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Translator's Dedication:

To Vicki

Chronology

1813 Born in Leipzig, Saxony, on 22 May, the last of nine children, to Johanna Rosina and police actuary Carl Friedrich Wagner
1813 Napoleon defeated in Battle of Nations near Leipzig, 16–19 October
1813–14 Carl Friedrich dies of typhoid fever and soon after Johanna Rosina marries Ludwig Geyer, a painter and actor; the family moves to Dresden
1814–15 Congress of Vienna, September to June
1821 Ludwig Geyer dies of tuberculosis
1822 Enters Dresden Kreuzschule as Richard 'Geyer'
1827 Death of Ludwig van Beethoven
1828 Enters Leipzig Nicolaischule as Richard Wagner and starts lessons with first composition teacher Christian Müller
1829 First (instrumental) compositions
1830 Offers publisher Schott piano arrangement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; witnesses October Leipzig demonstrations in the wake of the Paris 'July Revolution'
1831 Giacomo Meyerbeer becomes a celebrity overnight after the sensational Paris première of his opera *Robert the Devil*
1831 Studies with Leipzig Thomaskantor Theodor Weinlig
1832 Composes a symphony in C major and has it performed in Prague in November
1832 Death of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; posthumous publication of *Faust: The Second Part of the Tragedy*
1833–4 Libretto and music of first complete opera *The Fairies* (first performed posthumously in 1888) after Carlo Gozzi's

fairy tale *The Serpent Woman*; through Heinrich Laube comes under the influence of the literary Young Germany movement

1835–6 Libretto and music of second opera *The Ban on Love* after Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, performed only once complete in Magdeburg in March 1836

1837 Settles in Königsberg and marries the actress Minna Planer

1838 After accepting a conducting post in Riga, begins libretto and music of third opera *Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes* after Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes*

1839 Flees creditors in Riga by sea via London to Paris and on the way meets Meyerbeer for the first time

1839–40 Plans a *Grand Faust Symphony* after Goethe; completes only the first movement

1840 Finishes *Rienzi* and writes for a Paris music journal

1840–41 Conceives and finishes fourth opera *The Flying Dutchman* after a story by Heinrich Heine; Meyerbeer recommends *Rienzi* to the Royal Court Theatre in Dresden

1842 Returns to Dresden from Paris and rehearses *Rienzi* for its first performance on 20 October to great public acclaim

1843 Conducts première of *The Flying Dutchman* on 2 January (with moderate success) and commissioned by Laube publishes his first autobiographical essay; appointed Royal Saxon Kapellmeister

1843–4 Reads Jacob Grimm's *German Mythology*

1843–5 Composes fifth opera *Tannhäuser and the Song Contest at Wartburg* and conducts first performance on 19 October 1845

1844–6 Publishes scores of *Rienzi*, *The Flying Dutchman* and *Tannhäuser*

1846 Conducts Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for the first time on 5 April; essay on it with citations from Goethe's *Faust* published

1846–8 Composes sixth opera *Lohengrin*; presents revised German version of Gluck's opera *Iphigenia in Aulis* in Dresden and engages in a detailed study of Greek drama

1848 February insurrections in Paris; writes libretto of a new opera, *Siegfried's Death*

1849 Participation in Dresden May uprising; flees to Zurich into twelve-year exile and warrant issued for his arrest

1850 Première of *Lohengrin* in Weimar (in Wagner's absence) conducted by Franz Liszt on 28 August, 101st anniversary of Goethe's birth

1850–51 Publishes radical writings including *The Artwork of the Future* and (under a pseudonym) *Judaism in Music* aimed at Meyerbeer among others; aborts composition of *Siegfried's Death* and completes libretto of a prequel called *The Young Siegfried*

1851–2 Decides to expand *Siegfried's Death* into a cycle of four works, to cease calling his stage works 'operas', and to complete texts of *The Valkyrie* and *The Rhinegold*; the *Lohengrin* score is published

1852 Second French Empire under Napoleon III established; publishes treatise *Opera and Drama*

1853 Private printing of *The Ring* text (fifty copies) and public reading in Zurich 16–19 February; begins composition of *The Rhinegold* in November

1854 Completes the composition of *The Rhinegold* and the first musical draft of *The Valkyrie*; reads Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*

1855 Orchestrates *The Valkyrie* and conducts London concerts

1856 Finishes *The Valkyrie* and begins composing *Siegfried*; first sketches for *Tristan und Isolde*

1857 Moves with his wife Minna into a villa on the estate of Otto and Mathilde Wesendonck; abandons composition of *Siegfried* at end of Act II to complete the *Tristan* text and to compose Act I

1858 Begins composition of *Tristan* Act II; tensions on Wesendonck estate prompt departure for Venice

1859 Completes *Tristan* Act II in Venice and moves to Lucerne to compose Act III; moves to Paris in September and sells publishing rights of *The Ring* to Otto Wesendonck

1860 *Tristan* orchestral score published on 13 January;

conducts three concerts in Paris with the *Tristan* prelude and begins revisions of *Tannhäuser* for new production at the Opéra commissioned by Napoleon III

1861 Vocal score of *The Rhinegold* published

1861 Paris *Tannhäuser* withdrawn after three scandalous performances in March (although sold out for the rest of the run)

1861 After partial amnesty Wagner hears *Lohengrin* for the first time in Vienna, where *Tristan* rehearsals begin (abandoned two years later)

1862 Text and overture of *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* composed

1862–3 Excerpts from *The Ring*, including The Ride of the Valkyries, heard publicly for the first time in three concerts in Vienna

1863 *The Ring* poem published for the book trade with an appeal to a German prince to finance it

1864 Ludwig II ascends to the Bavarian throne on 10 March

1864 Summoned to Munich by Ludwig II on 3 May; affair with Cosima von Bülow, daughter of Franz Liszt, begins in earnest

1864 Signs contract on 18 October for completion of *The Ring* transferring all property and performance rights to Ludwig II

1865 Vocal score of *The Valkyrie* published; première of *Tristan* in Munich on 10 June conducted by Hans von Bülow

1866 Death of Minna Wagner in Dresden

1866 Having been forced to leave Munich, rents Villa Tribschen on Lake Lucerne and lives with Cosima; continues composing *The Mastersingers*

1867 Cosima with daughters returns to her husband Hans in Munich; composition of *The Mastersingers* completed in October

1868 Publishes brochure *German Art and German Politics* and second edition of *Opera and Drama*

1868 Publication of the score of *The Mastersingers* and public success of its première on 21 June conducted by Hans von Bülow; Cosima decides to divorce Hans and return to Tribschen

1869 Cosima begins her diaries on 1 January and Friedrich Nietzsche visits Tribschen for the first time in May

1869 Reissues *Judaism in Music* as a brochure under real name with an explanatory essay, composes *Siegfried* Act III and begins work on the music of *Twilight of the Gods*; première of *The Rhinegold* in September in Munich against Wagner's wishes (and in his absence)

1870 Reads about Bayreuth in Brockhaus's *Conversations-Lexicon* on 5 March (later declared the 'day of Bayreuth') and thinks seriously about a festival there

1870 Première of *The Valkyrie* in Munich in June again without Wagner's co-operation; Cosima's divorce from Hans is ratified and she marries Wagner on 25 August in a Protestant church

1870 Publishes extended essay *Beethoven* for the centenary of the composer's birth and composes the *Siegfried Idyll* for Cosima's birthday (24 December)

1871 18 January German Empire declared after Prussian victory over France; meets Bismarck on 3 May

1871 Publishes vocal score of *Siegfried* and initiates plans with Bayreuth city council for theatre and festival in November and December

1872 Nietzsche's last visit to Tribschen; Cosima and family join Wagner in Bayreuth where he lays the foundation stone of the festival theatre on his birthday and conducts Beethoven's Ninth in celebration

1874 Preparations for performance of *The Ring* begin in May and June; publishes orchestral score of *The Valkyrie* in June and completes that of *Twilight of the Gods* on 21 November

1875 July–August preliminary rehearsals with piano and orchestra of *The Ring* in the Bayreuth festival theatre; publishes *Siegfried* (orchestral score) and *Twilight of the Gods* (vocal score)

1876 Publishes orchestral score of *Twilight of the Gods* in June

1876 1 June–4 August piano and orchestral rehearsals of *The Ring* followed by open dress rehearsals 6–9 August; official world première on 13, 14 and – a day later than scheduled

due to indisposition of Franz Betz (Wotan/Wanderer) – 16 and 17 August conducted by Hans Richter

1877 Writes text of his final stage work *Parsifal*, calling it a 'Festival Play for the Consecration of the Stage', and begins composing the music in September

1877 30 April–4 June travels to London to conduct eight concerts in the Albert Hall (with Hans Richter) to raise money to pay off festival debts

1878 Helps to establish the 'house' journal *Bayreuther Blätter* (continues publication until 1938) for which he writes articles on vegetarianism, vivisection, race and the supposedly parlous state of the German Empire

1881–3 Impresario Angelo Neumann buys the Bayreuth scenery of *The Ring* and the rights to tour the cycle throughout Europe with full cast and orchestra, including four cycles in London beginning in May 1882 at Her Majesty's Theatre

1882 Orchestral score of *Parsifal* completed on 13 January; première on 26 July 1882 in the Bayreuth festival theatre conducted by Hermann Levi

1883 Death on 13 February; posthumous publication of the orchestral score of *Parsifal* in December

1885 Cosima agrees to take charge of the 1886 Bayreuth festival, a role she retained until 1907

Introduction

Richard Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung* is an epic cycle of four musical dramas in the spirit of Greek tragedy about the nature and future of human existence seen through the lens of the mid-nineteenth century. Already in its first two scenes it presents a world beset by abuse, primal crime and grandiose narcissism, the terrifying consequences of which can only be – and are – overcome by the power of human love.

It also happens to be one of the greatest texts ever written for the lyric stage. This is a translation of it for reading, not singing, though any thought that it could be translated independently from the marvellous score to which it is now attached – the rhythms, pitches and lengths of its musical notes – is probably utopian, a bit like *The Ring* itself. The thought has at least helped me to read, and above all to hear, the pungency and vitality of Wagner's words on their own, even on occasion their raw violence. Indeed, the more I translated them, the greater was my admiration. I always used to think that the following passage about Wagner's texts for his mature operas from Nietzsche's essay *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, a contribution to the first Bayreuth festival in 1876 and the world première of *The Ring*, was flattery expressed through gritted teeth. Nietzsche's private notes at the time, after all, show unmistakable signs of his later falling out with Wagner. His comments now strike me as entirely genuine:

> Wagner's poetry is all about revelling in the German language, the warmth and candour in his communion with it, something that as such cannot be felt in any other German writer except

> Goethe. Earthiness of expression, reckless terseness, control and rhythmic diversity, an extraordinary richness of powerful and significant words, the simplification of syntactical constructions, an almost unique inventiveness in the language of surging feeling and presentiment, and every now and then a totally pure bubbling forth of colloquialisms and proverbs – we ought to make a list of such characteristics, and even then we would forget the most powerful and admirable of them . . . the forging of a distinctive new language for each work and the giving of a new body and a new sound to each new interior world.[1]

TOWARDS BAYREUTH

Writing and personally directing *The Ring* for the stage was by far the longest artistic journey Wagner ever undertook. The first concrete signs in the historical record are in the diaries of two of his colleagues in Dresden, where in the 1840s he was, for the only time in his life, in the sustained employment of a state authority as Kapellmeister to Frederick Augustus II of Saxony. 'Wagner tells me about a new plan for an opera on the Siegfried saga,' the theatre director Eduard Devrient reported on 1 April 1848.[2] Two months later the composer Robert Schumann wrote on 2 June: 'Evening stroll with Wagner – his Nibelung text.'[3]

Twenty-eight years later, the journey was effectively at an end. By that time Wagner had passed through dangerous front-line action in the 1849 Dresden revolution, a warrant for his urgent arrest issued by the police of Saxony that led to over a decade of political exile in Switzerland, a twelve-year gap in work on *The Ring* devoted to other projects, partial and full amnesty, near-bankruptcy, the lavish royal protection of Ludwig II, a second marriage, three children, overseeing the construction of his own home in Bayreuth after years of moving from place to place in rented accommodation, and the founding of a major international festival. To cap it all, he had also supervised the design of a new building in Bayreuth specifically for the four evenings of *The Ring*, a theatre where

he imagined that performances of the cycle could be realized and celebrated as in no other.

In 1872 the foundation stone of the new theatre was laid in pouring rain – an occasion marked by a (dry, indoor) gala performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony – and three years later, in the summer of 1875, enough of the building was ready for rehearsals. After a further intensive two-and-a-half-month period of rehearsal from June into August in the following year, the world première of *The Ring* in its entirety took place with three cycles in all, each programmed on consecutive evenings with three 'recovery' days in between each cycle.

