

# Wagner's *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1: a Study in 'Renunciation of the Will' and the 'Sublime'<sup>1</sup>

Richard H. Bell

## *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1: A Dramatic and Musical Milestone

In Wagner's composition of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1 marks a significant milestone both in terms of its drama and its music. Wagner's first significant work on the *Ring* was his sketch of 4 October 1848,<sup>2</sup> but with the purpose of composing just one heroic opera, *Siegfried's Death*, and the first version of the libretto was composed from 12 to 28 November 1848. Although the emphasis was on the hero Siegfried, Wotan has a role as a 'respected god': he is called upon to consecrate the drink of Siegfried and Gunther in Act I;<sup>3</sup> oaths are made in his name;<sup>4</sup> the vassals call upon him as 'All-father! Ruling god!';<sup>5</sup> and at the end of the opera Siegfried enters Valhalla with Brünnhilde (as a Valkyrie)<sup>6</sup> and she praises Wotan as 'All-father! Magnificent one!';<sup>7</sup> his sovereignty being underlined by the vassals and women: 'Wotan! Wotan! Ruling god!'<sup>8</sup> However, as Wagner worked further on the libretto over the next four years, expanding this drama into the cycle of four operas, Wotan, although becoming the focus of attention and eclipsing Siegfried, was to experience a rude demotion from a 'Magnificent god' who graciously receives Siegfried and Brünnhilde into Valhalla to one who *seemingly* meets his end at the hands of this couple. I stress *seemingly* because although it appears Wotan's end comes about through certain external events (such as Siegfried's destruction of Wotan's spear in *Siegfried* Act III), Wotan in fact *voluntarily* renounces his power.

The first indication of this fundamental change in emphasis is found in the brief first sketch (May 1851) for the meeting of Wotan and Erda in *The Young Siegfried* (and in this sense the scene is a dramatic milestone): 'Wodan and the Wala: end of the gods.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a revision of a paper given to the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts at the University of St Andrews on 6 Feb. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> For the chronology of the evolution of the *Ring* see *Richard Wagner Sämtliche Werke*, xxix/1: *Dokumente zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Bühnenfestspiels 'Der Ring des Nibelungen'*, ed. Werner Breig and Hartmut Fladt (Mainz, 1976), 12–13.

<sup>3</sup> See *Wagner's Ring in 1848: New Translations of 'The Nibelung Myth' and 'Siegfried's Death'*, translated and with an introduction by Edward R. Haymes (Rochester, NY, 2010), 92–3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 132–3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 144–5. For the title 'All-father' of 'the highest or the oldest of all the gods' see, e.g., *Gylfaginning* 3 in *The Prose Edda: Norse Mythology*, tr. Jesse L. Byock (London, 2005), 11–12.

<sup>6</sup> *Wagner's Ring in 1848* (note 3), 184–5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 182–3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 184–5.



Wotan (John Tomlinson) summons Erda (Birgitta Svendén) in Act III Scene 1 of Harry Kupfer's 1990s Bayreuth staging of *Siegfried*. Photo: Bayreuth Festival/Wilhelm Rauh

Wodan's resolve: the Wala sinks down'.<sup>9</sup> Later he added 'Wodan and the Wala. – Guilt of the gods, and their necessary decline: Siegfried's destiny. – Self-destruction of the gods'.<sup>10</sup> So although it was not until June 1856 that Wagner announced that *Siegfried's Death* was to be renamed *Twilight of the Gods* (*Götterdämmerung*),<sup>11</sup> already in 1851 Wagner was working with the idea of the end of the gods and such a message becomes central for *Siegfried* Act III: in Scene 1, Wotan in his dialogue with the Wala<sup>12</sup> comes to the point of willingly renouncing his power; in Scene 2 Siegfried destroys Wotan's spear, the symbol of the god's will and power; in Scene 3 Siegfried and Brünnhilde declare their

love to each other, and we hear on Brünnhilde's lips the crucial words which are easy to miss (largely because Siegfried is singing different words): 'Dusk of the gods, let your darkness arise!' ('Götter-Dämm' rung, dunk'le herauf!')<sup>13</sup>

In the development of the *Ring*, *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1 is therefore a dramatic milestone; but, as is well known, it is also a musical milestone. From the very first bar the listener is presented with a remarkable 'quasi-symphonic development'<sup>14</sup> which continues into Scene 1. This change in style is attributed to the 'twelve-year break' (1857–69) Wagner took between Acts II and III during which he composed *Tristan* and *Meistersinger*. Although there was no complete twelve-year break (Wagner worked on the orchestration and fair copies of Acts I and II between 1864 and 1869),<sup>15</sup> the composition of the first two acts was effectively finished in 1857; the 'Kompositionsskizze' (composition sketch) was finished on 30 July and the 'Orchesterskizze' (orchestral sketch) on 9 August 1857. It was then in 1869 that he turned to Act III, working on the Kompositionsskizze (1 March to 14 June) and the Orchesterskizze (25 June to 5 August)

<sup>9</sup> Richard Wagner: *Skizzen und Entwürfe zur Ring-Dichtung*, ed. Otto Strobel (Munich, 1930), 66: 'Wodan und der Wala: götterende. Wodan's entschluß: die Wala versinkt.' Strobel (65) dates this sketch between 3 and 10 May 1851.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 67: 'Wodan und der Wala. – Schuld der götter, und ihr nothwendiger untergang: Siegfrieds bestimmung. – Selbstvernichtung der götter'. Strobel argues that this was added 'etwas später' (somewhat later) in view of the change in handwriting. See Strobel's 'Beilage VII'.

<sup>11</sup> Also *The Young Siegfried* was renamed *Siegfried*.

<sup>12</sup> The word Wala (vala) is derived from the Icelandic *völu-*, genitive of *völva*, 'prophetess': Árni Björnsson, *Wagner and the Volsungs: Icelandic Sources of Der Ring des Nibelungen* (London, 2003), 149–50.

<sup>13</sup> *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (London, 1993), 275.

<sup>14</sup> Barry Millington, *Richard Wagner: The Sorcerer of Bayreuth* (London, 2013), 104.

<sup>15</sup> Note that although a number of works wrongly simplify the process of composition of the *Ring* by claiming that there was this 'twelve-year break' they do nevertheless write about Wagner's work on the *Ring* in 1864–65, e.g. Curt von Westernhagen, *Wagner: A Biography*, tr. Mary Whittall, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1978), ii.608; cf. ii.349–50, 363–5, and in 1868–69: e.g. ii.407.

and on 25 August started work on the 'Niederschrift' (fair copy),<sup>16</sup> but not finishing this until 5 February 1871.<sup>17</sup>

The maturer style of Act III after his 'twelve-year break' turned out to be highly fitting for the fundamental themes of 'renunciation of the will' and the 'sublime' we are considering. It is particularly striking to compare two scenes which are dramatically similar but musically quite different, Act I Scene 2 and Act III Scene 1: not only do we find in the latter 'the new motivic, contrapuntal, and referential density of the orchestral accompaniment [...] but also the complete abandonment of anything like recitative'.<sup>18</sup> Cosima recalls: 'At tea he said that, if he wanted to make things easy for himself, he would, from the moment Wotan says, "*Seit mein Wunsch es will,*" introduce recitative, which would certainly create a great effect, but would put an end to the work as art. Nobody has yet noticed with how much art he has employed all means to prevent the interruption of the flow of melody, while still achieving a romantic effect. – Music, he says, transfigures everything, it never permits the hideousness of the bare word, however terrible the subject'.<sup>19</sup> Wagner's understanding of music expressed here (in that it 'transfigures everything [...] however terrible the subject') coheres rather well with his understanding of the 'sublime' which, as we shall see, he was developing as he composed the music for *Siegfried* Act III.

