

The *Ring* and the Greeks

Introduction

The Greeks were fundamental for Wagner’s artistic and political project. It is worth noting at the outset that one reason he was so strongly drawn to Goethe, a subject for chapter 5, is that *Faust* Part II is filled with references to the Greeks. In particular, Wagner would no doubt appreciate Faust marrying Helen in his medieval (German) castle, which has been placed in ancient Greece,¹ for it represented both the marriage of the Germans and the Greeks and situating Germany in the soil of Greece. As Mephistopheles comments in the Classical Walpurgis Night, a scene we know Wagner especially valued:²

Hier dacht’ ich lauter Unbekannte,	I thought they’d be all strangers here;
Und finde leider Nahverwandte;	But they’re my family, I fear.
Es ist ein altes Buch zu blättern:	How old a book I’m browsing in!
Vom Harz bis Hellas immer Vettern!	German and Greek, they’re kith and kin.

A further link between the “Germanic” and “Greek” traditions is their mythology and the way Wagner in both cases saw this related to, and not simply separated from, history. However, Wagner’s appropriation of “the Greeks” is not entirely straightforward as we shall discover and to some extent this is related to the view of A. W. Schlegel that the classical world is not merely to be imitated in our day but needs to be reborn within us.³ Hence, Wagner writes in *Art and Revolution*: “we do not wish to revert to Greekdom; for what the Greeks knew not, and, knowing not, came by their downfall: that know *we*.”⁴

1. Note that this marriage of Part II is anticipated in Part I: “Du siehst, mit diesem Trank im Leibe, / Bald Helenen in jedem Weibe” (GWJA 3:93 (ll. 2603–4); Luke, *Faust I*, 81).

2. GWJA 3:265 (ll. 7740–43); Luke, *Faust II*, 100.

3. See chapter 5 below on A. W. Schlegel.

4. PW 1:54; GSD 3:30.

Wagner's Knowledge of Greek Language and Culture

For details of Wagner's knowledge of the Greek language and culture in his youth we are almost entirely dependent on his autobiography, a work he started to dictate to Cosima in 1865 when he was fifty-two years old and which is not always entirely trustworthy. He tells of his enthusiasm for the Greek language "because the stories from Greek mythology seized my imagination so strongly that I wanted to imagine their heroic figures speaking to me in their original tongue." He makes it clear that his interest was not in the language itself, which was actually "a tiresome obstacle," and that he was "never thorough with [. . .] language studies."⁵ He claims that at the Kreuzschule in Dresden he was "destined to be a poet" and that his teacher Julius Sillig set him the task of writing a major epic poem on "The Battle of Parnassus" after Pausanias. He further claims that he began to write in hexameter but did not get beyond the first canto, "[b]eing not far enough advanced in my studies to master the Greek tragedians in their own language."⁶ But he explains that it was Greek mythology, legend, and history that really interested him⁷ and some years later in a letter to August Lewald he claims that at the Kreuzschule he and his friend Schlesier had sworn themselves to Creuzer's *Symbolik und Mythologie*.⁸ His autobiography then tells that at the age of fifteen (1828), when he transferred from the Kreuzschule in Dresden to the Nikolaischule in Leipzig, he was put back a year, this being especially hurtful since he had already "produced a written translation of twelve books" of Homer.⁹ However, one only has to read a little further to see that he had not in fact mastered Greek.¹⁰ But

5. *My Life* 14; *Mein Leben* 1:21.

6. *My Life* 15; *Mein Leben* 1:22.

7. *My Life* 16; *Mein Leben* 1:22.

8. SB 1:354. The letter is not dated but Glaserapp, *Leben*, 1:272 n. 2, dates it as 12 November 1838. This work of Creuzer (1771–1858), *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, went through three editions (1810–12; 1819–21; 1837), was not later to be found in his Dresden library but the second edition was in his Wahnfried library. Creuzer's first volume deals with issues of allegory and symbol, and discusses the religion of the Egyptians, Indians, Medes and Persians. Volume 2 turns to the religion of the Near and Middle East and only half way through does the discussion move on to the Pelasgians (302–416), Homer and Hesiod (417–63), and an overview of Greek gods (464–818). Volumes 3 and 4 continue with the Greeks (heroes, etc.) and includes a discussion of the relationship of "paganism" to the Christian religion. Creuzer's theory that the mythology of Homer and Hesiod came from an Eastern source via the Pelasgians upset the German Philhellenism of Winckelmann, Schiller, and Schelling. His views were criticized by Voss (Williamson, "Gods," 152–55) but he was praised by Hegel, who refers to the fourth volume in his *Philosophy of Right*, 194 (§203). On Müller's relation to Creuzer (often taken to be an opponent), see Blok, "Quest." Wagner valued Creuzer right through to his later years (CD 1 December 1880).

9. *My Life* 22; *Mein Leben* 1:29. This claim to have translated what amounts to half of the *Iliad* (15,600 lines) or *Odyssey* (12,000 lines) seems hardly credible (each contains twenty-four books).

10. See *My Life* 38; *Mein Leben* 1:45–46, where he explains that at the age of seventeen he took private lessons in Greek and read Sophocles with his tutor. Then he adds: "For a time, I hoped that this noble subject would reawaken my desire to learn the Greek language thoroughly; but it was all in vain. I hadn't found the right teacher; and besides, the living room in which we pursued our studies looked out upon a tannery, whose disgusting smell affected my nerves badly enough to spoil Sophocles and

although he struggled with the Greek language, there can be no doubt that already in his youth he loved the spirit of Greek tragedy. He writes that his uncle Adolf “was delighted to find in me a very willing listener for his reading of classical tragedies, having himself begotten a translation of *Oedipus the King*.”¹¹

The next significant engagement with the Greeks occurred in Wagner's Paris years (1839–42) when he got to know Samuel Lehrs, who renewed Wagner's interest in the Greeks. But he writes: “Lehrs dissuaded me from any efforts to study the Greek classics in the original, consoling me with the well-intentioned statement that, given the way I was and the music I had in me, I would find a way to extract knowledge from them even without grammar and dictionary; whereas Greek, if it were to be studied seriously, was no joke and could not be treated as a secondary matter.”¹²

The general impression therefore is that Wagner never really mastered the Greek language¹³ and he did in fact develop an ideological justification for this, claiming that it was Mendelssohn's very ability to read Greek that prevented him from composing appropriate music for Sophocles' *Antigone*!¹⁴

Wagner's engagement with the *content* of Greek works intensified in his years in Dresden in the 1840s. In 1843, when Wagner had secured the position of *Hofkapellmeister* to the Saxon Court, he was able to build up his personal library. One of the first indications of his working on Greek tragedy was revising Gluck's *Iphigenie in Aulis*, which he started in 1845.¹⁵ But it was the summer of 1847 that was to prove particularly fruitful for his appreciation of Greek tragedy¹⁶ when he read Aeschylus in

Greek for me completely.” Wagner says much the same about his enthusiasm for Greek in his *Open Letter to Friedrich Nietzsche* (PW 5:292; NWSEB 1:176), praising Sillig and explaining that he was thoroughly discouraged when he moved to the Nikolai- and Thomasschule in Leipzig.

11. *My Life* 23; *Mein Leben* 1:30. Adolf also wrote a work on “Die Alkestis des Euripides” (SB 1:19) as well on other literature (see chapter 5 below).

12. *My Life* 209–10; *Mein Leben* 1:221.

13. A picture of Wagner's Greek in his mature years can be gleaned from his Wahnfried library (he had to leave his Dresden library behind when he fled the city in 1849) which contained a range of Greek texts and some reference works. Apparently when he visited the Dannreuthers in London (1877) “in a playful way [he] tried to speak a little Greek” (Spencer, *Wagner Remembered*, 256). But although he did not have good Greek it was still of some use to him such that he could compare the translation of *Oedipus* with the original Greek (CD 18 November 1874).

14. See his *Open Letter to Friedrich Nietzsche* (PW 5:293; NWSEB 1:177): “while envying Mendelssohn his philologic fluency, I could but wonder at its not having prevented him from writing just his music for dramas of Sophocles, since, with all my ignorance, I still had more respect for the spirit of Antiquity than he here seemed to betray.” Wagner then goes on to castigate “teachers of Greek” who have little of the “Antique Spirit” within them (PW 5:293; NWSEB 1:177–78), naming in particular Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff (who had written a highly critical review of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and was the main target of this letter).

15. See the discussion of Euripides below.

16. This has been widely discussed. See, e.g., Schadewaldt, “Griechen,” 347–50; Lloyd-Jones, “Wagner,” 128–29.

Droysen's translation¹⁷ and it can be said that he made a breakthrough in regard to his understanding of Greek tragedy:

For the first time I now mastered Aeschylus with mature feeling and understanding. Droysen's eloquent commentaries [*Didaskalien*] in particular helped to bring the intoxicating vision of Attic tragedy so clearly before me that I could see the *Oresteia* with my mind's eye as if actually being performed, and its impact on me was indescribable. There was nothing to equal the exalted emotion evoked in me by *Agamemnon*; and to the close of *The Eumenides* I remained in a state of transport from which I have never really returned to become fully reconciled with modern literature. My ideas about the significance of drama, and especially of the theatre itself, were decisively moulded by these impressions.¹⁸

This interest in Greek tragedy continued throughout the rest of his life.¹⁹ In addition to Aeschylus he adored Sophocles (both counted as his "indispensables")²⁰ although he felt he did not match Aeschylus²¹ and he claims he did not care much for Euripides.²²

I now turn to consider his appropriation of Greek history, philosophy, and myth, epic, lyric, and tragedy in the *Ring* cycle.

Greek History

In chapter 2 I made the point that in the *Ring* Wagner was not so much *reflecting* German culture but was essentially *creating* Germany; one of the ways he was doing

17. In his Dresden library he had the 1832 edition. For other Greek tragedy he possessed Sophocles (2 vols, 1842) and Euripides (2 vols, 1841–45), both edited by J. J. C. Donner (Westernhagen, *Bibliothek*, 89, 104).

18. *My Life* 342–43; *Mein Leben* 1:356. On the *Didaskalien*, see below on "Tragedy and performance."

19. See especially CD 23 June 1880 where Cosima tells of her husband's reciting Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: "no stage performance could have a more sublime effect than this recital". See also CD 24 June (on *Agamemnon*; *Suppliants*) and 25 June 1880 (on *Choephoroi*; *Eumenides*). Her comments on *Choephoroi* are particularly interesting in relation to her husband's own art: "Speaking of the first scene in *Choephoroi* with its surging and its constantly returning flow, he says, 'I know something else like this: *Trist. and Isolde* in the 2nd act.'"

