies to Italian art from the 1830s as 'sensuously warm'.[58] Granted, the term's multivalency – and corresponding conceptual slipperiness – precludes comprehensive treatment, but we surely need a persuasive reason to misread Wagner's explicit decree about vocabulary, however unreliable or fractured his voice may be. Beyond any such widening of scope for Wagner's *Sinnlichkeit*, though, this study remains an informative and open-minded exploration of the concept's erotic connotations, even if the full story of its development in the nineteenth century remains untold.

One of the stated aims of Dreyfus's book is to put Wagner's anti-Semitism in the shade: 'the most pronounced and violent [contemporary] reactions were provoked by his erotics, not his politics' (p. 117). The question of drawing a distinction between the significance of art and anti-Semitism before and after Auschwitz does not arise, reflecting the book's orientation away from critical theory and its associated *kritikos*. With due care to avoid the pitfalls of moral relativism the author concludes that Wagner's obsessive hatred of Jews was a 'blind-spot' (p. 222), and worries that the political proclivities of the twentieth century have rendered the Holocaust the default lens through which Wagner becomes visible, and visibly caricatured, in public discourse, as:

[54] *Ibid*., 27.
[55] 'Feeling grasps nothing but the actual [*das Wirkliche*], what is physically enacted, perceivable by the senses'. Wagner, SSD 4: 69. Cf. PW 2: 198.
[56] 'Die Sinnlichkeit unsres Geschlechts verändert sich mit Bildungen und Klimaten; überall aber ist ein menschlicher Gebrauch der Sinne das, was Humanität führet.' Herder, *Werke*, vol. 6 'Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit', ed. Martin Bollacher (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), 286.
[57] 'diese[r] heißblütig[e] Sohn des Südens.' Wagner to Theodor Uhlig, 22 July 1852, Lugano, in SB 4: 419.
[58] 'sinnlich-warm.' Wagner, SSD 12: 1. Cf. PW 8: 55.

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Hitler's favorite composer, a progenitor of National Socialism whose works are so drenched in violent race hatred and anti-Semitic vitriol that the only way they can be appreciated – if at all – is by excoriating the nasty man and begrudging him his occasionally beautiful music. (p. 219)

The radical French philosopher Alain Badiou recently moved in a similar direction. He critiqued what, after the Second World War, is often called Wagner's proto-fascism (i.e. the Nietzschean trope of an overblown sensuality that keeps audiences pinned in their seats in order to subject them to 'mythological configurations' of feudal socialism) with the argument that Wagner's renunciation of ensembles – 'among opera's great sensual pleasures' – is ascetically motivated, i.e. precisely a renunciation of sensuality in music.[59] Badiou's work seeks, among other things, to historicise – and hence de-politicise – the accusation that Wagner's sensory artistic means are 'impure, pernicious – one might almost say disgusting'.[60] Likewise, Dreyfus vitalises the debate over sensuality and anti-Semitism by relativising the twentieth-century reception of Wagner through figures like Daniel Spitzer, an anti-Wagnerian Jewish *feuilletoniste* who satirised Wagner's 'silk fetish' in 1880 to the extent that 'it [becomes] clear that Wagner's anti-Semitism was considered ridiculous rather than dangerous' (p. 161). How could a cross-dressing, silk-clad, perfume-addicted, sexual submissive like Wagner be taken seriously as a sinister harbinger of Nazism? This, effectively, is the question that Dreyfus's sources from the nineteenth century pose to readers in the twenty-first. Work in qualifying, if not quite overturning, Wagner's indelible stigma has a long way to go, but these are powerful and, one hopes, influential beginnings.

