Myth, Music & Modernism

THE WAGNERIAN DIMENSION IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS DALLOWAY* AND *THE WAVES* AND JAMES JOYCE'S *FINNEGANS WAKE*

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Abstract

The study of Wagner's influence on the modernist novel is an established field with clear room for further contributions. Very little of the criticism undertaken to date takes full cognizance of the philosophical content of Wagner's dramas: a revolutionary form of romanticism that calls into question the very nature of the world, its most radical component being Schopenhauer's version of transcendental idealism. The compatibility of this doctrine with Wagner's earlier work, with its already marked privileging of myth over history, enabled his later dramas, consciously influenced by Schopenhauer, to crown a body of work greater than the sum of its parts. In works by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, the "translation" of Wagnerian ideas into novelistic form demonstrates how they might be applied in "real life".

In *Mrs Dalloway*, the figure of Septimus can be read as partly modelled on Wagner's heroes Siegfried and Tristan, two outstanding examples of the opposing heroic types found throughout his *oeuvre*, whose contrasting attributes are fused in Septimus's bipolar personality. The Wagnerian pattern also throws light on Septimus's transcendental "relationship" with a woman he does not even know, and on the implied noumenal identity of seemingly isolated individuals.

In *The Waves*, the allusions to both *Parsifal* and the *Ring* need to be reconsidered in light of the fact that these works' heroes are all but identical (a fact overlooked in previous criticism); as Wagner's solar hero *par excellence*, Siegfried is central to the novel's cyclical symbolism. *The Waves* also revisits the question of identity but in a more cosmic context – the metaphysical unity of *everything*.

In *Finnegans Wake*, the symbolism of the cosmic cycle is again related to the *Ring*, as are Wagner's two heroic types to the Shem / Shaun opposition (the Joyce / Woolf parallels here have also been overlooked in criticism to date). All three texts reveal a fascination with the two contrasting faces of a Wagnerian hero who embodies the dual nature of reality, mirroring in himself the eternal rise and fall of world history and, beyond them, the timeless stasis of myth.

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Note

A shorter version of Chapter II has been published as an article (and was awarded the Thomas Pringle prize for 2008 by the English Academy of South Africa):

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Parts of Chapters III and IV are scheduled for publication later this year as an essay:

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Introduction

> There can be no question, everyone will agree, that Wagner was trying to do some important things. . . . [He addresses] the most exasperating and obsessive of all issues: what, in our lives, are we prepared to accept as equivalent to the losses which are constantly inflicted on us, most often by ourselves? (Michael Tanner, *Wagner* 201)

> The question of whether and how human life may be endowed with significance is of the utmost importance and deserves to be taken seriously. . . . [Wagner's treatment of this question] involves an attempt to conceive the possibility and attainability of a special kind of humanly attainable significance – one that is beyond all optimism and pessimism alike, and that is at once deeply tragic and profoundly affirmative. (Philip Kitcher and Richard Schacht, *Finding an Ending* 61–2)

> [O]ur sympathy for the Wagnerian heroes – a sympathy brilliantly "managed" by the music that propels them – is not the artificial thing that Nietzsche pilloried. It stems from the deep-down recognition that their predicament is ours. (Roger Scruton, *Death-devoted Heart* 9–10)

If critical responses such as these are anything to go by, Richard Wagner must be regarded as more than simply one of the world's great composers, but also as one of the great teachers, moreover that he is – perhaps uniquely – a teacher *through* his music. This would certainly be the consensus reached by the critics quoted here, and they are by no means alone – witness the confidence with which Tanner assumes "everyone will agree". Not everyone agrees, of course, that Wagner was successful and there are still many who maintain that he was responsible for more harm than good (one of the chief merits of Tanner's work is the forthright and rigorous manner in which he refutes the more common charges laid against Wagner, though he has to admit that people will never tire of making them). What is undisputed, and by now widely known, is that Wagner's music-dramas aim at more than most great operas, that they are not primarily concerned with providing a moving aesthetic experience – though they undoubtedly are concerned with doing that (and to an extreme degree) – but that they in fact have a message for the world. Perhaps Scruton puts it most succinctly, when he states that "Wagner was an artist with an agenda, and this agenda was nothing less than

the redemption of humankind" (3). What this ambitious proposal amounted to in practice is a subject dealt with in some detail by all the writers quoted above, though none of them as impressively as Bryan Magee, whose recent book *Wagner and Philosophy* crowns a distinguished output on the subject, and is in my view the single most illuminating book on the composer to appear in English since Deryck Cooke's tragically unfinished study of the *Ring*, *I Saw the World End*. Among innumerable rich, vividly expressed insights, Magee clarifies something often hinted at in earlier criticism: that the essence of Wagner's "redemptive" art resides in the extraordinary power of its effect upon receptive audiences:

> By successfully giving expression to a universal, highly erotic longing for the unattainable he provides it with a certain degree of satisfaction. Not just in the world of our imagination but in the world of oceanic, unbounded feeling that music makes it possible for us to inhabit we are enabled to confound the reality principle, experience the disallowed, live the impossible. It is as if our most heartfelt but also most hopeless yearnings were, contrary to all possibility, met. A wholeness that is unachievable in life is achieved nevertheless, and in actual experience, because music of this greatness (I am thinking of the mature works now) is a directly felt experience as profound as any that it is possible for us to have. So the feeling is one of incredible and incredulous fulfilment, a satisfaction that finds itself unable to believe itself. People have always been seized by an inclination to use religious or mystical language about it, language as extravagant as the music itself. This is because they are in awe of their own experience. (27)

Despite the fact that it is only in music that such an experience is possible, it is equally the case that its fullness depends on this music being more than just music, that is on its being the unique expression of dramatic and (increasingly) philosophical content:

> in its unimaginable depths the music is not an expression of what is happening on the stage at all: both music and stage action are expressions of something else, and of the same something else, the one of its inner nature and the other of its outer. Of these two there is no doubt as to which carries the greater weight. . . . Symphonic music, which Beethoven had developed into a self-sufficient means of expressing the most highly personal, and in that sense dramatic, emotional conflicts,

> has found a new abode in the theatre and become drama in a literal sense; and what that drama is bodying forth is not only human characters but the whole cosmic scheme of things within which humans have their being. It is giving expression to ultimate metaphysical insight, a thoroughly possessed philosophical vision of the totality of what there is – than which, if it is valid, nothing could go deeper. This, I believe, is what Wagner had in mind when he talked of "Schopenhauerian philosophy and *Parcival* [*sic*] as the crowning achievement". Beyond them there is nowhere left to go in any available categories of human insight or understanding. (212)

That Magee goes on to explore the workings of this process in all Wagner's dramas, including the specific "something" being expressed in each one of them, does not exhaust the subject. If anything, the converse is true: the claims Magee makes are so far-reaching that they appear to open out into seemingly infinite vistas of human thought and experience. When coupled with the sometimes parallel claims made by others, the territory covered begins to grow wider yet and to overlap at all junctures with a bewildering variety of disciplines.

The question, then, as to what it is that Wagner teaches is a forbiddingly large one, and almost certainly cannot be fully answered by any single approach. Does he teach something unprecedented, or simply provide illustrations of what others, notably Schopenhauer, had already taught? Would that then make the function of his dramas to provide moving aesthetic experiences that relay the teachings of others? What, in other words, does Wagner have in common with his forerunners, and what does he add to them? Where does he stand in relation to the greater cultural stream? And, on the other hand, who is he teaching? Does he, as one might assume, teach different things to different people, and how is this teaching received differently in different times and places, under differing historical conditions? Who are those that have sought to learn from him, and what have been their reasons for doing so? What, in the end, can we learn – from him, from his predecessors, and from his followers? How is it that our lives are affected, if at all?

Given the breadth of the issue, it is not my intention here to attempt anything approaching a comprehensive answer, but rather to focus on a few

examples of Wagnerian influence that, with one exception, have received increasing attention in recent decades, the experimental modernist novels *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *The Waves* (1933) by Virginia Woolf, and *Finnegans Wake* (1939) by James Joyce. Both writers' relationships to Wagner, Joyce's far more than Woolf's, have been the subject of critical enquiry, though most of this has naturally been concerned with discussing what the influences are, how they arrived there and what effect they have on the text in question. While much of this discussion is directly relevant to my present purpose, and while I also supplement and modify it in several places, the central issue here remains the urgent significance that the critics quoted above attach to the Wagnerian *Weltanschauung* and whether either Joyce or Woolf can be regarded as recognising it and, if so, embracing, rejecting or ironising it. One needs of course to exercise restraint in attributing attitudes common among critics today to writers working three quarters of a century earlier. The fact is, if Wagner's works really teach us how to endow our lives with a kind of lasting significance, this will undoubtedly have been received – to the extent that it was at all – in very different ways when those works first appeared (in the mid to late nineteenth century), during the modernist period, and in our own time.

Given that they allude to him so pointedly, are Joyce and Woolf advocating that we go back to Wagner for answers, or that we engage with him critically, or mock him out of hand? Or are they merely imitating his effects in another medium, or even just alluding to him because he is part of the cultural landscape and not for any more philosophical reason? Finally, depending how we respond to those questions, does either novelist teach us anything new about Wagner, or about the truths he is alleged to have revealed in his operas? Do they advocate something identifiable as Wagnerism and show us how to apply it, or rebut his world-view and reveal its flaws, or do they simply misunderstand him, and overlook what he is “really” saying (perhaps intentionally – a case of Harold Bloom's "poetic misprision")?

In the first chapter, I undertake to clarify what the Wagnerian "agenda" referred to by Scruton[1] actually amounts to in practice. It begins with an

[1] See p 4.

examination of several claims advanced in the last fifty years to the effect that modernism is only a stage in a larger process, one that begins with romanticism – and especially German romanticism (for which Wagner provides the most obvious continuation, culmination and climax). Central to the movement is the thought of Kant and its modification by Schopenhauer, notably the way it gives new (and seemingly unshakable) credence to the view (first seriously proposed by Berkeley and famously ridiculed by Dr Johnson)[2] that the world is entirely the product of consciousness. Wagner's position in this process, undoubtedly an important one, can perhaps best be seen as an unusually prominent demonstration of some of the possibilities it leads to: unconditional rejection of worldly power as ultimately vain and empty (the *Ring*), yearning for unconsciousness as a superior alternative to this illusory world (*Tristan*), resigned acceptance of illusion as inescapable (*Meistersinger*), and compassion for the unwitting creatures condemned to suffer that illusion (*Parsifal*). At the same time, an essential ingredient in what Wagner is doing is the use of myth, not as a source of subject matter only but as a whole new way of seeing the world, that is as a phenomenon freed from the limitations of historical time. In addition, I stress the importance of seeing Wagner's individual operas, especially the later ones (the so-called music-dramas), as interrelated parts of a greater whole, and as expressing truths that are consistent throughout.

In the three following chapters, I turn to individual texts by Woolf and Joyce in order to examine their engagement with the material of Wagner's operas in general and with its metaphysical ramifications in particular. Firstly, in *Mrs Dalloway*, a text in which no critics have hitherto detected Wagnerian allusions, I consider that the "bipolar" figure of Septimus is consistently drawn with reference to the second act of *Siegfried* and the third act of *Tristan und Isolde*, two especially pivotal episodes in the Wagner canon – and which moreover have an especially significant relationship to one another as diametrically contrasting portraits of the hero in communion with nature. If my

[2] "We stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that everything in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, 'I refute it thus'." (Boswell v1.471)

assumptions are correct, then Woolf, who was undoubtedly familiar with both operas, had recognised – perhaps not altogether consciously – the paradoxical relationship between them and their starkly contrasting heroes. Of especial interest is the way the novel does not simply allude to scenes and images from the works in question, but to ideas that are integral to them, to their relationship with one another, and with the philosophy of Schopenhauer that is so closely bound up with their respective compositional histories. In the end, I argue that the many subtle but unmistakable implications made in *Mrs Dalloway* about being and consciousness, the nature of the world, the relationships between people, or between the individual and society, and the natural world, the fluidity of space and time, suffering and joy, the possibility and impossibility of transcendence, are greatly illuminated by exploring their relationship to Wagner's dramas and their Schopenhauerian content. Whether Woolf had studied Wagner (and / or Schopenhauer) as closely as some critics have suggested remains uncertain and is in a way beside the point; what does emerge strongly is a world-view that is similar to, and foreshadowed by, theirs in many fundamental respects.

The next chapter turns to *The Waves*, Woolf's strangest, most beautiful and "most Wagnerian" novel (Blissett, *Criticism* 5.3.257), and to the references it makes to both the *Ring* and *Parsifal* – but with a marked departure from the findings of previous criticism in that these references are not seen as distinct from one another, as if Woolf were merely coincidentally interested in works by the same composer. Given that the *Ring* is Wagner's *magnum opus* (in every sense), and *Parsifal* his intentionally final and crowning work, and that both also exist in complex relation to *Tristan* (to say nothing, for now, of *Die Meistersinger*), it seems somewhat naïve to think that these allusions could co-exist side by side in the same text without a shared significance. This is all the more apparent when one notes how systematically Woolf uses her allusions to these works to create the very form of the novel, as well as the relation of form to character, and of characters to one another. I further extend the discussion of mythopoeic intention and world-view in the previous chapter, noting the continuities between the two novels discussed and the sense in which Woolf's most markedly high

modernist text broadens its canvas to include the whole of human life, both in itself and in relation to other lives, to history and to the entire universe.

The fourth and final chapter begins by comparing *The Waves*' allusions to the *Ring* discussed in the previous chapter with those made in *Finnegans Wake*, perhaps the most fundamentally Wagnerian novel ever written (which may go some way towards explaining why it is so frustratingly difficult and yet so beguiling to read). The reason for this especial continuity between chapters devoted to different texts is the altogether remarkable coincidence (surprisingly *not* remarked on by the several critics who cover the subject) that both allude to precisely the same aspect of the *Ring*: its combination of cyclical structure with richly symbolic images of water, gold, sunlight, fire and woman. Where *The Waves* uses almost impressionistic interludes describing the progress of the sun's movement over the sea from before dawn until after nightfall to frame a narrative structured according to the successive phases in the lives of its characters (thereby implying a parallel between the two), *Finnegans Wake* features an immensely detailed pattern of references (starting with the opening word "riverrun") that is intimately bound up with the text's central thematic and structural concern with Viconian cycles of history, fall and resurrection, birth, death and renewal, and eternal recurrence. The chapter also examines *Finnegans Wake*'s marked interest in pairs of opposing heroes, the Shem and Shaun figures, often conceived – like Wagner's similar pairings – as, respectively, cheerful innocents and suffering outcasts. This thematic similarity is reinforced by the text's numerous allusions to several Wagner operas, and especially those to *Tristan* – from "Sir Tristram, violer d'amores" on the first page to "I sink I'd die down over his feet" on the last. Even more obviously than Woolf, Joyce makes it apparent here that he views the operas synoptically, in keeping both with their existing interrelationships and with the *Wake*'s own strategy of maximum conflation.

It will already be apparent that a satisfying symmetry emerges with regard to the themes covered here (though it is important to be aware that, in dealing with texts – and music – of such seemingly endless complexity, these are by no means intended as exhaustive). Both Joyce and Woolf were evidently interested in at least two prominent aspects of Wagner's *oeuvre*: his view of the world as an (at least potentially) ahistorical phenomenon, timeless

and limitless, and his emphasis within it on a heroic personality occurring in two mutually exclusive but ultimately complementary incarnations – the tragic and redemptive types, also seen as symbolically connected to the falling and rising arcs of the cycle, the recurrent and significant images of night and day. Although the whole of the Wagnerian world-view outlined above – still less the broader cultural stream behind it – cannot be restricted to these examples, it is substantially illuminated by them, since they in themselves imply a new way of seeing the world, and of being within it. The allusions to Wagner traced in these novels typically suggest a strong awareness of this epistemelogical-ethical dimension: rather than being added merely for colour, they are closely bound up with persistent, even central, concerns of those novels themselves.

In the end, I will attempt to show that despite expressing some (understandable) misgivings about Wagnerism (and particularly what it might lead to in the wrong hands), both Joyce and Woolf have much in common with "the real Wagner" (as distinguished from the grossly distorted public view of him that continues to this day): a notably left-wing attitude to politics; a marked opposition to traditional cultural institutions (particularly those that attempt to entrench rigidly restrictive attitudes to human behaviour in general, and aesthetic sensibility in particular); an especial hostility towards orthodox religion as the ultimate threat to individual autonomy; suspicion about Enlightenment-based explanations of reality, and a notable rejection of materialism; consequently, scepticism about history, and about attempts to order experience in general; and, especially, an emphasis on "real life" or "moments of being", along with a commitment to art that reflects this, that overturns outmoded forms in order to do so, and that aspires to replace religion in its role as revealer of the truth and gateway to salvation. As practitioners of the novel, both Woolf and Joyce were doubly challenged by Wagnerian drama: firstly, through its heroic grandeur, an idiom inimical to realism; and, secondly, through its recourse to music, an art literature could at best only approximate. Both writers nonetheless rose to this challenge, in the process redefining what the novel was, and what it could become. Although I do not finally believe that they set out to "preach" Wagnerism *per se* (far from it), or even that their authors were conscious of the full import of the mature operas (certainly not by the standards available to us today), *Mrs Dalloway,*

The Waves and *Finnegans Wake* offer surprising demonstrations of how relevant Wagner's world and his heroes could be to ordinary human beings living in the decidedly unheroic modern world.

Chapter I

WAGNERIAN MYTH AND MODERN LITERATURE

The influence of Richard Wagner from his lifetime to the present day upon a remarkable range and variety of artistic and cultural forms of expression throughout the western world has become the subject of a small literature in itself. One of its pioneers, William Blissett, has gone so far as to call that influence "[arguably] the greatest single cultural phenomenon of the century" and to call for

> a vast, internationally cooperative *Encyclopedia of Wagner and Wagnerism*, in German, English, and French, in which one could look up Peter Cornelius or Edward Elgar or Pierre Boulez, Gérard de Nerval, Stefan George or W. H. Auden, Henri Fantin-Latour or Aubrey Beardsley or Salvador Dali, Lou Andreas-Salome or Mme. Verdurin or Willa Cather, Jean Jaurès or Gabriele D'Annunzio or Paul Josef Goebbels, and see what Wagner meant in the life and activity of each. (*German Quarterly* 57.3.508–9)

Just within the relatively limited field of English literature in the modernist period, recent decades have seen a spate of books, articles and academic papers on the subject; while James Joyce is clearly the dominant figure here (with a full-length study all to himself),[1] attention has also been given to the composer's impact on writers as diverse as George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, T.S. Eliot, Joseph Conrad, E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence. Of the last four, plus Joyce, John Louis DiGaetani's 1978 study *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel* concludes that "Virginia Woolf's interest in Wagnerian patterns is the most difficult to describe. She was the least obviously influenced by the German composer" (159). DiGaetani nevertheless identifies allusions to Wagner in *The Voyage Out*, *Night and Day*, *Jacob's Room*, *The Waves* and *The Years*. Raymond Furness's much broader survey *Wagner and Literature* (1982) rates the same

[1] Timothy Martin's *Joyce and Wagner* (1991).

text, together with Proust's *Recherche du temps perdu* and a range of Thomas Mann's works, as an outstanding example of the Wagnerian legacy in modernist fiction:

> The novel reaches the richness and subtlety of poetry itself; the attempt to capture the actual flow of thoughts which cross the consciousness of the fictional character moves necessarily towards poetry in the interplay of images and symbols and in the delicacy of allusion; the musical translation of moods into major and minor keys encourages the emotional intensification and the psychological finesse. (18)

By contrast, Furness sees Joyce's allusions to Wagner as essentially parodic and notes that his typically "comic use of leitmotif and mythical structures are found above all in *Finnegans Wake*" together with "frequently ludicrous puns on both Wagner's name and on the names of his heroes" – not to mention at least one of the women in his life: "What Mathilde Wesendonck would have thought of this remarkable transposition of her name[2] defies speculation" (126).

Stoddard Martin's *Wagner to* The Waste Land*: A Study of the Relationship of Richard Wagner to English Literature* (1982) takes a surprisingly different view; ignoring Virginia Woolf altogether (although he devotes chapters to figures such as Swinburne and Yeats, whose references to Wagner seem slender at best, and others such as Arthur Symons and George Moore, whose overt Wagnerism does not in itself improve the stature of their contributions to literature), he sees Joyce, together with Eliot, as marking the culmination of an implicit "Wagnerian tradition" (vii) in English literature, and *Finnegans Wake* in particular as "a world-historic epic on the scale and even the pattern of the *Ring*" in which

> the loving monologue of Anna Livia . . . like the loving monologue of Erda/*Urmutter* Molly which closes *Ulysses*, creates an atmosphere of sleep, peace and transcendence into the Eternal Feminine which parallels the effects of the loving monologues of Brünnhilde and Isolde in the finales of the *Ring* and *Tristan*. (153)

[2] That is, in the phrase "as a wagoner would his mudheeldy wheesindonk" (*FW* 230.12).

These seemingly contradictory views of Joyce's attitude to Wagner are largely reconciled by Timothy Martin,[3] who recognises the relationship as a classic case of the anxiety of influence. For Martin, one of the chief factors circumscribing Joyce's relationship to Wagner was that "'great' artists, the most powerful of those whom Harold Bloom would call 'strong' poets, must finally make their own way even if they are at first inspired and guided by a powerful predecessor" (xii); it was only natural for Joyce to feel the need to cut Wagner down to size in order to declare independence from him.

The field is clearly a well-trodden one; my own researches into it date back almost twenty years, certainly to before reading Martin's work, and my MA dissertation was largely an attempt to salvage original ideas that had not been entirely pre-empted by the publication of his book. My chief contribution there, as to some extent here, is an insistence on the interconnectedness of all Wagner's operas, so that the more obvious references Joyce makes to Siegfried's sword Nothung or to the Flying Dutchman or Isolde's *Liebestod*, cannot simply be viewed in isolation but need to be seen as part of a much more elaborate symbolic network, one that it is partly the business of this thesis to unpack in some detail (or at least those parts of it that are relevant to the argument presented here).[4] For now, some indication of the complexity

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[3] Unless otherwise stated, references to Martin from this point on indicate Timothy Martin; references to Stoddard Martin will be specified as such.

[4] To elaborate *every* connection between each of the operas (and/or music-dramas) would require a very lengthy book, but one thing that certainly should be clearly set out before proceeding further is the overall "shape" of Wagner's *oeuvre*, which is more sharply defined than that of any other artist of comparable stature. The thirteen complete operatic works he composed over the course of his lifetime fall into three distinct groups, each separated from the other by a virtual "quantum leap" in the degree of expertise and sophistication he brought to bear upon them.

His first three completed works, up to and including *Rienzi*, are "widely and rightly agreed to be his juvenilia", composed when "he still lacked an artistic identity" (Tanner 34) – that is during the greater part of his twenties (1833–40). Though they undoubtedly provided him with a necessary apprenticeship, they are now largely of interest only to the student of his development and have no bearing on a serious consideration of his work. Unlike the operas that followed them, "they were not spontaneous products of his artistic intuition but artefacts put together by his conscious mind, trying to calculate what would work, what would be successful" (Magee 20).

Tanner claims Wagner may be the only "example of a composer so suddenly moving from competence . . . to commanding mastery" (36) such as he displays in the almost overnight shift to his "middle period" (1840–48) – comprising the first three of his ten canonical works: *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*. "In these works he did indeed develop German romantic opera beyond anything that had been done with it before: to this day they remain the most loved and most often performed works of that kind that there are." (Magee 13) It is with these works that "the unique Wagner magic first appears, the direct communication to us of elemental emotion still hot from the unconscious (ours,

involved can be discerned from noting that Siegfried has a clear alter ego in Parsifal, but is the antithesis of the Dutchman, himself the prototype for Tristan, whose incurable wound recurs in Amfortas, a figure cured by Parsifal (and in a way directly opposite to that in which Isolde cures Tristan). Where my earlier work concerned itself entirely with the ramifications of these overlapping interrelationships in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and, especially, *Ulysses*, I turn here to *Finnegans Wake*, a text whose relationship with Wagner's operas – as with so much else – is potentially inexhaustible.

In choosing to couple Joyce's last novel with two of Woolf's – *The Waves* (in which, as noted, a number of critics claim to have found allusions to Wagner) and *Mrs Dalloway* (in which, to date, no-one has) – I do not primarily intend a comparative study, though some comparisons are of course inevitable. It is, for instance, striking that the two preeminent exponents of the high modernist novel in English should be *exact* contemporaries (1882–1941), also that there is considerable overlap in the period of composition of the works in question. (The years Woolf spent on *Mrs Dalloway*, 1922–5, and on *The Waves*, 1929–33, both fall within the seventeen year span, 1922–39, in which Joyce struggled to complete the *Wake*.) More specifically, it is often remarkable how closely these texts' respective allusions to Wagner correlate

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perhaps, as well as his), arresting, incredible, fulfilling" (21). It is also significant that each of these three operas adumbrates important themes that would be developed more substantially in the later works.

These, the seven "music-dramas" that would follow Wagner's five and a half years of re-evaluation (1848–53) and whose composition would occupy the last three decades of his life, are marked by no less distinct a shift, whereby "he converted himself into a world-historical phenomenon" (Tanner 89), producing works of an altogether unprecedented kind. Because the completion of *Lohengrin* left him feeling "that he himself had now exhausted the possibilities of the genre [German romantic opera]: he could see nothing new he could do with it, nowhere left to go. . . . The rest of his output is different in kind from anything he had done before, and constitutes a revolutionary development not only in the history of opera but in the history of music. These are the works to which people are referring when they talk of Wagner's 'mature operas', or 'the later Wagner'" (Magee 13). These are further divisible into the four parts of the cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Das Rheingold, Die Walküre, Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*; and the three fully post-Schopenhauerian works, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Parsifal*. It is further worth noting that the composition of the *Ring* was interrupted (half-way through *Siegfried*) for the twelve years (1856–68) that saw the creation of *Tristan* and *Die Meistersinger*. The all-important catalyst for this interruption was undoubtedly Wagner's discovery of Schopenhauer's philosophy, which "struck him with the force of revelation" (Tanner 100) and necessitated a second (and more profound) re-evaluation of the whole vast project at a point when he was already substantially embarked upon it – a subject to be discussed in much greater detail below (see especially pp 64–83).

It is these mature dramas, above all, that are relevant to this thesis, though reference is also made, where necessary, to the middle-period operas; the distinction between the groups, and its relation to the shifts in Wagner's outlook and creative development, are worth bearing in mind throughout.

to one another. But while this correlation is a concern of this thesis, it is not so in order to assess the relative achievements of Woolf and Joyce, but rather to illustrate how each plays variations on the same Wagnerian theme.

It will be clear then that the thesis is intended as a contribution to the ongoing work on Wagner's substantial literary influence, and that it primarily consists of a close reading of *some* examples of that influence in the three designated novels. Why those examples have been chosen, and how my reading of them (where not entirely new, as it is in the case of *Mrs Dalloway*) differs from those of earlier critics, will become clearer in the course of this introductory chapter, which is principally concerned to present a reading of Wagner's operas that is central to the argument as a whole, and to which the subsequent chapters will continually refer.

Two things the thesis does not do should perhaps be indicated at the outset. Firstly, no attempt is made to repeat or add to the biographical / documentary evidence compiled by critics such as Martin and DiGaetani to show when, where and how Joyce and Woolf came to be influenced by Wagner, what their stated attitudes to Wagner were or how they changed across time. Where necessary, I cite those critics directly, usually to show simply that such an influence is already agreed to exist, but I am not in general interested in whether Woolf or Joyce can be shown beyond reasonable doubt to have borrowed a particular idea from Wagner. Rather, I am concerned with what those ideas *are*, and how they contribute to our experience of reading the texts in which they occur.

Secondly, despite the fact that *The Waves* and (especially) *Finnegans Wake* are among the most definitive examples of Wagner's influence on formal elements of the novel (the leitmotif, stream-of-consciousness, the interior monologue and so on) – in other words the "translation" of music into language that many critics, notably Furness, have examined – I am instead concerned almost exclusively with textual content. That is, my focus is on the ideas expressed through particular themes, characters and images, rather than the techniques employed to express them. Although, given the nature of Wagner's musical dramas, the music itself is often directly relevant to the discussion (and in some places I have even found it helpful to offer musical examples by way of illustration), it is not my intention to deal with the vexed

problem of how literature might aspire "toward the condition of music" (to apply Pater's well-worn phrase), but rather to explore territory common to both arts – the relation of myth to modern consciousness.

Wagner contra Wagner

One thing that may well be taken as indicative of the ongoing need to say more about Wagner is the fairly widespread tendency to take him at face value; this is surely what Tanner has in mind when he asserts that "a deep understanding of Wagner is so easily avoided, thanks to the glamour of his surfaces" (201) – and, he might have added (as he elsewhere implies), the obscurity of his depths. But the key to this particular problem may well be a phenomenon that Thomas Mann memorably described in his epochal essay "The Sorrows and Grandeur of Richard Wagner" (1933).

The importance of this essay, whose hostile reception was in part responsible for Mann's precipitous flight from Nazi Germany, resides in a degree of insight into the composer's inner world that is unsurpassed save perhaps by Nietzsche, but is free of the compromising love-hate relationship that so often leads Nietzsche to wilfully misrepresent Wagner's works.[5] Indeed, one of Mann's greatest distinctions is his "correction" of Nietzsche's more idiosyncratic statements (which are all too easily taken at face value, thanks to their apparent conviction and the authority of their source). For example,

[5] Furness describes Mann's as "arguably the most profound analysis of Wagner ever written" (57); by contrast, Nietzsche "delighted in a witty process of deflation and castigation, an attack which, however, became increasingly shrill and querulous, losing much of its humour and betraying more than anything the strictures of a disappointed lover. A guilty conscience is apparent here, an awareness of having derogated and besmirched the former idol, friend and mentor, and Nietzsche's mental collapse must be seen as resulting at least partly from an appreciation of Wagner's unique greatness and his own malicious contentiousness" (110).

Despite his disingenuousness in this regard, Nietzsche is nonetheless the supreme example among hostile critics of understanding the depths beneath Wagner's glamorous surfaces. Another is Adorno, who confesses (in the 1963 essay "Wagner's Relevance Today"), "My own experience with Wagner does not exhaust itself in the political content, as unredeemable as the latter is, and I often have the impression that in laying it bare I have cleared away one level only to see another emerge from underneath, one, admittedly, that I was by no means uncovering for the first time" (585).

> when Nietzsche represents the ageing Wagner as suddenly breaking down in surrender before the Cross of Christ, he fails to see – or would have us fail to see – that the emotional world of *Tannhäuser* already anticipates that of *Parsifal*, and that the latter work is simply the summation and supremely logical conclusion of a profoundly romantic-Christian *oeuvre*. (94)

Of course, Mann esteems Nietzsche almost as highly as he does Wagner himself but, like most who have found themselves in this position, he finds it necessary to separate the grain from the chaff.

But my principal interest here is what Mann has to say about the "double focus" Nietzsche had detected in Wagner's works, their "combination of fairy-tale artlessness with wily shrewdness, the trick of embodying the most sophisticated intellectual ideas in an orgy of sensual intoxication and making it 'popular'" (128). Clearly he has in mind the seemingly incongruous way Wagner's operas combine the naïve and childlike (their glowing mediaeval pageantry, the wholesomeness of their unabashed heroism, nobility and chaste love, their menagerie of swans, bears and dragons) with an underlying concern with the most serious ethical and metaphysical issues. It is an oddly touching foible that a composer who felt driven to write works that would change the world was every bit as concerned to clothe them with all the trappings of popular entertainment – and was successful in this to a degree that belies his generally forbidding reputation. But it does produce the side-effect that a large proportion of his audience enjoys an exceptionally rich, varied and substantial aesthetic experience, without ever once suspecting what the opera in question is really about.[6] Evidence of this is readily provided by some of the less scholarly synopses of his plots that are available, often in theatre programmes. An extreme case, but by no means unique, is found in the heavily bowdlerised and distinctly twee *Opera Stories for Young People* (1958). Its account of the third act of *Die Meistersinger*, for instance, opens as follows: "Next morning the cobbler was up betimes; and, already clad in his fine Festival clothes, he had just entered his workshop, when his nobly-born guest quickly followed him, full of excitement" (Davidson

[6] Mann refers, in a letter written in 1940 to the editor of *Common Sense*, to "a certain sense of discomfort felt by the one section of his admirers in the presence of the other" (198). There is no doubt to which group Mann belonged; the other, he implies, included Hitler among its members.

