

‘A Glittering Storehouse’: The Representation, Parody and  
Mythologies of Richard Wagner in Novels by Günter Grass, Anthony  
Burgess and Angela Carter

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## Abstract

This study aims to address the lack of critical commentary on representations of the Romantic composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883) in literature written after 1945. Literary criticism is a vital and active arm of Wagner Studies; however, works in this area pertain almost exclusively to fin de siècle and modernist literature. Nevertheless, Wagner's status as a cultural icon lost none of its significance throughout the post-war period. This has proved especially true for the three writers looked at here: Günter Grass (1927–2015), Anthony Burgess (1917–1993) and Angela Carter (1940–1992).

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the societies, literatures and cultures of Britain and Germany underwent significant transformation. These changes often play out in fiction through a text's engagement with totemic cultural reference points. The works of German writer Günter Grass are known for their engagement with a society that bears a burden of guilt because of the Second World War. For Grass, Wagner is emblematic of what went wrong but also what was right with his nation's cultural inheritance. In Britain Anthony Burgess recognised and exploited Wagner's extensive engagement with mythologies. Burgess saw Wagner as a progenitor of his own mythology through biographical legend. Indeed, the myths and legends that attached to Wagner would be used by Burgess to supplement several of his own narratives. Finally, Angela Carter was acutely aware of the conflicting appropriations that have attached to the Wagner cut. These discordant strands of Wagnerism were exploited by Carter to deconstruct what she saw as problematic and culturally persistent mythologies that relate to gender and sexuality.

Wagner has continually exerted a varied influence on literature and this is no less true of the post-1945 period.

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## Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Note: As this is a work dealing with Wagner's influence and reception, the years provided in brackets after the music-dramas are the year in which the works were first performed rather than completed. In Wagner's case, there was often a considerable length of time between the two.

## Introduction: Wagner reception in pre- and post-1945 literature

Seven years after the bicentenary of Richard Wagner's birth (1813–1883), the field of Wagner studies remains an area of perennial interest to scholars and general readers alike. The vast amount of published material on Wagner expounds on a wide range of areas, including biography, production and reception histories, the music-dramas, the history of the Bayreuth Festival, the role of Wagner within the cultural development of Europe, and the phenomenon of Wagnerism. Indeed, 'Wagnerism' now extends beyond its original associations as a cultural-historic phenomenon, as described throughout David C. Large and William Weber's *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (1984).<sup>1</sup> Owing to scholars such as Gary Tomlinson, the term has more recently taken on philosophical dimensions.<sup>2</sup> In Britain alone, 2020 has seen the publication of Roger Scruton's *Parsifal: The Music of Redemption* and Alex Ross' encyclopedic *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music*, the latter appearing at the time that this current project draws to a close.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, literary criticism proved a fertile area for Wagner studies. The extensive influence of Wagner and his works has meant that any meaningful analysis of the composer and literature needs to take into account a range of approaches; studies are often interdisciplinary to the point that politics, musicology, cultural reception and aesthetics are each considered. This is true of the most comprehensive treatment of Wagner and literature to date, namely, Raymond Furness' *Wagner and Literature* (1982). Furness covers an array of British, European and American writers, forming the basis of literary Wagner studies in Britain along with John Louis DiGaetani's *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel* (1978) and Martin Stoddard's *Wagner to 'The Waste Land': A Study of the Relationship of Wagner to English Literature* (1982).<sup>4</sup> Appearing within four years of each other, these works mark the late seventies and early eighties as a time of intense focus on the presence of Wagner in Anglophone, and particularly modernist, literature. Although invaluable, these studies focus almost exclusively on Wagner reception in pre-1945 literature. Furness has wielded the greatest influence in this area; his work is responsible for establishing and developing a lingering association between certain, often modernist, writers and Wagner. Prominent and typical among these are, George Moore (1885–1933), Willa Cather (1873–1947), Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), James Joyce (1882–1941) and T. S. Eliot (1888–1965).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> David C. Large and William Weber, ed., *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (London: Cornell University Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> See Gary Tomlinson, 'Parahuman Wagnerism,' *The Opera Quarterly* 29, no.3–4 (March 2014): 186–202.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Scruton, *Wagner's Parsifal: The Music of Redemption* (London: Penguin, 2020); Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (London: Fourth Estate, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Furness, *Wagner and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982); John Louis DiGaetani, *Wagner and the Modern British Novel* (London: Associated University Press, 1978); Martin Stoddard, *Wagner to 'The Waste Land': A Study of the Relationship of Wagner to English Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> See William F. Blisset, 'George Moore and Literary Wagnerism,' *Comparative Literature* 13, no. 1 (1961): 52–71; Joseph C. Murphy, 'Wagnerism and American Modernism: Rereading Willa Cather's "A Wagner Matinée",' *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 50, no.4 (October 2014): 405–425; Emma Sutton, *Virginia Woolf and Classical Music: Politics, Aesthetic, Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003); Robert Baines, 'Hegel (and Wagner) in James Joyce's "Drama and Life",' *Journal of Modern Literature* 35, no.4 (July

Unfortunately, the tendency to view Wagner's influence in literature as pertaining solely to works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has persisted to this day. Ulrich Müller's *Wagner in Literature and Film*, originally published in German in 1986 but appearing in English in 1992, provides a brief survey of Wagner in French, Italian, English and German literatures.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, a brief call for further work on Wagner reception in Scandinavian and Slavic literatures is also made.<sup>7</sup> Yet the overarching tendency is to suggest possibilities for re-examining authors already associated with Wagner. It is only for works in German that Müller provides examples of Wagner's influence in literature post-1945, although, no mention is made of Günter Grass (1927–2015) let alone his 1963 novel, *Hundejahre*, published in English as *Dog Years*.<sup>8</sup> The only post-1945 examples Müller gives of Wagner in Anglophone literature are the American Bernard Malamud's (1914–1986) *The Natural* (1952), and Indian writer Raja Rao's (1908–2006) *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960).<sup>9</sup> Müller dismisses other English language references to Wagner from this period as belonging to 'novels of a more trivial nature' in which Wagner is used 'simply as a means of characterising what their authors see as typically German or Germanic elements, an association permanently fixed at the level of the purest cliché.'<sup>10</sup> This attitude does a tremendous disservice to Wagner reception in Britain and to the writers who have, in a very meaningful way, carefully incorporated the composer into their works. Unfortunately, Michael Allis' assessment in 2013 of the new directions that Wagner studies in literature should take does little to right this wrong.<sup>11</sup> Although Allis recognises that there 'is certainly scope for further exploration of the relatively neglected area of Wagner and world literature,' he, like Müller, fails to recognise major British novelists on whom Wagner has exerted considerable influence.<sup>12</sup> It is strange that Allis should think of the poetry and prose of English mystic and occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) as a 'new direction' for literary Wagner studies ahead of writers such as Anthony Burgess (1917–1993), Iris Murdoch (1919–1999), A. S. Byatt (b.1936) and Angela Carter (1940-1992).<sup>13</sup>

Wagner has remained central to much of German and Anglophone literature during the second half of the twentieth century. In a 1964 article for *The Listener*, Anthony Burgess recognised that Wagner remained a 'glittering storehouse from which the literary [...] artist can take what he wants.'<sup>14</sup> Burgess followed his own lead and the composer proved an

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2012): 1-12; Michael Craske, 'Swinburne, Wagner, Eliot, and the Musical Legacy of Poems and Ballads,' *Journal of Victorian Culture* 23, no.4 (September 2018): 542–55.

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Müller, 'Wagner in Literature and Film,' in *The Wagner Handbook*, trans. Stewart Spencer, ed. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992), 373–93.

<sup>7</sup> Müller, 'Wagner in Literature,' 381.

<sup>8</sup> Günter Grass, *Dog Years*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Vintage, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Müller, 'Wagner in Literature,' 380.

<sup>10</sup> Müller, 'Wagner in Literature,' 380.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Allis, 'Wagner and Literature: New Directions,' *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 50, no.4 (September 2014): 371–9.

<sup>12</sup> Allis, 'Wagner and Literature,' 374.

<sup>13</sup> For Wagnerian allusions in Murdoch's early works, see Howard German, 'Allusions in the Early Novels of Iris Murdoch,' *Modern Fiction Studies* 15, no.3 (1969): 361–77. Byatt has written her own version of the Norse gods' downfall in *Ragnarok* (2011), while her *The Children's Book* (2009), contains numerous references to Wagner. See A. S. Byatt, *Ragnarok* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2009); *The Children's Book* (Vintage: London, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Burgess, 'Wagner's 'The Ring',' *The Listener*, September 17, 1964, 420.

important source throughout a prolific writing career. Across the Atlantic, Thomas Pynchon (b.1937), took up the mantle of American Wagnerism and mined the same ‘glittering storehouse’ throughout *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973); Wagner comprises one of the most sustained points of reference throughout a text of innumerable pop-culture and high-brow allusions.<sup>15</sup> Unlikely though it may seem, Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* (1845) links specifically to Pynchon’s narrative. The phallic V2 rockets launched from a site within a mountain and linked to Tyrone Slothrop’s philandering, find an apt comparison with Tannhäuser’s own sexual exploits in the mountain of Venusberg.<sup>16</sup> That Wagner retains significance for postmodern literature is also seen throughout Europe and Britain. In Germany, it was Grass in his novel *Dog Years*, who recognised that Wagner was part of a history that ought not to be shunned. Grass’ self-conscious deployment of techniques associated with Wagner, as well as his parody of Wagner-like figures, helped ensure that the composer remained a presence in the national cultural identity.

Grass’ *Dog Years* charts a pre-war Germany characterised and described by Prussian myths. The mythic elements of the narrative become more prominent throughout the years leading up to the Second World War until Grass’ portrayal culminates in a nation taken over by a Nazi ideology based on a superstitious mythic hysteria, hell-bent on destruction. The third and final section of the novel sees a divided Germany rebuilding itself according to the advice Mattern the miller receives from listening to the magically prophetic mealworms resident in his bag of flour.<sup>17</sup> Germany has failed, as Grass sees it, to learn from a cultural history that has given special and improper credence to myths and mythical patterns. One of the final images of the novel sees Walter Mattern, Edi Amsel and Jenny Brunies sitting paralysed in a bar as it burns down around them in a Götterdämmerung-like scene of destruction.<sup>18</sup> Given the novel’s historical context, its numerous references to mythic patterns and explicit references to Wagner, the dominant critical consensus has been to read Grass as being derisive of his cultural history and of the role that myths and mythologies have played in the development of Germany. Where Wagner has been critically commented on specifically, it has been to read the composer as a single element symptomatic of the broader problematic tradition of myths. This particular reading of *Dog Years* is part of a wider critical view that held Grass as the ‘conscience of the nation’. Accordingly, Grass’ works were primarily read as cautionary tales, serving a didactic function in warning individuals away from totalising ideologies and repeating painful history. Grass’ political campaigning for the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland (SDP), and friendship with the leader of that party, Willy Brandt (1913–1992), only encouraged such a moralistic approach. The outrage that ensued as a result of the Waffen-SS revelations in Grass’ memoir, *Peeling the Onion* (2006), demonstrated just how entrenched the idea of Grass as ‘conscience of the nation’ had become.<sup>19</sup> In reality this view of Grass is only partially borne out by the considerable number of speeches, lectures and open letters he produced on politics, art and literature. From a closer

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (London: Vintage, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> The blooming of the pope’s staff to signify Tannhäuser’s redemption is another phallic symbol and analogue that is irresistible to Pynchon.

<sup>17</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 442–63.

<sup>18</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 574–81.

<sup>19</sup> Günter Grass, *Peeling the Onion*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (London: Harvill Secker, 2007).



consideration of these materials emerges a picture of a more conservative Grass, disinclined towards fervour and zeal of any sort, an anti-revolutionary. Such ideals extend to Grass' attitudes towards the past, and how he responds to Germany's cultural heritage. Grass can no longer be summarised as a critical moral arbitrator writing from the lofty vantage point of history. The treatment of Wagner in *Dog Years* calls for a more nuanced approach in terms of how Grass situates himself within the tradition he inherits, and how he views the artistic and political future of his nation. The emulation in prose of Wagner's technique of 'leitmotifs', for example, is pervasive enough to be considered as signifying more than an attempt at parody. Through Wagner, Grass incorporates an element of Germany's cultural heritage into a work in which he looks as much to the future of Germany as he does to the past.

In post-war Britain, the tendency toward parodying Wagner prevailed. From a British point of view, the composer epitomises the cultural face of a political movement that took Europe and Britain to the brink throughout the Second World War. The appropriate response to Wagner in an austere, though victorious, post-war Britain was laughter. Anna Russell (1911–2006), was a British-Canadian entertainer and comedienne; she originally studied at the Royal College of Music, before turning her attention to entertainment. The Encyclopaedia Britannica lists her as 'the Queen of Musical Parody' with one of her best-known routines being 'a thirty-minute synopsis of Wagner's *Ring Cycle*'. In a 1984 recording of this routine from later on in her career, Russell acknowledges the long standing popularity of her comic take on Wagner.<sup>20</sup> The rapturous response of the audience betrays, if not a knowledge of Wagner's work, at least an awareness of Wagner and a firmly held notion of what he might represent. Whatever Wagner may mean for British audiences, humour is a vital response.

Manchester does not, at first, appear an obvious place in which Wagner would take hold. Nonetheless, the city has enjoyed deep cultural links with Germany. In addition to the well-known association with German political thinkers Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), the city and the nation also share literary and musical links. German writer W. G. Sebald (1944–2001) taught at the University of Manchester throughout the academic years 1966–7 and 1967–8.<sup>21</sup> He later based his book-length poem, published in English in 2002 under the title *After Nature*, on his wanderings around Manchester.<sup>22</sup> The city also provides the backdrop for his short story 'Max Ferber', published in Britain as part of the collection *The Emigrants* (1996).<sup>23</sup> Burgess wrote of Manchester as being a 'Wagnerian city', a claim based on the Hallé orchestra's tradition of performing 'bleeding chunks of Wagner' – to satisfy audiences 'stiffened with German immigrants'.<sup>24</sup> Contrary to what he had hoped for himself, Burgess remains known as a writer who occasionally composed. Music has nevertheless proved to be perhaps the single greatest influence on Burgess' oeuvre, shaping

<sup>20</sup> Anna Russell, 'Wagner's 'Der Ring des Nibelungen' (analysis),' from *The (First) Farewell Concert (1984)* YouTube video, accessed on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020 at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eN5dAQLYYrs&ab\\_channel=K.StewartBentley](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eN5dAQLYYrs&ab_channel=K.StewartBentley).

<sup>21</sup> For a history of Sebald's time as student and teacher, see Richard Sheppard, 'The Sternheim Years: W. G. Sebald's Lehrjahre and Theatralische Sendung 1963–75,' in *Saturn's Moons: W. G. Sebald, A Handbook*, ed. Jo Catling and Richard Hibbitt (London: Legenda, 2011), 64–81.

<sup>22</sup> W. G. Sebald, *After Nature*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Vintage, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> W. G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*, trans. Michael Hulse (London: Vintage, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Anthony Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God* (London: Vintage, 2012), 106–9.

his form, content and style. Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1876) provides the mythic backdrop for the second novel written by Burgess, *The Worm and the Ring* (1961). With a parodic force to match Anna Russell's, Wagner's world of giants and dwarves is transposed onto the humdrum setting of an Oxfordshire Grammar school in 1951, the year of the festival of Britain. Burgess would later concede that the narrative impulse overtook him, and the novel's concern ultimately lies in areas other than Wagner's mythology.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Wagner provides a great deal of the novel's not insignificant humour. The composer would remain a source of the comic in Burgess' *The Pianoplayers* (1986). Here, the humour relies on parodies and appropriations of Wagner's works to exaggerate a high-/low-brow contrast. *The Pianoplayers* marks a development in Burgess' use of Wagner as he begins to exploit not so much the composer himself but rather notions and perceptions of him that have arisen out of the clichés and myths of biography. *Mozart and the Wolfgang* (1991) and the posthumously published *Byrne* (1995) are two of the final projects Burgess worked on. These are the most obviously postmodern texts by Burgess that feature significant references to Wagner; each comprises a vast web of intertextual references to writers and composers. Self-referentiality abounds as Burgess muses on the nature of form, and the lines between literature and music become blurred. Wagner the poet, Wagner the composer and the legend of Wagner looms behind both of these works in a way that perhaps no other single figure does or could.

Like Burgess, Carter held a deep love for the music of Wagner. Yet, in Carter's mind, admiration for the music is always secondary to the problematic cult of personality and framework of mythologies that surround the composer.<sup>26</sup> To Carter, Wagner stood as a two-fold source of myth. Wagner's music-dramas are nineteenth century re-workings of myths, yet he also sought to perpetuate the perception of himself as a 'universal genius', worthy of a mythological-like following.<sup>27</sup> In a similar way to Burgess, a large part of what Carter would parody when referencing Wagner was the reception of the composer. Historically, appropriations of Wagner have been wildly at odds with one another. Wagner and 'Wagnerism' have enjoyed a close alignment with the decadent and *fin de siècle* movements. In this respect, devotees of Wagner have been characterised frequently as effete or homosexual. Somewhat absurdly, an opposing tradition has also endured where Wagner is seen as a proponent of hyper-masculine nineteenth century high-art (precisely the sort of historic-cultural phenomena that second-wave feminism rallied against). With these two conflicting traditions in mind, Wagner becomes the ideal point of reference for one looking to demonstrate the arbitrariness of man-made mythologies. Carter would use allusions to Wagner to foreshadow sexual violence in the eponymous short story of *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) but it was in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) that Carter made her most sustained and meaningful allusions to the composer.<sup>28</sup> Carter's biographer, Edmund Gordon, described *New Eve* as '[...] a vulgar, violent satire, debunking the cultural archetypes of masculinity and

<sup>25</sup> Burgess, *Little Wilson*, 368.

<sup>26</sup> See Angela Carter, 'Wagner and the Mistral' in *Shaking a Leg: Collected Writings* (London: Penguin, 1997), 336–340.

<sup>27</sup> Carter, 'Wagner and the Mistral,' 337.

<sup>28</sup> Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber* (London: Vintage, 2006); Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve* (London: Virago Press, 1982).

femininity.’<sup>29</sup> The conflicting history of Wagner appropriation exemplifies society’s cultural tensions, especially around gender and sexuality, making references to the composer particularly suited to debunking – or in Carter’s terms ‘demythologising’ – constructions of masculinity and femininity.<sup>30</sup>

Wagner did not escape the modes of criticism that developed throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Works such as Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand’s *Re-Reading Wagner* (1993) and Mary A Cicora’s *Modern Myths and Wagnerian Deconstructions* (2000) are examples of the way in which the composer has been subjected to re-evaluation along deconstructive lines.<sup>31</sup> Grimm and Hermand’s title suggests that although Wagner has undergone critical scrutiny, there is a need for these interpretations to be re-appraised. Such cultural and philosophical treatments of the composer are important to Wagner studies; but these revised views have yet to be considered alongside post-war literary representations of the composer. There remains an absence of critical works on post-1945 literary representations of Wagner, despite the composer’s acknowledged status as a ‘glittering storehouse’.

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<sup>29</sup> Edmund Gordon, *The Invention of Angela Carter* (London: Vintage, 2016), 228.

<sup>30</sup> Angela Carter, ‘Notes from the Front Line’ in *Shaking a Leg: Collected Writings* (London: Penguin, 1997), 38.

<sup>31</sup> Reinhold Grim and Jost Hermand, ed., *Re-reading Wagner* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Mary A. Cicora, *Modern Myths and Wagnerian Deconstructions: Hermeneutic Approaches to Wagner’s Music-Dramas*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000).

## Chapter 1: Writing the Past, Present and Future: Portraying Richard Wagner in Günter Grass' *Dog Years*.

### Attitudes to the past: writing history

Günter Grass was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1999. The award was widely recognised as an acknowledgement of a unique and definitive voice that had chronicled the struggles and trauma of a nation emerging from the horrors of the Second World War. Grass' voluminous output of novels, plays, poems and essays, alongside his career as political activist and campaigner for the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland (SDP), secured his place as 'a self-designated and fearless conscience of the nation'.<sup>32</sup> In light of the revelations of Grass' memoir published in 2006, *Peeling the Onion*, this view was somewhat reversed. Grass recounted his past involvement in the war and that he saw active, if very brief, service as a member of the Waffen-SS. He was attacked not so much for his involvement as his failure to disclose his past; particularly as he had been so vociferous about officials taking public office in post-war Germany doing the same.<sup>33</sup> Within academia and beyond, there was widespread acknowledgement that Grass had fallen from his position as moralist of the nation.<sup>34</sup> An article in the *Times Literary Supplement* described the damage done to Grass' reputation in no uncertain terms:

[Grass' critics] suggested that [his] career was over, that he should give back or be stripped of his Nobel Prize for Literature and his honorary citizenship of Gdansk, that his opinions on moral and political matters were henceforth worthless, and that even the works that made his name were now devalued and would have to be read in a sceptical light.<sup>35</sup>

The call to re-read Grass' novels in a 'sceptical light' is particularly telling. It highlights the extent to which the image of Grass as 'conscience of the nation' was responsible for his works being read in an historicist way with their primary function being to condemn the past and warn against allowing any such recurrence in the future. So firmly rooted was this notion of Grass and, by implication, readings of his novels that an article in the *Financial Times* saw the revelations in the autobiography as having, 'thrown Germans into moral disarray'.<sup>36</sup> Grass' social influence is not to be underestimated. Rarely has a single voice been so conspicuously exalted for espousing so morally rigid a message on behalf of so many people.

