INTRODUCTION
Bayreuth and the Wagners

What is it, you sleek creatures, that glitters and glistens there? – Das Rheingold
Alone then glows the Grail . . . – Parsifal

BAYREUTH – THE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION – LIES AT A CROSSroads: strategically located between Munich and Berlin, Paris and Prague. Before the two World Wars, it was at the centre of Germany and Europe; after the partition of Germany, it was relegated to a marginal position, but it has now been restored to its place at the heart of the reunited federal Länder. It is a place of history: a former residence of margraves, shaped into an architectural jewel in the eighteenth century, with a château and a rococo theatre, a hermitage, fountains and grottoes. It is a place of literature: its sandstone houses, onion-topped church towers, beer cellars and delightful hills have been much described, and it inspired both the Romantic Jean Paul and the anarchist Max Stirner. It is a place of politics, bearing the scars of its involvement in wider German events. It was badly bombed in the last war, and has suffered too from the questionable aesthetics of municipal reconstruction: it now rejoices in the banality of motorway flyovers and shopping arcades.

Bayreuth – the symbolic location – is the centre of the annual Wagner festivals, and its Wagner Theatre is a shrine to the art of a single composer. It is this that has defined the town for the wider public: Bayreuth, to the world, is synonymous with Wagner. The Festspielhaus, established by

Richard Wagner and built to his precise plans, has presided over the town on its famous green hill for over a hundred years. In this building, constructed in the simple style of a factory as a deliberate contrast to the ornate and opulent court opera houses of the period, Wagner's works are performed every summer to an audience from Germany and beyond.

The reason for this exclusive identification of the town with the mission of its summer festival – the perception that Bayreuth 'belongs' to Wagner, more completely, for example, than Salzburg belongs to Mozart – lies in a peculiar interplay of real, historical factors with imaginary, spiritual and mythological ones. This interaction of contradictory forces is similar to that found in Wagner's scores, in which at some points a dynamic plot is linked to music which creates a timeless present, and at others music drives the plot forward when the action is in danger of being lost in reflection. The Wagner–Bayreuth nexus (we can call it Wagner's Bayreuth to distinguish it from the geographical Bayreuth) is formed from a similar integration of contradictions: the antithesis between reality and consciousness, between history and myth, generates a certain dynamism – albeit one that is checked by the eternal recurrence of the same works.

Wagner's Bayreuth is the product of a constant collision between real and unreal elements: between the reality of a festival town in the present and the past, and an image in the collective consciousness. The fusion is not so complete, however, as to make the constituent parts of the phenomenon impossible to analyse. In one sense, for example, the Festspielhaus is nothing more than a festival theatre, a seasonal operatic enterprise with all that that entails: problems of staff and casting, stage sets and lighting designs, union agreements and safety regulations, a box office and computers, often in need of repair. The Festspielhaus is a cultural business. As such, of course, it does not stand in isolation, but has always operated in conjunction with the rest of society, with its rights and powers, its wishes and demands. Even though it took shape rather magically before the composer's eyes, once upon a time, with the unreality of a folly, there still had to be a real king of Bavaria, and behind him a Bavarian state budget, to bring the whim to life. There had to be willing town fathers, private benefactors, associations prepared to undertake the pilgrimage, as well as a circle of propagandists, paladins and pressmen.

All this has since changed only insofar as the structures of those political institutions, businesses, and media outlets that surround the Festspielhaus have themselves changed.

The real Bayreuth was and is linked to its context, and to the conditions which that context offers or dictates. It forms part of political history and reality, and of the cultural evolution of the nation. For in Wagner's Bayreuth, culture is defined first and foremost as German: cultural identity is reflected and confirmed through the image of the German nation. This has much to do with the composer's own understanding of himself, even if this self-understanding is not always clear from his operas and writings. Wagner regarded his theatrical revolution as both an allegory of, and a stimulant to the reshaping of German culture as a truly national art.

The continual repetition of Wagner's works, the almost incredible continuity with which they have been staged – from the days of Ludwig II, across two World Wars, to the present – signals the continuity, simultaneously disturbing and reassuring, of a particular strand of German history. This history reveals itself through the quasi-monarchical succession of the festival directorship, with its reigns and regency periods (this interpretation is no more and no less justified than any other attempt to humanise the historical process by emphasising the role of 'kings and queens'). Each new era of festival history brings its own drama and excitement, regicides and usurpations, revolutions and new beginnings. If the story of Bayreuth can indeed be understood as a microcosm of a broader political history, then the defining feature it shares with the outside world is its preoccupation with power – understood both as possession and as the ability to command. This preoccupation is also present, of course, in Wagner's work. Given that *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, that *summum opus* whose very execution demanded its own theatre, is concerned above all with the transfer and exercise of power, the preoccupation may justifiably be labelled as the *Ring*-principle – and the *Ring*-principle may in turn be identified with Wagner's Bayreuth.