20. CD 4 June 1871. His Wahnfried library had the editions of Theolorus Bergk (Latin) and that of J. J. C. Donner

21. See the comparison he makes between *Electra* and *Choephoroi* (CD 1 November 1877).

22. Cosima tells us that "[t]he Euripidean Helen [. . .] does not much interest him—only the idea, not the execution" (CD 1 December 1878). Four years earlier she and her husband attempted *Iphigenia* but gave up and turned to Racine's version instead (CD 1 April 1874). They eventually finished Euripides on 3 April. Cosima comments: "even its moment of beauty, the raising of Iphigenia, does not touch us—all feeling in it is killed by speech and explanations. Oh, Shakespeare! . . ." On another occasion they read *Phoenissae* "with very little enjoyment" (CD 29 September 1877). On another occasion she herself thought *Bacchae* was "very distasteful" but she liked the scene of the parting of Achilles and Clytemnestra in *Iphigenia in Aulis* (CD 13 January 1872).

this was by modelling his vision of the future Germany on the ancient Greeks, especially the Dorians, and his source for this would be Karl Otfried Müller, whose three-volume (second edition) work on the history of Hellenic peoples and cities was in his Dresden Library,²³ together with Herodotus.²⁴ Müller was influenced by Herder's view that the physical and mental characteristics of a people are determined by their original environment and the view developed in the nineteenth century that the Dorians originated in Germany. The Dorian invasion, although rejected by many archaeologists today,²⁵ was much discussed in Wagner's day, and the link between the Germans and the Dorians became fundamental. Friedrich Schlegel distinguished "animal" non-inflected languages from "noble and spiritual" inflected ones, by which he meant primarily "Indisch," Greek, and German.²⁶ Herder also stressed that for a people to retain its character it had to preserve its linguistic and ethnic authenticity²⁷ and it can be no accident that Humboldt used blood metaphors in claiming that both the German and Greek languages were "pure" and "uncontaminated."²⁸ No doubt such views would appeal to Wagner²⁹ as would Müller's view of the "northern character" of the Doric dialect³⁰ and his "Protestant" portrayal of the Dorians.³¹

One of the significant aspects of Müller's work for Wagner is that Apollo was seen as the principal deity for the Dorians and it was in fact the transmission of the cult

23. Müller, *Geschichten*, 3 vols, 1844 (DB 96). The second and third volumes were devoted to the Dorians. I found no markings in the Dresden library copies and we only know of his reading Müller on the Dorians in 1869 (CD 21 March 1869).

24. Wagner possessed the German translation by Friedrich Lange (DB 62), an edition which divided the work into nine sections, each entitled with one of the nine muses. We only know of his reading Herodotus from as late as 1877; he provided Richard and Cosima with their evening reading (CD 27 August–6 October 1877). Herodotus discusses the Dorians in numerous places (e.g., I.56, 57, 139, 146, 171; II.178; III.56; V.68, 72, 76; VIII.73). Foster, *Greeks*, 271, believes that Wagner's knowledge of the battles of Marathon, Thermopylae, and Salamis from his school days (*My Life* 39; *Mein Leben* 1:46), suggests he knew Herodotus. On these battles see Lange, *Herodotus*, 2:113–36 (Marathon, 490 BC), 2:231–44 (Thermopylae, 480 BC), and 2:266–92 (Salamis, 480 BC).

25. Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 121, who points out that many ancient historians "are insistent that the literary tradition cannot be jettisoned so easily."

26. Schlegel, *Sprache und Weisheit* (1808), 27–86; *KFSA* 1.8:136–90; Book I, chapters 3–6). Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 8, writes that in the German imagination Greek and German were linked by the fact that "both used definite articles, a plethora of particles and prepositions, and were the languages of religious protest after the Reformation." For further discussion of Schlegel see chapter 5 below.

27. Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 8.

28. Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 8, appeals to Wittenburg, "Müller," 1031–34.

29. Herder's selected works in one large volume of almost 1,400 pages were in his Dresden library (DB 61). Herder's influence on the *Ring* will be further discussed in chapter 5.

30. Müller, *Doric Race*, 1:18; *Geschichten*, 2:16. The English edition was itself a revised edition of the first German edition of 1824. This was then used to produce the second German edition of 1844 which Wagner possessed. See Müller, *Geschichten*, 1:III–X.

31. Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 8, appealing to Wittenburg, writes that "the character of Müller's Dorians is uncannily Protestant," noting that Müller's father was a Protestant military chaplain in Silesia. See Müller, *Geschichten*, 2:413.

of Apollo that was used to trace the migration of the Dorians.³² As we have already discovered in the discussion of *Die Wibelungen*, there is an important link between Apollo and Siegfried as Sun-god who slays the Python.³³

The other key writer on the Greeks for Wagner in his Dresden years was Droysen. He will be discussed in more detail below in the discussion of Greek tragedy but for now I focus on historical and political issues. Droysen's German nationalism would no doubt please Wagner and particularly his view that Aeschylus in the *Oresteia* "composed [. . .] a ceremony of expiation (Sühnefeier) for the blood-guilt still present in the land, and at the same time a reconciliation between the savage parties (eine Versöhnung zugleich zwischen den wilden Partheien) which threatened to destroy the state, those who all ought to be of one mind in order to ward off the enemy at hand."³⁴ For Droysen the "savage parties" were the "democratic and oligarchic factions that violently opposed the other and threatened to tear Athens apart from within" and the "enemy at hand" were the Persians.³⁵ Hence Germany corresponded to Athens and Prussian rule was seen as "the key to solving Germany's disorder."³⁶ Droysen's reading of the trilogy appealed to Wagner who "must have sometimes imagined the *Ring* as the new *Oresteia* and himself as the new Aeschylus come to save Germany from internal strife and external threat."³⁷

Droysen's two-volume *History of Hellenism* (*Geschichte des Hellenismus*, 1836, 1843) was in Wagner's Dresden Library, a work that he later purchased again, this same edition being found in his Wahnfried library. We know he read this in his years in Tribschen and in Bayreuth (and praised it)³⁸ and his reading it in Dresden is evidenced by his frequent markings (around 150 in volume 1 and around 100 in volume 2). However, there is *no evidence* that Wagner possessed Droysen's *History of Alexander the Great* (*Geschichte Alexanders des Großen*, 1833) in his Dresden library although it is found in the Wahnfried library³⁹ and Cosima records her husband's pleasure in the work and he comments: "If I were locked up in prison, I should ask

32. Hall, *Ethnic identity*, 6; Müller, *Doric Race*, 1:227–384; *Geschichten*, 2:200–370.

33. See chapter 2 above. This will be further developed in the discussion of Siegfried (and Wotan) in volume 2.

34. Quoted in Ewans, *Aeschylus*, 31 (to which I have added some key German phrases from the original). This text is not in Wagner's 1832 edition but it is in the 1868 edition (Droysen, *Aischylos*, 564–65) which was in his Wahnfried library.

35. Foster, *Greeks*, 286.

36. Foster, *Greeks*, 286.

37. Foster, *Greeks*, 286.

38. CD 3 July 1869, 2 January 1879.

39. Note that the Alexander book did constitute volume one of a three-volume second edition of Droysen's history that appeared in 1877. To clarify once more, in Wagner's two-volume Dresden edition the first deals with the successors of Alexander (*Geschichte der Nachfolger Alexanders*) and then in volume 2 we have *Geschichte der Bildung des hellenistischen Staatensystemes* with an appendix "über die hellenistischen Städtegründungen."

only for Greek literature and things about Greece.”⁴⁰ But the *Annals* of 1847 suggest he did read it⁴¹ and he may have borrowed a copy either from the Royal Library or from friends. But as was noted in chapter 2, the *Annals* of 1846–67 were re-written and certain things were falsified. Presumably it is on the basis of the *Annals* that some secondary literature may give the impression Wagner had read the Alexander book when he was in Dresden.⁴² Hence a sentence such as “The name of Alexander signifies the end of one world epoch, and the beginning of a new one”⁴³ may not have been read by Wagner when he was in Dresden. Rather in his copy of Droysen’s *Geschichte des Hellenismus* he would only read of Alexander’s death.⁴⁴ Wagner must therefore have had another source for Alexander⁴⁵ and in his Dresden years this may not have been detailed. In *Die Wibelungen* Wagner considered Alexander an “offspring of Achilles.”⁴⁶ Many years later Wagner claimed to have sketched out a drama *Alexander*: “the first act was the murder of Clitus, the second the decision to withdraw from Asia, the third his death.”⁴⁷ However, we do not know whether this was sketched before he worked on the *Ring* libretto. Perhaps one can say that Wagner saw in his Siegfried “the Teutonic successor to Alexander”⁴⁸ but we have no firm evidence that Wagner had worked on his Alexander before completing the libretto at the end of 1852.⁴⁹ We do though have more evidence that Wagner had worked on his opera for Achilles⁵⁰ and that this probably influenced his portrayal of Siegfried.⁵¹ On the same day he told Cosima about his Alexander sketches he said he had once “sketched the third act of an Achilles,”⁵² though we do actually possess these sketches,⁵³ which can be dated as early as the turn

40. CD 6 March 1870.

41. *Brown Book* 94; *Braunes Buch* 111.

42. I find Westernhagen, *Biography*, 127, insufficiently precise here.

43. Quoted in Foster, *Greeks*, 287 (Droysen, *Geschichte des Hellenismus I* (1877), 3: “Der Name Alexander bezeichnet das Ende einer Weltepoche, den Anfang einer neuen”).

44. Droysen, *Geschichte des Hellenismus* (1836–43), 1:3–5.

45. As well as Wagner’s general knowledge one source would be Hegel, *History*, 31, 103 (*Geschichte*, 47–48, 133); although there is little detail on Alexander’s history he appears as “[a] World-historical individual” (*History*, 31; *Geschichte*, 49: “[e]in welthistorisches Individuum”).

46. *PW* 7:283; *GSD* 2:140.

47. CD 1 April 1878.

48. Foster, *Greeks*, 287.

49. Foster, *Greeks*, 287, seems to assume Alexander was written before the libretto was completed.

50. *WWV* 340 argue it was intended as an opera, although in 1865 he claimed his Achilles and Friedrich Barbarossa were intended as “reine dramatische Dichtungen” (*KB* 1:183).

51. Wagner’s first setting of anything to do with Achilles was in his reworking of Gluck’s *Iphigénie*, where Achilles is a tenor.

52. CD 1 April 1878.

53. *DTB* 268 (*WWV* 81).

of the year 1848–49⁵⁴ but most likely in the first half of 1849⁵⁵ and possibly as late as the writing of his Zurich essays.⁵⁶

Wagner continued with his interest on Greek (and Roman) history and later in life not only read Theodor Mommsen but also got to know him via Helmholtz.⁵⁷

Greek Philosophy

Wagner admired Plato and this appears to be intensified after his engagement with Schopenhauer, who in the very first words of his first publication wrote of “[t]he divine Plato” (“Platon, der göttliche”);⁵⁸ further, Wagner became increasingly interested in certain dialogues, especially *Symposium*.⁵⁹ He possessed Schleiermacher’s translation of Plato in Dresden and at some point re-purchased this same edition, which is found in the Wahnfried library. Lamm comments: “Schleiermacher’s translation of Plato’s dialogues, along with his accompanying ‘Introductions,’ was a momentous event in the philosophical, philological, and literary world.”⁶⁰ It is also worth adding that Schleiermacher was to prove to be highly influential in studies of Socrates and his view of the so-called “Socratic problem,” set forward in an 1818 article, was to influence scholarship for over a century.⁶¹

Wagner does not often mention his debt to Aristotle but his *Poetics* were important for the composer (see below on tragedy) and he features in *Opera and Drama* as a commentator on Greek drama.⁶² He also shared Aristotle’s organic view

54. This is when he changed to a Latin script and the avoidance of capital letters (the Achilles sketches were so written).

