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Winifred Wagner: Breaking Tradition at Bayreuth

Brittany Anne Nielson
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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WINIFRED WAGNER:

BREAKING TRADITION AT BAYREUTH

by

Brittany Anne Nielson

A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

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ABSTRACT
WINIFRED WAGNER: BREAKING TRADITION AT BAYREUTH

by

Brittany Anne Nielson

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee 2015
Under the Supervision of Professor Gillian Rodger

Winifred (née Williams) Wagner (1897-1980) is notorious in history for her relationship with Adolf Hitler. Winifred married Siegfried, Richard Wagner's son, in 1915 and took over the Bayreuth Festival after his death in 1930. In 1923, Winifred met Adolf Hitler and formed a quick friendship with the charismatic man. This personal relationship drives much of Winifred's story and when it has been told, her contributions as the head of the Bayreuth Festival are rarely discussed. Often musical historians give credit for the artistic changes she made at Bayreuth to Heinz Tietjen and Emil Preetorius, ignoring Winifred's contributions. This thesis examines the reforms that were made at the Bayreuth Festival during Winifred's directorship and how her friendship with Hitler allowed her to modernize, by examining how tradition was formed at Bayreuth through the previous directorships of Cosima and Siegfried Wagner.

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For my mother,

Gabriele Barbara Kindt Nielson
(February 28, 1947 – May 4, 2005)

and my Omi,

Frida “Micki” Bauer Kindt
(March 25, 1922 – October 31, 2011)

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Introduction

Winifred (née Williams) Wagner (1897-1980), the adopted daughter of Karl and Henrietta Klindworth, is notorious in history for her relationship with Adolf Hitler. Winifred married Siegfried, Richard Wagner's son, in 1915 and took over the illustrious Bayreuth Festival after his death in 1930. Winifred was the first person not directly related to the Master, Richard Wagner, to run the festival. In 1923, Winifred met Adolf Hitler and formed a quick friendship with the charismatic man. This personal relationship drives much of Winifred's story and when it has been told, her contributions as the head of the Bayreuth Festival are rarely discussed. Often musical historians give credit for the artistic changes she made at Bayreuth to other people involved, ignoring Winifred's contributions.

There is little research on Winifred Wagner. Grove Music Online lacks a full entry for her, and she is the only festival director who is overlooked in this fashion, other than the current festival directors. Winifred is mentioned as Siegfried's wife, and there is one paragraph in the entry for Bayreuth:

Siegfried's successor, his British-born widow Winifred, had no pretensions as a producer, and she appointed the Intendant of the Berlin Staatsoper, Heinz Tietjen, as artistic director. Tietjen's productions, with scenic designs by Emil Preetorius (except *Parsifal*, redesigned in 1934 by Alfred Roller and in 1937 by Wieland Wagner), were lavish. If this period of the Bayreuth Festival's history is to some extent viewed with disapproval, the fault lies not in the productions or the stylized modified realism of Preetorius's sets, but in Winifred Wagner's personal association with Hitler, a frequent visitor to Bayreuth. Winifred's contribution to the building itself was the erection of an

administrative block on the north-west side and (in 1932) a new line of boxes at the back of the auditorium above the royal box.¹

This entry barely hides the author's contempt for the woman who was in charge of the festival during one of its most trying times. It also highlights two of the most common themes relating to Winifred in existing scholarship: 1) Her relationship with Hitler almost ruined Bayreuth and 2) she personally added nothing of worth to the Bayreuth festival.² Most scholarship connects Hitler, Winifred and Wagner, usually by discussing how Hitler felt a personal connection to Bayreuth through Wagner and briefly mentioning Hitler's personal connection to Winifred. There seems to be only one exception, in Fredrich Spotts' *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival*. Spotts acknowledges that Winifred played a major part in the running of Bayreuth and does not, unlike previous scholarship, try to separate Winifred from Bayreuth. Brigitte Hamann's biography is the only large-scale work

¹ Geoffrey Skelton, "Wagner's successors," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/40950?q=bayreuth&search=quick&pos=1&start=1#S40950.4> (accessed January 03, 2015).

² Most scholarship on Winifred Wagner can only be found in chapters on Bayreuth or on the Wagner family. Jonathan Carr, *The Wagner Clan: The Saga of Germany's Most Illustrious and Infamous Family* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007), Geoffrey Skelton, *Wagner at Bayreuth: Experiment and Tradition* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1965), and Hans Mayer, *Richard Wagner In Bayreuth, 1876-1976* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1976) are a sampling of the many books written in this fashion.

about Winifred Wagner.³ Its focus is on Winifred's relationship with Hitler, but Hamann shows also that the relationship was a friendship, and examines the ways that the friendship benefited Bayreuth. While this examination is important, Hamann barely talks about Winifred's artistic achievements at the festival and this is the gap that will be covered in this thesis. Winifred was most concerned about keeping the legacy of Bayreuth alive: "... as ever, the main thing is that it [Bayreuth] will stay in the hands of the family."⁴

The topic of this thesis also required looking at the relationship of Hitler and Richard Wagner. Most scholarship examines the connections between Hitler's and Wagner's political views. I have chosen not to discuss this connection, but Hitler's enjoyment of Wagner as an artist is necessary to this topic. Scholarship such as Robert L. Jacobs' "Wagner's Influence on Hitler," Christine A. Colin's "Der Meister and Der Führer: A critical reappraisal of thought of Richard Wagner and Adolf Hitler," and Pamela M. Potter's "Wagner and the Third Reich: Myths and Realities" focus not on how Richard Wagner and Hitler might be linked politically, but on Hitler's love for Wagner's music. These articles suggest that Hitler was more interested in Wagner for his music than for the political views espoused by the composer. Hitler's appreciation, and almost cult-like devotion, to Richard Wagner's

³ Brigitte Hamann, *Winifred Wagner: A Life at the Heart of Hitler's Bayreuth* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2002) benefits from an extensive amount of primary sources unavailable to previous scholars. The Wagner family is notorious for hiding certain letters or not allowing certain documents to be seen. The archives of Winifred, Siegfried and their son Wieland's documents have yet to be opened to the public. Brigitte Hamann sought out many of Winifred's friends to gain access to unpublished letters, allowing her to have a more complete picture of Winifred.

⁴ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 451.

music is part of the reason that the Bayreuth Festival received such personal attention from the Führer.

There can be no doubt that Richard Wagner's ideological views had a hand in influencing those who surrounded and ran Bayreuth to become so enthralled with National Socialism and Adolf Hitler. Winifred and Siegfried both seemed to have been mostly politically apathetic, but the "Bayreuth circle," a well-known group of Wagner devotees, including such people as Houston Stewart Chamberlain, friend and son-in-law of Cosima Wagner, and Hans von Wolzogen, editor of the Bayreuth Paper, were anything but indifferent. Wagner's political views are a product of his own time and they do not fit directly into National Socialist propaganda, though people directly link his anti-Semitic writings to Nazism. Instead, the Bayreuth Circle took Wagner's writings and created an amalgam of German Nationalistic thought and hero worship that was akin to a religion. Roger Allen's "From Critical Tool to Political Metaphor: Thoughts on the Writings of Houston Stewart Chamberlain," provides a good insight into how Chamberlain's writings influenced Hitler and made it easier to draw Bayreuth into National Socialism.⁵ As part of the Bayreuth Circle, Richard Wagner's son-in-law by marriage to Eva, Richard's second daughter, Houston Stewart Chamberlain helped to form the political link between National Socialism and Bayreuth. Though Winifred frequently stated that she had nothing to do with politics, Bayreuth was often used for political speeches during intermission

⁵ Chamberlain's political influence on Hitler is also discussed in many of the books on Bayreuth, including: Oliver Himes, *Cosima Wagner: The Lady of Bayreuth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Carr, *The Wagner Clan*; Skelton, *Wagner at Bayreuth*; Mayer, *Richard Wagner In Bayreuth*; Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); and Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*.

and Winifred supported Adolf Hitler's rise to power. There had to be an acceptance of National Socialism and in fact, most of those who were at Bayreuth fully supported the political power of Hitler and his government. Hitler represented all that the "Bayreuth circle" had been writing about since the death of Wagner. They saw through Hitler a way for Germany to be great again. This thesis does not discuss the politics of National Socialist thought in great detail, but Chamberlain was part of the reason that Hitler first made a pilgrimage to Bayreuth, thus initiating the meeting with Winifred. Hitler was fascinated by Wagner's music, but there is no scholarship that successfully shows that Hitler had more than just a passing knowledge of Wagner's writings. Hitler sought out Chamberlain to personally give thanks to Chamberlain for writing the books that helped to shape Hitler's political ideologies.⁶

It would be impossible to show how changes made during Winifred's tenure moved the festival to a more modern direction without exploring the past. This was done using the research of Mike Ashman, Nicholas Baragwanath, Oswald Georg Bauer, Richard Beacham, Patrick Carnegy and Jack Douglas. Winifred supported her husband in his vision of trying to break Bayreuth from following the strict "Bayreuth Style." The style, developed by Cosima Wagner, Siegfried's mother and Richard

⁶ Roger Allen, "From Critical Tool to Political Metaphor: Thoughts on the Writings of Houston Stewart Chamberlain," in *Music, Theatre and Politics in Germany: 1848 to the Third Reich*, ed. Nikolaus Bacht (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 80.

Wagner's second wife, was extremely rigid.⁷ In Cosima's effort to keep Richard Wagner's vision alive, she established an operatic formula that went so far as to dictate the singers' hand movements. This fanaticism in operatic style at Bayreuth bled into everyday life and even into performances of Wagner's operas staged elsewhere. Siegfried was able to make small changes and Winifred, as head of the Bayreuth festival from 1930 until 1945, continued the quest to bring a fresher approach to Wagner's operas. Winifred faced intense backlash against any changes that she tried to introduce from her in-laws and Wagnerian fanatics. Often she used her relationship with Hitler to get these changes approved or to protect the artistic integrity of the festival. Her relationship with Hitler allowed her to keep the festival running, which, in Winifred's eyes, protected the Wagner cultural tradition.

Approaching a subject that has considerable cultural baggage is difficult. In this thesis, my aim is to examine Winifred's life and her directorship of Bayreuth with fresh eyes. Winifred's history suffers from her connection to Nazism and to Hitler, as does her father-in-law's history and legacy. Too often, as Pamela Potter notes in "What is Nazi Music?," discussions of German music and musical culture during the 1930s and 1940s "gravitate[s] toward fulfilling 'denazification'-inspired tasks of determining the guilt or innocence" of those involved.⁸ That Hitler appropriated Wagner and Bayreuth to give a cultural voice to National Socialism

⁷ In fact, fanatic is a word that could be often used. An overview of Cosima's festival directorship can be found in Hilmes, *Cosima*; Nicolas Baragwanath, "Anna Bahr-Mildenburg, Gesture, and the Bayreuth Style," *The Musical Times* 148, no. 1901 (2007); and Nike Wagner, *The Wagners: The Drama of a Musical Dynasty* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000).

⁸ Pamela Potter, "What is Nazi Music?" *The Musical Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (2005): 429-430.

cannot be denied, and that Winifred and her husband's family were staunch supporters of Hitler's in the early period also cannot be denied. Life in Germany after World War I was desperate, and National Socialism, to the Wagner family and many bourgeois families, offered a way to bring Germany back to its pre-war glory days. I aim to portray Winifred as neither hero nor villain, but as a woman who put Wagner's Bayreuth Festival first. Winifred never denied her relationship with Adolf Hitler, even after the war was over and she was going through a "denazification" trial. In fact, she ultimately continued to give praise to Hitler as a man until her death. Winifred's denial of Hitler as a monster gave more fuel to the fire that Bayreuth was in Hitler's hand and continued to shame the family. I will not merely focus upon her relationship with Hitler, but will also examine what she tried to achieve at Bayreuth by utilizing her friendship with Hitler.

In 1940, Winifred's ability to communicate with Hitler personally was cut off. Winifred had overstepped her friendship and offended Hitler. At that point Winifred's ability to defy those who pushed against her artistic vision was lessened since many in power realized that her influence and protection was gone. Hitler still provided for the ailing festival, but any ambitions Winifred harbored to shape the artistic vision of the festival as its director were put aside in order to merely survive during the worst and final part of the European portion of World War II.

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter will provide an explanation of how Winifred came in to the Wagner family. Her future husband, Siegfried, was the legacy of the Bayreuth festival and for that legacy to continue Siegfried needed to produce heirs. Siegfried probably would not have married if it

were not for this consideration. Most of his romantic relationships were with men, although there was rumor of an illegitimate child born in 1900, and Siegfried appeared happy with his bachelorhood. This chapter explores the complex reasons that Siegfried had to move forward with the marriage. This chapter also sheds some light on why Winifred became so attached to Hitler; while Winifred never complained about her relationship with Siegfried, she seems to have found a surrogate relationship with Hitler. Even after Siegfried married, he continued to have relationships with men and spent a lot of time away from Winifred. Winifred and Siegfried's oldest child declared at one point that Hitler should be their father and Siegfried the uncle, merely because Hitler was more involved in with the children in the way a father should be, while Siegfried was said to spend only ten minutes a day with them.⁹

The second chapter will focus on the background of the Bayreuth festival, specifically how Cosima took over the festival from Richard Wagner. Bayreuth was not a place that merely staged operas; it had essentially become a temple to Wagner worship.¹⁰ It is important to see how steeped in tradition the festival was and how that affected not only Bayreuth but also contemporary opera trends in different opera houses. In order to show that Winifred was able to make artistic changes to Bayreuth using her relationship with Hitler, I believe it is important to see just how difficult that task would have been without Hitler's support. This chapter will also

⁹ Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Family*, 143.

¹⁰ Udo Bermbach, "The Transfer of Liturgy: About an aspect of the connection of Richard Wagner with Hitler and the Third Reich," *Wagner* 20 no. 3 (1999), 137.

explore the modern approaches that were happening in Wagnerian opera elsewhere in Germany, and the reaction of those at Bayreuth to those approaches to staging. I will discuss some of the reforms suggested by Adolphe Appia and instituted by Gustav Mahler and Alfred Roller. Understanding these reforms is crucial, because many of the changes that happened during Winifred's years as the director of the festival were influenced by the reforms rejected by Cosima.

Chapter three will show how Winifred's relationship with Hitler developed. This requires some mention of how Hitler felt about Wagner, as well as the political leanings of Bayreuth when Hitler was gaining popularity. Winifred's relationship started because of an admiration of what Hitler stood for, but it ended up being completely personal. They were never lovers, because according to Winifred, Hitler was incapable of having that kind of relationship; Hitler seemed to think of Winifred as a surrogate wife and her children as his children.¹¹

The fourth chapter will bring together all these seemingly unconnected pieces and show how Bayreuth prospered during the years leading up to the World War II and during the early years of the war. The main focus of the chapter will be on revolutionary changes that were instituted by Winifred and her team of Heinz Tietjen as artistic director and Emil Preetorius as stage designer. There was a huge outcry when they began to make changes to the *Ring* cycle and *Parsifal*, which occupied a near sacred position at Bayreuth, and the Wagnerian purists began to rally against the productions.¹² It was only Winifred's friendship with Hitler that

¹¹ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 114.

¹² Fredrich Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 184.

allowed them to keep making changes. This chapter will also explore other small concessions given to the Bayreuth Festival, because of Winifred's relationship, such as keeping singer Max Lorenz working despite the fact that he was openly homosexual and married to a Jewish woman.¹³

Winifred Wagner's history suffers from her relationship with Hitler. There is no way to separate her from Hitler, and it would be a disservice to try to do so. Winifred's opinion of Hitler was not that he was a madman who committed horrific, grotesque crimes against the human race, and because she saw him and described him as a human being, it has been difficult to give her credit for her tenure at Bayreuth. I will argue that Winifred's tenure at Bayreuth accomplished extraordinary things, and that despite what history may think of the man, much of it would have been impossible without Hitler's help.

¹³ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 341.

Chapter 1

Winifred Williams was first introduced to the Wagner family through her foster, parents, Henriette and Karl Klindworth, who later adopted the young girl. Karl Klindworth had musical and social connections to the Wagner and Liszt family, but Winifred was formally introduced to Cosima and by extension Siegfried at Bayreuth by them.

Winifred was nine years old when she was taken in for six weeks by the German couple. The toddler was born in England on June 23, 1897 in Hastings, Sussex. Her father was John Williams, an engineer, writer and theatre critic. Williams met Winifred's mother, twenty-five years his junior, while she was performing as an actress, and he was critiquing the theatre scene in England. Williams died when Winifred was one year old, and her mother contracted Typhoid Fever shortly thereafter, and also died, leaving Winifred in the care of relatives. These relatives did not keep her for long, and she ended up in an orphanage.

