

SIEGMUND AND WOTAN'S PLAN IN WAGNER'S *RING*

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First published in Journal No.104 of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association

I

The stages through which the text of Wagner's *Ring* passed before reaching its final form are well documented and provide an opportunity to see its development in a way that is hardly paralleled in a work of comparable stature. The text was written over a period of four years from 1848 to 1852; Wagner originally planned and wrote the text for only a single opera, *Siegfrieds Tod*,² and subsequently added *Der junge Siegfried* in order to dramatise events in the background. Still later he saw the possibility of making two further dramas to deal with events before Siegfried's birth, namely the crisis facing the gods and its origin, and wrote the texts of *Die Walküre* and *Das Rheingold*. He then completed the tetralogy by altering the original two dramas, later called *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. For each of the operas Wagner's practice was first to write sketches, some of which are mere jottings, then to write a full prose draft, and finally to versify the draft in a final version which I shall follow him in calling the poem. This abundant material³ offers a genetic approach to interpretation of passages which appear as problematic in the final poems. One such problem is the precise role which Wotan intends Siegmund to play in his plan to save his regime, and I believe that comparison of the final with earlier versions of this topic not only allows a clear solution to the problem, but also explains the source of the obscurity and thereby illumines the central issues of the *Ring*.

Wotan's dilemma is as follows. He has been forced by the logic of his wife Fricka, the goddess who guarantees the sanctity of marriage, to abandon Siegmund, a hero of the Wälsung clan, to punishment at the hands of an outraged husband, for Siegmund is guilty of adultery with Hunding's wife Sieglinde. What's more, Sieglinde is Siegmund's own

sister, so incest is a further outrage on propriety. Since the offending pair are Wotan's own children by a mortal woman, in abandoning Siegmund he is condemning his own son to death.

Beyond this personal tragedy the death of Siegmund means the frustration of a plan which Wotan has conceived for securing the rule of the gods. He had paid for his stronghold Walhalla by giving the giants who built it the ring and hoard stolen from the Nibelung Alberich. Now Alberich is threatening to recover the ring, presently guarded by the giant Fafner in the shape of a dragon. The ring must be wrested from Fafner before Alberich gets it and uses it to enslave the world, but the gods, whose authority is built upon contracts, cannot break their own rules by forcibly seizing it. Wotan's escape route from this predicament is to seek a free hero, who unbidden by Wotan will win the ring from Fafner. Such a hero he cannot find; wherever he looks he finds only himself, that is, heroes who are dependent upon him. In Act 2 Scene 2 of *Die Walküre* he outlines his dilemma to Brünnhilde. "What about the Wälsung, Siegmund?" asks Brünnhilde; "does he not act of his own accord?" And Wotan replies that he himself has been Siegmund's companion, he himself has incited him to break the laws, and now he protects him by the gift of a sword. He has been deceiving himself; he has had a hand in everything that Siegmund does. Fricka has so easily seen through him; he must support her demands and Siegmund must die.

Given this sequence: "we need a free hero to do the deed; perhaps Siegmund qualifies; no, I have been deceiving myself", one may be inclined to conclude that Wotan intended Siegmund to be this hero, the man who would win the ring back from Fafner. And this is how Siegmund is almost always seen by commentators. Deryck Cooke writes "It is because [Wotan] is afraid that Alberich may regain [the ring]...that he begets Siegmund to act as his agent - since he himself cannot act in the matter...Siegmund (and later Siegfried) is to be the free hero ...who will kill Fafner and regain the ring."⁴ And again "what Siegmund is there for in the first place, from

Wotan's point of view, is not to love Sieglinde, beget Siegfried on her, and die, but to kill the dragon and regain the ring." And if one is puzzled by this claim, and asks why then is there all this emphasis in the text on the mating of siblings, if Siegmund's primary function in Wotan's mind is to kill Fafner and regain the ring, Cooke answers: "[Siegmund's] twin sister Sieglinde, his early separation from her, his reunion with her, and his need to rescue her from a forced and loveless marriage - all these have been destined for him by Wotan, to increase his hardihood and independence before he carries out his main task" (280).

One might wonder, however, whether this explanation is adequate to the tremendous conclusion of Act 1 of *Die Walküre* illumined by a vision of all-conquering love - love which is one of the dominating themes of the whole cycle. Cooke's explanation of Wotan's purpose here omits Siegmund's love for Sieglinde, which he regards as an outcome not foreseen by Wotan, though not unwelcome to him. However, can it just be an accident that Wotan's Wälsung children are twins, male and female? Is it inessential that the ash tree where Siegmund found the sword left him by his father was the central pillar of his sister's house, in which the sword was driven at her wedding? "So flourish the Wälsung line" sings Siegmund as the pair fall into each other's arms as the curtain falls. One looks for an explanation whereby these striking features can be seen as central to Siegmund's role; and they would be central if he is intended by Wotan not to be himself the freest hero, but to continue the Wälsung line so that that hero can be born.⁵

The question whether Wotan sees Siegmund as the procreator of Siegfried, or as himself the free hero on whom he pins his hopes of recovering the ring, invites an answer through consideration of the way Siegmund is represented in the text of *Die Walküre* as compared with the sketches, drafts and earlier versions of the *Ring*, in which there are several references to him. Wagner was half way through his work before he had to dramatise Siegmund, and the earliest references to him in the sketches and in the two original

