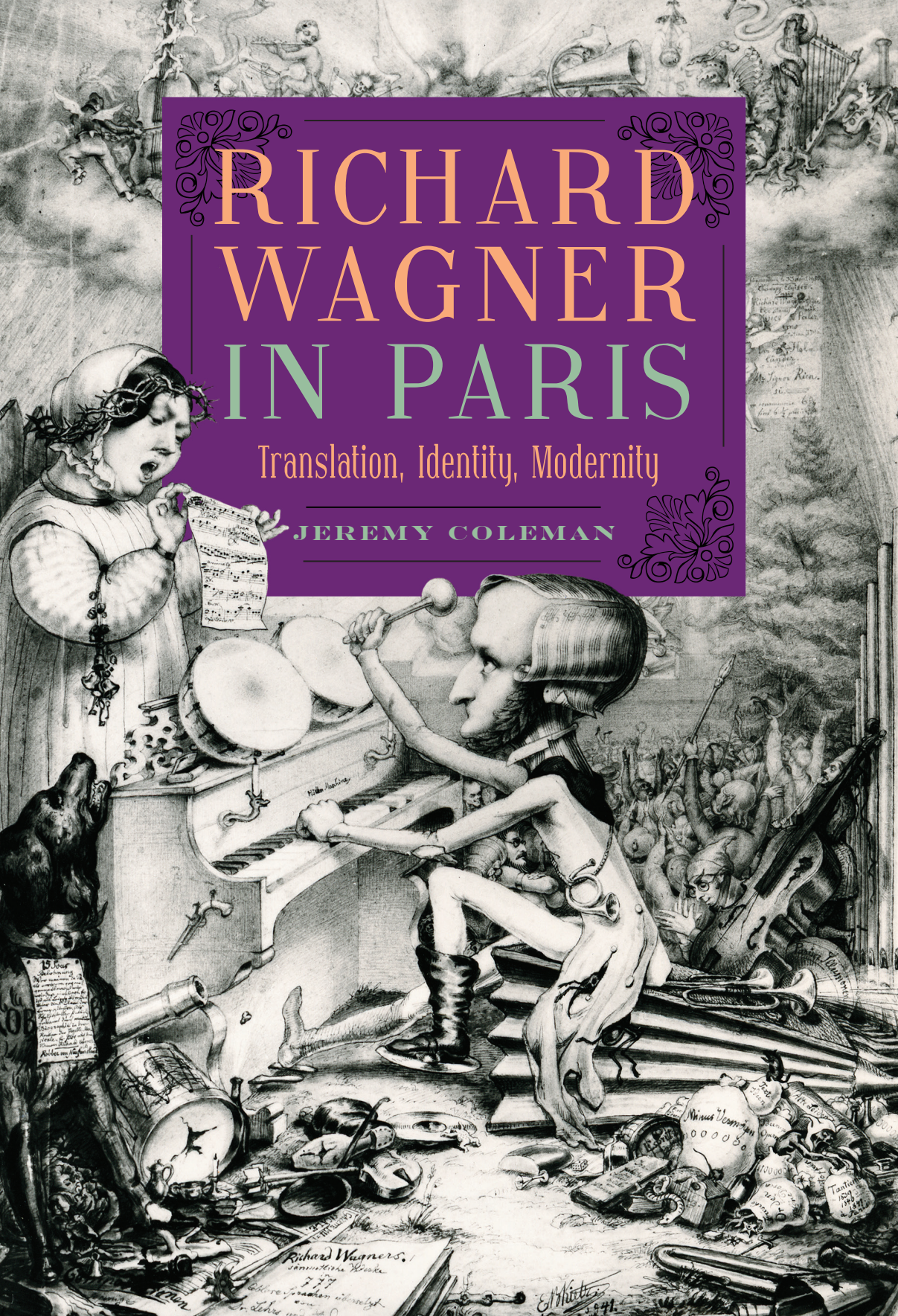


RICHARD WAGNER IN PARIS

Translation, Identity, Modernity

JEREMY COLEMAN



Richard Wagner in Paris

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Jeremy Coleman

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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To my teachers in gratitude

Contents

List of Illustrations	ix
List of Music Examples	xi
Note on the Text	xiii
Acknowledgements	xv
Abbreviations	xvii
Introduction: Wagner Against the Grain	1
PART I PARIS YEARS, 1839–42	
1 Through Babel's Arcades: Early Entanglements	21
2 Translating German Opera: <i>Le Freyschütz</i>	51
PART II DRESDEN AND ZURICH, 1842–52	
3 "... in ein fernes Land": German Identity Between Paris and Dresden	77
4 Exile, Internationalism and Media After the Revolution	105
PART III PARIS YEARS, 1859–61	
5 Wagner Without Theatre: Aporias of Translation	137
6 All About Venus: Another Look at the "Paris" <i>Tannhäuser</i>	155
Conclusion: Universality at the Crossroads	169
Bibliography	179
Index	195