At the end of the final set of performances on 30 August 1876, during wild applause, the curtain opened again to reveal the entire orchestra and cast on stage, including those from previous evenings, who had donned their costumes again especially for the occasion. Standing in an enormous half-circle with their conductor Hans Richter in the middle, they included some of the most distinguished musicians of the day. Together, they had helped to turn the motley collection of characters from gods to dwarfs to seeresses, not to mention the animals of the entire drama into the realities of earth-bound theatre. And by offering his warm thanks, Wagner acknowledged everyone who had made it possible: the set designers, costume makers, make-up artists, assistant stage directors and music staff, stage hands, lighting technicians, operators of a specially adapted steam locomotive to create fog and smoke effects, and last but by no means least the English firm of Richard Keene. They had provided props for a big snake with horrible rolling eyes required for the first evening, yoked rams for a goddess's chariot for the one after that, a bear plus a huge dragon plus a magpie and an ouzel (a bird resembling a blackbird) for the third evening, and for the last a medley of sacrificial beasts and two ravens.[4]

One animal was not a prop. This was Brünnhilde's horse Grane, which she famously rides into a burning pyre at the end of *The Ring*. Presumably it was standing on the stage as well, a black nine-year-old stallion called Cocotte loaned

from King Ludwig II, who was himself sitting in the audience, and to whom the published score of *The Ring* was formally dedicated 'with faith in the German spirit' (*im Vertrauen auf den deutschen Geist*). Wagner wished everyone a heartfelt farewell, after which, according to his first biographer and firsthand witness Carl Glasenapp, they left the theatre with feelings that 'cannot be described in words'.[5]

BEYOND READING, BEETHOVEN'S NINTH AND THE END OF OPERA

Wagner issued a notice for audiences during the first Bayreuth festival warning them that he would be taking the unusual step of dimming the lights to achieve 'the correct effect of the scenic image'.[6] Contrary to expectations of what normally happened in opera theatres up until then, it would be impossible for them to read the libretto during the performance. He therefore suggested that either the complete text be studied beforehand, or parts of it during the intervals between the acts. Libretti were usually issued in the opera world as part of immediate pre-performance publicity. They could be bought shortly before a performance and read at home in advance, or failing that obtained at the box office and scrutinized in the theatre as the singers were singing. But this was different. Wagner's new-found 'revelling in the German language' (Nietzsche) since leaving his early Romantic operas behind meant that its unusual literary ambitions were preparing the way for a markedly different kind of theatrical event. The clear implication of Wagner's notice was that the printed words were not as in previous opera a mere adjunct to the music that one could consume as the action unfolded, but an important step towards a transformative experience *beyond reading* – an entrance ticket to a utopia of pure human feeling, an immersion in vision and sound in a darkened space without the distraction of 'literature', the price of which, paradoxically, was literature of no mean order.

The paradox had consequences. During the years leading up to the laying of the foundation stone of the Bayreuth festival theatre in 1872, the advance availability of the text of *The Ring* led to an unusual situation. The first two parts of the cycle – *The Rhinegold* and *The Valkyrie* – had been produced in Munich in 1869 and 1870 at the request of Ludwig II against Wagner's wishes. A few concerts under Wagner's direction in Vienna and Budapest in 1862 and 1863 had also seen the first performances of some excerpts from the first three parts of the cycle. In the absence of radio, television and the internet, these were isolated events heard by relatively few people; in any case they gave only a fragmentary impression of *The Ring* as a whole. But since the first private publication of the complete text in 1853 before the musical score had even been started, and its first trade appearance ten years later in 1863 when Wagner was still only two-thirds of the way through writing the music, *The Ring* continued to have the attention of the German-speaking reading public. Since working on its early stages Wagner also called it a poem (*Dichtung*) to distinguish it from an opera libretto and to give it literary status. Even an entire book about it, the first of many, had long since been on the market.[7] The problem was how best to celebrate the laying of the foundation stone musically and prepare people for a new theatre and the première of *The Ring*, many of whom were likely to be more familiar with the poem and the overall vision of the cycle it offered than the music.

Wagner's solution was to perform Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Why? His idea that with the Ninth 'the *last* symphony had *already been written*',[8] or in other words that it was the final work of any real historical consequence in a supposedly now exhausted genre, was a grandiose message already well known at the time. And from the moment he publicly announced it in 1850 it had had to do with the idea of a symphony destined to be superseded by a new artwork of the future – one by Wagner of course that eventually turned out to be *The Ring*. The poem of *The Ring* from the beginning, in other words, was destined to take over from the point when Beethoven, with his decision to bring voices singing Schiller's

'Ode to Joy' into the Ninth's last movement, felt the necessity '*as Musician* to throw himself into the arms of the Poet'.[9]

Wagner also saw the symphony as a premonition of *The Ring*, if not the yet-to-be-built theatre itself. 'R. prepares for his performance of the 9th,' his second wife Cosima wrote in her diaries more than once, as usual not offering much detail.[10] But she does report how he remembered conducting it in three carefully prepared performances in his Dresden years (1846, 1847, 1849) with elaborate programme notes littered with quotations from Goethe's *Faust*. What he 'discovered' then, she reports, a time when he was starting to research and write *The Ring*, was that this music was 'not just to be listened to; the true sense of it is gained only by those who are swept along inside it'.[11]

The involvement of musicians, singers and audience being swept up in performance was part of Wagner's vision from the start. So was his view of the actual content of the Ninth. Take, for instance, the uncanny bare musical interval of the fifth at the start, as if emerging from a faraway archaic world. As Wagner interprets it, it tumbles into a utopian battle against 'hostile forces that rear up between us and earthly happiness'.[12] The interval of the open fifth emerging out of the depths of the Rhine at the start of *The Ring* is surely similar in intent, gradually filling the theatrical space and spilling forwards into a scene where the earth's happily slumbering gold is unceremoniously ripped from its bed by a hostile force. The idea of silence gradually infiltrated by distant sounds that Beethoven exploits in his opening bars to evoke dreamlike memories was influential too. Wagner promised at the foundation-stone ceremony that something very similar would happen in his theatre-to-be once the audience had accepted the idea that the new proportions of the building and its seating would place them in a relationship to the stage which they had never experienced anywhere else: 'the mysterious entry of the music will prepare you for the unveiling and distinct portrayal of scenic pictures that seem to appear from an ideal world of dreams'.[13]

For Wagner, reading the poem of *The Ring* was a journey

towards a completely new kind of theatrical experience that signified the end of opera itself. 'I shall write no more operas,' he declared at an early stage of writing it.[14] Schematic sequences of arias, choruses and ensembles were gone. Instead, the continuous dialogue of the poem was to be heightened with a more fluid musical setting and a halo of thematically intricate orchestral commentary to lend it dramatic force and coherence. Wagner thought that this would discourage the naive wallowing in vocal pleasures without dramatic purpose that had plagued the opera of old. Or to put it another way: he intended to stand firm and refuse to dilute the tragedy of *The Ring* and its violence by anaesthetizing audiences with opera's seductive accoutrements. He was not exactly deaf to diva A's divine stratospheric soprano or the gorgeous sonorities of Herr B's bass and their ability to liquefy the ardent hearts of opera lovers. But in *The Ring* he was ready to cast them in a new role as a way of seriously exploring the inspiring, but also the shocking, aspects of what it means to be human.

The effects of this new sensibility, considerably enhanced by the advanced musical language Wagner invented for *The Ring*, were similar for many to the effects of a drug, a dangerous feeling of disorientation compared by Nietzsche to the sense of losing one's depth in a large ocean. The drug metaphor was cleverly modified by Igor Stravinsky to make his peace with Wagner. The wonderful web-like blending of the orchestra with the stage in *Parsifal* (Wagner's final work) was a 'headache with aspirin'.[15] It was a witty way of admitting that even someone light years from Bayreuth in taste and imagination could appreciate Wagner's medicine that aided music's entrance into the twentieth century. But the drugs inside the dramas were always stronger. The two potions leading to the death of the hero in *Twilight of the Gods*, the finale of *The Ring*, for example, are in fact powerful triggers, via the hero's murder, to the potential opening of humanity's path to divine happiness. Here Wagner's analogy with the Ninth Symphony is most potent. The sentiments in the first three lines of Schiller's 'Ode to Joy' alone – the giddy search for the divine (*Götterfunken* / 'spark of the gods'), the Greek idea of Elysium

where the happiness of the blessed will find its home (*Tochter aus Elysium* / 'Daughter from Elysium'), intoxication through fire (*feuertrunken* / 'drunk with fire') – are at the heart of the apotheosis of *The Ring* when the audience gets swept up with the help of the now blessed daughter of the gods in the symphonic vortex of its concluding moments.

ANCIENT TRAGEDY AND THE FESTIVAL IDEA

The ending of *The Ring* is overwhelmingly triumphant, a magnificent vision of human sacrifice and loving compassion so awe-inspiring that in any good performance it leaves the audience speechless. There is no specific message about the future: only a thrilling monologue from the heroine about human love and the downfall of the gods followed by a concluding stretch of orchestral music, a stunning combination of vision and sound not just beyond reading, but words as well. Wagner described it, appealing frankly to the visceral reactions of his audience, as 'saying everything'. Chunks of the score extracted from significant moments in the epic gone by are loosely spliced together in one last grand revival of ancient memory to build – as Wagner himself is reported to have said – a 'symphonic conclusion of this world drama where the spirit of ancient tragedy and that of Shakespeare appear to have joined hands . . . the themes and melodies must pile themselves up before us like Cyclopean walls'.[16]

Wagner let it be known time and again that ancient tragedy was a key inspiration behind *The Ring*. Already heroes like Oedipus, or barbarian witches like Medea, as Simon Goldhill reminds us, were for the Athenian public in the fifth century BC 'others' in different cities and far in the past.[17] The violent actions of remote beings were already for the Greeks deliberately unreal, yet – as Wagner himself said – 'overpowering' in their 'truthfulness'.[18] *The Ring*'s vast landscape and dark visions are no different, conditioned as they are by primal envy

(*Neid*), a pitiless and relentless search for glory by all power-seeking parties: giants, gods, goddesses, heroes and dwarfs alike. Ancient family bonds and fealties go spectacularly awry, and immense faith and trust can shatter at a moment's notice. Brother kills brother; a father murders his son by proxy and selfishly punishes his daughter; a foster son peremptorily slays his guardian; a blood oath is brutally betrayed. Futile antagonisms between individuals, and conflicts between opposed groups, even whole tribes, pale before a cosmic confrontation with nature itself. In the end, all reason and its expression in law, which audiences know underpins their modern lives, is destroyed by a fire outrageously impervious to it as well as animal and human life. What *The Ring* definitely is not is a rational sermon about 'truth'. Wagner was perfectly serious when he remarked to Franz Liszt after sending him the first private edition of the poem in 1853 that it contained 'the world's beginning and downfall (*Untergang*)!'.[19]

But the scorched post-Enlightenment landscape of *The Ring* with the critical betrayal of reason by its gods and their subsequent self-effacement through fire would not have made sense to the Greeks. At a more basic level, too, it points to another, more formal difference. Wagner called the dramas collectively 'a stage festival play', but conceived their four evenings – with seeming perversity – as a trilogy over three days preceded by a preliminary evening. In fact it was an allusion to the four-day Athenian festival of the Great Dionysia in the fifth century BC when the custom was to commission from three reputable playwrights a trilogy of serious tragedies and one shorter satyr-play, each group of plays to be performed on consecutive days followed by a fourth day of comedies. As was the custom, the satyr-play courted absurdity by inverting the tragic narrative of each trilogy. But modern scholars are still unclear about where exactly it was introduced. In Wagner's day the accepted opinion was that it came at the end, an assumption that gave rise to the mistaken notion that he had merely inverted the Greek sequence in *The Ring* by putting his own satyr-play at the beginning.

The preliminary evening, *The Rhinegold*, is something else entirely: a bracingly austere tale about crime and deception that unfolds principally within the world of the gods. What is really unusual about it when compared with the Greek example is the exclusion of the human element, announcing right at the start of the cycle that the actions of the gods and the apocalyptic prospect of their demise are going to be just as central to the story as the fate of the mortals under their control. Putting the gods at the centre of a cycle of plays to show their foibles and brute power was familiar to the Greeks, as in the play *Prometheus Bound*, which is supposed to be by Aeschylus (doubts have arisen about his authorship). Placing the prospect of the spectacular destruction of the gods right at the start of the story definitely was not.

The Ring does have in common with Greek tragedy the idea of the festival. But just how the Athenian festival of the Great Dionysia celebrated the god Dionysus has been a topic of lively debate. Was it just entertainment or religious instruction? Did the plays question civic discourse, dramatizing the unpredictable space between conforming to it and challenging its authority? Goldhill cogently argues on the basis of good evidence that they did, and is not tempted like some scholars simply to assume that all the vast numbers of spectators did was to cram into the open-air theatre at the foot of the Acropolis and take advantage of a city-approved chance in the spirit of Dionysus to get drunk.[20]

There is no easy answer to what these festivals, including Wagner's, were actually celebrating. It could possibly be said that the pattern of norm and transgression Goldhill sees in the Great Dionysia events only became part of their supposed Bayreuth equivalent after the Second World War. This was the age of modernity with a vengeance. The norms of behavior supposedly according to the wishes of the master that for years had kept the Bayreuth audiences in thrall to ritual and conformity under the aegis of the master's second wife Cosima, and then his son Siegfried and daughter-in-law Winifred, had led to Hitler's dominant presence at the Bayreuth festival in the 1930s – a stigma that needed to be overcome. Indeed it

was largely the critical success of Wieland Wagner's first post-war 1951 production of *The Ring* with its sleekly clear and visually beautiful lines that banished the clunky bear-skinned heroes of Bayreuth's yesteryear for good, though the Wagner faithful were far from happy. With the stage now set for an endless fight between the enemies of modernity wanting their old *Ring* back and friends of the new ready to challenge the very idea, Bayreuth looked as if it had become 'Greek' at last.