55. We know he was concerned with the figure of Achilles at this time. See *Brown Book* 96: “Ideas for an ‘Achilles’ in 3 Acts” (*Braunes Buch* 114). One should bear in mind though that these Annals were re-written. In his autobiography he says that on 5 May 1849 as he strolled back home “through the barriers” he “worked out a drama on the subject of Achilles which I had been musing for some time” (*My Life* 396; *Mein Leben* 1:410). However, this must have been Friday 4 May (Gregor-Dellin, *Life*, 172) since on 5 May he spent the night in the tower of the Kreuzkirche.

56. See the mentions of his Achilles in letters from 1850: *SB* 3:242 (24 February), 331 (26–27 June), 364 (27 July). Not also that Götting, *Ueber das Geschichtliche*, 28 (a work Wagner borrowed 10 February to 19 June 1849), comments that “Siegbert” (the Austrasier) was named by his contemporaries as the “second Achilles.”

57. *CD* 25 April 1875.

58. Schopenhauer, *Fourfold Root*, 1; *ASSW* 3:11.

59. This was one of his “indispensables” (*CD* 4 June 1871).

60. Lamm, “Plato,” 92. It was in fact Friedrich Schlegel who suggested to Schleiermacher in 1799 that they together translate Plato but he then dropped out, the project being solely in Schleiermacher’s hands from 1803. Five volumes appeared in 1804–9, the sixth then much later in the year of his death, 1828. Volume 7 (which would have included Timaeus, Critias, and Laws) never appeared. Wagner possessed the first five volumes in a second edition (1.1: 1817; 1.2: 1818; 2.1: 1818; 2.2: 1824; 2.3: 1826) and the sixth (3.1) in its first edition (1828).

61. Dorion, “Socratic Problem,” 2–6. Note that Wagner in his extant works never refers to Schleiermacher.

62. *PW* 2:105; 124, 132, 139 (*GSD* 3:111, 4:6, 13, 19), all related to the “rules” of Aristotle. In *Public*

of the world, a view he most likely appropriated via Hegel (and possibly Schelling)⁶³ or possibly through Weisse, his philosophy professor.⁶⁴ But he must have had first-hand knowledge of Aristotle, whose works, according to his first wife Minna, were in the Dresden library, but are missing from the collection we now have available in the Richard Wagner Museum.⁶⁵ The Wahnfried library contains a good selection of Aristotle's works.⁶⁶

Epic

Despite some of Wagner's reservations about "epic"⁶⁷ he had immense admiration for Homer and counted him among his "indispensables."⁶⁸ He considered him a great poet⁶⁹ and he possessed the translations of the classicist and poet Johann Heinrich Voss (1751–1826) in both his Dresden⁷⁰ and Wahnfried libraries,⁷¹ and despite some reservations it was a translation he admired.⁷²

A number of Homeric influences on the *Ring* have been discerned by Schade-waldt. In his second of three lectures given in Bayreuth (see below) he points to the similarity between the opening of *Rheingold* Scene 2 and *Iliad* 14.347–50⁷³ and the similarities between the quarrel between Wotan and Fricka in *Walküre* Act 2 and that between Zeus and Hera in books 4 and 14 of the *Iliad*.⁷⁴

Wagner's understanding of epic may help unlock some of the political aspects of the *Ring*. Works such as the *Iliad* or *Nibelungenlied* could be understood as summing

and *Popularity* he argues for the limitations of "Criticism" ("Kritik") but says Aristotle produced the best (PW 6:62; GSD 10:70).

63. See chapter 6 below on Hegel's teleology.

64. Wagner notes that "Weiß" had translated Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (*My Life* 54; *Mein Leben* 1:62).

65. Westernhagen, *Bibliothek*, 111. Minna simply gives the details Aristoteles, *Werke*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1836–40.

66. There are works such as the *Metaphysics*, *Natural History of Animals*, *Parts of Animals*, *Poetics*, *On the Soul and the World*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*.

67. See the discussion in the previous chapter in relation to the *Nibelungenlied*.

68. CD 4 June 1871.

69. Cosima's comment reveals much about her husband's views on poets (CD 18 January 1869): "R. pointed out to me that all the great poets—with the exception of Homer and Dante—were dramatists." Wagner discussed Homer as poet in his *On Poetry and Composition* (PW 6:137–41; GSD 10:142–46).

70. He possessed the works in one volume (DB 65, 1840), magnificently illustrated by Bonaventura Genelli (1798–1868) and an edition of the *Odyssey* (DB 64, 1843). According to Minna's list he also possessed his edition of the *Iliad* (1842). See Westernhagen, *Bibliothek*, 94, 112.

71. In Wahnfried he also had Greek and Latin editions.

72. CD 1 April 1878. Hegel in a draft of a letter to Voss of March 1805 went as far to write this of his Homer translation: "Luther made the Bible speak German, and you have done the same for Homer—the greatest gift that can be made to a people" (Butler, *Hegel: Letters*, 107).

73. Schade-waldt, "Griechen," 366.

74. Schade-waldt, "Griechen," 361.

up the nation's heritage and essence and, as Hegel observes, does this through situations of war.⁷⁵ It is striking that Hegel understood the *Iliad* as “the triumph of the West over the East”⁷⁶ whereby “the Greeks take the field against the Asiatics.”⁷⁷ Wagner actually had an ambivalent view of Troy, since in *Die Wibelungen* it is the origin of both the Franks and the Romans, considered good and bad respectively.⁷⁸ But a case can be made that he, like Hegel, understood epic as dealing with enemies both without and within.⁷⁹ As Foster puts it, “Wagner sought less to create a German epic than to create Germany through epic.”⁸⁰

Wagner certainly believed that Greece had to be cleansed of “Asiatic” influences.⁸¹ So in *Art and Revolution* he writes: “After it had overcome the raw religion of its Asiatic birth-place, built upon the nature-forces of the earth, and had set the *fair, strong manhood of freedom* upon the pinnacle of its religious convictions,—the Grecian spirit, at the flowering time of its art and polity, found its fullest expression in the god Apollo, the head and national deity of the Hellenic race.”⁸² Germany, like ancient Greece, also had enemies without (the French) and enemies within (the Jews), a view that Wagner further developed in *Meistersinger*. But in establishing the nation's heritage and identity, epic was not simply triumphalist. The Trojan war in the *Iliad* ends with many deaths (books 20–22) and the *Nibelungenlied*, seen as German epic in *Die Wibelungen*, ends with a veritable bloodbath. Wagner's *Ring* too has many casualties, although the number of survivors is significant, as we shall see. But despite the catastrophes at the end of epics, they are, as Hegel saw them, “the Bible of a people, and every great and important people has such absolutely earliest books which express for its own original spirit.”⁸³

Wagner, however, appeared to see limitations in “epic.” In *Opera and Drama* he argues that epic has a less immediate effect: whereas in epic the heroes' deeds are celebrated, in drama they are enacted.⁸⁴ He singles out Virgil for his *Aeneid*, “an epos written for dumb reading” (“ein für die Lektüre geschrieben[es] Epos”)⁸⁵ and in *Art-*

75. Foster, *Greeks*, 37 (Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2:1059).

76. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2:1062.

77. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2:1061.

78. *PW* 7:280; *GSD* 2:137.

79. Droysen was a student of Hegel and both employed their knowledge of the Greeks to bolster their German nationalism.

80. Foster, *Greeks*, 64.

81. Such “Asiatic” influences would appear to refer to the nature-worshipping “Ur-Hellene” (Pelagians). See Warner, “Artwork,” 58; *PW* 1:157; *GSD* 3:124–25, discussed below.

82. *PW* 1:32; *GSD* 3:9–10.

83. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2:1045.

84. *PW* 2:60; *GSD* 3:268.

85. *PW* 2:119; *GSD* 4:1. He refers to Lessing, *Laokoon*, who compares the sculpture of Laokoon with *Aeneid* 199–224 (*GELW* 6:43; see also Brown, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, 92–95). Foster, *Greeks*, 53, adds that in Wagner's 1879 essay *Poetry and Composition* he questions the *ars poetica* of the Latins,

work of the Future writes an “aesthetic obituary for Greek epic”;⁸⁶ it was to be replaced by tragedy: “*Thespis* had already slid his car to Athens, had set it up beside the palace walls, dressed out his *stage* and, stepping from the chorus of the Folk, had *trodden* its planks; *no longer did he shadow forth* the deeds of heroes, as in the Epos, but *in these heroes’ guise enacted them*.”⁸⁷ So the epic was seen as “literary” for the elite whereas drama was for the “senses” and for the Volk.

In the light of this it is interesting to see how Wagner felt dissatisfied with his libretto for *Siegfried’s Tod*. Writing to Uhlig (12 November 1851) he explains how he “sketched out the entire myth in its imposing overall context.” The libretto for *Siegfried’s Tod* was “an attempt [. . .] to present a crucial turning point in the myth by *hinting* at the overall context.” However, on turning to the “musical execution” he writes: “I felt how incomplete was the product I had planned: all that remained of the vast overall context—which alone can give the characters their enormous, striking significance—was epic narration (*epische erzählung*) and a retelling of events on a purely conceptual context.”⁸⁸ With the prefacing of *Der junge Siegfried* he felt “all I had done was to increase the need for a clearer presentation *to the senses* of the whole of the overall context.”⁸⁹

Wagner’s way forward was to retain the important content of the *Ring*’s narratives but convert them into dramatic form. In a letter to Liszt of 20 November 1851 he writes: “I must therefore communicate my entire myth, in its deepest and widest significance, with total artistic clarity [. . .] every unbiased human feeling must be able to grasp *the whole* through its organs of artistic perception, because only then can it properly absorb the *least* detail.”⁹⁰ Wagner tells Liszt he intended to discard “all the narration-like passages which are now so extensive” or compress them “into a number of much more concise moments.”⁹¹ We are then left with the problem that much narration is still left in the final libretto.

Three points can be made in response to this supposed problem. The first is that “drama,” and specifically “tragedy” can contain “narration.” This is found in its most straightforward form in Euripides’ prologues or a report from a messenger,⁹² and

mentioning epics written since the middle ages: Dante, Ariosto, Cervantes and Scott (*PW* 6:139; *GSD* 10:143). Note however that the composer had great regard for Dante, Cervantes and Scott.

86. Foster, *Greeks*, 54.

87. *PW* 1:135; *GSD* 3:104. *Thespis* was believed in antiquity to be the inventor of tragedy (Seaford, “*Thespis*,” 1510). According to Horace, he took his plays around on a wagon (to which Wagner is alluding). Hieronymus Müller’s introduction to *Aristophanes*, 1:1–97, a work in Wagner’s Dresden library, covers Greek drama generally and includes a discussion of *Thespis*.

88. *SL* 232; *SB* 4:174.

89. *SL* 232–33; *SB* 4:174.

90. *SL* 237; *SB* 4:186.

91. *SL* 238; *SB* 4:187–88.

