

Fall, Power, Desecration of Nature, and Capitalism

Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how there was a goodness and innocence in nature as presented in the opening of *Rheingold*, but that there was always that possibility, perhaps inevitability, that such a state of innocence could not last. In this chapter I examine the “fall” as presented by Wagner. This is linked to issues of power in that in both instances of the “first sin” the lust for power is involved, such power being incompatible with love: Alberich curses love in order to fashion the ring and Wotan tears the branch from the World Ash Tree in order to exercise his power, which also means he has ultimately to deny love. This denial of love is worked out in the utter lovelessness we find in *Rheingold*; it is also found in the subsequent operas of the *Ring* (e.g., the marriage of Wotan and Fricka, the fraternal relationship of Mime and Alberich, the filial relationship of Alberich and Hagen). The issue of the fall is also related to the rise of capitalism (Alberich’s sin gives rise to his accumulation of wealth for the sake of wealth) and the desecration of nature (Wotan’s sin gives rise to the destruction of the World Ash Tree). Wotan’s imposition of law is not only linked to the desecration of nature (i.e., he had to tear the branch to form his spear on which his laws were inscribed) but again works to destroy love, not only in the sense that it leads to his own denial of love but also that such “law” is incompatible with love.¹

The “Fall”

The language of “fall” I am using is theological and deliberately so. The key biblical texts are Genesis 3, as understood in the Christian tradition,² and Romans 5 and 7. Although one can find traces of such tradition in the *Ring* it is also sometimes more subtle. So, as we have seen in the previous chapter and as we shall further discuss, sin can come into being not because of a “serpent” or personified “sin” (“hamartia” in Rom 7:8) but rather

1. See chapter 7 below.

2. The Jewish tradition does not have the same understanding of the “fall” as the Christian tradition and does not share the view of “original sin.” See Bell, *No one seeks for God*, 118–25.

can come into being because of the inherent nature of human beings (and gods): they are thinking and conscious beings, and as such there is a process which Hegel termed “bifurcation” (“Entzweiung”). But I start with the two most obvious explanations of sin’s origin, ones that have more of a biblical flavor.

The first is Scene 1 of *Rheingold* where Alberich’s amorous advances are rejected by each of the Rhinemaidens in turn and he decides that fulfilment lies in the renunciation of “love” and “rape” of the Rhinegold. But what is the nature of such “love”? Both Flosshilde and Wellgunde say he is “in love” (“verliebt”).³ All three ask: “Why, faint-hearted dwarf, / did you fail to bind fast / the maiden that you love (das du minnst)?”⁴ As the sunlight shines into the deep, the gold of the river Rhine is revealed in its glory. Woglinde introduces the possible renunciation of “love”: “Only the man who forswears / love’s sway (der Minne Macht), / only he who disdains / love’s delights (der Liebe Lust) / can master the magic spell / that rounds a ring from the gold.”⁵ But Wellgunde explains that they are safe “since all that lives must love (denn was nur lebt will lieben); / no one wants to abjure its delights.”⁶ Wellgunde adds “Least of all he, / the lecherous elf: / he’s almost dying / of lustful desire (Liebesgier)!” Flosshilde speaks of “the flames of his lust (Minne Brunst).”⁷ Wellgunde adds “with the frenzy of love (vor Zorn der Liebe) / he sizzles aloud.”⁸ Finally, after he decides to take the gold, all three sing that “love (Minne) has driven him mad!”⁹ The Rhinemaidens therefore seem to jumble “love” and “lechery” but they could be ironic, giving his lust the exalted name of love (“Liebe,” “Minne”).¹⁰ Alberich also confuses lust and “Minne”: “In every limb / a blazing fire / burns and glows! / Rage and desire (Minne), / wild and all-powerful, / throw my thoughts into turmoil!”¹¹ However, he also seems to think more clearly as he contemplates stealing the gold, making a distinction between love itself (“Liebe”) and the “delights” (“Lust”) it can confer: “Though love can’t be gained by force, / through cunning might I enforce its delights?”¹²

The key moment of the “fall” occurs when Alberich steals the gold and curses love:¹³

3. WagRS 59, 61.

4. WagRS 64.

5. WagRS 68.

6. WagRS 68.

7. WagRS 68.

8. WagRS 68.

9. WagRS 69.

10. WagRS 364 n. 7 suggests that the term “Minne” in the *Ring* has a more sexual connotation than “Liebe.”

11. WagRS 65.

12. WagRS 68. Note though that the German “Lust” does not have the negative associations of the English “lust.”

13. WagRS 69.

Bangt euch noch nicht?	Still not afraid?
So buhlt nun im Finstern,	Then whore in the dark,
feuchtes Gezücht!	you watery brood!
Das Licht löscht' ich euch aus,	Your light I'll put out,
entreiße dem Riff das Gold,	wrench the gold from the rock
schmiede den rächenden Ring:	and forge the avenging ring:
denn hör' es die Fluth—	so hear me, you waters:—
so verflucht' ich die Liebe!	thus I lay a curse on love!

I earlier wrote of the “rape” of the Rhinegold because the language in the stage direction for his subsequent stealing of the gold sounds like the rape of a woman: “he tears the gold from the rock with terrible force” and then adds: “Impenetrable darkness suddenly descends on all sides.”¹⁴ This darkness contrasts starkly with the brightness of the Rhinegold. The language in the 1848 *Mythus* stresses the purity and nobility of the Rhinegold: “Alberich seized the clear and noble Rhine-gold, abducting it from the depths of the water” (“Des klaren edlen Rheingoldes bemächtigte sich Alberich, entführte es den Tiefen der Wässer”).¹⁵

The “love” Alberich renounces is not simply sexual activity¹⁶ but it does seem to involve this. The “love” he renounces is what one could call true erotic love, the deep fulfilling relationship between human beings that involves sexual relations. Such love Alberich renounces, but he still wants sex of a debased nature. This becomes clear in his dialogue with Wotan in Scene 3: “Beware! / Beware!— / For when your menfolk / yield to my power, / your pretty women, / who spurned my wooing, / shall forcibly sate the lust (Lust) of the dwarf, / though love (Liebe) may no longer smile upon him.”¹⁷ The “fall” therefore involves divorcing sex from love and as in Genesis 3 the “fall” in *Rheingold* has a sexual element.¹⁸

One could argue that Alberich already had a propensity to “sin” since, as Wotan tells Brünnhilde, he was “born of the night.”¹⁹ Whether he has any diminished responsibility for his part in the “fall” could be debated but one can certainly say the fall is exacerbated by the gods’ susceptibility to evil. Wagner, in his key letter to Röckel of 25/26 January 1854, suggests that it was the loveless marriage of Wotan to Fricka that caused the evil: “it is not the fact that Alberich was repulsed by the Rhine-daughters which is the definitive source of all evil—for it was entirely natural for them to repulse

14. WagRS 69.

15. Haymes, *Ring*, 45 (my literal translation).

16. It would be too easy to equate the two. Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 120–21, tends to equate them on the basis of *Rheingold* Scene 1.

17. WagRS 96–97.

18. Note that the view of “fall” in the Christian tradition clearly intensifies anything found in the Jewish tradition and its interpretation of Genesis 3. Cf. Barr, *Eden*, 63–65, 69–70.

19. WagRS 149: “den Nacht gebär, / der bange Nibelung, / Alberich brach ihren Bund.”

him.” Further, “Alberich and his ring could not have harmed the gods unless the latter had already been susceptible to evil.” The “germ of this evil” (“Keim dieses Unheils”) is in the “mutual torment of a loveless union.”²⁰

The second sin to consider is that of the chief god Wotan. In the sketches of 1848 and in *Siegfried's Death*, there is no story of Wotan forming his spear out of the branch of the World Ash Tree. His sin and that of the gods appears to some extent to be a *response* to this first sin of Alberich in their attempts to impose order on the world,²¹ but doing this “through violence and cunning.”²² But in the later *Siegfried's Tod/Götterdämmerung* Wotan's sin could even be seen to pre-date that of Alberich. In the Prologue the first Norn explains that once the World Ash Tree stood tall and strong, and in its shade was a spring from which wisdom came. But a “dauntless god,” i.e., Wotan, was so desperate to drink from this spring so he could attain wisdom that he gave up one of his eyes. Then he broke off a branch from the sacred World Ash Tree to form his spear, which came to represent his power and authority and his laws. The tree had been “tall and strong,” having “a forest of sacred branches,” but the wound made by Wotan “consumed the wood” and leaves fell. The tree grew rotten and the well-spring, previously protected by the shade of the tree, ran dry.²³ Wagner hence presents the association of law and knowledge with the desecration of nature.