142). The disjunction between this breathless (and quite inaccurate) summary and the actual work beggars description. Not only is there not the faintest mention of Sachs's great "Wahn" monologue – the heart of the whole work – but its searching mood and explicitly philosophical content are at the furthest possible remove from such breezy assurance. It is rather like encountering a Walt Disney version of *Hamlet*. That such a view of the work can exist at all, though, offers resounding proof of Mann's observation. And while few adult spectators are likely to come away from a performance with quite so limited a sense of the drama, it is reasonable to expect that Wagner remains one of the most widely and substantially misunderstood and imperfectly appreciated of great artists.[7]

It is therefore fair, if a little oversimplified, to say that there are two distinct levels of meaning running throughout Wagner's dramatic works – one literal and the other metaphorical or allegorical. *Die Meistersinger* again offers one of the clearest examples, as its surface is so obviously the stuff of *volkisch* merrymaking, complete with mistaken identity, a planned elopement, a farcical riot scene, rousing and colourful crowd sequences and a cast of diverse comic characters, including in Beckmesser the stock figure of the pedantic schoolmaster as the necessary butt of popular mockery. Beneath this seemingly naïve exterior, however, the work contains – in somewhat coded form – some of Wagner's most introspective commentary on humanity, art and the nature of being and consciousness. And similar claims could be made for the other works, even – at the opposite end of the scale – *Tristan*, whose tragic and passionate intensity might well beguile audiences into

[7] Adorno expressed a similar view almost half a century ago (though he was less sanguine than I am about audiences' abilities to appreciate certain Wagner operas on at least some level): "to experience the Wagnerian work fully [is] something that to this day, despite all the external successes, has not been accomplished. *Tristan*, *Parsifal*, the most significant elements of the *Ring* are always more praised than truly appreciated. It is grotesque that in the *Ring*, then as now, *Die Walküre* still plays the most prominent role, on account of such selections as "Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond," or Wotan's farewell and the magic fire – in other words, on account of what in Vienna are called *Stückerl*, or little numbers. As such, they fly in the face of the Wagnerian idea. The incomparably greater architecture of *Siegfried*, in contrast, has never quite found its way into the public consciousness. At best, the opera-going public suffers through it as a cultural monument. The works of Wagner that have failed to win the appreciation of the public are precisely the most modern ones, those the most boldly progressive in technique and therefore the farthest removed from convention. Their modernity should not be misconceived as superficial, as a matter of the means they employ, simply because they make greater use of dissonances, enharmonic and chromatic elements, than the others. Wagnerian modernity is of a different order; it towers decisively over everything it leaves in its wake" (587–8).

thinking the profundity of the drama to be self-evident, only to overlook entirely the truly metaphysical insights that lie at the heart of it.[8] But exactly what the works are allegorical of is a matter of some contention, at least as far as the finer points are concerned. An almost inevitable rider to Magee's oft-repeated observation that "[t]he number of books written about [Wagner], which had reached the ten thousand mark before his death, overtook those about any other human being except Jesus and Napoleon" (*Aspects of Wagner* 50), is that the amount of outlandish nonsense written about him probably exceeds that about anyone else bar none (not even Jesus). Having said that, there remains a distinguished tradition of Wagner scholarship that is both sound and penetrating,[9] and one of the features that distinguishes it most, notably so in recent years, is its emphasis on the importance of an arcane core of meaning in his dramas, and of the need for ongoing exegesis.

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[8] There is no clearer example of this than the perennial confusion over the love potion. Isolde commands her handmaid Brangäne to prepare the death potion for Tristan, ostensibly in revenge for the insult – as she sees it – he has done her in offering her to his uncle Marke in marriage. Brangäne, unable to bring herself to commit murder, changes it for the love potion. When the pair drink it, they immediately confess their overwhelming desire for one another. At this point, Brangäne – and with her most of the audience – takes this to be the effect of the potion, unaware that they have been in love since before the opera even began. Ernest Newman lamented this widespread misunderstanding in the 1930s, but it seems no-one was listening. Sixty years later, Tanner writes: "Regrettably, it is still necessary to stress that, so far as its long-term effects are concerned, they might as well have been drinking water [Newman's original point]. The potion enables them to release their previously hidden feelings for one another instantly, but they do that only because they believe that death is imminent" (144). In other words, because they believe they are about to die, they feel that honour is satisfied and they have no reason to conceal the truth any more. The real reason Isolde has attempted to poison them both is because she is a woman scorned, and cannot bear to live without Tristan's love; he in turn, guessing her true intention, and knowing she does not know of his own hopeless love for her, sees death as a merciful release from an impossible situation. (The real significance of the revelation that comes with drinking the potion is that the values of the world (which have hitherto guided the lovers' actions) are void, and that in choosing death they have overcome the world – themes to be explored at much greater length in the remaining acts.)

Wagner, it seems, must take some blame for the confusion. It really does seem – to those who, like Brangäne, have failed to notice the clues – that Isolde hates Tristan, and that he is indifferent to her, but that the potion changes all that. And it is meant to *seem* that way, just as *Die Meistersinger* seems to be a light-hearted comedy, when it is really so much more.

[9] The biggest names, of course, are those of Nietzsche and Mann (Adorno might be thought another, only for an understandable need to denigrate Wagner that continually undermines his judgement of the works (as it notably does not in the case of Nietzsche) – as for example his eccentric view of *The Flying Dutchman* as a more successful achievement than *Götterdämmerung* (601)). In English criticism, the line begins with Shaw (whose views are now considerably dated) and includes such luminaries as Ernest Newman (whose biography remains unsurpassed after eighty years and is likely to continue so) and Deryck Cooke, whose study of the *Ring* (see p 4) is a contribution to musical scholarship that he surpassed only with his "performance sketch" of Mahler's incomplete tenth symphony. More recently, I would add most of the critics I have quoted thus far (Magee unequivocally).

Before proceeding any further, it will be necessary to clarify what, in my view, this core consists of, as well as what is distinctive about it and where it overlaps with, or forms part of, a broader cultural current. Even though the intended final outcome is to throw some light on the Joyce and Woolf texts in question, the means of doing so is through attempting a deeper understanding of Wagner than has been possible in previous research in this field. This is certainly not to disparage such important predecessors as Martin, who good-humouredly admits to an "imperfect Wagnerism" (186) and emphasises that his work "is intended, primarily, to advance our understanding of Joyce's work", partly through "the writings of contemporaries such as Shaw, D'Annunzio, and Nietzsche [that] hold greater importance here than they do for today's student of Wagner" (xii). Martin's aim, in other words, is to achieve as comprehensive a view as possible of Joyce's lifelong preoccupation with Wagner and the imprint it made on his work as a whole; the basis of his entire approach is historical, and is relatively more constrained by the need to establish authorial intention. Mine, by contrast, seeks to understand what further meanings might be generated by juxtaposing literary allusions to Wagner with current thinking about what Wagner himself was up to. It is my belief that doing so reveals not a few correspondences the authors in question probably never consciously envisaged, but that nonetheless offer illuminating insights into the nature of their works.

Mythopoeic Consciousness: a way of seeing the world

Wagner's changing relationship to his own most important philosophical influences is a substantial topic; it is the subject of Magee's most recent book on the composer, *Wagner and Philosophy*.[10] What this illuminates most clearly, in my view, is the way Wagner's operas carry through to their conclusion certain ideas expressed in one form or another throughout the body of German romantic thought, and which are moreover among the most

[10] See pp 4–5.

far-reaching ideas to have in turn shaped the growth of the modern world, and the modernist project. Before returning to the operas themselves in any detail, it will therefore be helpful to consider some of the foundational assumptions on which they can be said to rest, or the climate or context of ideas they can be said to inhabit.

To this end, I would like to introduce an idea, or a train of thought, found independently in two – otherwise strikingly different – places: the transcribed text of Isaiah Berlin's 1965 Mellon lectures, a model of lucid, humane and rational thinking; and Roberto Calasso's recent book *Literature and the Gods*, an exotic creation that appears to take criticism to the verge of poetry. Despite their stark difference of temper, both are sustained flights of inspiration, drawn from impressively wide bases of reading, upon a single theme. According to Berlin, "slow and patient historical method" can uncover "what appears to me to be the greatest transformation of Western consciousness, certainly in our time" (20), and that occurred "in the second third of the eighteenth century. . . . not in England, not in France, but for the most part in Germany" (6); or, according to Calasso, "[o]ne morning in 1851" (6) Parisians began to notice "something that actually had already manifested itself elsewhere and quite some time ago, in the Germany of Hölderlin and Novalis, for example, a good fifty years before: the reawakening and return of the gods" (9). Both authors – and these similarities increasingly proliferate as the arguments unfold – identify the same time, place and individuals as having collectively begun to uncover something truly momentous and extraordinary, something that is evidently thought to have introduced a permanent change in the way that human beings see the world – but that may, paradoxically, have largely gone unnoticed.

Berlin traces the root of romanticism to the pietist movement, defined as "a kind of retreat in depth" (37), as

> an emphasis upon spiritual life, contempt for learning, contempt for ritual and for form, contempt for pomp and ceremony, and a tremendous stress upon the individual relationship of the individual suffering human soul with her maker. (36)

This introspective climate breeds a kind of revolution, beginning, Berlin thinks, with the obscure figure of Johann Georg Hamann, "the first person to have declared war upon the Enlightenment in the most open, violent and complete fashion" (46), through contending that what human beings desire most is not, as Voltaire had supposed, happiness but creative and passionate self-fulfilment, and that myths are "not simply false statements about the world" but "ways in which human beings expressed their sense of the ineffable, inexpressible mysteries of nature, and there was no other way in which it could be expressed" (49). This leads in time, via further revelations from Herder, Kant, Schiller and Fichte, to

> the vast drive forward on the part of inspired individuals, or inspired nations, constantly creating themselves afresh, constantly aspiring to purify themselves, and to reach some unheard-of height of endless self-transformation, endless self-creation, works of art constantly engaged in creating themselves, forward, forward, like a kind of vast cosmic design perpetually renewing itself. (91)

From Fichte in particular arises the supreme value the romantics attach to "the exfoliation of a particular self, its creative activity, its imposition of forms upon matter, its penetration of other things, its creation of values, its dedication of itself to those values" (95). At around the same time, Schelling introduces the idea that will come to play a central role in the philosophy of Schopenhauer (though without seeing it, as he will, as a tragic process): that, starting

> from the most mysterious beginnings, from the dark, developing unconscious will, [the world] gradually grows to self-consciousness. Nature is unconscious will; man is will come to consciousness of itself. . . . Nature strives after something but is not aware that it strives for it. Man begins to strive and becomes aware of what he is striving for. By striving successfully for whatever it is that he may be striving for he brings the whole universe to higher consciousness of itself. (97–8)

In romantic art, this leads to the obsession with representing, through symbol and allegory, the infinite, the inexhaustible, the immeasurably profound, as

well as to nostalgia for that which is irretrievably lost, *Sehnsucht*, yearning, the "attempt either to absorb the infinite into myself, to make myself at one with it, or to dissolve myself into it" (104). The special quality that makes myths so indispensable for the romantics is that while remaining "images which the mind can contemplate, in relative tranquillity" they nonetheless

> embody within themselves something inarticulable, and also manage to encapsulate the dark, the irrational, the inexpressible, that which conveys the deep darkness of this whole process, in images which carry you to further images and which themselves point in some infinite direction. (121)

The whole movement finds its most complete expression in "the Byronic syndrome" (133), the attitude that the world is incurably hostile – taken further by Schopenhauer, "who sees man as being tossed in a kind of frail bark upon a vast ocean of the will", and further yet by Wagner, who depicts

> the appalling nature of unsatisfiable desire, which must lead to the most fearful suffering and ultimately the immolation in the most violent fashion of all those who are possessed by a desire which they can at one and the same time neither avoid nor satisfy. (134)

While this summary of what is already an attempt to summarise the main lines of the thought of a century must necessarily amount to extreme generalisation, I do feel it offers clear confirmation of something that is hardly an audacious claim to start with: simply, that Wagner's art is the highly sophisticated late expression of a world-view that has developed steadily from anti-Enlightenment assumptions of a radically individualist nature. Reduced to essentials, this view might be stated as: "Our selves, the world, and the relationship between the two, are not what tradition believes them to be". (What they are then supposed to be is something I believe will become clearer in the course of the argument.)

Calasso, by contrast with Berlin, concerns himself less with where romanticism comes from than what it comes to, while covering generally similar territory. Apropos of Hölderlin, to whom he attributes the rediscovery not only of the gods but of that which lies beyond even the gods, he suggests

it is mistaken to claim, as often happens, that modern man is in a position to create new mythologies

> as if a mythology were a kind of fancy dress that made life more exciting. The very idea that mythology is something *one invents* suggests an unpardonable arrogance, as if myth were at our beck and call. Rather, it is we, the will of each and every one of us, that are at the beck and call of myth. (46)

It is this that Nietzsche appears to have understood, and to have tried to warn us of. Citing the complete text of "How the 'real world' ended up as a fable" from *Twilight of the Idols* (which Tanner calls "a hilarious six-part account, in one page, of the history of Western thought" (164)), Calasso notes the ironic similarity to "the six days of Creation" and the sense of "the world gradually regressing towards its indecipherable origins, a place where, because these categories have yet to split apart, the distinctions 'real world' and 'apparent world' no longer apply"; instead of "living in a world where the fog had lifted, a disenchanted, ascertainable, verifiable world. . . . we find that everything has gone back to being a 'fable' again (73). This leads, in Calasso's view, to some very strange and disturbing (but wonderful) developments indeed, ultimately to what he terms "absolute literature" and locates, above all, in Mallarmé, who had "gone looking for Prajāpati, without even knowing who he was" (113). It is *in* literature, it seems, and particularly when it becomes absolute (that is when it throws off all subservience to other ends), that the gods (for example) are reborn. It is at this stage, to my mind, that Calasso's own literature, itself becoming absolute (for instance in its insistence on inhabiting a landscape of hypnotic and resonant metaphors left to speak for themselves, the same "blazing obscurity" (190) he admires in others), appears to part company with the Anglo-Saxon pragmatism of Berlin's "slow, patient, historical method". Certainly, he shows no trace of the "trepidation" Berlin admits to feeling at the prospect of exploring

> a dangerous and a confused subject, in which many have lost, I will not say their senses, but at any rate their sense of direction. It is like that dark cave described by Virgil, where all the footsteps lead in one direction; or the cave of Polyphemus – those who enter it never seem to emerge again. (1)

I do not wish to imply that Calasso loses his sense of direction, only that it proves difficult to follow him. Nonetheless, at the risk of reducing him to prose, and thereby seeming to miss his point, I feel that the essence of what both he and Berlin have in mind is the historical shift – contributed to by various individuals, but most centrally, if unintentionally, by Kant – whereby the world ceased to be the safe, predictable place it had increasingly come to seem under the serene reign of the Enlightenment, but instead became phenomenon, the product of a consciousness mysterious even to itself.

One might cite similar, or at least compatible, views from a wide variety of critics primarily addressing quite disparate issues, almost *ad nauseum*; I will therefore limit myself to just one more. In *Myth, Truth and Literature: Towards a True Post-modernism*, Colin Falck argues that romanticism "looks forward to Marxism, to psychoanalysis, and to every significant modern attempt to persuade men to take control of their own destiny" (1). His proposed "true" post-modernism in fact amounts to a kind of neo-romanticism, "a time when art would replace religion altogether as our most original and essential source of spiritual nourishment" (3). This has effectively happened, he argues, in that the revelation of mythic truth that was formerly the province of religion has been increasingly subsumed into literature. In particular, "[t]he myths of a primal fall, and of a redemption through love, have an undiminished appeal for the modern imagination" and these, together with "[t]he great myths of sexual love, and of the great conflict of civic duty and erotic passion, are essentially pagan rather than Christian in spirit" (133).[11] Indeed, following Hellenic paganism and Christianity,

> [t]he third great advent of spirituality to the Western world was Romanticism, and the religious scriptures that Romanticism brought with it are the rich, various and multi-faceted visions of imaginative literature. . . . [I]t is Romanticism as a spiritual movement which stands in the same relationship to modern rationality and to the decline of Christianity as Christianity stood in to ancient rationality and to the decline of paganism. From the point of view of its spiritual content Romanticism may seem

[11] Given his strong emphasis here on the "primal" and "pagan", Falck rather surprisingly cites *Carmen* as a modern example; "redemption through love" is as recognisably Wagnerian a catchphrase as "collective unconscious" is Jungian.

> to be a revival or liberation of long-buried imaginative dispositions which have their earliest basis in ancient myth, and therefore to be in its essence a form of neo-paganism. This is a view of it which would in fact very largely be justified. (140)

Falck relates this historical movement not only to the present day, as do Calasso and Berlin, but also to the future, concluding (with, as it happens, a quasi-Wagnerian cadence),

> the authentic religion of the future can only be: authentic living. Its scriptures can only be: poetry. . . . [It] will be a religion of full experiencing. All truth is carnal, and that Energy is from the Body is the true meaning of the Word made flesh. (170)

Such explicit portentousness underlines the unique significance attached to this historical shift. Falck's characterisation of romanticism as "[t]he third great advent of spirituality to the Western world" mirrors Berlin's: "the greatest transformation of Western consciousness, certainly in our time" (20); "the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred", compared with which "all the other shifts which have occurred in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries appear to me in comparison less important, and at any rate deeply influenced by it" (1–2). The same epochal significance is evident in Calasso's references to, for example, Apollo "thrust[ing] himself with such violence on a German poet wandering through western France" (10) or to "an extreme experience", one "that was quite unknown in France and hadn't even percolated through in Germany, if only because of the sacred terror it aroused" (11). More specifically, he points not only to the return of the gods but to

> the *difference* that the gods had acquired in now manifesting themselves to the moderns. This, at bottom, is *the* point at which history impresses itself on all that is, the point at which we are forced to acknowledge that time, in its mere rolling by, has changed something in the world's very essence. (42)

In other words, we have – all too obviously – not simply returned to the state prevailing in the ancient world. Nonetheless, there is no denying the sense of

momentousness, the impression that what is being referred to here is nothing less than a revolution in consciousness.

It is perhaps worth noting at this juncture that these arguments initially appear surprising, or even slightly bizarre. We are not generally accustomed to regarding highly charged romantic attitudes, or a sense that the gods have "returned", as being revelations of the truth, or even as entirely sane. In other words, if such a revolution has in fact occurred, it is one that, for all its momentousness, has largely gone unnoticed.[12] And yet, on reflection, it does seem that the theory offers a valid, perhaps even a necessary, explanation of the modern world. But what is it that the whole argument is made with reference to? The obvious answer, surely, is – myth. What is less certain is whether the very term "myth" may not now need redefining. To say nothing of the journalistic sense of the term (where it means nothing more than "misconception"), the standard literal sense ("an ancient story about gods") is plainly inadequate. For one thing, a marked feature of the romantic period is its tendency to make new myths – as it does, for example, Berlin argues, in its treatment of *Hamlet*, *Don Quixote* or *Faust* (122). What is the process at work here, though? When, one might ask, does something not literally considered a myth become one nonetheless? Surely: when it becomes an attempt to explain what is otherwise inexplicable.

Something of the sort is indeed strongly implied by Berlin's central thesis, that the principal achievement of the romantic revolution was its refutation of a set of beliefs that constituted the very mainstay of Western civilisation, which he reduces to three essential propositions: "that all genuine questions can be answered. . . . that all these answers are knowable. . . . [and] that all the answers must be compatible with one another" (21–22). It was this that romanticism exploded, asserting with conviction and with violence that this insistence on seeing the world exclusively in terms of

[12] By the general public, I mean. The critics I quote evidently occupy an exalted position that enables them to observe the impact of such tectonic shifts in the cultural landscape. Berlin, for one, appears to believe that popular opinion has shifted *en masse* since the romantic revolution, for instance in its glamorisation of rebels and lost causes that would previously have precluded all sympathy. But as far as the more extreme implications are concerned, it is surely plain that most members of our culture inhabit a world defined by the values of the Enlightenment and are likely to regard anything resembling a "return to myth" as regressive or as somewhat reminiscent of "New Age" thinking and consequently dubious.

empirically verifiable data was fundamentally false, misguided, spiritually impoverished and thoroughly undesirable.

Taking this into account, I propose (for the sake of argument) reducing the development of consciousness to just three broad phases. The first is the seemingly naïve one, in which there simply *is* no distinction between myth and history, and the gods (or, later, God) are taken quite literally, when, as Berlin says (paraphrasing Vico), ancient peoples were "able to conceive of their divinity not only as a bearded giant commanding the gods and men, but also as something of which the whole heavens could be full" (4). In the literature of this period, Calasso adds, there was "a great familiarity, almost a recklessness, in the way the divine is mentioned, as though to encounter divinity was hardly unusual, but rather something that could be expected, or provoked" (6). He gives an example from a passage by Apollonius of Rhodes, describing the Argonauts' vision of Apollo "suspended over an empty sea, just as the dawn spreads its first light, absorbed and unconcerned. . . . barely touch[ing] the heroes, whom he could easily trample underfoot" (43–4).

Secondly, there is the phase exemplified by the Enlightenment, in which the spread of rational enquiry leads to a downgrading of myth to mere fable, something easily dismissed as childish superstition, unworthy of civilised men. Even Christianity, despite its powerful hold on European minds, is not exempt for long, until it survives only as a set of moral precepts, its supernatural framework now seen chiefly as a symbol. Falck takes a similar view, though he differentiates between the historical declines in pagan and Christian belief (while nonetheless seeing them as parallel):

> The first decline of mythic awareness in the face of the progress of rational thought occurred in the ancient world with the decay of Hellenic paganism. This god-abandoned world was saved from its own directionlessness and lack of spiritual purpose by the rise of Christianity. A comparable mythic decline took place in the modern world in the face both of the rational thought-systems of seventeenth-century philosophy and science and of the manipulative or technological thought-habits which were their inseparable accompaniment. (139)[13]

[13] It is instructive in this context to compare Joseph Campbell's historical division of Christianity into four phases, each more insipid than the last: "(1) a period of literally following the master, Jesus, by renouncing the world as he did (Primitive Christianity); (2) a

Thirdly, the romantic phase, triggered by a realisation that the assumed superiority of "enlightened" minds is mistaken, is marked by recognition that taking myths seriously is not as naïve as it might seem, and is not mere regression to the ancient way of seeing things. (One is again reminded of Calasso stressing "the *difference* that the gods had acquired in now manifesting themselves to the moderns" (42).) It is rather an understanding that the Enlightenment was *partially* mistaken: right in seeing that myths were not literally true, but wrong in automatically assuming they were not true at all. The difficulty lies in grasping what this other mode of truth could be; we are still sufficiently in thrall to enlightened ways of thinking (which after all have proved largely responsible for the immense advances in science and technology that have shaped the modern world) to believe that there is only one kind of truth, that statements are either true or they are not, that to assert something is true in a non-literal sense is really to admit it is only "as if" it were true. But this is not something the romantic, mythopoeic, consciousness is prepared to settle for. It is rather determined that a literal interpretation of reality is circumscribed, that there really is a level of truth that reason cannot access, and never could. One is reminded of Berlin's claim that only myth could express a "sense of the ineffable, inexpressible mysteries of nature" (49).

It follows that literary treatments of myth are no longer limited by choice of subject matter. Indeed it is unsurprising – given the assertion that myths express the true nature of the world – that the works in which the new sensibility comes pouring forth in such abundance, such as *Werther* or *Childe Harold*, tend to favour a contemporary, realistic, setting. So too do several

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period of meditating on Christ Crucified as the divinity within the heart, meanwhile leading one's life in the world as the servant of this god (Early and Medieval Christianity); (3) a rejection of most of the instruments supporting meditation, meanwhile, however, continuing to lead one's life in the world as the servant or vehicle of the god whom one has ceased to visualize (Protestant Christianity); (4) an attempt to interpret Jesus as a model human being, but without accepting his ascetic path (Liberal Christianity)" (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 320).

Such a widespread erosion of faith would seem to be almost complete. I doubt whether the consciously held beliefs of even the most aggressive religious fundamentalists of our own time (disturbingly rabid as they sometimes appear) rest upon an unconscious assurance of their truth such as must have existed among the architects of the Gothic cathedrals, for example.

works of the period whose subjects are flagrantly fantastic, such as *Don Giovanni*, *Frankenstein* or the stories of Hoffmann and Poe. The obverse of this is also found: the neoclassical fashion for works that allude directly to myth while remaining completely superficial, relegating the gods to mere gilded monuments, a trend manifested as late as Offenbach's *Orpheus* or Shaw's *Pygmalion* (indeed this romantic-realistic continuum will come to provide a major source of tension in works of high modernism, where the painstakingly naturalistic stands side-by-side with the symbolic and the outlandishly fanciful). Put simply, a properly mythic work is no longer one that confines itself to literally mythic material. More often than not, it locates itself in a world as real to its audience as Homer's was to his.

This necessity for mythmaking, or mythopoeia, is determined, then, by the recognition, deep down, that empirical observation and deduction – the powers of reason – are insufficient for understanding the true nature of the world, more especially those states or experiences of most value to us. Reduced to the simplest possible form, there is something – something supremely important – that remains unknown, that never can be known. This is a discovery that has been fed from a number of sources and contributed towards by a variety of figures, but it seems fairly clear that its most explicit, logically coherent, emphatic and radical expression is Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), acknowledged by Schopenhauer as providing the foundation for his own philosophy, which he asserted was its logical continuation and completion. And it is Schopenhauer who is universally recognised as being the single most important intellectual influence on the mature works of Wagner.

The Role of Schopenhauer

The importance of Schopenhauer's philosophy for Wagner needs little reiteration. Magee points out that almost every book written about Wagner makes mention of the fact and adds that, despite the influences of other philosophers – notably Feuerbach – that had preceded it, "Schopenhauer penetrated to Wagner's core in a way that was unique; and both Wagner's

outlook and his work were never the same again" (*The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 336). As Magee explains,

> [t]he special significance of Schopenhauer for Wagner lies in the fact that when Wagner first read *The World as Will and Representation* – towards the end of 1854, at the age of forty-one – he was composing operatic masterpieces in a form which he had elaborated intellectually to a highly sophisticated degree; that Schopenhauer's ideas were incompatible with his approach; that he came under their influence nevertheless; and that his development as a creative artist, and therefore all his subsequent work, was changed as a consequence. (326)

Clearly, Schopenhauer's special contribution was sufficiently impressive and original to outweigh or supplant other, perhaps similar, ideas that formed the background of Wagner's intellectual life, and any understanding of his own work needs to account for what this change amounted to.[14] Before looking specifically at the impact of philosopher on composer, I will therefore consider the achievement of each separately.

As its title suggests, *The World as Will and Representation* (1819) is a philosophy in two parts, and these are presented with admirable neatness: side by side in alternating sections.[15] The first part deals with the world as representation, and is largely a clarification, in Schopenhauer's admirably

[14] In *Wagner and Philosophy*, Magee presents a clear and detailed account of all the intellectual influences on Wagner's work from his earliest creative period, showing which he came to repudiate, which to retain and which to modify in the course of his development as an artist. In particular, he devotes careful attention to the process whereby Wagner came to absorb Schopenhauer's influence more and more completely into his personality, and how his earlier influences became subservient to it. For anyone wishing to understand this process in full, Magee's book is indispensable; one helpful summarising passage reads as follows: "[Reading Schopenhauer] had raised the unconscious realm of [Wagner's] creative intuitions as fully and explicitly to the level of his consciousness as could be done. In doing this it had provided him with a philosophy available to his conscious mind that was in harmony with his own already existing insights, apprehensions and intuitions, instead of being hopelessly at odds with them and contradicting them, as his previously held 'philosophy' had done, and done increasingly as time had gone by. This is why, in spite of the fact that Schopenhauer's published views contradicted his own at so many points, he did not feel in the end that he as a human being was contradicting or compromising himself, still less being untrue to himself, by embracing them, but felt that, on the contrary, he was rendering himself whole. His consciously held philosophical beliefs were now, at long last, in organic unity with his creative intuitions, and also, therefore, with the preconscious and unconscious drives from which those intuitions sprang" (182).

[15] That is to say, the first and third books of the first volume deal with the world as representation, and the second and fourth with the world as will; the second volume consists of supplementary essays to all four books, arranged in corresponding order.

lucid prose, of the notoriously inscrutable content of Kant's transcendental idealism (at least as Schopenhauer conceives it):

> [N]o truth is more certain, more independent of all others, and less in need of proof than this, namely that everything exists for knowledge, and hence the whole of this world, is only object in relation to the subject, perception of the perceiver, in a word, representation. . . . Everything that in any way belongs and can belong to the world is inevitably associated with this being-conditioned by the subject, and it exists only for the subject. The world is representation. (v1.3)

By the same token,

> Realism, which commends itself to the crude understanding by appearing to be founded on fact, starts precisely from an arbitrary assumption, and is in consequence an empty castle in the air, since it skips or denies the first fact of all, namely that all that we know lies within consciousness. (v2.5)

He is at some pains moreover to differentiate between misunderstandings of idealism as being absolute, a denial of empirical experience that is self-evidently absurd and counter to common sense, and what he calls "true idealism". Absolute idealism is that associated with Berkeley, and famously objected to by Dr Johnson[16] (and, Julian Young reminds us, by Jonathan Swift, who "refused to open his door to him on the grounds that he ought to be able to walk straight through" (*Schopenhauer* 19)). Objections of this kind, while amusing, completely overlook the point. Where Berkeley maintained (or was held to have maintained) that there simply is no material world,

> [t]rue idealism, on the other hand, is not the empirical, but the transcendental. It leaves the *empirical* reality of the world untouched, but adheres to the fact that all *object*, and hence the empirically real in general, is conditioned by the *subject*. (v2.8)

It is, in other words, more fundamental: its claim is not that the world is not really there, but that *there* is not really there.

[16] See p 7 note 2.

The second part of the argument is Schopenhauer's own original contribution to the history of philosophy: by a brilliant piece of lateral thinking, he claims that there *is* another way of knowing the world. Every reader will recognise, asserts Schopenhauer,

> that the inner nature of his own phenomenon, which manifests itself to him as representation both through his actions and through the permanent substratum of these his body, is his *will*. This will constitutes what is most immediate in his consciousness. . . . The reader who with me has gained this conviction, will find that of itself it will become the key to the knowledge of the innermost being of the whole of nature . . . . He will recognise that same will not only in those phenomena that are quite similar to his own, in men and animals, as their innermost nature, but continued reflection will lead him to recognize the force that shoots and vegetates in the plant, indeed the force by which the crystal is formed, the force that turns the magnet to the North Pole, the force whose shock he encounters from the contact of metals of different kinds, the force that appears in the elective affinities of matter as repulsion and attraction, separation and union, and finally even gravitation, which acts so powerfully in all matter, pulling the stone to the earth and the earth to the sun; all these he will recognize as different only in the phenomenon, but the same according to their inner nature. He will recognize them all as that which is immediately known to him so intimately and better than everything else, and where it appears most distinctly is called *will*. . . . It is the innermost essence, the kernel, of every particular thing and also of the whole. It appears in every blindly acting force of nature, and also in the deliberate conduct of man . . . . (v1.109–10)

And as the will is not, like everything else, a mere representation, it must be the answer to Kant's seemingly insoluble riddle of the thing-in-itself – ultimate reality; by the same token, the laws of time, space, matter and causation, the laws of the world as representation, do not apply to it. Therefore, it is eternal, nowhere, immaterial and uncaused – which further implies that we are all in our innermost nature literally one with it, and with one another, that individual selves do not exist. The will is itself the cause of everything, and leads from non-existence to existence, as its opposite, the denial of the will, leads from existence to non-existence. This non-existence, non-being, that lies beyond the world is necessarily inconceivable since, whether or not it is "an absolute

nothing" (v1.409), it is the complete negation of everything we know, even of the forms of space and time (which are themselves mere representations), so that "to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is – nothing" (v1.412).