Siegfried dramas cannot be expected to have the same degree of definition as was achieved later when he came to make Siegmund a central focus; nevertheless there are differences which are not completely accounted for in this way. I shall concentrate mainly on three aspects: first, views expressed about Siegmund's role, second, the kinship of Wotan and Siegmund, and third, Brünnhilde's reasons for disobeying Wotan's orders.⁶

II

In October 1848 Wagner wrote a compressed account of the story entitled *Der Nibelungen-Mythus*.⁷ The later part covers in some detail the death of Siegfried, but the earlier section deals in a couple of pages with the events which eventually became the subject matter of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*. Here we find Wagner's first account of the gods' crisis and their plan:

Wotan cannot himself cancel the injustice [stealing the ring from Alberich in order to pay the giants for building Walhalla] without committing another injustice: only a free will, independent of the gods, who is in a position to take all the guilt upon himself and to expiate it, can unbind the magic [of the ring], and the gods see in mankind the capacity for such a free will.... Mighty human clans, made fruitful by divine seed, already flourish.... But the right hero is not yet born, in whom independent power can come to full consciousness so that he is prepared of his own free will, with the death penalty before his eyes, to acknowledge as his own his finest deed. This hero will at last be born in the clan of the Wälsungs: a marriage within this clan has remained childless, and Wotan makes it fertile by means of one of Holda's apples which he lets the couple eat; twins, Siegmund and Sieglinde, (brother and sister) are born of the marriage. Siegmund takes a wife, Sieglinde is wedded to a husband (Hunding); but both their marriages remain childless: brother and

sister themselves now mate in order to beget a genuine Wälsung. Hunding, Sieglinde's husband, discovers the offence and repudiates his wife and attacks Siegmund. Brünnhilde, the Valkyrie, defends Siegmund contrary to the orders of Wotan, who has condemned him to death as a penalty for the offence (158).

This account is the fountain-head of the entire *Ring* cycle, but is in some respects different from the completed work: here for example the gods are seeking a redeemer who will sacrifice his life in expiation for their original injustice. They will get him too, for in this version Wotan's rule is secured. But there is no suggestion here that Siegmund was a possible candidate for the role of redeemer. The story shows a family, the Wälsungs, destined to bring forth the hero in question, but in dire peril of becoming extinct through childlessness. In order to keep the line going the twins mate in defiance of propriety, and Siegmund pays the penalty. Structurally his function is to keep the family going so that the hero may be born, and as far as one can tell from the plain narrative, the twins are motivated by desire for the survival of the family. Whatever Siegmund's role may turn out to be in the final work, in the initial outline he is a generator and is not regarded as the finished heroic product.

It is noticeable too that here Wotan is not himself the father of Siegmund, as he is in *Die Walküre*. The gods in general are said to have been seminal in the origin of several heroic families, and Wotan is not even picked out as the founder of the Wälsungs, but keeps the line going when it is threatened by infertility. It is certain that he is not envisaged by Wagner at this early stage as having the peculiarly close relationship with Siegmund which produces such powerful emotional effect in the opera.

Much the same condition obtains in the draft and the poem of *Siegfrieds Tod*, which Wagner wrote later in October and November of 1848. In the draft Wotan is the ancestor of the Wälsung line; they are his offspring (Strobel 42). When Hagen is describing eligible spouses for Gunther and Gutrune

he says: "Siegfried, the noble Wälsung, is the strongest hero, he is the right husband for you, Guttrune." And in a note in the margin is added the anecdote about Holda's apple and the siblings' desire to beget the truest Wälsung (Strobel 39). A closer relationship is indicated in the poem, where Wälse is sprung from Wotan and Siegmund from Wälse.⁸ Thus Wotan is distinct from Wälse and is not the father of Siegmund. It would be fair to comment that, as far as Wagner was concerned in 1848, neither Wotan nor Siegmund himself thought that he was the strongest hero, but thought that the family had another generation to go.

III

Nearly two and a half years later Wagner took up the scheme again. Convinced that *Siegfrieds Tod* was disfigured by long narratives recounting background information, he saw the possibility of using that material as the subject of an additional opera, which he called *Der junge Siegfried*. In the first jottings of spring 1851 we find the following headings relating to Act 3: "Wotan and the Wala: the end of the gods. Wotan's decision." So here appears the first clear indication of the radical change to the end of the story: the gods are not to survive as they do in *Siegfrieds Tod* but are to meet their end. This momentous change does not, however, result in alterations to Wotan's plans for Siegmund, for it is only because of what happens to Siegmund that Wotan realises that the gods are doomed. Most of the treatment of Siegmund by Wotan is represented as taking place while he still believes that he can get his heroes to produce the independent individual whom he requires.

In the main draft to *Der junge Siegfried* we learn (Strobel 74) that all heroes are Wotan's offspring, but in answer to the Wanderer's question as to the name of the clan which Wotan begot but which he loves most and pursues most, the smith Mime answers that they are the Wälsungs. Likewise Brünnhilde tells Siegfried (Strobel 93): "Wotan begot for himself a beloved clan; they are called the Wälsungs: I noticed and pondered how much the Universal Father loved them" (cf. *Der junge Siegfried*, Strobel 186: "wie Allvater die

edlen liebte, ich sinnende sah es wohl"). So at this stage Wotan is the ancestor of the line as in *Siegfrieds Tod*, but with the additional feature of *loving* his offspring, though no suggestion is made that he is in person the father of Siegmund.