Another way this fall affects the future development of human affairs is by introducing a poisonous callousness. *Rheingold* is saturated with lovelessness. Wotan does not love his wife and has no genuine concern for the abducted Freia. Wotan's concern to free Freia only comes to a head when he starts to lose his immortality as the golden apples dry out and wither.²⁴ Earlier he was willing, it seems, to forsake her, i.e., forsake love! The only ones who appear to have any humanity are the Rhinemaidens and occasionally the half-god Loge, who sympathizes with their loss:²⁵

Traulich und treu

ist's nur in der Tiefe:

falsch und feig

ist was dort oben sich freut!

Trusty and true

it is here in the depths alone:

false and fated

is all that rejoices above!

20. *SL* 307; *SB* 6:67.

21. See volume 1, chapter 2.

22. Haymes, *Ring*, 46–47.

23. *WagRS* 280–81.

24. *WagRS* 86.

25. *WagRS* 118. Wagner may be alluding to these words in his “morning confession” (“Morgenbeichte”) to Mathilde Wesendonck (7 April 1858, *SL* 383; *SB* 9:231): “Only inside, within us, only deep down does salvation dwell!”

Influences on Wagner's View of the Fall

There are four possible sources that influenced Wagner's view of the fall in the *Ring*: the Bible, German philosophy, the Greeks, and Romanticism.

The biblical account of a "good creation" (Gen 1:31a) that is ruined by "sin" (Gen 3), an idea developed by St Paul,²⁶ is clearly reflected in *Rheingold* Scene 1. As noted in the previous chapter, creation does indeed seem to be "very good" with the life-giving river Rhine and the "light-bringing joy" of the Rhinegold (cf. Gen 2:11–12). The command of "father" not to divulge the secrets of the power of the ring²⁷ parallels Gen 2:16–17 where God warns Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Hence, in both *Rheingold* and Genesis the "fall" concerns the danger of "knowledge," a crucial Wagnerian theme. Once the demonic figure of Alberich enters, the potential for catastrophe is there. He "lusts" after the Rhinemaidens,²⁸ who in turn tease him. On being rejected he then "lusts" after the Rhinegold. His "fall" certainly has a sexual element and, as we have seen, even his stealing of the Rhinegold uses vocabulary and phrases usually used for the rape of a woman.²⁹ The only explanation given for Alberich's dark character is that he was "born of the night,"³⁰ therefore having a propensity to bring "sin" into the world as did the serpent in Genesis 3. His "fall" then leads to disastrous consequences for everyone.

Just as Alberich's sin has links to Genesis 1–3, so it is with Wotan's sin. We have the issue of "knowledge" again (Gen 2:16–17), here in Wotan's search for wisdom,³¹ and this link between "error" and "knowledge" is central for the beginning of the *Artwork of the Future*.³²

As far as philosophy is concerned, Schopenhauer, whose "pessimism" was inspired by St Paul, Luther, and Augustine,³³ could no doubt influence him, especially if, as I argued in volume 1, Wagner came to a reasonably good knowledge of Schopenhauer already in 1852 while he was still working on the libretto. The sage of Frankfurt may well have been at the back of his mind when he wrote this to Liszt (7 October 1854) shortly after he completing *Das Rheingold*: "let us treat the world only with

26. Rom 5:12: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned." Note also Rom 5:18 which was doubly marked in Wagner's New Testament and quoted in the *Jesus of Nazareth* sketches (PW 8:338; DTB 266).

27. Flosshilde warns: "Father told us / and bound us over / to guard the bright hoard widely / that no false thief should filch it from the flood: / be silent, then, you babbling brood!" (WagRS 67).

28. Wellgunde exclaims "The lecherous rogue!" ("Der lüsterne Kauz") (WagRS 59).

29. WagRS 69: "He tears the gold from the rock with terrible force" ("Er reisst mit furchtbarer Gewalt das Gold aus dem Riffe").

30. WagRS 149.

31. This is missing in the original *Nibelungen-Mythus* and *Siegfried's Tod* of 1848.

32. PW 1:69–70; GSD 3:43.

33. Wagner, as we have seen, greatly admired Paul and Luther, although there is little reference to Augustine in Wagner's writings and recorded utterances. See Bell, *Parsifal*, 136 n. 3.

contempt; for it deserves no better [. . .]. It is evil, *evil, fundamentally evil* [. . .]. It belongs to Alberich: no one else!! Away with it!"³⁴ Another philosophical influence was Hegel but this is actually much more subtle and is related to "Entzweiung" (diremp-tion), which was discussed in the previous chapter.

Another element contributing to his idea of fall could be early Greek thought.³⁵ Nestor in the *Iliad* speaks of heroes of former times: "Ere now have I consorted with warriors that were better men than ye, and never did they set me at naught. Such warriors have I never since seen, nor shall see, as Peirithous was and Dryas, shepherd of the host, and Caeneus and Exadius and godlike Polyphemus, and Theseus, son of Aegeus, peer of the immortals."³⁶ No one now, he avers, can match such heroes; "with them could no man fight of all mortals that now are upon the earth."³⁷ Wagner, we know, was an admirer of Homer, one of his indispensables,³⁸ and he possessed his works in both the Dresden and Wahnfried libraries.³⁹ However, we do not have a parallel with the sort of "fall" we find in *Rheingold*. We may be on slightly firmer ground with Hesiod, although I have found no explicit references to him in Wagner's works.⁴⁰ Foster considers Hesiod *Works and Days* 11–26, which compares two "strifes," a good one "inspiring healthy competition" and an evil one causing "strife, war, and feud."⁴¹ Foster sees this evil strife which caused Perses (supposed brother of Hesiod) to take more than his fair share of the family inheritance to be reflected in the antagonism between Alberich and Mime.⁴² There may be some parallels in that Mime is the wronged brother⁴³ but the parallels are not particularly strong. One could also consider Hesiod *Works and Days* 42–105; 106–26, in particular 90–95, which tells the story of Pandora: "For previously the tribes of men used to live upon the earth entirely apart from evils, and without grievous toil and distressful diseases, which give death to men. [For in misery mortals grow old at

34. *SL* 319; *SB* 6:249.

35. See Ruffell, *Prometheus Bound*, 58–61, on this "lapsarian" ideology of the Greeks.

36. *Iliad* 1.260–65 (Murray, *Homer I*, 23).

37. *Iliad* 1.271–72 (Murray, *Homer I*, 23).

38. *CD* 4 June 1871.

39. For the editions of Homer in the Dresden library, see Westernhagen, *Bibliothek*, 94. His admiration for Homer is reflected in the multiple editions he had of his works in the Wahnfried library (Greek editions of Wilhelm Dindorf and Wilhelm Bäumlein; German translations of Johann Heinrich Voss).

40. Note that there are no works of Hesiod in his Dresden library. But included in his Wahnfried library was a German edition of Hesiod's works edited by Eyth (second edition of 1865), and Lehrs' edition of *Carmina* (1862) (Lehrs had been a key influence on Wagner in his Paris years). There is a possible allusion to Hesiod (as Foster, *Greeks*, 89–90, seems to suggest) in the late essay *Religion and Art* (1880) where he writes some lines on "Greek Theogony" (*PW* 6:216). Note also *CD* 1 February 1873 which notes that Nietzsche sent a copy of his "Der Florentinische Tractat über Homer und Hesiod."

41. Foster, *Greeks*, 86.

42. Foster, *Greeks*, 86–87.

43. Foster, *Greeks*, 88, also considers the strife between Fafner and Fasolt.

once.] But the woman removed the great lid from the storage jar with her hands and scattered all its contents abroad—she wrought baneful evils for human beings.”⁴⁴ However, in *Rheingold* the “fall,” as I suggested in the previous chapter, is something much more subtle, reflecting Hegel’s idea of “Entzweiung.”