On the face of it the entire system might be thought reconcilable with religious tradition; indeed, the will sounds remarkably akin to the pantheistic view of God advocated by Spinoza, "one of the few Western philosophers, other than Kant, Plato and the British, for whom Schopenhauer almost always has a good word" (Young 78). But Schopenhauer plainly had no truck with God, so that his whole philosophy – which might otherwise have had a very different appearance[17] – is saturated with the spirit of profound pessimism for which it is best known, and which gives it its distinctive character. The principal reason given for this bleak outlook is that the will can never be satisfied, so that the whole of existence consists in "constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion . . . always drawing water in the sieve of the Danaids, and [in being] the eternally thirsting Tantalus" (v1.196). Consequently, optimism,

> where it is not merely the thoughtless talk of those who harbour nothing but words under their shallow foreheads, seems to me to be not merely an absurd, but also a really *wicked*, way of thinking, a bitter mockery of the unspeakable sufferings of mankind. (v1.326)

[17] Magee asserts that Schopenhauer's pessimism is by no means the inevitable outcome of his philosophy but an independent value judgement, a temperamental quirk of his acerbic nature: "In most people's minds the identifying feature of Schopenhauer's thought has always been its pessimism. Indeed, his name is more closely associated with pessimism than any other writer's. . . . Yet this is odd, because it is an elementary point in logic that no truth claim can entail a value-judgement. . . . you cannot derive an 'is bad' from an 'is'. No general philosophy – no ontology, epistemology or logic – can entail pessimistic conclusions. Professional philosophers ought always to have known, without having to read Schopenhauer to discover it, that in this sense his pessimism is logically independent of his philosophy, and so it is. It is true that he was a pessimist, no one more so. And it is true that his pessimism is compatible with his philosophy – but that is only because the two are, of necessity, logically unconnected. Non-pessimism is equally compatible with his philosophy. The traditional identification of him in terms of his pessimism is largely irrelevant to a serious consideration of him as a philosopher" (*The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 13).

"[T]here seems to have been a lifelong disparity between the content of what Schopenhauer said, particularly on paper, and the way he said it. The content was so often negative – corrosive, sarcastic, derisive, pessimistic, sometimes almost despairing – yet the manner was always positive, indeed exhilarating. Its gusto and verve both express and impart a *joie de vivre* which is almost gargantuan" (25).

All existence is therefore a tragic mistake, and it would be far better for nothing to exist at all. Salvation is possible, however, for those with the wisdom to recognise this, withdraw from foolish attachment to worldly desires and cultivate denial of the will to live.

Whatever we think of the logical assumptions of this philosophy, there is no denying its overall coherence, its originality, its vigour and its peculiar attractiveness,[18] at least for people already inclined to view the world somewhat sardonically (as Wagner certainly was). For our present purposes, we can effectively summarise it as three basic beliefs about the world:

1) It is a bad place; and
2) Nothing can be done to change this; but (fortunately)
3) It doesn't really exist.

That in a nutshell is what we will need to bear in mind when we come to look more closely at the impact reading *The World as Will and Representation* had on Wagner.

Notwithstanding his fame, Schopenhauer's position among philosophers appears equivocal at best, put somewhat in the shade by Hegel before and Nietzsche after him. Young suggests that "the academy has never really forgiven him for his disrespectful remarks about the 'professors of philosophy'" (221).[19] Ironically, this very disrespect is likely to endear him to

[18] Young frequently points out what he considers to be flaws and inconsistencies in the overall system, only to demur: "Yet in a way, it seems to me, this hardly matters. There is such a wealth of insight into the human condition contained within its framework that the question of whether or not the argument is completely watertight pales into insignificance. Schopenhauer's failed argument, it seems to me, is worth a thousand successful arguments by lesser philosophers." (218)

Christopher Janaway states, somewhat more cautiously, that "[m]any have found Schopenhauer's philosophy impossible to accept as a single, consistent metaphysical scheme. But it does have great strength and coherence as a narrative and in the dynamic interplay between its different conceptions of the world and the self. . . . Thomas Mann likened Schopenhauer's book to a great symphony in four movements, and it is helpful to approach it in something of this spirit, seeking contrasts of mood and unities of theme amid a wealth of variations. Certainly there have been few philosophers who have equalled Schopenhauer's grasp of literary architecture and pacing, and few whose prose style is so eloquent." (*Schopenhauer: A Very Short Introduction* 8)

[19] Schopenhauer never loses an opportunity to direct his scorn at the academic establishment: "those modern philosophemes that constantly move in nothing but very wide abstractions, [so that] I am soon unable to think of hardly anything more in connexion with them, in spite of all my attention, because I receive no material for thinking, but am supposed to operate with nothing but empty husks" (v2.64–5). While sparing none of his

lay readers, especially those who have themselves found the "professors" incomprehensible; whether he was entirely fair to his specific targets or not, his frequent sideswipes against obfuscation and "humbug" (one of his favourite terms) are among the most scathing pages of satire ever penned by a philosopher.[20] Despite, or because of, official neglect, his influence on non-philosophers, especially creative artists, is perhaps the greatest in modern times. There are doubtless many reasons for this, but at least two are immediately apparent (and they are closely related): style and outlook. As a stylist, Schopenhauer is unsurpassed by any modern philosopher save perhaps Nietzsche (and where Nietzsche's brilliant diatribes are liable to take on a sometimes alarming stridency, Schopenhauer's scorn is all the more biting for being measured).[21] Reading him is therefore a largely congenial experience, in which illuminating clarity of insight goes hand in hand with a frank, human and often humorous attitude. What makes this style

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contemporaries, Schopenhauer invariably reserves his fiercest (and funniest) attacks for Hegel: "The public had been forced to see [by Kant] that what is obscure is not always without meaning; what was senseless and without meaning at once took refuge in obscure exposition and language. Fichte was the first to grasp and make vigorous use of this privilege; Schelling at least equalled him in this, and a host of hungry scribblers without intellect or honesty soon surpassed them both. But the greatest effrontery in serving up sheer nonsense, in scrabbling together senseless and maddening webs of words, such as had previously been heard only in madhouses, finally appeared in Hegel. It became the instrument of the most ponderous and general mystification that has ever existed, with a result that will seem incredible to posterity, and be a lasting monument of German stupidity." (v1.429)

[20] It is also easy to feel in sympathy with Schopenhauer, especially since the widespread fashion for academic obscurantism is hardly a thing of the past. Young defends his "frenetic abuse of the 'professors of philosophy'" from the charge that it stems solely from professional jealousy, on the grounds that it originated in Schopenhauer's undergraduate years "long before personal disappointment could play any role" and that is in any case always rooted in the – surely quite justified – objection to "the mud-like unintelligibility of their prose" (8–9). Janaway notes that Hegel in particular "was the epitome of everything that Schopenhauer disliked in philosophy. He was a career academic, who made use of the institutional authority which Schopenhauer held in contempt. He upheld the church and the state, for which Schopenhauer, an atheist and an individualist, had no time. . . . Hegel was also an appalling stylist, who seemed to build abstraction upon abstraction without the breath of fresh air provided by common-sense experience, and Schopenhauer – not alone in this – found his writing pompous and obscurantist, even dishonest." (9)

[21] Magee describes Schopenhauer's prose style as "distinctly non-literary and non-academic, colloquial, concrete, idiomatic, direct, and much more remarkable for being these things in German than would be the case in English. . . . It manages to combine lucidity with musicality, sharp-edged precision with haunting metaphor, torrential energy with logical rigour. He has been regarded by many since his day as the greatest writer of modern German prose. Even in translation the quality of his writing is unmistakable. Above all, there is a man speaking: a whole man, a whole life, a whole way of seeing the world are embodied there before us on those pages, in those sentences. No writer is more 'there', more with you, almost tangibly and audibly present when you read him." (*The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 6–7)

inseparable from its outlook is its directness. In marked contrast to his favoured targets, Schopenhauer clearly prides himself on being a plain man speaking to plain men; instead of building castles in the air (one of his favourite charges against Hegel *et al*), his starting point is always the self-evident fact of human existence, what it is and what to do about it.

It is natural, then, that general readers (and some artists among them), finding themselves concerned about the world, about themselves and their place in it, about the difficulties of modern life, the loss of religious faith, the complexity and insuperability of so many of our problems, should be attracted by a philosopher who dispenses with abstruse terminology and gets right down to the business of addressing those problems squarely.[22] What is more, this bluntness coupled with a marked scepticism about anything that cannot be verified by observation, and especially about the kind of wilfully self-deluding optimism that human beings are generally prone to, has a refreshing honesty about it that makes it still more appealing. It is also – most surprisingly given its grim outlook – deeply consoling;[23] there is a strange comfort in feeling one knows the truth about things, perhaps, or alternatively that in knowing the worst one cannot be disappointed, and that at the very least one has restful oblivion to look forward to.[24]

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[22] Cf. Young: "The clarity and beauty of his prose, his unerring sense for the concrete example that is worth a thousand words, his abhorrence of jargon (so important to establishing the mystique of a priestly 'in-group') and his zestful abuse of the great and good in the professorial firmament, have, as observed, placed Schopenhauer beyond the academic pale. On the other hand, these same qualities have made him highly accessible to lay people and in particular to artists." (234)

[23] Scruton takes a similar view, arguing that it was precisely this paradoxical quality that attracted Wagner, who felt that Schopenhauer's doctrine of denial of the will offered the only genuine solution to our predicament. This was "neither the glorious salvation promised by the Christian Church nor the socialist utopia of Feuerbach and Marx, but an inner redemption achieved by the human subject alone, drawing precisely on the metaphysical isolation that distinguishes him from the natural order and which condemns him to a suffering that no other creature can know. Schopenhauer was an atheist whose sympathy for Hinduism and Buddhism nevertheless opened his thinking to religious ideas, leading him to graft onto the Kantian idealist metaphysics the very concepts with which Wagner's secular, solitary, and subjective redemption could be described. In addition Schopenhauer was a pessimist whose acerbic wit made pessimism both consoling and, in a strange way, enjoyable. Not surprisingly, therefore, Wagner was captivated by the philosopher, whose system he saw as quite simply the fundamental truth about the world." (126)

[24] This attitude may in itself be regarded as strikingly modern. Magee claims that "Schopenhauer was, perhaps surprisingly, the first major Western philosopher to make a point of atheism. (Hobbes and Hume, both of whom may well have been atheists in fact, went out of their way to dissociate themselves from atheism; and all the other great philosophers since the fall of the Roman Empire had been Christians.)" (*The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 263)

In any event, Schopenhauer's influence upon creative artists is prodigious. Apart from Wagner (invariably at the head of such lists), Young cites as examples "Tolstoy, Turgenev, Zola, Maupassant, Proust, Hardy, Conrad, Mann, Samuel Beckett and Jorge Louis Borges [*sic*]" (234).[25] The explanation Young considers most likely for this widespread affinity with the great pessimist, rather than simply that most artists are either seers or cripples – or perhaps both, is that such a philosophy for them registers the truth about the times, specifically "the post-death-of-God age – the age of waiting for Godot – that we all inhabit" (237). After arguing convincingly for a marked Schopenhauerian influence on – or at least an anticipation of – both Freud[26] and Darwin, Young concludes that

> notwithstanding his academic neglect . . . . it needs to be recognised that, through [Schopenhauer's influence on gifted individuals], a great deal of his thinking has become part of the natural consciousness of the present age. That there are many interpretations of reality, that God is dead, that life or history has no purpose, that we are members of the *animal* realm (and should accord more rights to our fellow animals), that we are biological organisms so that the human psyche and human behaviour are moulded by evolution, that we are often governed by instincts and by motives which we do not know and of which we would not approve, are all ideas which belong to the taken-for-granted background to our lives. In assessing his stature we need to recognise that a – and usually the – primary source of all these ideas is to be found in Schopenhauer's philosophy. (245)

In many respects ahead of its time, then, this philosophy even appears to be somewhat ahead of our own – certainly as far as some of its more advanced metaphysical implications are concerned. As Tanner amusingly points out,

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[25] Magee discusses all of these except Beckett, but distinguishes Wagner as "the outstanding instance in our culture of a great artist's work being importantly influenced by a great philosopher's" (*The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 379). Janaway adds to the list composers Mahler and Richard Strauss (also notable Wagnerians) and, among writers, D.H. Lawrence (120).

[26] "The unconscious, repression, 'Freudian slips', madness as repression and fictionalisation of the past and the centrality of sex to human life are all Freudian themes clearly anticipated by Schopenhauer. Freud seems to have been disingenuous in, while acknowledging Schopenhauer's *priority* with respect to these ideas, denying a direct *influence*." (246)

> long before Nietzsche, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault and their innumerable progeny came along, Schopenhauer had "decentred" the self with a vengeance. He would not have taken sides in the contemporary disputes of cultural materialists versus essentialist humanists, or post-structuralists versus everyone who has preceded them. Since there are no selves, centred or otherwise, these people are all wasting their breath, partly because they think they are arguing against other people. (106)

And with the advent of quantum theory, we even appear to have circumstantial evidence in support of his philosophy (which incidentally maintains that that is the most that science can ever offer, limited as it is to the world of phenomena).[27] To be sure, the discovery that matter does not exist in quite the same way we used to think it did is not the same thing as making the philosophical claim that the world has no reality independent of consciousness, but there is an affinity between both ideas that is, to say the least, suggestive.[28]

[27] For example: "[A]ll science in the real sense, by which I understand systematic knowledge under the guidance of the principle of sufficient reason, can never reach a final goal or give an entirely satisfactory explanation. It never aims at the inmost nature of the world; it can never get beyond the representation; on the contrary, it really tells us nothing more than the relation of one representation to another." (v1.28)

[28] I am acutely aware of my limitations in venturing, however marginally, into an area where I can scarcely claim even rudimentary knowledge. All I can assert is that in reading popularisers of science one continually stumbles upon claims that are not only astounding in themselves but that frequently appear to confirm the doctrine of transcendental idealism, or at least to be remarkably compatible with it. For example, in *The Matter Myth* (1991) Paul Davies and John Gribbin describe experiments in which "the observer seems to play a central role in fixing the nature of reality at the quantum level. This has long worried both physicists and philosophers. In the pre-quantum era of physics, everyone assumed that the world 'out there' existed in a well-defined state quite irrespective of whether, or how, it was observed. . . . But quantum physics presents a picture of reality in which observer and observed are inextricably interwoven in an intimate way." (208–9) In dramatic contrast to the Newtonian – or "commonsensical" – model of the cosmos, new discoveries increasingly reveal "a wonderland of nebulous activity" in which "the apparent solidity of ordinary matter melts away into a frolic of insubstantial patterns of energy" (229). Davies and Gribbin conclude with an assertion that – apparently unknowingly – endorses the Kantian-Schopenhauerian view of things: "Today, on the brink of the twenty-first century, we can see that Ryle was right to dismiss the notion of the ghost in the machine – not because there is no ghost, but because there is no machine." (303)

The Role of Wagner

An insistence that the most important part of human nature and of the whole world is something reason is inadequate to deal with, cannot even get at, was, I argued earlier, an integral, and perhaps even the central, element in German romantic thought. For all his obstreperous wrangling with his fellow post-Kantians, it is clear that Schopenhauer has this much in common with them. It is equally clear that, by the time Wagner arrived on the scene, such a general trend in thinking was already well-established, at least among radical left-wing intellectuals – a group with whom the young composer swiftly and enthusiastically identified himself. As a result, even though Schopenhauer's *magnum opus* remained unread for more than three decades, the broader current of ideas from which it emerged was very much a part of Wagner's formative influences, and there are continuities (if mostly quite general ones) between composer, philosopher and shared background (these would include, for instance, individualism, atheism, anti-authoritarianism and, once again, a firm belief in the limitations of reason and the pre-eminence of impulsive natural feeling).[29] None of this changes the fact that eventually reading Schopenhauer would have the most dramatically life-changing consequences for Wagner, a subject to be examined more closely in the next section. What I would like to do first is to establish what Wagner's *oeuvre* already amounted to – before its modification by Schopenhauer. (To avoid any potential confusion, I should note that I make a number of observations of a general nature here about all Wagner's operas and music-dramas, including those that follow his "conversion"; what I am

[29] Magee summarises Wagner's pre-Schopenhauerian influences as follows: "First there were the Young Germany group, most notably Laube. Then there were the philosophical anarchists, most notably Proudhon. And then there were the Young Hegelians, most notably Feuerbach. . . . The three sets of ideas were fairly easily harmonised into a single outlook. . . . The philosophical materialism of Feuerbach, and also his psychologising of religion, fitted in quite comfortably with the socialism or communism of the anarchists, as did anarchism with the desire of the Young Germans for liberation from the tyranny of political and religious authority, and of social convention. The Young Germans' desire for sexual liberation fitted in very happily with Feuerbach's extravagant valuation of the socially cohesive power of love; as again did both of those with the pacifism of the anarchists. It all meshed together. And in its time and place it constituted the most familiar pattern of political thinking that lay to the left of liberalism." (*Wagner and Philosophy* 64–5)

postponing for now is simply the precise nature of what changed in his outlook – and how *that* was reflected in the works.)[30]

What is outstanding about Wagner's personal contribution to the ideological trend outlined above is the fact that, although he was not (or at least not primarily) a philosopher, he was a creative artist of the highest magnitude who was influenced to an unusual degree by stimuli outside the sphere of the arts. Romantic composers in general were inclined to a progressive view of both art and society, motivated by self-expression, innovative in their approach to form and politically aware – generally with a marked leaning towards the left; Wagner, however, was unique in the extremism with which he pursued such ends, in the degree to which ideas formed the basis of his creative works, and in the attention which he devoted to philosophy in particular. It seems undeniable in fact that much of the power of his dramas results from their articulation of exciting new ideas and beliefs about the nature of existence itself (both before and – to a far greater degree – after his reading of Schopenhauer).

For all his immense originality, then, Wagner was very much a child of his times. This means in turn that his own prodigious influence on succeeding generations of artists and thinkers is inevitably mixed with, and often difficult to separate from, a wide variety of other influences. Indeed, within the current of German romanticism – his unquestioned milieu – he is somewhat of a latecomer.[31] Having said that, there can be no doubt that his personal contribution is a very great one and, in several respects, unique.

First of all, it is worth noting that his position among the greatest composers is now firmly established, that there are few figures outside the

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[30] The near-impossibility of *not* doing so has to do with the fact that all the works Wagner composed after reading Schopenhauer (with the single exception of *Tristan*) had been conceived long before. As a result, even though they are undoubtedly very different from what they might have been without Schopenhauer's influence, they still bear a close family resemblance to their predecessors in Wagner's canon – a unity already referred to above (see p 14 note 4) and to be discussed in much greater detail below (see especially pp 81–3).

[31] Wagner's relationship to established romanticism is perhaps best summed up by Magee's account of the Young German movement – to which the then twenty-six year old composer wholeheartedly subscribed: "In the arts they saw the classic figures of their immediate past, people such as Goethe and Mozart, as pre-revolutionary, and therefore antediluvian, no longer speaking to the condition of the young. What one could say had become the classic form of romanticism, that of Hoffmann and Weber, seemed to be sentimental, comfortable, conservative – and as such socially irrelevant." (24) For Wagner, it might be said, romanticism was an artistic inheritance that needed to be superseded in order to realise its true potential.

sacrosanct trinity of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven that many people would assert as having greater overall importance in the history of western music. Tanner makes the point that this is "a comparatively recent development" (occurring somewhere around fifty to sixty years ago), that in addition to the familiar moral objections made against Wagner (which are never likely to die down) there was a former tendency in some quarters to see him as "a tiresome perversion in the history of music" (1).[32] On the other hand, Wagner is probably the only major composer likely to receive a mention in the context of the history of ideas, as is indicated by a common tendency to group him together with influential thinkers almost as naturally as with romantic composers.[33] At least part of the reason must be that his music was never intended simply as music, was always part of something more.[34] His later, "post-Schopenhauer" dramas in particular must be almost alone among major musical compositions in deliberately setting out to give voice to a new, and radically subversive, world-view. It is notable that Wagner invariably heads lists of Schopenhauer's numerous artist-disciples (and not only because he was historically the first of them).[35] What distinguishes him is that he was so *passionately* devoted to Schopenhauer, that he felt his philosophy to have changed his life, that it radically altered the direction of his work, and substantially improved its quality, and that he attempted to express its essence, not in words only but in music also – and in the complex fusion of both that is his perhaps unique achievement.

Part of the reason Wagner was so quickly and wholeheartedly won over to Schopenhauer's philosophy, indeed felt it was an intellectual

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[32] Adorno emerges, perhaps surprisingly, as the first to openly refute this view, writing (in 1963): "The merely aesthetic anti-Wagnerianism rode the tide of the so-called neo-classical movement – politically not at all progressive – which is linked primarily to the name of Igor Stravinsky. This movement is not only chronologically passé; it also suffers from internal exhaustion. . . . The tendency that is now emerging in opposition to neo-classicism, and exposing by contrast the decorative weakness that is implicit in the latter, is producing many things that have more to do with Wagner than with those individuals who for the last thirty or forty years have enjoyed playing the role of his opponents. The Second Vienna School, that of Arnold Schoenberg, which exercises a decisive influence on the most recent contemporary music, took Wagner as its immediate point of departure." (586)

[33] Furness, for example, claims that "Wagner deserves without question his place beside Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger, those who have moulded European consciousness most palpably, and have 'invaded vast territories of the world's mind'" (146; quoting Erich Heller, *Encounter* 22.4 (April 1964): 59).

[34] See Magee, quoted on pp 4–5.

[35] See pp 38–9.

clarification and support of views he had long held unconsciously, is (as I have already asserted) that both men were products of the German romantic, post-Kantian world. It is therefore unsurprising to find Wagner, from as early as *The Flying Dutchman* (the first of what are standardly considered his authentic works),[36] already expressing, indeed taking for granted, the same type of mythopoeic outlook we have seen first beginning to emerge almost two generations before him. This means, of course, that he is indeed – as he is usually labelled – a late romantic, in Berlin's sense an "unbridled" romantic like Byron.[37] This in turn means that the central tenets of romanticism, its affiliation with the irrational and mysterious, are not merely present in his works, but are present to a degree that is frankly exaggerated. So, for example, only overtly mythic subjects will do for him, and as it turns out only very particular mythic subjects, ones that can be taken to express absolute states of being (absolute isolation, absolute desire, absolute fearlessness, and so on). Coupled with this, his chosen form of opera and his increasingly revolutionary approach to that form, mean that he combines musical and dramatic expressions that would already be considered extreme in isolation; together, they achieve a hitherto unheard-of intensity. The final result is that Wagner appears to be the logical, and in some ways inevitable, culmination of the romantic movement.

Among many quintessentially romantic features that can be seen to perfection in Wagner's operas is their Janus-faced quality, an apparent obsession with the past that is really an unwavering commitment to the future. The romanticised past, never supposed to have really existed, is a study in ways of being in the world that are depicted as superior to those currently in use, more intuitive, generous, wholesome and authentically human. Backward-looking formal devices, on the other hand, such as Wagner's use of *Stabreim* (alliterative verse) in the *Ring*, is the exception. Fluidity of form, an ideal naturalness modelled on a conception of the organic, ceaseless experimentation with enhanced means of expressiveness, and an underlying ideology of disruption, of subversiveness, of overcoming, all point ahead to

[36] See p 14 note 4.
[37] See p 24.

something as yet unheard-of.[38] That Stephen Spender, in *The Struggle of the Modern*, defines "[t]he idea of tradition as an explosive force, an unknown quantity almost, an apocalyptic mystery, something sought out from the past and chosen by the modern artist" (92) confirms that romanticism, simply put, is modern, and by the same token proto-modernist.[39]

This sense of the *avant-garde* in Wagner is something repeatedly emphasised during his lifetime, especially by his detractors – notably through the notorious catchphrase "music of the future", a corruption of his treatise title *The Artwork of the Future*, which together with its predecessor *Art and Revolution* indicates in itself the centrality of conscious progressiveness to the whole project. And the more innocuously named *Opera and Drama* actually extends their arguments further, a distinction being firmly drawn between corrupt contemporary entertainment (opera) and the authentic art form required to supersede it (drama). That Wagner bases a large part of his conception on the need to return to the principles of ancient Athenian tragedy, as he saw it, does not alter the essentially forward-looking nature of his approach, since the restoration of the lost values of the ancients is to be coupled with advances since made in drama (by Shakespeare) and in music (by Beethoven), the two further extended by the unprecedented interpenetration of each by the other, in order to result in an art form

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[38] Cf. Mann: "There are *reactionary* elements in Wagner, elements of backward-lookingness and obscurantist worship of the past; his fondness for the mystical and the ancient mythic-legendary, the Protestant nationalism of *Die Meistersinger* and the Catholicizing in *Parsifal*, his predilection for the Middle Ages, for the world of knights and princes, for miracles and burning religious faith – all this could be interpreted in this sense. And yet every instinct for the real and true nature of this artistic enterprise, directed wholly as it is towards renewal, change and emancipation, strictly forbids us to take its language and mode of expression literally, instead of for what it really is: an artistic idiom of a highly figurative kind, whose real purport at every turn is quite different and entirely revolutionary." (147–8)

[39] Spender's analysis of "the modern" offers many examples that reveal its romantic genealogy, such as "the idea that modern art might transform the contemporary environment, and hence, by pacifying and enobling its inhabitants, revolutionize the world" (84). Elsewhere, for example in his recognition of "The Alternate Life of Art. . . . [when] the processes of art are brought close to borderline ecstatic or sexual experiences. . . . the exaltation of violence, sexual relations, madness, drugs, through art which is regarded by the artists as a transition towards the actual experience of these states", Spender explicitly acknowledges a romantic forbear: "The tendency to seek such a compensation of life through art, and of art through life, was already present with Byron and Keats. Sensuality tinged with despair and anticipation of death produced a mood in which Keats regarded the taste of a peach or rose, with its further suggestion of a drug, as lines of poetry. Keats was tasting, I suggest, at these moments the sensation of his own being as a poet." (87–8) Cf. Tanner's reference to "people who have found Wagner's dramas superior to life, and in straightforward competition with it" (23–4).

surpassing all predecessors. A similar view is proposed by Mark Berry, who claims that "Wagner aimed not at a *restoration* of tragedy, but at its *renewal*" (*Treacherous Bonds and Laughing Fire: Politics and Religion in Wagner's* Ring 17).

The tendency to resort to revolutionary rhetoric was another notable hallmark of the romantic movement in general and has since become part of the way the whole period is characterised – as a radical reaction to the old order, signalled, in music at least, by Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony. His famous retraction of its dedication to Napoleon indicates better than anything else the unavoidable political dimension of the movement, its passionate revolutionary idealism. Something of this attitude is then found among most if not all composers of the succeeding generation until, with Wagner, it is applied with a rigour not seen before. It becomes, in effect, a *programme*.

As noted, the textbook features of romanticism tend to become exaggerated in Wagner. One might easily devote a disproportionate amount of attention to this, but a sufficient idea will be gained by considering Constant Lambert's amusing summation of the romantic view of the artist, again exemplified by Beethoven, as somebody "alternately bludgeoned by Fate and consoled by Platonic Love, the Beauties of Nature and Ultimate Faith in a Beneficent Providence" (*Music Ho!* 229).[40] In Wagner, it will readily be admitted, Fate does not so much bludgeon the artist as crucify him, Love is transcendentalised to a degree Plato had not envisaged, Nature is sublime rather than merely beautiful, and anthropomorphic Providence dissolves into a mystical infinitude that defies categorisation.

What is more, none of this is accidental or intended for merely picturesque effect. It is, rather, the expression of a complete world-view, profoundly coherent despite, and to some extent because of, the tensions existing within it, and held with unshakeable conviction. Some of its chief tenets might be put as follows: (1) There is no God in the traditionally accepted sense of a divine person, a supra-rational being; (2) Life,

[40] Cf. Berlin: "The figure who dominates the nineteenth century as an image is the tousled figure of Beethoven in his garret. Beethoven is a man who does what is in him. He is poor, he is ignorant, he is boorish. His manners are bad, he knows little, and he is perhaps not a very interesting figure, apart from the inspiration which drives him forward. But he has not sold out. He sits in his garret and he creates. He creates in accordance with the light which is within him, and that is all that a man should do; that is what makes a man a hero." (13)

unconscious nature, is sufficient in itself without Him, amoral, nurturing and eternally self-renewing; (3) It is nonetheless under considerable threat from humanity, which has increasingly severed itself from its source, largely through undue reliance on cerebration at the expense of intuitive awareness; (4) The process should duly be reversed, logically through such means as the unconditional abolition of law, property and the state, the practice of free love, mixed bathing, picnics,[41] communal brotherhood, collective creative enterprise and ritual re-enactments of myth; (5) This last is the special province of the true artist, who is blessed by nature with superabundant creativity, specifically akin to – and indeed accompanied by – exuberant male potency; (6) He is thus sharply distinguished from the numerous charlatans who attempt to cover their poverty and impotence through mere cleverness or ingenuity;[42] (7) Where they manufacture artefacts, forms without content, his art emanates from within him as the fruit from the tree, its content alone determining the form that it takes.

Further details concerning the choice of mythic subjects, the leitmotif, theatre design, politics, religion and race, to say nothing of vegetarianism and vivisection, can be gleaned by perusing Wagner's sometimes impenetrable prose writings, but this overview will be sufficient to show that it is a system cobbled together from many of the more progressive ideas of the previous

[41] These are not merely facetious additions. The original 1848 sketch for a drama on the Nibelung myth includes – surprisingly – notes for a scene featuring Wotan bathing with the Rhinedaughters. This, seen in tandem with the pervasive association between water and the erotic in Wagner's dramas, as well as his own penchant for "taking the waters" whenever possible, points to an underlying belief that bathing and sex are connected, and at the very least activities to be encouraged for the well-being of body and soul. Picnicking may seem further-fetched; there is nonetheless a precedent in *Götterdämmerung* III ii, in which Siegfried's death is led up to amid generally convivial *al fresco* relaxation, storytelling and replenishing of drink-horns. The context may seem a tragic one, but its ritual quality offsets this, establishing the hero's sacrifice as a necessary act of atonement and making it in many ways the logical culmination of his career of unconscious messiahship: despite Hagen's plot to frame him, Siegfried effortlessly wins the sympathy of the Gibichung court from his first appearance among them. By the time of the hunting-party, they hang on his every word and react to his murder with the choked unison outcry "Hagen, what deed is this?" (234) Although things inevitably go wrong, there is an underlying sense that Siegfried, in the generous manner of his life, is unintentionally teaching the others by his example.

[42] Northrop Frye was taking exception to this aspect of the romantic myth of the artist when he wrote (in 1957) that "[t]he conception of the critic as a parasite or artist *manqué* is still very popular, especially among artists. It is sometimes reinforced by a dubious analogy between the creative and the procreative functions, so that we hear about the 'impotence' and 'dryness' of the critic, of his hatred for genuinely creative people, and so on. The golden age of anti-critical criticism was the latter part of the nineteenth century, but some of its prejudices are still around." (*Anatomy of Criticism* 3)

century, often intensified to a more extreme form, deeply felt rather than clearly articulated, but harmonious and self-supporting to an unusual degree. Almost every essential feature proceeds logically from the underlying faith in instinct, in authentic feeling, spontaneous being and organic growth, free from all constraints, sublimely self-willed and self-justifying.

