Bibliographic Essay for Alex Ross’s *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music*

[under construction]

The notes in the printed text of *Wagnerism* give sources for material quoted in the book and cite the important primary and secondary literature on which I drew. From those notes, I have assembled an alphabetized bibliography of works cited. However, my reading and research went well beyond the literature catalogued in the notes, and in the following essay I hope to give as complete an accounting of my research as I can manage. Perhaps the document will be of use to scholars doing further work on the phenomenon of Wagnerism. As I indicate in my introduction and acknowledgments, I am tremendously grateful to scholars who have gone before me; a not inconsiderable number of them volunteered personal assistance as I worked.

Wagner has been the subject of thousands of books—although the often-quoted claim that more has been written about him than anyone except Christ or Napoleon is one of many indestructible Wagner myths. (Barry Millington, long established one of the leading Wagner commentators in English, disposes of it briskly in an essay on “Myths and Legends” in his *Wagner Compendium*, published by Schirmer in 1992.) Nonetheless, the literature is vast, and since Wagner himself is not the central focus of my book I won’t attempt any sort of broad survey here. I will, however, indicate the major works that guided me in assembling the piecemeal portrait of Wagner that emerges in my book.


Translations of the *Ring* are based on Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington’s *Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion* (Thames and Hudson, 1993). I also consulted Andrew Porter’s “singing” translation, *The Ring of the Nibelung* (Norton, 1977), and a recent version by John Deathridge (Penguin, 2018), and For variants and revised versions of Wagner’s dramatic texts, I looked to the imposing Schott edition of Wagner’s *Sämtliche Werke*, in particular vol.


of its history. For Bayreuth at the fin-de-siècle, I consulted Robert Hartford’s *Bayreuth: The Early Years* (Gollancz, 1980) and Albert Lavignac’s *Le Voyage artistique à Bayreuth*, 5th ed. (Delagrave, 1903). On the history of Wagner staging, see Bauer’s *Richard Wagner: Die Bühnenwerke von der Uraufführung bis heute* (Propyläen, 1982); Dietrich Mack’s *Der Bayreuther Inszenierungsstil, 1876–1976* (Prestel 1976); Barry Millington and Stewart Spencer’s *Wagner in Performance* (Yale UP, 1992); and, the essential book on the subject, Patrick Carnegy’s *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (Yale UP, 2006).


The Wagner shelves are crammed with specialized studies, not to say eccentric ones. Henri Perrier’s *Les Rendez-vous wagnériens* (Tramontane, 1981) is a delightful guide for the Wagnerian tourist in Europe; a new, comprehensive book on the same subject is Markus Kiesel, Joachim Mildner, and Dietmar Schuth’s *Wanderer heißt mich die Welt: Auf Richard Wagners Spuren durch Europa* (ConBrio, 2019). Rudolph Sabor’s *The Real Wagner* (Cardinal, 1989) reveals some of the odder corners of Wagneriana, such as the “Wagalaweia!” bathtub. Terry Quinn’s *Richard Wagner: The Lighter Side* (Amadeus, 2013), is a welcome contrast to a generally solemn-toned literature; it draws on two collections of Wagner caricatures, John Grand-Carteret’s *Richard Wagner en caricatures* (Larousse, n.d.); and Ernst Kreowski and Eduard Fuchs’s *Richard Wagner in der Karikatur* (Behr, 1907). The field of canine Wagnerism is not overlooked: recent monographs include Kerstin Decker, *Richard Wagner: Mit den Augen seiner Hunde betrachtet* (Berenberg, 2013); Franziska Polanski, *Richard Wagners Hunde: Da lernt’ ich wohl, was Liebe sei* (Implizit, 2017).

The phenomenon of Wagnerism itself—the composer’s influence on arts and literature—has inspired a number of general surveys. Among the earliest of these was Anna Jacobson’s *Nachklänge Richard Wagners im Roman* (Carl Winter, 1932). Invaluable to my own work were

Prelude: Death in Venice

My account of Wagner’s death relies on John Barker’s thoroughgoing study *Wagner and Venice* (University of Rochester Press, 2008), and on Henry Perl’s contemporary account, *Richard Wagner in Venedig: Mosaikbilder aus seinen letzten Lebenstagen* (Reichel, 1883), with a few other primary sources consulted. Needless to say, some details are difficult to pin down. There are several competing accounts of Wagner’s last words, as Barker observes on pp. 306–307: the mundane utterance “My watch!” seems the strongest candidate, but one version has him saying “Siegfried should . . .”—an unfinished instruction to his son. There is also a lack of clarity about Cosima’s emotional state in the hours before her husband’s death. In a reminiscence reprinted in Carl Glasenapp’s *Das Leben Richard Wagners*, vol. 6 (Breitkopf and Härtel, 1911), p.772, Paul von Joukowsky mentions that as she played Schubert’s “Lob de l’Tränen” at the piano “ihre eigenen Tränen flossen dabei”). But the same eyewitness wrote to Liszt on Feb. 20, 1883 at lunch with Cosima “we were merry as always.” (See La Mara [Marie Lipsius], ed., *Briefe hervorragender Zeitgenossen an Franz Liszt*, vol. 3 (Breitkopf and Härtel, 1904), p. 398: “Nous étions gais comme toujours.”) Stewart Spencer’s “Er starb,—ein Mensch wie alle’: Wagner and Carrie Pringle,” *Das Festspielbuch 2004* (Bayreuther Festspiele, 2004), pp. 72–85, effectively debunks a popular tale attributing Wagner’s death to stress over an argument he had with Cosima over an alleged affair with Carrie Pringle, who had been one of the Flower Maidens at *Parsifal* in Bayreuth. Despite the lack of evidence, the story will undoubtedly continue to circulate indefinitely.

Thomas Mann had Wagner in mind when he named one of his most famous stories *Death in Venice*. He had read Maurice Barrès’s 1903 meditation “La Mort de Venise,” reprinted in *Amori et Dolori sacrum* (Plon, 1921), which dwells on themes of Wagner, longing, disease, beauty, and death: “At the peak of the waves where Tristan bears us, we recognize the fevers that from the lagoons at night” (p. 95). This most famous of deaths in Venice has been depicted or evoked in a fairly large number of novels, stories, poems, and films. Barker catalogues fourteen of them in *Wagner and Venice Fictionalized: Variations on a Theme* (Boydell and Brewer, 2012). Three of these—Mann’s novella, Gabriele d’Annunzio’s *Il fuoco*, and Franz Werfel’s *Verdi*—are
discussed in Wagnerism. I had no space for such lesser oddities as Zdenko von Kraft’s *Abend in Bayreuth* (Hyperion, 1943), a sequel to his Wagner trilogy *Welt und Wahn Wahn* (Keysersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1954), and Gustav Renker’s *Finale in Venedig: Ein Richard Wagner Roman* (Staackmann, 1933). The latter describes an odd Platonic love affair between Wagner and a blond-haired, blue-eyed youth who writes poetry in his spare time and is besotted with the great-hearted Meister.

Chapter 1: Rheingold