92. E.g., in *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (the work of Euripides which Wagner knew best because of his work on the Gluck opera) we have the “prologue” so to speak (ll. 49–105) and the key action of Iphigeneia’s

Schadewaldt compared such narration (“in charakteristisch euripideischer Form”) to the “prologue” of the *Holländer*, the Rome-narration in Act III of *Tannhäuser*, and the grail narrative in Act III of *Lohengrin*.⁹³ One can also make a case that in the *Ring* Wagner employs epic narration rather as Aeschylus does,⁹⁴ a good example being the Norns’ narration in the Prologue in *Götterdämmerung* (to which I will shortly return), which could be said to bear a certain similarity to the long opening chorus of *Agamemnon*.⁹⁵

Second, although Wagner was critical of certain epic poets (see above on Virgil, etc.), he had great admiration for Homer. Foster says that whereas in his letter to Liszt he bemoans his “halb epische Darstellung” (“half-epic mode of presentation”) what he saw in Homer and what he wanted to produce in the *Ring* was, as Foster puts it, a “voll epische Darstellung.”⁹⁶ Later, in 1879, Wagner wrote that Homer was “seer and poet in one; wherefore also they represented him as blind, like Tiresias. [...] This poet, as ‘seer,’ saw not the actual (*das Wirkliche*), but the true (*das Wahrhaftige*), sublime above all actuality; and the fact of his being able to relate it so faithfully to hearkening men that to them it seemed as clear and tangible as anything their hands had ever seized—this turned the Seer to a Poet.”⁹⁷ Foster comments that “[t]he truth [...] when expressed by a seer of Homer’s stature, need not be expressed in a way that is actually tangible to the senses.” And so for Wagner, despite narrative forms, “Homer’s epics were as true and immediately graspable by the senses as drama was. They were, to borrow [...] the terminology of his letter to Liszt, full-fledged epic dramas.”⁹⁸ Foster argues that the clue to how Wagner made his epic more dramatic is found again in his essay *On Poetry and Composition*. After Homer “we have to seek the genuine epic fount in tales and sagas of the Folk alone, where we find it still entirely undisturbed by art.”⁹⁹ As Foster points out Wagner is probably referring not only to the Greek myths Homer employed but also the medieval sources Wagner was using for the *Ring*. Like Homer, Wagner felt he was both poet and priest, i.e., a seer.¹⁰⁰

being rescued and taken up is narrated by the messenger (ll. 1540–1612).

93. Schadewaldt, “Griechen,” 387. The grail narrative could also be likened to the dramatic use of narration when Oedipus reveals his history in *Oedipus Tyrannus* (ll. 771–833).

94. Cf. Schadewaldt, “Griechen,” 387–88.

95. After the exit of the Watchman, the chorus runs from l. 40 until l. 257 after which Clytemnestra enters (Lloyd-Jones, *Oresteia*, 20, 30, argues she does not appear at l. 83 but at l. 258).

96. Foster, *Greeks*, 60.

97. *PW* 6:138; *GSD* 10:142. On the tradition that Homer was blind, see Graziosi, *Inventing Homer*, 125–63. One reason he was so portrayed was because “blindness was regularly associated with prophecy and poverty” and “[a] blind man was thought to be particularly close to the gods, while at the same time he remained completely dependent on the goodwill of others for his daily sustenance” (133). Homer is made a poet and seer in one in that his *Odyssey* features Demodocus, the blind bard of *Odyssey* 8, and the figure Wagner mentions, the blind seer Teiresias of *Odyssey* 10 and 11.

98. Foster, *Greeks*, 61.

99. *PW* 6:139; *GSD* 10:143.

100. Foster, *Greeks*, 62.

The third point to make in relation to this problem of narratives in the *Ring* (although this does not necessarily solve the “problem”) is that in one way or another they function essentially as songs, seen for example in the Norns’ “singing” in the Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*,¹⁰¹ Siegfried’s “song” in *Götterdämmerung* Act III,¹⁰² and perhaps even in Wotan’s monologue in *Walküre* Act II.¹⁰³ This then brings us to the question of “lyric.”

Lyric

Wagner read of the Dorian lyric from Müller, who writes that “while all poetry which was necessarily attended with music was called lyric, that which was sung to accompany dances, frequently of large choruses, has been called the Doric lyric poetry.”¹⁰⁴ Müller makes the case that lyric did not develop out of epic poetry.¹⁰⁵

In *Artwork of the Future* Wagner discusses the emergence of the “purely human” (“rein menschliche”) artwork in Greek history and it is here that lyric played an important role. Building upon Müller’s work on the Dorian invasion he argues that the “Ur-hellene” (Pelasgians) were Asiatic peoples who worshipped nature deities. The “Ur-Hellene” bowed himself before “gods’-oak”¹⁰⁶ at Dodona, waiting for the oracle. But “the *Orpheist*” (identified with “the art-glad *Lyrist*”) “beneath the shady thatch of leaves, and circled by the verdant pillars of the [*gods’-grove* . . .] raised his voice.”¹⁰⁷ The voice was not to support this nature religion but rather to lead the worshipper from “gods’-grove” to “gods’-temple,” which appears to be identified with the theatre of Greek tragedy (having “gods’-altar” as its central point).¹⁰⁸ Hence, the lyricist enables the transition from nature to the “purely human” artwork, not that nature is in any sense abolished but that it is “conquered” such that the human being is placed on the pinnacle of nature.¹⁰⁹

101. As well as refrains on “spinning” and “singing” (*WagRS* 280–82) there are the refrains “do you know what will become of him/it?” (*WagRS* 281–83) which he adopted from *Völuspá* 27, 28, 33, 34, 38, 40, 49, 59, 60 (*Dronke, Edda II*, 14–24).

102. *WagRS* 340: “I’ll sing you tales / about my boyhood days.”

103. See Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 201–2, who argues that it is a narrative song, the text itself being “strophic” and “musical” (175). Note, however, that Wotan “speaks” to Brünnhilde (*WagRS* 148–49).

104. Müller, *Doric Race*, 2:380–81; *Geschichten*, 3:362, who refers to Schlegel, *Geschichte der Poësie der Griechen und Römer*.

105. Müller, *Doric Race*, 2:385; *Geschichten*, 3:367–68.

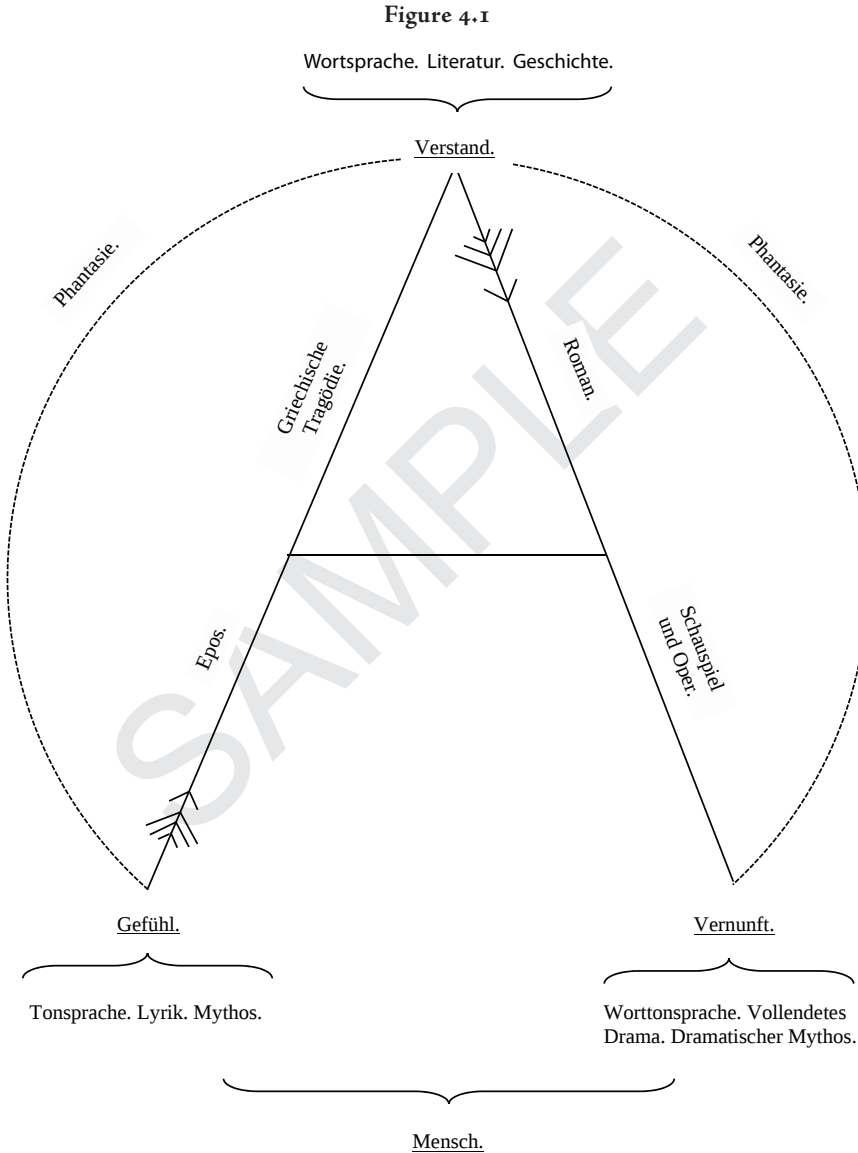
106. Cf. Warner, “Artwork,” 58. *PW* 1:157, fails to represent the German plural “Göttereiche” (and “Götterhain”) (*GSD* 3:124–25) with “God’s-oak” (and “God’s-grove”).

107. *PW* 1:157; *GSD* 3:124–25.

108. *PW* 1:157–58; *GSD* 3:124–25. A little later (*PW* 1:158; *GSD* 3:125) he identifies “the Temples of the Gods” (“*die Tempel der Götter*”) with “the *Tragic theatres* of the Folk” (“*die Tragödientheater des Volkes*”). This section of *Artwork* is primarily concerned with architecture.

109. *PW* 1:157; *GSD* 3:124. Hence, the “purely human” contrasts not with the “divine” but with “nature.”

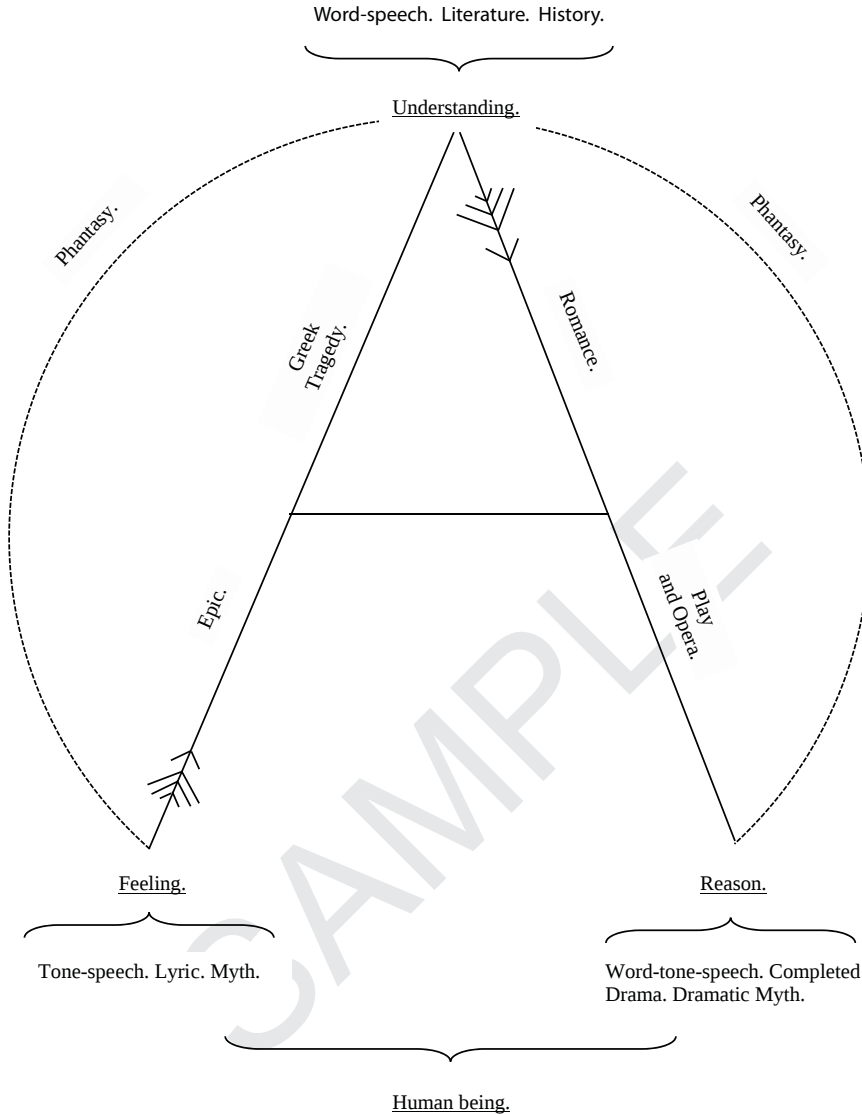
Wagner returned to the matter of lyric in *Opera and Drama*. In section 2.6 he writes that “the *Lyric* is the beginning and end of Poetry.” In parallel with lyric is “tone-speech” (“Tonsprache”), the beginning and end of “word-speech” (“Wortsprache”), and “myth” as the beginning and end of “history” (“Geschichte”). In each case the mediator is “the *Phantasy*”¹¹⁰ and this whole process is illustrated with a diagram he drew for Uhlig (see figures 4.1 and 4.2).¹¹¹