A final influence to consider is that of Romantic writers, who themselves were influenced by the Bible, idealism, and the Greeks. One such figure is Freidrich Schlegel who set forward views of human development, employing biblical categories such as paradise, fall, and redemption.⁴⁵

Industrialization, the Desecration of Nature, and Capitalism

The transition from Scene 2 to Scene 3 of *Rheingold* can be shocking, and familiarity with it can dampen the shock. It is perhaps ironic that the horror of the industrial landscape of Nibelheim, which is first represented by the “incessant dotted rhythm” on the anvils, may reflect Beethoven’s joyful Seventh Symphony (“the apotheosis of the dance”),⁴⁶ which Wagner had conducted shortly before composing the music.⁴⁷ Over twenty years later, as Wagner left London on 25 May 1877, he noted: “This is Alberich’s dream come true—Nibelheim, world dominion, activity, work, everywhere the oppressive feeling of steam and fog.”⁴⁸

George Bernard Shaw in his allegorical interpretation famously drew attention to how Nibelheim represent the worst aspects of factories and capitalism. Commenting on Scene 3, he wrote: “This gloomy place need not be a mine: it might just as well be a match factory, with yellow phosphorous, phossy jaw, a large dividend, and plenty of clergymen shareholders. Or it might be a whitelead factory, or a chemical works, or a pottery, or a railway shunting yard [. . .] or any other of the places where human life and welfare are daily sacrificed in order that some greedy foolish creature may be able to hymn exultantly to his Plutonic idol.”⁴⁹ The most telling passage on the folly of accumulating capital is in Scene 3 of *Rheingold* where Wotan asks Alberich: “What good is the hoard / since Nibelheim’s joyless / and naught can be bought here with wealth?”⁵⁰ Alberich responds: “To create yet more wealth / and to hide away wealth.”⁵¹ Wagner always associated capitalism with the Jew who “rules, and will rule, so long as Money

44. Most, *Hesiod I*, 95 (n. 6 explains that the sentence in brackets is only found in the margin or text of very few manuscripts and is generally rejected as a gloss).

45. See volume 1, chapter 5.

46. *PW* 1:124; *GSD* 3:94 (*Artwork of the Future*).

47. Matthews, *Beethoven*, 184.

48. *CD* 25 May 1877. No doubt Wagner was attracted to Balzac for his portrayal of human misery in society. Writing forty years ago, Gregor-Dellin, *Leben*, 854, noted that a sociological and psychological study on Wagner and Balzac had not yet appeared. To my knowledge we are still waiting.

49. Laurence, *Shaw’s Music III*, 434.

50. *WagRS* 96. “Nibelheim” means “land of mists” (“Nebelheim”) (Haymes, *Ring*, 44–45).

51. *WagRS* 96.

remains the power before which all our doings and our dealing lose their force.”⁵² No doubt he saw Alberich in these terms. Likewise, he had a negative view of the Roman equivalent of Hermes, Mercury, “the god of merchants.”⁵³

With the rise of Alberich's “capitalism” work becomes alienating. Mime tells Wotan and Loge that before the “fall”:⁵⁴

Sorglose Schmiede,	Carefree smiths,
schufen wir sonst wohl	we used to fashion
Schmuck uns'ren Weibern,	trinkets for our womenfolk,
wonnic Geschmied,	delightful gems and
niedlichen Nibelungentand;	delicate Nibelung toys:
wir lachten lustig der Müß'	we cheerfully laughed at our pains.

Alberich becomes the arch-capitalist; Wotan is not interested in capital as such but he longs for power, including that which the ring can confer: “I must have the ring!” (“Den Ring muß ich haben!”)⁵⁵ It is with Wotan's plan to obtain the ring that, according to Borchmeyer, we have the circulation of radical evil (“Kreislauf des radikal Bösen”),⁵⁶ such a view of radical evil being prominent in Kant.⁵⁷ This brings us to the question of power and how it can have a positive and negative connotation.

Power: Positive and Negative

The commonplace understanding of the *Ring* is that it concerns the conflict between love and power; more precisely it concerns the conflict between love of power versus power of love. So power in itself is neutral (rather as money is)⁵⁸ but the poison enters when power is made one's God.⁵⁹ In the *Ring* power in its most ominous sense is achieved by renouncing love. This is highlighted when one considers a case where power is apparently sought without the explicit renunciation of love, as seen in the figure of Mime. His desire for the ring is not so much motivated by a desire for power

52. *PW* 3:81; *GSD* 5:68.

53. *PW* 1:41–42; *GSD* 3:18–19.

54. *WagRS* 91.

55. *WagRS* 82.

56. Borchmeyer, “Anfang,” 19. Zegowitz, *Opern*, 197, suggests that as Wotan hears of the ring in *Rheingold* Scene 2 that he is prepared to give up Freia. However, at this stage Wotan does not know of the demand of the giants for “the Nibelung's bright red gold” (*WagRS* 83) as a substitute for Freia.

57. Kant, *Religion*, 45–73.

58. Hence, the significant wording in 1 Tim 6:10: “For the *love* of money is the root of all kinds of evil.”

59. Cf. Luther's *Greater Catechism*, *BSELK* 560 (quoted in chapter 3 above).

itself, but rather in hate for and rivalry with his brother Alberich: had he ever gained the ring he would not really know what to do with it in exercising power.⁶⁰

Hence, the menacing exercise of power is seen in those instances where it is gained by renouncing love, expressed musically by the so-called “Entsagungsmotiv” (“renunciation motif”), which first appears in *Rheingold* Scene 1.⁶¹ But it is not just Alberich who renounces love, for Wotan is his “unwitting mirror” as he “renounces love in his own way, seeking in its stead power over the world.”⁶² This mirroring is expressed by the fact that they are both “Alberich”: “Licht-Alberich” and “Schwarz-Alberich”⁶³ But one can also say “Whereas Alberich renounces love in favour of the pursuit of power, Wotan finds his power diminished just because he cannot image a life without love. As the drama unfolds, they each lose both power and love.”⁶⁴ Alberich’s and Wotan’s renunciation of love for the sake of power could be reflected in the use of the “Entsagungsmotiv” as Siegmund pulls Nothung out of the ash tree. Cooke shows the clear parallels between the music and the words in the first occurrence of the motif in *Rheingold* Scene 1 and in *Walküre* Act I Scene 3: “Minne” and “Liebe” in both instances are sung on E $\flat$ and then D.⁶⁵ Cooke argues that “Siegmund is drawing the sword from the tree, not only to win Sieglinde for his bride, as it seems to him, but also, unwittingly, to regain for Wotan the ring of absolute power which was originally made by Alberich at the cost of renouncing love.”⁶⁶

Before proceeding with the question of positive and negative power in the *Ring* I consider two possible influences on Wagner in this respect, Norse Mythology and Hegel, which may or may not illumine Wagner’s understanding of power.

Norse Mythology and Power

In Norse Mythology the gods, despite their many failings, do at least attempt to create order in the cosmos as it emerges from the world of giants, wood-ogresses, etc. We read of their giving names to parts of the day (*Völuspá* 6), engaging in building projects (*Völuspá* 7), and trying to prevent what they see as the disaster of Ragnarök. This idea of their imposition of order in the *Edda* may well come from Genesis, where we see an ordering of the cosmos in terms of “separation” (Gen 1:1–19, days 1–4) and naming of animals (Gen 2:20), etc. The idea of imposing order is found in the *Ring*, especially in reference to Wotan’s spear. But although Wagner could learn of Odin as lawgiver from

60. For this insight I am grateful to Richard Roberts who sang Mime in the 2016 Opera North production of the *Ring*.

61. See Example 11.3 below.

62. Schofield, *Redeemer Reborn*, 40.

63. *WagRS* 210–11.

64. Winterbourne, “Freedom,” 349.

65. Cooke, *End*, 3.

66. Cooke, *End*, 4.

his Norse sources, there is nothing there to relate this to his spear.⁶⁷ Magee thinks that the source for this connection can only be Wilhelm Müller, who writes: "We may also quite rightly surmise that under the protection of the god [Odin] were particularly such legal matters in which symbols were formerly used which we also find associated with him. Thus the spear Gungnir was Odin's chief weapon."⁶⁸ Hence in *Rheingold* Wotan is represented as the chief of the gods, "ruler of the world with a basically civilizing mission, symbolized by his spear."⁶⁹ Although Wotan may have had a good motive in imposing such order, such exercise of power also has a corrupting influence.

Wotan's spear does not just represent his ordering of the world but also acts as a weapon. Sometimes it is a weapon in preventing strife, as when he intervenes in *Rheingold* Scene 2 to prevent Donner first from attacking the giants⁷⁰ or Loge.⁷¹ At other times his spear actively determines the outcome of battle, and we see the devastating consequences of this in *Walküre* Act II.

Hegel and the Master/Slave

It is not clear how much of Hegel's philosophy of power Wagner fully understood, but there are possible instances in the *Ring* that witness to his ideas of domination and the counter-intuitive idea that it is in fact the slave who has the greatest freedom. Hegel's view of the master/slave is set forth in the section on self-consciousness in the *Phänomenologie*, a text with which Wagner was to some extent familiar, even if he did not understand every word of this demanding work. The master/slave relation Hegel examines "is not embedded in the world" in the sense that he is not speaking of slavery in ancient Greece or Rome but simply considers the relation of a master, who dominates his slave and consumes things around him, and the one subject to him.⁷² "The lord is the consciousness that exists *for itself*, but no longer merely the Notion of such a consciousness. Rather, it is a consciousness existing *for itself* which is mediated with itself through another consciousness, i.e. through a consciousness whose nature it is to be bound up with an existence that is independent, or thinghood in general."⁷³ The master as master may feel autonomous but according to Hegel's understanding his consciousness is recognized by the consciousness of the other, the slave. He thinks that his selfhood resides in "the sheer negation of the thing, or the

67. Magee, *Nibelungs*, 185, refers to *Ynlinga saga* Chapter 8 (in *Heimskringla*). See also Björnsson, *Volsungs*, 139: "Odin established in his land [Sweden] the same laws which had formerly been current among the Æsir."