Or had it? Audiences loved the 1876 performances, despite their technical imperfections. But critical reaction in newspapers was already deeply divided, and at times almost perversely contradictory. There were musical conservatives like Max Kalbeck, the future biographer of Johannes Brahms, who actually thought the music sublime, but objected to the poem's 'ethical anarchy' as 'outrageous and provocative, a slap in the face for all religious feeling'. There were nationalists like Gustav Engel, a singing teacher and writer on music from Berlin, who demanded that Germany reject a work written in its name that identifies with 'raw egotism, animalistic sensuality, cynical loutishness, brutal guile and perfidy'. And there were representatives of the Protestant Church like Hermann Messner who tied themselves in knots decrying a text supposedly littered with 'chilling acerbities' rooted in paganism, while also noticing at length that its admirers were flocking to Bayreuth for spiritual refreshment in order to fill the aching void caused by a 'lack of respect' in the modern state for 'living Christianity'. Messner noticed correctly that Wagner's disciples, who were beginning to regard Bayreuth as a cult, were symptomatic of an ever-widening gap between modernity and religion in an age of growing secularism. But he refused to ask why, consoling himself instead with the lordly observation that the 'words and sounds' of what he had heard were incapable of elevating 'the soul of the German people above its current level'.[21]

A THEATRE FOR *THE RING*

If Wagner's festival was meant to be a religious event after the manner of the Greeks, the intention clearly fell on stony ground. There is little convincing evidence to support the idea anyway. But as nearly always with Wagner, who despite his reputation as a philosophizing artist of the future was always better as a pragmatist in the present, his contradictions are best seen at a hard materialist level. We know for example that in 1876 Wagner's audience in Bayreuth filled 1,395 seats of his theatre. (Over time the number has increased to 1,965). The large chasm between the numbers of spectators in the Acropolis theatre – 14,000 to 16,000 at a rough estimate – and Wagner's underscores an enormous difference of scale and intent. The geometric fan-shaped arrangement of unbroken rows of seating spreading from left to right in front of the Bayreuth stage inspired by the Greek *theatron*, on the other hand, illustrates more vividly than anything else Wagner's productive straddling of the very old and the very new in *The Ring* that riled his Bayreuth critics. The magisterial surveyor of theatre design history, George C. Izenour, put it starkly like this: 'the Wagnerian Festspielhaus . . . broke finally and irrevocably the hold of 2½ centuries on theater design by the baroque ring-balconied horseshoe-shaped auditorium.'[22] Not only did *The Ring* poem abolish the old hierarchies of operatic forms at the outset, the representation of sharp social differences in the tiered seating structures of the old baroque-style theatres had vanished by the end of the project as well.

Together with the architect Otto Brückwald and the theatre consultant Carl Brandt (with the architect Gottfried Semper hovering in the background), Wagner masterminded an avant-garde theatre building with the help of the Greeks like no other in the nineteenth century. Good, Brandt's stagecraft and stage illumination were still mired in the old baroque two-dimensional scenery and flammable light sources, though the gaslight Wagner mostly used was more controllable and brighter, if really only marginally less dangerous than the

candlelight of the old baroque stage. A good deal of the supposedly impractical scenic directions that take up significant portions of *The Ring* poem – swelling waters, mountain vistas, gathering clouds, a dragon, a forest bird, two ravens and Valkyries on horses flying through air – were actually not far from seventeenth-century French theatre. Oceans even then could transform into spectacular landscapes with the help of machines and there was nothing that could not be put on the end of big sticks raised up at the back of the stage and moved up and down or side to side by invisible assistants. Brandt improved things with modern camshafts, trolleys, gears or winches and flew people through the air without the wires showing. But in the end all he was really doing, albeit with the assistance of up-to-date mechanisms and great skill, was streamlining the old baroque illusionist tricks.

In stark contrast Wagner's new auditorium was a revolution, heralding a new kind of seeing and hearing, a total immersion in the stage picture. In essence it was all about hiding the wires. The theatres built by the Greeks were so huge according to Wagner that he felt moved to ask about a comedy by Aristophanes, only a year after the foundation stone of his own theatre had been laid:

> 'How could the audience follow it at that distance? I can only conclude that the Greeks saw and heard things in quite a different way from us stay-at-homes (*Stubenhocker*) with our glasses on.'[23]

Stubenhocker can be translated anachronistically now as 'couch potatoes'. Had Wagner known the phrase he would – well, just might – have approved of it. In his new theatre, vertical and horizontal sightlines for the modern spectator were to be so redefined that he or she could enter into an environment that felt more real than the world they were actually in. The *theatron* model led to rational limits. Seats outside lateral and vertical viewing angles of about 30 degrees were to be eliminated, automatically ridding the space of stacked ring-balconies in favour of a fan-shaped concentric seating

arrangement in unbroken rows that was steeply raked. Five pairs of ever-widening wings engaged with the side-walls on both sides of the auditorium were to be added to help make the acoustics so clear that every word from the singers could be understood. What had been read in advance would, contrary to what usually happens in opera auditoria, actually *be heard*.

In near darkness, the view of the entire stage from each sitting position also had to have high definition. Not even the orchestra should be in the way. It must affect the ear, Wagner decreed, but remain invisible. Otherwise the eye would perceive something real, real people playing instruments, the conductor conducting. In turn that would mean the audience measuring the actors on stage according to their 'true' size and not submitting to the virtual reality of the stage image. Wagner wanted the effect for which he and the architect Gottfried Semper assumed 'the Greek tragedians were striving', namely that 'the persons to which they entrusted their heroic roles should exceed human proportion (*das menschliche Maß*) through the use of masks, laced high boots [to make them look taller], and other means'.[24] The means for that Wagner and Semper wanted to use for the new festival theatre for *The Ring* – first intended for Munich but never built and then transferred to Bayreuth, by which time Semper had withdrawn from the project – were quite different, basically amounting to a narrowing of the audience's sightlines without the distraction of visible human beings playing in the orchestra straight into the stage area via a series of three increasingly smaller frames or proscenium arches. But the principle was the same: the actors had to look larger than life. The allure of cinema, of television, of smartphones and modern media in general was already on the horizon.

JACOB GRIMM AND THE NEW MYTHOLOGY

Significant tensions in negotiating *The Ring*, whether translating or producing it, interpreting it or building a space for it, arise from Wagner's love affair with the archaic. This was not just a fascination with medieval German literature and ancient culture, but a belief that the farther one goes back in time to the origins of language and myth, the closer one gets to an uncorrupted ideal of life that should be, but supposedly is not, manifest in the present. From the time of their supposed pristine original form on the way into the modern age, so the narrative goes, the words and deeds of conscious living beings have been utterly despoiled. Even if it can never be proven conclusively that such a state of life ever existed, it feels right, and is right, to infer that it once did.

'Now if such inferences as to what is non-extant are valid in language, if its present condition carries us far back to an older and oldest; a like proceeding must be justifiable in mythology too.'[25] This sentiment expressed in Jacob Grimm's vast treatise *Deutsche Mythologie* (*German Mythology*) in its second, 1844, edition, which we know Wagner had in his Dresden library, was in all likelihood the key that unlocked the door to *The Ring*. Wagner himself confesses in a little-discussed passage in his autobiography *My Life* that Grimm's researches changed his whole way of thinking as an artist:

> Formed from the scanty fragments of a vanished world . . . I found here the outline of a chaotic building . . . Nothing in it was complete, nor was there anything resembling an architectural line, and I was often tempted to abandon the bleak task of building something from it all. And yet I was firmly in the power of its marvellous magic . . . There rose up in my soul a whole world of shapes, which proved to be unexpectedly graphic and related to one another in some fundamental way . . . The effect they produced on my innermost being I can only describe as a complete rebirth.[26]

Except for the famous fairy tales he collected with his brother Wilhelm, Jacob Grimm rarely appears on anyone's radar screen now. Which is why Wagner's reading of various philosophers and political thinkers in the years leading up to the 1848–9 revolutions in Europe when he started planning *The Ring* usually takes precedence in the minds of commentators. No doubt the political instability of the times contributed to the forging of *The Ring*. But the New Mythology of the 1830s – Tom Shippey's twenty-first-century re-christening of the antiquarian activities of Grimm and his colleagues – obviously seized Wagner's imagination from the start. Not only did Jacob Grimm establish 'Grimm's Law', the proof that Germanic and Proto-Indo-European languages have common ancestors in ancient languages like Greek and Latin, he also did more than most to collect massive amounts of data about German mythology to propose, albeit on less secure grounds than in his work on language, that one can logically trace its disparate strands back to pure archaic origins. It was in effect a revolution in the study of ancient myth. Shippey refers implicitly to the phenomenally popular work of J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling and not a few others in modern times when he reminds us that it was 'the New Mythology, not ancient folk-tradition', that gave us 'the orcs and trolls, the elves and dwarfs and dragons and werewolves which now crowd the shelves of every bookstore' – 'the shadow-walkers' and 'shapes from the cover of darkness . . . which now haunt the imagination'.[27]

What was it about Jacob Grimm's *German Mythology* that appealed to Wagner? The first thing was its sheer range. Grimm was a Protestant who in his mythological universe not surprisingly wanted to keep Christianity in pole position as the logical outcome of the pagan worship of the gods. Even so, he was willing to include so many different gods, languages and diverse forms of life that ironically by the end of it all no attentive reader could still be a completely convinced Christian, assuming that they had been that in the first place. Grimm was – and Wagner suggests as much – comprehensive, but disorganized. He left it to others to join the dots,

and ironically provided so much tantalizingly incomplete data about intertwined dialects, dwarfs, dragons, let alone various gods and half-gods, that to any devout Christian Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel by the end must seem barely adequate as explanations of humanity's origins.

The lead chapter is devoted to God ('the supreme being'). Another soon comes tumbling by on Wodan/Odin ('the supreme divinity'), followed by erudite sections on other pagan gods, goddesses, heroes, dwarfs and elves, giants, ghosts, magic, superstition, animals, the devil, and for the purposes of understanding *The Ring* an extremely important one on the four elements water, fire, air and earth. 'In their silent greatness,' Grimm writes, '[they] wield an immediate power over the human mind.'[28] After the collapse of the gods, these naked substances to which the 'essence' of the gods were mysteriously wedded come to the fore again.

With this idea we probably have the first seed of the ending of *The Ring*. Brünnhilde rides on her horse through air into a burning pyre, water bursts the banks of the Rhine to flood the earth, and the whole spectacle ends with a vision of the gods completely engulfed by fire. Moreover the four parts of *The Ring* poem were already held together by striking images of the elements in the order that Grimm describes them: the underwater beginning of *The Rhinegold,* the unforgettable magic fire at the end of *The Valkyrie*, the open air spaces of *Siegfried*, and the earthly feudal community and its rituals in *Twilight of the Gods*. The sequence is also underpinned by a series of journeys through the same elements in reverse order, a magnificent palindrome that locks the mythic structure of the whole in place: Siegfried's journey down the Rhine in *Twilight of the Gods*, his passing through fire up the mountain to find Brünnhilde in *Siegfried*, the ride of the Valkyries through air in *The Valkyrie*, and the journey through earth down to Nibelheim in *The Rhinegold*. In its 'silent greatness', the framework is massive, and certainly intentional.

One of Grimm's main ideas was that the rich stories of the gods to be found in the thirteenth-century Icelandic sources were in fact the leftover traces of a crucial missing

piece in the jigsaw of early Germanic peoples caused by the 'arrogant notion' that they were 'pervaded by a soulless cheerless barbarism'.[29] It all boiled down to the utterly fantastical proposition of early German culture as a black hole – the notion that the universe of the gods in the form of 'pure' early versions of the Norse sagas had been there all the time despite their lack of appearance to the naked literary and historical eye. Not surprisingly Grimm's fantasy caused friction with Scandinavian scholars in the course of time, who understandably suspected that their literature had been hijacked for inappropriate nationalistic and religious reasons. Even a conservative German scholar later in the nineteenth century like Wolfgang Golther, who had inherited from senior colleagues the idea that the world of Odin, the Valkyries and the fairy-tale and mythical parts of the Siegfried legend that saturate Norse myth were *urdeutsch* – proto-German – admitted in his account of the sources for *The Ring* that 'in Germany there was no trace of any of this, not because its features are extinct, but because they never existed in the first place'.[30]

But for Wagner it was literally a godsend. It allowed him to indulge in the idea of spear-carrying gods and horse-riding Valkyries as essentially German. (That they are not may have something to do with the fact that an epic dedicated 'with trust in the German spirit' turned out to have such enduring universal appeal.) And reading Grimm and other inventors of the New Mythology also encouraged him to desert history for myth, to abandon concrete figures of the past, whose political intrigues were continuing to provide endless theatrical fodder for French grand opera. He had already tried his hand at the genre with his five-act opera *Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes*, an early work and a huge success with the public at its first performances in Dresden in 1842, indeed one of the most spectacular of his entire career. And during the late 1830s and 1840s he had three other five-act operas based on historical subjects in the pipeline as well, for all of which he left behind ideas in draft form.[31] The last of these, *Friedrich*

I, based on the life of the legendary Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who in the twelfth century had tried to unite the 1,600 or so German states large and small, is particularly interesting because Wagner was working seriously on it from 1846 to just before the Dresden uprising in 1849 while he was also researching *The Ring*.

