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THE ICELANDIC AND GERMAN SOURCES OF WAGNER'S *RING OF THE NIBELUNG*

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Thwarted hopes, thwarted ambitions, thwarted love - a web of intrigue, of deceit, of treachery leading early on to an act of murder most foul on the one hand, and finally, on the other, to overall cataclysmic catastrophe. These themes appear in the major mediaeval versions of the story of Volsungs and Nibelungs - in the German *Nibelungenlied*;¹ in the Old Icelandic *Völsunga saga*,² *Poetic Edda*,³ *Snorra Edda*⁴ and the essentially German-based *Piðriks saga*;⁵ and they figure prominently in Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung*,⁶ as do many of the major "dramatis personae" of the mediaeval German and Scandinavian sources from which Wagner drew so much material.

It is something of a joke among committed anti-Wagnerites that Wagner wrote the four parts of his tetralogy in reverse order, beginning with *The Twilight of the Gods* and working backwards to *The Rhinegold*. Joke or not - and my own admiration of Wagner is, to speak frankly, less than wholehearted and, at least in my present essentially non-musical context, without wishing to be unduly provocative and with apologies to Shakespeare, I come to bury Wagner, not to praise him - joke or not, it is convenient for my present purpose to begin with some consideration of the last part of the tetralogy.

We know that the NL was not Wagner's main inspiration for a Siegfried opera⁷ - it can only have been the links that exist between that German epic and its Scandinavian analogues that gave him creative impetus.⁸ But choices had to be made: what basic pattern, which forms of the names should be used? Not unnaturally, Wagner opted for German, not Scandinavian-sounding names, using, with spelling variations, those of the NL, though he abandons Kriemhilt, Gunther's sister and Siegfried's wife (the Grimhild of PSS) in favour of the parallel Icelandic character, Gudrun, rendered as Gutrune. The name Gibichungs for Gunther's family derives from the name Wagner gives to their father, Gibich, no relation in any sources except in the late German *Hürnen Seyfrid*,⁹ where he is their father (p.107, st.16). In the NL, Gibeche is a king at Etzel's court and unrelated to them. And as to that basic element of murder most foul, Wagner's pattern is based on the NL, though much adapted. For, as in the NL, Hagen is Siegfried's murderer, so unlike his Icelandic parallel, the reluctant conspirator Hogni, whose younger brother Gutorm, brother also of Gunnar (our Gunther) is the assassin.

Wagner has dispensed with young brothers, and has done something

else in the context of brothers: Hagen is not, as in the NL, Gunther's vassal, right-hand man and distant kinsman, nor is he Gunther's full brother, as in the Icelandic. Instead, Wagner adopts the ÞSS version in which he is Gunnar's half-brother, born of the same mother, but fathered by a supernatural being, an elf (ÞSS I pp.319-21). In the ÞSS this is a blind motif. Admittedly it accounts for our assassin's physical characteristics and temperament in the ÞSS (I p.321), taken over and elaborated by Wagner, but with Wagner it is very far from being a blind motif, as most of us will know.

For the moment, how does Wagner treat the sources telling of Siegfried's murder and its motivation? Wagner's Hagen, as in the NL (st.901-4), discovers the secret of Siegfried's invulnerability and, again as in the NL (st.911-12), he arranges a hunt. Siegfried, as in the NL (st.970) is thirsty after the hunt, and as he is quenching his thirst, Hagen plunges his spear into the back of Siegfried, who vainly attempts to strike down Hagen with his shield before expiring. In the pure Icelandic sources, the young brother stabs Siegfried (i.e. Sigurd, the parallel Icelandic character) when he is asleep in bed in the arms of his wife, though here the slayer is himself slain, Sigurd hurling his sword after the retreating Guttorm, and severing him at the waist.¹⁰

But what differences have been introduced by Wagner into this much abbreviated and simplified story-line of Siegfried's death in the NL? Firstly, Siegfried's thirst: in the NL (st.966-7) Hagen makes sure there is no wine for the hunters' refreshment - in the ÞSS (II p.264) their breakfast is in addition heavily over-salted - and Siegfried's need to slake his inordinate thirst by leaning over to drink from a clear spring thus provides the assassin with his opportunity. But with Wagner, Siegfried's thirst - not incidentally artificially increased - serves a different purpose for, when Hagen recharges Siegfried's drinking-horn, he adds a herb to stimulate Siegfried's memory. This herb is an antidote to a drug previously administered to efface from Siegfried's memory the incident Hagen now wishes him to recall. There are no such potions in the NL, where there is no such incident to be forgotten or recalled. But both the incident and the potion causing loss of memory figure in the Icelandic sources, while Wagner's stimulant (in none of the sources) derives from the fact that there the effect of the original potion wears off and Sigurd's memory returns spontaneously.¹¹

Memory of what? Wagner's Hagen has just asked Siegfried whether it is true that Siegfried understands bird-language, and Siegfried is thereby encouraged to tell the hunting party of his "young days" (incidentally a slip by Wagner since the events concerned, unlike those of the sources, were not enacted some years earlier. So Wagner's Siegfried tells of his youthful adventures - back-narration of what Wagner's opera *Siegfried* tells us: his upbringing by his dwarf foster-father, the forging of the sword with which he slays the dragon whose blood enables him to understand bird-language. All this, with considerable differences of detail, is present in the Scandinavian sources. Hagen of the NL (st.87-100) gives an outline version of Siegfried's youthful adventures - we

do not see them enacted - but of the birds the NL tells us nothing. Wagner's bird - he has reduced to a single bird the two of PSS (I p.312) and SnE (p.168), and the small flock of VS (p.34) and PE (pp.186-7) - also tells Siegfried of the treasure guarded by the defunct dragon, treasure which in the Icelandic¹² he knew about before his fight. In the NL (st.100) Siegfried's dragon-fight is separate from his treasure adventure.

The Scandinavian birds do warn Sigurd of his foster-father's intended treachery, and Sigurd slays him - but it is at this moment of Siegfried's back-narration that Wagner's Siegfried needs his stimulant, for it was the bird's next suggestion, and its consequences, that had been effaced by that first potion. And the stimulant works: for now Siegfried pours out the story of how, prompted by the bird, he first came upon Brünnhilde - in all the sources Gunther's wife-to-be - passed through the fiery barrier surrounding the rock where she slept, and of how fiery was her embrace.

Gunther has been listening to Siegfried's seeming confession of intimacy with his wife with increasing horror, when suddenly two ravens fly over Siegfried's head and on towards the Rhine. Hagen asks Siegfried whether he can also understand these birds, and as Siegfried, thus distracted, looks up at the ravens, Hagen strikes.

It is this public revelation by Siegfried of his earlier intimacy with Gunther's wife - seeming perfidy - and hitherto understandably denied by Siegfried that Hagen has striven to achieve, for he has already stoked the fires of Gunther's suspicions and secured his originally reluctant agreement to the murder, abetted by Brünnhilde herself, Siegfried's original accuser of perfidy. Hagen now has his excuse, and he acts.

But Siegfried from Gunther's point of view is innocent, for he did not break his oaths to Gunther when wooing Brünnhilde in Gunther's shape and on Gunther's behalf (the change in appearance being accomplished in Wagner by the magic helmet, the Tarnhelm) for that occasion was the second time Siegfried broke through the flames surrounding Brünnhilde, his memory of that first intimate visit having been effaced by the magic potion - a first visit not known to Gunther and wrongly identified by him with the second visit, but a first visit known, of course, to Brünnhilde, who, totally ignorant of the potion that made Siegfried forget her, considers him deliberately unfaithful to their vows made on the first visit in that Siegfried helped Gunther to win her and is himself marrying Gutrune. Nor, unlike the Icelandic sources, does Wagner's Brünnhilde learn of the potion until after Siegfried's murder when she surely overhears Gutrune cursing Hagen for having counselled the use of the first potion so that it would be specifically Siegfried's first meeting with Brünnhilde he would forget, not (as Hagen had implied) some encounter with any woman who might previously have taken Siegfried's fancy.

