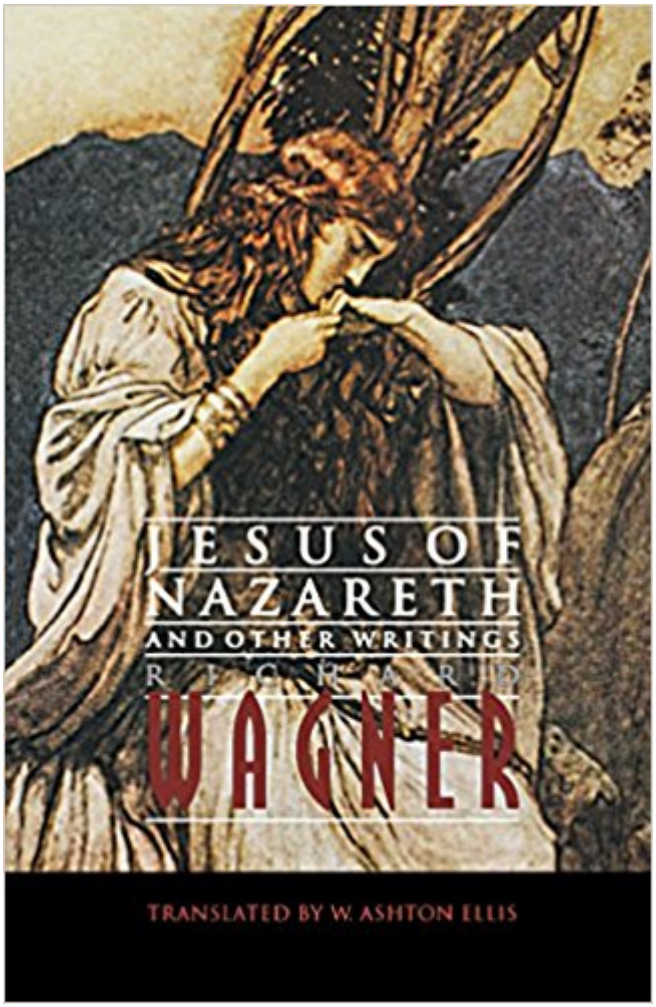
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Jesus Of Nazareth And Other Writings



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Synopsis

Near the end of his life, Richard Wagner supervised the publication of his collected writings, providing an extensive view of his thoughts about art and politics from his youth to his final period of triumph. After his death, there was still more to be told: his admirers discovered a large number of writings he had forgotten, misplaced, never published, or had chosen to omit from his collected works. This volume, the last of eight volumes now reprinted by the University of Nebraska Press, collects the most illuminating of those works.Ã Â The title work, Ã¢â ¬Å“Jesus of Nazareth,Ã¢â ¬Â• was written in 1848 or 1849; its composition coincided with the most widespread revolutionary ferment seen in Europe. It expresses WagnerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s own revolutionary ideals, thoroughly justified (or so he thought) by Jesus and the early Church. At the time Wagner considered Jesus as a revolutionary leader whose struggles with authority and traditions were much like his own.

The opening work is Ã¢â ¬Å“SiegfriedÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Death,Ã¢â ¬Â• a poem written in 1848 that set the tone for his most famous operatic work, the tetralogy Der Ring des Nibelungen. Whole sections of the poem were later incorporated into the fourth Ring opera, Gotterdammerung, but the differences are as revealing as the carryover. Ã Â The essays that Wagner published in journals but saw fit to exclude from his Gesammelte Schriften might have embarrassed the elderly sage but are key documents to WagnerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s activities in his revolutionary period. For example, his ardently prorevolutionary essay, Ã¢â ¬Å“The Revolution,Ã¢â ¬Â• would have displeased the wealthy patrons of his later years.Ã Â This edition includes the full text of volume 8 of the translation of WagnerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s works published in 1899 for the London Wagner Society.

