

the appearance in the orchestra of a motive that recalls an earlier event or emotion, thus revealing unspoken thoughts of the actor. And on rare occasions he attaches specific dramatic referents to specific motives.¹⁵ More frequently he seems to say that his musical motives are positioned simply to provide, in a traditional fashion, unity of design. In a later essay, *Über die Anwendung der Musik auf das Drama* (On the Use of Music in Drama, 1879), he specifically compared his use of motives to those in a movement of a symphony, with the exception that "here the progress and playing out of the dramatic action provide the basis for separations and connections."¹⁶ That the musical signification of the "reminiscence" should ordinarily occur in the orchestra is important in theory and practice alike: "Here," Wagner exults, "the musician's power, when employed for the highest realization of the poetic aim, is, by means of the orchestra, made boundless."¹⁷ But that other account—means of opera, the chorus, as normally employed "will only confuse us: none but clearly distinguishable individualities can engage our sympathies."¹⁸

THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG

Much of the theory of dramatic poetry expounded in *Opera and Drama* was related to Wagner's struggle, at that time, with the beginnings of a new dramatic project which was to result in his monumental cycle *The Ring of the Nibelung* about a quarter-century later. As early as 1848, while yet in Dresden, Wagner had made a sketch for a drama based on his extensive reading of Germanic myth in the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Edda*.¹⁹ And by the end of the year a poem for an opera treating the final portion of that complex of legend had emerged under the title *Siegfried's Death*. Later, living in exile in Zurich, he felt that an understanding of the saga demanded some knowledge of its earlier events; accordingly he wrote a prefatory poem, *The Young Siegfried* (1852), and by a similar process produced yet two more librettos, *Die Walküre* and *Das Rheingold* (both 1852). Then *Siegfried's Death* and *The Young Siegfried* were revised and renamed, respectively, *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods) and *Siegfried*. By 1853 this giant literary project was finished, and the four librettos were printed privately. Almost immediately, after over five years in which he wrote next to no music, Wagner plunged into the setting of these texts to music. Working forwards this time, he finished the scoring of *Das Rheingold* by May, 1854, and the music of *Die Walküre* was nearly complete by the end of that year. A season as conductor of the Orchestra of the Philharmonic Society in London in 1855 hardly slowed his pace:²⁰ by April of 1856 *Die Walküre* was completely scored, and a little over a year later he had finished the music, except for the orchestration, through the second act of *Siegfried*. At this point, discouraged about the prospect of ever seeing his huge tetralogy performed or published, he abandoned work on it for a dozen years. It was not until 1874 that he put the finishing touches on *Götterdämmerung*.

The Ring of the Nibelung is an involved tale of the doings of Germanic gods, demigods, giants, dwarfs, and other creatures more difficult to classify. Almost all are greedy for the gold controlled by the dwarfish race of the Nibelungs, and particularly for the ring fashioned from it by Alberich, the Nibelung referred to in the title. Desirous of the ring, but fearful of its curse, the god Wotan begets a pair of twins, Siegmund and Sieglinde. The son of their incestuous love, Siegfried, is destined to retrieve the ring from the giant Fafner, who has taken on the form of a dragon. Siegfried succeeds, and also wins the love of the Valkyrie Brünnhilde, the favorite daughter of Wotan (she is the *Walküre* of the second drama of the cycle). Possession of the ring, however, proves fatal: Siegfried is finally slain by Hagen, son of Alberich. Brünnhilde joins him on the flaming funeral pyre; those two, the gods, and their home Valhalla are all consumed in a general conflagration, and the ring is returned to the Rhinemaidens, its rightful owners.

The music of the entire *Ring*, like the dramatic action, is conceived as a unified whole. Musical motives are used consistently from beginning to end, and—particularly in view of the twenty-year span over which the work was composed—its style is astonishingly uniform. In *Das Rheingold*, especially, occasional skeletal outlines of recitative and *arioso* persist; but vocal writing in *The Ring* as a whole is dominated by a style of declamation that moves easily between two poles: rhythmically regular melody and a kind of disjunct vocal counterpoint to the music in the orchestra. The orchestral part is powerful, flexible, vividly expressive, and coherent in its own right. And in this, Wagner's mature style, his famous chromatic idiom operates within a harmonic framework that, however intricate, remains solidly tonal.