In this whole complex, Wagner departs radically from his sources. He discards the NL version (st.431-66) of the Amazon-like Queen of Iceland, defeated in Olympic-style games by Siegfried as

Gunther's helper, invisible in his magic cloak (not, as in Wagner, a magic helmet) and later subdued chastely (unlike the *DSS*: II p.42) by Siegfried, again invisible, so that Gunther could enjoy his conjugal rights (st.653, 663-79) which had been hitherto refused him in that famous scene where the monstrous Brünhilt hangs him on a nail in the wall of their bed-chamber, letting him dangle there all night (st.630-42). Wagner prefers the basic Icelandic version, yet allows expressions such as "bind" and "subdue" to slip through,¹³ and a description of Brünnhilde as a "monstrous woman" even before her arrival at Gunther's court,¹⁴ and of Gunther as having proved himself in battle¹⁵ - all echoes of the NL rather than of the Icelandic situation.

Of relatively minor interest is the fact that in VS (p.35) no fire surrounds Brynhild on Sigurd's first visit. Brynhild's words in VS (p.50) to her foster-father, and indeed the logic of the VS situation, demand that Sigurd's first penetration of the flame barrier was on his second visit, and in Gunnar's shape. But in the *PE Lay of Fafnir* (p.188, st.4) the fire from Sigurd's second visit has already been transferred to the first, and this is clearly the source of Wagner's version. Wagner also abandons all reference to the other two somewhat contradictory accounts of Brynhild's betrothal to Sigurd,¹⁶ a natural simplification.

A greater simplification as compared with the sources is Wagner's analysis of Brünnhilde's anger and desire for vengeance. Firstly, in the sources,¹⁷ she is forced to realise that her husband, Gunnar, is a lesser man than Gudrun's husband, Sigurd, and Brynhild envies Gudrun her enjoyment of Sigurd and of all the gold; secondly, Brynhild feels herself perjured because she had sworn to marry only the man who rode through her fire - and that oath she would keep or die;¹⁸ thirdly, this situation is the direct result of the deception practised on her by Sigurd and Gunnar, Sigurd being the greatest deceiver of all;¹⁹ moreover, fourthly, the secret of the deception is out, Gudrun knows all and is taunting Brynhild.²⁰

There is not very much talk of Brynhild's love for Sigurd in all this - certainly not in any markedly romantic sense. Gudrun does mention it,²¹ the dying Sigurd remarks that Brynhild loved him above all men,²² but in one source at least²³ Brynhild's love of Sigurd seems closely connected with his great wealth (we recall that she grudged Gudrun the enjoyment of both Sigurd and of all the gold). And even if in Brynhild's self-immolation on Sigurd's pyre there may be more than just a hint of a *Liebestod* motif, the reasons for her suicide are clearly not only, and perhaps not chiefly, a wish to join a romantic lover in death, but are connected with her broken oath to die if she could not marry the man who braved the flames, and in death she in a sense redeems her oath, claiming her rightful place at the side of the man who did just that, and whose downfall the overriding vengeance ethic caused her to seek, even though, unlike Wagner's Brünnhilde, she did know of the potion that made him forget their original vows.²⁴

But for Wagner, at least in his earlier conception, the idea of "in for a penny, in for a pound, it's love that makes the world go round" ousted every other psychological complexity of the

Icelandic Brynhild - less complex, admittedly, in the ÞSS (II pp.261-2) where her main desire for vengeance seems due to the fact that Sigurd really deflowered her when he helped Gunnar after the abortive wedding night, combined with the event becoming public knowledge. In Wagner she does not seem unduly distressed at the deception as such, but the added (and essentially German) element in Brünhilt's desire for vengeance, found only in relatively embryo form in Icelandic, is the public humiliation and insult suffered by Brünhilt through Siegfried's wife claiming precedence over her. In the pure Icelandic sources²⁵ it is a matter of the one avoiding washing in the other's dirty water. In ÞSS (II p.259) Grimhild (i.e. Gutrune) refuses to stand in the presence of Queen Brynhild, and in the NL (st.847), Kriemhilt (i.e. Gutrune) claims precedence over Brynhild in entering the cathedral, and later, after Divine Service, she insists on Siegfried's natural superiority by flaunting in Brünhilt's face the ring, as also in ÞSS (II p.261), along in the NL (st.849) with the girdle - Siegfried's trophies when helping Gunther claim his conjugal rights.

This quarrel scene with its great dramatic potential is absent from Wagner's *Twilight* - perhaps to avoid the partial duplication of a not dissimilar scene in *Lohengrin*.²⁶ Instead, Wagner gives us a Brünnhilde who immediately upon her arrival at Gunther's court sees with horror the ring - taken from her as she supposed by Gunther, though in reality by Siegfried when he wooed her in Gunther's shape - not on Gunther's, but on Siegfried's hand. So Wagner transforms the quarrel between the two ladies of his sources into a bitter exchange between Brünnhilde and Siegfried, while Hagen, backing up Brünnhilde who calls Siegfried a thief, adds fuel to the flames by saying that Siegfried must have gained the ring by fraud and must atone - an element surely suggested to Wagner by Kriemhilt's feeling in the NL (st.848-9) that she is herself being accused of theft. The fiery Kriemhilt of the sources is, as Wagner's Gutrune, little more than a passive bystander, her rôle much reduced, as it is still further reduced by Wagner's transferring her betrayal of the secret of Siegfried's invulnerability, into which she is tricked by Hagen, to Brünnhilde who is only too happy to tell all, and no trickery is involved.

Clearly, there is little in Wagner of public humiliation brought about through counter-claims of social precedence, as there is more especially in ÞSS (II pp.259-60) and NL (st.843, 852-4, 863). It is quite simply a matter of Brünnhilde's feeling of having been jilted and maliciously betrayed by Siegfried in helping Gunther deceive her and in marrying Gutrune - hence her deliberate lies about his, in fact, irreproachable behaviour when he appeared to her in Gunther's shape, so that she might better ensure vengeance for the betrayal of romantic love.

We have seen that there is relatively little romantic love in the Icelandic sources, or in ÞSS; and in the NL there is no "eternal triangle" nor any need to assume that Siegfried knew Brünhilt before he married Kriemhilt (Wagner's Gutrune),²⁷ and Brünhilt most certainly does not join Siegfried in death. In the NL the mortally insulted Brünhilt is not the main direct instigator of the plot

against Siegfried, and even though there are hints to that effect (st.917, 1010) they are not borne out by the actual events. In the NL (st.864, 867, 873) as with Wagner, it is Hagen who is both perpetrator and main instigator of the murder, his motives there being that as Gunther's "hit man" he needs to avenge the public humiliation suffered by Queen Brünhilt at the hands of Siegfried's wife, for whose arrogant behaviour Siegfried is responsible.

But there is more to it than this: Siegfried, once a great asset to the Burgundian Royal House, is now seen as a danger to royal authority and prerogatives: we can see fear and jealousy of his increasing power, and lust for his wealth (st.870, 993). All this is brought to a head by the quarrel, and so Siegfried is liquidated. This theme, often called the *Machtmotif* ["power motif"], is found in all the main sources, though expressed by different characters; in the NL, Hagen is its main exponent.²⁸ Hagen in that epic (st.774) always had his eye on the treasure, not for his own gain, but for the enhancement of Burgundian power, and it is Hagen who, after Siegfried's death, sinks it in the Rhine (st.1137) to prevent Kriemhilt (Wagner's Gutrune) using it to secure vengeance against himself as her husband's murderer, and against his royal fellow conspirators.

