**Dresden uprising (May 1849),** one of the final wave of revolts during the 1848-9 revolutions, parallel to uprisings in Baden and the Bavarian Palatinate, all quelled by Prussian armed intervention. Across Europe, the “springtime of peoples” had witnessed liberal, constitutional victories. Rhetorical liberty, however, proved just that: initial coalitions – revolutionary socialists such as Wagner and laissez-faire Rhenish industrialists; pan-Slavists such as Bakunin and *völkisch* German nationalists; monarchists and republicans, etc. – proved irreconcilable. Moreover, the old order proved stronger than either it or its opponents had believed – and for many bourgeois seemed less threatening. Representatives to the Frankfurt *Vorparlament* moved towards national unity, promulgating a German constitution (March 28) and offering the imperial crown to Prussia’s Frederick William IV. His refusal (April 3) to “pick up a crown from the gutter” threw them into disarray. Emboldened, Frederick Augustus II of Saxony rejected the constitution and dissolved the Saxon parliament (April 30), elected in January with a democratic majority. Unlike Prussia, Saxony had long been a constitutional monarchy, and a reform ministry had governed from March 1848 to February 1849. But the king’s appointment of a reactionary movement, headed by Friedrich von Beust, and rejection of the constitution, ultimately provoked democratic opponents into a hurried response. On May 3, the town council organized the Communal Guard into a defense committee. Loyalist troops opened fire. Early on May 4, king and government escaped to Königstein; townsmen formed a provisional government.

Even at the time, the extent of Wagner’s involvement was obscured. Eduard Devrient reports Minna visiting him in desperation for advice concerning her husband, implicated yet not directly involved (Diary entry for 17 May 1849). Devrient is clear that she has been deceived. Wagner would downplay his role further in *Mein Leben*, yet nevertheless admits considerable involvement. He had the printer of Röckel’s *Volksblätter* print appeals to the Saxon army: “Are you with us against foreign troops?” (ML/E 394). Wagner probably ordered hand-grenades; he certainly served on the barricades and acted as look-out, observing street-fighting from the Kreuzkirche tower, whilst engaging in animated politico-philosophical discussion. Prussians entered the Neustadt on April 6. “Immediately the troops, supported by several cannon, opened an attack on … the people’s forces on the new marketplace” (ML/ 397). On April 7, miners from the Erzgebirge singing the *Marseillaise* arrived to reinforce the opposition. However, Prussian and loyalist troops outnumbered the rebels and were gaining ground, even though barricades meant that every street was hard fought. As the provisional government began an unsurprisingly abortive attempt to retreat to the Erzgebirge, to encourage revolt across Germany, Dresden’s streets, including the opera house were ablaze. In his Introduction to Marx’s *The Class Struggles in France*, Engels would bracket Dresden’s barricade heroism with that of Paris and Vienna, yet also pointed to the inevitable, once politics gave way to the “purely military standpoint.”

Repression was brutal. Many leaders, participants, and sympathizers were killed or punished: Bakunin, Röckel, and even Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient were arraigned. By chance, and with Liszt’s help, Wagner escaped into Swiss exile, intending in the *Ring*, as he explained, to “make clear to the men of the Revolution the *meaning* of that Revolution, in its noblest sense” (Wagner to Uhlig, 12 Nov. 1851).

MARK BERRY

Eduard Devrient, *Aus seinen Tagebüchern*, ed. Rolf Kabel (Weimar: Böhlau, 1964).

Frederick Engels, “Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Progress: Moscow, 1970), 1: 300-89.

Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851* (Cambridge UP: Cambridge, 1994).