With this uncoupling of Wagner from his politicised reception comes a new structural coupling: the composer's 'erotic attraction to floral aromas [rose perfume]' and 'fetishisic transvestism' seemingly become a prerequisite that enables Wagner to compose his 'musical erotics'. Dreyfus does not argue for Wagner's *a priori* dependence on such stimulation, but the implication lingers: 'Wagner both fetishized the particular fabric satin . . . at the same time that he had the urge to wear the clothing to spur his creativity and satisfy erotic craving . . . [H]e took obvious pleasure in indulging his fantasies and allowed them to find their way into his words and music' (p. 150). Illicit stimuli are as old as cultural configuration, but would Wagner, deprived of silk and scent, have been incapable of creating what he did? This difficult claim begs methodological reflections that exceed the scope of this review: suffice to say that indispensable olfactory triggers for creative outpouring neatly dovetail the historical imagination with historical fiction, as in the novelist Patrick Süskind's claim that 'Odours have a power of persuasion stronger than that of words, appearances, emotions, or will. The persuasive power of an odour cannot be fended off, it enters into us like breath into our lungs, it fills us up, imbues us totally. There is no remedy for it.'[61] Dreyfus's Wagner, ensconced in his rose-scented, silk-walled 'Venusberg-like grotto' (p. 140) at Penzing, would agree.

To help regain perspective, Paul Bekker famously reversed the nineteenth-century assumption that composers' works reflect the life lived, claiming in 1924 that Wagner did not write *Tristan* in response to his sexual infatuation with Mathilde Wesendonck, but rather was drawn to his younger neighbour precisely because he was busy composing *Tristan*.[62] (In 1869, Wagner himself reportedly took the rather different, pragmatic view that 'a poet cannot write about what he is currently experiencing, since he cannot see it clearly

[59] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London and New York, 2010), 84.
[60] *Ibid.*, 76.
[61] Patrick Süskind, *Das Parfum* (Zurich, 1985); Eng. trans. John E. Woods, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (London, 2007), 86–7.
[62] Paul Bekker, *Wagner: Das Leben im Werke* (Berlin, 1924), 320–4.

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enough'.)[63] Methodologically, Dreyfus has no objection to a pendular swing between life and works, where evidence from the two becomes at times freely interchangeable, even self-reinforcing. This flexibility is refreshing given the thorny heritage of the debate. It finds its clearest test in the analyses of Chapter 3, where semiotic boundaries are mobilised in sympathy: the slippage between mimesis and representation (i.e. Peircean icons and symbols), or actual sexual motion within the repetitive rhythms and gyrating chromaticisms of the Venusberg on one hand, and the Tristan chord as 'a quintessential emblem of mimetic sexual desire' (p. 101) on the other, does not indicate any methodological sleight-of-hand, for by exploring 'the interior feel of sexual stimulation . . . [b]y embodying gestures in legible musical signs' – Dreyfus explains – 'Wagner provokes explicit erotic thoughts' (p. 88). Such decoding of the listening experience leads to a situation where Wagner's music for the Prelude to *Tristan* speaks more explicitly 'of a male sexual fantasy' (p. 105) than his 1860 programme could, a universalist claim substantiated by music's independence from 'grammatical subjects' (p. 104). At least one medical study has argued that the *Liebestod* accurately mimics female orgasmic response,[64] indicating that while musical erotics is not gender specific in its 'grammar', approaches to erotics tend nevertheless towards the one or the other gender category. Dreyfus's reading of eroticism is aimed at the male in this sense, for it projects a man's perspective, ostensibly Wagner's. If we choose to peer further through this particular looking-glass, other matters that undermine the putative universality of an erotics, such as cultural specificity or sexual orientation, would also come into focus, as Kevin Kopelson demonstrated in *Beethoven's Kiss* ('I have a strange, but far from unique, investment in representing . . . myself to be a better (i.e. queerer) gay man . . . than either [André] Gide or [Roland] Barthes . . . Let's just call it a male thing and leave it at that').[65] On the other hand, historical advocacy of a gender continuum (by Otto Weininger [1903], among others) means that it will be fascinating to see whether studies of musical erotics can continue to resist new orthodoxies even as they reveal their bias.