110. *PW* 2:224; *GSD* 4:91.

111. *SB* 3:478 (and plate 7). The letter is undated but has been calculated as 12 December 1850 (*SB* 3:479 n. 4). A schematized version of diagram is also given in *SSD* 16:95 (see *WDS* 181) and *PW* 2:2 but there are errors in the directions of two of the arrows and with some minor misrepresentations.

Figure 4.2



For now I consider the first part (left hand part of the diagram). Here we have an “evolution” from “tone-speech (Tonsprache)/lyric/myth” to “word-speech/literature/history” that involves a journey through “epic” and then “Greek tragedy,” hence taking us from “feeling” (“Gefühl”) to “understanding” (“Verstand”). “The march of this evolution ([d]er Gang dieser Entwicklung) is such, however, that it is no retrogression (Rückkehr), but a progress to the winning of the highest human faculty; and it is travelled, not merely by Mankind in general, but substantially by every social individual.”¹¹² This movement from “feeling” to “understanding” is then taken up a little later where

112. *PW* 2:224; *GSD* 4:91.

he discusses the transition from Ur-melody to “Absolute Word-speech.”¹¹³ In “the oldest Lyric [...] the words and verse proceeded from the tones and melody.”¹¹⁴ “In the evolution of the human race, the more the instinctive faculty of Feeling (“das unwillkürliche Gefühlsvermögen”) condensed itself to the arbitrary faculty of Understanding” (“zum willkürlichen Verstandesvermögen”); and the more, in consequence, the content of the Lyric departed from an Emotional-content (Gefühlsinhalt) to become an Intellectual-content (Verstandesinhalte).¹¹⁵ Hence there was a divorce of word and melody (which Wagner saw as his mission to reunite).

The so exuberant Form of Greek speaking-Lyric, such as it has come down to us, and specifically the choruses of the Tragicists, we can never explain as necessarily conditioned by the *content* of these poems. The mostly didactic and philosophic content of these chants stands generally in so vivid a contrast with its sensuous expression, in the profusely changing Rhythmik of the verses, that we can only conceive this manifold investiture, not as having emanated from the Content of the poetic-aim, but as conditioned by the melody and obediently conforming to its immutable demands.¹¹⁶

This is especially interesting in view of the fact that the orchestra took over the role of the chorus for Wagner.

The key place lyric plays in Wagner’s scheme is that it alloys with epic to create tragedy (see the left hand part of the diagram), and it to this that I now turn.

Greek Tragedy

Of the categories of Greek literature tragedy is by far the most important for understanding the *Ring*. As we saw in chapter 3, Wagner read Grimm’s *Deutsche Mythologie* in 1843 and one question to address is why it was not until 1848 that he began to work on the *Ring*. One view is that it was his reading of Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* and of the Greeks, especially tragedy, in 1847 that catapulted him into working on the *Ring*. There may be some truth in this and it could be that this motivated him to engage in his “Old German Studies” and “Mone’s researches,”¹¹⁷ hence renewing his interests of 1843. Therefore, Wagner may well be appropriating his Germanic and Norse sources through the lens of the Greeks, and in particular how Hegel understood the Greeks. His main source for Greek tragedy was Droysen (whom we have already encountered in relation to Greek history) and it is significant that he had been a student of Hegel in Berlin. Wagner’s understanding of tragedy sometimes corresponds to Hegel’s and it is

113. *PW* 2:281; *GSD* 4:143.

114. *PW* 2:281; *GSD* 4:143.

115. *PW* 2:281–82; *GSD* 4:143.

116. *PW* 2:282–83; *GSD* 4:144.

117. *Brown Book* 95; *Braunes Buch* 113.

striking that Hegel's favorites were also Wagner's: *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, and *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles.¹¹⁸ However, there are also significant differences between Wagner and Hegel, the most important being in relation to "conflict and collision," to which I return shortly.

Scholarly discussion concerning Wagner and Greek tragedy

That Wagner was fascinated with Greek tragedy is beyond doubt. But even though Wagner himself reflected on Greek tragedy in his theoretical writings, relating it to his own artistic project,¹¹⁹ it is not always entirely clear how Greek tragedy influenced his art-works and the question is disputed to this day.

There were already discussions of the relationship of Wagner's art-works to Greek tragedy during his own lifetime, the writings of Nietzsche being the most significant. Then with a sense of "distance" to Wagner's operas, a series of works appeared after the composer's death that addressed more systematically the issue of Wagner and Greek tragedy.¹²⁰ But after the Second World War it was the three significant lectures given by Schadewaldt at the Bayreuth Festival (1962–65) that came to define the debate.¹²¹ Following Schadewaldt there appeared in addition to studies in German a number in English such as that of the Greek classical scholar Lloyd-Jones (1982),¹²² in many ways a response to Schadewaldt and, in the same year, the substantial study of Ewans.¹²³

Tragedy and performance

The *Didaskalien* of Droysen's Aeschylus edition was fundamental for how Wagner developed his view of his theatre and performances.¹²⁴ In his essay *Art and Revo-*

118. Going forward to Shakespearean tragedy, one can also note that Hegel's view of Macbeth and the way tragedy functioned fits very well with Wagner's approach.

119. The most significant writings are *Art and Revolution* (Summer 1849), *The Art-work of the Future* (Autumn 1849), and *Opera and Drama* (1851),

120. The most significant studies before the Second World War were those by Petsch, "Tragödie" (1907); Braschowanoff, *Wagner und die Antike* (1910) (but this focusses on Homer, Plato, and Aristotle, rather the tragedians themselves); Wilson, *Greek Tragedy* (1919); Drews, *Ideengehalt*, (1931). Sometimes Strobel, *Skizzen* (1930), has been wrongly cited as dealing with Wagner and the Greeks (e.g., Müller, "Wagner and Antiquity," 227). However, there is virtually nothing there on Wagner and the Greeks. I suspect a false inference has been drawn from Schadewaldt, "Griechen" (see below), who uses Strobel's work, but only in the sense that Strobel traces the evolution of the *Ring* (and its relation to *Siegfried's Tod*, etc.) in some detail.

121. They were published in 1970 and dedicated to the memory of Wieland Wagner. Schadewaldt's research actually influenced Wieland's productions of the *Ring* in Bayreuth during the years of those lectures. See, for example, the costumes worn by Hans Hotter (Wotan) and Martha Mödl (Brünnhilde) which suggest "Greek sculptures rather than Nordic gods" (Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 236).

122. Lloyd-Jones, "Wagner."

123. Ewans, *Aeschylus*.

124. Foster, *Greeks*, 350 n. 3, "can find no evidence" Wagner read this, although he thinks it a

lution Wagner found it highly significant that in Greek tragedy all elements of art come together and that performances should take place at a particular festival (that of Dionysus in Athens).¹²⁵ This religious aspect of Wagner's understanding was most likely informed by Droysen's understanding of the relation of Aeschylean tragedy to religion. It is also striking that Droysen emphasizes the joy involved in the religion of Greek tragedy (perhaps suggesting a lack of such joy in his Lutheran services).¹²⁶ It is also probable that Wagner's idea of the "total work of art" (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) owes something to Droysen's *Didaskalien*, although he could also just be thinking generally of the three essential elements in tragedy: dance, tone, and poetry.¹²⁷ Then Droysen's description of the layout of the theatre influenced Wagner, such as the arrangement of the stage and proscenium¹²⁸ and the layout of the auditorium.¹²⁹

But Wagner was to make certain changes in his appropriation of tragedy, one of the most interesting being his orchestra taking on the role of the "chorus." In a performance of the *Oresteia* the parts were divided between three male actors and their dialogue would be punctuated by the chorus (of twelve members in Aeschylus' time and later increased to fifteen) who might "narrate past events relevant to the present situation, try to interpret that situation, or speculate about the future."¹³⁰ An example Wagner gave of the orchestra acting like such a chorus is Siegfried's Funeral March. Cosima records: "I have composed a Greek chorus," R. exclaims to me in the morning, 'but a chorus which will be sung, so to speak, by the orchestra; after Siegfried's death, while the scene is being changed, the Siegmund theme will be played, as if the chorus were saying: 'This was his father'; then the sword motive; and finally his own theme."¹³¹ Such a "chorus" could be compared to the "stasimon" of Attic tragedy,¹³² a choral ode sung by a group, accompanied by music and dancing, and "usually made

reasonable assumption. But since it is part of Droysen's edition of Aeschylus, which we know he read, it seems highly likely he did read it.

125. See, for example, *PW* 1:47–48; *GSD* 3:23–24.

126. Droysen, *Werke*, 1:179: "Damals war die Andacht Freude und der Gottesdienst Genuß, damals die Kunst das Sakrament, in der die Gottheit die Gestalt ihrer Menschwerdung fand."

127. See *Artwork of the Future* (*PW* 1:95; *GSD* 3:67).

128. Droysen, *Werke*, 1:184: "Was von der Bühne vor diesem Vorhange liegt, ist das Proscenium, ein Vorbau, der in gleichen Höhe mit den untersten Sitzreihe gegenüber."

129. Droysen, *Werke*, 1:186: "in einem ringsaufsteigenden Halbkreise ordnet sich die Menge der Schauenden am natürlichsten."

130. Lloyd-Jones, *Oresteia*, v. The chorus in Greek tragedy fascinated Wagner and he felt "one could write a whole book about it" (*CD* 27 November 1879). Hieronymus Müller's introduction to *The Clouds* (*Die Wolken*) includes a discussion as to why the clouds function as the chorus (*Aristophanes*, 1:211), part of which Wagner underlines.