At the outset of his rigorous reassessment of the composer, Tanner argues "there is, if one understands what a perspective is, no such thing as getting someone, and *a fortiori* not Wagner, into *it*" (2). Part of the problem, perhaps, is that Wagner's *oeuvre* seems to resist being seen in anything other than the way it so forcefully presents itself: as the *inevitable* outcome of the cultural trend then prevailing in Europe. The mature works in particular offer a great summation of all that might be thought material to the nineteenth century consciousness. The *Ring* alone spans all of history, and appears to encapsulate almost all human activity:

> There is probably no more capacious work of art in existence. It can almost be said without facetiousness to be about everything. It begins with the emergence of Nature out of nothingness and ends with the destruction of the world. In between, various races of beings – gods, dwarfs, giants, humans and animals – interact with each other and with Nature in the multifarious ways of love, parenthood, play, work, assertions of dominance and independence, the creation of families, dynasties, societies, races; mutual succour and support, betrayal, mortal strife, conquest, failure, success. (Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 330–1)

At the same time, as if to supplement or augment the tetralogy, *Tristan* presents a tragic love story of unparalleled intensity, and *Meistersinger* a comedy of rare humanity and warmth, while *Parsifal* seems designed to crown the whole with its ethereal meditations on the infinite. Taken all together, these works, individually immense, produce an unusually satisfying impression of completeness.

In several places, Wagner's tendency towards an ultra-romanticism explodes into something strange and new, and it is just here that one discerns

the strongest foreshadowing of modernism.[43] When the romantic impulse, despite its commitment to excess, to continual self-surpassing, reaches saturation point, where its virile intensities of affirmation are sustained to the last degree of tolerability, collapse and exhaustion are inevitable – since to proceed further is to risk exceeding the human faculty of apprehension, hence to lapse into meaninglessness. (One suspects this is precisely what happened to many among Wagner's first audiences, and perhaps to not a few among those of the present day.) Where this collapse takes place, there arises an ambiguous bleakness, a disorderly raggedness, an asymmetry, that is closer in spirit to the twentieth century than anything in the nineteenth, at the same time as it approaches the timeless immensity of Shakespeare's tragedies. This is especially true of the works Wagner composed in his "post-Schopenhauer" period. One thinks, for instance, of the stark, almost atonal, worlds of suffering that are the third acts of *Tristan* and *Parsifal*, Sachs's musings in *Die Meistersinger* – seemingly irrelevant to the plot – on the vanity of all human endeavour, the irreconcilable clash of millennial promise and apocalyptic doom in *Götterdämmerung*.

Baudelaire, despite knowing only the earlier Wagner of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, was the first to identify the composer's modernity as such – this from an artist himself often identified as a father-figure of modernism proper. Baudelaire made no secret of his adulation for Wagner's music, which compared with that of Weber and Beethoven contained "something new which I was incapable of defining, and this incapacity caused me a rage and a curiosity mingled with a strange delight" (*The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* 118),[44] and he was similarly open in declaring symbolism

[43] Mann, in a letter to his friend Walter Opitz, describes the final scene of *Parsifal* as "the supreme triumph of Romanticism" and almost immediately continues "The music is the ultimate in modernism. Nobody has ever gone beyond it. Strauss's so-called 'progress' is all twaddle. Every one of them continues to feed and draw on *Parsifal*." (45)

[44] This distinguishing quality, since detected by so many, appears to have been that concreteness with which Wagner's music suggests an extra-musical subject. Baudelaire speaks of its "eloquent" capacity, a "power of suggestion" that allows it to overcome the alleged inability of music "to translate all or anything with precision, as can painting or writing" (113–14). As evidence, he offers three independent impressions of the *Lohengrin* prelude (those of the composer, his friend Liszt, and Baudelaire himself – formed prior to his acquaintance with the others), noting the way that all three describe "a sensation of *spiritual and physical bliss;* of *isolation;* of the contemplation of *something infinitely great and infinitely beautiful;* of an *intensity of light* which rejoices *the eyes and the soul until they swoon;* and finally a sensation of *space reaching to the furthest conceivable limits*" (117).

to be a deliberate attempt to apply Wagnerian effects to poetry. Both Raymond Furness and Stoddard Martin argue extensively for the existence of a line connecting Wagner, via symbolist poets and writers such as Verlaine, Mallarmé, Maeterlinck and Dujardin, to major modernist works like *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*.[45] Andrea Gogröf-Vorhees's *Defining Modernism*, on the other hand, draws a specific comparison between Baudelaire's reception of Wagner and Nietzsche's, speculating whether the latter may have been cognisant of the former. Nietzsche's violent, in many ways pathological,[46] vituperation of his erstwhile mentor is now commonly seen as being, at least in part, a posture necessary for him to achieve independence from a potentially overwhelming influence. Beneath the vitriol there is therefore a wealth of insight into the composer's unique significance for the age. According to Gogröf-Vorhees, what both Baudelaire and Nietzsche independently recognise about Wagner's work is that it marks a crisis in the way the nineteenth century sees itself, that far from being as affirmative as its musical splendours and spectacular effects may lead the unwary to suppose, it is critically subversive to a degree hardly any other canonical western art had even approached. One of many later developments to bear this out is the way several of the operas treat subjects that strongly foreshadow Freud: the incest taboo in *Die Walküre*, the extreme eroticisation of the death-instinct in *Tristan*, the oedipal mother-fixations of both Siegfried and Parsifal, and – also in *Parsifal* – the sublimation of sex into religion. (Gogröf-Voorhees notably defines Wagner's modernity as being determined "not by the choice of his subjects, but by his temperament" (102).)

[45] Historian Peter Gay, in his in-depth cultural survey *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy*, calls Dujardin "an involuntary pioneer" and his novel *Les Lauriers sont coupés* "a signal contribution to modernism", despite the fact that its author was "largely lost to the history of literature". Dujardin's invention of the interior monologue, explicitly adapted from Wagner, was acknowledged by Joyce after the triumphant publication of *Ulysses*. Gay's assessment of Dujardin's role clearly shows what a pivotal (and representative) role he played in the transition between the romantics and the modernists: "Dujardin, better known as an editor than as a novelist, was active in French writers' campaigns against prosaic literary and philosophical schools like Realism and positivism. Following the traditions established by the Romantics writing more than seventy-five years earlier, he wanted to participate in re-enchanting the world that, he believed, the Enlightenment had reduced to dry and boring materialism. In 1885, he was among the founders of *La Revue Wagnérienne*, and, in the following year, of *La Revue Indépendante*, both mouthpieces of the Symbolists, a small but influential band of avant-garde writers for whom Zola's Realism was not avant-garde enough." (188–9)

[46] See p 17 note 5.

Much of what I have said thus far suggests that Wagner's major works are something other than simply unusually long, intense and serious operas on mythological subjects, that there is something about them that makes them categorically different from other recognised masterworks in the repertory. Tanner even asserts that they have no place there at all and notes that

> [s]ome anti-Wagnerians, naturally not very large a proportion, realise that and wonder what these extraordinary works are doing existing alongside those of Mozart, Verdi, Puccini and Richard Strauss. Their hostility registers their awareness that he is out of place in their company – though that need not entail a value judgement. (98)

Tanner's point is clearly that Wagner's works are *sui generis*; they are not like conventional operas. Not that they are any more like spoken dramas either (despite Wagner's own preference for terming them "dramas" rather than "music-dramas" – the term that has stuck),[47] or non-dramatic musical works (though they have sometimes been compared, not unreasonably, to immense symphonies). They are, quite simply, unique – and it is worth considering in some detail what it is that makes them so, in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of what they *are*, and what they *teach*.

The reason commonly advanced, though it is in my view only part – and a secondary part at that – of the real reason, is Wagner's famous *modus operandi* of making music the means of serving the end of drama, not the other way round – something he felt was the great weakness of contemporary opera. That is to say, quite simply, that meaning in his works is expressed, not through the words alone, but through the music itself – and through the interplay of words *and* music. For music to *mean*, it must perforce become *language* – but this in effect is exactly what Wagner achieves, and with quite remarkable precision. Examples abound throughout his mature scores; one such – highly characteristic – is Isolde's description, in the first act of *Tristan und Isolde*, of the moment when Tristan first looked into her eyes. Without

[47] Both terms are generally used only with reference to the "mature" works identified above as comprising the last of the three groups in Wagner's *oeuvre*, those preceding them being still regarded as operas in the conventional sense (see p 15 note 4).

the music, or even with only the *vocal* music, the full significance of this encounter would not be apparent. This is not simply because Isolde *will* not say what really happened, because she is repressing her feelings, but because she *cannot*, other than to say "his helplessness troubled me sore" (34) – which plainly does not do them justice. What the music makes abundantly clear, however – through the magical effect of a solo viola playing a leitmotif not heard since the prelude but known hereafter as the "Gaze" or "Look" motif – is that this moment is the unutterably profound meeting of their two souls in mutual recognition of one another's suffering, the beginning, both inescapable and freely willed, of their love. The impossibility of verbalising this, and Isolde's subsequent attempts to deal with it, are obviously incommunicable through either words or music alone; it *requires* the interaction of both to achieve the final effect.[48]

Where Wagner's achievement becomes truly distinctive, however, is not in this impressively complex and subtle art of weaving words and music into drama – unique as that is – but in the manner in which this art is used, as a whole, to communicate his philosophy, his *Weltanschauung*, which is – both in its pre- and post-Schopenhauerian phases – of a piece with Calasso's "return of the gods" (9) and Berlin's "transformation of Western consciousness" (20). But since the impact of Schopenhauer upon Wagner's work was so momentous, resulting in what might be seen as a last added layer of significance in those of his works created (or at least completed) in its wake, it will first be helpful to consider his works prior to that impact, specifically how they already articulated – and amplified – the mythopoeic consciousness then prevailing in Europe.

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[48] Scruton offers a convincing close analysis of this passage, emphasising how precise details in the music are used to convey the subtlest psychological processes. Referring to Isolde's deliberate specification that Tristan's gaze fell "Not on the sword, nor on my hand, / But deep in the eyes he looked me", he comments: "The text and the music deftly remind us of a singular fact: that we look *at* inanimate objects, and we look *at* human limbs, but we look *into* someone's eyes, and every such look is compromising, fraught with significance, a face-to-face encounter with the other, and therefore a summons to hate or to love. . . . Wagner captures what is meant by a 'look into' another's eyes. The repeated G recalls the way in which a look first glimpses and then seizes the soul at which it is aimed, reaching in as though to grasp the tentative frail will and drag it to the surface, before releasing it with a sigh." (41)

This episode is also, of course, the clearest of those clues missed by Brangäne and that part of the audience which shares her belief that the potion *causes* Tristan and Isolde's love (see p 20 note 8).

That Wagner's work is mythic to the core is something no-one would dispute; it is the most obvious and distinctive thing about it, as is borne out by the inescapable association of his name with almost any modern treatment of the subject of myth. An especially prominent example is that no less an authority than Claude Lévi-Strauss (in the significantly named "Overture" to *The Raw and the Cooked*) attributed the inspiration for his system to

> my reverence, from childhood on, for 'that God, Richard Wagner.'[49] If Wagner is accepted as the undeniable originator of the structural analysis of myths (and even of folk-tales, as in *Die Meistersinger*), it is a profoundly significant fact that the analysis was made, in the first instance, *in music*. . . . Wagner's discovery that the structure of myths can be revealed through a musical score. (15)

It is the *Ring* that provides the touchstone. The literal content alone is derived from the Norse eddas, the *Volsungasaga*, the *Nibelungenlied* and other Old and Middle German sources. But even in his editorial choices, Wagner gravitates towards the timeless, scrupulously reversing historicising tendencies, for example in his avoidance of the second half of the *Nibelungenlied*, a dynastic epic of the fall of the Burgundians to Attila (Etzel), and his reversal of the complete poem's anachronism (evident for example in its depiction of Siegfried's wedding to Kriemhild in Worms cathedral). Beyond this, there is the thoroughgoing return to the *spirit* of myth, its primacy, its revivification of nature, its potent suggestivity of a pre-conscious awareness – an effect that is immeasurably enhanced by the music.[50]

None of this, of course, is accidental. From the outset, Wagner's conception of the *Ring* was bound up with the theories expressed in his prose works concerning the art form that would renew the spirit of ancient tragedy, of which myth naturally formed an essential part. Siegfried was seen at the planning stage as identical with a number of heroes, Friedrich Barbarossa, Achilles, Jesus and Wieland the Smith, on all of whom Wagner wrote prose sketches for potential dramatic or operatic works. Ultimately, these others

[49] An allusion to Mallarmé's sonnet "Hommage á Wagner".

[50] According to Furness, "Gerhart Hauptmann had claimed that such a work as the *Ring* stood by itself, apparently utterly beyond modernity and atavistic in its primitive pathos, a world-poem interlaced with music and prophecy" (93).

were abandoned in favour of Siegfried, who Wagner came to see as embodying them all. John Deathridge plausibly concludes from this that all myths were as one to Wagner, that one hero was as good as another: "Wagner's socialist ideas about love, power and property wandered from one subject to the next almost oblivious of their context. Christian or pagan? Greek or German? For Wagner, it did not seem to matter" ("The Ring: An Introduction" 4). This tends to overlook, or blur, the fact that in the end it *does* matter, and not only because Wagner eventually opts for Siegfried.

Considerable light is thrown on the matter by taking into account Wagner's earlier treatment of mythic material. What tends to happen in the pre-*Ring* operas is that a "real world" setting is used – augmented in both *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* by specifically historical periods and characters (respectively the thirteenth-century poets Wolfram von Eschenbach and Walther von der Vogelweide, and the tenth-century monarch and nation-builder Henry the Fowler). These "middle period" works[51] all feature realistically portrayed human communities involved in various aspects of the business of living: work, recreation, entertainment, courtship, marriage, family life, comradeship, maintaining law and order, policy and statecraft, defence of the realm, religious observance. The subject matter here is that of *social* existence; everybody knows what his purpose is and gets on with fulfilling it, but there is a certain naivety in this, or a failure of imagination: life is commonplace, but nobody minds or even notices. This then forms the background for the radically disruptive emergence of the protagonist – someone who is, above all else, *not* portrayed realistically. The Dutchman, for example, is a man who literally cannot die, but longs to do so nonetheless, because he is compelled (it is not clear how) to spend his unending existence sailing a phantom ship. Tannhäuser is an orphic figure whose singing magically opens the way to an erotic underworld, where the love-goddess herself unstintingly bestows her favours on him. Lohengrin is sent into the world by the Holy Grail (again in a way that is never clearly specified) to champion the downtrodden and fight injustice, being endowed by the Grail with superhuman power, knowledge and virtue. The subject matter now is

[51] See p 14 note 4.

individual experience – of an intense and extraordinary kind that, it is strongly implied, is only available to those with the vision and daring to confront forces that could potentially obliterate the safe snug world of everyday existence. There is in each case a distinct element of *surrender* – to some overwhelming, non-human and vastly *super*-human power that most of us are aware of only on the fringes of consciousness but prefer, in the interests of self-preservation, to keep firmly at arm's length.

The drama thus involves a clash of conflicting worlds. The protagonist always attempts, for varying reasons, to conceal the truth about himself for as long as possible, but the dramatic resolution always hinges on the inevitability of its catastrophic revelation. When this happens, it is as if the veil is momentarily swept aside, allowing the astonished, alarmed or awestruck bystanders a fleeting glimpse into the "other" world. The opera then typically ends with a disquieting suggestion of asking "Who was that masked man?" – implying an impossibility of things ever being the same again. There *is* a realm beyond the ordinary, both fearful and wonderful, and our predictable lives can only seem diminished by the contrast.

When one turns to the world of the *Ring*, an immediate difference is apparent. The former disruption between historical "real world" setting and mythical "other world" phenomenon has given way to an all-subsuming unity of vision, whereby the audience is transported *en masse*, so to speak, *into* the other world. While parts of the cycle (specifically *Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung*) do feature more-or-less realistically portrayed human societies (in an early iron-age setting), this is effectively contained – and thus absorbed – within the mythic dimension of the whole. It is a world, in other words, shaped by the gods – and other non-human entities – before human beings even come into existence (they are entirely absent from the first part, *Das Rheingold*). And while the gods themselves are all-too-human and at any rate embody such fundamentally human concepts as law, marriage, contracts, oathbreaking, betrayal, punishment, atonement, forgiveness, sacrifice and so on, these very concepts are thus presented in a *primarily* mythic, hence non-realistic, way. In other words, they are presented less as examples than as essences. The building of Valhalla, for example, does not represent the founding of any historical civilisation; it is civilisation *itself* in an

ideal form. It is even *necessary* to portray the world in these terms in order to show concepts that might originate with human beings but nonetheless transcend them. Civilisation in its eternal aspect is an idea before which the individual appears to dwindle into insignificance; the obverse to this, however, is that the individual too has an eternal aspect, and in Siegfried it is shown to triumph eternally over civilisation.

But this subsumption of the real into the mythic – the *un*-real or *super*-real – is only half the picture. The more purely *other*-worldly regions of experience – of the kind we saw breaking through into everyday life in the earlier operas – are here the very substance of the whole. This is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the necessarily mysterious beginning of the entire work, its musical evocation in the opening bars of the *Rheingold* prelude of the imperceptibly gradual emergence of the universe from nothingness. As this is not an event that could ever be depicted in literal terms, since it completely eludes human understanding, it establishes the context of the entire work as properly metaphysical. But since the universe self-evidently does exist, it brings us uncomfortably face-to-face with the inescapable reality that our own existence is an insoluble mystery, no matter how much we attempt to bury our awareness of this in the relative safety and familiarity of our everyday affairs. This is, nonetheless, just the beginning. As stated above, the principal shift between the *Ring* and its predecessors is that it presents the "other" world, or higher consciousness, not as something in the distance, flickering on the fringes of our awareness, but as already here. And so the vision of the prelude does not recede (as in *Lohengrin*) but is concretised in actuality, in the primordial depths of the Rhine, its flowing waters, amoral, sensual nymphs and warmly radiant sunlit gold comprising a composite portrayal of the immersion of consciousness in nature: the senses of the beholder are, so to speak, submerged, awash with sensation, saturated in pleasure that is both pure and physical, even quasi-erotic, and hence edenic.[52]

[52] Here, as throughout the music-dramas, we should not be surprised to find echoes of Judeo-Christian myth subsumed into Wagner's essentially atheist world-view (see pp 46–7). This is in fact another aspect of the "double focus" of his works (see pp 18ff): they (in some cases) espouse an apparently Christian point-of-view, but this is simply a part of their subject matter and should by no means be construed as making them Christian works. Cf. Magee:

But that which is opposed to this golden joy, the greed, envy, lust and anger of Alberich, with all the hatred, death and destruction they lead to, is equally presented as part of the same world, a corruption that arises quite as spontaneously as the original purity. In other words, both poles are mythic; there is infernal blackness, but no limbo, no flat and superficial "here-and-now" world as in the former works. That Alberich's use of the Ring to transform Nibelheim into an industrial hell is obviously a pertinent comment on the modern world does not alter this. As with Valhalla and the gods, the topical, the realistic, is subsumed under the category of the eternally symbolic. What is presented is not simply an *instance* of industrial slave labour; it is the internalised experience of it, the full horror of lives reduced to incessant pounding at anvils amid smoke and flame for the enrichment of an unseen overlord – the idea of hell made concrete.

Nonetheless, it remains an unmistakably modern hell – one that could not have been imagined in a pre-industrial age.[53] We are looking at our own all-too-familiar world viewed through a mythic lens. The effect is thus not one of being spirited away to a faraway escapist fantasy – quite the reverse. Rather, it is that we have been made to inhabit the visionary consciousness that the earlier operas allowed only brief glimpses into – and to see what the world looks like when viewed from it. Thus, every aspect of life is present, but stripped of the filter of literalness, that mode of seeing, dulled by habit, where

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"[Wagner] never became religious in the normal meaning of the term. Attempts to represent him later as a Christian are not only mistaken in themselves but make a full understanding of his work impossible" (*Wagner and Philosophy* 123). This is even the case with *Parsifal*, whose "apparently Christian content" consists not only of "verbal references in the text: it includes two spectacular and solemn enactments on the stage of something that appears very like mass or holy communion" (280). And not only that, there is also the overwhelmingly sacramental atmosphere of the music. Despite all of this, however, there remains no doubt that the essence of the work is not Christian but Schopenhauerian, and "it is not possible to be a Schopenhauerian and a Christian" (278).

[53] "The brutality and relentlessness of the anvils' pounding rhythm, which we hear during the descent to Nibelheim, is quite unlike anything music has previously experienced – quite unlike anything the pre-industrial world could have conceived. . . . Wagner's anvil 'music' is arguably more radical in its use of 'noise' than any music before Varèse. . . . The despotism of capital represented nothing less than a hell intensified by modern technology." (Berry 100–102)

everything is an object merely; instead, it appears charged with significance: as bathing in sunlit water is an ecstatic return to Eden, so working on the factory floor is a term spent in Tartarus.

And so it continues with the rest of the cycle. The heroism that emerges in opposition to Alberich's villainy might seem especially larger than life, but it nonetheless captures something real in us – even if it is just the need to feel bigger than we are, and to imagine that becoming so is (in *some* sense) achievable. We are stirred, in other words, by the *idea* of a messianic *Űbermensch*, just as we are shaken by the spectacle of his martyrdom, and profoundly moved by the final transcendence achieved by Brünnhilde. There is, in fact, much to be gained from a full length exploration of exactly how the *Ring* (and Wagner's other works) can be applied to our own lives, can become as Tanner says "something to live with and slowly be affected by" (210), though this is, needless to say, not the place for it. What does require emphasis here is that all the chief features of the cycle, as outlined above, express feelings and ideas that hold the most direct and pertinent significance for the modern world (and as such are compellingly relevant to modernist authors).

What is true for the *Ring* applies equally to the other mature dramas. *Tristan* is (like the later *Parsifal*) even more obviously dehistoricised than the *Ring* – where mythical time functions, as we have seen, as an analogue for human history, and even *Die Meistersinger*, in which Wagner appears to abandon his usual pretentions and deal exclusively with real people for a change (the setting, period and (most) protagonists are strictly historical) is in this respect an illusion. According to Peter Hohendahl "a lost *Heimat* that possibly never existed" (43), Wagner's Nuremberg is a quasi-historical image of the rooted cultural community as an earthly paradise, hence quite as thoroughly mythic as the brooding landscapes of the *Ring*. It is in other words to be distinguished from the pre-1848 operas, where the mythic manifests – with alarming effect – in the everyday world. Instead, the everyday world itself – the world of work, family and social life familiar enough to us all – takes on a transforming glow that enables us to see it as if with new eyes.

But what really lay at the root of this tension between mythic and historical time? Mythic subjects had not been found in opera much since the

baroque, when they were anachronistically set in a gilded neoclassical present, decked out with every kind of decorative artifice and generally aimed at lauding the glory of the sovereign and upholding the status quo – the exact opposite of Wagner's aim. His roots in German romanticism were to lead him, via the fairy-tale world of Weber's *Oberon* and *Euryanthe*, with their dim woodland groves and wistful lovers, to a more sustained engagement with the dynamics of fantasy and the real, with appearance and essence.

To reiterate, the subjects and settings of Wagner's "middle period" operas associate historical time with the "real" world – that is, with more-or-less ordinary people engaged in work and play, social interaction, personal development and political activity. Mythical figures intruding upon this world and interacting with it embody contrastingly internal, psychological experiences of unusual intensity: alienation, overwhelming erotic passion, mystical (and quasi-erotic) revelation. Such experiences, it is strongly implied, are the natural province of the romantic artist, whose task – regarded by others with both dismay and delight – is to disrupt and transform the world they normally inhabit. Both inner and outer levels of experience are equally timeless; both are intrinsic parts of human existence, as relevant in Wagner's day as in our own and for the foreseeable future. In other words, the apparently historical in Wagner is no less symbolic or allegorical in function than the mythic: a literal setting in the tenth or thirteenth century (presented with detailed verisimilitude)[54] metaphorically signifies the unchanging present.

The essential distinction these works make between history and myth, then, is not that one is true and the other merely fabulous, but that one concerns itself with, broadly speaking, sociological, the other with psychological, questions. No less than myth, history itself is a metaphor – for the proverbial "real" world of socio-political action, where myth penetrates to the hidden depths of individual being, the direct apprehension of life. Stylistically, too, the two modes are distinct: "history", which always provides the frame, the norm upon which "myth" intrudes, is presented in fairly conventional theatrical terms – through clearly delineated, two-dimensional characters with blunt, wholly articulate motives, through foursquare,

[54] For *Tannhäuser*, for instance, Wagner required the set designers to paint the mediaeval castle of the Wartburg from life.

undistinguished verses and commonplace, though always effective, operatic mannerisms; "myth" defines itself by contrast through the appearance of impossibility, the suspension of natural laws and accompaniment of signs and wonders, through more sophisticated or daring poetic devices and truly distinctive, richly textured, harmonically adventurous, "symphonic" scoring.

The departure marked by the *Ring* and the other mature dramas – from "partly" to "fully" mythic – is a movement from works that dramatise the conflict between vision and conformity to ones in which the visionary element is dominant. This is why Deathridge's view that "it did not seem to matter" (4) which particular mythic subject or ethos Wagner opted for[55] is potentially misleading. Deathridge suggests that, for Wagner, "Friedrich [Barbarossa] was not a historical, but a mythological figure like Siegfried" (ibid.) Mythological, perhaps, but not altogether like Siegfried. The trouble with Barbarossa was that he was at some level unavoidably historical; any operatic treatment of him[56] would, one imagines, have been closer in spirit to *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* than the work Wagner ultimately went on to produce. Siegfried, on the other hand, as a hero predating, or transcending, historical time altogether, would belong entirely to the world beyond everyday experience. Where Barbarossa, like the heroes of the earlier operas, would have embodied a potent personality impressing itself forcefully on more ordinary mortals, and on human society in general, Siegfried would inhabit a sphere where everything is charged with preternatural significance.

As Wagner's *summa*, the *Ring* would have to transcend culture as well as history, and Siegfried absorb all other (relevant) heroes; Achilles would find in him a natural Teutonic counterpart (both heroes enjoy a fatally flawed invulnerability, and are seen as inherently nobler than the gods responsible for their tragic fates) and Wieland's Daedalean wings would transmute effortlessly into Siegfried's sword Nothung.[57] Most significantly of all, Jesus –

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[55] See p 53.
[56] Wagner in fact never envisaged an *opera* on the subject at all, merely a spoken drama.
[57] Wagner's "Wieland" sketch dates from almost a year later than his other "alternatives" to the *Ring*, following his flight into exile and completion of his revolutionary treatise *The Artwork of the Future*. Transparently intended as an allegory of the triumphant artist, Wieland – like his classical counterpart Daedalus – forges the wings he needs to fly to freedom, thereby becoming an embodiment of the ardent aspirations of the people, their hope in a renewal and a rebirth yet to come. It seems likely (to me at least) that drafting this scenario when he did may well have suggested the idea of prefacing "The Death of Siegfried" with a contrasting

dehistoricised and translated to a pagan universe – would provide the ultimate motivation behind the hero's origin: a figure of outstanding, indeed unique, innocence, Siegfried is betrayed to his death for money; Brünnhilde, free of this baser motive, nonetheless sanctions his murder with the claim that "all the blood of the world never could wash out your guilt, but the one man's death . . . shall atone for all" (*Götterdämmerung* 181–2); during the build-up to his death, Siegfried repeats the words from the Cross, "I thirst" (220), and when the cup is offered to him with the warning that it contains only his own blood, he responds by pouring more wine into it with the words "Our blended blood flows over; to earth, our mother, refreshment let it bring" (222);[58] and after his death, Brünnhilde apostrophises Wotan, saying:

> The deed of deeds he wrought,
> Worked the wish of thine heart;
> Then on the hero laid'st thou the load
> Of the curse that of old consumed thee. (259–60)

That is to say, he atones for Wotan's original sin; in Siegfried, it is clear, Wagner is foregrounding the Christ-parallels only implicit in his earlier heroes.

In one of his finest passages, Mann explores the way this myth is encoded into the very score of the *Ring*:

> The overpowering accents of the music that accompanies Siegfried's funeral cortège no longer speak of the woodland boy who set out to learn the meaning of fear; they speak to our emotions of what is *really* passing away behind the lowering veils of mist: it is the sun-hero himself who lies upon the bier,

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lighter work, "The Young Siegfried", since this would in turn absorb the motif of the hero as artist. In forging his own sword (in contrast to the mediaeval sources where this servile labour is invariably relegated to the dwarf), Siegfried himself now becomes the ideally free architect of revolution, thereby preparing the way for his sacrificial martyrdom in the following drama. (Incidentally, this suggests that the "Wieland" idea was instrumental in expanding the envisaged single opera into the tetralogy we know today.)

According to Vicki Mahaffey, it was "Wieland the Smith" as well as *Siegfried* that influenced Joyce's treatment of Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait*: like Stephen, "Wieland longs for his freedom and deplores his slavery to his countrymen, and he takes inspiration for flight from the flight of the swan-maiden. He uses his art to forge wings for himself, and the [projected] opera ends with his triumphant flight." ("Wagner, Joyce and Revolution" 243)

[58] Cf. Kitcher and Schacht: "[I]t may be no accident that Siegfried echoes the words of Christ on the Cross ('*Mich dürstet* [I thirst]'), or that his drinking-horn spills over, to 'bring refreshment' to 'Mother Earth.' . . . He is a sacrificial victim, whose own ending makes possible the many-sided act in which Brünnhilde expresses her ultimate love. His death is not only the demise of the dream of The Hero, but also an offering to love, in the service of love, gaining its meaning from the coming transfiguration and epiphany of love." (188–9)

> slain by the pallid forces of darkness – and there are hints in the text to support what we *feel* in the music: "A wild boar's fury", it says, and: "Behold the cursed boar", says Gunther, pointing to Hagen, "who slew this noble flesh." The words take us back at a stroke to the very earliest picture-dreams of mankind. Tammuz and Adonis, slain by the boar, Osiris and Dionysus, torn asunder to come again as the Crucified One, whose flank must be ripped open by a Roman spear in order that the world might know Him – all things that were and ever shall be, the whole world of beauty sacrificed and murdered by wintry wrath, all is contained within this single glimpse of myth. So let it not be said that the creator of *Siegfried* broke faith with himself when he gave us *Parsifal*. (100)[59]

No-one listening to the Funeral Music is likely to deny that Mann has here expressed its essence; there is a sense of outrage in its jagged repeated chords, of violent shock – as if at something that *ought not to have been*, which in its very dreadfulness attains religious significance. Long before *The Golden Bough*, Wagner's vision here is of the unity of several myths, and perhaps even of their prehistoric origin.[60]

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[59] Mann is here defending Wagner against Nietzsche's characterisation of him as "suddenly breaking down in surrender before the Cross of Christ" (94) (see p 18). He might also have added that the Christian appearance of *Parsifal* should by no means be taken at face value, that if anything it conceals a world-view inimical to orthodox Christianity (see p 56 note 52).