During his studies of Barbarossa, Wagner came to see Frederick fancifully as 'a historical rebirth of the old-pagan Siegfried'. Connecting the dots backwards in this imaginative way was in the spirit of Grimm. But what really took courage – as Wagner openly confesses in his autobiographical writings – was eventually to abandon Frederick and to see Siegfried in his earliest and 'purest human form' free of all later historical trappings.[32] In any case Siegfried was never going to be the 'gallant knight' from the *Nibelungenlied* ('Song of the Nibelungs'), a Middle High German epic poem of anonymous authorship based on events from the fifth century, written down at the turn of the thirteenth, and regarded since its discovery in the eighteenth as a German *Iliad*. Heaven forbid that he should have the same character as in that poem, the son of the king and queen Siegmund and Sieglind, who commanded that he be 'dressed in elegant clothes' and well trained 'in matters of honour'.[33] This figure rooted in the likely historical context of the *Nibelungenlied* in the fifth century had to be superseded without further ado by the rougher fairy-tale hero of the thirteenth-century Icelandic sagas.

The main advantage, again in the spirit of Grimm, was that an imaginative re-invention of Siegfried's pedigree could make him a direct descendant of the gods, the grandson of Wotan. And the same was true of Brünnhilde, whom Wagner created as a Valkyrie and daughter of a powerful god and goddess, Wotan and Erda, quite unlike the formidable queen of Iceland Brunhild in the *Nibelungenlied*, whose forebears and fate remain unclear, and who in any case disappears halfway through the story to cede pride of place in the narrative to her antagonist Kriemhild, the powerful Burgundian queen of Worms. The wild, kaleidoscopic fairy tales and brutal stories

of turbulent gods and unstable tribal warfare of Norse mythology had entered the sturdy cathedral-like structure of the *Nibelungenlied*, so to speak, through the front door.

TOWARDS THE POEM AND A TRANSLATION

The writing of *The Ring* poem began in 1848 with the libretto of a single 'grand heroic opera', *Siegfried's Death*, an early version of the final drama *Twilight of the Gods* based on the *Nibelungenlied*. The idea of turning the medieval epic into an opera had already been considered by several people, among them Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann, as well as a minor philosopher F. T. Vischer from Tübingen, who suggested it as early as 1844 as a possible opera for potential German supremacy in the genre. We do not know if Wagner knew of the proposal. If he did, Vischer's diagnosis that 'German music has yet to acquire its Schiller and Shakespeare'[34] could not have fallen on deaf ears. But the plan invented by Vischer for the envisioned opera lacked artistry; it was too long – a grand opera in five acts over two evenings – and provided (ironically) with a health warning about the perils of adding stories from the Icelandic sagas that would make it even longer.

Wagner ignored any such warning. *Siegfried's Death* was to be a heroic opera with a dark halo about the past chicanery of the gods culled mainly from the thirteenth-century Eddic poems and particularly the Icelandic prose rendition *Saga of the Volsungs* containing most of the detail he wanted. But colleagues and friends were confused. This was not the lord Siegfried of the *Nibelungenlied* they were expecting. And the central idea of the opera that, in order 'to reach [the] high goal of erasing their own guilt, the gods now educate human beings, and their goal would be reached if they extinguished themselves in this creation of humanity, namely that they forego their direct influence in favor of the freedom

of human consciousness',[35] looked abstrusely political. While the gods were an obvious symbol of the ruling feudal class, their crimes were reported only in onstage narrations. And in the end they survived anyway. The opera finished with a great choral scene in which Wotan is addressed as 'Father of the Universe' and Siegfried's sacrifice as 'guarantor' of the god's eternal power.

It was hardly the stuff of revolution. Wagner tried to set *Siegfried's Death* to music two years later, after participating in the 1849 Dresden Revolution and going into exile, but abandoned the attempt. Not long after, in May 1851, he made the momentous decision to give *Siegfried's Death* a more radical ending to encompass the destruction of the gods, and to write three more dramas to explain it. Once the material from Scandinavian sources about gods and heroes embedded obscurely inside *Siegfried's Death* was unfurled as drama beforehand over three extra evenings, audiences would at last understand what the story was about. Moreover the working titles of the new dramas reflected an emerging grand scheme worthy of the great novels of the nineteenth century. In the order they were written they were: *The Young Siegfried*, *The Theft of the Rhinegold* and *Siegmund and Sieglinde: The Punishment of the Valkyrie*. The implied sense of these titles, and the one already in existence (*Siegfried's Death*), was innocence, crime, punishment and sacrifice. The big subjects were at last coming to the fore.

Without mention of Wagner's name (perhaps because Germany's warrant for his arrest was still in force), the libretti of the four dramas were published privately in 1853 as *The Rhinegold*, *The Valkyrie*, *The Young Siegfried* and *Siegfried's Death*, with the collective title and description *The Ring of the Nibelung. A Stage Festival Play for Three Days and a Preliminary Evening*. From here on the whole text led a double existence: one destined for music, and another as poetry in its own right. Some who managed to get hold of a copy were baffled. But others were enthusiastic, including Franz Liszt and the Swiss writer Gottfried Keller, a fastidious man of letters, who recommended it to a friend as 'power-

ful poetry, pure German, purified by the classical tragic spirit'.[36] Further title changes were considered in 1856 and subsequently introduced. The third drama became simply *Siegfried* and the fourth *Twilight of the Gods*, a title aligning it accurately with the idea in Norse mythology of *Ragnarök* (twilight of the gods) that was now the work's principal focus.

When the first Bayreuth festival took place in 1876, the complete poem of *The Ring* had appeared three times under Wagner's supervision over a period of twenty years. Given the changes he had constantly been making while setting it to music, no edition was identical with another. And he continued changing things and inventing new ideas during the Bayreuth rehearsals as well. Indeed, the whole idea of an ironclad authentic final version of *The Ring* is moot. Wagner's idiosyncratic handling of punctuation underwent startling transformation from source to source. Alterations of words or word order in his more ambitious alliterative schemes were not uncommon. And puzzling disappearances or amplifications and additions of scenic descriptions and directions, often without apparent reason, were not infrequent. Even in the full version of the poem included in his collected writings as late as 1872, the crucial final image of the gods sitting in Valhalla and being consumed by fire is missing – though this did have an explicable and highly interesting reason (see Notes).

The first problem confronting the translator is therefore which version of the German text to choose. There can never be one that is truly authentic in every detail, if only because Wagner's whole approach to his texts was contradictory. He liked to have them enshrined in print, spending a great deal of time fussing about how they were to be fixed on the page. On the other hand, myriad details of text and music were not always sacrosanct when it came to performance. Witnesses reporting Wagner's remarks from the rich sources of his 1876 rehearsals of *The Ring* relating to scene and word that are included in this translation (see Sources of the German Text) show that his attitude towards gesture and expression in particular was continuously inventive – and surprising.

At Brünnhilde's *Ewig war ich, / ewig bin ich* ('For ever I

was, / for ever I am') in *Siegfried* Act 3 (lines 2602–3), for example, where the existing stage direction describes her face as showing 'an image of grace', Wagner recited the immediately preceding passage to his singers with 'an upsetting power of expression', calling it a 'terrible moment'. Here Brünnhilde is not so much in love with Siegfried as teetering on an existential precipice on her mountainous journey from immortal goddess to human being. The gorgeous lyrical outpouring that follows is a famous set piece for singers. But in light of Wagner's personal demonstration of the utter despair leading into it, the singing in context must surely feel highly vulnerable, as if walking on thin ice. Wagner obviously felt that he had to make this clear to his performers. Even now the dramatic point does not always come across.

Wagner also carried on adding new scenic ideas. Towards the end of *The Rhinegold* (after line 1828), Wotan picks up a shabby sword left lying around by Fafner to illustrate his grand idea as he points it towards the fortress. In the opening scene of *Twilight of the Gods*, the Norns read the fate of the world directly off their rope as if it were cosmic ticker tape. Neither example (nor the others I have included in the text) was meant to be temporary, as far as I can see. If Wagner had lived long enough to publish another 'definitive' version of the poem after staging *The Ring*, we can only guess what it might have looked like. It would surely have again included further modifications and additions.

In assembling the German text, I have kept strictly to the wording and punctuation of the dialogue in the full orchestral scores of the new Schott critical edition (1980–2014) and the vocal scores based on it (2010–14). With the stage directions I have chosen more randomly from either the new critical edition or the full version of the text in Wagner's collected writings, whichever was most detailed. (No systematic concordance of these two sources, by the way, as yet exists.) With Wagner's remarks during the arduous *Ring* rehearsals in 1876 in vocal scores annotated by his assistants Julius Kniese and Heinrich Porges, and the conductors Hermann Levi and Felix Mottl, I have selected only what I feel are Wagner's most

telling comments about scenic action, gesture and expression. In the same spirit I have also drawn on Heinrich Porges' long-since published essay on the 1876 rehearsals written specifically at Wagner's request (see n.16).

As for my translation, I decided to resist, in most but not all cases, Wagner's penchant for the archaic. For me there is absolutely no point in trying to find Old Anglo-Saxon equivalents, say, for words like *Wag*, *Harst*, *queck*, *freislich* or *glau* that few German speakers understood in the nineteenth century and still don't, unless they were, or are, professional linguists. On the other hand, Wagner often uses familiar words in the sense of their older meanings that need to be expressed. Two prominent cases are *Neid* (envy) and *Not* (need). In its older usage *Neid* is not merely passive or passive aggressive (the way it is mostly used now) but a signal for drastic action, for damage to the enemy in battle. In *Siegfried* (line 985) as an adjective in *Neidliches Schwert!*, for instance, I have translated it as 'pitiless sword' rather than the inaccurate 'sword of my need' (Andrew Porter), or even the more accurate 'fearsome sword' (Stewart Spencer). I also use the modern spelling of *Not*, but leave an older one (*Noth*) inside the name of the sword, a reminder of the word's feudal resonance. *Not* is never simply 'need' in *The Ring*; invariably it denotes a bitter, warlike state of emergency, again one signalling action: extreme peril demanding a way out.

The language of *The Ring* is a language of extremes. Its guttural violence and over-the-top ecstasy, plus everything in between, are so vivid and vital that a good deal of thought is needed about how to bring them uncompromised into another language. Particularly difficult are Wagner's alliterative language games. Alfred Forman, the first-ever English translator of *The Ring*, happened to be the London go-between for Wagner's big order of animal props for the Bayreuth première in 1876. While that was truly helpful, his *Ring* translation, which prides itself on being 'in the alliterative verse of the original', was a disaster. Wagner thought highly of it at first – perhaps because even with his limited English he could see that it was a near replica of his text – and his publisher Schott duly added it to their first imprints of *The Ring*. But it soon

caused controversy. The diaries of Wagner's second wife Cosima report on 5 March 1882 that Forman's *Ring* translation 'is being very severely criticized', adding somewhat sourly: 'we have to admit that all these things seem to us of very little account'.

But they are of account to any translator of *The Ring* because Forman made a classic error that has been repeated, albeit less egregiously, a number of times since: overzealous fealty to the original. Forman's translation is an early example, a bad case of miscalculation and a tin ear for language. 'Better beset / the slumberer's bed, / or grief will bring us your game!' near the opening of *The Rhinegold* (lines 17–19) not only replicates Wagner's alliteration and the German word order far too exactly. The clumsy choice of words also dooms them to virtual meaninglessness from the start.

The really big mistake Forman made was not to strive independently for a translation that could reflect the literary power of Wagner's text without straying from its sense and dramatic energy. I hope I am not guilty of that too. I would be the last to claim that I have come close enough in English to the 'extraordinary richness of powerful and significant words', the zest for language and the daring syntactical concision that Nietzsche admired in *The Ring*. But I have tried to make it as close as I could for the reader to grasp the sheer verve of this magnificent epic tale of crime, punishment, gods trapped by their own hypocrisies, fated, short-lived freedoms, and a heroine who avenges the death of the hero by expiating the crimes of the gods in a moment of spectacular self-sacrifice. Since its first staging in Bayreuth all those years ago, it still feels strangely disquieting and uplifting, both at once – perhaps even more so now than it did then.

NOTES

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', in *Nietzsche Werke*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, IV/1 (Berlin, 1967), p. 59 (all translations from German sources JD). For the whole essay in English, see Nietzsche, *Untimely*

Meditations, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 195–254 (this passage differently translated pp. 237–8).

2 Eduard Devrient, *Aus seinen Tagebüchern*, ed. Rolf Kabel, 2 vols (Weimar, 1964), i, p. 427.

3 Robert Schumann, *Tagebücher*, ed. Gerd Nauhaus, 3 vols (Leipzig, 1982), iii/2, p. 462.

4 See Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, 4 vols (Cambridge, 1976), iv, p. 475.

5 Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, *Das Leben Richard Wagners*, 6 vols, 3–5th ed. (Leipzig, 1908–23), v, p. 307.