131. *CD* 29 September 1871. See also *CD* 16 January 1871: "The significance of the orchestra, its position as the ancient chorus, its huge advantage over the latter, which talks about the action in words, whereas the orchestra conveys to us the soul of this action—all this he explains to us in detail."

132. Borchmeyer, *Theatre*, 167. On the stasimon, see Stoeßl, "Stasimon," 342–43; Aristotle, *Poetics* 1452b 16 (Halliwell, *Aristotle XXIII*, 68–69).

up of one or more pairs of stanzas which have the same metrical form" known as the strophe and antistrophe ("turn" and "counterturn").¹³³

Now in Greek tragedy the chorus and the dialogue could not operate simultaneously, but if the orchestra takes on the role of the chorus then a significant transformation is possible, as he explained in his *Prologue to a Reading of Götterdämmerung* (1873): "whilst Antique Tragedy had to confine its dramatic dialogue to separate sections strewn between the choruses delivered in the Orchestra—those chants in which Music gave to the drama its higher meaning—in the Modern Orchestra, the greatest artistic achievement of our age, this archetypal element goes hand in hand with the action itself, unsevered from the dialogue, and in a profounder sense may be said to embrace all the action's motives in its mother-womb."¹³⁴ In fact, he said something similar twenty years earlier in *Opera and Drama*:

The *orchestra* thus plays an uninterrupted and, from every point of view, a leading and elucidatory role in the overall impression that the performer conveys both to the ear and to the eye; it is the teeming womb of music from which the unifying bond of expression grows.—*The chorus of Greek tragedy* has bequeathed to the *modern* orchestra the significance that is felt as being necessary to the drama, for only in the orchestra can it be developed, free from all constraint, and achieve so immeasurable varied an expression.¹³⁵

Replacing the chorus with the orchestra also had visual as well as aural consequences: in Bayreuth the distance between audience and performers, which is partly introduced by having the orchestra, is fundamental, but in the Greek theatre the distance is virtually nil since it had no curtain, no double proscenium, and no "mystic gulf" ("mystischer Abgrund") from which the music sounds "rising from the holy womb of Gaia beneath the Pythia's tripod."¹³⁶ Further, this distancing of the audience from the performers has the effect of producing a sense of illusion that went against what the Greek theatre was attempting.¹³⁷

Before leaving the issue of tragedy and performance, three further differences should be mentioned. First, the Greeks had three tragic plays followed by a satyr play¹³⁸ all performed on a single day¹³⁹ whereas Wagner's "Bühnenfestspiel" has four

133. Goldhill, "Language," 128. This pattern of strophe and antistrophe could possibly be discerned in Siegfried's Funeral March. See *Götterdämmerung* III.931–34/938–42 (Volsung motif) and 959–63/965–68 (Siegfried motif) where we have two sets of musical phrases which "answer" each other. However, it would be unwise to press such an argument.

134. *PW* 5:306; *GSD* 9:309.

135. Quoted in Müller, "Wagner and Antiquity," 230 (*GSD* 4:190–91; cf. *PW* 2:335–36).

136. *PW* 5:335; *GSD* 9:338.

137. Droysen, *Werke*, 1:181: "Die alte Bühne beabsichtigt nicht theatralische Täuschung, sie sucht nicht einen Schein von Wirklichkeit und äußere Wahrheit, die nur zu leicht unnatürlich, störend, selbst lächerlich wird."

138. Easterling, "Dionysus," 38.

139. Droysen, *Werke*, 1:188–89, writes that the performance "wenigstens bei Aischylos bis nach

“plays” performed over “three days and a preliminary evening.” Secondly, Wagner has no satyr play although cases have been made that *Rheingold* should be so understood. The latest and most complete argument for this has been put forward by Sanson, who finds similarities between *Rheingold* and Droysen’s reconstruction of *Proteus*,¹⁴⁰ the Satyr play for the *Oresteia*. Despite the fact that parallels can be found, *Rheingold* seems so removed from the genre of Satyr play, being “a bracingly austere tale about crime and deception that unfolds principally with the world of the gods,”¹⁴¹ that I find this extremely unlikely.¹⁴² The third difference is that whereas Wagner hardly saw his art-works as “entertainment”, in Greek tragedy “[e]ntertainment was part of its function and an important part.”¹⁴³

Themes in Wagner’s *Ring* from Greek tragedy

Although “any neat abstract definition [of tragedy] would mean nothing,” nevertheless one knows well enough what “tragic drama” is.¹⁴⁴ In Wagner’s *Ring* a number of Greek tragic themes can be discerned and I give two examples.

First, tragedy has a distinct view of conflict: “The first and most obvious quality of tragic conflict is its extremity: it does not ordinarily admit of compromise or mediation,”¹⁴⁵ one reason for this being the sense of a “hidden or malevolent God, blind fate, the solicitations of hell, or the brute fury of our animal blood.”¹⁴⁶ Where reconciliation does occur it generally comes through divine intervention or it comes too late when the catastrophe has already occurred. This sense of conflict is found in most of the operas in the Wagnerian canon.¹⁴⁷ The conflict caused by the love between

Sonnenuntergang gespielt wurde.”

140. Droysen, *Des Aischylos Werke*, 1:153–58.

141. Deathridge, *Ring*, xxii.

142. There is also the problem that it has been almost universally accepted that the Satyr play came last, a view assumed by Droysen and presumably by Wagner. Although Sansone may be right that “the surviving evidence no more guarantees that the satyr-play was last in the program than that it was first” (“Satyr Play,” 7), the problem remains that Wagner would assume a final Satyr play. Sansone, “Satyr-Play,” 6, actually finds parallels to *Proteus* not only in *Rheingold* but also in the closing scene of *Götterdämmerung*: “Brünnhilde is reunited with her (dead) husband Siegfried, whom she had wrongly thought to have betrayed her, just as Menelaus is reunited with the living Helen, whom he had mistakenly thought to have been unfaithful to him.” This seems somewhat unconvincing given the “tragic” character of *Götterdämmerung*.

143. Lloyd-Jones, “Wagner,” 137–38.

144. Steiner, *Tragedy*, 9.

145. Burian, “Myth,” 181. He points out that conflict has been central to study of tragedy only since Hegel’s *Aesthetics*.

146. Steiner, *Tragedy*, 9.

147. Consider these examples outside the *Ring*. 1: As the curtain rises in *Lohengrin*, we have an irresolvable conflict between Elsa and Telramund. Even though Lohengrin arrives as her supposed “redeemer,” Elsa suffers a disastrous end. Wagner likened Elsa to Semele, who perished because she wanted Zeus to visit her as he visited Hera (*PW* 1:334; *GSD* 4:289). Aeschylus wrote a lost play about

Siegmund and Sieglinde, the Volsung twins who are fated to meet and fall in love, cannot be resolved and results in their death. Siegfried is fated to betray Brünnhilde and again reconciliation comes too late.¹⁴⁸

One area where there is disagreement about the nature of this conflict and collision regards the moral standing of the conflicted parties. It was noted above that both Wagner and Hegel had a love for Sophocles' *Antigone*; but their interpretations were somewhat different. On Hegel's view, both Antigone and Creon had a principle they should hold to and the fact that neither was prepared to compromise meant that the drama was to end tragically for both parties. As Houlgate argues, "[t]he essence of original tragedy for Hegel [. . .] resides in a real contradiction."¹⁴⁹ So Antigone "lives under the political authority of Creon; she is herself the daughter of a King and the fiancée of Haemon, so that she ought to pay obedience to the royal command. But Creon too, as father and husband, should have respected the sacred tie of blood and not ordered anything against its pious observance."¹⁵⁰ Houlgate believes Hegel is right in showing that "contrary to A. W. Schlegel, *Antigone* presents a clash not between a tyrant and a heroine of 'the purest femininity,' but between two equally one-sided and blinkered tragic figures."¹⁵¹ Wagner is clearly on the side of Schlegel and adds his own views about the fall of the state! So Antigone is most certainly the one in the right and Creon the one in the wrong. Whereas Creon was the "State personified"¹⁵² in *Antigone* we see "the fullest flower of pure Human-love."¹⁵³ But Creon is transformed at the end in that "at the sight of the dead body of the son who through Love perforce had cursed his father, the ruler became again a father" and "wounded deep within, the State fell crashing to the ground, to become in death a Human Being."¹⁵⁴ This raises the question whether there are any "villains" in the *Ring*. The clearest example is Hagen, but it is perhaps significant that his character

Semele, and Wagner would know the story from Droysen, *Aischylos*, 2:228–29. 2: It seems that Amfortas' sin was unavoidable and he is powerless to repent and reconciliation can only come through the divine intervention of the holy spear, which bleeds with the blood of Christ. 3: The love triangle of *Tristan* cannot be resolved and reconciliation does come but too late, as King Marke exclaims, "Todt denn Alles! Alles todt?" (GSD 7:78–79)

148. WagRS 347–48.

149. Houlgate, "Tragedy," 150.

150. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2:1217; *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst* (1823), 95.

151. Houlgate, "Tragedy," 154, 172 n. 31, referring to Schlegel, *Über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*, 1:177, 186–87. Houlgate, "Tragedy," 154–55, also points out that a harmonization could have been achieved "by burying Polyneices far away from the city" but "both Antigone and Creon remain blind to—or refuse to countenance—this possibility." Houlgate refers to Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, 55, who could have some sympathy with such a position. But see also Bungay, *Beauty and Truth*, 168, who argues that Hegel's interpretation "makes better sense as a reading of the mythological material used rather than of [Sophocles'] play itself."

152. PW 2:190; GSD 4:63.

153. PW 2:189; GSD 4:63.

154. PW 2:190; GSD 4:63.

and form is largely drawn from the “epic” of the *Nibelungenlied*. Perhaps the most intriguing figure to consider regarding “conflict” is Fricka. Hegel’s analysis would be that she has perfectly valid reasons for the position she takes regarding Siegmund and Hunding. Wagner also presents the complexity of the conflict between Fricka and Wotan and even makes her win the argument in *Walküre* Act II Scene 1. However, his portrayal is such that virtually every spectator comes to sympathize with Siegmund and Wotan and is antipathetic to Hunding and Fricka.

A second tragic theme in the *Ring* is tragic guilt and non-guilt. Schadowaldt gives the example of Oedipus, whom he considers is subjectively fully guiltless (“subjektiv völlig unschuldig”) yet objectively he has murdered his father and married his mother.¹⁵⁵ One could doubt whether he is fully guiltless since, for example, he did kill someone in a fit of rage, although not realizing that the victim was his own father. But his character is portrayed positively,¹⁵⁶ and certainly more positively than Siegfried. But it could be said that in both cases there is “tragic guilt and non-guilt.” At the end of *Götterdämmerung* Brünnhilde stresses the purity of Siegfried who betrayed her: “der Reinste war er, der mich verrieth!” (“the purest of men it was / who betrayed me!”).¹⁵⁷ Siegfried is destroyed by powers beyond his control; yet he has his personal failings! Hence Aristotle may well be onto something when he argues that the protagonist “falls into adversity not through evil (kakia) and depravity (mochthēria), but through some kind of error (hamartia).”¹⁵⁸ Such a pattern is also found in Shakespeare’s protagonists who fall through an “error” (Hamlet, Lear, Othello) in the way they respond to external circumstances although, unlike Oedipus and Siegfried, they are not destroyed primarily by powers beyond their control.