Winifred might have remained in the orphanage (and England) for quite some time had she not contracted a skin "complaint" when she was around nine years of age. The doctors advised that she needed to be in a more "Continental climate" to overcome this skin problem, and this is how Winifred came to be in the care of the Klindworths.¹⁴ Her mother was related to Henriette Klindworth; there is no mention of how the orphanage knew of the existence of the Klindworths all the

¹⁴ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 3.

way in Berlin, Germany, but arrangements were made to send Winifred to the couple for six weeks, ostensibly long enough for the skin complaint to be cured. Karl and Henriette ended up keeping Winifred for much longer than the intended six weeks, despite their advanced ages of 78 and 70, respectively.

Winifred was inducted into the world of Richard Wagner's music through Karl. She was "brought up thoroughly German and in the Bayreuth spirit," as Siegfried, her future husband, proudly noted in his memoirs.¹⁵ Karl was a pianist and star pupil of Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner's father-in-law.¹⁶ Klindworth's musical background served to inform Winifred's musical upbringing, an upbringing that was often focused upon Richard Wagner's musical legacy. Klindworth taught piano and was the founder of the Karl Klindworth Music Conservatory in Berlin, but he considered transcribing the piano excerpts from the works of his "friend" Wagner, his "true life's work."¹⁷ Winifred heard the music of Wagner almost every day as her foster father played the piano, cementing her love of the music. The Klindworths had a close enough relationship with Cosima, Richard Wagner's second wife, that there were often letters written to Cosima about Winifred. In 1914, when Winifred met the Wagners, she was just seventeen years old and must have been a bit awe-struck upon meeting the family of the musician she grew up loving.¹⁸

¹⁵ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 3.

¹⁶ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 1.

¹⁷ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 1.

¹⁸ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 3.

Winifred was probably unaware of the amount of drama in the Wagner family before she married Siegfried. The young girl knew that Cosima was Franz Liszt's daughter, but was certainly ignorant that Franz was not married to Cosima's mother, the countess Marie d'Agoult. Winifred was probably also unaware of the background of Richard and Cosima's relationship, the Klingworths kept Winifred well insulated from negative gossip surrounding the Wagners.¹⁹ Richard Wagner was married once before Cosima, but had many lovers. Cosima was married to Hans von Bülow before marrying Wagner in 1870. These facts alone do not make for a striking story, but the circumstances leading up to Richard and Cosima's marriage were anything but ordinary for the time.

The liaison between Liszt and d'Agoult lasted twelve years and produced three children. The two ended their affair in a string of arguments and often would use their children against one another. Cosima was their only child to live past her twenties. Growing up Cosima rarely saw her father or her mother. Richard Wagner was Liszt's contemporary, and it was through Liszt that Cosima first met Wagner. Liszt visited his children in 1853, seeing them for the first time in eight years, and brought two composers whose work he was trying hard to promote: Hector Berlioz and Richard Wagner. Wagner, it was reported, treated the group with a reading of the last act of *Götterdämmerung*. Cosima was deeply moved by the music but Wagner hardly noticed her, stating merely that Liszt's daughters seemed very shy.²⁰ Cosima met Richard once again in 1857 while on her honeymoon with Hans von

¹⁹ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 6.

²⁰ Carr, *The Wagner Clan*, 30.

Bülow. Cosima, now aged nineteen, had just married von Bülow, an ex-pupil of her father and eight years her elder, and he could think of no better way to spend a memorable honeymoon than in the company of Wagner, whom he venerated as much as he did Liszt. Cosima was not impressed with the man who was then married to Minna Wagner, but in love with the already taken Mathilde Wesendonck.²¹ Hans von Bülow was so mortified by his wife's coolness towards Wagner that he sent letters after the visit apologizing and making excuses for her.²²

Hans von Bülow was completely dedicated to Richard Wagner. The obsession began when he attended the world premiere of *Rienzi* in 1842. Eight years later Bülow fled to Zurich with Wagner when he was fleeing from political problems. According to Bülow Wagner was:

... the greatest artistic phenomenon of our century, perhaps even in the whole history of the world. It has become clear to me that I could be this man's famulus, I'd like to become his pupil and apostle, and with such an ambition and such a goal, life would seem worth living.²³

Under Wagner's tutelage Bülow became a great conductor. Bülow also benefited from piano lessons with Liszt and Liszt believed that Bülow would become his "legitimate successor, [his] heir by the grace of God and by virtue of his talent."²⁴ Indeed Bülow was one of the leading musicians of the nineteenth century. He

²¹ Carr, *The Wagner Clan*, 31.

²² Carr, *The Wagner Clan*, 31.

²³ Hans von Bülow, letter to Marie Isidore von Bülow, January 26, 1851, quoted in Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 35.

²⁴ Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 35.

toured the entirety of Europe as a pianist and became well known as a conductor. Bülow's close relationship with Liszt was the catalyst for Franziska von Bülow, Hans' mother, becoming the new nursemaid for Cosima and her sister in 1855. Liszt's daughters were in need of someone to care for them when their current caretaker became too old. Liszt turned to Franziska von Bülow to step in as caretaker and trusted Hans to take care of his daughters' musical education. Cosima was already eighteen years old and soon formed a crush on von Bülow. For his part Hans seemed infatuated with the idea of marrying Cosima because she was Franz Liszt's daughter. He wrote to Liszt:

It is more than love that I feel for her. Rather, the idea of drawing even closer to you, whom I regard as the principal instigator and animator of my present and future existence, sums up all the happiness that I can expect to feel here on earth. In my eyes Cosima Liszt towers over all other women not only because she bears your name but also because she resembles you so much and because so many of her qualities make her a faithful reflection of your own person.²⁵

Liszt was uncomfortable with the proposal of marriage, not because of the clear focus on Bülow's love of Liszt rather than Cosima, but because Liszt hoped that Cosima would marry into nobility. Liszt was also aware that Bülow had a biting, sarcastic personality that would make marriage a difficult prospect for the young musician. Cosima's mother was firmly against the match and this is what finally made Liszt give his consent, using Cosima's marriage as a way to show his hand against Marie d'Agoult. Liszt was present for the marriage Marie d'Agoult was not.

²⁵ Hans von Bülow, letter to Franz Liszt, April 1856 quoted in George Marek, *Cosima Wagner* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981): 27.

Wagner himself wrote to Bülow to beg him to come and help Wagner with writing *Siegfried*. Wagner was not impressed with Cosima during this trip writing to Bülow “Cosima’s reserve toward me really disturbs me.”²⁶ Cosima would not continue to be cold and reserved with Wagner, toward the end of the next trip, seemingly for no reason, Cosima left Wagner by kneeling in front of him and kissing his hands while weeping. This struck Wagner so much that he mentions the incident in a diary he was writing for Mathilde Wesendonck.²⁷ Cosima wrote many years later that she was already in love with Wagner, but this seems as if it is mere fiction. Cosima was already deeply unhappy in her marriage and she was extremely touched by Wagner’s music and words; perhaps Cosima was overcome by sadness at leaving someone who brought her much joy through his music.

Cosima and Hans had two children. The first was named Daniela Senta, born in 1860. Hans was unexcited by the prospect of fatherhood and complained about the baby interrupting his ability to compose at his piano.²⁸ Cosima was shipped away to a spa in the Bavarian Alps shortly after Daniela was born and von Bülow went to Paris to assist Wagner with the production of *Tannhäuser*. When the Paris production of *Tannhäuser* ended in colossal failure Wagner made his way back to Germany, stopping in Weimar to meet with Liszt. While in Weimar he met Cosima’s sister who suggested they all take a trip to the spa in the Bavarian Alps to visit Cosima. This seems to be the trip when Wagner recognized Cosima warming to him,

²⁶ Marek, *Cosima Wagner*, 29.

²⁷ Marek, *Cosima Wagner*, 35.

²⁸ Marek, *Cosima Wagner*, 39.

though at the time he was involved with Mathilde Maier and showed no love interest in Cosima. Cosima and Hans had one more child, Blandine in March of 1863. There is no way to tell exactly how Cosima and Richard's affair began in the summer of 1864. Richard seemed to not have Cosima in mind for anything but a platonic relationship because he was involved with Mathilde Maier. Wagner had recently gained the patronage of King Ludwig II and requested that Mathilde join him to run his household. At the same time Wagner wrote to von Bülow asking him to join Wagner and to bring his wife and children. Cosima arrived in Munich on June 29th a week before Hans was to follow and Wagner wrote Mathilde shortly after telling her not to come.²⁹ Richard and Cosima's first child, Isolde, was born approximately nine months later on April 10, 1865. There is no proof that von Bülow was aware of the affair until much later. He continued to be dedicated to Wagner and seemed to just let Cosima fade from his life. Cosima and Wagner ended up having three children total; all while Cosima was still married to von Bülow. Eva, their second child, was born in February 1867 and Siegfried on June 6, 1869. Cosima wrote von Bülow asking for a divorce nine days later. Hans seemed upset by losing his wife, not just for her companionship, but because of the effect it would have on his relationship with Wagner. Cosima and Richard married a about a year later on August 25, 1870. Wagner was twenty-four years her senior and she seemed content to dedicate her entire life to the man, his ideals and his works. Cosima's commitment went on long after Richard Wagner died in 1883. Her dedication and

²⁹ Geoffrey Skelton, *Richard and Cosima Wagner: Biography of Marriage* (London: Victor Gollancz, LTD, 1982): 38.

worship of her second husband would continue to cause conflict among even among her own children.

In 1914, Siegfried Wagner was 45 years old and still a bachelor, a fact that created much angst for his mother, who spent much of her life making sure her husband's works and legacy would live on. Winifred met Siegfried during her first trip to Bayreuth. Siegfried might not have taken a second look at Winifred if certain political and family situations had not made it imperative that he find a wife. His sisters, Eva and Isolde, were already married. Isolde married Franz Beidler who was a conductor and appointed as musical assistant in 1896 for the Bayreuth Festival. Eva married Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the scion of a British military family, a fanatical Wagnerian and Cosima's close friend for many years.

In 1913, the Wagner family lost copyright protection on Richard Wagner's works, and this would serve to decrease the family income by a considerable amount. The family struggled to figure out how to supplement the loss of income and Cosima suggested cutting Isolde's annual allowance to the statutory minimum.³⁰ Isolde's relationship with her family had been struggling, because her husband, Franz, believed that Siegfried should not be the sole heir to Bayreuth. Isolde was the only offspring of Richard Wagner to produce an heir and Franz believed this meant he should have more say at Bayreuth and his son should have the opportunity to inherit Bayreuth. Cosima would have none of Franz's argument and firmly stuck to the idea of Siegfried as sole heir. This arguing caused a large rift, since nothing

³⁰ Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 276.

could be more important than the rightful heir to Bayreuth, and Cosima made the decision to cut Isolde's funds. When Isolde heard the news about this cut to her income she was incredibly upset; it was immaterial, she stated, whether she was born "under Bülow's roof or in Tribschen."³¹ The argument centered on whether Isolde's father was Richard Wagner or Cosima's first husband, Hans van Bülow. By cutting Isolde's allowance Cosima was effectively claiming that Isolde was not Wagner's daughter, even though Wagner had claimed Isolde as his own. Isolde desperately tried to contact Cosima to reach an agreement and to reconcile with her mother, motivated not only by a lack of funds but also to protect the right of her son, born in 1901, to the Wagner legacy.³² Siegfried, however, prevented her letters from reaching Cosima, either out of concern for his mother's health (Cosima was 76 at the time) or perhaps by a desire to protect his own position at Bayreuth.³³ Isolde's husband reacted to their reduced income and the threat of his son's legacy to Bayreuth by threatening Siegfried. While there is little research on Siegfried's sexuality it is commonly held that Siegfried preferred the company of men. Alban Berg suggested that Siegfried had a circle of men surrounding him in 1909; "Bayreuth couldn't kill *Parsifal* for me, nor could the ghastly horde of homosexual Wagnerians spoil Wagner."³⁴ It is not clear whether Cosima knew that Siegfried was

³¹ Letter from Isolde Beidler to Eva Chamberlain, 22 June 1913, as quoted in Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 276.

³² Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 136.

³³ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 136.

³⁴ Mitchell Morris, "Tristan's Wounds: On Homosexual Wagnerians at the Fin De Siècle," in *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, ed. Sophie Fuller and Lloyd Whitesell. (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002): 271.

homosexual, which at the time was a criminal offence and regarded as “unmanly and repellent,” but it was probably the information Franz Beidler used to try to get more money for his wife after she was limited by the loss of copyrights by the family; this suggests that, at least, Siegfried’s sisters were aware of this fact.³⁵ Franz attacked Siegfried, claiming that he had collected “material” about his brother-in-law, which could be produced if necessary and Isolde, Siegfried’s stepsister, followed up:

My husband has hinted at the severity of the charges against you, charges that have repeatedly come to my attention. I consider it my duty and even now am convinced that we had no alternative but to warn you.³⁶

Siegfried, probably quite aware of what they were threatening, responded to Isolde in a letter:

Don’t worry. People spoke ill of the greatest king of all time, Frederick the Great, and Prussia became great and strong through him! So, don’t worry! I shan’t desecrate the theatre!³⁷

Siegfried and his family ignored the threats from Isolde and her husband. Frustrated at the lack of ability to change her mother or her brother’s mind she pushed the family to court.

The court case ended when it was determined on June 19th, 1914, that since von Bülow recognized Isolde as his daughter she was not allowed to use “née

³⁵ Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 269.

³⁶ Isolde Beidler, letter to Siegfried Wagner, November 14, 1909, quoted in Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 267.

³⁷ Siegfried Wagner, letter to Isolde Beidler, November 14, 1909, quoted in Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 267.

Wagner.”³⁸ One result of the lawsuit was that much of it was reported in the press and the family’s reputation was damaged. The *New York Times* even reported on some of the family drama, noting that Isolde had lost her suit and that Cosima had been living with Richard Wagner long before her divorce to Hans von Vulow.³⁹ The increasingly negative publicity caused Siegfried to finally become concerned that Isolde or her husband might report to media that he was homosexual. At about the same time Maximilian Harden published a defamatory article about the Wagners in response to the court case. Harden’s article, which came out a few days after the case had ended, claimed that Cosima and Siegfried had lied, and the article also alluded to Siegfried’s homosexuality in one sentence, “Herr Siegfried Wagner, who cannot wish for too much exposure to the public eye,” was a “savior of an altogether different hue.”⁴⁰ Harden was notorious because of his reporting of the scandalous information regarding a relationship between Philipp, Prince of Eulenburg-Hertefeld and his close companion, Count Kuno von Moltke, both of whom were part of “a number of men nearly all of high birth and influential position and with intimate ties with the imperial head of Germany,” Kaiser Wilhelm II.⁴¹ Harden “strongly intimated or else stated outright that a number of these imperial intimates

³⁸ “Not Wagner’s Daughter,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1914.

³⁹ “Not Wagner’s Daughter,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1914.

⁴⁰ Maximilian Harden, “Tutte le Corde. Siegfried und Isolde’, *Die Zukunft*, June, 6, 1914, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 9.

⁴¹ Wolf von Schierbrand, “Startling revelations made by Maximilian Harden indicate the existence of abnormal influences to which the Kaiser has recently been subjected,” *New York Times*, November 17, 1907.

were cursed with abnormal impulses and habits.”⁴² The men were not sentenced but their careers were ruined and their reputations shattered. This scandal was highly publicized, and brochures and leaflets containing the complete transcripts of courtroom testimony were printed while songs and postcards also referenced the scandal. Harden’s mention of Siegfried in his 1914 article about the Wagners must have created much anxiety for the bachelor. It is not known if the Wagners knew that Isolde’s husband wrote to Harden after the article appeared, but Beidler was extremely interested in what Harden had to say on Siegfried. Beidler wrote:

Having taken a closer look at your article *Tutte le corde*, I feel impelled to write and express my extreme admiration and humble thanks. Wahnfried’s fear that I might tell the world about Siegfried’s morality was the real reason for the row. I take the liberty of telling you this because I assume that it will interest you after you have shown such great concern for the whole business.⁴³

Beidler and Harden did not end up further exploring Siegfried’s “morality.” The article was eclipsed when the following day, June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were shot by a Serbian student, starting The Great War, later dubbed World War I. Siegfried, however, was probably still shocked to his core by Harden’s article. His family could not afford a scandal that might harm Bayreuth. Siegfried had to stand by his claim that he would not “desecrate the theatre.”⁴⁴

⁴² Wolf von Schierbrand, “Startling revelations made by Maximilian Harden indicate the existence of abnormal influences to which the Kaiser has recently been subjected,” *New York Times*, November 17, 1907.

⁴³ Franz Beidler, letter to Maximilian Harden, July 1, 1914, quoted in Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 284.

⁴⁴ Siegfried Wagner, letter to Isolde Beidler, November 14, 1909, quoted in Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 267.

When Isolde lost the court case her son was no longer regarded as a scion of Wagner's, and the family claim on Bayreuth could be broken without an heir. Siegfried probably recognized that he needed to marry and to produce an heir in order to help restore his own reputation and to secure the family claim to Bayreuth.

