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1 Dieter Borchmeyer, *Richard Wagner: Ahasvers Wandlungen* (Frankfurt, 2002), 3.
2 Ulrike Kienzle, 'Brünnhilde – das Wotanskind', *Alles ist nach seiner Art: Figuren in Richard Wagners 'Der Ring des Nibelungen'*, ed. Udo Bermbach (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2001), 81–103.
3 Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, 'Syphilis, Sin and the Social Order: Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vii (1995), 261–75, esp. 262.
4 Albert Heintz, 'Richard Wagner in Zürich', *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (14 Feb. 1896), 91–4.
5 Kienzle, 'Brünnhilde' (note 2), 90.
6 Hermann Grampp, 'Der *Ring* in Frankreich 1904–2006', *wagnerspectrum*, ii/2 (2006), 9–37 *[fascicle necessary because not continuously paginated].*
7 Georges Liébert, 'Entretien avec Pierre Boulez', *L'avant-scène opéra*, nos. 6–7 (1976), 144–58 *[double issue bound as one; no volume numbers].*

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Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin (Munich, 1963); tr. Andrew Gray as *My Life*, ed. Mary Whittall (Cambridge, 1983) [ML]
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Elsa (Annette Dasch) and Lohengrin (Jonas Kaufmann) in Act I of Hans Neuenfels' Bayreuth production of *Lohengrin*. Photo Bayreuther Festspiele GmbH/Enrico Nawrath

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Opening the Shrine

The new regime at Bayreuth, if sections of the German press are to be believed, will not last more than a couple of years. Katharina Wagner is only interested in fast cars and Rolex watches, apparently, while her half-sister Eva wants a quiet life. Such an analysis may appeal to disaffected former members of the inner circle and to others disapproving of the radical productions espoused by the sisters. But it appears to have little basis in reality. On the contrary, a stimulating new *Lohengrin* from Hans Neuenfels joins Herheim's stupendous *Parsifal*, while Katharina continues to hone her own *Meistersinger* (see reviews on pp. 58–61). (Responsibility for the dismal Tankred Dorst *Ring*, now happily consigned to Valhalla, cannot be laid at their door.) At the time of going to press, no announcement had been made about the new *Ring* for 2013, except that the conductor is to be Kirill Petrenko. The talk is, however, that it will be assigned to four directors, as in Stuttgart and Toronto, including Neuenfels and Katharina herself.

Meanwhile, it was announced in June that the festival archives would be opened to scholars in order to lay the ghosts of Hitler and the Nazis once and for all. Those of us who naively took this to mean that any reputable scholar who applied would have the red carpet rolled out in the Richard-Wagner-Archiv were disabused when it was subsequently announced that two scholars had been *appointed* to the task. Early indications are that the two researchers – Professor Wolfram Pyta of Stuttgart University and Peter Siebenmorgen, a senior contributor to the Berlin *Tagesspiegel* – are indeed serious and reputable. Yet a number of questions need to be asked. Will there be there any limitation on the scope of the inquiries? By whom is the research to be paid for? Who will own the resulting manuscript and who will publish the results? Who will decide on the conditions of publication? Furthermore, will the researchers have access to the really interesting material said to be in the possession of Amélie Lafferentz (Winifred's granddaughter)? Only if and when satisfactory answers are given to these questions will it be possible to have complete confidence in the inquiry.

Here we continue to explore other sensitive aspects of Wagner over which some would prefer to draw a veil. One of them is the question of Wagner's erotics, discussed by Laurence Dreyfus in 'Siegfried's Masculinity' (pp. 4–26). To what extent, Dreyfus asks, are Wagner's feminised sexuality and fetishistic tendencies evident in the works he wrote? The answers may surprise some. Suddhaseel Sen looks at Brünnhilde's Immolation in relation to the Indian practice of Satī (suttee), while Liszt's landmark essay on *Lohengrin*, edited and annotated by David Trippett, reaches its conclusion.

Finally, readers are urged to follow the online debate between Barry Emslie and Mark Berry on the thorny issue of anti-semitism in Wagner's works. This high-powered but eminently readable exchange can be found on the website at <www.thewagnerjournal.co.uk/wagnerandanti-se.html>.

If there is a common theme emerging from all this, it is surely that such matters should hold no fear for Wagnerians. We do not need an airbrush. In fact the picture that emerges without it is so much richer and more interesting.

Barry Millington
Editor

The Wagner Journal, **4**, 3, 4–26

Siegfried's Masculinity

LAURENCE DREYFUS

Siegfried, as portrayed by Arthur Rackham, revels in his strength.

Wagner's protagonist Siegfried, the quintessence of the new German man of the future, has always exuded a self-evident virility, most obvious in his heroic deeds, in his rejection of sentimentality, in his traditional costume design and in a popular iconography which has remained unchanged since the mid-19th century. From the very moment Siegfried first appears onstage in Act I of the third *Ring* opera, everything about him confirms an undiluted representation of manliness. Wagner's stage directions couldn't make this more clear: 'In rough forest clothing, with a silver horn on a chain, Siegfried enters with sudden boisterousness from the forest' (*Siegfried, in wilder Waldkleidung, mit einem silbernen Horn an einer Kette, kommt mit jähem Ungestüm aus dem Walde herein*). To show off his physical prowess, he has 'tethered a large bear with some organic rope fibre' and 'with merry cockiness' sets the bear on Mime, egging on the animal to 'bite the dwarf' and do violence to him. There is surely not a soft bone in this boy's body. Yet if we think of the masculinity of Siegfried's affectionate creator, Richard Wagner, we confront a less conventional specimen of what it means to be a man, someone obsessed throughout his life with the acquisition of pink satin and rose perfumes on which he spent much of his money when he had any, and that of his patrons and friends when he hadn't. Whether in Penzing, Munich, Geneva, Tribschen or Bayreuth, Wagner insisted on the necessity of a pampered ambience and luxuriously outfitted boudoir along with an astounding selection of silk clothing which would make most women blush. How does one reconcile these two images: that of the rough-hewn forest boy with the soft, spoilt artist enrobed in strokable fabrics and bathed in sweet-smelling aromas? Considering that Wagner makes Siegfried's exaggerated virility into an obvious component of his character and expresses a special personal attachment to Siegfried as an aesthetic creation, it is worth examining the young Siegfried's masculinity in both literary and musical terms so as to characterise the role it plays in the third *Ring* opera as well as to reflect on Wagner's own depictions of sexual identity. The subject is extensive, and I shall make special reference to Siegfried's manliness as it relates to what I call Wagner's erotics – that is, how the composer represents sexual arousal, union and torment in his music.

Ambivalence about erotics

Love plays an overriding role in the final versions of the four dramas of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, but it is striking how, in Wagner's original conception of 1848, the composer avoids even the slightest interest in the erotic. A character's masculinity is, rather, about his strength and superiority and has nothing to do with romantic love. Instead of falling in love, males force themselves on females, and women submit to superior males. Or there is even rape, as when Grimhild, mother of Gunther, is 'overpowered' (*überwaltigt*) by Alberich in the words of *The Nibelung Myth as Draft for a Drama*.[1] Instead of love or

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1 *Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, Volks-Ausgabe, 16 vols. (Leipzig, 1911–14) [SS], ii.160. Translations are my own unless otherwise cited. Hagen, it is true, persuades Gunther that Brünnhilde is desirable, but, for his part, Gunther wishes just to 'take possession' of her. Only in one passage in the early sketch does Wagner link ardour to an attraction when 'Gudrun, inflamed to love by the praises [Hagen] has showered on Siegfried […] welcomes Siegfried with a drink prepared by Hagen's art'. Yet even in the 1848 prose draft for *Siegfrieds Tod* Gudrun never gives vent to her attraction, exclaiming only 'Siegfried mein!' in response to Hagen's promise that he will become her husband. *Richard Wagner: Skizzen und Entwürfe zur Ring-Dichtung: mit der Dichtung 'Der junge Siegfried'*, ed. Otto Strobel (Munich, 1930) [SE], 41.

sexual desire, Wagner's early narrative focuses on primeval cunning and raw power, freedom and bondage, curses, oaths and vows, and of course revenge: Alberich does not forswear love to seize the Rhine gold, but has merely 'abducted it from the waters' depth, and forged from it with cunning art a ring that gained him the dominion over all his race, the Nibelungs'. Neither do the giants vie for the goddess Freia, nor the wish-maidens provide sexual favours to the fallen heroes: the Valkyries rather shelter the heroes, who 'resume a glorious life of jousts in Wodan's [*sic*] company' (SS ii.158). Siegmund and Sieglinde are both suffering in unhappy and childless marriages, but the siblings do not fall in love with one another: rather, to sire a true Volsung, 'brother and sister now mate with one another' ('begatten sich nun Bruder und Schwester selbst') (SS ii.158). Even Brünnhilde, awakened by Siegfried, submits to him without much ado: 'she joyfully recognises him as the most glorious hero of the Volsung tribe, and surrenders herself to him' ('sie erkennt freudig Siegfried, den herrlichsten Helden von Wälsungenstamme, und ergibt sich ihm') (SS ii.159). Before her immolation, in which she dresses again in full Valkyrie garb, Brünnhilde leads Siegfried by the hand to restore Wodan's domination: 'One only shall rule, All-father, you glorious one! As sign of your eternal might, I lead this man to you' (SS ii.166). Certainly all a far cry from redemption through love, a theme conspicuous by its absence from the vivid plot outlines which remain remarkably intact during the next quarter-century of the *Ring*'s gestation and development.

Only when Wagner extends his conception of *Siegfrieds Tod* in the autumn of 1851 under the influence of Ludwig Feuerbach, first devising 'a heroic comedy' (*ein heroisches Lustspiel*) called *Der junge Siegfried* – and working further in the narrative past, conceiving *Der Raub des Rheingoldes* and *Die Walküre* (in that order) – does he, for the first time since *Tannhäuser*, become obsessed with sexual love. Echoing Feuerbach's essay, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* (1830), Wagner now sees the world's chief problem as a lack of Love. Only with the upsurge of more love, especially the sexual union between man and woman but also every other kind of derivative love, can the world hope to redeem itself from its misery. Emblematic is Brünnhilde's Feuerbachian love for Siegfried. Though she ultimately consummates a bodily union with him, her initial declarations of love for him are utterly lacking in erotic stimulus: 'Oh if you only knew how I've always loved you', she tells the hero. 'I nourished you, tender one, even before you were conceived: my shield sheltered you when you were still in the womb.' Ever the fan of nourishing and redeeming female figures, Wagner can scarcely have written these verses in a less alluring way, yet he insisted to August Röckel in January 1854 that Brünnhilde's reactions were utterly amorous: 'From the moment Siegfried awakens her, she has no longer any other knowledge save that of love.' Love, he continues, is really just 'the "eternal feminine" itself', and within this model Siegfried becomes 'a complete "human being"' only by uniting his masculinity with the femininity of this 'suffering, self-immolating woman [who] finally becomes the true, conscious redeemer'.[2] These ideas conspired, therefore, to obscure the exploration of erotic desire and sexual desire in Wagner's initial conceptions for the *Ring* poem.

An ambivalence about the role of sexual desire can already be seen in the literary composition of the poem for *Der junge Siegfried* when Wagner first thought to end the opera with an erotic climax. It is significant that he drafted and then crossed out the following

2 *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, tr. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (London, 1987) [SL], 307.

text for his young hero: 'If I enfold you, hold you tight, press my chest to your bosom, suck your breath from your mouth [*saug' ich deinen Athem dir vom Munde*], then you are, were, and will be mine; faded is the worry that you're now mine!' (SE, 95). The same image of a breathless kiss is repeated in the final erotic stage direction, also later deleted: 'Brünnhilde falls into Siegfried's arms: they remain intertwined, mouth to mouth' (*sie weilen verschlungen, Mund an Mund*) (SE, 95). In the final version of the poem, by contrast, the only kiss in the opera is the one – 'long and passionate [*inbrünstig*]' – which Siegfried plants on the Valkyrie, but of course she is asleep. In the finale, despite all the ecstatic declarations of Love, the curtain falls as soon as a rather more prim Brünnhilde merely 'collapses into Siegfried's arms'. In the final version of the opera finale, therefore, apart from nailing some exceptionally high notes and trying to be audible over a Wagnerian soprano, Siegfried has little manly behaviour to engage in.

The next stage in Siegfried's development comes as Wagner begins to compose the music for his third *Ring* opera in 1856–7 and reaches the end of the second act. Here Schopenhauer is in the picture and wreaks havoc with the composer's earlier plans. Wagner admits this explicitly, if self-servingly, in a letter to Röckel from August 1856 in which he suggests that Schopenhauer provides support for Wagner's former intuitions if not his conceptions:

> My most striking experience [in confronting so great a contradiction between my intuitions and conceptions] came finally through my Nibelung poem; it had taken shape at a time when, relying upon my conceptions, I had constructed a Hellenistically optimistic world […]. I recall now having singled out the character of my Siegfried with (the) particular aim in mind […] of putting forward the idea of a painless existence; more than that I believed I could express this idea even more clearly by presenting the whole of the Nibelung myth, and by showing how a whole world of injustice arises from the first injustice, a world which is destroyed in order – to teach us to recognize injustice, root it out, and establish a just world in its place.[3]

A Siegfried who embodies a 'painless existence' is the most interesting revelation of this letter, which seems to confuse the radical idealism of 1848 with the Buddhist notion of Nirvana, the freedom from human suffering, a theme far closer to Wagner's unwritten opera *Die Sieger* (The Victors) than to the *Ring*. What is missing is Schopenhauer's 'Metaphysics of Sexual Love' (*Metaphysik der Geschlechtsliebe*), as the philosopher had entitled his own chapter on the topic. (Only the earlier chapter on music – significantly – is also styled by the word *Metaphysik.*) And precisely because of the burning interest he shows in sexual love, Wagner begins to lose interest in Siegfried or at least confuses him so with Tristan that he famously puts his boisterous young hero on the back burner. As Wagner writes to Liszt in June 1857:

> I had to wrench Siegfried away from my heart and place him under lock and key as though I were burying him alive. I shall leave him there, and no one shall have a glimpse of him as long as he has to remain locked away like this. Well, perhaps the rest will do him good; I have no plans for waking him.[4]

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[3] *Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Briefe*, i–ix, ed. Gertrud Strobel, Werner Wolf and others (Leipzig, 1967–2000); x–, ed. Andreas Mielke, Martin Dürrer and others (Wiesbaden, 1999–) [SB], viii.153.

[4] SL, 372.

So rather like a vestal virgin in ancient Rome punished for violating her vows of celibacy by being 'buried alive', or like Sophocles' Antigone who is sealed in a cave with a small amount of bread and water, Siegfried exits Wagner's immediate purview for quite some time. Of course Wagner quits his young hero with a great deal of affection, saying: 'I've guided my young Siegfried into the beautiful solitude of the forest; there I've left him under the linden tree and taken my leave of him with heartfelt tears: he's better off there than anywhere else.' (SB viii.354)

Romantic friendship

Siegfried's liberation from the cave occurs next in the heady period when Wagner is enjoying the first fruits of patronage from the young King Ludwig II and is orchestrating the second act of *Siegfried* in 1864–5. Here 'Siegfried' becomes one of the pet names Wagner gives to the monarch, whose support and salvation of Richard Wagner herald a victory for the German nation. Noteworthy here is that the victory is peaceful and occurs entirely without bloodshed. As he puts it in a letter to the King from 1865: 'My King! My – friend! My consummation! My victorious Siegfried – victor – bringer of peace.'[5] Or from 1867: 'May the flag of the noble German spirit then flutter over Germany from Munich, a flag which I too will have helped to weave and which my glorious Siegfried shall wave high about the German lands.' (KL ii.167) There is also a tangential but not insignificant reference to romantic friendship or *Freundesliebe* in 1865 signifying the love of King Ludwig/Siegfried for Wagner in the same breath as the identification of Germany with Brünnhilde: 'Thus I proclaim to my life's dear Siegfried, the sense of the act of his love for me, his power: his awakening of the high-born bride, Germany – is his Brünnhilde!' (SL, 665)

This was the same Wagner who wrote in 1849 in 'The Artwork of the Future' about the exemplary and undying 'love between men' (*Männerliebe*) shown for each other by Spartan warriors (and which Ludwig had probably read before meeting the composer). Somewhat surprisingly, Wagner grounds the idea for a woman's selfless love in the unselfish devotion shown by male lovers in ancient Sparta:

> This handsome naked man is at the core of everything Spartan: from genuine delight in the beauty of the most perfect human *male* body arose a *love between men* [*Männerliebe*] which pervades and shapes the whole configuration of the Spartan state. In its primitive purity, this love proclaims itself as the noblest and least selfish utterance of the human sense of beauty […] for it teaches him to sink and merge *his entire self* in the object of his affection. And exactly to the same degree as a woman, in perfected womanhood, through love to man and sinking of herself within his being, has developed the manly element of that womanhood and brought it to a thorough balance with the purely womanly, and thus in measure as she is no longer a merely man's *lover* but his *friend* – can a man find fullest satisfaction in a woman's love. (SS vi.110)

This affection is none other than that of romantic friendship:

> The higher element of same-sex love excluded the aspect of selfish pleasure. Nevertheless it not only included a purely spiritual bond of friendship, but (one) which blossomed from and crowned the sensuous friendship. This sprang directly from delight in the […]

[5] *König Ludwig II. und Richard Wagner: Briefwechsel*, ed. Otto Strobel, 5 vols. (Karlsruhe, 1936) [KL], i.106.

> sensuous bodily beauty of the beloved man; yet this delight was no mere sexual yearning, but a thorough abnegation of self into the unconditional sympathy with the lover's joy in himself involuntarily expressed by the joyous bearing prompted by his beauty. This love, which had its basis in the noblest pleasures of both eye and soul […] was the Spartan's only tutor of youth, the never aging instructress of boy and man, the marshal of communal feasts and valiant forays, even the inspiring helpmate on the battlefield. (SS vi.110–11)

This vision of complete trustworthiness and undying affection shows up viscerally in Wagner's correspondence with King Ludwig, and also makes an important appearance in his relations with Schnorr von Carolsfeld, as well as in his literary depictions of Kurwenal, King Mark and Parsifal.[6] This object of passionate love also forms part of what Wagner takes to be Siegfried's masculinity.

Musical constructions of masculinity

Turning to the music attached to Siegfried, we can see how Wagner highlights and augments poetic elaborations of his masculinity. Siegfried is introduced by his famous horn call signalling a woodsman and huntsman, a phrase which is famously open-ended, unfinished musically and harmonically (Ex. 1). Siegfried reveals that his horn call has a purpose. He 'sought a better companion than the one that sits at home', namely Mime,

Ex. 1. Siegfried's Horn Call

and the horn call literally advertises for a reliable companion: 'ob sich froh mir gesellte ein guter Freund, das frug ich mit dem Getön'. This yearning for a soulmate and (male) friend corresponds to a key aspect of Siegfried's masculinity which can be clearly seen in Wagner's developing vision of the character, since he takes on ever more rowdy and virile traits at the same time as Wagner gradually transforms the image of Mime from a somewhat sympathetic helpmate attending the dying Sieglinde to a scheming and murderous plotter. Siegfried himself is not all about joyful boisterousness, however, and in the music which depicts his raging temper, Siegfried shows how his impetuousness erupts in anger. This is the music – sometimes misnamed 'Life's Joyfulness' or 'Youthful Strength' – over which Siegfried sings 'at least I'd have an end to my anger' ('Des Ärgers dann hätt' ich ein End'!') if he got rid of 'this old silly dwarf' after which he throws

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6 I treat Wagner's homoerotics in the final chapter of Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 175–217.

(Siegfried wirft sich wütend auf eine Steinbank zur Seite rechts.)
Des Är - - gers dann hätt' ich ein End!

Ex. 2. Siegfried's Anger

himself in fury onto a stone seat (Ex. 2). This rage connected to an imagined act of physical violence is yet another component of his manliness.

Siegfried's developing manhood also embodies a predictive heroism heard in his own leitmotif, first enunciated in the third act of *Die Walküre* (Ex. 3). This motif is redolent more of a victorious knight than a boyish woodsman, but of course Siegfried has yet to prove his heroism at the opening of his own opera. In its Schumannian Romanticism

Da sah ich denn auch_ mein ei - gen Bild;
Horn

Ex. 3. Siegfried motif

it draws on the heraldic music of *Lohengrin* and is related to Siegfried's tragic father Siegmund as well as to his truly regal grandfather Wotan. The theme expresses a potential, not actual, attribute of the young Siegfried, and Wagner makes this clear by sounding it first in the opera when he looks into the brook and sees his own face ('Da sah ich denn auch mein eigen Bild'). Only then, he says, does he notice that it is completely different from Mime's: 'ganz anders als du dünkt ich mir da'. It is Mime, though, who reveals the sense behind Siegfried's musical identity when Siegfried asks about his own name: Your mother asked me to call you Siegfried, the dwarf says, for 'as Siegfried you would become strong and handsome' ('als Siegfried würdest Du stark und schön'); the etymology of Siegfried of course stems from 'victory' and 'peace'. In Scene 1 of the opera, this motif is also tied syntactically to the motif 'Woe of the Volsungs' from *Die Walküre* which imparts a nobility of character to Siegfried stressed more by his music than by his words and actions.

Connected to these motifs are a raft of other musical characterisations which likewise record an unambiguous maleness, for example, Siegfried's *Wanderlust* (opening up

from tonic to dominant chords) signalling his intent to leave the forest to wander fearlessly into the wide world beyond: 'Aus dem Wald fort in die Welt zieh'n: nimmer kehr' ich zurück!' (Ex. 4). Alongside this theme we find the downward spiral of his so-called Freedom motif, still echoed in the Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* as Siegfried leaves the Valkyrie rock (Ex. 5). In addition there is the music for the Forging Scene – the heroic Beethovenian 'working' music made up of a sequence of rising augmented chords, the heavy and 'bold' chaconne theme for the melting of the hard metal, 'Des Baumes Kohle,

Ex. 4. *Wanderlust*

Ex. 5. Freedom

Ex. 6. Smelting Song

wie brennt sie kühn; wie glüht sie hell und hehr' – marked 'weighty and sustained' (*wuchtig und gehalten*) (Ex. 6). There is also the striking music for the forging of Nothung, marked 'heavy and powerful' (*schwer und kräftig*), and involving actual strokes of an anvil over dissonant half-diminished 7th chords – no hint here of this chord's erotic potential as found in *Tristan und Isolde* (Ex. 7). It is in fact Wagner who refers to these motifs this way in a letter to Liszt from May 1857 (SB viii.319). As we compile this lexicon of Siegfried-related themes, we can see that Wagner has taken considerable pains to depict the paradigmatic components of Siegfried's masculinity.

Ex. 7. Forging Song

The only sign in Act I of any softness in Siegfried occurs in a lyrical motif in a rocking 6/8 metre (first accompanying Mime) which recalls parental love and love between mates – it is still tinged with the fuzzy perspective of Feuerbach, who embraces sexual love but doesn't single it out or differentiate it in any way (Ex. 8). When Siegfried first

Ex. 8. Caress

sings over the orchestral sounding of this motif, Wagner not only makes a point of scoring a very similar group of *divisi* lower strings as for the original form of the Love music for Siegmund and Sieglinde (*Die Walküre*, Act I, Scene 1), but even seamlessly shifts the new melody into a musical reminiscence of his parents' love for one another. Siegfried notes how the birds sing so blissfully in the spring when the little male and female caress each other ('Es sangen die Vöglein so selig im Lenz; sie kosten so lieblich und ließen sich nicht'): they build a nest and breed, and there raise and care for their young. The key

word here is the caress – *das Kosen* – which can be thought of as Wagner's favourite erotic speciality and one doubtless fuelled by his own love of touching fabric, especially silk as related to caresses and kissing. The 'soft' music for this motif is exceptionally evocative and at odds with the Siegfried to whom one has been introduced thus far.

All this musical material looks backwards in a sense towards the original heroic comic conception of *Der junge Siegfried*, tinged with the coloration of *Die Walküre,* and is wildly successful in weaving together grandiose Beethovenian tropes from, say, the Seventh Symphony with the medievalism and lyricism of Romantics like Robert Schumann. If one looks further at the more touching sides to Siegfried's character, especially in the music – even in the music of the Forest Murmurs and in the motifs found only in the third act – it becomes clear that Siegfried is clearly distinguishable from Tristan, who was becoming ever more dominant in the composer's thoughts by 1857. Even when Wagner returns to *Siegfried* in the late 1860s, having now composed *Tristan und Isolde*, the Paris *Tannhäuser* revisions and *Die Meistersinger*, he takes care in the final scene of the third act to craft an image of his youthful hero which is still faithful to his original plan. That is, despite all Wagner's intervening investment in detailed explorations of sexual love, he goes to some trouble to compose a Siegfried whose erotic desire is closely observed but whose music – oddly – fails to arouse.

Already in his poem, Wagner ensured that there would be a significant dampening of potential erotic identification with Siegfried. Surely a boy who admits to panic-stricken fear at confronting a woman and who cries out in desperation for his mummy – 'Whom should I call to help me? Mother! Mother! Remember me!' ('Wen ruf' ich zum Heil, daß er mir helfe? Mutter! Mutter! Gedenke mein!') – was hardly conceived to incite an aroused response on the part of the audience. The controlling trope of this part of the scene was of course Siegfried's confrontation and overcoming of fear, a decidedly unerotic theme for a drama. There is a similar suggestion of Siegfried's childishness when Siegfried miscon-

left Franz Stassen's muscular Siegfried bathes in the blood of the dragon (illustration for *Siegfried, der Held*, Berlin, 1912)

right Oil painting by Walter Einbeck (1890–1968) of Young Siegfried in more contemplative mode

strues Brünnhilde's words, concluding wrongly that his mother might still be alive: 'So my mother didn't die then? Did the devoted one only fall asleep?' ('So starb nicht meine Mutter? Schlief die minnige nur?') This demonstration of naivety likewise thwarts a view of Siegfried as erotically charged lover with whom the audience can identify.

In his music for the third act, even more than in his poem, Wagner crafts a set of musical motifs which assert the purity and confusion of Siegfried's idealised adolescence in ways that evoke poignancy and pity rather than erotic arousal. In other words, even when Siegfried is wooing Brünnhilde, persuading her to part with her virginity, the musical ardour expressed plays a very different role from the heated passion in evidence in the long stretches of *Tristan*'s second act or what Wagner had composed in *Die Walküre* for the love scene between Siegfried's parents. The boy's astonishment (*Verwunderung*) in surveying the Valkyrie rock is extended to his rapture as 'long curly hair issues' from the helmet of the sleeping Brünnhilde – whom he still assumes to be a man. Both experiences are captured in the tender sweetness of the Astonishment motif with its mild and lyrical triplets, and its wistful falling 7th in the clarinet capturing Siegfried lost in reverie: *Er verbleibt in Anblick versunken* (Ex. 9). The earlier incarnations of the Astonishment

Ex. 9. Astonishment

motif had occurred in *Das Rheingold*, Scene 2, where the music captures Fricka's wifely enticements to Wotan to settle down with her in Valhalla, inviting him to see the castle as a site of domestic bliss. In one stage direction accompanying the same motif in Scene 4, Wagner characterises Fricka's inviting gesture as she 'fawningly' reminds Wotan of the beckoning domesticity of the fortress. Rather than recall Fricka, the music's appearance in *Siegfried* borrows instead the poignant qualities of her sexless love for her husband to transfer them metaphorically to Siegfried's childlike and equally sex-free amazement at the noble hero who is thought to lie before him.

The moment Brünnhilde's sexual identity finally dawns on him – 'Das ist kein Mann!' – Siegfried's shock 'in extreme agitation' (*in höchster Aufgeregtheit*) provokes a distorted and blaring version of the Astonishment motif as a fiery outburst marked 'very passionate' (*sehr leidenschaftlich*) in the score. Chaste wonder is disfigured by – and thus transformed into – sudden and implacable lust. The crude arousal and gripping fear Siegfried experiences next – 'A torrid attraction inflames my heart; a furious fear grips my sight: my senses falter and confound' ('Brennender Zauber zückt mir ins Herz; feurige Angst faßt meine Augen: mir schwankt und schwindelt der Sinn') – is marked by the first statements of a brief and hyperventilated gesture borrowing heavily from

the harmonic language of *Tristan*. This musical motif, sometimes called Love's Lust, certainly makes a vivid job of marking Siegfried's racing pulse, his shortness of breath, and rapidly falling blood pressure (Ex. 10). Yet in presenting five rapid-fire statements

Ex. 10. Searing Desire

of the passage in quick succession – its dynamics lurching irrationally between *forte* and *piano* – Wagner records Siegfried's excitement as no more than a theatrical *coup de théâtre*, though one, it must be said, which brilliantly tinges sexual arousal with extreme agitation and alarm. As the stage directions put it, 'He succumbs to extreme anxiety' (*Er geräth in höchste Beklemmung*). Even as Siegfried prepares to kiss the Valkyrie and sings 'So I suck life from the sweetest lips' ('So saug' ich mir Leben aus süßesten Lippen') – the remnant of the final lines from the original finale for *Das junge Siegfried* – Wagner sets the 'Fate' motif on the same pitches as in its first iteration in *Die Walküre* (Act II, Scene 4), recalling Brünnhilde's momentous approach to the sleeping Siegmund. This is scarcely an inducement to hear Siegfried's own advance as erotic. Indeed, just as in Brünnhilde's move toward Siegmund, there is an ominous and deathly aspect to Siegfried's kiss, as Wagner's stage directions make clear: 'He sinks, as if dying, upon the sleeping woman' (*Er sinkt, wie ersterbend, auf die Schlafende*).

Matters don't improve much even after Siegfried conquers his fear. Wagner certainly sets fiery music to Siegfried's gauche confession of his physical needs – 'My blood rages in swelling heat; a devouring flame ignites within me: the burning embers near Brünnhilde's rock now smoulder in my chest' ('Es braust mein Blut in blühender Brunnst; ein zehrendes Feuer ist mir entzündet: die Glut, die Brünnhilds Felsen umbrann, die brennt mir nun in der Brust!') – but no catalogue of masculine lusts is going to persuade either Brünnhilde or the audience to be seduced by the hero's entreaties. This is why Siegfried's demand to Brünnhilde, 'Extinguish the fire! Still the seething rage!' ('Jetzt lösche den Brand! Schweige die schäumende Wut!'), and his manly attempt to gain control over her – 'He embraces her violently' (*Er hat sie heftig umfasst*) – fall flat. Rather, Wagner has composed music for this outburst which depicts an adolescent confusion in the face of the sexual impulse. The relevant musical motif might capture what Siegfried calls his 'searing desire' (*sehrendes Sehnen*) at its first musical occurrence – in the printed *Ring* poem Wagner had originally written 'searing scorching' (*sehrendes Sengen*) – but this musical treatment effectively prevents him from claiming an honoured position next to Wagner's other erotically charged male protagonists: Tannhäuser, Siegmund, Tristan and Amfortas.

Idealised Love

Support for this reading is offered by the complicated compositional prehistory of one passage from the third act of *Siegfried* which shows how a key component of Siegfried's love for Brünnhilde depended on an idealised and sexless view of Love. The music in question sets the words 'Did you not sing to me that your knowledge would radiate your love' ('Sang'st du mir nicht, dein Wissen sei das Leuchten der Liebe zu mir?'). In the final version of the opera, Siegfried sings the motif often called World Inheritance, first attached to Wotan when, earlier in the act, he tells Erda with what joy he had decided to see his original plan for the world realised by Siegfried: 'What I once decided in the fierce pain of discord, I now freely realise in joy and cheer' ('Was in des Zwiespalts wildem Schmerze verzweifelnd einst ich beschloss, froh und freudig führe frei ich nun aus'). The link between this text and 'Sang'st du mir nicht' is not immediately obvious, but, in one of Wagner's more subtle leitmotivic connections, the composer joins Wotan's acceptance of the future to Siegfried – in the sense of a joyful renunciation – to Brünnhilde, who, as Erda's 'all-knowing child', with Siegfried's love, will achieve a 'world-famous redemptive deed' (*erlösende Weltentat*) through an equally joyful renunciation (Ex. 11).