For Wagner, too, it is Hagen who expounds the *Machtmotif*, but so deviantly from the sources! Wagner's Hagen is interested in one specific part of the treasure, the Ring, and for his own ends, not to enhance the power of the Royal House. His villainy far exceeds that of the NL character for that Hagen acts, morally or not, in the interests of his royal masters. Moreover, even though a murderer, Hagen's final heroic stance at the end of the NL arouses our admiration, if not our sympathy, for him. Not so in Wagner, since the ending of his tetralogy has little in common with the end of that great epic.

Wagner's Hagen is as villainous as they come. In the different sources, different characters suggest that the two central marriages should take place: Siegfried's to Kriemhilt (Gutrune) and Gunther's to Brünhilt. But nowhere is this Hagen or Hogni. In the NL (st.329) it is Gunther's own idea that he should woo Brünhilt, Siegfried speaking against the proposal (st.330), and of all the sources it is only in the NL (st.333-5) that a bargain is struck: Siegfried to wed Kriemhilt (Gutrune), provided he assist Gunther to woo Brünhilt.

And this bargain is the basis on which Wagner constructs his parallel action - but now, unlike the situation in the sources, it is Hagen himself who proposes both marriages, and the bargain to accomplish them, and the use of the magic potion, and all before Siegfried even arrives at Gunther's court. It is from the Icelandic version that Wagner must derive his potion, but for him it also seems to serve as an aphrodisiac, which is quite alien to the sources, arousing Siegfried's passion for Gutrune the moment it makes him forget Brünnhilde.²⁹

This is all part of a dastardly plot by Wagner's Hagen to secure for himself that fateful and fatal ring from Siegfried which he knows Siegfried won as part of the dragon's hoard. The Wagner

buff knows full well the significance of the ring, bestower upon its possessor of the power to acquire ruthless world dominion - a possessor who is also irreversibly contaminated by the curse laid upon it. The German sources now almost fade away and we move from the world of heroes to the world of the Norse gods. So, with your indulgence, I now make a *salto*, probably *mortale*, back to the first drama, *The Rhinegold*, where Icelandic mythological tales come into their own, though as if seen in a fun-fair hall of distorting mirrors.

In Icelandic we have no "ring of power" - an idea Wagner must have taken from the NL (st.1124) where one of the treasures in the Nibelung hoard is a little golden wand (though there is no curse upon it) whose secret, if discovered, gives mastery over all mankind. This is a blind motif in the NL, but not with Wagner who transfers the gold wand's potential to his gold ring of power, opposed to and irreconcilable with true love. And the ring Wagner takes from the Icelandic tale of how Odin, Loki and Hœnir despoiled of his treasure, including the ring, the dwarf Andvari, a river-dweller, who lays a curse on it.³⁰

For the gods Wagner uses with slight variations the German names suggested by Jacob Grimm in his *Deutsche Mythologie*³¹ as equivalents of the Norse gods, and he also adopts Grimm's interpretation of their natures and functions. But where the Icelandic Odin needs the gold as wergeld, Wagner's Wotan needs it as a substitute wage for his goddess of love, Freia, pledged as a reward to Fafner and Fasolt, two giants, for completing the building of Valhalla. In the parallel Icelandic tale³² there is but one, unnamed, giant and he built not Valhalla, but a different fortification, and although Freyja was at risk in the source, the solution there is not Wagner's substitution of dwarf gold. Moreover, Wagner's Freia must at all costs be ransomed since without her rejuvenating apples the gods would age and perish. In the mythology Freyja has no such apples - they pertain to the goddess Idun³³ who has no connection with the giant master-builder of Wagner's Icelandic source. So Wotan, with the help of Loge (the Icelandic Loki) tricks the dwarf out of his gold, a trick derived from no mediaeval source, but suggestive of Perrault's fairy-tale *Puss in Boots*, where, as in Wagner, the victim is tricked into magically changing himself into a tiny creature, easily dealt with by the trickster.³⁴

Wagner's dwarf, however, is not the Icelandic Andvari, but Alberich of the NL, where his rôle is different, though the name may also have been underpinned by Friederich von der Hagen's "Alberich", which in his translation³⁵ of *DSS* (I 34, 139-40) replaces the name Alfrik, a dwarf, probably a water-dweller and a great thief; for Wagner's Alberich, from whom Wotan stole the ring, is himself the thief who originally stole the gold from the Rhine-daughters and with it, through renouncing love, was able to forge the ring of loveless power. The idea of the Rhine-daughters, unknown in the Icelandic, was perhaps suggested by water-sprites that appear in the NL (st.1533-49), though unconnected with Alberich or gold.

Wagner's aqueous origin for the gold from which the ring is forged clearly has support in the mediaeval Scandinavian sources. What has no parallel in any source is Wotan's continuing interest in the ring once it has been handed over as payment. But Wagner's Wotan wants it back - it must not revert to Alberich who with it, in order to amass wealth, had already forced his Nibelung dwarfs to slave-labour and had sworn to supplant the gods. In no source do we find such a slave-driving "capitalist" monster of a dwarf-king.

Why should Wotan not simply steal back the ring from the remaining giant (Fasolt had already fallen victim to the curse, slain by his brother Fafner for possession of the ring)? Because, prone though Wotan is to deceit, he cannot, by breaking his contract with the giants, offend against the laws and contracts instituted by himself, from which he derives his authority and his ordered cosmos, and which are engraved as runes on his spear which is, then, a symbol of duly constituted authority, not just a mighty weapon.

But before considering Wotan's solution of how to regain the ring, just how does Wotan's situation so far compare with that of Odin? The details of the nature of Wotan's spear with its engraved runes are explained by Wotan in *Siegfried*, and again by the Norns in the prologue to *The Twilight of the Gods*. Odin's spear is a weapon of war pure and simple; nor did Odin, as Wagner's Wotan does, make it himself from a branch of the great World Ash, centre and sustainer of the universe: Snorri tells us that it was made by dwarfs,³⁶ and there are magic runes engraved on its point, though totally unconnected with binding legal obligations. Wagner tells us (agreeing with the mythology) that Wotan paid with one of his eyes for a drink from the Well of Wisdom, associated with the World Ash, but with Wagner, there is an implication that this drink caused Wotan to cut his spear from the great tree and that, in consequence, the Well of Wisdom dries up and the World Ash begins to decay. Certainly, the World Ash of the sources was never healthy³⁷ but this is quite unconnected with a Wagnerian motif totally absent from those sources. Equally alien to the sources is the Wagnerian implication that with the loss of Wotan's eye went some of his capacity for love, seemingly contradicted by the statement that he gave his eye to win his wife Fricka, though there is not much love in that relationship: she is childless, whereas her Icelandic counterpart has a son by Odin, none other than Balder himself.³⁸ Again, her Icelandic counterpart nowhere expresses Fricka's jealousy, and is indeed guilty of infidelity,³⁹ whereas Fricka is the strictest upholder of the sanctity of marriage - a vital consideration in her condemnation of Wotan's solution to his dilemma in *The Valkyrie*. The idea that Wotan with the loss of his eye exchanged love for the power of his spear is, of course, unknown in the sources. There will be more to say of Wotan, the World Ash and the Doom of the Gods, but for the moment we turn to some of the other deviations from the mythology.

Wagner amalgamates the two separate sets of originally rival gods, the Æsir and the Vanir. Mime, Alberich's brother in Wagner

but nowhere else, shares his name with a hostage given by the Æsir to the Vanir who slew him⁴⁰ and from whose well Odin drank the draught of wisdom (his rôle in Wagner as Siegfried's foster-father derives from the DSS). Again, Freia, Froh and Donner are Wotan's siblings, whereas in the mythology Donner (i.e. Thor) is Odin's son⁴¹ and the other two are Vanir and children of Njord.⁴² Further, the Niblungs or Niflungs are not dwarfs in the main sources, but Wagner, probably following von der Hagen's theory⁴³ that the ferocious dwarf Alberich of the NL was the third brother of two human Nibelung princes from whom Siegfried in that epic won his treasure, deduces that they, too, were dwarfs - a deduction supported in part by the existence in the fifteenth-century *Hürnen Seyfrid* of dwarf kings, sons of a deceased dwarf-king Nibelunc, and possessors of great wealth.⁴⁴ As for Mime, nowhere in any source does Mime appear as a dwarf or as Alberich's so ill-treated brother.

