



# WAGNER'S *MEISTERSINGER*

Performance, History, Representation

NICHOLAS VAZSONYI

# Wagner's *Meistersinger*



**Wagner's *Meistersinger***  
**Performance, History, Representation**

Edited by  
Nicholas Vazsonyi



University of Rochester Press

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# Introduction

## *Die Meistersinger:* Performance, History, Representation

NICHOLAS VAZSONYI

Few personalities in cultural memory provide such ideal ground for interdisciplinary, or at least multidisciplinary, consideration as Richard Wagner, arguably the most significant composer this side of Beethoven. There is Wagner the musical innovator with a genius for evocative and sensuous sounds, Wagner the avant-garde dramatist with conservative tastes, Wagner the anti-Semite with Jewish friends, the nationalist political pamphleteer who associated with Marx and Bakhtin, the transcendent romanticist with a keen eye for business, the womanizing egotist, chased by creditors but with a king in the palm of his hands, worshipped and loathed by Nietzsche, Wagner the founder of the longest-standing theatrical tradition in German history. All these and more have been studied in what annually becomes an ever more unwieldy array of publications. And yet there is still work to be done, primarily in overcoming what may be the most stubborn of disciplinary divides, the one between music and what I will broadly call the “other” humanities. The problem with music is that its constituent components reach in several directions and require an assemblage of different skills and expertise not ordinarily associated with any other discipline that readily comes to mind. While music history and literature—for want of a better term—certainly do belong to the “humanities,” music theory combines not only the study of musical structures and a “grammar” that is almost mathematical in its conceptual complexity, but demands also the development of an acoustic sensitivity that includes the ability to “visualize” sound. The physics and physicality of this ear-brain training has much to do with what I would call the third branch of “music”: performance. This branch adds to the intellectual and auditory requirements additional physical and mental skills, including the capability of remembering large amounts of data, often under intense pressure. Talking about music in any reasonable way requires sensitivity to, if not actual experience with all of these. In the meantime, what we generally call the humanities are a long way off. Traditional scholars of the humanities—even the music lovers among them—thus understandably shy away from addressing musical issues in their scholarship.

There have more recently been notable—though not uncontroversial—exceptions to this divide. Lawrence Kramer<sup>1</sup> has made significant contributions to our understanding of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music as a culturally coded referent; Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker<sup>2</sup> have also sought to expand the dimensions of operatic analysis beyond what has traditionally constituted the disciplinary limits of music history and musicology. Specifically in the case of Wagner, these exceptions include Marc Weiner's admittedly problematic indictment of Wagner which is nevertheless supported by extensive and close attention to musical detail.<sup>3</sup> There have also been musicological studies that conversely demonstrate a keen sensitivity to the text and dramatic development. Specifically in the case of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, these have recently included Ray Komow's analysis of the mastersingers' guild scene in Act I, including Walther's two arias, which demonstrates in minute detail how Wagner uses musical and textual structures to augment dramatic characterization.<sup>4</sup> Despite lingering rejection by traditional Germanists of what they have deemed Wagner's inferior poetic and linguistic skills, Komow shows instead how Wagner is the consummate master of using all means—textual, musical, and dramatic—to create convincing characterizations that are successful precisely because even apparently insignificant formal details have been carefully honed to contribute to the overall effect. Looking instead at large-scale forms and relationships, William Kinderman analyzes musical and textual references connecting Acts II and III of *Die Meistersinger* to develop our understanding of Hans Sachs's relationship with Eva and to show just how deep the musical connections are to *Tristan und Isolde*.<sup>5</sup> But I would submit that these excep-

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1. Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984), and *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990). Others involved in aspects of this project, like Peter Kivy, John Neubauer, and Susan McClary, not to mention Lydia Goehr (who is a contributor to this volume) also come readily to mind.

2. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, eds., *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989), and Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1991).

3. Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1995).

4. Ray Komow, "The Structure of Wagner's 'Assembly of the Mastersingers' Guild," *Journal of Musicological Research* 13 (1993): 185–206. See also Paul Buck's exhaustive study of the leitmotifs in *Die Meistersinger* and their relationship to dramatic development, and in particular at the intersections of text and music, see Paul Buck, *Richard Wagners 'Meistersinger': Eine Führung durch das Werk*, (Frankfurt/M: Lang, 1990).

5. William Kinderman, "Hans Sachs's 'Cobbler Song,' *Tristan*, and the 'Bitter Cry of the Resigned Man,'" *Journal of Musicological Research* 13 (1993): 161–84.

tions only prove the rule, and it is rare indeed to find books and articles where discussion of the music rests comfortably beside textual or cultural critique. I will return to the notion of “comfort” later on.

In his thought-provoking introduction to a set of innovative critical readings of opera libretti, David Levin complained that, historically, opera criticism has simultaneously placed music at the center and suppressed or banalized the text.<sup>6</sup> But ironically, in the case of Wagner, the reverse is also true, a phenomenon which Levin’s volume on operatic analysis, from which music is conspicuously absent, reflects. The frequent avoidance of the musical dimension, or separation of the musical and non-musical, in Wagner scholarship can be explained on two grounds. First, Wagner was one of the few composers whose non-musical activities are arguably as significant as the musical ones. Second, as I already suggested, the specific theoretical knowledge of musical structures and terminology necessary for any analysis is not as easily grasped and appropriated as the methodologies of one discipline in the “other” humanities that can be transferred to another. Thus, while literary critics often avail themselves of models from psychoanalysis or political theory, it would be more extraordinary for that same literary critic to incorporate discussions of modulations and orchestration. The standard institutional division that comfortably places political science, language, and literature alongside departments of psychology within the same “college,” while separating music into its own “school” merely confirms these seemingly entrenched limits of interdisciplinarity.