Whether or not cultural estimations of Grass changed following *Peeling the Onion*, the critical reception of his novels remains firmly grounded in historicist readings that focus on the texts' and the author's position in history. This is not to say that there is a single over-

<sup>32</sup> Fritz Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2006), 242.

<sup>33</sup> See, Günter Grass, 'Open Letter to Kurt Georg Kiesinger,' in *Speak Out!* trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd, 1969), 65-8.

<sup>34</sup> See, Frank Brunssen, 'A Moral Authority? Günter Grass and the Conscience of the German Nation,' *The Journal of Contemporary Eastern Europe* 19, no. 3 (December 2011): 565-584.

<sup>35</sup> Ian Brunskill, 'An Added Ingredient,' review of *Beim Hauten der Zwiebel*, by Günter Grass, *Times Literary Supplement*, September 29, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher Caldwell, 'Peeling Away Grass' Morality,' review of *Beim Hauten der Zwiebel*, by Günter Grass, *Financial Times*, August 18, 2006.

riding critical consensus but rather that the novels engage thoroughly with the manifold problems of a society that was at the epicentre of the destruction wreaked throughout Europe during the Second World War. This remains especially true of Grass' early works, *The Danzig Trilogy* comprising of *The Tin Drum* (1959), *Cat and Mouse* (1961) and *Dog Years*. Across the trilogy Grass covers pre-war Germany, the years of the conflict itself and post-war society. It is in *Dog Years* that each of these time frames ~~isare~~ most comprehensively and distinctly treated. Each of these periods is addressed more or less distinctly by the novel's tripartite structure. As a result, critical responses to *Dog Years* more than to other works of the trilogy, take their impetus from how the novel portrays and might influence a society emerging from the war. Grass' role as political activist – trying to shape the future by learning from the past – has no doubt also coloured the reception of his works. As he said in a 1965 election speech: 'Who has been speaking to you? A man who has written a record of *Dog Years*, [sic] who has pumped the stomach of guilt and poked about in the ruins and scrap piles for traces of shame.'<sup>37</sup> *Dog Years* is viewed by Grass as an historically significant cultural artefact. It is a 'record' that preserves the character of a particular time and offers a suggestion as to how that state of affairs came to be.

A wide recognition of the novel's central concern does not lead to anything like a consensus among critics. Grass' prominent use of myth, numerology and the astrological have been read by some critics – including Lyle H. Smith – as constructing meaning within the text.<sup>38</sup> Others, such as Scott H. Abbott, have read the same tropes and preoccupations as working to deconstruct a false and pernicious narrative which German culture has historically and disastrously exalted.<sup>39</sup> Thomas Mann (1875–1955) is a writer whose influence on Grass is well documented and has been elsewhere specifically linked to *Dog Years*' engagement with German history.<sup>40</sup> Abbott situates *Dog Years* as Grass' response to a cultural tradition – typified by Mann in *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*), (1924). Abbot writes:

Given [the] profusion of related motifs in *Hundejahre*, the modes of interpretation most often resorted to are naturally theological, mythical, numerological, or masonic. Readers conditioned by novels such as Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (which makes extensive use of symbolic numbers, contains lengthy descriptions of Freemasonic ritual, and features a mythical revelation in the snow), are especially apt to rummage through *Hundejahre* with delight. But these striking similarities, far from inviting similar interpretations, should warn the reader [...] that the novels should be read differently.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Grass, 'The Issue,' in *Speak Out!*, 3-15. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Lyle H. Smith, 'Volk, Jew and Devil: Ironic Inversion in Günter Grass's *Dog Years*,' *Studies in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literature* 3, no. 1 (1978): 85-96.

<sup>39</sup> Scott H. Abbott, 'Günter Grass' *Hundejahre*: A Realistic Novel about Myth,' *The German Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (March 1982): 212-220.

<sup>40</sup> W.V. Blomster, 'The Demonic in History: Thomas Mann and Günter Grass,' *Studies in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literature* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1969): 75-84.

<sup>41</sup> Abbott, 'Günter Grass,' 212.

Abbott even goes so far as to refer to *Dog Years* as a: ‘post-war parody of *Der Zauberberg*.’<sup>42</sup> For Abbott, Mann is an important node in the problematic matrix of German culture that became obsessed with extrapolating meanings and ideologies from numbers, myths and symbols. The result is the Nazi party and its ideologies. *Dog Years* stands as Grass’ diagnosis of this. Abbott concludes:

*Hundejahre*, then, is not a Romantic/mythical/occult novel, it is a realistic novel about Romanticism, myth and the supernatural. [...] After recognising the myths, Freemasonry, and numerology, we must step back from the seemingly systematic but ultimately chaotic mass of supernatural and suprahistorical phenomena depicted and read the novel as a realistic account of a common and dangerous flight from reality.<sup>43</sup>

*Dog Years* is not only a response to a given, albeit dramatic, moment in history. It is also an attempt to chart the ways in which a society arrived at such a dark place and how exactly individuals of that time responded to such a culture.

Abbott’s portrayal of Grass’ attitude towards history is too straightforward. In reality Grass’ engagement with his cultural heritage is more nuanced and approaches something like a cynical approbation. To consider *Dog Years* as a ‘post-war parody of *Der Zauberberg*’ is to oversimplify the ways in which Grass views the literary tradition which has gone before him and how he views his own place within that tradition. *Dog Years* is more accurately characterised as an attempted reconciliation between the past, the events of the war and Grass’ present (i.e. post-war Germany). Two clear points suggest this. Firstly, far from condemning or somehow writing contrariwise to Mann, Grass considered him an important voice and precursor. Contrary to Abbott’s argument, Grass sees himself as belonging to a similar tradition to Mann. As Frank Finlay points out:

Mention of Whitman is also meant to place Grass in the ranks of those few intellectuals who had publicly supported the democratic institutions of the Weimar Republic, most notably Thomas Mann, who himself had quoted Whitman in his speech defending the Weimar Republic and espousing democratic principles ‘About the German Republic’ (1922).<sup>44</sup>

Grass is not merely part of the same tradition as Mann because they were both writers who spoke out on political matters; each took a similar political stance. This is no coincidence. Grass was himself aware of the connection and would mention Mann by name in political speeches, as he did in his 1983 address delivered in Frankfurt:

Early in the Weimar Republic, leading writers warned against the rising tide of barbarism, and published their insights, perforce in polemical terms. They went

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<sup>42</sup> Abbott, ‘Günter Grass,’ 213.

<sup>43</sup> Abbott, ‘Günter Grass,’ 218.

<sup>44</sup> Frank Finlay, ‘Günter Grass’s Political Rhetoric,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Günter Grass*, ed. Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 24-38. 34.

unheard and still do. [...] yet Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Alfred Döblin and Bertolt Brecht are treated as émigrés, as foreigners.<sup>45</sup>

This is significant because it connects Grass' call to heed the past with a distinctive lineage of preceding German writers. It demonstrates that Grass sees the artist, specifically the writer, as acting as a type of guide or advisor. Grass recognises this tradition and seeks to position himself within it among others who have looked to history to learn lessons for their present.

Furthermore, a disavowal of his cultural heritage, even by way of parody, would amount to a deconstructive gesture; something too close to a revolutionary act. After all, this sort of move was completely antithetical to Grass' thinking. In light of the address Grass delivered at the Belgrade Writers' Conference in 1969, 'Literature and Revolution or The Rhapsodist's Snorting Hobbyhorse', it becomes difficult to conceive of Grass as one who would simply reject or condemn the past. Grass may be left-wing but he is also notably conservative in his approach.<sup>46</sup> As Grass phrased it in his address:

I'll come right out with it: I'm against revolution. I detest the sacrifices that always have to be made in its name. I detest its superhuman goals, its absolute demands, its inhuman intolerance. [...] Even archconservative newspapers have been running feature articles that foam at the mouth with revolutionary fervour. Literature and revolution, or the rhapsodist's snorting hobbyhorse.<sup>47</sup>

Abbott does not go so far as to suggest that *Dog Years* is a revolutionary work. Nonetheless, critiquing a culture or society to argue that it is responsible for a given situation, is surely one of the prerequisites of revolution. A repudiation of heritage, along the lines that Abbott reads *Dog Years*, is an example of the 'inhuman intolerance', or one of the 'sacrifices' that revolution calls for. It is therefore unlikely that Grass would wish to write such a relationship between past and present into his text.

#### From past to present: the question of parody and why Wagner?

To better appreciate the nature of such a reconciliation, closer attention needs to be paid to just how the text portrays and incorporates elements of Germany's culture. The most telling and more widely referenced components of which is Richard Wagner. The composer occupies a unique role in this respect for a number of reasons. The most obvious and well known is the Nazi appropriation that Wagner and the Bayreuth Festival underwent in the years leading up to and throughout the Second World War. The Nazi Party's commandeering of one of Germany's most prominent cultural figures is surely one reason that Grass feels the need to re-evaluate the role that German cultural heritage has played in Germany's recent history. Secondly, Wagner more than any other figure is less likely to be considered as a single component of culture operating in isolation; for Wagner had been exerting significant

<sup>45</sup> Günter Grass, 'On the Right to Resist,' in *On Writing and Politics 1967–1983*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Florida: Harcourt, 1986), 141-8. 143.

<sup>46</sup> Grass is often associated with the snail for his insistence on slow progress and fastidious scrutiny. For more detail on this approach and its application to politics and art, see, Günter Grass, *From the Diary of a Snail*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Vintage, 2000), and 'On Stasis in Progress' published in the same volume.

<sup>47</sup> Grass, 'Literature and Revolution or The Rhapsodist's Hobbyhorse,' in *On Writing and Politics*, 93-99. 93-4.

influence on creative artists up to the time Grass was writing. It is surely no coincidence that the most extensive influence Wagner exerted on any artist before Grass and probably since, was on Thomas Mann. The influence of Wagner is well-known in, though not limited to, Mann's *Tristan* (1903), *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912) and *Doktor Faustus* (1947). The year 1986 saw the publication of *Pro and Contra Wagner*, a posthumously compiled collection of Mann's essays and lectures on the composer.<sup>48</sup> It is therefore not unreasonable to read Grass' treatment of Wagner as operating, at least on some level, as a response to German culture more broadly. Finally, despite the association of Wagner's music with the Nazis, there is a sense in which the composer is strongly redolent of a pre-war Germany. Slavoj Žižek relates an interesting anecdote in his afterword to Alain Badiou's *Five Lessons on Wagner* (2010). He describes how Israeli friends of his wished to defy authorities in Israel by flouting the ban on performing Wagner's works in public. As a tongue-in-cheek gesture, they advertised a performance of Wagner's *Ring*, with no intention of it taking place. But Žižek relates a curious outcome:

As the hour of the performance approached, increasing numbers of old Jews, both men and women, dressed in the ridiculously old-fashioned, solemn way of pre-Hitler Germany, appeared in the club: for them, a public performance of Wagner was, more fundamentally than the Nazi use of his music, a reminder of the good old Weimar Germany where Wagner's operas had been a crucial part of their cultural experience.<sup>49</sup>

Wagner played a crucial role in the cultural landscape of a pre-1930s Germany. He is the emblematic figure of what was right with German culture whilst simultaneously a perilous example of what went wrong. It is little wonder then that the composer exerts myriad influences within *Dog Years*. Grass' attitude towards Wagner is complicated. It cannot be dismissed simply as critical, although in a large part it is. For if Grass were merely writing against Wagner, it makes no sense that the composition of *Dog Years* should owe so much to his influence. It is far more logical to say that Grass is looking to reclaim something of what Germany was, without the perilous folly of failing to acknowledge a culture that allowed for the rise of Nazism.

Yet it could be argued that *Dog Years* owes much of its composition to Wagner precisely because it is a parody, one along the lines that Abbott argues with respect to Mann. Grass' adoption of numerous and evolving leitmotifs in the second half of the novel, for example, might be viewed as functioning in such a way. Virtually all critics agree that, to some extent, parody is a part of Grass' writing.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the tendency to read, Grass' parody as

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, trans. David Luke (London: Vintage, 2001); Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. John E. Woods (London: Vintage, 1999); Thomas Mann, *Pro and Contra Wagner*, trans. Erika Blunden (London: Faber & Faber, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'Wagner, Anti-Semitism and 'German Ideology'', in *Five Lessons on Wagner* trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 161–225.161.

<sup>50</sup> For notable instances in addition to Abbott, see Mary A. Cicora, 'Music, Myth, and Metaphysics: Wagner Reception in Günter Grass' *Hundejahre*,' *German Studies Review* 16 no. 1 (February 1993): 49–60. and William Slaymaker, 'Who Cooks, Winds Up: The Dilemma of Freedom in Grass' *Die Blechtrommel* and *Hundejahre*,' *Colloquia Germanica* 14, no. 1 (January 1981): 48–68.



derisive and dismissive is all too strong. This is not always the case with references to Wagner. In order to better understand how allusions to Wagner attempt to reconcile different aspects of German history, it is necessary to look more closely at the section of the novel immediately preceding the first instance in which Wagner is referred to by name.

The half-Jewish Eddi Amsel is an artist, working in the medium of scarecrow design and construction. His scarecrows have made him famous throughout his native Nickelswalde and beyond. Eddi's success has allowed him to move into his own villa where he can practice more elaborately his art of scarecrow building. Indoctrination of the scarecrows by Eddi is a part of this process: 'Amsel declaimed with preacher's pathos to already-finished figures dangling from oak ceiling and to the many wooden and wire frames that occupied the polished floor and peopled the oak-panelled room with an amorphous yet eagerly debating company.'<sup>51</sup> The symbolism is overt; Nazi indoctrination is parodied by Grass. Eddi the artist resembles a lone despot ranting at the crowd. The mass population of Germany is reduced to no more than scarecrows, unthinking and mechanical in their actions. The crowd is 'amorphous' comprised of individuals that lack independence and definition yet are zealous, 'eagerly debating'. That Eddi is quite literally manufacturing scarecrows is a mirroring of how Nazi propaganda produced devotees. To portray the half-Jewish artist Eddi Amsel as the Nazi counterpart seems counterintuitive; something compounded by the text which he preaches from, Otto Weininger's (1880–1913) *Sex and Character* (1903). Eddi Amsel inherits the 'standard work'<sup>52</sup> from his father. It is 'provided with marginal notes by Amsel's father and footnotes by Weininger.'<sup>53</sup> Grass does not simply include this problematic text but has it passed from father to son, strengthening the idea of an inherited and patrilineal culture influencing history.

Lyle H. Smith has written convincingly on the role of Weininger's work in *Dog Years* and the seeming contradiction of having Amsel quote and preach from it to his scarecrows. Smith summarises Weininger and his work as:

[A]n apostate Jew, published his work in 1903 as an endorsement of conservative Volkist thinking about the role of women in German society. Appearing at a time of increased demand for women's rights, it presented the argument that only the masculine was endowed with true creativity; the feminine was reserved for lesser and strictly biological roles. To buttress his argument, Weininger asserted that the masculine-feminine role relationship was similar to that of Aryan and Jew. Whereas the Aryan was spiritual and creative, the Jew [...] was materialistic and incapable of original creativity.<sup>54</sup>

Weininger purports the long-established antisemitic view of the Jew as effeminate, which equates to uncreative, unheroic and scornful of the spiritual or more noble aspects of life.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 202.

<sup>52</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 202.

<sup>53</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 202.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, 'Ironic Inversion,' 86-7.

<sup>55</sup> I use the spelling 'antisemite' in accordance with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. See [https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/memo-on-spelling-of-antisemitism\\_final-1.pdf](https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/memo-on-spelling-of-antisemitism_final-1.pdf)

Smith acknowledges that Grass is on one level creating a parody but unlike Abbott, does not read all of Grass' references as pointing to a condemnation of German culture. Smith reads Grass' references to the gods of ancient Prussia as constructing a binary within which the character of Eddi Amsel is itself parodic:

[Grass] parodies the mythos of anti-Semitism, undercutting not only Nazism, but its foundation in Volkist race ideology. By identifying the Jewish character, Eddi Amsel, with the gods of ancient Prussia while simultaneously demonstrating his conformity with some of the standard traits claimed by Volkist anti-Semitic propaganda to be uniquely and objectionably Jewish, Grass ironically inverts the traditional identification of land, Volk and life forces which [...] formed the life and world view of most Germans from the early nineteenth century onward.<sup>56</sup>

In other words, Grass is parodying but it is a parody which is built on the specific allusions that Grass includes. The parody suggested by a specific reference does not always equate to a wholesale dismissal of German culture. In fact, Grass' parodies can also have a positive, constructive and constitutive effect. Smith notes of Eddi that: '[he] is easily the most personable and engaging character in the novel.'<sup>57</sup> One should therefore consider closely how Grass presents his references and the multiple ways in which they function, for their effects can be varied and far reaching.

This passage of the novel which deals so closely with Weininger is worth a detailed consideration because it includes the first mention of Wagner by name. After reading the passage from Weininger to his scarecrows, Eddi soliloquises to them contemplating the arguments he has just read: 'But, and only for the sake of argument, don't we often observe Jewish characteristics in rabid anti-Semites? Wagner, for example, although *Parsifal* will always be incomprehensible to an authentic Jew, and, [...].'<sup>58</sup> Eddi's words become less coherent and more frenetic as he goes on. After numerous cultural references, most notably Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Goethe's *Faust*, Eddi finally and climactically concludes: '[...] and grace and honour and song and faith, the oak tree, the Siegfried motif, the trumpet, and spontaneous being, I say, are forever beyond their [the Jews'] grasp, yes, grasp, let me finish: grasp grasp!'<sup>59</sup> In this passage Wagner sits at the heart of the German culture Eddi is soliloquising on. It begins with *Parsifal* (1882), concludes with the Siegfried motif, and does so via the way of the antisemite Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), the British-German philosopher who married into the Wagner family. Chamberlain married Richard Wagner's daughter, Eva (1867–1942), in 1908. Eddi's rant cements Wagner's role as a representative of German culture more broadly.

Eddi's monologue, however, does more than confirm Wagner as a prominent and influential aspect of German culture. It is directly through Wagner that Eddi suggests that perceived stereotypes are not as fixed as was traditionally supposed when it comes to defining

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<sup>56</sup> Smith, 'Ironic Inversion,' 86.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, 'Ironic Inversion,' 90.

<sup>58</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 202.