Ex. 11. Joyful Renunciation (World Inheritance)

In 1857, however, Wagner thought of some very different music for Siegfried's 'Sang'st du mir nicht', music which first occurred to him without knowing which words it would set. As he put it to Mathilde Wesendonck: 'The music is beginning to visit me […]. The first thing I found was a melody which I didn't at all know what to do with, till all of a sudden the words from the last scene of *Siegfried* came into my head.'[7] The opera *Tristan* was much on Wagner's mind at the time, and the composer found himself in the awkward position of composing music for both operas at once, one reason why he ultimately abandoned his work on *Siegfried*. Eventually, he found a better use for his sketches in Brangäne's loving entreaty to her mistress. What is clear is that Wagner marks his sketch 'charming', or 'graceful' (*Anmuthig*), thereby revealing the particular

[7] *Richard Wagner an Mathilde Wesendonk: Tagebuchblätter und Briefe, 1853–1871,* ed. Wolfgang Golther (Berlin, 1910) [MW], 20. See also John Deathridge, 'Wagner's Sketches for the "Ring": Some Recent Studies', *Musical Times*, cxviii (1977), 386, and also Robert Bailey, 'The Method of Composition', *The Wagner Companion*, ed. Peter Burbidge and Richard Sutton (New York, 1979), 317–27, where there is a transcription of these musical sketches for *Siegfried* and *Tristan* along with a detailed commentary.

shade of its character. Even in the earliest sketch, one can see that the music embodies the sweet lyrical expression of two lovers in a particularly poignant way. There is a feminine grace also in the lilting reference to the waltz which underlies this version of the motif, but Wagner – thinking of music for Siegfried to sing – also tried his hand at a version of the motif in a more 'masculine' duple metre (Ex. 12).

Tristan und Isolde
Act I
872
BRANGÄNE: *Ungeminnt?*
dolce
Tristan und Isolde
Act III
1590
p dolce
879
1593

Ex. 12. Romantic Friendship

Although the leitmotif is sometimes called Brangäne's Consolation, it is better understood in *Tristan* as an allusion to Romantic Friendship (*Freundesliebe*), of an ideal love between 'friends' of the same sex, for Wagner also uses the same music, but in duple time, for King Mark's lament over Tristan. What torments the King is the pain which Tristan – not Isolde – inflicted on him, for he forgoes any mention of his wife's guilt. In the third act, when Tristan lies dead before him, he rejoices that Tristan – not Isolde – was innocent of intentional guile.

If we try to understand Wagner's original intentions for *Siegfried*, we can see that he intended to inflect Siegfried's words with an innocence and grace, not erotic fervour. Even the Joyful Renunciation with which Wagner ultimately set 'Sang'st du mir nicht' did not form part of the sketches for *Siegfried* but was originally intended for his never-composed Buddhist opera *Die Sieger*. In her diaries, Cosima Wagner reveals that the Joyful Renunciation motif set to the passage in *Siegfried* was originally intended for the Buddha in

Die Sieger, WWV 89,[8] namely, at the moment when he gains a new insight into the stilling of sensual desire.[9] Wagner describes this moment in a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck from 1858, speaking of how this awareness marks the Buddha's final progress towards a state of supreme enlightenment. A woman, now understood compassionately, could be accepted into the community of the saintly as long as she too renounced sensuality as a component of her love for a man (MW, 57–8). Friedrich Glasenapp also reports hearing Wagner himself recount how 'this quite literal origin of the solemnly sublime theme of joyful resignation' ('diese ganz buchstäblich zu nehmende Herkunft des feierlich erhabenen Themas einer freudigen Entsagung') lay behind the subsequent passage in Act III of *Siegfried*.[10]

How very significant, then, that music for the grand *renunciation* of sensuality by a religious figure should provide the coloration of Siegfried's words as he tries to woo Brünnhilde! If one imagines very different words from the uncomposed *Die Sieger*, it seems clear that the musical motif makes far better sense as a grand statement of supreme Buddhist enlightenment than as a seductive inducement. Indeed, in every other instance of Joyful Renunciation in the final scene of *Siegfried* – whether it accompanies Brünnhilde's own anti-sexual remonstrances or Siegfried's own highly sexed notions of Love, the music is tied in its diatonic purity to Romantic idealisation rather than erotic stimulation. And since – in its intertextual associations – the musical material is far from arbitrary, it seems compelling that the derivation of both passages of music was related in the composer's mind either to the sexless desire of Brangäne for Isolde or of King Mark for Tristan, or to the renunciation of sexual love as articulated in *Die Sieger*. This gushing if idealised notion of sexuality – love without torment – gives us a further key to Siegfried's ideal and resolute masculinity.

Siegfried as antipode to Wagner

Wagner's own masculinity presents rather a different picture, and with his great sense of artistic honesty, the composer had allowed it to seep into aspects of his operas in significant ways, though not in the unruly character of Siegfried, who seems constructed as an antipode to Wagner's own more feminine and feminised pursuits. In Tannhäuser, for example, we encounter a character whose pleasures are rather prim and sedentary, and above all, passive. It is the goddess Venus who promises him the fulfilment of his wildest desires. But what exactly are these desires? The Sirens call men to a land where their longings are sated: 'Near the shore, where blessed warmth will sate your desires in the arms of torrid love! – 'Naht euch dem Lande, wo in den Armen glühender Liebe selig Erwarmen still eure Triebe!' Yet while the Maenads rage in drunken gestures around him, Tannhäuser appears in a more recumbent pose with Venus – 'half kneeling before her with his head in her lap' (*vor ihr das Haupt in ihrem Schoße* […] *halb kniend*) – and wishes only to lay his head 'on her warm breast' surrounded by 'rosy scents' (*rosigem Duft*). Tannhäuser, more than anything else, it seems, depends on a fantasy of female superiority and domination. It is her arms which surround him: 'that my arm enfold you in intimate proximity' ('dass

8 *Cosima Wagner: Die Tagebücher 1869–1883*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, 2 vols. (Munich, 1976–7) [CT], 20 July 1878.

9 A transcription of the original sketch in A major is given in John Deathridge, Martin Geck and Egon Voss, *Wagner Werk-Verzeichnis (WWV): Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke Richard Wagners und ihrer Quellen* (Mainz, 1986), 426.

10 Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, *Das Leben Richard Wagners*, 6 vols. (Leipzig, 1896–1911), iii.119.

dich mein Arm in trauter Näh' umschlänge'), Venus sings. More to the point, he isn't free to leave: 'You may not withdraw from me' – 'Du darfst von mir nicht ziehen', she makes clear to him. Whereas the Sirens lure men into the Venusberg harem, once Tannhäuser is there, he wishes only to lie back and allow Venus to stimulate him into a blissful stupor. 'Soothed on the softest pillow, every ache shall flee your limbs, coolness refresh your blazing head, blissful fervour swell your heart' ('Besänftigt auf dem weichstem Pfühle flieh' deine Glieder jeder Schmerz, dein brennend Haupt umwehe Kühle, wonnige Glut durchschwelle dein Herz'), she sings. Even when Tannhäuser is desperately seeking Venus in the third act, he yearns to submit to her regal sexual authority:

Zu dir, Frau Venus, kehr ich wieder,	To you, Lady Venus, I return,
in deiner Zauber holde Nacht;	in the spell of your ravishing night;
Zu deinem Hof steig ich darnieder	to your court I climb down.

Tannhäuser's attraction to the goddess requires him to relinquish control rather than maintain it, and indeed, he must beg her permission to leave the blissful realm. His request to depart in fact prompts her to abuse him: 'Beggar! Give way, slave! My realm receives heroes alone' ('Bettler! Sklave weich! Nur Helden öffnet sich mein Reich').

It is Wagner who invents Tannhäuser's passivity, as none of his literary sources suggests anything similar. In Heinrich Heine's version, which Wagner knew, moreover, Tannhäuser and Venus even indulge in some playful sadomasochism:

Tannhäuser, edler Ritter mein,	Tannhäuser, noble cavalier,
Das sollst du mir nicht sagen,	that you should not tell me,
Ich wollte lieber, du schlügest mich,	I'd much prefer you struck me hard,
Wie du mich oft geschlagen.	you've done it oft to fell me.
Ich wollte lieber, du schlügest mich,	I'd much prefer you struck me hard,
Als daß du Beleidigung sprächest,	than now to give offence,
Und mir, undankbar kalter Christ,	you cold, ungracious Christian man
Den Stolz im Herzen brächest.[11]	whose pride is so immense.

From a Wagnerian vantage point, the idea of a Venus who asks for a beating is a tasteless gaffe. Nothing, in fact, could be further from Wagner's own soft and gentle erotics, which shun the slightest suggestion of discomfort. The worst that can be said for this fantasy of female domination is that, after a while, it becomes a bit stifling, and one needs to come up for air. 'But I yearn for forest breezes, away from these rosy scents' ('Doch ich, aus diesen ros'gen Düften, verlange nach des Waldes Lüften'), Tannhäuser exclaims, an outburst he conveniently forgets in Act III while inhaling the beloved fragrances emanating from the sweet Venusberg: 'Do you not sense the ravishing precious fragrances? […] It is the mount, the sweet mount of Venus' ('Atmest du nicht entzückend holde Düfte? […] Das ist der Berg, der süße Venusberg').

Wagner's personal habits were certainly unusual and received a good deal of exposure in the 19th-century press. The evidence for them is overwhelming, but it was clear at the time that Wagner, though married with children and thought to act in a conventionally masculine manner, a man not known to have had male lovers, nevertheless had an unconventional relationship to femininity. For Wagner indulged in a long-standing practice of wearing and surrounding himself with soft fabrics, especially pink satin and silk,

11 *Heinrich Heine: Werke und Briefe*, ed. Hans Kaufmann, 10 vols. (1961); 2nd edn (Berlin, 1972), v.368.

without which he found it difficult to compose music. He was also positively addicted to strong rose perfumes and oils, whose aromas and scents seem to have been almost as important to him as the soft fabrics.[12] Although the first public revelations about Wagner's unusual interests awaited the publication in 1877 of a cache of letters Wagner wrote to his milliner or *Putzmacherin*, Bertha Goldwag,[13] evidence for his interests extends over the entire course of his life. What was later seen by the early 20th-century sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld as a cross between silk fetishism and a type of cross-dressing or transvestism – to which one has to add the perfume compulsion – was certainly pronounced during all the periods when Wagner was working on *Siegfried*.[14]

The published letters Wagner wrote to his Viennese milliner begin at Christmas 1863 and extend for a period of several years. The letters spell out in sensational detail Wagner's lavish requirements (even sketched drawings) for a succession of pink satin dressing gowns with lengthy trains and flounces, along with voluminous orders for satin undergarments, silk slippers, pillows, quilts, curtains, upholstery and embroidered accessories too numerous to name. From the days when Wagner had any money at all, he always surrounded himself with extravagant luxuries, but luxury alone doesn't begin to explain the hundreds of yards of costly fabric ordered year in, year out. There was the complete refurbishing of his wardrobe and his residence in Penzing outside Vienna, then the outfitting of the house in Munich (where Ludwig II footed the bill), and later regular packages sent to the cottage at Tribschen in Switzerland, where Nietzsche was a frequent visitor. In the Briennerstraße in Munich, for example, Bertha outfitted what was called the Grail or Satin Room, about 11½ × 14½ feet (15.5 sq m) with 11½ foot (3.5 m) high ceilings crammed with a dizzying supply of satin furnishings, draperies and curtains, mostly pink: even the walls were covered in yellow satin with valances, and artificial recesses in the corners were covered with pink satin in folds.[15]

Wagner liked to wear and be surrounded by pink satin and specified his requirements in exacting detail as well as keeping precise financial accounts of what he was spending. Daniel Spitzer, the Viennese journalist who revealed the existence of the letters just a year after the 1876 *Ring* premiere (which he attended), was also able to capitalise on the stark contrast between the Teutonic hero Siegfried clad in bearskins and rough-hewn cloth, and the softer and rather more feminine and sensuous attire of their author living in luxurious Wahnfried. Not only do we learn, Spitzer writes, 'that the maestro also wears satin waistcoats and pink satin knee-breeches lined with pale pink satin'. There is also a letter which

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[12] Portions of this article have been reprinted by permission of the publisher from the forthcoming title *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* by Laurence Dreyfus, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright © 2010 by Laurence Dreyfus. All rights reserved. I treat Wagner's silk and perfume fetish more extensively there, 133–55, 178–9.

[13] Daniel Spitzer, *Briefe Richard Wagners an eine Putzmacherin* (Vienna, 1906).

[14] It was Hirschfeld (1868–1935) who first treated the question of cross-dressing and fetishism in his pioneering work of 1910, which, significantly, discusses the case of Richard Wagner. Hirschfeld, who coined the term 'transvestites' in a book of the same title, *Die Transvestiten*, includes an entire chapter called 'Transvestism and Fetishism (Explanation of Richard Wagner's Letters to a Milliner)' in which he sees Wagner's sexual 'tendencies' as merging aspects of cross-dressing and clothing fetishism. Magnus Hirschfeld, *Die Transvestiten* (Leipzig, 1910), tr. Michael Lombardi-Nash as *The Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress* (Amherst, NY, 1991), 158–70.

[15] Ernest Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist* (1914); 2nd edn (London, 1924), 130–35.

> contains two pen drawings from the maestro's hand. There is a drawing of the eider-down-padded house robe of pink satin – a magnificent specimen – , in any lady at court it would create a sensation, – as well as a smaller drawing of the 5-yard sash. This sash worries us a little, considering that its wearer, with his short stature, is likely to stumble over it constantly. The drawing of the house robe betrays remarkable (artistic) training, after the best models of the fashion journals. The 'quilted squares' are executed in gentle strokes and reveal a great delicacy of feeling. The 'shirred ruffles and bows' demonstrate a sweeping stroke and an energetic hand. The ruffled insertion in front is done with a touch of fantasy […]. And what spirit there is in the whole![16]

The sixteen letters published in Vienna – mostly from the year 1867 – were in fact less than two-fifths of the total number of letters Wagner wrote to Bertha Goldwag in Vienna. The entire cache runs to some forty-three items and covers the period from Christmas 1863 – that is, before Wagner received the royal summons from Ludwig II – until August of 1871, the period when he orchestrated the second act of *Siegfried*, composed *Die Meistersinger* and returned to compose the third act of *Siegfried*. In addition to drawings, accounts and precise instructions, there are samples of satin fabric attached to letters that one can still see in Washington at the Library of Congress: the detail makes for heady reading, and any explanation that Wagner's sensitive skin condition prompted his interest in silk is quickly laid to rest.

Wagner's preoccupation with shades of colour is, for example, especially striking, with pale pink (*rosa*) very much in the ascendant. Forced to leave Munich on 10 December 1865 after causing a political crisis which reached the highest echelons of government, Wagner found the time to write to Bertha on 17 December, then again on 7 January and once again on the 23rd, and regularly again thereafter. Satin was a serious matter for Wagner. Bertha Goldwag Maretschek was herself interviewed for the first time in 1906, and describes in great detail her early work for Wagner in Penzing in 1863 where she executed the interior decor of the entire villa, including one special room, a Venusberg-like grotto. 'Just one room […] was decorated with extravagant splendour according to Wagner's most exacting indications. The walls were lined with silk and all around garlands were mounted. A wondrous lamp emitted muted light down from the ceiling. Heavy and exceedingly soft carpets, into which the foot sank seamlessly, covered the entire floor.' In this *Boudoir*, as Bertha calls it, the sofas, chairs and a small table

> were covered in costly fabrics and with cushions, which he used to prop up his elbows. I had customised all of them [*alle angefertigt*]. The room was always out of bounds to everyone. [*Das Zimmer durfte nie von jemandem betreten werden.*] Wagner always holed himself up there alone, and always before noon. Without my having asked, he once told me that he felt especially well in such a room, because the colourful luxury greatly stimulated him to work [*sehr zur Arbeit anrege*].

The composer told his milliner that he 'always had a need for exceedingly great warmth so as to feel well' ('zu jeder Zeit ungemein viel Wärme brauchte, um sich wohl zu fühlen'), so that all his satin garments, even his soft house slippers, had to be padded with cotton, and his boots additionally filled with masses of fur and cotton, 'for Wagner

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16 *Richard Wagner and the Seamstress*, ed. Daniel Spitzer and Leonard Liebling, tr. Sophie Prombaum (New York, 1941), 37–8. Wagner's drawings for the lavish pink satin dressing gown (actually four yards in circumference) and sash are reproduced in SL, 713.

always complained of feeling cold'.[17] As for Cosima, there is only a slight allusion to her adverse reaction to Wagner's fetish. Near the beginning of her diaries she notes: 'Unfortunately R[ichard]'s passion for silk fabric sparks an observation from me which I should preferably have refrained from making, because it caused a slight malaise' (CT, 24 Jan. 1869). By 1881, on the other hand, Cosima suggests that Wagner's 'penchant for softness' ('Neigung für das Weiche') was even treated as a family joke (CT, 20 July 1881).

Nor was Wagner's silk fetish a taste first developed in the 1860s. One can surmise that its origins lay in his childhood when his heart used to beat wildly while touching his sisters' theatrical wardrobe. As he reveals in *Mein Leben*: 'I often saw the family busy fussing with the more delicate articles in my sisters' wardrobe, which [exerted] a subtly arousing spur [*einen fein erregenden Reiz*] to my imagination; touching [the garments] excited me so that my heart started pounding anxiously [*mich bis zu bangem, heftigem Herzschlag aufregen*].'[18] At his wedding to Minna Planer in 1836 – he was 23 years old – each guest received in commemoration a pink satin handkerchief, one of which found its way into the Burrell Collection.[19] In 1849, with Wagner on the run from Dresden, the police description of him as a wanted fugitive noted, in addition to 'Clothing – above all of dark green buckskin with trousers of black cloth and velvet waistcoat, and the usual felt hat and boots – a silk neckerchief', and further police reports from 1853 note his ostentatious luxury, including his silk curtains.[20] During his 1855 stay in London – if Ferdinand Praeger may be believed in this instance – Wagner suffered from 'occasional attacks of erysipelas' (*Gesichtsrose*: a bacterial skin infection) and

> wore silk next to the body, and that at a time when he was not the most favoured of fortune. In London he bought the silk and had shirts made for him; so, too, it was with his other garments. We went together to a fashionable tailor in Regent Street where he ordered that his pockets and the back of his vest should be of silk, as also the lining of his frock-coat sleeves; for Wagner could not endure the touch of cotton, as it produced a shuddering sensation throughout his body which distressed him. I remember well the tailor's surprise and explanation that silk […] was not at all necessary, and that the richest people never had silk linings; besides, it was not seen. The last observation brought Wagner up to one of his indignant outbursts, 'never seen! Yes: that's the tendency of this century: sham, sham in everything; that which is not seen may be paltry and mean, provided only that the exterior be richly gilded.'[21]

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17 Ludwig Karpath, *Zu den Briefen Richard Wagners an eine Putzmacherin: Unterredungen mit der Putzmacherin Berta* (Berlin, 1906), 24–5.

18 Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben: Jubiläumsausgabe,* ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin (Munich, 1963), 21.

19 Julius Kapp, *Richard Wagner und die Frauen: Eine erotische Biographie* (Berlin, 1912), 43.

20 Spitzer, *Richard Wagner and the Seamstress* (note 16), 9; Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, 4 vols. (London, 1933–46) [NL], ii.409.

21 Ferdinand Praeger, *Wagner as I Knew him* (London, 1892), 251–2. Despite Praeger's many documented fabrications, it is worth noting that Wagner himself seems to provide support for Praeger's claims that he accompanied him on a luxury shopping spree. In a letter to Klindworth from 1857, Wagner admits that while in London they 'met comparatively often […] because, given my passionate and earnest nature, what I sought above all else from this particular relationship was to satisfy a need of mine to let myself go in a nonchalant sort of way, and a desire for homely relaxation. What I seek on such occasions is comfort, and I am easily won over by helpfulness and flexibility.' (SL, 369)

On Easter Sunday of 1859, composing Act III of *Tristan*, he asks Mathilde Wesendonck to obtain some new silk bedding for him in Zurich, of which he needs 'quite a lot': what he currently uses is 'terribly dirty' and he is ashamed when he thinks of the housemaid making the bed. But 'for heaven's sake' Mathilde should keep this a secret from her husband (MW, 130–31). Thoughts of the purchase made Wagner think of a leitmotif for *Tristan* he had just composed, which he attaches to the letter as a snippet marked Allegro (*Lebhaft*) at the end of the letter – 'something new and silken' ('etwas neues, seidenes'), music which he uses in Act III.

Evidence of satin and rose oils accumulates throughout the period of the Bayreuth *Ring* and is intimately connected with *Parsifal*, as is seen in the correspondence with Judith Gautier. The precise details and demanding tone of the letters to Gautier – though later than the *Siegfried* period – provide a good indication of how very important these garments, oils and scents were to Wagner's compositional process. Concerned to prevent any further scandal, Wagner had Judith's parcels sent to him secretly in care of his local barber Bernhard Schnappauf in Bayreuth (NL iv.607). Wagner also found a reliable supplier in Julius Cyriax, a leading figure in the English Wagner Society. Though alarmed by the potential effect of so many strong rose scents on Wagner's health, Cyriax complied over the next three years with regular requests for silk nightshirts and a unending quantity of oil called 'Otto de Rose'. It's no exaggeration to say that this supply line formed the basis for the friendship.[22]

Pale pink satin remained the leitmotif of Wagner's intimate attire until the day he died: 13 February 1883. In a posthumous report syndicated in the Italian press one reads how Wagner

> was struck ill. He was in his bedroom and had donned *a dressing gown the colour of pink* [emphasis added]; he rang the bell and asked for his wife. His Cosima understood at once, and seeing her husband's condition much worsened, sent for the doctor and gave whatever succour she could to the dying man. But it was all in vain, for when the family physician Dr Keppler arrived, he could do nothing but verify Wagner's death.[23]

So in the midst of this tragic assembly – the inconsolable widow, grieving children and helpless doctor – lay the corpse of Richard Wagner, clad in the last article of clothing he ever donned, announced to the entire world as a pink (and without any doubt, satin) dressing gown.

The specifically erotic nature of Wagner's obsession emerges most clearly from his letters to Judith Gautier, in which each paragraph alternates between the evocation of soft caresses and an uncompromising list of fabrics and scents Gautier was to supply. It is clear from the plentiful evidence that Wagner took pleasure in enveloping his own body in soft tissues and feminine perfumes, especially when composing. His intimate spaces approximated to Orientalist interiors which disdain any hint of rough edges or hard contours. Although the lady's pink satin dressing gown with flounces and sash and the pair of laced satin knee-breeches that he ordered certainly crossed the line of luxurious male attire, Wagner did not cross-dress with any wish to parade himself publicly. Stopping short of donning articles of

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[22] Wagner's letters to Cyriax are edited and translated by Barbara Eichner and Guy Houghton in 'Rose Oil and Pineapples: Julius Cyriax's Friendship with Wagner and the Early Years of the London Wagner Society', *The Wagner Journal*, i/2 (2007), 19–49.

[23] *Gazzetta di Venezia*, 15 Feb. 1883, cited in Stewart Spencer, '"Er starb, – ein Mensch wie alle": Wagner and Carrie Pringle', in *Bayreuther Festspiele 2004*, ed. Peter Emmerich (Bayreuth, 2004), 72–85 (p. 76).

women's outerwear, the composer seems to have experienced a sensuous harmony, erotic arousal and a creative surge when both wearing and touching women's satin garments in the privacy of his personal grottos, always enhanced by the scent of roses. (For his own masculine outerwear, Wagner sometimes used pink satin as lining for a velvet coat in black, for example, as the soprano Lilli Lehmann noted upon meeting him in Prague in 1863.)[24] Nor did his inclinations threaten the sense of his own masculinity: he placed his orders with Gautier (October–December 1877) at the very time he was suggesting to Otto Eiser, Nietzsche's physician, that it was Nietzsche who suffered from a sexual malady caused by overindulging in masturbation! In addition, the letter to Eiser makes plain that Wagner's silk fetish – if ever it had to do with his troublesome skin condition – was no longer necessarily linked to it. As Wagner put it to Eiser in October 1877: 'Years ago a brilliant hydropathist near Geneva completely healed me of a recurrent erysipelas, of which I had suffered numerous relapses until this plague never again returned to vex me [*bis zur Nie-Wiederkehr dieser Plage*].'[25] If anything – given the important role of the colour *rosa* in his life – it is not far-fetched to see Wagner's skin problem, his *Gesichtsrose* (literally 'facial rose'), as a psychosomatic condition related to, if not actually induced by, his colour and fabric fetish.

While the minutiae of anyone's intimate life are bound to remain impenetrable to outsiders, it is striking how writings that document Wagner's satin dressing gowns, embroidered rose garlands and floral perfumes reiterate themes spelt out in his opera texts and in their musical representations. The rosy mists, pleasing scents and pink lights of the *Tannhäuser* Venusberg are reproduced in the Penzing boudoir, but there is also *Lohengrin*'s bridal chamber, described by the chorus as a 'fragrant space bedecked for love' which 'shall now enclose you away from the glare' ('Duftender Raum, zur Liebe beschmückt, nehm' euch nun auf, dem Glanze entrückt'). As 'Lohengrin embraces Elsa gently', according to the stage directions, 'he points to the flower garden through the open window', and sings:

Atmest du nicht mit mir die süßen Düfte?	Don't you smell the sweet scents with me?
O, wie so hold berauschen sie den Sinn!	O how ravishingly they befuddle the mind!
Geheimnisvoll sie nahen durch die Lüfte,	They approach mysteriously on the breezes,
fraglos geb' ihrem Zauber ich mich hin	without question I submit to their spell.[26]

In similar fashion, the stage directions for Act III, Scene 3 of *Siegfried* specify how 'the ever more delicate cloud cover has dissolved into a fine misty veil of a rosy hue [*in einen feinen*

[24] Lilli Lehmann, *Mein Weg* (Leipzig, 1913), 125.

[25] Curt von Westernhagen, *Richard Wagner: Sein Werk, sein Wesen, seine Welt* (Zurich, 1956), 528. In fact, the condition recurred once more at the end of Wagner's life.

[26] The governess engaged to teach the Wagner children in 1875–6, Susanne Weinert, noted in her diary that Wagner frequently played and sang *Lohengrin*'s Bridal Song in Wahnfried, mentioning immediately thereafter how she was once allowed to see the fabrics which were used in Wagner's dressing gowns. 'In the lower regions of the house', she notes, 'there were large boxes which shimmered with satin in a mixture of colours, in pale pink, azure, and green.' The housekeeper told her that she made 'dressing gowns and breeches into a negligee [*Schlafröcke und Beinkleider zum Negligé*] for the master of the house'. *Richard Wagner Briefe: Die Sammlung Burrell*, ed. John N. Burk (New York, 1950), 576. Weinert provides further descriptions of silk furnishings at Wahnfried and in Wagner's thinking room (*Denkzimmer*), 568–71. English translation in *Letters of Richard Wagner: The Burrell Collection*, ed. John N. Burk (New York, 1950), 436.

Nebelschleier von rosiger Färbung], and now dissipates so that the mist completely curls upward'. In *Tristan* there is the 'flowery bank' where 'Tristan sinks on his knees before [Isolde] and rests his head on her arm'. Isolde's penultimate lines in her Transfiguration are, moreover, drenched in perfumes:

Sind es Wolken wonniger Düfte?	Don't you smell the sweet scents with me?
Wie sie schwellen,	As they swell
mich umrauschen,	hissing around me
soll ich athmen,	should I breathe them,
soll ich lauschen?	should I hear them?
Soll ich schlürfen,	Should I sip them,
untertauchen,	dive beneath them,
süss in Düften	in their fragrance
mich verhauchen?	exhaling sweetly?

Then there are the 'lilac' scents of the second act of *Die Meistersinger* and the 'flowers and ribbons' which Magdalene gives to David, an act akin, he says, to his lover stroking him and smiling at him blissfully ('streichelt sie mich und lächelt dabei holdselig'), and which he offers to Hans Sachs in the third act.[27] Walther's Prize Song itself describes the quintessential Wagnerian morning garden which beckons invitingly to the dreamer:

Morgenlich leuchtend in rosigem Schein	In the morn lighted in a rosy glow
von Blüt' und Duft	from blossoms and scents
geschwellt die Luft,	the air swelled
voll aller Wonnen.	full of every joy.

Siegfried as anomaly

Everything about the young woodsman encountered in the first act of *Siegfried* is in complete contrast to these images and their musical depictions. Even the lilting forest murmurs of the second act are devoid of floral scents: the linden tree on which the Forest Bird lands and under which Siegfried sits gives off no pleasant odour. (It is only the 'bliss-

[27] There is a dispute in the literature about which tree Wagner meant by the 'Flieder', which stands in front of Hans Sachs's house (according to the stage directions) and whose scent he characterises as 'so mild, so strong and full' ('so mild, so stark und voll'), potent enough to prompt Sachs's limbs to loosen up and soften ('Mir lost es weich die Glieder') as well as to cause the irrational madness of the riot ('Der Flieder war's'). The botanical problem is that lilac or *Syringa vulgaris* (*spanischer Flieder*) didn't exist in 16th-century Germany, and in any case blossoms earlier in the spring than midsummer's eve when the opera takes place. Wagner might have made a mistake about the history of lilacs in Europe as well as the timing of their blossoming. If so, he wasn't the only one, since a later 19th-century German print of a stage production of *Meistersinger*, Act II, shows a lilac bush in bloom. The translation of *Flieder* as the indigenous 'elder' or *Sambucus nigra* (also known as *Holunder*) seems, on the other hand, to solve the problem, since a case can be made that its admittedly less pungent scent is well known – and equally distinctive – and superstitions about it date back to the Middle Ages. Yet we may be barking up the wrong tree, especially if, for Wagner, lilac had as much a tactile as an olfactory association. In 1878, for example, he waits impatiently to hear from Judith Gautier whether she has found him some 'lilac satin' called 'Ophelia', which, according to 19th-century fashion magazines, was a pale pink silk named after an old rose and used for trim and for undergarments. Considering the importance to Wagner of satin, roses and the colour pink, it seems plausible that he associated the lilac (rather than the elder) with the kinds of scents and fabrics he found desirable and erotic. If so, *Flieder* might be best translated as 'lilac' despite the historical and seasonal anachronism.

fully warm scent of [Brünnhilde's] breath' – 'Atems wonnig warmes Gedüft' – which first draws him into the contrasting realm of the feminine.) As Wagner returned to the composition of music for the third act of *Siegfried* in 1869, he was working not only to a different plan, but evoking an inverted and contrary world. Siegfried – unlike Tannhäuser, Siegmund, Sachs (and later, Amfortas) – doesn't suffer a surfeit of erotic desires or torments: his uncomplicated masculinity, attractively ornamented by a smattering of soft incidental brushstrokes, weathers the storm of dangerous Schopenhauerian Eros. He has no need of expensive luxuries, he doesn't indulge himself in creating a harmony of sweet smells, he hasn't been ruined by modern 'sensuality' – in short, he is everything that Richard Wagner isn't. The love that Siegfried therefore experiences as a man is also not the love desired by Richard Wagner, but rather a vague kind of love as a victory over sensuality. Its musical image is captured in a description Wagner provided to King Ludwig in 1869 about the music for the 'Joyous Victory of Love' which marks the final *stretta* of the Act III duet and which he first drafted in 1859 to the text 'She is eternally mine, for ever my own heir, once and for all' ('Sie ist mir ewig, ist mir immer Erb' and eigen, ein und all'). As Wagner described the music to King Ludwig, 'It is like the triumphant shout hurled from the hero's breast, flinging its cry of victory, love, and joy [*Sieges–Liebes–Freude*] across the Alpine heights, to abandon it to eternity's endless echo.' (Ex. 13)

SIEGFRIED
La-chend er - wachst du_ Won-ni-ge mir!
Lebhaft, doch kräftig und ohne zu eilen.
Horn
f
sempre f
Str.