While the two most prominent Wagner handbooks<sup>7</sup> make every effort to integrate the music with the “other” humanities, monographs and volumes of collected essays are less apt to do so.<sup>8</sup> This disciplinary *manqué* accounts in part for the chronic problem of distorted emphasis that continues to plague Wagner scholarship and fuels the ongoing acrimony evident in so many exchanges.<sup>9</sup> The problem is a complex one which I do not wish

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6. David J. Levin, ed., *Opera through Other Eyes* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993), 2.

7. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski, eds., *Richard-Wagner-Handbuch* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1986), English translation, *Wagner Handbook*, trans. John Deathridge (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1992); and Barry Millington, ed., *The Wagner Compendium: A Guide to Wagner's Life and Music* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992 and New York: Schirmer, 1992).

8. Two recent collections of significant essays, which, however, entirely bypass musical questions, illustrate the point: Saul Friedländer and Jörg Rüsen, eds., *Richard Wagner im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Beck, 2000), and Dieter Borchmeyer, Ami Maayani, and Susanne Vill, eds., *Richard Wagner und die Juden* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000).

9. On a national level, the ongoing though unofficial ban in Israel of performing Wagner’s music and the controversy surrounding Daniel Barenboim’s recent (2001) performance of a portion of *Tristan und Isolde* in Jerusalem serve to illustrate the point. I will refrain from mentioning examples of individual scholars engaged in what occasionally deteriorate into insultingly personal attacks.

to oversimplify by pointing solely to insufficient cooperation between academic fields, or by insinuating that some studies are published by scholars lacking sufficient or appropriate breadth of knowledge. Wagner himself can in part be held responsible for taking on tasks normally split between composer and librettist, for (mis)using his notoriety to make public declarations about history, linguistics, politics, philosophy, and race for which he lacked any formal training or expertise, declarations which, because of his notoriety, remain accessible and relevant long after such pronouncements would normally have sunk into oblivion. Then there is the long and ever-lengthening history of the representation and appropriation of Richard Wagner by his family and others which further complicates the issue. By necessity, everyone is compelled to create his or her own particular Wagner, a Wagner who then becomes an object to be defended or attacked relentlessly.

The state that characterizes Wagner scholarship in general is no different for the particular subject of this volume: *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Here, too, there are two handbooks that attempt to address the broad issues and thus necessarily attend to both the technically musical and musical-humanistic dimensions.<sup>10</sup> In the absence of any volume of collected essays on *Die Meistersinger*, individual articles and studies almost of necessity focus on specific aspects of the work and their significance. The problem with many such studies is that they nevertheless attempt a holistic grasp. Thus, depending on whom one reads, Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* is either about "the medium in which it is written,"<sup>11</sup> about "art, tradition and authority,"<sup>12</sup> about "correct and false art,"<sup>13</sup> about art

10. Attila Csampai and Dietmar Holland, eds., *"Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg": Texte, Materialien, Kommentare*, (Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981), and John Hamilton Warrack, ed., *Richard Wagner, "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg"*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994). For an excellent, though brief, overview of the significant musicological issues in *Die Meistersinger*, see John Warrack's chapter "'Wahn,' Words and Music," in his *Richard Wagner, "Die Meistersinger"*, 111–34.

11. Lucy Beckett, *"Die Meistersinger: Naïve or Sentimental Art?"* in *Richard Wagner, "Die Meistersinger"*, ed. John Warrack, 98–110, here 98.

12. Michael Tanner, *Wagner* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1996), 156. Later: *"Die Meistersinger* is, more than anything else, about the connections between life and art, between individuals' lives and the art they produce, and between the life of a community and its attitude to art" (160). In fairness to Tanner, see also his essay "Richard Wagner and Hans Sachs" in *Richard Wagner, "Die Meistersinger"*, ed. John Warrack, 83–97, where, among other nuanced observations, he writes: "It is an achievement of *Die Meistersinger* that one's focus on it keeps moving from the outside . . . to areas within it, and this process never stops" (97).

13. Peter Wapnewski, *Richard Wagner: Die Szene und ihr Meister*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Beck, 1983), 62: "Denn endlich geht es . . . um *rechte und falsche Kunst*: das Wagnersche Lebensproblem" (emphasis in original).

as “the only thing that justifies life,”<sup>14</sup> or about the dialectic between “improvisation and expertise,”<sup>15</sup> about “masters who paradoxically teach by not teaching,”<sup>16</sup> about “romantic sacrifice”<sup>17</sup> about “Wahn und Witz” (delusion and wit)<sup>18</sup> or, less charitably, about “hardly enough to fill even a modest two-act Singspiel.”<sup>19</sup> More narrowly, the work has been interpreted as an exercise in failed reading,<sup>20</sup> more ominously as a blueprint for the type of German state orchestrated by Adolf Hitler.<sup>21</sup>

That Wagner’s music drama continues to provide such fertile ground is hardly surprising, especially given ongoing controversies. But that such a diverse collection of readings, however selective, provocative, or objectionable for those who disagree, can in some measure at least be sustained by textual examination is a testament to *Meistersinger*’s complexity and subtlety—a word not often used to describe the work or its composer. Nevertheless, when read carefully, *Die Meistersinger* often seems to undermine or at least question the arguments it so boldly and emphatically presents. For example, on one level, Beckmesser is guilty of too zealously clinging to outmoded rules of song and composition. However, after his final humiliation cunningly orchestrated by Hans Sachs and accompanied by the jeers of all Nürnberg, it is none other than Sachs who turns to the opera’s hero, Walther, as well as to townsfolk and audience with the injunction that the mastersingers and their tradition—precisely what Beckmesser had represented—must be upheld and respected. This

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14. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), 68.

15. Dieter Borchmeyer, *Das Theater Richard Wagners: Idee—Dichtung—Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982), 206–30, especially 212. The subtitle of the *Meistersinger* chapter and its main thrust centers on “Improvisation und Metier—Die Poetik der *Meistersinger*.”

16. Lydia Goehr, *The Quest for Voice: On Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy: The 1997 Ernest Bloch Lectures* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), which includes a chapter on *Die Meistersinger*, 48–87, here 74.