<sup>59</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 204.

individuals. After all, Wagner, a ‘rabid antisemite’, is considered by Eddi as embodying ‘Jewish characteristics’. Eddi does not quantify or expound on this, as though it was self-evident. The qualification which follows: ‘*Parsifal* will always be incomprehensible to an authentic Jew’ reads as a concession to the prevailing antisemitic narrative of the time. It typifies a view that had become normalised to the extent that Eddi feels the need to state it as one side of the argument with himself. Within Eddi’s speech these two views vie together until the normalised antisemitic view eventually wins: ‘[...] forever beyond their grasp [...]’. In a significant sense Eddi has failed as artist. He recognised the problematic narratives of his time but failed to transmute a healthier alternative into his art, i.e. to teach it to his scarecrows. Indeed, there is something ridiculous about Eddi Amsel’s art of scarecrow building. ‘Amsel’ meaning ‘blackbird’ in German suggests that Eddi is somehow untrue to himself in making objects so adept at scaring away birds. Eddi may fail to take up his own message but through his allusions to Wagner, Grass begins to probe something of the duality that Eddi agonises over. It is through Wagner that Grass, via Eddi, promotes the idea that to be Jewish coincides with being German. It is possible to be gentile, antisemitic even, and yet still embody ‘Jewish traits’. Of course, the notion of ‘Jewish traits’ is itself problematic but presumably so entrenched and already a part of the culture that Grass cannot begin to deconstruct it. Moreover, when these ‘Jewish’ stereotypes are perceived in the self, they can become a way in which to explain antisemitism. Herein lies the first sense in which, as noted by Eddi, the antisemitic Wagner could himself be considered as quasi-Jewish. In his biography of the composer, John Louis DiGaetani notes of Wagner’s appearance:

What did Wagner look like as a child? [...] He was short, with a very large head and a slight hump on his back, and a big nose. He had a rather dwarf like appearance—actually something like the anti-Semitic view of the appearance of Jews as short people with big noses. [...] When caricatures of him appeared in newspaper articles of his period, he was often presented with a Jewish appearance. [...] His friend Friedrich Nietzsche [1844–1900] suspected [Wagner was Jewish] and wrote about it when he became an enemy of Wagner. From his childhood Wagner was suspected of being a Jew, which added to the neurosis he developed with anti-Semitism, which may have been a form of self-hatred.<sup>60</sup>

Wagner’s antisemitism is therefore an outward projection of a denial of parts of the self. He has ‘Jewish traits’, and yet is the composer of so spiritual a work as *Parsifal*. That Grass is using Wagner to signify these things is mirrored in the character of Eddi Amsel. Like Wagner, he is the artist and follows in Wagner’s tradition by repudiating any Jewishness within himself. Indeed, the purpose of Weininger’s *Sex and Character* was to call for Jews to make such a denial. Smith states: ‘Amsel the younger is at pains to surmount the Jewishness within him by reading Weininger and then acting as little like a Jew as possible.’<sup>61</sup> The conflicted character of Eddi Amsel arises out of what Grass sees as the deep irony of German cultural heritage. That is, the purporting of a ‘German Spirit’ which is dependent on a denial

<sup>60</sup> John Louis DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner: New Light on a Musical Life* (North Carolina: McFarland & Co, 2014), 22.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, ‘Ironic Inversion,’ 88.

of self. This was a function of Weininger's work, as pointed out by Ann L Mason: 'The Aryan, then, must continually guard against the latent 'Jew' in their own character; thus in an ironic way, the Jews come to serve some positive purpose for the Aryan [...]'<sup>62</sup> Wagner typifies this best of all. He is present at the start of Eddi's monologue, 'Jewish characteristics in rabid anti-Semites: Wagner,' and also at the end, when Eddi repudiates his own and all Jewishness in favour of a 'German ideal', 'song and faith, the oak tree, the Siegfried motif, the trumpet and spontaneous being, I say, are forever beyond their grasp'. It is telling that Grass references Wagner to this effect and in such a way. A motif is merely a sound bite. The Siegfried motif acts as a synecdoche to represent the whole of Wagner but also to construct Eddi's view of the totality of German culture. Just as a single motif is an inadequate stand in for Wagner, so too is the summation of German identity similarly lacking. Grass is not parodying Wagner per se, but he is parodying the type of arguments in which Wagner was misused to argue an ideological stand point. Grass signals the need to reconstruct a German identity that better assimilates a more accurate notion of German cultural heritage. As will be demonstrated, Grass' incorporation of numerous 'Wagnerian' techniques later in his novel more closely resembles an effort to reclaim German culture than an attempt at parody.

In addition to possible physical or personality traits, Wagner brings a further unique relevance to Eddi's speech on Jewish/German identity. Weininger's work is predicated on equating 'Jewish' traits to so called 'feminine' characteristics. It is a work which is almost as divisive and problematic along gender lines as it is in terms of race. This is relevant because appropriations of Wagner occupy both sides of the masculine-feminine dichotomy. Most obviously there is the masculine, high Romantic artist figure, a brooding personality disposed to the spiritual and capable of overcoming the trials of the material world to create their artwork. Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated in relation to Carter, Wagner reception has a strong tradition of aligning the composer with an effete and decadent aesthetic. In *The Case of Wagner* (1888), Nietzsche argues that audiences have been blinded by the composer's decadence:

That people in Germany should deceive themselves about Wagner does not surprise me. The opposite would surprise me. The Germans have constructed a Wagner for themselves whom they can revere. [...] How closely related Wagner must be to the whole of European decadence to avoid being experienced by [Europeans] as a decadent. [...] One honours oneself when raising him to the clouds.<sup>63</sup>

How prophetic of Nietzsche to see in Wagner a character who, especially in Germany, lends himself to a 'constructed' identity that is 'revere[d]'. The argument that 'One honours oneself when raising him to the clouds.', anticipates German nationalism of the 1930s with its belief in Germany's cultural and overall superiority. Max Nordau considered Wagner worthy of an entire chapter, 'The Richard Wagner Cult', in his *Degeneration* (1892). Nordau's work is

<sup>62</sup> Anne L. Mason, 'Günter Grass and the Artist in History,' *Contemporary Literature* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1973): 347-362. 357-8.

<sup>63</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Case of Wagner,' in *The Basic Writings of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 2000), 621.

now primarily of historical interest; his methods and thoughts are widely discredited.<sup>64</sup> He was nevertheless once widely read.<sup>65</sup> Nordau situates Wagner unambiguously within a tradition of decadence that declines into degeneracy: ‘The stigmata of this morbid condition [an abundance of degeneration] are united with him in the most complete and most luxurious development.’<sup>66</sup> For Nordau, Wagner suffers from nothing short of a pathology. Wagner is seen as a figure of decadence, a pernicious influence whose music purports to be something more than it in fact is. Within Wagner studies more recently Erwin Koppen’s *Dekadenter Wagnerismus Studien zur europäischen Literatur des Fin de siècle* (1973) has also drawn on the decadence movement in order to delineate the composer’s influence on literature.<sup>67</sup> As far as the relevance extends to Grass, it is enough that Wagner simultaneously occupies a place as figurehead of a nationalist German culture whilst being labelled by some as a degenerate responsible for cultural demise.

The irony of this ambiguity only makes Wagner more appealing to Grass as a point of reference on which to hone his complex parody. Wagner appears in one of the most loaded symbols of the novel, the dog. The same family of German Shepherds span the years over which the novel takes place: ‘Senta, his young she-dog, barks at the short-winded Baltic waves. Perkun is gone, carried away by one of many canine diseases. Senta of Perkun’s line will whelp Harras. Harras of Perkun’s line will sire Prinz.’<sup>68</sup> Motif-like this lineage is often repeated in various ways throughout the text. It is Prinz who will go on to ‘make history’ as Adolf Hitler’s (1889–1945) dog.<sup>69</sup> Part of what makes the dog such a loaded historic symbol is that both Wagner and Hitler shared a love of the animals.<sup>70</sup> Senta is the heroine of Wagner’s *Der Fliegende Holländer* (1843), a version of the antisemitic Ahasuerus legend. By falling in love with the Dutchman, Senta redeems and releases him from his curse to eternally roam the seas. Grass’ Senta recalls the music-drama by ‘bark[ing] at the short-winded Baltic waves.’ Grass chooses to place only one female element within the lineage of the German Shepherds and this is a reference to Wagner. It is an acknowledgement that the composer and his music simultaneously carry an element of the feminine as well as the patriarchal within the history of German culture. The element of parody is introduced when Grass has Senta suffer a telling fate: ‘Senta had to be shot because she grew hysterical and did damage.’<sup>71</sup> Grass’ wry parody sees the macrocosm of German culture play out within the microcosm of a family of dogs. Yet, as has been established, Grass has no interest in merely attacking his cultural heritage. The notion of Senta being ‘hysterical’ and causing ‘damage’, sounds akin to a Nordau-like criticism; Grass condemns Wagner reception and appropriation, rather than the

<sup>64</sup> See Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 20–26.

<sup>65</sup> See Steven E. Ascheim, ‘Max Nordau, Friedrich Nietzsche and *Degeneration*,’ *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, no. 4 (October 1993): 643–57.643.

<sup>66</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 172.

<sup>67</sup> Erwin Koppen, *Dekadenter Wagnerismus. Studien zur europäischen Literatur des Fin de siècle* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973).

<sup>68</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 44.

<sup>69</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 44.

<sup>70</sup> For accounts of Wagner’s and Hitler’s love of dogs, see Richard Wagner, *My Life*, trans. Andrew Gray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Profiles of Power* (London: Routledge, 2000), 162.

<sup>71</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 350.

composer or German culture as a whole. The perception among the characters is that ‘Senta *had* to be shot’ (my emphasis). There could be no clearer analogue for a repudiation of the past.

Senta’s death represents an attempt at the forceful removal of Wagner from Germany’s cultural history. Grass condones no such refutation; the past is always something to be faced and reconciled with the present. After all, as will be demonstrated, Grass’ novel owes a significant part of its composition and style to distinctly ‘Wagnerian’ techniques. Reconciliation with the past also applies to a German society coming to terms with events of the Second World War. Grass uses the dog Prinz/Pluto, descendent of Senta, as symbolic of a past that cannot be ignored. After escaping from Hitler’s Bunker at the end of the war, Prinz/Pluto seeks out Walter Matern and stalks him:

Never has a dog, unwilling to leave his self-chosen master, had an opportunity to learn so much about the dog’s function in mythology: is there an underworld he doesn’t have to guard; any river of the dead whose waters some dog doesn’t lap up? Lethe Lethe, how do we get rid of memories? No hell but has its hell hound! [...] But the following day from Mandelsloh to Rothenuffeln isn’t dogless for a single step, [...].<sup>72</sup>

The presence of Prinz/Pluto brings a hellishness to Walter Matern’s existence. No answer is offered to the question: ‘how do we get rid of memories?’. No matter where Matern goes, or who he interacts with, the memories of his involvement in the war pursue him. Matern attempts to abandon Prinz/Pluto at Cologne’s protestant station mission.<sup>73</sup> After a feverish train journey, during which Matern hallucinates dogs, Prinz/Pluto is returned to Matern in East Berlin by Eddi Amsel.<sup>74</sup> There may be a dark element of parodic humour in having German culture, represented by Wagner, embodied in the form of an hysterical ‘she-dog’ but Prinz/Pluto is a serious symbol. Nor is there any element of parody in portraying Prinz/Pluto as a consequence of Senta, that is to say, of Germany’s cultural misappropriations.

Grass clearly uses parody. Yet that is not to say that the many and numerous references he includes point towards a straightforward rejection and condemnation of German culture. As suggested by the conflicting aspects of references to Wagner, Grass sees the need for something of a synthesis between past and present if the future is to avoid a dangerous repeat of the past. Throughout the second half of the novel Grass incorporates more and different types of allusions to Wagner as he focuses more closely on Eddi Amsel’s blood brother, Walter Matern. The third book of *Dog Years*, ‘Materniads’, charts Matern’s coming to terms with his wartime self within the post-war landscape. This portrayal and section is firmly grounded in what has gone before but for the first time in the novel the narrative begins to look forward to what the future should and could hold for the people of Germany.

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<sup>72</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 394–5.

<sup>73</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 551.

<sup>74</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 556–9.

### Looking forward: post-war Germany and representations of Wagner

It is no contradiction to say that for all Grass looked back at the past he played an active role in shaping German society. Grass actively campaigned for the SPD; political activism is after all, an attempt to shape the future. There is wide and conscious acknowledgement that Grass is one of, if not *the*, defining and influential voices to have shaped post-war Germany. As Grass scholar and leading researcher on German identity since the Second World War, Stuart Taberner pointed out in his obituary of Grass:

Grass was not only a fascinating case study in the writer as public intellectual or in the possibilities of a politically engaged literature. He in some sense also embodied post-war German literature. It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that it often felt impossible to imagine German writing after 1945 without Grass — to imagine how it might have turned out if he had not been there. Even when we noted that his work had become less popular, or perhaps never again achieved the brilliance of *Die Blechtrommel* [...] we always presumed his centrality to post-war German letters.<sup>75</sup>

No other single voice has proved as influential to the period as Grass' was. Taberner's claim that 'it often felt impossible to imagine German writing after 1945 without Grass', is a huge one. It is even more significant when one considers that Grass' writing career only began in 1959 with the publication of *Die Blechtrommel*. Fourteen years after the end of the war is a relatively late start for a voice that would become so definitive of the period. When Taberner suggests a possible decline in Grass' later works he notes that his first novel 'achieved brilliance'. Grass' early works, in particular the *Danzig Trilogy*, are of particular interest when assessing the influence Grass would exert through his writings.

Taberner provides a useful summary of just how the post-war period as influenced by Grass can be defined: '[...] how might Germany's laboriously acquired post-war culture of contrition and watchfulness be refashioned to respond to the new challenges of the post-post-war?'<sup>76</sup> Taberner proceeds to argue that Grass' *Peeling the Onion* was an instrumental text in shaping what he terms 'post-postwar Germany'. Grass remained an influential figure throughout his life. But it is Taberner's characterising of post-war Germany that is of interest here. Post-war culture was 'laboriously acquired'. 'Laborious' is an adjective that perhaps also describes the effort to maintain a 'watchfulness'. This is in part a cautionary vigilance with a view to guard against a repetition of the horrors of the Nazi past. But, as Taberner later acknowledges, the post-war period is also characterised by a type of reconciliation with the past: '[...] the post-war project of coming to terms with the past that [Grass] himself did so much to shape.'<sup>77</sup> The extent to which *Dog Years* promotes such a relationship with the past has already been addressed but it is interesting to note that this attitude was imbibed by

<sup>75</sup> Stuart Taberner, 'Some Reflections on the Passing of Günter Grass' *German Studies Review* 38 no. 3 (2015): 483-489. 485.

<sup>76</sup> Stuart Taberner, 'The Meaning of The Nazi Past in The Post-Postwar: Recent Fiction by Günter Grass, Christa Wolf and Martin Walser,' *A Journal of Germanic Studies* 50 no. 2 (May 2014): 161-177. 165.

<sup>77</sup> Taberner, 'The Meaning of The Nazi Past,' 165.

society. A 1964 review of the novel by George Steiner shows that looking into the past was by no means the norm: '[...] Grass has had the nerve, the indispensable tactlessness to evoke the past. By force of his macabre, often obscene wit, he has rubbed the noses of his readers in the great filth, in the vomit of their time.'<sup>78</sup> Steiner uses no uncertain terms. Germany's past is a 'great filth' and 'vomit'. That Grass shows 'nerve' and 'indispensable tactlessness' demonstrates just how much he was railing against a convention of ignoring the past. In describing Grass' wit as 'obscene' Steiner emphasises both the extreme nature of the subject matter that *Dog Years* parodies and the extent to which looking back at the past was still taboo.

There is one more significant quality displayed by Grass and which he promotes as a virtuous, even essential, quality within an emergent society: doubt. It is a quality recognised in Grass by Salman Rushdie (b.1947). In an introduction to Grass' own essay, '*The Tin Drum* in Retrospect', Rushdie wrote:

What Grass learned on his journey across the frontiers of history was Doubt. Now he distrusts all those who claim to possess absolute forms of knowledge; he suspects all total explanations, all systems of thought which purport to be complete. Amongst the world's great writers, he is quintessentially the artist of uncertainty, whose symbol might easily have been the question mark if it were not the Snail.<sup>79</sup>

Rushdie's account reads as a simplified version of some of postmodernism's fundamental tenets. Stuart Sim succinctly summarises postmodern theorist Jean-François Lyotard (1926–1998) in a remarkably similar way: '[...] Lyotard is critical of what he calls grand narratives: theories that claim to be able to explain everything, and resist any attempt to change their form (or 'narrative').'<sup>80</sup> Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) is published at a time that allows for retrospective classifications of Grass' *Danzig Trilogy* (1959–1963).<sup>81</sup> The three novels appear at the start of a period that Barry Lewis considers as quintessentially postmodernist: 'texts published between 1960 and 1990 are more precisely postmodernist.'<sup>82</sup> It seems only natural therefore, that Grass be not merely categorised in this way but seen as a pioneer. In addition to this retrospective classification according to later cultural theory, Grass consciously takes on the role as the voice of doubt. The image of the snail comes from Grass' novel *From the Diary of a Snail* (1972), a fictionalised account of his campaigning for the SPD during West Germany's 1969 election. Grass writes for a German post-war audience

<sup>78</sup> George Steiner, 'The Nerve of Günter Grass,' review of *Hundejahre*, by Günter Grass, *Commentary*, May 1964.

<sup>79</sup> Salman Rushdie, 'On Günter Grass,' *Granta*, March 1, 1985. <https://granta.com/on-gunter-grass/>.

For an account of the various published forms in which Rushdie's introduction and the Grass essay to which it refers have been published, as well as more detail on the influence of Grass on Rushdie, see Patricia Merivale, 'Saleem Fathered by Oskar: Intertextual Strategies in *Midnight's Children* and *The Tin Drum*,' in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. M. D. Fletcher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 83n. and 83–96 respectively.

<sup>80</sup> Stuart Sim, 'Postmodernism and Philosophy,' in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Stuart Sim (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 3–15. 7.

<sup>81</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge Theory*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

<sup>82</sup> Barry Lewis, 'Postmodernism and Fiction,' in Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 111–122. 112.



with the specific aim of avoiding a repeat of the rise of totalitarianism. To this end, the novel personifies ‘Doubt’ and constantly re-iterates the need for uncertainty and questioning.

Grass recognised how important his anti-extremist message of scepticism and doubt was to post-war Germany. In 1966 he delivered a speech to discourage young voters from supporting the far-right Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (N.P.D.): ‘Because I know my own past and also the weakness of our German youth for absolute, self-defeating ideas [...]’<sup>83</sup> Grass views the young as being particularly disposed to ‘absolute self-defeating ideas’. He identifies the same flaw in the national consciousness. Grass was working to a similar effect in his writing some years earlier. A wryly humorous parodic passage of *Dog Years*, the ‘Open Forum’, combines an imitation of official-like bureaucratic language with Prinz/Pluto singing along to *Götterdämmerung* (1876) in a trial by Germany’s youth of Walter Matern.<sup>84</sup> Like many of Hitler’s speeches and much of Nazi propaganda the chapter is broadcast on the radio. The ridiculousness of the children’s ‘court’ is that it closely resembles what it is so zealously trying to condemn. On the page, the chapter is set out as a play, perhaps another nod to Wagner’s music-dramas. The children make use of and refer to various aspects of German culture but it is Wagner who is at the fore. When trying to ascertain the origin of Matern’s Pluto, the children conduct what is in effect a trial by culture. After playing *Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles* to the dog:

DISCUSSION LEADER: The dog reacts with pleasurable animation, so demonstrating that his former owner was a German national. [...]

A BOY: Why beat about the bush? I suggest a direct approach: some typical Wagner, the Siegfried motif or the Helmsmen’s Chorus...

A BOY: We might as well start right in with *Götterdämmerung*.

CHORUS: *Göt-ter-dämmerung!*

*Göt-ter-dämmerung!*

[Walli S. puts on the record. The music from *Götterdämmerung* plays at length. The dog howls throughout.]

DISCUSSION LEADER: Here we have our conclusive proof that the dog Pluto must have belonged to an admirer of Wagner. [...] we shall make no mistake in presuming former chancellor Adolf Hitler [...] whose predilection for Wagner is well known, to have been the rightful owner of the black shepherd here present, currently named Pluto.<sup>85</sup>

The image of a German Shepherd howling throughout parts of *Götterdämmerung* as though it were singing along is Grass at his most humorous and playful. Cultural heritage is not a sacred entity to be preserved and treated with reverence. Yet neither is Grass’ parody an

<sup>83</sup> Grass, ‘Speech to a Young Voter Who Feels Tempted to Vote for the N.P.D.’ in *Speak Out!*, 54–61, 55.

<sup>84</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 513–550.

<sup>85</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 536–7.

attack on Wagner or any other aspect of Germany's culture. Rather, Grass condemns simultaneously an ideology, here it is one of an extreme accountability and the use of culture as a weapon to enforce that ideology: 'A BOY: Why beat about the bush? I suggest a direct approach: some typical Wagner,'. Wagner is once again the most potent cultural point of reference for Grass because it is through their use of Wagner that the children bear a likeness to the Nazi party that they are ostensibly so keen to distance themselves from.

Yet Grass' engagement with Wagner goes much deeper; for it is through Wagner that Grass suggests what a healthier, more constructive engagement with Germany's culture would look like. *Dog Years* is unambiguous in its condemnation of Nazism and the atrocities of the war. For Grass, there is no contradiction between doing so whilst consciously incorporating numerous and significant elements of Wagner into the form of his novel. It is precisely such a synthesis that stands as Grass' call to be 'watchful' without a renunciation of the past. Grass provides his own literary example of how the past should play a role in Germany's culture of the present and future.

The most comprehensive survey of representations of Wagner in *Dog Years* has been carried out by Mary A. Cicora.<sup>86</sup> Cicora starts with a comparison of the novel's opening to that of the three Norn's in the prologue to *Götterdämmerung*:

[*Dog Years*] has three narrators and deals with the question of how to come to grips with the past, the prologue to *Götterdämmerung* shows the three Norns spinning as they narrate past events. This is underscored by Wagner's "Leitmotiv" technique, by which the repetition of a musical phrase can recall past events.<sup>87</sup>

The different voices at the start of *Dog Years* that comment on events of the novel before they have been introduced, make for an apt comparison with the prologue to *Götterdämmerung*. Grass does not yet begin to use his own leitmotifs but he takes the opportunity to introduce recurring themes such as the dog, the Vistula and the mine.<sup>88</sup> Cicora's main oversight is to overlook the fact that any reference to the Norns points as much to the future as it does the past, in Paul Dawson-Bowling's words: '[The Norns] describe the past, present and future ages of *The Ring* ...'<sup>89</sup> It is in this capacity that a reference to the Norns is so appropriate for the Janus-faced Grass, who looks to the past and the future at the same time. Unfortunately, Cicora reads the references to Wagner as working to a deconstructive end, and even cites Abbott to position herself within a tradition that relegates Grass to a writer of parodies. In Cicora's analysis the associations between Wagner, myth and Nazism are too strong for Grass to be doing anything other than criticising. As has been demonstrated, the parody cannot be isolated as an attack on Wagner alone; it extends more broadly to notions of myth and German culture. Thomas Mann is again and wrongly, cited to this end: 'Grass offers, in *Hundejahre*, a parody of Wagner's and Mann's use of

<sup>86</sup> Cicora, 'Music, Myth and Metaphysics,' 49-60.