### ***Siegfried* Act III Scene 1: Sublime Terror, Wotan's Will and its Renunciation**

The central figure of Act III Scene 1 is Wotan, and he is also the central figure of the Prelude in that we hear nine musical motifs, skilfully woven together, which in one way or another are related to him:<sup>20</sup> (1) the Valkyrie ride motif, here used for Wotan's riding, which forms the background texture for most of the Prelude; (2) the Erda motif; (3) the need of the gods;<sup>21</sup> (4) the spear or treaty motif; (5) twilight of the gods; (6) Wanderer; (7) power of the ring; (8) sleep motif; (9) 'mutual recognition'.<sup>22</sup> These motifs are, so to speak, 'emblems' around the central figure of Wotan,<sup>23</sup> and roughly correspond to

<sup>16</sup> In various ways, Wagner's method of composition changed when he worked on *Siegfried*: see Curt von Westernhagen, *The forging of the 'Ring'*, tr. Arnold and Mary Whittall (Cambridge, 1976), 131; also Barry Millington, *Wagner* (Oxford, 2000), 197.

<sup>17</sup> One reason for the delay was his working on the 'Vorspiel' and Act I of *Götterdämmerung* (2 Oct. 1869–2 Jul. 1870).

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Newcomb, '*Siegfried*: The Music', in *Siegfried: Richard Wagner*, English National Opera Guide, ed. Nicholas John (London, 1984), 34.

<sup>19</sup> *Cosima Wagner's Diaries 1869–1883*, tr. and ed. Geoffrey Skelton, 2 vols. (London, 1978–80) [CT], 12 Mar. 1869.

<sup>20</sup> Of these nine motifs, numbers eight and nine strictly belong to the beginning of Scene 1 into which the music of the Prelude seamlessly moves.

<sup>21</sup> This first occurs in *Walküre* Act II Scene 2 (bars 815ff).

<sup>22</sup> This theme, commonly called the 'fate' motif, 'has a very specific identity in *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*, at least': Barry Millington, 'Wagner's revolutionary musical reforms', in *Ring Companion* (note 13), 16. E.g., in *Walküre* Act II it is heard in Brünnhilde's annunciation of death to her words 'Siegmond! – Look on me!' (ibid., 159; bars 1490–92). The theme's use here, as Scene 1 begins (bars 64–71), presumably refers *ironically* to the mutual recognition between Wotan and Erda, since only later in the scene does Erda realise that it is Wotan who stands before her.

<sup>23</sup> Note that the motif often used for and associated with Wotan, the Valhalla motif, does not occur in the Prelude.





Dürer's *Melencolia* woodcut provides a visual analogy with the way Wagner surrounds his protagonist with his musical emblems.

the 'confused court' in Walter Benjamin's analysis of Baroque dramas<sup>24</sup> whereby we find emblems placed around a central melancholic figure and illustrated so powerfully by Dürer's various depictions of *Melencolia*.<sup>25</sup> Wotan in this scene is not actually a figure of melancholy although he certainly becomes one later as can be seen in Waltraute's description of him in *Götterdämmerung* Act I.<sup>26</sup> In fact throughout the Prelude Wotan, far from being portrayed as melancholic, is full of 'will', this being expressed through the 'drive' of the music<sup>27</sup> whose 'elemental power' is driven 'largely by the persistent ostinato-like repetition of the dotted figure associated [...] with the raw energy of the Valkyries'<sup>28</sup> but also by the five overlapping entries of the spear motif (bars 15–22). That these were highly significant for Wagner is suggested by his comment to Porges: 'The overlapping entries of the Treaty motive must be brought out with the utmost precision'.<sup>29</sup>

In this scene Wotan is in turmoil; the Prelude, as we have seen, presents a rapid combination of musical motifs related to Wotan and his worries, and his first musical entry in Scene 1 ('Wotan's refrain') reflects this turmoil. Especially important for the whole scene is the melody for Wotan's words 'Wala! Erwach!' ('Wala! Awake!'), the third and fourth bars of the eight of 'Wotan's refrain',<sup>30</sup> which I call the 'Wotan's anxiety' motif (see Ex. 1). It is a transformation of one of the love motifs in the *Ring* and this is achieved by conforming its rhythm to the 'definitive version' of the ring motif as it occurs at the end of Scene 1 of *Rheingold* (bars 749–50); further, as Newcomb points out, the final note employs the diminished seventh which is also the first chord of the 'power of the ring' (compare bars 51 and 77).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, tr. John Osborne (Thetford, 1977), 188, original 'Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels', in *Walter Benjamin Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt, 1963), I.i.364. Cf. John Deathridge, 'Don Carlos and *Götterdämmerung*: Two Operatic Endings and Walter Benjamin's Trauerspiel', *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil* (Berkeley, 2008), 79–101, esp. 83, 94.

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin, *Origin* (note 24), 140; original 'Ursprung', 319.

<sup>26</sup> Her description here (see *Ring Companion* (note 13), 302–4) is then matched with that in the final stage direction of *Götterdämmerung* (*ibid.*, 351). Deathridge, 'Trauerspiel' (note 24), 96–7, argues that this 'image of the gods and their indecisive and resigned ruler' was probably introduced while Wagner was 'recomposing the music of the ending of the *Ring* sometime between April and July 1872 (the period in which the full second draft of the music was finally completed)'.

<sup>27</sup> Bryan Magee's comment in *Wagner and Philosophy* (London, 2001), 274, about Wagner's music before *Parsifal* having 'an enormously powerful drive of assertiveness', although by no means applicable to all this music, is certainly apposite for this Prelude.

<sup>28</sup> Roger Allen, "'The old order changeth, yielding place to new": *Siegfried* Act III, Scene 1', *The Wagner Journal* i/3 (2007), 35–48, esp. 38.

<sup>29</sup> Heinrich Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing the 'Ring'*, tr. Robert L. Jacobs (Cambridge, 1983), 101.

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Newcomb, 'The Birth of Music out of the Spirit of Drama: An Essay in Wagnerian Formal Analysis', *19th-Century Music*, v (1981–82), 38–66, esp. 60–62, uses the term 'Wotan's refrain' initially for the whole eight-bar phrase (bars 74–81, 82–9) but later, rather confusingly, for just the third and fourth bars.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Ring motif: 

Love motif: 

WANDERER

Wa - che, Wa - la! Wa - la! Er - wach'! \_\_\_\_\_

[Lebhaft, doch gewichtig]

1 2 3 4

ffp *fp*

Aus lan - gen Schlaf weck'... ich dich Schlumm - ern-de auf.