17. Paul Robinson, *Opera and Ideas: From Mozart to Strauss* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 211.

18. Nike Wagner, “Wahn und Witz in den *Meistersingern*,” *Wagner Theater* (Frankfurt/M: Insel, 1998), 126–63. She asserts that “Wahn und Witz” constitute the “secret center of the opera” (das geheime Zentrum dieser Oper), 126.

19. Eduard Hanslick, “Die Meistersinger von Richard Wagner,” in his *Die moderne Oper: Kritiken und Studien* (Berlin: Hoffman, 1875, reprint Westmead: Gregg International, 1971), 293: “und kaum hinreichenden Stoff für ein bescheidenes, zweiactiges Singspiel bietet.”

20. David J. Levin, “Reading Beckmesser Reading: Antisemitism and Aesthetic Practice in *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*,” *New German Critique* 69 (1996): 127–46, esp. 138.

21. Joachim Köhler, “Der Meistersinger-Staat,” in his *Wagners Hitler: Der Prophet und sein Vollstrecker* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 1997), 347–81.

complex and highly problematic operation, which involves creating and casting out a devil, only to reinstate him (or at least that which he represents) later as a necessary part of the whole, clearly requires unpacking to an extent I will not attempt here. My point is that the work, for all its apparently bombastic, dare I say Faustian, self-confidence and unwieldy length, is often delicate, decidedly uncertain, and, to borrow a term from Cultural Studies, polyvalently coded. By offering the reader so many possibilities, it, like Goethe's magnum opus, resists definitive interpretation.

To say that *Die Meistersinger* is exclusively "about" anything thus probably misses the mark. Nevertheless, a book must have its focus, and the unifying principle for this collection of essays on *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is that, reduced to its essence, Wagner's music drama is concerned with performance, history, and representation. These three categories are not only interconnected within the work but become the modalities through which the story of its existence as an integral component of German culture can be traced since its premiere on June 21, 1868. What I mean by this is that, if we wish to think about *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, we must also consider its performance, history, and representation, meaning also its history of performance as well as how it has performed in history. Perhaps even more importantly, however, and in response to what I have argued remains the greatest impediment to a new and more inclusive form of Wagner scholarship, these three categories establish a context in which specifically musical and more broadly cultural (humanistic) issues can be addressed side by side. Having made this claim, however, I would hasten to add that, while this volume has endeavored to mediate between a number of different voices and even open up a space for types of discourse not often seen in a more traditional academic publication, its focus remains more pronounced towards issues of text and culture than those which would be considered purely musicological.

Performance is a category both extrinsic and intrinsic to *Die Meistersinger*. It is a work to be performed and, as such, I have included the voices of performers in this volume, even though their contributions do not conform to the more scholarly discourse of the remainder. The possibilities and limitations inherent in performance are important to consider, even for more theoretically oriented academic discussions. Within the work, performance is intimately bound up with the drama's central poetic dilemma, which probes the essential question posed by (musical) aesthetics as a philosophical discipline, namely "what is beautiful?" In his consideration of this question, Wagner departs from German philosophical tradition by refusing to answer in theoretical terms alone, but rather attempting to answer in practice, through performance. So pervasive is the imperative to perform that other major categories, such as good and evil, success and failure, acceptance and rejection—in sum, the aesthetic, cultural, and even political stakes of the drama—are determined by and reflected in Walther von Stolzing's and Sixtus Beckmesser's ability or inability to perform. The sexual meta-

phor represents overtones which abound in and interfere with the aesthetic dilemma and are hardly coincidental, a (con)fusion which Walther himself thematizes in the climax of his Act III Prize Song, where Eva becomes the literal embodiment of the aesthetic (the muse of Parnassus) and the erotic (Eva in Paradise).<sup>22</sup> Within the terms of the drama, the “ability to perform” necessarily means both winning the song competition (aesthetic) and getting the girl (erotic). Given “performance” as the criterion of analysis, it turns out that Veit Pogner’s idea of offering his daughter as the prize for the winner of the song contest, however troubling and inappropriate in terms of even nineteenth-century gender politics and human rights, seems entirely appropriate within the discursive modality of the drama.<sup>23</sup>

Beginning as early as Hanslick’s review, critical scholarship has made much of the fact that *Die Meistersinger* is the most “realistic” of Wagner’s works,<sup>24</sup> or the only one that presents historical figures in an existing location rather than reinscribing a medieval or Germanic myth.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, by idealizing Nürnberg, its culture, and its albeit historical residents, *Die Meistersinger* formalizes a process of myth-making and mystification which preempts the most sophisticated political and corporate propaganda machines of the twentieth century and their multimedia capabilities. The fact that it is grounded in history has only served to render the myth more powerful. One of the devices making *Die Meistersinger* “the most German of all German operas”<sup>26</sup> is that

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22. I disagree with Jeremy Tambling’s assertion that there is a “repression of the sexual in Eva and *Die Meistersinger* generally,” (42). While the point might be sustained in the case of Eva, though Harry Kupfer would certainly object (see his interview in this volume), even a cursory look at the music and text of Walther’s Trial Song (“Fanget an”) reveals that it is loaded with the acoustics and sentiments of unbounded sexuality. See Jeremy Tambling, *Opera and the Culture of Fascism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

23. On the gendered conflation of the sexual and the aesthetic within the feminine, see Eva Rieger’s essay in this volume.

24. Hanslick, “Meistersinger,” 299: “Er [Wagner] wendet endlich seinen Zwergen, Riesen und Walkyren den Rücken, stellt sich mitten in die reale Welt und gibt uns lebensvolle Bilder aus dem deutschen Volks- und Bürgerleben.”

25. Recently, musicologist Martin Geck has even discussed *Die Meistersinger* as the example of Wagner’s “musical realism,” see *Zwischen Romantik und Restauration: Musik im Realismus-Diskurs 1848–1871* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001): especially 164–65, arguing in part that much of what the characters in *Die Meistersinger* “naturally” would be doing involves singing, thereby making the opera acceptable “even for opera skeptics.”

