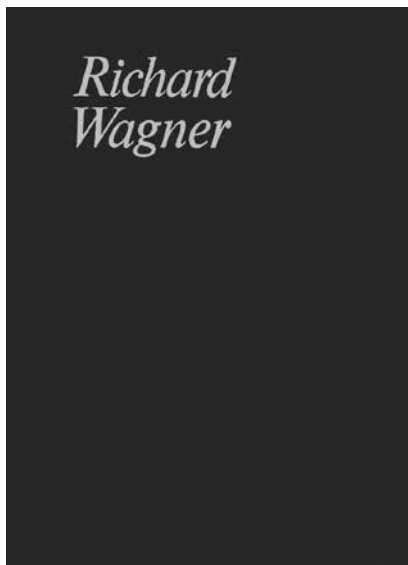


Books

The Body in the Library

Jeremy Coleman takes on the herculean task of reviewing the collected edition of Wagner's musical works

Richard Wagner Sämtliche Werke, general ed. Egon Voss [in 31 volumes, Series A and B] (Schott Musik: Mainz, 1970–). Individual ISBNs. Individual volumes priced €100–€463.



The front cover of each of the seventy books

The first collected edition of Wagner's musical works, the *Richard Wagner Sämtliche Werke* (hereafter RWSW) is a strange publication to be asked to review. Vast in sheer physical size, it comprises no fewer than seventy individual books organised in thirty-one 'volumes'. The fact that it has appeared piecemeal since the publication of the first volume in 1970 (vol. 19, *Klavierwerke*, ed. Carl Dahlhaus) means that the editions hardly strike one today as 'new' contributions to Wagner scholarship. If the collected edition has been slowly accumulating on library shelves like a kind of bibliographic glacier, abrading the rough ground of the 'Wagner myth' with ever-mounting pressure, the widespread use of the editions of individual works in operatic productions might for some be valorisation enough. Many of the editions have been reprinted by Ernst Eulenburg and arranged as vocal scores. A review of the edition may even be premature, bearing in mind that – contrary to Schott's recent

publicity – four volumes have yet to be released. What can one say about an edition that has to all purposes already become part of the furniture?

The fact is that the RWSW has not received anywhere near the scholarly attention or recognition it merits. Moreover, its imminent completion provides an opportunity to evaluate it critically as a whole and its wider significance for scholarship and performance today. The series was started in 1968 by Carl Dahlhaus and Martin Geck, published by Schott Music, and funded by the Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Richard Wagner-Gesamtausgabe (Society for the Funding of the Richard Wagner Collected Edition) in Mainz under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences and Literature (Mainz) and the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts (Munich), making it the first edition of Wag-

ner's works to be supported by an academic body.¹ The collected edition, led latterly by Egon Voss, is based in Munich and has employed Wagner specialists from Germany and the UK. The seventy books are divided into two series (*Reihe*): series A consists of fifty-seven books (twenty-one volumes) of musical scores complete with critical commentaries (*Notenteil*); series B has thirteen books (ten volumes) of literary sources and documentation relating to each of the works (*Dokumententeil*). An outline of the volumes is given below in English:²

Series A (Musical Scores)

Vol. 1 (I–III)	<i>Die Feen</i>
Vol. 2 (I–II)	<i>Das Liebesverbot oder: Die Novize von Palermo</i>
Vol. 3 (I–V)	<i>Rienzi, der Letzte der Tribunen</i>
Vol. 4 (I–IV)	<i>Der fliegende Holländer</i>
Vol. 5 (I–III)	<i>Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg</i> (1845, with variants until 1860)
Vol. 6 (I–III)	<i>Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg</i> (1861–75, with variants)
Vol. 7 (I–III)	<i>Lohengrin</i>
Vol. 8 (I–III)	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>
Vol. 9 (I–III)	<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>
Vol. 10 (I–II)	<i>Das Rheingold</i>
Vol. 11 (I–III)	<i>Die Walküre</i>
Vol. 12 (I–III)	<i>Siegfried</i>
Vol. 13 (I–III)	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>
Vol. 14 (I–III)	<i>Parsifal</i>
Vol. 15	Compositions for Theatre
Vol. 16	Choral Works
Vol. 17	Songs with Piano
Vol. 18 (I–III)	Orchestral Works
Vol. 19	Piano Works
Vol. 20 (I–IV)	Arrangements, Piano Editions
Vol. 21	Supplement ³