Ex. 13. Joyous Victory of Love

Marked 'lively but vigorous and unrushed' (*Lebhaft, doch kräftig und ohne zu eilen*), this musical motif with its bell-like echo signals a manly heroic triumph in contrast to Wagner's initial conception of the finale in which Siegfried would suck the breath from Brünnhilde's lips, with the curtain falling on a couple who 'remain entwined, mouth to mouth'. The new ending, instead, with its heroic apostrophes and grand gestures, provides a fitting and optimistic conclusion to a problematic opera girded onto an ultimately untenable masculinity, an ideal which Wagner wished for his son, and for the new German man of the future, but which was far removed from the sense of his own manhood and the more complex representations of masculinity which bedevilled all his other male protagonists. The character Siegfried remains an anomaly in the Wagnerian oeuvre, but we gain a sense of what he symbolises by reflecting on the more ambiguous sense of masculine identity which both plagued and inspired his creator.

The Wagner Journal, **4**, 3, 27–42

Brünnhilde, the Aryan Satī: Wagner and German Orientalism

Suddhaseel Sen

'Why do they burn Brünnhilde at the end?' famously asked Anton Bruckner at the end of a performance of *Götterdämmerung*.[1] Bruckner's question is often seen as indicative of the composer's total, all-exclusive obsession with the music of Wagner, and the very limited appreciation of Wagner's art that can ensue from such an approach. In fact, Bruckner's question is far more relevant than it seems. Why does Brünnhilde die by *burning*? Why does Wagner make her *choose* such a horrific death, causing her Immolation Scene to be one of the most difficult to stage in all opera? Moreover, why does Wagner compose glorious, jubilant music that is, on the face of it, completely at odds with the death and all-round destruction depicted onstage?[2] Finally, why does Wagner make changes to the stage directions to suggest, not that the onlookers onstage (and, by extension, the audience) view the spectacle of Brünnhilde's suicide by self-immolation in 'speechless dismay', as the composer originally envisaged, but instead be 'moved to the very depths of their being', a description the composer provided in the stage directions in the full score?[3]

Even the trope of *Liebestod*, or love-death, fails to explain the necessity of depicting the spectacle of nothing less than an onstage self-immolation, or the joyous music that accompanies it. In Ernest Reyer's *Sigurd* (1884), based on the same legend, Brunehild 'falters and feels a blade' at the very same moment Sigurd is killed in the woods nearby,[4] accompanied by dark and ominous music; paeans of praise to the dead couple are sung later, at the very close of the opera, by an onstage chorus as the bodies of Brunehild and Sigurd are cremated as per Gunther's orders. Brunehild neither chooses to die, nor does she die by burning. In contrast, at the close of Emmanuel Chabrier's *Gwendoline* (1886), the eponymous heroine chooses to stab herself in order to join her dying lover Harald. While the music of this scene is ecstatic, and its visual details

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1 Carolyn Abbate, 'Wagner, "On Modulation", and *Tristan*', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, i (1989), 33–58 (p. 34).

2 Carl Dahlhaus, for instance, argues that 'the theme in the orchestra with which *Götterdämmerung* ends is not a musical metaphor of renunciation and "negation of the will", but an expression of the "rapturous love" celebrated in the 1852 ending'. See Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, tr. Mary Whittall (Cambridge, 1979), 140.

3 See Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington, ed., *Wagner's 'Ring of the Nibelung': A Companion* (London, 1993) [WRC], 372 (note 180).

4 See Steven Huebner, *French Opera and the Fin-de-Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford, 1999), 500.

A Suttee, anonymous watercolour, *c.*1800

Brünnhilde (Hildegard Behrens) prepares to immolate herself in Peter Hall's Bayreuth production (1986). Hall's Immolation Scene referenced the cremation pyre at the 1984 funeral of Indira Gandhi.

somewhat reminiscent of *Götterdämmerung*, it is the Danish ships belonging to Harald that are gutted by fire and not the lovers themselves.[5] In fact, operatic heroines may stab themselves to death or consume poison, but they rarely ever die by burning: by some twist or turn of the plot, they are always saved, usually by gallant European men. Only in *Götterdämmerung* – and Albert Roussel's *Padmâvatî* (1923) – do we find heroines who choose to commit suicide by burning. Even more strangely, in both operas their act of self-immolation is meant to be seen not with shock and horror, as the extreme manifestation of pagan superstition, but as a supreme manifestation of personal valour.

The Indian connections provided by Roussel's opera provide a clue to understanding the close of *Götterdämmerung*, for, as I argue in this article, the presence of the music of 'rapturous love' in the scene of Brünnhilde's voluntary self-immolation after the death of Siegfried can be accounted for if we read Brünnhilde's suicide as an act of Satī (suttee).[6] Although the ritual of Satī was a Hindu one, European (especially German) interest in the Aryan origins of the Caucasian people resulted in a more positive view of the ritual in the 19th century, when Satī came to be seen as epitomising an Aryan woman's fidelity to her husband. Because Satī was an Aryan ritual, the Satī figure also embodied the brave, loyal Aryan woman, and the 19th-century development of the notion that the Aryans moved outwards from the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent and settled in Europe made it possible for Wagner to tap into the associations of such an image in his depiction of Brünnhilde. Previous readings have focused on four principal ideas that have been seen to lie behind the ending of *Götterdämmerung* and, especially, the closing Immolation Scene: Wagner's quasi-Hegelian notion that a world order controlled by the gods will be replaced by an order led by morally sentient human beings; Ludwig Feuerbach's concept of the dialectical relationship between love and power; Arthur Schopenhauer's notion of renunciation of the Will; and the concept of redemption through love, present in other operas of Wagner. I do not intend to replace these readings; rather, I argue that the ritual of Satī serves as one more important interpretative thread that needs to be taken into account, since none of the other concepts explains the most remarkable aspect of the close of *Götterdämmerung* and its significance in the larger context of the *Ring*: the death of Brünnhilde by voluntary self-immolation.

Satī: Indian and European perspectives

The term Satī is used differently in Indian and European languages. In modern languages derived from Sanskrit, such as Hindi and Bengali, the word refers to the woman who immolates herself, and the custom is called *Satī-prathā*. There are two viewpoints

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5 Ibid., 486.

6 It should be noted that although Roussel's Padmâvatî has been read as a Satī figure, this is not an accurate reading, the reasons for which will become clear in due course. Padmini (also known as Padmâvatî), the Rajput Queen of Chitor, committed Jauhar, the practice of voluntary suicide by burning, along with all the other women of the fort, in 1303, in order to avoid being captured by the enemy (the troops of Sultan Alauddin Khilji), while the men died in battle. Unlike Satī, the practice of which was grounded in religious belief, Jauhar was an act of political defiance, and was committed when defeat at the hands of the enemy was imminent. Two other incidents of Jauhar took place in 1535 and 1568.

regarding the origin of the term. In the first, the term is assumed to derive from the original name of the goddess Satī, also known as Dakshayani, who died because she was unable to bear her father Daksha's humiliation of her (living) husband Shiva. However, in no important account of the legend does Dakshayani burn herself; moreover, her husband is alive at the time of her death.[7] The other theory states that the word comes from the Sanskrit root *Sat* (meaning 'truth'; a well-known modern derivation is Gandhi's concept of *Satyāgraha*, or the 'quest for truth'), and is related to the belief that:

> a woman who has vowed to become sati is understood by those surrounding her to be filled with the galvanising presence of *sat*, a palpable force of virtue and truth. They come before her expecting that in the final hours of her life this *sat* will burst forth from her mouth in a series of blessings and curses – blessings upon the good and the faithful, curses upon those who defy what is right or who stand athwart her path.[8]

It was also argued by supporters of Satī that a woman does not immediately become a widow on the death of her husband; rather, it is only after his cremation that the wife becomes a widow, and if she dies along with her husband by self-immolation, she dies as a 'nonwidow woman'.[9] In contrast, in Western languages, Satī (frequently anglicised as 'suttee') refers to the ritual of self-immolation by widowed women.[10]

The practice of Satī, which seems to have started around 400 CE, was never anything more than sporadic; it was observed in parts of the Indian subcontinent at certain times, and the presence of only a few scattered historical records from ancient times – mostly stones and shrines – makes it difficult to understand why this was the case.[11] It is, however, well documented that around 1800 Satī was practised more widely in Bengal than in any other part of the Indian subcontinent, one possible reason being that greedy relatives of the deceased husband wanted to deprive the widow of her share of her husband's wealth which, according to Bengali tradition, she was supposed to inherit.[12] (Bengali inheritance customs were different from those in other parts of India.) The ostensibly voluntary act of self-immolation now, more often than not, involved varying degrees of intimidation and duress. The coercive role of unscrupulous priests came under increasing focus, leading to European accounts usually holding Brahmin priests responsible when, in fact, Satī was practised by members of non-Brahminical castes as well. However, the 19th century was also a time when wide-scale religious, social and intellectual reforms began in Bengal (and, gradually, spread to the rest of India), and the most influential among early Bengali reformers, Raja Rammohan Roy, effectively persuaded the British authorities to abolish Satī by arguing that the practice was, in fact, incompatible with true Hindu

7 John Stratton Hawley, ed., *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India* (Oxford, 1994), 14.
8 Ibid., 6.
9 Ibid., 13.
10 Ibid., 12.
11 For a description and analysis of some of these stones and shrines, see Paul B. Courtright, 'The Iconographies of Sati', in Hawley, *Sati* (note 7), 27–53.
12 Ibid., 42.

beliefs.[13] In 1829, the British administration deemed Satī illegal; by 1856, the efforts of Rammohan Roy's successor, Ishwarchandra Sharma (Vidyasagar), made widow remarriage possible in Bengal.[14] Efforts at making higher education accessible to women followed. By the end of the 19th century, the situation of women in India, though far from perfect, was nevertheless very different from that at the beginning of the century: a sizeable proportion of middle- and upper-class Bengali women, for instance, took up teaching jobs, and in 1886, Kadambini Ganguly, trained in Calcutta and England, became the first south Asian woman to qualify as a practitioner of European medicine.

While the earliest European accounts of Satī from the turn of the 16th century focused on the horror and the spectacle of the ritual, and (sometimes) the individual heroism of the person committing it, later accounts, especially those from the 18th and 19th centuries, made the ritual either a part of a larger European discourse on religious and cultural Otherness, or an example of Aryan notions of heroism. Contemporary developments in India did not figure in these accounts. As Dorothy Figueira states in her chapter 'Die flambierte Frau', accounts by Italian travellers such as Lodovico di Varthema and Pietro della Valle, among others, describe Satī either as a voluntary act of honour on the part of the widow, or as a barbaric practice into which widows were coerced by Brahmin priests, or as a combination of the two.[15] Portuguese accounts by Tomé Pires and Duarte Barbosa emphasise honour – it was either only honourable widows who committed Satī, or that committing Satī enabled the widow to raise her social status as well as that of her family. Later European interpretations of Satī highlight either the aspect of honour or the irrationality of the belief. Enlightenment philosophers, on the whole, focused on the latter aspect and took a negative stand on the practice, even when they were otherwise deeply interested in ancient Hindu religion and philosophy. Voltaire, for example, argued that Satī was an extreme manifestation of the consequences of religious superstition and excessive power in the hands of the clergy. The poet and philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder argued in his *Ideen* (1784) that Satī was an evil consequence of the Hindu belief in metempsychosis.[16]

A fictional treatment is Pierre Sonnerat's *Voyage aux Indes orientales* (1782), which contains a tale of a prostitute who raises her social status by attempting to commit Satī. Sonnerat's story was completely reworked by Goethe in his poem 'Der Gott und die Bajadere' (1797), where the prostitute figure displays absolute, self-sacrificing love bordering on religious devotion that represented an ideal for all women to follow. Goethe's representation of the Satī figure as a woman who gives her life for love

[13] On Roy's successful campaign to abolish Satī, see Dorothy M. Figueira, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity* (Albany, NY, 2002), 94–6; Lata Mani, 'Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India', *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid (New Brunswick, NJ, 1999), 88–126.

[14] In 1987, a young girl from Rajasthan, Roop Kanwar, shocked the nation by committing Satī; the ensuing debate in the media resulted in the Indian government, then led by Rajiv Gandhi, reaffirming the ban, this time not only on the practice, but also on the valorisation, at the discursive level, of the practice.

[15] Dorothy M. Figueira, 'Die flambierte Frau', in Hawley, *Sati* (note 7), 55–71.

[16] Ibid., 57–9.

becomes increasingly important in European literary works, especially those from 19th-century Germany. The concept of redemption through such self-sacrificing love becomes, after Goethe, closely associated with Satī narratives, as in Charles-Simon Catel's *Les bayadères* (1801; libretto by Etienne de Jouy) and, especially, Daniel-François Esprit Auber's opera *Le dieu et la bayadère* (1833; libretto by Eugène Scribe).[17] As I stated earlier, neither of these Satī figures ultimately dies by burning: they are rescued in both cases, with the heroine ascending to heaven in Brahma's arms in Auber's opera. Moreover, in all these works the Satī figure is represented as a sexually active woman who rebels against patriarchal authority. Such a representation was, of course, at odds with the ground reality in India. This is not surprising since, as John Hawley points out, 'European emplotments of sati tended to have far more to do with Europe than with Asia'.[18] But European representations of Satī are important for understanding Wagner's *Ring*. It is Brünnhilde's rebellion against the authority of Wotan that makes possible the birth of Siegfried, the person with whom she would have a sexual relationship.[19] A loyal, self-sacrificing, heroic, independent-minded woman, combining features of the two Aryan upper castes, the spiritual Brahmin and the warrior-like Kshatriya, went into the making of the ideal Aryan woman in accounts by both 19th-century Indian writers and European Orientalists keen to create a mythical, glorious past for ancient India.[20]

By the time Wagner began his first sketches for the *Ring*, Indology was already a more than century-old discipline in Europe. The links between Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and other modern European languages led Western scholars to speculate widely on the common origins of Europeans and Indians on the basis of philological factors.[21] There was much speculation regarding Indian religion, culture, language and literature, and the word 'Aryan' became the site where diverse notions regarding ancient Indian history and its relationship to modern Europe intersected, reflecting a range of European political and ideological positions. By the beginning of the 19th century, a divergence of patterns between English and German Indologists could be observed. As Dorothy Figueira notes:

> While Evangelicals, Utilitarians, and colonial administrators could only envision India's salvation through a rejection of its irrational culture, conversion to Christianity, and embrace of British rule, scholars sympathetic to Indian culture, epitomized by the figure of F. Max Müller, effectively promulgated an idealized portrait of the Aryan in order to counter those who championed this backward view of the Indian past.[22]

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17 Ibid., 60. In Wagner's other, earlier works, too, such redemptive figures appear (Senta, Elisabeth and Isolde, for example), but in the context of his works, their connection with European representations of the Satī figure becomes evident only with Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung*.

18 Hawley, *Sati* (note 7), 18.

19 It can be argued that her rebellion reveals Wotan's innermost desire for self-annihilation. It is, nevertheless, important to recognise that it is a woman, Brünnhilde, who would go on to immolate herself and who is the rebel figure – not Siegfried, the hero of the *Ring* cycle.

20 Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?', *Recasting Women* (note 13), 29.

21 Figueira, *Aryans* (note 13), 27–31; Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened', 40.

22 Figueira, *Aryans* (note 13), 47.

In this respect, it is important to note that the degree of identification with the culture of ancient India varied from scholar to scholar. Müller, for instance, began by equating the term Aryan with an ur-Indo-European language and race, but later insisted that 'Aryan' referred only to a linguistic category. In his opinion, practices such as Satī were later accretions, and were not part of Vedic Aryanism. The Aryanism of Karl Ritter (1779–1859), the geographer turned professor of history at Berlin University, was of a different kind. Distinguishing between ancient Indians and modern ones, whom he considered a separate race altogether, Ritter argued that Aryans were closer to modern-day Europeans than they were to modern-day Indians, and that the Germans had far more in common with these Aryans than with the Greeks. Moreover, Ritter identified the Vedic religion practised by the Aryans with cults of Odin and other pagan gods, effectively arguing, as Figueira says, that 'Judeo-Christianity was foreign to the Romantic mythographer's schema'.[23] Ritter's linking of European pagan gods with Aryan religious beliefs enables us to understand why the Nibelung legend and the Volsung saga gradually became closely identified with German cultural identity, when different narrative versions of these myths were not confined to Germany alone. It is not surprising that Ritter's views gained a new lease of life once the *Vedas* were discovered and translated into German in the 1840s.[24]

Wagner and German Orientalism

Although Wagner's anti-semitism has been well studied, the nature and extent of his involvement with German Orientalism has received considerably less attention. The elevation of the *Nibelungenlied* in 19th-century Germany to the status of a national epic coincided with the championing, by German scholars and philologists, of Sanskrit religious texts and literature as forming an important constituent of a supposed common Aryan ancestry of both Germans and the people of the Indian subcontinent. Scholars such as Friedrich Schlegel, Ritter and, above all, Müller emphasised the need to know and appreciate this body of Sanskrit literature in order to understand Germany's own cultural past. In their increasing self-identification with 'Aryan' mores and practices, some of these scholars took a positive view of certain Hindu religious beliefs such as metempsychosis (the transmigration of the soul); although the custom of Satī was never valorised by any major school of English or European thinkers, some came to appreciate the practice, either by finding a parallel in Christian martyrdom, or by seeing the ritual as embodying the Aryan woman's capacity for complete loyalty and self-sacrifice.[25] Brünnhilde's immolation scene from the Scandinavian source material evokes, as I will show, the intertext of Satī by which her death becomes a paean to the construction and representation of an ideal Aryan femininity.

Critics have explored how 'the concepts of racial purity and regeneration formulated by Wagner in his last years were woven into the ideological fabric of his works', and have analysed their presence in works like *Parsifal*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*

[23] Ibid., 33.

[24] Ibid., 34.

[25] See Andrea Major, '"Pious Flames": European Encounters with Sati before 1805', *Journal of South Asian Studies*, xxvii (2004), 153–81 (pp. 176–7); Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened' (note 20), 42–7.

and the *Ring*.[26] Just as Wagner manages to introduce anti-semitic overtones in his operas without explicitly identifying any of his characters as Jewish, so he suggests Aryan connotations in Brünnhilde's Immolation Scene without being explicit; indeed, even in his prose writings, his views on the Aryan origins of Germans figure less prominently than the allegedly evil influences of Judaism on German culture and politics in Wagner's time. After all, the origins and migration patterns of the Aryans were, at best, speculative, and connotations of the word 'Aryan' changed substantially over the 19th century, both in Europe and the Indian subcontinent. Wagner's understanding of Germany's Aryan origins, while very much of its time, is rather different from, say, Hitler's views on them.[27] Moreover, Wagner's intertextual references in the *Ring* cycle are so complex and extensive that to focus *only* on the racial politics is to miss out on the many interpretations that are possible. Wagner's notoriously anti-semitic tendencies did colour his operas, and his racial politics are, indeed, extremely important for a fuller understanding of his works. But his outlook was more complex and multidimensional than that of his wife Cosima or his daughter-in-law Winifred Wagner, whose affiliations with Nazism, coupled with Hitler's appropriation of Wagner's music, have cast a permanent shadow over his operas.

By the time Wagner decided to take on the *Ring* project, the *Nibelungenlied* was already considered by many to be Germany's national epic,[28] and Wagner's choice of it was intimately tied to the role he hoped to play in German culture. What did Wagner understand by 'German art'? Wagner himself addressed this question in two essays, 'What is German?' ('Was ist deutsch?', 1865–78) and 'German Art and German Policy' ('Deutsche Kunst und deutsche Politik', 1867).[29] Although these essays were written long after he began work on the *Ring* tetralogy, they are nevertheless revealing of Wagner's views on the subject. In 'German Art and German Policy', Wagner defines German culture as growing out of the ordinary German *Volk*, as opposed to élite French

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[26] See Barry Millington, 'Nuremberg Trial: Is there Anti-Semitism in "Die Meistersinger"?', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, iii (1991), 247–60; *The Wagner Compendium*, ed. Barry Millington (London and New York, 1993), 164.

[27] Indeed, Aryanism had completely lost its Indian connections by Hitler's time. Although the Sintis and Roma people were of Indian origin and spoke Indo-European languages, they, too, along with Jews and black people, were part of a tradition of racial Othering which in fact went back to the 19th century; they were all categorised by the Nazis as racially distinctive minorities with foreign blood, and anywhere between 220,000 to 1,500,000 Roma people were killed by the Nazis during the Second World War. For an examination of the striking parallels between the treatment meted out to Jews and 'Gypsies' – Romas and Sintis – see Sybil Milton, 'Sintis and Roma in Twentieth-Century Austria and Germany', *German Studies Review*, xxiii (2000), 317–31. Milan Hauner makes the equally important point that 'Nordic solidarity […] bound Hitler in spirit with the English', and that Hitler frequently made 'laudatory comments on the role the British rulers were playing in India', despite the fact that Germany and England were at war with each other during the Second World War; see Hauner, 'Did Hitler Want a World Dominion?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xiii (1978), 15–32.

[28] Elizabeth Magee, *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs* (Oxford, 1990), 3.

[29] See *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, tr. and ed. William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols. (London, 1892–9); repr. 1966 (New York, 1966) [PW], iv.149–69, iv.35–135. The German originals can be found in Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, 5th edn, 11 vols. (Leipzig, 1911) [SS], x.36–53 ('Was ist deutsch?') and viii.30–124 ('Deutsche Kunst und deutsche Politik').

culture which thrived in the courts and did not reach out to the people. Wagner further states that German princes and kings have traditionally patronised French culture and systematically ignored the culture of their own German subjects. As a result, in Wagner's Germany there was nothing comparable to Greek drama, which Wagner read as embodying the natural expression of ordinary Greek people's collective culture. Attic drama was the great *Gesamtkunstwerk* of classical antiquity,[30] and Germany, Wagner firmly believed, needed a modern equivalent for it. The implication was, of course, that Bayreuth was the answer: the patronage of King Ludwig of Bavaria and the genius of the *Gesamtkünstler* Wagner would, in such a design, fulfil a much-needed cultural, political and spiritual need.

In the other essay, 'What is German?', Wagner begins by arguing that the defining linguistic feature of the Germans is that they continued to speak their ur-language long after the Romanic countries gave up speaking their own.[31] Wagner goes on to state that the true development of German culture took place when it looked inwards and harked back to its roots, instead of being concerned with political domination over other nations.[32] Wagner's vision of the German artist is worth quoting – it combines elements of the Rousseauesque natural man found in Siegfried with the celebration, through art, of native myths and sagas that define Wagner's own work on the *Nibelungenlied*:

> In rugged woods, throughout the lengthy winter […] for generations he [the German] keeps green the deeds of his forefathers; the myths of the native gods he weaves into an endless web of sagas. He wards not off the influences incoming from abroad; […] he longs to reproduce them; he therefore turns his steps towards home, for he knows that here alone will he be *understood.*[33]

Wagner adds to an allegedly natural and positive insularity of spirit an idealism of temperament and a meditative nature; the latter quality brings the German spiritually closest to the ancient people of the Indus, although, quite ironically, this same quality, when seen in modern-day 'Orientals', is better understood as sloth.[34] The idealism and inwardness of the ancient Aryans, developed to the fullest possible extent by modern-day Germans, made German culture, for Wagner, radically different from that of the cosmopolitan and materialistic Jew.[35]

We see, therefore, that depending upon the agenda in hand, Wagner's definition of German culture went along two different lines. When he had in mind his plans for German cultural regeneration by means of the Bayreuth theatre, he would align German art with that of the ancient Greeks, and posit it against the art of the French. When thinking of the origins and defining characteristics of German culture, he would assume what Ashton Ellis terms an 'idealistic–conservative' position,[36] one that brought German art close to its putative spiritual ancestor, that of the ancient Aryans of the Indus valley; in

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30 Wagner develops this point further in his 1849 essay, 'Art and Revolution' ('Die Kunst und die Revolution'), PW i.30–65, SS iii.8–41.
31 PW iv.152; SS x.38.
32 PW iv.153–4; SS x.38–9.
33 PW iv.159; SS x.44; emphasis in the original.
34 PW iv.164; SS x.49.
35 PW iv.158; SS x.42–3.
36 PW iv.158.

this latter instance, Jewish culture would be posited as the Other. Wagner's tendency to trace the meditative, conservative essence of German culture and language to its idealised Indo-Aryan roots, and the concomitant tendency to displace Hebrew from its position of centrality, was shared by the majority of 19th-century German Indologists such as Friedrich Creuzer, Joseph Görres, Karl Ritter and Max Müller.[37]

Given the shifting interpretations of the term 'Aryan' among German Indologists, it is not surprising that Wagner avoided the word entirely in his libretti and used it only sparingly in his prose writings. However, the opening lines of his pamphlet 'The Wibelungs' ('Die Wibelungen', 1848) show that Wagner adhered to the assumption that people from the 'Indian Caucasus' travelled westwards, reaching Europe in the end, where they 'commenced a livelier and freer evolution'.[38] 'The Wibelungs' was Wagner's first attempt at adapting the story of the *Nibelungenlied*. It can, therefore, be deduced that he was indeed influenced by the work of German Indologists, mentioned earlier regarding the origins of the Germanic peoples, when he started work on the *Ring* cycle. However, Wagner's interest in India changed over time.[39] In his 1880 article 'Religion and Art' Wagner explicitly discusses Aryanism: acknowledging that the notion of Aryan origins was no more than a hypothesis, he describes Aryans, in keeping with German Orientalist scholarship, as a peace-loving, spiritual, agrarian people.[40] Wagner

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37 Figueira, *Aryans* (note 13), 21–34.

38 PW vii.260–61; SS ii.117.

39 There are scattered references to India in an article from 1850, 'Art and Climate', where Wagner argues that true art was born in Greece and not in India; see PW i.253; SS iii. 207–21 (p. 209). Wagner's encounter with Schopenhauer's philosophy in 1854 was, of course, of the greatest significance, and Schopenhauer's reading of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy would profoundly affect Wagner. His reading of Schopenhauer spurred him to plan an opera, *Die Sieger* (1856), based on Buddhist themes. As Bryan Magee, Raymond Schwab and Dorothy Figueira have shown, it is impossible to analyse *Parsifal* without taking into consideration Wagner's reworking in that opera of themes from the *Ramayana*, or the figure of Kundry from the same opera without taking into account Schopenhauer's positive view, rare among European philosophers, of the Hindu notion of metempsychosis; see Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East 1680–1880*, tr. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York, 1984), 442; Figueira, 'Die flambierte Frau' (note 15), 64; Magee, *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy* (New York, 2000), 278–83. Post-Schopenhauer, references to India are more common in Wagner's writings. There is, of course, the 1865 article, 'What is German?', discussed earlier; other articles include 'On Opera Poetry and Composition in Particular' (1879), where Wagner uses unequal inter-caste relationship as a metaphor for word–music relations; see PW vi.165; SS x.152–75 (pp. 167–8). Some of Wagner's most elaborate references to Hinduism and Buddhism are in the 1880 essay 'Religion and Art', in which he argues that, in contrast to Christianity, the myths of Hinduism and Buddhism, while of profound insight, can be explained only through philosophical, rather than artistic, exegesis; see PW vi.214, SS x.211–85 (pp. 212–13). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Wagner chose to rework themes initially planned for *Die Sieger* in *Parsifal*, which he had decided would be his final stage work.

40 PW vi.225–7; SS x.223–6. In his 1881 article 'Know Thyself' ('Erkenne dich Selbst', in PW vi.264–74; SS x.263–74), Wagner acknowledges Schopenhauer's pivotal role in the rediscovery of ancient Indian philosophical thought, and in another article, 'Herodom and Christendom' ('Heldenthum und Christenthum', in PW vi.275–84; SS x.275–85), Wagner associates Aryanism with Brahminism. Wagner's ideas here are at their most confusing. He begins by praising the profundity of Hinduism's philosophical thoughts. He then goes on to call it a race-religion, and posits Christianity, the truly egalitarian of all religions, as the necessary antidote. In the

was drawn to Aryanism because that scholarship, in its quest for the originary, had used the notion of Aryan racial, cultural and even religious origins in order to displace Judaism from its central position. But there were, nonetheless, aspects of actual Hindu and Buddhist thought that were incompatible with some of Wagner's equally strong beliefs about the German people's origins and cultures. Any attempt, therefore, to find a consistent, unified vision of India on Wagner's part would be futile. Moreover, in the context of the compositional development of the *Ring*, the progressive shifts away from the sketch of 'The Wibelungs' show that the question of racial origin gradually became less important for Wagner than the question of racial purity. As Stefani Engelstein has shown, Wagner's focus on racial purity, and the associated fear of *Blutschande*, the disgrace to the bloodline through shameful exogamy, led him to valorise, for the first time in German literature, conscious incest between the siblings Siegmund and Sieglinde, in *Die Walküre*. The only other love relationship that is presented in a positive light in the cycle is also an incestuous one – that between Brünnhilde and her nephew Siegfried.

While Wagner's celebration of incestuous relationships in the *Ring* can be related to the composer's concerns regarding racial purity, a discourse that was central to 19th-century German anti-semitism,[41] it is also possible to read these unions as central to Wagner's critique of what he felt were legitimate but loveless marriages that are often based on convenience and material interests. While the love–power binary has its origins in Wagner's reading of Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, in the case of the Brünnhilde–Siegfried relationship this critique is tied in with 'a European nostalgia for lost innocence'[42] that also runs through European accounts of Satī. The complex representation of incestuous relationships in the *Ring* shows that the most radical aspects of Wagner's thought could coexist with the most reactionary ones. This is what makes analysis of the *Ring* so fraught with difficulties: its enormous thematic and musical complexity, dense intertextual allusions and compelling affective power make any analysis based exclusively on the theoretical paradigms of class, race, gender and so on, or on the basis of music alone, extremely reductive. A focus on any particular aspect of the *Ring* needs to be supplemented by an awareness of the multiple intertextual references that suffuse the work.

When the *Ring* is analysed in this light, it becomes clear that among the several intertexts that can be related to Brünnhilde's Immolation Scene are Wagner's German and Scandinavian epic sources,[43] his readings of European philosophy (especially Hegel, Feuerbach and Schopenhauer),[44] as well as 19th-century representations of the Satī

very next paragraph, however, egalitarianism takes a back seat as Wagner, citing the Comte de Gobineau, argues that true equality between races is a horrifying thought, as is miscegenation. Although Wagner felt the need to valorise Christianity over Hinduism or Buddhism, he could not come to terms with Christianity's egalitarian tendencies. In 1864, he prepared sketches for an unnamed dramatic project in which Luther would show the unsuitability of the Buddhist doctrine of renunciation in harsher European climes. See PW viii.386.

[41] See Stefani Engelstein, 'Sibling Incest and Cultural Voyeurism in Gunderode's *Udohla* and Thomas Mann's *Wälsungenblut*', *German Quarterly*, lxxvii (2004), 278–99.

[42] Figueira, 'Die flambierte Frau' (note 15), 57.

[43] The principal sources include the Old Norse *Eddas*, the *Volsunga Saga* and the *Thidreks Saga*.

[44] As a result of Schopenhauer's influence, Wagner initially changed the words of Brünnhilde's Immolation Scene, aligning her death with the concept of nirvana as Wagner understood it via

figure, which had already become common through European travel accounts, literature, drama and opera. It is to the operatic contexts that I now turn.

Wagner's glorification of Satī in *Götterdämmerung*

The representation of the ritual of Satī in operas mirrored European literary and critical attitudes towards the practice. England and France, the two leading colonial powers, incorporated Satī in ways that mirrored the nations' own colonial relations with India. British accounts often reflected the revulsion felt at the personal level by administrators who witnessed the practice at first hand, while French accounts ranged from Enlightenment scepticism to satire (as in Sonnerat) to the association of Satī with the concept of redemption through love (as can be seen in Auber's opera, mentioned earlier). Satī stories also fed into the trope of 'white men saving brown women from brown men',[45] and reinforced both the British civilising mission and Enlightenment attitudes towards Hinduism. German theatre and opera of the early 19th century were often based on British and French narratives informed by Enlightenment attitudes towards Satī. Julius von Soden's drama *Dirna* (1809), for which E. T. A. Hoffmann composed incidental music, was based on John Henry Grose's *A Voyage to the East Indies* (1757), while Louis Spohr's *Jessonda* (1823), an opera that retained its popularity till the beginning of the 20th century, was based on Antoine-Marin Lemièrre's play *La veuve du Malabar* (1770).