5 3 6

*dim.* *p*



Ex. 1 *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1: bars 74–81, showing the derivation of the 'Wotan's anxiety' motif in the love and ring motifs, and with the five chords of Wotan's refrain numbered 1 to 5.

The use of this 'Wotan's anxiety' motif therefore indicates that the god's anxieties about his downfall (and that of Valhalla) are ultimately caused not only by the ring which bears the curse but also by the power of love, especially that between the Volsung twins Siegmund and Sieglinde (the most powerful use of this love motif is precisely in *Walküre* Acts I and II). Wotan's anxieties are further heightened by the fruit of this most passionate love, the hero Siegfried, who is about to destroy Wotan's spear and then fall in love with Brünnhilde. These relationships are ultimately to lead to the downfall of the gods. Wagner described the opening of Act III as 'Wotan's last ride, which is yet another descent to the underworld';<sup>32</sup> and in a letter to Ludwig (24 February 1869) he writes of 'a dark,

<sup>32</sup> Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing the 'Ring'* (note 29), 101. The stage direction mentions no such 'riding', obviously something which is problematic to bring off on stage, and the idea is probably inspired by *Baldrs draumar* (*Baldr's dreams*), stanzas 2–3, where Odin rides to Hel on his eight-legged horse Sleipnir: see *The Elder Edda*, tr. Andy Orchard (London, 2011), 248. On the parallels between *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1 and *Baldr's dreams*, see Björnsson, *Wagner and the Volsungs* (note 12), 209–12.



sublime and awesome dread with which I enter the realm of my third act. We come here, like the Hellenes at the reeking crevice at Delphi, to the nub of the great world tragedy: the world is on the brink of destruction; the god seeks to ensure that the world is reborn, for he himself is the world's will to become [der Wille der Weltwerdung]. Everything here is sublime terror [Hier ist Alles erhabenes Grauen], and can be spoken of only in riddles.<sup>33</sup> Clearly, this sense of the 'sublime terror' is central for this scene.

Wotan's expression of will can be discerned immediately in the stage direction: 'He strides resolutely to the mouth of a vault-like cavern in a rock at the front of the stage and takes up his position there, leaning on his spear, while calling into the mouth of the cave'.<sup>34</sup> He aggressively awakes Erda, his final 'Erwache!' being underlined by the spear motif (bars 117–20). Comparing the stage direction ('She appears to be covered in hoar-frost; hair and garments give off a glittering sheen') with Wagner's source, *Baldr's dreams* stanza 5 ('I've been covered with snow, battered with rain, drenched with dew: I've been long dead')<sup>35</sup> may suggest that he is actually awakening her from the dead.<sup>36</sup> As she responds 'Strong is the call of your lay' ('Stark ruft das Lied') one is immediately aware that Wotan's 'functionally centered, stable tonality' contrasts with Erda's 'non-functional, unstable tonality',<sup>37</sup> which again highlights Wotan's sense of 'will'. She asks who wakes her.<sup>38</sup> Wotan simply identifies himself as her awakener and emphasises twice that he is desperate for knowledge ('Kunde') which he thinks only Erda can disclose. Erda tells him that her knowledge is related to dreams in that her dreaming is 'brooding' ('Sinnen') and her brooding is the 'exercise of knowledge' ('Walten des Wissens').<sup>39</sup> Knowledge and its relationship to dreams was an important theme in Wagner's stage works and in a number of his essays including his 1870 essay *Beethoven* which was written as he was composing Siegfried Act III. Now Erda's point may be that her knowledge is in what one could call 'percepts'<sup>40</sup> and if Wotan wants conceptual knowledge then, she suggests, he ought to ask the Norns since when the goddess sleeps they keep watch and weave whatever she knows through her 'percepts'.

<sup>33</sup> *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, tr. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (London, 1987) [SL], 740 (translation slightly modified); *König Ludwig II. und Richard Wagner Briefwechsel*, ed. Otto Strobel, 4 vols. (Karlsruhe, 1936), ii.258.

<sup>34</sup> *Ring Companion* (note 13), 254.

<sup>35</sup> *Elder Edda* (note 32), 248.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Magee, *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs* (Oxford, 1990), 130–31, points out that the Erda of *Siegfried* predates that of *Rheingold*. That of *Rheingold* is based on the all-knowing seeress of the *Völuspá* whereas that of *Siegfried* is based on *Baldrs draumar* (*Baldr's dreams*), otherwise known as *Vegtamskvida*. See *Elder Edda* (note 32), 338.

<sup>37</sup> Newcomb, 'The Birth of Music' (note 30), 60.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Baldr's dreams* stanza 5 in *Elder Edda* (note 32), 248: 'What man is that, unknown to me, who has made me take a troublesome trip?' There is a hint of the 'mutual recognition' motif six bars before her entry, again this being an ironic reference. The orchestration is that of the Tarnhelm motif (four muted horns).

<sup>39</sup> 'Exercise of knowledge' could be taken as both a subjective genitive (exercise of knowledge in the sense that the knowledge itself 'exercises', 'works') and an objective genitive (exercise concerning the knowledge): Herbert Huber, *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Vollständiger Text mit Kommentar* (Weinheim, 1988), 245.

<sup>40</sup> On 'percepts' cf. Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford, 1997), 102–3.

But Wotan wants to consult Erda herself for only thereby can he change events.<sup>41</sup> As he expresses his desperation 'to hold back a rolling wheel', oboes and clarinets play the 'Wotan's anxiety' motif (bars 214–16) and that is immediately preceded by the equally significant ring motif (bars 212–13). In the following bars as 'Wotan's anxiety' is transformed into the ring motif (bars 218–23) Erda, still not recognising who awakens her (she refers to Wotan in the third person), points to what Schopenhauer would call the 'will to life'<sup>42</sup> in one of its most ominous aspects: 'Deeds of men / becloud my mind: / wise though I am, / a ruler once tamed me.' As she alludes to being raped by Wotan the music moves from the ring motif (bars 220–23) to 'love's denial' (bars 224–5); but these negative associations disappear as she goes on to speak of the 'Wish-Maid' she bore to Wotan, the music moving into the major Valhalla motif (bars 226–9). Erda then suggests that Wotan should seek knowledge from his 'Wish-Maid'; he explains that if she is referring to Brünnhilde then he cannot consult her since she has been put to sleep on the 'yonder fell'. He explains that she defied 'War-Father' and has been punished: she sleeps on a rock and will awaken only to the one who will be her husband. 'What use would it be to question her?' he asks.<sup>43</sup>