[60] This is evidently what is implied in Mann's description of mankind's "very earliest picture-dreams" – a clear allusion to Frazer's hugely influential theory of vegetation ritual as the root of myth and religion, which Wagner in this respect appears to have foreshadowed. The eminent Frazerian Jessie Weston (whose work *From Ritual to Romance* T.S. Eliot credited with inspiring *The Waste Land*), after a lifetime spent on studying several of the mediaeval texts that Wagner had used as sources, felt it necessary to point out a seemingly obvious, yet easily overlooked, fact: the Grail and the sacred spear found in these romances (and in Wagner's *Parsifal*) "are sex symbols of immemorial antiquity and world-wide diffusion, the Lance, or Spear, representing the Male, the Cup, or Vase, the Female, reproductive energy" (75); they "were originally 'Fertility' emblems, and as such employed in a ritual design to promote, or restore, the activity of the reproductive energies of Nature" (99). Interpreted literally, such rituals evidently refer to the sexual act itself, the actual generation of life in the womb; metaphorically, they appear to point via the sexual symbolism to the mysterious cause of *all* life, and to the sense of divine mystery associated with it: "The Exoteric side of the cult gives us the Human, the Folk-lore, elements – the Suffering King; the Waste Land; the effect upon the Folk; the task that lies before the hero; the group of Grail symbols. The Esoteric side provides us with the Mystic Meal, the Food of Life, connected in some mysterious way with a Vessel which is the centre of the cult; the combination of that vessel with a Weapon, a combination bearing a well-known 'generative' significance; a double initiation into the source of the lower and higher spheres of Life." (158–9)

That the striking coincidence of Weston's ideas with Mann's was unconsciously picked up by Furness is evident from the way he unwittingly plagiarises Mann's phrases and argument: "For Miss Weston the grail legends are not necessarily Christian but are associated with ancient fertility rites, and Wagner, though heavily indebted to Christian ritual in *Parsifal*, likewise seems to touch upon more ancient archetypes. It can be claimed that his gaze encompassed the whole world of slain and martyred loveliness, and the most ancient sacrifices are invoked: Adonis slain by the wild boar and Siegfried, whom Hagen claimed had

Near impossible as it is to reduce the complex of ideas we have been involved with here to a single kernel of thought, the closest one may perhaps come to that ideal aim is to see Wagner as belonging to (perhaps even being the outstanding member of) a movement that seeks to return humanity to a pre-historic, and therefore non-historic, mentality, of the type described by Mircea Eliade as "abolishing history" altogether:

> [Traditional / archetypal ceremonies] suspend the flow of profane time, of duration, and project the celebrant into a mythical time, *in illo tempore*. We have seen that all rituals imitate a divine archetype and that their continual reactualization takes place in one and the same atemporal mythical instant . . . . [which] tends to restore the initial instant, the plenitude of a present that contains no trace of history. (*The Myth of the Eternal Return* 76)

While it might be thought impossible, or at the very least wildly impractical, for modern humans to think in this way, something of the kind might nonetheless be attempted – on an experimental basis so to speak.

> It is the profound meaning of primitive behavior that is revelatory; this behaviour is governed by belief in an absolute reality opposed to the profane world of "unrealities"; in the last analysis, the latter does not constitute a "world," properly speaking; it is the "unreal" *par excellence*, the uncreated, the nonexistent: the void.
>
> Hence we are justified in speaking of an archaic ontology, and it is only by taking this ontology into consideration that we can succeed in understanding – and hence not scornfully dismissing – even the most extravagant behavior on the part of the primitive world; in fact, this behavior corresponds to a desperate effort not to lose contact with *being*. (92)

Eliade here intersects (I am tempted to say overlaps) most opportunely with Schopenhauer, for whom history "approximates in all respects to a work of fiction" and

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met a similar end; the mutilated Christ, whose side was pierced by a Roman spear, and the dismembered Dionysus. T.S. Eliot's waste land, a desert of meaningless husks and former beliefs, owes much to *From Ritual to Romance*, and it is the Parsifal of Wolfram and Wagner which fed the basic arguments of that book. The mythical method is seen again most vividly in Virginia Woolf . . . her Percival hearkens back, across the *Waste Land* to *Parsifal*, the wild hunting song and the breaking of bread" (91).

> always has for its object only the particular, the individual fact, and regards this as the exclusively real, [so that] it is the direct opposite and counterpart of philosophy, which considers things from the most universal point of view, and has the universal as its express object. . . . Whereas history teaches us that at each time something different has been, philosophy endeavours to assist us to the insight that at all times exactly the same thing was, is, and will be. In truth, the essence of human life, as of nature everywhere, exists complete in every present time. (v2.441)

As for "the Hegelian pseudo-philosophy that is everywhere so pernicious and stupefying to the mind", its practitioners are

> glorifiers of history . . . and consequently shallow fellows and Philistines incarnate. In addition, they are really bad Christians, for the true spirit and kernel of Christianity, as of Brahmanism and Buddhism also, is the knowledge of the vanity of all earthly happiness, complete contempt for it, and the turning away to an existence of quite a different, indeed an opposite, kind. (v2.442–4)

According to this, myth might indeed be seen as a form of philosophy, and certainly more "true" than history. In any event, one can easily appreciate how Wagner, having abandoned history for myth with a vengeance, would have been ripe for an encounter with the philosophy that was to so dramatically change his life, and the direction of his work.

Wagner before and after Schopenhauer

We are now in a position to state *what* claims Wagner's works make about the world, and *how* they do so. Magee, as we have seen,[61] forcefully reiterates the signal importance that reading *The World as Will and Representation* had for the whole of Wagner's subsequent career. At the same time, Magee also acknowledges that Wagner was quite justified in his claim to have unconsciously pre-empted Schopenhauer's views in the works

[61] Pp 31–2.

he had composed thus far (in 1854), so that it was less a case of his changing his outlook than it was of his clearly understanding for the first time what it was that that outlook really amounted to. The strongest evidence for this is to be found in the operas themselves. Over the thirteen-year period immediately prior to reading Schopenhauer, he had produced three relatively conventional works, *The Flying Dutchman* (1841–2), *Tannhäuser* (1843–5), and *Lohengrin* (1845–8),[62] had intermittently written the complete text for *The Ring* (1848–51), and composed the music for it as far as the first act of *The Valkyrie* (1853–4). In all this body of work, completed before Wagner had even heard of Schopenhauer, there are several characters, scenes and situations that foreshadow his philosophy quite markedly (as will be considered more closely in due course). Then, concurrently with reading and then voraciously re-reading *The World as Will*, Wagner continued work on the second and third acts of *The Valkyrie* and the first two acts of *Siegfried*, before reaching the critical decision, in 1856, to shelve the whole project until he had reconsidered it in the light of his conversion, instead proceeding to create the unambiguously Schopenhauerian masterpiece *Tristan und Isolde* (1856–9). Two later works, *Die Meistersinger* (1861–7) and *Parsifal* (1877–81), though both originally conceived as early as 1845, are also written from a consciously Schopenhauerian perspective and are thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his philosophy. The problem case, clearly, is *The Ring*, which Wagner went back to and completed after a break of twelve years (in 1868–74).

Now the standard view of *The Ring* is that Wagner continued to compose it in the optimistic utopian spirit of Feuerbach right up until the end of Act II of *Siegfried* – the point where he broke off – and then resumed work, from Act III on to *Götterdämmerung*, in subdued Schopenhauerian mood. Moreover, it is still quite widely repeated that Wagner changed the ending of the work in keeping with his changed outlook. The truth of the matter is that Wagner had in fact altered the originally optimistic ending (in which Valhalla is not destroyed and Brünnhilde leads Siegfried there after his death) almost at the planning stage (around 1849), understandably finding it deeply

[62] See p 14 note 4.

inadequate – so that it is, like the earlier operas, a case of him *foreshadowing* Schopenhauer. And while it is true that he would later write new words for Brünnhilde's final scene, the so-called "Schopenhauer ending", in the end he decided not to set them, believing that their spirit was sufficiently captured in the music. Magee even believes that Wagner's musical powers enabled him to modify the meaning of the words he had written *without* needing to change the words themselves.

> When Wagner discovered *The World as Will and Representation* he had still to compose more than half the music of *The Ring*. And although his reading of Schopenhauer may not have brought about any changes in the text, its influence on the music, and on the synthesis of the music with the drama, was prodigious. (*The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 347)

It is clear that Magee is not referring only to the ending, which was not to be set to music until 1874. In fact, Magee goes so far as to claim that Schopenhauer's influence on the *music* of *The Ring* may have begun almost immediately, from as early as the third act of *Walküre* (1854–5), certainly from the first two acts of *Siegfried* (1855–7). While this certainly is persuasive, it does not change the all-important fact that Wagner did not yet know how music alone could *sufficiently* change the work as a whole to bring it in line with his new set of beliefs. There is some doubt as to whether even the more experienced composer of twelve years later was fully successful in this, whether it is *possible* for the increasing complexity of the score to alter the meaning of the earlier parts; there is no denying that the tetralogy ends with a spiritual outlook fundamentally different from that with which it began. Far from seeing this as an irreparable flaw, however, it is usually conceded that this shift contributes greatly to the fascination the cycle continues to generate. Apart from anything else, it might readily be observed that it actually *dramatises* a conversion to the philosophy of Schopenhauer; something of the kind is certainly evident in the characterisation of Wotan, the drama's chief protagonist. (He progresses from being the blind slave of his will in *Rheingold*, through bitterly despairing over its frustration in *Walküre*, to arriving at a deeply felt resignation in *Siegfried*.)

The essential question is just what it is that Schopenhauer changes Wagner's mind about. It will be remembered that we had already proposed reducing the content of *The World as Will* to three rather drastic propositions:[63]

1) The world is a bad place; and
2) Nothing can be done to change this; but (fortunately)
3) It doesn't really exist.

Now, the claim most commonly made about Wagner in relation to this is that his original view, the one he held prior to reading Schopenhauer, was essentially agreement with point 1, disagreement with point 2, and – insofar as it is mentioned at all[64] – blissful ignorance of point 3. That is, then, that the world, taken for granted as really existing, is a bad place but that this can be changed – albeit only by the most strenuous exertions. Hence, the crucial alteration in his outlook – the one that so drastically affected the final outcome of the *Ring* – was his conversion to agreement with point 2. In other words, it is assumed that he had always believed the world could still be saved, hence his involvement in the Dresden uprising and his frequent outpourings of revolutionary rhetoric. Reading *The World as Will* completely disabused him of this notion, by persuading him that the root of evil is existence itself, that all resistance is useless and therefore tragically misguided, and that there is nothing for it but a bleak and hopeless resignation. Tanner, for instance, has it that

> Wagner put himself into a strange position by converting to Schopenhauerianism in the middle of creating the *Ring*, for that work is crucially concerned to show how we might move from a law-governed to a love-governed society . . . . Yet in the end the prospects for any society whatever are null. (107)

[63] See p 36.

[64] Most writers on the subject, from Nietzsche onwards, mischaracterise Wagner's conversion as being essentially from optimism to pessimism, and generally overlook the vital role played by the doctrine of transcendental idealism. Magee alone seems to have clarified the matter, though Tanner hints at it when he states that Schopenhauer's "profoundest influence on Wagner [may have been to teach him that] the belief that there are separate individuals is one that applies only to phenomena" (105).

In my view, however, such an account is severely limited – as is borne out by an examination of the operas themselves.

First of all, *The Flying Dutchman* – the work that can be seen with hindsight to present in its most straightforward form the basic premise underlying all the others – tells the story of a man who longs to die, but cannot, and must instead endure life for endless ages, a life that consists of being eternally battered by furious tempests.[65] This is, all too evidently, intensely pessimistic, a violent and bitter rejection of life on any terms; it also locates the cause of all the trouble in the Will: the Dutchman suffers because he insists on striving, but he has no choice, indeed is heroic in that he refuses to settle for a less difficult existence. What is crucial is that this inevitable striving is Sisyphean in nature: it leads nowhere, achieves nothing, and cannot be overcome by anything short of death – the negation of the world, and hence hardly a *positive* improvement of its fundamental condition.

Tannhäuser, similarly, tells of a man who suffers primarily on account of his sex drive – the Will at its most irresistible – and whose salvation again lies only in renunciation and death. *Lohengrin*, by way of variation, features a potential redeemer – but one who is forced, through a lack of faith on the part of those he redeems, to return to where he came from, leaving the world much as it was before.

The *Ring* presents us with an altogether more complicated scenario. Its chief purpose appears to be to diagnose exactly what it is that is wrong with the world (it is taken for granted that there is something very badly wrong with it), and then to propose a solution. The problem (largely outlined in *Rheingold*) is the greed for power, which causes men to prey upon one another, to despoil the natural world, to diminish their own capacity for self-growth, and to generally make the world an unsafe and unhappy place. So far, clearly, the Will is once again seen as the root of the problem. Indeed it is

[65] This, the most obvious instance of Wagner foreshadowing Schopenhauer, is alluded to in a letter he wrote to Liszt in which he described the philosopher's impact on him: "When I think back on the storms which have buffeted my heart and on its convulsive efforts to cling to some hopes in life – against my own better judgement – indeed, now that these storms have swelled so often to the fury of a tempest – I have yet found a sedative which has finally helped me sleep at night; it is the sincere and heartfelt yearning for death; total unconsciousness, complete annihilation, the end of all dreams, the only ultimate redemption" (*Letters* v1.274).

hard to conceive of a more perfect embodiment of the Will than the central figure, Wotan, driven as he is by an overmastering ambition to subjugate the world to his vision and purpose. As the work progresses, and Wotan experiences one frustration and disappointment after another, it grows even more apparent that the Will is divided against itself, and leads to nothing but suffering.

This is only half of the picture, however. There is still hope for the world – or so it seems – and it keeps resurfacing, no matter how violently it gets crushed. It first emerges with those characters who have no interest in power and who dedicate their lives to love and freedom, beginning with Siegmund and Sieglinde in the first act of *Walküre*, then Brünnhilde in the second and third acts, and finally – as it seems at that point – with the eponymous hero in *Siegfried*, whose invincibility and imperturbability appear to have comprehensively triumphed over the forces of darkness. But even though Wagner abandoned work on the cycle at its most hopeful point, the text that had yet to be set (and that he would finally decide did *not* need changing) already shows this hope to be ambiguous at best, if not wholly deceptive; Siegfried is destined to die, and Brünnhilde with him, and all the gods to go to their fiery end. It is true that all these deaths are presented as sacrificial acts of atonement and renunciation, that through them the curse of the gold is annulled and the world redeemed from its evil forever, so that the ending, while tragic, remains affirmative. But this simply shows once again, this time in vastly more detail, and therefore more emphatically, what was already implicit in *The Flying Dutchman*: that there *is* no final hope in programmes of reform or revolutions, or indeed in any form of action whatsoever, but only in resignation, in self-overcoming, in *denial* of the Will. What is lost materially is compensated for by an immense gain in spiritual insight, in wisdom, in understanding and in peace.

On the face of it, then, it appears as if Wagner didn't really need Schopenhauer to teach him anything, that his enthusiastic reaction to his philosophy resulted simply from the way it confirmed what he already knew, and presented solid and rigorous arguments to back it up. If this is true, it suggests that the standard view – that Wagner agreed with proposition 1 (that the world is a bad place) but that it was Schopenhauer who taught him

proposition 2 (that nothing can be done to change this), thereby disabusing him of his former naïve optimism – is simply incorrect. As we have seen, neither the Flying Dutchman nor Tannhäuser can be freed from their afflictions unless they die, and Lohengrin is obliged to leave unredeemed the world that has rejected him. So far, this is a sorry catalogue of failures. And, in the *Ring*, which seems to leave no stone unturned in its effort to find a final solution, a hero who will conquer all, a love that will redeem all, everything still ends with general death and destruction. Of the anonymous crowd of figures who do survive the apocalypse, there is perhaps a suggestion that they will be inspired by Siegfried and Brünnhilde's example to renounce all possessions and live in a free community governed only by brotherly love, but there is no guarantee of this. In any event, the redemption that has resulted consists, yet again, in dying, in sacrifice, in surrender, in letting go and giving up, in final acceptance that there is no further possibility of trying to mend that which is irreparably damaged, and that the best thing for the world is that it should end altogether.

In other words, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that Wagner already believed, before reading Schopenhauer, both that the world is a bad place *and* that nothing can be done to change this. What there is no indication of whatsoever, though, as will be glaringly obvious, is any prior awareness, even the faintest suspicion, of our proposition 3 (that the world does not really exist). It is this, surely, that was the true revelation, and it explains why Wagner's acclamation of Schopenhauer has such a rapturous quality, why he continually speaks of him in terms of gratitude and consolation, not to say salvation. This is, if anything, a reversal of the common view – that Schopenhauer destroyed Wagner's hope, by showing him that all revolutions were doomed to failure. This, Wagner had already largely decided for himself, hence his continued obsession with death as the only possible release. Schopenhauer, however, actually gave him hope – by showing that all the unending misery of the world was, in the end, merely the result of an appearance. This, admittedly, did not actually change anything, did not remove the suffering of creatures wholly deluded by appearances, but it did show that death was all the more complete a redemption in that it did

not simply end the suffering alone but the illusion that was the cause of suffering.

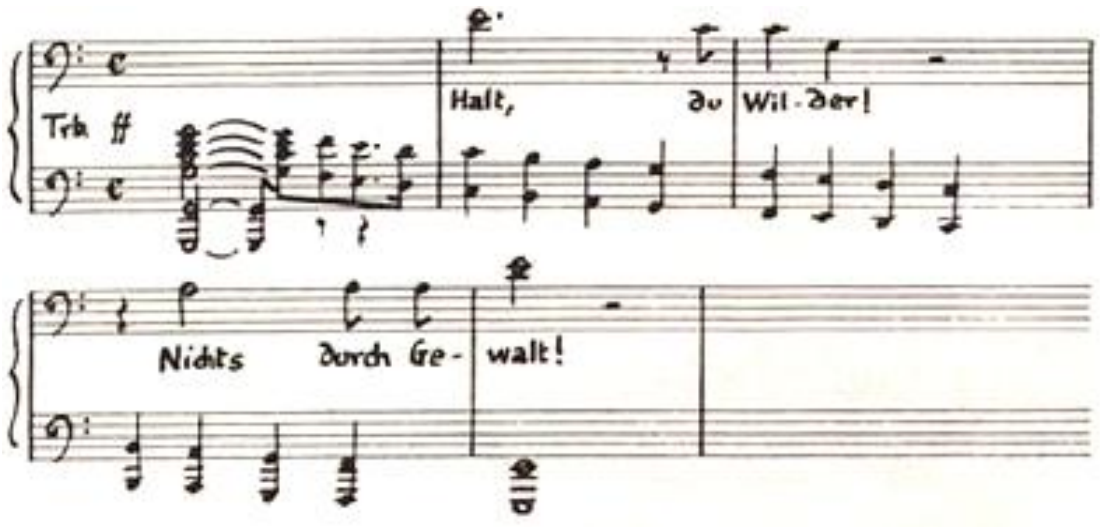
The test of this theory is once again the operas themselves. In *The Flying Dutchman*, for instance, as we have seen, there is no denying the gloomy outlook, the glorification of death, and the insistence on a furious, driving Will, an insatiable desire and restless striving at the root of everything. But there is no indication whatsoever that the Dutchman is portrayed as anything other than a real (albeit not *realistic*)[66] individual, living and suffering in an all-too-real world. And the same thing applies to the *Ring*, at least to that part of it set to music before Wagner read Schopenhauer. Its full-blooded, aggressive characters are walking embodiments of the Will, but by the same token people who could never conceive that they and their opponents and the world they fight one another to the death for the right to dominate, are all ultimately illusions.

The first signs of a change are felt at precisely the point where Wagner decided to shelve the whole vast project – in the second act of *Siegfried* – and in a way that confirms Magee is right when he claims that the music has now begun to modify the meaning of the action without requiring any corresponding change to the text.[67] In the famous "Forest Murmurs" episode, the hero is resting in the forest at daybreak. It is a brief pause in the action before his dramatic encounter with the dragon, and the first opportunity the audience has to see Siegfried on his own. The text alone is straightforward: the hero touchingly tries to imagine what the parents he has never known looked like in life; the emphasis is on his innocence, his unconscious desire for a mate – to be fulfilled in the final act, and on the contrast between the simplicity and naturalness of his needs and the inordinate greed, envy and lust for power of the other characters. It is a hopeful episode, in contrast to the pessimism of the whole, in that it offers a wholesome alternative to violent aggression and wilfulness, but there is no question that Siegfried is a real individual in a real world.

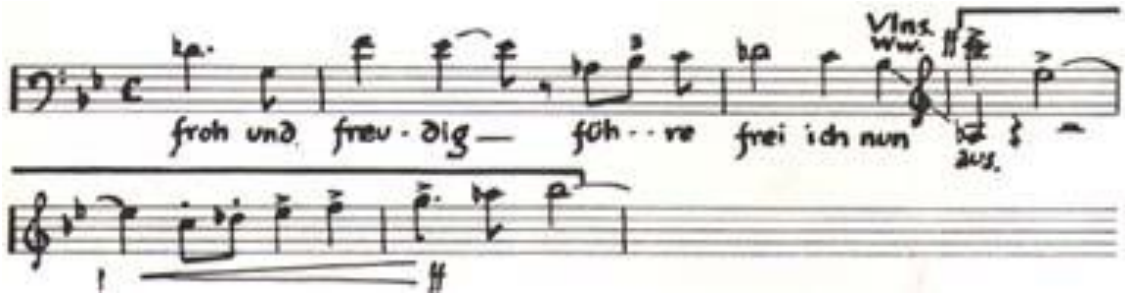
[66] He is, as noted, an obviously mythic and symbolic figure, but what he *represents* is the suffering of *real* individuals; identity itself is not yet seen as illusory.
[67] See p 66.

What happens when Wagner sets this seemingly innocuous passage to music, however, is suggestive. Soft alternating chords in the lower strings, and gentle snatches of melody for woodwind and solo violin, create a magically vivid impression – not a *visual* picture only (as in the wonderfully vivid opening scene of *Rheingold*) but the sense of a *felt* experience – of being in the forest, hearing the rustling leaves, seeing the dappled woodland floor, feeling the cool breeze and the warm sun, sensing the life of the hidden creatures, the mood of tranquillity, of slow awakening. The point unmistakably made is that Siegfried is *at one with* the natural world, attuned to the deeply felt, timeless rhythm of the earth, and is at that moment *not* an individual at all, but pure consciousness, the consciousness of a detached, Will-less observer. It is an experience the other characters would be incapable of, one we have to wait for Siegfried to show us, and the critical difference is that their striving for power is no longer contrasted solely by his *attitude*, his indifference to material possessions, but by his *being*, his capacity for vanishing, for becoming an unselfconscious centre of pleasurable sensation.

When Wagner returns to complete this work and the whole of the final instalment, *Götterdämmerung*, twelve years later, he has learned more than the skills of extreme harmonic development from composing *Tristan*, and extreme contrapuntal development from composing *Die Meistersinger*. He has also learned, from both, how to express a thoroughly Schopenhauerian outlook in music. Thus, when Wotan finally renounces the world in the third act of *Siegfried*, one feels that he is no longer just abandoning his lifelong addiction to power, but has been liberated from the illusion of seeing any value in power at all. In particular, the "World-inheritance" motif that is heard now for the first time, articulates an extraordinary ecstasy, beginning with a downward leaping sixth like a great sigh of release and then inverting the oppressively descending "Spear" motif, symbol of Wotan's Will to Power, into an ascending form that appears to fly away into infinity – an eloquent metaphor for the denial of the Will. The emotional signification of the "Spear" motif, typically thundered out on trombones, is transformed into its antithesis; what was previously a grasping, aggressive, unpleasantly phallic need to dominate and subdue other wills:

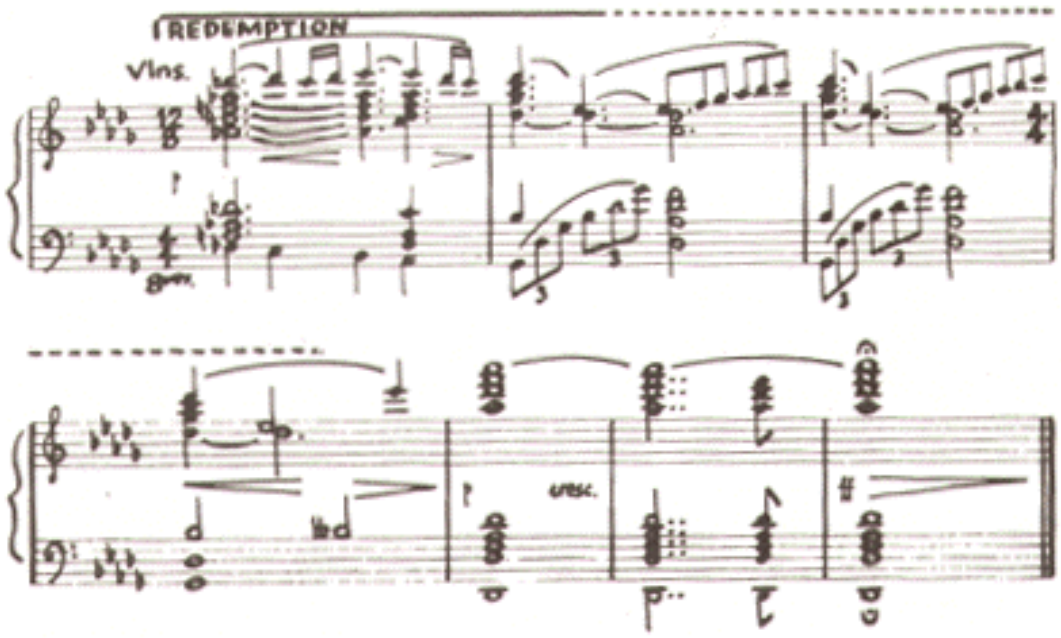


now gives way to a broad wave of relaxation, of unburdening, of smiling acquiescence:



(Wotan's evident conversion to Schopenhauerism could hardly be depicted more clearly.)[68] A similar effect, albeit greater still, is achieved by the serene motif, popularly called "Redemption through Love", heard on soaring strings at the very end of the complete cycle. The impression created is not simply that the world is saved, but that consciousness is released, like a bird set free, from the world for ever:

[68] This example offers us a good illustration of the point made above (see p 66) that the evolving point-of-view evinced in the *Ring* appears to dramatise such a conversion.



What has changed in the course of the tetralogy is not that the hope for a better future is lost, but that all such hope, like everything else in the phenomenal world, is seen for the chimera it is.

But the shift is really complete in the works *begun* after Wagner's conversion, starting with *Tristan und Isolde*,[69] in which the lovers gradually become aware that in rejecting a life in which they can never be together what they are really rejecting *is* the illusory world. The first faint hint of this is that pivotal moment, referred to earlier,[70] when Isolde recalls Tristan looking into her eyes. Here, it is well worth comparing the incident with its direct counterpart – and prototype – in the first act of *Die Walküre*,[71] when much the same thing happens between Siegmund and Sieglinde (albeit enacted onstage rather than merely recalled) and is even given a similar musical accompaniment – the "Love" motif played on solo cello (cf. the "Gaze" motif

[69] *Tristan*'s "very conception was Schopenhauerian – indeed, to adapt a phrase from Ernest Newman, it is Schopenhauer from centre to periphery. The fundamental musical conception that was the seed-germ of the whole idea was a response to the reading of Schopenhauer, and from then on everything important about it was informed by Schopenhauer's ideas – the relationship of the music to the other elements of the drama, the central theme of the story, the verbal imagery that dominates the text . . . it is all Schopenhauer, through and through." (Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy* 223–4)

[70] See pp 51–2.

[71] Significantly, perhaps, the last music composed before Wagner read Schopenhauer.

on solo viola in *Tristan*). In each case, it is evident that two human beings are seeing one another in a unique way, each looking deeply and closely into the other's eyes as only lovers can do, and recognising the other as a unique individual for whom an immediate and intense bond of sympathy is felt. In each case, the relationship is set against the backdrop of a social world that is felt as largely hostile or indifferent to the personal fears and desires of the individual, so that it comes to offer a therapeutic remedy for the sufferings that inevitably result from such an existence. That is, the lovers find their escape and consolation in one another. It is also implied that this is possible because the two are kindred spirits, alike in their unusual sensitivity to suffering – whereas those around them tend to be satisfied and comfortable with their place in the social hierarchy and *status quo*. The subtle difference exists, however, that Siegmund and Sieglinde never doubt that they are real individuals in a real world, and their attraction is based largely on their similarity of experience and temperament (in their case underlined by the fact that they are also, at first unbeknown to one another, brother and sister), whereas Tristan and Isolde, although both they and the audience only gradually become aware of it, are ultimately shown to have recognised in one another the suffering subject of consciousness trapped in a world that is alien to it. This is subtly implied from the beginning in the way each of them is depicted as being wrapped up in his/her obsession with the other, to the exclusion of all else about them. The world, that is, of everyday existence, in which they are expected to move and act and play the roles assigned to them, is something they have already withdrawn from at a fundamental level of their being. By contrast, again, with Siegmund and Sieglinde, who have a normal healthy urge to defy and escape from their oppressors by running away and sharing a happy and fulfilling life together – something it would be entirely conceivable for them to do were it not for the tragic fate in store for them – Tristan and Isolde seem already to have an intuitive apprehension of an existential crisis that makes this impossible.[72]

The first explicit indication of this comes at the end of Act I, when they drink the potion and declare their true feelings for one another. They do this,

[72] Cf. Scruton: "In Wagner's worldview death is not merely a way out for forbidden love but a fulfillment of erotic love *even in its permitted forms*." (30)

not – as Brangäne supposes[73] – because she has substituted a love philtre for the fatal poison ordered by Isolde, but because, believing they are about to die, they are no longer prevented by social convention from admitting their forbidden desires. Consequently, it makes sense for them to dismiss that convention as meaningless, as a delusion, as they do in their impassioned exchange:

> TRISTAN: What dream was mine of Tristan's honour?
>
> ISOLDE: What dream was mine of Isolde's shame? (94–5)

The logical corollary of this is that ultimate reality is not of this world, but is that mysterious and unknowable thing that each has perceived in the other's eyes and now seeks in death. The fact that Brangäne's well-meant deception cheats them of their goal makes possible the much more detailed consideration of the metaphysical issues at stake that forms the subject matter of Acts II and III; not yet dead, but forced to confront the implications of their act in this life, the lovers embark, in the course of their immense duet, on a thorough examination of what has happened to them. The salient feature of this is the dichotomy of night and day that runs through their dialogue. At first literal, in that the night is the only time it is safe for them to be alone together, this soon becomes a colourful characterisation of the illusory world of the court, of social responsibility, ultimately of all *phenomena*, as "day" – brightly lit, garish, full of pomp and splendour but really empty and meaningless; and of the true world, as yet barely glimpsed, that the lovers have found in one another, as "night" – still, seductive, private and mysterious.[74] Since the world of day is the very stuff of life, it follows that the night resides in its

[73] And with her, it seems, the overwhelming majority of listeners (see p 20 note 8).

[74] Cf. Scruton: "Throughout [Acts II and III], day is a symbol of the public world – the world of others, in which all is open to the gaze, illumined and also compromised. The night, by contrast, is a symbol of intimacy and secrecy. In Wagner's night there *is* no other, since self and other are one. The dissolution of self that occurs in love presages the final dissolution in death – the release from the world of daylight into eternal night, which thereby becomes both the symbol and the goal of love. . . . The day / night symbolism, simple in itself, is enriched with allusions to Novalis, the Upanishads, and Schopenhauer, and elaborated as a powerful, complex dramatic idea. It is the lovers themselves who introduce it, trying to make sense through symbols of the strange thing that has happened to them." (51)

negation, death – something Isolde now recognises in explaining that the reason she had offered Tristan the potion was that

> The light of day I thought I would flee
> And far in the night drag thee with me,
> Where my heart had told me delusion would die,
> Where deceit and fear would enter never;
> There had I pledged thee love for ever.
> I wished thou, joined with me,
> Pledged unto death might'st be. (152–3)[75]

But what then is this true world that is only to be found in death? Is there any way of knowing? The strongest indication so far is offered in the sublime erotic reverie of the *Liebesnacht*, in which in seeking to become one the lovers can jointly exclaim "I am the world" (167–8). This is a more intensely realised version of the experience unwittingly enjoyed by Siegfried in the "Forest Murmurs", where we first saw individual self-consciousness dissolving and disappearing in the direct apprehension of physical sensation. Obviously, sex is a familiar way of doing so that is potentially more successful than any other – the sensation involved being so intense that it effectively banishes self-consciousness altogether, at least for the duration of the act. In the height of ecstasy (literally "standing outside"), lovers experience a complete suspension of knowledge – at least of the usual everyday form of knowledge that includes factual information about the phenomenal world – and become instead pure perception of pleasure. But where this communion with one another differs more fundamentally from the solitary nature lover's communion with the earth is that it happens simultaneously to *two* seeming individuals, a difference that considerably complicates the issue.