6 Richard Wagner, 'Über den Gebrauch des Textbuches' [On the Use of the Libretto], in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, 16 vols (Leipzig, 1911–14), xvi, p. 160.

7 Franz Carl Friedrich Müller, *Der Ring des Nibelungen: eine Studie zur Einführung in die gleichnamige Dichtung Richard Wagners* (Leipzig, 1862).

8 Richard Wagner, 'The Art-Work of the Future', in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols (London, 1892–9; repr. Lincoln and London, 1993–5), i, p. 127. Wagner's emphasis.

9 Richard Wagner, 'Opera and Drama', in *Prose Works*, ii, p. 107. Wagner's emphasis.

10 *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, trans. with an Introduction by Geoffrey Skelton, vol. 1: 1869–1877 (London, 1978), pp. 475, 476 (10 and 12 April 1872).

11 *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, p. 447 (6 January 1872). Trans. modified.

12 Richard Wagner, 'Beethoven's Choral Symphony at Dresden, 1846', in *Prose Works*, vii, p. 247. Trans. modified.

13 Richard Wagner, 'The Festival Theatre and Stage in Bayreuth', in *Prose Works*, v, p. 325. Trans. modified.

14 Richard Wagner, 'A Communication to My Friends', in *Prose Works*, i, p. 391. Trans. modified.

15 Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes* (New York, 1966), p. 189.

16 Heinrich Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing the 'Ring': An Eye-Witness Account of the Stage Rehearsals of the First Bayreuth Festival*, trans. Robert L. Jacobs (Cambridge, 1983), p. 145. Trans. modified.

17 Simon Goldhill, Introduction to *Greek Tragedy* (Penguin Classics), ed. Shomit Dutta (London, 2004), p. xx.

18 *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, p. 992 (1 November 1877).
19 *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (London and Melbourne, 1987), p. 281 (letter of 11 February 1853). Trans. modified.
20 Simon Goldhill, 'The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 107 (1987), pp. 58–76.
21 All citations in this paragraph from the collection of press reports in Susanna Großmann-Vendrey, *Bayreuth in der deutschen Presse*, Dokumentenband 1: '*Die Grundsteinlegung und die ersten Festspiele*' (Regensburg, 1977), pp. 193 (Kalbeck), 164 (Engel), 77, 80 (Messner).
22 George C. Izenour, *Theater Design*, 2nd ed. (New Haven and London, 1996), p. 76. I am also indebted in the discussion below to the same author's *Theater Technology*, 2nd ed. (New Haven and London, 1996), pp. 54–7.
23 *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, p. 630 (5 May 1873). Trans. modified.
24 See the 'Explanatory Report for the Principal Plans for the Monumental Festival Theatre [in Munich]' submitted by Wagner and Semper to the Munich authorities and Ludwig II in Appendix I of Manfred Semper, *Das Münchner Festspielhaus, Gottfried Semper und Richard Wagner* (Hamburg, 1906), pp. 107 and 110.
25 Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. James Steven Stallybrass from the fourth edition, 4 vols (London 1880–88; repr. Cambridge, 2012), iii, p. vi. Stallybrass's use of the more general word 'Teutonic' in the title was in all likelihood a tactical manoeuvre to deflect attention from Grimm's late-nineteenth-century critics, who among other things balked at his claim that Norse mythology was purely German in origin. In the text I use the more accurate *German Mythology*.
26 Richard Wagner, *My Life*, trans. Andrew Gray and ed. Mary Whittall (Cambridge, 1983), p. 260. Trans. modified.
27 Tom Shippey, 'A Revolution Reconsidered: Mythography and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. Tom Shippey (Tempe, Ariz., 2005), pp. 1–2.
28 Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, ii, p. 582.
29 Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, iii, p. vii. See also Shippey, 'A Revolution Reconsidered', pp. 11–12.
30 Wolfgang Golther, *Die sagengeschichtlichen Grundlagen der Ringdichtung Richard Wagners* [The Foundations of Richard Wagner's Ring Poem in the History of Myth] (Berlin, 1902),

p. 9. Golther himself had already published a major study refuting the thesis that the roots of the Nibelung myth in Norse legend lay in a remote Germanic past. 'An unprejudiced examination of the northern sources', he wrote, 'has shown that not only the writing down of them, but also their content are from a much later period'. Wolfgang Golther, *Studien zur germanischen sagengeschichte. I der valkyrjenmythus. II über das verhältniss der nordischen und deutschen form der Nibelungensage* (Munich, 1888), p. 3.

31 In fact there were four potential five-act works, if we include Wagner's realignment of the New Testament in an opera to be called *Jesus of Nazareth*, for which he wrote a thirty-page scenario in early 1849 and did not give it up until early 1850. The other projected scenarios were *The High-Born Bride* (1836–42), *The Saracen Woman* (1841–3) and *Friedrich I* (1846–9). Whether the last was to be a spoken play or an opera is not clear from available evidence.

32 Wagner, 'A Communication to My Friends', *Prose Works*, i, pp. 358–9. Trans. modified.

33 *The Nibelungenlied* (Penguin Classics), trans. A. T. Hatto (London, 1965), p. 20. This may be one aspect Hatto is referring to on the first page of his Foreword when he somewhat crustily accuses Wagner of 'intruding reckless distortions' in *The Ring* 'between us and an ancient masterpiece'.

34 Friedrich Theodor Vischer, 'Vorschlag zu einer Oper' [Proposal for an Opera], in *Kritische Gänge*, vol. 2 (Tübingen, 1844), p. 400.

35 Richard Wagner, 'The Nibelungen Myth', in *Wagner's* Ring *in 1848: New Translations of* The Nibelung Myth *and* Siegfried's Death, trans. and with an introduction by Edward. R. Haymes (Rochester, NY, 2010), p. 47.

36 Cited in Arthur Groos, 'Appropriation in Wagner's *Tristan* Libretto', in *Reading Opera*, eds Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton, 1988), p. 13, n. 3.

SYNOPSES

THE RHINEGOLD / *DAS RHEINGOLD*

Preliminary Evening / *Vorabend*
In four scenes

CAST

Gods: Wotan *high bass*, Donner *high bass*, Froh *tenor*, Loge *tenor*
Goddesses: Fricka *low soprano*, Freia *high soprano*, Erda *low soprano*
Nibelungs: Alberich *high bass*, Mime *tenor*
Giants: Fasolt *high bass*, Fafner *low bass*
Rhinedaughters: Woglinde *high soprano*, Wellgunde *high soprano*, Flosshilde *low soprano*
Nibelungs

SCENE ONE

In the depths of the Rhine

In greenish twilight steep rocks are visible. Water swirls around them at the top while the waves dissolve into a damp mist lower down. The Rhinedaughters circle round the central reef which points upward to the brighter light above. Alberich comes out of a cleft in the rocks and makes advances to the Rhinedaughters who cruelly lead him on. Alberich eventually realizes that he is being ridiculed. Silenced by anger, he catches sight of the gleaming Rhinegold high on the central reef.

Wellgunde imprudently reveals that whoever can fashion an all-powerful ring from the gold will inherit the world. Woglinde adds that the required magic can be attained by whoever denies the power of love. Alberich curses love with hideous passion and snatches the gold before vanishing into the depths.

SCENE TWO

An open mountaintop area, situated near the Rhine

The light of dawn reflects off the battlements of a magnificent castle. Wotan dreams of eternal power and a fortress for the gods. His wife Fricka rudely awakens him. While Wotan gazes enraptured at the magnificent edifice he has just been dreaming about, Fricka bluntly reminds him of its price. Built by the giant brothers Fasolt and Fafner, the fortress is to be paid for by giving them Freia, keeper of the golden apples of eternal youth.

Freia rushes in, complaining that she has been threatened by Fasolt. The giants enter and Fasolt proceeds to lecture Wotan on the significance of contracts. The more pragmatic Fafner, however, knowing that Freia is indispensable to the gods, proposes to abduct her by force. Donner and Froh, Freia's brothers, hurry in to protect their sister, but the giants invoke their contract. The long-awaited god of fire, Loge, on whom Wotan is relying to find a way out of the dilemma, joins the gods at last and tells of many things, including Alberich's theft of the gold and the mighty ring he has fashioned from it.

The giants agree to take Freia away as a provisional hostage until evening, and then to hand her over in exchange for the gold. A pallid mist fills the stage. As Loge taunts the gods, calling them 'a wilting travesty to the entire world' and predicting their demise, they begin to age, fearfully looking to Wotan for a way out of their plight. Wotan decides to travel with Loge to Nibelheim to take possession of the gold.

SCENE THREE
Nibelheim's underground chasms

Tormented in the first scene, Alberich is now the tormenter. With great skill and at his brother Alberich's behest, Mime has created the Tarnhelm, a magic helmet that enables its wearer to assume any form at will. Alberich takes it from him by force and uses its power to make himself invisible, vanishing in a column of mist. Mime writhes in agony from Alberich's whiplashes without being able to see the whip. Alberich takes off the Tarnhelm and drives a pack of Nibelung dwarfs laden with treasure before him.

Eventually he notices Wotan and Loge. Unable to resist a demonstration of his power, he kisses the ring on his finger, causing the screaming Nibelungs to scatter. He then dons the Tarnhelm again to turn himself into a monstrous dragon. Loge cunningly suggests to Alberich that a small creature would better escape danger, but that the transformation would probably be too hard to accomplish. Alberich rises to the challenge and turns himself into a toad. Loge and Wotan easily capture him and drag him back to the earth's surface.

SCENE FOUR
An open mountaintop area, situated near the Rhine

Alberich is forced to give up the hoard, which is dragged up through a chasm by the Nibelungs. Already humiliated in front of his own slaves, Alberich is completely ruined when Wotan violently takes the ring from him. Driven to confront Wotan, among other things with the telling argument that his own theft of the gold was a peccadillo compared with Wotan's present betrayal of the laws he supposedly upholds, Alberich curses the ring to destroy its owners. Henceforth no one who possesses the ring will escape death.

The giants enter with Freia and plant two stakes in the ground on either side of her. They demand that the hoard be

piled up until her shape is concealed. Now it is Wotan's turn to be humiliated: to fill the final crack the giants demand the ring. Wotan refuses until Erda, the goddess of earth, intervenes to deliver a sphinx-like warning about the destruction of the gods, advising him to discard the prize.

With sudden resolve he throws the ring on to the pile. Freia is free and the gods return to their immortal state, at least for the moment. But to their horror they witness the first effects of the curse as Fafner kills Fasolt in the ensuing struggle for the ring. Donner conjures up a storm to clear the sultry air. Valhalla lies gleaming in the evening sun at the end of a rainbow bridge, which the gods begin to cross in triumph.

Diffidently joining the procession, Loge remarks that the gods are really hastening towards their destruction. Their refurbished glory is also dimmed momentarily by the Rhinedaughters, who lament from the depths that their demand that the gold be returned to its original purity has gone unheeded. 'Up there' in the realm of the gods, they complain, it may thrill; but it remains 'false and accursed'.

THE VALKYRIE / *DIE WALKÜRE*

First Day / *Erster Tag*

In three acts

CAST

Siegmund *tenor*, Hunding *bass*, Wotan *high bass*, Sieglinde *soprano*, Brünnhilde *soprano*, Fricka *soprano*
Valkyries: Gerhilde, Ortlinde, Waltraute, Schwertleite, Helmwige, Siegrune, Grimgerde, Rossweisse, *soprano and contralto*

ACT ONE
Inside Hunding's house

SCENE ONE

A man is being pursued. He enters the house and staggers towards the hearth. The wife of Hunding, the absent master of the house, gives him water. The stranger explains that a storm has driven him there and prepares to leave. But the woman begs him to stay. A secret bond begins to grow between them.

SCENE TWO

Hunding returns from combat. He is instinctively distrustful of the stranger, but reluctantly grants him hospitality for the night. Hunding insists on knowing his guest's name. The stranger says he calls himself 'Ruled by Sorrow' (Wehwalt) and explains by telling the story of his childhood. He and his father Wolf returned one day from the hunt to find his mother murdered and his twin sister abducted. He eventually lost track of his father and has been cursed with bad luck ever since, hence his name. A woman forced to marry someone she did not love had asked him for help, whereupon he killed her brothers whose kinsmen are now hunting him.

Hunding realizes that 'Ruled by Sorrow' is the killer. He reveals that he is one of the hunters and challenges the stranger to combat the next day. Only the laws of hospitality protect him for the moment. Hunding's wife has tried to intervene, but Hunding orders her to leave to prepare his nightly drink.

SCENE THREE

Alone, the stranger recalls his father's promise to provide him with a sword when in the direst circumstances. The woman returns. She has put a sleeping draught in Hunding's drink

and proceeds to show the stranger a sword thrust into the tree. It was put there by a one-eyed man during her wedding to Hunding. None of the guests, nor anyone since, has had the strength to draw it out. She believes that the hero who can will more than make up for the shame she has had to endure since robbers forced her to marry Hunding.