Erda tells him that she has grown confused since being awakened: 'wild and awry / the world revolves!' She asks whether Brünnhilde 'atones in trammels of sleep / while her knowing mother slept?' She points to Wotan's hypocrisy. 'Does he who taught defiance / scourge defiance? / Does he who urged the deed [that is save Siegmund] / grow wroth when it is done?'<sup>44</sup> Wotan reminds Erda that she once thrust 'the thorn of care [Sorge Stachel] / into Wotan's venturesome heart' and, referring back to her first appearance in *Rheingold* when she predicted the end of the gods, he says 'with fear of a shamefully adverse end / your knowledge filled him / till dread [Bangen] enmeshed his mind'. He asks the wisest woman how can he, 'der Gott', overcome his care (Sorge)? The words 'der Gott' are placed at the end of the phrase and Erda's reply focuses on this when she utters 'You are not / what you say you are!' and she refers to him as 'Stubborn, wild-spirited one' ('du störrischer Wilder').<sup>45</sup> Wotan replies: 'You are not / what you think you are!'<sup>46</sup> He continues: 'The wisdom of primeval mothers ['Urmütter-Weisheit']<sup>47</sup> / draws toward its end: / your knowledge wanes / before my will'. But

<sup>41</sup> Wotan's words assume the Norns are subject to Necessity: 'In thrall to the world / those wise women weave: / naught can they make or mend'. *Ring Companion* (note 13), 255.

<sup>42</sup> E.F.J. Payne translates Schopenhauer's 'Wille zu Leben' as 'will to live' (see below).

However, it is more accurate to translate the phrase as 'will to life'. See Dale Jacquette, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Chesham, 2005), xi–xii.

<sup>43</sup> *Ring Companion* (note 13), 256.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 256–7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 257 translates as 'stubborn wild-spirited god', presumably to avoid the classic translationese 'stubborn, wild-spirited one'. But, by including the word 'god/Gott', which is absent in the German, Erda's insult is lost in translation. Note the Stabreim in this and the following line: 'Was kam'st du störrischer Wilder / zu stören der Wala Schlaf'.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Baldur's draumar* stanza 13, *Elder Edda* (note 32), 249: "'You are not Way-tamer, as I suspected, rather you are Odin, the ancient sacrifice", "You are not a seeress or a wise woman, rather are you the mother of three ogres"'.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Ring Companion* (note 13), 257. Such 'primeval mothers' are probably other valas and there may be an allusion to the 'mothers' of Goethe's *Faust* part II (ll. 6214–17). Cf. *ibid.*, 369, n. 122.



not only does Erda's knowledge 'wane' by means of Wotan's will but his very will also 'waned'. So he asks her 'Do you know what Wotan wills?'

We now come to the turning point in the scene marked by the 'long silence' (bar 351).<sup>48</sup> Wotan addresses Erda as 'unwise woman' ('unweisen'),<sup>49</sup> playing on what he earlier called her ('Urweltweise', 'Primevally wise')<sup>50</sup> and as he calls on her to sleep forever free from care, the orchestra play the familiar Erda and twilight of the gods motif (bars 352–7). Then as Wotan tells Erda that he, like she, is also free from care and that the end of the gods no longer consumes him, the chords of 'Wotan's refrain' (marked here, in Ex. 2 opposite, as in Ex. 1, from 1 to 5) are presented in an expanded form.<sup>51</sup> And so the god comes to the remarkable conclusion that his end no longer consumes him because this is precisely what he now wills; it is ironic that what he wills is to renounce his own will. 'What I once resolved in despair, / in the searing smart of inner turmoil, / I now perform freely / in gladness and joy' ('froh und freudig / führe frei ich nun aus').<sup>52</sup> The reference to resolving 'in despair' to give up his power is presumably to his words in *Walküre* Act II: 'Let all I raised / now fall in ruins! / My work I abandon; / one thing alone do I want: / the end – / the end!'.<sup>53</sup> Although Wotan in *Walküre* Act II resolved to will the end 'in despair', here in *Siegfried* Act III he now wills it 'freely in gladness and joy'. This is one of those cases where Wagner is a 'Schopenhauerian' before first reading Schopenhauer in September 1854.<sup>54</sup>

As soon as Wotan utters these words of renunciation a new theme occurs ('bequest', 'world inheritance') in A flat major<sup>55</sup> which is associated with Wotan's handing on his inheritance to Siegfried (and by implication to Brünnhilde also). Porges comments: 'He [Wagner] once characterized the spiritual significance of this theme (whilst going through the work at the piano) by the statement: "It must sound like the proclamation of a new religion."' <sup>56</sup> The composer added: 'The prescribed piano on the first crotchet of the second bar must be scrupulously observed: it is precisely the unexpected reduction of volume at that point which makes possible a deliberate increase of emphasis as the phrase broadly unfolds. Subsequently the performance of the whole scene must be imbued by this revelation of spiritual renewal.'<sup>57</sup> This interpretation is by no means fanciful. Previously (bars 216–29) there has been a 'mutation' of themes from 'Wotan's anxiety', to the ring, and to Valhalla. These three motifs are related by 'an emphatic,

<sup>48</sup> One wonders how often this is actually observed in performance: cf. Newcomb, 'The Birth of Music' (note 30), 60.

<sup>49</sup> The 1875 score has 'urweisen', but *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen von Richard Wagner*, 10 vols., 3rd edn (Leipzig, 1897) [GSD], vi. and the sketches for *Der junge Siegfried* have 'unweisen': Ströbel, *Skizzen* (note 9), 173.

<sup>50</sup> *Ring Companion* (note 13), 254.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Newcomb, 'The Birth of Music' (note 30), 62.

<sup>52</sup> *Ring Companion* (note 13), 257–8 (note the alliteration).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>54</sup> The denial of the will was a key theme in the fourth book of the philosopher's magnum opus, e.g. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, tr. E.F.J. Payne, 2 vols. (New York, 1966), ii.603–33.

<sup>55</sup> In the first sketch it was in G major – for the sketches, see Westernhagen, *The forging of the 'Ring'* (note 16), 168–9.

<sup>56</sup> Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing the 'Ring'* (note 29), 103.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 103–4.

Wagner's 'Siegfried' Act III Scene 1: a Study in 'Renunciation of the Will' and the 'Sublime'

WANDERER

[Mässig]

Um der Göt-ter En - de grämt mich die Angst nicht,

seit mein Wunsch es will. Was in des Zwic-spalt's wil-dem

Schmer-ze ver-zwei-felnd einst ich be - schloss, froh und freu - dig füh - re

frei ich nun aus.