Wagner's Brünnhilde, personifying the characteristics of the spiritual and heroic Aryan woman, belongs to a later period and is in striking contrast to these earlier representations of Satī. First, unlike other the heroines of other Satī narratives, Brünnhilde immolates herself, and she does so of her own accord:

Starke Scheite
schichtet mir dort
am Rande des Rhein's zu Hauf':
hoch und hell
lod're die Gluth,
die den edlen Leib
des hehrsten Helden verzehrt! –
Sein Roß führet daher,
daß mit mir dem Recken es folge:
denn des Helden heiligste
Ehre zu theilen
verlangt mein eigener Leib. –
Vollbringt Brünnhilde's Wort!

Heavy logs
heap up for me here
in a pile at the edge of the Rhine:
high and bright
let the flames flare up
and consume the noble limbs
of the most exalted hero! –
Lead his stallion hither:
let it follow the warrior with me:
for my own body yearns
to share in the hero's
holiest honour. –
Do as Brünnhilde bids![46]

Schopenhauer, but later discarded the change. On this topic, see Carl Suneson, *Richard Wagner und die indischen Geisteswelt* (Leiden, 1989), 65–9; Figueira, 'Die flambierte Frau' (note 15), 64–6; and Figueira, *The Exotic: A Decadent Quest* (Albany, NY, 1994), 100–04. On Schopenhauer's influence on Wagner's philosophy, see Magee, *The Tristan Chord* (note 39), 133–44; on Wagner's knowledge of Hindu and Buddhist literature, see Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 438–48.

[45] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL, 1988), 296–7. See also Robin Jared Lewis, 'Sati and the Nineteenth-Century British Self', in Hawley, *Sati* (note 7), 72–7.

[46] WRC (note 3), 348. All further translations from the libretto of the *Ring* are from this source.

The mention of flames leads Wagner to allude to the Magic Fire music,[47] whose presence here makes it part of a larger design. It has been shown that Wotan's instruction to Loge to encircle the sleeping Brünnhilde with a Magic Fire (in *Die Walküre*) was an afterthought.[48] By alluding to the Magic Fire music at this point in *Götterdämmerung*, Wagner draws parallels between the endings of the last three operas of the *Ring* cycle. The circle of fire that surrounds the sleeping Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* is the same through which Siegfried goes in order to unite with Brünnhilde at the end of *Siegfried*. Similarly, at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, Brünnhilde goes through fire to unite with Siegfried in the afterlife. Love, and not the desire for self-oblivion, motivates this action, and this is the reason why Wagner decided not to set the Schopenhauer-influenced ending.

Next, Wagner goes on to make Brünnhilde, rather than Siegfried, embody the spirit of a visionary heroism. There is a quick statement of the Valkyrie motif when Brünnhilde expresses her longing to join Siegfried in death.[49] Wagner initiates this shift of heroic emphasis verbally by making Brünnhilde articulate her deep ambivalence about Siegfried's heroism:

Ächter als er	Never were oaths
schwur keiner Eide;	more nobly sworn;
treuer als er	never were treaties
hielt keiner Verträge;	kept more truly;
laut'rer als er	never did any man
liebte kein and'rer:	love more loyally:
und doch alle Eide,	and yet every oath,
alle Verträge,	every treaty,
die treueste Liebe –	the truest love –
trog keiner wie er! –	no one betrayed as he did![50]

Furthermore, Brünnhilde's decision to immolate herself coincides with a higher understanding of the cosmic order that she *now* acquires: she knows that the pyre in which she will burn herself will also destroy Valhalla and result in the quasi-Hegelian overthrow of the order of the gods:

Alles! Alles!	All things, all things,
Alles weiß ich:	all things I know,
Alles ward mir nun frei!	all is clear to me now!
…	…
Ruhe! Ruhe, du Gott! –	Rest now, rest now, you god! –[51]

It may be recalled that women committing Satī were considered heroic; furthermore, these women were in the presence of virtue and truth (*Sat*), making them prophetic

[47] See the Schirmer vocal score of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, arr. Karl Klindworth (New York, n.d.), 318/5/2 – 319/1/2. I use the following convention: page/system/bar number, and henceforth refer to this edition as VS.

[48] Warren J. Darcy, 'The Metaphysics of Annihilation: Wagner, Schopenhauer, and the Ending of the *Ring*', *Music Theory Spectrum*, xvi (1994), 1–40 (p. 4, note 10).

[49] VS 320/1/1.

[50] WRC (note 3), 348–9.

[51] WRC (note 3), 349. Though Wagner was no feminist, these words can be used – as long as the discovery of authorial intention is not the principal aim of analysis – as a starting point

figures. Both through her elevation in heroic status and through her insight into higher truths, Brünnhilde becomes closely aligned with the Satī figure.

In her next words, she tells Wotan's ravens to inform the gods that the torch that will immolate her will cleanse the ring of Alberich's curse (since, by choosing to die and join Siegfried, she chooses love over power), and that the fire will also destroy Valhalla. Hence the ritual of Satī will result in a Feuerbachian redemption *of* love (*Liebeserlösung*) and, at the same time, bring to an end the cosmic order controlled by the gods. Even productions that completely ignore Wagner's stage directions cannot bypass the Satī intertext, since the Magic Fire music returns in the orchestra at this point.[52] Furthermore, soon afterwards, as Brünnhilde asks for her horse, Grane, the Valkyrie motif returns, and is heard more prominently this time.[53] The quick succession of the Magic Fire music and the Valkyrie motif brings to mind *Die Walküre*, the opera in which, as a result of disobeying her father, Brünnhilde loses her divine status as Wotan's daughter and becomes a mortal. In this light, it is tempting to read the Immolation Scene as one in which Brünnhilde regains musically her divine status (just as women who committed Satī were elevated to divine status in popular perception, and were memorialised through shrines and temples). It might, however, be far-fetched to do so, since Wagner does not incorporate in *Götterdämmerung* Hindu religious beliefs (whether authentically Vedic or not) that were supposed to inform the ritual. Brünnhilde uses her heroism not to join the order of the gods led by her father Wotan, but to overthrow it instead. It is, therefore, better to see her revolt as resulting in a successful overthrow of Wotan's patriarchal order, just as Satī figures in European narratives almost always challenged the order of the Brahmin priests. In fact, a parallel could be drawn between the use of Satī by Enlightenment philosophers to critique religious orthodoxy and Wagner's representation of Brünnhilde's self-immolation as an act that successfully challenges a world order controlled by the gods.

The final moments of the Immolation Scene are permeated by one musical motif. First heard in this scene over Brünnhilde's words, 'Im Feuer leuchtend / liegt dort dein Herr, / Siegfried' ('Lit by the fire, / your lord lies there, / Siegfried'), this motif is repeated a number of times towards the end of Brünnhilde's monologue, in which she sees the fire as enabling her finally to unite with Siegfried in 'mächtigster Minne' ('mightiest love').[54]After a quick recall of some of the other principal motifs, *Götterdämmerung* ends with one final restatement of this theme. Hans von Wolzogen called this motif *Liebeserlösung*, or redemption of love, on the basis of a Feuerbachian reading of the ending. However, it should be remembered that Wagner discarded the Feuerbach-influenced ending. Yet the significance of the motif is not too difficult

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for a feminist rereading of the *Ring* cycle. Since Wagner's views changed radically over the long period of composition of the libretto of the *Ring*, it may not even be desirable to search for his interpretative intentions. As I argue here, the Immolation Scene bears traces of several interpretative frameworks that Wagner developed over the years, not all of which, by any means, are reconcilable with each other.

52 VS 329/4/2 – 330/4/1.

53 See VS 331/5/2 onwards.

54 WRC 350. The relevant bar numbers are VS 333/1/2 – 333/3/1; 334/3/2 – 336/1/1; 339/2/3 – 339/3/2; and 340/4/1 – 340/5/1.

to discern. This motif is heard in Act III, Scene 1 of *Die Walküre*, as Sieglinde, in deep gratitude to Brünnhilde for having disobeyed Wotan's orders and saving her, calls her, 'O hehrstes Wunder! / Herrliche Maid!'('Sublimest wonder! / Glorious maid!').[55] Furthermore, this theme bears a strong kinship to Brünnhilde's own theme, heard in the Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*.[56] According to Warren Darcy, Wagner's own description for the *Liebeserlösung* motif was 'the glorification of Brünnhilde' and a 'hymn to the heroine'; moreover, he consciously associated the 'glorification of Brünnhilde' theme with Sieglinde's hymn of praise to Brünnhilde. If we keep in mind the Satī's desire to unite with her husband in death through an act of glorious self-sacrifice as forming an important intertext in the Immolation Scene, it is clear why Wagner described the motif that ends *Götterdämmerung* in these terms.[57]

The Satī intertext also explains why Darcy's argument that Wagner employs 'this theme to represent Brünnhilde's transcendence' in the Schopenhauerian sense remains open to question since, as is well known, Wagner wrote a 'Schopenhauerian' ending in prose form in 1856, versified it in around 1871/72, and then did not set it, relegating this version, like the Feuerbachian ending of 1852, to footnotes in the publication of the *Ring* libretto in 1872. To argue in favour of an exclusively Feuerbachian or Schopenhauerian reading of the ending is to ignore the crucial fact that Wagner discarded these endings for one that celebrated Brünnhilde's heroism and devotion to Siegfried. Moreover, Darcy writes that Wagner did not follow Schopenhauer in his 'injunction against suicide, which the composer felt was a legitimate means for lovers to employ in order to attain eternal union with one another'.[58] Wagner's departure from Schopenhauer is understandable, since the eternal union of lovers *with one another* after death does not feature either in Schopenhauer or in the Buddhist concept of nirvana from which Schopenhauer's thought is derived. As Darcy himself succinctly sums up, according to Schopenhauer, to 'free oneself is to deny the Will, primarily by asceticism and self-abnegation'.[59] The various dramatic contexts in which the 'glorification of Brünnhilde' motif appears and the affective charge it carries hardly bring to mind asceticism or self-abnegation; in this scene, Brünnhilde knows that her self-immolation will destroy the gods, no less. Her desire for transcendence through suicide, like Isolde's at the end of *Tristan und Isolde*, is not triggered by a Wotan-like world-weariness, as Darcy seems to suggest,[60] but is charged by erotic longing. World-weariness leading to the goal of

[55] WRC 178. The corresponding bar numbers, from the Schirmer vocal score of *Die Walküre* (New York, repr. 1980), are 228/1/4 – 228/3/1.

[56] See the *Götterdämmerung* VS 20/1/2 – 20/5/5 for the first prominent statement of this theme in this opera.

[57] Wagner made this point in his diary entry of 23 July 1872. See Darcy, 'The Metaphysics of Annihilation' (note 48), 8.

[58] Ibid., 2–8.

[59] Ibid., 6.

[60] Ibid., 18 (note 32): 'Wagner makes explicit the connection between Brünnhilde's desire for self-annihilation and Wotan's; not only will Brünnhilde's self-immolation be mirrored by Wotan's, but the two acts are fundamentally *one and the same*' (emphasis in the original). Wotan's desire for self-annihilation can be better read in Schopenhauerian terms, but the topic lies outside the scope of this discussion.

self-annihilation in Schopenhauer's sense is not the same as *Liebestod*, the lover's desire for union with her beloved in death; hence, both *Tristan* and *Götterdämmerung* end on a note of powerful exaltation rather than of weary resignation. As I have argued, in *Götterdämmerung* the notion of *Liebestod* is also associated explicitly with a heroic ethic that Wagner identifies with Brünnhilde. This bringing together of the heroic ethic with the *Liebestod* was characteristic of readings of apologists for Satī, both European and Indian, that tried to see at least the impulse behind Satī in a positive light. It may be impossible to determine what Wagner thought of the practice, but his Immolation Scene echoes the logic of Satī apologists, and, as I have shown, many features of the ritual of Satī, and European accounts of it, are present in this scene. In turn, Wagner's Brünnhilde reinforces the notion of the ideal Aryan woman as being spiritual, faithful, self-sacrificing and warrior-like at the same time, a notion that had been gaining ground in certain schools of 19th-century European thought.

When we consider Wagner's Aryanism in the light of the work of German Orientalists, we see that his opinions, deeply anti-semitic as they are, belong to a discursive universe where anti-semitism's imbrications with Oriental scholarship, especially that on India, were dominant for nearly a hundred years before Wagner entered the fray. Moreover, while anti-semitic references loom large in his journalistic and paratextual writings, these elements are suggested, rather than spelt out, in his operas, as most scholars agree. This kind of implicit association is also true of his endorsement of the Aryan hypothesis of the origin of the German people. It is through this power of suggestion that Wagner is able to connect the racial imaginary of the Scandinavian source myth with German Orientalist scholarship on India in his time, and to make possible the association of Brünnhilde's spectacular death by fire with the archetypal Aryan Satī and its European representations. Wagner's valorisation of the self-immolation of Brünnhilde – the ideal of the heroic, self-sacrificing woman – is disturbing, but the affective power of his music also leaves audiences 'moved to the very depths of their being', just as the composer wished.

The Wagner Journal, **4**, 3, 43–57

Liszt on *Lohengrin* (or: Wagner in absentia)

translation from *The Monthly Musical Record* edited by

David Trippett

Part 3

The instrumental introduction to the third act is a lively movement of more than a hundred bars; it breathes an air of festivity and noble rejoicing, depicting to us the scenes of joy and contentment which follow the rites of Christian marriage.[1] On listening to it one calls to mind the Paladins and their jousts,[2] one seems to recognise the summons to the tournament and the clarions which announce the brilliant passages of arms, which should accompany the festivals and weddings of such high and powerful nobles.

We see next the nuptial chamber of the young couple. The train of women, and that of men headed by the king, conduct them thither, entering by opposite doors; their song fills the air like a cloud of incense, of nard,[3] of myrrh, of cinnamon, from which emanates a duet, whose waves of Æolian sweetness overflow with the adorable raptures, the purest ecstasies, the unspeakable caresses, the most sacred voluptuousness of love. The elevation, the purity, and the climax of sentiments which are developed in this scene could not be surpassed, or expressed in a more ideal manner, by poetry and song. 'And now that we are for the first time alone, tell me if you are happy, Elsa?' asks the knight. 'How ungrateful I should be not to esteem myself happy!' replies she. Sublime hyperboles! Convincing proofs of love!

Lohengrin blesses the fate which appointed him as her champion, since he could not find happiness but by her alone. 'I saw you in a dream before you came' is her answer, accompanied by the same melody to which, in the first act, she recounted her dream of his appearing to her. 'When you first set foot upon our shore, like a brook I would have followed your steps; like the flowers of the meadow I would couch at your feet! … Is not

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1 Liszt's personal situation at this time may underlie his warm appreciation of a church-sanctioned, Catholic marriage. Between 1851 and 1854, arrangements leading to an annulment of the marriage between Liszt's mistress Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein and Prince Nicholas Wittgenstein were unpleasant. Alan Walker reports that disputes over control of Carolyne's inheritance and her daughter Marie involved frustratingly protracted bureaucracy 'meant to humiliate'. Furthermore, the presence of the scandalously unmarried pair in Protestant Weimar led – Walker continues – to frequent 'petty harassment' of Carolyne in the town, and to her becoming a pariah in the Weimar court. In the end, Liszt and Carolyne were never able to authorise their union in a church, despite their fervent Catholic faith. See Walker's detailed account of the matter in *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years 1848–1861* (London, 1989), esp. 10–11, 140–44.

2 Liszt refers to the Palatines of the Imperial Guard in ancient Rome, latterly (under Constantine) the Praetorian Guard, and more generally to a benevolent, heroic champion fighting for a just cause.

3 A fragrant ointment prepared from the rhizome of the nard plant (*Nardostachys grandiflora*, family Valerianaceae).

this love? … tell me! … and what name shall I give to my lord and master?' Her feminine instinct points in this allusion to the mystery which disquiets the young wife, and curiosity gives an unaccustomed craftiness to the simple girl. 'How sweet thy name would be to my lips!' continues she. 'My lips would only murmur it in the silence of love!' Lohengrin, pointing to the country through the open window, asks her with an indefinable melancholy whether, while breathing the aromatic scent of the flowers, spread afar in the forests and mountains and borne to her by the night winds, she asks what names they bear: 'When I saw thee, my soul met thine, as I contemplated thy candid brow, and I was assured of thy purity, even when the shame of crime weighed upon thee!' This *morceau* is without doubt one of Wagner's finest inspirations, one of the happiest that he has had or can have, one of his most incontestable titles to fame, and to the place which the future reserves for him amongst the great masters of music.

Elsa replies with that enthusiasm for devotion which is a woman's heroism: 'Can I not prove my love for you, and die to save you? … Shall I not be aware of danger, if any threatens you? … May I not have a secret to keep, to assure you of my fidelity? … The torments of death would not tear it from me!' Thus one sees her approaching by degrees the point upon which her eager anxiety rests. By kind caresses Lohengrin tries to calm her agitation; but with each word she draws nearer the abyss. 'Disclose to me all the glory of your birth! … You will never repent having told me of your famous country. … I shall never be wanting in silence!' Sternly the loving bridegroom replies: 'I have already confided in you by relying on your oath. … I have already put you above other women, believing that you would not disobey me!' After these grave words the stern husband soothes her with the tenderest caresses of the most devoted lover. 'Let me love you', says he, 'in order that I may be happy upon this earth, for the happiness which I owe to you can alone compensate for that which I gave up, in order to come to you! … Not one of God's creatures has a more beautiful existence than was mine. … If a king had offered me his crown, with good reason I should have declined it. … Your love alone can make amends for the sacrifice I have made! Would that doubt were removed from your heart … [these words are pronounced to the 'prohibitory' motive],[4] for I am not come from the bosom of night and pain, … but from an abode of light and happiness.' Elsa utters a cry of terror. The ominous phrase peculiar to Ortrud already indicated at the knight's words: 'Would that doubt were removed from your heart', recurs with a still more passionate development than in the second act, when Ortrud and Friedrich were plotting their vengeance, for the fears of love are far more heart-rending and full of anguish and torment than all the frenzies of envy. The suspicions which it has sown bud and grow. Despair takes possession of the weak woman. 'What am I then in your eyes?' says she in her grief; 'you cannot realise my feelings. … I must count the days that you remain with me … I shall count them with terror, … and one will come when you will desert me, … and I shall be left alone and miserable!'

In vain her lover persuades her that the attraction of her love will last as long as doubt does not extinguish it. Burning fevers devour her. Delirium takes possession of her. Lohengrin hopes to subdue it by tempering his censure with kindness; … all his

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[4] Liszt's insert. See Ex. 4 in Part 2 (*TWJ*, iv/2, p. 33).

efforts fail. She thinks she hears a noise, … she fancies she sees the swan coming to take him from her arms, and beside herself, in a fit of gloomy hallucination, she breaks her oath. 'Elsa, how dare you?' cries the knight, whilst the 'prohibitory' phrase rolls forth like bolts of fire; but she listens no longer to the words of her well-beloved; she sets him at defiance, and calls out 'that she will know who he is, … and whence he comes, … even though she must die for it'. At this instant Friedrich, attended by four satellites with drawn swords, steals in through a secret door. Elsa, as if suddenly awakened, with a gesture of horror at the traitor who had speculated on her feminine impatience, her loving anxieties, her irritable curiosity, condones her fault by throwing herself before her husband, who could not see the assassin enter, and handing to him his sword, which he had removed from his belt. In a short passage of arms, Lohengrin stretches Friedrich dead at his feet. After a long silence, the fatal phrase which denotes human wickedness trails through the orchestra like an expiring groan. And when Lohengrin says to the confederates in this treachery, 'Carry this corpse before the court of the King', the phrase of the duel is recalled. He then summons the attendants of Elsa, who has fallen down in a swoon, and tells them to conduct her also before the King, in order that she may there learn who is her husband. The 'warning' motive which is now heard terminates this scene.

We must guard ourselves against entertaining the belief that the author, in creating this episode in his drama, in developing it with an interest so elevated, so involved, so poignant, should have been influenced by the analogy of his subject with traditions which, treating of the curiosity of women, in so many different myths, have equally given cause for incalculable misfortunes; but involuntarily he suggests them to our mind. How many instances there are of fictions with an interesting story of irreparable catastrophes arising from this innate weakness of woman! Under how many forms have not poetry and history painted the same lamentable succession of uncontrollable and fatal feminine impatience? … Nevertheless, each time that the same tragedy, however familiar it may have become, is again presented to us, we find that it arouses our whole interest afresh, and that by its point and meaning it has lost none of its pristine power to evoke a responsive echo from every heart. Who is there, in fact, that does not attribute to Dalila traits which are, perhaps, dear to himself? Who is there who does not recognise in the inquisitive Pandora and the rash Chriemhilda[5] types which still exist, and, like these, know not how to preserve the silence due to the mysterious, neither by respecting it nor keeping it secret?

Whether the gracefulness of the people of the South and the more solid grandeur of the North be respectively due to the possession of a light-hearted or a gloomy disposition, it is enough that our ready sympathy is always excited by the same chain of circumstances which tempts rash Beauty.

The author who has again breathed new life into this old legend has certainly followed the bent of his poetic fancy, but little troubling himself whether he adheres to or alters its original matter, caring but little to give predominance in his work to this or that thought, or to bring about this or that conclusion. Wagner is too genuine a poet to admit the introduction of *philosophy in action* into his dramas. He is a poet: that is to say, he is

[5] Kriemhild in the *Nibelungenlied*, Gutrune in the *Ring*.

subject to inspiration; and this will never cease to take possession of the spirit it comes upon, just as of old the breath of Apollo took possession of the Pythoness, in order that she might give utterance to the Oracle of the Temple. The Slavonic tongue, by making the word Poet synonymous with Prophet, thoroughly characterises this transport, and those who have never felt it, though they may employ themselves in writing poems with 'tendencies', or poems to prove something, would be wiser to keep to polemics. The poet who only writes when he feels himself inspired will never turn his burning tripod into a pulpit. To convince is not his mission. His object is to excite the emotions and to inoculate his audience with his own burning thoughts, to make them weep at his tears, and to entrance them with his ecstasy. If, then, one of his hearers, powerfully excited by these visions, should try to reflect upon the order of impressions which have been made by an oracle, who is at once both mysterious and ambiguous, or upon the art by which the poet reveals the sublime in his *chefs-d'oeuvre*, or if he should look for any agreement or difference in the work which he is considering with those already existing, he ought at least to abstain from attributing to the poet the result of these investigations. For the only intention of the true poet is to steal a spark of the sacred fire with which to animate his own creation!

Of all this group of indiscreet beauties, Elsa with her naïve purity, and the humble and fervent confidence of her love, is perhaps the most attractive. She is not, thank God, a reasoner or an independent[6] woman proclaiming the rights of women, and who, while wishing to know all and judge for herself, abdicates of necessity that beautiful privilege of clairvoyance and instinctive prescience which is only granted to the heart when it enlightens the understanding, instead of being enlightened by it. The importance of Elsa's position is not set forth in grand hexameters. She loves with a charming simplicity, and it is only the fear of losing her husband that betrays her into frenzy, disobedience and perjury. Up to this misguided moment she has experienced the identity of love and faith. Each of her words has breathed this loving self-abnegation, which enfolds the soul in an absolute confidence and voluntary obedience, leaving no place for doubt. Those who love, have they not also their Cartesian formula, from which flows the whole system of their sentiments? – 'I feel, therefore I know.' The intelligence of the Greeks, as analytical as intuitive, which has embodied so many precious allegories in the fantastic bands of mythology, has not failed to seize upon this cardinal virtue, this imprescriptible character of love, disengaging herself from the necessities of the understanding, and with one stride going beyond its limits. For our part, we like to find a higher interpretation than that commonly seen in the bandage that antiquity has placed upon the eyes of love. For in truth there is no need of their witness to help one to recognise the beauty and the presence of those we love.

Elsa, by that faith which is the certainty of the heart, was equal to her supernatural betrothed, and if she makes herself beloved to the end, it is because by a magnificent repentance she returns to that faith as soon as the tempter appears to satisfy her curiosity. She now sees[7] and recognises the error that by means of doubt has associated her

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6 *Indépendent* is in italics in Liszt's French, as is *Les droits de la femme*. Liszt, *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Gerhard Winkler and Rainer Kleinertz (Wiesbaden, 1989–) [SS], iv.68.

7 Liszt prefaces this sentence with: *A sa vu* (At his [Lohengrin's] glance). SS iv.70.

with hatred and wickedness. She refuses to know. She wills to be ignorant. She feels the superiority of her believing ignorance, and returns to the natural lucidity of her being, to the light and strength of her humble innocence; quicker than lightning she would repulse the one who would teach her good and evil. One follows the fluctuations of this pathetic scene with an emotion which is the more intense because the mystery hidden in Lohengrin is so grand, so beautiful, so full of love! The soul identifying herself with the varied griefs of this struggle fancies she sees there another image, and murmurs the name of Psyche.[8]

If faith were not the most beautiful prerogative, the most glorious vesture, the final end of love, from whence would come all our sympathy for this woman who gives herself up with transport to an unknown? Does it not savour of cowardice to deny to affection the right to affirm by presentiment that which reason cannot prove? Why should we be so touched at seeing Elsa with angelic candour taking pity upon Ortrud, 'who does not know how to believe'? Whence comes our satisfaction on hearing her repulse the insinuations of Friedrich and her reply to Lohengrin, 'My love is far too great for doubt'? Finally, whence comes it that we find her sublime when, suddenly renouncing her mistrust and her doubts, she refuses to learn the secret which she had so eagerly desired to know, and which now, on the contrary, she would rather preserve and defend, when she hastens to arm with his sword him whom before she did not believe to be menaced by any real danger? If, in love, for faith to be demanded and granted to the one who knew the most and had the greatest power was tyrannical unreasonableness, should not Elsa, in order to be consistent, heroic, admirable and admired, persist in *knowing*, *understanding* and judging him[9] who had humiliated and lowered her by expecting from her a confiding love? Fiction, guided by poetry, has thus once more represented here as the culminating point of a fond affection, as the flower and the fruit simultaneously produced from one rich sap – faith in love.[10]

The curtain falls as Lohengrin quits the bridal chamber, and the scene[11] changes to that of the first act. The Seigneurs, Barons, Counts and Dukes re-assemble on horseback, each carrying a banner emblazoned with his coat-of-arms, and their retainers rally round the standard which each has fixed in the ground. A stirring parade march is

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8 Connections between the principal characters in Wagner's *Lohengrin* and other mythic characters were common in the pro-Wagner German press. In addition to Psyche, the relationship between Jupiter and Semele was compared early on to that of Lohengrin and Elsa. See Edmund Kulke, 'Semele und Lohengrin: Eine Parallele', *Anregungen für Kunst*, *Leben und Wissenschaft*, vi (1861), 41–6, 77–90.

9 Italics in Liszt's French.

10 Such judgements drawn from Liszt's Catholic faith provoked Wagner's counter-argument that Lohengrin represented the artist in society. Primed by his reading of Feuerbach, Wagner protested that 'This "Lohengrin" is no mere outcome of Christian meditation […]. It is the Necessity of Love; and the essence of this love, in its truest utterance, is the longing for utmost physical reality, for fruition in an object that can be grasped by all the senses, held fast with all the force of actual being. In this finite, physically sure embrace, must not the God dissolve and disappear?' See *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, tr. and ed. William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols. (London, 1892–9); facsimile repr. (Lincoln, NE, and London, 1993–5) [PW], i.333, 335.

11 Liszt's text is subtly different. He writes 'la décoration change et représente le même lieu, qu'au premier acte.' SS iv.70.

executed on the stage by eight trumpets, tuned in four different keys – E flat, D, E and F. Each pair makes its separate entry according to its key, accompanied by a figure,[12] sustained by all the strings in unison, suggestive of the commotion of the horses. This figure of triplets of quavers is continued without intermission during more than a hundred bars, until the entry of the four trumpeters of the King, who execute the same fanfare that is heard throughout the opera on each occasion of his appearance. This time, on their arrival, the trumpets belonging to the different troops of the Seigneurs at first salute them in turns. Then by degrees joining together, they vie with each other in adding to the animation of the scene, which at last reaches its climax in a grand simultaneous burst from the whole band of trumpeters. The close conjunction of their rapid rhythm has somewhat the effect of a shout, or hurrah; a prolonged roll of the drums adds to the deafening clamour, which now comes to an end as the King takes his seat upon a throne which has been erected under an old oak. Soon afterwards, the corpse of Friedrich is brought in on a bier.

Abashed, dismayed, and with her head bowed down, Elsa advances; the astonished crowd murmur her praises as she passes. The melody which accompanied Lohengrin's injunction to Elsa is heard for the last time, seeing that the secret in which she was concerned is now on the point of being disclosed to all. The expression of admiration by the by-standers, allied with this musical phrase, seems like a word of enlightenment to recall to us how much all Elsa's well-being depended upon her confidence, her humble obedience, and faithful silence. In continuation, the chorus remarks, 'How sorrowful she seems! how pale she looks!' and for the last time also is heard the melody which occurs so frequently in the second act – the melody which, like the bitings of rage, has gnashed at the imprecations of Ortrud. The work of human iniquity is complete; Elsa's happiness is destroyed! – The trumpets bring relief to this sombre tint as they sound the motive peculiar to Lohengrin, just as he advances and announces to the Emperor and his suite, who till now had been under the impression that he was about to join them in taking up arms against the enemies of the empire, that this is not his intention, but that he has come before them in the character of an accuser! – 'Before you all', he says, 'I accuse this Friedrich, Count of Telramund, of attempting to attack me unawares by night.' (At this moment the duel motive is heard.) 'Judge if I did wrong in killing him in self-defence. … Next, I accuse before the whole world Elsa, the wife whom God entrusted to me, of having allowed herself to entertain treason against me. … You all heard the oath that she swore to me. … She has broken it, … seduced by pernicious counsels. … In satisfaction of the questions arising from her foolish and inexcusable doubt, I will inform you who I am, … and you shall judge whether my nobility is not on a par with yours!'

A gradual forgetfulness of the world which surrounds him seems to take possession of him, and in a kind of ecstatic rapture he recounts, with a suavity of manner as enticing and inspiring as the nocturnal exhalations of an orange-grove in full flower, while the orchestra resumes in all its magnificence the motive of the introduction to the first act, 'that there is a country, … that there is a mountain, … that there is a sacred temple … where the Holy Graal is guarded by a company of noble knights … who, when they are sent forth among men for the succour of oppressed virtue, are endowed with a

12 Liszt: 'figure de basse continue' (a thoroughbass figure). SS iv.72.

superhuman power as long as they remain unrecognised; … but, from the moment that their secret is discovered, they must shun the gaze of profane eyes. … Know that the chief of this most excellent knightly band, who bears the crown in this fortunate country, is Parcival, my father, … and that I am his son, and his knight, … Lohengrin.' Now from the full orchestra resounds the Lohengrin motive with so glorious an éclat, that we cannot imagine even the fanfares of the celestial hosts of St George and Michael the archangel, their chief, on the field of battle, to be more brilliant.

'Learn', he continues, 'how it was that I came among you. … Borne on the winds of heaven, the sighs and prayers of a young persecuted damsel were brought to the sacred temple, and I had just been deputed to start off in her defence, when a swan, drawing an empty shallop,[13] landed on our strand. … My father recognised it at once, … and pressed it into the service of the Holy Graal; … for whosoever has been subjected to magical enchantments recovers his proper form after having faithfully served it during the space of a year. … I embarked in the shallop; and after having traversed divers rivers and unknown seas, this swan landed me here.'