Then we have Wagner's giants, Fafner and Fasolt. Fasolt derives from a human hero of that name in DSS (I 190 etc.), also identified by Jacob Grimm as a storm-giant⁴⁵ and turned by Wagner into Fafner's brother, though Fafnir is not clearly identifiable as a giant in the sources, where he slays out of greed not a brother but his father,⁴⁶ in SnE (p.166) helped by another brother, Regin, his third brother, Otter, being the victim for whom the gods paid wergeld in the first place (p.164). The name Regin, Sigurd's foster-father in the pure Icelandic sources was, as we have seen, passed over by Wagner in favour of Mimir of DSS, where Regin is the name of the dragon.

As for Loge, he is the one god not related to Wotan, but an old friend and, in the sources (where he is Loki, Odin's blood-brother)⁴⁷ as in Wagner, he is disliked and distrusted by the other gods for the mischief he creates. Following Jacob Grimm's parallel identification of Loki,⁴⁸ Wagner identifies Loge as god of fire, but dispenses with his rôle as one of the main opponents of the gods in the last battle.⁴⁹ Nor is Loge's physical absence from the gods after *The Rhinegold* the result of punishment inflicted on him in the sources for his share in preventing the return from the underworld of Balder, whose death he had encompassed.⁵⁰

And so to Erda, in *The Rhinegold* modelled on the prophetess of the Eddaic *Sibyl's Prophecy*, though appearing unbidden, whereas in the sources, as in *Siegfried*, where she is modelled on the sibyl of the Eddaic *Balder's Dreams*, she is probably always invoked against her will.⁵¹ The name Erda derives from Jacob Grimm's ancient German earth goddess,⁵² as does Wagner's figure of Wala. Wagner's idea that her knowledge comes to an end is peculiar, and the idea that what Erda sees is told every night to Wotan by the Norns, Erda's daughters (in the sources the Norns have no parents) runs counter to the mythology. Certainly, Erda's basic function is akin to that of the Sibyl in the sources, though her cosmological and eschatological utterances refer, of course, to Wagner's own invented cosmology.

From persons to objects, and so a word on the Tarnhelm, substituted for Siegfried's NL cloak of invisibility by Wagner and needed to transform Siegfried into Gunther's shape, which was

effected in the sources by a magic spell,⁵³ not a magic object. Unlike the NL cloak (st.337), the Tarnhelm does not increase its wearer's strength, but, again unlike the cloak, it does provide instantaneous transportation, and (to be facetious) "beams" its wearer to any desired spot.

But why a helmet? No one seems to have linked it with the helmet given to Sigurd by his ÞSS foster-father after the dragon-slaying episode,⁵⁴ nor, more especially, with the dragon Fafnir's "helm of terror", made much of in the sources,⁵⁵ nor with von der Hagen's reference⁵⁶ to Fafnir's helm of terror in close association with the helmets of various classical heroes which rendered their wearers invisible. Grimm mentions that dwarfs could have a hat rendering them invisible,⁵⁷ but his was not the only scholarship that influenced Wagner here.

And from object to place. The Valhalla of the Norse sources was not an all-purpose home for all the gods: it is what in Wagner it only secondarily and only in part becomes - a hall for warriors slain in battle who are to be the allies of the gods in the final, unavailing, battle against their enemies.⁵⁸ Nor in the sources is Valhalla especially associated with the Rainbow Bridge; rather, it is a general link between earth and heaven.⁵⁹

But as to Wotan's dilemma, the solution seems to come to him as he is about to cross over that Rainbow Bridge to Valhalla, a solution secondarily interpretable as turning Valhalla into a part-barracks for those fallen heroes he will recruit to defend it against Alberich's onslaught, should Alberich regain the ring.⁶⁰ But primarily the solution is that which leads us to *The Valkyrie* - the begetting of a hero, independent and free, not bound by Wotan's own laws who can thus win back for his father the ring of power from the dragon, for such (as in the sources) Fafner has become, and so Wotan will triumph, without breaking his contractual agreement and thus without offending against his own world order.

In the sources, Odin certainly does not have the specific problems of Wagner's Wotan and so cannot need Wotan's solutions - and *The Valkyrie* with its account of Wotan's would-be free, independent hero, and of how his plan is frustrated by Wotan's ultra-conservative and moral wife Fricka because she frowns on the incipient breakdown of the marriage, however unloving, between Hunding and Wotan's "Wälsing" daughter, Sieglinde, in the context of Sieglinde's and her brother Siegmund's consciously incestuous union - *The Valkyrie* in these and other respects diverges greatly from the sources.

Sigmund in the sources was not Odin's son, but his great-great-grandson,⁶¹ and his sister's name was Signy,⁶² not Sieglinde. Nor did Sigmund know that he was committing incest, for differently from in Wagner's version, he did not recognize his sister who had changed her shape by magic, for she wished to conceive a son of the purest Volsung strain who would wreak vengeance on her unloved husband, not Hunding, but Siggeir.⁶³ The Hunding of the sources does not slay Sigmund but is slain by Helgi, Sigmund's son by another woman⁶⁴ and not the son of the incestuous union with Signy

which produced Sinfjotli,⁶⁵ for whom Wagner substituted Siegfried as he substituted for Signy Sieglinde, who indeed, though differently spelt (Sigelint) appears as Siegfried's mother in the NL (st.20) but is not her husband's sister. The Siegfried or Sigurd of the ancient tales is not the fruit of incest.

And so, shock and horror on the part of the German audience, certainly of Wagner's day! Does the crime of incest explain the downfall of Wagner's Wälsing twins? Their son Siegfried is certainly no inferior product of in-breeding. I believe we must now turn briefly from mediaeval to classical literature.

Classical Greek literature had a profound effect on Wagner; how far it is responsible for Wagner's deviations from the mediaeval sources falls outside the scope of this lecture, but the immediate point is that Antigone, the fruit of that unwittingly incestuous union between Oedipus and his mother Jocasta, is interpretable as a perfected human being, born of a union essentially moral and natural, and judged immoral and unnatural only by the artificial morality imposed by a corrupt state. This is ultimately overthrown, at least symbolically, in the death of King Creon's son, Haemon - a death caused in the last analysis by Antigone's execution, itself the result of her rebellion, based on true morality and pure human love, in defying Creon's orders and burying the body of her brother Polynices: by Antigone's action, motivated by pure human love, a higher level of society, it may be argued, is attained.⁶⁶

Here we have a hint of the original political message of Wagner's tetralogy. There is something of Antigone in Wagner's Brunnhilde, and there is even more of her in Wagner's Siegfried - son of an essentially moral union, though as incest condemned by the artificial rules of society - a son who will rise up as a free and independent hero in Wagner's terms, and like Antigone will perish, but through whose agency the imperfection of the old order will give place to the perfection of the new. We may here recall that in Wagner's original plan as incorporated into *Siegfried's Death*, fore-runner of his *Twilight of the Gods*, the gods are purged of their guilt by Siegfried's deed and his death, and are raised to a higher moral plane - and they do not perish. And even when in the changed plan they do perish - whether or not the aftermath (as I am told that the music might suggest) implies a new beginning, or indeed that allegedly still "higher" ideal of a pseudo-Schopenhauerian annihilation of the will - is there not here (if I may draw a bow at a venture) more than a trace of influence from that triadic concept, almost a commonplace of eighteenth-century thought, continuing into the nineteenth, expounded philosophically by Hegel in his thesis, antithesis and synthesis, put to such startling dramatic purpose in Hebbel and eventually employed by Nietzsche in his presentation of the implicit, dynamic synthesis of the Dionysian and of the Appolinian antithesis in his *Birth of Tragedy*? And is there not also a link here with that Goethean concept, so cogently elucidated by Professor Wilkinson,⁶⁷ of *Polarität*, *Steigerung* and *Spezifikation* ["polarity", "intensification" and "specification"]? Do we not have in Wagner the idea of a spiralling upwards to a new level of development, and can we not claim here yet

another German source of influence for Wagner's tetralogy, albeit not a mediaeval one? These are elements I find difficult to locate in mediaeval sources, Icelandic or German.