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Near the end of his life, Richard Wagner supervised the publication of his collected writings, providing an extensive view of his thoughts about art and politics from his youth to his final period of triumph. After his death, there was still more to be told: his admirers discovered a large number of writings he had forgotten, misplaced, never published, or had chosen to omit from his collected works. This volume, the last of eight volumes now reprinted by the University of Nebraska Press, collects the most illuminating of those works. The title work, "Jesus of Nazareth", was written in 1848 or 1849; its composition coincided with the most widespread own revolutionary ideals, thoroughly justified (or so he thought) by Jesus and the early Church. At the time Wagner considered Jesus as a revolutionary leader whose struggles with authority and traditions were much like his own. The opening work is "Siegfried's Death", a poem written in 1848 that set the tone for his most famous operatic work, the tetralogy Der Ring des Nibelungen. Whole sections of the poem were later incorporated into the fourth Ring opera, Gotterdammerung, but the differences are as revealing as the carryover. The essays that Wagner published in journals but saw fit to exclude from his Gesammelte Schriften might have embarrassed the elderly sage but are key documents to Wagner's activities in his revolutionary period. For example, his ardently prorevolutionary essay, "The Revolution", would have displeased the wealthy patrons of his later years. This edition includes the full text of volume 8 of the translation of Wagner's works published in 1899 for the London Wagner Society.

Late in life, Wagner published his complete writings: Gesammelte Schriften (GS). In the 1890's, William Ashton Ellis translated them and they were published in English in 8 volumes. They were originally published by London:Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. as "Richard Wagner's Prose Works". In 1995, they were reprinted in this country. Title not withstanding, this is volume 8 of that set. This volume contains various bits and pieces that were not a part of the original GS, and is more like an appendix to the original series. There are some important pieces, but in the end it is not that much more valuable than the other 7 volumes in the series.1)The first piece is the complete, original prose poem for Siegfried's Tod (50 pages). It has the happy ending where Siegfried and

Brunnhilde enter Valhalla together rather than Ragnarok.2)The next section (200 pages) is labled by Ellis as "Discarded". These are not really discards, but were not included by Wagner probably because he did not have access to them while preparing GS. These works are essays, letters, and articles of little importance (you can probably skip every other sentence while reading them and not miss anything of importance).3)The next section contains sketches for potential operas: "Die Sarazenin" (25 pages) whose plot bears a striking similarity to Rienzi, "Das Liebesmahl der Apostel" (5 pages) which Wagner composed as an independent choral piece, and "Jesus of Nazareth" (60 pages), Wagner's risible attempt to rewrite the New Testament.4)The last section (60 pages) is a mish mash of unpublished fragments found in various manuscripts. It begins with "Kunstlerthum der Zukunft" - Artisthood of the Future (20 pages). In spite of its incomplete state, I found this essay to be more decipherable than most of Wagner's other pieces, but only because it contains his main points without the usual rhetorical conflations. You will also find a brief, one page prose sketch for "Die Sieger", another potential opera but this time about Ananda, Prakriti, and Buddha (here, the theme is unrequited love, and the plot is similar to Tristan).For those who are interested in the other 7 volumes of this series, here are the titles: The Art-Work of the Future (volume 1), Opera and Drama (volume 2), Judaism in Music (volume 3), Art and Politics (volume 4), Actors and Singers (volume 5), Religion and Art (volume 6), and Pilgrimage to Beethoven (volume 7). Note that the book titles were assigned by the American publishers (Bison Books), and are merely the name of just one of the essays in the book and do not constitute the entire book's contents. The exception is Opera and Drama, which is a book-length essay constituting the entirety of volume 2.

More than just a dry run for his liturgical Christian music drama PARSIFAL, the German composer's personal look at the life of Christ merges the traditional Passion story with his own brand of revolutionary politics, proving true novelist Reynolds Price's words that "virtually all post-Gospel lives of Jesus [have] told us far more about their authors than their subject." Yet for a man so often identified with anti-Semitism, readers will be surprised that Wagner's mystery play is remarkably free of racial bias or slurs. Not only are the Jews not scapegoated as the Christ-killers of Medieval lore, but the portrayal of Judas as a heroic freedom fighter echoes the portrait in Nikos Kazantzakis' THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST. (One wonders if this interpretation tricked down to Kazantzakis during his intensive studies of Wagner friend-turned-foe Friedrich Nietzsche.)All in all, fascinating material not only for musicologists, historians, and Wagnerites, but for those interested in the Christology as seen though the eyes of historical personages.

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