Winifred and Siegfried met shortly after Harden's article was published. The young woman was musically informed and came from a family well known to the Wagners. The close relationship with the Wagners allowed Karl and Winifred to attend the dress rehearsals for the Bayreuth Festival in July of 1914. Only close family friends were afforded access to the dress rehearsals, which were not open to the public. Siegfried had taken over full management of Bayreuth at this time due to the ailing health of his mother, Cosima. This festival included Siegfried's new production of *Der fliegende Holländer*, which had not been performed in Bayreuth since 1902. Winifred met Cosima and her future sisters-in-law first, when, upon their arrival, they were brought to the main house to sit with the women in the Wagner family. Winifred met Siegfried later in the evening during an intermission. According to Winifred it was "love at first sight" and that "he was the unattainable ideal of my dreams."⁴⁵ This romantic memory came from an interview with Winifred in 1969, well after the original meeting, and is thus a bit suspect, but Winifred also wrote to her friend Lene about the meeting. Winifred, already calling Siegfried "Fidi" as a term of endearment, spoke of her enthusiasm about attending Bayreuth and the

⁴⁵ Interview with Winifred Wagner, BBC, 1969, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 9.

“searching, but so charming” way “Fidi” looked at her.⁴⁶ Winifred seemed enchanted by the older bachelor, besotted even since “Siegfried was the unattainable ideal of” her dreams.⁴⁷ Winifred and Karl had tea with the Wagners every day and Winifred said that Siegfried helped her get past her shyness around the Wagner family through his “cheerfulness and kindness.”⁴⁸ Siegfried apparently felt a certain fondness for the “little child,” and he started to court Winifred.⁴⁹

Most of their courtship was conducted through written correspondence, since Winifred was considered an enemy alien due to her English citizenship, and was unable to leave Berlin. The war that broke out in Europe meant that Winifred had to constantly report to police, had troubles going back to school, and in general was viewed with much distrust.⁵⁰ These actions made adoption of Winifred a necessity by the Klindworths. After the adoption, Winifred was still unable to leave Berlin, but there was less trouble from local police. Siegfried and Winifred’s correspondence was more about friendship until she turned 18. Siegfried invited the Klindworths to the premiere of his composition *Oath on the Flag*, which was dedicated to the German Army and its leaders, in October 1914. Siegfried’s long-time friend, the painter Franz Stassen accompanied him on this trip and when

⁴⁶ Winifred Wagner, letter to Helena Boy, October 28, 1914, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 14.

⁴⁷ Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 288.

⁴⁸ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 12.

⁴⁹ Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 288.

⁵⁰ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 14.

Winifred turned 18 and was of marrying age, Franz Stassen accompanied Siegfried again to visit Winifred. The importance of this trip was stated in a letter from Siegfried's older sister Eva, urging him to get married and secure Bayreuth's future.⁵¹ If Siegfried was unable to marry and produce heirs then Bayreuth could eventually be turned over to someone who was not a Wagner, something that was sacrilege in the eyes of Cosima and her family. Eva wrote about the threats by Isolde and her husband, warning:

Don't let Loldi's frightening, triumphant words, "Fidi won't marry," come true! If you do, you play into the hands of the evil people, what we call the "un-German devils." Everyone who loves and respects you is concerned about the future and shares with us the profound wish that you may find the right one!⁵²

Both Siegfried's family and Winifred's family seemed to be pushing for the match. Stassen reported that at the Klindworth's house there was one table that had nine pictures of Siegfried on it and that Klindworth asked Siegfried on more than one occasion to take care of Winifred if something were to happen to the aged couple.⁵³

Siegfried proposed in a letter, asking in a roundabout way: "My wish is that you wish what I secretly wish."⁵⁴ Winifred replied shortly after on July 5, 1915:

⁵¹ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 14.

⁵² Eva Chamberlain, letter to Siegfried Wagner, June 1915, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 17.

⁵³ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 16.

⁵⁴ Siegfried Wagner, letter to Winifred Klindworth, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 17.

Most honored, dearest Master, how may I interpret your gladdening words? If I may read them as I would like to, then I am the happiest soul beneath God's glorious tent of Heaven! Master, I am really still an overgrown child, but if you love me just a little as I am – then your wishes have surely long been fulfilled? And if it depended on me they would all, all be fulfilled! Good night! Tonight I won't dream of lizards!⁵⁵

Siegfried promptly wrote to Bayreuth to tell them that he hoped to be married soon.

Winifred's adopted father was overjoyed at the union, pleased that the son of the Master saw "the longing of his heart fulfilled by a union with the little imp."⁵⁶ Cosima too found Winifred to be a good choice, probably because Cosima believed her to be malleable:

No choice could suit me better than the one he has made! The girl has been brought up in strict morality and seclusion, and given a select education . . . It does no harm, it seems to me, that the eighteen-year-old child is also charming and beautiful. So we may see divine providence in this event and give devout thanks for it.⁵⁷

Winifred dedicated herself to Siegfried's dream of Bayreuth when she married him on September 22, 1915, at a mere 18 years old. Winifred's years at Bayreuth while Cosima was still alive was characterized by constant fighting for control, mostly against her sisters-in-law and sometimes her mother-in-law. Siegfried and Winifred made efforts to impose change on the tradition-bound Bayreuth, but it would not be

⁵⁵ Winifred Klindworth, letter to Siegfried Wagner, July 5, 1915, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 17.

⁵⁶ Karl Klindworth, letter to Siegfried Wagner, July 8, 1915, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 17.

⁵⁷ Cosima Wagner, letter to Ernst II, Prince of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, August 1915, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 18.

until after the war when, Winifred was sure of her position in the family, that the pair were able to make the changes that they desired.

Chapter 2

Winifred soon discovered that the Wagner family was steeped in tradition and ritual. The newlywed couple did not live in their own house or apartment, but instead were installed in Cosima's residence. Winifred quickly learned that she was expected to follow a strict daily regimen set up by her mother-in-law, that accounted for each hour of the day.⁵⁸ Cosima had an equally strict control over the Bayreuth festival, which she had directed since her husband's death in 1883. Richard Wagner's festival house, Bayreuth, was not a financial success during his lifetime. The only operas that were staged were the Ring Cycle in 1872 and *Parsifal* in 1882. Wagner died before he could accomplish his dream that all his other works from *Der fliegende Holländer* on would be performed at Bayreuth. It was only through Cosima's leadership that Bayreuth reached the epitome of success that Richard hoped it would become, a successful opera house dedicated to all his works. While Cosima was able to make Bayreuth successful, many of her strategies resulted in a strict and inflexible performance tradition that was almost impossible even for her son, Siegfried, to change.

Richard Wagner's death caused Cosima great sorrow. For twenty-five hours she sat alone with Wagner's body, cut off her hair to place in his coffin, and had no food or sleep for almost four days.⁵⁹ Cosima spent her years with Wagner completely devoted to his ideas, works and life, and once that was taken from her

⁵⁸ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 23.

⁵⁹ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 90.

she retreated from the world. The only human contact she had for about a year after his death was with her children and Bayreuth's financial advisor, Adolf von Groß.⁶⁰ This helped to create the myth that Cosima only emerged from her grief when she was informed that the festival, her husband's crowning achievement, was in dire trouble and she reluctantly stepped in to rescue it. In reality the Festival was one of Cosima's first concerns after Wagner's death and she decided within days to move forward with the 1883 festival.⁶¹ Wagner left no will and his finances were in terrible disorder when he died. Cosima wanted to make sure that Richard's son Siegfried's claim, as the heir to Bayreuth would not be in jeopardy. If the law did not view Siegfried as Wagner's son, Siegfried would be unable to inherit. One of the basic tenets of German law, "pater est, quem nuptiae demonstrant," stated that children of a married woman have only one father: the woman's husband.⁶² Though Siegfried was the only child that Wagner publically claimed as his own, Cosima quickly contacted Hans von Bülow, the man she was still married to when Siegfried was born, to establish paternity. Hans von Bülow secured Siegfried's claim to Bayreuth by writing the following:

I acknowledge that Siegfried, who was born on 6 June 1869 during the divorce proceedings between me and Frau Cosima née Liszt, later the wife of Herr Richard Wagner, is not my son.⁶³

⁶⁰ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 90.

⁶¹ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 90.

⁶² Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 159.

⁶³ Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 160.

Bülow's statement helped secure legal documentation that stated Cosima and Siegfried were Wagner's only legal heirs. This allowed Cosima to run the festival until Siegfried, who was thirteen at the time of Richard Wagner's death, was old enough to take over. It also made sure that anyone else who wanted to take over the festival would be unable to do so; Wagner's followers were already concerned about who should become director of the festival and Cosima was not a popular option. It was a brilliant move on her part.

Most of the criticism of Cosima's leadership of the festival came from those who admired Wagner the most. The first strike against her was that she was a woman:

It is impossible that a woman, and even if she were extremely talented . . . were energetic and were ready to make sacrifices (and these qualities were certainly in evidence) – could embrace the wide range of a man like Wagner . . . I wish that I were mistaken. Many people, however . . . think the way I do.⁶⁴

Her nationality was also criticized:

Cosima's spirit, I fear, will finally be the grave of the *true* Bayreuth spirit. The key to this puzzle was given to me in the laconic statement made by Joseph Rubinstein, who is one of her closest friends and who admitted: I consider her completely unmusical. Wagner's works can be fully comprehended and reproduced only from the depths of the German soul, the German music . . . Ever since Cosima has been in charge, talk has centered mainly on theatrical effects, scenic improvements, etc., not on music . . . Cosima's pure French character is dangerous in that it has brought about a Bayreuth

⁶⁴ Hans Mayer, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth: 1876-1976*, 69. Letter written to Hans von Wolzogen, editor of the *Bayreuther Blätter* from Friedrich von Hausegger, Austrian musician, February 27, 1891.

internationalism. At any rate, she is un-German from head to toe, and this will bring about the ruin of Bayreuth!⁶⁵

Ironically these two charges were also leveled against Winifred when she became director after her husband's death, keeping the festival in the family until Winifred and Siegfried's oldest son, Wieland, could take over the reins. But while Winifred used her relationship with Hitler to gain credibility, Cosima was careful to establish that only she knew what Wagner would want in the staging of his operas, and she followed Wagner's directions in the score and his writings as literally as possible.

Richard Wagner wanted to build an opera house that would facilitate complete immersion in the illusion of the world created by his operas.⁶⁶ To Wagner this meant that everything had to serve the drama: the orchestra had to be hidden to make sure that no dramatic barrier existed between the expression of the words and their being understood by the audience: the singers had to express themselves through gesture, blocking and enunciation as if they were driven by the music; and the costumes and set design must not pull the audience from the world created by the music. Wagner was fighting the trend of the time in opera in which little value

⁶⁵ Hans Mayer, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth: 1876-1976*, 69. Letter written to Ludwig Schemann, one of the most important ideologues of the Bayreuth nationalistic and anti-Semitic doctrine, from Martin Plüddemann, who made an earnest effort to cover the deficit for the 1883 Festival.

⁶⁶ Alan David Aberbach, *The Ideas of Richard Wagner: An Examination and Analysis of His Major Aesthetic, Political, Economic, Social, and Religious Thoughts* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1984), 62.

was placed on the feature that he felt was centrally important: dramatic consistency.⁶⁷

I need a theater in which only myself can produce. It is impossible to bring about what I need and to find a real footing for my work in the same theaters where other operatic nonsense is produced and where everything – the acting, concept, and required effect – is basically diametrically opposed to my work.⁶⁸

Richard Wagner was certain that no one would be able to produce his operas the way they were meant to be staged, except for himself. His vision was completely innovative for the time, and it seemed to many that no one but Richard Wagner would be able to run Bayreuth. Cosima went about taking over strategically, perpetuating a mythical version of her husband and taking complete control of all aspects of Bayreuth.

Cosima was concerned with the artistic success of her husband's works at Bayreuth, but just as important to her was the "promulgation of the Wagnerian gospel through out the world."⁶⁹ When Richard Wagner died, Cosima increasingly encouraged a type of hero worship of her late-husband. She went to considerable effort to retrieve all documents written by Wagner, every letter, and manuscript.⁷⁰ Once Cosima had obtained this documentation, sparing no expense, she began to

⁶⁷ Neil K. Friedman, "Gold Rules: The Politics of Wagner's *Ring*," in *Inside the Ring*, ed. John Louis DiGaetani (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 173.

⁶⁸ Friedman, "Gold Rules," 173.

⁶⁹ Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 158.

⁷⁰ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 91.

remove anything that showed the composer in a less-than-heroic light. It was easier once this was done for Cosima to establish the “official” view of Wagner in which Wagner’s revolutionary and democratic activities and essays were removed or de-emphasized, while his prose writings and later music dramas were accentuated.⁷¹ Cosima was able to do this through the help of men such as Hans Wolzogen, Carl Friedrich Glasenapp and Houston Stewart Chamberlin, a group of men who surrounded Wagner, Bayreuth and Cosima. These men became known as the Bayreuth Circle. The Bayreuth Circle helped to perpetuate the myth of Wagner through an outpouring of articles and books. Chamberlin’s biography of Wagner skirted such issues as Wagner’s marital misbehavior and his exploitation of Ludwig II.⁷² Cosima even went so far as to try and rewrite her own history when she requested that her daughter, Daniele, write to her friends from the period before she knew Wagner, requesting that any letters they might have from Cosima be destroyed.⁷³ Oliver Hilmes, Cosima’s biographer, suggested that this was not because of her fear of scandal, since the letters contain only innocuous details, but rather that Cosima was trying to destroy any evidence of an existence independent

⁷¹ Daria A. Depa, “Wagner and Musikpolitik in the Weimar Republic: Re-appropriations and Re-evaluations,” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2001), 83.

⁷² David C. Large, “Wagner’s Bayreuth Disciples,” in *In Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, eds. David C. Large and William Weber, 72-133. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984, 121.

⁷³ Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 158.

of Wagner.⁷⁴ By doing this Cosima could then completely identify herself with Wagner's life and works, helping Wagner to live on through his widow.

For the first years after Richard Wagner's death, the operas were staged without Cosima in open control. Instead, she had a curtained box constructed from which she could watch, visible to no one. She then sent letters to the conductors or the singers when even the slightest deviation was noticed from her husband's score: "if possible, more tenderly and the kettle-drums not so heavy"; "to be played with reverence"; "string playing not always precise"; "not mysterious enough, somewhat flat."⁷⁵ The conductor at the time, Hermann Levi, kept all these notes and when they were made public, the amount of detailed knowledge that Cosima had of Wagner's works was undeniable. Cosima obviously had musical talent and the ability to understand how to direct the festival, but she had to prove this to her detractors. That she stayed secluded in that enclosed box during the first two years in which she ran the festival was quite brilliant. Not only did it help to give the impression of a widow in deep mourning for her husband, keeping the attention on what was lost and the reason for the festival, but it also gave Cosima the ability to show that the festival could be successful under her direction. Cosima held onto the artistic production of Wagner's work with an iron grip, and the festival thrived under her control. She was able to extend Bayreuth's repertoire to cover the whole of Wagner's output, from *Der Fliegende Holländer* onwards, during her reign as festival director.

⁷⁴ Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 158.

⁷⁵ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 92.

Once Cosima began to direct the festival publicly she went to great lengths to preserve what she believed was her husband's vision. Wagner used the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, to describe what he was trying to achieve in his operas. This meant that not just the music was important, but all the various media should be combined. The sets, costumes, lighting, props, acting, music and singing were all equally important. Cosima kept this in mind while she was the director Bayreuth. *Parsifal* and the Ring cycle had extensive information about Wagner's Bayreuth productions. While Wagner was working on these operas he asked his assistants, Heinrich Porges, Richard Fricke and Julius Hey to keep record of all that was going on during production. For the performances of *Parsifal* these became a roadmap, not to be deviated from, but for Wagner's other productions Cosima needed to either fix what Wagner found lacking, such as in The *Ring Cycle*, or to guess at what she believed Wagner would want, depending mostly on her memory and recollection of Wagner's productions. When she was unable to rely on her own recollection or documentation, such as in the case of *Lohengrin* and *Der fliegende Holländer*, it was completely up to Cosima to come up with staging and musical direction.⁷⁶ *Parsifal* (1882) became the bedrock of the Bayreuth festival and was performed every year the festival ran, with 119 performances during Cosima's twenty-three year directorship.⁷⁷ *Tristan und Isolde* (1865), *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868), *Tannhäuser* (1845), and the *Ring* (1876) had almost equal share

⁷⁶ Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 138.

⁷⁷ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 138.

as the second productions with twenty-four, twenty-two, twenty-one and eighteen performances respectively, while *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843) and *Lohengrin* (1850) only had ten and six.