But to return specifically to the reason for the downfall of the Wälsing twins: incest does explain it, but only in so far as Fricka, interpretable as a personification of the conservative side of Wotan's nature, interferes in his plans for the reasons already alluded to, and also stresses that Siegmund (not her son, of course) is not the free, independent hero his father thinks he is, but simply Wotan's creature, totally dependent on his father's grace, favour and protection; Wotan in using him will still be culpable of offending against his own world order and the associated supremacy of the gods themselves - and so Wotan is persuaded not to defend Siegmund (his original intention) against Hunding.

Before turning to Wotan's countermanding of his order to Brünnhilde to favour Siegmund in the coming single combat with Hunding, I must stress that the relationship between the incestuous brother and sister of the sources is not romantically passionate: on his part it is a matter of a temporary, earthy, unidealistic physical attraction for an attractive woman, unrecognized under her magic guise as his sister; and on her part it is a cold-blooded plan to conceive a son of pure Volsung blood for the purpose of revenge I mentioned earlier. In contrast the love between Wagner's Siegmund and Sieglinde is indeed that love that should make the world go round, in total opposition to the ideals of power symbolized by the ring, but a love which must itself be sullied by the need to resort to violence in order to sustain it. This concept is totally lacking in the sources.

But as to Wotan's new instructions to Brünnhilde: in the sources Odin has no need to countermand an order, for he doesn't change his mind as to which of the two heroes Brynhild must support, and those two heroes are not Siegmund and Hunding but Agnar and Hjalmgunnar,⁶⁸ minor characters whose sole purpose is to provide a reason for Brynhild's disobedience to Odin in not supporting his favourite, and for her consequential punishment, that sleep of suspended animation from which condition she is awakened by Sigurd. Nor in the sources can Brynhild be thought of as a personification of the progressive side of Odin's nature, as she seems to be of Wotan's; nor does she disobey Odin in the sources because she thinks that her disobedience is what Odin in his heart of hearts desires.

There is a bare hint in the sources that Brynhild feels some sympathy for young Agnar whom she supports in defiance of Odin, but there is no trace there of the scene in *The Valkyrie* between Brünnhilde and Wagner's substitute hero, Siegmund, where it is Brünnhilde's deepest sympathy bordering on that emotion of Antigone's pure love that forms an additional motive for her disobedience. We also remember that Brünnhilde is Wotan's daughter by Erda and thus Siegmund's half-sister, which is not the case in the sources.

Odin, unlike Wotan, does not personally intervene in the combat between the two heroes: his shattering of Siegmund's sword in the sources⁶⁹ is an entirely unconnected incident and has nothing to do

with his wife's sense of outraged morality, or with Brynhild's disobedience. Nor, as we have seen, does Odin in the sources slay Hunding, as does Wagner's Wotan.

Some minor points: Brynhild in the sources is not herself the leader of a band of valkyries, nor are the valkyries Odin's daughters; the appearance of a valkyrie to a warrior is not necessarily, in the sources, a sign of his impending doom, as Wagner's Brünnhilde would have it. Again, where the wall of flame that surrounds Brynhild appears in the sources it is not, as with Wagner, Brunnhilde's idea, but Odin's,⁷⁰ though that it is her idea to marry only a man who knows no fear does have some support in the sources. The lengthy conversation on these matters between Wagner's Brünnhilde and Wotan in Act III is not in the sources, nor is there any affection between Odin and Brynhild. In Wagner it is Brünnhilde who tells Siegmund that his wife is pregnant; in the sources it is Siegmund who so informs his wife.⁷¹ Siegmund's refusal to go to Valhalla because Sieglinde cannot be there with him would seem scarcely credible to Old Norse ears, as would Wotan's objection to accepting Hunding into Valhalla. As for the sword in the tree, in the sources (as opposed to Wagner) Odin thrusts the sword into the tree in Sigmund's home and in his presence, and it is withdrawn by Sigmund then and there.⁷² With Wagner the tree is in Hunding's home complete with sword on Siegmund's arrival.⁷³

And so we must turn to *Siegfried*, where Wagner's picture of the youthful Siegfried is based primarily on the ÞSS. The differences in detail between the ÞSS account and Wagner are numerous, many being due to influences from other sources. Some are certainly worthy of note.

In ÞSS (I pp.301-5) Sigurd is at birth put into a frail vessel and is carried by the waves to a forest where he is reared by a hind and found accidentally by Mimir. Wagner's Mime comes across Sieglinde when she is near her time and he adopts Sigurd after Sieglinde dies giving birth to him. Wagner makes Siegfried into an even more loutish youth than he is in ÞSS - witness his uncouth rudeness to Wotan in *Siegfried*, Act III, and his spiteful virulence towards his hated foster-father, the smith, Mime, whom some allege to have Jewish characteristics and whom Wagner turns into a dwarf, probably on the basis of Sigurd's foster-father of the other sources, Regin by name, a "dwarf in stature" in the PE⁷⁴ though not in VS, Regin being, of course, the dragon's name in ÞSS (I p.304). It is from VS and PE that Wagner transfers to his own dwarf-smith the reasons for Siegfried's being sent to fight the dragon, viz. lust for the dragon's gold (and in Wagner's context specifically for the ring, forged in *The Rhinegold* by Mime's brother Alberich and filched from him by Wotan) whereas in ÞSS (I pp.306-9) Mimir just wishes to be rid of a loutish nuisance, and Siegfried's dispatch of Mime is in ÞSS (I pp.220-1) dictated by his desire to avenge himself on Mimir for plotting his death and to avoid Mimir's taking vengeance on him for slaying his dragon-brother - a motif present in the main sources but absent from Wagner since his dragon is not Mime's brother. Wagner's Siegfried slays Mime simply out of disgust at his foster-father's unholy joy, so unsuccessfully concealed, at the

thought of becoming lord of the treasure by murdering Siegfried. I should mention here that the "Quiz-game" between Mime and Wotan as the Wanderer springs from Wagner's imagination, but is modelled on not dissimilar situations in the *Poetic Edda*, such as the lays of Vaföruðnir or Grimnir.

The major difference between the hero of our sources and Wagner's Siegfried - a difference necessary to Wagner's original conception - is that Wagner's Siegfried has no interest in dragon-gold, or wealth, or power. Yet such wealth is a vital consideration for the hero of the sources (indeed for any Germanic hero); let one quotation speak for all: Sigurd, addressing Fafnir who is in his death-throes and has warned Sigurd that the gold will be his death, says in VS (p.32):

"Heim munda ek ríða, þótt ek missta þessa ins mikla fjár, ef ek vissa at ek skylda aldri deyja, en hverr frœkn maðr vill fé ráða allt til ins eina dags."
 ["If I knew I'd never die, I'd ride back . . . even though I were to forfeit all the wealth. But every valiant man desires to have wealth until that day comes."]