As for Siegmund's function in the story, there is striking emphasis on procreation and none on dragon-slaying. Mime tells the Wanderer of the siblings' mating in order to produce a hero strong enough to help the family in its need (Strobel 75), and more detail is given in Brünnhilde's account to Siegfried in Act 3 (Strobel 93):

Siegmund was the name of an offspring of the Wälungs, his sister was called

Sieglinde; Sieglinde was married to Hunding, but they only produced

cowardly sons. The noble Wälung stock needed bolder offspring; it was

beset by envy and grim hatred and was practically doomed to be

exterminated soon. So Siegmund consorted with his sister in a secret night of

love (in heimlicher Liebesnacht), and Sieglinde bore the truest Wälung, who

was to be the most glorious. Hunding complained about the adultery,

repudiated his wife, and moved against Siegmund.

This emphasis is maintained in the completed poem of *Der junge Siegfried*; it is clear that Siegmund is motivated by concern for the beleaguered family line. Though the language of love is used to describe the union, this hero is acting for dynastic purposes, and there is no suggestion that he was being groomed for any other destiny.

There has been little opportunity so far for Wotan to express an opinion about his plan for Siegmund, but one place to look is in Brünnhilde's explanation of why she disobeyed Wotan. She is a separate person and not just a personification of part of Wotan's mind, but nevertheless she stands in an intimate relationship to his deepest wishes, and if

she says that in disobeying Wotan and defending Siegmund she is in fact carrying out what the god really wants, then there might be found here a pointer to Wotan's aspirations for Siegmund. In *Der Nibelungen-Mythus* it is simply stated that she helped Siegmund against Wotan's orders and was punished; in *Siegfrieds Tod* (SSD 2.184) she tells her fellow Valkyries that Wotan taught her always to protect the Wälsungs in battle, and she would not give way in Siegmund's case. But the draft of *Der junge Siegfried* yields a better insight into Wotan's mind: Brünnhilde tells Siegfried in their love duet of Act 3 that she had always loved him, for she alone read Wotan's thought, the thought that she did not think but only felt; the thought that in her was only *love for Siegfried* (Strobel 93).⁹ She goes on to describe her interview with Wotan: "He forbade me to defend in the fight the Wälsung, who had to fall to Hunding; yet beneath his brow his eye flickered (zuckte sein Aug'); what Sieglinde carried pleased him, and with reluctance he punished Siegmund. In favour of his thought (Sinn) I defied his word." The language is almost identical in the completed poem of *Der junge Siegfried*: Wotan's eye gleamed (blinkte) and betrayed gladness at Sieglinde's pregnancy, and it was for the sake of that thought that Brünnhilde defied him (Strobel 187). It is remarkable how devoid of deep feeling Wotan is in this interview. He is reluctant to punish Siegmund, but his sorrow is a far cry from the all-encompassing grief that we know from *Die Walküre*. The gleam in the eye shows that Wotan's real interest is in the family line; Siegmund's death was a near thing, but the pregnancy offered a ray of hope. The crucial distinction between what Wotan says and what he thinks allows Brünnhilde to base her disobedience upon her apprehension of Wotan's idea: she does not, one might comment, tell Siegfried that she disobeyed Wotan because she knew he loved Siegmund, but because she felt his ulterior motive as *love for Siegfried*.

In summary of this stage we can see that for the first time Wotan's relationship with his heroic offspring is one of love, but hardly of love for Siegmund himself for his own

sake. Rather it is directed towards the unborn hero. Wotan is said to be reluctant to punish Siegmund, to be sure, but what his eye betrays is desire for Siegfried. At this point of the development of the *Ring* it seems that Wagner conceived Wotan as regarding Siegmund with affection indeed, but with affection for him as the producer of the true focus of his attention, the greatest hero who is as yet unborn.

IV

In November of the same year 1851 Wagner, who had by now hit on the notion of expanding his two Siegfried dramas by writing two more to dramatise the background, made a brief sketch relating to the theft of the Rhinegold in which for the first time Alberich was enabled to seize the gold *because he foreswore love*. Correspondingly, in the sketches for *Die Walküre* which Wagner wrote from November 1851 to May 1852, love comes to dominate Wotan's attitudes, and we have something of the great antithesis of the final *Ring*.¹⁰ Now Wagner had to commit himself to clear representation of the Siegmund material, and on matters for which broad outline in narrative form previously sufficed he now must take a stand in one way or the other. The present discussion is based on the main prose draft of 17-26 May 1852, with references to previous sketches where relevant.

Wotan is now for the first time indisputably *the father of Siegmund*, though Siegmund knows him only as Wälse, his human father. Fricka, however, recognizes Wälse as Wotan, and identifies his children (Strobel 239). Wotan tells Brünnhilde: "I myself begot the Wälsungs; Siegmund is the dearest man to me...I must give him up and everything that I love....I must murder what I love." Hence come his despair and his longing for the end. The language of love is being used, though as the finished poem shows, there is plenty of scope for a more nearly precise determination of Wotan's love as love for Siegmund *for his own sake*. For in the draft Wotan is still manipulating Siegmund far more clearly than in the opera. The most remarkable example of this is Act 1, where the situation unfolds as follows: Siegmund comes into Hunding's house and is tended by Sieglinde; they feel very

much drawn to each other. Hunding enters and in the course of conversation learns that Siegmund is his enemy, one in fact whom he had gone to fight at a recent disastrous wedding. He thereupon declares that his hearth is sacred to him and Siegmund should keep it so *and depart immediately*.¹¹ Hunding is therefore showing Siegmund the door; Sieglinde gestures to Siegmund to stay, and at this crisis Wotan enters, unrecognised in the guise of an old traveller asking for a rest. In conversation the traveller lets Hunding know that he is aware of the Wälsungs' misfortunes and of how their hearth and house were destroyed, hearth and house which, he adds pointedly, seem so sacred to everyone. Hunding's embarrassment reveals that not only is he also aware of that crime, but that he himself took part in it.¹² Wotan suggests that it would be some small compensation if Siegmund, who had been made homeless as a boy, should now receive one night's shelter. Hunding in shame accedes. Wotan then sticks the sword in the tree as a guest-gift in return for the rest which he had been granted. Hunding fails to pull the sword out, Siegmund succeeds, and meanwhile Wotan quietly goes out (Strobel 235).