She embraces the stranger passionately as the great door opens to let in a beautiful spring night. The stranger sings in praise of spring, which, like a brother, has freed love, its sister, from the storms of winter.

The image soon turns into reality. The woman knew from the single eye of the old man who planted the sword that she was his daughter. Seeing the same look in the stranger's eyes, she suspects that she is related to him too. The stranger asks her to give him a name she loves. When he tells her that his father's name was not Wolf, but Wälse, she knows for certain that he is the Wälsung for whom the sword is intended. She calls him Siegmund, Protector of Victory. In turn, Siegmund grips the sword and calls it Nothung, a weapon that can save him from peril. Revelling in his new name, Siegmund pulls the sword from the tree with a mighty wrench. Rapt with wonder and delight, the woman tells him that she is his twin sister Sieglinde. They embrace in ecstasy as Siegmund calls for the blossoming of the Wälsung race.

ACT TWO

Wild rocky mountains

SCENE ONE

Wotan knows that Siegmund and Sieglinde (a son and daughter borne to him by an unnamed mortal woman since the end of *Das Rheingold*) are fleeing from Hunding, and that Hunding will eventually overtake them. He charges his favourite daughter Brünnhilde (also borne to him since the end of *Das Rheingold*, this time by the earth goddess Erda) with the task of ensuring Siegmund's victory in his forthcoming duel with

Hunding. Brünnhilde warns Wotan of the ‘violent storm’ in store for him from his wife Fricka, the guardian of marriage, who is approaching in a chariot drawn by a pair of rams.

Fricka insists that Hunding has a right to vengeance. She upholds the law in the face of Wotan’s advocacy of nature. The power of spring may have brought the twins together, but their incestuous union is a monstrous affront to reason. As for Wotan’s grand idea of a free hero who would allow the gods to escape their guilty complicity in the theft of the Rhinegold, this is just false: Siegmund is not free, but merely a pawn in a game invented by Wotan, who is himself severely compromised by his promiscuity.

Humbled by the sheer force of Fricka’s reasoning, Wotan agrees to forbid Brünnhilde to let Siegmund win the battle against Hunding. The hero must be sacrificed to preserve the divine law.

SCENE TWO

Alone with Brünnhilde, Wotan confesses that all along he has been deceiving himself. Master of the laws of the universe, he is also their victim. Only the destruction of everything he has built will cleanse the guilt of the gods. And to that end Alberich is working. He has created a son whom Wotan now blesses: may the hate of Alberich’s child feed on the empty glory of the gods’ divinity. Brünnhilde cannot accept Wotan’s bleak nihilism and argues to protect Siegmund. Wotan threatens her with the direst consequences if she rebels.

SCENE THREE

Siegmund and Sieglinde enter. Sieglinde is haunted by nightmarish visions of Hunding and his dogs in pursuit of them. She faints in Siegmund’s arms.

SCENE FOUR

Brünnhilde appears to Siegmund and announces his impending death. But he refuses to go to Valhalla if Sieglinde cannot join him. Rather than put her and their unborn child at the mercy of a hostile world, he threatens to kill them with his sword Nothung. Brünnhilde is overcome by this display of human emotion and promises to defy her father's command. Sounds of Hunding's approach are heard summoning Siegmund to battle. Brünnhilde tells Siegmund to put his faith in the sword.

SCENE FIVE

Sieglinde's nightmare is now becoming a reality. Siegmund places her carefully on a stone seat and bids her farewell with a kiss. He goes to confront Hunding as they hurl insults at each other in the dark storm clouds. Sieglinde has awoken from her dreams and calls out to the men to stop fighting, pleading to them to murder her instead. But already a lightning flash has revealed the men engaged in a vicious battle. Brünnhilde protects Siegmund with her shield. But just as Siegmund is about to deal Hunding a deadly blow, Wotan intervenes, forcing Siegmund's sword to shatter on his spear. Hunding drives his spear into the breast of the unarmed Siegmund. Wotan looks in anguish at Siegmund's body and with a dismissive wave of the hand causes Hunding to fall down dead.

Meanwhile Brünnhilde has fled with Sieglinde on horseback after gathering up the sword Nothung's shattered fragments. In a thunderous rage Wotan storms off in pursuit of them.

ACT THREE

On the summit of a rocky mountain ('Brünnhilde's rock')

SCENE ONE

The Valkyries gather together with warlike exuberance, each with a slain hero destined for Valhalla on the saddle of her horse. To their astonishment Brünnhilde arrives with a woman. The Valkyrie sisters, fearful of Wotan's wrath, refuse to protect them. Brünnhilde tells Sieglinde to flee to a forest in the east where she will be safe. There she will give birth to 'the noblest hero of the world'. Brünnhilde gives her the shattered pieces of the sword and names him Siegfried, Joyous in Victory, predicting that he will one day forge the fragments anew. Brünnhilde asks her sisters for protection and they surround her to conceal her.

SCENE TWO

Wotan enters in extreme rage looking for Brünnhilde. The Valkyrie sisters do their best to protect her. But Wotan's condemnation of his daughter is so powerful that she is compelled to step out of the Valkyrie throng and face him. To their horror he condemns her to lie defenceless in a magic sleep, vulnerable to the first man who finds her. The Valkyries storm off wildly in tight formation.

SCENE THREE

Left alone with Wotan, Brünnhilde justifies her actions. Although she is not wise, she knew in her heart that Wotan loved Siegmund, which is why she disobeyed his order.

Wotan is moved against his better judgement by her courage. Reluctantly he grants her only request. She is to be surrounded by a magic fire, which only the freest hero who

knows no fear can penetrate. With great emotion, Wotan bids farewell to his daughter and summons Loge to encircle her with fire: only one freer than himself will be able to win her.

SIEGFRIED

Second Day / *Zweiter Tag*

In three acts

CAST

Siegfried *tenor*, Mime *tenor*, the Wanderer (Wotan) *bass*, Fafner *bass*, Erda *contralto*, Brünnhilde *soprano*, Forest Bird *boy soprano*

ACT ONE

A rock cave in the forest

SCENE ONE

Mime is frustrated that he can neither forge a sword strong enough for Siegfried, his ward, nor piece together the shattered fragments of Nothung. Nothung is the only weapon adequate for the task Mime has in mind for his powerful charge: the killing of the dragon Fafner in order to win back the ring. Siegfried enters boisterously from the forest. He has no respect for the puny dwarf who pretends to be his father. Siegfried forces him to confess the truth. A dying woman emerged from the forest, Mimi relates, to give birth in the cave. She entrusted the child to him insisting that he should be called Siegfried, and gave him the fragments of Nothung, which had been shattered when the child's father was slain.

Siegfried is thrilled by the story and, before racing back into the forest from which he senses freedom at last, orders Mime to repair the sword.

SCENE TWO

The Wanderer, dressed in a long dark blue cloak, appears uninvited at Mime's hearth. Mime can be rid of him only by agreeing to a game of riddles. The Wanderer stakes his head on three questions from his unwilling host who, over-confident in his own cunning, agrees to ask them.

The unwanted guest answers correctly and insists that Mime stake his own head on three questions in turn. But Mime, panic-stricken, cannot solve the third riddle: who will weld Nothung together again? The Wanderer solves it for him: 'Only he who's never felt fear' and the one to whom, he adds casually, Mime's head is now forfeit. Mime slumps down on his stool in front of the anvil looking devastated.

SCENE THREE

Mime promises to take Siegfried to Fafner's lair to teach him fear. Disconcertingly for Mime, Siegfried is only too willing to co-operate.

Siegfried starts to forge Nothung himself, deliberately ignoring Mime's expertise. Dimly aware of Siegfried's destiny, Mime brews a poison to kill him once he has slain the dragon. Siegfried sings lustily of Nothung as he forges and Mime skips around the cave in delight at the secret plan he has concocted to save his head. With the finished sword, Siegfried cuts the anvil in two and exultantly lifts Nothung high in the air as Mime jumps onto a stool in heady rapture, only to fall off it to the ground in fright.

ACT TWO
Deep in the forest

SCENE ONE

Alberich is on watch outside Fafner's cave. The Wanderer enters and stops to face Alberich who, as a shaft of moonlight illuminates the scene, quickly recognizes his adversary. Alberich, suspicious of the Wanderer's nonchalance, confronts him with his main weakness: his inability to steal the hoard yet again – an act that would shatter the rule of law once and for all.

As if to prove his indifference, the Wanderer generously tells Alberich of Mime's plans to get the hoard for himself, and suggests warning Fafner who, to avoid being murdered, might relinquish the ring to Alberich before Mime arrives. The Wanderer even offers to waken the dragon himself. Predictably the dragon refuses to listen and goes back to sleep. The Wanderer knows full well that everything is set on a course that no one, not even Alberich, can alter. He vanishes quickly into the forest.

SCENE TWO

Siegfried and Mime arrive as day breaks. Mime conjures up threatening images of Fafner. But Siegfried is more intent on ridding himself of his guardian, whom he finds increasingly repulsive. Mime leaves Siegfried beneath a linden tree to muse on his origins.

Siegfried cuts a reed pipe and tries to play it in order to converse with the birds. He loses patience and instead uses his silver horn. As the sounds of the horn grow faster and louder Fafner begins to stir. Spewing venom out of its nostrils, the dragon heaves itself up to crush the interloper, only to expose its heart into which Siegfried swiftly plunges his sword. Realizing that his killer is only a naïve boy being used

by someone more sinister, the dying Fafner warns Siegfried of Mime's true plans. Some of the dragon's blood spills on to Siegfried's hand. After involuntarily licking it, Siegfried can at last understand the song of one of the birds, who tells him that the hoard is now his. Siegfried climbs down into the cave to look for it and quickly disappears.

SCENE THREE

Mime and Alberich sidle back into sight, quarrelling about their right to the hoard. Siegfried emerges from the cave looking thoughtfully at the ring and the Tarnhelm. Alberich withdraws as Mime persuades Siegfried to take the poisonous drink. But the dragon's blood also enables Siegfried to hear the murderous intent beneath Mime's ingratiating phrases.

Instead of taking the drink, Siegfried kills Mime in a moment of disgust with a single stroke of his sword. Alberich's mocking laughter echoes in the background, but Siegfried, oblivious, simply asks the Forest Bird for a new and preferably more congenial companion. The Forest Bird obliges by telling him of Brünnhilde who, asleep on a high rock and imprisoned by a magic fire, awaits a fearless hero to set her free. The Forest Bird flies off to show Siegfried the way.

ACT THREE

A wild region at the foot of a rocky mountain

SCENE ONE

The Wanderer awakens Erda from a deep sleep. Bleakly observing that nothing can change the destiny of the world, he still wants to ask her: 'how can a rolling wheel be stopped?' She replies that the 'deeds of men darken my spirit'. She was raped by Wotan and bore him Brünnhilde. She is confused and not even clear who her rude awakener is.

Irritated but not surprised, the Wanderer announces that

their child 'will carry out the deed that redeems the world'. He tells Erda to go down to 'eternal sleep'.

SCENE TWO

The Wanderer awaits Siegfried who enters in high spirits. Their banter is good-humoured until the old man asks the young hero who it was who first created Nothung. The Wanderer laughs at Siegfried's ignorance. Siegfried, hurt by the condescension, pours scorn on the Wanderer in turn.

With a single blow Siegfried cuts the Wanderer's spear in two. The Wanderer picks up the pieces and disappears in total darkness. Siegfried puts his horn to his lips and plunges into the billowing fire spreading down from the mountain.

SCENE THREE

On the summit of 'Brünnhilde's rock'

Siegfried has reached the sleeping Brünnhilde, whom he mistakes at first for a male warrior. He cuts away the armour to discover a feminine form that fills him with a strange emotion, asking himself whether he is learning fear at last. He sinks down, as if about to die, and with closed eyes places a kiss on Brünnhilde's lips.

She awakens slowly from the darkness of sleep, sitting up gradually to praise the sun and the earth. Siegfried and Brünnhilde are lost in delight, she praising the gods and the divine hero who woke her, and both giving thanks to the mother who bore Siegfried and made their situation possible. As Siegfried tries passionately to embrace her, she violently pushes him away. 'Even gods never neared me', she protests, bemoaning her newly found 'inglorious' condition. 'I am Brünnhilde no more.'

Miraculously regaining his fearlessness, Siegfried manages to calm Brünnhilde's emotional turmoil. Together they become ecstatically blind to the world. Siegfried rejoices that he is

'gloriously lit by Brünnhilde's star'. Brünnhilde, more presciently, welcomes the coming of the 'twilight of the gods' and the 'night of annihilation' when 'darkness will arise' and 'fog will be let in'. They both end their duet with the words: 'radiant love, laughing death'.

TWILIGHT OF THE GODS / *GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG*

Third Day / *Dritter Tag*
Prologue and three acts

CAST

Siegfried *tenor*, Gunther *high bass*, Alberich *high bass*, Hagen *low bass*, Brünnhilde *soprano*, Gutrune *soprano*, Waltraute *low soprano*, First Norn *contralto*, Second Norn *soprano*, Third Norn *soprano,* vassals *tenor, bass*, women *soprano*
Rhinedaughters: Woglinde *soprano*, Wellgunde *soprano*, Flosshilde *contralto*

PROLOGUE

On the Valkyries' rock

The three Norns, daughters of Erda, spin the golden rope of world knowledge and read from it the world's future and past. The rope was once tied to the World Ash Tree until Wotan desecrated the Tree to create his spear and establish his rule of order over the universe. Wanting to know when the fate of the world they are predicting will come to pass, the Norns try to keep the rope taut. But its threads tangle and it breaks. The Norns' primeval wisdom is at an end.