26. Joseph Goebbels, “Richard Wagner und das Kunstempfinden unserer Zeit: Rundfunkrede von Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels,” partially reprinted in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg: Texte, Materialien, Kommentare*, ed. Attila Csampai and Dietmar Holland, 194–99, here 196: “Unter all seinen Musikdramen ragen die *Meistersinger* als das deutscheste immerdar hervor.”



it is rooted in, perpetuates, and intensifies a historical myth already three centuries old by the time Wagner conceived the work. The “real” mastersingers of the sixteenth-century and earlier had already created their own idealized lineage back to the so-called “twelve great masters,” mostly actual poets of the Medieval period, including Walther von der Vogelweide, who represented the first flowering of German literature and culture early in the thirteenth century. The number twelve with its clearly biblical allusion served already then to characterize German art as a noumenal messiah around whom the living Masters were gathered. It is entirely fitting then that, in *Die Meistersinger*, there are also twelve masters. Fitting also that the opera’s hero, the fictitious sixteenth-century Walther von Stolzing, names the historical thirteenth-century Walther von der Vogelweide as the master—though dead—from whom he learned his craft. Wagner’s nineteenth-century fusion, or blurring, of fact and fiction adds yet another historical layer. When character Hans Sachs implores his townsfolk to “honor your German masters,” Wagner presents a historical Sachs who would quite plausibly have been referring to the original masters of the 1200s and their successors, meaning Sachs himself. In addition, Wagner transforms his historical figure into a graven image, making Sachs a nineteenth-century mouthpiece through whom Wagner the composer addresses his contemporary audience. The lineage stretching back to the thirteenth century now includes not only the sixteenth-century Sachs, but the full roster of German “masters” up to and including Wagner. Wagner thus inscribes himself into an admittedly constructed, but successfully unified, “imagined” German cultural history for which he becomes the latest incarnation and disciple (read: Master). This “invented tradition,” to borrow a concept from Eric Hobsbawm, is what, for better or worse, makes *Die Meistersinger* an enduring representation of the German national culture, German cultural history, or, in the words of Goebbels, “the most German of German operas.”<sup>27</sup> It was this “invented tradition” that the Nazis appropriated and in turn extended by inscribing their own program and pageantry into the existing model constructed by Wagner, thereby also legitimizing National Socialism as an organic outgrowth of a deeply rooted German culture, rather than as an upstart political clique.

The literary-cultural lineage is complemented by Wagner’s self-proclaimed use of a musical idiom reminiscent of Johann Sebastian Bach, generally evident in the work’s richly contrapuntal style—which the prelude so proudly announces, and especially in the opening chorale.<sup>28</sup> Wagner was not alone

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27. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983). In a similar argument, Lydia Goehr also invokes Hobsbawm’s concept of “invented tradition” in her *Quest for Voice*, 51–52.

28. See Arthur Groos, “Constructing Nuremberg: Typological and Proleptic Communities in *Die Meistersinger*,” *19th-Century Music* 16, 1 (1992): 18–34, esp. 22, 26, as well as Peter Schneider’s essay in this volume.



among composers and musicians of the nineteenth century in ceding Bach a unique place in music history: the first coherent exponent of Western tonal music, and hence the first great German composer.<sup>29</sup> By incorporating allusions to Bach's musical style, Wagner not only creates a parallel to the literary-cultural narrative, but continues the type of codification of German musical history already found in utterances like Franz Grillparzer's speech delivered at the funeral of Ludwig van Beethoven in 1827, where Beethoven is declared the successor to "Händel, Bach, Haydn, and Mozart."<sup>30</sup> When compared with its literary counterpart, this musical continuum may be shorter in duration, but the sheer quantity and brilliance of the output matches and arguably exceeds what authors using the German language produced. Wagner rehearses this continuum, a historical tradition he did not invent, but one which he once again appropriates, and where he again places himself at its head.

As with the literary-cultural lineage, there was Nazi appropriation of this musical line as well, perhaps most evident in the musicological analyses of Alfred Lorenz, as Stephen McClatchie argued recently in his cogently written book.<sup>31</sup> Lorenz's main project, to discern coherent structure and form in Wagner's works, played "an important role in remaking Wagner into a monument to the great German tradition rhapsodized by the Nazis by removing the 'taint of decadence' that still clung to Wagner."<sup>32</sup> As it happens, *Die Meistersinger* figured prominently in Lorenz's "remaking" of Wagner, because, next to the "German" element of Beethoven, it was the so-called Bar form, which Lorenz maintained was the unifying structural principle of Wagner's operas.<sup>33</sup> The Bar form is rooted in German medieval tradition and thus becomes the centerpiece of the formal aesthetic lesson imparted to Walther and the audience via the *Tabulatur* in Act I and in Sachs's lecture of Act III. It is the "German" Bar form which gives shape to Walther's unbounded genius or, alternately, the genius of Walther's apparently spontaneous improvisations is reflected in their "natural" organization in Bar form.<sup>34</sup>

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29. See for instance Wagner's glorification of Bach in "Was ist deutsch?" 47–48, in his *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 10, ed. Wolfgang Golther (Berlin and Leipzig: Bong & Co., 1913), 36–53.

30. Franz Grillparzer, "Grillparzers Grabrede, 29. März 1827," in *Ludwig van Beethoven: In Briefen und Lebensdokumenten*, ed. Reinhold Schimkat (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1961), 212.

31. Stephen McClatchie, *Analyzing Wagner's Operas: Alfred Lorenz and German Nationalist Ideology*, Eastman Studies in Music (Rochester: U of Rochester P, 1998).

32. *Ibid.*, 207.

33. Alfred Lorenz, *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner*, vol. 3 of 4, *Der musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagners "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg"* (Berlin: Max Hesse, 1924–33; reprint, Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1966.)