This is a colossal intervention by Wotan into the human world, and it is designed to ensure that Siegmund spends the night in Hunding's house. That can only have one meaning: Wotan wants to secure the union of Siegmund and Sieglinde. If Hunding had thrown Siegmund out, as he was on the point of doing, there would have been no opportunity for development in the love affair already budding between Siegmund and Sieglinde. As things are, the lovers go ahead and meet when Hunding is asleep. Indeed, in one of the minor sketches (Strobel 212) Wotan does not leave the house, but remains asleep in an alcove, or perhaps rather only apparently asleep, so that he can tell Fricka in Act 2 that he actually witnessed the lovers together (Strobel 204).

If Wotan wants the union to take place, it must be because he is set upon the continuation of the Wälsung clan. This seems decisive evidence that, less than a couple of months before the completion of the poem of *Die Walküre* (1

July 1852), Wagner represented Wotan as seeing Siegmund not as a candidate super-hero, but as a continuer of the line, as father of the greatest hero. There is no mention of Siegmund as the doer of the greatest deed, the recovery of the ring, but there is enormous emphasis upon Siegmund as progenitor, and, most importantly, the whole action of Act 1 is structured round this being Wotan's aim for Siegmund. It makes no dramatic sense to take Siegmund as the deed-doer, for there is no preparation in our minds for taking him this way; conversely, unless we take him as progenitor there is no sense in the drama of Act 1 as developed in the main prose draft.

Brünnhilde's reason for disobeying Wotan supports this view. In the first sketch Wotan, after Fricka has gone, lets slip to Brünnhilde his plan for the Wälsungs: "Wotan verräth, ohne es zu wollen, seine geheime Absicht mit den Wälsungen, seinen Sprossen" (Strobel 204). She divines his meaning completely, and offers to save Siegmund herself; Wotan forcefully reiterates his command that Siegmund must die. Note that what Brünnhilde learns is Wotan's plan *for the clan*, not for Siegmund himself, so that again it is implied that Siegmund is part of the process of production of the supreme hero and not its termination. Her offer to save Siegmund need imply no more than that Sieglinde and the unborn baby will not be expected to survive without Siegmund to protect them. Siegmund's dying words in this first sketch (Strobel 205) are "Rescue Sieglinde", and so Brünnhilde escapes with her.

In the main prose draft (Strobel 249) when Wotan catches up with Brünnhilde and passes sentence on her, she explains that in disobeying him she was only doing what he himself really wanted, and that actually meeting Siegmund made all the difference: "You had to will to refuse your help to the Wälsung....I had to dare, because I saw him....I heard the deepest need of love....I heard him for you, and for you I changed the decision. You breathed into me the love which now turned against your will" (Du hauchtest in mich die Liebe, die wider deinen Willen jetzt sich wandte). And Wotan replies: "So you did what I would gladly have done, but with terrible

strength forced myself not to do..." Whereas, when directed in the first sketch to abandon Siegmund, Brünnhilde offers to save him *because she intuits Wotan's plan for the Wälsungs*, that is, for the family, in the event, when face to face with Siegmund, it is the hero's love for Sieglinde that moves her to disobedience, and she defends herself by saying that the motive was in fact *Wotan's own love for Siegmund*.

Apparently love for Siegmund as an individual coexists in Wotan with the design to use him to generate the one true hero. This makes Wotan's love focus on Siegmund more sharply than in *Der junge Siegfried* (Strobel 93), where we saw that Brünnhilde tells Siegfried that, though Wotan was sorry for Siegmund's punishment, his eye betrayed his interest in the unborn Siegfried, and that she had therefore always loved him. Rather, perhaps, though Wotan's love in *Der junge Siegfried* is clearly not for Siegmund but for the Wälsung line and for Siegfried yet unborn, in the main prose draft for *Die Walküre* the distinction is less clear, and one feels that his love is for Siegmund too. Whether it is possible to have total love in combination with use of a person as an instrument of policy, is a question which may have troubled Wagner.¹³ The various attempts which he made to draft Act 1 suggest that he was having trouble getting it right.¹⁴

V

From *Der Nibelungen-Mythus* right through to the final draft for *Die Walküre*, therefore, the role in which Siegmund is cast is uniformly that of the continuer of the line of the Wälsungs, and in particular to be the father of the greatest hero, Siegfried, the one who will be capable of taking the ring from Fafner. Not once is there any indication that Wagner thought of Siegmund as a possible doer of the deed, nor is any sign given of Wotan planning that part for Siegmund in his scheme to save his world. The remaining drama, *Das Rheingold*, deals with events before the creation of the Wälsungs and contains no reference to the family, and *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, close adaptations of *Der junge Siegfried* and *Siegfrieds Tod* respectively, contain no new material relating to Siegmund. Thus the entire material

of the *Ring*, leaving aside the point at issue, namely Siegmund as he is actually represented in *Die Walküre*, offers no support for the notion of Siegmund as a possible winner of the ring. If he is portrayed as a candidate for this role in *Die Walküre*, therefore, this must constitute a change in Wagner's view of him. That of course is entirely possible, but one might be inclined to interpret ambiguities in favour of his role as a progenitor rather than as a recoverer of the ring.