This long recital completes the *dénouement*[14] of the opera of *Lohengrin*, just as does that of Tannhäuser in the work which bears his name. The latter is marked by all the gloom of despair, the grief and trouble of sin and folly, an overwhelming regret, and the anguish of remorse. All that the heart can suffer finds its corresponding tone here: hopes deceived, misery inexpressible, cruel irony, bitter delights! That of Lohengrin, on the contrary, becomes more ineffably bright as it proceeds. A solemn calm takes possession of the soul, as if a mystic and supernatural brightness opened and beamed ever more vividly and overwhelmingly. Every tone of it resounds like a sigh of happiness, as it describes that realm which neither evil, nor grief, nor death, nor decay can approach; that realm where sanctity is invited to enjoy to the full unspeakable heavenly blessings, where the souls of the elect are intoxicated with the superhuman joys arising from the sight of God. Tannhäuser's last recital becomes bar by bar more mournful, more heart-rending and full of anguish. This unfortunate,[15] crushed by the anathema which has been pronounced against him, seems gradually to lose all his self-command as he gives way to the utterance of vague but awful curses, and with execrable blasphemy vows allegiance to the goddess, just as if he had found himself in a gloomy cavern surrounded with thousands of like groaners longing for him to make one of them, and inviting him by their lascivious seductions. Lohengrin, on the contrary, in his last speech by degrees reveals himself in his proper character, as he stands forth, the picture of a glorified being on a background of gold. His valiant bravery, his holiness and noble pride, his superhuman power and intelligence, reveal to us, as enthralled we look on, the nature of this angelic hero, this divine messenger, proof against every hurt or weakness,[16] but not exempt from the extreme penalties, the infinite sadness, the imperishable regrets of love.

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13 A gondola, later called a skiff.

14 Although he used the term *dénouement* in his *Tannhäuser* essay, Liszt did not do so here; rather, his original reads: 'Ce long récit termine l'opéra de *Lohengrin*.' SS iv.76.

15 *MMR* omits part of Liszt's original phrase, 'L'individualité du malheureux' (the personality of the unfortunate). SS iv.76.

16 *MMR* dropped the *immortel* from Liszt's original 'Immortel invulnérable à toute blessure et à toute faiblesse.' SS iv.76.

This trouble, these griefs, these regrets are then expressed with poignant emotion, when Lohengrin, pressing Elsa for the last time to his heart, which she has so mistrusted, tells her: 'if some day your brother should return to you, you are to give him my sword, which will render him always victorious; my horn, which will save him from all danger; my ring, which he is to wear in memory of me who has saved his sister from shame and death.' In the accents of this resigned out-pouring of a heart which is still inconsolable from an irremediable evil,[17] in this entire abandonment to a heart-breaking bitterness, there reigns a suffering which one might say is still mingled with sweetness; and Wagner, as if in love with it, indulges in a rare exception to his system of musical declamation, by twice repeating this last *memento*.

Suddenly the people, silent and stupefied, see the swan appear, once more drawing the same little skiff. The motive of the introduction, which has been reproduced in its entirety, is interrupted a second time by that which individualises Lohengrin; transposed now into a minor key, it breathes of sadness and seems clothed in mourning. Elsa throws herself at the feet of her husband, who reproaches her gently, but with all the grief of love, with having disturbed their happiness and trifled with his heart. The Emperor,[18] the nobles, and the people wish to detain him. 'I must … I must go! … The St Graal calls me!' he replies. On seeing the swan Elsa utters a cry of extreme terror. Lohengrin then explains that, if a knight of the Holy Temple were to remain among men after he has been recognised, not only would he lose all his invincible strength, but he would become weaker than a woman. With a look of extreme sorrow he advances towards the river, and singing the same strain with which he had previously welcomed him (in Act I), but which is now accompanied by a constant tremolo of the violins, suggestive, one might say, of the tremulousness of emotion, he tells the mysterious swan that he had hoped not to have seen him for a year, and then in another form.[19] He turns back once more, and with an agonising effort embraces Elsa, his gentle wife, in a last adieu.

She sinks down as he leaves her, and suddenly and unexpectedly Ortrud appears at her side. Gasping in her horrible joy, with a hoarse shriek, and gnashing vengeance, she points to the swan, and readily sacrificing herself to infallible ruin in order to add to Elsa's last despair, she cries out to her: 'I thank thee for having driven thy noble hero from among us! … for had he remained with thee, thy brother would have been delivered. … It was I, it was I who enchanted him, and changed him into a swan by putting round his neck the golden chain that thou seest. … Let them both go now. … thou wilt never see them again. … My gods that you have all foresworn have helped me thus to revenge myself upon you!' At this savage cry of triumph, Lohengrin, who has already reached the bank of the stream, kneels down in silent prayer, while the orchestra with solemnity again repeats the Graal motive. The swan disappears in the water; a dove descends and seizes the chain attached to the skiff. Shortly afterwards Godefroi[20] de

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[17] 'Evil' is meant here in the sense of a necessary punishment or sentence (Liszt: *irrémédiable peine*). SS iv.78.

[18] As was mentioned in note 1 to Part 2, Liszt's reference is to King Henry the Fowler.

[19] *MMR* inserts a paragraph break here, which I have not followed since it is not in Liszt's original.

[20] Liszt uses the French name Godefroi, though the collaborative German translation refers, of course, to the name given by Wagner: Gottfried.

Brabant emerges from the waves. All salute the young prince. The melody peculiar to Lohengrin recurs again, and in the course of its development, which lasts to the end of the scene, Lohengrin enters the skiff and gradually disappears in the distance. As Elsa, after being clasped in the arms of her brother, disengages herself from him to look for her husband, and descries him already floating upon the stream, this same melody is again taken up, but now in a minor key; and this may be regarded as an expression of grief on the part of her beloved, equal to her own. Elsa utters a cry, falls down, and dies.[21]

In this résumé we cannot hope to have adequately described the striking interest[22] of this drama, or to have exhibited the delicacy of touch, at the same time so firm and fine, which pervades this picture so rich and agreeable in colouring, or how the poet-musician has there shown his learned understanding of the resources of art. The character of its personages is throughout admirably and evenly sustained. Wagner has known how to combine, with a finesse of touch that one cannot help noticing in all his work,[23] the divine element which assured the victory of his knight, with the valorous character, the personal heroism which renders him dear to our eyes, and makes him an object of our admiration and sympathy, instead of the cold messenger which he might so easily have become. Lohengrin at first appears grave, stately, and tender as the Saint of a legend. His condescension towards his beloved is indulgent, but inexorable; her love in return gives a lustre to her whole being with the unfading happiness of being his choice. It seems as if happiness would be an unfruitful theme, so many have failed in making it interesting: and see here how this simple, common, perpetual sentiment[24] has inspired one of the most pathetic works of art, for without question the most poetically beautiful part of the whole score is the inspired idea at first developed by the orchestra with such exquisite instrumentation, and which on each allusion to the miraculous intervention of the Holy Graal again returns as if to open to us a glimpse of Eden, where sparkle in our eyes celestial love, divine happiness, radiant glory and beatific exaltation.

Elsa, a weak but passionate soul, dreams, prays, loves, and finds expression and sublime strains in dreaming, praying and loving. Her song is like a harmonious breath, a magnetic inspiration; it loses itself in the infinite, and touches upon an unattainable ideal, in like manner as in the dim horizon the blue waves mingle with the blue sky. Her interview with Ortrud, following the strident apostrophes of this woman of so savage an energy that every other personage of the drama in turn speaks of her as a 'fearful woman', describes in music the same scene which we behold in pictures of St Marguerite, with her tearful eyes of crystalline purity and sweet grace, surrounded by hideous reptiles, which, hissing, encircle the feet of the virgin[25] devoted to their mortal fangs.[26]

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21 The third instalment of *MMR*'s translation broke off at this point, and resumed on 1 May 1876.

22 Liszt speaks of 'l'intérêt si grand, si saisissant de ce drame!' SS iv.80.

23 'Work' distorts Liszt's original sense somewhat; he specifically refers to Wagner's *intentions* rather than a work or composition composed by Wagner. SS iv.80.

24 *MMR* omits Liszt's first adjective *delighted* ('cette aspiration ravie, simple, uniforme et infinie'). SS iv.80.

25 St Marguerite's martyrdom is more explicit in Liszt's text: 'les pieds de la vierge et martyre' (the feet of the virgin and martyr). SS iv.80.

26 Liszt's Catholic iconography would be roundly contradicted by Wagner in *Eine Mitteilung*, where he would firmly state, 'the form in which Lohengrin first stepped before me made

Ortrud is a creation so different from the types of envious mediocrity and vulgar wickedness which the boards of our theatres supply that she seems likely to take her place some day by the side of Lady Macbeth and Marguerite d'Anjou, as may Elsa take hers by the side of Milton's Eve, or the antique Psyche. The role of Frederic is not sacrificed, although it would seem necessary that it should be so. Fascinated by the predictions, and confiding in the occult science of his wife, he is full of remorse for the mischief she has brought about, being averse to his own degradation. He regrets his lost honour; he believes in the God that Ortrud insults, and it is only by frightening him, and representing his adversary as armed with a power not from on high, that she makes his resentment burst forth in desperate efforts to avenge his injury and seize again the aim of his proud desires.

If dramatic musicians could be brought to prefer the librettos of *Tannhäuser* and *Der Fliegende Holländer* as equally poetical in their plots and the beauty of their verse, and yet of a kind most suited for musical treatment, dramatic poets must put the poem of *Lohengrin* far above all those that Wagner has till now written. Its literary merit will be sufficient to place its author among writers the most highly gifted by the tragic muse.[27] By the side of verses most touchingly sentimental, exclamations the most happily found, a dialogue in which the secret springs of action of the personages are discovered by a clever intricacy of thought, its versification is not only sonorous and beautiful, the style elevated and appropriate to the characters, but more than all, this drama borrows a singular reflection from the Middle Age[s] by the introduction of the old German dialect, by the employment of old terms of expression, by the frequent recurrence of words of another epoch, which, without having been completely forgotten, bear the stamp of antiquity.[28] One must also praise the tact and good taste with which this imitation is confined to *nuances* easily comprehended even by those who have not been initiated into the secrets of an erudite archaism; for this is never pushed to the point of rendering the poem difficult to follow. But not content with recalling to the ear the old turns

an almost disagreeable impression upon my feeling [...]. The medieval poem presented Lohengrin in a mystic twilight, that filled me with suspicion and that haunting feeling of repugnance with which we look upon the carved and painted saints and martyrs on the highways, or in the churches, of Catholic lands. Only when the immediate impression of this reading had faded, did the shape of Lohengrin rise repeatedly, and with growing power of attraction, before my soul.' Later on, he makes his virtually direct criticism of Liszt as 'he to whom there seems nothing comprehensible in *Lohengrin* beyond the category "Christian-Romantic"'. See PW i.333–43 (p. 333).

27 *MMR*'s translation is very interpretative here. Liszt writes 'son mérite littéraire suffirait pour placer son auteur parmi les écrivains hautement doués du sens tragique' – that the literary merit of *Lohengrin*'s libretto would suffice to place Wagner among the highly gifted writers in the tragic mode. SS iv.82.

28 Wagner's more extensive discussion of medieval literature, of etymologies, historical grammar and the burgeoning discipline of German philology occurs in 'Opera and Drama', which was written in the months immediately following Liszt's drafting of his *Lohengrin* essay. Wagner's interest in *Stabreim* had been declared in 'The Artwork of the Future', which Liszt had read. Thus, even though there is no *Stabreim* in *Lohengrin*, Liszt was clearly aware of Wagner's interest in antiquated forms of literary expression. Liszt's reference to assonance in the following sentence strongly suggests, however, that he was exaggerating this aspect of Wagner's achievement.

of expression,[29] Wagner has extended this imitation to the disposal of the letters, which, as in the old poems of Wolfram von Eschenbach and others, are not written in capitals at the beginning of each line. This simple plan at once strikes the eye on perusing the pages of the libretto.[30] The concordance of all these impressions transports us so much to the times and the beliefs that it revives that we should not be surprised on going out from this opera to find that a portion of the public, endowed with a weird and tender imagination, is almost convinced of the actual existence of the Holy Graal, its temple, its knights and its unheard-of blessings.

The music of this opera is before all things characterised by such unity of conception and of style that there is not a melodic phrase, still less a *morceau d'ensemble*, or any passage whatever, which, on being detached from the rest, can be comprehended according to its proper signification and true meaning. The whole is compact and carefully weighed; every thing depends upon the subject, and cannot be separated from it.[31] It becomes very difficult to appreciate with justice fragments extracted from this work, in which there is nothing mosaic, intercalary, supererogatory or abstruse; where all is consistent and hangs together like the meshes of a net; where all is preconceived and predetermined; where each harmonic progression is pervaded or followed by a corresponding thought: such reflection is essentially German in its systematic rigour, and one might regard this great work as the most premeditated of inspirations. It is easy, on the other hand, to account for the fact that each episode may lose some of its charm when heard by itself, if we consider the principle on which Wagner has musically

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[29] Liszt refers specifically to *les anciennes assonances*, which suggests *Stabreim*, though Wagner himself rebuked the critic Julius Schaeffer for exactly the same suggestion about *Lohengrin* in 1852: 'What he [Schaeffer] says, for example, about alliterative verse (which he cannot find in *Lohengrin*!) would then have been impossible.' See Wagner to Uhlig, 31 May 1852, Zurich, in *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner,* tr. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (New York, 1988), 261.

[30] Jacob Grimm recommended resuming this medieval practice for clarity within Germanic languages in his *Deutsche Grammatik*, 2nd edn (Göttingen, 1822, repr. Berlin, 1870, and New York, 1989). Wagner's Dresden library contained the third edition of volume i of Grimm's *Grammatik* (1840), and – like Grimm – he adopted the use of lower-case letters for substantives and proper nouns, though not for the beginning of each sentence. This practice extended not only to his librettos, but also to his correspondence during this period.

[31] In spite of this assertion, individual sections of the opera were performed widely (the orchestral Prelude, Elsa's Dream, the Bridal Chorus, the Prelude to Act III, Lohengrin's Grail Narration) and helped to make *Lohengrin* one of Wagner's most popular works during his lifetime. It is indicative that the Bridal March, for instance, was played at the royal wedding of Princess Victoria and Prince Frederick William of Prussia in 1858. Back in 1853, Wagner's three-day festival on 18, 20 and 22 May in Zurich, and Liszt's parallel festival during September and October in Karlsruhe, had excerpted several sections from *Lohengrin*, which, as Wagner explains in his programme proposal to Liszt, demanded newly composed transitional and closing material: 'A. Instrumental Prelude / B. The whole scene for male chorus commencing with the song of the watchman on the tower, which enters in D major immediately after the great prelude in A major, and thus leads from the heights to the earth. This is followed (after a transition specially written) by Elsa's bridal progress (with a close, specially written in E flat). / C. Wedding music (introduction to Act III); bridal song; then wedding music in G major repeated. This makes the conclusion.' Wagner to Liszt, 3 March 1853, Zurich, in *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt*, tr. Francis Hueffer, 2 vols. (Cirencester, 2005), i.154.

personified roles and ideas. The recurrence of the five phrases whose wanderings we have tried to follow: that of the introduction, that which is heard when the judgment of God is invoked, that which accompanies Lohengrin's appearance, that which he sings on administering the oath to Elsa, and that which accompanies the impious threats of Ortrud, as well as the less frequent but always justifiable recurrence of the secondary motives, naturally stand in the way of one's following the entire dramatic idea and experiencing all the emotion which ought to result from such a complication, so new, so clear and so lucid in its turns and constant windings, especially when at the same time one has to familiarise oneself with all the lights and shades displayed, all the intentions hidden in the general formation of the plan of this beautiful monument.

There are some who, by the aid of a single idea, a single invention, or a discovery apparently of the smallest possible importance, introduce immense changes into the sphere to which such discoveries belong. There are others who, without bringing the knowledge of a new fact, or introducing an element hitherto passed over, to the science of their predecessors, by a new disposition of old material enlarge the domain to which they have turned their attention. As an innovator, Wagner belongs to the latter; his system is closely allied to that of Gluck by the importance with which he invests the eloquence of dramatic declamation, and to that of Weber by the declaimed eloquence and the sensibility of his instrumentation. Wagner would certainly have written the preface to *Alcestis** if Gluck had not already done so. But he has gone beyond Gluck and Weber

* *Preface to* ALCESTIS. – 'When I undertook to set the opera of *Alcestis* to music, I proposed to myself to avoid all the abuses which the mistaken vanity of singers and the excessive complaisance of composers had introduced into Italian opera; and which, from the most splendid and beautiful of spectacles, had reduced it to the most tiresome and ridiculous. I wished to confine music to its true function – that of seconding poetry by strengthening the expression of the sentiments and the interest of the situation, without interrupting the action and weakening it by superfluous ornaments. I thought that music ought to give that aid to poetry which the liveliness of colouring and the happy combination of light and shade afford to a correct and well-designed picture, by animating the figures without altering their contour. I have, therefore, carefully avoided interrupting a singer in the warmth of dialogue, in order to make him wait for a tedious ritornel, or stopping him in the midst of his speech upon a favourable vowel, either that he may display in a long passage the agility of his beautiful voice, or that he may wait till the orchestra has given him time to take breath for a point d'orgue. I have not thought it right to pass rapidly over the second part of an air, when this is its most important portion, in order regularly to repeat the words four times, or to finish an air when the sense is incomplete, in order to give the singer an opportunity of showing that, according to his fancy, he can vary a passage in several different ways. In short, I have tried to abolish all those abuses against which for a long time good sense and good taste have called out in vain.

I have felt that the overture ought to bring before the audience the character of the piece about to be represented, and at the same time indicate to them its subject; that the instrumental accompaniment should be proportioned to the interest and passion of each scene; that especially it should not leave too marked a void in the dialogue between the air and the recitative, in order that it should not break into the sense and connection of a period, nor interrupt the progress and energy of the action. I have also thought that it should be a great part of my aim to attain a beautiful simplicity; I have accordingly avoided a parade of difficulties at the expense of clearness. I have attached no value to the discovery of novelty, unless it has arisen naturally from the situation and in accordance with the expression demanded. Finally, there is no rule which I have not been willing to sacrifice in favour of a good effect.'

in carrying out their theories. Availing himself with rare felicity and bold intelligence of all the conquests that music has made since the death of these great men, utilising all the resources offered by newly invented instruments, as well as the beautiful use to which they have been put – especially by Meyerbeer and Berlioz – he has enlisted in his service all the means resulting from the progress of modern times; and, by a system more vast than that of Gluck's, and by principles more absolute than those of Weber's, he aims at securing a predominance for the poetic sense, to which both voices and orchestra must be subservient. Unless one has seen and listened to Wagner's scores, and has studied their skilful construction and scenic effect, it is by no means easy to arrive at a just idea of the result which he has obtained by the complete union of the operation of these two sources, or, as one might better express it, these two torrents of emotion. Both as a symphonist and as a dramatist he is equally extraordinary. By this concentration of rare and different faculties, he has succeeded in creating an *ensemble* which may please or displease, but which as a whole one cannot deny to be as equally logical and perfect in its colossal conception as in the very least of its details. Madame de Staël's definition of music as the architecture of sounds allows us to compare the structure of Wagner's magnificent edifices with an architectural order of which neither the partisans nor the opponents could change or modify the least of its laws without at the same time destroying the whole character of its style.[32]

After having tried to explain to the reader the fundamental principles of Wagner's dramatic system – which, in pursuance of the desires and efforts already manifested by Gluck, aims at attaining a more complete fusion of the effects of poetry and of music, even to the play of the actors, from whom he demands a profound comprehension of their art, making even the *nuances* of his orchestration agree with their mute gestures, and in certain scenes using the symphonic motive as indicative simply of their presence – it will be less easy to describe the style of instrumentation which he has adopted. We can only point out certain significant traits, such as the very remarkable division of the orchestra into three different groups, obtaining thus three distinct bands: viz., a string band, a wind (wood) band, and a brass band. Instead of massing and distributing them in accordance with conventional or arbitrary rules, he classes them in distinct bands, from each of which he obtains a quality of tone appropriate to the situations and personages of his drama. This distribution is one of the most salient of his innovations, and one of the first to make itself felt. With this persistence in sub-division before us, it is no surprise to learn from an autobiography of Wagner, published some years ago in a German paper,[33] that the first of his overtures which was performed in Leipzig was written by him in three different coloured inks, in order to facilitate the comprehension of his score for those musicians who wished thoroughly to examine it. Black ink was

[32] Johann Christian Lobe used the same simile during his analysis of the *Tannhäuser* overture, in his seventh letter about Wagner, to illustrate a negative view, namely that Wagner was needlessly destroying timeless laws of art (or masonry). Some of these comments appear in my translation of Lobe's 'Briefe über Wagner an einen jungen Komponisten', *Richard Wagner and his World*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton, NJ, 2009), 287.

[33] Wagner's *Autobiographical Sketch* (to 1842) was written for Heinrich Laube's *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* and published in two instalments, on 1 and 8 February 1843. A modern English translation by Thomas Grey was published in *The Wagner Journal*, ii/1 (2008), 42–58.

used for the strings, red for the wood wind, and green for the brass instruments. The prosecution of this parallelism of sound has necessarily obliged Wagner to mix up in his orchestration instruments which hitherto had been generally employed by themselves, and to unite with them as almost inseparable some others. Consequently it is his usual habit to employ three flutes, three oboes (two oboes and a cor anglais), three clarinets (two ordinary and one bass clarinet), three bassoons, three trombones and a bass tuba. Among other advantages this ternary system admits of complete chords being attacked and sustained by instruments of the same *timbre*. It is this that gives light and shade to his orchestration in a new way, which he uses with the most exquisite art, harmoniously blending it, in a manner as new as it is impressive, with the declamation, upon which it is made to serve as a sort of comment. Wagner also makes great use of the violins in sub-divisions. In a word, instead of employing the orchestra as an almost homogeneous mass he separates it into different channels and[34] rivulets, and sometimes, if we may venture to say so, into bobbins of different colours, as numerous as those of the lace-makers; as these do, mingling them, rolling them together, and like them producing from this surprising tangle a manufacture, an embroidery of marvellous and inestimable value, in which the broidery of a solid texture spreads itself out over the most diaphanous transparencies.

To a mind so fully imbued with the poetry of the drama, to an organisation so sensitively alive to the impressions derived from the most trifling details of his art, this peculiar tendency of his genius to divide the orchestra into three currents of sound, which, like the waters in the confluences of certain rivers, preserve their different tints while flowing in the same bed, without mingling their muddy, azure or verdant waves, must instinctively have suggested itself. Its application by him to every idea of a purely intellectual order follows as a matter of course. It has been effectively carried out here. Wagner had already brought it to bear in his earlier operas; but in *Lohengrin* he has reserved quite a different palette for his principal characters. The more attentively one examines the score of this opera, the more clearly one perceives what an intimate relation he has established between his orchestra and his libretto. Not only has he, as we have said, personified in his melodies the sentiments and passions which he has brought into play, but it has also been his aim to invest their outline with a colouring appropriate to their character; and, simultaneously with the rhythms and melodies which he employs, he has adopted a *timbre* peculiar to the personages which he has created. Thus the motive which first appears in the introduction, and recurs each time that allusion is made to the St Graal, or is developed as in Lohengrin's recital[35] towards the close when he declares his sublime mystery, is invariably confided to the violins. Elsa is almost always accompanied by wind instruments, which give rise to the happiest contrasts when they succeed to the brass. One is especially moved when, in the first scene, a pause follows the long speech of the King (whose role is throughout supported by trumpets and trombones, which then predominate in the orchestra), and when one hears this soft and airy murmur arising like the perfumed undulations of a celestial breeze to assure us, even before Elsa has appeared, of her spotless purity. The same

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[34] *Ou* (or) in Liszt's French. SS iv.88–9.
[35] That is, recitation (*récit*). SS iv.88.

instrumentation comes like a refreshing dew to extinguish the sombre flames of the duet of Friedrich and Ortrud, when Elsa appears in her balcony; it is also used in the grand wedding march of the second act, and succeeds in representing this holy exultation and innocent happiness in a manner which renders this *morceau* one of the most precious, if not one of the most telling, in the opera.

The difficulties of the *mise-en-scène* and of the satisfactory execution of Wagner's operas, combined with the serious character of their subject-matter, their elevated style, and the close attention they demand from the listener, will all, alas! contribute to retard their popularity. The severity of their perfection is an obstacle to their meeting with the vulgar applause which is readily accorded to works of short vitality, or with that immediate enthusiasm which the genius of Rossini and Meyerbeer has evoked by the glittering lightning-like manner and rich harmonies with which they have clothed every human passion. Is it then necessary to wait till Wagner's scores have been embedded in the dust of ages, for the learned to discover by perusing them the marvellously ingenious secrets which they contain, and for poets in retrospective admiration to be enamoured of those heroes who surpass a hundredfold our paltry and vulgar conceptions?[36]

[36] *MMR* omits Liszt's final paragraph, in which he goes on to explain that one could not claim the means of his Weimar stage are adequate to the demands of Wagner's dramas, for the stage, the orchestra and the chorus of the Hoftheater are all too small. But Liszt qualifies such modesty, adding that he 'dared to believe' in giving the premiere in spite of the difficulties because of the 'profound admiration' that had arisen from his studying the work. Liszt had described Wagner's score as similarly 'profound' two years earlier, and his initial scepticism about performing the opera at Weimar ('I fear at the performance the superideal colour which you have maintained throughout'; 19 June 1849, *Correspondence* [note 31], i.30) gave way in part because of his increasing fascination with the score ('The more I enter into its conception and masterly execution, the higher rises my enthusiasm for this extraordinary work'; 29 July 1849, *Correspondence* [note 31], i.34) as well as pressure from Wagner as mentioned in the introduction.

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Live Performances

Pest Control

Laboratory rats feature in a thought-provoking new Bayreuth 'Lohengrin', reports Barry Millington

Lohengrin. Jonas Kaufmann (Lohengrin), Annette Dasch (Elsa), Hans-Joachim Ketelsen (Friedrich von Telramund), Evelyn Herlitzius (Ortrud), Georg Zeppenfeld (King Henry), Samuel Youn (Herald), Stefan Heibach, Willem van der Heyden, Rainer Zaun, Christian Tschelebiew (Brabantine Nobles); Bayreuth Festival Chorus and Orchestra / Andris Nelsons; Hans Neuenfels (director), Reinhard von der Thannen (set designs and costumes), Franck Evin (lighting), Björn Verloh (video). Festspielhaus, Bayreuth, 6 August 2010

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. James Rutherford (Hans Sachs), Klaus Florian Vogt (Walther von Stolzing), Michaela Kaune (Eva), Artur Korn (Veit Pogner), Norbert Ernst (David), Carola Guber (Magdalene), Charles Reid (Kunz Vogelgesang), Rainer Zaun (Konrad Nachtigal), Adrian Eröd (Sixtus Beckmesser), Markus Eiche (Fritz Kothner), Edward Randall (Balthasar Zorn), Florian Hoffmann (Ulrich Eisslinger), Stefan Heibach (Augustin Moser), Martin Snell (Hermann Ortel), Mario Klein (Hans Schwarz), Diógenes Randes (Hans Foltz), Friedemann Röhlig (Nightwatchman); Bayreuth Festival Chorus and Orchestra / Sebastian Weigle; Katharina Wagner (director), Tilo Steffens (designer), Michaela Barth, Tilo Steffens (costumes), Andreas Grüter (lighting). Festspielhaus, Bayreuth, 5 August 2010

As ever, there has been much speculation about the future of Bayreuth under the new regime of the half-sisters Katharina Wagner and Eva Wagner-Pasquier. A short visit was enough, however, to convince me that it is in rude health. The fact is that on successive evenings one could see hugely stimulating, cutting-edge productions of *Lohengrin*, *Parsifal* and *Die Meistersinger*, admirably conducted and for the most part strongly cast. What more could one ask?

Hans Neuenfels' new production of *Lohengrin* has upset many traditionalists, but his concept is a thought-provoking one. The significance of all its details is not necessarily obvious on a single viewing, but it is nevertheless a powerfully realised piece of musical theatre, with stage and pit combining to unforgettable effect.

The action takes place in a white-walled, brightly lit laboratory, with the populace – both armies and civilians – presented as rats, under observation. The main characters are not themselves rats, but are clearly part of the experiment. Unappealing as it may sound, the rats are far from disgusting: indeed, with their floppy front and rear paws, their twitching and nuzzling, they are rather endearing. While the military personnel at the beginning are black rats, they are joined later by a bevy of sweeter white rodents; the bridesmaids of Act III are yet cuter sugar-plum rats whose childlike antics are very funny indeed.

Why rats? Rats are cunning, gluttonous and great survivors – except in the scientific laboratory, of course. It is, in fact, Lohengrin who creates the laboratory conditions – we see him doing so during the Prelude – his purpose being, one understands, to test concepts

Elsa (Annette Dasch), surrounded by king (Georg Zeppenfeld) and rodent onlookers, waits for her champion to appear. Photo Bayreuther FestspieleGmbH/Enrico Nawrath

such as truth and deceit, fidelity and treachery. What draws people to one another? Why are we lured by what is forbidden (like rats 'tempted by a bit of bacon', as Neuenfels puts it, in a shoddily translated interview in the programme)? Why do we put our trust in external forces, human or supernatural, to solve the problems of our existence?

A further element of pseudo-scientific observation is incorporated in video form. A screen descends from the flies on three separate occasions to reveal the 'truth' behind the facade. On the first – during Telramund's false testimony in Act I – we see cartoon images, inside a rat's head, of ambition and conquest. Wahrheit II and III, as they are called, are interpolated later that act during the combat and in Act III when the King and troops are summoned.

Immediately before the latter summons occurs one of the most affecting moments in the production, when the four rodent accomplices of Telramund look mournfully, and then accusingly, at Elsa, whose asking of the forbidden question precipitates the final tragedy. Rather like puppets, the gestures and facial expressions of these creatures have a poignancy here that a human actor would struggle to emulate.

That said, the *Personenregie* is generally on a high level. The bedchamber scene for Lohengrin and Elsa in Act III skilfully plots the spiral of loss of trust, while some of the ensemble scenes are brilliantly done. As Lohengrin's arrival becomes imminent, the Brabantines shed their rodent costumes and don bright yellow suits (a rare departure from Reinhard von der Thannen's stylish white, black and red colour scheme). All look expectantly out to the audience and the house lights come on, but salvation is not to be found there: Lohengrin emerges unseen at the rear, the swan carried in an open coffin. The Act II curtain is also extraordinary. The minster is represented only by a wooden cross, put in place by Lohengrin himself. Now two laboratory assistants grab the cross.

The procession to the minster. Photo Bayreuther FestspieleGmbH/Enrico Nawrath

Lohengrin wrests it back from them and holds it aloft, while Elsa flaps her arms like a swan and the garishly garbed wedding guests also raise their arms – whether in supplication, invocation or despair is not clear.

Gottfried emerges at the end from an egg: a hideous, foetus-like creation that breaks its own umbilical cord and tosses the fragments to the crowd. An engineered future clearly doesn't of itself provide the answers to the dilemmas of our condition.

The casting of the six principals is a triumph. Jonas Kaufmann's Lohengrin is in a class of his own. His ringing, ardent tenor is a joy to hear, but almost more impressive is his control of half-tone. We hear it several times in the latter stages of the opera, most tellingly in his Grail Narration, where Andris Nelsons similarly scales down his orchestral forces to exquisite effect. Elsewhere too Nelsons finds much mystery and poetry in the score, though he also knows how to screw up the tension when required. Annette Dasch has been trailed, alongside Kaufmann, as the other half of a 'dream couple'. In spite of their osculatory curtain-call embrace, it's not quite that, on this evidence, but given her gleaming tone and intelligent phrasing, this is an exciting development for Dasch – a favourite at Salzburg in recent seasons and better known for lighter Classical roles. Though somewhat unpredictable lately, Evelyn Herlitzius can still deliver a thrilling performance as Ortrud, her rich colouring invoking the venomous, wheedling aspects of the role. Her uncollegial penchant for singing everybody else off the stage resulted in a barnstorming outburst at the final appearance of the swan that for all its visceral power seemed out of proportion to the dramatic action. Hans-Joachim Ketelsen was an admirable Telramund, and Georg Zeppenfeld and Samuel Youn outstanding as King Henry and the Herald respectively.