In the final portion of Act III of *Die Walküre* (ARRM 18), often known as Wotan's Farewell, the God Wotan visits punishment upon his daughter

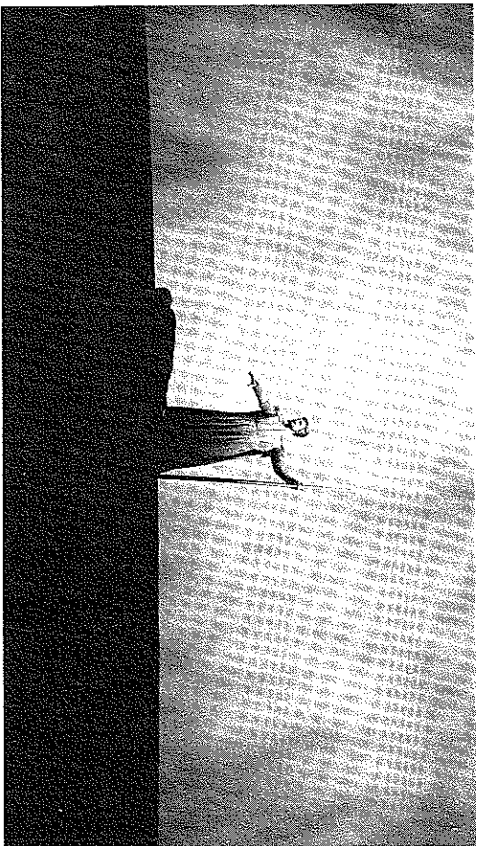
15. See John Deathridge in *19th-Century Music*, 5 (1981): 84.

16. *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 10, p. 185.

17. *Ibid.*, 4, p. 84.

18. *Ibid.*, 5, p. 162.

19. These two bodies of literature represent, respectively, the German and Icelandic versions of a common fund of northern European legend. According to responsible opinion this network of tales has an ultimate historical basis centering about the overthrow of the kingdom of Burgundy by the Huns in the fifth century—a conclusion which would not have applied to Wagner's German nationalist sentiment.



“Wotan’s Farewell” from *Die Walküre* in a recent Bayreuth production.

ter, the Valkyrie Brünnhilde. He had ordered her to intervene in the combat of Siegmund (father of the hero Siegfried) and Hunding (husband of Sieglinde, Siegmund’s beloved—as well as his sister) on behalf of Hunding. Instead, she had protected Siegmund, and now Wotan proceeds to divest her of her godly status and puts her into a deep sleep. He conjures up about her a circle of magic flame which can be penetrated only by the true hero who will come to rescue her (this, of course, is to be Siegfried). After his opening farewells Wotan sings the following lines (mm. 536ff.):

Muss ich dich meiden und darf nicht minnig mein Gruss mehr dich grüssen: sollst du nun nicht mehr neben mir reiten, noch Met beim Mahl mir reichen; muss ich verlieren, dich, die ich liebe, du lachende Lust meines Auges: ein bräudliches Feuer soll dir nun brennen wie nie einer Braut es gebrannt! Flammende Gluth umgltühe den Fels; mit zehrenden Schrecken scheuch es den Zagen; der Feige Fliche Brünnhilde’s Fels! Denn einer nur freie die Braut, der freier als ich, der Gott!	If I must leave you and never more lovingly extend you my greeting: if you shall no more ride with me, or give my mead at the table; if I must lose you, whom I loved, the laughing delight of my eye: then a bridal fire shall now burn for you such as never yet burned for a bride! Flaming fire shall glimmer around the rock; with devouring fear it shall terrify the timorous; the coward shall flee Brünnhilde’s rock! For only one shall free the bride, one freer than I, the God!
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Such a mixture of very short lines with slightly longer ones is char-

requently has two or three strong accents per line and is loosely organized by means of *Stabreim* (“dich meiden—darf minnig,” “Met beim Mahl,” “lachende Lust,” etc.). Wagner gives this text a musical setting that is almost entirely syllabic and that places textual accents with great consistency on strong beats (in the first lines, these occur on “Muss,” “meiden],” “darf,” “minnig],” “Gruss,” and “grüßsen]”).

