The Supporting Cast

Cosima von Bülow Wagner, widow and impresario

Ludwig will have to forgive me, for I shall
never see Starnberger See
as the scene of an ending. Richard and I
conceived Isolde there (though
Ludwig never knew, nor that he’d played a role,
placing the Villa Pellet
at the Master’s disposal). An ending, yes,
for Hans and me, and much less
the beginning of an end, much more the end
of a beginning. Hans un-
derstands this as well as anyone. He knows
that all things are important
only so far as they relate to The Work,
the Master’s, and mine, since I
alone am left now to see that things are done
as He would have wished. But this,
too, is an event in our lives; after all,
the king was a good soldier
in the Great War and well deserves his medals
of honor—for loyalty,
for service. That’s it: one for each of the two
wreaths he placed on the Coffin.
If for nothing else, he will be remembered
for this, I’m sure—a noble
benefactor at times of greatest incon-
venience to Art. But—and this
is to be regretted, by him as much as
anyone—Ludwig was not
as trustworthy as we had first hoped. In truth,
he could have saved me writing
those beseeching letters to secure his last-
minute support. It was be-
neath the Master’s dignity that I should be
forced to do so, and had he
not wasted his time and (our dear) money
on his infantile castles,
His work in Bayreuth might have moved along more
smoothly. In fact, Richard might
have lived longer. . . . Besides, even they, Ludwig’s
castles, owe more of their praise
to the Master who inspired them than to this
altogether less gifted,
albeit passionate, pupil. Finally,
in the beginning, those months
in Munich, Ludwig could have prevented us
the greater indignity
of having to deceive him about our . . . what
we’ll call undressed rehearsals
for marriage. I suppose that letter I wrote
—dictated, actually,
by Richard—denying rumors of our
adultery and pleading
for Ludwig to stifle the scandalmongers,
to demand some decorum,
is destined now for print along with the rest.
Indeed, there is a good deal
left for the sorting out of posterity.
My deepest regret is that
I won't be there to oversee it. For now
my work . . . *His* work? . . . our work
goes on. We did all we could for poor Ludwig.
If the histories are less
than kind to him . . . well, but what can one hope for
being what he was: servant
to Munich and king of the beer philistines?
We cannot all play the lead.