One final thought. For reasons that have always baffled me, Bayreuth along with many other opera houses round the world – the recent production, conducted by Semyon

Bychkov, at Covent Garden is a meritorious exception – has always set its face against the inclusion of an extensive section of the score at the end of the opera. I am referring not to the second stanza of the Grail Narration, which Wagner decided to cut, but to material following it, for the excision of which there is no justification. When he directed *Lohengrin* at Bayreuth in 1999, Keith Warner was told that it was not possible to incorporate this material. This passage has some fine music, not heard elsewhere, including a remarkable ensemble in French Grand Opera style, and its excision deprives us of the opportunity to experience *Lohengrin* in all its Romantic opera glory. Neuenfels possibly lets the cat out of the bag when in his programme-book interview he refers to the perceived difficulty of including the text 'Never, not even in the distant future, shall the hordes of the East rise to defeat Germany!' His rationale is nonsensical, however. 'Although we Germans', he argues, 'are always afraid of being seen as fascists when we assert our identity, we needn't have any fear of Wagner. On the contrary: he is a catalyst who reinforces these fears. With Wagner, we come closest to approaching the German critically.' Yes, indeed, but why then censor this passage, as Neuenfels and Bayreuth still do?

Two major roles have been recast in Katharina Wagner's *Meistersinger* since I reviewed it in 2007 and 2008 (i/3, pp. 74–9; ii/3, pp. 69–72). The new Hans Sachs, James Rutherford, more than proves the faith many have had in him with an authoritative, richly nuanced reading of the role. Rutherford joins the international league with this assumption. Adrian Eröd's Beckmesser (new in 2009) is impressive for its precision. Klaus Florian Vogt's Walther is not new, but the relative sinew and enhanced colour he brings to the role are. Sebastian Weigle has by now got the measure of the Festspielhaus acoustics and delivers textures of more amplitude than previously, within a surely paced reading that once again harmonises ideally with the staging.

Katharina Wagner's bold idea was to chart the progress of Sachs and Walther (a purveyor of the visual pop art of the 1960s) towards a commercialised, infantilised culture that rewards popular art with ludicrous financial incentives (Walther receives a cheque for €10,000 for his Prize Song). Beckmesser, meanwhile, discards the persona of a fusty pedantic traditionalist, discovering the joys of avant-garde creativity after undergoing some sort of liberating epiphany during the riot. Traditional German culture suffers all manner of degradation here – huge puppet figures representing the great masters (including Goethe, Hölderlin, Dürer and Wagner himself) engage in tawdry and libidinous activity – and the final scene spirals terrifyingly into a totalitarian nightmare. Many details of the production have been developed, resulting in a more sharply focused conception, with improved *Personenregie*. Katharina Wagner has held firm to her resolve to undercut a good deal of the work's emotional thrust: her Eva is either a grey product of the guild ethos or a model for Walther's body art, while the sublimity of the Quintet is compromised by an eminently dispensable piece of puerile lavatory humour.

Still, it's a very brave and impressive production. It does not offer audiences the kind of benediction bestowed by Herheim's *Parsifal* (see next issue for review) or Richard Jones's *Meistersinger* (see pp. 64–6), but in its unsparing dissection of the interface of culture and politics, and its cool, unsentimental treatment of the love element, it remains a highly theatrical production of undeniable integrity and historical significance.

Between Worlds

The new Seattle 'Tristan' explores the threshold between life and death, reports Andrew Moravcsik

Tristan und Isolde. Clifton Forbis (Tristan), Annalena Persson (Isolde), Greer Grimsley (Kurwenal), Margaret Jane Wray (Brangäne), Stephen Milling (King Mark), Jason Collins (Melot), Simeon Esper (Young Sailor/Shepherd), Barry Johnson (Steersman); Seattle Opera Chorus and Orchestra/Asher Fisch; Peter Kazaras (director), Marion Tiedtke (dramaturg), Robert Israel (set designs and costumes), Duane Schuler (lighting). Seattle Opera, 4 August 2010

What are we to make of *Tristan und Isolde*'s paradoxical premise that romantic love is realised only in death? The couple's amorous sincerity leaves no doubt that even ill-fated love permits us, if only briefly, to transcend the limitations of material and social life. Yet Tristan's lacerating self-analysis in Act III, in which love seems just another burden to be cast aside, implies more sombre Schopenhauerian pessimism: we can transcend worldly desires, even romantic love, only through separation and death. To 21st-century ears, Wagner's philosophical resolution of all this – death as metaphysical transfiguration – is so much mumbo-jumbo.

The result: contemporary productions of *Tristan* simply duck the issue. Some are naively realistic. Others, in the tradition of Wieland Wagner, adopt a studied neutrality, emptying the stage of recognisable objects and leaving the audience to free-associate on the varied pathologies of romantic love or psychological evasion. Still others, in the tradition of modern German *Regietheater,* use deliberately alienating settings – a glitzy cruise liner, for example – to undermine the romantic premise that love and death are big issues at all, leaving us to ruminate on our solitary existences. None of this does justice to the opera's central tension.

In his recent Seattle Opera production, director Peter Kazaras proposes something new. The drink is indeed the death potion Isolde ordered, and from then on we observe the hallucinations that pass through the lovers' minds in the moments before death – a notion borrowed from Ambrose Bierce's famous story *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*. This concept promises to make sense of the tension between love and death, underscores Tristan and Isolde's uncanny spiritual separation from their surroundings, and highlights the opera's uniquely distorted subjective sense of time.

While Kazaras's stage direction, backed by Duane Schuler's innovative lighting and Robert Israel's set design and costumes, ultimately fails to realise this ambitious concept fully, it provides new insights into the music drama. The blocking of Act II, in which Tristan and Isolde slowly follow one another across a dark stage, like Orpheus and Eurydice, evokes their ghostly state between worlds. Tristan and Isolde's costumes shift from mortal red to half-red, and finally to pure white, as if the blood is slowly draining from them. Tristan sings his first lines in Act II while apparently fully encased in a large slab of solid stone – one of many striking lighting effects, and one that highlights the idea that Isolde is summoning the knight only in her mind. Kurwenal is not killed in a pointless battle, but simply recedes from Tristan's consciousness into darkness.

Yet much else is jumbled, undermining the production's core concept. Semi-realistic elements – large wrapped paintings, a tree, furniture and the little model ship (mandatory, it seems, in contemporary *Tristan* productions) – coexist uneasily with abstract ones, such as laser-like red cords and a 'stage within a stage' curtain behind which characters intermittently disappear. Blocking, lighting and costuming of characters fail always to delineate unambiguously their status from the perspective of the dying couple: to the first-time observer, some aspects seem arbitrary, others over-subtle, still others blandly realistic. A future revival should give Kazaras a second chance to realise its promising central premise more starkly and with greater rigour.

Musically, while perhaps not reaching the epochal standards of Seattle's 1998 production, in which Ben Heppner and Jane Eaglen made their debut in the lead roles, the production was deeply satisfying. Clifton Forbis is a true dramatic Heldentenor whose clarion top rests on a dark baritonal base. While somewhat restrained in Act I, perhaps by design, he trumpeted the Act III high notes (no cuts) with apparent ease – as if, in the Birgit Nilsson tradition, he could sing it all again. Those with a historical perspective might quibble, calling here and there for warmer timbre, gentler *piano*, subtler phrasing, clearer diction or deeper psychological insight. Yet who today sings a finer Tristan?

Keen anticipation attended the American debut of the young Swedish soprano Annalena Persson. Young, blonde, comely and (by Wagnerian standards) slim, Persson looks Isolde's part. Her silvery voice can be thrilling or moving, particular in swiftly paced, exciting moments, such as the Act III Lament. On sustained (particularly rising) notes in the upper-middle register, however, the voice spreads, curdles and slides out of control. The Liebestod, almost entirely comprising such passages sung against full orchestra, was rendered anti-climactic.

Seattle favourites took the secondary roles. Stephen Milling nearly stole the show with a world-class King Mark of deep feeling, his rich bass effortlessly filling the hall with exemplary German. Margaret Jane Wray's soprano approach to Brangäne – slightly steely at the top, but cleanly projected and delivered, with plenty of volume – vindicated her recent success at the Met and elsewhere. Greer Grimsley, Seattle's resident Wotan, made a more convincing Kurwenal for its elegant understatement.

The company's Principal Guest Conductor Asher Fisch is not one to pepper this score with excessive *accelerandos*, overweighty accents or bloated brass. He strives instead for classical restraint, impressively achieved through long lines, subtle details, transparent textures and smooth blend. The intimate mood suited this production's exploration of dreams at the threshold between life and death.

Restricted View

The WNO 'Meistersinger' lacks a crucial dimension, finds Barry Millington

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. Bryn Terfel (Hans Sachs), Raymond Very (Walther von Stolzing), Amanda Roocroft (Eva), Brindley Sherratt (Veit Pogner), Andrew Tortise (David), Anna Burford (Magdalene), Geraint Dodd (Kunz Vogelgesang), David Stout (Konrad Nachtigal), Christopher Purves (Sixtus Beckmesser), Simon Thorpe (Fritz Kothner), Rhys Meirion (Balthasar Zorn), Andrew Rees (Ulrich Eisslinger), Stephen Rooke (Augustin Moser), Owen Webb (Hermann Ortel), Paul Hodges (Hans Schwarz), Arwel Huw Morgan (Hans Foltz), David Soar (Nightwatchman); Welsh National Opera Chorus and Orchestra/Lothar Koenigs; Richard Jones (director), Paul Steinberg (designer), Buki Shiff (costumes), Mimi Jordan Sherin (lighting). Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff, 19 June 2010

The skill with which Wagner weaves together his dual themes of art and love – old artistic forms giving way to new, while retaining the best of tradition, just as Sachs' avuncular love for Eva gives way to the spontaneous youthful passion of Walther – is such that new interpretative approaches to *Die Meistersinger* are never short of nourishment. There's also a political dimension to the work, however, evident in the nationalistic rhetoric of Sachs' notorious 'Hab' Acht!', for example, and in the victimisation of the outsider, Beckmesser. Coupled with the troubled legacy of the opera and the perennial issue of the relationship of art and ideology in Wagner's work, this is a dimension one does not expect a sentient director to shirk. Richard Jones's new production for WNO surprisingly does sideline the politics, focusing exclusively on matters of art and love.

Nor does Jones appear to be firing on all cylinders in this production. It is in places witty, engaging and poignant, full of visual stimulation and novel touches. And with Bryn Terfel making a confident debut in the role of Hans Sachs, there was plenty to enjoy. And yet, the restricted parameters Jones set himself seem to have resulted in a show that fell some way short of his usual standards.

Greeting the audience at the beginning is a dropcloth consisting of cameos of German creative artists and intellectuals – from Büchner to Brecht and Freud to Fassbinder. Like Walther, these are representatives of German culture, often regarded as radical in their time but eventually absorbed into the mainstream. The location of the opening scene (St Katharine's Church) is austere, stripped of religious iconography and decorative detail generally. The same space then serves for the Song School, but the bareness is gradually ameliorated by the addition of portraits of Masters, past and present.

David's (intentionally) tedious recital of the categories and rules of Mastersong is enlivened by the arrival of a dozen cubicles wheeled in by the apprentices. Each is emblazoned with symbols representing the various *Töne*, pointed to in turn as they are mentioned by David. The cubicles are subsequently revealed to contain a mini-wardrobe, complete with cloak, mirror, stool and bust – one for each Mastersinger. High above the stage are placed tablets which we deduce bear the sacred rules of the *Tablatur*.

Jones's genius for grouping his characters onstage is demonstrated at several points. When the Masters question Walther as to his provenance and credentials, they cluster round a mobile lectern, closing in on him, backing away when he talks of learning his

art from the birds. As Walther prepares to deliver his Trial Song, the Masters adopt hilarious Bunthorne-like aesthetic poses. When Walther has committed his vocal outrage, they form a chorus line, wagging their fingers in disapprobation.

Buki Shiff's costumes combine medieval and 19th-century features, reflecting Jones's consciousness that the 16th-century setting of the story provides little more than colouring for a drama of more modern preoccupations. Similarly the dwellings of Sachs

Walther (Raymond Very) and Sachs (Bryn Terfel) contemplate the various stanzas of the Morning Dream Song, as the ink dries on the manuscript. Photo Catherine Ashmore

and Pogner in Paul Steinberg's designs for Act II fuse Elizabethan (or rather mock-Elizabethan) and floral patterning from a later period.

Act II is the most disappointing. Walther's hallucination of pursuit by the Masters is visualised in a characteristically surreal sequence in which he is chased by figures with boxes for heads (marked with a cross) and wagging admonitory sticks of chalk. The Nightwatchman (well sung by David Soar) is also a splendidly Hoffmannesque creation, shrouded in black and bearing a lantern suspended from a pole. But for the rest, the direction is deeply conventional. Jones brings nothing to the scene of Beckmesser's Serenade, which as a result seems laboured and unfunny. Nor is the Riot Scene, culminating in the debagging of Beckmesser, one of his more imaginative efforts.

The set for Act III strikes a different note. The whole of the stage area is devoted to the inside of Sachs' house, illustrative of his poet–cobbler status: half is a 19th-century-style library, adorned with antlers, half a cobbler's workshop. To dictate his Morning Dream Song, Walther lies on a couch, the better to recreate his nocturnal inspiration. As each stanza is wrung out of him, Sachs pegs it onto a washing line for the ink to dry. Later, as the time to 'baptise' the song approaches, he hoists the line to the same height as that occupied in the first act by the diktats of the *Tablatur*. For the Quintet, the manuscript of the song attains comparable status, and while the lighting elsewhere is lowered, the manuscript itself glows in a pool of light like an icon.

The staging of the final scene on the Festival Meadow is again disappointingly conventional, obviating any engagement with the ideological resonances of the work. As Sachs delivers his homily, 'Honour your German masters', the crowd display portraits representative of their artistic heritage, such as made up the dropcloth at the beginning. The message is clear: Sachs is merely saying 'respect our cultural tradition and all will be well'. But is it that simple? Does the celebration of that tradition, in Wagner's terms, not involve a resistance to a foreign (cultural) invasion, a perceived need to preserve the German spirit from pollution, a persecution of outsiders? Unsavoury though they may seem to modern sensibilities, Wagner's ideas about German nationhood and alien outsiders (who, like Beckmesser, are artistically sterile and can only mangle the language), expressed forcefully in essays of the *Meistersinger* period, clearly inform the dramatic argument of the opera. Jones's avoidance of the problematic issue at the heart of the work may recommend his production to those for whom it is exclusively about art, love and renewal, but for others it will lack a rather crucial dimension.

This was also very much Bryn Terfel's show, however, and the Welsh bass-baritone brought his trademark lieder-singer qualities to bear in a wonderfully nuanced delivery of the role of Sachs. Amanda Roocroft was sadly not at her best here as Eva: though she was often tender and touching, her high register was squally and the Quintet was an uncomfortable experience. Raymond Very's Walther began well – his tone is attractive – but later in the evening the strain of the role was taking its toll in a laboured line that lacked both bloom and pliability. (Happily, his appearance in the WNO concert performance a few weeks later at the Proms was far more assured.) Christopher Purves's Beckmesser, eschewing the ridiculous, is a character to be reckoned with; Brindley Sherratt's Pogner also deserves a special mention, as does Andrew Tortise's David.

Lothar Koenigs conducted with a feeling for the score's chamber-like textures – the orchestra is not large, by Wagnerian standards – and a firm command of its natural flow.

New Perspectives on the *Ring*

Katherine Syer reports on a pair of cycles recently initiated in Milan/Berlin and Frankfurt

Das Rheingold. René Pape (Wotan), Jan Buchwald (Donner), Marco Jentzsch (Froh), Stephan Rügamer (Loge), Johannes Martin Kränzle (Alberich), Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke (Mime), Tigran Martirossian (Fasolt), Timo Riihonen (Fafner), Doris Soffel (Fricka), Anna Samuil (Freia), Anna Larsson (Erda), Aga Mikolaj (Woglinde), Maria Gortsevskaya (Wellgunde), Marina Prudenskaya (Floßhilde); Orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala/Daniel Barenboim; Guy Cassiers (director), Guy Cassiers and Enrico Bagnoli (stage designs), Tim Van Steenbergen (costumes), Enrico Bagnoli (lighting), Arjen Klerkx and Kurt d'Haeseleer (video), Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (choreography). Teatro alla Scala, Milan, 19 May 2010

Das Rheingold. Terje Stensvold (Wotan), Dietrich Volle (Donner), Richard Cox (Froh), Kurt Streit (Loge), Jochen Schmeckenbecher (Alberich), Hans-Jürgen Lazar (Mime), Alfred Reiter (Fasolt), Magnus Baldvinsson (Fafner), Martina Dike (Fricka), Barbara Zechmeister (Freia), Meredith Arwady (Erda), Britta Stallmeister (Woglinde), Jenny Carlstedt (Wellgunde), Katharina Magiera (Floßhilde); Orchestra of Oper Frankfurt/Sebastian Weigle; Vera Nemirova (director), Jens Kilian (stage designs), Ingeborg Bernerth (costumes), Olaf Winter (lighting), Bibi Abel (video). Oper Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, 15 May 2010

Although the stark economic shift of recent years has slowed down *Ring* production plans in Washington, Riga and Florence, while casting a harsh spotlight on the Los Angeles enterprise, the building up of new cycles nevertheless continues at an unprecedented pace. The solution for La Scala, where a full *Ring* has not been mounted for decades, is a co-production with the Staatsoper in Berlin, where Barenboim's earlier Wagner collaborations with Harry Kupfer are gradually being retired. The Belgian director Guy Cassiers, a newcomer to opera, tackles the Milan/Berlin project with an intensely multimedia approach that is more inventive than most. In Frankfurt, Peter Konwitschny's protégée Vera Nemirova contributes to a house whose last two *Ring*s (that directed by Ruth Berghaus in the mid-1980s and the revival of Herbert Wernicke's Brussels production in the mid-90s) both flaunted their irreverence for traditional staging solutions. Nemirova conveys a less tensional relationship with staging and reception history than her predecessors, as does her designer Jens Kilian. Together, their handling of space in the newly launched *Rheingold* stakes out a diametrically opposed perspective on the singing actor's role in theatre to that pursued by Cassiers's team in Milan.

In the opening scene of Cassiers's *Rheingold*, contrasting textured projection surfaces flank the rear of the stage. A central squared-off acting area serves as a shallow water basin for the Rhinedaughters to splash about in near-darkness, accompanied by rippling water imagery. Alberich, like us, can hardly see let alone touch the nymphs he craves. The temptation is virtual. One by one the Rhinedaughters approach suspended live cameras that enable their writhing hands and faces to be projected on the rear wall. What we see is often distorted and elusive (and includes pre-existing video material). When Alberich realises that his physical wishes will not be satisfied, he displays a sudden fascination with the cameras. Before long, he is wildly flailing about in the

water, as if relishing a vision. The gold, when revealed, is a central band along the floor of the acting space, not brightly lit but warmed in earth tones that have subdued the entire scene, constraining any sense of a radical change in the state of nature.

The visual layers of Cassiers' production are constantly in flux. Most novel and controversial is the team of dancers choreographed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Introduced during the transition to Scene 2, their range of expressive roles is broad. Their first appearance is generally moulded to the transitional music's rhythmic shape and distinctive thematic contours, lending dynamism to an otherwise modest scene change. The gods arrive as slightly unkempt visitors from a mixed historical era. Their emotional disconnections revisit the idea of virtual interaction in a non-technological way. Two dancers convey the emotional tension between Wotan and Fricka that the singers themselves do not express through their own body language. Fafner and Fasolt are also exceedingly restrained – two anonymous business suits. Dancers behind a projection screen (already displaying an image of a vast canyon) become shadow doubles for the giants that suddenly grow to enormous height. Fafner threatens his brother with aggressive gestures while Fasolt gently reaches out to clasp Freia's tiny hand. Potent and poignant pantomime indeed, but when to this are added projections of writhing bodies as well as a dancer onstage, the ability to appreciate each or all such elements quickly evaporates.

A better balance was struck during the Nibelheim Scene, which develops a link between the dancers and Alberich's vision of power. Initially just a clump of bodies, the dancers embody the Tarnhelm by enveloping Johannes Martin Kränzle's deliciously mad Alberich. Later they form a massive human throne for their master – one that can flick out a leg when Loge gets too close – and eventually a weighty padlock around his

left Loge (Kurt Streit) delivers his narration from the top of a ramp-like structure in Jens Kilian's design for Vera Nemirova's Frankfurt *Rheingold*. Photo Monika Rittershaus

right Silhouette projections of Fasolt and Fafner tower above a vast canyon in Guy Cassiers's Milan *Rheingold*. Photo Brescia/Amisano

neck when he is trapped. Alberich's command of the human element here involves a more physically beautiful and poetic solution than is typical of this scene.

In this context, Loge's almost singular expressive freedom (among the singers) is striking and surely a directorial comment on his freedom in general. Stephan Rügamer is certainly a fine Loge, but it is unfair that his expansive narration was one of the few extended stretches in which a singer could easily come to the foreground amid so many other performative elements – Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke's sensitive performance of Mime's 'Sorglose Schmiede' was another. Of the rest of the cast Anna Larsson's Erda was penetrating and assured, while Tigran Martirossian's Fasolt was oddly unreliable at certain moments. René Pape was especially poorly served by the stage direction in his much-anticipated role debut as Wotan; his tasteful performance seemed laced with reticence. At the risk of conflating musical and dramatic qualities, Barenboim encouraged a highly textured reading from an orchestra not accustomed to performing the *Ring*. While it is full of life and liveliness, there is still much opportunity for individual moments to achieve more clarity. The abundance of ideas profiled on the stage also need to be refined so that the strong vocal cast shine more fully. After performances of *Das Rheingold* in Berlin, *Die Walküre* will open the Milan season in December, only three years after *Tristan und Isolde* claimed that high-profile spot.

Frankfurt's new *Rheingold* combines a more limited number of visual elements, along cleaner lines. The set is dominated by Kilian's large structure of concentric ramp-like rings, which can be turned independently. The Frankfurt Opera boasts the largest rotating stage in Europe (39 metres wide, with a smaller inner rotating possibility) so this set in a sense celebrates the house itself. The centre sphere also functions like a traditional trapdoor – an obvious passageway for entrances and exits that is put to good use in *Rheingold*. With plenty of space surrounding this installation, and a cyclorama some distance away, the set gives the sense of vast open space with light-handed symbolic potential, but not fully mythic aspirations. The limited colour palette (mostly white, ivory, gold, red, blue and black) feels like a gentle nod in the direction of the Berghaus–Manthey collaboration.

During the Prelude, a simple video projection of drops of water creates a hypnotically repetitive ripple pattern on the unified set's circular surface. Projections are not, however, a dominant aspect of this production. Lighting avoids much mystery but clearly reinforces key dramaturgical turning points. The set literally springs to life as soon as Alberich begins his fruitless chase after the Rhinedaughters. The undulating ramps quickly become a variable playground that hints at its potential for suggesting vertical depth and complexity.

Nemirova's theatrically self-conscious frame presents us with an Alberich in a sharp black suit with briefcase, a self-composed man who comes upon the Rhinedaughters in their sequinned white gowns almost by chance. By the time the trio has stripped him down to his long underwear and taunted him with feigned masochistic foreplay, he is fully humiliated. This encounter lurks behind his later transformation into a *Riesenwurm*, when he snaps on a red rubber glove and begins to reach into Loge's trousers (the demigod is the most overtly virile character in the cast). More dramatically effective is the parallelism of Alberich's second undoing, when he is robbed of

the ring and exposed, once again, as a pathetic image stripped of his suit of authority. Psychologically penetrating transformations also come into the picture with Freia, atypically first depicted as frantic and wilful rather than vulnerable. When she returns to the stage with the giants in the final scene, her blank stare and physical immobility imply offstage trauma.

The rest of the gods are benignly elegant and mostly detached; thus their insensitivity to distress is sharply emphasised. Martina Dike (apparently indisposed on 15 May) was perfectly adequate, whereas Terje Stensvold's Wotan does not quite physically or vocally embody the forceful figure Nemirova wants him to be at the onset. Jochen Schmeckenbecher's Alberich is better characterised and sung, as is Hans-Jürgen Lazar's Mime. The unusual manic characterisation of Freia was not especially flattering for Barbara Zechmeister. Basic blocking is generally carefully worked through, with singers usually well positioned to deliver their parts. If the cast is not quite as strong as one might expect in Berlin or Milan, it is solid enough and they are at least allowed the space and encouragement to give a great performance. Such an approach can often work very well dramatically too. For instance, the appearance of Fasolt and Fafner involves some of the rings tilting up collectively – like an enormous manhole raised by the giants along with several co-workers. At one point Wotan stands defiantly on top, adding his weight to their burden. Loge claims this place as the 'stage' for his narration, as does Alberich, when the full disc is tilted much higher to show his underground community of teenaged Nibelung gang members counting cash.

An innovative treatment of the aging of the gods involves a group of doddering doubles that parade across the front of the stage. Loge's comments thus carry the effect of a stern warning as they glimpse what will happen to them if they do not reclaim Freia. Her temporary absence brings no sudden withering of the gods themselves. The warning has a particular effect as the gods return in the final scene eager to save Freia, but they have also become a little slicker in their toughness. Donner, for example, has traded his countryman's attire and crowbar for a riding crop and military costume, complete with boots. Loge's final thoughts in the direction of destroying the gods are especially well motivated. Erda's emergence at the centre of things, covered almost entirely in auburn hair and surrounded by three young girls, makes for an odd and arresting intrusion.

At the conclusion, the gods all shed any recent concerns and don formal attire to celebrate their achievement. In a classic Konwitschny moment, the house lights come on as the gods descend into the audience to the lower proscenium loges, where they serenely sip champagne and toast the stage. Loge, who has been cast as contrary to the gods since his entry on a swing, is airlifted out of this simultaneous celebration and critique of the theatre. Capitalising on Kurt Streit's admirable physique, this Loge is an agile rock-climber who has an obvious connection to and regard for nature that the gods do not. Streit's performance of unbounded physical and vocal energy stole the show. But the effort on the whole reflects a strong ensemble, both musically and on the production side. The larger pacing and goal-direction of the conducting could be even further honed, but the orchestra offers a committed and assured reading under Sebastian Weigle. It seems that all involved are keen to build upon the already honourable *Ring* tradition in Frankfurt.

Full Marx for Paris *Ring*

Mark Berry is impressed by Günter Krämer's political approach to the tetralogy

Die Walküre. Robert Dean Smith (Siegmund), Ricarda Merbeth (Sieglinde), Günther Groissböck (Hunding), Thomas Johannes Mayer (Wotan), Katarina Dalayman (Brünnhilde), Yvonne Naef (Fricka), Marjorie Owens (Gerhilde), Gertrud Wittinger (Ortlinde), Silvia Hablowetz (Waltraute), Wiebke Lehmkuhl (Schwertleite), Barbara Morihien (Helmwige), Helene Ranada (Siegrune), Nicole Piccolomini (Grimgerde), Atala Schöck (Roßweiße); Orchestra of the Opéra National de Paris/Philippe Jordan; Günter Krämer (director), Jürgen Bäckmann (designs), Falk Bauer (costumes), Diego Leetz (lighting), Otto Pichler (choreography). Opéra Bastille, Paris, 29 June 2010

I surprised myself by concluding that the first instalment of the Paris *Ring* had been 'all told, [...] the best *Rheingold* I have attended since Haitink's tenure at the Royal Opera'.[1] *Die Walküre* is arguably a tougher proposition still than the cycle's *Vorabend*, but that earlier promise was essentially maintained. Günter Krämer's production remains sure-footed and often imaginative; the contribution from Wagner's Greek chorus, the Orchestra of the Opéra National de Paris, was truly excellent; Philippe Jordan's conducting grew in stature as the evening progressed; and, if the singing was rarely at a level to challenge the great interpretations we have all heard – or fancy we have – then it was at least creditable, Katarina Dalayman's Brünnhilde proving much more than that.

The synthetic nature of Krämer's *Rheingold* continues into his *Walküre*. Ideas might well be traced back to other productions, but that is not to say that either the particular mode of expression or the particular synthesis too closely resembles any other. No Wagner scholar would claim that he did not rely upon, that he was not inspired by, the work of his predecessors. Nor, I am sure, would any Wagner performer be so arrogant, though I have a nasty suspicion that Sir Roger Norrington, he of the *Tristan* Prelude waltz, might draw close. Why should we expect stage direction to be entirely different? And should it be so, is that not likely to be the product more of default than of design? What we have here are ideas that generally have a firm basis in the work, not in a quasi-archaeological obsession with Wagner's intentions, narrowly construed, but nevertheless in meaningful dialogue with what he wrote. There is plenty of directorial leeway in deciding what to emphasise, what to develop, without necessity to transplant something entirely 'new' onto Wagner's drama.

The first act is a case in point. Krämer elects to convey a greater sense than the composer prescribes of Hunding's society. This highly militarised milieu reminds us that the brutal Hunding represents a remarkably contemporary – for Wagner and for us – bourgeois hierarchy of instrumentalisation. Hunding appears to be a middle-ranking figure in whatever civil war is raging; Siegmund hails of course from an insurrectionary wild race, for whom nothing (at least nothing that Fricka, voice of custom, would understand) is sacred. Thugs billeted upon Sieglinde, Hunding's mere chattel, are Krämer's invention; the violence they exude conveys Wagner's dramatic purpose. Another social aspect emphasised, again in contradistinction to Volsung anarchistic outlawry, is that of the Valkyries. A choice is

[1] *The Wagner Journal*, iv/2 (2010), 74.

Freia's apples adorn the Valhalla dining table, backdrop to a confrontation between Fricka (Yvonne Naef) and Wotan (Thomas Johannes Mayer). Photo Opéra National de Paris/Charles Duprat

thereby set up for Brünnhilde to make. Wotan's maidens serve a military role, in this case not only returning heroes to Valhalla but cleaning up their bodies and enrobing them. Theirs is probably the most convincingly integrated Ride I have seen: no danger here of something to be tacked on, endured, until we can return to the proper business of Wotan and Brünnhilde. Valkyries and soldiers form part of an uncomprehending society that watches the extraordinary turn of events at the end of the second act, when for Brünnhilde the first intimations of the power of love lead her to disobey Wotan's command. Loge's fire, when it comes, will burn brightly indeed. Yet, like the Young Hegelian Bruno Bauer's 'I demonstrate that religion is a hell composed of hatred for humanity and that God is the bailiff of this hell',[2] the intention will be to unmask, leaving us with a view of the society left behind. Bauer, who at one point harboured plans with Karl Marx to found a Hegelian journal entitled *The Archives of Atheism*, knew Mikhail Bakunin well – and we know with whom Bakunin would fight upon the barricades of Dresden.

The sickness of the (painted) tree in the first act stands consonant with that of the 'bad' 19th century: a sort of sub-Pre-Raphaelite post-Romanticism. First we do not see it, then

[2] Letter of 2 Aug. 1843, quoted in Ernst Barnikol, 'Bruno Bauers Kampf gegen Religion und Christentum und die Spaltung des vormärzlichen preußischen Opposition', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, xlvi (1927), 5. Bauer refers to his *Das entdeckte Christentum* (1843), seized by the Prussian censors.

Sieglinde reveals it. Then we – or at least I – think: is that not just too poor a substitute for Wagner's ash? But there is something more to come: the revelation from behind the painting of the sword that mysterious visitor had deposited. The real forest, when viewed properly during the second act, evokes Caspar David Friedrich, but at a slight remove, as if that artist's day has already passed, which in a way of course it has, whilst retaining a presence. Reality, and especially history, become more layered than one might have thought, in a fashion akin to Wagner's motivic method.

GERMANIA now stands tall, but Krämer and his team cleverly undercut, like Wagner, Valhalla's grandiosity. They do it with mirrors – which both extend the scope of Jürgen Bäckmann's set and highlight the trickery involved. Gothic letters, seen in the production picture, may be seen in black onstage and white in reflection: magically, as it were, the 'right way round'. This, presumably, is what the gods see, or delude themselves they see. Likewise the upholders of self-righteous, hypocritical bourgeois morality, they represent a properly Feuerbachian inversion of religious practice. If Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* looms large, so does his earlier *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*. Where Feuerbach had praised antiquity for its lack of belief in and unawareness of the doctrine of immortality of the soul, it is now necessary to strike against that belief, as Siegmund does.[3] Interestingly, Wotan himself takes Siegmund to his final resting place during the third act, honouring perhaps 'das Ende', for which the god has wished, and to which the Volsung might have pointed the way. Freia's golden apples are littered around Valhalla, to remind us of the casual abandon with which the denizens of light have adopted their false immortal cause. Ubiquitous yet already insufficient, they equate very well to the terms of the drama so far. One might even claim that they not only support the words but compensate for a surprising absence from the music. Still, Wagner had so many balls in the air that dropping the odd apple is neither here nor there.