Illustrations

Figures

- 3.1 First two systems of Iphigenia's aria "Leb' wohl", *Iphigenie in Aulis*, Act 3 No. 35, in F. Brissler's edition (1839), 108. © Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar (reproduced with permission). 95

Tables

- 1.1 Texts of the preliminary drafts of the Ballad to *Le Hollandais volant* (*Der fliegende Holländer*), verse 1, lines 1–4. 32
- 2.1 Comparison between Wagner's German draft and the publication in RGMP (23 and 30 May 1841) of his first *Freischütz* article: references to "dreaming". 68

Music Examples

- | | |
|--|----|
| 1.1 Opening of voice part, Claudio's Cavatina ("Cavatine"), <i>Liebesverbot</i> , Act 1 No. 2; French version, bb. 6–8 in SW 2/2, 373. | 42 |
| 1.2 Isabella's voice part, Lucio–Dorella–Isabella Trio, <i>Liebesverbot</i> , Act 2 No. 9: | |
| a) French version, bb. 160–64, in SW 2/2, 387. | 43 |
| b) French version, bb. 177–84, in SW 2/2, 388. | 43 |
| c) French version, bb. 201–11, in SW 2/2, 390. | 43 |
| 1.3 Extracts from R. Wagner, "La tombe dit à la rose" (fragment) (WWV 56), transcribed from SW 17, 37. | 44 |
| 1.4 Opening bars of R. Wagner, "Dors, mon enfant" (WWV 53), transcribed from SW 17, 28. | 44 |
| 1.5 Transcribed from G. Meyerbeer, "Guide au bord ta nacelle (Komm', du schönes Fischermädchen)", ([Paris]: [Schlesinger], [1837]): | |
| a) close of verse 1 (p. 28). | 46 |
| b) close of verse 3 (pp. 31–2). | 46 |
| 1.6 Prototype of Senta's "redemption" motif, German draft of Ballad, transcribed from Richard-Wagner-Gedenkstätte der Stadt Bayreuth Hs 120 T. | 47 |
| 1.7 Opening bars of voice part from the Spinning Song, <i>Der fliegende Holländer</i> , Act 2 No. 4. | 47 |
| 1.8 Excerpt from H. Berlioz, <i>Roméo et Juliette</i> , "Scène d'amour", piano reduction, bb. 72–85. | 49 |
| 3.1 Agamemnon's recitative "Non, la Grece outragée", R. Wagner's arrangement compared with F. Brissler's edition (1839): <i>Iphigénie en Aulide</i> , Act 1 scene 1. | 89 |
| 3.2 Middle section of Agamemnon's aria "Peuvent ils ordonner", R. Wagner's arrangement compared with F. Brissler's edition (1839): <i>Iphigénie en Aulide</i> , Act 1 scene 3. | 91 |
| 3.3 Iphigenia's voice part, opening of "Leb' wohl", <i>Iphigenie in Aulis</i> , Act 3 No. 35, in F. Brissler's edition (1839), 108. | 96 |

- 3.4 Equivalent number “Leb’ wohl”, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Act 3 No. 26, R. Wagner’s arrangement, piano edition by H. v. Bülow, 118–19 96
- 3.5 Artemis’s arioso, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Act 3 No. 30, R. Wagner’s arrangement, piano edition by H. v. Bülow, 36–7. 99
- 6.1 Piano reduction of Venus, “Geliebter, sag!”, *Tannhäuser*, Act 1 scene 2 (1845). 161
- 6.2 Venus’s voice part, comparison of extracts from *Tannhäuser*, Act 1 scene 2, 1845 and 1861 versions. 164
- 6.3 Vénus’s voice part, “Viens que mon bras”, *Tannhäuser*, Act 1 scene 2 (1861), bb. 288–92; transcribed from 1861 autograph score, NA A I f 2⁽³⁾. 165
- 6.4 Venus, “Sag, holder Freund”/“Viens, mon amant”, *Tannhäuser*, Act 1 scene 2 (“Paris”/“Vienna” versions); reproduced from Richard Wagner, *Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg*, piano edition by Wolfgang M. Wagner, 127. 165
- 6.5 Venus, “Mein Ritter, mein Geliebter!”, *Tannhäuser*, Act 1 scene 2 (1845), bb. 364–75; reproduced from piano edition, 57. 166

Note on the Text

Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. For citations of Wagner's prose works, I have referred to SSD (see Abbreviations) and, where appropriate, to original publications. Quotations are given in English translation with original texts provided either immediately below or in a corresponding footnote. In some cases where the linguistic particularity of the original text is the main purpose of the quotation (particularly in chapters 1 and 2), the original is given first followed by the English translation immediately below. Chapter 3 uses some material which has previously appeared in Jeremy Coleman, "'In ein fernes Land': The Politics of Translation in Wagner's Arrangement of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*", *The Wagner Journal* 13/2 (July 2019), 28–48.