The documentation on *Parsifal* and the *Ring* became a template for Cosima in how to direct the other operas. Wagner was concerned with the singer's acting, blocking and stage movements. He believed that the music embodied the drama and the action of the singers should naturally develop from the emotion of the music. However, the operatic trend of the time was to focus solely on the music and the singer instead of the drama. Singers sang to the audience and were unnatural in their movement and gestures. In order to combat this trend Wagner was often forced to dictate gesture and blocking to the singers in the hopes that they would better understand the characters they portrayed. Porges recorded many examples during the *Ring* and *Parsifal* rehearsals. The following section from Porges notes recorded how Fricka was to protest against Wotan's acquiescence of Siegmund and Sieglinde's incest in *Die Walküre*:

Fricka's speech, "Wie thörig und taub du dich stellst . . ." must be harsh and at the end she must step back a little and raise her left hand in emphasis. She should not gesticulate at the beginning of the speech, "Achtest du rühmlich der Ehe Bruch . . .," but only when she reveals her growing agitation at "Mir schaudert das Herz, es schwindelt mein Hirn . . ." ⁷⁸

Instructions like these were meant to help the singer in the role during the rehearsals, which was where the notes were taken. Wagner was trying to help the

⁷⁸ Carnegie, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 93.

singer understand the motivation and psychology of the character, but Cosima took instructions like these and demanded that every singer who played the role follow them precisely for every performance. According to Cosima, “there was nothing left for [them] to create, but only perfect [the] details.”⁷⁹ And perfect she did. The singers had every gesture given to them, leaving nothing to chance. Something as small as a gaze was given a detailed description for the singer to follow:

... the conscious control of the eyelids-had to be practiced in three stages: (1) the gaze is directed at a point on the ground at a distance of five or six yards: the lids then almost cover the whole eye; (2) the gaze is slowly raised to eye-level: the eyelids are now raised; (3) the gaze is widened by a drawing back of the eyelids. In this way one achieves looks of weariness, of longing and of recognition.⁸⁰

Cosima hid behind her late husband’s reputation if questioned, and she would often turn to her young son and ask if that was how his Papa did it; Siegfried always agreed with his mother, even though he was only 13 when his father died and had not even seen most of his father’s operas while Richard was still alive.⁸¹ The amount of detail and control that Cosima wielded, down to the very gesture of a fingertip, became known as the Bayreuth style.⁸² Cosima’s direction also influenced how Wagner’s operas were staged outside of Bayreuth, and Wagner stage productions everywhere became entrenched in the Bayreuth Style well into the first decades of


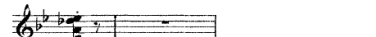
⁷⁹ Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 97.

⁸⁰ Kittle as quoted in Skelton, *Wagner at Bayreuth: Experiment and Tradition*, 85-86.

⁸¹ Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 117.

⁸² Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 99.

the twentieth century. One example can be seen in a performer's guide to *Tristan und Isolde* that was published in 1936 by Anna Bahr-Mildenburg, a Wagnerian soprano who performed all of the major soprano roles at Bayreuth under Cosima from 1897 to 1914. While the gestures that Bahr-Mildenburg gives do not exactly replicate the direction Cosima gave the singer, they still give an example of the Bayreuth Style. In fact there is actually more room for creativity by the singers using Bahr-Mildenburg's guide since it does not direct glances or how to position fingers. The following excerpt applies to *Tristan und Isolde*, Act II, Scene 1 into Scene 2:

'da' hell sie dorten leuchte' [Bliss M.]	With jubilant, gushing expression and an ecstatic, sweeping, grand movement of the right arm, after which she collapses onto the steps.
'wo sie dein Licht verscheuchte'	At the foot of the stairs, she gets up and turns around
'Zur Warte du: dort wache treu!' [Recit.]	with a lively gesture of command to Brangäne.
'Die Leuchte,' [Love-Call M.]	She seizes the torch with her right hand and holds it high.
'und wär's meines Lebens Licht,' [Recit.]	With closed eyes, in choked [suffocated] tones of the greatest intensity
'lachend' [Love-Call M.]	she lifts her head up in a gesture of arrogant, passionate determination, then (during the pause) hoists the torch still higher with an enthusiastic, decisive movement, and plunges it
'sie zu löschen' [Recit.]	quickly to the ground and puts it out. (For this purpose, a suitable amount of loose, wet sand must be placed to the right of the steps –
'zag' ich nicht!' [Love-Call and Death Ms. Combined]	if possible, out of sight – in which Isolde sticks the torch. It should be done this way so that Isolde doesn't first have to look down, searching, which would be disturbing and would destroy the illusion.)
After: 'zag' ich nicht'	Isolde stands now in an ecstatic posture, her head held high, her eyes open wide, gazing lustfully and thirstily through the trees, with both her arms stretched out to the side. When the music changes to <i>piano</i> , she sinks down slowly, as if involuntarily.
[V. Period, Main Section]	In breathless excitement, and with careful steps, she descends the stairs.
	She stops <i>suddenly</i> , looking and listening cautiously around.
	



Again, careful, secretive little steps on the staircase.



Again, *suddenly* standing still, listening.

For the next nine bars [Impatience M.]

Hasty, scurrying little steps across the length of the stage, peering here and there through the trees.

On the tenth bar [Middle Section]

She releases her veil from her hair.

[Waving M.]

The first, as yet unspoken, gesture of waving, as she peers out into the darkness with uncertainty. This waving is repeated five times, as is obvious in the music, becoming ever more impatient and the waves of the veil ever larger. She also hurries about the trees, looking and searching in a high state of arousal.



From here on, as is obvious from the music, she increases the waving motion until:



'A gesture of sudden delight', she has spotted Tristan in the distance.

[Reprise]

She hurries to the steps of the watchtower and tries to raise herself higher.





A great wafting movement with the entire length of the veil. The veil shouldn't be too short, but should be able to float through the air in great waves. Only while Isolde waves with uncertainty should it be kept short.



At the end of this bar, the hand holding the veil is low.



The veil once again waved high



The veil low



Again waved high



Veil low



Veil high – always more excited



Veil low



Isolde 'jumps down' from the steps 'to meet Tristan'.

Act II, Scene 2

'Isolde! Tristan! Geliebter!'

She falls into his arms with tremendous passion. Both then stagger to the foreground, closely entwined. This meeting must, in its elementary passion, be free from banal little loving caresses! No kissing.

Figure 1: Anna Bahr-Mildenburg, "Performer's guide to *Tristan und Isolde*," Act II, Scene 1 into Scene 2.⁸³

Cosima's style was prevalent throughout the world and lasted at Bayreuth until Winifred became director in 1930. The Bayreuth style was a result of Cosima taking Wagner's views to the extreme. Like Wagner she wanted the opera to be a music drama, not just sung beautifully, but also expressed in a way that was motivated

⁸³ Nicholas Baragwanath, "Anna Bahr-Mildenburg," 68.

from the music. But in doing so, she also denied the part of the composer's genius that was dedicated to change and renewal.⁸⁴

The recipe that Cosima put in place for the singers to follow made it difficult for even her son, Siegfried, to break away from the Bayreuth style. It spread to countless productions outside of Bayreuth and put a "straight jacket on Wagner," encouraging the notion that the modern style that was emerging was blasphemous.⁸⁵ The modern style of staging Wagner that was viewed as heretical was based on the theories of the architect Adolphe Appia (1862-1928). Appia took a revolutionary approach to stage design and lighting, and focused many of his theories on perfecting the faults he found in the way that Wagnerian operas were staged, and especially the set design.⁸⁶ Bayreuth's stage design was of literal depictions, while Appia believed that the scene should create a mood using sparse scenery and that lighting should be the main component to create place and mood.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of Theater*, 135.

⁸⁵ Geoffrey Skelton, *Wagner at Bayreuth: Experiment and Tradition*, 81.

⁸⁶ Richard C. Beacham, "Adolphe Appia and the Staging of Wagnerian Opera," *The Opera Quarterly*, 1 (1983): 127.

⁸⁷ Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 147.



Figure 2: Adolphe Appia, *Parsifal: Sacred Forest*.⁸⁸



Figure 3: Bayreuth, *Parsifal: Sacred Forest Scene*.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Beacham, "Adolphe Appia," 127.

⁸⁹ Beacham, "Adolphe Appia," 127.

Cosima firmly rejected Appia's ideas.⁹⁰ At one point Cosima was given Appia's *La Mise en scene du drama wagnerien* and grandly replied, "Appia does not seem to know that the *Ring* was produced here in 1876, and therefore there is nothing more to be discovered in the field of scenery and production."⁹¹ This quote is ironic since one of the few changes Cosima made was to redesign the sets for Wagner's *Ring* Cycle. Wagner believed that the sets would need to be created and painted by real artists, instead of stage designers, to create natural looking sets. He often used landscape artists and for the *Ring*, such as Viennese Josef Hoffman. Cosima found the sets to be too busy and she wrote in her diary about the Hoffman sketches:

In the afternoon looked through the sketches – a fine and powerful impression, the only questionable aspect being the downgrading of the dramatic intentions in favor of an elaboration of the scenery. This is particularly disturbing in Hunding's hut, and above all in Gunther's court, which is designed very sensibly, but is much too ostentatious.⁹²

Cosima hired Max Brückner, a scenic artist, to paint the new sets for the *Ring* cycle based on her own design. Brückner stayed on at Bayreuth to complete all of the sets for Cosima's productions at Bayreuth. Cosima's settings provided greater simplicity and were designed to not overwhelm the stage acting, but to compliment it with clearly defined spaces for the singers. The following pictures show that Cosima's

⁹⁰ Beacham, "Adolphe Appia," 127.

⁹¹ Skelton, *Wagner at Bayreuth*, 130.

⁹² Carnegie, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 80.

sets were simpler than Wagner's, but still were naturalistic and tried to retain the feeling of Wagner's sets.



Figure 4: Hoffman's sketch of Wagner's staging for *Die Walküre*, Act III.⁹³

⁹³ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 58.



Figure 5: Cosima's stage design for *Die Walküre*, Act III. ⁹⁴

Cosima kept the same elements and created a cleaner set. Set design at Bayreuth followed this visual pattern, refusing, especially during Cosima's directorship, to change sets once they were created. Appia, too, was disappointed in the sets from the original 1876 Bayreuth production and it was that performance that inspired him to create his theory on staging Wagner's operas which Cosima found so vexing.

Modernity, however, was knocking on Bayreuth's door, despite Cosima firmly denouncing any kind of change. The biggest threat to Cosima's Bayreuth style was not Adolphe Appia's ideas, though they certainly shook her, but instead a production of *Tristan und Isolde* conducted by Gustav Mahler with set designs by

⁹⁴ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 117.

Alfred Roller. This performance of 1903 lent authority to a modern style of staging Wagner by being performed in a major theatre, the Vienna Court Opera. The fact that a composer, Mahler, who was seen as the supreme Wagner conductor of his generation was involved gave it even more authority.⁹⁵ Mahler and Roller put the music at the center of the drama and sought to eliminate anything on stage that served as merely decoration and detracted from the “total conception” of the drama.⁹⁶ In this, Roller as a set designer followed the theories of Appia. The sets that were produced for *Tristan und Isolde* do not scream of modernism, like Appia’s, but they mark the first time that a stage of international renown did not just try to duplicate Wagner’s original performance.⁹⁷ It showed that it was possible to go back to the score and create a new interpretation, completely shaking the seal of authenticity that Bayreuth had claimed. Some thirty-one years later Roller would be invited to Bayreuth under Winifred’s direction.

Siegfried takes over

Siegfried took over control of Bayreuth in 1906, three years after Mahler and Roller’s production of *Tristan und Isolde* and seven years before he married Winifred. Siegfried was more open to change than his mother, but he constantly worked under her shadow and spent much of his time trying to please her. Siegfried is often portrayed as a man who was henpecked by his forceful mother and sisters.

⁹⁵ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 157.

⁹⁶ Gustav Mahler as quoted in Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 163.

⁹⁷ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 165.

Indeed he is frequently depicted, in scholarship, as a weak person, who did not often stand up for himself. Unfortunately there is little scholarship on Siegfried, and there must be a wealth of opportunity to find out more about the man and his compositions. Siegfried was an opera composer, but many of his compositions failed to gain the respect of the audience. He was unable to make much money composing and eventually focused mostly on Bayreuth.



Figure 6: Siegfried and Cosima ⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 165.

Siegfried was aware of the changes in set design for Wagnerian opera performances that was happening outside of Bayreuth, and even approved of much of what was happening. Though Cosima firmly disapproved of Appia and his improvements, the Wagner children must have discussed the developments on Wagnerian opera set design because fifteen year old Siegfried wrote in a letter to his half-sister Daniele: "The Appia looks very good on my wall. Would you mind if I kept it?"⁹⁹ Siegfried also was in the audience at Mahler and Roller's staging of *Tristan und Isolde*. Inspired by what he saw he ended up bringing some "bold" new changes to his production of *Parsifal* in 1911; he adjusted the scenery for one set, the magic garden. Siegfried presented Brückner with a sketch for the magic garden scene that was reminiscent of landscapes of J.M.W. Turner. Turner's style was a precursor to impressionism and is more about suggesting details, smooth lines and a focus on light than on the realistic imagery that Cosima and Wagner used. It says much that Brückner, Cosima's original set painter, censored Siegfried's break in tradition by creating a more conservative interpretation for the performance.¹⁰⁰ Siegfried's change of just one scene might not seem like a large break from tradition or a pathway to modernism, but *Parsifal* held a sacred place in Bayreuth, and this small change resulted in much displeasure from critics and was seen as more groundbreaking at Bayreuth than it would be anywhere else.

Parsifal was first performed in 1882 at Bayreuth and was intended by Wagner only to be performed at Bayreuth:

⁹⁹ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 151.

¹⁰⁰ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 151.

I must now try to consecrate a stage for it *Parsifal*], and this can only be my Festival theatre in Bayreuth, which stands here all alone. there, and there alone, may *Parsifal* be presented now and always: never shall *Parsifal* be offered in any other theatre as a mere amusement for its audience.¹⁰¹

It was this quote that was used again and again by Cosima and the Bayreuth circle. The major figures in the circle were Hans von Wolzogen, editor of the *Bayreuther Blätter* and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, an English political philosopher who had married Eva Wagner in 1908. This group sought to extend the copyright date of *Parsifal*, beginning their appeal as early as 1898, fifteen years before the copyright was due to expire. The copyright extension was denied in 1901, but Cosima continued to try and sway public opinion by seeking allegiances among well-known dignitaries and, in one case, a pastor. Many believed that Cosima initiated this fight in order to keep money from the copyright in the Wagner family hands, but much of the language used in appeals suggests that those at Bayreuth had formed a type of quasi-religion around *Parsifal*. The following quote from Cosima's letter to the pastor seeks to persuade the man of religion to help her keep Wagner's most sacred work out of ordinary theaters:

... if the clergy could be persuaded to take an interest in ensuring that the Sacred Stage Festival Drama *Parsifal* were protected and its sublime and sacred object not abandoned to ordinary theaters.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Richard Wagner, Letter to Ludwig II written September 1880 as quoted in Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 226.

¹⁰² Cosima Wagner, letter, as quoted in Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 230.

Cosima and supporters put together a petition to “protect” *Parsifal*, signed by 18,000 people in which the first chapter began “About the religious reasons” for the protection of *Parsifal*.¹⁰³ Even Wagnerian singer Anna von Mildenburg-Bahr observed that those who attended *Parsifal* at Bayreuth had a religious experience:

Common to them all is their need to admit that what they have experienced here is something wholly unique, something that cannot be compared with anything else in the world and that they could not have experienced elsewhere . . . They undergo a profound inner transformation and experience the union of the receiving congregation and the spirit of creation.¹⁰⁴

Those at Bayreuth talked about *Parsifal* as if it were something that was sacred and meant to be worshiped. It was not a small decision on Siegfried’s part to make the change to the *Parsifal* set. He was well aware of how those, especially his family, including Houston Stewart Chamberlain, would take to changes. This was also one of the last advancements that Siegfried would be able to accomplish before the war stopped the festival for nine years in 1914. The festival resumed in 1924 after the end of the war, but by then Bayreuth was completely strapped for funding. It was at this point that National Socialism entered Bayreuth.

¹⁰³ Udo Bermbach, “The Transfer of Liturgy,” 136.

¹⁰⁴ Anna von Mildenburg-Bahr as quoted in Hilmes, *Cosima Wagner*, 237.

Chapter 3

Hitler first visited Wahnfried on October 1st, 1923, at the invitation of Winifred Wagner. She had been introduced to Hitler the evening before by family friends, the Bechsteins, and was immediately taken with his charismatic personality and blue eyes.¹⁰⁵ The Wagner family was very familiar with Adolf Hitler and his political positions. While they were not members of the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP), the party of which Hitler was the leader, they had been following his political career. The economy of Weimar Germany was dire; hyperinflation raised the cost of milk first to one million marks, and then a billion marks. The Bayreuth Festival was bankrupt after a truncated 1914 season (it was forced to close when The Great War broke out) and the rest of their capital was wiped out due to postwar inflation. Siegfried and Winifred now had four children and struggled to find a way to reopen the festival. Siegfried wrote in June, 1923:

Everything is getting much worse. The yawning abyss is just about to open up! – And we're supposed to hold a festival! The word is an irony in itself! ...

How many people are wandering around alone, have lost everything in Russia, are staying alive by taking the most menial jobs; how many artists are obliged to play in cinemas and nightclubs! Misery wherever you look! I've completed umpteen things that are just lying in a drawer, I can't get them printed, just like a painter who can't get any more paints.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 140.