Further, throughout the material discussed so far Wotan has been described in a series of relationships to Siegmund that have become progressively closer, from having no personal kinship with the family of the Wälsungs, to becoming its founder and perhaps the father of Siegmund's father Wälse, until finally he becomes *himself* Siegmund's father, disguised as Wälse. And with this increasing consanguinity has grown an ever stronger emphasis on love.

VI

We should look now at the finished poem of *Die Walküre* to see how these trends are exemplified, for they have crucial bearing on our question. The first thing that strikes one is the major change in Act I: now Wotan does not appear in person to arrange Siegmund's lodging for the night and to thrust the sword into the tree; instead, his visit occurred long ago at Sieglinde's wedding, and it was then that the sword was fixed in the tree. All this is told in narrative by Sieglinde, and the sword is pulled out at the very end. The Act no longer offers the spectator clear guidance about Wotan's purpose in bringing the twins together. The structure in the main prose draft, as was argued above, made it incontrovertible that Wotan wished to bring about the union of his offspring, and this is a defining factor in a reader's understanding of Siegmund's role in Wotan's plan. Not so in *Die Walküre*; the idea may be present, but only in hints such as the sword in the tree dominating Sieglinde's marriage from beginning to end, which leaves one wondering why it was long ago left just there, if not to bring, mysteriously, Siegmund to Sieglinde.

Nor is there any statement of Wotan's precise purpose

for Siegmund throughout the opera, nor of any purpose of his for the Wälsungs either, for that matter. In Act 2 Scene 1 the argument between Fricka and Wotan reveals that Wotan begot the Wälsungs, that is, he is the ancestor of the line, and that he has recently begotten a pair of ordinary humans while roaming the forest wolflike as Wälse (SSD 6.30-31). As Wotan goes on to defend the antisocial behaviour of Siegmund we learn why such a hero is needed: the gods need a hero independent of their defence and of their laws, who can do the deed that the gods cannot do, no matter how much they need it done (SSD 6.32). This is one of the passages adduced by Cooke to show that Siegmund was intended for that role; but one should remember that the audience of the *Ring* cycle does not know at this stage what the deed is to be. Alberich's ring has not been mentioned since *Rhinegold*, nor has Fafner. The deed here is hinted at only in the most general terms, for the drama shows Wotan's plan unfolding in action, and explanation is only given piece by piece and never as an overall account. Wotan keeps his plan to himself, so that even his own wife is not in the secret, and the audience is only allowed a fuller glimpse in the next scene when Wotan speaks to Brünnhilde as if to himself. Yet even then, when Wotan recounts the history of events and we learn of his despair because he cannot find a free man to wrest the ring from Fafner, there is no mention of the Wälsungs as the clan from which it was hoped this hero would spring. Now, when Brünnhilde, in a passage quoted earlier, asks if the Wälsung, Siegmund, does not act independently, Wotan answers in the negative and explains Siegmund's dependence without alluding to the clan. Contrast the main prose draft, where, after her question, Wotan sets Siegmund in a wider context by prefacing his negative reply with a reference to the clan ("Die Wälsungen zeugte ich selbst: Siegmund ist mir der teuerste Mann"). When he orders her to fight for Hunding against Siegmund, she begs him, both in the draft and in the poem, as she did in *Der junge Siegfried* (Strobel 94; 187), to take back his word. He refuses, but now no longer does his eye betray his gladness at the prospect of Sieglinde's child.

Instead we have the additional plea from Brünnhilde: "*You love Siegmund*", words not in the draft, before she goes on as in the draft to affirm that her habitual defence of the Wälsung was carried out for Wotan's sake. Siegmund is indeed called "the Wälsung", but this appears merely as an alternative name, without the eugenic resonances established in the earlier material. The emphasis has been taken away from the family line and placed upon the individual. Likewise in Act 3 Scene 3, where Wotan pronounces Brünnhilde's punishment, she claims that it was her conviction that he loved Siegmund that inspired her disobedience: "I am not wise, but I knew one thing, that you *loved the Wälsung*" (Nicht weise bin ich; doch wüsst' ich das eine - dass den Wälsung du liebtest). When she reports on her meeting with Siegmund, telling Wotan of the heart-shaking impact of actually seeing and hearing Siegmund's devotion to Sieglinde, she says: "I stood ashamed. I could only think of helping him. To share victory or death with Siegmund, this was the only course I recognized. It is because I had an inward loyalty to the will that breathed this love into my heart, the will which sent me to be with the Wälsung, that I defied your order" (SSD 6.78). And in summary: "My own thought gave me only one instruction, to love what you loved" (zu lieben, was du geliebt).

There is then no explicit mention of the Wälsung line as the producer of the super-hero. Wotan is Siegmund's loving father; Brünnhilde - and nobody knew Wotan's deepest thoughts and the well-spring of his will as she did (SSD 6.71-2) - acts upon his love for Siegmund. As far as the exchange of ideas relevant to her disobedience is concerned, it is as if the possibility of the birth of Siegfried is just ignored. The issue between Wotan and Brünnhilde has the same structure as in *Der junge Siegfried*: Wotan gives her an order which is in conflict with his true will, and she disobeys the order in obedience to the will. But now she reads this as entirely to do with Siegmund, and not with Siegfried. Wagner has altered Brünnhilde's grasp of Wotan's secret thought from desire for Siegfried to love for Siegmund.