Wagner's Siegfried, for all his valour, is a somewhat brutish, simpleton-like child of nature: he communes lyrically with Wagner's wood-bird even before he understands bird-language and he sports with a companionable bear in a vicious practical joke against Mime (an incident transferred in its essence from the hunting episode in the NL (st.949-62) just before Siegfried meets his fate). The idea of a Sigfridean harmony with a benevolent nature opposed to the unnatural malevolent exploiters of nature by the seekers after world domination through the power of wealth (in Wagner's context, through the ring) is alien to the sources, as is Siegfried's child-like longing to be loved - with Wagner, partly the result of the absence of parental affection - though he can only hate his probably Jewishly conceived foster-father. In the sources Sigurd is no semi-brutalized Tarzan, nor yet an heroicized Papageno minus the latter's endearing qualities.

But a hero Wagner's Siegfried certainly is, and moreover that free, independent hero Wagner's Wotan had wished to see in his son Siegmund - no wonder that Siegfried's conception and birth were, unlike Siegmund's, not planned by Wotan; no wonder that, contrary to all the sources, Siegfried himself, not his smith foster-father, forges anew his father Siegmund's sword, shattered by Wotan's spear, thus creating a weapon of his own so that he cannot be thought of as Wotan's personal agent. Wagner's Siegfried forges the sword simply because its fragments are a parental inheritance and he wishes to leave the hated Mime and be off into the wide world. But his foster-father wants Siegfried to slay the dragon, and Wagner achieves this by grafting on to the Icelandic Brynhild's refusal to marry anyone who knew the meaning of fear⁷⁵ the motif of Grimm's fairy-tale about the man who set out to learn the meaning of fear⁷⁶ - for Mime tells Siegfried that he had promised his mother not to let him out into the wide world until he had in fact learned this

supposedly vital emotion, and he can do this by attacking the dragon, whom Siegfried, of course, slays - and without Odin's guidance (present in the sources) since this would have interfered with his independent status. He does not learn fear, and did not learn about the treasure in advance, from which, on the advice of the wood-bird, he takes only ring and Tarnhelm, seemingly merely as mementos of his encounter with Fafner (here the sources are bound to differ) - and then he makes his way to Brünnhilde's rock, guided for part of the way (and differently from in the sources) by the wood-bird fluttering ahead, until Wotan vainly bars his path, his spear shattered by Siegfried's sword, of which there is nothing in the sources.

So Siegfried finds Brünnhilde. This first encounter of Siegfried with Brünnhilde and her awakening - extending into the prelude of *The Twilight of the Gods* - keeps to what might be called the "tin-opener" technique of the sources, but differs in detail. Some of the divergences are worth noting. For the first time Siegfried now thinks he feels fear and calls on his dead mother to aid him, even wondering whether Brünnhilde could actually be his mother since, differently from in the sources, she tells him she has loved him since before he was even begotten. We know, of course, that, again differently from in the sources, Brünnhilde must be Siegfried's aunt (even more incest?).

The most significant difference of all is the lyrical-cum-heroic mood of the Wagnerian text which is entirely lacking in any of the sources, where there is nothing of a Tristan-and-Isolde-like yearning for the ultimate consummation of love in death. The relationship of Sigurd and Brynhild in the equivalent scene of the sources seems to be much more prosaic, and connected rather with Sigurd's admiration of Brynhild's runic wisdom than with passionate love.⁷⁷ In Wagner, too, Brünnhilde imparts runic wisdom to Siegfried but of a different nature from that of the sources, in return for which he gives her as a so-inappropriate pledge of love that loveless ring of power from Fafner's treasure - the ring to be taken from her by Siegfried on his second visit (in Gunther's shape) which causes all the trouble. And as we learn, she it is, through the exercise of her magic powers and not the dragon's blood of NL (st.100 902) or ÞSS (I p.312) that ensures Siegfried's partial invulnerability. In the pure Icelandic sources, the blood, as with Wagner, gives Siegfried the understanding of bird-language only, and there he is no invulnerable at all.⁷⁸ Again, the idea that Brünnhilde's special powers depend on her virginity is borrowed from the NL (st.681); it is not in the Icelandic.

And so we are back with *The Twilight of the Gods*, the starting point of my discussion. We saw that Wagner's Hagen, of semi-supernatural origin, is himself responsible for the Siegfried-Brünnhilde tragedy, designed by him to gain possession of the ring for selfish ends, and more especially - a point I did not previously mention - because his supernatural father is, according to Wagner, none other than Alberich, original dwarf-forged of the ring, who specifically begets Hagen to retrieve it - which clearly cannot be the case in the sources. No wonder Siegfried has to die, whether on

a deeper level because of his hubris in refusing to return the ring to the Rhine-daughters (a scene invented by Wagner, especially the idea that Siegfried's sword can cut, like some Gordian knot, the web of fate spun by the Norns, for in the sources it is well attested that no man can fight against fate);⁷⁹ or perhaps he dies through contamination by the accursed ring, itself perhaps responsible for his hubris, though, because of his lack of interest in power, Alberich himself, in his dream appearance to Hagen (another product of Wagner's imagination) says that Siegfried is immune to the curse. Or is Siegfried doomed because he, like his father Siegmund, infects his love by the use of violence to break through past Wotan to Brünnhilde? - though here, too, the curse may play its part. In the Icelandic, the curse is certainly working insidiously in the background, though it is hardly susceptible to a Wagnerian interpretation, and in the NL there is no curse at all. There is certainly nothing in the sources to suggest that the curse is somehow responsible for the Norns' thread of fate breaking - in the sources it just does not break.

And so to the events following on Siegfried's murder. The details of Gutrune's being confronted with Siegfried's corpse are largely conflated from different sources, and Hagen in the NL does not slay Gunther in a quarrel reminiscent of Fafner's with Fasolt. Nor does Siegfried's dead body raise a warning finger, in almost Gothic style, as Hagen seeks to take the ring.

Wagner's conception of heroism lacks, for me, one trait at least of what I regard as heroic saga tradition. When the Atli of VS (p.73) receives his mortal wound, he exclaims laconically,

"eigi mun hér þurfa um at binda eða umbúð
at veita . . . hvern veitir mér þenna áverk?"
["no need here for bandaging or treatment
. . . Who inflicted this hurt on me?"]

Or there is the other Atli in the *Saga of Grettir*, struck down by a stealthy enemy, who as he falls dying, remarks,

"þau tíókast nú in breiðu spjótin".
["those broad spears are quite the thing
these days".]

Such an attitude is not Romantic enough for Wagner.

It is in this last part of *The Twilight of the Gods* that there is little resemblance either to the second half of the NL, or to the parallel version of the Icelandic sources, for there almost to a man the various combatants are wiped out in battle, in the NL as a result of Kriemhilt's (our Gutrune's) desire to avenge Siegfried and to regain his treasure, and in the Icelandic largely because of her second husband's lust for that same treasure. There is nothing of this in Wagner. His linking of the tale of Siegfried and Brünnhilde with, in his original plan, the redemption and rehabilitation of the gods, or in the final version, with their self-destruction, is Wagner's invention, no doubt inspired by the

scholarship of his day, e.g. von der Hagen again, who asserts that the German Siegfried's life and death and the doom of the Burgundians are nothing other than the life and death of the Norse god Balder and the final doom of the Northern Pantheon.⁸¹

But that Siegfried and Brünnhilde are in some sense responsible for what befalls the gods is Wagner's brain-child. And what does befall them through the return of the ring to the Rhine-daughters? Not that redemption and rehabilitation brought about by Siegfried's atoning death combined with Brünnhilde's love and self-immolation, when love and truth are indistinguishable, and the philosopher Feuerbach very much to the fore⁸² - nor yet the titanic struggle of the Icelandic sources between the doomed gods and their equally doomed opponents - no, we have a Wotan who, since *The Valkyrie*, has yearned for "the end". The idea that Wotan deliberately wills the end of the gods, the destruction of his own power, of his own cosmos, the idea that Wotan now desires extinction in self-destruction, and that he orders the felling of the World Ash, piling its logs up round Valhalla to create a funeral pyre parallel to that of Brünnhilde and Siegfried - from the point of view of the Odin of Icelandic mythology this is quite simply mid-summer madness. But not from the stand-point of Wagner's new pessimistic interpretation of his tetralogy, reinforced by his reading of Schopenhauer with special reference to the annihilation of the will - though I must admit (and here I tread on dangerous ground) that Wotan's self-destruction is for me tantamount to suicide, and for Schopenhauer suicide is just not the way to his annihilation of the will.⁸³

Wagner implies that in his tetralogy he is recreating the original myth,⁸⁴ and doing so, partly at least, so that the Germans of his day should come to feel that close communal affinity with mythical truth as did the ancient Greeks, though they knew their myth, whereas the Germans of Wagner's time were not well-grounded in Wagner's Germanic material and had little feeling for it. It did not provide for them that myth which, for the Greeks, as Wagner says, was the poem of a life-view held in common;⁸⁵ and one cannot help wondering why Wagner deliberately discarded the idea of using for his purpose the Christian gospels which would indeed have provided a life-view held in common by his audience.