The *Ring*-principle plays itself out through contestation and power struggle, both within the family and against various outside forces. Even the core of the Festspielhaus, the stage, has become an arena in which rivalries

are fought out, particularly since the late 1930s, when the tendency for directors to try to stamp their own identity on the Wagnerian stage was first established. The stage becomes the arena in which artistic capabilities and reputations are tested. In this way, it assumes a revelatory character, exposing subtleties and deficiencies of character: success or failure there can affect a contender's position in future leadership struggles. The stage is never a purely aesthetic domain: it projects the glittering symbol of the golden ring deep into the structures of political power.

It is not the dominance of the *Ring*-principle alone, however, that causes Bayreuth to be identified as 'belonging' to Wagner; after all, every opera house, every political party, every sizeable business experiences similar power struggles. There is another aspect of the Ring whose presence is exclusive to Bayreuth, however: this is the mythical dimension, one which has been observed and described on numerous occasions. Emblematic representations of the Festspielhaus, particularly those dating from the beginning of the twentieth century, often show a mysterious light emanating from behind the theatre, surrounding it with a kind of halo: the house is literally radiant. Light, however, can have different iconographic meanings, and the light here is not the result of the sun of Enlightenment having been cast on the house; rather, it is an indicator of the mystical significance of the building. This is proved not only by the writings of Wagner's followers, who had always preferred a religious model of theatre to an intellectual and critical one; it is demonstrated also by the arguments of Wagner himself, who had always conceived of his theatre as a place where the renewal myth would be fulfilled, as a German equivalent of Delphi.

In contrast to the archetypal 'village church', situated in the middle of a community and therefore likely to engender a sense of the community belonging to its people, Wagner's theatre towers high above the town, framed by a dark pine forest, a sacred grove. The arrangement of the auditorium as an amphitheatre recalls the theatres of antiquity. The audience is squeezed together – imprisoned, almost, in mind and body – and drawn in to the total work of art, forced to surrender to what is happening on stage. The lowering of the orchestra pit turns the orchestra into a mysterious oracle, in line with Wagner's intention to create a 'Dionysian' effect (as correctly analysed by Nietzsche). The sound swells up in the

dark, seemingly without origin, so that the music seems to be a hallucinatory figment of the imagination; the simple timber structure is thus transformed into a theatre of orgiastic ritual. The mythical quality of the experience is further enhanced by Wagner's choice of subject matter – heroes and knights, gods, swans and dragons – which leads the imaginations of his audience back towards half-remembered legends.

Wagner's Bayreuth could not exist without this superstructure: the mythical Bayreuth is a constant companion to the real Bayreuth, anchoring it against the buffeting of struggles and upheaval. This quality of timelessness is symbolised by the Holy Grail, an image drawn from the Christian–Germanic myth that was Wagner's principal source. The Grail encapsulates all that is magical and sacred about Bayreuth; as in *Parsifal*, it is radiant, illuminating the entire community. Its radiance has a quite different quality to the seductive 'glitter' of its temporal counterpart, the Ring, since that brings disaster to whoever wears it. We can therefore identify a Grail-principle which stands alongside and opposite the *Ring*-principle; it is the interaction of the two principles that created and creates Wagner's Bayreuth.

The Grail-principle seeks to safeguard whatever is timeless, constant, mysterious. It was most strikingly personified in Wagner's life by his desire to use Bayreuth to lend a timeless, cultish character to his own work, an aim pursued most elaborately in relation to *Parsifal* itself, that 'farewell to the world' intended to be performed exclusively at his own theatre. This intention had repercussions beyond his own lifetime. The story of the 'Lex *Parsifal*' (Cosima Wagner's attempt to persuade the Reichstag to prohibit performances of the piece outside Bayreuth) and the Wagner family's use of the term '*Parsifal* theft' to describe the performances that took place in Amsterdam and New York before the expiry of the thirty-year copyright period are good illustrations of the interaction of the Grail-principle with the dynamic forces of progress, the collision of myth and history. It is a moot point whether we should condemn the act of abduction as an attack on the Holy Grail, or, in a more enlightened mood, welcome it as the demystification of the archaic in favour of progress, emancipation and democracy.