¹⁰⁶ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 48.

The Wagners, like many other Germans, found the postwar political situation intolerable and viewed Hitler as someone who could save the country.¹⁰⁷ The NSDAP branch in Bayreuth had three hundred members within four months of its formation; Winifred and her sisters-in-law did not join until four years later and then they did so at Adolf Hitler's request.¹⁰⁸

Hitler was also familiar to the family through Eva Wagner's husband, Houston Stewart Chamberlain. An English-born German writer and philosopher, Chamberlain was the only one in the family who was more concerned about politics than art or at least worked to join the two together. Chamberlain was the primary reason that Wagner became so linked to the Nationalist and *völkisch* ideology that appealed to Hitler.¹⁰⁹ Chamberlain spent the years 1892 to 1896 devoted to writing propaganda on behalf of Bayreuth, much of which was published in the *Bayreuther Blätter*. But Chamberlain also published pamphlets that presented Richard Wagner's writings, and the man himself, as German in the most nationalistic terms.¹¹⁰ Hitler was an admirer of Chamberlain, and it has been said that he was influenced by Chamberlain's book *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century), published in 1899.¹¹¹ The book was

¹⁰⁷ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 140.

¹⁰⁸ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 51.

¹⁰⁹ Roger Allen, "From Critical Tool to Political Metaphor," 79.

¹¹⁰ Barry Millington, "Chamberlain, Houston Stewart," *Grove Music Online*, accessed January 19, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/05378>.

¹¹¹ Allen, "From Critical Tool to Political Metaphor," 80.

extremely anti-Semitic and it advanced the theory that the Aryan race was central to the success of European supremacy; it also depicted Jewish influence as negative. There is no real way to prove that Hitler was directly influenced by Chamberlain's book, but it is certain that Hitler was aware of Chamberlain and his political leanings. In a letter to Siegfried Wagner in 1924, Hitler claimed "the spiritual sword that we wield was forged in Bayreuth, first by the Master himself, then by Chamberlain."¹¹² Many of Chamberlain's writings, especially during World War I, spoke of a messianic, strong leader who would arise from the *Völk* and save Germany. It was in his treatise, *Politische Ideale* of 1915, that he wrote: "An iron broom must sweep Germany clean. Whoever has the courage to wield it will find that he has the entire strength of the Folk behind him."¹¹³ Initially Chamberlain did not view Hitler as the person who would fulfill that role; he viewed Hitler as an agitator and his party had a reputation for street fighting among bourgeois circles.¹¹⁴ Hitler met Chamberlain a few days before visiting Wahnfried, and Chamberlain was struck by Hitler's personality and the respect that Hitler showed for him. This is what prompted Chamberlain to send Hitler a letter after the meeting, in which he wrote:

[...] You are not at all, as you have been described to me, a fanatic. In fact, I would call you the complete opposite of a fanatic. The fanatic inflames the

¹¹² Adolf Hitler, Letter for Siegfried Wagner, May 5, 1924 quoted in Hans Rudolf Vaget, "Wagnerian Self-Fashioning: The Case of Adolf Hitler," *New German Critique* 101 (2007), 100.

¹¹³ Chamberlain, *Politische Ideal* (Munich, 1915), 101 as quoted in Roger Allen, "From Critical Tool," 89.

¹¹⁴ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 51.

mind, you warm the heart. The fanatic wants to overwhelm people with words, you wish to convince, only to convince them-and that is why you are successful. Indeed, I would also describe you as the opposite of a politician, in the commonly accepted sense of the word, for the essence of all politics is membership of a party, whereas with you all parties disappear, consumed by the heat of your love for the fatherland. It was, I think, the misfortune of our great Bismarck that he became, as fate would have it (by no means through innate predisposition), a little too involved in politics. May you be spared this fate. [...]

But I am digressing, for I wanted only to speak of you. That you brought me peace is related very much to your eyes and hand gestures. Your eye works almost as a hand: it grips and holds a person; and you have the singular quality of being able to focus your words on one particular listener at any given moment. As for your hands, they are so expressive in their movement that they rival your eyes. Such a man brings rest to a poor suffering spirit! Especially when he is dedicated to the service of the fatherland.

My faith in Germandom has never wavered for a moment, though my hopes had, I confess, reached a low ebb. At one blow you have transformed the state of my soul. That Germany in its hour of greatest need has given birth to a Hitler is proof of vitality; your actions offer further evidence, for a man's personality and actions belong together. That the magnificent Ludendorff openly supports you and embraces your movement: what a wonderful combination!¹¹⁵

The letter was thereafter used as propaganda to give Hitler credibility and was widely publicized. It represented the first endorsement of Hitler from a person who was well known and respected. Papers gave the meeting incredible importance even well after 1923:

Adolf Hitler and Houston Stewart Chamberlain clasped hands. The great thinker, whose writings went with the Führer on his journey and laid the intellectual foundations of the Nordic German world-view, the genius, seer

¹¹⁵ Houston Stewart Chamberlain, letter to Adolf Hitler, 7 October 1923, quoted in Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Vinkle, eds., *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 84.

and herald of the Third Reich, felt that through this simple man of the people Germany's destiny would achieve a glad fulfillment.¹¹⁶

Chamberlain and Winifred were fully taken with Hitler when he finally entered Wahnfried to visit the place where Richard Wagner lived, worked and was buried. Chamberlain saw Hitler as a Savior, but Winifred later noted that her excitement at meeting Hitler was due to "my youthful enthusiasm."¹¹⁷ Hitler was "awed" at visiting The Masters home and grave.¹¹⁸

Scholarship directly linking Wagner's political ideologies to Hitler's has been popular since 1976, the year that Hartmut Zelinsky sought to link Wagner's philosophies with the National Socialists.¹¹⁹ This is not the place to discuss the political and ideological link between Hitler and Wagner, but Hitler's admiration for Wagner cannot be ignored. It is part of the reason that Hitler became so connected to Winifred, and the main reason Hitler felt linked to Bayreuth. *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* are the Wagnerian operas that have come under the most scrutiny for their "potential ideological messages" and performance history during the Third Reich, but Hitler was said to have a special connection to *Rienzi*.¹²⁰ Hitler related his memory of the first time that he saw *Rienzi* during a gathering at Bayreuth, where

¹¹⁶ Headline, *Bavarian Ostmark*, July 26, 1936.

¹¹⁷ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 59.

¹¹⁸ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 59.

¹¹⁹ Bermbach, "The Transfer of Liturgy," 130.

¹²⁰ Pamela M. Potter, "Wagner and the Third Reich: Myths and Realities," *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner* ed. Thomas S. Grey, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 243.

his childhood friend August Kubizek was a special visitor. Kubizek wrote a biography of Adolf Hitler called “The Young Hitler I Knew” in 1955 and famously described Hitler’s first experiences with Wagner. There is much debate over the credibility of Kubizek’s stories, so I want to instead focus only on what was said at the Bayreuth gathering and also to Robert Ley, head of the German Labour Front from 1933 to 1945.¹²¹ This account states that Hitler credited *Rienzi* with starting him on the path of politics. At a gathering at Bayreuth in 1939 Hitler told the story of first seeing *Rienzi* and explained its significance:

“It was at that moment that it all began. [Rienzi sings] But if you choose me as the protector/ of the people’s given rights, /then you may look back upon your forebears,/ and see me as the people’s tribune! To which the assembled people reply, “Rienzi, hail to you, tribune of the people . . . ”¹²²

Rienzi was one of Wagner’s earlier operas, first performed in 1842, and Wagner had no plans to show the opera at Bayreuth. The opera was not the first Wagner opera that Hitler saw, that distinction goes to *Lohengrin*, but *Rienzi* held a special place for Hitler. The Party Rally always opened with the overture from *Rienzi* and when Robert Ley tried to persuade Hitler to substitute a modern composition for the *Rienzi* overture, Hitler again told the story of the significance of *Rienzi*:

You know, Ley, it’s not accidental that the Party Rally always opens with the overture from *Rienzi*. It’s not just a musical question. By invoking the

¹²¹ For discussion on the credibility of August Kubizek’s accounts of Hitler first viewing Wagner see Jonas Karlsson, “In that hour it began”? Hitler, *Rienzi*, and the Trustworthiness of August Kubizek’s *The Young Hitler I Knew*,” *The Wagner Journal* 6, 2012; The introduction to Fredric Spotts *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* and Brigitte Hamann, *Hitler’s Vienna*, 52-59.

¹²² Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 308.

splendors of the Imperial past, this son of a small inn-keeper succeeds, at 24 years of age, in persuading the Roman people to drive out the corrupt Senate. It was while listening as a young man to this divinely blessed music in the theatre in Linz that the inspiration came to me that I was likewise destined to unite the German Reich and make it great.¹²³

Hitler's love of Wagner certainly went further than just *Rienzi*. Hitler was reported to be very familiar with most of Wagner's works and loved to discuss them with Winifred after performances.¹²⁴

It was through his love of Wagner and admiration for Houston Stewart Chamberlain that Hitler became entrenched in the Wagner family. Hitler won over not just Winifred and Chamberlain during his visit in 1923, but also Siegfried.

Winifred wrote to her friend:

“. . . after an extraordinarily lively conversation . . . in his spontaneous way and with a cordial laugh, Siegfried had put his hands on the shoulders of Hitler and exclaimed: 'Do you know, I like you!' Siegfried was taken with A[dolf] H[itler], in that extremely modest but very definite way of his, and soon offering to be on 'du' terms with him."¹²⁵

Siegfried's support of Hitler was just as fierce as Winifred's, though he later became more reserved when the relationship threatened the Bayreuth festival, declaring "we'll remain faithful to him, even if we should also go to prison for it."¹²⁶ Siegfried

¹²³ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 309.

¹²⁴ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 109.

¹²⁵ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 60.

¹²⁶ Siegfried Wagner to Rosa Eidan, December 1923 as cited in Wagner und Musikpolitik, 211.

in this statement was referring to his wife's dedication to the now fugitive, Hitler, after the failed Beer Hall Putsch. Winifred declared the family loyalty in no uncertain terms on November 12, 1923 by writing into the local Bayreuth newspaper:

For years we have been following with the deepest personal sympathy and approval the constructive work of Adolf Hitler, this German man who, filled with the most ardent love of his Fatherland, sacrifices his life for his ideal of a purified, united national Great Germany, who has taken upon himself the dangerous task of opening the eyes of the working class to the internal enemy and the danger of Marxism and its consequences, who has managed as no one else to bring people together as brothers, who has learned how to overcome implacable class hatred and who has given thousands upon thousands of confused people the welcome hope and firm belief in a revived, worthy Fatherland.¹²⁷

So fierce was her defense of Hitler that she was threatened with arrest if she did not stop making anti-government statements.¹²⁸ Winifred refused to stop making these statements and Siegfried, for the most part, supported his wife and enjoyed that she supported Hitler "like a lioness."¹²⁹

This support of Hitler and the Nazi party was not, however, without problems for the Bayreuth Festival. Siegfried and Winifred toured America in early 1924, hoping to gain financial support from American Wagnerians in order to open Bayreuth for the first time since the beginning of World War I. The tour was a complete failure, not in small part to the constant discussion of the connection between the Wagner family and Bayreuth and National Socialism in the press.

¹²⁷ Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival*, 141-142.

¹²⁸ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 68.

¹²⁹ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 68.

Siegfried often made anti-Jewish statements and unknowingly offended those he was trying to befriend. Siegfried did not realize that he and Winifred were under constant scrutiny by their American hosts and the American Press because of his family's connection to Hitler, so he did not concern himself with diplomacy and acted as he did in Germany. The journalist Joseph Chapiro, sarcastically, said of one evening in Siegfried's company: "It would never end if I tried to report all the value-judgments I had the pleasure of hearing from Herr Wagner's lips in a single evening."¹³⁰ Siegfried and Winifred seemed unaware of the disrepute that their connection to Hitler and his politics brought to the Bayreuth Festival in the eyes of the American public. They also seemed unaware of the damage their own anti-Semitic mutterings did their image.

When the festival opened in summer 1924, there were ample signs that it was firmly associated with the National Socialist party. The flags that were chosen to hang from the Festival House were the old conservative "black-white-red" Reich flags. Known members and sympathizers of the banned National Socialist Party were constantly seen attending the operas. The Volksdeutsche publishers, a group of writers dedicated to nurturing and deepening *völkisch* thought in cultural areas, put together a special festival guide.¹³¹ The guide spent much time discussing Wagner as the trail-blazer of nationalistic socialism and the enemy of Americanism

¹³⁰ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 85.

¹³¹ Depa, "Wagner and Musikpolitik," 207.

and Judaism, much as Chamberlain had done before and during World War I.¹³² Siegfried began to understand the consequences of the Bayreuth Festival turning political as talk of German boycotts of the festival began.¹³³ In a panic Siegfried sought to gain favor with the Rabbi of Bayreuth, Falk Solomon, in the hopes that the Rabbi could stop a boycott by German Jews. Solomon was unimpressed by Siegfried's clumsy attempt that showed the heavy influence of Chamberlain's race ideology and replied:

There is a widespread view that your house is a stronghold of this *völkisch* movement. Herr Chamberlain is the typical representative of anti-Semitic race theory. Members of your family wear swastikas. Your family...is said to support the *völkisch* parties with substantial funding. Is it any surprise that decent men and women of the Jewish faith here and abroad exercise caution regarding things Wagnerian, and are not willing to offer contributions that they fear may indirectly go to benefit the *völkisch* movement?¹³⁴

He closed with:

We Jews, too, admire the work of Richard Wagner, and we find it painful when someone tries to destroy this admiration. A House of Wagner . . . that does not serve the parties of the day will be placed above all parties and will encounter no enemies.¹³⁵

Siegfried could no longer turn a blind eye to the effects of Winifred's friendly nature towards National Socialism and those who were at the head of the party, such as Hitler and Goebbels, on the Bayreuth festival. Siegfried put a complete stop to the politicization of the festival when, after the conclusion of *Die Meistersinger*, the first

¹³² Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 142.

¹³² Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 85.

¹³³ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 85.

¹³⁴ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 94.

¹³⁵ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 95.

opera of the 1924 season, the audience stood and sang all three verses of *Deutschland über Alles*. The press and many audience members complained about the political spirit that radiated from many of the audience. Wagnerians like Prince Heinrich Reuss XLV were irritated:

We saw Wagner and his work of art desecrated by a non-artistic demonstration...Wahnfried should beware the spirits who have invoked this demonstration. Perhaps they do not know what they are doing. But they are the enemies of the artist Wagner, and they are digging the grave of the Bayreuth idea.¹³⁶

From then on there was a large notice that was displayed declaring, “The public is strongly urged not to sing at the conclusion of *Die Meistersinger*. Art is what matters here!”¹³⁷ Siegfried sought to further limit the damage by writing an open letter which was published in the Central Society Newspaper of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith refuting any knowledge of what was going on (including the official Festival Guide) and promising that the Festival would be free of any political slant from then on.¹³⁸ Siegfried had no way real way to guarantee that the festival attendees who were supporters of Hitler would not burst out in song again, or distribute political pamphlets. Afraid of what kind of reaction the crowd would have if Hitler attended the festival Siegfried asked Hitler not to attend when he was released from prison in 1925.

¹³⁶ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 101.

¹³⁶ Depa, “Wagner und Musikpolitik,” 202.

¹³⁷ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 103.

¹³⁸ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 142.

Winifred maintained the relationship with Hitler, even after Siegfried pulled away from allowing Bayreuth to become a political arena because of fears of offending the liberal press and foreign guests.¹³⁹ Winifred's letters to her friend Lene depict a love-struck young woman. Hitler is referred to as "Wolf," a familiar nickname. The letters talk about her meetings with Hitler, during which her husband often left her alone with the other man. Winifred wrote that she was "daydreaming" while walking through Munich and found herself standing "suddenly in the administrative office of the NSDAP . . . Hardly had [she] arrived there than, horrors, Hess [Hitler's personal secretary] spotted [her]."¹⁴⁰ Winifred continues, stating that she left her address behind in the hopes that Hitler would invite her to lunch. Hitler responded and Winifred took her husband Siegfried to the meeting. "Touchingly, he [Siegfried] went off all alone to some other eating-place. He pretended he was doing so out of generosity, but actually of course he was scared of being seen together with W[olf]!!!"¹⁴¹ Winifred began inviting Hitler to spend the night at Wahnfried when he was traveling from Munich and Berlin, or during other trips that took him near Bayreuth. These visits always occurred secretly at night and Siegfried usually did not know until after they had happened, when his children informed him. The visits were innocent. Winifred and Hitler both seemed to enjoy playing at being married. Siegfried spent little time with his wife outside of Festival matters and even less time with his children, nor was Siegfried circumspect when it

¹³⁹ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 127.

¹⁴⁰ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 127.

¹⁴¹ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 127.

came to spending time with men.¹⁴² The close relationship was kept hidden as much as possible to keep Bayreuth out of the spotlight; Hitler was also quite close to the children and when he arrived to spend the evening he would always wake the children up to tell them stories or jokes.