<sup>87</sup> Cicora, 'Music, Myth and Metaphysics,' 54.

<sup>88</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 9.

<sup>89</sup> Paul Dawson-Bowling, *The Wagner Experience and its Meaning to us*, vol II (Brecon: Old Street Publishing, 2003), 309.

mythology.<sup>90</sup> Cicora argues along similar lines to Abbott to conclude that: ‘Insofar as he is building on the Nazis’ misuse of Wagner, the novel can be considered a parody of a parody.’<sup>91</sup> This is a view born out of too vague or superficial a view of Wagner’s role in the text. It is odd that Cicora should fail to go into obvious Wagner references in more detail yet draws attention to, at best, tenuous links to the composer: ‘The blood-brotherhood between Amsel and Matern also recalls the oath sworn by Siegfried and Gunther. The incident of Matern throwing the pocketknife into the Vistula brings to mind Siegfried’s and Brünnhilde’s refusal to throw the ring into the Rhine.’<sup>92</sup> These are contentious and incidental parallels of lesser significance. By contrast, the element of Wagner most whole-heartedly embraced by Grass here is the leitmotif.

Cicora identified the opening of *Dog Years* as being ‘underscored by Wagner’s “leitmotiv” technique’ by virtue of that passage’s reference to events past. Cicora explains motifs as: ‘the repetition of a musical phrase [that] can recall past events.’ Yet Wagner’s leitmotifs are much broader in scope, referring to characters, objects and concepts. Motifs are fluid and undergo transformation. Grass includes motifs sparsely throughout the first two sections of his novel, but it is in the final, post-war section that various leitmotifs occur frequently and in different guises. Grass’ most sustained Wagner reference occurs throughout the section of the novel that looks towards the future, that stands as a tentative suggestion as to how Germany should progress. The most common of these motifs begins in its original form as: ‘Don’t turn around, the Grinder’s around.’ ‘Grinder’ being another nickname for Walter Matern, the phrase appears frequently throughout the third part of the novel. It undergoes various transformations: ‘Don’t turn around, the clap’s going around’;<sup>93</sup> ‘Don’t smoke too much or you’ll smoke too much’;<sup>94</sup> ‘Never sleep three in a bed or you’ll wake up three in a bed’;<sup>95</sup> ‘Don’t listen to the worm, there’s a worm in the worm’.<sup>96</sup> The repetitive nature of these representative examples shows why these motifs are so effective at characterising Grass’ own style. The voice of post-war Germany adopts the technique for which Wagner is known. Germany’s cultural inheritance therefore, is destined to play a role in that which is to come; it should not be dismissed entirely. Yet at the same time Grass re-iterates his message to be sceptical of that same inheritance, demonstrated by another of his motifs: ‘Leitmotives and murder motives’<sup>97</sup> appears throughout the final section of the novel. It is a motif which directly acknowledges its debt to Wagner, a motif comprised of the word ‘motif’. It reaches its symbolic height at the climax of the novel in which Eddi forces Matern to observe a late stage of scarecrow production in his mine. It is a development of the earlier scene in which Eddi ranted to his scarecrows from Weininger:

And in the end the radio symphony orchestra in its brown work clothes plays something from *Götterdämmerung*. That is always appropriate, a leit- and murder

<sup>90</sup> Cicora, ‘Music, Myth and Metaphysics,’ 50.

<sup>91</sup> Cicora, ‘Music, Myth and Metaphysics,’ 58.

<sup>92</sup> Cicora, ‘Music, Myth and Metaphysics,’ 58.

<sup>93</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 422.

<sup>94</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 434.

<sup>95</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 410.

<sup>96</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 452.

<sup>97</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 418.

motif that flits like a spook through the entire history, imagined and resurrected in scarecrows, which fills the twenty-first stall.<sup>98</sup>

This appears at the end of a scene where Eddi's scarecrows have enacted out Germany's history. The music is played by scarecrows in 'brown work clothes', that is, Nazi uniforms. Eddi forces an uncomfortable Matern to watch. It is as though Eddi has finally realised his artistic *raison d'être*. Eddi has fashioned his scarecrows to embody the uncomfortable history that he knows people need to be confronted with. It is an almost exact mirroring of Grass' own task as he sees it: to allow a society to tread carefully into the future by creating an artwork that simultaneously confronts, examines, reconciles and embodies the past.

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<sup>98</sup> Grass, *Dog Years*, 602.

## Chapter 2: Anthony Burgess' British Wagner: Parody and Wagner Reception in the Works of Anthony Burgess.

### Burgess, Music and Wagner

John Burgess Wilson, known as Anthony Burgess, wished for himself '[that] people would think of me as a musician who writes novels instead of a novelist who writes music on the side.'<sup>99</sup> In reality he was more than both these things. Burgess worked throughout his life as a journalist, critic, scriptwriter and commentator; his output was prodigious. Yet his claim to be a musician is one that rests as much upon his novels as it does his compositions. Music is a prominent feature throughout the better and lesser known of Burgess' novels, from *The Worm and the Ring* based on Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelung* to 'Ludwig van' obsessed Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). Burgess transposed Ludwig van Beethoven's (1770–1827) third symphony into prose in *Napoleon Symphony* (1974). In Burgess' trans-medial mind, music and literature were never separate entities; he also worked on a number of projects that saw literature transformed into music. In 1978 Burgess wrote a musical setting of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) for flute, oboe, cello, piano, soprano and narrator. *Blooms of Dublin* (1982) was a project that saw parts of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) transformed into an operetta. A few years later Burgess undertook a similar task and adapted his own *A Clockwork Orange* into a musical stage version, *A Clockwork Orange: A Play with Music* (1986).

Burgess felt the calling to be a composer early on, 'At the age of thirteen I decided that I was to be a great composer, and I trained myself, pursuing an indulged hobby, to that end.'<sup>100</sup> Burgess the autodidact was drawn to the more modern harmonies of Claude Debussy (1862–1918), than he was to more classical composers:

At thirteen I had a vague idea of the music I wanted to write. It was to be 'modern', like Stravinsky or Schoenberg. I was finding my way about music through the simple tonalities of Handel and early Beethoven and the children's pieces by Robert Schumann [...]. But I rather despised these diatonic harmonies and cadences all too easy to anticipate. Those composers were saying nothing about the modern world. Debussy, [...], had said plenty about it.<sup>101</sup>

This passage appears in the first volume of Burgess' autobiography, *Little Wilson and Big God* (1987) and reveals a sophisticated ear for tone and music, not least for a teenager. There is an awareness of harmony and how its development relates to the history of music. Burgess would maintain a life-long love of Debussy but the French impressionist composer was by no means the greatest musical influence on Burgess. Rather, it is an encounter with Wagner that is one of the earliest musical experiences that Burgess relates in his memoir. Wagner exerts more than a musical influence; he is associated with Manchester itself, the city of Burgess' birth:

<sup>99</sup> Walter Clemons, 'Pushing On: Anthony Burgess,' *New York Times*, November 29, 1970, ProQuest.

<sup>100</sup> Anthony Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God* (London: Vintage, 2012), 109.

<sup>101</sup> Burgess, *Little Wilson*, 110.

Manchester was a Wagnerian city. Hans von Richter, conductor of the Hallé from 1899 to 1911, had established the tradition of throwing bleeding chunks from the music dramas to Mancunian audiences stiffened with German immigrants, and Michael Balling, another German and another Wagnerian, sustained the heavy meat diet from 1912 to the outbreak of the war. Under Sir Hamilton Harty Manchester had started to become a Berliozian city, but Wagner still packed them in. The Wagner night he conducted in early 1929 bored me, except for the glockenspiel in the Apprentices' Dance from *Die Meistersinger* [1868].<sup>102</sup>

It may not be readily obvious that the late romantic German composer could be so integral a part of the cultural life of a city in the north of England. Yet to this day Manchester remains home to the Manchester Wagner Society, one of only three Wagner Societies throughout the UK. Burgess' relationship with Wagner goes beyond a fondness for his music; Wagner is a prominent part of the cultural landscape in which he developed as an artist. There is an affection for the composer without the need for reverence, perhaps something borne out of a close intimacy with and knowledge of the music, hence the 'bleeding chunks' that comprise a 'heavy meat' diet. Nevertheless, Wagner must have made an indelible musical impression on the young Burgess, for he also recalls of the same occasion:

I was bored but a few days later I found a tune turning over and over in my head [...]. [My father] told me it was the main theme from the Overture to Wagner's *Rienzi*. It was not solely the melody that had adhered to my brain but the harmonies too. I could hear what I would later be able to call a sixth suspended over a chord of the dominant seventh.

Burgess' wording is curious, for 'bored' and 'boredom' are elsewhere associated with Wagner, a figure whom Burgess has – ever since his school-boy days – viewed as being linked with wordplay: 'The advantages of knowing something about music were minimal – knowing that *tanner* meant to bore, since, after the first Paris performance of *Tannhäuser*, Parisians said "*Wagner me tanne aux airs*"'.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, Burgess was able to recall that certain parts of Wagner stayed with him and played their role in bringing about his musical awakening. Later in life the boredom wore off and Wagner would prove to be a musical love and influence on Burgess. In 1966 Burgess chose the Trial Song from Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868) as one of his desert island discs.<sup>104</sup> Within the archive held at the Anthony Burgess Foundation in Manchester there are upwards of twenty records that feature or are entirely Wagner in Burgess' personal LP collection.<sup>105</sup>

Wagner has also exerted influence in Burgess' compositions. In Paul Schuyler Phillips' terms, 'The music of Beethoven, Wagner and Elgar was of profound significance to Burgess. He adored Romantic and especially late Romantic music and imitated its harmonic language

<sup>102</sup> Burgess, *Little Wilson*, 106–7.

<sup>103</sup> Burgess, *Little Wilson*, 116.

<sup>104</sup> 'Desert Island Discs,' BBC, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p009y34z>.

<sup>105</sup> These primarily include recordings of *Der Ring* but also *Tristan und Isolde*. See 'Anthony Burgess Audio Collection,' Archives Hub, accessed February 14, 2020, <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb3104-ab/ab/arch>.

and style of instrumentation often in his own compositions.<sup>106</sup> If anything, Phillips underplays the extent to which Wagner featured in Burgess' own music. The archives in Manchester hold the transcripts of four unpublished T. S. Eliot memorial lectures on the theme of music and literature, delivered in 1980. In his first lecture, 'Under the Bam', Burgess addresses music and popular song in Eliot's *The Waste Land*.<sup>107</sup> Burgess referred to Wagner as 'probably the hero of the sub-text [in that poem]'.<sup>108</sup> In his musical setting of *The Waste Land*, composed two years earlier, Burgess directly quoted melodies from Wagner. This included mirroring Eliot's own references to Wagner's Rhinemaidens and *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) as well as an incorporation of Wagner independent of Eliot's poem, through bacchanal motifs from *Tannhäuser*.<sup>109</sup> Burgess places the *Tannhäuser* references at the start of the 'A Game of Chess' section. Melodies from Igor Stravinsky's (1882–1971) *The Rite of Spring* (1913), also appear at various points. Stravinsky's work was bound in Burgess' mind with precisely the type of modern landscape he saw Eliot as coming to terms with in his poem.<sup>110</sup> One reason Burgess may have included Wagner beyond Eliot's own references to the composer is that *The Waste Land*, with its many cultural allusions, promotes the idea of a direction and tradition, to culture. Eliot's poem is both a result of cultural history and a response to the time in which it was written.<sup>111</sup> Burgess recognises this and takes advantage of music to further the sense that *The Waste Land* responds to the present by referencing the culture of the past. To this end, Wagner was of particular use. As Burgess wrote in an unpublished article likely written to commemorate the centenary of Wagner's death:

When we come to *Tristan*, *The Ring*, *Parsifal*, we are into a world of profound symbolism, in which realism melts into myth, and great psychological depths are plumbed. This new kind of art is not easy, it is not pure entertainment, but it is the necessary consummation of nineteenth century thought and feeling, and it looks into the future.<sup>112</sup>

For Burgess, Wagner is at once transcendent of time, delving through 'profound symbolism' to 'psychological depths', a product of his time, 'a consummation of nineteenth century thought and feeling', and also a figure who 'looks into the future'. Including Wagner in his setting of *The Waste Land* not only allows for Eliot's references to be presented in their 'original form' but also allows Burgess to emphasise the sense of conflict between mythology, cultural history and the present that *The Waste Land* is so engaged with.

<sup>106</sup> Paul Schuyler Phillips, 'The Postmodernist Always Swings Twice,' in *Anthony Burgess and Modernity*, ed. Alan R. Roughly (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 79–95. 81.

<sup>107</sup> Anthony Burgess, unpublished transcript of 'Under the Bam,' from *Blest Pair of Sirens*. Transcripts held at The Anthony Burgess Foundation, Manchester, accessed on 14/02/2020.

<sup>108</sup> Burgess, 'Under the Bam,' 18.

<sup>109</sup> For the full score of Burgess' setting, see <https://www.anthonymburgess.org/music-anthony-burgess/the-waste-land/>. Motifs from Wagner's *Tristan* appear at bars 62–83. Variations of Bacchanal motifs from *Tannhäuser* occur at bars 150–151 and numerous motifs associated with the Rhinemaidens can be heard at bars 338–345.

<sup>110</sup> Burgess had long since associated *The Waste Land* with Wagner and Stravinsky. For an account of a student project he worked on to set the poem to music, see Burgess, *Little Wilson*, 179–80.

<sup>111</sup> Eliot expounds on theories of tradition and the artist in T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), 13–23.

<sup>112</sup> Anthony Burgess, unpublished article 'Richard Wagner,' (1983), 1. Typescript held at The Anthony Burgess Foundation, Manchester, accessed on 14/02/2020.

Writing Wagner: journalism and *The Pianoplayers*

There is however, little to be gleaned of Burgess' attitude towards Wagner from the purely musical references that appear in his setting of *The Waste Land*. There is an obvious admiration for the music and a clear regard for its value. Nevertheless, Burgess' engagement with Wagner is more thorough and systematic in his writing. Wagner was the subject of a number of articles and reviews written by Burgess. In a 1964 article titled 'Wagner's "The Ring"', published in *The Listener*, Burgess outlined Wagner's technique and some major criticism of *Der Ring*. The piece also demonstrates that as early as 1964, Burgess was aware of Wagner as a figure of literary significance for generations of artists to come:

But what many of us tend to miss is the way in which *The Ring* itself goes on giving us fragmentary symbols, how it remains a glittering storehouse from which the literary, as opposed to the musical, artist can take what he wants. In *The Waste Land* T. S. Eliot turned the three Rhine-daughters into three Thames-daughters.<sup>113</sup>

Implicit in the claim that Wagner holds promise as a source for the literary artist rather than the composer, is that literature and music should begin to converge as art-forms. Any literary work that contained a discernible influence of Wagner could, at least in some sense, be said to be musical. This article appears three years after the publication of Burgess' own attempt to forge literature out of Wagner in *The Worm and the Ring*. As a novel it is by no means a definitive attempt if Burgess considers Wagner as a presence in literature that has yet to be exhausted. Moreover, Burgess saw references to Wagner as having, by their very nature, no straightforward or easily defined meaning: '*The Ring* is symbolism and only artists who are not sure what they believe indulge in it, since symbols are good at reconciling opposites, resolving ambiguities [...] The symbolism of *The Ring* can mean pretty well anything [...]'.<sup>114</sup> Burgess was aware of just how contrasting Eliot's serious engagement with the mythical aspects of Wagner in *The Waste Land* was drastically different from his own parodic and over all light-hearted use of the composer in *The Worm*. To Burgess' mind, the composer has remained entirely malleable to the artists' needs.

The early 1980s saw other journalistic engagements with Wagner that would demonstrate a thorough working knowledge of the composer's biography. 'Wagner in Brown' (1980) was a review of Wagner's so-called 'brown book', the diary he kept from 1865 until his death in 1882, translated and published in English.<sup>115</sup> The second, published in *The Observer* in 1981, was a review of *Cosima Wagner's Diaries 1878-1883* and Richard Hartington's *Bayreuth: The Early Years*.<sup>116</sup> Burgess playfully took the title to his article, 'The Imperfect Wagnerite?' from George Bernard Shaw's (1856–1950), book on Wagner, *The Perfect Wagnerite*

<sup>113</sup> Anthony Burgess, 'Wagner's "The Ring"', *The Listener*, September 17, 1964, 420.

<sup>114</sup> Burgess, 'Wagner's "The Ring"', 420.

<sup>115</sup> Anthony Burgess, 'Wagner in Brown,' in *Homage to QWERTYUIOP* (London: Abacus, 1987), 564–566; Richard Wagner, *The Diary of Richard Wagner: The Brown Book 1865–1883*, trans. George Bird (London: V. Gollancz, 1980).

<sup>116</sup> Anthony Burgess, 'The Imperfect Wagnerite?' review of *Cosima Wagner's Diaries: 1878–1883*, by Cosima Wagner and *Bayreuth: The Early Years*, by Robert Hartforth, *The Observer*, January 11, 1981.



(1898).<sup>117</sup> Burgess considered himself to be an ‘imperfect’ rather than a ‘perfect Wagnerite’ by virtue of ‘lov[ing] a great deal of the music’, if not wholeheartedly subscribing to the Wagner cult.<sup>118</sup> The playful tone of ‘The Imperfect Wagnerite?’ is contrasted by two articles appearing at approximately the same time. In 1982 Burgess wrote an article, ‘Ring’, that was only published posthumously in 1998 in *One Man’s Chorus: The Uncollected Writings*.<sup>119</sup> Burgess reverts to a tone of reverence and again echoes the call that Wagner carries significance for his time and ours: ‘[Wagner] is a very modern poet and composer.’<sup>120</sup> Tellingly, the literary epithet of ‘poet’ is placed before the musical term ‘composer’ reiterating the idea that in Wagner there remains an untapped literary source. The following year saw Burgess write the unpublished article ‘Richard Wagner’, which is quoted above. The tone remained largely one of praise and admiration for the composer.

Within Burgess’ novels however, it is the parodic, jovial attitude to Wagner that wins out. *The Worm* is Burgess’ most sustained and earliest written engagement with Wagner. The composer would remain a source for passing references throughout Burgess’ oeuvre but it was only later on his career that he returned to more thorough engagements with Wagner. A later novel of Burgess’, *The Pianoplayers*, has received scant critical attention. At the time of its publication it received mixed reviews. Erica Jong described it as ‘breezy, entertaining, funny with a center of considerable substance’, whereas John Banville was less appreciative.<sup>121</sup> Although he acknowledged the novel’s humour, calling it a ‘funny book’, he remained unimpressed: ‘[...] it is a shamefully slapdash, ramshackle piece of work by a novelist whose musical sense, if nothing else, should have prevented him from publishing in its present form.’<sup>122</sup> In Paul Phillips’ comprehensive survey of Burgess’ literary and musical output, *A Clockwork Counterpoint: The Music and Literature of Anthony Burgess* (2010), *The Pianoplayers* receives little more than a plot summary.<sup>123</sup> The novel is Burgess’ homage to his hapless piano playing father who performed in pubs and accompanied silent films prior to the advent of ‘talking’ pictures.<sup>124</sup> It is narrated from the point of view of semi-literate and retired ‘Madame’ Ellen Henshaw, who recalls her father William’s various piano-playing jobs. William Henshaw, ‘Bill’ or ‘Willy’, eventually suffers a fatal heart attack during an attempt to break the world record for non-stop piano playing at a side-show attraction in Blackpool. The Lancashire seaside holiday resort provides the humorous contrast between low-brow tastes and William’s high-brow aspirations; the marathon of piano playing sees works by Wagner coincide with popular parlour songs of the day:

<sup>117</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *The Imperfect Wagnerite* (Edinburgh: Constable & Co., 1913).

<sup>118</sup> Burgess, ‘The Imperfect Wagnerite?’

<sup>119</sup> Anthony Burgess, ‘Ring,’ in *One Man’s Chorus: The Uncollected Writings* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishing, 1998), 180–189.

<sup>120</sup> Burgess, ‘Ring,’ 189.