The significance of Siegmund's stage life is thereby shifted from the future generation to the present, in the feelings of Wotan and Brünnhilde. Something similar happens to Siegmund also in the final scene of Act 2. When he refuses to go to Valhalla on Brünnhilde's summons, turning down every alternative to staying with Sieglinde to protect her, and threatening to kill her rather than entrust her safety to Brünnhilde, the Valkyrie tries to persuade him by announcing Sieglinde's pregnancy as an extra reason for him to seek assistance for her. Siegmund, however, merely proposes to kill both mother and unborn child at one stroke before turning his sword on himself. Nothing else, not even the possible survival of his family, means anything to him apart from his love for Sieglinde. It is this total commitment which communicates itself to Brünnhilde and makes her disobey Wotan. So all three, Siegmund as well as Wotan and Brünnhilde, are dominated by a love which has in it no ulterior motivation, no manipulation of other people for ends beyond themselves. Everywhere is an intense absorption in the present. The contrast between this and our review of the relationships in which the protagonists have been involved hitherto is clear.

VII

The reason why Wagner made these changes, however, is not so apparent. He would now need to consider how he could convincingly portray on stage Wotan's feelings towards a family which he was training to produce a hero who must die to save the gods' regime - for that is what Wotan's original plan entailed for Siegfried. Wagner did not have to deal precisely with that issue, though we are reminded of it at the end of *Götterdämmerung*,¹⁵ but he met it obliquely when he presented Wotan and Siegmund, for here too Wotan has to bring about the death of a favourite agent.

The decision to make Brünnhilde act upon Wotan's concern for Siegmund rather than for Siegfried replaces love for an idea - the hero as yet unborn - with love for a living person. This has a profound impact upon the way we see Wotan's decision to bring about the end of the gods, which decision is perhaps the central event of the whole *Ring*.

Suppose that Wotan's hidden thought were still represented as desire to bring into existence Siegfried, the culminating hero of the Wälzung line - as it was in *Der junge Siegfried*, and even as late as the main prose draft of the first act of *Die Walküre*. Then his attitude towards Siegmund must be primarily instrumental. But this is not the case in the poem, where we see Wotan love Siegmund for his own sake. And because he does so love, in Siegmund he has not just lost a favourite and indispensable tool, but is seen by the audience as a parent grieving for the loss of a child. Because of the depth of his suffering in this archetypal pattern, we feel compassion for him and readily grasp the psychological ground of his longing for self-annihilation: his grief is such that he wants to die, but for him this means the destruction of the world of the gods. Without this, his predicament would be grim indeed, but we would view it in a relatively detached way. With it, we *feel* Wotan's longing for the end; not just his practical bafflement, but his personal affliction. One element of his world-surrendering agony is his grief at having to have his own son killed,¹⁶ and thus the end of the gods is emotionally justified, to use a Wagnerian term, by the change in Brünnhilde's intuition of Wotan's secret thought from desire for Siegfried to love for Siegmund. At the very least the change removes a consolation which would be incompatible with Wotan's situation being truly tragic. There is no room here for the gleam in the eye: a Wotan who reacted like *that* could not but appear shallow as a person.

Thus the need to present Wotan's grief convincingly in the context of the annihilation of his regime would appropriately explain the change. A further consequence is that the audience does not question the intensity of Wotan's grief at parting from Brünnhilde: we have seen him suffering over the loss of his son, and we are convinced that his sorrow at losing his daughter is equally genuine. Still more important is the way that Wotan's absolute love for Siegmund reveals a corruption in his own regime. Despite his high aspirations, the commitment to order in his rule is destructive of love: he tells Brünnhilde in Act 2 Scene 2 that he touched Alberich's ring

and now must abandon what he loves, killing those whom he loves and deceitfully betraying those who trust him.¹⁷ Once he has gone to such lengths he sees that there is no way back. Not only is his system tactically beyond rescue, but it is not worth saving either. But the conflict between creative love and repressive control in his world-rule is shown most powerfully to be a corruption beyond remedy because Wotan loves Siegmund not egotistically but for Siegmund's own sake. Thus Wotan's treatment of his son is brought into the orbit of the theme of renunciation of love, which Wagner describes in his letter to Uhlig of 12 November 1851 as the shaping motif of the story right up to Siegfried's death.

It appears from *Siegfried* that Wotan comes to believe that the world which he must abandon might well be inherited by humanity, a form of life characterised by self-determining independence and unifying love, represented by Siegfried and Brünnhilde. At the end of *Die Walküre* he banishes from Walhalla his daughter and most intimate confidante, Brünnhilde, the "creative womb of his wish" (sie selbst war meines Wunsches schaffender Schoss, SSD 6.72), and relegates her to mortal status. Now, it is because Brünnhilde reads his deepest thought as total and uncompromising love for Siegmund that she disobeys him. Wotan is his own enemy because he yields to Fricka in the irresolvable contradiction between the controlling laws fundamental to his rule and the life-giving impulses of the individual, and in banishing Brünnhilde he detaches his own non-egotistical love from the divine level and leaves it to be inherited, if at all, by a mortal brave enough to take it for his own. The legacy of the gods to mankind is to be love. In this way the apparently trivial modification of Brünnhilde's reading of Wotan's secret thought from desire for Siegfried to love for Siegmund is the hinge upon which the metaphysical vision of the *Ring* turns.