Nevertheless, rumors started to spread that Hitler and Winifred were having an affair. Winifred wrote to her friend, rejecting the rumors that her relationship with Hitler had ruined her marriage to Siegfried:

Broken marriages look rather different from ours . . . you know how much I would like Fidi to be more manly, more assertive-for a while I was naïve enough to believe that I could change Fidi [Siegfried's nickname] . . . Fidi knows my outlook, and I know his present one, but also his true one, and I'm waiting for it to come back to the fore. Fidi too plays a different part in my life from the one he would like – how often he slips into expressing admiring words for Hitler's personality and sincerity etc. etc. of his aims. ¹⁴³

This quote suggests that Winifred is aware of the type of relationship that she has with Siegfried and that she is doing the best that she can to make the relationship last. Winifred constantly rejected the idea that she and Hitler had a sexual relationship. Winifred's theory on Hitler's relationship with women, formed from a biography on Mussolini, was:

That in their inner life people who are destined for such great things naturally had to become totally solitary – their mission placed them above others and therefore on the outside – a relationship with a female represented the only bridge and contact to connect them with the rest of

¹⁴² Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 143.

¹⁴³ Winifred Wagner, letter to Helena Roesener, February 2, 1926, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 115.

humanity, and was therefore immeasurably significant for such men – unique in fact for their character and their development, formed and directed almost exclusively in the case of such men by the mother (true of W[olf] and of M[ussolini]) and unconsciously [signifying] for such men their longing for their late mother. I had never previously understood the importance of such a relationship – and I couldn't help thinking of myself and W. – and as I did so finding, I believe, the truth of this assertion confirmed.¹⁴⁴

Winifred's theory seems to confirm that they did not have a sexual relationship, and instead appears to suggest that Hitler viewed her as a mother figure, despite her being eight years his junior. To outsiders, did not seem as if Winifred was a mother figure to Hitler. His counselors often jokingly suggested that Hitler needed to go and get his "Bayreuth treatment" when he was in a bad mood.¹⁴⁵ In 1933, three years after Siegfried's death, the American press even reported on a possible engagement between the two in 1933, three years after Siegfried had died. Despite these rumors, guests, staff and Winifred's children all attested that he never spent a night in Winifred's room. Winifred offered family intimacy instead of sexual intimacy. Winifred in turn enjoyed the relationship and because of their close bond until 1940 she felt a strong loyalty to the man. Even while many people were denouncing Hitler, and the world was learning of his atrocities, Winifred blamed those around Hitler, claiming that he had no knowledge. This relationship would damn her and cause Bayreuth to struggle from a stigma that lasts to this day, but their relationship

¹⁴⁴ Winifred Wagner, letter to Helena Roesener, November 22, 1926, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 114.

¹⁴⁵ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 247.

also allowed Winifred to keep Bayreuth running during World War II and it also allowed her to make major changes to an institution steeped in tradition.

Chapter 4

Winifred Wagner took over the running of the Bayreuth Festival when her husband, Siegfried, died on August 4th, 1930. Siegfried outlived his mother Cosima by only four months. As the festival director Winifred was in a unique position as someone who had merely married into the Wagner family, to affect change. Siegfried had constantly lived in a state where the old Wagnerian traditionalists saw every cautious innovation as treacherous to his father's works, while those who hoped to see more progress accused him of hiding behind his mother's skirts.¹⁴⁶ Winifred was not under the same intense pressure to adhere closely to a tradition that was now severely outmoded. Winifred saw her role as festival director as bringing "modern sensibilities" to Wagner's work.¹⁴⁷ Winifred was in charge from 1930 to the end of World War II, when American Occupied forces seized the festival. Hitler's relationship with Winifred tainted the festival after the war, but during the 1930s it was what allowed Winifred to be unconcerned with the Wagnerian traditionalists who rejected any changes. Their relationship also placed Bayreuth in the unusual position of existing within a kind of bubble during the beginning of the war, a time during which politics did not dictate the running of the festival, though often those at Bayreuth were more than happy to lend their support to furthering the politics of the time. Hitler's fondness for Winifred protected Bayreuth from being reduced to

¹⁴⁶ Skelton, *Bayreuth*, 107.

¹⁴⁷ Oswald Georg Bauer, "Touchstone *Parsifal*: On the First Publication of Alfred Roller's Designs for the Bayreuth *Parsifal* of 1934," *Bayreuther Festspiele* (1998): 63.

merely a propaganda showpiece. Other opera houses were taken over by party leaders and performances were designed to promote the official ideology of the Third Reich.¹⁴⁸ Winifred was fiercely devoted to Bayreuth and worked tirelessly to protect and elevate the festival by whatever means necessary, both during her directorship and by Siegfried's side.

Siegfried's directorship of the Bayreuth festival can be split into two periods: before and after World War I. The period before World War I, from 1908 until 1914, as noted in Chapter Two, saw little operatic reform. Winifred and Siegfried were married in 1915 and World War I ended on November 11, 1918. Many Wagnerites clamored for the festival to open as soon as possible, but financial stress kept the festival from reopening directly after World War I. The festival reopened in 1924, with Winifred by Siegfried's side. From 1924 until Siegfried's death in 1930, he worked to make small changes to the productions. The sets of *Parsifal* were still from the original production, and were now over thirty years old. Other than the changes to the magic garden scene that Siegfried made during the 1911 production, the sets had merely been patched over and over again as needed. Siegfried decided to bring new life to *Parsifal* for the 1926 festival, but in the midst of redesigning the opera he put the project aside, feeling that it was committing a sacrilege.¹⁴⁹ As much as Siegfried wanted to move forward, he was still tied to tradition. Perhaps as a way to move Bayreuth forward into more current opera production practices without being held to tradition, Siegfried staged Wagnerian operas that were less closely

¹⁴⁸ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 164.

¹⁴⁹ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 150.

associated with Bayreuth. *Tristan und Isolde* had not been produced at Bayreuth since 1906; Siegfried put the opera on the program in 1927. The changes that he made were transformative and but critics were disappointed, viewing the production which would have been very modern in 1906, as completely out of date.

The festival at this time was in complete financial disarray. Winifred set up a large advertising campaign in order to try and bring more international guests to the festival; Siegfried complained that those Germans who would normally have attended no longer had the money to do so. Winifred also was able to convince the town of Bayreuth to pave the approach to the festival, so that guests would no longer have to drive through mud and dust. Despite Winifred's successes in bringing some money to the Bayreuth Festival, ticket sales remained sluggish. During this time of financial crisis Winifred escaped the stress by focusing on Hitler. Hitler did not attend the festival since Siegfried was concerned about the political strife that Hitler's presence would cause. Hitler also was offended that the singer scheduled to sing Wotan, Friedrich Schorr, was Jewish. Winifred, who in the future would fight to keep Jewish singers at Bayreuth, found a non-Jewish Wotan to sing a few performances during the 1927 festival year so that Hitler could attend these performances instead of the performances of the original Wotan.¹⁵⁰ Hitler still did not attend the festival despite the great lengths that Winifred went to in order to please him. Though Winifred would often exhibit the same anti-Semitic sentiments that the Wagner family exhibited, she seemed to be only concerned about Jewish

¹⁵⁰ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 125.

descent when it directly affected her, such as keeping Hitler from attending the festival. In this case, her extreme desire to please Hitler over-ruled artistic considerations. Winifred also made foolish decisions in trying to raise money for Hitler while her family remained in financial stress. She wrote to her friend that for Christmas 1927 she “scraped together [her] last few pennies” and gave him “sheets and a quilt he really wanted.”¹⁵¹ She did this because “I’m looking forward to his face when he comes to thank me!!!”¹⁵² Winifred was completely infatuated with the man. Hitler, meanwhile, seemed to be more focused on what Winifred could give to him financially. Winifred constantly joked about Hitler’s lack of money to her friend, Lene, in letters: “Wolf is unbearable; he’s always saying he needs 2-3 million – and I haven’t got it.”¹⁵³ Winifred still went to great lengths to help financially by using her rich friends and contacts to help raise money. When Hitler’s personal secretary, Rudolf Hess, needed help raising funds, Winifred, not entirely selflessly, jumped at the chance to help. Winifred knew that Hitler would help his poverty stricken secretary find funds to rent a flat: “Wolf had immediately offered to give [Hess] an advance, but [Hess] knew what a sacrifice that would be for him, and Wolf would naturally be pleased” if the money could be raised in another way.¹⁵⁴ Winifred

¹⁵¹ Winifred Wagner, letter to Helena Roesener, December 20, 1927, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 127.

¹⁵² Winifred Wagner, letter to Helena Roesener, December 20, 1927, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 128.

¹⁵³ Winifred Wagner, letter to Helena Roesener, December 7, 1928, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 129.

¹⁵⁴ Winifred Wagner, letter to Helena Roesener, December 7, 1928, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 129.

immediately wrote Henrich Bales, a rich patron who often helped Winifred and Bayreuth to ask if he would be willing to donate to Hess. Bales declined to help Hitler and Hess but were willing to give money personally to Winifred and that they did not actually care what Winifred did with the money, stipulating that Hess must not know where the funds came from.¹⁵⁵ Winifred's help not only gained Hitler's appreciation for help in solving the problem of funding Hess but Winifred stated "Hess is childishly thrilled . . . and I'll be able to accept favors from Hess in a way that I couldn't have done otherwise."¹⁵⁶ Winifred was then able to receive reports from Hess on Hitler's well-being and day-to-day activities.

During his last years as director, Siegfried was exhibiting signs of health problems such as shortness of breath and asthma. He set up a will naming Winifred as his successor, but "if Frau Wagner marries again . . . she will be entitled only to the compulsory portion prescribed by law."¹⁵⁷ If Winifred remarried she would not only lose much of her income, but she would lose the directorship of the festival. It is possible that Siegfried saw Winifred's devotion to Hitler as a sign of things to come and decided to protect the festival from falling into Hitler's hands. The will also made no special provisions for his oldest son, Wieland, to receive directorship after Winifred's death, but instead split it equally between his four children. This surprised Winifred who had been raising Wieland, twelve at the time of the writing

¹⁵⁵ Winifred Wagner, letter to Helena Roesener , December 7, 1928, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 129.

¹⁵⁶ Winifred Wagner, letter to Helena Roesener , December 7, 1928, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 129.

¹⁵⁷ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 134.

of the will, as his father's successor.¹⁵⁸ Siegfried's last festival year was 1930 when he was 60 years of age. Siegfried had hoped to be able to stage *Tannhäuser* throughout his tenure as festival director, but the opera required more funds than were available, a larger cast than many of Wagner's other operas, and unusually lavish sets. Thus the cost to stage the opera were higher as well. To celebrate Siegfried's sixtieth birthday Winifred spent months writing to rich Wagnerians to raise funds so that Siegfried would be able to finally fulfill his dream of staging *Tannhäuser*. Winifred raised 100,000 marks. Siegfried had sunk into a bit of a depression before his birthday and seemed to have lost hope that he would have anything to celebrate: "I'll have to do the decent thing and be at home for my birthday, although I'd much rather run away."¹⁵⁹ When Siegfried was presented with the funds on his birthday he immediately sat down and began to work on *Tannhäuser*. Like *Tristan und Isolde*, *Tannhäuser* had not been produced since 1891, and it was also less entrenched in the Bayreuth style. Siegfried began his attempt anew at modernization with Winifred's encouragement for the 1930 festival, hoping that *Tannhäuser* would bring the festival up to date and out of the outmoded style.

It's going to be really different here for the first time – modern-ish – with all the publicity and ticket-selling – Unfortunately we're going to have to concentrate on earning money for a year or so, and then work all the harder on the artistic side and on presenting ourselves in that light.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Nike Wagner, *The Wagners: The Dramas of a Musical Dynasty*, trans. Ewald Osers and Michael Downes (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), 213.

¹⁵⁹ Siegfried Wagner, letter to Evelyn Faltis, April 4, 1929, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 135.

¹⁶⁰ Winifred Wagner, letter to Margarethe Strauss, September 22, 1929, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 136-137.

Winifred and Siegfried attended a concert conducted by Arturo Toscanini Berlin in 1929. Siegfried was impressed by the man and invited Toscanini to conduct *Tannhäuser* and *Tristan und Isolde* for the 1930 Festival. Toscanini's involvement in the festival marked the first time that a non-German conductor was asked to fill the position. Siegfried never saw his production of *Tannhäuser*. He was bedridden when the show premiered and died a few days after that on July 22nd, 1930. His *Tannhäuser* did not fully embrace the modern; once again it was too little, too late. He stripped away much of the fussiness of Cosima's 1891 set design, but still chose to base his design in the style of artists such as Rubens and Holbein, which were still too naturalistic to be considered modern.¹⁶¹ Cosima's sets for *Tannhäuser* were full of baroque details dedicated to a depiction of a natural scene that was almost overwhelmed by the many details.

¹⁶¹ Carnegie, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 155.

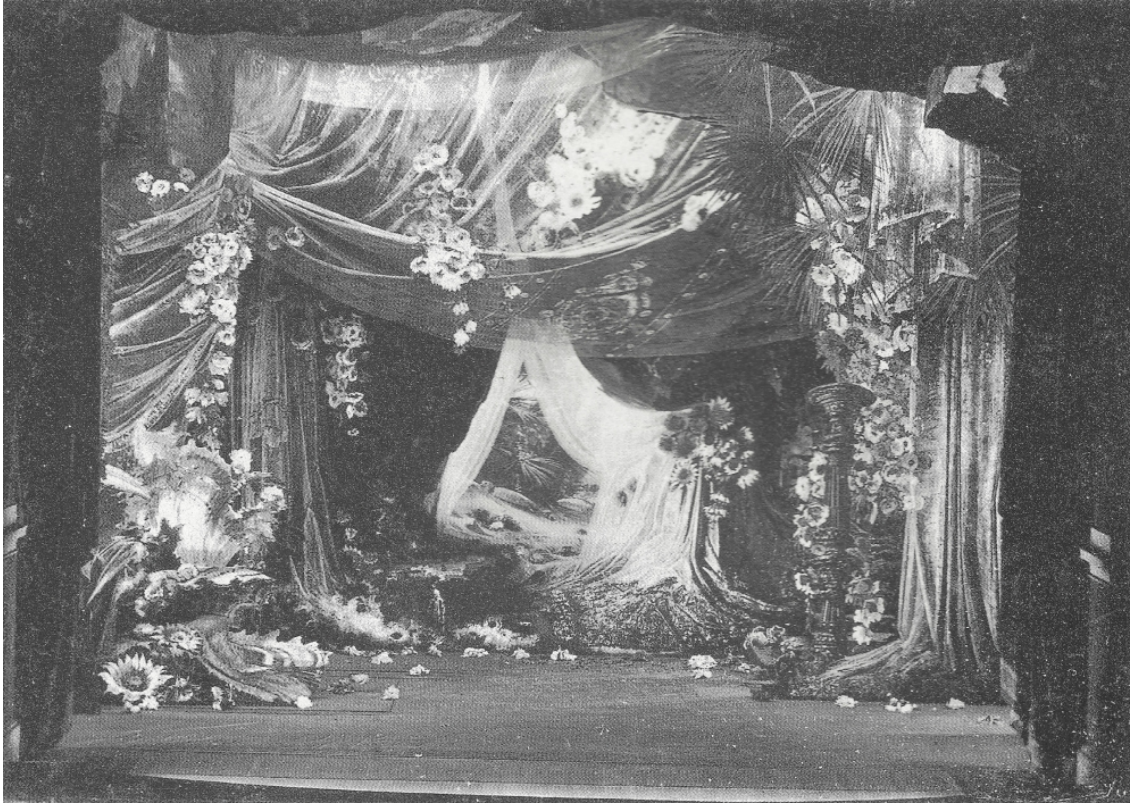


Figure 7: Cosima's grotto in the 1891 *Tannhäuser*.¹⁶²

Siegfried also stuck to naturalistic depictions, but his sets were starker and less overwhelmed by the minutiae. Details, such as the leaves on trees, were often merely suggested. The picture below shows the final scene of Siegfried's production of *Tannhäuser*. Siegfried depicts the Pilgrims' Chorus focusing on the miracle of the Pope's staff sprouting leaves while Tannhäuser mourns over Elisabeth's body.

¹⁶² Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 109.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-2004-0512-501
Foto: o.Äng. | 1930

Figure 8: Siegfried's Tannhäuser, Act III, Final Scene – 1930 ¹⁶³

The most daring aspects of his production were the engagement of the avant-garde choreographer Rudolf von Laban to stage the Bacchanal and Siegfried's use of lighting. Cosima decided to stage the Paris version of *Tannhäuser* for the premiere of the opera at Bayreuth in 1891. It originally premiered in Dresden in 1845, but Wagner made considerable changes to the score when he was invited to stage *Tannhäuser* in Paris by Emperor Napoleon III in 1861. Wagner extended the Bacchanal scene in the opening act to provide the ballet that was expected in the

¹⁶³ Das Bundesarchiv, accessed March 12, 2015, [http://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/cross-search/search/_1429403326/?search\[view\]=detail&search\[focus\]=1](http://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/cross-search/search/_1429403326/?search[view]=detail&search[focus]=1).