Ex. 2 *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1: bars 357–77, featuring the repetition of the chord sequence (boxed Nos. 1 to 5) from Ex. 1

marcato, downbeat-afterbeat pattern with the afterbeat longer than the downbeat, set to a falling melodic gesture' (bars 216, 218, 220, 224, 226) but then for the 'world inheritance', 'the quarter-note pulse becomes a half-note pulse, the falling interval becomes a sixth'.<sup>58</sup> Hence 'the scene is finally realizing its own destiny. [...] The effect is both musically logical and splendidly dramatic'.<sup>59</sup>

So although Wotan once in furious loathing 'bequeathed the world to the Nibelung's spite'<sup>60</sup> now he gladly leaves his inheritance to the lordliest Volsung. Siegfried rejoices in love and is free from greed (he does not know the value of the ring he now possesses) so the curse has no power over him for he knows no fear. Wotan foretells that Siegfried will awaken Brünnhilde who will 'work the deed that redeems the world' ('erlösende Weltenthat'),<sup>61</sup> the first explicit reference in the *Ring* to Brünnhilde's redeeming work.<sup>62</sup> Finally Wotan tells Erda to sleep on and in dreaming to behold his end, and adds these highly significant words about this cheerful renunciation:

Whatever they do –  
to the one who's eternally young  
the god now yields in gladness.<sup>63</sup>

### 'Renunciation of the Will': Wotan's and ours

It seems clear, even without knowing Wagner's interpretation, that a central idea in *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1 is Wotan's renunciation of his will. But what Wagner's interpretation adds is that Wotan is an example for us and that in some sense he also represents us. In a letter to Ludwig he writes: 'I too, like Wotan, must shut off the world of the will, firmly, unopenably [unentriegelbar] and with final resolution: this have I done! Nothing shall open it up again! In it and for it I suffered all I was capable of suffering; I have now acquired the right no longer to be a part of it! – You, my most gracious friend, will discover some day *what* I am telling you here and what I am hinting at! – And so I am now ready to cast myself into this final horror: for I can already hear the echo from the mountains resounding with the exultant clamour of redemption.'<sup>64</sup> The 'echo from the mountain' must refer to the sleeping Brünnhilde who will bring redemption.

Wotan is therefore an *example* for us of someone in need of redemption; but he could also be an allegorical figure, *pointing beyond himself*. In his letter to Röckel of 25/26 January 1854 Wagner contrasts Wotan with Siegfried. On Wotan as the Wanderer he writes: 'observe him closely! he resembles *us* to a tee; he is the sum total of present-day

<sup>58</sup> Newcomb, 'The Birth of Music' (note 30), 62–3. See Ex. 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>60</sup> *Ring Companion* (note 13), 258. Wotan is referring to his outburst in *Walküre*, Act II (*ibid.*, 154): 'So take my blessing, / Nibelung son! / What I loathe most deeply / I leave as your legacy' ('So nimm meinen Segen, / Niblungen-Sohn! / Was tief mich ekelt, / dir geb' ich's zum Erbe').

<sup>61</sup> The world inheritance motif reappears but now in G major (bars 408–11). The scene ending in G major therefore balances the opening tonality of G minor: see Allen, 'Old order' (note 28), 44.

<sup>62</sup> However, already at the end of *Walküre* Act III it is implied that she will act as redeemer, her 'incarnation' being the necessary prerequisite.

<sup>63</sup> *Ring Companion* (note 13), 258.

<sup>64</sup> SL (note 33), 740–41; *König Ludwig II. und Richard Wagner Briefwechsel* (note 33), ii.258 (Wagner's emphasis). He derived 'unentriegelbar' from 'Riegel' meaning 'bolt'; therefore the sense is not just that you cannot 'open it' but also that you cannot 'unlock it' or 'unbolt it'.

intelligence, whereas Siegfried is the man of the future whom we desire and long for but who cannot be made by us, since he must create himself on the basis of *our own annihilation*.<sup>65</sup> This transition from Wotan (the sum total of present-day intelligence) to Siegfried (the man of the future) is portrayed in *Siegfried* Act III and there is a possible 'symbolic intent' in the movement from G to C, 'G as the key of Wotan's renunciation of power, and C as the key in which Siegfried assumes and transforms that power'.<sup>66</sup> I suggest that both god and hero are not only representative figures but also allegorical figures. Wotan as Wanderer represents the human being in Adam and Siegfried represents the human being in Christ; further the god and hero point beyond themselves as allegorical figures of Adam and Christ. That this interpretation is not so far from the truth may be suggested by Wagner's sketches for *Jesus of Nazareth* which were composed between the completion of the libretto for *Siegfried's Death* and early 1849. The work was intended as an opera (we have just one musical sketch, 'Christus im Schiffe', 'Christ in the boat', for a scene from Act II)<sup>67</sup> and it continued to occupy Wagner's thoughts in the second half of 1849 when he was considering having it performed in Paris.<sup>68</sup> As Zegowitz has argued, many of the issues raised in the prose sketches were eventually represented on the stage of the *Ring*<sup>69</sup> and I add the relationship between Adam and Christ which Wagner raises in the second and third parts of the sketches. He explains that although Jesus was descended from David, ultimately he traced his lineage to Adam, 'the immediate offspring of God, from whom spring all men'.<sup>70</sup> Jesus came to understand the 'universal' significance of this: 'So Jesus brushed aside the House of David: through Adam had he sprung from God, and therefore all men were his brothers'.<sup>71</sup> But there was a darker side to Adam. Although Adam and Eve were 'innocent', in the process of gaining 'knowledge' ('erkenntnis') they had to distinguish between the 'helpful' and the 'harmful'. But 'in the human heart the notion of the Harmful (der begriff des schädlichen) developed into that of the Wicked (bis zu dem von bösen)'.<sup>72</sup> The dualism ('Zwiegespaltenheit') of the 'Wicked' and 'Good' 'formed the basis of all Sin and Suffering of mankind'.<sup>73</sup> The idea of this 'fall' is found in a number of Wagner's works, both in the writings<sup>74</sup> and in stage works,<sup>75</sup> including the *Ring*.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>65</sup> SL (note 33), 308 (Wagner's emphasis).

<sup>66</sup> Patrick McCreless, *Wagner's 'Siegfried': Its Drama, History, and Music* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1982), 191.

<sup>67</sup> John Deathridge, Martin Geck, and Egon Voss, *Wagner Werk-Verzeichnis: Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke Richard Wagners und deren Quellen* (Mainz, 1985), 339.

<sup>68</sup> See the letters of 9 Aug. and 19 Nov. 1849 to Theodor Uhlig and Ferdinand Heine respectively in SL (note 33), 175, 177–8.

<sup>69</sup> Bernd Zegowitz, *Richard Wagners unvertonte Opern* (Frankfurt, 2000), 195–210.

<sup>70</sup> *Jesus of Nazareth*, in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, tr. and ed. William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols. (London, 1892–9) [PW], viii.297; *Richard Wagner Sämtliche Werke*, xxxi: *Dokumente und Texte zu unvollendeten Bühnenwerken*, ed. Isolde Vetter and Egon Voss (Mainz, 2005) [SW], 248.

<sup>71</sup> PW (note 70), viii.298; SW (note 70), 248.

<sup>72</sup> PW, viii.310; SW, 254. Wagner returns to the theme of 'innocence' and 'Fall' later in his section on 'woman' (PW, viii.320; SW, 258).

<sup>73</sup> PW, viii.311; SW, 254.

<sup>74</sup> See, e.g., 'The Art-Work of the Future', PW, i.69–70.

<sup>75</sup> One of the more light-hearted examples is Hans Sachs's song 'Jerum! Jerum!' in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* Act II Scene 6, in GSD (note 49), vii.211–13.