In short, the change of emphasis in Wotan's attitude to Siegmund, as registered in Brünnhilde's feelingful insight, makes the *Ring* truly tragic while hinting at the possibility of a better era to arise among mankind. This miraculous achievement is secured by the shaping of the central action to

reflect the theme of renunciation of love, and for this purpose Wagner has thrust Siegmund into the foreground as a beloved son. In so doing he has played down Siegmund's role in the story as the begetter of the real dragon-slayer to come, for if our attention were focussed on this - as it would be for instance if Wagner had left the first act of *Die Walküre* as it was in the main prose draft, where Wotan in person intervened to bring the twins together - then the utilitarian basis of Wotan's attitude towards his agent would be ruinous to the attempt to present him to us as moved by true love for his son.

But it is wrong to suppose that Wagner changed the role of Siegmund in the sketches to that of Wotan's intended dragon-slayer, although the extent to which his role as progenitor has been played down certainly offers some excuse for the supposition. The uniform evidence of the Norse and Germanic source material, along with the unswerving trend of Wagner's preparatory treatment, makes the idea almost incredible. In fact, in a performance the audience is not led to think that Siegmund is either procreator or dragon-slayer to the exclusion of the other, but rather, more generally, to see in him someone whose death effectively puts an end to Wotan's plan. But on reflection one can see that Fricka's argument does not devastate Wotan because he must lose in Siegmund his candidate dragon-slayer, but because he realises that *any* product of the Wälsung line would be just as much a tool of his own making, and therefore incapable of achieving the independence required for winning back the ring without compounding the injustice of the gods as their covert agent. This, and the signs remaining in the first act (e.g. "So flourish the Wälsung line"), are sufficient indicators to the mind reflecting upon the text that Siegmund is still only the progenitor. And if so, then inevitably his love for Sieglinde was envisaged by Wotan. For just *how* would Wotan hope to induce the twins to get the next generation under way? The dynastic motivation of the early *Ring* sketches smacks too much of the Sagas for romantic taste, and would be intolerably cold. Wotan himself claimed to have wooed in love

to beget the twins (SSD 6.43); he can *only* have relied upon them responding to each other likewise. Therefore to treat the twins' love as something unexpected is to remove the sexual element from Wotan's plan, and leads one to seek another role for Siegmund - otherwise why should Wotan be so devastated by his loss? Siegmund then must be the longed-for dragon slayer. Such is the logic behind the interpretation which I am criticising. But to regard him so is to reintroduce the utilitarian colour to Wotan's feelings towards him which Wagner has so effectively subdued in the final poem of *Die Walküre*, and thus to make Wotan's grief incapable of moving us to understand the sorrow that ends his world. What Wagner has changed is not Wotan's intended role for Siegmund, obscured though this may be, but his feeling for him.

The audience does not need to have this change motivated,¹⁸ for in performance only *Das Rheingold* precedes *Die Walküre*, and we simply take Wotan's genuine love for Siegmund as given; but, with the benefit of Strobel's researches, one can see that it is not simply given as part of the tale, but is an innovation of genius introduced at a late stage of the maturation of Wagner's ideas. It results in the most sublime gains for the *Ring*, and in fact its impact is really only fully appreciated when seen in this way, for if the text is taken at face value, without any consideration of its genesis, one hardly realises the issues involved. But Brünnhilde's disobedience because of Wotan's unexpressed longing for Siegfried is, strictly speaking, not reconcilable with disobedience because of his love for Siegmund. When the old pattern of Wotan's plan reasserts itself after Siegmund's death, as it must, and Brünnhilde affirms that she felt Wotan's inmost thought as her own love for Siegfried, Wagner has no difficulty in making the change back again appear dramatically plausible. When Wotan's grief is centre-stage, the god's interest in the future of the clan on which he pinned his hopes is submerged in his overpowering sense of loss of the son whom he loves. Later, when this emphasis is no longer the main concern, his structurally implicit love for the

next generation can re-emerge. The shift is effected without damage to Wotan's character, for after his passion in *Die Walküre* we are not going to see him as a self-centred manipulator; in wild despair he abandoned the world to Alberich's vicious abuse, but his renewed interest in Siegfried is sufficiently motivated by a return to calm after his agony, as indeed is his conviction that the world can be redeemed and his intention to bequeath it to young mankind (*Siegfried* 3.1, SSD 6.56; cf. *Götterdämmerung* 1.3, SSD 6.203). Wonderfully, the required saviour is at hand; he may save the world from Alberich, as Wotan wanted, but he will not save it for Wotan. Wotan's regime is doomed, and his abdication is the necessary precondition of the success of his plan.

Notes

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² *Siegfrieds Tod* is quoted from vol. 2 of *Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, Volks-Ausgabe, 6th ed. (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, no date), and *Ring* opera texts are quoted from vol.6, abbreviated as SSD + vol. + page. Quotations are in German where specific words are relevant.

³ The drafts and sketches, along with the poem of *Der junge Siegfried*, are quoted from O. Strobel, *Richard Wagner: Skizzen und Entwürfe zur Ring Dichtung, mit der Dichtung 'Der junge Siegfried'* (München: Bruckman, 1930). I have regularised proper names to the most familiar form: e.g. throughout Wagner's sketches "Wotan" actually appears as "Wodan".