In speaking of the Greek tragic poet Wagner wrote:

"The unitarian form of his art-work . . . lay already mapped out for him in the contours of the myth; which he had only to work up into a living edifice, but in no wise break to pieces and newly fit together in favour of an arbitrarily conceived building"!

And this is precisely what Wagner did in "restoring the original myth".⁸⁶

Ladies and gentlemen, if what you are looking for is a distillation of aspects of German Romanticism with a dash of Feuerbach and a soupçon of Schopenhauer, whether misunderstood or consciously

adapted, and what seems to me to be a form of nihilism (even though the music may imply a new beginning - in accordance with the sources) - a nihilism substituted for a former German-socialist revolutionary zeal, all expressed in a colourful literary (I almost said sub-literary!) mosaic arbitrarily constructed out of the ancient tales, the various cracks and flaws in the mosaic unnoticed in the overwhelming power of music that - if I may allow myself a subjective evaluation - terrifies me with its well-nigh irresistible appeal to the emotional and the irrational at the expense of the intellect - then by all means you must immerse yourselves in Wagner's tetralogy. But if you wish for a truthful picture of the ancient myths and legends, then I can only quote to you the words of Wagner's own primeval Erda: Ladies and Gentlemen, "I counsel you, shun the ring!"⁸⁷

NOTES

- ¹ *Das Nibelungenlied*, ed. Helmut de Boor (13th ed., Wiesbaden, 1956). Abbreviated NL.
- ² *The Saga of the Volsungs*, ed. and trans. R.G. Finch, Nelson's Icelandic Texts (London and Edinburgh, 1965). Abbreviated VS.
- ³ *Edda*, ed. Gustav Neckel (4th ed., revised by Hans Kuhn, Heidelberg, 1962). Abbreviated PE.
- ⁴ *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík, 1935). Abbreviated SnE.
- ⁵ *Piðriks saga af Bern*, ed. H.H.A. Bertelsen, STUAGNL 34, 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1905-11). Abbreviated PSS.
- ⁶ Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, Volks-Ausgabe (6th ed., Leipzig, 1911) V-VI. References to other volumes of this edition are made as appropriate. Abbreviated Volks-Ausgabe.
- ⁷ Volks-Ausgabe IV, p.312: *Erst jetzt auch erkannte ich die Möglichkeit, ihn [Siegfried] zum Helden eines Dramas zu machen, was mir nie eingefallen war, so lange ich ihn mir nur aus dem mittelalterlichen Nibelungenliede kannte.* ["Now, also for the first time, I recognised the possibility of making him [Siegfried] the hero of a drama, something that had never occurred to me as long as I only knew him from the mediaeval Nibelungenlied."]
- ⁸ Volks-Ausgabe IV, p.311f.: *In dem Streben, den Wünschen meines Herzens künstlerische Gestalt zu geben, und im Eifer zu erforschen, was mich denn so unwiderstehlich zu dem urheimatlichen Sagenquelle hinzog, gelangte ich Schritt für Schritt in das tiefere Altertum hinein . . . Meine Studien trugen mich so durch die Dichtungen des Mittelalters hindurch bis auf den Grund des alten urdeutschen Mythos; ein Gewand nach dem anderen, das ihm die spätere Dichtung entstellend umgeworfen hatte, vermochte ich von ihm abzulösen, um ihn so endlich in seiner keuschesten Schönheit zu erblicken.* ["In the effort to give artistic form to my heart's desires, and in the eagerness to find out what it was that drew me so irresistibly to the primeval source of our native legends, I moved step by step into the deeper recesses of antiquity . . . My studies thus took me through the literary works of the Middle Ages right down to the foundations of the ancient primeval German myth; I was able to strip away one disfiguring garment after another, wrapped around it by later poetry, and thus at last to behold it in its chastest beauty."]
- ⁹ *Das Lied vom Hürnen Seyfrid*, ed. K.C. King (Manchester, 1958). This poem is extant only in printed texts dating from the sixteenth century.
- ⁰ VS p.58; PE p.210, st.20-33; SnE pp.170-1.
- ¹ VS p.50.
- ² VS p.26; PE pp.176-7; SnE p.167.
- ³ Volks-Ausgabe VI, p.213, *Siegfried: Euch beiden meld' ich, / wie ich Brünnhild' band* ["I'll tell you both how I bound Brünnhilde"]; *ibid.*, *Hagen: So zwangst du Brünnhild'?* ["So you subdued Brünnhilde?"; p.214,

Gutrune: ¹So zwangst du das kühne Weib? ["So you subdued the fearless woman?"].

- 14 Volks-Ausgabe VI, p.217, Hagen: *Ein freisiliches Weib / führt er heim* ["He's bringing home a monstrous woman"] (cf. NL st.655: *si ist ein vreisilîchez wîp* ["she is a monstrous woman"]).
- 15 Volks-Ausgabe VI, p.217, Die Mannen: *So bestand er die Not, / bestand den Kampf?* [The vassals: "So he came through the danger, won the fight?"]
- 16 VS pp.42-4, 53; PE pp.212-13, *Sigurðarqviða in scamma* st.34-8.
- 17 VS p.51.
- 18 VS pp.53, 56.
- 19 VS pp.53, 55.
- 20 VS p.57.
- 21 VS p.45.
- 22 VS p.59; PE p.211, *Sigurðarqviða in scamma* st.28.
- 23 PE p.213, *Sigurðarqviða in scamma* st.37, 38, 40.
- 24 VS p.52.
- 25 VS p.50; SnE p.170.
- 26 *Lohengrin*, Act II, Sc.2, Volks-Ausgabe II, pp.85-9.
- 27 See R.G. Finch, VS, pp.xxi-xxiv.
- 28 See R.G. Finch, VS, p.xxvff..
- 29 Volks-Ausgabe VI, p.194, stage direction after Siegfried drinks the potion: *mit schnell entbrannter Leidenschaft, den Blick auf sie heftend* ["with suddenly inflamed passion, fixing his gaze upon her"].
- 30 VS pp.24-6; cf. SnE pp.164-6.
- 31 Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie* (2. Ausgabe, Göttingen, 1844) ch.7ff..
- 32 SnE pp.65-8.
- 33 SnE pp.48-9.
- 34 P. Saintyves, *Les Contes de Perrault* (Paris, 1923) p.464.
- 35 *Nordische Heldenromane* (Breslau, 1814-28) I-III.
- 36 SnE pp.158-9.