French tradition of opera. Wagner's decision to put the ballet in the first act instead of the second act was part of the reason that the Jockey Club disrupted three of the performances before Wagner withdrew the work. Cosima decided to have the ballet filled with nymphs, sirens, naiads and fauns attempting to "create something magnificently classical in the opening scene."¹⁶⁴ A prima ballet dancer from Milan choreographed it. Siegfried chose to go a completely different emotional direction with the ballet. He removed the classical imagery of the sets and the nymphs, sirens, naiads and fauns and the dance became a "witches Sabbath."¹⁶⁵ Laban, the choreographer, believed that Wagner's music lent itself to the contemporary dance styles and choreographed the scene in that style instead of classical ballet.¹⁶⁶ Siegfried focused on representing the passions as innate drives, usually stirred up by the beautiful goddesses in the scene. It was an entirely different emotional focus from his mother's production. Siegfried's lighting often accentuated innate passion and the internal struggle against those passions. In Act II, Wolfram and Tannhäuser are pitted against each other in a contest of love songs to win the hand of Elisabeth. Wolfram sings of a righteous, pure love, but Tannhäuser, haunted by his memories of Venus, sings scandalously about his desire for Venus. Siegfried chose to plunge the Hall into complete darkness at this moment, focusing on Tannhäuser by illuminating him in rosy red, blue and violet lighting, representing Venusberg. This lighting reinforced the internal struggle Tannhäuser faced by trying to choose

¹⁶⁴ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 150.

¹⁶⁵ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theater*, 140.

¹⁶⁶ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theater*, 156.

between pure Elisabeth and Venus, a switch from focusing on the external struggle between Christianity and the Dionysian cult. Siegfried's choice of Toscanini as conductor brought new life to the Bayreuth musicians because he demanded unprecedented musicality. Toscanini often fought with the singers, refusing to follow tempo changes they might make in their arias, but his results could not be denied. Though critics loved the musicality of this production gained by the perfectionism that Toscanini expected from the musicians, they were not kind to Siegfried's attempts at innovation. The famous musicologist, Alfred Einstein, who attended a performance of the production described it as "a compromise, or let us say clearly and concisely: a stylistic monster."¹⁶⁷ According to Einstein, the problem seemed to be that Siegfried lacked the courage to either stick with the conventional or to mount something truly original.¹⁶⁸

As the new festival director, Winifred was in a unique position to keep Siegfried's attempts at modernization moving forward. She was young enough and in good enough health to fight the conservative Wagnerians and her heritage allowed her to pull free from the stodginess of tradition. Winifred's first act was one of making her mark. She attended the dinner celebrating the end of the Festival by taking Siegfried's place. This act had many up in arms, because they expected Winifred to mourn alone; instead, she got down to work.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 153.

¹⁶⁸ Hamann, *Winifred*, 146.

¹⁶⁹ Hamann, *Winifred*, 146.

Winifred Takes Over

Winifred's first major decision was to appoint Heinz Tietjen as artistic adviser to the festival. Winifred knew that artistically she had limitations. She spent her marriage at Siegfried's side helping him run the festival, but had none of the musical training that her husband or Cosima had. Siegfried had recommended Tietjen to her. Tietjen did not lack experience; he had been promoted to the post of Intendant-General of the Prussian State Theaters, and in Berlin, he was in charge of the State Opera on Unter den Linden, the Kroll Opera House, the Theater on the Gendarmenmarkt and the Schiller Theater. Winifred first wrote to Tietjen hoping to gauge his view on the Wagner family and legacy. Her letter also asked him to support a petition, initiated by Richard Strauss, to secure voluntary, honorary royalties of the kind Cosima had enjoyed up to her death for Cosima's financially distressed daughters.¹⁷⁰ Tietjen eventually wrote back and he and Winifred quickly forged a friendly relationship. He did not take the formal title of artistic director immediately, but Tietjen told Winifred that he was completely at her disposal even though he should not be named as a collaborator.¹⁷¹ Tietjen had a notorious reputation for scheming.¹⁷² He was seen as a modernist, but would pull back when it

¹⁷⁰ Hamann, *Winifred*, 149.

¹⁷¹ Hamann, *Winifred*, 148.

¹⁷² Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 160.

was politically expedient. It is possible that Tietjen was waiting to see if Winifred would be able to keep Bayreuth running. By working with her behind the scenes he could keep his current position in case Bayreuth failed under Winifred's leadership but stake his claim if Bayreuth succeeded. Winifred seemed ignorant of these traits and became firmly devoted to Tietjen.

Winifred also needed to find a conductor for Bayreuth when Karl Muck resigned shortly after Siegfried died. Muck wrote to Winifred: "I no longer fit into the new machinery in any way, of course – my artistic outlook and convictions being rooted in nineteenth century Bayreuth."¹⁷³ Muck knew that Winifred hoped to follow in Siegfried's footsteps to bring updates to Bayreuth. He also was extremely close to Siegfried's sisters Daniele and Eva, who were extremely upset that Winifred was now in charge. Muck's reasons for resigning must have also been in protest of Winifred on behalf of Eva and Daniele. Winifred needed to quickly find a replacement. The choice was between Toscanini, the most famous conductor in the world, and Wilhelm Furtwängler, the most celebrated conductor in Central Europe. Winifred appreciated the rave reviews that Toscanini received after the 1930 festival, but she was concerned it would come off badly in Germany if she appointed a non-German conductor.¹⁷⁴ A compromise was made and Winifred asked Toscanini to direct *Parsifal* and *Tannhäuser* the next year, while Furtwängler was asked to become the music director. The two conductors clashed almost right away. Fights

¹⁷³ Carl Muck, letter to Winifred Wagner, September 1, 1930 quoted in Hamann, *Winifred*, 149.

¹⁷⁴ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 161.

and constant disagreements between Furtwängler, Toscanini, and Tietjen plagued the 1931 festival, and it was necessary for Winifred to deal with temperamental musicians who threatened to quit. Toscanini ended the season by proclaiming that he would not return to Bayreuth; Furtwängler also took his leave. He had believed that he would be given complete autonomy in musical decisions and was frustrated that Winifred insisted that final overall authority must remain with her.¹⁷⁵ Winifred spent much of 1932, while the festival was on a rest year, trying to find a conductor to replace Furtwängler. Eventually she was able to convince Toscanini to come back for the 1933 festival year.

Many high-ranking officials in the Nazi party were keeping a watchful eye on Bayreuth after Siegfried's death. Among all the changes in personnel at the festival, one stood out as unwelcome: Tietjen, who was suspected as being "on the Left" and against National Socialism. Before Tietjen realized that National Socialism would probably take over the German government he was extremely anti-Nazi and very vocal about his views. In addition, he had an international career, which was seen as suspicious. Winifred began receiving letters expressing concern about Tietjen; one letter came from Alfred Rosenberg, editor in chief of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, who accused Tietjen of disloyalty to the house of Wagner, citing obscure informants:

... a certain lady is, regrettably, still the secretary of the editor of a Jewish film magazine in Berlin. This editor is a very good friend of Herr Tietjen. The

¹⁷⁵ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 163.

latter had said in the presence of the secretary that he knew very well why he was going to Bayreuth: to protect Wagner from the Wagnerians.¹⁷⁶

Rosenberg was a Wagnerian who firmly believed in the tradition of Bayreuth.

Tietjen supported Winifred's desire to modernize Wagnerian opera productions at Bayreuth, but Rosenberg found this offensive. Rosenberg also objected to Tietjen's friendship with the Jewish editor. Winifred wrote back, defending her artistic advisor; she explained that she had appointed him because he was the right man for Bayreuth and even maintained that Tietjen's alleged statement about "protecting Wagner from the Wagnerians" was justified, and indeed that she saw this as:

... my primary duty. What we mean are all those people who cannot bear to see Wotan's beard trimmed by a single millimeter, or Brünhilde represented by a lithe and lesser figure rather than a lady of the usual heroic proportions; people who perhaps demand that Kundry should wear an 1882 style of corset etc. etc.¹⁷⁷

Though Winifred managed to deter those attacks on Tietjen, he remained constantly under surveillance. Winifred also transferred her infatuation from Hitler to Tietjen. She still spoke often to Hitler and would drop everything at his request to visit, but Winifred was hoping that a relationship with Tietjen would emerge.

In addition to personnel changes, Winifred sought to make attending the festival easier. She persuaded the Reich railway system to set up a daily express

¹⁷⁶ Alfred Rosenberg, letter to Winifred Wagner April, 1931, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred*, 153.

¹⁷⁷ Winifred Wagner, letter to Alfred Rosenberg, April 29, 1931, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred*, 154.

service between Munich and Bayreuth throughout the Festival. She also had them set up express overnight service on the route from Berlin to Bayreuth via Leipzig. She further used the profits that came from the 1930 festival year to make improvements to the festival grounds. This included building a new balcony box for the press, enlarging the restaurant and converting Siegfried's bachelor home into a home for guests. The press reaction was mostly positive and most articles emphasized the modernization implicit in these decisions.¹⁷⁸

Winifred, Bayreuth and Hitler

The 1933 festival year was auspicious in many ways. It marked the fiftieth anniversary of Richard Wagner's death, and it was also the year that Hitler came to power. Winifred's relationship with Hitler was well known by this point. An article on the festivities that were taking place to celebrate Wagner's music focused not on the composer, but on the rumors of a possible engagement between Hitler and Winifred.¹⁷⁹ At this point Winifred was more infatuated with her artistic advisor Tietjen, but did not hesitate to call on Hitler when she needed something. The 1933 festival was the first time that financial support came from the government, and this was made possible by Hitler's love of Wagner and his friendship with Winifred. Bayreuth was experiencing a problem with ticket sales. In the wake of the National

¹⁷⁸ Hamann, *Winifred*, 151.

¹⁷⁹ Associated Press, "All Reich Honors Wagner in Leipzig," *New York Times*, February 13, 1933.

Socialists political win, international ticket sales were dwindling. The expenses were higher than normal since productions for *The Ring* and *Die Meistersinger* were new and required new sets, costumes and lighting. Winifred wrote to Hitler explaining the predicament and asking for help. Hitler was now in a position to help the festival; the festival received 50,000 marks and became tax exempt.¹⁸⁰ Hitler promised as well that the government would buy a large block of the tickets each summer. This help, he promised, would go on in perpetuity. This financial help was the only thing that allowed Bayreuth to stay open in the years leading up to, and during, World War II. Winifred attempted to close the festival at the start of the war, but Hitler wanted to keep it open. Winifred wrote to Tietjen saying that logistics such as the lack of air-raid shelters, food rationing and limited travel and transport facilities made holding the Festival impractical. Hitler decided to keep the Festival open and supplied the audience from the ranks of the wounded and their nursing attendants. Tickets to the Festival were also offered as recognition to munitions workers. Those who rendered good service would be given free travel, food and tickets as “the thanks of the Führer and the country in general.”¹⁸¹ Hitler went on to say that Wagner’s music would be restorative since Wagner’s music was “spiritually uplifting . . . in a way that only pure art can be.”¹⁸² From 1940 until the end of World

¹⁸⁰ Jack Douglas, “Bayreuth, Summer of 1936: Music and Politics in Hitler’s Germany,” *Leitmotive: The Journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California* 20, no. 1 (2006): 4.

¹⁸¹ Hamann, *Winifred*, 323.

¹⁸² Hamann, *Winifred*, 323.

War II the Festival was completely funded by the government and the audiences were comprised mostly of military personnel and wounded soldiers.

The greatest boon to the festival during Winifred's years was the partnership of Heinz Tietjen and Emil Preetorius. The artistic advisor and stage designer were part of the artistic experimentalism that was happening outside of Bayreuth and they both knew that Bayreuth would need to move on from tradition. The sets that were used for many productions were still the original design and in the case of *Parsifal* were still the original sets. Thus Tietjen and Preetorius set out to innovate Bayreuth and Winifred stood against the traditionalists and her sisters-in-law in order to allow them to succeed. This was especially necessary in the case of Tietjen, who was coming under attack again from high ranking Nazis, such as Goebbels, under the new government. The Berlin State Opera, which was still under Tietjen's directorship, celebrated the anniversary of Wagner's death by staging all of Wagner's works. This plan came under attack when a production of *Tannhäuser* conducted by Otto Klemperer caused scandal. The press was upset that a Jewish conductor was allowed to stage Wagner's work in such a modern production. The *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* demanded: "Bring us the head of the General Intendant [Tietjen] on a silver platter."¹⁸³ Tietjen often found himself under attack from the higher echelons of the Nazi government and his position was only secure because of Winifred's fierce protection. She went to great lengths, often writing directly to Hitler to sing the praises of Tietjen. Winifred even arranged a personal

¹⁸³ Hamann, *Winifred*, 183.

meeting between the men in the hopes that they would form a friendship, but neither was particularly fond of the other.¹⁸⁴ Hitler kept those who would interfere at Bayreuth from doing so because he believed that only Wagner's family should make decisions for Bayreuth and this included Winifred's choice of Tietjen. Even with Hitler's protection, Tietjen was under constant surveillance and Winifred often needed to reiterate to critics why she brought Tietjen on as artistic director.

In 1933 the German government began persecuting Jews and forcing Jewish citizens from their jobs. Winifred went to Hitler right away to make sure that those musicians who were Jewish would be able to stay on at Bayreuth. Hitler allowed Winifred to keep the Jewish artists working at Bayreuth, but in 1934 she was no longer able to employ Jewish artists. The persecution of Jewish musicians across Germany also led to Bayreuth losing Toscanini as a guest conductor. Prominent musicians and composers in New York, including Toscanini, signed a protest telegram directed towards the German government on behalf of their Jewish colleagues on April 1, 1933. Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda under Hitler, was outraged and banned all German radio stations from broadcasting work featuring those who signed the protest. Winifred feared that this would damage Bayreuth's relationship with Toscanini and he would cancel his contract. She begged Hitler to contact Toscanini personally on behalf of Bayreuth. Hitler, in one of the first acts on behalf of Winifred, sent a telegram to Toscanini assuring the conductor

¹⁸⁴ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 172.

of his admiration for him.¹⁸⁵ Toscanini took three weeks to reply, a huge slight to Hitler, and said, in masked politeness, that he would keep his Bayreuth contract only if Jewish artists ceased to be threatened and removed from their posts. It took Toscanini two months to give Winifred a final answer:

Since, contrary to my hopes, there has been no change in the actions which have offended my feelings as an artist and a human being, I regard it as my duty to break the silence I have imposed upon myself over the last two months, and inform you that it is better for my peace of mind, as well as yours and that of all concerned, to cease thinking about the possibility of my coming to Bayreuth.¹⁸⁶

Winifred scrambled to not only find a new conductor, but also to find out if her request for a personal favor from Hitler had damaged her relationship with him. Winifred knew that Hitler was easily offended and she felt that she might have asked too much of Hitler.¹⁸⁷ Hitler was in fact upset and felt humiliated since he had already allowed Winifred to retain Jewish artists at Bayreuth.¹⁸⁸ Winifred had to struggle to find a new conductor and turned to Richard Strauss, who accepted the appointment for the 1934 festival.

Winifred's protection of Tietjen and the Jewish musicians kept Bayreuth artistically sound for the 1933 festival, but the complaints against the new productions were fierce. The *Ring* and *Parsifal* were institutions at Bayreuth.

¹⁸⁵ Hamann, *Winifred*, 188.

¹⁸⁶ Arturo Toscanini, telegram to Winifred Wagner, May 28, 1933, quoted in Hamann, *Winifred*, 189.

¹⁸⁷ Hamann, *Winifred*, 190.

¹⁸⁸ Hamann, *Winifred*, 190.

Winifred decided to stage *The Ring* and *Die Meistersinger* and the productions would be completely reworked. For the sets Winifred and Tietjen decided to move even further from Siegfried and Cosima's painterly, naturalistic style into uncharted waters. Emil Preetorius (1883-1973) was hired to do the sets. Preetorius, like Tietjen, was problematic for the new government. Preetorius was the protégé of Bruno Walter, German composer and conductor and Preetorius had protested Walter's treatment by the Nazi government due to Walter's Jewish descent. Preetorius was also an active member of the Union to Combat Anti-Semitism and in 1930 had published an outspoken article attacking anti-Semitism. Preetorius remained safely at Bayreuth during the Nazi years even though he was investigated by the Gestapo in 1942 and 43 and found to be politically unreliable. Hitler suggested at one point that Winifred should replace Preetorius with his preferred designer, Benno von Arent, who was given the role of "Reich theater designer," but, despite her adoration for Hitler, Winifred refused. According to Winifred's second oldest son, Wolfgang: "She would never have considered employing a designer like Benno von Arent . . . who botched the festival meadow in *Die Meistersinger*."¹⁸⁹ Arent made the decision to bring politics to the stage by placing a miniature *fahnenreihe*, or alley of banners, specifically flags of the National Socialist Party in the festival meadow for the finale of *Die Meistersinger*.¹⁹⁰ This ran completely counter to the manner in which Winifred and those at Bayreuth believed Wagner's operas should

¹⁸⁹ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theater*, 276.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas S. Gray, "Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* as National Opera (1868-1945)," in *Music and German National Identity*, eds. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago, Ill: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 95.

be staged. The decision to place the political paraphernalia in this scene in no way matched what was going on in the music and drama and above all, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* should be adhered to, even above politics. That Hitler did not force Winifred to take Arent shows how much independence Bayreuth had.