⁴ *I saw the World End: a study of Wagner's Ring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 278-9.

⁵ Siegmund is regarded as Wotan's intended dragon-slayer by, for example, E. Newman, *Wagner Nights* (London: Putnam, 1949), 549; C. Dalhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, tr. by M. Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 89; D. Borchmeyer, *Theory and Theatre*, tr. by S. Spencer (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 307-8; M. Owen Lee, *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Round* (New York: Limelight, 1994), 57; J. Tietz, *Redemption or Annihilation: Love versus Power in Wagner's Ring* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 59; P. Kitcher and R. Schacht, *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner's Ring* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36-37; J. Köhler, *Richard Wagner: The Last of the Titans*, tr. by S. Spencer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 35. One notable exception, who (correctly in my view) sees Siegmund not as a potential dragon-slayer but as the father of the same, is George Bernard Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite*, 4th ed. (reprint New York: Dover, 1967), 34-35. However, in this work, first published in 1898, Shaw is speculative in supposing that Wotan's plan is to produce a man of his own race who will breed with his daughter Brünnhilde.

⁶ No attempt is made here to relate the characters and events to Wagner's sources in the Icelandic sagas and German legend, for which see e.g. Elizabeth Magee, *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); it should however be noted that in Wagner's

main sources, that is, the Eddas, the Volsunga saga and the *Nibelungenlied*, Siegmund figures only as the father of the dragon-slayer Sigurd/Siegfried, and that Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, i (4th ed. Berlin 1875-80, reprint Wiesbaden: VMA-Verlag, 1968), 308, regards as remarkable the description of Sigemund as the dragon-slayer in the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*. Further, in the sources Siegfried is never born of an incestuous union; though in the Sagas Siegmund begets offspring from his sister, Siegfried is not one of them, but is the child of a later, impeccable marriage; and in the *Nibelungenlied* his parents are Siegmund and Sieglinde, but they are not siblings. Thus his incestuous birth is Wagner's innovation, and should be seen as laying great thematic weight on the lineage of Siegfried. Nor is there room here to discuss the background of ideas which might explain aspects of the changes, for which see e.g. Christine Emig, *Arbeit am Inzest, Richard Wagner und Thomas Mann* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998).

⁷ *Der Nibelungen-Mythus. Als Entwurf zu einem Drama* (SSD 2.156-66).

⁸ "Von Wotan stammte Wälse, von dem ein Zwillingpaar" (SSD 2.174). Presumably the verb implies direct paternity.

⁹ "Der Gedanke,...den ich nicht dachte, sondern nur fühlte....der Gedanke - mir war er nur Liebe zu dir." These words recur in the poem of *Der junge Siegfried* (Strobel 185) and *Siegfried* Act 3 Scene 3 (SSD 6.168).

¹⁰ The key testimony to this innovation is Wagner's letter to Uhlig of 12 November 1851.

¹¹ "Heilig ist mir mein Herd: heilig halte ihn du und flieh schnell dieses Haus.

¹² Hunding is demonized in the sketches: he married Sieglinde perforce when she was a slave after she was taken from her burning home; Hunding's clan were responsible for that burning; at the recent wedding catastrophe it was Hunding who, turning up late and seeing the carnage wrought upon his kinsmen, maliciously stabbed to death the wretched bride who was weeping on the bodies of her slain brothers (Strobel 211-212). And now we find he personally participated in the burning of Wälse's home.

¹³ This issue is important in Wagner's discussion of the Oedipus myth in *Oper und Drama* 2.3 (SSD 4.53-67) in connection with the relationship between state and individual. The corruption in the property-oriented quietism of Thebes is revealed by the citizens' failure to protest at Laius' exposure of the infant Oedipus: "Creon realised that...everybody would have preferred that the murder had actually taken place...Peace and quiet, even at the price of the basest crime against human nature and against customary morality – even at the price of deliberate murder of a child by its father, motivated by a most unfatherly self-interest, were given precedence over the most natural human feeling, which tells a father that he should sacrifice himself for his children, not them for him" (61). Apart from the general similarity of the situation of Wotan and that ascribed to Laius, the importance of *Oper und Drama* as the theoretical workshop for the *Ring* drama strongly suggests that Wagner developed Wotan's dilemma along these lines. See the analysis of the socio-political theme in the *Ring* in Borchmeyer 287-325.

¹⁴ See Strobel 204ff. A jotting recorded on p. 204 sets the scene in Wälse's house, now occupied by Hunding.

¹⁵ Brünnhilde: "Meine Klage hör', du hehrster Gott! Durch seine tapferste Tat, dir so tauglich erwünscht, weihstest du den, der sie gewirkt, des Verderbens dunkler Gewalt" (SSD 6.252).

¹⁶ Wotan's impassioned declaration of his decision to destroy his world is presented in just this way: "...wo grässliche Not den Grimm mir schuf, einer Welt zuliebe der Liebe Quell

im gequälten Herzen zu hemmen? Wo...wütender Sehnsucht sengender Wunsch den schrecklichen Willen mir schuf, in den Trümmern der eignen Welt meine ewige Trauer zu enden..." (SSD 6.78).

¹⁷ "Ich berührte Alberichs Ring...was ich liebe, muss ich verlassen, morden, was je ich minne, trügend verraten, wer mich vertraut" (SSD 6.42).

¹⁸ If one asks, the answer that Wotan grew to love Siegmund during their life together readily suggests itself.