[75] For convenience in citing both text and music where necessary, I have found it helpful to use piano scores of the dramas. Most of those available that contain English translations are now considerably dated and, being designed for use in performance, follow the original metre, sometimes at the expense of accuracy, elegance or both. In the case of the *Ring* dramas, as well as *Parsifal*, I have used those by no lesser a Wagnerian than Ernest Newman, which are superior to most, and certainly capture the flavour (and the oddity) of Wagner's idiosyncratic archaism (extending in the *Ring* to the use of *Stabreim* – alliterative verse). With *Tristan*, which Newman never translated, I have been less fortunate. Arguably Wagner's most poetic text, it is also his most cryptic and certainly his most resistant to rendering in idiomatic English (the prevalence of feminine rhyme being just one of the technical difficulties posed). The version used here, by Henry Grafton Chapman, is no clumsier than most, yet there is an unavoidable "cringe factor" in places. The reader's indulgence is requested.

Unlike normal consciousness of the natural world, which is a relatively straightforward enjoyment of sensation, sexual love – as Wagner emphasises – begins with eye contact, that is with the consciousness of consciousness itself. In other words, in seeing "you", "I" see the very being that sees, the mysterious being that is more than just phenomenon, but is the underlying reality. And at the same time, of course, "you" are doing the selfsame thing to "me". Obviously, then, what is happening here is that consciousness is perceiving itself in, or through, the medium of the phenomenal world. Finally, in the consummation of passion, lovers combine such a perception – necessarily indirect – with the direct one of personal Will-full desire.

After the musical evocation of their first extended climax, Tristan says "Let me die now" (172) and clearly means this more literally than most lovers who wish to express the completeness of their satisfaction. In a way, he means the opposite, that he desires the complete annihilation of which he has had merely an intimation. In considering what this would mean, the lovers now come to the understanding that, far from separating them, physical death would make their union absolute. Exchanging, then discarding, their names – labels after all for merely illusory identities – they reveal an intuitive awareness that they are one another, that beyond the phenomenal world they have no separate existence but are one in the most literal sense, without knowledge of time or space or change or degree, in other words that they are not in fact individuals at all but undifferentiated being.

The final, and most baffling, mystery, reserved for Act III, concerns the way this being is really non-being, or, rather, something altogether transcendental that is beyond both being and non-being alike, unclassifiable in any terms, and eternally elusive. Tristan, now fatally wounded, regains consciousness with a haunting recollection of the "ewges gottlich Urvergessen" (eternal godlike primal oblivion) that he has known in "der weiten Reich der Weltennacht" (the wide realm of the world's night) (228)[76] – a passage set to some of Wagner's most inspired music, remote, rapt, intensely searching, conveying with an uncanny insight a state of mind that

[76] These short but crucial phrases are readily translated literally, as I do here; this seems preferable, in this instance, to using the severe distortions found in Chapman's version (such as "everlasting out-from-thinking" in the first instance).

holds tentatively to the dimly apprehended recollection it has of being in another state, but one that eludes all attempts to describe it. Tristan believes he has returned from death because Isolde is still alive, implying he is incapable of achieving complete release from the world unless she achieves it too. Thus he begins the long excruciating agony of his final delirium, the negative counterpoise to the shared ecstasy of the *Liebesnacht* in that it takes place under the relentless blinding glare of a late afternoon sun – the world of day at its most hateful. Only with her arrival, does he finally die – again staring into her eyes, a shock that propels her into the visionary consummation of the *Liebestod*. Here, at the last, in images of resurrection, transfiguration and synaesthetic transformation, and music of incomparable power and exquisite sweetness, it is implied there lies a metaphor for the dissolution of consciousness, conceived as a sexual climax of such blinding intensity and overwhelming joy that it permanently dispels all other sensation and fades, not into reawakening but rather into eternal silence.[77] And if we are not necessarily any nearer to understanding what ultimate reality actually consists of, it is at least clear that death is not simply the end of suffering, as it is for the Flying Dutchman, but the final vanishing into nothingness of the illusion that we exist at all.

If the fathomless profundities of *Tristan*, as the evidence suggests, constitute Wagner's most sustained effort to give credible artistic shape to Schopenhauer's philosophy, they do not yet exhaust its possibilities for him. In *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, they transform an opera first conceived (two decades before) as a mere comic addendum to *Tannhäuser* into a masterfully sly commentary on human nature, a work with the seemingly impossible distinction of being both radiantly affirmative and profoundly Schopenhauerian. On the face of it a light-hearted opera in a popular style, *Die Meistersinger* is full of riddles and ambiguities – the key to which is the

[77] Scruton comments that the words of the *Liebestod* "are inspired by the Upanishads and by the Hindu doctrine of Nirvana – release from the world – as the highest state of being. . . . [and] are buoyed aloft by such sublimely smiling music that this mystical transfiguration of flesh into spirit becomes entirely believable. The music effects what the words describe. It rises from the orchestra to swamp the stage, dissolving desire in renunciation, flesh in spirit, and time in eternity." (72) Wagner had in fact been directed towards Brahmanic literature by Schopenhauer, who claimed his own philosophy to be a working-out on logical principles of truths intuited by Indian sages centuries earlier.

sudden shift at the start of Act III, when Hans Sachs, having hitherto played little more than a supporting role, unexpectedly emerges as the true protagonist, someone who is far more depressed than anyone in a comedy normally has a right to be, and who moreover expresses the decidedly Schopenhauerian view that the world is nothing but "Wahn", or delusion, that people who think they are individuals triumphing over other individuals are really just figments of the general imagination causing further suffering to itself. Fortunately, this time, the other characters have the opportunity, thanks to Sachs' intervention, to listen to something suspiciously resembling Wagnerian art[78] – a delusion as pleasurable as life is otherwise hurtful – so that their nightmare is transformed without their knowing it into a blissful dream of paradise, life as it might be.

Finally, in *Parsifal*, the plot hinges on a "pure fool, made wise through compassion"[79] – compassion, that is, understood in the most literal sense of the term, that of "suffering with" another (cf. German "Mitleid"). When Parsifal witnesses the excruciating agony of the wounded Grail king, Amfortas, his gestures indicate that he feels an answering pain in his own breast but that he has no idea what is causing it. When, in Act II, the temptress Kundry kisses him, awakening him sexually for the first time, he immediately associates the sensation with his earlier sympathetic pain, crying out "Amfortas! The wound!" (104)[80] He thereby experiences the profound insight that sex is the root cause of human suffering, which in Schopenhauer's view it is, because it brings us into the world in the first place, and also deludes us into thinking life worth all the effort. The implications are that Parsifal's lack of (illusory) self-

[78] Walther's Prize Song, that is, suggests a self-reflexive microcosm of the opera itself – Wagner's most overtly autobiographical. In other words, the work demonstrates its own purpose, that of "saving" its audience. Magee encapsulates the manner in which it does so as follows: "The ridiculous vanity, foolishness, and petty ill-will of human beings are exposed, so there is plenty of comedy in that sense, but at a deeper level the attitude to these things evinced by the work as a whole is one of heartaching regret and resigned acceptance. . . . [T]he resignation that is both achieved and expressed within the work is authentic, so that one could go into a performance of it with all the troubles of the world on one's shoulders and come out truly reconciled to life with all its folly and grief. There is an extraordinarily powerful, and perhaps on Wagner's part involuntary, life-assertion within the very renunciation, an acceptance that life is, after all, worth living even on these terms." (*Wagner and Philosophy* 253)

[79] "Durch Mitleid wissend, der reine Tor" – a cryptic refrain, describing Amfortas's potential redeemer, that sounds throughout the opera and has its own distinctive motif, also occurring independently, known variously as the “Fool”, the “Promise” or the “Prophecy”.

[80] I here substitute a literal translation for Newman's "spear-wound", made necessary to match the German bisyllable "Wunde".

awareness enables him to understand (intuitively) that he *is* feeling Amfortas's pain – because he *is* Amfortas, knowledge that ultimately gives him the power to resist temptation and to cure the king's wound.

> Further, it leads him to apprehend for the first time the condition of the whole of suffering mankind, the rack of unsatisfiable willing on which it is endlessly stretched out – and hence to understand the compassion of a Christ for humanity at large – and hence to understand the significance of the religious ceremony he has witnessed. (Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 375)

But, as Magee goes on to explain, the most profoundly Schopenhauerian influence of all is that which is expressed in the music itself, an effect that makes this last work of all the crowning achievement of a career that seems in some mysterious way to have been leading up to it all along:

> This music has an extraordinary sound, perhaps best characterised by contrast with Wagner's other mature works. In them there is an overmastering insistence, a lust to assert which comes close to attempting the subjugation of the listener. In short, there is an assertion of will, which is widely felt to be unique in music, and perhaps unique in art. Very many people have found it alienating, even repellent, and on the whole it is the characteristic of Wagner's work which those who dislike it dislike in it most. This unremitting vehemence is absent from *Parsifal*. The motor that powers those other works is not present at all in this one, which seems to unfold in a relaxed, inevitable way, without impetus, as if altogether un-driven from inside. It is a music that radiates acceptance. It is resignation in orchestral sound. With this opera, which Wagner knew was to be his last, the crucial point is not that he advocates renunciation of the will but that he achieves it. (377–8)

To summarise, it will be apparent above all that throughout Wagner's major operatic works, both those that unconsciously foreshadow Schopenhauer and those that are composed in the full knowledge of his philosophy and richly saturated with its spirit, there runs a connecting thread – or rather a cable of multiple intertwining strands. This is more than simply the kindred resemblance one would automatically expect to stamp the creative output of a single individual; it is the result of deliberate single-minded

attention to a particular set of issues (and of approaches to them) throughout a long working life. The phenomenon is nowhere better described than by Thomas Mann:

> [An] infinite power of characterisation . . . distinguishes each work from the next, develops each from its own unique tonal beginnings, so that each individual work is like a self-contained galactic entity within the personal cosmos of the total *oeuvre*. Between the works there are musical points of contact and links that indicate the organic unity of the whole. . . . But each work as a whole remains stylistically distinct from all the others. . . . The individual themes and works are a series of stages, progressively more extreme variants of the basic unity underlying his perfectly consistent and fully rounded life's work – a work that 'develops', but in a sense is all there right from the beginning. . . . There is an apparent air (and more than just apparent) of conscious strategy, of a whole career carefully mapped out in advance (111–2).

This, in my view, is nothing less than pivotal to a full understanding of Wagner, as one's appreciation of any single work of his is immeasurably enriched by an awareness of its relationship to the others, and of its place in his complete canon. It needs to be said here that this is an understanding that is largely absent in the criticism of his literary influence: in most treatments of the subject there is a tendency to treat individual operas, even when alluded to in the same text, as quite separate entities. A clear example of this approach can be found in DiGaetani's remarks about *The Waves*: "Woolf's borrowings from Wagner's *Ring* make her novel reverberate with epic implications that it would otherwise lack. *Parsifal*, on the other hand, helps her to portray the complex nature of her hero" (124). Here, the distinction between the works is actually stressed. The problem with doing so is that it fails to take into account many significant connections between the operas, not least that Parsifal himself is a Christianised version of the pagan Siegfried. Similarly, much of the (considerable) research into the famous Wagnerian quotations in *The Waste Land* notes that both *Tristan* and *Parsifal* (as well as *Götterdämmerung*) are alluded to but does not take into account the connection Wagner himself drew between these works when he noted, writing to his muse Mathilde Wesendonck, that the suffering Grail-king

Amfortas in *Parsifal* is "my third act Tristan inconceivably intensified" (*Letters* v2.54). Nor is it simply a matter of characters reappearing in varying guises; as Mann so expressively indicates, the ten complete operas of the composer's maturity form a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Myth versus Realism: music-drama and the novel

My final purpose in here presenting this fairly detailed consideration of Wagner's dramas as a prominent late (and in some sense culminating) expression of "the greatest transformation of Western consciousness" (Berlin 20) is to suggest that it offers further evidence that helps explain the intense fascination these works held for many artists of the early twentieth century. Their unique scope, power and overall unity, as well as their distillation of much post-Kantian, but especially Schopenhauerian, thought, makes them almost unavoidably attractive sources for plundering rich mythic material to help depict the modern world. That they were so plundered by generations of literary (and other) artists is now an established view, firmly and enthusiastically expressed in Furness's introduction to his book on the subject:

> [T]he major European novelists stand beneath his sway, as well as an abundant florilegium of minor figures, not only in their reference to the man and his art but in their imitation of his method; the composer who provided a common source of inspiration for the subtleties of Virginia Woolf, the vagaries of the decadents and the religious yearnings of the myth-makers must have been of uncommon stature. That a *musician* should have had such an overwhelming effect on *literature* is even more remarkable . . . . it may be safely claimed that without Wagner the literature of at least a century would be immeasurably impoverished, as regards topics as well as structures. His Protean abundance means that even the literature of decadence could be fired by his work, which can provide the tortured *frisson* as well as radiant myth and luminous symbol. The use of interior monologue in many a modern novel is the narrative equivalent of Wagner's constantly modulating river of sound and the literary leitmotif, developing, intensifying and establishing complex inter-relationships, stems

> directly from his technique of polyphonic expression of complex states of awareness. (*x–xi*)

Despite all of this, there remains at least one obvious difference between Wagner's heroic idiom and that of the novel, especially in the form it took in the early twentieth century. For Stoddard Martin the central issue is

> the conflict between Romanticism, with its emphases on transcendent love and individual self-determination, and Modernism, with its emphases on the "real" world, destruction of old forms, and forging of new order out of their rubble. (235)

Undoubtedly such a difference of temper exists, and leads to a fairly widespread tendency to parody, most marked in the extreme irreverence of Joyce (as one would expect), but this is not the whole story. Mahaffey sums up the shared position of writers on Joyce and Wagner as an agreement "that Joyce's attitude towards Wagner is equivocal: he most often uses Wagnerian allusions in humorous or deflating ways, yet beneath the parody runs an undercurrent of a more serious concern" (239). In a similar vein, Timothy Martin comments: "It may be that the Irish writer, in *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, required a Wagnerian hero like Siegfried to represent the grandeur of his ambition, even as his ironic temperament maintained a characteristic distance from it" (169). In any event, the "destruction of old forms, and forging of new order out of their rubble" is as much a part of Wagner's *modus operandi* as the most anarchic modernist's (and is something he self-reflexively draws attention to in Siegfried's forging scene).[81] Moreover, as I

[81] As well as elsewhere in the opera; indeed Siegfried's whole purpose is the irreverent destruction of the old order, sweeping it aside to clear the way for a new and improved creation. The forging scene, however, may well be taken as exemplary. What is more, it has a special relevance to Wagner's compositional technique, particularly his doing away with the segmented or episodic manner of constructing operas in favour of an integrated organic form. Scorning Mime's advice to solder the two broken pieces of the sword together, Siegfried insists they must be filed into powder, melted down and recast; the sword thus becomes, quite literally, as good as new – indeed better, since it now proves unbreakable.

Cf. Adorno: "What Wagner achieves in the differentiation of color through its dissolution into the tiniest elements, he complements by combining the smallest values constructively to create something like integral color. His tendency is to take the tone, once it has been broken down into minimal units, and create great tonal surfaces, like unbroken fields; to take the fragments into which the sword has been shattered, as Siegfried says in the enigmatic sword songs, and forge them back together into great homogenous units. Only infinitesimally small elements can be combined flawlessly into such wholes." (594) Adorno

have tried to suggest all along, this oft-perceived "conflict" between romanticism and modernism disguises an underlying affinity – and contradicts Berlin's view that romanticism makes all subsequent cultural developments appear "less important, and at any rate deeply influenced by it" (1–2).[82]

The real distinction to be made is that the milieu of the novel is, as it has almost always been, the world of everyday appearance, and that this is given an added boost by the marked modernist interest in mundanity for its own sake, its conviction that the minutiae of ordinary lives are not only worthy of serious literary treatment, but actually demand it; Wagnerian music-drama, by vast and obvious contrast, inhabits the world of high romance,[83] even (if possible) heightens it further, through its supreme intensities of feeling. And yet, as argued above,[84] this goes hand in hand with the most direct relevance to contemporary problems, indeed expresses them in symbolic guise. Alberich's lust for gold is all too obviously intended to be understood as a comment on nineteenth century capitalism, while Wotan's double-dealing is

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goes on to draw a logical parallel to painting, though it is the possibilities this technique offered to literary style that have exercised critics such as Furness (see above, p 83).

[82] See p 27.

[83] The distinction is amply illustrated by the seminal work of the myth-criticism of the 1950s and '60s, Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, which categorises literary types in five "modes" according to the stature of the protagonist: "1. If superior in *kind* both to other men and to the environment of other men, the hero is a divine being, and the story about him will be a *myth* in the common sense of a story about a god. . . .

2. If superior in *degree* to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of *romance*, whose actions are marvellous but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him, and enchanted weapons, talking animals, terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established. . . .

3. If superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment, the hero is a leader. He has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature. This is the hero of the *high mimetic* mode, of most epic and tragedy. . . .

4. If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience. This gives us the hero of the *low mimetic* mode, of most comedy and of realistic fiction. . . .

5. If inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have a sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity, the hero belongs to the *ironic* mode. This is still true when the reader feels that he is or might be in the same situation, as the situation is being judged by the norms of a greater freedom.

Looking over this table, we can see that European fiction, during the last fifteen centuries, has steadily moved its centre of gravity down the list." (33–4) Wagner's operas clearly belong to the romance mode, shading into myth at one end and "high mimesis" at the other ("low mimesis" in the case of *Die Meistersinger*); most modernist novels are obviously "low mimetic", though Joyce's frequently lapse into irony.

[84] See, for example, pp 56ff.

similarly indicative of political intrigue at any time in history – at the same time as his vision embodies all that is most glorious in human aspiration. Siegfried, as Mann rightly says, is Baldur, buffoon, and Bakunin rolled into one;[85] he is also, as Joyce would come to realise, emblematic of the artist at work in his forge.[86] Tristan, Sachs, and Parsifal, in their differing ways, all demonstrate aspects of that central Schopenhauerian idea that there are no such things as individuals, that "I am my neighbour, in the most literal sense" (Tanner 105). Whether or not one accepts this view, there is no question that it is a claim made about the real nature of human beings. All these examples and more, indeed arguably everything in Wagner's dramas, is unwaveringly directed at our actual experience of life. The heightening of this experience that is effected by the heroic idiom serves to show that it is in the end a universal one; indeed the mythic mode is even necessary in showing that it is the unchanging, the essential, the absolute, the real, *felt* experience that is at issue here and not simply isolated historical instances of it. That is, it is presented as experienced *from the inside*, as we do in fact experience it, and not as something we can simply view dispassionately, as if happening to someone else. It is the "contact with *being*" referred to by Eliade (92), the "emphasis upon spiritual life" Berlin sees as the root of romanticism (36), that Calasso describes as "an extreme experience" arousing "sacred terror" (11) and Falck as "authentic living. . . . a religion of full experiencing" (170).

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[85] "Wagner's dramatic ability to unite the popular and the intellectual in a single figure is most perfectly revealed in the hero of his revolutionary period, Siegfried. The 'breathless delight' that the future theatre director of Bayreuth felt one day as he watched a puppet show – and which he describes in his essay 'On Actors and Singers' – is turned to practical, productive purpose in the dramatization of the *Ring*, that supreme piece of popular entertainment, with its uncomplicated hero. Who can deny the striking resemblance between this Siegfried and the little fellow who wields the slapstick in the fairground booth? Yet at the same time he is the son of light, Nordic sun myth – which does not prevent him, thirdly, from being something very modern and nineteenth-century: the free man, the breaker of old tablets and renewer of a corrupt society – or 'Bakunin', as Bernard Shaw's cheery rationalism always terms him. Harlequin, god of light, and anarchistic social revolutionary, all in the same person: what more could the theatre possibly ask for?" (130–1)

[86] The close relationship of Siegfried to Stephen Dedalus (in both *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*) has been the subject of considerable critical interest; the fullest treatment to date is Timothy Martin's, which draws on and develops the earlier findings of Stoddard Martin, Furness, DiGaetani and Mahaffey. The last named was the first to discover the "missing link" between Siegfried and Stephen to be found in "Wieland the Smith" (see pp 60–1 note 57). A substantial part of my MA dissertation was devoted to showing how Siegfried further connects Stephen to Wagner's other heroes, and places him in a network of elaborate relationships to other characters, including women, opponents and father figures.

> A myth, for Wagner, is not a fable or a religious doctrine but a vehicle for human knowledge. The myth acquaints us with ourselves and our condition, using symbols and characters that give objective form to our inner compulsions. Myths are set in the hazy past, in a vanished world of chthonic forces and magniloquent deeds. But this obligatory "pastness" is a heuristic device. It places the myth and its characters before recorded time and therefore in an era that is purged of history. It lifts the story out of the stream of human life and endows it with a meaning that is timeless. (Scruton 5)

It is the achievement of the high modernist novel (especially by contrast with more straightforwardly social-realist texts) that it effectively fuses the mythic with the everyday. Where myths, Wagnerian or otherwise, are adopted, they are given a contrasting realist adaptation (the best known example is Ulysses "becoming" Leopold Bloom). But the effect is more than simply parodic deflation (though it is that, and frequently).[87] It also makes explicit what was only implicit in Wagner: that, as unlikely and incongruous as it may seem, ordinary people *are* the heroes of epic myth, the experiences of an Odin or Odysseus are *our* experiences.

For Joyce, and arguably Woolf, putting myth back into "the stream of human life" completes the process, begun by Wagner, of "acquaint[ing] us with ourselves and our condition" (and so actively demonstrating what Scruton is here simply explaining). It is what T.S. Eliot implies in his famous definition of the mythic method as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (269), at the same time as it goes beyond Eliot in suggesting that myth provides a pattern that is not artificially imposed upon life, but discovered to be pre-existent within it – a reminder of Calasso's point that "it is we, the will of each and every one of us, that are at the beck and call of myth" (46) and not the other way around.[88] When Stephen Dedalus protests in *Ulysses* that history is "a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" (40), he is prefiguring the mythopoeic moment when he will dispel that nightmare by wielding his ashplant as Siegfried's sword Nothung.

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[87] See above, p 84.
[88] See p 25.

More than simply a drunken young man behaving absurdly (as he undoubtedly appears when looked at from the outside, from a literal or historical perspective), Stephen in another sense quite genuinely becomes the hero, his action being a logical interpretation of Siegfried's in the *Ring* (best exemplified by the moment when he breaks the Wanderer's spear). It shows, that is, what Siegfried represents, translated into realistic terms – justified and exalted defiance of the gods. That this is no mean feat for the seemingly antiheroic Stephen is made clear by the context: breaking the psychological stranglehold that Irish Catholicism has attempted to hold him in since childhood (and that has gathered force from the terrifying hell sermon of *A Portrait* to the ghastly guilt-induced vision of his dead mother in "Nighttown") requires nothing less than everything, and an identification with no less unbreakable a will to freedom than that of the all-conquering Siegfried. Joyce is showing, so to speak, how Wagner might be "applied" in real situations, and the mockery is secondary; he is making a similar point, and every bit as seriously – that the extreme forms of psychological blackmail and manipulation employed by religious totalitarianism represent the greatest possible threat to individual autonomy and need not so much to be resisted as smashed.[89]

This is, of course, one isolated example. Attempting to unpack all the possible allusions to Wagner and their respective layers of significance, even in the three selected texts, is a task that plainly exceeds the bounds of my project. Martin's work in particular has shown just how much Wagner there is in Joyce, and what the major thematic links between them are. With *Finnegans Wake* alone, the possibilities for exegesis are literally endless.[90]

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[89] In this Stephen comes to function (as Siegfried had done) as a beacon of hope for his beleaguered people, showing them the way to free themselves (or forging their uncreated conscience): "The value of the parallel between Stephen Dedalus and Siegfried is that it helps us see more clearly what sort of artist-hero Stephen aspires to be. The artist is a hero not only because he forges his art in defiance of cultural impediments like 'Prince, Pope, and People' to borrow Wilde's formulation, but also because he is potentially able, as Nietzsche, Shaw, D'Annunzio, Moore, Yeats, and Wagner himself believed, to redeem his nation's culture and people." (Martin 52)

[90] Martin himself makes no bones about this: "[N]o list of allusions in Joyce's work can claim to be definitive. . . . the compiler must consider many allusions that can only be called 'possible'. . . . My aim [is] simply to gather and increase our store of information about Joyce and one of his most important 'parental' sources and to show Wagner's pervasiveness in Joyce's work without pretending to close the subject. . . . I must offer this list certain that many references to Wagner remain to be discovered." (185–6)

I have therefore chosen to limit myself to careful consideration of two main configurations that appear to me especially prominent in works by both novelists: firstly, the opposition of "tragic" and "triumphant" types, or personalities, and, secondly, the pangalactic view of all space and time as circular, mythic and self-transcending rather than linear, literal and limited. While the latter is supported primarily (though not exclusively) through references to the *Ring*, the former draws more obviously upon the still larger cycle that is formed by "the personal cosmos of the total *oeuvre*" (Mann 111).[91] Both patterns are moreover related to one another. (In the interests of clarity, I will postpone any further elaboration of Wagner's treatment of either one until it becomes immediately relevant to the overall argument.)

The detailed close reading of passages in *Mrs Dalloway*, *The Waves* and *Finnegans Wake* that follows is based on several assumptions that this chapter has illustrated at some length, primarily that these texts' allusions to particular people, places and events depicted in a given Wagner opera cannot be fully understood if viewed simply as allusions to that opera only; rather, they open themselves up to a creative interaction with Wagner's entire repertoire and its underlying *Weltanschauung*.[92] To this day, as I have argued, there are many important aspects of this gigantic corpus that remain imperfectly understood, and the most penetrating Wagnerian scholarship for over a century has been that which sees beneath "the glamour of his surfaces" (Tanner 201). The post-Enlightenment, and especially post-Kantian, ways of thinking that Wagner inherited from his immediate forbears led him not only to the mythological content of his works but to the mythopoeic vision it espoused, the discovery that the death of God had not removed that reality once mistaken for God:

> the [modern] recognition that the sacred could be recuperated from art – against the current of unbelief – comes from Wagner. *Tristan und Isolde* was the luminous proof of what might otherwise have been a pious hope: that religion could live again in art and did not need God for its survival. (Scruton 196)

[91] See p 82.
[92] See pp 14, 81–3.

Indeed, through his drive to push romanticism to its limits, Wagner can be said to have made modernism possible. The inspiration he drew from developments in philosophy directly fed his eschewal of appearances for the sake of "inner" reality, and culminated in Schopenhauer's revelation to him of the "truth" of pessimism and the ultimate unreality of the phenomenal world. This pivotal discovery enriched and brought to completion the "series of stages, progressively more extreme variants of the basic unity underlying his perfectly consistent and fully rounded life's work" (Mann 112). In moving from the "high mimetic" mode of music-drama to the "low mimetic" one of the modern novel,[93] we do not find parody and deflation alone but a serious attempt to show how "real" people might enter and inhabit the mythopoeic universe of epic-romantic heroism and in so doing have life more abundantly. In the revolving wheel of world-history and – alternately despairing and exulting – the figure of the man apart, images memorably recreated by Wagner, both Woolf and Joyce would find material for their richest literary experiments and inspiring answers to the persistent modern question: how can we bear, and more than bear, existence?

[93] See p 85 note 83.

Chapter II

"THE SEA, MUSIC AND DEATH": THE SHADOW OF *TRISTAN* IN WOOLF'S *MRS DALLOWAY*

That aspects of Virginia Woolf's novels were influenced by Wagner is a claim advanced by a number of critics. DiGaetani devotes a chapter of his study to Woolf, concentrating on those texts that allude directly to Wagner, especially *The Waves*, in which he finds the composer's influence to be "pervasive" (118), an impression largely shared by other critics. Furness goes further, arguing that this influence is not confined to allusion only but to the text's advanced use of leitmotifs, concluding "the novelist has learned her trade by sensitive emulation" (21) of Wagner. Aside from *The Waves*, however, Woolf's novels are rarely considered to be obviously Wagnerian, and no critics to date have revisited the claims DiGaetani advanced with regard to *The Voyage Out*, *Night and Day*, *Jacob's Room* or *The Years*. As for *Mrs Dalloway*, I believe I am the first to note the possibility of its allusion to Wagner.[1] The reasons for this lack of attention are not hard to find: Woolf, according to DiGaetani, is "the least obviously influenced by the German composer" (159) – that is in comparison with Conrad, Forster, Lawrence and Joyce.[2] Even in *The Waves*, the allusions in question are never so unmistakeably direct as, for example, *Ulysses*' references to "*Nothung!*" (517), "the *Flying Dutchman*" (557) or "Wagnerian music" (581). Unlike Joyce in general even, Woolf is rarely considered to be in any sense a "mythic" writer. There are exceptions, such as Furness's assertion that "[t]he mythical method is seen again most vividly in Virginia Woolf" (91) – though he is thinking exclusively of *The Waves*.[3] On the whole, however, it is fair to say that, despite Woolf's prominence as a leading modernist, her feminism, pacifism and challenges to imperialist and patriarchal structures, her formal experimentalism, psychological penetration and lyrical, even musical, style,

[1] A condensed version of this chapter has been published in *English Studies in Africa* 49 (2), 2006: 83–108.
[2] See p 12.
[3] See pp 62–3 note 60.

she is nonetheless widely, and accurately, seen as firmly rooted in the mainstream tradition of the English novel – realistic, domestic, middle-class, deliberately avoiding the grandiose and exotic in favour of the humble, familiar and close to home (while finding in it much to wonder at, to celebrate and see afresh):

> She used, with rich metaphorical expressiveness, likenesses borrowed from the nature she knew. Birds, flowers, gardens, water – especially waves, with their undulent fluidity – all familiar pictures in the mind of an educated Englishwoman who often visited, and at times owned, a country cottage, served her purposes. (Gay, *Modernism* 207–8)

Hermione Lee, perhaps surprisingly, characterises this tendency to parochialism as limiting Woolf's importance, rating her as

> a remarkable, though not a major figure in [the modernist] "movement". None of her novels has the stature or scope of Proust or of Conrad, of Joyce's *Ulysses* or of Lawrence's *The Rainbow*. She is, with Forster, in the second rank of twentieth-century novelists. Her imaginative territory is strictly demarcated by her social environment, her intellectual inheritance, her mental instability and her sexual reserve. (*The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 14)

Even though "Woolf inherits something of the Romantic idea of the potency of the imagination, working at a depth below the conscious mind", it is nonetheless the case that "she can find no other way to express the truth of life and character than through natural images and physical perceptions" (28). There are, in other words, no possible grounds in Woolf's case for claiming the "strong artistic kinship" with Wagner that Martin claims for Joyce, both of them being "artists [who] exploit the resources of myth, emphasise sexual themes, pursue 'totality' of form and subject matter, and represent the 'modern' or 'revolutionary' in art" (xi). Indeed, in most if not all of these respects, Woolf can all too easily be seen as embodying their opposite.

Even such direct references to Wagner as are scattered through Woolf's novels tend to be of a social and inconsequential nature – Mrs Dalloway's memories (in *The Voyage Out*) of a visit to Bayreuth, a Covent Garden performance of *Siegfried* in *The Years*. In other words, they have

more to do with the fact that Wagner's operas were very much a part of English middle-class life in the first decades of the twentieth century than any deeper engagement with their mythic themes.