34. On the notion of "spontaneity" in *Die Meistersinger*, see Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, 69–70.

Clearly, the blatant representation of "German" culture, especially music, is the centerpiece of the drama, but it is through the representation of types and ideas that *Die Meistersinger* becomes infused with contour and nuance. For instance, the major characters—Hans Sachs, Walther von Stolzing, Eva Pogner, Sixtus Beckmesser, David, even Veit Pogner—constitute allusions to long-standing literary and cultural archetypes as well as being possibly contentious representations of race and gender. Of these, the debate concerning Beckmesser as Wagner's representation of the Jew has been the most intense in recent years, originating, it seems, from a brief passage in Theodor W. Adorno's book-length essay "Versuch über Wagner."<sup>35</sup> A satisfactory resolution to this debate seems unlikely, as the disagreement centers not so much on Richard Wagner—who was unquestionably an anti-Semite—but on the ways in which a work of art should be read. An extreme example of this problem, reproduced in a number of studies, is illustrated in a statement made by pianist-conductor Daniel Barenboim and the subsequent response by Marc Weiner. Since there are no overt references to Jews in *Die Meistersinger*, Daniel Barenboim—himself Jewish—argues against an anti-Semitic reading of the work, on the grounds that Wagner "would have called a spade a spade."<sup>36</sup> Marc Weiner, who insists on a more complex reading which understands the work as a polyvalently coded text embedded in a specific cultural context, accuses Barenboim and other "apologists" of naively reducing Wagner's "contradictory complexity . . . to straightforward mimesis."<sup>37</sup>

The more enduring and ultimately less contentious focus of discussion has been on Sachs, or in some cases on the combination of Sachs and Walther, as conduits for Wagner's poetics. But some characters have been ignored almost completely. William McDonald's careful analysis of the musical and textual characterization of Sachs, Walther, and even David is a case in point because, like so many others, he pays no attention to the figure of Eva or to the issue of gender, specifically the nexus of gender and music that turn out to be central concerns in the work.<sup>38</sup> Eva Rieger's essay in this volume attempts to fill this particular lacuna.

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35. Theodor W. Adorno, "Versuch über Wagner," in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 13 (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1971), 7–148, here: 21: "der impotente intellektuelle Kritiker Hanslick-Beckmesser, all die Zurückgewiesenen in Wagners Werk sind Judenkarikaturen." English version: *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: New Left Books, 1981).

36. "Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said: A Conversation," *Raritan* 18.1 (1998): 1–31, here 18.

37. Marc Weiner, "Reading the Ideal," *New German Critique* 69 (1996): 53–83, here 55 and 83.

38. William E. McDonald, "Words, Music and Dramatic Development in *Die Meistersinger*," *19th-Century Music* 1, 3 (1978): 246–60. For an essay dealing with Eva, see Mary A. Cicora, "'Eva im Paradies': An Approach to Wagner's *Meistersinger*," *German Studies Review* 10.2 (1987): 321–33.

Wagner did not initiate the gendered discourse of music. Instead he again reinscribes one this time developed by German music critics during the eighteenth century, which sought to create a distinctly German musical paradigm, separate from that of the French and Italians.<sup>39</sup> In the process of doing so, German music critics identified “German” music as being harmonically more complex, contrapuntal, predominantly instrumental, intellectually and emotionally more demanding, and hence more “manly” than French and Italian music, which were characterized as vocal, melodic, using simple harmonies, and thus superficial and “effeminate.” Whereas Germans wrote music increasingly understood *per se* as the “universal” language, all others wrote in easily identifiable “national” styles. Wagner was committed to the notion of perpetuating a distinctly “German” style and developing a uniquely “German” form of opera, a lifelong project announced at length in his famous theoretical works written between 1849 and 1851—*Die Kunst und die Revolution* (1849; Art and Revolution), *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849; Artwork of the Future); *Oper und Drama* (1851; Opera and Drama) and *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde* (1851; A Communication to my Friends). Wagner’s emphatic affirmation and representation of a national “German” musical style is evident in the demonstratedly symphonic and contrapuntal prelude to *Die Meistersinger* as has been frequently noted, perhaps most succinctly by Friedrich Nietzsche and by musicologists ever since.<sup>40</sup> Less discussed, and perhaps more difficult to explain, is Wagner’s possibly hypocritical incorporation in *Die Meistersinger* of French and Italianate musical dramatic elements most commonly associated with the genre of grand opera.<sup>41</sup> These include the use of large chorus, grand finales, as well as the prominence, uncharacteristic for Wagner, of melody, principally in Walther’s arias which, considering Wagner’s theoretical dismissal of Italianate opera, are surprisingly florid, passionate, dare I say “effeminate.”<sup>42</sup> In the context, these elements are reinscribed as manly and virile, since Walther uses them successfully not only to woo Eva but to convince the masters and townsfolk of his own mastery. Barry Millington has noted Wagner’s inclusion of these “foreign”

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39. On this topic, see the excellent study by Mary Sue Morrow, *German Music Criticism in the Late Eighteenth Century: Aesthetic Issues in Instrumental Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997).

40. See Friedrich Nietzsche, “Achstes Hauptstück: Völker und Vaterländer,” in his *Jenseits von Gut und Böse, Nietzsche Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 6 Abt., Bd. 2, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), §240: “Diese Art von Musik drückt am besten aus, was ich von den Deutschen halte: sie sind von Vorgestern und von Übermorgen—*sie haben noch kein Heute*” (188).