<sup>76</sup> Richard H. Bell, *Wagner's Parsifal: An Appreciation in the Light of His Theological Journey* (Eugene, OR, 2013), 135–8.



One of the striking aspects of the *Ring* is that the fall is due not only to Alberich's theft of the Rhinegold but also to Wotan's search for wisdom (missing in the original 'Nibelung Myth' and *Siegfried's Death* of 1848). Wotan's 'fall' opens up the possibility that he points beyond himself to the figure of Adam who, like the god, fell in his search for knowledge (this link between 'error' and 'knowledge' is central for the beginning of 'The Art-Work of the Future'<sup>77</sup>). In opposition to Adam is Christ. Although, as we have seen, Christ's lineage goes back to Adam in *Jesus of Nazareth*, his role is to undo the effects of Adam's fall and it is significant that the relevant New Testament text, Romans 5:18, was doubly marked in Wagner's copy of the New Testament and is quoted in *Jesus of Nazareth*.<sup>78</sup>

Now just as Wagner makes a Wotan/Adam link, so he makes a Siegfried/Christ link. In *The Wibelungen*, composed at roughly the same time as he was working on his first sketch for the *Ring*, he likens the two figures, 'in [that one native Stem-god, i.e. Siegfried] was found the striking likeness to Christ himself, the Son of God' and even equates them: 'In the German Folk survives the oldest lawful race of Kings in all the world: it issues from a son of God, called by his nearest kinsmen *Siegfried*, but *Christ* by the remaining nations of the earth; the welfare of his race, and the peoples of the earth derived therefrom, he wrought a deed most glorious, and for that deed's sake suffered death.'<sup>79</sup> The 'race' which issued from Siegfried/Christ should be understood in a 'spiritual' sense since neither fathered any children.<sup>80</sup>

I therefore take Wotan and Siegfried as allegorical figures who point beyond themselves. But are they solely allegorical figures to whom we can choose to relate? Are they also not mythical figures? They certainly are, but it is important to ask what sort of myth we are dealing with. Schelling made a sharp distinction between allegory and myth, claiming the latter was not 'allegorical' but 'tautegorical'. Schelling argued that mythology is not something 'artificial' ('künstlich') but rather 'natural' ('natürlich') and since myth comes into being by necessity, there is no distinction between form and content, stuff and dressing.<sup>81</sup> I think he is right in the sense that myth is not a freely produced work of art such as a novel but comes into being under key constraints. And so adopting a term from Coleridge, he argues that mythology is 'tautegorical'.<sup>82</sup> Therefore the gods of myth are real existing beings and do not point beyond themselves.<sup>83</sup> This

<sup>77</sup> PW (note 70), i.69–70.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.338; SW (note 70), 266.

<sup>79</sup> PW (note 70), vii.287, 289; GSD (note 49), ii.144, 146.

<sup>80</sup> Although Sigurd of *Saga of the Volsungs* fathers Aslaug through Brynhild, presumably in chapter 25 – cf. *Prose Edda* (note 5), 102 – Sivrid of the *Nibelungenlied* is childless; also no mention is made of Aslaug in the *Elder Edda*.

<sup>81</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie* (Stuttgart/Augsburg, 1856), 195: 'Weil die Mythologie nicht ein künstlich, sondern ein natürlich, ja unter der gegebenen Voraussetzung mit Nothwendigkeit Entstandenes ist, lassen sich in ihr nicht *Inhalt* und *Form*, *Stoff* und *Einkleidung* unterscheiden' (Schelling's emphasis).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 195–6. Coleridge argued symbol was tautegorical: see *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 6: Lay Sermons*, ed. R.J. White (Princeton, 1972), 30. Note, however, that although Schelling took this term from Coleridge he also influenced the poet in giving him a higher regard for Greek myth. See Nicholas Halmi, 'Coleridge on Allegory and Symbol', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford, 2009), 354.

<sup>83</sup> Schelling, *Mythologie* (note 81), 196: 'Die Götter sind ihr wirklich existierende Wesen, die nicht etwas anderes sind, etwas anderes bedeuten, sondern nur das bedeuten, was sie sind.'

highlights the crucial point that whereas myth is inexchangeable, allegory (together with other tropes such as metaphor) is exchangeable. In C.S. Lewis's allegory *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the lion Aslan is an allegorical figure for Christ. But the lion could be exchanged by another figure. Likewise in metaphor, closely related to allegory, if one says Achilles is a lion, no one believes that Achilles really is a lion and this metaphor can be replaced by another metaphor, such as Achilles is an eagle (see Homer, *Iliad* 24.41; cf. 21.252). But in myth we are dealing with something which is inexchangeable (e.g. the sacrifice of Christ). In such myths one can work with Schelling's view that myth is tautegorical. But I suggest that in Wagner's *Ring* a different sort of myth is at work. Employing a distinction of Eberhard Jüngel, Wagner as an artist and allegoriser is concerned with 'Arbeit am Mythos' (work on myth) which is a myth-critical reception as opposed to 'Arbeit des Mythos' (work of myth) which is the reception of myth Schelling appears to have in mind.<sup>84</sup> Wagner certainly draws on myth but his myth, I suggest, seems to move over into allegory because of the composer's free artistic intent. Even Coleridge can acknowledge in his lectures on Prometheus that in myths of 'Jove's intrigues with Europa, Io, &c. [...] symbol fades away into allegory' although symbol 'never ceases wholly to be a symbol or tautegory'.<sup>85</sup> The artist has a freedom that other myth-makers may not have and it is primarily the artist who has this freedom for the 'invention [Erfindung] of mythic allegories'.<sup>86</sup> So, going back to *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1, it may be that myth takes on an allegorical dimension in that the figure of Wotan points beyond himself to Adam; and allegory takes on a mythic dimension in that we have the possibility of a mythological identification with the allegorical figure of the Wanderer and, later on, with Siegfried.

Therefore, although myth is often seen as fundamental for the *Ring*, allegory may well be equally central. Wagner rarely discusses allegory, but this may have something to do with the Romantic promotion of the symbol and the corresponding denigration of allegory as found in figures such as Goethe. Goethe makes a clear contrast between symbol and allegory in his letter to Schelling (29 November 1803) where he asks him to explain to the painter Johann Martin Wagner the crucial distinction between the two: 'Can you make clear to him the distinction between the allegorical and the symbolic; thus you will be his benefactor since so much revolves around this axis'.<sup>87</sup> But in contrast Schopenhauer makes no categorical distinction between allegory and symbol in plastic and pictorial art and indeed offers a positive evaluation of allegory in relation to poetry.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, 'Die Wahrheit des Mythos und die Notwendigkeit der Entmythologisierung', in *Indikative der Gnade – Imperative der Freiheit* (Tübingen, 2000), 43.

<sup>85</sup> *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 11: Shorter Works and Fragments*, 2 vols., ed. H.J. Jackson and J.R. de J. Jackson (Princeton, 1995), ii.1280.