Brünnhilde and Siegfried emerge from a cave with the rising of the sun, he in full armour, she leading her horse Grane.

Brünnhilde sings that her love for Siegfried would not be true if she refused to let him go forth into the world to perform new deeds. Siegfried leaves Brünnhilde the ring as a token, and she in turn gives him Grane. Carrying his sword, he begins his descent from the rock and vanishes with the horse. His horn is heard from below as Brünnhilde bids him farewell.

ACT ONE

Gunther's royal hall near the Rhine

SCENE ONE

Hagen, the illegitimate son of Alberich and Grimhild, is plotting to regain the ring for his father. His legitimate half-siblings Gunther and Gutrune, who have inherited their kingdom from their dead parents Gibich and Grimhild, sit on a throne to one side.

Hagen gives them some (seemingly) sensible advice. If they are to retain the respect of their subjects, they must marry without delay. Hagen suggests Siegfried for Gutrune and Brünnhilde for Gunther. The lacklustre Gibichungs are overwhelmed with the thought, but sceptical until Hagen suggests a way of attracting their powerful partners-to-be.

Gutrune is to give Siegfried a potion that will erase his memory of all other women. Once Gutrune has captured his heart, it will be easy for her brother to persuade him to woo Brünnhilde. Siegfried's horn sounds from his boat on the Rhine.

SCENE TWO

Hagen calls out to Siegfried to come ashore. Siegfried steps on to land with his sword and Grane. He tells Gunther of the Tarnhelm and the ring. As planned, Gutrune offers him the potion of forgetfulness, which he unwittingly accepts, dedicating his first drink before drinking it to Brünnhilde and faithful love.

The effect of the drink is immediate: spellbound by Gutrune, he hears Gunther talk of the woman Gunther desires, but cannot win because she lives on a high mountain surrounded by fire. Siegfried shows no sign of recognition. Knowing that he can penetrate the fire, he offers to woo the woman, using the Tarnhelm to disguise himself as his host.

After sealing his promise with an oath of blood brotherhood, Siegfried sets off with Gunther for Brünnhilde's rock, leaving Hagen to guard the hall. Sitting without moving and leaning against a pillar, Hagen savours the plot he has set in motion.

SCENE THREE
The Valkyries' rock

Brünnhilde sits at the entrance of her cave gazing rapturously at the ring. Dark storm clouds appear as Waltraute, one of the Valkyries, arrives to tell her of Wotan seated morosely in Valhalla, waiting passively for the destruction of the gods.
Despite Waltraute's pleading, Brünnhilde refuses Wotan's only remaining wish: to free the gods from the curse by returning the ring to the Rhinedaughters. Brünnhilde vows never to renounce the ring, or the love it supposedly symbolizes. Waltraute hastens away distraught.

The brightening flames and the sound of a horn herald the arrival of Siegfried. But to Brünnhilde's horror a different figure steps out of the fire. In Gunther's shape, Siegfried wrestles with her and wrenches the ring from her finger. He forces her into the cave and lays his sword between them as witness that his wooing of Gunther's bride is chaste.

ACT TWO
In front of Gunther's hall

SCENE ONE

Hagen is asleep. As the moon suddenly appears, Alberich can be seen in front of him, resting his arms on his son's knees. He exhorts Hagen to keep faith with their plan to ruin Siegfried and win back the ring.

SCENE TWO

With the help of the Tarnhelm, Siegfried arrives at the Gibichungs' court ahead of Gunther and Brünnhilde. In a detailed dialogue with Hagen and Gutrune, he describes his successsful wooing of Brünnhilde for Gunther and announces their imminent arrival.

SCENE THREE

As if calling the Gibichung vassals to battle, Hagen summons them to greet Gunther and his bride. The vassals do not understand Hagen's warlike tone, or the need for the sharp weapons and bellowing horns. Hagen explains by proposing a barbaric feast, including the slaughter of animals for the gods, and uninhibited drunkenness.

SCENE FOUR

Solemnly, the vassals greet Gunther and Brünnhilde as they disembark. Brünnhilde appears crushed and humiliated until she sees the ring on Siegfried's finger. Roused to furious anger, she declares that Siegfried is her husband and flings desperate charges at him. To clear his name Siegfried swears an oath

on Hagen's spear that its point may pierce his body if he is lying about who he is. Brünnhilde dedicates the sharp point of Hagen's spear to Siegfried's downfall.

SCENE FIVE

After Siegfried has left to prepare for his marriage, Brünnhilde tells Hagen that she did not protect Siegfried's back with her magic as he would never have turned it towards an enemy. Now his enemy, she reveals that his back is the only place where he can be mortally wounded.

Gunther, the deceived deceiver, is convinced of Siegfried's treachery by Hagen, but worried about the effect Siegfried's death will have on Gutrune. Hagen decides to make it look like a hunting accident. All are now dedicated to Siegfried's death.

Calling on Wotan, guardian of vows, Brünnhilde and Gunther swear an oath of vengeance. Hagen in turn invokes the spirit of his father, Alberich, lord of the ring. Siegfried returns with Gutrune and the bridal procession, while Hagen forces Brünnhilde to join Gunther to prepare for a double wedding.

ACT THREE

A forest region near the Rhine

SCENE ONE

A dwarf has lured Siegfried away from his hunting companions to the riverbank where the Rhinedaughters are playing. They tell him he will die later that day if he keeps the ring. Laughing, he ignores them. They lament his blindness and swim away to 'a proud woman', who will soon inherit his treasure and give them a better hearing.

SCENE TWO

Siegfried has rejoined his hunting companions, who sit down to rest and drink. At Hagen's prompting he regales them with stories of Mime and Nothung, of Fafner and the Forest Bird. But Hagen slips an antidote into Siegfried's drink that enables him to tell the true story of Brünnhilde. Siegfried gives a rapturous account of how he learned about her from the Forest Bird and how passionately she embraced him after his bold kiss. Gunther is horrified at what he hears.

Wotan's two ravens fly up out of a bush. Hagen asks Siegfried if he can understand them too. Siegfried turns, and immediately Hagen thrusts his spear into Siegfried's back. Hagen gloats to the horrified onlookers that Siegfried's perjury is avenged.

The vassals take up Siegfried's body to form a solemn cortège as the magnificent funeral march recollects and reflects on the hero's life.

SCENE THREE

In the hall of Gunther's court, Gutrune has been plagued by disturbing dreams and the sight of Brünnhilde walking to the banks of the Rhine. When she discovers Siegfried's body, brought back by the hunters, she nearly faints with shock. Hagen freely admits the murder and kills Gunther in a fight over the ring. But when Hagen reaches for the ring, the dead Siegfried's hand rises menacingly to prevent him from taking it.

Brünnhilde comes forward to silence Gutrune's lament and to contemplate the dead Siegfried. She orders his body to be placed on a funeral pyre. Now, after talking to the Rhinedaughters, she understands Wotan's will to destroy the gods, to rid them of the curse that also ensnared her innocent lover. She takes the ring, puts it on her finger and casts a torch on the pyre. To cleanse the ring from the curse with fire before

it is returned to the Rhinedaughters, she leaps with her horse into the burning pyre, united with Siegfried in love and death.

The Rhine overflows its banks and pours over the flames. As the Rhinedaughters appear on the waves, Hagen rushes headlong into the flood to demand the return of the ring. Woglinde and Wellgunde draw him into the depths, while Flosshilde holds up the ring in triumph. In the ruins of Gunther's hall the men and women watch apprehensively as an increasingly bright glow appears in the sky.

Gradually the hall of Valhalla becomes visible, filled with gods and heroes just as Waltraute described it in Act I. Bright flames appear to blaze up in the hall. When the gods are completely engulfed by them, the curtain falls.

THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG

DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN

A Stage Festival Play for Three Days
and a Preliminary Evening

Ein Bühnenfestspiel für drei Tage
und einen Vorabend

Author's dedication:

Conceived with faith in the German spirit and brought to completion for the glory of his noble benefactor King Ludwig II of Bavaria by Richard Wagner.

Im Vertrauen auf den deutschen Geist entworfen und zum Ruhme seines erhabenen Wohltäters des Königs Ludwig II von Bayern vollendet von Richard Wagner.

DAS RHEINGOLD

(VORABEND)

VORSPIEL UND ERSTE SZENE

In der Tiefe des Rheines

Grünliche Dämmerung, nach oben zu lichter, nach unten zu dunkler. Die Höhe ist von wogendem Gewässer erfüllt, das rastlos von rechts nach links zu strömt. Nach der Tiefe zu lösen die Fluten sich in einen immer feineren feuchten Nebel auf, so daß der Raum der Manneshöhe vom Boden auf gänzlich frei vom Wasser zu sein scheint, welches wie in Wolkenzügen über den nächtlichen Grund dahinfließt. Überall ragen schroffe Felsenriffe aus der Tiefe auf und grenzen den Raum der Bühne ab; der ganze Boden ist in ein wildes Zackengewirr zerspalten, so daß er nirgends vollkommen eben ist und nach allen Seiten hin in dichtester Finsternis tiefere Schlüfte annehmen läßt. – Das Orchester beginnt bei noch niedergezogenem Vorhange.

Hier wird der Vorhang aufgezogen [Takt 126].

Volles Wogen der Wassertiefe

Um ein Riff in der Mitte der Bühne, welches mit seiner schlanken Spitze bis in die dichtere, heller dämmernde Wasserflut hinaufragt, kreist in anmutig schwimmender Bewegung eine der Rheintöchter.

WOGLINDE

Weia! Waga!
Woge, du Welle,
walle zur Wiege!

THE RHINEGOLD

(PRELIMINARY EVENING)

PRELUDE AND SCENE ONE

In the depths of the Rhine

Greenish twilight, getting lighter towards the top, darker towards the bottom. Surging waters fill the upper space, flowing restlessly from right to left. Deeper down, the floods evaporate into a damp mist, constantly thinning out so that a space the height of a man, from the floor up, seems to be entirely free of the water that floats instead over the nocturnal river bed like moving slivers of cloud. Everywhere steep rocky reefs rear up out of the depths, bordering the stage and defining its space; the entire bottom of the river is fractured by a maze of jagged edges, making it nowhere completely flat and suggesting deeper ravines on all sides stretching out into a chain of darkness. – The curtain remains closed when the orchestra starts playing.

The curtain is raised here [bar 126].

Deep water currents at full force

With graceful swimming movements at the centre of the stage picture, one of the Rhinedaughters circles a reef, its slender pinnacle towering upwards into a denser flood of water and brighter dawning light.

WOGLINDE

Weia! Waga!
Swell up, you waters,
in waves to our cradle!

Wagalaweia!
Wallala weiala weia!
Wellgundes Stimme von oben

WELLGUNDE
Woglinde, wachst du allein?
Sie taucht aus der Flut zum Riff herab.

WOGLINDE
Mit Wellgunde wär' ich zu zwei.

WELLGUNDE
Laß sehn, wie du wachst!
Sie sucht Woglinde zu erhaschen.

WOGLINDE *entweicht ihr schwimmend*
Sicher vor dir!
Sie necken sich und suchen sich spielend zu fangen.
Floßhildes Stimme von oben

FLOSSHILDE
10 Heiala weia!
Wildes Geschwister!

WELLGUNDE
Floßhilde, schwimm!
Woglinde flieht:
hilf mir, die Fließende fangen!
Floßhilde taucht herab und fährt zwischen die Spielenden.

FLOSSHILDE
Des Goldes Schlaf
hütet ihr schlecht!
Besser bewacht
des Schlummernden Bett,
sonst büßt ihr beide das Spiel!
Mit muntrem Gekreisch fahren die beiden auseinander: Floßhilde sucht, bald die eine, bald die andere zu erhaschen; sie entschlüpfen ihr und vereinigen sich endlich, um gemeinsam auf Floßhilde Jagd zu machen. So schnellen sie gleich Fischen von Riff zu Riff, scherzend und lachend. – Aus einer finstren Schlucht ist währenddem Alberich, an einem Riffe klimmend, dem Abgrunde entstiegen. Er hält, noch vom Dunkel umgeben, an und schaut dem Spiele der Rheintöchter mit steigendem Wohlgefallen zu.

Wagalaweia!
Wallala weiala weia!
Wellgunde's voice from above

WELLGUNDE
Woglinde, you're on watch alone?
She dives down out of the water onto the reef.

WOGLINDE
With Wellgunde there'd be two of us.

WELLGUNDE
Let's see how awake you are!
She tries to catch Woglinde.

WOGLINDE *swimming out of her reach*
Safe from you!
They tease and playfully try to lure each other into a trap.
Flosshilde's voice from above

FLOSSHILDE
Heiala weia! 10
You sisters are wild!