Throughout the text, Dreyfus consistently reframes some familiar Wagnerian relationships in sexual terms. The genuinely fresh perspective is engaging, if provocative for stalwart traditionalists. Relying heavily on Hans Fuchs's 1903 category of *der geistige Homosexuelle* (connoting romantic friendship between men, in which sexual activity may or may not occur), Dreyfus teases out erotic tensions in Wagner's personal encounters and stage characters. Schröder-Devrient becomes a kind of platonic dominatrix to Wagner's henpecked submissive (p. 61); Nietzsche is *de facto* his sexually humiliated romantic partner who – we are told – may have later sought retribution in *Der Fall Wagner* (p. 133); each young acolyte – Ritter, Bülow, Tausig, Cornelius etc. – was 'encouraged, even groomed . . . to understand and fulfill his assigned role as the adoring, self-sacrificing younger lover' (p. 214); there is a genuine, if non-carnal, *Freundesliebe* with King Ludwig (p. 202) and to a lesser extent with Carolsfeld, the first *Tristan* (p. 31). Among the stage characters themselves Dreyfus detects traces of lesbianism between Brangäne and Isolde, homoeroticism between Mark and Tristan, and between Kurwenal and Tristan (though John 15:13 might offer an alternative reading here), and indeed overt homophilia in Parsifal's community of knights.

[63] *Cosima Wagner: Die Tagebücher*, 1 March 1869.
[64] Susan K. de Ghizé, 'Orgasm in Wagner's Transfiguration', paper given on 9 July 2010 for the 16th Biennial Conference on Nineteenth-Century Music, Southampton University, UK.
[65] Kevin Kopelson, *Beethoven's Kiss: Pianism, Perversion, and the Mastery of Desire* (Stanford, 1996), 10.

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While the impetus for much of this sexualisation of relationships is drawn from *fin-de-siècle* writings preoccupied with bourgeois health, the literary evidence to support such interpretations may stretch some readers' willingness to play on the range of meanings possible in, most obviously, 'love / *Liebe*'. Dreyfus argues Wagner harboured genuine homoerotic feelings towards Ludwig (p. 199). But as Deathridge points out with regard to the composer's intimate correspondence, Wagner 'never actually talks about . . . sex . . . [I]t is almost a shame to have to point out that sex and details of intimate relations were taboo in letters of the period.'[66] Supposedly, the topic was only permitted to arise in correspondence with doctors, which would explain Wagner's expression of concern to Otto Eiser, Nietzsche's physician, about the young Classicist's masturbation (pp. 130–1). Be that as it may, if we accept Dreyfus's implied view that Wagner did not feel bound by such taboos, one figure is notably absent: Liszt does not figure in this cosmos of homoerotic relations, yet Wagner's written sentiments would seem at least to approach those directed at Ludwig. ('Ah, dear friend, my thoughts of you and my love of you are still too enthusiastic . . . May Heaven grant me the power to do full justice to the love I have for you.'[67] And later: 'If only I could describe my love for you! There is no torture, yet also no bliss, which does not vibrate in this love . . . You are a wonderful man, and wonderful is our love' etc.[68]) Despite such language, there was of course no sexual attraction between the two, leading us to qualify any reading of Wagner's purple prose. While Ludwig's infatuation with Wagner has long been accepted, the character of Wagner's reciprocation is more contentious. Privately, he likened Ludwig's behaviour towards him to his own teenaged fantasy of meeting Shakespeare, a comparison that undermines the sexual motive in favour of sheer amazement at a larger-than-life idol.[69] And if relationships are to be examined purely at the level of language (as demanded by the biographical tradition), wherein 'all ways of thinking, more or less perceptibly, lead through language', as Heidegger once put it, comparison between the early letters to Ludwig and Liszt would further weaken the assertion that Wagner harboured homoerotic feelings for his patron.[70] That is, unless the same were true for Liszt, whose literary caricature as Don Juan would make this a harder claim to substantiate. Wagner was, of course, professionally dependent on Liszt during the early 1850s in much the same way as he became dependent on Ludwig from 1864; conversely, both Liszt and Ludwig were drawn to Wagner, in part, for the same reason: displaced ambition predicated on a deep admiration of Wagner's operas. Beyond the obsequiousness of Wagner's correspondence, there is also a sense in which he crafted himself into a figure-to-be-assisted,

[66] John Deathridge, 'Introduction', in *Family Letters of Richard Wagner*, ed. and trans. William Ashton Ellis (Basingstoke and London, 1991), xxvii.