<sup>121</sup> Erica Jong, ‘Anthony Burgess and the Music of Love,’ *Washington Post*, November 16, 1986, and 6.

<sup>122</sup> John Banville, ‘Burgess and His Mss of Potage,’ *Independent on Sunday*, September 7, 1986, 16.

<sup>123</sup> Paul Phillips, *A Clockwork Counterpoint: The Music and Literature of Anthony Burgess*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 209–12.

<sup>124</sup> For more detail on the biographical details in *The Pianoplayers*, see Anthony Burgess, ‘Guilt’s a Good Thing,’ in *Conversations with Anthony Burgess*, ed. Earl G. Ingersoll and Mary C. Ingersoll (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 116.

The things dad played in addition to what I mentioned before were these: [...] Ma He's Making Eyes At Me, Am I Blue, Body And Soul, [...] selection from Wagner's The Master Singers, Prelude to Third Act of Tristan and Whatshername (all right hand and nobody could say he was cheating), [...] I Love Little Pussy Her Coat Is So Warm.<sup>125</sup>

This passage develops playfully one of the central concerns of the book, the relationship between sex and music. A number of the musical titles Burgess lists are in some way sexual, from 'Ma He's Making Eyes At Me' through to the not quite remembered name of Wagner's most erotic work *Tristan Und Isolde*. The crude word play of 'I Love Little Pussy Her Coat Is So Warm' is Burgess being more bawdy than subtle, as is the occasional punning on Ellen's father name, 'Willy'. Elsewhere, the subject of 'fingering' in relation to piano and 'fiddle' playing allows for similar euphemisms and innuendoes.<sup>126</sup> After an undesired sexual advance, Ellen remarks in musical terms of her body: 'There ought to be a key. Only proper players should know where it is.'<sup>127</sup> In adult life Ellen goes on to establish a 'school of love' in Paris where men are taught sex as one might be a musical instrument.<sup>128</sup> The comparison between music and sex is sincere as well as humorous. Burgess' novel is a celebration of life insofar as it promotes an aspiration for a higher quality of both. It remains an irony that although Ellen has mastered the art of sex, she lacks a great deal of musical and otherwise artistic appreciation; after all, Ellen's narrative is not even her own writing but rather dictated to an amanuensis. In listing the works played by her father, Ellen refers to the Largo from Antonín Dvořák's (1841–1904) *New World Symphony* (1893), as the 'Lager from the New World [...] The night of DAY FIFTEEN was a terrible experience to begin with like a Nightmare.'<sup>129</sup> Malapropisms and grammatical errors such as these are a distinguishing feature of Ellen's dictation and text.

For a celebration of sex and music Wagner, at once high-brow and carnal, is the obvious choice. The high-brow element not only produces a comic element by way of contrast with the parlour songs but the composer also represents a worthwhile aspiration to real art and greatness. During the piano playing marathon, Willy asks Ellen to bring him '[...] all of Bach's 48 and the vocal scores of Wagner if you can. I've got to give my brain something to do as well as my fingers or I'll go bloody mad.'<sup>130</sup> William is a man of humble origins and is not educated; like his daughter, he is prone to displays of comical ignorance, referring to Fritz Lang's (1890–1976) *Metropolis* (1927), as 'Metro Polis'.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, William's one redeeming quality is his musical aspiration. The poignancy of the novel depends on William recognising but never achieving musical greatness. He is isolated in his ambition, destined to be surrounded by people who do not appreciate music or his renditions of it. When Bill Henshaw plays from Wagner in his marathon, he is told by his shady manager to 'lay off the

<sup>125</sup> Anthony Burgess, *The Pianoplayers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 129–30.

<sup>126</sup> Burgess, *The Pianoplayers*, 155.

<sup>127</sup> Burgess, *The Pianoplayers*, 98.

<sup>128</sup> Burgess, *The Pianoplayers*, 156–165.

<sup>129</sup> Burgess, *The Pianoplayers*, 133.

<sup>130</sup> Burgess, *The Pianoplayers*, 131.

<sup>131</sup> Burgess, *The Pianoplayers*, 43.

heavy stuff, there's a good lad.'<sup>132</sup> This is an attitude reflected when Ellen went to buy the music: '[...] there was a vocal score of *The Rhine Gold* and another of *The Twilight of the Gods* ('not ever bin axed for them afore, love' said a very old man who smelled of peppermints)'.<sup>133</sup> Ellen invariably recounts Wagner titles in English, likely an indictment by polyglot Burgess of the manner in which the works survive within an Anglophone context. Even from the vantage point of old age, Ellen speaks of Wagner in an unintentionally comic way: 'Wagner (which is pronounced like Vaaagner because it is German)'.<sup>134</sup> In stating this Ellen assumes that it might be a common mistake to mispronounce 'Wagner' and that she believes it is not generally known that he is German; her musical knowledge is not as rarefied as she thinks. At the end of the novel, she refers to the bridal march from *Lohengrin* (1850) as the 'Wedding March from Low and Grin'.<sup>135</sup> Burgess presumably finds the word play on Wagner's opera all too tempting. In reality it is a mistake unlikely to be made by someone who, like Ellen Henshaw, has the wherewithal to live in France and speak French. As an inconsistency it suggests that Burgess finds the parodic appeal of Wagner, or of characters who misunderstand Wagner, all too tempting. The comedy depends less on the nature of Wagner or his works, than it does on how he is perceived and translated into everyday life. Manchester and Blackpool during the 1920's are far removed from the composer's typical association with ancient mythologies and nineteenth-century Bavaria. In two later works, *Mozart and the Wolf Gang* (1991) and the posthumously published *Byrne* (1995), Burgess would change his approach and begin to parody not merely Wagner reception but the man, or at least widely held biographical notions of the composer.

#### Parodying Wagner reception: *Mozart and the Wolf Gang* and *Byrne*

Burgess' *Mozart* is a celestial farce in which composers and writers from throughout history mingle together, converse and attend performances of various musical and literary endeavours. Naturally, Wagner is among the composers represented. It is no exaggeration to say that he appears in a particularly caricatured form. He is the raging antisemite, megalomaniac and egoist:

**Wagner:** Did you not disguise your own Jewishness to pose as a Teuton? Did not your grandfather Moses Mendelssohn embrace Teutonic culture? True, I put music in its proper place, as the handmaiden of human emotions and progressive ideas. You merely purveyed picture postcards of the Scottish highlands and the more accessible street sights of a tourist's Italy. You played with fairies. I at least was not a sentimental Jew.<sup>136</sup>

Burgess' characterisation of Wagner is exaggerated for comic effect. Even in the celestial realm Wagner rants over being a 'Teuton' and 'Teutonic culture'. Burgess treats other composers in a similar way, according to the clichés of their biographies; a pessimistic Beethoven and a jealous Salieri also appear, for example. For Burgess to exaggerate and

<sup>132</sup> Burgess, *The Pianoplayers*, 132.

<sup>133</sup> Burgess, *The Pianoplayers*, 131.

<sup>134</sup> Burgess, *The Pianoplayers*, 132.

<sup>135</sup> Burgess, *The Pianoplayers*, 190.

<sup>136</sup> Anthony Burgess, *Mozart and the Wolf Gang*, (London: Vintage, 1992), 11.

restate the associations that have clung to some of these composers, especially Wagner, seems surprising given that elsewhere Burgess was keen to divest music of the connotations it may have garnered over time. Such a divestment was the aim of the third of Burgess' T. S. Eliot memorial lectures; he specifically addressed the question of meaning in music in relation to Wagner:

Whenever we hear [*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*] we hear whatever we want to hear, we may not hear Nuremberg, we may not hear anything about the Nazi striving for purity of race and the ultimate tyranny, but we will hear whatever our own moral background is willing to impose upon us. I think this is a terribly important point, that there is nothing implicit, there is nothing contained within the music itself. Things are imposed upon music from the outside.<sup>137</sup>

Burgess firmly believes in the absolute autonomy of music. The types of meaning that history attaches to music, often via its composer, are not necessarily invalid but they are not suggested by the music. This is precisely what Burgess draws on in *Mozart*. Burgess is unequivocal in drawing a distinction between music and literature. If meaning only attaches to music after being imposed 'from the outside' then literature, via language, is that in which meaning is already implicit. Later in the same lecture Burgess stressed the folly of believing that one could stand in for the other: 'I think, with Berlioz, we have the beginning of this arrogance, this bombastic belief that music could do the job of literature.'<sup>138</sup> Although Burgess would elsewhere discuss his attempts at a 'musicalisation' of prose, this statement should warn against an eagerness to read *Mozart* as an incorporation of music into the novel.<sup>139</sup> Jean-Philippe Heberle's assessment of *Mozart*, is that it is a novel that contains 'a vast network of intertextual and metatextual relationships, [that] aims at testing out the limits of the way music and literature can mingle or echo each other.'<sup>140</sup> Heberle's suggestion that literature and music 'mingle or echo each other' within the novel is sufficiently vague to avoid challenge. Yet it is more helpful and accurate to say that in deploying the characters of the novel, Burgess is drawing on a more literary tradition of biography and appropriation through history rather than attempting to incorporate any element of 'music'. While the novel obviously includes 'a vast network of intertextual and metatextual references', it is itself metatextual by portraying composers and writers who, it would seem, cannot be portrayed in a way other than that which historiographical and biographical trends have determined for them. It is therefore a development of the references to Wagner that appeared in *The Pianoplayers*. *Mozart* contains neither a parody of Wagner nor of his works. It is instead a parody of a parodic image that has formed over time as a result of references to and appropriations of the composer throughout culture and history.

<sup>137</sup> Anthony Burgess, unpublished transcript of 'Curiously Coloured Things,' from *Blest Pair of Sirens*. 10.

<sup>138</sup> Burgess, unpublished transcript of 'Curiously Coloured Things,' 12.

<sup>139</sup> See Burgess, *Little Wilson*, 362–3. For the same pertaining to James Joyce, see Anthony Burgess, *Here Comes Everybody* (Feltham: Hamlyn, 1982), 137–42.

<sup>140</sup> Jean-Philippe Heberle, 'Music and Literature/ Literature and Music in *On Mozart: A Paeon for Wolfgang*' in *Anthony Burgess: Music in Literature and Literature in Music*, ed. Marc Jeannin (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 129–143. 129.

Burgess' final work, *Byrne*, describes itself as 'a novel' despite it being written almost entirely in ottava rima. It charts the picaresque life of middle-brow composer and womaniser Michael Byrne and two of his sons. Although Byrne is assumed dead for a significant part of the novel he reappears at the reading of his will to confront his many illegitimate offspring. The form as well as the subject matter of a sexually promiscuous title character draws an obvious parallel to Lord Byron's own satire *Don Juan* (1819).<sup>141</sup> Unlike *Mozart*, composers and writers do not feature directly as characters within the narrative. Nevertheless, intertextuality is rife. Critics such as Lars Ole Sauerberg read the novel's extensive intertextual references as working to construct a 'double irony' of detachment between author Burgess and the narrator commissioned by Michael Byrne to record his life story: 'In me, who wear the obituarial robe./ [...] As an inferior pressman, salaried/ [...] Byrne was good garbage for my garbage bin.'<sup>142</sup> Sauerberg identifies a pejorative reference made by the narrator to James Joyce (1882–1941), 'Butchering English was his other care', as being at odds with Burgess' well known admiration for the Irish writer.<sup>143</sup> This leads Sauerberg to conclude:

The informed reader identifies a narrator detached from the author at an early point in the narrative. This observation sets up a system of double irony in the reader's awareness of the narrator's explicitly ironic attitude on the one hand, and the author's implicitly ironic contempt for the former's voluble, intertextually sparkling and by no means un-learned but occasionally philistine opinions.<sup>144</sup>

Implicit within Sauerberg's phrase 'by no means un-learned but occasionally philistine opinions' is a value judgement of objectivity. It is to say that the intertextual references demonstrate that the narrator is aware, but does not hold the referents in their proper regard. Whether the 'proper regard' implied by 'philistine opinions' is determined by Burgess, or an objective measure within the canon, Sauerberg does not specify. Sauerberg's reading is convincing, however no knowledge of authorial background or opinions is necessary to detach the voice of author from narrator. When Ellen Henshaw reminds the reader that '([Wagner] is pronounced like Vaaagner because it is German)', it would never be supposed that Burgess himself was taking the opportunity to inform his readers on pronunciation. In both novels Wagner is referenced by a narrator consciously constructing a text. When Burgess' narrators make reference to Wagner, the effect is to characterise themselves as much as to contribute to the texts they produce. In *The Pianoplayers*, Wagner provided a comic element by virtue of his high-brow cultural capital clashing with Ellen's working class background as she mispronounces the operas. By the time of *Byrne*, Burgess had refined these ideas; the inclusion of writers and composers characterised by the myths and clichés of

<sup>141</sup> For an account of the picaresque subject matter of *Don Juan* as well as the self-conscious artificiality of ottava rima in English, see Drummond Bone, 'Childe Harold Pilgrimage IV, *Don Juan* and *Beppo*,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151–70.

<sup>142</sup> Anthony Burgess, *Byrne* (London: Vintage, 2012), 40.

<sup>143</sup> Burgess, *Byrne*, 11.

<sup>144</sup> Lars Ole Sauerberg, 'Repositioning Narrative: The Late-Twentieth Century Verse Novels of Vikram Seth, Derek Walcott, Craig Raine, Anthony Burgess, and Bernadine Evaristo,' *Orbis Litteratum* 59, no.6 (December 2004): 455.

their biography in *Mozart*, was an essential step in this development. In *Byrne*, allusions to Wagner not only characterise the narrator as an individual willing to draw on the myth of the composer but they also pertain to the subject of the biography, Michael Byrne. Like Wagner, Byrne garners his own mythology. As a result, *Byrne* as written by the narrator becomes a document in the tradition of myth and biography that has resulted in meaning being projected onto music. *Byrne*, as written by Burgess, stands as a critique of this tradition, drawing attention to the fact that the mythology arising from biography is a layer of meaning that can be contained within literature but not in music.

Wagner remains the cultural and historical figure most suited to this end. As an outspoken composer who led a particularly turbulent life and whose works have undergone infamous historical appropriations, Wagner remains an obvious touchstone for Burgess. Wagner is only one of many writers and composers alluded to but he is among the most consistently incorporated into the narrative. Passing references include, ‘Tim reached the Rhine, like Siegfried, though with no/ Horn-blasts,’<sup>145</sup> and ‘Your brother/ Was soaked in *Tristan* and proposed a lush/ *Liebestod* for himself’.<sup>146</sup> At another point, Burgess uses Wagner playfully to suggest a possible meaning to music: ‘The bass trombone concerto – soloist/ G. Gregson – seemed to speak rather than sing./ A strong dot-dash component braved a mist/ Of mock Wagnerianism. Was the thing/ Venturing on a message?’<sup>147</sup> Burgess mocks the idea of music containing a ‘message’, with the ridiculous suggestion that piece contains Morse code, ‘dot-dash component [...] Venturing on a message’. Moreover, imitations of ‘dot-dash’ rhythms typical of Wagner are enough to suggest the concerto as being ‘Of mock Wagnerianism’ as though the piece described is a parody of Wagner. This is an observation that in some ways applies to *Byrne* itself. The biographical details of Byrne are almost ‘mock Wagnerianism’; it is the story of a womanising composer, always on the move around Europe. Wagner biography, or the popular legend of his life, is suggested with humour elsewhere when Burgess reiterates his comparison of sex and music: ‘Byrne was a bastardiser, not a rake, a/ Creator, procreator. The adventure/ Of art’s not for the rubbered amorist./ Remember Byron, Balzac, Wagner, Liszt.’<sup>148</sup> For Byrne sex, like composing, is the creative act. Artists from history are invoked as models for comparison. Among the composers mentioned, Liszt represents the Catholic element of Byrne’s biography and Wagner the womanising side. The humorous element here is that it is not specified which of these elements it is that leads Byrne to be the ‘[un-]rubbered amorist’; it could equally be either or both.

In addition to these references, Wagner’s historical reception allows for allusions that other composer’s music does not. Throughout the 1930s, Byrne becomes entangled with the Nazi regime. At the outbreak of the war Byrne finds himself in Berlin and decides to stay to work as a composer. He justifies the decision by musing to himself:

The question is: Can music really speak?  
Music is merely notes, all self-referring;

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<sup>145</sup> Burgess, *Byrne*, 105.

<sup>146</sup> Burgess, *Byrne*, 113.

<sup>147</sup> Burgess, *Byrne*, 136.

<sup>148</sup> Burgess, *Byrne*, 37.

The articulative faculty is weak;  
 Music means rather less than a cat's purring.  
 The fact that E flat clarinets can squeak  
 Will hardly make them murine.<sup>149</sup>

Byrne takes Burgess' attitude that music can not inherently 'mean' anything but he is naive to assume that music does not carry consequences as a result of meaning that is imposed upon it. Byrne's comparisons in this passage eventually prove prophetic as he becomes embroiled in a 'cat and mouse' game with the authorities as a consequence of perceived meaning in his music.<sup>150</sup> Being based in war-time Berlin, the example of Wagner should have served as warning to Byrne of how music may be co-opted for political purposes. In the following stanza, Byrne writes a piece under the pseudonym Börn. It is viewed in Britain as unpatriotic, an irony underlined by another reference to Wagner: 'Newspaper leaders truculently trounced/ Such treachery. 'We'll see that dastard swing.'/ Meanwhile the BBC diffused *The Ring*.'<sup>151</sup> The irony of having the BBC broadcast *The Ring*, depends on the Nazi appropriation of Wagner but also the accusation against Byrne of being unpatriotic. It is a ridiculous inconsistency to assume that Byrne's music can be unpatriotic, but also to assume that it is not unpatriotic to play *The Ring*. Burgess further demonstrates the way in which music exists within an externally imposed framework of meaning when Byrne composes his next piece:

There was no problem, no problem whatever  
 When Byrne or Börn took as a choral text  
 A passage from *Mein Kampf*. It was not clever,  
 Though some thought it was ironic. It annexed  
 Motifs from Wagner in a coarse endeavour  
 To symbolise Teutonic muscles flexed  
 To kill the Jews, enslave the Slavs, and make  
 Six of these seas into a German lake.<sup>152</sup>

Byrne's inclusion of 'Motifs from Wagner' in his own music are presumably direct musical quotations of Wagner's works. Byrne writes with a purpose in mind, 'symbolise Teutonic muscles flexed', yet the attempt to have music contain meaning is foiled by those who think it 'ironic'. By including the misunderstanding that irony is at play Burgess again re-iterates his belief that meaning is external and a subjective projection onto the music. Burgess exploits a perceived meaning within music to argue for the very opposite; presumably it is the obviousness of the association between Wagner and the Nazis that prompts the perception of irony. Wagner's music is so widely perceived as containing intrinsic, problematic meaning that it stands as an appropriate target for Burgess when promoting the absolute autonomy of

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<sup>149</sup> Burgess, *Byrne*, 34.

<sup>150</sup> Burgess, *Byrne*, 35–6.

<sup>151</sup> Burgess, *Byrne*, 35.

<sup>152</sup> Burgess, *Byrne*, 35.

music. Wagner's leitmotifs are particularly suited to Burgess' end as they are a well-known instance in which a passage of music is assigned a referent, usually a character or a concept; they are a very explicit instance in which meaning is imposed upon music from the outside.<sup>153</sup>

The same example of Wagner in *Byrne* also allows for telling contrasts between British and German attitudes to culture. German society takes Byrne's music at sincere face-value, while the British response is to dismiss it as 'ironic' or as a parody. Burgess himself seems to hold both conflicting views of Wagner. From the tone of his journalism with respect to Wagner, it is clear that he has a sincere love of the composer's music. As has been demonstrated through Burgess' fiction however, he by no means regards Wagner as a figure too sacred to be made humorous. When Burgess writes of conflicting reception of Wagner in *Byrne*, he does so without clearly occupying either side. Burgess' ambivalence is a vindication of the arbitrariness with which he regards the 'meaning' imposed upon music from the outside. Meaning may be arbitrary but it is not inconsequential. By including an example of contrasting Wagner reception in Britain and Germany in his final novel, Burgess has returned, via the composer, to a similar and more central concern of one his earliest novels. *The Worm and the Ring* is Burgess most protracted reference to Wagner; it is a novel fundamentally concerned with the disparity between British and European cultural identity.