Wagner's Bayreuth was constructed from the combination of various elements of Wagner's work with physical characteristics of the Fest-

spielhaus itself: the acoustic consequences of its architecture and its remote, elitist location. However, there is another important element that has allowed the Bayreuth myth to endure even in the most secular of times: this is Wahnfried, the Wagner family's private residence, symbolically situated in the centre of Bayreuth. This classical villa, adjoining the gardens of the margraves' palace, was a personal gift from King Ludwig; after Richard Wagner's death his widow Cosima lived there, and with her and after her, Wagner's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Real as this villa was with its promising name,* its mythical significance was still greater. The inhabitant of Wahnfried was also the director of the festival: Wahnfried therefore came to symbolise the domestic history of the festival. Leaders were bred here, family alliances forged and enmities fomented; it was the home of that theatrical family whose family life was itself compelling theatre.

At one level, of course, Wahnfried is a physical inheritance, a town house with garden and outbuildings, and the *Ring*-principle operates at this level, too. However, it owes its mythical status to the unusual circumstances under which it is bequeathed: it is not just a legacy to be administered, but also a spiritual inheritance, a commitment that must be nurtured and passed on from generation to generation. The family guards an archive of European significance, and is obliged by the provisions of a legacy to 'ensure the festive performance of the works of Richard Wagner'. Admittedly, the text of this stipulation is found in the will of Siegfried Wagner, not Richard: there is no last will and testament in Richard's hand, and Siegfried himself had merely been charged by his father to preserve the legacy in an 'ethical [and] moral' manner. As he was only fourteen when his father died, his mother Cosima initially assumed the Bayreuth regency. On Siegfried's death his English widow Winifred would inherit both the Festspielhaus and Wahnfried. She in turn would be succeeded by their children, and so the pattern has continued.

Every family with an awareness of its own ancestry constructs its own saga. Precedents may be found in the impressive genealogical tables in the Bible, and royal and imperial houses have always sought to legitimise

*A literal translation of Wahnfried is 'peace from illusion'.

their authority by demonstrating the longevity and purity of their bloodline. The bourgeoisie rushed to emulate these examples, gaining a sudden interest in their family tree as soon as it became distinguished by property, or, as in this case, by artistic achievement. In most cases, the beginning of a dynasty is marked by a clear act of foundation, establishing a purpose within the family and a claim towards the outside world. In this case, that act was the laying of the foundation stone of the Festspielhaus, the moment at which the Wagners' history became clearly distinct from that of other composers' families. Ownership and operation of a festival theatre sent the family's prestige soaring, and bestowed a certain aura of spiritual superiority upon them.

Although they were not endowed with castles and coronets, only with debits and credits, the Wagners became likened to royalty in the public imagination, and various versions of their family saga were disseminated. Their actual history was so coloured by hearsay that reality became fairy tale, an archetypal nineteenth-century myth. Many elements of their story conspired to make it seem more like fantasy than reality: the presence of a king walking alongside the artist; the fact that the king was young, handsome and romantic and that the artist was a social revolutionary, refugee, émigré and notorious debtor; the fact, moreover, that there was a 'princess' in the shape of the slender Cosima, the product of a romantically illicit union between the most celebrated virtuoso and composer of his day, Franz Liszt, and a beautiful French countess. If we look closer to our own time, we find further elements of fairy tale in the Wagners' story. Siegfried, the son, married a destitute English orphan who, even as a schoolgirl, had yearningly drawn his profile in her exercise-books, like Cinderella with her Prince Charming. This couple was blessed with numerous children, among whom were the two brothers who, after war and destruction, saved the honour of the house. And the fairy-tale has not released us from its power, even today. After the tragically early death of the older brother, the younger set himself on the Festspielhaus throne to begin a reign whose length has reached supernatural proportions. And there he remains, the King Lear of the green hill.

Through the archives, as though through a trap-door, we enter the deepest vaults of this family fortress, the engine-room of the legend. We are

forcibly reminded of the image of the Grail, which has to be unveiled by the heirs so that the old man, Richard Wagner, can live. The Grail must be made to radiate again and again so that fresh blood is pumped into the veins of his work. The lives of the executors, too, seem to depend on this ritual of unveiling and display, as though the fable told by *Parsifal* has been turned back on the family, shaping their lives and dictating their actions. Wagner's Bayreuth contains a rite for the family: a rite that must be repeated as a talisman against time and history. He who resides at Wahnfried must continually uncover the festival Grail: only in this way can the essence of the myth be preserved.