Erda returns at the end, reprising her slow walk across the stage. Brünnhilde elects to sleep beneath rather than upon the table Wotan has prepared for her and Siegmund. It is not yet clear what this might mean, since there is more to come, but the handling of *Walküre* makes me eager to find out.

Philippe Jordan's first act opened impressively, not least on account of the tremendous bite from the opera orchestra's strings. This was a true storm, also a musical one, a mini-exposition if you like. Tension was not always maintained, however, especially during the final scene, some of which meandered. Yet the structure of the second and third acts was far more clearly in place: a sterner task to effect, one might have thought, yet accomplished with great success. No one in the theatre seems likely to match my experience of Bernard Haitink's direction of the potentially sectional second act, Wotan's monologue and all, yet shape and momentum were skilfully imparted. Wagner's endless melody (*unendliche Melodie*) was sung – and meaningfully so.

Robert Dean Smith is unlikely to win prizes for charisma, but he was for the most part a dependable enough Siegmund, even if 'dependable' is hardly sufficient in this role. His second cry of 'Wälse' seemed, surprisingly, to last for an eternity, far longer than I can

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3 Ludwig Feuerbach, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality: From the Papers of a Thinker, along with an Appendix of Theological–Satirical Epigrams, Edited by One of his Friends*, tr. and ed. James A. Massey (Berkeley, CA, and London, 1980), 6.

otherwise recall. Jon Vickers might have brought it off, but here we ended up with an audibly strained hero for a good part of what ensued. Ricarda Merbeth portrayed a feistier, less pure Sieglinde than is often encountered. Her odd facial expressions took a bit of getting used to, but the confidence of her vocal assumption grew, culminating in a refulgent, genuinely moving 'O hehrstes Wunder!' Günther Groissböck and Yvonne Naef, imperiously resplendent in Falk Bauer's gown (pictured above), made much of the words of Hunding and Fricka, and showed that they could act too. Thomas Johannes Mayer, substituting for the advertised Falk Struckmann, was a more than creditable replacement as Wotan, gaining in stature as the drama progressed. He too showed especial attentiveness towards the words, veritably hissing his contempt at Hunding, but proving equally capable of lyricism when required. Katarina Dalayman's Brünnhilde was the star turn, however: tireless and yet a soul in transition – arguably in emergence. The demands of words, music and stage action combined here to present a Valkyrie unlikely to be equalled by present-day exponents.

What a pity, then, that one was fortunate to hear a single bar of the second act without an onslaught of heavy coughing, the outer acts bearable only by comparison. Once again, I was reminded of Pierre Boulez's strictures concerning opera houses; once again I doubted whether they really are the right place to stage Wagner's music dramas. Not for nothing has the later composer–conductor voiced admiration for his predecessor's loathing of a system in which 'opera houses are […] like cafés where […] you can hear waiters calling out their orders: "One *Carmen*! And one *Walküre*! And one *Rigoletto*!"'[4] A Jockey Club disruption might at least have proffered entertainment as well as enragement value. If the Opéra National de Paris and the Bastille amphitheatre are doing Wagner proud, they remain hamstrung by a pernicious section of their audience. It is not difficult to imagine how Wagner would once again have railed at the city of his misère.

4 Pierre Boulez, 'Time Re-explored', *Orientations*, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, tr. Martin Cooper (London and Boston, 1986), 262.

The Wagner Journal, **4**, 3, 75–78

CDs

The Pursuit of Reality

David Breckbill appraises three contrasting approaches to recording Wagner

Father and Son: Scenes and Arias. 'In fernem Land' (*Lohengrin*), Love Duet, Act I (*Die Walküre*), 'Selige Öde auf wonniger Höh", 'Das ist kein Mann' (*Siegfried*), Siegfried's Rhine Journey, Siegfried's Narration, Siegfried's Death and Funeral March (*Götterdämmerung*), 'Amfortas, Die Wunde!', 'Nur eine Waffe taugt!' (*Parsifal*). Simon O'Neill (tenor), Susan Bullock (soprano), Thomas Grace (bass-baritone), John Tomlinson (bass-baritone); NBR New Zealand Opera, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra/Pietari Inkinen. EMI 4 57817 2 (1 CD, 79 minutes 42 seconds)

Götterdämmerung. Lars Cleveman (Siegfried), Peter Coleman-Wright (Gunther), Attila Jun (Hagen), Andrew Shore (Alberich), Katarina Dalayman (Brünnhilde), Nancy Gustafson (Gutrune), Susan Bickley (Waltraute), Ceri Williams (First Norn), Yvonne Howard (Second Norn), Miranda Keys (Third Norn), Katherine Broderick (Woglinde), Madeleine Shaw (Wellgunde), Leah-Marian Jones (Floßhilde); Hallé Choir, BBC Symphony Chorus, London Symphony Chorus, Royal Opera Chorus and Extra Chorus, The Hallé/Mark Elder. Hallé HLM 7530 (MP3 CD), HLD 7525 (5 CDs, 284 minutes [including 8 minutes of applause]), recorded live in the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, 9 and 10 May 2009

Parsifal. Karl Liebl (Parsifal), Gerda Lammers (Kundry), Eberhard Waechter (Amfortas), Otakar Kraus (Klingsor), Gottlob Frick (Gurnemanz), Forbes Robinson (Titurel), Edgar Evans (First Grail Knight), Joseph Rouleau (Second Grail Knight), Jeannette Sinclair (First Esquire), Lauris Elms (Second Esquire), Robert Bowman (Third Esquire), Raymond Nilsson (Fourth Esquire), Joan Carlyle, Judith Pierce, Josephine Veasey, Jeannette Sinclair, Mary Wells, Margreta Elkins (Flowermaidens); Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden/Rudolf Kempe. Testament SBT 4 1455 (4 CDs, 244 minutes 28 seconds), recorded live at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden 16 June 1959

Wagner recordings are made and issued for a variety of reasons, and this miscellany illustrates three of them. Under review here are (1) a studio recording of excerpts that constitutes a Wagner debut recording for its featured singer; (2) a recording made with current, technically sophisticated equipment at a concert performance of a complete opera; and (3) a recording of a staged performance from half a century ago, preserved in only very moderate sound quality. The Wagner discography contains numerous recordings of each of these types that represent significant achievements, but each variety also tends to feature certain distinguishing characteristics that should be acknowledged and identified in order better to hear the intention – and perhaps even extrapolate the 'reality' – behind the actual aural product.

Simon O'Neill's disc introduces us to the Wagnerian artistry of a singer who has begun only recently to become a fixture on the international Wagner circuit. Evaluated on its own merits, this disc has some dispiriting elements: Pietari Inkinen and the

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra do not have this music in their blood, a fact which results in orchestral playing that generally sounds either expressively limp or rhythmically stiff; the few lines interjected by Susan Bullock are recorded so as to make her ample voice sound thin and distinctly unalluring; the cover of the disc asserts that the programme includes 'Hagen's Narration' rather than Siegfried's, which is actually performed; several of the excerpts end awkwardly; and so on. It is also likely that O'Neill will grow further in these roles. His prevailing artistic characteristic at this point is a distinctive and, frankly, unusual sort of blending of declamation and singing. Inkinen's generally cautious tempos allow O'Neill time to enunciate each syllable carefully, but also to sing through each one, making of each a self-sufficient event. At its best, this results in a sense of elevated fervour that seems to savour the expressive meanings of words and musical details. But in other places O'Neill makes a nearly didactic impression: it's almost as though he conceives of the audience as a dull-witted entity to which he must explain things with elaborate patience in words of one or two syllables. Ever an admirer of eloquent declamation, I believe that O'Neill could profitably experiment with binding these individual syllables and words into larger units and more cohesive lines. It should also be noted that his German pronunciation is still a work in progress, and that the approach he adopts makes it a matter of some urgency that he hone his vowels more precisely (for example, he renders the 'i' vowels in 'Schritten' and 'Blitz' as though they were in English). And it will be interesting to hear him in later recordings and performances with conductors who are used to shaping these passages dramatically – his markedly precise treatment of the beginning of Siegfried's Narration here seems to be a way of creating interest despite the woodenness of the accompaniment. In short, this disc will acquire additional significance as we follow O'Neill's development: what features on display here will turn out to be the seeds of his later style, and what traits will he abandon or downplay as he matures?

Concert performances of Wagner operas encourage a level of musical refinement and orchestral splendour not available in most operatic settings; at the same time, it's sometimes hard to make the drama come alive as naturally as in a staged performance. That generalisation certainly applies to the Elder–Hallé *Götterdämmerung*. Its recorded sound is consistently sleek and noble, deep but not overripe, and clear yet atmospheric, while the orchestra generally does itself proud (occasional unevenness in the expanded brass section notwithstanding). The voices are consistently surrounded by a resonance that makes them as attractive as possible, although this in itself lends a sense of unreality to the dramatic dimension. Elder's approach emphasises grandeur and breadth over overt excitement. Although the sonority described above prevents the results from seeming heavy, there are still some passages that make a puzzlingly restrained effect: the end of the Dawn Duet does not attain the kind of visceral impact Wagner's detailed instructions for acceleration imply, the basic tempo of the Rhine Journey is too slow to let the Loge/Magic Fire motif flicker, and so on through the score. Perhaps the most significant example of this sort occurs in the very last minutes, where, presumably to convey the distance involved in the far-off image of the burning Valhalla, Elder holds back the dynamic level until suddenly playing the last statement of the Valhalla motif and the subsequent Siegfried motif very loudly; consequently, these closing pages are prevented from participating in a long-range, inevitable-sounding, cumulative musical

trajectory. Throughout this performance one finds many well-tailored musical effects that seem a bit beside the point dramatically. Listen, for example, to the various choral passages. They are invariably spot-on in intonation, ensemble, blend and elegant dynamic shaping – but do any of them (especially in Act III) sound as if they have been conceived and prepared in light of the dramatic context?

An interesting issue arises in relation to the rhythmically jagged repeated notes which occur just after Hagen stabs Siegfried and which then play a large role in the Funeral March (Donington gives this and the subsequent nine-note flourish the motivic label 'the darkness of death itself'). In most performances they emerge as two staccato semiquavers, a pause, and then two more staccato semiquavers. These pairs are not alike, though. Whereas it is almost impossible to hear the first set as anything other than a trochee, in which the metrical accent falls on the first note, the second is in fact an iamb, in which the first note is a pickup to the second. In most performances one is hard pressed to recognise this difference through either accent or duration. Elder's performance, however, draws attention to Wagner's notation, according to which the last note of the second pair not only occurs on a strong beat but is a staccato quaver rather than a semiquaver. The usual realisation of this motif has, I suspect, been influenced by the fact that the timpani, which are often responsible for playing it, cannot play one note 'longer' than any other, and so the general treatment of the motif is conceived in terms of what the timpani can do with it. In Elder's solution, however, the orchestral statements of the motif emerge with the last note of the second pair being held longer than the first. The effect is so different from what one usually hears that I hesitate to venture an opinion as to which reading is 'better': the traditional one strikes me as starker and more dramatic, Elder's as plush and mournful; in other hands, it could conceivably suggest a ragged breath culminating in a sob.

The singing does not allow one to forget that this is a concert performance. Lars Cleveman makes for a consistently boisterous Siegfried who does not seek much else from the role; he sings the quotations of the Wood Bird in the Act III narration for vocal effect (by contrast, hear how O'Neill lightens his voice for these moments), and one cannot sense that Siegfried is near death during his final lines. On the other hand, Attila Jun (Hagen) places a higher priority on sounding menacing than being musically accurate, and Peter Coleman-Wright sings Gunther with considerable force and animation. Nancy Gustafson (Gutrune) gets off to an insecure start but improves later on. Alberich, the Norns and the Rhinemaidens are serviceable, and Susan Bickley's bright tone imparts urgency to Waltraute's entreaties. The singer who most encapsulates the overall spirit of this performance is Katarina Dalayman as Brünnhilde. Her voice, richly coloured, well produced in all registers, and capable of both introspection and force, nevertheless possesses a covered sound that precludes vivid diction (sibilants are almost always under-articulated) and minimises variety of expression. One can hear any given phrase and think it a reasonable realisation of the words or music, but often in context there's a dulling sameness about her singing that is more musically than dramatically satisfying.

Staged performances offer greater opportunities for dramatic involvement but tend to lack the kind of polish that can characterise concert performances. The 1959 *Parsifal* newly released by Testament continues the welcome attention to and dissemination of

historical Covent Garden performances in recent years. To my ears, however, this set does not quite match the hopes I had for it based on my experience of Kempe's remarkable 1957 *Ring* (Testament SBT13 1426) and Gerda Lammers's famous 1958 Elektra (ROH S004). Perhaps the most serious problem is that the sound quality is not quite on a par with other recordings from this source and vintage – it is mostly quite muffled, with occasional pitch wobbles, distortions of various kinds, and puzzling changes of perspective. And behind this scrim the performance seems not to be an especially notable one. Kempe steers clear of both the darkness and searing compassion that arise in some of the orchestral passages (the Act I Transformation Scene music, for example), and adjusts some traditional dramatic emphases: the Flowermaidens' tussle over Parsifal seems more intense than merely flirtatious, the first visual appearance of Parsifal in Act III seems to represent the intrusion of mystery into banality rather than the more customary lightening of a heavy mood, and so on. Kundry is so much more declamatory a role than Elektra that the sort of intensity with which Lammers endows the latter part rarely comes into play here. She is an inventive interpreter who shapes lines interestingly, and a resourceful singer who attempts sophisticated gradations of tone from one utterance to the next. Her basic tone, however, is too self-consciously 'sung' to convince as either wild penitent or enchanting seductress. Gottlob Frick's Gurnemanz is fundamentally likeable and moving, containing welcome stretches of lyrical singing alternating with naturally conversational declamation, but his control of both voice and intonation is more erratic than one might hope. Karl Liebl did not make many Wagner recordings, so it is good to have this memento. His voice has the heft for the role but even so is a light, pleasing one; he handles vocal challenges successfully without, however, convincing this listener that he has a strong identification with the 'pure fool'. Otakar Kraus, the memorable Alberich from the 1957 *Ring*, begins unpromisingly: as long as Klingsor thinks he's in control of Kundry, Kraus merely sings his lines, but once Kundry taunts him, Kraus conveys a raging bitterness that is much more communicative (and, ironically, better sung). The star of the evening is Eberhard Waechter as Amfortas – his is a beautifully voiced performance (some emphatic stresses near the end notwithstanding) in which certain phrases are offered up with heart-rending, delicate vulnerability. All in all, though, this *Parsifal*, which includes a near-breakdown at the first choral entry in Act III (the choir enters late and in a slower tempo than Kempe has established), demonstrates once again that audio recordings of staged performances do not invariably preserve the essence of the production.

The Wagner Journal, **4**, 3, 79–96

Books

The German Homer

Arnold Whittall examines the extent of Wagner's debt to the Greeks

Daniel H. Foster, *Wagner's 'Ring' Cycle and the Greeks* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge and New York, 2010). 377pp. £55. ISBN: 978-0-521-51739-3

For many, it will be a matter of rejoicing that recent books on Wagner's *magnum opus* have avoided titles like *Tonality and Thematic Process in the 'Ring' Cycle*. How much more there is, and should be, to Wagner scholarship and Wagner appreciation than matters of musical procedure and compositional technique is a topic to challenge the finest minds: but to write about the *Ring* as if only the music mattered (in anything but a contribution to one of those specialised journals whereby musicologists seek to ensure their professional survival) wins little admiration. And in a culture where we all 'know' the music, and can easily access the works – as staged, recorded, filmed – the best way to celebrate their significance seems to be to explore their genesis within the responses of Wagner's mind to all the social, cultural and political forces that shaped his career at that particular time and in those particular places.

Mark Berry's *Treacherous Bonds and Laughing Fire: Politics and Religion in Wagner's 'Ring'* (Aldershot, 2006) took an impressively fresh look at how intensively these four compositions could be aligned with things outside and beyond those theatrical forms and conventions that, for most people, matter more than tonality, melody (endless or otherwise), leitmotifs, or even Wagner's own ideas about 'rhetorical dialectics'. Now Daniel Foster, who teaches theatre studies in America, has sought to return the tetralogy to the place where it comes most vividly to life, considering what Wagner might have known about ancient Greek culture and how that knowledge might have helped to shape and characterise the *Ring*. The subject itself is of course not new, and Foster acknowledges Michael Ewans's *Wagner and Aeschylus* (Cambridge, 1983), as well as (among much else) a recent essay by Simon Goldhill, 'Wagner's Greeks: The Politics of Hellenism'. But he is easily able to justify his own extended exploration of the work within this particular context.

He makes a very uncertain start. Summarising his arguments and ambitions in the Preface leads to this kind of assertion about how work connects directly and unequivocally to life: 'by allowing Siegfried, his operatic double, to discover his true paternity through nature Wagner tried to solve what he saw as both his country's and his own identity crisis.' This very basic declaration probably derives from the claim in the main body of the text that Wagner saw the Wanderer as a 'Wandering Jew figure' who 'confronts his own problematic identification with Alberich and Fafner, members of decadent races that value wealth, power, and convention over love and nature. Twice-removed from this lyrical self-projection, Wagner also contemplates, albeit from a safe distance, his own anxieties about his possible Jewish identity.' A little earlier, Foster has noted that 'the desire to drive a wedge between Wagner's artistry and his personal life

and especially his ideology is very strong, especially in a post-Holocaust world that would sometimes prefer to keep Wagner's more unsavory political leanings and personal faults separate from his music'. He then goes on to suggest (apparently without irony) that it is the 'more innovative Wagner scholars' who have gone against this grain, attempting 'to establish important links among Wagner's characters, his theoretical intentions, and his personal life', succeeding thereby in opening up the text 'to a greater multiplicity of meanings'.

Clearly, Foster is not going to duck the difficult questions, even when they might seem to have little to do with the ancient Greeks. He is no less bold, as a non-musician, in declaring that 'Wagner uses his music to deconstruct what the libretto seems to say in earnest', and his determination to pursue this point creates a reading of *Götterdämmerung* (to be discussed later) which should raise a few eyebrows. However, once the book's main narrative is under way Foster unveils some useful arguments in the kind of pungent literary style that keeps some productive binarisms to the fore – for example, the claim that 'for Wagner aesthetics was all too often the velvet glove concealing the iron fist of politics'. And the importance of those contemporary politics, when given an orientation by way of allusions to ancient Greece, emerges with full power when Foster declares that 'Wagner sought less to create a German epic than to create Germany through epic'. It could equally well be argued that, on balance, he did the former (initially) while only aspiring to do the latter: but the point is arresting nonetheless, following as it does from the emphasis that Wagner's starting point was the wounding and death of Siegfried: 'like Homer Wagner tries to raise the past to at least the same level as the present. Along the way, remembrance threatens to overwhelm experience as this epic occasion for anxiety even exceeds that of Homer.' That, it hardly needs saying, is one of the many reasons why, without music, the tale of Siegfried, and how his death is led up to and away from, would be a very different affair without Wagner's musical design.

Foster soon puts paid to any suggestion that Wagner's four compositions can be neatly mapped onto four literary genres – epic, lyric, tragedy and comedy – noting that Wagner 'considered drama to be much more direct' than epic narratives which enable us only to 'imagine' a story. 'Whereas epic only celebrates the deeds of heroes, drama re-enacts them': and, as Foster does not quite say, music drama re-enacts them by way of a mode of expression that stands apart from mere words. The Greek model remains salient, however, since 'to rescue and replant similar stories at the center of his culture was what Wagner thought Homer had done for Greece and what he was trying to do for Germany, to be a combination poet and priest, to be, in a word, a seer'. Fortunately for Wagner, he had no access to musical scores for Greek theatrical enactments, so all he had to do was to improve on the inferior models of his immediate operatic predecessors, in Germany and elsewhere.

Foster reveals his literary bias in expressing irritation at the *Ring*'s repetitious narrative sequences. 'Like the Sorcerer's apprentice, in his furious effort to put the axe to his unruly epic episodes it seems that Wagner succeeded only in multiplying their number. In addition, the resultant episodes very often seem entirely redundant.' That is surely the case only if you ignore the music, and Foster doesn't help his case by including a few token music examples that give a wrong clef to the Ring motif and a novel melodic

variant to the Valhalla motif. Altogether more useful is Foster's examination of Wagner's possible (political) motivations for Hellenisation: he contrived a 'mythopoetic creation of Hermes/Brünnhilde in order to remind his German audience of the national identity he wishes to inspire in them, specifically, an identity like that of the Greeks and not the Romans. He wants his audience to realize that Brünnhilde resembles Hermes specifically and not the other famous winged messenger, the Roman god, Mercury.' This is helpful in underlining the mid-19th-century focus of Wagner's para-musical thought: simply because the issue of Greek or Roman models might concern later audiences so little, it provides a powerful focus for the differences between Wagner's 'original' and what we prefer to think about today. Not only was it 'more important to him [Wagner] to use and/or abuse the past for his own aesthetic and ideological purposes than to represent it faithfully': such strategies might have been his way of acknowledging that claims about whether or not he is representing ideas (and even feelings) 'faithfully' will be even more vulnerable to divergent degrees of critical subjectivity than would be the case with dramas whose enacted texts consisted only of words.

None of this diminishes the force of Foster's claim that 'it is through such attempts to say what is German through what is Greek that Wagner aims to fulfill the most important function of epic: to define national identity'. And yet, if Wagner's breast-beating declarations to Cosima are to be taken at face value, and his eventual conviction was that Germany was a collection of individuals with no national identity – no 'civilisation' – one can see how he might have come to believe that working on the later stages of the *Ring* was a way of shifting the balance back from politics to aesthetics, from the Homeric to the Orphic. Foster clings to the argument that 'opera revives Greek tragedy not only as a staged musical event involving heroic characters and actions, but as a lyric embodiment of certain political beliefs'. But to proceed from this to the striking point that 'Wagner seems to deploy a lyrical critique of myth through his hero Siegfried's search for individual freedom and personal identity' does rather support the suspicion that 'political beliefs' were becoming increasing confused with psychological and even physical discontents during the later phases of work on the tetralogy.

Foster recognises that this process of 'lyric critique' has much to do with the later Wagner's reliance on the orchestra to do what solo singers (and even choruses) cannot; however, this phase of his narrative needs more flesh on its bones than the very basic claim that, in the *Ring*'s first two evenings, 'the orchestral narrator widens the gap between the audience's understanding of the characters and the characters' understanding of themselves, thereby heightening our objective sense of these epic operas. But *Siegfried*'s orchestra collapses the distance between audience and character.' Is it really that clear-cut? For Foster, however, there is no denying the decisive shift of 'mythopoetic' perspective that the emergence of Siegfried wreaks on the *Ring*. It is not through the cycle as a whole, but through the character, the presence of Siegfried that Wagner 'advertises his own form of music drama as the transfigured artwork of the future'. Still more specifically, 'it is through Siegfried's confrontation with Fafner that Wagner heralds the German artwork of the future, an artwork that will unite sight and sound, external and internal, national and personal, epic and lyric – in short, the synthetic perfection of poetic evolution, a Hellenized form of German music drama equivalent to

Greek tragedy.' That's more than enough to contend with, without seeking to restore an explicitly political dimension as well.

Which brings us, finally, to *Götterdämmerung*. Having already reached for a bald political allegory in declaring that 'Siegfried as Germany […] triumphs over Fafner as France', Foster seeks to align his ancient Greek theme with contemporary national contexts, linking Wagner's desire to depict 'the fall of a civilization' with a savagely parodistic dimension deriving from Greek comedy. 'Like Aristophanes' *Frogs*, which parodies the corruption of fifth-century B.C. tragedy and its corrosive effects on Athenian culture, *Götterdämmerung* parodies nineteenth-century opera and its corrosive effects on German culture'; and Foster highlights Michael P. Steinberg's embellishment of Jean-Jacques Nattiez's point about Gutrune's allusion to Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyne*, Princeton, NJ, 1993, pp. 86–7; Steinberg, *Listening to Reason: Culture, Subjectivity and Nineteenth-Century Music*, Princeton, 2004, p. 158).

The central question here is how extensively Wagner's wish to represent the decadence of a Gibichung-led society, and to engage in sardonic allusions to the decadence of Grand Opera, pervades the musico-dramatic content of *Götterdämmerung* as a whole. There is certainly a case to be made for the impact of Wagner's post-Schopenhauerian pessimism on the work, connecting a failure of communal values with an enhancement of the semi-religious role of art. But Foster has a more complex political point to make: 'if German drama were to follow the model of Athenian tragedy by imitating its national politics, it would necessarily reflect the state's corrupt values. For Wagner, the most genuine German drama therefore turns out to be revolutionary and individual, not conservative and communal. […] The good German dramatist should therefore revolt against the state, not defend it.' Foster therefore concludes that 'in *Götterdämmerung* Wagner ultimately recuperates Aristophanic parody not as a conservative force but a revolutionary one'.

Foster reaches this austere political reading by way of an equally blunt aesthetic observation:

> musically speaking the so-called Redemption motif in the orchestra inaugurates this new society while cleansing the old one (as represented by Siegfried and Brünnhilde) of its sins. It is typically Wagnerian, however, that we do not actually witness this newer, more natural world. Instead […] in both his theoretical works and other operatic works, so too in the finale to *Götterdämmerung*: Wagner relishes demonstrating what this society and artwork of the future should not be rather than what is should be.

This perspective on what is missing from the *Ring* does not go as far as, for example, Barry Emslie in claiming that *Götterdämmerung* suffers from a besetting 'shallowness' (this journal, i/2, p. 75). But it still seems to shut down the process of speculative interpretation just at the point where psychology is most determinedly in tension with the political. In particular, there is surely a good deal more to be said about why that 'newer, more natural world' can have no place in this particular work, whose closing music offers such powerful reminders of what was heroic and, ultimately, compassionate about the old world. Perhaps, it wasn't so bad, or so anti-revolutionary, after all?

As Foster wisely accepts, 'because this multifaceted figure confronts us with such endless and important contradictions, the job of the Wagner critic may ultimately be not to resolve these contradictions or to solve the paradoxes, but to ask why is the ambigu-

ity so pervasive in the first place?'. There are many other questions to be asked of the *Ring*'s ending, especially for those who believe that there is a profoundly consolatory quality to the music, however open-ended it leaves the political issues about what 'should not be' as opposed to what might be. Is this what Foster means by donning the paradoxical Nietzschean cloak and admitting that Wagner made music 'more meaningful' by endowing it with 'hermeneutic impenetrability'? It is certainly appropriate for a study which roots itself in ancient Greek texts to end by acknowledging the semantic and conceptual indefiniteness of 19th-century music, even when it is setting words. I find it regrettable that Foster does not include a fuller account of how memory, as distinct from parody, has a presence in *Götterdämmerung*, though including this might have risked leaving his own argument even more open-ended and enigmatic than it is already. But Waltraute's (Aristophanes-rejecting?) portrait in sound of the broken god stands against those sardonic, parodistic invocations of the earthy divine by Hagen and his crew in ways which resonate musically to the very end, and leave this sublimely meaningful drama speechless.

Puppy Love

Barry Emslie is unimpressed by an artless apologia for Wagner

Michael Tanner, *The Faber Pocket Guide to Wagner* (Faber and Faber: London, 2010). 352pp. £8.99 (paperback). ISBN: 978-0-571-23736-4

Michael Tanner is a fan. He loves Wagner. And this is his principal virtue. But it is also the source of the difficulties that bedevil his new book. For Tanner's love is true love. Notwithstanding his intelligence and erudition, he is like a blindly infatuated teenager, even though he is beginning to suspect that the beloved is not in every sense kosher and will sometimes leave you standing on the street corner holding a bunch of fading flowers while he is off with the boys behaving badly. Nonetheless this Faber and Faber pocket 'Guide' has (almost) everything an introduction should have: a chronology of the life, a short biography, an account of the 'operas', a (reluctantly written) chapter on anti-semitism, and a section on recommended literature, CDs and DVDs.

Now, while we may know that love can be a problem and often comes with baggage that when finally unpacked contains items which do not prove benign at all, this does not trouble Tanner. Consequently he despises those who want to muddy the waters of the Wagner project. Superficially he can get away with this with the operas. Or at least many fans will cheer him on as he tries, while anyone new to Wagner will be impressed by his enthusiasm and devotion. So here is a largely radiant account of the stage works. They are inspiring and noble and Tanner is happy to defend them against commentators who talk of a 'dark underside', and producers who subvert them according to their own wilful agendas.

However, even the most naive fan knows that this strategy won't work with the writings. But Tanner has the perfect solution to this. He largely ignores them. Indeed he even advises us to do likewise. After all, they are often merely works in which Wagner 'let off so much steam'. Furthermore, 'we neither have to read ['Opera and Drama']

nor even to know a great deal of what it says in order to grasp the drastic novelty of the artistic works that Wagner went on to compose.' This is piffle, and if Tanner has not read 'Opera and Drama' then his book is perfect proof of the falsity of his claim. If (as is likely) he has read it, one can only conclude that he read it badly – or all too well, and thereby appreciated how dangerous it is (along with much else that Wagner wrote) to his own artless agenda. Clearly to understand Wagner fully his writings are vital, and this certainly includes his longest theoretical work. However, should we let our love for Wagner take us into these choppy waters we are confronted by a brilliant contradictory maverick, a mesh of novel speculations on sexuality, anthropology and history, and masses of disturbing stuff on culture, nation and race. Adult love is not always a many-splendoured thing.

And here we come to the fundamental dilemma. The fan has to commit surgery (at times butchery) on the object of his affections in order to preserve him in the manner he so desperately needs. However, to airbrush all the problematic stuff out of the picture is to betray Wagner on two levels. In the first instance it is to reject a more serious and sophisticated view of aesthetics than Tanner will entertain (which is fair enough). In the second instance it is to deny Wagner the respect *he* explicitly demands, for he could not have insisted more passionately on the importance of his written texts. Ironically it is Wagner's critics – no less enthusiastic about the many-sided Master than Tanner himself – who show us the real riches of the subject because they show us, among other things, the darker side(s). Tanner's selective surgery saves Wagner by repudiating him. But does not everyone kill the thing he loves?

The same problem crops up when we move to the man, where the hagiography becomes both disturbing and potentially silly. Tanner resorts to every mitigating factor he can find. Wagner was 'a man of the people' (certainly not in his lifestyle), he paid his estranged wife Minna an allowance (unlike all those others from whom he 'borrowed' and stole), and he loved dogs (true enough). And then there are sweeping statements designed to buff up the master's character: 'His servants worshipped him, and condescension had no part in his makeup.' Frankly I doubt the former and dispute the latter. Consider the insolent letter (12 Dec. 1861) to Baron von Hornstein: 'I hear you have become rich. […] I require an immediate loan of ten thousand francs. […] Now let me see whether you are the right sort of man!' and the sneering retort when Hornstein refuses him both the money and free lodging in one of his castles. And think of his treatment of Hermann Levi. I would have thought that a miracle of superior condescension. Indeed I fear that even the most dewy-eyed newcomer to Wagner may have trouble overcoming the occasional doubt when confronted by an apologia that tells us he despised Jews, but loved dogs.

And so we come – as reluctantly as Tanner himself – to the final chapter of the book proper: 'Wagner, the Jews, and the Nazis'. It would have been better if Tanner had followed his instincts and not written it. But allegedly the folly of others forces his hand. Still, he does tell us we may 'avoid' it. The tactics now in play are familiar from many books by Wagner apologists. The anti-semitism is marginalised (in a previous book Tanner dispensed with it early on with a cry of 'Basta!'), and then the horror the author felt on first reading Wagner's essay 'Judaism in Music' is laid on with a trowel. Tanner was 'appalled and distressed'; it's 'vile', 'evil rubbish'. The point here is to make this aberration (it isn't one) as horrid as possible so as to put it in a different category

altogether. It is so exceptional as to be alien; it doesn't really belong. Of course this lies awkwardly with the earlier hagiography, although the general upending which it necessitates does induce Tanner to tell us that idols may have feet of clay. None of that matters however. What *does* matter is the significance of the anti-semitism for Wagner's intellectual and creative life, and the attempt on the part of the apologists to keep the issue out of any discussion of the operas. I am not going into all these arguments again (I have already done so in this journal and elsewhere), but it is important to note the problems that Tanner gets himself into.