68. Magee, *Nibelungs*, 186, translating Müller, *Geschichte und System*, 193.

69. Cooke, *End*, 316.

70. *WagRS* 77: "Stop, you firebrand! / Nothing by force! / My spearshaft / safeguards contracts: / spare your hammer's haft."

71. *WagRS* 79.

72. Houlgate, *Phenomenology*, 95.

73. Miller, *Phenomenology*, 115 (§190); *HHW* 2:112–13.

enjoyment (Genuß) of it.”⁷⁴ Whereas “desire” (“Begierde”) comes face to face with the independence of the other, in the case of “enjoyment” the master is simply a consumer⁷⁵ and does not grow since he sees the slave as a thing and not as an autonomous agent.⁷⁶ The slave on the other hand recognizes the independence of the master and as opposed to being a consumer he is a worker. Whereas Marx applied Hegel master-slave relationship to the necessity of the transformation of society, Hegel was interested “solely in tracing the changes in *self-understanding* that the master and the slave undergo.”⁷⁷ The counter-intuitive outcome is that “just as lordship showed that its essential nature is the reverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is; as a consciousness forced back into itself, it will withdraw into itself and be transformed into a truly independent consciousness.”⁷⁸ For Hegel “through the combination of labour and the fear of death, the slave comes to realize that, within his servitude, he is essentially *free*.”⁷⁹ The sense of freedom therefore arises not through labour alone but also through the indispensable condition of fear of death.⁸⁰

Towards the end of the section on master-slave Hegel focuses on fear: “In the lord, the being-for-self is an ‘other’ for the bondsman, or is only *for* him [i.e., is not his own] (Im Herrn ist ihm das Fürsichsein *ein anderes* oder nur *für es*; in der Furcht ist das Fürsichsein *an ihm selbst*); in fear, the being-for-self is present in the bondsman himself; in fashioning the thing, he becomes aware that being-for-self belongs to *him*, that he himself exists essentially and actually in his own right.”⁸¹

Turning to the *Ring*, one often sees a pattern of master/slave relationship but it does not always follow Hegel’s scheme. In the Alberich/Mime relationship in *Rheingold* Scene 3 Alberich views his “slave” as a thing and not as an autonomous agent, but beyond this I am unsure what Hegel’s analysis can offer. A rather better example of the slave who is the real instrument of a new consciousness is “woman in her traditional roles as wife and lover.”⁸² As Millington elaborates: “Erda is subjugated by Wotan, Sieglinde by Hunding, the young unnamed woman in Siegmund’s narration by her kinsmen, Grimhilde by Alberich, Brünnhilde first by Siegfried disguised as Gunther, and then by Gunther himself.”⁸³ This subjugation is something of which women also break out; however, it is not quite in the way Hegel envisages. So the description of

74. Miller, *Phenomenology*, 116 (§190); *HHW* 2:113. Cf. Houlgate, *Phenomenology*, 95.

75. Houlgate, *Phenomenology*, 96.

76. Corse, *Consciousness*, 29.

77. Houlgate, *Phenomenology*, 97.

78. Miller, *Phenomenology*, 117 (§193); *HHW* 2:114. Cf. Houlgate, *Phenomenology*, 98.

79. Houlgate, *Phenomenology*, 100.

80. Houlgate, *Phenomenology*, 100.

81. Miller, *Phenomenology*, 118 (§196); *HHW* 2:115.

82. Corse, *Consciousness*, 30.

83. Millington, “The Ring and Its Times,” 24.

the slave's consciousness that Corse quotes from the *Phenomenology* hardly applies to Brünnhilde's immolation as she suggests.⁸⁴ Likewise, although I can agree that "[w]omen in the *Ring* are the natural subjects of domination and fear" I am unsure the following words using Hegel's analysis really illumine the drama: "Brünnhilde fears Wotan's wrath, but she conquers this negativity of being (symbolised by her long sleep) rising to a new self-consciousness that her own fear has taught her."⁸⁵ I am also unsure of Corse's argument that for the hero Siegfried, the necessary component of fear for the slave's psychology has been removed such that "Brünnhilde learns fear for Siegfried and passes her 'wisdom,' the knowledge she has gained through fear, to him."⁸⁶ One problem with this is that it overlooks the fact that he already learns fear directly on finding Brünnhilde asleep on the rock. Siegfried in learning such fear is truly transformed.

Hence, I think there are limitations as to how Hegel's master/slave analysis opens up an understanding of the power structures in the *Ring*, important though the philosopher was to Wagner in other respects.

Walküre Act II Scene I

Perhaps the most interesting and subtle "master/slave" relationship in the *Ring* is that of Wotan and Brünnhilde, but it springs a number of surprises. Nike Wagner describes Brünnhilde's entrance thus: "From behind a clump of rocks, a young girl in armour bursts upon the stage, jubilant, fierce, childlike—Brünnhilde. Her overbrimming *joie de vivre* is evident from her exuberant cries, leaping from high to low and back again—'Heiaha! Hojotoho!' Headstrong, angular and jagged, her song is like the mountains all around: it echoes the world of nature that surrounds the Valkyries, the nature that is Brünnhilde's home." The Valkyrie "leads an untroubled existence" in that she "is at one with herself because she is at ease with her appointed role, and the task that so fulfils her has been assigned to her by Wotan, her father."⁸⁷ Her warrior character reflects that of her father who, as we saw in chapter 2 above, adopts three of Odin's titles from the *Edda*: Valfadir, Herfadir, and Sigfödr. As we saw Valfadir = father of the slain (Walvater for Wagner) (Wal = slain, Vater = father), Herfadir = father of hosts (Heervater), and Sigfödr = father of victory (Siegvater). Then Valkyrja = chooser of the slain (Walküre) and Valholl = hall of the slain (Walhall/Walhalla).

At the beginning of *Walküre* Act II Wotan tells Brünnhilde to harness her horse for there is to be a "furious fight" ("brünstiger Streit").⁸⁸ She is to give victory to Sieg-

84. Corse, *Consciousness*, 30, quotes Hegel's *Phenomenology* (cf. Baillie, *Phenomenology*, 237; Miller, *Phenomenology*, 117 (§194)).

85. Corse, *Consciousness*, 30.

86. Corse, *Consciousness*, 30.

87. N. Wagner, *Wagners*, 72.

88. *WagRS* 140.

mund—Hunding should die and Wotan adds that he does not want him in Valhalla. Nike Wagner comments: “It does not occur to her that her mission—luring heroes to their death so that they can reside in Valhalla—is a bloody and ugly one. For her, the justness of her assignments is guaranteed by the fact that her father, whom she loves, commands them.”⁸⁹ This is a remarkable relationship. She “rides with Wotan through storms and foul weather, hands him his beer at table and lets herself be kissed by him at all times. Her childlike femininity enchants without offending, her boyish masculinity conceals no Oedipal threats.”⁹⁰ As Wish-Maid she fulfils her father’s fantasies. Magee points out that one of Wotan’s names in Old Norse is “Oski” and in Middle High German “Wunsch”; therefore the Valkyries are “Wunschmädchen” or “daughters of Wunsch/Wotan.”⁹¹ So the wish maids who will serve Siegmund in Valhalla are daughters of Wotan.⁹² However, there is another aspect to this in that Brünnhilde is the “creative womb of his wishes.”⁹³ She appears to exercise no power herself and in this sense she could be considered Wotan’s “slave” as he explains in *Walküre* Act III:⁹⁴

Keine wie sie	No one, as she did,
kannte mein innerstes Sinnen;	knew my innermost thinking;
keine wie sie	no one, as she did
wußte den Quell meines Willens;	watched at the well-spring of my will;
sie selbst war	she herself was
meines Wunsches schaffender Schooß:—	my wish’s life-giving womb:—

However, although she should have been Wotan’s “slave” she defied him, even though later she argues that she had been true to his deepest wishes since Fricka had made him an enemy of himself.⁹⁵ Wotan speaks of his “slave’s rebellion” thus:⁹⁶

Wunsch-Maid	Wish-Maid
war’st du mir:	you were to me:
gegen mich doch hast du gewünscht	but against me you have wished

However, as I will argue in subsequent chapters, the irony of Wotan as “master” is that through punishing Brünnhilde he comes to lose power (and thereby comes to grow personally) and his “slave” will later come to take over the world with her

89. N. Wagner, *Wagners*, 72.

90. N. Wagner, *Wagners*, 72. This is summed up in Wotan’s words to his daughter in *Walküre* Act III (*WagRS* 181, 190–91) his kisses being *non-sexual*.