41. On this point, see also Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, 75.

42. Cf. Robert W. Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), 292.

elements, arguing that Wagner here is not returning to the principles of grand opera, "rather he has found a way of integrating these elements into his music drama."<sup>43</sup> I would go a step further than Millington, however, and suggest that in *Die Meistersinger*, Wagner accomplishes multiple objectives by affirming the century-old discourse of German music and, in addition, seizing and thereby legitimizing (i.e., making "German") the above-mentioned "foreign" elements. This supports a supposed characteristic of "the Germans" who, according to Wagner, have the capacity to absorb "foreign" elements and make them their own.<sup>44</sup> The habit of taking from other cultures, by the way, is one which Wagner also repeatedly associates with Jews, though, importantly, Jews fail at the process of "making it their own," revealing the extent to which they are spiritually as well as culturally foreign and homeless.<sup>45</sup>

Beyond the representational dimension of individual characters, Wagner also transforms social groups and conventions such as the guild system and its rites, musical devices like the chorale and counterpoint, not to mention the city of Nürnberg into coded signifiers. Perhaps the most loaded of these is Nürnberg, supplied even with its own musical call sign. It is possible, even advisable, to read Nürnberg on several levels.<sup>46</sup> There is the historical city whose heyday recalls the economic success of semi-independent German towns, particularly in the early modern period preceding the Thirty Years' War. For Wagner's contemporaries, the utopian image of a pre-industrial and ultimately harmonious community in the geographical and thus spiritual heart of Germany served as a marker against the encroachment of a modernity that had been so steadfastly resisted since Schiller and the Romantic generation.<sup>47</sup> This reading of Nürnberg as a bulwark against modernity and a symbol of the truly German had already been articulated

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43. Barry Millington, *Wagner*, rev. ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1992): 250.

44. Richard Wagner, "Was ist deutsch?" "es [war] dem deutschen Geiste bestimmt, das Fremde, ursprünglich ihm Fernliegende . . . zu erfassen und sich anzueignen" (40). "Er [der Deutsche] will aber nicht nur das Fremde, als solches, als rein Fremdes, anstarren, sondern er will es 'deutsch' verstehen" (44). "Von den Italienern hatte der Deutsche sich auch die Musik angeeignet" (46).

45. Richard Wagner, "Das Judentum in der Musik," in his *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 5, ed. Wolfgang Golther (Berlin and Leipzig: Bong & Co, 1913): "Der Jude hat nie eine eigene Kunst gehabt, . . . daß er unmöglich den Mut zur Mitwirkung bei unserem Kunstschaffen sich erhalten könnte . . . er [horcht] daher auf unser Kunstwesen und dessen lebengebenden inneren Organismus nur ganz oberflächlich hin" (76–78).

46. See Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "Reworking History: Wagner's German Myth of Nuremberg," *Re-Reading Wagner*, ed. Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1993): 39–60.

47. Cf. Millington, *Wagner*, 252.

during the earliest phase of Romanticism, in which this city of Albrecht Dürer and Hans Sachs was revived and thus promoted along with its most significant residents in such works as Wackenroder's *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (ca. 1796). The utopian element is juxtaposed with the notion of decadence both within *Meistersinger* and in the nineteenth-century context of its composition and performance. Sixtus Beckmesser and Hans Sachs are engaged in a struggle over how best to save and maintain a tradition that seems to have fallen into disrepair. The corrupt state of the art is addressed by Veit Pogner in his lengthy presentation to the Guild during their meeting in Act I. By offering his only daughter Eva as the "prize" for a worthy Lied, he hopes to inject new life into a dying art. Wagner's contemporary and mentor, Franz Liszt, was equally concerned with musical stagnation in nineteenth-century Europe and sought a rejuvenation of musical aesthetics and form, declaring that "new wine demands new bottles."<sup>48</sup> *Tristan und Isolde* was perhaps Wagner's most daring formal answer to this call, but the musically more traditional *Meistersinger*, which followed immediately thereafter, also addresses the question of aesthetic innovation and its urgency.<sup>49</sup> Thus, aesthetically and despite the superficial differences in their "sound," *Tristan* and *Meistersinger* actually present two sides of the same coin by pursuing, albeit differently, the loosely defined goals of the New German School. Even structurally, both works are built on the idea of musical or melodic transformation, an idea Liszt and Wagner pioneered, though again with differing results and, despite its reputation for diatonicism, *Meistersinger* is filled with chromaticism more reminiscent of *Tristan*. Dramatically, Nürnberg becomes the contested ground where these issues of stagnation and utopian redemption meet. The key role Wagner gives to this city above and beyond the homage to Sachs and the mastersinger tradition quite literally prepared the ground for the even more significant and problematic prominence of Nürnberg in the twentieth century.

Thus it is perhaps through Nürnberg that we make the smoothest transition to "performance, history, and representation" as categories through which we can best explore and understand the importance of *Die Meistersinger* within German culture. The historical and political meaning of Nürnberg over the last century and a half, and especially for the Nazi regime, can in large measure be attributed to the city's glorification in

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48. Quoted in Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt*, vol. 2: *The Weimar Years, 1848–1861* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 309. The quote is attributed to Liszt by his pupil August Stradal in the latter's *Erinnerungen an Franz Liszt* (Bern: P. Haupt, 1929); the quote in German: "Neuer Wein bedarf neuer Schlaeuche." My thanks to Alan Walker for the additional insight.

49. On the relationship between *Die Meistersinger* and *Tristan*, see Kinderman, "Hans Sachs's Cobbler Song," as well as Lydia Goehr's essay in this volume.

Wagner's work. Moreover, the history of the work's performance, the manner in which the work has itself been (re)presented to the public, is closely linked to the contemporaneous politics of German culture. While a performance can always be read in terms of a given cultural context, *Die Meistersinger* has a special place. Indeed, one can possibly even speak of a symbiotic relationship between the story of the work's performance and political/cultural developments in Germany. Beyond merely reflecting a certain climate, the performance history of *Die Meistersinger* reveals moments when the theatrical experience preceded political reality.