This account of Wahnfried emphasises the elements of continuity and stasis, but the house has also always witnessed the contradictory impulses of change, restlessness and movement. The laws of nature dictate that a family will tend towards diversification, development, division, a process from which younger members will emerge to challenge their elders. Thus the Grail-principle is challenged by its opposite pole, by elements of conflict and disagreement: the *Ring*-principle mercilessly intervenes whenever problems of inheritance and succession arise.

One such instance arose when Cosima sought to question the Wagnerian paternity of one of her daughters, Isolde, falsely claiming that her first husband, Hans von Bülow, was Isolde's father. There was considerable anxiety at Wahnfried that Isolde – given that name because she was born at the time of the Munich première of *Tristan*, when Cosima and Richard were still living together illicitly – would bring in her husband, the conductor Franz Beidler, as a potential heir to the Bayreuth throne. Cosima would not tolerate the presence of any rival to her son, Siegfried, so she claimed that Isolde had no Wagnerian blood in order to deny her any leverage with which to realise her family's ambitions.

This scandalous denial of entirely legitimate claims recalls the numerous thefts that take place in *The Ring*. The motif was to recur in the next generation of family history. The son of Isolde and Franz Beidler, Franz Wilhelm became a lawyer and writer, resident in Switzerland. After the Second World War, during which the residents of Wahnfried were seriously incriminated by their friendship with Adolf Hitler, Beidler proposed a complete reorganisation of the festivals under the direction of an international committee of respected writers, musicians and intellectuals.

Skilful intrigue by the Wagner brothers, Wieland and Wolfgang, ensured that he was marginalised and that his proposal was not even discussed. The brothers treated their sister Friedelind in a similar way: as the only member of the family to oppose the Nazis and to go into exile, she would have been the ideal candidate to reconstruct the festival – a genuine Wagner, yet untainted. But anyone who has grasped possession of the festival Ring does not relinquish it voluntarily. Wolfgang Wagner, the grandson, has guarded it since 1951, initially together with his brother, but since 1966 on his own. He has presided as Intendant for far longer than is sensible or desirable, and has placed a strain upon the tradition by disregarding the wishes and rights of younger members of the family. Intrigue has joined with obduracy to break, at least temporarily, the unwritten contract between the generations.

Historical conflicts such as these reveal the innate ambivalence of the opposing forces: the tensions that exist within, as well as between, the stasis of myth and the dynamism of history. Where the Grail-principle dominates for too long, a shadow is cast: ritual can become routine, repetition is in danger of stagnating into a celebration of the *status quo*. This is what happened in the period following Wagner's death, when Cosima was the guardian of the Grail. In the context of the mausoleum, where a weakened Grail-principle is sacrosanct, the morally questionable *Ring*- and robbery-principle reveals its necessity as a safeguard against bad myth; through death, it is a font of new life.

The two principles thus reveal their vital relationship with each other, perhaps even their interdependence. The similarities and the differences between them are present in their visual manifestations: they both contain the geometrical figure of the circle, but their differences are revealed when they are viewed in three dimensions. The circle of the Grail has depth and volume: it is a source of plenitude, of sustenance. The circle of the Ring, by contrast, appears as a narrow ridge: metaphorically, it can be linked to a mountain pass or a racetrack. Both these symbols may involve deception of the senses: the depth of the Grail may be a chimera, like that of the skies, while the circular track of the Ring creates an expectation of progress that may prove to be illusory. Nonetheless, Wagner's creation of the redeeming image of the Grail, after the orgy of destruction at the end of *The Ring*, is seen by many musical philosophers as the composer's last

word – the victory of 'radiance' over 'glitter'. The fact that the two symbols have the circle in common demonstrates the interconnectedness of the composer's works, and his hope that his art would represent not the end of the world but its continuation.

The symbol of the circle is present everywhere in Wagner's Bayreuth: roundness is found as much in the topography of the festival landscape as in the spiritual dimension. The layout of the Wahnfried garden is circular; the view from the central room is of a circular fountain surrounded by a circular lawn. The avenue leading to the Festspielhaus describes an arc. Circles dominate the stage, too. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that Wieland Wagner's 'New Bayreuth' stage space, perceived as revolutionary at the time, was in fact rooted in tradition: the magic circle became the archetypal idea underlying his production of the *Ring*, and, to an even greater extent, of *Parsifal*. The circle was also an important image for the followers of Wagner: the 'Bayreuth Circle', active in Wagner's lifetime as propagandists of his work, developed an ideology of cultish, nationalistic philistinism after the composer's death – their very name reveals their intellectual isolation. Their present-day successors, the 'Association of Friends of Bayreuth', identify themselves to one another by a small golden ring on their lapels, jocularly referred to as the 'Golden Sphincter'.