<sup>86</sup> Although in paragraph 1 of *Religion and Art* Wagner writes of 'the religious Founder' having this freedom, in paragraph 2 he writes that it is the artist who 'freely and openly gives out his work as his own invention [Erfindung]': PW (note 70), vi.213–14; GSD (note 49), x.212. Note that he then goes on to speak of the 'sublime distinction of the Christian religion' ('eine erhabene Eigenthümlichkeit der christlichen Religion'); my emphasis.

<sup>87</sup> 'Können Sie ihm den Unterschied zwischen allegorischer und symbolischer Behandlung begrifflich machen; so sind Sie sein Wohlthäter, weil sich um diese Axe so viel dreht': F.W.J. Schelling; *Briefe und Dokumente*, iii., ed. Horst Fuhrmans (Bonn, 1975), 32.

<sup>88</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will* (note 54), i.239, 240–42.

I suggest that Wagner himself had a positive approach to allegory. As I suggested earlier, the leitmotifs<sup>89</sup> of the Prelude to Act III are rather like allegorical emblems placed around the central figure of Wotan. As such they are exchangeable; so although the downward scale is appropriate for Wotan's 'spear' one could conceive of Wagner composing a different one. Further, Wagner's emblematic leitmotifs display a certain instability,<sup>90</sup> an example from the Prelude being the 'fate'/'mutual recognition' motif.<sup>91</sup> This now brings me to one of the fundamental characteristics of allegory: at its best it demonstrates a certain instability and it can spring surprises. Benjamin speaks of allegory scattering and gathering. Speaking of the 'confused court' he writes: "This court is subject to the law of "dispersal" and "collectedness". Things are assembled according to their significance; indifference to their existence allowed them to be dispersed again."<sup>92</sup> Deathridge argues that the sources for the *Ring* 'provided endless possibilities for allegory' and that 'in this labyrinth of images and ancient tales, its heroes, heroines, villains, and even stage props imbued with "fate" such as the ring and the spear could be treated much as if they were disparate emblems gathering and dispersing around a figural center like Benjamin's "confused court"'.<sup>93</sup> I suggest that Wagner's allegory 'gathers' in the following way in *Walküre* Act II. Just as Wotan is fettered by his own treatises, so for Wagner God the father is fettered by his laws and an important aspect of Christ's atoning work is to free God from these laws.<sup>94</sup> And so allegory 'gathers' in that Wotan appears as 'God the father' who not only allows his son to die but has to plan it. Allegory 'gathers' also at the end of *Walküre* Act III as Brünnhilde appears as a Christ figure through the act of 'incarnation'.<sup>95</sup> But allegory not only 'gathers'; it also 'scatters'. For Brünnhilde could appear as a Christ figure at the end of *Walküre* but then the allegory breaks down as she is awakened in *Siegfried* Act III and especially when we witness her behaviour in *Götterdämmerung* Act II.

Such instability means that there is no consistent allegory in Wagner's *Ring* and if George Bernard Shaw is to be believed, we can be grateful for this. Realising that the tetralogy is an inconsistent allegory he wrote: 'an allegory is never quite consistent except when it is written by someone without dramatic faculty, in which case it is

<sup>89</sup> On this term see 'Über die Anwendung der Musik an das Drama', GSD (note 49), x.185 (Wagner points to Wolzogen's use of this term). Wagner's terms are 'melodic moments', 'elements', 'orchestral melody', 'motifs': Thomas S. Grey, 'Leitmotif, temporality, and musical design in the *Ring*', *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner* (Cambridge, 2008), 87–97, esp. 88.

<sup>90</sup> One example is the 'Valhalla' motif, sometimes used for Valhalla itself, but sometimes for Wotan. Other such cases of 'unstable' motifs have been discussed in secondary literature although often there is some dispute as to how 'unstable' these motifs are in their reference. See, e.g., 'love's denial' as used in *Rheingold* and *Walküre*: discussion in Deryck Cooke, *I Saw the World End: A study of Wagner's 'Ring'* (London, 1979), 2–10.

<sup>91</sup> See note 22.

<sup>92</sup> Benjamin, *Origin* (note 24), 188; 'Ursprung' (note 24), 364: "'Zerstreuung" und "Sammlung" heißt das Gesetz dieses Hofes. Die Dinge sind zusammengetragen nach ihrer Bedeutung; die Anteillosigkeit an ihrem Dasein zerstreute sie wieder'.

<sup>93</sup> Deathridge, 'Trauerspiel' (note 24), 94.

<sup>94</sup> Bell, Wagner's *Parsifal* (note 76), 132–3.

<sup>95</sup> Again Wotan appears as a 'father God': 'And so – the god turns away from you: so he kisses your godhead away'. *Ring Companion* (note 13), 191.

unreadable'.<sup>96</sup> Such inconsistency is manifest in the way an allegorical figure such as Wotan can point to different entities beyond himself: in *Walküre* Acts II and III to 'God the father' and in *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1 to Adam.<sup>97</sup> This observation confirms that Wotan cannot be understood simply in terms of 'myth'.

### Wagner's *Ring*, Tragedy and the Sublime

Just as Wagner's works do not fit neatly into either myth or allegory so they neither fit easily into what Benjamin called 'tragedy' or 'lament play' ('Trauerspiel'). For Benjamin 'tragedy' is associated with myth and 'lament play' with history and allegory. A rather different distinction was made by Schopenhauer: he spoke of 'Greek tragedy' and what he called 'Christian tragedy'. Schopenhauer thinks the essence of tragedy is not the sense of 'beauty' but of the 'sublime' where we have a split twofold consciousness. For Schopenhauer the 'characteristic tendency' of the sublime 'is the dawning of the knowledge that the world and life can afford to us no true satisfaction, and are therefore not worth our attachment to them. In this the tragic spirit consists; accordingly, it leads to resignation'.<sup>98</sup> But, he goes on to argue that there is a higher form of tragedy which he calls 'Christian tragedy'. Here we have not stoic resignation but Christian renunciation and it involves 'the giving up of the whole will-to-live, cheerful abandonment of the world in the consciousness of its worthlessness and vanity'.<sup>99</sup> Such 'cheerful abandonment of the world' is movingly displayed by Hans Sachs in Act III of *Meistersinger*, a figure with whom Wagner closely identified himself. But before he read Schopenhauer we find the same 'cheerful abandonment of the world' in the second half of *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1. Reflecting on his *Ring* in later life, Wagner commented: 'I know of no other work in which the breaking of a will [...] is shown as being accomplished through the individual strength of a proud nature *without the intervention of a higher grace*, as it is in Wotan. [...] I am convinced Sch. would have been annoyed that I discovered this before I knew about his philosophy.'<sup>100</sup>

There is a further parallel between the composer and the philosopher and this regards the link between the 'hero' of tragedy and the spectator. Schopenhauer considers what he calls modern tragedy to be special because there is a 'conversion of the hero's frame of mind'.<sup>101</sup> Schopenhauer finds this in Bellini's *Norma*, 'a true model of the tragic disposition of the motives'. He writes that the 'effect [of the tragic progress of the action] [...] on the frame of mind of the hero [...] passes on to the spectator'.<sup>102</sup> Wagner also wishes that the frame of mind of the hero passes on to the spectator. And in passing, note Wagner's belief that this very same opera, Bellini's *Norma*, could lead to a revival through opera of

<sup>96</sup> 'The Perfect Wagnerite', in *Shaw's Music*, ed. Dan H. Lawrence, 3 vols. (London, 1964), iii.444.