The new sentinel at Bayreuth approached staging Wagner in a more philosophical manner than naturalistic. In an article written for the 1933 program book, Preetorius points out that the former naturalistic style would never be able to do justice to the complex magic of the operas.¹⁹¹ Wagner's works were meant to be eternal in nature, not fixed to any point in place or history. Wagner himself sought to create this type of effect, focusing on the costumes and requesting that they not be based on historical paintings, but he was unable to find satisfaction in his own productions on this point. Wagner's operas, however, could not be fully staged in a completely avant-garde manner, as suggested by Adolphe Appia in the 1890s, because certain elements required a minimum of naturalism:

The glimmering and shining of the forest leaves in the second act of *Siegfried*, the luminous moonlit night into which Siegmund and Sieglinde plunge, the waves in the depths of the Rhine, thunder and rainbow, the horse Grane, Lohengrin's swan, the reed from which Siegfried fashions his flute.¹⁹²

These were all naturalistic elements that could not be ignored and were integral to the music and drama. The end result was a compromise between the literalism of traditional Bayreuth set design and the symbolic spaces of Appia.

¹⁹¹ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theater*, 273.

¹⁹² Emil Preetorius, "Zum Szenenproblem in Bayreuth," *1933 Bayreuth Festival Program Book* quoted in Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 180.

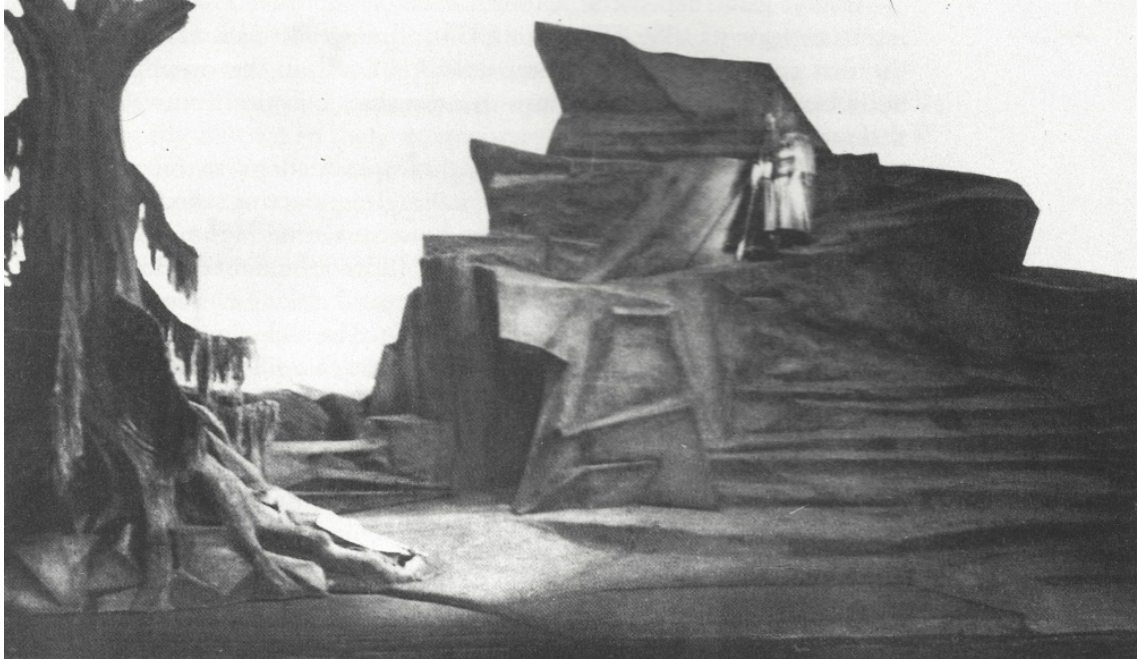


Figure 9: Preetorius design – Die Walküre, Act III ¹⁹³

In the picture, above, showing the set design for Act III of *Die Walküre*, the fir tree is more naturalistic while the rock formation hearkens to Appia's figurative structures.

Conservative Wagnerites were in an uproar over the changes. Daniela Thode, Winifred's sister-in-law, in charge of costumes since her mother's direction of the festival, was incensed at the changes to *The Ring* production: "For God's sake, what on earth are you doing? . . . You can't just turn it into a completely different work."¹⁹⁴ Hostile pamphlets began to circulate suggesting that Preetorius was a "Jew in disguise" who intended to ruin Wagner's works from the inside.¹⁹⁵ Joseph Goebbels,

¹⁹³ Patrick Carnegy, "Designing Wagner: Deeds of Music Made Visible?," in *Wagner in Performance*, eds. Barry Millington and Stewart Spencer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 60.

¹⁹⁴ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 196.

¹⁹⁵ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 196.

was frustrated by Bayreuth, and he often wrote in his diary that Bayreuth was “impossible on the Jewish question” or run by “women and Jew lovers.”¹⁹⁶ Many protestors who wrote to Hitler about the modernization received no reply, his silence was censure enough against any complaints.¹⁹⁷ Hitler had been completely enthralled by the new production style and exemplary musical quality. Winifred’s secretary wrote that after the first performance Hitler was “overwhelmingly kind and helpful, ready to do anything for Bayreuth.”¹⁹⁸ This became necessary when Winifred began to make plans to rework the sacred *Parsifal* in the new style. The sets from the original 1882 production were badly in need of being redone. Once the news broke that plans were in place to replace these sets the traditionalists, led by Winifred’s sisters-in-law, Eva and Daniele, started a petition. It stated that the original sets “on which the eyes of the Master had reposed” possessed a “timeless validity and must be preserved without even Siegfried’s alterations.”¹⁹⁹ Winifred ignored the petition, which had included more than 900 signatures, and the petitioners circulated the pamphlet throughout Germany, eventually sending the appeal directly to Goebbels and Hitler. Hitler once again took Winifred’s side and the sisters, who finally recognized where the true power lay, retreated from Bayreuth.

The new festival team also tackled the long-standing tradition of using Cosima’s acting recipes. The singers were encouraged to be more subdued and

¹⁹⁶ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 197.

¹⁹⁷ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 205.

¹⁹⁸ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 202.

¹⁹⁹ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 184.

realistic in their emotions. No longer were they directed as to exactly when to move and how to move. It was said that the “gods suppressed physical agitation and anger, affecting a tense, almost statuesque sense of calm authority, while his human heroes were allowed a freer, more natural and individualistic expression.”²⁰⁰ Tietjen also broke tradition by employing a vast number of chorus members. The production of *Die Meistersinger* included 800 townsfolk, in 1938 the crew of Tristan’s boat increased from the original 22 to 38, the 1937 *Parsifal* had 48 Flowermaidens instead of 24. Many, including Winifred’s oldest daughter, Friedelind, found this to be too lavish.²⁰¹

Musically the new Bayreuth was above par. Tietjen pulled the best singers for Bayreuth from the Berlin Opera house, and they were unarguably the best in the country at the time. Max Lorenz was introduced during this festival to Bayreuth and he became a mainstay there throughout the war. Lorenz was protected by his career at Bayreuth. Married to a Jewish woman and also a homosexual, Lorenz was put on trial shortly after the 1933 festival when the Nazi party began persecuting homosexuals. Hitler suggested to Winifred that Lorenz was no longer acceptable to perform at Bayreuth, but Winifred fired back in a letter: “All right, I might as well shut Bayreuth down, then. I can’t do Bayreuth without him.” Lorenz’s trial was stopped, he was able to continue to sing at Bayreuth and his wife was given “Aryan” papers, protecting her as well. Winifred once again put artistic quality over politics.

²⁰⁰ Review of the *Ring* as quoted in Carnegy, *Wagner and the art of theater*, 274.

²⁰¹ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 274.

This did not mean that Winifred kept all politics out of Bayreuth. She allowed the festival to be used in ways that she viewed as minor and that did not interfere with what was happening on stage. Goebbels gave a radio address during an intermission of *Die Meistersinger* appropriating Wagner as the Nazi ideal:

There is certainly no work in the entire music literature of the German people that is so relevant to our time and its spiritual and intellectual tensions as is Richard Wagner's *Meistersinger*. How often in years past has its rousing mass chorus "Awake! Soon will dawn the day" been found by an ardently longing, believing German people to be a palpable symbol of the reawakening of the German nation from the deep political and spiritual narcosis of November, 1918.²⁰²

Goebbels' address was not the only broadcast from Bayreuth. Hitler also made broadcasts from Bayreuth, always during intermissions or before production. Winifred also encouraged high ranking political figures to frequent Bayreuth. She was in no way against the politics of the National Socialist Party. Her relationship with Hitler was one of the most important of her life. Even after Hitler's horrendous actions and those of his party were exposed Winifred blamed those surrounding Hitler. She never condemned the man, and this became problematic for Bayreuth and for Wagner's reputation. How could someone who was so connected to Wagner support such a man? Ultimately, Winifred's most problematic contribution to the festival was the connection of Wagner and Bayreuth to the Nazis.

²⁰² Depa, "Wagner and Musikpolitik," 266-267.

Conclusion

The new Management team of Winifred, Tietjen and Preetorius brought new life and artistic renewal to Bayreuth from 1933 to 1938. These achievements have been overshadowed by the connection fostered between, Bayreuth, Hitler and the Nazi government, the depth of changes from previous festival performances has only recently been recognized. Even in newer scholarship that discusses these achievements, Winifred's role during these years is typically glossed over, but without her involvement and her fierce protection of Bayreuth the advancements would not have been possible.

Winifred's accomplishments have been ignored and deemphasized as academia tried to figure out how to represent and study the musical world during a time of unspeakable violence. It was Thomas Mann who said:

It was not right, it was impossible, to go on producing culture in Germany while all the things we know of were taking place. To do so meant palliating depravity, extenuating crime. Among the torments we suffered was the sight of German literature and art constantly serving as window dressing for absolute monstrousness. Strangely, no one seems to have felt that there were more honourable occupations than designing Wagner sets for Hitler's Bayreuth.²⁰³

This is perhaps the primary reason that it is easier to ignore Winifred than to give her credit for her accomplishments. If one recognizes her achievements, does one condone the political party to which she was so closely tied? Should she not have

²⁰³ Thomas Mann, letter to Walter von Molo, September 7, 1945 quoted in Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 188.

recognized what Hitler was and what he was doing? Would someone with a stronger temperament in her position have been able to keep politics away from Bayreuth completely and just focused on artistic achievement? Should music making have continued during a time when, as Mann says, absolute monstrosities were going on? None of these questions have a definitive answer, and if we examine Winifred's directorship while thinking about how to answer these questions it skews our perspective in a way that is unfair to Winifred and her role at Bayreuth.

Winifred's participation needs to be re-evaluated without involving "backshadowing," a term coined by historian Michael A Bernstein, defined as "a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events . . . is used to judge the participants in those events as though they should have known what was to come."²⁰⁴ This has been especially difficult in the case of Winifred because even after she learned what Hitler's political party had done, she never strayed from her loyalty towards Hitler; she never separated herself from the monster. Winifred defended Hitler until she died in 1980, placing the blame on high ranking figures, such as Goebbels and Goering, instead of Hitler. It is also difficult to research Winifred's history because the Wagner family still holds the bulk of her personal letters in their archive, which is inaccessible to anyone but family. This thesis was only possible because Brigitte Hamann gathered letters that were written by Winifred to friends and political figures. As a result we only have a

²⁰⁴ Michael Andre Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 16 as quoted in Hans Rudolf Vaget, "National and Universal: Thomas Mann and the Paradox of 'German' Music," in *Music and German National Identity*, eds. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 156.

one sided view and the rest needs to be filled in. Hitler's replies to Winifred are currently stored in the Wagner archive and might fill in some of the gaps.

Winifred's relationship with Hitler began to wane in 1939 after she suggested numerous times that Hitler speak with the pro-German British ambassador, Sir Nevile Henderson, in an effort to arrive at a consensus between Germany and Britain. It seemed that Winifred had overstepped her friendship by involving herself in politics. She also damaged the relationship by beginning to write to Hitler in an effort to save Jewish citizens from being taken to concentration camps, or pleading for individuals to be removed from the camps. Though she seldom received replies from Hitler, she continued to write to him as if nothing had happened. Hitler only took calls from her that dealt with the running of the Festival and no longer sent personal letters.²⁰⁵ He also stopped attending the Festivals. Preetorius came under close scrutiny after Winifred lost her close contact with Hitler, but it is a testament to the work that Preetorius did at Bayreuth that he was able to keep working.

The Wagner's house, Wahnfried, was hit by a bomb April 5, 1945. The house was mostly destroyed, but the façade remained intact and the grave of Richard Wagner lay undisturbed. The town of Bayreuth surrendered to the Americans on April 14. Once the War was over on May 9 and the German population and the world learned about the atrocities that were committed in the concentration camps and the crimes that were committed by the Nazi Party, Germans were shocked, ashamed

²⁰⁵ Hamann, *Winifred*, 360.

and angry about these events, but also afraid of the vengeance that would be taken. Winifred was unable to take possession of the Festival and her sons, Wieland and Wolfgang, did not receive permission to resume the Festival until 1951.

Wieland and Wolfgang understood that Winifred's relationship with Hitler firmly connected Bayreuth to the Nazi party, and to try to lessen that connection her sons requested that she stay away from the Festival. They proposed to the Bavarian Education and Culture Ministry, the department in charge of Bayreuth, that they would take over the Festival and Winifred would never be involved again. Unlike Cosima, who remained engaged with Bayreuth until the end, Winifred lived out the rest of her life uninvolved with the Festival. Winifred seemed unconcerned that she was no longer involved in the Festival; in her eyes she had merely been holding the position until her sons could take over.

Wonders never cease. The Bavarian Education and Culture Ministry, in the form of a Secretary of State, received Wieland and Wolfgang on 13 February, and they seem to be prepared to let my sons take up their mission, as long as I disappear from the scene immediately. I am of course quite happy to make this sacrifice to the continuation of the Work, and have absolute confidence that they have now acquired the necessary maturity and knowledge.²⁰⁶

Wieland and Wolfgang opened the Festival again in 1951, and the aesthetic employed was as far from the traditional Bayreuth style as possible. Where Winifred's directorship eased Bayreuth into modernism while retaining some reverence for the traditionalists, Wieland and Wolfgang tossed all tradition out the

²⁰⁶ Winifred Wagner, letter to Daube, March 3, 1948 quoted in Hamann, *Winifred*, 444.

door. Their sets, staging and costumes were completely avant-garde. The drastic step was one that was meant to drive away any lingering notion of Nazi involvement in the festival.

These changes possibly also overshadowed the revolutionary changes that went on during their mother's directorship. Winifred had to pave the way to modernism by going against traditionalists that were extremely critical of her methods, by fighting against her sisters-in-law, who saw themselves as the rightful successors of Siegfried and by using her relationship with Hitler. As can be seen from the first chapter of this thesis, the Wagner family placed loyalty to Richard Wagner's works and ideology over loyalty to their own family members. Winifred had to fight this extreme view of her sisters-in-law, especially when they brought a petition against the new staging of *Parsifal* to Goebbels and Hitler.

Winifred was also able to control Bayreuth without interference from the government, something that other opera houses were unable to do. She did this despite some government members pushing against her control. The highest echelons of the National Socialist Party were not Wagner fans, that claim can go only to Hitler. It was well known that Goebbels disliked much of Wagner's music and was frustrated that Winifred and not the government controlled the festival, dismissing it as a "family and clique affair."²⁰⁷ Preetorius and Tietjen would not have been allowed to continue working under normal circumstances because of their questionable politics. Scholars have given Preetorius and Tietjen credit for the

²⁰⁷ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 178.

achievements at Bayreuth during Winifred's directorship, but Winifred still suffers from the stigma of her relationship with Hitler.

Without Hitler's admiration of Winifred, as a person, and Wagner's music, Bayreuth might have suffered a different fate under the government of the Third Reich. It was only through Winifred's influence and leadership that Bayreuth was able to break from the Bayreuth tradition. Though Goebbels, Winifred's own family and the traditional Wagnerites all rejected and fought against the changes that were happening at Bayreuth, Winifred saw to it that Bayreuth brushed off the traditions and allowed modernization to happen. It has become too easy to dismiss Winifred entirely as a result of her fierce protection from Adolf Hitler, but I have shown the necessity of a more nuanced view that allows her contribution to the modernization of opera at Bayreuth to be recognized despite this.

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