Wagner's dramas, together with the Festspielhaus, constitute a system which seeks to safeguard the timelessness of its own mythology; this state of affairs is merely reinforced by the annual repetitions of the festival and the associated cult of Wagner, now fanned by the international media. The driving force of the system, however, is provided by the family, by the Wahnfried idea: the family's activities are founded on their identification with their cultural heritage and their striving, following Goethe's injunction, to inhabit their inheritance, to realise it within themselves and make it radiant. However, these two complexes of ideas – we may refer to them in shorthand as the Festspielhaus and Wahnfried – never quite escape their own historicism; nor do they escape each other. In their ambivalence and their dialectical integration of the Grail-and *Ring*-principles, the theatre and the home, Wagner's Bayreuth and the family substance, are congruent with each other. The theatre of the

Wagners and Wagner's theatre are twin aspects of a single entity.

It is no accident, therefore, that the family will feature heavily in the following chapters, even those that focus on Wagner's works. The family dramas are inseparable from the music dramas. As if the subterranean power of the family had guided the author's pen, the essays increasingly drift from the objective and aesthetic into the subjective and private, until they culminate in an account of family history. The more musicological essays on Wagner's works, too, reflect family history, in that they record staging posts in the author's intellectual biography. They could not have been unaffected by father, mother or brother, by the ceaseless flow of family conversation – approving, ironic or mocking – that accompanied individual interpretations and reinterpretations of Wagner's theatre.

The author's participation in various dance groups between 1963 and 1965 furnished her with a sensual attachment to *Tannhäuser*, *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*: the euphoric sense of scenic space which that experience provoked, normally the prerogative of old hands, has inspired her subsequent involvement with these works. Beginning in the 'New Bayreuth' of her father, Wieland, whose post-war spirit and imagery moulded her childhood and youth, an educational journey through the world – taking in musical and intellectual-Jewish America, philosophical circles in France and finally literary Austria – gave rise to new and different views on Wagner. These outside perspectives helped her to decode her own milieu and to shed some of her intellectual naivety. However, it also helped her to become more conscious of her happy childhood in the artistic environment of Wahnfried. The author's changing opinions and impressions of Wagner have acquired something of the quality of geological strata in her mind: the lower strata are hidden, but not destroyed, and a moment from the past often reappears suddenly to illuminate a preoccupation of the present.

Many of the essays on individual works reflect a personal or family involvement in a particular production, and some details on this autobiographical background may be useful. The author's brother, Wolf Siegfried, made an exciting reassessment of the values in *The Flying Dutchman* in a production of 1978, a time when even the most Romantic of operas were being exposed to a down-to-earth historical reading. Wieland nearly broke his teeth on the *Tannhäuser* problem, rather like the composer

himself, who was unable to resolve the discrepancies within this work. The author's reflections on *Lohengrin* are more concerned with the general background of this opera, representing as it does a transition from French and German Romanticism to genuine Wagnerian music drama. In the background, however, are two experiences connected with the family: Wieland's unforgettable 1958 production in Bayreuth, notable for the beauty of its blue and silver sets, faithfully painted by the director's thirteen-year-old daughter, and Gottfried Wagner's 1996 production in Dessau, which endeavoured to demonstrate that the 'Hitler inside Wagner' was already present by the time of *Lohengrin*.

Der Ring des Nibelungen particularly interested the author because of the way in which a huge family psychodrama was hidden beneath the cloak of German mythology. It is scarcely necessary to spell out the innumerable resonances between this drama and the action played out in the family theatre; members of the family frequently identify themselves with characters from *The Ring*, and gain an understanding of their own conflicting emotions from the family struggles depicted there. As for *Tristan*, a revealing essay by Wieland, written in response to his own Bayreuth production of 1962, forms the background to the thoughts on the work presented here. Not only was that production one of his most successful, his essay on it is a remarkable document of suffering, written at a late stage of his terminal disease in the Munich clinic to which he had been moved in July 1966. The character of Tristan here provided the opportunity for Wagner's grandson to explore his own melancholy and depression. There are many inner threads between this slow death, this text and the 'twice-solitary death' contemplated here; the more recent stimulus for this essay was the 1992 production by Wolf Siegfried, Wieland's son and the present author's brother.

