



Nietzsche and Wagner: A Lesson in Subjugation

Joachim Köhler

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This volume, first published in German in 1996, presents an account of the relationship between the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, the composer Richard Wagner, and his wife Cosima. Nietzsche was 25 when he first met Wagner and his 32-year-old mistress Cosima (daughter of Franz List and at that time wife of the conductor Hans von Bulow) in May 1869. The relationship survived on a combination of mutual intellectual admiration - dominated by the bullying Wagner - and erotic jealousy, until the composer's death in 1883 and the philosopher's own descent into madness six years later. Joachim Köhler brings this relationship to life. He shows how their traumatized childhoods bound Nietzsche and Cosima in submission to the demonic, ageing Wagner, how Nietzsche was enticed into the Bayreuth labyrinth, entrapped in its culture wars and used as a tool in its sectarianism and anti-semitism. The book sheds light on Nietzsche's early writings, revealing them subverted by Wagner to parade his own ideas of German superiority, of the domination of the masses by a few chosen geniuses, and of the supremacy of art and aesthetics over morals and humanity. The source of Nietzsche's "Superman" and "Will to Power" are traced to the pre-fascist ideology of Richard and Cosima Wagner, an ideology later uncomprehendingly idolized by Hitler's Reich.

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