He is much fussed by the Nazis. It's not his fault. Other people are too. But he should have ignored all the *ex post facto* arguments and saved space for other things. After all, *ex post facto* arguments axiomatically contain the anachronistic seed of their own contradiction. Yet it is exactly here that Tanner's commitment becomes bizarre. He claims that if there were an anti-semitic subtext to the operas then the Nazis would have spotted it. However, 'Nazi commentators […] didn't produce anti-Semitic interpretations.' As he has passionately insisted on this elsewhere, challenging people to prove him wrong, it had better be done – if only to liberate extreme Wagnerian flat-earthers from this nonsense.

The Nazis celebrated Wagner's operas for their portrayal of intrinsic Germanic virtues. They knew these were anti-semitic because, first, such virtues *as they saw them* had to be anti-semitic, and, secondly, because they claimed that the Jews had spotted this as well. Goebbels, especially after performances of *Meistersinger*, understood perfectly why the Jews wanted to kill off the Master ('totreden'). He knows they have got the message; just as he has. (Goebbels' Diary, 3 Feb. 1930; see also 2 Aug. 1932 and 22 Nov. 1932). And if we turn to arguably the Nazis' chief ideologue, we find Alfred Rosenberg celebrating at length the anti-Jewish character of Wagner's operas in *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Should a specific example be needed – one that in itself explodes Tanner's argument – it will be found in his characterisation of Alberich as a Jewish capitalist exploiter of the sort that stabbed Germany in the back. Slipping down the pole of Nazi ideology we land at the bottom on *Der Stürmer*. In the July 1938 issue (no. 29) there is a review of a book by Richard Wilhelm Stock. Devoted to *Meistersinger* and the city of Nuremberg, it explains how the Jews have tried to sabotage Wagner's masterpiece because they have understood, correctly, its anti-Jewish message. And so on and so forth. Clearly Tanner's argument that the Nazis didn't produce anti-semitic interpretations is absurd. It is like listening to an apologist argue that the Ku Klux Klan aren't really racist (they just don't believe in intermarriage) or that apartheid really did mean separate and equal.

But in general it is notable here how Tanner's erudition lets him down and how his generalisations become unsustainable. Thomas S. Grey, whom he enrols as an expert witness for the defence, does not conclude that there is 'no anti-Semitic element in the works themselves'. In fact he says he thinks it quite possible that Wagner might have 'construct[ed] characters who could be perceived as acting, sounding and behaving "like Jews"'. He also finds the suggestion that Wagner let his 'anti-Jewish obsession' into his creative work 'plausible'. Quite unambiguous, however, is his observation that 'one would have to be culturally tone-deaf not to see how Siegfried's attitude toward Mime reflects a great deal of Wagner's attitude toward the Jews'. Grey also expresses

clear reservation concerning the manner in which Tanner rationalised Wagner's anti-semitism in his earlier book. Furthermore it is ridiculous to claim that the 'only views' that Barry Millington 'has aired' on Wagner's works 'are concerned with their dark underside'. Perhaps Millington has written too much. Tanner is also mistaken when he thinks that all this stuff on anti-semitism in the operas is a modern phenomenon whose progenitors are Adorno and Robert Gutman. Mahler made the link between Mime and Jew-hating in 1898.

Above all Tanner is let down by one of *his* great heroes (Thomas Mann) who turns out – like Wagner – to be more complex than he can handle. Allegedly Mann 'not even once' mentions Wagner's anti-semitism. But in a letter (1940) to the journal *Common Sense* he has much to say on the Hitler–Wagner connection. For instance: 'I find an element of Nazism not only in Wagner's questionable literature; I find it also in his music.' And what is Nazism if not anti-semitism? In this context Tanner's gloss on Mann's 'there is much Hitler in Wagner' (he is only concerned with the 'glory' of Wagner's art!) sounds a smidgeon far-fetched. Even more damning is a letter to Emil Preetorius (6 Dec. 1949) where the Hitler–Wagner coupling also surfaces. Here Mann calls Beckmesser the 'Jew in the Thorn Bush': i.e. the title character of the Grimms' very upfront anti-semitic story. Thus he violates Tanner's assertion in two ways. First he addresses the forbidden topic and secondly he makes an explicit link between it and one of the operas. In fact Tanner is mercilessly exposed by his own mentor. For Thomas Mann characterises those frightened of seeing Nazism in Wagner as guilty of 'sentimental innocence'. Tanner should take this to heart.

In truth Tanner does not want to write a book about Wagner at all. He wants to write a book about the music dramas. And he should. For it would allow him to freely express his love and admiration according to the Leavisite values that mean so much to him. Moreover it would be a book worth reading. However, this is not the whole story. For even putting aside publishers' requirements, he is still bent on fighting the good fight. So while the tone is usually amiable, it can occasionally degenerate into a (sincere) rant. For instance other critics are engaged in a 'labour of hate', they exhibit 'hopeless lunacy', they are 'deranged', 'vicious', they 'push open the floodgates [of] sewage' and so on. Therefore despite his explicit desire to make use of author-free, purely text-based, New Criticism, which would allow him to cast off the unpleasant stuff and gambol untroubled on sunny uplands, he is wilfully self-driven onto territory which he should really shun. Once there, he starts shooting wildly with little regard for either serious theory or hard facts. Not surprisingly he ends up putting most of the pellets in his own foot.

Wagner's Legacy in Close-up

Hilan Warshaw is stimulated by a study of Wagner's influence on cinema

Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, eds., *Wagner and Cinema* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2010). 504pp. $75 (hardback), $27.95 (paperback). ISBN: 978-0-253-22163-6

In recent years, the connection between Wagner and film has become a topic of widening discussion – one which is likely only to intensify as Wagner's bicentennial year approaches. The discussion is in fact nearly as old as cinema itself, although its tone has changed sharply over time. In the film industry's early years, Wagner's works were routinely invoked as a model for the new medium; both in Europe and America, film-makers and commentators spoke reverently of Wagner's ability to synthesise all the arts in the service of a gripping narrative. In the wake of Nazism, however, the subject of Wagner and film inevitably took on darker connotations. Perhaps more than anyone else, the keynote was struck by Theodor Adorno, who viewed Wagner as a harbinger of not only Fascism, but the crude manipulations of the American culture industry. When Adorno described Wagner's works as 'the birth of film out of the spirit of music', he meant it as a derisory quip.

Wagner's legacy in film, then, became bound up with the ideological explosions of the 20th century. How, if at all, has the view shifted for the 21st? *Wagner and Cinema*, a highly stimulating if uneven anthology, addresses itself to this question with contributions by scholars from a variety of fields. A hefty work at nearly 500 pages, the book is divided into articles on Wagner and the silent film; Wagner in Hollywood; Wagner and German cinema; and Wagner beyond the soundtrack.

The book opens with several persuasive articles about the best-known aspect of Wagner's cinematic legacy: the Wagnerian influence on film composers, in both the silent and sound eras. David Neumeyer's article on the Hollywood film composer Max Steiner provides fascinating instances of Steiner's (self-confessed) debt to Wagner in his intricately motivic, drawn-out scores. Peter Franklin's excellent essay is essentially a detailed rebuttal of the film theorist Scott Paulin (who has also contributed an essay to this book). In an earlier essay, 'Richard Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Unity', Paulin argued that the historical continuity between Wagner and film scoring has been much overstated, originally by film producers looking to legitimate their product for a bourgeois public by linking it with Wagnerian high art. In countering Paulin, Franklin returns the focus to music, exploring the rich visual storytelling in Wagner's scores, and the Wagnerian orchestra's role as a purveyor of foreboding and psychological analysis. These Wagnerian values did indeed provide a powerful example for the pioneers of classical film scoring, such as Steiner and Erich Korngold – master craftsmen for whom cinematic unity was not a fantasy (to use Paulin's word) but a working aspiration.

Several of the most valuable chapters draw attention to films whose significance – both to Wagner studies and to film history – has been overlooked. Paul Fryer's study of Carl Froelich's German biopic *The Life and Works of Richard Wagner* (1913) provides an engaging introduction to this remarkably ambitious production; at 80 minutes long

(a nearly unprecedented duration for its time), the scale of the film attests both to the immense prestige of Wagnerism in Germany at that time and to the seriousness with which German film-makers regarded Wagner's legacy. Joy H. Calico's chapter discusses Joachim Herz's extraordinary East German film version of *Der fliegende Holländer* (1964) – the first complete Wagner opera adapted as a feature film. Calico's detailed attention to this rarely seen masterpiece (it has never been commercially released in the West) is most welcome. She convincingly argues that Herz's film, with its persistent visual references to F.W. Murnau's classic vampire film *Nosferatu* (1922), used Wagner's opera as a vehicle – and not an inappropriate one – for making a bona fide horror film; horror was not one of the genres officially sanctioned by DEFA, the state-owned East German film studio. (Calico does omit one relevant detail: in 1922 Murnau was planning to direct an adaptation of *Der fliegende Holländer*, which never came to pass.[1] *Nosferatu*, released the same year, has many similarities to the *Holländer*: the film's self-sacrificing heroine, to take one example, is much more redolent of Wagner's opera than of *Nosferatu*'s source material, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Perhaps, then, the references to *Nosferatu* in Herz's film are especially fitting.)

This is a book filled with bold theoretical stances, and the authors sometimes overreach themselves. In a relatively brief essay, William H. Rosar quickly spirals from a discussion of 'monster' motifs in two science fiction soundtracks to an amorphous Jungian analysis of both opera and science fiction. Eva Rieger argues that Wagner's chauvinistic gender views are coded within his musical settings – and, by extension, those of the Hollywood composers whom he inspired. Her methods here are distractingly didactic; she explicates several musical passages one interval at a time, identifying intervals and other musical devices that were traditionally associated with 'negative', feminised attributes. And while there is no denying Wagner's chauvinism – the devoted, sacrificial woman is his most entrenched ideal – Rieger overlooks some complicating shades of grey: for instance, she does not mention *Tristan und Isolde*, in which both female sexuality and chromaticism (one of her musical markers for pejorative femininity) are treated in a decidedly non-judgemental light.

Not surprisingly, many of the articles are concerned with the political overtones associated with Wagner. In one way or another, these articles all touch on a central paradox. Wagner (his music or his name) is often used in film in connection with the Nazis or anti-semitism; yet Wagner also had an immense aesthetic impact on the medium as a whole. Is there an inherent conflict between using Wagner as a signifier of a very specific (and often nefarious) reception history, and as an aesthetic source for cinema itself? How can he be both politically toxic and artistically crucial? The book includes case studies of several films that use Wagner's music as a marker of Nazism or political madness. Fascinatingly, however, these same examples also suggest that it is difficult for film-makers to keep Wagner entirely at arm's length.

Scott Paulin analyses the use of motifs from the *Ring* cycle in the Hollywood war melodrama *Golden Earrings* (1947). These Wagnerian quotes usually (although not always) accompany scenes involving Nazis. Provocatively, Paulin argues that the varied, in fact leitmotivic, ways in which Victor Young, the film's composer, develops

1 Lotte H. Eisner, *Murnau* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973), 142.

these Wagnerian quotes are meant to wrest Wagner from his politicisation by the Nazis and to redirect attention to the music in its own right. Marc Weiner discusses a more recent Hollywood production, *Gladiator* (2000), which draws on musical evocations of *Götterdämmerung*'s Funeral Music to conjure comparisons between Rome under the tyrannical Commodus and the Nazi dictatorship. (Weiner quotes the film's composer, Hans Zimmer, who confirms this intention.) However, the ideological coding of the music is hardly watertight: the same Wagnerian evocations are also used to accompany heroic scenes of the film's protagonist, such as the dramatic showdown in the Colosseum ('My name is Gladiator…').

Similarly, in their essays on Wagner and the New German Cinema, Roger Hillman and Jeremy Tambling highlight films in which directors such as Hans Jürgen Syberberg and Alexander Kluge indicted Wagner as a source of dangerous political passions. Elsewhere, however, both film-makers use Wagner uncritically for dramatic effect; in fact, as Hillman notes, Syberberg's main purpose in extensively quoting from Wagner in his *Hitler: A Film From Germany* (1977) was to wrest Wagner from the Nazis' grip. Hillman also analyses films by Werner Herzog, who was not thinking of Fascism when he used Wagner's music to endow his documentaries with mythic sweep.

The book has two chapters on Bill Viola's *Tristan Project* (2004) as well as an interview with Viola, which suggest that it is the mythic and universal view of Wagner that has continued to engage modern film-makers. That notion is certainly supported by the current vogue for epic films in the manner of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which manifested Wagner's influence on numerous levels.

All of this suggests that the most valuable contribution that cinema has made to Wagner's legacy – apart from introducing his works (often anonymously) to a vast audience – is that it has provided a forum where Wagner's work can potentially transcend his historical baggage. Scholars disagree about the extent to which Wagner's art can be divorced from his ideology (a process complicated by Wagner's own insistence on the vital connection between his art and politics). Film-makers, on the other hand, are not faced with the same constraints: after all, stripping away and reassigning meanings is inherent to the technical process of film montage itself. Within the system of a film, attaching Wagner's music to a visual moment creates a new link, a new meaning. And film-makers' attraction to Wagner has historically proved to be larger than politics; it is worth noting that in the 1940s – when the subject of Wagner was at its most volatile – Wagner's influence could be felt in the films of Nazi Germany, Hollywood and the Soviet Sergei Eisenstein, who considered Wagner 'without doubt one of the forerunners and progenitors of the audiovisual polyphony of contemporary montage'.[2] Wagner's techniques have been incorporated by film artists of every ideological stripe, in order more intensely to communicate their message – or no message at all.

It may be, then, that cinema can never avoid Wagner's shadow. But by editing, redirecting and universalising Wagner, the film-makers studied in *Wagner and Cinema* propose that cinema may be the best way for Wagner finally to surpass his own shadow.

[2] Quoted in Rosamund Bartlett, 'The Embodiment of Myth: Eizenshtein's Production of *Die Walküre*', *Slavonic and East European Review*, lxx/1 (January 1992), 63.

Bold Knights and Lovely Ladies

Edward Haymes assesses a new prose translation of the 'Nibelungenlied'

The Nibelungenlied: The Lay of the Nibelungs. Translated by Cyril Edwards (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2010). 245 + xxxvi pp. £10.99. ISBN 978-0-199-23854-5

Wagnerians will be interested in a translation of one of the main sources for *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, although Wagner himself did not like the poem and drew much of his material from other sources. He did adapt portions of the Middle High German epic for his drama, mainly in *Götterdämmerung*, but his chief interest was in the Siegfried figure developed in Iceland and Norway (as Sigurd) and in the Germanic pantheon he saw in Wotan and the other gods, something that is totally missing in the *Nibelungenlied*, which takes place in a very Catholic Europe of the High Middle Ages. Still, it is important for the serious student of Wagner's *Ring* to know the epic that attracted much scholarly and lay opinion in the first half of the 19th century.

The *Nibelungenlied* is at once the earliest and most modern of the complete medieval retellings of the Siegfried legend. It was composed around the year 1200, probably in Passau (although this location has been disputed). The poem consists of more than 2300 strophes of four long lines each and it is contained in some thirty-five manuscripts and fragments from the Middle Ages. (The various manuscripts have differing numbers of strophes.) I have characterised it as the most modern because it takes place in the chivalric world in which it arose rather than in the more primitive surroundings assumed elsewhere. Although the poem drew heavily on traditional Germanic heroic legend for its story, it was clearly the work of an author working to address the concerns of his own day. He chose a language and a verse-form that looked backward to traditional narrative, probably in order to awaken certain expectations on the part of his audience. On the other hand, he adopted contemporary notions such as courtly love, so much so that some scholars feel that the *Nibelungenlied* was an attempt to bring traditional stories up to date for a contemporary audience. I have argued that the poet chose these elements and placed them in the traditional framework to show their weakness. The modern reader will have to decide what the 'message' of the Middle High German epic was to its medieval readers. It was never printed during the early years of printing and it disappeared from view from the 16th century until its rediscovery in 1755 by the Swiss physician Jakob Hermann Obereit. Its popularity in Germany was largely the result of patriotic feelings aroused during the Napoleonic wars and the period immediately after them. It is, in any case, an important work of European literature of its period and deserves attention from Wagnerians and others.

The core of the present book is a relatively accurate translation of the Middle High German text by Cyril Edwards. Of course, one can always find small points for disagreements with the translator. The disjuncture between the verse of the original and the prose of the translation is clearly visible in the numerous fillers that were inserted to make the lines and strophes work in the original, but which seem inappropriate in English. A literal translation of these expressions makes the whole appear somewhat loose in its narration. The continual references to 'bold knights' and 'lovely ladies'

worked better in the original, where they filled out rhyming lines, than they do in the prose translation. Occasional Anglicisms also end up making the work appear more lightweight than its Middle High German model. 'They are both in fine fettle' (strophe 545) is a strange translation for 'den liez ich wol gesunden', which I would render as 'I left them quite healthy'. But these are small matters in such a large work. On the whole, the translation is accurate and serviceable.

The introduction and afterword, on the other hand, are not well done. There are numerous errors of detail as in the following: The Ambraser Heldenbuch is only one volume (I've held it in my hands), but a very large one, not two as suggested here. There is no indication that the Nibelungs are dwarfs before Wagner (though one of the dwarfs in the *Hürnen Seyfried* is called Nyblung). The author of a book on Old High German literature should know that Hildebrand and Dietrich are on the *same* side in the OHG 'Hildebrandslied'. The 'infectious' enthusiasm of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm apparently works backwards in time to inspire August Wilhelm Schlegel, writing while the two were still students (1802) and several years before their first publications appeared. The afterword also contains several errors: Attila died of a haemorrhage, not suffocation. The author identifies the Franks as Burgundians, speaking of Sigibert more than once as a Burgundian king. These are probably not fatal errors, but they reduce the value of the ancillary material, which is sketchy in any case.

One also wonders what the market for this book would be. There are perfectly usable translations into prose by A.T. Hatto (Harmondsworth, 1965) and into verse by Burton Raffel (New Haven, CT, 2006) and this version does not really improve on the prose translation still in print. Although I wrote an introduction for the verse translation by Raffel, I am generally more sympathetic to Hatto's prose. Hatto also has a much superior introduction and afterword, even if I don't agree with all of his claims. They are, at least, not factually incorrect, as are many of those in this new translation, but tend to rest on scholarly opinion.

A strength of the new translation by Edwards is the numbered references to the strophes of the Middle High German edition by Karl Bartsch, revised by Helmut de Boor and Roswitha Wisniewski (Wiesbaden, 1996), which should help the reader using this translation to decipher the original. The Bartsch–de Boor–Wisniewski text is now easily available in the bilingual Reclam volume with a modern German translation by Siegfried Grosse (Reinbek, 1997), which is not included in the bibliography. The bibliography should also contain at least some reference to the monumental edition of the three major manuscripts (known as A, B and C) by Michael Batts (Tübingen, 1971) in which a synoptic view of the three major manuscripts is presented along with what the editor considered important readings from the other manuscripts. Also missing from the English-language studies of the poem is the excellent interpretation by Hugo Bekker, *The Nibelungenlied: A Literary Analysis* (Toronto, 1971).

Tormented Titan

Malcolm Miller applauds a biography of a prominent star in the Wagner constellation

Alan Walker, *Hans von Bülow: A Life and Times* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2010). xxvii + 510pp. £27.50/$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-195-36868-0

After the birth of Eva, Cosima's second child with Wagner, in 1867, Hans von Bülow, her legal husband, finally unfettered himself from several years of feigned respectability and lashed out, describing Wagner as a 'scoundrel' who was 'as sublime in his works as he is incomparably abject in his actions'. For Alan Walker this shows 'a sense of discrimination so rare among human beings that we have no hesitation in describing it as one of Bülow's finest achievements. […] He took the man out of the music and it is through Bülow's devastating dichotomy that the world still deals with the complexities of Wagner's character.' (p. 146)

Both in this and in many other spheres, Bülow emerges in Walker's first full-length English-language biography as a pioneer who initiated new trends, many of which are still followed. Coming on the heels of Walker's monumental award-winning three-volume Liszt biography, and several more recent Liszt-related books, it adds a rich context for 19th-century music history and the reception history of two giants of the

Contemporary cartoon by M. Schultze, published in Munich, showing Wagner and Cosima walking along the Maximilianstrasse after a rehearsal of *Tristan und Isolde*, with Bülow bringing up the rear, dropping pages of the score, including one headed 'Markes Klage' (Mark's Lament).

'new German school', Liszt and Wagner. Bülow is one of the most charismatic supporting characters on the stage of that history, aware of his role as satellite to their universe. He was also proactively influential in the reception of other Romantics such as Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Brahms. It is to Alan Walker's great credit that his vivid narrative combines literary impetus and zest with musicology of the highest scholarly level.

The introductory chapter presents an overview of Bülow, best known for many notable premieres as conductor and pianist. He premiered both Tristan (1865) and Die Meistersinger (1868), as well as the Liszt Sonata in B minor (1857) and the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto no. 1 (1875). He was one of the first conductors of the Berlin Philharmonic, and as conductor of the famous Meiningen Orchestra in the 1880s he raised the standard of performance to unprecedented heights – drilling the players to perform Beethoven symphonies from memory! As a pianist and pedagogue he was a formidable force, especially in the realm of Beethoven interpretation. In Europe and the USA he pioneered such practices as recitals of the last five Beethoven sonatas and, from the mid-1880s, the first Beethoven 'cycles' as chronological surveys of Beethoven's style. Interestingly Bülow's Beethoven editions, originally to have been dedicated to Wagner, were rededicated to Liszt 'by his grateful student Hans von Bülow' after the 'Cosima affair'.

Clearly it is this affair which lies at the heart of the Bülow story, for which the author draws on a wide range of newly available archives. Both Wagner and Liszt are inextricably bound up in Bülow's rise to musical fame and fortune. Wagner's conducting inspired the young Bülow, whose circle of friends curiously overlapped with Wagner's: Jessie Taylor was a 'surrogate sister', while it was through Karl Ritter that the 16-year-old Bülow received an encouraging letter about his compositions from Wagner (p. 41). It was Liszt's premiere of Wagner's Lohengrin, which Bülow attended with his mother, Franziska, that formed 'a major turning point', leading him to abandon law studies for music. Liszt and Wagner each wrote to the implacable mother, earning her a place in the footnotes of musical history since 'to receive two letters within nine days from two of the greatest musicians of the nineteenth century, glowing with praise for the musical gifts of her son, was without precedent' (p. 52).

Bülow's outspokenness – one of his most pronounced traits – led him into difficulties, including controversy in the press, throughout his career: it cut short his very first post in Zurich as assistant to Wagner, owing to an argument with the husband of one of the singers. The result was a move to a less glamorous post in St Gall. The author describes with loving anecdotes Bülow's apprenticeship as a pianist under Liszt in Weimar, his virtuoso career and his appointment in 1855 to the Stern Academy in Berlin. There it was that Cosima Liszt became his pupil: when Liszt embarked on his liaison with Carolyne von Wittgenstein, the children of his first mistress, Marie d'Agoult, moved in with the Bülows in Berlin; the 17-year-old Cosima was apparently a good pianist.

We learn of the 'dramatic story' of their first declaration of love when, after having conducted the Tannhäuser overture to a hostile audience, Bülow fainted in the dressing room and was tended by Cosima. Bülow wrote an astonishing letter to Liszt soon after, on 20 April 1856: 'I feel for her more than love. The thought of moving nearer to you encloses all my dream of whatsoever may be vouchsafed to me on this earth, you

whom I regard as the principal architect and shaper of my present and future life. For me Cosima is superior to all women, [...] because she resembles you so closely.' (p. 98) He added 'prophetically' that he would 'release her were she ever to feel she had made a mistake with regards to me' (p. 99). The author comments: 'He would be called upon to redeem this pledge under circumstances so harrowing that they almost ended his life.' The important point is that from the very start the relationship was flawed since it was fuelled by Bülow's admiration for Cosima's father. Thus what followed was not too hard to explain, or predict.

Already on their honeymoon the first inkling of trouble was evident: teaming up with another honeymooning couple, Karl Ritter and his (soon-to-be-divorced) wife, they decided to visit Wagner at the summer house of the Wesendonck villa in Zurich. The author deliberately avoids retelling the whole steamy story, referring instead to such sources as the Spencer–Millington *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*. Yet intriguing details are highlighted, such as the way Wagner used Bülow to play through parts of the *Ring* and to listen to readings of *Tristan* together with Mathilde Wesendonck (whose five poems Wagner set around this time). Bülow made a copy of the *Tristan* poem for Cosima, who read it over and over again and kept it as a souvenir. Walker speculates that she was already under Wagner's spell. Certainly Cosima witnessed the marital tensions between Wagner, Minna and Mathilde Wesendonck at first hand, when the Bülows returned there in July 1858. Bülow was with Wagner when matters exploded, though it was Karl Ritter who accompanied him to Italy (where *Tristan* was completed). This was also the period of the curious 'suicide pact' between Ritter and Cosima which attested to both of them already being unhappy in marriage; the author poetically describes the 'mournful mood that pervaded the Asyl during that woebegone summer of 1858' (p. 111).

As they returned to Berlin, the marriage began to fracture: Bülow was a workaholic, even keeping his distance while Cosima nursed her younger brother Daniel, who was dying, aged 20, of consumption. (The couple's first daughter, born a year later, was named Daniela.) Even more 'dreadful neglect' ensued when Cosima was again pregnant in 1863 with Blandine, named after Cosima's recently deceased sister: Hans and his mother stayed in a separate part of the house while Cosima was alone in labour.

This was the context for Cosima and Wagner's first assignation in November 1863, on a ride in the Berlin Tiergarten while Bülow was rehearsing his own tone poem *Des Sängers Fluch* (a work which is now recorded). The author's caustic footnote points up the irony that the Uhland tale on which the work is based is about a king who jealously kills the minstrel who has attracted his wife. Cosima, the author suggests, might have been just one paramour among several others at this time, had she not created a spectacular *ménage à trois*, described in graphic and gripping detail, which served Wagner's purposes.

With the accession of the young Ludwig to the Bavarian throne in 1864, Wagner was rescued from debtors and housed in the lavish Villa Pellet outside Munich. He invited Bülow there ostensibly to provide him with a opportunity to better his career: playing to the new king, heading the piano department of a new Royal School of Music, conducting the premiere of *Tristan*, the piano score of which Bülow had already arranged. Yet Cosima and the two daughters arrived about a week and a half ahead of Bülow, who was delayed with work engagements, to 'give herself to Wagner' (p. 118). The author

challenges the accepted notion that Bülow knew nothing until the birth of Wagner and Cosima's child Isolde a year later. He provides a fascinating new reading of transcripts of the court case in 1914 brought by Isolde to confirm her own son Franz Wilhelm Beidler as a Wagner heir. Cosima claimed to have had intimate relations only with Wagner during this time, yet was seen bed-hopping while Bülow was trying frustratedly to gain access to the locked Wagner bedroom at the Villa Pellet: 'for the next several years she passed back and forth between Bülow and Wagner.' (p. 121)

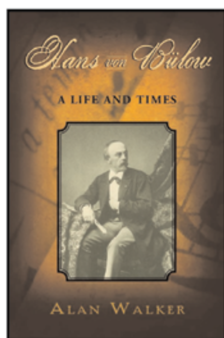
Their complex triangular relationship formed the background to the June premiere of *Tristan* since the first rehearsals on 10 April 1865 ironically began two hours after the birth of Isolde. Not wanting to lose Cosima, and concerned for the family honour, Bülow accepted the situation and treated Isolde as his own, 'assuming fiscal responsibility' for her. While he endured the 'purgatory' of these years, his professional career flourished: only later, with the birth of Eva in 1867, when the affair became more public, did Bülow succumb to the pressure of his painful situation. He nevertheless continued to conduct a triumphant premiere of *Die Meistersinger* despite friction behind the scenes, as when a photo of baby Eva fell out of the full score and Bülow had to leave the room in tears (p. 151). The situation had become untenable: Wagner knew that if he married Cosima, Bülow would have to go. Three days after the premiere Wagner left Munich (it was eight years before he saw Ludwig again in Bayreuth), while Bülow never saw his 'tormenter-in-chief again' (p. 153). Meanwhile Hans Richter was the new promising conductor on the scene since 1866 (alongside Mottl and Levi, one might add), groomed for Bayreuth.

Bülow went to Italy; he engineered the divorce and sent all the children to live with 'Uncle Richard', continuing to raise vast sums for the Bayreuth deficit fund through his recitals. Meanwhile Bülow's daughter Blandine married the Sicilian Count Gravina, and Daniela married the art historian Henry Thode, in Bayreuth in 1886. On that occasion Bülow, the father, was absent, as also when, just over three weeks later, on 31 July, Liszt died. As Alan Walker explains, 'Cosima did not want the complications of Bülow's presence […]. It would have raised too many questions to have the greatest Wagner conductor of the day, who had first brought *Tristan* to life twenty-one years earlier, come to Bayreuth at such a time.' (p. 359) To be denied access to his own daughter's wedding and the funeral of Liszt, his most revered mentor and friend, was surely painful enough, even more so since it was in order to avoid embarrassing questions for Cosima and Wagner, his friend and mentor turned rival and betrayer. Such was the destiny of Bülow, to be ever trapped within a web of egos. Nevertheless, he left all his children legacies, a final posthumous retaliation against Wagner, the author speculates.

Interestingly Walker acknowledges as a primary source Bülow's second wife, the singer Marie Schanzer, who was still fighting to preserve and catalogue her husband's papers as late as 1941, an odd date in Nazi Germany which provides a link to another facet of Bülow's character in common with Wagner, his anti-Semitism. Even though he signed the 1880 anti-semitic petition presented by Förster, which Wagner refused to sign, he continued to perform his revered Mendelssohn. Though the author does not exonerate Bülow, it is obvious that Wagner's anti-semitism (through his publications and letters) had far more impact, and the issue deepens in relation to Wagner's music dramas. Bülow's reflection of the anti-semitic rhetoric of the times highlights just how far this was a 'normal' part of the ideological fuel of the Wagner circle.

The final chapters are perhaps the most illuminating in their account of Bülow's conducting and teaching, with a chapter on the Meiningen years (1880–85) and his achievements with the Berlin Philharmonic, culminating with the remarkable meeting with Bismarck. There is a fascinating account of a debate on tempos in the prelude to *Die Meistersinger*, though it is the three B's – Bach, Brahms and Beethoven – whose names recur most often. Bülow premiered some of Strauss's works, and despite Mahler's unfinished Second Symphony having been coldly greeted by Bülow in 1891, it was Bülow's funeral service which inspired the 'Resurrection' finale; Mahler later conducted a memorial concert (and Walker provides details of the complex arrangements that led to the choice of Mahler rather than Strauss). We learn of more recent tributes to Bülow the conductor from figures as distinct as Boulez and Maazel, for both of whom he was a hugely influential figure.

Walker's narrative unfolds with energy, and provides an impressively rounded portrait of his subject, full of flaws as well as strengths. He explores numerous avenues and leaves some open for further research – for instance Bülow's compositions, little known, for which the inclusion of a useful complete catalogue may, it is hoped, stimulate new performances. We also learn of some lost cylinder recordings of his performances, which may eventually turn up. Generously laced with witty, wise anecdotes, copious footnotes, elegant illustrations and a family tree, as well as a hefty index and source list, the book represents a seminal study of one of the movers and shakers of 19th-century music, a relatively unsung hero of musical history.



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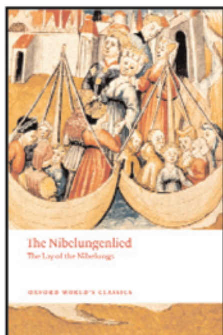

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