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Abbreviations

BL	British Library
CM	Berlioz, Hector. <i>Critique Musicale, 1823–1863</i> , edited under the direction of H. Robert Cohen and Yves Gérard. 10 vols (projected). Paris: Buchet/Chastel, Meta-Éditions, 1996–.
CWD	Wagner, Cosima. <i>Cosima Wagner's Diaries</i> , edited and annotated by Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, translated and with an introduction by Geoffrey Skelton. 2 vols. Vol. 1, 1869–1877, London: Collins, 1978. Vol. 2, 1878–1883, London: Collins, 1980.
CWT	Wagner, Cosima. <i>Cosima Wagner: Die Tagebücher</i> , edited and annotated by Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack. 2 vols. Munich and Zurich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1976–77.
GSD	Wagner, Richard. <i>Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen</i> , edited by Richard Wagner. 10 vols. Leipzig: E. W. Fritzsche, 1871–83.
LRW	Newman, Ernest. <i>The Life of Richard Wagner</i> . 4 vols. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1933–47.
NA	Bayreuth, National Archives
NW	Nietzsche, Friedrich. <i>Nietzsche Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> , founded by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. c. 40 vols. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1967–.
PW	Wagner, Richard. <i>Richard Wagner's Prose Works</i> . 8 vols, translated by William Ashton Ellis. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892–99; reprinted by Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993–95.
RGMP	<i>Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris</i>
SB	Wagner, Richard. <i>Sämtliche Briefe</i> . 34 vols (projected), edited by Gertrud Strobel and Werner Wolf (vols 1–5), Hans-Joachim Bauer and Johannes Forner (vols 6–8), Klaus Burmeister and Johannes Forner (vol. 9), Andreas Mielke (vols 10, 14–15, 18, 21, 23), Martin Dürrer (vols 11–12, 16–17, 22, 24), Martin Dürrer and Isabel Kraft (vol. 13), Margaret Jestremski (vols 19–20), Angela Steinsiek (vol. 25). Leipzig:

- Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1967–2000 (vols 1–9); Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2000– (vols 10–).
- SLRW Wagner, Richard. *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, edited and translated by Barry Millington and Stewart Spencer. London and Melbourne: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1987.
- SRG *Richard Wagner: Schriften eines revolutionären Genies*, edited by Egon Voss. Munich: Langen Müller, 1976.
- SSD Wagner, Richard. *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, 16 vols. Volks-Ausgabe. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel and C. F. W. Siegel (R. Linnemann), 1911 (vols 1–12), 1914 (vols 13–16). English translation by W. Ashton Ellis. *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* (see PW).
- SW Wagner, Richard. *Sämtliche Werke*. 31 vols. General editor Egon Voss. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne / Schott Musik International, 1970–.
- WWV Deathridge, John, Martin Geck, and Egon Voss (eds). *Wagner Werk-Verzeichnis: Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke Richard Wagners und ihrer Quellen*. Mainz, London, New York, Tokyo: B. Schott's Söhne, 1986, 1987.

Introduction: Wagner Against the Grain

“Babel d’escaliers et d’arcades,
C’était un palais infini”

Charles Baudelaire, “Rêve Parisien”,
*Tableaux Parisiens*¹

FRIEDRICH Nietzsche remarked more than once that Wagner’s only true home was in Paris.² He had in mind Wagner’s pervasive influence on modernist and *decadent* French culture of the late nineteenth century (so-called “Wagnérisme” and its satellite discourses). But he was also alluding to features of Wagner’s stage works, the nature of his artistic ambition and aspects of his personality that smacked far more of the Parisian dilettante or theatrical impresario than it did of the provincial Kapellmeister. Nietzsche even placed Wagner in the context of French Romanticism of the 1840s, a clear reference to the composer’s ill-fated sojourn in Paris from 1839 to 1842 which suggested an affinity that had been present almost from the start. The *bon mot* is as exaggerated as it is suggestive. Laced with ironic wit, it also betrays deep admiration on Nietzsche’s part, an attempt to salvage something of Wagner from the taint of Prussian imperial expansionism and to account for that which continued to fascinate him about a handful of Wagner’s stage works.