Readers familiar with Woolf's views on modern fiction will nonetheless recognise an immediate affinity with the "real" Wagner that the previous chapter attempts to uncover (although it is difficult to say to what extent Woolf was conscious of this). Her well-known opposition to "materialism" in writing, her belief that the modernist approach, exemplified by Joyce, was "spiritual" and her interest in the relevance for literature of recent advances in physics and astronomy, or of Bergsonian theories of time,[4] would be unthinkable in an intellectual climate that was not so profoundly marked by the imprint of German romantic philosophy. Her objection to Messrs Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy writing "of unimportant things" and spending "immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring" implicitly recognises the relative unimportance of the empirical. Her exasperated question "What is the point of it all?", and her insistence on capturing "life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing", the "myriad impressions" of the mind like "an incessant shower of innumerable atoms" and "the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages upon the brain" (*The Common Reader* 187–90), make it abundantly clear that for Woolf it is consciousness that constitutes reality. "The world is representation."[5]

> In rejecting Victorian "materialism" Woolf is rejecting the Victorian idea of reality itself . . . "Materialism" suggests hard

[4] Holly Henry, in *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science*, discusses "the powerful shaping effect advances in astronomy in the early decades of the twentieth century had on Britain's literary artists and intellectuals" and notes that "Virginia Woolf, in particular, was deeply curious about the sciences, especially astronomy. Her fiction and essays reveal that she read best-selling, non-technical science texts covering cosmology, relativity and the new physics. Developments in astronomy and cosmology were reported in daily newspapers, as well as the eclectic weekly literary reviews in which Woolf published her short fiction and essays. . . . Not only would she have read about galaxies whirling in the abysses of space, the nearly unimaginable size of the star Betelgeuse, and Clyde Tombaugh's discovery of a new planet, Pluto, but she also knew, and in some cases socialized with, some of Britain's most prominent mathematicians and science writers." (14) By contrast, Lee considers the commonly noted "parallels between Bergson's philosophy and Virginia Woolf's perceptions" to be "coincidental: it seems very unlikely that she had read him. The 'Bergsonian' flavour of *Mrs Dalloway* was more probably filtered through her reading of Proust." (111)

[5] See p 33.

> science as well as soft furnishings and, for many, the most striking scientific development of the early 20th century was Rutherford's discovery that the atom was "porous"; "all that we regard as most solid" turned out to be "tiny specks floating in void". (Whitworth, “Virginia Woolf and Modernism” 151; quoting Eddington's *The Nature of the Physical World* [6])

In other words, while seldom mythological in reference, Woolf's writing is frequently mythopoeic in its innermost nature, reflecting Falck's advocacy of "a religion of full experiencing" whose "scriptures can only be: poetry" (170),[7] and shares with the "archaic ontology" predicated by Eliade a "belief in an absolute reality opposed to the profane world of 'unrealities' . . . . a desperate effort not to lose contact with *being*" (92).[8] By the same token, it has an unmistakable affinity with Wagner's musical narration of "[t]he most important things in life, namely its psycho-emotional fundamentals *as inwardly experienced*" (Magee, *Aspects of Wagner* 55, author's emphasis).

By the time she embarked on her fourth novel, Woolf can confidently be said to have perfected the technique of capturing "life" in her writing. *Mrs Dalloway* is

> the first important novel resulting from the techniques and approaches to fiction that Woolf discovered in writing *Jacob's Room*. In this novel, too, Woolf dispenses with the usual conventions of plot and, in passages employing a stream-of-consciousness technique, seeks to narrate the inner worlds of characters. But what distinguishes *Mrs Dalloway* from the previous novel is that the narration of the inner worlds of characters is much more sustained. The immediate stimulus for the novel was undoubtedly James Joyce's *Ulysses*, published in Paris in 1922, which Woolf read before she started work on the draft of *Mrs Dalloway* as we now know it . . . . Like *Ulysses* which records life on a single day in Dublin on 16 June 1904, *Mrs Dalloway* takes place on a specific day but in London on Wednesday, 13 June 1923. (Linden Peach, *Virginia Woolf* 88–9)

[6] The second of "five non-technical science texts" (Henry 39), published in 1928, by "Cambridge astrophysicist Arthur Eddington", one of the leading popular authorities of the day whom Woolf had "clearly" read (15). Cf. note 4 above, as well as my speculations on the continuity of transcendental idealism and "the new physics" (p 40 note 28).
[7] See p 27.
[8] See p 63.

The similarities to *Ulysses* are indeed obvious: the (relative) lack of incident, the detailed attention to life as lived by ordinary people, the protagonist's experience complemented by those of others, all more or less unknowable to one another, the emphasis on inner states, the fluidity and uncertainty of the modern condition, the use of the urban setting, specifically the streets of a nation's capital. Both are even set on warm summer days in mid-June, the characters in each case taking particular enjoyment in the pleasant weather. The differences are also marked: Woolf steers clear of the "queasy undergraduate" streak she genteelly lamented in Joyce (*A Writer's Diary* 47). She likewise avoids the epic and encyclopaedic dimensions of *Ulysses*, as well as the extremism of its stylistic experimentation. The overall tone and texture of the work is strikingly different, softer and more fluid, perhaps in a conscious effort to embody a "feminine" sensibility – or rather an androgynous one, such as Woolf would later term "woman-manly or man-womanly" (*A Room of One's Own* 157). Finally, there is no underlying mythic frame; where Leopold Bloom is Ulysses, Clarissa is merely Mrs Dalloway.

The narrative is largely dominated by the inner worlds of two characters who never meet one another, the eponymous heroine and Septimus Warren Smith. A survivor of the Great War, Septimus is employed as a clerk in the City of London, is aged about thirty, and suffers from a number of symptoms that his doctors attribute to the delayed effects of shell shock, but closely resemble those found in serious mental illness, notably bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Whatever posthumous diagnosis critics propose for Virginia Woolf's own illness, it is generally acknowledged[9] that the

[9] For a discussion of Woolf's attitudes towards mental illness while writing *Mrs Dalloway* see Lee's biography *Virginia Woolf* 188–97; note also her comment, in *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, that Clarissa Dalloway's world is "familiar to Virginia Woolf, as Septimus's is not. But her personal experience was used in the characterization of Septimus at a more profound level than that of social identity. . . . [Leonard Woolf's] painfully clinical account of [his wife's] symptoms – the progression from exhaustion and insomnia to states of excitement, violence and delusions alternating with comatose melancholia, depression, guilt and disgust at food – have points of resemblance to Septimus's. . . . Though such information adds nothing to a literary estimation of *Mrs Dalloway*, it is inevitably of interest to know how much the 'mad part' owes to her recollections of being mad herself." (95–6) Cf. Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*: "Creating Septimus had been an act of exorcism, in which she summoned up her own experiences in order to write them out of her system and into his, and ultimately into the imagination of her readers. While shell shock (or war trauma) was distinctly different from her own breakdown, the symptoms were comparable, and so was the treatment. . . . Septimus's experiences are virtually the only record we have of what Woolf"s illness felt like from the inside" (146).

symptoms she portrayed in Septimus were largely those of her personal experience: rapid alternation between, and sometimes simultaneous co-existence of, frenzied excitement and suicidal despair, as well as both grandiose and paranoid delusions, and visual and aural hallucinations (including the Greek-speaking birds she is famously reputed to have heard on at least one occasion).[10] The creation of Septimus thus allowed her to examine her illness at a comfortable distance: it is notable that character is separated from author by class, gender, age, education and experience; the narrator even insists on maintaining this sense of distance, for instance describing Septimus as "a clerk, but of the better sort; for he wore brown boots; his hands were educated; so, too, his profile . . . but not his lips altogether, for they were loose" (93). Septimus's condition also affords an opportunity for scathing satire of the medical establishment, specifically through the inept Dr Holmes and the sinister Harley Street specialist Sir William Bradshaw.[11]

The substance of the novel might thus be seen in part as fictionalised autobiography, to which are added a wealth of other ingredients, including literary allusion. A notable example is the Shakespearean refrain "Fear no more the heat o' the sun", which runs through the thoughts of both the suicidal Septimus (157) and – repeatedly – the sane and cheerful Clarissa Dalloway (8; 31; 42; 210). The importance of this connection for the novel as a whole is that it is one of a number of correspondences that link the two characters, otherwise so disparate. Clarissa, in some respects a satirical figure of female acquiescence in the patriarchy[12] (comparable in this regard to Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*), also embodies aspects of her creator's experience, such as a partly repressed lesbian eroticism and ambivalence about the institution of marriage. There is considerable irony in the connection that is developed between the two central characters, in that the reader learns enough about each of them to know that they would have

[10] Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf* v1.90.
[11] A literary response to Woolf's own "hostility to her doctors, particularly to Sir George Savage . . . whom Leonard himself distrusted" – just as Septimus's wife Rezia distrusts Bradshaw (Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 96).
[12] "[T]he social arena of the Dalloways, in both novels, reflects [Woolf's] fascinated dislike of the world of society hostesses, eminent politicians, distinguished doctors and lawyers, and grand old dowager ladies, in which powerful men talk a great deal of nonsense and the woman's place is decorative, entertaining and subservient." (Lee 94)

nothing to say to one another if they ever did chance to meet (Clarissa is class-conscious and superficial in company; Septimus is paranoid, brooding and given to "mad" behaviour that makes strangers feel uncomfortable). That the novel nonetheless highlights several beliefs and attitudes common to both of them naturally emphasises their shared humanity. It also indicates – increasingly as the text develops – a far deeper connection between people than is normally thought to exist (and which belies "the apparent unconnected nature of the two narratives" (Peach 89)).

The "Fear no more" refrain in itself is, of course, a classic example of the literary leitmotif – one of several used in the novel – that technique most widely claimed to derive from Wagner's compositional practice.[13] Use of leitmotifs aside, however, Wagner is not, like Shakespeare, an immediately obvious presence in the text. In marked contrast to Joyce, or to Eliot in *The Waste Land*, there are no overt references to his operas,[14] which, as noted, helps to explain the lack of critical attention to this novel in studies of Woolf's interest in the composer.[15] Though DiGaetani does not mention *Mrs Dalloway* at all, he provides a helpful summary of the available evidence that Woolf knew Wagner's operas well: her regular attendance over many years of their performances at Covent Garden, her visit to Bayreuth in 1909 and her subsequent article for the *Times Literary Supplement*, "Impressions at Bayreuth", her efforts to study German and acquaint herself with the libretti at first hand. He comments that "[d]uring the Edwardian period particularly, anyone who considered himself at all intellectual had to know something about Wagner" (110) and concludes, "Virginia Woolf was a product of her environment in this regard" (111). But a tantalising indication that Wagner

[13] See for example Furness: "In interior monologue the leitmotifs are usually staccato thrusts, frequently having no meaning out of context. Their shortness means that they can easily be recalled to the mind of the reader when they recur; the associations are programmatic, since a leitmotif must refer to something beyond the tones or words which it contains. . . . [It] is needed to relieve the uninterrupted flow of thought, a contrivance delicately interwoven into the pattern of the monologue, indicating direction and modification in a manner that is not too obtrusive. It must make an *emotional* impact, and here it is Wagner's example that is of importance, for his continual transformation of existing motifs into new ones, conveying a sense of progressive emotional and psychological development, immeasurably enriched the potential of language." (17)

[14] The composer is alluded to by name on two occasions, both of them seemingly inconsequential: "It was the state of the world that interested him; Wagner, Pope's poetry, people's characters eternally, and the defects of her own soul" (6); "Peter Walsh and Joseph Breitkopf went on about Wagner" (38).

[15] See p 91.

was more than just an intellectual interest for Woolf is given in David Garnett's recollection of his first meeting with her:

> It was at a fancy-dress ball in aid of Women's Suffrage at Crosby Hall very soon after it had been re-erected in Cheyne Walk. Wagner was the greatest of musicians then, and all the cultured who could afford it went to hear *The Ring* at Bayreuth. So Virginia was dressed as a Valkyrie. She was very slim and astonishingly beautiful as she stood at gaze near me and Adrian, who was already a friend of mine.
>
> Then she caught sight of a female friend on the other side of the ballroom and swooped on her like a falcon. (155)

In fact, the *Ring* was regularly performed at Covent Garden from the turn of the century, as was Wagner's entire repertory excepting *Parsifal*. It was the latter that committed Wagnerians had to make the "pilgrimage" to Bayreuth to hear (since it was still under the embargo Wagner had placed on performances elsewhere for thirty years after his death).[16] As noted, Woolf was among those to do so and her Bayreuth article suggests an especially appreciative understanding of *Parsifal*. Woolf even compares Wagner to Shakespeare in seeming

> to have attained in the end such a mastery of technique that he could float and soar in regions where in the beginning he could scarcely breathe; the stubborn matter of his art dissolves in his fingers, and he shapes it as he chooses. When the opera is over, it is surely the completeness of the vast work that remains with us. The earlier operas have always their awkward moments, when the illusion breaks; but *Parsifal* seems poured out in a smooth stream at white heat; its shape is solid and entire. (248)

The assurance with which Wagner's last work is here compared with its predecessors certainly suggests familiarity with the complete oeuvre, and it is unsurprising that Wagnerian allusions have already been found in some of Woolf's novels. That the composer's presence also underlies *Mrs Dalloway* becomes clear when one examines the evidence, even if much of it appears at first glance indirect or even tenuous. Timothy Martin, writing on Joyce and

[16] In an entirely characteristic gesture, he had declared *Parsifal* too sacred a work to be profaned by performances in "unconsecrated" theatres.

Wagner, asserts that an allusion can be considered genuine "if its context seems to draw on themes from the opera or if another reference to Wagner is present" (185). The phrase taken as the title for this chapter is one such example he identifies in Joyce's play *Exiles* (35), where it occurs in the context of a love triangle reminiscent of *Tristan und Isolde*. Stoddard Martin had already noticed this and commented "'the sea, music and death' – Joyce could not have made the Tristan resonance more clearly" (148). The reason for this is at least partly that the conjunction of these three themes has come to be Wagnerian in itself, irrespective of context, and it forms in *Mrs Dalloway* a composite motif whose reverberations sound continuously through the whole.[17]

That being said, it is important to guard against assuming every echo of Wagner in the text to be a deliberate allusion. Unlike Joyce, Woolf cannot be considered a Wagnerian *per se*, and her avouched appreciation for his dramas, especially *Parsifal*, needs to be qualified by proper regard for the wide disparities between his artistic ambitions and sympathies and her own – though it is fascinating to consider how these often mask far deeper underlying connections. It might be thought highly unlikely, for instance, that Woolf would have considered Wagner "androgynous" as she famously did Shakespeare and other canonical male authors in the English tradition, sharply distinguishing them from the dreaded patriarchal wielders of the phallic "I" (something in which Wagner in a sense far surpasses Mr Bennett and his ilk, or anyone else for that matter).[18] And yet, even though Woolf's

[17] This is not, of course, a *leit*motif in the strict sense that "Fear no more" is in the novel, that is, as Timothy Martin describes it, "a brief, distinctive phrase which, through repetition and variation in appropriate contexts, establishes its meaning, acquires intrinsic importance (that is, importance residing not simply in what it signifies or represents), accumulates in thematic and emotional significance, and draws together the contexts in which it appears" (154); cf Furness's description quoted above (note 13). While not limited to any particular form of phrasing, the endless subtle permutations of "sea, music and death" imagery nonetheless behave in precisely the manner described.

[18] I have already referred to the subject of Wagner's unashamedly male self-assertion in his works, their tendency to project what Frye called "a dubious analogy between the creative and the procreative functions" (3) (see p 47 note 42). One thinks here not only of Siegfried's lusty forging song, for example, but the flowering staff in *Tannhäuser* or Walther's gushingly florid and spontaneous songs of spring and love in *Die Meistersinger*. Indeed, one of the strongest objections periodically made by the anti-Wagner lobby is the sheer forcefulness of his works, the way they "seem to demand an incessantly high-level emotional response more insistently than any others" (Tanner 8), which is "precisely what makes them suspect for many people" (10) since it enables them "to sense a dominating presence demanding submission" (45) and one that makes "those who feel most dubious about his art feel that he

interest in Wagner is in a way marginal, certainly compared with the tradition that she undoubtedly felt she (at least partly) belonged to, the admiration she expressed for his operas justifies our taking a different view. The figures she takes to task in her critique of "man's writing" that is "honest and logical; hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding" are by and large those, such as "Mr Galsworthy and Mr Kipling", who today seem to merit her charge of "unmitigated masculinity" (*A Room of One's Own* 149–55). They are limited, in other words, not only by embodying a now discredited chauvinism, but by their diminished stature compared with the large-minded, generous, whole, unbounded, gender-transcending figures of Shakespeare and Coleridge. Although Woolf was here thinking exclusively in terms of English writers, there seems little doubt – if the question had been put to her – in whose company she would have placed the German composer. In any event, it is a matter of historical record (though Woolf is unlikely to have been aware of it), that Wagner regarded his own work as androgynous. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, starting from the composer's own metaphor of poetry as the seed fertilising the womb of music (an extraordinarily apt characterisation of his compositional method), has written a book on the subject. Among Nattiez's claims is that

> it is in order to express the nature of the *Gesamptkunstwerk* that Wagner has recourse to the metaphor of sexual union: the work of total art – the work of art of the future – also has to be the one that, by restoring our original androgyny, will complete the history of music.
>
> In his irrepressible longing for totality, the androgyne cannot admit to temporal limitations: he existed at the beginning of human history – since the world was born of the one – and will also be found at the end, in the whole that will be synonymous with nothingness. (*Wagner Androgyne* 282)

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is making a devilish bid for their souls, just as those who are most spellbound by it are happy to give themselves into its, or his, keeping" (128) (cf. Magee's discussion of its "assertion of will" quoted on p 81). Clearly, the metaphor is a sexual one at root: the listener is supposed to surrender to the forceful seduction of the music as if to a masterful Byronic ravisher (hardly a model of political correctness). What is more, this is no merely idle conceit; there is every indication that Wagner *intended* such a response. (It is alluded to in various ways in the operas themselves, such as when Elisabeth announces to Tannhäuser "But what new worlds outspread before me / When thy dear song upon me stole! / At first a thrill of pain came o'er me, / Then floods of joy o'erwhelmed my soul! / New raptures that I scarce could measure / Awoke within my trembling breast, / And lost was every girlish pleasure / In longings ne'er before confest!" (98–9))

While this suggests a somewhat different concept of "androgyny" from Woolf's (partly in that it consists primarily in a quasi-sexual coupling of both genders, rather than an avoidance of dominance by either),[19] it also suggests that Wagner cannot be easily defined as merely a dominating patriarchal figure (much though his public image encourages that),[20] and that Woolf is therefore unlikely to have thought of him so simplistically. Indeed, while Wagner's music undoubtedly participates uncritically in the masculine-feminine polarity of traditional discourse, it is remarkable for the extent to which it increasingly favours, or inclines towards, the feminine pole (for instance in its preference for "fluidity" over "rigidity" of form).[21] Similarly, the exaggeratedly heroic masculine emphasis of his dramas is belied by their critique of patriarchal institutions and their celebration of an ever-more extreme pacifism.[22] Somewhat ironically, then, Woolf's own quest for an androgynous style has a precursor in Wagner.

Intermezzo: Woolf, Wagner and Anthony Burgess

Septimus's suicide, which occurs some three-quarters through the text of *Mrs Dalloway*, provides a distinct climax. In a final desperate bid to elude and defy his doctors, he throws himself violently out of an upstairs window onto the area railings beneath (subsequently envisaged by the horrified Clarissa as "rusty spikes" (207)). Before looking at this in more detail, it is worth noting

[19] Although in fact Woolf notably uses the procreative metaphor with great aptness and distinction throughout her argument: "a sentence of Coleridge . . . gives birth" to other ideas; crudely masculine authors "cannot penetrate within" the mind "however hard [they hit its] surface"; a Fascist poem "will be a horrid little abortion" produced "out of an incubator"; mental androgyny is necessary "before the act of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated." (153–7)

[20] This is yet another aspect of the widespread misunderstanding of Wagner I have been at pains to emphasise (see especially pp 17–21); Magee tackles it forthrightly in his excellent chapter on "Wagner's Misleading Reputation" (*Wagner and Philosophy* 68–82).

[21] The manner in which this is coupled with the music's Will-full assertion of its own potency is another way the metaphor of androgyny can be seen to be coded into its very structure.

[22] Even Siegfried is not as bellicose as he initially seems, and he gives way in Wagner's canon to Tristan, who deliberately loses his fight with Melot, to Sachs, who laments the violence of others, and to Parsifal, who suffers the wounds dealt by his enemies rather than profane the sacred lance by defending himself with it. In Wagner, masculinity is enhanced, not the reverse, by gentleness and a lack of aggression.

that it appears to have struck at least one other reader as being Wagnerian. In Anthony Burgess's rather strange literary experiment *The Worm and the Ring* (1961), a character is also violently impaled on iron railings, this time accidentally. Burgess, however, quite unambiguously intends a Wagnerian parallel, as the entire novel uses the *Ring* cycle in much the same way that *Ulysses* uses the *Odyssey* – as a kind of scaffolding on which to erect a system of mock-heroic correspondences. The role of Siegfried falls to a schoolboy, Peter Howarth, very much the wholesome innocent alongside his knowing and precocious fellow pupils. Dared by a group of them to retrieve a ball from the schoolhouse rooftop and driven by a naïve sense of family honour, he falls backwards onto the railings "with spikes on" (233), like Siegfried stabbed in the back by Hagen's spear; both victims are scapegoats, sacrificed for the sins of others. Peter's chief nemesis is the cynical Albert Rich (all too obviously Alberich, the Nibelung dwarf who originally makes the accursed ring, and in this scene doubling as the dwarf's son Hagen), though the ultimate responsibility for the accident devolves upon Christopher Howarth, Peter's father and the schoolmaster on duty, as Siegfried's death does on his grandfather Wotan, the chief of the gods.[23] When Brünnhilde apostrophises Wotan in the immolation scene at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, she claims that the weight of his past sins and the curse of the Nibelung's ring are expiated by the hero's death;[24] similarly, as Peter falls, "[h]e offered up what was coming now for his father" (237). As he lies on the spikes, staring tranquilly upward at "the sky with its sailing clouds . . . . [a] bird twittered on a branch of the elm" (238), an allusion to Siegfried's forest bird. (Although the bird is only physically present in the previous opera, *Siegfried*, the hero himself recalls its words to him in the scene leading to his death.) Surprisingly, Peter turns out in the end to have miraculously survived the accident (the heroic correspondences, like Joyce's, are rarely exact and often ironically inverted), but this is also a symbolic resurrection, like that implied in the transfiguring climax of Siegfried's Funeral Music, and Peter now "had the look of one who has discharged a great obligation" (257).

[23] Although Howarth's role is more generally aligned to that of Siegmund, Wotan being – again obviously – the headmaster, Woolton.
[24] See p 61.

Burgess must surely have been aware of the similarity between this incident and that in Woolf's famous novel, but does that imply he thought she had intended a similarly Wagnerian correspondence? If she had, she was certainly far more subtle about it and there is plainly no *Ulysses*-style mythic framework involved. If one compares their treatments of the incident in question, Woolf's resembles the death of Siegfried far less overtly than Burgess's, except for the fact that Septimus actually dies. So, for instance, he takes his own life rather than being the victim of others and it is not quite certain, as it is with Peter, that he lands face upwards. In fact, Septimus's death is more like a conflation of Siegfried's and Tristan's: like Siegfried's it results from a combination of heedless self-abandonment and betrayal by a cruel world, and like Tristan's it is deliberately sought as a release from the unbearable burden of existence.

Lee notes a more obvious correspondence in the novel, that the Greek-speaking birds of Woolf's hallucination "sound romantic rather than horrifying, like the bird Wagner's Siegfried suddenly finds he can understand". She goes on to question whether Woolf "may have refashioned the frightening, unintelligible mental language of her hallucinations – a language which was, as it were, all Greek to her – into a more meaningful ensemble, either immediately afterwards or long afterwards" (*Virginia Woolf* 196–7). Lee does not appear to suggest that Woolf herself saw the resemblance between her bird and Siegfried's but given that Woolf attended this opera in particular on a number of occasions and alludes to it quite unambiguously in *The Years*[25] it is hard to see how she could have overlooked it. Whether speaking in Greek or in German, these birds talk to people – and appear to have something important to say.

But, as its title suggests, this chapter is primarily concerned with the very different hero of that very different opera, *Tristan und Isolde*. Elements of both heroes, in my view, are combined in Septimus – making this a signal instance of the phenomenon whose importance I emphasised in the previous chapter, that of the "musical points of contact and links [between the dramas] that indicate the organic unity of the whole" (Mann 111).[26]

[25] See DiGaetani 124–8.
[26] See p 82.

Irreconcilable Contraries: Septimus, Siegfried and Tristan

At this point, it is essential to return to a more detailed consideration of the Wagnerian canon, and specifically to one of its major emphases, one I have alluded to more than once but have yet to explain in full: its two opposing versions of the hero.

There are essentially four, clearly differentiated, character types in Wagner, and the first and foremost of these – the hero – defines all the others, as they exist purely in relation to him.[27] The hero is presented entirely without irony as a man whose stature and vision are exceptional, so that he towers head and shoulders above all others; the dramatic and, especially, musical resources are employed to enhance this impression to the utmost, to invest him, as it were, with a palpable aura of greatness. One of the things anti-Wagnerians find most offensive is the way this appears to be a shameless expression of the artist's own ego, since Wagner himself is always plainly present in his own hero. But this, it seems to me, is really only part and parcel of the way his music expresses "life as it would be if the Id could have its way" (Magee, *Aspects of Wagner* 60); quite unencumbered by tact, Wagner (in his art and, frequently, in his life) allowed himself to act the uninhibited hero in ways most of us abandon in early childhood but perhaps secretly wish we could still indulge ourselves in.

While, at some points, these additional characters and relationships will become relevant to the discussion, my principal focus remains the central figure himself and, most pertinently of all, his further subdivision into two mutually exclusive and diametrically opposing types. These types are delineated by Tanner as follows:

[27] The remaining three types are: (a) the beloved (who embodies everything the hero wishes for – and ultimately attains), (b) the villain (whose meanness and pusillanimity stand in direct antithesis to the hero's nobility) and (c) all the rest – authority figures, brothers-in-arms, rivals in love, loyal retainers, and so on (who stand for the vast mass of humanity in general, against whose ordinariness the hero can stand out in greater relief, and who generally regard him with unmixed admiration and awe).

> people who [have] no past – innocents, ignoramuses – and . . . people who [have] all too much of a past, who [are] burdened with having done something so dreadful (which might simply be having been born) that only by a prodigious act on their part, or on someone else's on their behalf, [can] they be released from the torments of an insupportable existence which [can] not be ended until they [are] absolved (186).

This pattern of contrasting heroes is no simple matter. Of the two, the tragic or fatally doomed hero is the more prominent overall, and probably the more interesting for a sophisticated modern audience. It occurs prototypically in the central figure of Wagner's earliest masterpiece, *The Flying Dutchman* – a pale figure, all in black, cursed to an eternal existence that is a torment to him. After a somewhat watered-down version of this in his next opera, *Tannhäuser*, Wagner first introduces the radiant redeeming hero in *Lohengrin* – a knight in dazzling silvery armour, surrounded whenever he appears by a sort of musical halo, the shimmering Grail motif on ethereal high violins. Thereafter, in the mature dramas, matters grow more complicated. Apart from *Tristan*, Wagner's most extended – and sublime – treatment of the suffering hero, all his mature works involve both types. In the *Ring*, the most complex of all, they are most obviously present in the tragic god Wotan and his blissfully ignorant human grandson Siegfried. Similar pairings are evident in Sachs and Walther in *Die Meistersinger* and, pushed to the furthest extreme, in Amfortas ("Tristan inconceivably intensified")[28] and the eponymous hero in *Parsifal*.

More importantly, there is a widespread view that associates the two types of hero with two equally diametrically opposed obsessions that manage to coexist within Wagner's work and that create some of the most fascinating tensions within it. Mahaffey, one of the few Joyceans to take this into account, claims simply "[t]here are two Richard Wagners", one the proto-Nietzschean revolutionary, creator of Siegfried and anarchic destroyer of idols, the other the post-Schopenhauerian decadent, "robed in a silk dressing gown and composing elaborate orchestral 'illusions'", whose characters seek "death or atonement in a darkened theater" (237).

[28] See p 83.

To fully unpack the workings of this bipolarity in Wagner would be a subject for a full-length study in itself; a brief outline must suffice here. The principal issue is the centrality – in all the dramas – of the theme of redemption. Leaving aside the role played by the other characters, notably the heroines and villains, the two types of male protagonist are either those in need of redemption or those who offer it. The former are, as we have seen, the predominant type; they feature in every one of the major works except *Lohengrin*. The exact nature of what it is they need to be redeemed from varies in the details but in essence is always that their very existence consists in unbearable suffering. The Flying Dutchman, again the prototype in this, encapsulates the problem in its simplest form: he cannot die, and his life consists of interminably sailing stormy waters. Tannhäuser, at least in the last act, is banished, excommunicated, and damned. Wotan, an especially complex case, is, as chief of the gods, responsible for the effective running of the world but has made a woefully bad job of it; his own power rests on flawed contracts, and is constantly under threat from the baleful influence of the ring and its curse. His own son Siegmund, at first a potential redeemer, is himself a homeless outcast and is ultimately crushed by the forces that his father has set in motion. As the Wanderer, Wotan looks to his grandson to resolve matters and longs for his own supersession and the end of the power (and the existence) that has by now become an intolerable burden to him. Tristan, like the Dutchman, simply longs for death, in his case because it is the only possible consummation of an infinite yearning. Sachs, being in a comedy, suffers less, but is still painfully aware of, and resigned to, the madness and folly of this world. Finally, Amfortas, the culminating case, languishes of a burning wound that will neither heal nor kill him, instead preserving him in his agony (of which the wound itself is the least part, all but outweighed by the psychological torment occasioned by the daily humiliation of having to administer to others the sacrament of which he is himself unworthy).

Most of these parts – Tristan is the chief exception[29] – are written for baritone and all of them feature powerfully dramatic monologues, set to some

[29] The others are Tannhäuser and Siegmund – the latter an equivocal figure in any case.

of the most protractedly anguished music ever composed. By complete contrast, the radiant tenor roles of the redeemer heroes – a rather smaller number – are characterised by irrepressibly bright and buoyant energy. These heroes either do not suffer at all or at least not to anything approaching the same degree; even when aware of suffering, they generally have reserves of innocence or spiritual well-being that preserve them from its worst excesses.

Lohengrin, the first of the redeemers, is a semi-divine figure, a heavenly messenger who appears to offer the world the possibility of enlightened leadership; since it ultimately fails (through Elsa) to take this offer on trust, he is obliged to withdraw both it and himself – the only example in Wagner's canon where final redemption is not granted. Lohengrin is also most atypical in being a conscious redeemer. Siegfried, by contrast, helps to save the world without being the least bit aware of it, or of anything beyond the fact that he is having some enjoyable adventures. Thus he annuls the baleful influence of the ring, at first temporarily (through winning possession of it), then permanently (through his sacrificial death, an unconscious act of atonement that leads Brünnhilde to final enlightenment and simultaneously lifts the age-old burden of guilt from Wotan).[30] Walther, almost as unconsciously, rejuvenates the spirit of the Mastersingers and brings a newfound unity and social harmony to Nuremberg. Finally, it is precisely through his ignorance that Parsifal is led to a knowledge that eludes the wise, allowing him to heal the wound of Amfortas and succeed him as Keeper of the Grail, the last and crowning of Wagner's acts of salvation.