Short poetic lines serve Wagner’s purposes well. Their lengths are directly coordinated with the phrases of the vocal part, so that single lines can comprise very brief exclamations (“Flammende Gluth,” and “umgltühe den Fels,” for example), or combine, usually in pairs, to produce longer phrases. Sometimes the phrases fall into symmetrical patterns. Beginning with “Muss ich dich meiden” a very regular and common type of melodic sequence is made up of two sets of two phrases, each set comprising 2 + 4 measures. This arrangement follows the clear parallelism of syntax and meaning in the three-line groups “Muss ich . . .” and “sollst du.” Beginning with “muss ich verlieren,” there follows another symmetrical sequence of 2 + 2 + 4 measures. And even the fragmented melody starting from “Flammende Gluth” has a strongly sequential character, for the initial one-measure phrases form pairs, and the following three-measure ones all have the same shape. Wagner’s vocal melodies are often thought to be flexible almost to the point of amorphousness. Many, as here, are in fact meticulous as to declamation and rich in underlying symmetries that accord with both poetic form and significance.

The harmonies of this passage, though they often steer a tortuous modulatory course, play a vital role in establishing its symmetries. “Muss ich dich meiden,” for example, begins in F# minor, tilts immediately toward C# minor, and in the course of the first set of two phrases (2 + 4) modulates through E to the dominant of G at “grüssen.” The corresponding set of two phrases starting at “sollst du nun nicht mehr” then begins in G minor and pursues a parallel harmonic course, a half step above the first pair, through F to the dominant of A^b at “reichen.” What follows is another three-line group set as three phrases (2 + 2 + 4). Here, however, there is a clearer harmonic goal: a rising bass line drives toward the emphatic dominant of E major in preparation for the “bridal fire” and its characteristic music in that key.

Wagner’s mature harmonic style is often described, with some ambiguity, as chromatic. Seldom, however, does his music show much of the chromatic inflection and decoration of a traditional diatonic structure such as that common in piano music of the 1830s and 1840s (and often in the music of Chopin). Nor does it eschew the ordinary syntax of diatonic harmony. Rather, on both a local and long-range level, it expands upon the usual relationships of tonal harmony. An instructive example is the sixteen-measure passage in Wotan’s Farewell (ARM, pp. 269–70) from “Wotan’s Kammerflüster” to “Istretam Küss.” Beginning and

Example IX-4: WAGNER, *Die Walküre*, Act III, Wotan's Farewell,
harmonic reduction

ending in E, this music thoroughly explores some of the possible relationships of that key, as can be seen in Example IX-4.

Starting in E minor, this passage moves directly into G, its relative major, and then, after a fleeting reference back to E minor, to C, the subdominant of G. A tonally unstable passage centering around A minor (relative minor of C) completes this exploration of the “natural” keys in the orbit of E minor. Then, at “webendem Bangen,” a plunge in the sharp direction brings a series of harmonies pointing toward B minor, which in the major mode becomes the dominant leading back to E. But before the final cadence is reached, another brief excursion brings sonorities based on C and F that we heard before in a very similar configuration in the C-major section. Now they have the effect of digressive Neapolitan sounds in B minor and E major, and they seem an encapsulated reference to that earlier, more extended tour of the keys related to E minor on the “natural” side. Such an insertion of parenthetical sonorities before a cadence is only one method Wagner employs to avoid or delay an arrival at the tonic. Another is simply a determined evasion of the expected movement from dominant to tonic. In the C-major section two elaborate progressions lead to the dominant and no further, and the final passage in B and E presents a series of dominants that find no resolution until the *vare* and

The key of E, which dominates the passage just discussed, is the principal one in the second half of Act III and the key in which the entire work ends. The persistent return to this tonal home base can be seen in this diagram of the whole of Wotan's Farewell:

Measure: 518	536	555
Text: “Leb’ wohl!”	“Muss ich dich meiden”	“Ein bräutliches F
Key: D	F	E
Motive: Brünnhilde's slumber		Fire, Siegfried
Measure: 573	577	602
Text: “Denn Einer nur”	[Orchestral]	“Der Augen”
Key: e, E	E	e, e
Motive: Siegfried	Brünnhilde's justification	Brünnhilde's slum
Measure: 631	638	672
Text: “Denn so Kehrt”	[Orchestral]	“Loge hör”
Key: e, c	(Ab) E	Loge hör
Motive:	Magic sleep, Brünnhilde's slumber	Compact, Fire
Measure: 691	714	721
Text: [Orchestral]	“Wer meines”	[Orchestral]
Key: E	E	E
Motive: Fire	Brünnhilde's slumber, Siegfried	Brünnhilde's slum

As the opera nears its end the magnetic attraction to the key of E becomes ever stronger. And in the motion from D major of the previous section to this key there is a reflection in miniature of the tonal movement of the entire work from D to E.

The musical motives mentioned in the diagram are the celebrated leitmotifs of the *Ring*, designated by their customary names. Sometimes they refer to dramatic events in the most obvious possible way (Debussy once contemptuously called them “calling cards”); when Wotan speaks of the “bridal fire” the orchestra plays music associated with fire and with Loge, the god of fire in *Das Rheingold* (Example IX-5a). At other times the reference is more subtle. “For only one shall free the bride” is accompanied by a motive that signifies Siegfried, who has not yet been born (Example IX-5b). The exultant music called “Brünnhilde's justification” (Example IX-5c) follows Wotan's reference to “one [i.e. Siegfried] freer than I, the God!” This motive had occurred earlier when Brünnhilde spoke of Wotan's actual desire as to the outcome of the Siegmund-Hunding duel (he had been forced to favor Hunding by Fricka his wife). Now this music reappears as Wotan contemplates the ultimate fulfillment of his will through Siegmund's son Siegfried.

Example IX-5: Motives from *Die Walküre*
a: Fire

b. Siegfried

c. Brünnhilde's Justification

d. Brünnhilde's Slumber

e. Magic Sleep

f. Compact²¹

But the referential function of these motives is often overemphasized, as if their detection and labeling alone provide a useful account of Wagner's musical drama. They are the very stuff of his music, and they are subject to the sort of development, transformation, and combination that one expects in large-scale instrumental compositions. The music to Wotan's final words, "Wer meines Speeres Spitze fürchtet durchschreite das Feuer nie!" ("He who fears the point of my spear shall never cross the fire!") provides an example. Wotan sings these words to a single statement of the "Siegfried" motive in augmentation while the fast, even-note motion of the fire music is played above. At the same time repetitions of "Brünnhilde's slumber" pursue a serpentine modulatory course dictated by the harmonic requirements of the "Siegfried" theme. Such an elaborate working-out of musical materials stands solidly in the German traditions of Bach and Beethoven to which Wagner fell heir.

The orchestra Wagner demanded for this work is a very large one. In addition to the usual strings it includes six harps; the normal woodwinds (in threes) are augmented by the English horn and the bass clarinet (an instrument much favored by Wagner). The giant brass ensemble requires eight French horns, four tubas (tenor and bass) modified to Wagner's specifications, four trumpets, a bass trumpet, three trombones, a contrabass trombone, and one contrabass tuba. Among the percussion instruments are a tenor drum, a tantan (or gong), cymbals, triangle, and glockenspiel. Wagner's infinitely inventive and flexible management of this expanded ensemble, producing effects ranging from overpowering brilliance to the most fragile and delicately colored orchestral commentary, though in some particulars indebted to Berlioz and Meyerbeer, was in his time a unique achievement.

Example IX-6 shows in full score the ending to Wotan's Farewell that was just discussed. The vocal line is powerfully reinforced through approximate doublings by four horns and the bass trumpet.²² In a sense,

21. The compact refers to an agreement made in *Das Rheingold* whereby Freia, goddess of youth, is given to the giants in exchange for their having built the mansion of Valhalla for the Gods. This agreement is engraved on Wotan's spear; the motive appears in Wotan's Farewell as he points his spear at a large rock to summon fire.

22. This instrument, now largely obsolete, is often replaced in modern performances with the similar valved trombone. Mixing such an instrument with the horns pro-