Religion and myth of Greek tragedy in the *Ring*

Lloyd-Jones argued that “[a]n understanding of the nature of Greek religion is the main requirement for an understanding of Greek tragedy”¹⁵⁹ and we know that Wagner took a keen interest in the religion of Greek tragedy. He felt that Aeschylus’ choruses are “religion.”¹⁶⁰ Further, he noted the link between holiness and nature, seeing this particularly in what he calls the “eagles’ chorus” in *Agamemnon*.¹⁶¹ He also speaks

155. Schadowaldt, “Griechen,” 402.

156. See the discussion in Finglass, *Oedipus*, 70–73, who argues that regarding the killing of Laius, Oedipus would have been acquitted by an Athenian court “on the grounds of self-defence when his life was in danger.”

157. *WagRS* 348.

158. *Poetics* 1453a9–10 (Halliwell, *Aristotle XXIII*, 70–71).

159. Lloyd-Jones, *Oresteia*, ii.

160. *CD* 24 November 1879.

161. *CD* 11 October 1879; 14 November 1879. This “eagles’ chorus” (*Agamemnon* 104–59; Sommerstein, *Aeschylus II*, 15–19) comprises three stanzas within the long opening chorus, written in dactylic meters, interspersed with iambic passages (Lloyd-Jones, *Oresteia*, 21).

of “the sanctity and divinity of the curse-laden individual who is being punished on behalf of a whole generation. Oedipus is quite godlike in his harshness against Poly-
nices, it could be Zeus himself speaking, which is why, when he lays aside his last mortal frailty, he is at once summoned to the gods. That appears to us harsh, for we do not share the religious feelings of the Greeks.”¹⁶²

Since Wagner took such an interest in the religious outlook of Greek tragedy, it comes as no surprise that this outlook is found in the stage works. But Wagner uses the religion of Greek tragedy in a highly creative and sophisticated manner. Central to this is the issue of myth, which Wagner considered “the basic material of Greek tragedy.”¹⁶³ Wagner saw clear connections between the Greek and Germanic myths. For example, of both he writes this: “natural phenomena such as day and night, or the rising and setting of the sun, are transformed by an act of imagination into characters who act and who are worshipped or feared because of their actions, so that gods who are thought of as human finally become truly anthropomorphized heroes.”¹⁶⁴ Such an idea of the numinous quality of nature is central to the *Ring* and Wagner's myth brings about a mixing of the human and the divine, the material and the spiritual. However, he faced some formidable problems in presenting his mythology to his nineteenth-century public.

The problem becomes apparent when we see that Greek tragedy drew on material from “a limited repertoire of legends.”¹⁶⁵ The audiences of Aeschylus and Sophocles would therefore know something of the traditions, and tragedies partly functioned by introducing “mutations” into this tradition. The key was the “interaction between an ongoing series of tragic performances marked by sameness and difference and their reception by the ‘interpretative community.’”¹⁶⁶ But if Wagner wished his *Ring* to function in the same way then he had a special problem: many in his audience would have little idea of the “tradition history.” The Nordic gods and goddesses were alien to his audience and relatively few would know the *Nibelungenlied* and *Eddas*. He therefore had to present a new mythology. As Ewans points out, Wagner succeeds here by giving a full mythology in the final text of the *Ring* and “only very rarely makes the mistake of alluding to legends which are neither enacted nor expounded elsewhere in the trilogy.”¹⁶⁷

However, Wagner found another way of making his mythology more comprehensible; this was by alluding to what those in the audience may already know. So in *Rheingold* he unites his gods into one group headed by Wotan, “who like Zeus

162. CD 14 April 1870. See *Oedipus at Colonus* 1348–95 (Lloyd-Jones, *Sophocles II*, 556–59).

163. Ewans, *Aeschylus*, 41.

164. *PW* 2:161; *GSD* 4:38.

165. Burian, “Myth,” 178; cf. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453a17–22 (Halliwell, *Aristotle XXIII*, 70–71).

166. Burian, “Myth,” 179.

167. Ewans, *Aeschylus*, 58.

on Olympos is authoritative but not omnipotent.”¹⁶⁸ In Wotan and Fricka (and their quarrels in *Rheingold* Scene 2 and *Walküre* Act II Scene 1) we find clear echoes of Zeus and Hera; in Loge we find echoes of Prometheus; in Freia, Aphrodite; in Erda, Gaia; in Siegfried, Heracles; in Brünnhilde, Athene.¹⁶⁹ Further, Wagner, like all myth-makers, “worked on” these earlier myths¹⁷⁰ and to gain a full appreciation of the artworks a thorough reading of his sources (whether they be Greek, German, or medieval) may be necessary so one can discern the “mutations” in the tradition, for therein lies the “message” he wishes to convey.

Aeschylus

As already noted, Wagner had particular admiration for the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus and many argue that this has influenced the *Ring*, although the precise nature of this influence has been disputed.¹⁷¹ Although Wagner considered Aeschylus the greatest of the Greek tragedians, in the Romantic period admiration first came for Euripides and Sophocles and only later for Aeschylus,¹⁷² and this largely thanks to Droysen (1808–84), who translated Aeschylus in 1832 and did so with remarkable success. Ewans believes that two “important biases” in Droysen’s translation had “significant effects” on the composer. Although there is some basis for the second of these (which concerns “nationalism” and was discussed above), concerning the first, which concerns the moral aspect, I disagree. Ewans writes: “The principals of the *Oresteia* are in [Droysen’s] version guilty of their actions, and suffer moral retribution for sin.” So “*Hubris*” is translated as “guilt” and “*Dikē*” is simply “*Das Recht*, with all its implications of legal and moral rightness.”¹⁷³ Ewans argues that Droysen misses a crucial aspect of Aeschylus: the tragedian renounces “the traditional motif of an assured, doom-laden house condemned by its distant past to inevitable self-destructive violence.” This then in turn, according to Ewans, has led Wagner astray. Wagner, reflecting on the *Oresteia* in 1866, described *Agamemnon* as the play of “complete human error—crime—desire” and *Choephoroi* as “revenge-expiation-punishment.” In 1880 he described Agamemnon’s death as “expiation for his father’s crimes.” This then colored his conception of the *Ring* with Alberich’s curse, Wotan’s guilt, and Siegfried having to “throw off the doom of the Volsung race.”¹⁷⁴

Helpful though Ewans’ work is in relating Aeschylus to the *Ring*, I cannot see how Droysen has misrepresented Aeschylus at this point and in turn cannot see how

168. Ewans, *Aeschylus*, 60.

169. Cf. Ewans, *Aeschylus*, 56–61.

170. Cf. Blumenberg, *Myth*.

171. For example, Ewans, *Aeschylus*, believes it has influenced details of the plot.

172. Ewans, *Aeschylus*, 25–26.

173. Ewans, *Aeschylus*, 29.

174. Ewans, *Aeschylus*, 30.

Wagner has been led astray. Consider these lines of Clytemnestra (*Agamemnon* 1497–1504) in response to the accusation of the chorus that she is the treacherous murderer of her husband: “You think this deed is mine? / <Do not suppose so,> nor reckon / that I am the spouse of Agamemnon: / no, the ancient, bitter avenging spirit / of Atreus, the furnisher of the cruel banquet, / has taken the likeness of this corpse’s wife / and paid him out, / adding a full-grown sacrificial victim to the young ones.”¹⁷⁵ Whatever the disagreement between Clytemnestra and the chorus may be regarding her own guilt, both agree that the curse of the “cruel banquet” (l. 1502) is at work. According to the chorus Clytemnestra is guilty yet at the same time asks (l. 1565): “Who can cast the seed of the curse (gonan araion) out of the house?”¹⁷⁶

There has also been a long tradition of finding allusions to *Prometheus Bound* in the *Ring*.¹⁷⁷ One of the first to write on this was Schaefer (1899)¹⁷⁸ and there have been many subsequent studies.¹⁷⁹ Wagner used the reconstruction of Droysen, who assumed that the extant *Prometheus Bound* was the second play of the trilogy. Droysen thought the first concerned the theft of fire (“Feuerraub”), the second the binding of Prometheus (“Fesselung”), and the third (for which we have considerable fragments)¹⁸⁰ the freeing of Prometheus (“Befreiung”). I believe a good case can be made that Droyen’s reconstruction corresponds well to the first three dramas of the *Ring*: originally *Rheingold* bore an alternative title “Der Raub” or “Der Raub des Rheingold” (the stealing the Rheingold);¹⁸¹ *Walküre* concerns the binding of Brünnhilde;¹⁸² *Siegfried* concerns the freeing of the bound Brünnhilde.¹⁸³ Further, as Wieland Wagner put it, “Jawohl, Brünnhilde ist Prometheus”;¹⁸⁴ both are children of a knowing and warning earth goddess (Themis, Wala-Erda);¹⁸⁵ both are punished for their love to humankind;

175. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus II*, 182–83.

176. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus II*, 190–91. Note that Ewans, *Aeschylus*, 30, translates “gonan araion” as “seed of vengeance.” I am grateful to Alan Sommerstein (private communication, 13 October 2015) for clarifying the issues.

177. Wagner described “Prometheus” as “the most pregnant of tragedies” (*PW* 1:34; *GSD* 3:11).

178. Schaefer, “Aischylos’ Prometheus und Wagners Loge.”

179. Petsch, “Tragödie”; “Drews, *Ideengehalt*, 141–45; Schadewaldt, “Griechen,” 365–86. Note, however, the arguments against Promethean echoes by Ewans, *Aeschylus*, 256–60 (who believes the play is not by Aeschylus, a view now held by the majority of scholars; see Griffiths, *Authenticity*, and Sommerstein, *Aeschylus I*, 433). Nevertheless, Ewans believes Droysen’s introduction (if not the play itself) has exerted some influence (159).

180. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus I*, 438.

181. *TBRN* 1 348, 350.

182. See Brünnhilde’s words to Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung* Act I Scene 3: “fesselte er mich auf den Fels” (*WagRS* 301). The fact that she was not literally chained to the rock does not exclude a clear allusion to *Prometheus Bound*. On the Brünnhild/Prometheus link see also volume 2, chapters 10 and 11.