#### *The Worm and the Ring: Wagner and British identity*

*The Worm* was the second novel written by Burgess; the earliest drafts date 1952.<sup>154</sup> Where Burgess' first novel, *A Vision of Battlements* (1965), saw Vigil's *Aeneid* transposed onto his own experience of Gibraltar in the Second World War, *The Worm* is a loose reworking of Wagner's *Der Ring* based on experiences of teaching at Banbury Grammar School, Oxfordshire. Unfortunately for Burgess, *The Worm* was considered by some of his former colleagues – chiefly Gwendoline Bustin – to resemble all too closely his real-life experiences. The work was issued with a libel writ that consequently saw it withdrawn from circulation.<sup>155</sup> By the time of the novel's publication in 1961, Burgess had moved onto other projects and seemed little inclined to mount a rigorous defence of his novel. When interviewed for an article in the *Banbury Guardian* titled 'Why I wrote *The Worm and the Ring*', Burgess stated:

Of course, there was no intention whatsoever on my part to link [Gwendoline Bustin] or anyone else in Banbury with the characters in 'The Worm and the Ring.' I would not be such a fool to do such a thing. The book was completely fictitious – the characters, the theme and the setting.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>153</sup> For a discussion of Wagner's technique of leitmotifs and the merits of a nomenclature to describe such, see Deryck Cooke, 'Wagner's Musical Language,' in *The Wagner Companion*, ed. Peter Burbridge and Richard Sutton (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 225-269.

<sup>154</sup> Andrew Biswell, *The Real Life of Anthony Burgess* (London: Picador, 2005), 132.

<sup>155</sup> For a full account of the legal and personal difficulties that arose for Burgess out of *The Worm*, see Biswell, *The Real Life*, 132-7.

<sup>156</sup> Unknown, 'Why I Wrote 'The Worm and the Ring' – Anthony Burgess,' *Banbury Guardian*, August 16, 1962, 1962.



This is simply not true. In his biography of Burgess, Andrew Biswell has detailed some of the particular references in the novel that the libel writ took issue with and more besides.<sup>157</sup> In spite of a bowdlerised version appearing in 1970, the only one available today, the book has fallen into relative obscurity.<sup>158</sup> Being out of print since 1970 has generally kept the novel from being read by both critics and the public.

Burgess was characteristically unreliable when discussing other aspects of the novel. In a 1978 interview with Samuel Coale, Burgess was asked if moving to Malaya was ‘really a chance to get out of the grammar school in Oxford?’ Burgess replied ‘I didn’t mind it. I was very happy in many ways. I’m a good teacher, I think. I enjoy teaching.’<sup>159</sup> This is hardly congruent with what he stated were his intentions in writing *The Worm*; in the same article for the *Banbury Guardian*, Burgess stated:

But what made me so fed up was the public attitude to the teachers – and, of course, the pay. I worked five days a week, in addition to every evening marking exercise books and examination papers, and my salary was only £400 per annum. It was not enough to live on and I decided to go abroad.<sup>160</sup>

Burgess’ thinly disguised counterpart in the novel is over-worked lapsed Catholic and analogue to Siegfried, Christopher Howarth. At the novel’s close Howarth leaves teaching to work in Italy. This would suggest that Burgess was more disillusioned with teaching than he later cared to admit. A short review of the novel in *Punch* also picked up on Burgess’ contempt for the profession, ‘[Burgess] describes a squalid mixed Grammar School [...]. In practice, even in 1951, Grammar School entrants would have been selected by a rigorous test; but in Burgess’ world they are near-illiterates, drooling delinquents.’<sup>161</sup> There are also inconsistencies in terms of how Burgess esteemed Wagner’s standing in *The Worm*. In the Samuel Coale interview, it is put to Burgess that modernist writers used myth to give coherence to a world that was incoherent. After he paid due reverence to Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Burgess was dismissive of myth, ‘The myth element is not in the least important. I don’t think it matters in the slightest. It’s mere nonsense.’<sup>162</sup> This was a view shared by one reviewer writing in the *Times Literary Supplement* who discusses the novel without mentioning Wagner.<sup>163</sup> And yet Burgess would later recall that Wagner’s *Der Ring* was ‘not altogether arbitrary. The hierarchy of gods, heroes and dwarfs found a parallel in a grammar school. The gods had their specialisations, just like teachers.’<sup>164</sup> Moreover, Burgess could not have felt Wagner to have been so very incidental to his text. In his article for *The Listener*,

<sup>157</sup> For more details on factual elements in Burgess’ novel and similar libel cases that his publishers Heinemann were involved in at the time, see Biswell, *The Real Life*, 133. and 268–271. respectively.

<sup>158</sup> Burgess likely had very little to do with the changes to his novel. Later in life he would recall his original and significantly different ending, rather than the one the novel has to this day. See Burgess, *Little Wilson*, 369.

<sup>159</sup> Anthony Burgess, ‘Guilt’s a Good Thing,’ in *Conversations with Anthony Burgess*, ed. Earl G. Ingersoll and Mary C. Ingersoll (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008) 115–135, 118.

<sup>160</sup> Unknown, ‘Why I Wrote,’ 3.

<sup>161</sup> R. G. G. Price, ‘New Novels,’ review of *The Worm and the Ring* by Anthony Burgess, *Punch*, June 28, 1961.

<sup>162</sup> Anthony Burgess, ‘Guilt’s a Good Thing,’ 125.

<sup>163</sup> Unknown, ‘Sparing the Rod,’ review of *The Worm and the Ring* by Anthony Burgess, *Times Literary Supplement*, July 7, 1961.

<sup>164</sup> Burgess, *Little Wilson*, 368.

the same in which he describes *The Ring* as ‘a glittering storehouse from which the literary [...] artist can take what he wants’, Burgess follows a quote from *The Worm* with: ‘For a long time I was able to take the ring on its fairy-story level.’<sup>165</sup> Burgess does not define what the ‘fairy-story’ level of reading is but this is at least not an outright dismissal of Wagner’s literary significance. Herein lies a consistency to Burgess’ thought for he continues:

I discovered, to my horror, that Wagner was supposed to be responsible for the Nazi movement and, further back, the rise of German imperialism. It all had something to do with anti-semitism and, in a very erroneous association, with Nietzsche and the Superman.<sup>166</sup>

Throughout the article Burgess continues to dispel the Nazi appropriation of Wagner. His tone is clearly scathing of the ideological ‘meaning’ that has been imposed upon the composer due to his association with the Nazis. Burgess is scathing of people who accept the misappropriation: ‘Some people still feel guilty when they enjoy Wagner, and, of course, Wagner was Hitler’s favourite composer.’<sup>167</sup> By choosing words such as ‘still’ and ‘of course’ Burgess undermines the validity of Wagner’s misappropriations. It is a subtle irony that pre-figures his later parody of Wagner reception in *The Pianoplayers*, *Mozart*, and *Byrne*. It is in *The Worm* that Burgess first becomes critical of British reception of European musical culture.

Burgess is inconsistent in the way in which he writes Wagner into his *The Worm*. The most sustained and obvious mirroring of Wagner’s tetralogy is the opening of the novel. Burgess writes in close and unsustainable details in a bid to include Wagner. As the novel progresses the associations become weaker; in Burgess’ own words, ‘The realism overcame the symbolism.’<sup>168</sup> Often there are only the names of characters to suggest the composer. In the fourth and final section of the novel, Hilda Connor – representative of Brünnhilde – faces a move to Gibraltar with her husband. The analogy with Wagner is that at the end of *Die Walküre* (1870), Wotan exiles Brünnhilde to a rock surrounded with magic fire. By this point in *The Worm*, Burgess is playing fast and loose with the Wagner analogy. The chronology of the narratives no longer match up and the Wotan equivalent, headmaster Woolton, is in no way responsible for Hilda Connor’s exile. Furthermore, in Burgess’ work, the object of power, a diary rather than a ring, only diminishes in value as the novel progresses. Unlike the ring in Wagner’s dramas, it ultimately plays only a minor role in bringing down liberal headmaster Woolton. Although among the few critics who comment on the novel, Paul Phillips does little more than provide a brief outline of the plot and Wagner references. Phillips also identifies the less obvious allusion to Siegmund’s aria ‘Winterstürme’ from *Die Walküre* and Christopher Howarth’s recollection of *Parsifal*.<sup>169</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Burgess, ‘Wagner’s ‘The Ring’,’ 419.

<sup>166</sup> Burgess, ‘Wagner’s ‘The Ring’,’ 419–20.

<sup>167</sup> Burgess, ‘Wagner’s ‘The Ring’,’ 420.

<sup>168</sup> Burgess, *Little Wilson*, 368.

<sup>169</sup> See Phillips, *A Clockwork Counterpoint*, 58–60.

The title of *The Worm and the Ring*, is enough to mark out Burgess' intentions with respect to Wagner as playful; it prompts associations with the trivial fungal infection ringworm. 'Worm' also suggests 'Wurm', the German name for Wagner's Fafnir the dragon, who is eventually killed by Siegfried. Burgess continues this light-hearted tone into the opening of the novel:

The February school day (1951) finished, mad with electric bells spelling release. In the caverns of the cloakrooms there was treble laughter and guffaws rang under the showers. The whole building seemed to turn to water – flushing cisterns, hissing taps, elementary games in the urinals. Musical appreciation in the School Hall ended abruptly, two bars before the final bar of the Handel hornpipe, and the Hanoverian Thames was tipped into the basin. And outside was rain.<sup>170</sup>

Like the opening of *Das Rheingold* (1869), set at the bottom of the river Rhine, water is a prominent feature. Wagner's opening of sustained E flat major chords (so evocative of natural tranquillity) have been thrown out by industrial sounding 'electrical bells', 'hissing taps' and 'flushing cisterns'. The setting of schoolboy's toilets with mention of 'elementary games in the urinals' is Burgess bordering on a, quite literal, 'piss-take'. Musical appreciation does not come naturally and it requires teaching; the end of the lesson is described as a 'release'. British-German composer George Fredrick Handel's (1685–1759) *Water Music* (1717), itself a British-German compound, 'Hanoverian Thames', is poured down the sink. Burgess evokes Wagner's subterranean Nibelheim by referring to schoolchildren as 'raincoated dwarfs'.<sup>171</sup> Alberich's counterpart, uncouth schoolboy Albert Rich, enters the scene at this point to steal the diary and object of power, from schoolgirl Flossie. Flossie, along with Linda and Thelma, form the equivalent of Rhinemaidens Flosshilde, Woglinde and Wellgunde. Just as the Rhinemaidens tease Alberich, so too is Albert Rich tormented by the schoolgirls: 'His acne-blotched mug looked evil at her, sexy little bitch as she was. She screamed, but the scream sounded like laughter.'<sup>172</sup> From early on in his inclusion of Wagner in his works, Burgess associates Wagner and music with sex and desire. Specifically, the 'scream that sounded like laughter' is musically close to Wagner who included sung laughter in the libretto for this scene of *Das Rheingold*.

Geoffrey Aggeler's account of *The Worm* remains the most comprehensive.<sup>173</sup> Aggeler primarily focuses on Burgess' depiction of the conflict between liberal and conservative values within the context of a Catholic marriage and the running of a Grammar School. Nonetheless, Burgess' disparaging treatment of British culture is acknowledged as an important feature of the novel. To this end, the industrialised updating of *Das Rheingold* and Burgess' setting of the novel in 1951, the year of the Festival of Britain, are not arbitrary. Aggeler connects these circumstances with Burgess' treatment of teachers:

<sup>170</sup> Anthony Burgess, *The Worm and the Ring* (London: Heinemann, 1970), 3.

<sup>171</sup> Burgess, *The Worm*, 3.

<sup>172</sup> Burgess, *The Worm*, 4.

<sup>173</sup> Geoffrey Aggeler, *Anthony Burgess: The Artist as Novelist* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1979), 58–68

[T]he scope of [the novel's] social criticism is much broader than the treatment of teachers. Indeed, the undervaluing of teachers is shown to be symptomatic of a national drift towards philistinism. England has 'spewed up the old values' and there remains little to celebrate.<sup>174</sup>

The deterioration of British culture, so ironic in the year of the Festival of Britain, is so pervasive and characteristic to the novel that Aggeler elsewhere describes *The Worm* as 'one of Burgess better novels [...] because it is such a memorable record of conditions that should have generated national shame in the year of the Festival.'<sup>175</sup> Aggeler is right to view Burgess' treatment of Britain in this way although he fails to frame this within the context of the novel's portrayal of European culture. The rift between the two is portrayed most starkly during the school trip to Paris. The school children are unenthused upon their arrival in the city. Howarth tells them:

'There are plenty of things to do. Look, there are maps, there are books, there are magazines.'  
 'They're all in French, sir,'  
 'How terribly unjust,' said Howarth. 'How wrong that the French should be permitted to have a language other than English. I shall speak to the Government about it.'<sup>176</sup>

This passage emphasises just how alien any non-Anglophone world or experience is to the school children. The children's philistinism is an indictment of their education and teachers; Burgess portrays the children as inhabiting a world that is divided into the English and the foreign. Their expectations of France do not extend beyond cultural cliché: 'Where were the bellied priests and bearded painters and special elegant thin women?'<sup>177</sup> The purpose of the school trip was only ostensibly to broaden the children's outlook, in reality it was an excuse for Howarth to spend time with Miss Connor. Albert Rich summarises the failure of the visit to Paris:

'[...] Waste of time it was. A lot of old frogs jabbering away all the time, and everything smelling of them strong onions. Picture galleries and what-not. We could have gone to London for the Festival of Britain and gone on them Domes of Discovery and things. It was a waste of time.'<sup>178</sup>

Rich's English is poor, to say nothing of his French. The next step along Rich's regression is to consider cultural worth to correlate to nationality. Stereotypes of culture condemn that which is French as inferior to that which is British. Burgess' wry humour has Rich describe Britain's leading cultural achievement of the time as 'them Domes of Discovery and things.'<sup>179</sup> Rich would far rather have had the money for his trip spent on a television.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Aggeler, 'Artist as Novelist,' 58–9.

<sup>175</sup> Aggeler, 'Artist as Novelist,' 64.

<sup>176</sup> Burgess, *The Worm*, 171.

<sup>177</sup> Burgess, *The Worm*, 167.

<sup>178</sup> Burgess, *The Worm*, 202.

<sup>179</sup> Burgess, *The Worm*, 202.

In light of such a contrasting representation of British and European culture, Aggeler's summary of Wagner in the novel as a 'burlesque of [...] *Der Ring*'<sup>180</sup> is accurate and yet insufficient. Burgess is consciously producing a British novel based on one of Europe's most renowned cultural endeavours. In some sense the novel embodies a contradiction; it is a work that argues against philistinism and yet transposes Wagner's lofty mythology onto the banal setting of rain-soaked semi-rural Britain. Burgess' parody of Wagner allows the novel as a whole to be read as being the very thing it condemns – a British and inferior version of something that was once grand European high art. Alternatively, were *The Worm* to be read by one who missed the allusions to Wagner, the novel has the potential to exist as a joke at the expense of those who, like Albert Rich, it condemns. Later in his career Burgess would go on to parody the legacy of Wagner within British culture. Whilst *The Worm*, by its very existence, secures a place for Wagner reception within British culture, it also plays with and warns against the possibility that Wagner may one day go unnoticed in British cultural life.

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<sup>180</sup> Aggeler, 'Artist as Novelist,' 59.

### Chapter 3: Demythologising: The Sexual Duality of Wagner in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*.

#### The myths of gender stereotypes: Zero, Wagner and misogyny

Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* is a text that deals overtly with new and emerging ideas of gender construction and sexuality. In this respect it has received close and comprehensive critical attention. Typical of such approaches is that taken by Roberta Rubenstein who contextualises Carter's work through the feminist theory of the time and since, considering it prominent among novels that are:

Illustrative of Gilbert's observations concerning the relationship between cultural flux and literary representations of gender anomalousness, and concurrent with Clement and Cixous's theorized "newly born woman," in the mid-seventies two novels (among others) were published that interrogate reigning ideologies concerning biological gender, socialised gender roles, and bisexuality or androgyny: Lois Gould's *A Sea-Change* (1976) and Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*.<sup>181</sup>

Rubenstein is sensitive to the evolving gender and feminist theory of the period during and since the publication of the novels that she discusses. An appreciation of the historical context necessary to properly interpret Carter's novel, it seems, can only be gleaned from a retrospective point of view some years later:

As fictional expressions and critiques of a period during which the "nature" of gender roles was beginning to be re-evaluated and challenged by feminists, [the texts] apparently interrogate but in fact are more or less complicit in the gendered scripts that dominated their moment in historical experience. Nonetheless, these novels, re-read in the nineties with awareness of their historical context, suggest a link between social disruption and literary representation comparable to the one that Clement and Cixous suggest in deconstructing male visions of the feminine and that Gilbert describes in considering modernists' preoccupation with gender and "genderlessness".<sup>182</sup>

Rubenstein goes on to argue that the 1970s did in fact offer a period of social disruption that accompanies interrogations of gender paradigms: 'The turbulence of the 1970s, distinguished by disruptions of the war in Vietnam and the rise of the women's movement [...] give historical context to these fables of gender "misrule" and social disorder.'<sup>183</sup> Rubenstein argues convincingly that Carter does in fact interrogate notions of gender, specifically along the lines of Clement and Cixous' "newly born woman". Nevertheless, it remains that gender identity and transformation are fundamental concerns of the novel's narrative. It is precisely because gender roles and experience occupy such a central part of the novel that it can

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<sup>181</sup> Roberta Rubenstein, 'Intersexions: Gender Metamorphosis in Angela Carter's "The Passion of New Eve" and Lois Gould's "A Sea-Change",' in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 12, no. 1 (1993): 104-5.

<sup>182</sup> Rubenstein, 'Intersexions,' 105.

<sup>183</sup> Rubenstein, 'Intersexions,' 105.

become difficult to pass comment on the text's relation to gender; inferences made along these lines can sometimes seem too obvious or simplistic to state.

Carter interrogates gender in a very specific way, attacking the myth of constructed femininity. In this respect, 'myth' is used in its sense of referring to something false or arbitrarily fabricated. In an essay, 'Notes from the Front Line' (1983), Carter is explicit in her contempt for myth:

This is also the product of an absolute and *committed materialism* – i.e., that *this* world is all that there is, and in order to question the nature of reality one must move from a strongly grounded base in what constitutes material reality. Therefore, I become mildly irritated [...] when people [...] ask me about the 'mythic quality' of work I've written lately. Because I believe that all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice. I'm in the demythologising business.<sup>184</sup>

Carter shuns the spiritual and any associations that the material world may have with such. If myths reflect only 'material human practice' then Carter sees it as her duty to divest them of the power that they are perceived as carrying in suggesting a transcendental or spiritual function. Specifically, Carter identifies *The Passion of New Eve* as the novel in which she consciously attempted to do this, 'I wrote one anti-mythic novel in 1977, *The Passion of New Eve* – I conceived it as a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity, amongst other things'.<sup>185</sup> This is a work that deconstructs and shows as empty myths that relate to many aspects of society; the most prominent of which is more accurately described as gender or sexuality, rather than simply 'femininity'. Part of this interrogation takes place through the character of Zero, a tyrannical misogynist. He is a caricature of the hyper-masculine who devotes his life to a mono-mania of hunting the spectacular movie-star Tristessa, epitome of femininity and the one whom Zero blames – irrationally – for his infertility. The extremity of Zero's characterisation is not simply parodic but so ostentatious as to appear fragile. Portrayal of Zero is mediated through references to Wagner. Zero not only listens to Wagner's music but also appears as a type of Wotan and shares certain biographical details with the composer himself. Finally, Wagner was the composer-philosopher completely devoted to Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), that theorist of sublimation.<sup>186</sup> Given the deep and obvious ironies that Eve, the focus of Zero's violent sexual attention, was once a man and that Tristessa – Zero's object of obsession as the epitome of femininity – is later revealed to be a man, associations with Wagner support the idea that Zero does not act out his true motives, but rather suppresses and sublimates. In short, Carter deploys extreme examples of gender stereotypes to highlight their emptiness. Wagner is the driving force of such parody.

In Carter's mind, Wagner is a figure ripe for a parody that will undermine such myths. There is a tension between her love of Wagner's music, the philosophy of the composer and

<sup>184</sup> Carter, 'Notes from the Front Line,' 38.

<sup>185</sup> Carter, 'Notes from the Front Line,' 38.

<sup>186</sup> See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea: abridged in one volume*, trans. David Berman (London: Phoenix, 1995). For an account of Schopenhauer's impact on Wagner see Paul Dawson-Bowling, *The Wagner Experience and its Meaning to us* (Brecon: Old Street Publishing, 2003), 39.

the countless appropriations that his mythical dramas – and their devotees – have come to garner. In her essay, ‘Wagner and the Mistral’ (1975), Carter writes of her attendance at an outdoor amphitheatre production of *Die Walküre*:

Because it is not the music of Wagner that offends me, I love it, even if that gut-rotting pessimism of he who sympathises too passionately with the love-suicide warps the, yes, nobility of the whole conception. [...] No. It is the idea of drama as a religious occasion, the elevation of the artist to the role of priest or philosopher that’s Wagner’s real crime. This is the con-trick of all con-tricks and though, like all confidence tricks, it contains a great element of vengeance, it has also taken in artists themselves, which is a great pity.<sup>187</sup>

Carter attacks myth in the sense of the mythical status Wagner the man has come to occupy. He is a con-artist, one who is only perceived as the force that he claims to be, a myth that even other artists have bought in to. The music may well be quite separate from these claims to grandeur but it nonetheless plays a part in disillusioning people as to the mythical status of its creator, ‘that gut-rotting pessimism of he who sympathises too passionately with the love-suicide [...]’. At another point, Carter summarises the composer, ‘Not so much a case study in the pathology of genius but one of the great con men of all time, who saw around him an incontinent yearning for a universal genius and hurry-scurried to fit the bill.’<sup>188</sup> The personality of Wagner took on mythic proportions. Carter regards the historical presence of Wagner in western high culture with contempt. Yet, fittingly, Wagner also brings a set of contrary appropriations that make him particularly useful to undermining the myth of gender stereotypes; for Wagner has been appropriated within traditions of both the decadent/effete and patriarchal misogyny.