According to *The Case of Wagner* (1888), the composer’s modernity was bound up with the artistic and cultural movement of French *decadence*. If German art destroyed culture wherever it spread, as Nietzsche elsewhere claimed,³ Wagner had taken German identity so close to the brink that in its very excessiveness it resonated with the latest artistic developments in French culture, above all in literature.⁴ Where Nietzsche saw the tendency towards the febrile and the

¹ Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, 2 vols, I (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 102.

² Nietzsche articulated this idea variously in terms of “Heimat” (home), “Boden” (ground, earth, or soil) and “gehören” (to belong). Aphorisms 254 and 256 in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, in NW 6/2, eds Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1968), 206–8, 209–12; “Wohin Wagner gehört”, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in NW 6/3 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1969), 425–6; “Warum ich so klug bin” (aphorism 5), and “Menschliches, Allzumenschliches” (aphorism 2), *Ecce Homo*, in NW 6/3, 286–7, 321–2.

³ Nietzsche, “Warum ich so klug bin” (aphorisms 3 and 5), *Ecce Homo*, in NW 6/3, 283, 287.

⁴ Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner*, in NW 6/3, 3–47, especially 15–17.

voluptuous, not to mention an all-consuming commitment to theatre and theatricality, Theodor Adorno half a century later recognised the origins of mass culture and the dialectic of Enlightenment in his *Versuch über Wagner*.⁵ Adorno traced certain formal and technical elements to Berlioz's *idée fixe* and instrumentation and to Meyerbeer's grand operas which allegedly reduced politics to mere "spectacle".⁶

Such observations formed only a marginal part of Adorno's essay on Wagner. Yet some of them had appeared in the writings of the utopian Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, who noted with reference to what he dubbed the "grand salon appearance" of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*:

it stands in such dense theatricality that it almost has something of reality about it, which is why Wagner was also able to play off his absolute appearance against Meyerbeer's half-measure, i.e. against mere theatrical effect [Effekt] as 'effect without cause' [Wirkung ohne Ursache]; Wagner fought against Meyerbeer with almost the same arguments with which Nietzsche in turn unmasks the 'actor' Wagner.⁷

Bloch identified a contradiction at the heart of Wagnerian music drama, namely Wagner's tendency towards theatrical "effect" of the very sort that he simultaneously decried in others such as Meyerbeer.⁸

The influence of Paris in Wagner's development has tended to be reduced simplistically to his notorious relationship with Meyerbeer as one of person-

⁵ For comparative readings of Nietzsche's and Adorno's respective Wagner critiques, see Karin Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives: Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), especially chapter 4: "Wagner's Aesthetics as the Origin of Totalitarianism or the Advantages and Disadvantages of Decadence for Wagner", 117–71; and Marc A. Weiner, "Why Does Hollywood Like Opera?", *Between Opera and Cinema*, eds Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa (New York: Routledge, 2002), 75–91.

⁶ See Theodor W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1952), 27, 66, 107; *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: New Left Books, 1981), 21, 60, 103. Adorno made a similar point, though in a less guarded register, writing to Walter Benjamin on 13 May 1937 that "all of the noise and spurious glitter of Wagnerism can be traced back to [Berlioz]". Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 190.

⁷ Ernst Bloch, "Rescuing Wagner Through Surrealistic Colportage (1929)", *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice (Oxford: Polity, 1991), 338–45, at 340. Towards the end of the essay, Bloch described Wagner's relationship with Offenbach in similar terms: "Wagner needs his Offenbach, whom he already has in him anyway, and towards whom he therefore had no sense of humour. [...] Much already seems like Offenbach parodied again." *Ibid.*, 344.

⁸ Bloch was seeking to portray Wagner as a spiritual ancestor to early twentieth-century French surrealists. *Ibid.*, 341.

ally inflected, envious rivalry.⁹ Slavoj Žižek has cited Wagner's unfinished works *Die Sarazenin* (1843) and *Jesus von Nazareth* (1848–49) to highlight not only the contingency of the composer's creative development ("each of them indicates a path which might have been taken but was abandoned") but also his weakness to "Meyerbeerian temptation". In fairness, this faintly salacious remark goes beyond the usual obligatory allusions to Wagner's Meyerbeerian "bad conscience". Žižek appears to mean both Wagner's penchant for theatricality and at the same time the radical alterity implicit in (French) grand operas that placed history above myth, despite Adorno's scepticism that such "Romantic" operas in fact did anything of the kind.¹⁰