183. Schadewaldt, “Griechen,” 360–61.

184. Schadewaldt, “Griechen,” 342.

185. Themis was daughter of Gaia and Ouranos (Hesiod, *Theogony*, l. 135) and identified with Gaia in Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, ll. 208–12 (here Themis, like the Wala, prophecies).

both are “fastened” to the rock through the agency of a fire god (Hephaestus, Loge); both are eventually freed by a hero (Heracles, Siegfried) descended from a god and a dying woman (Io, Sieglinde) whom they have assisted. It is also worth noting that *Prometheus Bound* was beloved by revolutionaries.¹⁸⁶

If these parallels fail to convince, one can consider Act I scene 3 of *Siegfried's Tod* where the influence of *Prometheus Bound* is unmistakable.¹⁸⁷ In the 1848 version the Valkyries come to Brünnhilde on her rock and there follows a lyrical-musical dialogue whereby the Valkyries ask and warn and Brünnhilde responds. This pattern very closely reflects *Prometheus Bound* 124–96 where Prometheus is visited by the chorus of nymphs, daughters of Oceanus.¹⁸⁸ Later Wagner was to replace the groups of Valkyries with Waltraute alone, and fresh allusions to *Prometheus Bound* were introduced, first in Brünnhilde's very opening words (“old-familiar sounds / steal to me ear from afar:—/ a winged horse is sweeping / this way at full gallop”)¹⁸⁹ and then with the unmistakable allusion in Brünnhilde's reply to Siegfried: “an eagle came flying / to tear at my flesh.”¹⁹⁰

Sophocles

As we have seen, Sophocles' Antigone had an important role for Wagner's view on love and the state. In *Opera and Drama* she is, I believe, the figure who draws together so many of the threads of Part II from chapter 3 (where he discusses the Oedipus myth) right through to the end of Part II (chapter 6). I think she provides one clue to the difficult chapter 4 (which concerns issues of love and state) and in view of her parentage (Jocasta and Oedipus) she represents both feeling and understanding and can be said to be cast “as the patron saint of musical drama.”¹⁹¹ Oedipus himself is also fundamental for *Opera and Drama*¹⁹² and it is widely recognized that in *Siegfried* Act III (and *Parsifal* Act II) the hero has a clear Oedipal rôle.¹⁹³

186. Ruffell, *Prometheus Bound*, 105–30.

187. GSD 2:183–86; PW 8:15–17; Haymes, *Ring*, 96–101.

188. Schadewaldt, “Griechen,” 375, even goes to the point of comparing Aeschylus' use of the anapaest (two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed) for Prometheus with the anapaestic shape (“anapästische Gebilde”) Wagner uses for both Brünnhilde and the Valkyries.

189. WagRS 300; cf. *Prometheus Bound* 124–27 (Sommerstein, *Aeschylus I*, 458–59).

190. WagRS 307; cf. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 1021–25 (Sommerstein, *Aeschylus I*, 556–57).

191. Borchmeyer, *Theatre*, 296. See volume 2 chapter 6.

192. See the discussion in *Opera and Drama* (PW 2:180–92; GSD 4:55–66).

193. Perhaps not so well known is that there is a further allusion to Sophocles in *Parsifal* Act II in that Kundry, playing the role of the sphinx, puts riddles to Parsifal, which he manages to “solve” and thereby he overcomes her. Wagner speaks of Kundry as sphinx-like and dog-like (SL 500). Compare *Oedipus Tyrannus* 390–400 (Lloyd-Jones, *Sophocles I*, 362–63), where Oedipus rebukes Tiresias for trying to throw out the very person who solved the riddle of the “versifying hound” (hē rhapsōdos kuōn).

Euripides

Wagner's study of Euripides was in relation to his re-working of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*.¹⁹⁴ In Euripides, Iphigenia, who has been called to Aulis on the pretext that she will marry Achilles,¹⁹⁵ disappears as she is about to be sacrificed, being replaced by a hind,¹⁹⁶ and Agamemnon interprets this as her having fellowship with the gods.¹⁹⁷ In Gluck's opera "Diana" grants the marriage. Wagner was clearly unhappy with this happy ending, and it is significant that he marked in his copy of Euripides these words of Agamemnon: "No man to the end is fortunate, / Happy is none; / For a lot unvexed never man yet won."¹⁹⁸ Indeed, Wagner's portrayal of the Greek general most probably colored the character of his Wotan.¹⁹⁹ Wagner's version ends with "Artemis," appearing as *dea ex machine*, and he inserted eight lines where she calls Iphigenia to serve her in her temple in Tauris and announces that her wrath is appeased ("versöhnt ist [...] mein Zorn") and the wind now blows for the journey of the Greeks to Troy.²⁰⁰

Conclusions on Greek tragedy

Although the above discussion demonstrates the way in which the *Ring* was influenced by Greek tragedy, the question remains whether it can be considered "tragedy" in this sense. Despite the influences and parallels I think the answer has to be "no."²⁰¹ The ending of *Götterdämmerung* is remarkably ambiguous; although it ends with the double sacrifice of Siegfried and Brünnhilde, it also offers a possible optimistic

194. He started on the reworking in 1845 and completed it in January or early February 1847 (WWV 333). It was performed on 24 February 1847 (reviews in Kirchmeyer, *Wagner-Bild III*, nos 752–59, 761–64, 812; see also Kirchmeyer, *Wagner-Bild I*, 717–30).

195. Way, *Euripides I*, 12–13, ll. 98–100.

196. Way, *Euripides I*, 146–47, ll. 1581–87.

197. Way, *Euripides I*, 148–49, l. 1622.

198. Way, *Euripides I*, 18–19, ll. 160–62; ll. 158–60 in J. J. C. Donner's edition of Euripides, used by Wagner. This marking was first noted by Westernhagen, *Bibliothek*, 22–23, and I have been able to verify it for myself.

199. Jost (SW 20.IV:IX) speaks of the "tormented king" of Act II "quarrelling both with the immortals and with himself, vacillating between his love for his daughter and his obligations to the soldiers" who "repeatedly changes his mind before finally becoming aware of the pitifulness of his desire for power." Further, she compares the "long pause" after his "nichts? nichts?" (SW 20.IV:80 (*Reinschrift*), 310 (bar 63)) with that noted by Porges, *Rehearsing the Ring*, 58, after Wotan's first "das Ende" in *Walküre* Act II (bar 944). Wagner praised Anton Mitterwurzer's role of Agamemnon (*My Life* 338; *Mein Leben* 1:351), whose singing was a model for his later Wotan (SW 20.IV:IX).

200. SW 20.IV:87 (*Reinschrift*), 401–3 (Nr. 30, bars 85–102). Wagner later explained that his ending was more faithful to Euripides than Gluck's (SB 5:88).

201. The opera that comes closest is *Lohengrin*, but even here there is an element of hope in that Gottfried is restored as "Herzog von Brabant" (GSD 2:114). *Tristan* is removed from the "tragic" for despite the deaths King Marke witnesses in the closing scene, Isolde's "Liebestod" is actually her "transfiguration" which Wagner understood in the light of the assumption of the Virgin Mary (CD 25 April 1882).

outlook for a renewed world order. All this raises the question whether Wagner “ever succeeded in writing a tragedy in the Greek spirit at all.”²⁰² Schadewaldt equivocates in claiming that although Wagner was not interested in reviving Greek tragedy, he can nevertheless, as Deathridge puts it, “reach out and shake hands with Homer and Aeschylus over the ages after all.”²⁰³ Lloyd-Jones, by contrast, claims that “in the Ring in general we find something profoundly alien to the spirit of an ancient tragedy.”²⁰⁴ It is certainly the case, as Lloyd-Jones suggests, that Wagner’s attachment to Christian theology prevented him from writing a truly tragic music drama. All the operas of the Wagnerian canon concern “redemption,” which, for Wagner, had a distinctly Christian connotation. But Wagner was far from simply distancing himself from Greek tragedy. Two points can be made. First, tragedy does not have to end tragically, as Hegel noted in the case of *Eumenides*. This play I noted above was praised by Wagner, and one wonders whether Paul’s speech on the Areopagus in Acts 17 was so important for Wagner²⁰⁵ because the setting was precisely that of the close of the *Eumenides*. The second point is somewhat related to what I have just said, for a case can be made that Wagner was “baptizing” tragedy. I believe far too much emphasis has been placed on Wagner’s opposition in *Opera and Drama* of Greek tragedy and Christian myth²⁰⁶ and the overwhelming impression he gives in essays, letters, and diaries is that the two actually belong together. John’s Gospel for him was a tragedy²⁰⁷ as was his own sketch for *Jesus of Nazareth*.²⁰⁸ Jesus of Nazareth must appear with Apollo.²⁰⁹ Wagner was brought up in the world of Lutheran Protestantism and after his breakthrough with Greek tragedy in the 1840s, he was able to form a remarkable synthesis. Both Lutheranism and Greek tragedy share a pessimistic view of the human person;²¹⁰ and to this pessimism he added his distinctive idea of redemption through love.

Wagner’s Later Reflections on *Ring* and Tragedy

Anticipating Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* (1872), which famously discusses “the duality of the Apolline and the Dionysiac,”²¹¹ Wagner wrote in *Destiny of Opera*

202. Deathridge, *Good and Evil*, 103.

203. Deathridge, *Good and Evil*, 104, discussing the end of Schadewaldt’s first lecture (“Griechen,” 364–65).

204. Lloyd-Jones, “Wagner,” 141.

205. See chapter 7 below.

206. *PW* 2:159–60; *GSD* 4:37.

207. *CD* 11 February 1875.

208. *My Life* 387; *Mein Leben* 1:401.

209. See the ending of *Art and Revolution* (*PW* 1:65; *GSD* 3:41).

210. Hence I strongly disagree with Lloyd-Jones, “Wagner,” 141, that Wagner believed in the “essential goodness of human feelings”. This is hardly sustainable given his Lutheranism and the clear pessimistic anthropology found in both the stage works and writings.

211. Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 14.

(1871): "The Tragedy of the Greeks having evolved from a compromise between the Apollinian and the Dionysian elements, upon the basis of a system of Lyrics well-nigh past our understanding, the didactic hymn of the old-Hellenian priests [i.e., "Apollinian"] could combine with the newer Dionysian dithyramb to produce that enthralling effect in which this artwork stands unrivalled."²¹² He goes on to speak of Apollinian element of literature ("Word-speech") and contrasts "literary products" with Gluck's *Iphigenia* and Mozart's *Don Juan*:

What so profoundly moved them in these last, must surely have been that here they found the drama transported by its music to the sphere of the Ideal, a sphere where the simplest feature of the plot was at once transfigured, and motive and emotion, fused in one direct expression, appealed to them with noblest stress. Here hushed all desire to seize a Tendency, for the Idea had realised itself before them as the sovereign call of Fellow-feeling.²¹³

Wagner then quotes from the Prologue in Heaven of Goethe's *Faust* and from Schiller's *Braut von Messina*:²¹⁴

"Error attends man's ev'ry quest," or "Life is not the highest good," was here no longer to be clothed in words, for the inmost secret of the wisest apothegm itself stood bared to them in limpid Melody. Whilst that had said "it means," (das bedeutet) this said "it is!" (das ist) Here had the highest pathos come to be the very soul of Drama; as from a shining world of dreams, Life's picture stepped before us here with sympathetic verity.²¹⁵

As in *Religion and Art*, Wagner applies Luther's view of communion ("das ist") to music and Zwingli's to other arts ("das bedeutet").²¹⁶

212. *PW* 5:138–39; *GSD* 9:137–38.

213. *PW* 5:139–40; *GSD* 9:138–39.

214. See *GWJA* 3:19 (l. 317); Luke, *Faust I*, 11: "Es irrt der Mensch so lang' er strebt"; Schiller, *Braut von Messina*: "Das Leben ist der Güter höchstes nicht" (*FSSW* 2:912 (l. 2838)). The last two lines are: "Das Leben ist der Güter höchstes *nicht*/Der Übel größtes aber ist die *Schuld*."

215. *PW* 5:140; *GSD* 9:139.

216. For *Religion and Art*, see *PW* 6:224; *GSD* 10:222 (discussed in Bell, *Parsifal*, 305). No doubt Wagner's years in Zurich impressed upon him the dispute between Martin Luther and the reformer in Zurich, Huldrych Zwingli. As well as disagreeing on the Eucharist, they had diametrically opposing views on music. As Walton, *Richard Wagner's Zurich*, 9, comments: "It is an odd fact, but the greatest reformer of Zurich's musical life before Richard Wagner was the man who did away with it: Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531)."