Wagner’s alignment with the patriarchal has been taken up by critics, most notably Eva Rieger, who have read Wagner’s music dramas as embodying problematic treatments of women.<sup>189</sup> More damning than these types of arguments however, are those that see Wagner the man, as well as his works, as a figure-head for the culture and society of his time. Peter Morris-Keitel, Alexa Larson-Thorisch and Audrius Dundzila in *Re-Reading Wagner* view the shift within opera from the eighteenth- to nineteenth-century as encompassing a change of purpose, specifically, ‘the purpose of opera [was] no longer [...] to glorify absolutism, but rather to serve as a means of bourgeois emancipation.’<sup>190</sup> The consequences of this emancipation were to have problematic effects on gender dynamics within society:

The rise of the bourgeoisie also led to a change in and a polarization of gender roles. The striving of the preceding era for romantic and Young German ideals of emancipation were now replaced by a new ideological activism centred around and dominated by the masculine. [...] Such models of masculinity dominated the art, the music, the philosophy and the literature of the time. Prevalent were encounters with

<sup>187</sup> Carter, ‘Wagner and the Mistral,’ 340.

<sup>188</sup> Carter, ‘Wagner and the Mistral,’ 337.

<sup>189</sup> Eva Rieger, *Richard Wagner’s Women*, trans. Chris Walton (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011).

<sup>190</sup> Peter Morris-Keitel, Alexa Larson-Thorisch and Audrius Dundzila, ‘Transgression and Affirmation: Gender Roles, Moral Codes and Utopian Visions in Richard Wagner’s Operas’ in *Re-reading Wagner*, p.61.



the heroic man, who embodied physical power, lust for hunting, readiness for battle, and a defiance of law and order.<sup>191</sup>

It is easy to see how Wagner's works, in particular his iconic 'heldentenors', became proponents of precisely this type of masculinity. Wagner the essayist, political dissident and most significantly, nationalist, can easily be viewed as being inextricably bound with this type of masculinity: '[...] a strong appeal to feelings of nationalism was made quite often, thereby presenting the great individual as the masculine role model'.<sup>192</sup> Carter's view of Wagner as con-man facilitates something of this multivalence, for the disparity is between the image of the composer (created and perceived) and the man himself. It is also significant to the treatment of Wagner in Carter's novel that Morris-Keitel *et al* view this dominance of masculinity as the predominant cause of suppression of women within European society: 'This cult of the masculine inevitably led to new forms of repression regarding bourgeois women. [...] This led to the dogma of "natural determination" of women, whose niche was away from the active centre of cultural development'.<sup>193</sup> In this light, references to Wagner are emblematic not only of a promotion of a particular type of masculinity but also of an anti-feminine one.

It is this anti-feminine appropriation of Wagner that Carter would go on to reference in the eponymous short story of her *The Bloody Chamber* collection. The naïve seventeen year-old narrator is courted by the sadistic Marquis at a performance of *Tristan und Isolde*. As a work suffused by sex and death, *Tristan* is an entirely appropriate reference to characterise the Marquis and his intentions. By the narrative's close, the Marquis is revealed as the sadistic, sexually violent torturer and murderer of his previous wives; the narrator narrowly escapes such a fate. Music plays an important role in the short story. The narrator is a pianist and her performances of Claude Debussy's impressionistic pieces for piano form the antithesis to the high-romantic *Tristan*. Debussy's music is a source of comfort to the narrator during her isolation in the hostile masculine environment of the Marquis' castle. In a very different way from Burgess' *The Pianoplayers*, Wagner facilitates a close alignment between music and sex. Unlike *The Worm and the Ring* or *The Pianoplayers*, the parody is honed to a more serious and purposeful end where much of the humour has vanished. In *The Bloody Chamber*, Wagner foreshadows a very real and serious threat of sexual violence against the narrator. If any humour remains in *The passion of New Eve*, it is at the expense of the ridiculousness of Zero as a character, rather than his tyrannical rule.

Surreal and graphic, *The Passion of New Eve*, sets out a dystopian view of America in the not too distant future. It charts Evelyn's, later Eve's, journey travelling from New York across the American desert. Evelyn first encounters the underground radical militant feminists of Beulah where he is forced to undergo the operation to become Eve. It is at the point of Eve's escape from the subterranean city that Zero enters the narrative. As a violent misogynist he is the obvious, though equally deplorable, antithesis to what Eve has just experienced in Beulah. In light of Wagner's misogynistic associations, Zero is appropriately

<sup>191</sup> Morris-Keitel, Larson-Thorisch and Dundwila, *Transgression and Affirmation*, 62.

<sup>192</sup> Morris-Keitel, Larson-Thorisch and Dundwila, *Transgression and Affirmation*, 62.

<sup>193</sup> Morris-Keitel, Larson-Thorisch and Dundwila, *Transgression and Affirmation*, 62.

portrayed by alluding to the composer. Zero keeps a bust of Nietzsche, that thinker so redolent of Wagner and the cult of personality, on his desk. There is perhaps a reference here to Hitler, another authoritarian so infamously associated with Wagner and Nietzsche. Morris-Keitel *et al* single Nietzsche out as a proponent of misogynistic thought: ‘Friedrich Nietzsche reduced such stereotypes even further in characterising man by his war-time abilities and woman by her fertility.’<sup>194</sup> Zero believes and promulgates a philosophy of complete masculine superiority:

In whispers, [the wives] told me how Zero believed women were fashioned of a different soul substance from men, a more primitive, animal stuff and so did not need the paraphernalia of civilised society such as cutlery, meat, soap, shoes, etc. though of course, he did.<sup>195</sup>

Carter’s language is carefully chosen to reveal something of the power dynamics within Zero’s compound. The wives recount the state of affairs to Eve(lyn) using a spuriously highbrow language that is parodic of problematic strain of nineteenth-century thought as alluded to by Morris-Keitel: ‘women were fashioned of a different soul substance from men, a more primitive, animal stuff’ and ‘paraphernalia of civilised society’. The oppression of Zero’s wives is so great that they do not see what an absurd notion this is. What is presumably Eve(lyn)’s choice of words is so basic and mundane by contrast that it serves to show just how ridiculous their delusion is: ‘such as meat, cutlery, soap, shoes, etc. though of course, he did.’ Carter’s narrator shows a simultaneous contempt for both an oppressive pseudo-philosophical thought and the subservient mind-set that uncritically accepts it. Wagner may not be being directly referenced here, but his looming presence around this moment in the narration is suggestive of the types of historic attitudes that Carter is here being critical of.

Zero is hyper-masculine and anti-feminine to the point that his sexuality seems all the more fragile. Among the few things that Zero loves are guns, an obvious phallic symbol, emblematic of power and aggression: ‘He loved guns almost as much as he cherished misanthropy’.<sup>196</sup> To similar effect Zero also has a preoccupation with knives (‘He removed a knife from his weapon bristling belt and tossed it lightly at Tristessa.’).<sup>197</sup> At another point Zero sits at his desk, ‘fingering his knife’.<sup>198</sup> Masculinity is synonymous with aggression. The phallic symbols of knives, guns and a wooden leg are obvious, just as the depiction of sexual violence is overt and unflinching. Indeed, the references to Wagner only strengthen Zero’s characterisation as a violent, aggressive misogynist. Tellingly, the first explicit mention of Wagner comes after Eve is raped for the first time:

When Zero had finished with me, he went into the house with jumping dog at his heels and banged the door. [...] Zero sat in solitary state in his study, the next room.

<sup>194</sup> Morris-Keitel, Larson-Thorisch and Dundwila, *Transgression and Affirmation*, 62.

<sup>195</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 84.

<sup>196</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 83.

<sup>197</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 88.

<sup>198</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 88.

Music, Wagner, played so loudly on his transistorised cassette recorder that it filled our room, too.<sup>199</sup>

The association between Wagner and sexual violence is two-fold. Not only is listening to Wagner the first thing that Zero does after raping Eve, but by playing the music so loudly that it fills both rooms it mimics an act of forcefulness; all are made to hear it whether they consent or not.

### Wagner the decadent: queerness and the effete

Before expounding further on the ways in which Wagner supports the misogynistic characteristics of Zero, it is important to consider the opposite side to appropriations of the composer. For it is when Zero's masculinity is at its most extreme that it appears most fragile and the antithetical associations of Wagner begin to come in to play. Some of the most prominent late nineteenth-century devotees of Wagner are aligned, quite notoriously, with the aesthetic 'decadent' movement. Jane Desmarais and Chris Baldick acknowledge the difficulty in defining 'decadence' and even resist referring to it as movement: 'Bringing this literary-artistic tendency under anything like a stable definition is notoriously difficult.'<sup>200</sup> Who else but Wagner could come to mind when they refer to the Decadent as: 'a connoisseur of the passing cloud. Flux and ephemera and temporary sensations, particularly in luxurious material consumption and sexual excess'?'<sup>201</sup> Alfred Engstrom, Clive Scott and Jenifer Presto proffer a relevant definition in terms of gender identity: 'gender ambiguity and anxiety, which were reflected in, among other things, the decadents' complex attraction to and identification with the femme fatale Salome'.<sup>202</sup> It is no coincidence that late nineteenth-century Paris was simultaneously a hot bed of Wagnerism and decadence.<sup>203</sup> As John Louis DiGaetani phrases it: 'Aesthetes and decadents like Wilde, Symons, and Beardsley exulted in the glories of French Symbolist poetry and made it fashionable in the 90s. Wagner has long been recognised as the father of French Symbolist poetry.'<sup>204</sup> From French Symbolism, via the likes of Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), and Théophile Gautier (1811–1872), to Decadence and beyond, Wagner can be traced as an evolving element of influence throughout European literary culture.<sup>205</sup>

Wagner and his works can further be situated within the tradition of decadence according to the criticism that both attract. Decadence is often recognised as 'a term used ostensibly in reference to periods or works whose qualities are held to mark a "falling away" from

<sup>199</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 83.

<sup>200</sup> Jane Desmarais and Chris Baldick, ed., *Decadence: An Annotated Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>201</sup> Desmarais and Baldick, *Decadence*, 5.

<sup>202</sup> Alfred Engstrom, Clive Scott and Jenifer Presto, 'Decadence,' in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* ed. Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 338.

<sup>203</sup> See Elwood Hartman, *French Literary Wagnerism* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988).

<sup>204</sup> John Louis DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel* (London: Associated University Press, 1978), 16. For an account of decadence as a literary movement, see Arthur Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature,' *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*, June 1, 1893, Periodicals Index Online.

<sup>205</sup> It is a tradition realised in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, a poem that owes a debt to both French Symbolism, especially Baudelaire, and Wagner. See T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004), 59–80.

previously recognized conditions or standards of excellence.<sup>206</sup> It was Nietzsche, curiously also revered by Zero, who levelled the charge against the composer in his essay, *The Case of Wagner*:

*To the artist of decadence:* there we have the crucial words. And here my seriousness begins. I am far from looking on guilelessly while this decadent corrupts our health - and music as well. Is Wagner a human being at all? Isn't he rather a sickness? He makes sick whatever he touches – *he has made music sick*. A typical decadent who has a sense of necessity in his corrupted taste, who claims it as a higher taste, who knows how to get his corruption accepted as law, as progress, as fulfilment.<sup>207</sup>

Carter was not the first to lay the charge of 'con-man' at Wagner's door. Nietzsche went one step further in aligning Wagner firmly within the tradition of decadence and in so doing marking his work out as not only inferior in quality but degenerate. Given that among decadents there was a tendency to 'caricature the extravagance and debauchery of the Romans and indulge in refined self-parody', a charge such as that laid by Nietzsche was only ever likely to encourage followers of Wagner.<sup>208</sup> It is therefore hardly surprising that Wagner should inspire works such as Aubrey Beardsley's (1872–1898) *Under the Hill* (1903), a parody of Wagner's version of the Tannhäuser legend.

Beardsley's lesser-known posthumously published novel receives significant attention from Raymond Furness in his *Wagner and Literature*.<sup>209</sup> In the chapter 'Wagner and Decadence' Furness draws on Beardsley's text as well as biographical details of the composer to align Wagner with not only a decadent but also queer cultural tradition. Unsurprisingly, Wagner's long-standing association with King Ludwig II (1845–1886), draws comment in this respect:<sup>210</sup>

[The] young king, enraptured by Wagner's music, fled into a world of make-believe, fairy-tale and Wagnerian excess: the house of Wittelsbach and King Ludwig II. That such a king should have adored such a composer provided a fruitful source for any account of wanton aestheticism.<sup>211</sup>

Once the link between Wagner and decadence has been made, there remains little to do in extending an homosexual appropriation to Wagner. Furness is at his most explicit in developing these ties when discussing the influence of Wagner on Beardsley. As Furness points out, Beardsley is better known for his illustrations, including his 'Wagner drawings' and contributions to the 'Yellow Book'.<sup>212</sup> In terms of queerness however, it is *Under the Hill* that proves most illuminating. After summarising the work as 'an amusing transposition of Wagner's theme [from *Tannhäuser*] into a Rococo setting, a *galanterie* of witty and preposterous obscenity', Furness goes on to identify specifically homosexual elements of the

<sup>206</sup> Engstrom, Scott and Presto 'Decadence,' 338.

<sup>207</sup> Nietzsche, 'The Case of Wagner', 620.

<sup>208</sup> Desmarais and Baldick, *Decadence*, 5.

<sup>209</sup> Raymond Furness, *Wagner and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982).

<sup>210</sup> The association was popularised in Luchino Visconti's 1973 film *Ludwig*.

<sup>211</sup> Furness, *Wagner and Literature*, 55.

<sup>212</sup> Furness, *Wagner and Literature*, 38.

novel with Wagner.<sup>213</sup> The protagonist's study of the opening scene to *Das Rheingold*, prompts an overtly homosexual imitation on his behalf:

The Chevalier rises at eleven, slips off a charming nightdress and, after posing before a long mirror, steps into a bath with his servant boys, an obvious variation on the opening scene of that music drama which he had just been studying.<sup>214</sup>

Beardsley's *Das Rheingold* reference within the overarching *Tannhäuser* parody strengthens the idea that Wagner is directly responsible for the homosexual elements of the text. The protagonist is inspired to homosexual acts by *Das Rheingold* and carries them out in a conscious imitation of that same work but also as an unconscious imitation of *Tannhäuser* in Venusberg. Furness concludes his comments on Beardsley's text by acknowledging that allusions to Wagner can connote different and even opposite ends of a spectrum: 'Beardsley's *Tannhäuser* [...] would be more appropriate to the *Folies Bergères* than to the *Festspielhaus*'.<sup>215</sup> Even though multiplicity of meaning is only being obliquely referred to here in relation to the matter of high- versus low-brow, Furness has begun to acknowledge that the references to Wagner do not point towards a single end. The multivalence contained within allusions to Wagner is the very thing that attracts Carter to the composer as being of such utility in her attempts to 'demythologise'.

A somewhat more nuanced assessment of the sexual associations that the Wagner references have come to suggest is provided by Mitchell Morris. Commenting in 2006 on Wagner's essay 'The Art-Work of the Future' (1849), Morris argues:

[I]t would seem that Wagner favoured an account of homoeroticism, with potentially physical expression, that saw such desire as hyper-masculine rather than transgendered. One of the famous difficulties of masculinity as a spectacle, though, is that the more it is put on display, the less naturalised, the less unquestioned, and the more vulnerable it seems to be. We call masculinity into question as soon as we put it on display. Claims to "healthy" masculinity become all the more suspect when trumpeted in a heady aesthetic text written by a notorious voluptuary known for his taste for the wives of other men, pink satin bathrobes, and perfumed baths. This helped set the stage for visual joke-like caricatures.<sup>216</sup>

This lengthy passage is worth quoting verbatim because it contains a number of important implications when considering how allusions to Wagner will come to bear on representations of masculinity and how such pertain to sexuality. Morris is more explicit than Furness in drawing the connection between decadence, 'pink satin bathrobes and perfumed baths', and homosexuality ('Wagner favoured an account of homoeroticism, with potentially physical expression'). More significantly, Morris' arguments carry more importance when discussing Wagner in terms of masculinity, hyper-masculinity and transgender identities. Morris focuses

<sup>213</sup> Furness, *Wagner and Literature*, 38.

<sup>214</sup> Furness, *Wagner and Literature*, 39.

<sup>215</sup> Furness, *Wagner and Literature*, 40.

<sup>216</sup> Mitchell Morris, 'Homosexuality and the Manly Absolute: Hanns Fuchs on Richard Wagner,' *The Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 330.

on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century writer Hanns Fuchs (1881-1909?), including Fuchs's essay, 'Richard Wagner und die Homosexualität'. This essay is important in re-enforcing not only the link that has historically been drawn between the composer and a homosexual following/appropriation but also in opening up a discussion of how Wagner may support or subvert gender stereotypes. For Morris, the effete element of Wagner arises directly out of the composer's image of masculinity: 'Claims to "healthy" masculinity become all the more suspect when trumpeted in a heady aesthetic text written by a notorious voluptuary known for his taste for [...] pink satin bathrobes, and perfumed baths.' Morris views masculinity as having the potential to be self-defeating in that it suggests the opposite. As one so devoted to spectacle and invested in the cult-of-personality, Wagner becomes an increasingly obvious choice for Carter as a reference point. Incorporations of Wagner suggest both ends of the masculine/effete binary and in so doing subvert established and – as Carter sees it – arbitrary, paradigms of gender.

### Cultural and textual embodiments of Wagner

By virtue of its multiple and contrary connotations, the Wagner references in Carter's *New Eve* also suggest an interesting insight into the narrator. It is telling that Eve(lyn) is able to identify not only Wagner as the sole composer of the music played, but Eve(lyn) also knows specific passages of Wagner's works by name:

Since the only tapes he possessed were of the music of Wagner, we performed our high kicks in ragged unison to Siegfried's journey down the Rhine or the love duet from Tristan or the ride of the Valkyrie. He played the music very loudly [...]<sup>217</sup>

This passage informs the reader about something of the nature of Zero. His devotion to Wagner does not translate into anything as wholesome as a love of music. The attachment is more likely fetishistic; the pieces listed here are highlights from Wagner, a 'popular classics' or 'greatest hits' selection. Of more interest is that Eve also betrays a familiarity with these works. Carter appreciates that the historic reception of Wagner is such that this is knowledge that could characterise the narrator in both a masculine way, an appropriation along the lines of Morris-Keitel et al, or in a feminine way, an appropriation in the vein of Morris. Either Eve recalls the Wagner passages from her time spent as a man, or has since encountered them in her time as a woman. There is more evidence to suggest the former. Eve's narrative is steeped in extensive allusions to major touchstones of western culture; references to Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and especially Carl Jung (1875–1961) abound, as well as composers, such as Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) and writer-artists such as William Blake (1757–1827). An assimilation of the background necessary to make these intertextual references occurs over a long period of time, making them on balance more likely to have been acquired during the narrator's presumably greater period of time spent as Evelyn. At the start of the narration Evelyn is at least old enough to be sexually active and to travel to America to take a teaching post at a University.<sup>218</sup> By the end of the narration, Eve is referred

<sup>217</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 100.

<sup>218</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 5–9.

to by the old woman on the beach only as ‘Young Eve’.<sup>219</sup> There is little to suggest that any significant period of time has elapsed between the actual end of the narration and its retelling. Even if this is not so, the conclusion of the narrative remains ethereal and sublime to the point that it is hard to imagine Eve acquiring both the aural and nominal knowledge of Wagner’s music dramas. Knowledge of Wagner is more likely to be a small aspect of Evelyn’s broader assimilation of western culture.

Reading the narrator’s knowledge of Wagner in this way creates an interesting and illuminating link between him/herself and Zero. It is through repeated acts of sexual violence perpetrated by Zero on the narrator that Eve(lyn) comes to recognise him/herself as a one-time sexual aggressor:

[...] our marital encounters, therefore, took place at a pitch of intensity that filled me with terror. Each time, a renewed defloration, as if his violence perpetually refreshed my virginity. And more than my body, some other yet equally essential part of my being was ravaged by him for, when he mounted me with his single eye blazing like the mouth of an automatic, his little body imperfectly stripped, I felt myself to be, not myself, but he; and the experience of this crucial lack of self [...] forced me to know myself as a former violator at the moment of my own violation.<sup>220</sup>

In this light, the Wagner Reference seems apt at characterising both Zero and Eve(lyn), for the narrator has certainly come to identify him/herself with their attacker. Before developing these arguments further however, it is important to elucidate another less obvious reference to Wagner that Carter works into her text. Zero stands as a representation of the cultural presence of Wagner in a two-fold way.