¹ This introduction is expanded from Jeremy Coleman, 'Sämtliche Werke', in *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, ed. Nicholas Vazsonyi (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 511–13. For further information about the RWSW in the wider context of Wagner scholarship and criticism, see John Deathridge, 'Waiting for Wagner: Reluctant Musicology, Radical Philosophy, and the Rescue of a Fraught Legacy', *The Opera Quarterly*, xxx (2014), 267–85, based on his review of Alain Badiou's book *Five Lessons on Wagner* in *The Wagner Journal*, v/1 (2011), 103–08. Reviews of individual volumes of the RWSW have appeared over the years predominantly in the journal *Die Musikforschung* (published by Bärenreiter on behalf of the Gesellschaft für Musikforschung).

² Limitations of space prevent me from including further information about each of the volumes such as publisher(s), date of publication, ISBN and price. The latest version (dated Jun. 2016) of the publication catalogue may be consulted online: <http://www.adwmainz.de/fileadmin/adwmainz/MuKo_Publikationen/PV-Wagner.pdf> (accessed 26 Jul. 2017). English translations from the RWSW are my own unless otherwise stated.

³ This volume, which has not yet been published, will contain: Kontrapunktstudien; Doppelfuge (WWV 19B); kleinere Liedkompositionen (WWV 92, 105, 112, 113); 'Kinder-Katechismus zu Kosel's Geburtstag' (WWV 106); Sogenannte Themen (WWV 93, 98, 107); Nachträge (WWV 7, 23A); Sonstiges (Miscellaneous).

Series B (Documentary Volumes)

Vol. 22	Documents and Texts to <i>Die Feen</i> and <i>Das Liebesverbot</i> ⁴
Vol. 23	Documents and Texts to <i>Rienzi, der Letzte der Tribunen</i>
Vol. 24	Documents and Texts to <i>Der fliegende Holländer</i>
Vol. 25	Documents and Texts to <i>Tannhäuser</i>
Vol. 26	Documents and Texts to <i>Lohengrin</i>
Vol. 27	Documents and Texts to <i>Tristan und Isolde</i>
Vol. 28	Documents and Texts to <i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>
Vol. 29 (I–III)	Documents and Texts to <i>Der Ring des Nibelungen</i> ⁵
Vol. 30	Documents to the Genesis and First Performance of the ‘Bühnenweihfestspiel’ <i>Parsifal</i>
Vol. 31	Documents and Texts to the Incomplete Stage Works

It goes without saying that space does not permit me to refer to each volume. Nor is it my intention to consider individual works so much as to review the edition as a whole while referring to a selection of volumes as appropriate.

The editorial method of the RWSW corresponds to the *Wagner Werk-Verzeichnis* – the definitive catalogue of Wagner’s musical works and still today the single most comprehensive source of critical scholarly information about him.⁶ The editors have grappled with a number of idiosyncratic problems, by turns material and intellectual. The critical report in each volume opens uniformly with the same *raison d’être*: ‘The present edition strives, through careful modernisation as well as the elimination of the superfluous, to achieve a simplification of the score and thereby a greater degree of clarity.’⁷ In some cases, the picture of the score is clarified by a long way. The editions of *Lohengrin* and *Tristan und Isolde*, for example, were comparatively straightforward for at least two reasons. Firstly, the autograph full score of each – the obvious main source for any critical edition – survives intact (the autograph score of *Lohengrin* was, by the composer’s own admission, his ‘best-written’ manuscript, complete with the all-important stage directions).⁸ Secondly, these are works that Wagner never sought to revise following their first performances. The task of these editions therefore – in a radical departure from all previously existing attempts – consisted in (simply) reinstating the original text.

The differences between *Lohengrin* and *Tristan* are more pronounced with respect to the question of the cuts that Wagner at one time or another authorised and often strongly recommended. On 2 July 1850, amidst preparations for the first performance of *Lohengrin* under its dedicatee Franz Liszt, Wagner decisively cut the second verse of Lohengrin’s Grail Narration from Act III, Scene 3, never to reinstate it. On this basis, the editors John Deathridge and the late Klaus Döge provided the passage in an

⁴ This volume has not yet been published.

⁵ Forthcoming: vol. 29/IIb (Texts to *Der Ring des Nibelungen*) and vol. 29/III (Documents to the First Bayreuth Performance of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*).