91. Magee, *Nibelungs*, 175–78.

92. *WagRS* 160.

93. Magee, *Nibelungs*, 176.

94. *WagRS* 180.

95. *WagRS* 184.

96. *WagRS* 181.

husband Siegfried. However, this all happens in ways that do not really correspond to Hegel's analysis in the *Phenomenology*.

Siegfried, the Positive View of Power, Revolution, Anarchy, and Property

We have seen the menace of Alberich's and Wotan's lust for power and money. The opposite pole is Siegfried. He is precisely the one who can exercise power in a positive sense and correspondingly he is the one who has no interest in "money." As he emerges from Fafner's cave he has little interest in the treasure he has gained from killing the dragon:⁹⁷

Was ihr mir nützt,
weiß ich nicht:
doch nahm ich euch
aus des Hort's gehäuften Gold,
weil guter Rath mir es rieth.

What use you are
I do not know:
but I took you
from the heaped-up gold of the hoard
since goodly counsel counselled me to do so.

Likewise, when Hagen in *Götterdämmerung* Act I Scene 2 hails Siegfried as the "lord of the Nibelung hoard" he responds: "I'd almost forgotten the treasure, / so little I treasure its barren worth."⁹⁸

Wagner's portrayal of Siegfried has been justly likened to revolutionaries such as Bakunin. Shaw write that Siegfried is "a totally unmoral person, a born anarchist, the ideal Bakoonin, an anticipation of the 'overman' of Nietzsche."⁹⁹ He is not only rude and cruel to his step-father Mime, but his attitude to his grandfather can be painful to experience: "But under it [the huge hat] one of your eyes is missing [. . .]. Be off with you now! / Or else you could easily / lose the other one, too."¹⁰⁰ Perhaps less obviously a "Siegfried" was Wagner's friend and colleague in Dresden August Röckel who, Wagner noted, had undergone "the strange transformation":¹⁰¹ "On the basis of the socialist theories of Proudhon and others pertaining to the annihilation of the power of capital by direct productive labor, he constructed a whole new moral order of things to which [. . .] he little by little converted me, to the point where I began to rebuild upon it my hopes for the realization of my artistic ideals."¹⁰² As Wagner started composing the *Ring* he was indeed influenced by French socialists such as Proudhon.¹⁰³ In *Artwork*

97. WagRS 246 (*Siegfried* Act II Scene 3).

98. WagRS 294.

99. Laurence, *Shaw's Music III*, 457–58; he goes on to call him "Siegfried Bakoonin" (458–68).

100. WagRS 261.

101. *My Life* 372; *Mein Leben* 1:386.

102. *My Life* 373; *Mein Leben* 1:387.

103. Although Proudhon is not mentioned by name in *Die Wibelungen* there are certainly echoes

of the Future he writes: “Nothing has been more destructive of human happiness, than this frenzied haste to regulate the Life of the Future by given present laws. This loathly care about the Future, which indeed is the sole heritage of moody, absolute Egoism, at bottom seeks but to *preserve*, to *ensure* what we possess to-day, for all our lifetime. It holds fast to Property—the to-all-eternity to be clinched and riveted, *property*—as the only worthy object of busy human forethought.”¹⁰⁴ There is a clear allusion to Proudhon in this final sentence (cf. his comments quoted above on his influence on Rockel). His *Qu'est-ce que la propriété* was published in 1840 when Wagner was actually living there and his slogan “property is theft” “is encapsulated in the symbol of the ring” and “as a source of wealth, it puts temptation in everybody’s way and invites theft.”¹⁰⁵

But despite such negative views on “property” in the *Ring* it is worth saying that in the *Jesus* sketches a more realistic view of property is put forward and actually represents Proudhon’s views fairly accurately.¹⁰⁶ He clarified his slogan “property is theft” by saying it was polemically formulated and that property could even be the basis for the freedom of the individual over against the state.¹⁰⁷ Property is only problematic when it turns into power over human beings and this of course is the fundamental problem with Alberich’s and Wotan’s longing for the ring. Wagner’s Jesus does not demand the total abolition of property but simply a just distribution of it, a view that was also not unlike that of Marx and Engels.¹⁰⁸

Nationalism

Whereas twentieth- and twenty-first-century nationalism is generally associated with right-wing politics, in much of the nineteenth it was associated with socialism, hence Wagner’s involvement in the 1849 Dresden revolution. Wagner’s nationalism has associations with figures such as Herder and Fichte,¹⁰⁹ but categorizing his nationalism, like his antisemitism, is not always straightforward. He held to a cultural nationalism rather like Herder,¹¹⁰ but it is striking that although the *Nibelungenlied* was associated with such German nationalism, Wagner does not appear to appeal to this epic to support his nationalist sentiments. As far as Fichte is concerned, Wagner certainly shared

of his thought (*PW* 7:295–96; *GSD* 2:153; see volume 1, chapter 2).

104. *PW* 1:206; *GSD* 3:171.

105. Millington, “The Ring and Its Times,” 19.

106. See Proudhon, *Staatsökonomie*, 1:341–46.

107. Kreckel, *Frühsozialisten*, 104–6.

108. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, 235: “The distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. But modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products, that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few.”

109. Wagner’s relationship with these two figures was discussed in volume 1, chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

110. This is seen clearly in Hans Sachs’ final words in *Meistersinger* (Berger, *Beyond Reason*, 28).

his view that the nation was more fundamental than the state. In his *Orations to the German Nation*,¹¹¹ Fichte writes “the state, as the mere regiment of human life proceeding along its usual peaceful course, is not something primary, existing for itself, but is merely the means to a higher end, that of the ever-uniform and continuing development of the purely human (*Ausbildung des rein Menschlichen*) in this nation.”¹¹² His likening of Germany to Greece in this respect would be music to Wagner's ears: “As was the case only among the ancient Greeks before them, among the Germans the state and the nation were actually separate from each other.”¹¹³

Although Wagner explained how his art could lead to a new order (and hence a genuine German nationalism) in his Zurich essays, a key to this being the appropriation of Greek tragedy, he nevertheless argued that Germany could only be revitalized through the Greeks after a revolution.¹¹⁴ Therefore Wagner “incites his audience to overthrow the present state in order to rebuild the nation along more natural lines. Only after this revolution might Germany be able to sponsor a drama such as Athens sponsored for its citizens.”¹¹⁵

Wagner's nationalism had not only a “Greek” element but also a strong “Christian” component as we shall shortly see when I consider Friedrich Barbarossa. But this Christian component was essentially Protestant, and Wagner often relates the Reformation to his German nationalism, and he considered “Rome” an alien element. Cosima relates her husband's only extant allusion to Arminius: “‘So far,’ R. says, ‘we have been great in *defence*, dispelling alien elements which we could not assimilate; the Teutoburger Wald was a rejection of the Roman influence, the Reformation also a rejection, our great literature a rejection of the influence of the French; the only positive thing so far has been our music—Beethoven.’”¹¹⁶

Wagner certainly believed that in composing the *Ring* he was creating Germany, and the inscription on the titles page of the first printed score of *Das Rheingold* (dated 20 March 1873) certainly witness to a nationalism:¹¹⁷

111. The 1859 edition compiled by Fichte's son, Immanuel Hermann Fichte, was in Wagner's Wahnfried library.

112. Fichte, *Address*, 111 (eighth address; *JGFAW* 5:502–3); note Fichte's use of the “purely human,” a key idea for Wagner.

113. Fichte, *Address*, 111 (*JGFAW* 5:503); cf. Berger, *Beyond Reason*, 29–30. On the *Orations* and whether they are hostile to human liberty see Wood, “Philosophy of Right,” 185, and Aichelle, “Ending Individuality,” 248–72.

114. Foster, *Greeks*, 209, writes that for Wagner Germany would need to “return to the more universal world of nature in order to ‘replant’ the nation in a richer and purer cultural soil and thus, in a sense, do for itself what Wagner did for Siegfried, namely, provide a natural education.” He refers to *Artwork of the Future* (*PW* 1:203; *GSD* 3:168): “Our modern *States* are thus far the most unnatural unions of fellow men.”