- 37 See especially *Grímnismál*, st.29-33, in PE pp.63-4.
- 38 SnE pp.12, 14.
- 39 *Locasenna* st.26 in *Edda* p.101.
- 40 *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla I*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit 26 (Reykjavík, 1941) p.13.
- 41 SnE p.28.
- 42 SnE p.47.
- 43 F.H. von der Hagen, *Die Nibelungen: ihre Bedeutung für die Gegenwart und für immer* (Breslau, 1819) p.43: . . . wie Siegfried von den beiden Söhnen Nibelungs den Hort gewinnt: der dritte Bruder ist dort Alberich mit der Tarnkappe . . . [" . . . how Siegfried wins the hoard from Nibelung's two sons: there, the third brother is Alberich with the cloak of invisibility . . ."]
- 44 Op.cit., p.54, 106-7 (st.13-14).
- 45 *Deutsche Mythologie*, p.602.
- 46 VS p.26; *Reginismál* in PE p.175 (prose passage).
- 47 *Locasenna*, st.9 in PE p.98.
- 48 *Deutsche Mythologie*, pp.220-2.
- 49 SnE pp.96-8; *Vǫlospá* st.51 in PE p.12.
- 50 SnE pp.88, 92.
- 51 Clearly so in *Balder's Dreams, Baldrs draumar* st.4-5 in PE p.277; by implication in the *Sibyl's Prophecy, Vǫlospá* st.1 in PE p.1.
- 52 *Deutsche Mythologie*, p.229.
- 53 VS p.48.
- 54 ÞSS I p.314.
- 55 VS p.32; *Fáfnismál* st.16-17 in PE p.183; SnE p.166.
- 56 *Die Nibelungen*, p.42: Der Wurm hat den alleserschrekenden Helm, sonst auch . . . der unsichtbarmachende Helm des Aides, Plutus, Perseus . . . ["The dragon has the all-terrifying helm, then again there is . . . the helmet of Aides, Plutus, Perseus that produces invisibility . . ."]
- 57 *Deutsche Mythologie*, p.431: gewöhnlich wird die unsichtbarkeit der zwerge in ein bestimmtes stück ihrer kleidung, einen hut oder mantel gesetzt, durch deren zufälliges ablegen oder abwerfen sie plötzlich sichtbar werden. ["the invisibility of dwarfs usually resides in a particular article of

their clothing, a hat or cloak, the accidental removal or discarding of which renders them suddenly visible."]

- 58 See e.g. *Grímnismál* st.8 in PE pp.58-9; SnE p.61.
- 59 SnE p.31.
- 60 There might seem to be some slight inconsistency in Wagner's conception of the threat posed by Alberich: if, as would appear to be the case, it is the power of untold wealth that will undermine the hegemony of the gods (see *Rheingold*, Volks-Ausgabe V, pp.243-4, Alberich's words to Wotan) then to what distinct end does Wotan gather together in his impregnable fortress Walhalla the heroes slain in battle? It may also be noted that in the sources the dwarfs are not numbered among the enemies of the gods and pose no sort of threat to them.
- 61 The line of descent is as follows: Odin - Sigi - Rerir - Volsung - Sigmund (VS pp.1-3). In the mediaeval, and Christian, German sources there can be no link between human warriors and pagan gods.
- 62 VS p.3.
- 63 VS pp.9, 13-14.
- 64 VS p.14; *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri*, st.1-10 in PE pp.130-1.
- 65 VS pp.9-10.
- 66 See L.J. Rather, *The Dream of Self-Destruction. Wagner's "Ring" and the Modern World* (Baton Rouge and London, 1979) p.47ff., who refers especially to the third chapter of Wagner's *Oper und Drama*.
- 67 Elizabeth M. Wilkinson, "'Tasso - ein gesteigerter Werther' in the light of Goethe's principle of 'Steigerung'", *MLR* 13 (1949) p.305ff., reprinted in Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby, *Goethe. Poet and Thinker* (London, 1962; repr. 1970) p.185ff. I am indebted to my colleague Dr R.H. Stephenson for his scholarly guidance in this and associated areas.
- 68 VS p.35; *Sigrdrífomál*, prose passage after st.4 in PE p.190; *Helreið Brynhildar*, st.8-10 in PE pp.220-1.
- 69 VS p.20.
- 70 *Helreið Brynhildar* st.8-10 in PE pp.220-1. The sources are not, in fact, uniform in the details they give of the scene in which Sigurd (Siegfried) first encounters Brynhild; in *Sigrdrífomál* (prose introduction in PE p.189) he does not pass through a barrier of flame, nor does he do so in the parallel passage in VS (p.35) that derives from it, though in both these instances there is a reference to a great light "as if there were a fire blazing"; in SnE (pp.168-9) there is no such reference, nor any fire; in *ÞSS* the situation is totally different, and in NL so such meeting takes place at all.
- 71 VS p.21.
- 72 VS pp.4-5.

- 7³ Though in Siegmund's account of his background in *The Valkyrie* (*Die Walküre*, Volks-Ausgabe VI, p.8) there is mention of another tree, an oak, once in his own home but burned to a stump in the general holocaust described.
- 7⁴ *Reginsmál*, introductory prose passage in PE p.173.
- 7⁵ VS p.35; *Sigrdrífomál*, prose passage after st.4 in PE p.190.
- 7⁶ "Märchen von einem, der auszog, das Fürchten zu lernen": Brüder Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, ed. Heinz Rölleke (Köln, 1982) pp.17-25.
- 7⁷ VS pp.35-40; *Sigrdrífomál*, *passim*, in PE pp.189-97.
- 7⁸ VS p.33; *Fáfnismál*, prose passage after st.31 in PE p.186.
- 7⁹ For a typical example see VS p.59, *en eigi má vid sköpum vinna* ["but no one can fight against fate"].
- 8⁰ *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, *Islensk Fornrit* 7, (Reykjavík, 1936) p.146.
- 8¹ *Die Nibelungen*, p.37: *Aber es lässt sich darthun, dass auch bei uns Siegfrieds Leben und Tod, die Klage, und der Nibelungen Noth . . . nichts anders ist, als das Leben und Tod Baldurs des Guten, der Untergang aller Götter in der Götterdämmerung.* ["But it can be shown that with us, too, Siegfried's life and death, the "Lament" (die Klage) and the doom of the Nibelungs . . . is nothing other than the life and death of Baldur the Good, the downfall of all gods in the Twilight of the Gods."]
- 8² Ludwig Feuerbach, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Bolin and Friedrich Jodl, 5 vols. (2. unveränderte Auflage) II, p.299: *Wie aber objektiv, so ist auch subjektiv die Liebe das Kriterium des Seins - das Kriterium der Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit. Wo keine Liebe, ist auch keine Wahrheit.* ["But just as it is objectively, so, too, is love subjectively the criterion of Being - the criterion of truth and reality. Where there is no love, there is also no truth".]
- 8³ See e.g. Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford, 1983) pp.222-3.
- 8⁴ For example, Wagner called his original short prose outline of what was to develop into his *Ring* "The Nibelungen-Myth as Sketch for a Drama" (*Der Nibelungen-Mythos Als Entwurf zu einem Drama*; Volks-Ausgabe II, pp.156-66).
- 8⁵ Volks-Ausgabe IV, p.34: *der Mythos [ist] aber das Gedicht einer gemeinsamen Lebensanschauung.* ["the myth [is], however, the poem of a life-view held in common."]
- 8⁶ This translation is that of W. Ashton Ellis as quoted by Albert Goldman and Evert Sprinchorn, *Wagner on Music and Drama* (London, 1970) p.90. The original is found in Volks-Ausgabe IV, p.34: *Die einheitvolle Form seines Kunstwerkes war ihm aber in dem Gerüste des Mythos vorgezeichnet, das er zum lebenvollen Baue nur auszuführen keineswegs aber um eines willkürlich erdachten künstlerischen Baues will zu zerbröckeln und neu zusammenzufügen hatte.*
- 8⁷ Volks-Ausgabe V, p.262: *dir rat' ich, meide den Ring!*