⁶ John Deathridge, Martin Geck, and Egon Voss, ed., *Wagner Werk-Verzeichnis: Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke Richard Wagners und ihrer Quellen* (Mainz, 1986).

⁷ Translated from e.g. Peter Jost, ‘Kritischer Bericht’, RWSW 1/III: *Die Feen* (Mainz, 2015), 196.

⁸ The comment was recorded in the entry dated 30 Nov. 1880 in *Cosima Wagner’s Diaries 1869–1883*, tr. and ed. Geoffrey Skelton, 2 vols. (London, 1978–80).

appendix, rather than in the body of the edition.⁹ By comparison, all the sections in *Tristan* that Wagner recommended or considered cutting (confined to Act II, Scene 2 and Act III, Scene 1) are – more cautiously – preserved in the body of the edition, with the cuts merely indicated in footnotes as options.

In other cases, critical attention to Wagner's intentions complicates the idea of a stable 'work', even if it still succeeds in simplifying the picture of any one score. The inclusion of multiple versions of certain works in the RWSW – *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser* (so-called 'Dresden', 'Paris' and 'Vienna'), to name the most obvious – creates new possibilities for performance and scholarship. On the one hand, it exposes the fault lines in Wagner's conception and subsequent interpretation of those works; on the other, the RWSW is laid out in such a way that the different versions are presented as equally valid options to be selected according to preference. In the collected edition, Wagner's vacillation about certain works – again, *Tannhäuser* is a case in point – translates directly into a menu of choices on offer to the present-day interpreter. Put more positively, the documentary volumes invite further criticism and interpretation in the numerous cases where Wagner contradicts his position on a work or more consciously revises it.

While the editors have offered a plurality of versions of some works, in other cases the palpable absence of what normally would be the main source poses the single greatest editorial obstacle. To rehearse the most famous of these, Wagner's autograph manuscript scores of *Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot*, *Rienzi*, *Rheingold* and *Walküre* were among the scores presented to his patron King Ludwig II of Bavaria from 1865 onwards.¹⁰ Following Ludwig's death, they came into the possession of the Wittelsbach family and in 1919 the estate donated them to the Wittelsbach Ausgleichsfond. They were acquired by the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in 1938 and presented to Adolf Hitler on his fiftieth birthday, 20 April 1939 (in his preface to *Rheingold*, Egon Voss gave the incorrect year of the latter, '20 April 1938'¹¹). All these scores were lost, presumably destroyed, in 1945.¹²

The fact that Michael Balling, the German violist and conductor who undertook the first attempted collected edition of Wagner's musical works, had access to these sources prior to their disappearance and used many of them as the basis of his problematic 'performing' editions, for example *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot*, has not exactly made this state of affairs any less confusing. These editions, comparable to but ultimately of a different class from Gustav Mahler's ad hoc alterations of scores for specific circumstances of performance, thus preserve a layer of evidence now indistinguishable from the cosmetic changes Balling superimposed. Balling's projected edition, aborted soon after his death in 1925, not merely obfuscated Wagner's intentions, setting Wagner source criticism back by several decades. It also missed the point that performance

⁹ John Deathridge and Klaus Döge, ed., RWSW 7/III: *Lohengrin* (Mainz, 2000), 202–12.

¹⁰ Wagner also presented Ludwig with particell (partially reduced) autograph scores of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, which suffered the same fate. These were cleverly designed as a ruse to prevent Ludwig from staging *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* without Wagner's consent, which is exactly what Ludwig had done with *Rheingold* and *Walküre*.

¹¹ Egon Voss, tr. Richard Deveson, 'Vorwort/Preface', RWSW 10/I: *Das Rheingold* (Mainz, 1988), vi.

¹² In the case of *Feen*, three fragments of the autograph score survive in facsimile.

considerations were integral to Wagner's theatrical conceptions in the first place; in other words, that rigorous philological criticism and modern performance practice are by no means alternatives, least of all where Wagner is concerned. There are a few instances in the critical reports in which the aim at modernisation trumped any literalist reproduction of the original text, such as: 'Wagner's general notation of the voice parts above the orchestral bass has been abandoned on the recommendation of distinguished conductors'.¹³ And by supplementing the textual sources with further notes on performance and interpretation deriving from Wagner himself, notably his illuminating remarks on expression and tempo in rehearsals for the first production of the *Ring* (1876), the editors have also honoured Wagner's express wish to establish a performing 'tradition' of his works.¹⁴