115. Foster, *Greeks*, 209, referring to *Art and Revolution* (*PW* 1:54–55; *GSD* 3:30–31).

116. *CD* 19 February 1872.

117. *DEBRN* 5, 172.

Der Ring des Nibelungen	The Ring of the Nibelung
Ein Bühnenfestspiel	A Festival Stage Play
für drei Tage und einen Vorabend	for Three Days and a Preliminary Evening
Im Vertrauen auf den deutschen Geist entworfen	Conceived in faith in the German spirit
und zum Ruhme seines erhabenen Wohltäters	and completed for the greater glory of its noble benefactor
des Königs	King
Ludwig II	Ludwig II
von Bayern	of Bavaria,
vollendet von	by
Richard Wagner	Richard Wagner

Wagner believed after his rescue from financial disaster by King Ludwig II in 1864 that Bavaria would provide the context for his art renewing the nation. However, his hopes were frustrated by the Bavarian politicians and press. He then pinned his hopes on Prussia and Bismarck in the process of which he was to celebrate the new establishment of the German Reich in 1871 after the Franco-Prussian war. But Bismarck also was to prove to be a bitter disappointment and Wagner's hopes for change in society were rooted again in his art and not in politics.¹¹⁸ But despite being so disillusioned with current political leaders, he could at least take some comfort from the great leaders of the past. After 1871 he took a special interest in Friedrich der Grosse, considering him one of the "very rare geniuses"¹¹⁹ and entertained writing a stage work about him.¹²⁰ He read Carlyle's biography,¹²¹ and two writers who influenced Wagner, Ranke and Droysen, both took a special interest in Friedrich der Grosse, extolling his achievements. However, the dominating political (and to some extent "spiritual") figure for Wagner for much of his creative life was to be Friedrich Barbarossa.

118. Bermbach, *Wahn*, 343–44.

119. CD 26 January 1871.

120. CD 30 January 1871: "If I were a young fellow' R. said, 'how I should like now to complete my Barbarossa, my Bernhard von Weimar! Frederick the Great still occupies my thoughts, his state of mind is in fact a true picture of our own up till now; the imagination French, but the essential being thoroughly German; this division ought to give the work an extremely interesting profile." Just over a week later he received Mathilde Wesendonck's *Friedrich der Grosse: dramatische Bilder nach Franz Kugler* (published 1871 and based on Kugler's *Geschichte Friedrichs des Großen*, Leipzig 1840). But according to Cosima, "R. is utterly opposed to women's venturing into the market in this way, he sees it as a sign of lack of taste." I am unsure whether this is an accurate representation of the composer's views.

121. CD 4 June 1871.

Hohenstaufens

Wagner read Raumer's history of the Hohenstaufens at the end of 1841¹²² in his Paris years¹²³ when he was sketching his proposed five-act opera *Die Sarazenin*,¹²⁴ a work that concerns Manfred, the son of Friedrich II. This was not the first time he dealt with the Staufer theme since already in 1832 he had composed an Overture "König Enzo" (WWV 24; WWV 88–91).¹²⁵ But the figure who was to fascinate Wagner was Friedrich Barbarossa, as can be seen in the sketches for his opera *Friedrich I*¹²⁶ and in *Die Wibelungen*.¹²⁷ Raumer's work in six volumes first appeared in 1823–35 and Wagner possessed volumes 1, 2, and 4 of the second edition of 1840–41 (volume 2 being concerned with Friedrich I).¹²⁸ Whereas A. W. Schlegel and Ranke viewed the Hohenstaufens in terms of a Roman/German medieval world, Raumer portrayed a Romantic "Christian-German" history whereby the emperors were not seen in terms of real power but rather as an ethical idea.¹²⁹ Munz argued that over the century the sometimes sober assessments of Barbarossa's career was to be transformed¹³⁰ such that by the time we come to Prutz's three-volume work *Kaiser Friedrich I* (1871–74) we find Barbarossa portrayed as a heroic figure and his reign a golden age¹³¹ such that it was understandable that the Kyffhäuser legend (see below) could have developed.¹³²

The *Friedrich I* sketches are brief but *Die Wibelungen* is an extensive work and holds many clues for the *Ring*.¹³³ Wagner writes of conflict between the "Welfen" and the "Wibelungen," the significant point being that whereas the Welfen were submissive to the papacy, the Wibelungen wished to dominate. The Hohenstaufens were preceded by the Salian emperors who ruled 1024–1125, the last being Henry V (reigned 1106–25) who died childless, appointing his nephew Friedrich of Swabia of the house

122. Gregor-Dellin, *Chronik*, 31.

123. *My Life* 210; *Mein Leben* 1:221.

124. *My Life* 210–12; *Mein Leben* 1:221–23. On *Die Sarazenin* (WWV 66; DTB 205–21) see *PW* 1:313–14; *GSD* 3:270–71 (*Communication to my Friends*).

125. Zegowitz, *Opern*, 110.

126. The sketches were composed over the period 1846–49 (see volume 1, chapter 2 on the issue of dating).

127. Wagner worked on this in late 1848 and in early 1849.

128. Note also that Ranke, *Reformation*, 1:36–37, deals briefly with Friedrich Barbarossa's relationship to the papacy (Wagner possessed Ranke's five-volume history of Germany at the time of the Reformation in his Dresden library).

129. Kaul, *Barbarossa*, 1:79.

130. Munz, *Barbarossa*, 4, claims that in Raumer's work "nothing spectacular is attributed to Frederick, and his reign does not appear to have been particularly golden." Note, however, that Raumer writes of the Roncaglia diet in glowing terms (*Hohenstaufen*, 2:101).

131. Prutz, *Kaiser Friedrich I*, 3:353–56, offers a concluding "doxology." This work was in Wagner's Wahnfried library.

132. Prutz, *Kaiser Friedrich I*, 1:4.

133. See volume 1, chapter 2.

of Hohenstaufen as his successor. But the ecclesiastical and lay princes elected Lothar (a Welf). Wagner contrasts Henry V and Lothar thus: “Heinrich V., previously supported by the Church against his hapless father, had scarcely reached the rank of Kaiser than he felt the fateful craving to renew his father’s wrestle with the Church” realizing that his “world-dominion” should include “dominion of the Church herself.”¹³⁴ On the other hand, the Welf Lothar III (reigned 1125–37) “adopted an attitude of peaceful submission to the Church: he did not fathom what the Kaiser-rank implied; *his* claims did not extend to world-dominion,—those were the heirloom of the Wibelungen, the old-legitimist contenders for the Hoard. But clearly and plainly as none before, great *Friedrich I.* took up the heir-idea in its sublimest sense.”¹³⁵ Hence Friedrich I came to have such an important place in Wagner’s thinking. In his autobiography he comments in the context of his *Friedrich I* drama: “The idea of a ruler was to be grasped here in its most powerful and momentous significance; his dignified resignation at the impossibility of realizing his highest ideals was to lead, while arousing sympathy for the hero as well, to a true insight into the manifold complexity of all action in this world.”¹³⁶ Part of Wagner’s admiration for Friedrich was clearly that he opposed the power of the pope; he added “Holy” to the “Holy Roman Empire” (in 1157), the epithet “reflecting his aim to dominate Italy and the papacy, as well as the areas north of the Alps.”¹³⁷ In *Die Wibelungen* Wagner related Barbarossa to both Siegfried and Christ, all three being in their different ways “saviour” figures.¹³⁸ The close link Wagner made between Barbarossa and Siegfried is also seen in the fact that in the *Annals* for 1848 he writes: “Old German studies. Sketched out in my head Barbarossa in five acts. Passed on to Siegfried by way of a prose work on his historical significance: *Die Wibelungen*.”¹³⁹

While Friedrich was viewed by Wagner as a parallel to Siegfried (and to Christ) in positive terms, he was also viewed as a parallel to Wotan, but in ways that are not always positive. There is the parallel to Wotan in that Friedrich, according to the legend, sleeps in the Kyffhäuser mountain with his ravens circling above.¹⁴⁰ But there is also the entirely negative association in that Wotan was prepared to sacrifice his son, Siegmund. Cosima records: “Talked about Barbarossa and Arnold of Brescia, the great sin of the former in delivering him up, an act avenged on his whole

134. *PW* 7:288; *GSD* 2:145.

135. *PW* 7:288; *GSD* 2:146.

136. *My Life* 376; *Mein Leben* 1:390.

137. Whaley, *Germany I*, 17.

138. See volume 1, chapter 2. As well as Wagner’s linking Barbarossa and Christ see the connection made in the painting (1837) and copperplate engraving (1858; E. Bendemann and E. A. Goldfriedrich) “Christus streitet für uns” (Kaul, *Barbarossa*, 2:3–4).