The subterranean interweaving of the works of Wagner with the history of the family is particularly relevant to *Die Meistersinger*. Wieland's post-war productions of *Die Meistersinger* represent stages in the growth of an awareness of the truth about Hitler's Germany, revealing how the first vague feelings of guilt were articulated: though rarely put into words, they were reflected in the images of the production. Wieland spoke out aggressively on the subject of the corrupted German Richard Wagner (but did he really know what he was saying?): 'Ever since 1945, the festival

management, and the town of Bayreuth, have endeavoured to let this subject, fatal to the Bayreuth Festival, be forgotten.' The era of National Socialism was then too close to Wieland's still-young generation for the full extent of its horror to register. The fact that an event only begins to strike home after a lapse of time is an as yet unexplained paradox of 'coping with the past'. Though the present author's work is not directly connected with the persistent suspicion of anti-Semitism that has surrounded *Die Meistersinger* since 1945, it explores matters such as folly and wit in relation to the linguistic and psychological mechanisms of humour. An examination of the pleasure arising from 'wicked wit', from *Schadenfreude*, readily reveals analogies with the political sphere. The German word for folly – *Wahn* – frequently appears in Wagner's vocabulary, flickering between artistic and more questionable connotations. Despite the secure social structures shown in *Die Meistersinger*, this folly can at any time flip over into madness and chaos. Violence cannot be accurately defined or predicted. Hans Sachs' question – 'How in God's name did that come about?' – all too often applies to our world too, though we only ask it when it is too late.

How it came about that the Jewish Vienna of the turn of the century became the centre of the author's literary research, and her spiritual home too, is another question that is not easy to answer: it is a milieu far removed from Wahnfried. Admittedly, a thread does lead back to Wahnfried: Vienna at this time was the home not only of Karl Kraus, Sigmund Freud, Arthur Schnitzler and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, but also of Adolf Hitler. This fact may illuminate the attempt to understand the unfortunate connection between Richard Wagner's anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitism of the cultured Jewish bourgeoisie. *Parsifal* and the phantasm of purity, translated into a private theology, provide an opportunity for reflecting on this paradoxical historical delusion. *Parsifal* is a personification of family tradition, but it is not an end. Traditions must at some stage be broken, and *Parsifal* will one day be seen in a new light, as the demands for progress dictate. Although the 'family spirit' has prevailed so far, even against the anti-traditionalism of Wieland Wagner, future interpretations of *Parsifal* must inevitably be coloured by life outside Bayreuth.

The second part of the book directly explores the family's history. First

of all, there are two brief essays focusing on particular family members: Wieland and his mother, Winifred. There is good reason to single out these particular Wagners, even though both feature prominently in the general family history that follows: their attitudes and the opposition between them could be said to have defined 'Bayreuth' for the outside world in the decades following the war. Wieland Wagner's life at this time consisted of various attempts to escape from the family fortress: the stages of this journey are explored in the chapter on his 'negative life', with a little help from Hegel. The essay on Winifred attempts to understand the true nature of her relationship with Adolf Hitler, despite the fact that 'truth' is a strangely elusive concept where this particular woman is concerned.

The final seven chapters of the book aim to tell the history of the Wagner family in more or less chronological terms – although as the reader will note, chronology is forever disrupted by striking recurrences of themes and patterns of relationships between different generations, recurrences which it is the chronicler's duty to explore. Despite the violent upheavals recounted in this history, the family currently presents a strangely tomb-like aspect to the public: the phrase 'Wahnfriedhof' may be used to describe this phenomenon.* Since the conversion of the Festspielhaus into a public enterprise, supervised by a foundation, Wahnfried has become a museum. No member of the family has lived there for a long time. The present festival director, Wolfgang Wagner, lives in a private house in Bayreuth; the rest of Wagner's descendants are scattered throughout Germany, Europe and beyond. The *Ring*-principle seems to have had the final word: the twilight of the gods has descended. Although the Grail on the green hill is still regularly unveiled, its lustre has faded; it now has only the dim glow of the perpetual candle flame in the church. There are signs, though, that the story is about to enter a new phase, and the book ends with a brief consideration of some of the ways in which Bayreuth may begin to look forward again, after the long sleep of the Wolfgang era.

*In the original German edition, the title of the section of the book dealing with the family's history is WAHN/FRIED/HOF. It is impossible to make an effective English translation of this pun: Nike Wagner's invented word compresses numerous meanings of which 'Wahnfried' (the Wagner family home) and 'Friedhof' (the German for cemetery) are only the most obvious.