It is predominantly via the documentary volumes (Series B) that the editors have sought to realise this remarkable ambition. Drawing heavily on literary sources, particularly correspondence and autobiography, the documentary volumes give an account of the respective work's conception, composition, performance(s), publication(s), and subsequent revision and reinterpretation. Each of the documentary volumes bears the same statement in the preface:

The documentary volumes of Series B of the Richard Wagner Collected Edition are no mere supplement to the editions of the musical scores in Series A but an essential and integral component of the edition itself. Series B takes into account the fact that Wagner was, on the one hand, his own poet or librettist and, on the other, his own interpreter and commentator.¹⁵

The point can't be made too strongly: the documentary volumes were conceived from the start as an integral feature of the edition itself, not a mere appendage to the body of works. The documentary volume thus imparts to the corresponding work not so much a passive *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (reception history) which at once outsources interpretation and reifies 'works' as such, but a more subjective, experiential *Nachleben* (afterlife), to adopt Walter Benjamin's term.¹⁶ With the contextual totality of the documentary material, it is almost as if these works take on a life of their own.

All this means in practice is that the textual commentary and interpretation of the works relate directly to the content of the editions and at the same time reflect Wagner's idea of the work as an evolving entity, subject to a continual process of reinterpretation even after its 'completion'. Documentary material was selected on the criterion that it derived from Wagner himself or at least was closely associated with him (e.g. a recorded testimony or a correspondent's reply). The material circulating in the orbit of Wagner's 'intentions' does not so much impose a monolithic image of a work but suggests something quite different: a bricolage of literary accounts providing a more complex, multifaceted view of his intentions, warts and all. The editors of the documentary volumes have spared the reader extensive commentary distinguishing fact

¹³ Egon Voss, 'Kritischer Bericht', RWSW 8/III: *Tristan und Isolde* (Mainz, 1993), 210.

¹⁴ See e.g. Voss, tr. Deveson, 'Vorwort/Preface', RWSW 10/I: *Das Rheingold* (note 11), vi-viii.

¹⁵ Translated from e.g. Egon Voss, 'Vorwort', RWSW 24: *Dokumente und Texte zu 'Der fliegende Holländer'* (Mainz, 2004), 7.

¹⁶ See e.g. Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zorn (London, 2015), 72ff.

from fiction in these accounts, a potentially controversial sleight-of-hand which ultimately lends credence to the idea that Wagner even at his most self-mythologising articulated a broader ‘truth’ about his own subjective process of reinterpreting his works. The documentary volumes therefore not only justify the inclusion of multiple versions of any given work within Series A but also reveal Wagner’s conception of his works in general to be more fluid than most critical editions demand.

Fragments, arrangements, transcriptions, alternative versions, translations, cuts and all kinds of *dissecta membra* which might otherwise be excluded from a collected edition enjoy a central position within the RWSW.¹⁷ It is no surprise then that the Incomplete Stage Works and Projects fill a volume of their own (Series B, vol. 31), one that has yet to receive sustained attention from either theatre historians or musicologists.¹⁸ There is no evidence that any of the stage works Wagner planned or left incomplete were conceived as purely spoken theatre. Yet the fact that little or no musical material of those projects survives is apparently enough to recommend them for Series B as a ‘documentary volume’. Problematically, the documentary volumes in general contain none of Wagner’s musical sketches except for those that happen to appear arbitrarily within literary contexts, such as a theme jotted in the margins of a prose draft.¹⁹ The sketches, if not all drafts in the compositional process, are at least as important evidence of precise stages in a work’s conception and genesis as literary accounts.²⁰

If the documentary volumes suggest a literary bias, then, the poetic texts have been subordinated within the edition as a whole. This priority stems from the ‘surprising phenomenon that Wagner did not align the versions of the librettos with those of the score’, preferring to see the libretto or poetic text as a literary object in its own right.²¹ Yet, at an extreme – for instance in the case of the *Lohengrin* edition – the sources of the poetic texts were not even consulted, instead being confined to Series B alongside the documentary material and only then presented as transcriptions of particular sources (e.g. Prose Draft) rather than in fully fledged critical editions. The latter will have to wait for the *Richard Wagner Schriften*, inaugurated in 2013 at the University of Würzburg under Ulrich Konrad.