139. *Brown Book* 95; *Braunes Buch* 113. Note, however, that these *Annals* were rewritten in 1868 and certain details were falsified. See volume 1, chapter 2.

140. In certain respects (but only certain respects) this resembles Waltraute’s description of Wotan in *Götterdämmerung* Act I Scene 3: “So he sits, / says not a word, / silent and grave / on his hallowed seat” (*WagRS* 303). But note Friedrich will return to *save* Germany; Wotan is simply awaiting his end.

family like—*Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Wotan's sin."¹⁴¹ Arnold of Brescia was a radical preacher who attacked the wealth of the clergy, advocated their complete poverty, and led a rebellion against the pope.¹⁴² Pope Hadrian demanded that Friedrich capture and hand over Arnold, which he did;¹⁴³ Hadrian in turn handed him over to the prefect of Rome, who had him executed,¹⁴⁴ something Friedrich later bitterly regretted (since Arnold may have been useful to his cause).¹⁴⁵

Friedrich I as an opponent of the pope also became important for Luther, and this connection was not lost on Wagner as a keen Protestant. Cosima records her husband's words in 1869, the year he earnestly started working again on the *Ring* after his so-called twelve-year break: "When I have finished the *Nibelungen* [. . .] I shall write some plays for the theater: Luther's marriage with C[atherine] v[von] Bora, Bernard von Weimar [. . .] and also Barbarossa."¹⁴⁶ Wagner's associating Barbarossa with Luther was not accidental.

There are two key sources for Wagner concerning the legendary and mythological stories of Friedrich: Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, which he read in 1843, and then the *Volksbuch* of 1519, which was republished in 1845. Grimm tells of the legend that Friedrich I had not in fact died but that he had been taken to the Kyffhäuser in Thüringen where he sleeps, sitting on a round stone table, his beard growing over the table.¹⁴⁷ Friedrich asks a shepherd if the ravens were still encircling the mountain, and as the shepherd said yes, Friedrich said that he must then sleep for another hundred years.¹⁴⁸ Grimm then goes on to speak of the tradition of the final battle: "When the beard has for the third time reached the last corner of the table, the *end of the world* begins, a *bloody battle* is fought for the Walserfeld, *Antichrist* appears,

141. CD 27 October 1876.

142. Munz, *Barbarossa*, 29, 59, 61.

143. Munz, *Barbarossa*, 80.

144. Munz, *Barbarossa*, 87.

145. Munz, *Barbarossa*, 87, 247.

146. CD 27 June 1869.

147. Grimm's *Mythologie*, 2:906; *Mythology*, 3:955. The legend originally was attached to Friedrich I's grandson, Friedrich II. The idea that it was Frederick I was first made popular by Rückert's poem *Barbarossa*, composed in 1816 and published in 1817 (Kaul, *Barbarossa*, 1:102). It tells of his never dying (strophe 2) and his returning the glory to Germany (strophe 3: "Er hat hinabgenommen / Des Reiches Herrlichkeit, / Und wird einst wiederkommen, / Mit ihr, zu seiner Zeit"). It ends thus: "Er spricht im Schlaf zum Knaben: / Geh' hin vor's Schloß, o Zwerg, / Und sieh, ob noch die Raben / Herfliegen um den Berg! / Und wenn die alten Raben / Noch fliegen immerdar, / So muß ich auch noch schlafen, / Verzaubert hundert Jahr" (Rückert, *Gedichte*, 172–73). Further linking the legend with Friedrich I was "given the seal of scholarly approval by the publication of Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*" (Munz, *Barbarossa*, 15), which was first published in 1835. Grimm did in fact link the legend to Barbarossa back in 1816 when his *Deutsche Sagen* (written with his brother Wilhelm) was published. But whereas his main source Johannes Praetorius had doubts about the identity of the emperor, Grimm, it appears, had none (Munz, *Barbarossa*, 15, n. 4).

148. Grimm, *Mythologie*, 2:906–7; *Mythology*, 3:955–56.

the angel-trumpets peal, and the *Last of Days* has dawned.”¹⁴⁹ He then gives the older tradition, including that of the religious poem of the sixteenth century (Gräter’s *Odina*) that tells of “Herzog Friedrich,” “who is to win back the H[oly] Sepulchre, and hang his shield on a leafless tree; and Antichrist is brought in too.”¹⁵⁰ This, we will see, is related to the tradition found in the 1519 *Volksbuch*.

Hence, Grimm explains: “That the *common people* disbelieved the death of Emp. Frederick, and expected him to come back, is plain from the passages which expressly refer to ‘old peasants’”¹⁵¹ and adds that “it had most likely been the same in the preceding (thirteenth) cent., and was long after.”¹⁵² Such a “coming back,” his “wiederkehr,” exactly the term Wagner’s Jesus of the *Jesus of Nazareth* sketches employs for the “second coming,” will occur once the ravens ceased to encircle the mountain.¹⁵³ These ravens are clearly Wotan’s birds but the precise nature of his association with the mountain is unclear.¹⁵⁴ This discussion of Friedrich appears in Grimm’s *Mythologie* chapter 32 headed “Entrückung” (“rapture”)¹⁵⁵ and in a section specifically on “Bergentrückte Helden,” (“heroes taken up into mountains”) and immediately before the discussion of Friedrich I there is brief mention of Siegfried who, it is believed, lives with other heroes in the old Geroldseck Castle and will appear when the German people are facing greatest need.¹⁵⁶ Wagner developed these legends in *Die Wibelungen* which, as was seen in volume 1, is a strange but important work for understanding the *Ring*, in particular the

149. Grimm, *Mythology*, 3:956; *Mythologie*, 2:908: “hat der bart zum drittenmale die letzte tisch-ecke erreicht, so tritt das *weltende* ein, auf dem Walserfeld erfolgt eine *blutige schlachte*, der *antichrist* erscheint, die engelposaunen tönen und der *jüngste tag* ist angebrochen.”

150. Grimm, *Mythology*, 3:956; *Mythologie*, 2:908.

151. Grimm, *Mythology*, 3:958; *Mythologie*, 2:910: “Dass kaiser Friedrichs tod *unter dem volk* bezweifelt und seine wiederkehr geglaubt wurde, lehren die angeführten stellen, die sich ausdrücklich auf alte bauern beziehen.” See also the *Jesus of Nazareth* sketches, which speak of Jesus’ “wiederkehr.” Berry, *Bonds*, 41, refers to Heine who speaks of Barbarossa as “holding in his hand the divine sceptre of liberty, and carrying upon his head the imperial crown without a Cross” (“tenant dans sa main le sceptre divinatoire de la liberté, et portant sur sa tête la couronne impériale sans croix” (*Werke*, 9:191)).

152. Grimm, *Mythology*, 3:958; *Mythologie*, 2:910.

153. When Wagner included *Die Wibelungen* in his collected writings in 1871 he omitted the “supernatural conversation with Barbarossa in the underworld” (Köhler, *Titans*, 255). “When will you return, Frederick, O glorious Siegfried! and slay the evil gnawing worm of humanity?” “Two ravens are flying round my mountain,—they are gluttoned on the spoils of the empire. From the South-east pecks the one, from North-east the other:—drive away the ravens and the hoard is yours. But leave me in peace in my mountain of the gods!” See SSD 12:229 (entitled “Die Wibelungen (1848) (Schlußworte)”: “Wann kommst du wieder, Friedrich, du herrlicher Siegfried! und schlägst den bösen nagenden Wurm der Menschheit?”—“Zwei Raben fliegen um meinen Berg,—sie mästeten sich fett vom Raube des Reiches!—Von Südost hackt der eine, von Nordost hackt der andere:—verjagt die Raben und der Hort ist euer! Mich aber laßt ruhig in meinem Götterberge!”