The positive features of Wagner's affinity with Paris and all it represented had been first recalled with genuine admiration by Nietzsche in various writings other than *The Case of Wagner*, and not merely those confined to the earlier period when he and the composer were outwardly on good terms. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), *Ecce Homo* (1888) and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (1888–89), he argued at length that the Master of Bayreuth had belonged to French late Romanticism of the 1840s along with Berlioz, Balzac, Delacroix and Hugo ("there is nowhere else that people have such passion for questions of form, such seriousness about the *mise en scène* – it is the Parisian seriousness *par excellence*")¹¹ as well as French socialists including Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. It was this, he added, that made Wagner supra-German, positively European, and indeed a "misunderstanding among Germans".¹²

"What happened?", Nietzsche demanded incredulously: this paragon of refined European cosmopolitanism had been "translated into German" ("ins Deutsche übersetzt") by the Bayreuth Wagnerians and bedecked with "German virtues".¹³ In a footnote to the first postscript of *The Case of Wagner*, he even asked whether Wagner was a German at all: "His very soul contradicts everything which hitherto has been regarded as German; not to mention German musi-

⁹ For a comprehensive treatment of their relationship, see Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, Marion Linhardt and Thomas Steiert, eds, *Meyerbeer – Wagner: Eine Begegnung* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 1998).

¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, "Christ, Hegel, Wagner", *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 2/2 [online] (24 February 2007), 1–12, at 6–7, available at <<http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/41/64>> (accessed 7 August 2018). See also Žižek's "Afterword: Wagner, Anti-Semitism and 'German Ideology'", in Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, 212–13. The recurrent charges of Wagner's dilettantism (from Nietzsche, Thomas Mann and Adorno) seem to insinuate that he had all the traits of the Parisian cultural bourgeoisie.

¹¹ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, eds Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 93. Cf. NW 6/3, 286–7.

¹² Since Nietzsche repeats, elaborates and rephrases his argument in different writings, I have merely summarised some of his salient points at the risk of collapsing important distinctions. For the relevant citations, see above, n. 2.

¹³ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in NW 6/3, 321–2.

cians!”¹⁴ Nietzsche went on to insinuate Wagner’s possible Jewish heritage while also repeating his image of Wagner the actor, but the question “Was Wagner a German at all?” also pertained to nationalist identity. The significance of Paris in Nietzsche’s assessment of Wagner was shot through with inconsistencies and its spectre has hovered on the periphery of the debate ever since, surfacing in various guises in the writings of commentators from Adorno to Alain Badiou by way of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe.¹⁵ The idea that Wagner harboured some identification with the French capital *malgré lui* has been brandished as a critical weapon against his “Germanness” – understood by the majority of twentieth-century commentators to mean his proto-fascist features – by turns to defend him from such accusations and to cast him in a still more negative light.

This book does not dismiss the divergent theoretical ideas, motifs and claims about Wagner so much as probe them in dialogue with readings of previously neglected, and in some cases still unpublished, source materials. To furnish studies such as Adorno’s composer-centred monograph with fuller social context, one may read Walter Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project), a materialist historiography of capitalism and commodity function in nineteenth-century Paris, as a complement to *Versuch über Wagner*.¹⁶ The mutual influence of these two works has been well documented, particularly with respect to “phantasmagoria”, a concept at the heart of Adorno’s Wagner, as well as related methodolog-

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. with commentary by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 182 n.

¹⁵ See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta (Figures of Wagner)*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford University Press, 1994); Slavoj Žižek, “The Politics of Redemption, or, Why Richard Wagner Is Worth Saving”, *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2006), 231–69; Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 49ff.; and Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer, with an afterword by Žižek (London: Verso, 2010). Mary Ann Smart adopted Nietzsche’s remark about Wagner (“the most enthusiastic mimomaniac”, cited on p. 4) for her study of gesture in nineteenth-century opera, using Nietzsche’s Wagner polemic to highlight the composer’s wider debt to the aesthetics of French grand opera. See, for example: “The pantomimic excesses of *Die Walküre* suggest that Wagner may have absorbed some unacknowledged dramaturgical lessons during his miserable sojourn in Paris in the early 1840s” (29). Smart’s argument still operated in a broadly polemical mode of discourse, albeit with a different aim from Nietzsche’s, and the notion of some affinity between Wagner’s mature works and French grand opera was not subject to further examination. Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Harvard: Belknap Press, 1999). It was in the title of his essay “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century” that Benjamin coined the oft-quoted epithet. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 3–26. Cf. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* 5/1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), “Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts”, 45–59, and “Paris, Capitale du XIX^{ème} siècle”, 60–77. For an important study of nineteenth-century Paris inspired by Benjamin’s project, see David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003, rpt. 2006).