[67] 'Mein gedenken an Dich und meine liebe zu Dir sind noch zu enthusiastisch . . . got gebe mir dann die fähigkeit, meiner liebe zu Die vollkommen genügen zu können.' Wagner to Liszt, 5 June 1849, in SB 3: 72–3.

[68] 'Wenn ich Dir mein liebesverhältnis zu Dir beschreiben könnte! Da giebt es keine marter, aber auch keine wonne, die in dieser liebe nicht bebte! . . . Du bist ein wunderbarer mensch, und wunderbar ist unsre liebe!' Wagner to Liszt, 18 April 1851, Zurich, SB 3: 543.

[69] 'Nun habe ich einen jungen König, der mich wirklich schwärmerisch liebt: Sie können sich so Etwas nicht vorstellen! Ich entsinne mich aus meinen ersten Jünglingsjahren eines Traumes, wo ich träumte Shakespeare lebte und ich sähe ihn, und spräche mit ihm, wirklich, leibhaftig; der Eindruck hiervon ist mir unvergesslich, und ging in die Sehnsucht über, Beethoven noch zu sehen (der doch auch schon todt war). Etwas Aehnliches muss in diesem lieblichen Menschen vorgehen, wenn er mich hat. Er sagt mir, er glaube es noch immer kaum, dass er mich wirklich habe! – Seine Briefe an mich kann Niemand ohne Staunen u. Entzücken lesen.' Wagner to Eliza Willie, 9 September 1864, Starnberg, SB 16: 296–7.

[70] Martin Heidegger, 'Die Frage nach der Technik' [1953], in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main, 2000), 7.

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tailored to the respective sympathies of the monarch and the Weimar Kapellmeister. At a certain level of psychological detail, such historical relationships must inevitably resist categorisation, and it is then the shades of grey that are at stake.

It would, however, be uncharitable to nit-pick further in what remains a rich study, saturated with insight, fresh perspective and delivered with panache. The virtuosity of Dreyfus's readings is often dazzling, if challenging to a more mainstream approach to Wagner represented by the recent multi-authored *Cambridge Companion* and *Wagner and his World* volumes, both edited by Thomas Grey. Yet Dreyfus's strategy of bringing historical voices to the fore allows him to open up broader hermeneutic horizons with ease. To raise the possibility of exploring these further is not to cite omissions; on the contrary, so thought-provoking is this study in its claims that it will surely give impetus to further scholarly work on erotics, as an historical nodal point both for Wagner reception, and perhaps for music more broadly.

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As further specialist readings of Wagner continue to appear, the parallactic drift in Wagner studies looks set to continue. In a related examination of women and feminine sexuality within Wagner's works, Eva Rieger recently argued that we still have a blindspot: the 'stamping of gender characters' is deeply embedded in Wagner's music through the heritage of *Affektenlehre*, instrumentation and tonal symbolism.[71] Dreyfus's erotics would appear to argue differently. As Foster's and Vazonyi's Wagners demonstrate, another pair of differing coordinates shows the composer both blithely in thrall to antique sources and participating in (and perhaps exceeding) the modernity of his age.

Slavoj Žižek described the 'philosophical twist' in such parallax configurations as the notion that 'an "epistemological" shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an "ontological" shift in the object itself'.[72] That is, rather than a merely 'subjective' difference in perspective, there is a reflexive short circuit between observer and objective reality whereby 'I myself am included in the picture constituted by me'. If each viewer's position creates a new reality for their perceived object, we will soon be embracing a plurality of new Wagners as the taste grows for material incursions into objects of study. The parallax in Wagner studies thus begs the question of whether Wagner's identity can ever be stable, and perhaps in a naive sense, of who Wagner 'is', however ungraspable this may be phenomenologically. On the basis of ongoing empiricism in the *Sämtliche Werke* and *Sämtliche Briefe*, a new plurality has decentred the literary Wagner tradition created by apologists and polemicists, which Liszt christened so optimistically back in 1854, and which later scholars felt impelled to condemn.

David Trippett

[71] Eva Rieger, *Leuchtende Liebe, Lachender Tod: Richard Wagners Bild der Frau im Spiegel seiner Musik* (Düsseldorf, 2009), 256.
[72] Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (London and Cambridge, MA, 2009), 17.

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