<sup>97</sup> Wagner even could conceive of Wotan as 'a kind of Flying Dutchman': CT (note 19), 23 Jan. 1879.

<sup>98</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will* (note 54), ii.433–4.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 434 (translation altered).

<sup>100</sup> CT (note 19), 29 Mar. 1878.

<sup>101</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will* (note 54), ii.435.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 436. Note, however, that Schopenhauer finds that in *Norma* 'the effect' which 'passes on to the spectator [...] is more natural and simple and the more characteristic of the true nature of tragedy, as no Christians or even Christian sentiments appear in it' (436).



‘the demeanor of Greek tragedy’.<sup>103</sup> Wagner’s wish then is that just as Wotan comes to experience that ‘cheerful abandonment of the world’, so should we.

There is, however, a fundamental distinction between the process of Wotan’s renunciation and ours. For the ‘spectator’ of tragedy, the element of the ‘sublime’ is fundamental, and the same can be said for the composer.<sup>104</sup> I find it significant that as Wagner was still working on *Siegfried* Act III (it was not completed until 5 February 1871) he wrote his essay *Beethoven*, which is not so much a tribute to the composer on the centenary of his birth as an exposition of Wagner’s mature aesthetics. He began work on this essay on 20 July 1870 and notes for the essay in his *Brown Book* probably date between 3 and 20 July.<sup>105</sup> The notes give a useful outline of the final essay and their final paragraph contains ‘a thinly disguised reference to his critical nemesis Eduard Hanslick’.<sup>106</sup> The significant thing to latch on to here is that whereas Hanslick saw music as expressing the ‘beautiful’, Wagner emphasised the ‘sublime’.<sup>107</sup> Music gives ‘Terror of the inner world basis of sublime. Sublimity. Effect of music always that of sublime’.<sup>108</sup> The distinction between the beautiful and sublime was first put forward by Edmund Burke in the 18th century<sup>109</sup> but was radically reshaped by Kant<sup>110</sup> who in turn influenced Schelling and Schopenhauer.<sup>111</sup> In *Beethoven* Wagner is building upon this tradition<sup>112</sup> and in turn Nietzsche’s first book, *Birth of Tragedy*, built upon Wagner. Nietzsche’s Dionysian relates to the ‘sublime’ of music<sup>113</sup> whereas the Apolline relates to the other arts. Such a distinction may not always work, but at least the Prelude to Act III of *Siegfried* is distinctly ‘Dionysian’ and points to this ‘terror’, finding its climax in the orchestral cry of the ‘power of the ring’ (bars 51–4). But it is the spectator who

<sup>103</sup> John Deathridge, ‘Reminiscences of Norma’, in *Das musikalische Kunstwerk*, ed. H. Danuser, H. de la Motte-Haber, S. Leopold, and N. Miller (Laaber, 1988), 226. Wagner’s review appeared in 1837 (i.e. well before he first read Schopenhauer in 1854) and was discovered by Weinstock and Lippmann in 1973: see F. Lippmann, ‘Ein neuentdecktes Autograph Richard Wagners: Rezension der Königsberger *Norma*-Aufführung von 1837’, in *Musicae scientiae collectanea: Festschrift Karl Gustav Fellerer* (Cologne, 1973), 374.

<sup>104</sup> See SL (note 33), 740; *König Ludwig II. und Richard Wagner Briefwechsel* (note 33), ii.258, quoted above.

<sup>105</sup> *The Diary of Richard Wagner 1865–82: The Brown Book*, ed. Joachim Bergfeld, tr. George Bird (London, 1980), 176.

<sup>106</sup> Roger Allen, *Richard Wagner’s ‘Beethoven’ (1870)* (Woodbridge, 2014), 13.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>108</sup> *Brown Book* (note 105), 177.

<sup>109</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (Oxford, 1987).

<sup>110</sup> *Immanuel Kant: Critique of the power of judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, tr. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge, 2000), 89–127 (‘Analytic of the Beautiful’), 128–59 (‘Analytic of the Sublime’).

<sup>111</sup> See Schopenhauer, *The World as Will* (note 54), i.195–200 (on beauty); i.200–7 (on the sublime). Note, however, that for Schopenhauer ‘the sublime is merely a special case of the beautiful’: Jacqueline, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (note 42), 161.

<sup>112</sup> Schopenhauer, following Kant, made a distinction between the ‘dynamical sublime’ and the ‘mathematical sublime’: *Kant: Critique of the power of judgment* (note 110), 131–43, 143–59; Schopenhauer, *The World as Will* (note 54), i.205. Wagner here is clearly more interested in the ‘dynamical sublime’.

<sup>113</sup> Richard H. Bell, *Deliver Us from Evil* (Tübingen, 2007), 170–71.

experiences this sublime terror, not Wotan. For him there is no sense of 'protection' which the viewer enjoys. And for Wagner's understanding of the spectator the link between experience of the sublime and renunciation of the will is fundamental. Wagner hints at this in *Beethoven*, arguing that since music 'arouses in us an ecstatic state of heightened awareness' it can act to liberate the intellect from 'serving the will'. He does not explicitly speak of the renunciation of the will here but the idea is very close to the surface.<sup>114</sup> Wagner is more explicit about the link between the sublime and renunciation of the will in his 1864 essay *On State and Religion* although that is in a discussion of theology rather than of music.<sup>115</sup>

### Conclusions

In *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1 Wotan as Wanderer comes to renounce his will. He can be viewed as a 'mythic allegory': allegorical in that he points beyond himself to 'Adam'; but also mythical in that he is a figure in whom the spectator can participate. And just as Wagner desires that we put to death the Wotan within us, so he also wishes that we bring to life what one can call the 'inner Siegfried' for 'the revelation of spiritual renewal'.<sup>116</sup> But, as Wagner wrote to Röckel, Siegfried 'must create himself on the basis of *our own annihilation*'<sup>117</sup> in that we put to death the 'will to life'. Siegfried as dragon slayer could be seen as a Christ figure; but for me the true Christ in the *Ring* cycle is the woman he awakens and who 'works the deed that redeems the world'.<sup>118</sup> But that is a topic for another paper or book.<sup>119</sup>

*Music examples by Matthew Rye*



---

<sup>114</sup> Allen, *Richard Wagner's 'Beethoven'* (note 106), 75–7.

<sup>115</sup> PW (note 70), iv.24–5.

<sup>116</sup> Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing the 'Ring'* (note 29), 104.

<sup>117</sup> SL (note 33), 308.

<sup>118</sup> *Ring Companion* (note 13), 258.

<sup>119</sup> I am in the process of writing a two-volume work on the theology of the *Ring* cycle, doing for the tetralogy what I did for *Parsifal* in Bell, *Wagner's Parsifal* (note 76).