154. Munz, *Barbarossa*, 12.

155. Grimm, *Mythologie*, 2:903. *Mythology*, 3:951 render “Entrückung”: as “Translation.”

156. Grimm, *Mythologie*, 2:906; *Mythology*, 3:955. Castle Geroldseck is in Alsace and overlooks Haegen.

issue of its German character, questions about race, and the links between Siegfried (who is like Apollo killing Python),¹⁵⁷ Friedrich Barbarossa, and Christ, and then again links from Friedrich and Christ to Wotan.¹⁵⁸

The second work to consider is the *Volksbuch* of 1519, which was important regarding Friedrich's confrontation with the papacy.¹⁵⁹ It was originally published in Augsburg, had a wide circulation, and went through many editions.¹⁶⁰ Then in the nineteenth century it was republished in the *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum* in volume 5 of 1845 (together with other Friedrich I material), which was in Wagner's Dresden library.¹⁶¹ I think it is very likely Wagner read the section of Friedrich since it was in 1846 that he produced his first sketch for his opera *Friedrich I* and chose to write this on Reformation Day (31 October). The *Volksbuch* recounts four stories concerning Friedrich, all of which are essentially legendary. The first includes Friedrich's capture of Jerusalem.¹⁶² The second concerns a story that Pope Alexander III envied Friedrich, ordered a portrait be produced which was sent to the Sultan of Babylon, who was asked to find Friedrich in Armenia on his crusade. Friedrich and his chaplain were captured, imprisoned, but were eventually released by the Sultan. Friedrich returned to his empire and planned vengeance on the pope.¹⁶³ The third story concerns his capture of Venice (to where the pope had fled), his making St Mark's basilica a stall for his horses, and ploughing up St Mark's square to sow corn.¹⁶⁴ This story ends by Friedrich humbling himself before the pope on the advice of the Bishop Hartman of Brixen but confessing that he is obedient to St Peter, not to the pope (even though he is his successor).¹⁶⁵ All ends peacefully between Friedrich and Alexander.¹⁶⁶ The fourth story tells of the deaths of the two figures. The pope's final act is to call a counsel and he dies in the twenty-first year of his papacy. But no one knows where Friedrich is buried. The *Volksbuch* ends by telling of the tradition of Barbarossa living still in a mountain, having been being taken up. He is expected to return when he will punish the clergy, and hang his shield on the

157. Spencer, "Romantic operas," 298 n. 37, suggests that Wagner drew the Siegfried/Fafner and Apollo/Python parallelism from Grimm, *Mythologie*, 1:345; *Mythology*, 1:371–72.

158. The most detailed discussion I have found is that of Wilberg, *Mythische Welt*, 77–184. This work is especially helpful in relating Wagner to the fundamentally important work of Hübner, *Mythos*. Among other things she gives a helpful summary of earlier work on *Die Wibelungen* (89–95).

159. Stadtwald, *Roman Popes*, 52–57.

160. Munz, *Barbarossa*, 14.

161. Wagner possessed volumes 1–6 (1841–48) (Westernhagen, *Bibliothek*, 110). In addition to the "Volksbüchlein" itself (253–67) there was an introduction by Pfeiffer (250–52), a text from 1572 ("Eusebii chronica aller christ. kirchen"), which includes an outline of the pope's various attempt to kill Friedrich (267–68), and a poem "Kaiser Friedrich aus Enenkels Weltchronik" (268–93).

162. Pfeiffer, "Volksbüchlein," 253–59.

163. Pfeiffer, "Volksbüchlein," 259–65.

164. Pfeiffer, "Volksbüchlein," 265–66.

165. Pfeiffer, "Volksbüchlein," 266: "ich bin nit dir, sonder Petro, des nachkomen du bist, gehorsam."

166. Pfeiffer, "Volksbüchlein," 265–67.

barren tree that is guarded by the Sultan.¹⁶⁷ This is the first extant reference to the figure in the Kyffhäuser being Friedrich I.¹⁶⁸

Although such stories have little basis in history, and Wagner was clearly aware of this, one has to take seriously his utterance that Cosima reports: “what human beings have themselves thought out and imagined is more important than what really happened.”¹⁶⁹ Such stories concerning Friedrich were part of the German collective consciousness of the nineteenth century and fashioned the way they thought of the nation and its relationship to the papacy. In addition to the stories related in the *Volksbuch* of 1519, but possibly growing out of it, is that Friedrich on his return will avenge the blood of the peasants in the battle of Frankenhausen (1525). According to the *Volksbuch*, Friedrich in taking Jerusalem was helped by the son of a Bavarian miller who was carrying the flag of the “pundtschuoch” (“Bundschuh”),¹⁷⁰ the “peasants’ boot,” which was to be the symbol of the peasants’ revolt of 1525.¹⁷¹ It may be purely a coincidence but the final battle of the revolt took place in Bad Frankenhausen, situated at the southern slope of the Kyffhäuser range. A tradition developed in that region that on Good Friday peasants would assemble on the Kyffhäuser, Friedrich would be resurrected, and he would avenge the innocent blood spilt at Frankenhausen.¹⁷² We do not know if Wagner knew of this tradition, but if he did it would clearly appeal to his political sympathies.

Wagner’s fascination with Barbarossa was to continue and in 1871 he said that if he were young again he would like to complete the play.¹⁷³ In November, whilst making corrections on *Die Wibelungen* (for publication of *Collected Writings*) Cosima records: “he says he is in fact still thinking of doing something on Friedrich Barbarossa, in order to bring out this one single feature—his magnificent, barbaric, noble, and indeed divine inexperience.”¹⁷⁴ This description of Friedrich is clearly fitting for Siegfried.¹⁷⁵ He then speaks as though the “Holy Roman Empire” still exists

167. Pfeiffer, 267: “Die pawrn und schwartzen künstner sagen, er sey noch lebendig in ainem holen perg, soll noch herwider komen und die gaistlichen straffen und sein schilt noch an den durren paum hengken, welchs paums all Soldan noch fleissig hüeten lassen. Das ist war das des paums gehüet wirt, und sein hüeter darzu gestift: wölcher kaiser aber seinen schilt sol daran hengken, das weiss got.” This barren tree is presumably the one Jesus cursed in Mark 11:12–14, 20–21; Matt 21:18–20.

168. There was also a tradition that it was in fact Barbarossa’s grandson, Friedrich II, who was the figure of the Kyffhäuser legend (Munz, *Barbarossa*, 6–15). See above on Wagner’s interests in Friedrich II.

169. CD 17 November 1879.

170. Pfeiffer, “Volksbüchlein,” 256–57.

171. On Wagner’s interest in the peasant’s war see the letters of 10 April 1845 (to Ferdinand Hiller, SB 2:425) and 24 October 1846 (to Johann Kittl, SB 2:529).

172. Munz, *Barbarossa*, 10, who refers to Eberhardt, “Kyffhäuserburgen,” 97.

173. CD 30 January 1871.

174. CD 12 November 1871.

175. See chapter 10 below on Siegfried’s character.

(perhaps because of Wilhelm I of Prussia being proclaimed emperor on 18 January 1871 in the Hall of Mirrors, Versailles).

"And how inconceivable it is," R. adds, "that this German Empire, the most inconceivable thing of all, is probably something which will outlast all monarchies."—"I am glad," he says, "that I have an eye for this connection between legend and history. In the popular view Caesar was connected with Ilium, and Saint Gregory of Tours speaks of a Frankish Pharamund who was a descendant of Priam. The compilation of the Nibelung Saga, which was hardly understood anymore, began with Friedrich I."¹⁷⁶

Then a year later Cosima records: "we talked yesterday about this wonderful race (diese herrliche Race) of Hohenstaufens, who appear before us like all the magnificent figures of the ancient world."¹⁷⁷

Wagner's interest in Friedrich was no doubt fed by Hegel's emphasizing the greatness of Friedrich Barbarossa. The first sketch for *Friedrich I* was made in 1846, he read Hegel's *Philosophy of History* in 1847 and then made further sketches in 1848–49 and composed *Die Wibelungen* at around the same time. Hegel writes:

In the brilliant period of the *Hohenstaufen* dynasty, individuals of commanding character sustained the dignity of the throne; sovereigns like Frederick Barbarossa, in whom the imperial power manifested itself in its greatest majesty, and who by his personal qualities succeeded in attaching the subject princes to his interests. Yet brilliant as the history of the Hohenstaufen dynasty may appear, and stirring as might have been the contest with the Church, the former [Hohenstaufen dynasty] presents on the whole nothing more than the tragedy of this house itself [and of Germany], and the latter [the Church] had no important result in the sphere of Spirit.¹⁷⁸

176. CD 12 November 1871. Note he had a copy of Lobell, *Gregor von Tours*, in both his Dresden and Wahnfried libraries.

177. CD 8 November 1872. This was in relation to reading on 7 November a poem by Heinrich VI, son of Barbarossa.

178. Hegel, *History*, 388. *Geschichte*, 466: "In der glänzenden Periode der Hohenstaufen behaupteten Individuen von großem Charakter den Thron, wie Friedrich Barbarossa, in welchem sich die kaiserliche Macht in ihrer größten Herrlichkeit darstellte und welcher durch seine Persönlichkeit auch die ihm untergebenen Fürsten an sich zu halten mußte. So glänzend die Geschichte der Hohenstaufen erscheint, so lärmend der Kampf mit der Kirche war, so stellt jene doch im ganzen nur die Tragödie der Familie dieses Hauses und Deutschlands dar, und dieser hat geistig kein großes Resultat gehabt."