WELLGUNDE
Flosshilde, swim!
Woglinde's getting away:
help me catch the slippery thing!
Flosshilde dives down and intervenes in her sisters' games.

FLOSSHILDE
You're careless with
the gold's slumber!
Better to watch
the bed where it rests,
or you'll both rue the fun and games!
Screaming with laughter, the two separate: Flosshilde tries to snatch first one, then the other; they elude her and eventually unite to chase Flosshilde together. In this formation they dive like fish quickly from reef to reef, joking and laughing. – Meanwhile, Alberich, clambering on one of the reefs, has emerged from a murky chasm in the abyss. Still surrounded by darkness, he stops to look at the Rhinedaughters' games, liking what he sees more and more.

ALBERICH *mit rauher Trockenheit im Ton**

20 Hehe! Ihr Nicker!

Die Mädchen halten, sobald sie Alberichs Stimme hören, mit dem Spiele ein.

Wie seid ihr niedlich,
neidliches Volk!
Aus Nibelheims Nacht
naht' ich mich gern,
neigtet ihr euch zu mir!

WOGLINDE

Hei! Wer ist dort?

WELLGUNDE

Es dämmert und ruft!

FLOSSHILDE

Lugt, wer uns belauscht!

Sie tauchen tiefer herab und erkennen den Nibelung.

WOGLINDE *und* WELLGUNDE

Pfui! Der Garstige!

FLOSSHILDE *schnell auftauchend*

30 Hütet das Gold!

Die beiden andern folgen ihr, und alle drei versammeln sich schnell um das mittlere Riff.

Vater warnte
vor solchem Feind.

ALBERICH

Ihr da oben!

WOGLINDE, WELLGUNDE, FLOSSHILDE

Was willst du dort unten?

ALBERICH

Stör' ich eu'r Spiel,
wenn staunend ich still hier steh'?
Tauchtet ihr nieder,
mit euch tollte
und neckte der Niblung sich gern.

WOGLINDE

40 Mit uns will er spielen?

ALBERICH *with a raw dryness of tone**
Hey! You sprites there! 20
The girls stop playing their games as soon as they hear Alberich's voice.
How lovable you look,
you quarrelsome people!
Out of Nibelheim's night
I'll gladly approach,
if you'll get closer to me!

WOGLINDE
Hey! Who's there?

WELLGUNDE
It's dim and it's calling!

FLOSSHILDE
Well, look who's eavesdropping on us!
They dive deeper down and see the Nibelung.

WOGLINDE *and* WELLGUNDE
Ugh! What filth!

FLOSSHILDE *quickly diving upwards*
Protect the gold! 30
The other two follow her, and all three fall into line quickly around the reef in the middle.
Father warned
of an enemy like this.

ALBERICH
You up there!

WOGLINDE, WELLGUNDE, FLOSSHILDE
You down there, what's up?

ALBERICH
Am I a spoilsport
just standing here, quietly marvelling?
If you dive down here,
the Nibelung will be glad to play
and raise hell with you.

WOGLINDE
He wants to play with us? 40

* Asterisks indicate Wagner's directions from the 1876 Bayreuth rehearsals. See Sources of the German Text, p. 723

WELLGUNDE
Ist ihm das Spott?

ALBERICH
Wie scheint im Schimmer
ihr hell und schön!
Wie gern umschlänge
der Schlanken eine mein Arm,
schlüpfte hold sie herab!

FLOSSHILDE
Nun lach' ich der Furcht:
der Feind ist verliebt!

WELLGUNDE
Der lüsterne Kauz!

WOGLINDE
50 Laßt ihn uns kennen!
Sie läßt sich auf die Spitze des Riffes hinab, an dessen Fuße Alberich angelangt ist.

ALBERICH
Die neigt sich herab!

WOGLINDE
Nun nahe dich mir!
Alberich klettert mit koboldartiger Behendigkeit, doch wiederholt aufgehalten, der Spitze des Riffes zu.

ALBERICH *hastig*
Garstig glatter
glitschriger Glimmer!
Wie gleit' ich aus!
Mit Händen und Füßen
nicht fasse noch halt' ich
das schlecke Geschlüpfer!
Er prustet.
Feuchtes Naß
60 füllt mir die Nase –
verfluchtes Niesen!
Er ist in Woglindes Nähe angelangt.

WOGLINDE *lachend*
Prustend naht
meines Freiers Pracht!

WELLGUNDE
Is he serious?

ALBERICH
In the gleaming light you look
so fair and lovely!
How my arms would love
to embrace one of those slim shapes,
should she obligingly slip down here!

FLOSSHILDE
Now I laugh at my fear:
our enemy's in love!

WELLGUNDE
Horny freak!

WOGLINDE
Let's teach him who we are! 50
She lowers herself onto the pinnacle of the reef, the foot of which Alberich has reached.

ALBERICH
Down she comes!

WOGLINDE
Get closer to me!
With imp-like alacrity, Alberich clambers up towards the pinnacle of the reef, but repeatedly gets stuck.

ALBERICH *rushed*
Filthy, slithery,
slimy surface!
I'm sliding off!
With hands and feet
I can't catch or hold
the slippery lovelies!
He sneezes violently.
My nose's stuffed up
with soggy slime – 60
sneezing be damned!
He has arrived close to Woglinde.

WOGLINDE *laughing*
The wheezing splendour
of my suitor is nigh!

ALBERICH
Mein Friedel sei,
du fräuliches Kind!
Er sucht, sie zu umfassen.
WOGLINDE *sich ihm entwindend*
Willst du mich frein,
so freie mich
Sie taucht zu einem andern Riff auf.
hier!
Die Schwestern lachen.
ALBERICH *kratzt sich den Kopf*
O weh! Du entweichst?
Komm doch wieder!
70 Schwer ward mir,
[Woglinde] schwingt sich auf ein drittes Riff in grösserer Tiefe.
was so leicht du erschwingst.
WOGLINDE
Steig nur zu Grund,
da greifst du mich sicher!
ALBERICH *hastig hinabkletternd*
Wohl besser da unten!
WOGLINDE *schnellt sich rasch aufwärts nach einem höheren Riff zur Seite.*
Nun aber nach oben!
WELLGUNDE, FLOSSHILDE *lachend*
Hahahahahaha!
ALBERICH
Wie fang' ich im Sprung
den spröden Fisch?
Warte, du Falsche!
Er will ihr eilig nachklettern.
WELLGUNDE *hat sich auf ein tieferes Riff auf der andern Seite gesenkt.*
80 Heia, du Holder!
Hörst du mich nicht?
ALBERICH *sehr heftig und gierig**
sich umwendend
Rufst du nach mir?

ALBERICH
Be my beloved,
you womanly child!
He tries to embrace her.
WOGLINDE *twisting out of his grasp*
If win me you will,
then win me
She dives up to another reef.
here!
The sisters laugh.
ALBERICH *scratches his head*
Oh no! You're escaping?
Please come back!
It's hard for me 70
[Woglinde] swings herself over to a third reef deeper down.
to move as easily as you.
WOGLINDE
Just climb to the bottom,
there you'll get me for sure!
ALBERICH *hurriedly clambering downwards*
Down there's much better!
WOGLINDE *dives upwards quickly to a higher reef at the side.*
Now up to the top!
WELLGUNDE, FLOSSHILDE *laughing*
Hahahahahaha!
ALBERICH
How do I jump and catch
the tiresome fish?
Wait, you cheat!
He wants to clamber after her fast.
WELLGUNDE *has settled down on a lower reef on the other side.*
Hey, my darling! 80
Can't you hear me?
ALBERICH *very fiercely and covetously**
swivelling around
Are you talking to me?

WELLGUNDE
Ich rate dir wohl:
zu mir wende dich,
Woglinde meide!
ALBERICH *indem er hastig über den Bodengrund zu Wellgunde hin klettert*
Viel schöner bist du
als jene Scheue,
die minder gleißend
und gar zu glatt.
90 Nur tiefer tauche,
willst du mir taugen.
WELLGUNDE *noch etwas mehr sich herabsenkend*
Bin nun ich dir nah?
ALBERICH
Noch nicht genug!
Die schlanken Arme
schlinge um mich,
daß ich den Nacken
dir neckend betaste,
mit schmeichelnder Brunst
an die schwellende Brust mich dir schmiege!
WELLGUNDE
100 Bist du verliebt
und lüstern nach Minne,
laß sehn, du Schöner,
wie bist du zu schaun?
Pfui! Du haariger,
höckriger Geck!
Schwarzes, schwieliges
Schwefelgezwerg!
Such dir ein Friedel,
dem du gefällst!
ALBERICH *sucht, sie mit Gewalt zu halten.*
110 Gefall' ich dir nicht,
dich faß' ich doch fest!
WELLGUNDE *schnell zum mittleren Riff auftauchend*
Nur fest, sonst fließ' ich dir fort!

WELLGUNDE
Here's good advice:
start turning to me,
avoid Woglinde!
ALBERICH *while he's clambering hurriedly over the river bed to Wellgunde*
You're much prettier
than your bashful sister;
she's less sparky,
and much too slippery.
But dive deeper 90
if you want to please me.
WELLGUNDE *sinking herself down a bit more*
Am I now close to you?
ALBERICH
Not enough yet!
Put those slender arms
right around me,
that I may teasingly
touch that neck,
and with lusting flattery
snuggle myself into your swelling bosom!
WELLGUNDE
As you're smitten 100
and lusting for love,
let's see, you handsome creature,
what you're like to look at?
Ugh! You hairy
humpback of a fool!
Black, bumpy
sulphurous dwarf!
Seek out a lover
who'll like you!
ALBERICH *tries with force to hang onto her.*
You don't like me, 110
but I'll hold you tight!
WELLGUNDE *diving up quickly to the central reef*
Tightly then, or I'll slither away!

WOGLINDE, FLOSSHILDE *lachend*
Hahahahahaha!
ALBERICH *Wellgunden erbost nachzankend*
Falsches Kind!
Kalter, grätiger Fisch!
Schein' ich nicht schön dir,
niedlich und neckisch,
glatt und glau –
hei! So buhle mit Aalen,
120 ist dir eklig mein Balg!
FLOSSHILDE
Was zankst du, Alb?
Schon so verzagt?
Du freitest um zwei:
frügst du die dritte,
süßen Trost
schüfe die Traute dir!
ALBERICH
Holder Sang
singt zu mir her!
Wie gut, daß ihr
130 eine nicht seid:
von vielen gefall' ich wohl einer,
bei einer kieste mich keine!
Soll ich dir glauben,
so gleite herab!
[Floßhilde] taucht zu Alberich herab.
FLOSSHILDE
Wie törig seid ihr,
dumme Schwestern,
dünkt euch dieser nicht schön!
ALBERICH *hastig ihr nahend*
Für dumm und häßlich
darf ich sie halten,
140 seit ich dich Holdeste seh'!
FLOSSHILDE *schmeichelnd*
O singe fort
so süß und fein,

WOGLINDE, FLOSSHILDE *laughing*
Hahahahahaha!
ALBERICH *bawling furiously in Wellgunde's wake*
Treacherous brat!
Cold, bony, grump of a fish!
To you I'm not handsome,
sweet or sparkling,
smooth or sharp –
hey! So hang out with eels,
if my body disgusts you! 120
FLOSSHILDE
What's the fuss, dwarf?
Already losing heart?
Two you've pursued:
if you ask the third,
your life's love will bring
sweet consolation!
ALBERICH
Lovely singing
sounds in my ear!
It's good there's more
than one of you: 130
with many I can please at least one,
with only one, nobody would have me!
So if I'm to believe you,
glide down here!
[Flosshilde] dives down to Alberich.
FLOSSHILDE
How foolish you are,
stupid sisters,
to think him not handsome!
ALBERICH *hurriedly getting close to her*
I'm minded to think
them vapid and vile
now I see you, fairest of all! 140
FLOSSHILDE *flatteringly*
O sing more
that's sweet and fine,

wie hehr verführt es mein Ohr!
ALBERICH *zutraulich sie berührend*
Mir zagt, zuckt
und zehrt sich das Herz,
lacht mir so zierliches Lob.
FLOSSHILDE *ihn sanft abwehrend*
Wie deine Anmut
mein Aug' erfreut,
deines Lächelns Milde
150 den Mut mir labt!
Sie zieht ihn zärtlich an sich.
Seligster Mann!
ALBERICH
Süßeste Maid!
FLOSSHILDE
Wärst du mir hold!
ALBERICH
Hielt' ich dich immer.
FLOSSHILDE *ihn ganz in ihren Armen haltend*
Deinen stechenden Blick,
deinen struppigen Bart,
o säh ich ihn, faßt' ich ihn stets!
Deines stachligen Haares
strammes Gelock,
160 umflöss' es Floßhilde ewig!
Deine Krötengestalt,
deiner Stimme Gekrächz,
o dürft' ich staunend und stumm
sie nur hören und sehn!
Woglinde und Wellgunde sind nahe herabgetaucht.
WOGLINDE, WELLGUNDE *lachend*
Hahahahahaha!
ALBERICH *erschreckt aus Floßhildes Armen auffahrend*
Lacht ihr Bösen mich aus?
FLOSSHILDE *sich plötzlich ihm entreißend*
lustig
Wie billig am Ende vom Lied!