The first of these uncanny coincidences are the years surrounding the work's completion and first performance. One explanation for the instant success of *Die Meistersinger* and its ascension to unofficial German national opera (*Nationaloper*) lies in its aesthetic and textual unification of a people and a nation in anticipation of a long-awaited political unification, which, as it turned out, took place three years later: the founding of the Second Reich in 1871 under Otto von Bismarck. The link between the opera and the German nation was thus forged, which makes the notorious spontaneous singing of the *Deutschlandlied* at the close of the 1924 Bayreuth production understandable, though, again, this political gesture can be read as a preview: the politicization and nationalization of German culture in general and *Die Meistersinger* in particular during the Nazi period after 1933. Considering the degree to which *Die Meistersinger* was appropriated as the signature opera of the Third Reich,<sup>50</sup> it is perhaps counterintuitive that Hitler would forbid the habit of singing the national anthem at the work's conclusion: almost as if the *Deutschlandlied* were no longer necessary since the opera *in toto* had itself become a part of Germany's national music.

Given the vexing association between the work and the Hitler regime, it is noteworthy that one of the operas selected for the reopening season of the Bayreuth festival after the war was again *Die Meistersinger*. Even more problematic, considering the role of the work between 1933 and 1945, and the Wagner clan's embrace of Hitler and his regime, was the highly publicized slogan which accompanied that 1951 season: "Hier gilt's der Kunst."<sup>51</sup>

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50. See David Dennis's essay in this volume.

51. Translated at the time as "Art is our aim!"; see Hartmut Zelinsky, *Richard Wagner—ein deutsches Thema: Eine Dokumentation zur Wirkungsgeschichte Richard Wagners 1876–1976* (Frankfurt/M: Zweitausendeins, 1976). The full text of the plea reads: "Im Interesse einer reibungslosen Durchführung der Festspiele bitten wir von Gesprächen und Debatten politischer Art auf dem Festspielhügel freundlichst absehen zu wollen." "Hier gilt's der Kunst" had already been used as a slogan during performances of *Die Meistersinger* at the 1925 Bayreuth Festival, along with the plea not to sing the German national anthem. On this and other details of *Die Meistersinger* at Bayreuth, see Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A Concise History of the Wagner Festival* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1994), here esp. 142–43.

The choice of words was doubly insidious because it is actually a quote taken from a line spoken by Eva in Act II of *Die Meistersinger*. The innocent and virginal Eva was thus appropriated in order to cleanse a tarnished Bayreuth and, by extension, Richard Wagner. However, this arguably disingenuous and rather hypocritical attempt at depoliticization represented only the first of many phases of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (overcoming the past), or more accurately, the absence of it. Nevertheless, if we look at the entire context, the choice of *Die Meistersinger* was both conservative and daring. It was a gesture of stubborn denial but also of a stubborn determination to carry on and “reclaim” that which had been seized and transformed. The combination of timeless and archaic setting in Wieland Wagner’s 1956 production signified yet another stage in the process: a depoliticization on stage to match the rhetoric of 1951, where “overcoming” seemed more like avoidance.<sup>52</sup> But Wieland Wagner’s bare sets, his “Mastersingers without Nuremberg” as some complained, suggested also Germany as an empty space waiting to be filled, once again.<sup>53</sup> Whatever way we choose to read these highly contested moments in the history of the work’s performance, the important point is that *Die Meistersinger* and the manner it, and thus Germany, was represented in performance is intimately bound up with questions of German historical and political identity and self-representation.

Given the broad range of issues that the categories “performance, history, and representation” raise, a single book devoted to their exploration cannot hope to be comprehensive. This volume brings together a diverse group of contributors to discuss aspects of the issues raised above. The diversity becomes readily apparent in terms of academic disciplines represented—philosophy, history, musicology, theater studies, German studies—as well as the inclusion of active performers. By inviting the kinds of contributions presented, I wanted to open up a space for discourse at multiple levels of complexity and for fresh, even unconventional, modes of writing. Rather than streamline or homogenize the sound and language of the individual chapters, I decided to let the authors speak with their own disciplinary voices, however much their vocabularies or methodologies seem strange or off-putting to the reader not initiated into the peculiarities of a particular discipline.

While the deliberately eclectic mixture of chapters brings music and the “other” humanities into closer proximity, thus encouraging a broader, more

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52. For details on this and other stagings of *Die Meistersinger*, see *Die Meistersinger und Richard Wagner: Die Rezeptionsgeschichte einer Oper von 1868 bis heute*, Eine Ausstellung des Germanischen Nationalmuseums in Nürnberg (Cologne: Kopp, 1981), as well as Patrick Carnegy, “Stage History,” in *Richard Wagner, “Die Meistersinger,”* 135–52.

53. See Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 218–21, and also Hans Mayer, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth 1876–1976*, trans. Jack Zipes (New York: Rizzoli, 1976), 189–91.



inclusive way of thinking about Richard Wagner and his works, this same eclecticism carries with it both the benefits and difficulties associated with interdisciplinary or, better said, multidisciplinary ventures. Though each of the essays reflects the approach, style, methodology, and language consistent with the conventions of a specific discipline, these may rest “uncomfortably” beside the essay directly preceding or following it. Nowhere is this difference more acute than between Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau’s succinct, almost tersely worded essay on performing Hans Sachs and the following chapter by philosopher Lydia Goehr on the stakes of performance in *Die Meistersinger*, which approaches the question via the often impenetrable language and thought—for lay readers—of Wittgenstein and Theodor W. Adorno. As a consequence, this volume offers no continuing narrative, but rather a presentation of often contradictory vignettes, grouped within the three main categories, and concerning the same object: *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. There are, of course, points of intersection between the essays, but in many instances the differences or disagreements between them may be even more stimulating than the similarities. For the reader, the multidisciplinary multiperspectivism should result in a truly interdisciplinary experience.

With this in mind, it was a priority in the conception to include the voices of artists actively engaged in the work’s performance. As I suggested earlier, it is important that the issue of actual performance be part of any broader consideration of a musical or dramatic work. Although many artists wish their performance to speak for itself, I was delighted that a conductor, at least one stage director,<sup>54</sup> and a singer were prepared to share their performatory insights and experiences. From the vantage point of anyone involved in the performance of this or any other major work by Wagner, the undertaking is a major feat on three fronts: intellectual, emotional, and physical.