Each volume of the RWSW contains an appendix with a critical report in German, including general remarks, source descriptions, variants and errata. The prefaces to each of the volumes are given in German and English in parallel columns, making the volumes more open to an international readership. The English translations are service-

¹⁷ Wagner’s concert arrangements of *Rheingold* for Vienna, 1862–63, could not be included in Voss’s edition of that work due to the fragmentariness of the surviving sources. Egon Voss, ed., RWSW 10/II: *Das Rheingold* (Mainz, 1989), 427–8.

¹⁸ See Coleman, ‘Stage works, incomplete’, in *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia* (note 1), 561–2, and ‘Projects’, *ibid.*, 449–50. The only major studies of Wagner’s incomplete stage works to date are Dieter Borchmeyer, *Drama and the World of Richard Wagner*, tr. Daphne Ellis (Princeton, 2002) and Bernd Zegowitz, *Richard Wagners unvertonte Opern* (Frankfurt, 2000).

¹⁹ Several editors have noted as much in prefaces to the documentary volumes, hinting at a possible tension behind the scenes of the RWSW. See e.g. Voss, ed., RWSW 24 (note 15), 7; Deathridge and Döge, ed., RWSW 26: *Dokumente und Texte zu ‘Lohengrin’* (Mainz, 2003), 7. Wagner’s musical sketches remain largely unpublished.

²⁰ For a summary of the debate, see Deathridge, ‘Waiting for Wagner’ (note 1), 282, n. 3.

²¹ E.g. Voss, ed., RWSW 24 (note 15), 8.

able, with faults cropping up more frequently in Peter Jost's preface to *Die Feen*²² and in Richard Deveson's translation of Christa Jost's preface to *Walküre*.²³ The reproduction and layout is for the most part clear and well executed. On occasion, in the *Lohengrin* edition (vol. 7/I–III) for example, the musical notation is squeezed horizontally on the page, although this does mean that the individual volumes have turned out physically slimmer. It is regrettable, incidentally, that the collected edition never made it into digital media.²⁴ The RWSW began in the late sixties long before the era of so-called Digital Humanities and so it has steadily come to its conclusion in printed format. Nonetheless, in view of the challenges that Wagner's works pose as well as his idea of the role of media within musical theatre and what that might mean for the future of the printed score, digital technology of the 21st century would have only emphasised many of the innovative approaches already contained in this supposedly most old-fashioned of musicological products.

The RWSW marks a radical breakthrough in Wagner studies and in musicology more broadly and deserves to be an indispensable reference for anyone who seeks to interpret Wagner with critical sophistication and maturity. The picture of Wagner that emerges from the RWSW is a world away from the dilettante who, according to Theodor Adorno, was 'from the very first day [...] the author of his collected works', fantasising 'rows of classics bound in gold'.²⁵ To all appearances, the *Richard Wagner Sämtliche Werke*, rendered luxuriously in those eye-catching Burgundy covers, pays homage to that self-same myth. In reality, by attending so sensitively to the dynamic impulse at the core of Wagner's project, it blasts apart the view of him as a future classic assured of his historical niche in the museum of Great Art. As the editors remind us, Wagner consistently held performance as the true realisation and completion of a 'work', still today a progressive view by any measure. Some fifty years in the making, this marvellous edition, too, has merely thrown down a gauntlet. When practitioners and scholars eventually take it up, it will have begun to fulfil its purpose.

²² Peter Jost, 'Vorwort/Preface', RWSW 1/I: *Die Feen* (Mainz, 2010), vi–ix.

²³ Christa Jost, tr. Richard Deveson, 'Vorwort/Preface', RWSW 11/I: *Die Walküre* (Mainz, 2002), vi–xii. E.g. (quoting Wagner) 'I am so lath [*sic*], though, to let my original scores out of my hands'; and 'the revise proof [*sic*] (Revisionsauszüge)': *ibid.*, viii. Egon Voss, tr. A. C. Howie, 'Vorwort/Foreword', RWSW 9/I: *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Mainz, 1979), vi: 'This edition, therefore, is largely based on the letter [*sic*]'.
²⁴ On the question of digital editions in German scholarship including musicology today, see Thomas Bein, ed., *Vom Nutzen der Editionen: Zur Bedeutung moderner Editorik für die Erforschung von Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte* (Berlin, 2015).

²⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, tr. Rodney Livingstone (London, 1981), 19. Cf. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner* (Frankfurt, 1952), 25.