Firstly, Zero represents a conscious attempt on Carter’s part to caricature Wagner the man. Like Wagner, Zero is an artist, a poet; while Wagner conforms to the nineteenth-century Romantic paradigm of a tempestuous, volatile and isolated creative individual, Zero forms an accurate caricature of the same figure. Wagner is also known for his love of dogs and Zero’s dog, Cain ‘[...] was the one thing Zero loved, beside the sterility of the desert’.<sup>221</sup> The symbol of the dog is again used to invoke Wagner. The dog, like his master, only has one eye, symbolically indicative of his myopic views. These are held by Zero in the form of his misogyny and by Wagner in his renowned antisemitism. Carter is no doubt referencing the mythical monstrous Polyphemus. More specifically, perhaps, she evokes that infamous cyclops of modern literature, Joyce’s antisemitic ‘Citizen’ who, like Zero, has an aggressive dog. The Joycean connection is pertinent as it strengthens the Wagnerian association via an antisemitic link. Zero and the composer become more closely bound by their mutual prejudices and bigotry.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>219</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 185.

<sup>220</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 98.

<sup>221</sup> See Richard Wagner, *My Life*, trans. Andrew Gray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 158-9; Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 87.

<sup>222</sup> See James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: The Bodley Head, 1960).

More overt however, is the symbolic significance of Zero having just one eye. Sigmund Freud made the notorious if somewhat acausal link that saw blindness as symbolic of castration.<sup>223</sup> For all Zero revels in his masculinity, he remains castrated. Carter depicts this in no uncertain terms; in addition to Zero's single eye, he is infertile and has a missing limb replaced by a wooden leg. The single eye of Zero also forms a more obvious connection between himself and Wagner's works. Given the many explicit references to Wagner, anyone familiar with his works would recognise in Zero a depiction of Wotan. Wotan is the king of the gods in Teutonic mythology; he is Wagner's protagonist throughout the first half of his *Der Ring des Nibelung*. Wotan is recognisable by his one eye; productions of Wagner's *Der Ring* typically show Wotan wearing, just as Zero does, an eye patch. The portrayal of Zero as a type of Wotan is Carter at her 'demythologising' best. Wagner is being subtly referenced in order to undermine the myth that Zero creates for himself as the ultimate in masculinity; in resembling Wotan, Zero is emasculated. By having the reference to Wotan connote not only emasculation but also its opposite in the form of a patriarchal tyrant, Carter demonstrates that the myths surrounding Wagner and the stereotypes of gender are empty of meaning.

Zero's association with Wotan via a missing eye strengthens his portrayal as an enforcer of violent misogynistic power. Zero lost his eye by violent means '[...] poked out by a broomstick in a brawl with a warder during one of his spells in prison [...]'.<sup>224</sup> Violence and power are suggested by allusions to Wagner. This is not too tenuous a connection to make; for within Wagner's work itself, the loss of Wotan's eye is closely connected with a struggle for power and specifically power over female gods. The loss of Wotan's eye is twice referred to by Wagner throughout *Der Ring*. Most obviously and in close concordance with more traditional Nordic mythology, reference is made to how Wotan gained his power to rule the world by drinking at the spring of wisdom; for which the price was one of his eyes. As recounted by the First Norn in the prelude to *Götterdämmerung*, 'A dauntless god/ came to drink at the spring; one of his eyes/ he paid as toll for all time'.<sup>225</sup> Wotan himself also refers to a similar incident; significantly, he does so in connection with how he was willing to sacrifice an eye in order to win Fricka as his wife. In scene two of *Das Rheingold*, he recounts 'In order to win you as wife./ my one remaining eye/ I staked that I might woo you/ How foolish you are to blame me now'.<sup>226</sup> Translators Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington attach an interesting note to this part of Wotan's dialogue:

There is no contradiction here with the first Norn's account in the prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, where it is said that Wotan sacrificed an eye at the Well of Wisdom. It is clear from the 1852 prose draft that, having forfeited one eye, Wotan offered to stake his remaining one in order to win Fricka. There is nothing in the

<sup>223</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003).

<sup>224</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 101.

<sup>225</sup> Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 281.

<sup>226</sup> Spenser and Millington, *Wagner's Ring*, 72.



Norse sources to substantiate this offer, which was presumably introduced by Wagner to indicate the strength of Wotan's youthful love for Fricka.<sup>227</sup>

Wagner specifically deviated from his sources to portray Wotan as willing to go to excessive lengths to 'win' Fricka for his wife. The physical scar of losing one or both eyes would form an outward aspect that characterises the personality of the god making it easier for future artists to reference, just as Carter has done. That 'youthful love' rather than a misogynistic striving to dominate is Wotan's motive is only speculation on behalf of the translators. Even if Wotan at one time did feel something akin to 'youthful love' for Fricka, by the time the drama is set no such feeling remains. This is widely acknowledged within criticism of *Der Ring*. Commentators are quick to point out that a large part of the cycle and in particular *Die Walküre*, deals with dysfunctional relationships and marriages. This is succinctly put by Jean Shinoda Bolen in a 1992 study of *Der Ring* firmly rooted in the post-feminist era trend of re-reading Wagner: 'Wotan and Fricka are [...] in a dysfunctional patriarchal marriage'.<sup>228</sup> Bolen views *Die Walküre* more broadly as being a work that '[...] focuses on relationships that reflect what we see in dysfunctional families headed by a powerful authoritarian man'.<sup>229</sup> It is easy to see how the presence of Wagner himself but especially his mythical Wotan provides Carter not only with a prototype on which to base her critique of a violent masculine power but also to suggest an indictment of how culture throughout history has been a proponent of that same force.

If Zero is to be taken not only as an embodiment of all negative and aggressive aspects of masculinity but also a personification of history and culture in that same vein, then it is important to consider the consequences of Eve identifying with him. As quoted above, through the acts of rape Zero commits against her, Eve achieves a better understanding of him/herself ('know myself as former violator'). To extend the metaphor, it could therefore be argued that a violent encounter with culture and tradition, however problematic in its appropriations, is somewhat beneficial insofar as it furthers self-knowledge. Carter perhaps has something of Yeats' 'Leda and the Swan' (1923) in mind: 'Did she put on his knowledge with his power/ Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?' (lines 12–13).<sup>230</sup> This is perhaps an unusual thing to argue given Carter's avowedly feminist stance; but it is important to remember that the novel is also engaged with matters of how one relates to the culture one inherits. Another way of describing this would be to refer to *New Eve* as an 'anti-mythic novel'. Yet this is not quite the entire picture. The narrator later recounts how their identity within their second sex was shaped by these encounters:

It was as savage an apprenticeship in womanhood as could have been devised for me [...] to atone for the sins of my first sex vis-à-vis my second sex itself [...] I had

<sup>227</sup> Spender and Millington, *Wagner's Ring*, 364n14.

<sup>228</sup> Jean Shinoda Bolen, *The Ring of Power: A Jungian Understanding of Wagner's Ring Cycle* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 61.

<sup>229</sup> Bolen, *The Ring of Power*, 59.

<sup>230</sup> William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems* (London: Vintage, 1992), 221.

Carter mined Yeats' poem much more extensively in her earlier novel *The Magic Toyshop*. See Angela Carter, *The Magic Toyshop* (London: Virago Press, 1997).

become the thing I was. The mediation of Zero turned me into a woman. More. His peremptory prick turned me into a savage woman.<sup>231</sup>

In light of this passage the forceful encounters with Zero seem more likely to result in a rebellious antithetical attitude against everything that he represents; it is in this sense that violent experience is transformative. The narrator's tone becomes more militant. They are transformed into a 'savage woman' and her attitude to her fellow wives, who do not realise their servitude, is one of 'angry pity'.<sup>232</sup>

*New Eve* is not merely an attempt at purporting a single rebellious stance against the type of aggressive masculinity characterised by Zero. This has been a point of contention within Carter studies. The general consensus views Carter as attacking paradigms of gender itself rather than adopting a single antithetical stance to patriarchy. Arguments that engage with this matter in relation to *New Eve* often rest on Carter's portrayal of the underground militant feminist sect that operates in 'Beulah', immediately preceding the Zero's compound section of the novel. Sarah Gamble adopts such a standpoint and argues of the portrayal of 'Beulah' and the ideologies of its leader 'Mother': 'Only the most uncritical of readers, however, could interpret such claims literally, For Carter's 'demythologising' sentiments are blatantly manifested through satire, exaggeration and grotesque hyperbole.'<sup>233</sup> Gamble is aware that within criticism this is not a universally accepted view and cites Robert Clarke as one such 'uncritical reader'.<sup>234</sup>

Ultimately, Carter's use of Wagner references are such that they work toward her broader subversion of rigid gender paradigms. While representations of Wagner suggest Zero's – and at one time Evelyn's – aggressive masculinity, Carter is aware of how such portrayals can also work to different, even opposite effects. *New Eve* is a text which relies heavily on the phenomenon described by Morris in relation to Wagner and hyper-masculinity: 'One of the famous difficulties of masculinity as a spectacle, though, is that the more it is put on display, the less naturalised, the less unquestioned, and the more vulnerable it seems to be.' The masculinity and misogyny of Zero is deliberately overdetermined by Carter. The characterisation of Zero is a parody of masculinity and one that relies on the techniques Gamble describes as 'satire, exaggeration and grotesque hyperbole'. Wagner is the primary reference point through which this is achieved. Zero's bizarre monomania, the focus of all his efforts, is to hunt and kill the movie star Tristessa: 'Zero had chosen Tristessa as the prime focus of his hatred of the sex; he thought you'd bewitched him'.<sup>235</sup> It is because so much emphasis is placed on woman-hatred and the hyper masculine that there begins to be suggested precisely the opposite; there is an element of over compensation, even sublimation.

Conflicting versions of Wagner reception are precisely what make the composer an ideal target for Carter's parody in deconstructing, or 'demythologising', stereotypical gender

<sup>231</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 104.

<sup>232</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*. 104.

<sup>233</sup> Sarah Gamble, *Angela Carter: Writing From the Front Line* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 124.

<sup>234</sup> Robert Clarke, 'Angela Carter's Desire Machine,' *Women's Studies* 14 (1987):147-61.

<sup>235</sup> Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 88.

paradigms. If Carter was aiming simply to undermine aggressive, problematic masculinity by portraying an extreme example, then such sustained incorporation of Wagner would not be necessary, although it would not be out of place. As such an influential and divisive figure, allusions to Wagner facilitate much more. The homosexual/effete tradition of Wagner reception forms so stark a contrast to Zero's characterisation that both sides appear as arbitrary constructions. Carter's belief that 'all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice', is born out through the ways in which she incorporates Wagner into her text. Both sides of the Wagner reception binary presumably rely on an admiration of the composer's works. Yet Wagner's works are themselves consciously re-worked versions of myth. Carter's 'demythologising' via Wagner, therefore, is further reaching than it first appears. It attacks not only arbitrary and extreme appropriations of the composer but also the foundation of what these followings are built on, that is, an unhealthy and inflated estimation of Wagner's own re-worked myths.

Conclusion: Re-framing Wagner for the post-1945 period.

The cultural centrality of Wagner throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has secured the composer a prominent position in post-war literature. As an attempt to broadly characterise postmodern fiction, Barry Lewis describes its proponents as ones who ‘exaggerate certain techniques previously associated with the modernists in order to signal their perception that cultural values have shifted.’<sup>236</sup> Wagner’s long standing association with modernist writers such as Woolf, Joyce and Eliot, which was promulgated by the likes of Furness and DiGaetani, have made the composer all the more ripe for use by postmodern authors. Lewis specifically names Grass and Carter as being two such writers of fiction.<sup>237</sup> The proclivity across each of the writers discussed here to include Wagner as a parodic element in their fiction certainly supports this claim. Moreover, distance across time allows for post-1945 writers to pass comment on a tradition of Wagner reception. For Grass, this was to critique the historical association between the Nazis and Wagner without renouncing German culture. Burgess’ *Mozart* and *Byrne* rely on a history of Wagner reception to facilitate exploration of the myths and narratives that attach to individuals and how these exist as texts within a culture. The complex characterisation of Carter’s *Zero* depends entirely on two conflicting strands of Wagnerism that were beginning to develop even during the composer’s lifetime.

It would be no exaggeration to say that each of the writers discussed here shared similarities in outlook. Burgess admired Grass and *The Tin Drum* appears second on a list of translated novels that was most likely preliminary notes for a book on Burgess’ favourite such works since 1939.<sup>238</sup> Burgess also favourably reviewed English translations of Grass’ *The Flounder* (1978) and *In the Egg and Other Poems* (1978) in an article for the *Times Literary Supplement* entitled, ‘A fish among feminists’ [sic]. It is telling that Burgess recognises Grass’ novel as ‘a neo-mythical fantasy of the age-old struggle for dominance, now at its height in free Germany, as elsewhere, between men and women.’<sup>239</sup> Burgess recognised Grass as creating new myths for his time. Burgess’ attempt to re-work Wagner’s own myths in *The Worm* largely predates Grass’ *Danzig Trilogy*; nevertheless, Germany wielded a vital influence on the Mancunian writer: ‘My own German is atrocious, but I taste ancestral roots and fungi in the language. [...] I sustain a Nordic patriotism.’<sup>240</sup> This sentiment goes some way to explaining Burgess’ affinity for and frequent return to Wagner in his works; it certainly contextualises the Anglo-German amalgamation that is *The Worm and the Ring*.

A German influence is also notably present in Carter’s use of fairy tales. At various points throughout her career she was lauded and criticised for her resemblance to the Brothers

<sup>236</sup> Lewis, ‘Postmodernism and Fiction,’ 112–3.

<sup>237</sup> Lewis, ‘Postmodernism and Fiction,’ 112.

<sup>238</sup> Graham Foster has written about this likely list of Burgess’ ninety-nine favourite translated novels for The International Anthony Burgess Foundation. See ‘Object of the Week: Burgess’s Favourite Novels in Translation,’ The International Anthony Burgess Foundation, accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2020.

<https://www.anthonymburgess.org/object-of-the-week/object-week-burgesss-favourite-novels-translation/>

<sup>239</sup> Anthony Burgess, ‘A fish among feminists,’ review of *The Flounder* and *In the Egg and Other Poems*, by Günter Grass, *Times Literary Supplement*, October 13, 1978.

<sup>240</sup> Burgess, *Little Wilson*, 203.

Grimm.<sup>241</sup> Carter was also familiar with Grass' work and once likened the subject of a review, favourably, to *Dog Years*.<sup>242</sup> Carter and Burgess shared a warm friendship and mutual admiration. Carter referred to Burgess' *Inside Mr Enderby* (1963) as 'a splendid novel' and believed that he ought to have been honoured with a Booker prize for a 'lifetime's contribution'.<sup>243</sup> In 1972 Carter wrote to Burgess asking for his help to support an application to a teaching post at the University of East Anglia.<sup>244</sup> Burgess replied: 'if called upon, I'll say that you're one of the three best living women novelists, which is probably true.'<sup>245</sup> In 1965 Carter even sent the manuscript of *Shadow Dance* (1966) to publishers Heinemann because she 'would be listed immediately after Burgess in the catalogue.'<sup>246</sup> It is clear that, at the very least, Carter saw her artistic vision as congruous with Burgess'.

If there is a significant point of departure between the two writers' works, it lies in their respective attitude towards myth. Burgess was, on the whole, more or less ambivalent to the stories of gods that had so inspired Wagner. For Burgess, these stories could only function on a symbolic level that was in itself too ambiguous to be really meaningful: '*The Ring* is symbolism and only artists who are not sure what they believe indulge in it, since symbols are good at reconciling opposites, resolving ambiguities [...] The symbolism of *The Ring* can mean pretty well anything [...]'.<sup>247</sup> This does not mean that Burgess does not recognise the utility of a source like Wagner to the writer but myths, laden as they are with symbolism, remain an instrument for the author to use to their own ends. Carter, by contrast, is more convinced that myths contain a particular – and to her mind – problematic meaning. Were this not so, her 'anti-mythic' stance would hardly be necessary. Carter is of course so invested in the influence and meaning that myths are capable of containing, that she re-wrote fairy tales to her own purpose. In *The Passion of New Eve* it was Wagner, that mythical figure and re-writer of myths, who provided a means by which mythologies could be deconstructed. By pitting myths against myths, Carter demonstrated the perceived arbitrariness and falsehoods contained within mythologies.

Grass exhibits a synthesis of the ambivalent and deconstructive approaches of Burgess and Carter. Grass was well versed in the mythologies of his culture and they are a prominent feature of *Dog Years*.<sup>248</sup> For Grass, myths are as much a part of the past as they are the future; *Dog Years* is a narrative that looks forward as well as back. Burgess' recognition of *The Flounder* as a 'neo-mythical fantasy' shows that throughout his career Grass continued to attempt to write new and more relevant myths. The representation of Wagner in *Dog Years*, some fifteen years earlier, shows these ideas beginning to coalesce. In that novel, Wagner reception was a potent example of what had gone so wrong with political and cultural life in

<sup>241</sup> Gordon, *The Invention*, 114–5.

<sup>242</sup> Angela Carter, 'Much, Much Stranger than Fiction' in *Shaking a Leg*, 361.

<sup>243</sup> Gordon, *The Invention*, 76; Carter, 'Trials of a Booker Judge,' in *Shaking a Leg*, 557.

<sup>244</sup> Unpublished 1972 letter from Angela Carter to Anthony Burgess, held at The International Anthony Burgess Foundation.

<sup>245</sup> Quoted in Gordon, *The Invention*, 208.

<sup>246</sup> Gordon, *The Invention*, 84.

<sup>247</sup> Burgess, 'Wagner's "The Ring",' 420.

<sup>248</sup> Rimvydas Sliazas, 'Elements of Old Prussian Mythology in Günter Grass' *Dog Years*,' *Litanus* 19, no.1 (1973): 39–46.

Germany. In Wagner, Grass recognised a German culture that was not to be forsaken but rather re-written. As such, Wagnerian elements and techniques manifest themselves in *Dog Years*. Indeed, to the extent that Grass wrote his own myths in a ‘neo-mythical fantasy’, he shares something in common with Wagner.

To date, there has been little to no critical engagement with representations of Wagner in post-1945 literature, a fact that has made this brief survey all the more necessary but also difficult to contextualise critically. Mary A. Cicora has recognised the same problem within German literature. She introduces her ‘Music, Myth, and Metaphysics: Wagner Reception in Grass’ *Hundejahre*,’ by stating: ‘This article will begin where most studies of Wagner’s influence in German literature leave off, that is, in the post-war era.’<sup>249</sup> Cicora has proved a valuable, if lone, corrective voice to this critical lacuna and one that marks Grass’ novel as a suitable point of departure for considering representations of Wagner in post-war literature. Wagner’s complex and often controversial relationship with myth has continued to prove an irresistible point of reference to authors and so it proved to Burgess and Carter. Burgess as writer-composer remains the most obvious starting point from which to consider Wagner reception in the literature of post-war Britain. Burgess is a source of allusions to Wagner that have by no means been exhausted here. Passing references to the composer are made throughout the Enderby novels, published together as *The Complete Enderby* in 2002.<sup>250</sup> References to Wagner and to *Götterdämmerung* in particular, also appear throughout the novels that comprise *The Malayan Trilogy* (1972) and suggest, among other things, the end of the British Empire.<sup>251</sup> *Götterdämmerung* is also used in the apocalyptic *Puma* (2018) where the music drama lends its name to a brand of beer.<sup>252</sup> As an admirer of Burgess, who also loved Wagner’s music, Carter provides a logical next step in the development of post-war British Wagnerism. Carter’s preoccupation with such Wagnerian topics as myths, sexuality and the spectacle, suggest that she will prove a writer of special interest within Wagner studies. There remains much more to be said, for example, on music and the performance of *Tristan und Isolde* as recounted in her short story ‘The Bloody Chamber’. Representations of Wagner in British and world literature have changed radically since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Nevertheless, the composer has remained a potent and multivalent point of reference for writers. There is no reason to suggest that Wagner should not continue to prove a source of interest to novelists and critics alike.

Word count: 29,481

<sup>249</sup> Cicora, ‘Music, Myth and Metaphysics,’ 49.

<sup>250</sup> See Anthony Burgess, *The Complete Enderby* (London: Vintage, 2002), 406.

<sup>251</sup> See Anthony Burgess, *The Malayan Trilogy* (London: Vintage, 2000), 147, 286 and 499–500.

<sup>252</sup> See Anthony Burgess, *Puma* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 95.

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