This in the first place is true for the conductor, who not only is responsible for questions of global conceptualization like the stage director, but who must also withstand the unremitting physical and emotional demands of actual performance. Conductor Peter Schneider likens the task to a mountain climb—indeed a climb of the highest mountain on earth. His essay leads us through a performance of the work by examining how Wagner has constructed his monumental work using the utmost economy of means: the intervals of a third and fourth, and the scale. His musical analysis owes much to the work of Alfred Lorenz and, in light of McClatchie’s book mentioned earlier, demonstrates nicely the divide between academic discussions—which are often concerned with and (involuntarily) perpetuate the politicization of aesthetics—and the imperatives of interpretation for

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54. I report with deep regret that Götz Friedrich, who had agreed to supply a chapter on staging *Die Meistersinger*, passed away before completing his essay.



the purpose of performance, which continue to bring to the foreground the notion of music unencumbered. Interestingly, it is often the sections discussed less from a textual or dramatic perspective that prove the most formidable for the conductor.

Harry Kupfer's provocative call to "finally stop apologizing for *Die Meistersinger*" reflects his perhaps shocking vision of the opera's role in a new post-Wall Germany, to dispel lingering shadows of the Third Reich and, instead, to think about issues of identity in the context of a unified Europe. The bulk of the interview with Kupfer concerns general questions of characterization and interpretation within the context of his new 1998 staging of *Die Meistersinger* at the Staatsoper in Berlin, including careful and revealing comments about Hans Sachs, Walther von Stolzing, and Eva and Veit Pogner. He also confronts the perennial problem of Beckmesser, and responds to the issue of the town clerk as representation or caricature of the Jew. By setting the opera to play in "history, today, and nowhere" he does seem to suggest a way out of the highly charged role *Die Meistersinger* has played in German cultural history.

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's essay on performing the role of Hans Sachs combines an examination of its technical requirements with important insights into characterization, demonstrating the degree to which the physicality of vocal technique is inseparable from the intellectual and emotional dimensions of performing the role, which, he argues, may well be the most demanding of all the roles Wagner created for the singer-actor.

Philosopher of music Lydia Goehr turns our attention from performing *Die Meistersinger* to performance in the work. By examining the sequence of drafts, or what might be considered rehearsals, preceding Walther's final presentation of the *Preislied*, Goehr argues that the audiences on stage and in the theater are being primed to accept Walther's song as the "only" and "correct" version, a song that thus leaves us satisfied, a metaphor for the opera's own success. In terms of the aesthetic innovation that the text of the opera preaches, however, the *Preislied*—like the opera itself—is a failure because it takes no risks. It is a failure, Goehr argues, which actually primes the theater audience to accept Wagner's truly innovative work: *Tristan und Isolde*.

The next section, *Meistersinger* and German history, addresses from the vantage point of three different centuries the manner in which the work is situated in history, represents history, and is laden with unique burdens of its own history of and in performance. Lutz Koepnick investigates the nineteenth-century optical origins of Adorno's concept of "phantasmagoria"—often used as a tool for understanding Wagner's compositional technique. The "phantasmagorias" of vision and visuality in *Die Meistersinger*, which locate the drama in "neither past nor present," connect nicely with the underlying concept of Harry Kupfer's production, but also reflect and participate in the transformation of visual culture during the nineteenth cen-

ture. Koepnick uses his findings to argue against the legitimacy of Heinz Tietjen's 1933 Bayreuth staging of *Die Meistersinger* as a Nazi rally. Similarly flawed, he submits, are the arguments proposed by postwar critics who have accepted the Nazi appropriation of the work as somehow prefigured in Wagner's mis-en-scene.

Historian David Dennis continues where Koepnick leaves off by looking closely at the perennial and troubling issue of the ways in which the work was appropriated and read by the leadership of the Third Reich. While he does not confront the contested issue of the work's embedded anti-Semitism per se, his analysis proposes a new approach to resolving the debate. Dennis's careful and exhaustive archival research reveals the many ways in which the opera became emblematic for the kind of Germanness promoted by the Nazi regime. From 1933 on, *Die Meistersinger* was used on every imaginable occasion for purposes of political exigency to create an inviolable link between it and the Nazis, between it and Germany. Surprisingly, none of the leading Nazi voices ever made mention of anti-Semitic elements, nor was Beckmesser ridiculed as representative of the Jew or, as Adorno suggested, as embodiment of Grimm's notorious "Der Jude im Dorn" (Jew in the brambles). Dennis suggests provocatively that we reconsider to what extent claims of anti-Semitic coding in current academic discourse are legitimate if even the Nazis did not think to use the opera for their anti-Semitic propaganda, especially since they used it so freely for demonstrations of pro-Germanness.

Peter Höyng's twenty-first-century interview with Richard Wagner is a light-hearted but nevertheless serious encounter with Wagner's published utterances and positions, viewed retrospectively through the twists and turns of German history since his death in 1883. The conversation covers aspects of German history and identity connected with the opera, and imagines Wagner's response to the issue of anti-Semitism in the wake of Hitler and the Holocaust. This *jeu d'esprit* or Goethean "ernster Scherz" using current technology to create a cyber-reality can be legitimated by pointing to the common practice since the Nazi period of judging Wagner in light of historical developments of which he had no knowledge and over whose occurrence he may or may not have had any influence and therefore responsibility. Is it any more of a stretch to postulate Wagner's responses to an interrogation which presumes his own opportunity to witness post-Wagnerian German history?

The last section of the volume, devoted to "representation" in its widest context, deals with several questions either insufficiently examined to date or whose contentiousness demands continued reflection. Theater historian Klaus van den Berg begins by revisiting the problematic issue of *Die Meistersinger's* genre designation as "comedy." Too often in studies the question is dismissed with facile remarks about Wagner's "cruel"<sup>55</sup> or "un-

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55. Gutman, *Richard Wagner*, 220.