Limited as this brief overview is, it does reveal the central pattern: suffering arises from too acute consciousness, from the agony of existence itself. The tragic figures are always horribly self-aware, and also tormented by their inability to achieve the impossible: for the Dutchman, simply not to be; for Wotan, to enjoy both power and love unconditionally; for Tristan, to assuage an infinite yearning; for Amfortas, to reconcile sexual guilt with his supremely sacred office. And the redeemers, their antitheses, are almost always serenely un-self-conscious and demonstrate an enviable capacity to

[30] See p 61.

lose themselves in the enjoyment of life. It is as if, in their innocence, they achieve the very non-being (or at least non-conscious being) for which the others yearn: a state exemplified by Schopenhauer's description of contemplation as that highly desirable mode of consciousness in which, through absorption in the object,

> we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object, so that it is as though the object alone existed without anyone to perceive it, and thus we are no longer able to separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one, since the entire consciousness is filled and occupied by a single image of perception. If, therefore, the object has to such an extent passed out of all relation to something outside it, and the subject has passed out of all relation to the will, what is thus known is no longer the individual thing as such, but the *Idea*, the eternal form, the immediate objectivity of the will at this grade. Thus at the same time, the person who is involved in this perception is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; he is *pure*, will-less, painless, timeless *subject of knowledge* (v1.178–9).

There is plainly nothing esoteric about this; it is a perfectly familiar part of human experience. What is new (or at least newly expressed)[31] is the idea that it constitutes an *actual* loss of identity, and that, contrary to the suppositions of those caught up in the veils of the Buddhist's *maya*, or the self-deluding instincts of the will, this is a desirable outcome.

Siegfried listening to the forest bird is evidently a prime example of such rapt absorption,[32] from which he only emerges to the extent of wondering what the bird's song means, then trying to imitate it – all typically natural unreflective actions. Somewhat surprisingly, then, the hero whom even sympathetic critics tend to dismiss as a mere buffoon[33] embodies a way of being in the world that both composer and philosopher appear to recommend highly, though acknowledging its elusiveness for more

[31] Schopenhauer frequently acknowledges Vedic literature as anticipating his philosophy, albeit in mystical terms that he asserts are no longer necessary or desirable.
[32] See p 72.
[33] Kitcher and Schacht for example consider him "far more a part of the problem than any solution to it", "an impulsive, shallow adolescent" and a "crude bully", claim that he and the scheming dwarf Mime "thoroughly deserve one another", and conclude that "it is hard to conceive of a youth more ridiculously obtuse" (187).

introspective persons. Tristan, for example, suffers from the impossibility of full absorption in the object, which for him is always Isolde, and longs for the utter extinction of consciousness in the endless night of the love-death. Thus, both types of hero, while seeming irreconcilable opposites, ultimately depict the same thing: that the end of suffering is to cease being a self.

Returning our attention to *Mrs Dalloway*, it is immediately striking that the two Wagner heroes I have suggested are alluded to in the novel's presentation of Septimus, are precisely those who can most easily be seen as the defining examples of each type. Where Siegfried grows up half wild in the forest, knows nothing about anything – himself included, and spends his time talking to the birds, blowing his horn, waving his sword about and generally running cheerfully from one adventure to the next, shouting "Heigho!" at the top of his voice, Tristan is an immeasurably more restrained and intellectual hero, almost an operatic Hamlet. Resembling Siegfried in being an orphan whose mother died in childbirth and whose father fell in battle shortly after begetting him, Tristan's whole personality – as his name suggests[34] – is coloured (as Siegfried's patently is not) by the sadness of his family history. Raised among the ruins of Kareol in Brittany (to which he returns in Act III – the climax of his suffering) and exposed thereafter to a life of travel and accomplishments, Tristan is the epitome of the chivalric courtier, elegant, gracious and urbane, yet at the same time withdrawn, haunted, distant – quintessentially romantic. While Wagner is following tradition in so characterising his sad hero, he – impressively – does not do so through detailed reference to past events (which are if anything substantially repressed in the text) but through the music: the very contours of Tristan's vocal line are tinged with sadness, from his first courteous exchange with Brangäne, and even before he speaks (or sings) his posture alone indicates his subdued mood – his back turned to the others, his eyes fixed on the horizon, weighed down by a hopeless love that seems the perfect expression of his inmost being.[35] The contrast with Siegfried is so absolute it seems

[34] Tristan's name, as Scruton notes, was traditionally (if incorrectly) derived "from the hero's *tristesse*, an attribute that preceded his fatal enchantment with Isolde, and that remained through all his many adventures" (15).

[35] This impression ought to be immediately apparent to an attentive audience of any production that observes Wagner's stage directions (though such an occurrence is perhaps

doubtful Wagner did not intend it. Indeed it is worth remembering that it was precisely in the middle of composing *Siegfried*, at the end of the scene with the forest bird, that he broke off to begin work on *Tristan* – as discussed in the previous chapter, in direct response to his life-changing encounter with Schopenhauer.[36]

Interestingly, Woolf appears to allude to Wagner primarily in order to express views strikingly similar to Schopenhauer's (which there seems to be no clear evidence of her having read)[37] about the illusory nature of

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unlikely today). This is true despite the fact that the lovers only acknowledge their feelings openly after drinking the potion at the end of Act I and then only because, under the mistaken impression that they are about to die, they see no reason for further concealment (see p 20 note 8, pp 75–6). The real beginning of their love takes place long before the rise of the curtain; it is precisely pinpointed in Isolde's narration to Brangäne, when she recalls how the wounded Tristan had looked up at her from his sick bed and his longing gaze pierced her own (see pp 51–2; 74–5). But even this only confirms what is apparent to the observant spectator from the beginning, both from Isolde's fixated staring at Tristan, and his own listlessness, as he stands "somewhat apart . . . his arms folded, gazing thoughtfully out over the sea" (15). In this posture he remains absolutely motionless throughout the first part of the scene, oblivious to everything around him until, at the mention of Isolde's name, he is suddenly jolted to attention; he then almost immediately controls himself and becomes gravely courteous, only the music expressing his unacknowledged and unassuageable sadness. Cf. Scruton: "The artistic purpose of the Prelude [is] to *begin the action*, to set it in motion by purely musical means, so that the drama is already advancing inexorably towards its culmination even before the curtain rises. . . . by this device Wagner ensures that we, like Isolde, are saturated by an emotion that we have yet to understand." (36)

[36] See p 71.

[37] At least I can find no references to him in any of her published letters and diaries, though it is extremely unlikely that she did not at least know something of his work at second hand. Christine Froula sees Woolf and Bloomsbury in general as in large measure formed by the intellectual heritage of Kant. "To do justice to the ways (both obvious and subtle) that the influence of Kant, that towering intellectual ancestor of modernity, stamps the work of Leslie Stephen, Freud, George Moore, Roger Fry and Clive Bell, is beyond this chapter's scope. . . . Bloomsbury's modernist aesthetics resonates with Kant's emphasis on the artwork's purely formal beauty, apart from content, truth claims and external rule. . . . In this originality, the artwork actualises a freedom that belongs to the noumenal (supersensible) realm, beyond reach of nature's sensible, phenomenal realm and beyond human will." (*Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde* 12–13) Froula makes a case for Woolf's mind being formed not only by her father's "philosophical bent" and access to his prodigious library but also by his (for its time) unusual receptivity to things German (16–17). This is the context of Magee's remarking that, even though "the extraordinary cultural renaissance that began in Germany in the eighteenth century passed to an extreme degree unnoticed in England, . . . there were individuals in England who did take an interest in what was going on in Germany, and were excited by it. The first of those whose name is familiar to us now was Coleridge. Then there was Carlyle. By the middle of the century there was a small but recognizable band of English intellectuals who had, among other aims, a conscious desire to propagate an awareness of German literature and thought to an educated English public that was not just ignorant of it but still largely uninterested in it." (*Wagner and Philosophy* 147–8) Froula quotes Stephen's biographer Noel Annan as making the claim, "No one can appreciate the nineteenth century, or indeed our own times, unless he realizes that we live in the shadow of a Renaissance as brilliant and dominating as the Italian Renaissance" (*Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* 165), and emphasises "the continuity between Freud's radical insights on postwar Europe's future, Kant's vision of Enlightenment as unending struggle, and both thinkers' deep ambivalence toward civilization and their stress on rational systems and institutions rather

consciousness. Indeed, as I will show, the text of *Mrs Dalloway* contains numerous strong correspondences to both Wagner and Schopenhauer (frequently overlapping with one another). If Woolf had not, in fact, read Schopenhauer, this must surely represent a further instance of the tendency noted by Young whereby "a great deal of his thinking has become part of the natural consciousness of the present age" (245), if the "present" age may be allowed to extend backwards to the 1920s. In Woolf's case, an indirect Schopenhauerian influence would have been unavoidable, infused as it was not only throughout Wagner's later operas, but also the works of several prominent recent novelists, notably Tolstoy, Hardy and Conrad.[38] The general cultural predominance of Wagner at the time that DiGaetani argues makes Woolf "a product of her environment" (111)[39] means that – at the very least through conversations with avowed Wagnerian friends such as Sydney Saxon-Turner – she would have been familiar with Wagner's philosophical preferences and how they helped to shape his works. There is also a great deal in the Schopenhauerian-Wagnerian world-view that Woolf would have found congenial and in general accord with her own beliefs (albeit modified by other emphases she would presumably have found less sympathetic – such as Schopenhauer's misogyny and Wagner's anti-Semitism).[40]

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than individuals in their political thought; in short, their pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will." (337 note 46) Froula makes no mention of Schopenhauer; cf. Young's view that he is an essential but neglected intermediary between Kant and the twentieth century and an important unacknowledged influence on Freud in particular (see p 39 note 26), as well as his comment that the neglect he continues to suffer "is really something of a scandal" (244).

[38] See pp 38–9. Magee also makes a similar claim, that is for an indirect or mediated influence, for Dylan Thomas, whom he speculates may have absorbed Schopenhauerian ideas through reading Hardy (*The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 391–3). He also frequently implies that the diffusion of the philosopher's thought was so complete by the early twentieth century as to be almost impossible to avoid in one form or another. In Woolf's case, however, the strongest evidence of such awareness (conscious or otherwise) is found in her writings. A most striking example in *Mrs Dalloway*, amounting almost to a restatement of Schopenhauer, is Septimus's bitter thought that "One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities, eddying them now this way, now that" (99).

[39] See pp 97–8.

[40] Woolf's own apparent anti-Semitism might be thought to problematise the issue, though the consensus among critics has been to regard it as slight and even condonable. Briggs regards it as "unconscious" (179), though "thoughtless" might be a more accurate term. Lee characterises her introducing Leonard to friends as "a penniless jew" as an outrageous jest, calculated to shock (*Virginia Woolf* 325), while Froula reminds us of the important fact that the "Nazi genocide of the Jews" was "then unimaginable" (398 note 21). Magee even uses a similar line of argument in discussing Wagner's (far more serious) anti-Semitism: despite the indescribable revulsion and moral outrage that anti-Semitism rightly arouses *after* the

"Red flowers grew through his flesh": Sacrifice, renewal and communion

Turning now to a more detailed examination of *Mrs Dalloway*, there is – as suggested above – a wealth of imagery surrounding Septimus that appears to incorporate allusions to both Siegfried and Tristan (all the more appropriate in that such markedly contrasting heroes reflect the two poles of Septimus's tragically divided personality). The amount of textual detail that could be cited in evidence is prodigious; I will therefore confine myself to only the broader overall patterns.

Almost as soon as Septimus is introduced, a sense of the essential oneness of all things emerges with visionary intensity. Upon the drawn blinds of a motor car there appears

> a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. (14)

The image of a tree as emblematic of the cosmos (suggested here by its being a "drawing together of everything") is of course an archetypal one (and is also found in the mythical world-ash (Yggdrasil) to which Wagner refers in the *Ring*). Septimus's terrified reaction, on the other hand, is a vividly realised presentation of a mind in a state of neurotic, near-hallucinatory, panic. This is, all too clearly, the world as Septimus's representation, its unreality emphasised by its wavering and quivering appearance. The imagery of flickering flames also occurs frequently in the text and music of the *Ring*, culminating in the conflagration that engulfs Valhalla in the end (and that is fuelled by the riven boughs of the world-ash).[41]

Holocaust, "to apply standards of judgement based on what the Holocaust has done to us to people who lived generations before it happened is to look at history through a distorting lens. If those of us who live after the event can still not get our minds round the reality of it, how can we expect pre-Holocaust anti-semites to have possessed the remotest conception of what their attitudes could lead to, and what serious grounds can we really have for attributing to them a readiness to condone it?" (369)

[41] These similarities are too oblique and subtle to be considered allusions, but they are undoubtedly suggestive.

The narrative shifts soon after this to the calmer but poignantly isolated inner world of Septimus's Italian wife Rezia, blended of homesickness, concern for her husband's state of mind, and uncertainty over whether to trust the advice of Dr Holmes:

> The frustration of her love for [Septimus] turns to anger, particularly at how he seems to be happy in his solipsism. . . . The novel blurs the boundaries between Rezia's despair at her husband's condition, Holmes' failure to recognise that he is ill, her loneliness as an Italian in a foreign country, and public discourses about masculinity, heroism and death. (Peach 111)

Woolf indeed takes obvious delight in ridiculing Holmes' conventionally manly English bedside manner:

> Dr. Holmes had told her to make her husband (who had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts) take an interest in things outside himself. (22)

Beyond mocking the inanity of the diagnosis, Woolf's point is that the relationship between the human subject and the "things outside himself" is a matter of some complexity. Septimus's consciousness, seemingly wrapped in itself, is really absorbed in contemplation of the world, although he appears only partly able to distinguish between "reality" and his intrusive visions. Increasingly in *Mrs Dalloway*, one detects intolerance for the view expressed by Holmes that "things outside" – the proverbial "real world" of business, sports and social interaction – constitute the only ultimate reality, or even that they are real at all.

Guided by Rezia to a bench in Regent's Park, Septimus reflects that

> leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement. The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white and the blue, barred with black branches. Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. . . . Rightly far away a horn sounded. All taken together meant the birth of a new religion. (23)

The image-cluster here recalls *Siegfried*: trees, birds, a distant horn, and underlying all the distinctive sense of calm communion, a being at one, with the natural world. The "birth of a new religion" reminds us of Siegfried's (unconscious) messianic mission and Wagner's own ambition to replace the Judaeo-Christian world-view with a "purely human" religion of art.[42] Septimus's "religion" is not doctrinally defined but is evidently a summation of all the sensations and intuitions he experiences. The keynote is his powerful sense of the interconnectedness of all things, himself included. It is this in particular that suggests a far closer affinity to the "Forest Murmurs" than merely shared images; the composition of the whole scene is similarly designed to emphasise the protagonist's identification with the attractively tranquil scene before him. In each case, we are reminded of Schopenhauer's remarks about the absorption of the beholder in the object of contemplation.[43] Only, in Septimus's case, he does not remain completely absorbed but a part of him becomes conscious of the process. (That is, Woolf's technique of free indirect representation suggests that the narrator is complicit in Septimus's thoughts, so that he is not simply described as being connected to the leaves, but rather that is his own perception.)

Like Siegfried, Septimus then waits to hear what message the birds will reveal to him and is rewarded (albeit without having to taste dragon's blood) by hearing it call him by name:

> He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (25)

It is questionable here how much is the delusion of a madman and how much a genuine insight into life, or even a recommended way of living.[44] The idea

[42] Cf. Scruton, quoted on p 38 note 23.
[43] See p 108.
[44] I concede that this is an unusual approach to the character. Lee's, which may be taken as (relatively) standard, is that Septimus "is not always able to distinguish between his personal response and the indifferent, universal nature of external reality" and in fact "struggles to do so". As a result, "[t]he distinction between self and external reality is as blurred, in his mind,

that there is no crime might be related to the lawlessness Wagner celebrates in his free hero; that there is no death is altogether more mysterious. That it appears in conjunction with traditional images of the afterlife is problematised by the horror of Septimus's periodic visions of his fallen comrade Evans and by the generally godless nature of his and the novel's universe. Siegfried's bird, by contrast, gives him unambiguous messages of immediate practical benefit: to take the ring and tarnhelm from the dragon's hoard, to beware Mime's treachery, and to seek the sleeping valkyrie. There is, in other words, an obvious difference of sense and idiom between Wagner's fairy-tale opera and Woolf's realistic portrayal of a mentally disturbed man – and this appears, on the face of it, to undermine, or to render ironic, the correspondence. To be specific, it is natural for the epic hero to have supernatural experiences, whereas the modern antihero must be assumed to be hallucinating. To assume this, however, is first of all to make the mistake I warned against in the opening chapter – taking Wagner at face value. The content of *Siegfried* in particular is by no means as naïve or as pantomimic as it might appear. Mann indeed singles this work out as exemplifying precisely that "double focus" he suggests is so important a part of Wagner's *oeuvre.*[45] More than slapstick horseplay, then, Siegfried's colloquy with the forest bird has a more serious meaning, for it signals his intimate relationship with the natural world, his ability to derive insight from it – which the opera implies is one of the unique attributes that sets him apart from others, thereby exposing the spiritual poverty of modern man in general. Possibly, Woolf is implying a similar capacity for her "mad" hero; considering further evidence will be helpful here.

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as the distinction between different forms of physical response: sight, sound, touch. In an attempt to sort this out as it happens to him, Septimus, the victim of Science and Proportion, tries to be 'scientific'; but the universe he inhabits, in which the usual categories are merged beyond recognition, defies analysis". As an example Lee cites the "leaves were alive" passage (see above, pp 113–14) and concludes, "Septimus's perceptions are those of a normal sensibilty taken to its illogical conclusion". (*The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 109) While agreeing with most of this, I would add that abandoning conventional wisdom for a post-Schopenhauerian view of reality throws a rather different light on Septimus's condition. Unquestionably confused, tormented, deluded and unable to function in the world as he is, Septimus nonetheless sees the world in transcendental terms. His inability "to distinguish between his personal response" and, for example, the movements of the branches and the flocks of sparrows conceals the deeper insight that in the noumenal realm all these things are literally one.

[45] See pp 18, 86 note 85.

The gulf between the isolated individual and the compliance demanded of him by social convention now increases to an almost ludicrous degree, as Rezia remembers Holmes telling her "to make him notice real things, go to a music-hall, play cricket", while Septimus ascends to an altogether more ethereal plane:

> Look the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket smitten only by the sun, for ever unwasted, suffering for ever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer, but he did not want it, he moaned, putting from him with a wave of his hand that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness. (26)

The birds have now given way to an unspecified "voice" and Septimus, still a messianic figure (at least in his own estimation), is now seen in his suffering rather than his rescuing aspect. Significantly, it is here that Septimus's resemblance to Tristan – specifically the dying Tristan of Act III – becomes marked. Beyond the mere fact that Tristan, like Siegfried, is frequently described in terms synonymous with "the greatest of mankind" and "the Lord who had come to renew society", is the powerful sense of his "suffering for ever". Scruton rightly sees him in this final act as "the man of sorrows" (186). That he too has been "lately taken from life to death" is clear. He has sought death throughout the entire length of the opera thus far and though he still has a long way to go and the worst of his sufferings to get through he is gradually nearing his destination: mortally wounded, committed to death, only alive now because he is waiting for Isolde to join him. But he has also, at least temporarily, been taken from death to life, has apparently had what is called a near-death-experience, though emphatically not one involving a tunnel of light or any other paraphernalia of popular iconography. As he weakly confides to his squire Kurwenal,

> Where I awoke stayed I not
> But where I tarried –
> Yet that I cannot tell thee.
> The sun I did not see,
> Nor yet the land and people;

But, what I saw –
Nay, that I cannot tell thee.
I was where I have been from ever,
Where I forever go:
The boundless realm of worldwide night. (227–8)[46]

This sublime passage, set to the most hauntingly evocative music, is arguably the most profound moment in the score, the emotional heart of the entire work and what it expresses is both disbelief in any conventional doctrine of the soul's immortality and an immense, consoling peace.[47] There is also a hint, necessarily of the faintest kind, that the non-being that so utterly eludes Tristan's attempts to describe it is nonetheless not mere empty nothingness but a mystery surpassing all our categories of thought.

Like Septimus too Tristan does not want that eternal suffering, would rather let the cup pass from him, but has no choice in the matter. At the unendurable climax of his agony, he screams curses at the potion that caused it, now clearly no longer the love-potion of Act I but synecdoche for all the circumstances that constitute his existence. And throughout the final act he too is "smitten only by the sun" (a motif Woolf introduces in *Mrs Dalloway* from the moment of Septimus's first appearance, when "the throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body. The sun became extraordinarily hot" (14)). As throughout the opera night is emblematic of death, so day of life, especially the public life of the court;[48] and as Act II recreates the sublime sensuality of the lovers' timeless union in the night, so Act III depicts the mercilessly baking glare of the late afternoon sun in which Tristan lies racked on his sick-bed:

Nowhere, ah, nowhere is there rest,
For I'm by night to daylight cast;
For aye while my woe doth wound me
The sunlight shineth around me!
O yonder sunlight's withering beam –

[46] This is the passage discussed in more detail above (see pp 78–9) in the context of Wagner's conversion to transcendental idealism.
[47] Cf. Scruton's assessment of *Tristan* as "a drama which proceeds toward death through every kind of mental, physical, and spiritual suffering, and which is yet one of the most consoling works of art to have been produced in modern times." (162)
[48] See pp 76–7.

> It burneth my brain with the glow of its gleam!
> This hateful heat doth wither and burn me;
> No shadows cool whereto I can turn me. (254–5)

For Septimus too, this excruciating exposure increases relentlessly:

> It was the heat wave presumably, operating upon a brain made sensitive by eons of evolution. Scientifically speaking, the flesh was melted off the world. His body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock. (75)

Despite the absurd tone of Septimus's "scientifically speaking", the image of flesh melted by intense heat and reduced to "nerve fibres" (and by association human experience reduced to the sensation of physical pain, necessarily extreme) suggests an impressive counterpart to Tristan's protracted agonies – in his case made immeasurably more terrible through Wagner's magnificently evocative music. The Act III prelude, an expression of stultifying oppression and weariness, sets the tone for the act as a whole, which is allowed to build up waves of incessant and pitiless burning torment, the unmistakeable physicality of which makes it all the more impressive an expression of Tristan's ultimately metaphysical suffering. By the time we reach the supreme climax, the setting of the words quoted above, it has already seemed unendurable for some time and yet still keeps managing to get worse.[49] Throughout all of this relentless suffering, Tristan repeatedly "sinks back exhausted". Septimus reacts to his own sufferings in precisely the same way:

> He lay back in his chair, exhausted but upheld. He lay resting, waiting, before he again interpreted, with effort, with agony, to mankind. He lay very high, on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head. Music began clanging against the rocks up here. It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered; but up here it cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met in shocks of sound which rose in smooth columns (that music should be visible was a discovery) and became an

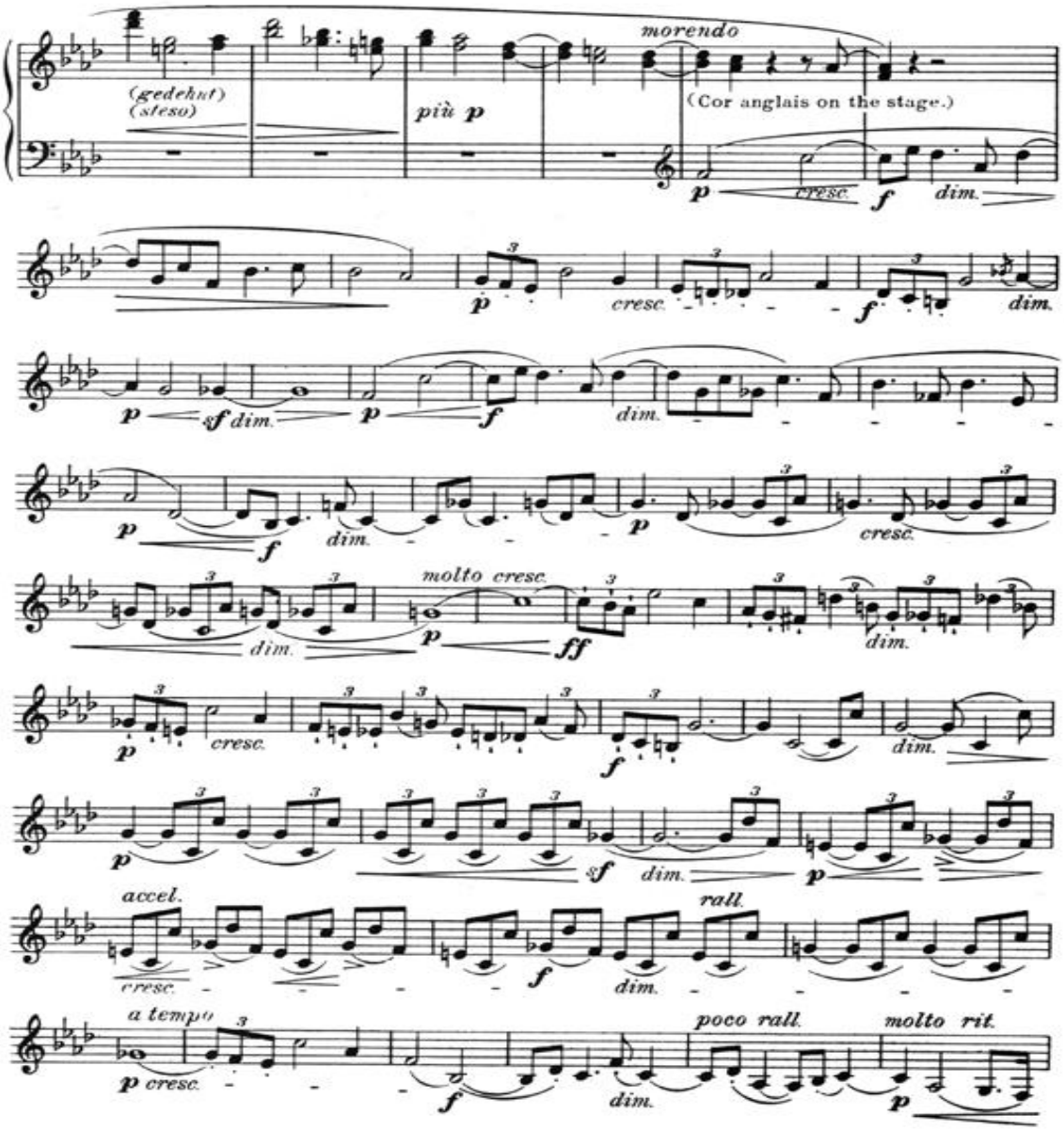
[49] Cf. Tanner: "The music rises to an intolerable pitch of intensity . . . . the first of his great cycles of agony . . . the second cycle will be far worse. . . . Throughout the frightful scene that follows . . . . climax follows unimaginable climax" (148–9).

> anthem, an anthem twined round now by a shepherd boy's piping . . . which, as the boy stood still, came bubbling from his pipe, and then, as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath. This boy's elegy is played among the traffic, thought Septimus. (75–6)

Septimus is actually still sitting on his park bench, but he seems to have been transported in his mind to another world, one that sounds remarkably like the stage directions for *Tristan* Act III:

> *The situation is supposed to be on rocky cliffs; through openings one looks over a wide sea to the horizon. The whole scene gives an impression of being ownerless, badly kept, here and there dilapidated and overgrown. In the foreground inside lies Tristan, sleeping on a couch, under the shade of a great lime-tree, extended as if lifeless. . . . From without comes the sound of a shepherd's pipe.* (217)

It is the shepherd who seems to clinch the connection; he is the same figure T. S. Eliot quotes, and with similar effect, in the line "*Oed' und leer das Meer*" (*The Waste Land* 42). This line, which translates as "Bare and clear the sea" (220), has essentially the same import as the piping itself – both signal that the ship bearing Isolde has not yet been sighted and Tristan's loneliness must remain unrelieved. The melody itself (played onstage by solo *cor anglais*) is an extraordinarily effective depiction of the empty horizon as a symbol of isolation. It is characterised by Tanner as "huge, weird, relentlessly unending" and seeming to come "from another time and place" (147), and by Roger Scruton as "paint[ing] the world with Tristan's sadness, mak[ing] sadness ubiquitous and unescapable" (116):



Plainly, the "shepherd boy" Septimus hears is not really supposed to be in Regent's Park (as the sparrows evidently are); indeed Septimus himself is clearly no longer there except in body. That the boy "stood still" and then "climbed higher" corresponds to the comings and goings over the "rocky cliffs" of the *Tristan* shepherd; that his "elegy is played among the traffic" suggests that the visionary plane "up here" somehow intersects with the real one in a way that resembles Tristan's own state of delirium. The world of Septimus's representation is so transformed by his hallucinations that the very notion of reality is called into question; while he dimly appears to retain

awareness of the "real" world on the periphery of his vision, suggesting an eerie impression of two landscapes superimposed against one another, the outer one remains emphatically "beneath" the inner, which thereby takes precedence over it. Septimus has evidently succeeded, for the time being, in leaving the world. Whereas for Tristan the romantic setting symbolises his isolation, the modern antihero has no such frame to dignify his suffering but is forced to create his own, in defiance of the noisy, brightly coloured and populous urban environment he is confined to. This very process of creation, however, suggests the Tristanesque theme of real and illusory worlds; in both cases, stricken and sensitive souls seek to forsake the daylit world of public life for a realm all but purged of human habitation and trembling on the verge of the nothingness beyond.

It is even notable that Septimus's posture is altered in the dream world: while physically remaining still on the park bench, he first "lay back in his chair" (a transitional phase perhaps), then lay "on the back of the world", in direct proximity to the earth, and feeling himself intimately attached to it – "[t]he earth thrilled beneath him". This is, momentarily at least, rather more like Siegfried again (it will be remembered that the "Forest Murmurs" episode characterises him as being at one with the earth).[50]

Here it is necessary to consider in more detail one of the most fascinating aspects of the equal-but-opposite relation of the two Wagner heroes – and specifically with reference to these two pivotal scenes, so utterly different in mood: Siegfried relaxing in the forest; Tristan languishing upon the sea-cliffs. Both obviously feature the hero at rest, and in a deserted natural setting. Both are also specifically placed directly underneath "a great lime tree" (*Tristan* 217; *Siegfried* 118) – a remarkably close concurrence by any standards.[51] In Siegfried's case, given the emphasis on his intuitive awareness of the at-one-ness of everything, this carries a further mythic resonance, that of the Buddha under the Bo tree.[52] At the same time, as I

[50] See pp 71–2, 114.
[51] Trees, of one type or another, feature so prominently in Wagner's *oeuvre* that one might easily write a book on that alone.
[52] It is uncertain whether this was an intentional correspondence when the text was written; it almost certainly was when the music was composed. Reading Schopenhauer taught Wagner a good deal about Buddhism (the philosopher's favourite religion) and encouraged him to study its teachings for himself; the "Forest Murmurs", it will be remembered, was set to music

have repeatedly stressed, he is predestined to become the sacrificial lamb whose innocent blood must be shed for the purgation and renewal of the world.[53] And yet it is Tristan whom Scruton sees as "'the man of sorrows' from whose sacrifice redemption proceeds" (186),[54] so this religious theme can be seen as a further device connecting the various operas to one another:

> To render the Christian idea of redemption in artistic form is automatically to move beyond the arena in which tragedies are played out, into a place where death loses its finality. This is the enchanted landscape of *Parsifal*, and it is part of Wagner's genius to have perceived that the Christian idea of redemption looks beyond tragedy to the celestial acceptance of suffering as the precondition of renewal. . . . But the avoidance of tragedy informs all the great Wagnerian dramas, including *Tristan*, and this fact is of a piece with the act of Christian renunciation that compels the Wagnerian plot. (171)

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in the wake of Wagner's "conversion", immediately prior to beginning *Tristan* (see p 65). It furthermore seems likely that Wagner's imagination would have been much stimulated by the correspondences between the Bo tree and Yggdrassil, beneath which the Aesir would gather to dispense justice, one of whose roots grew from the well of wisdom from which Odin/Wotan drank, and upon whose trunk the god offered himself as a sacrifice to himself, hanging there for nine days. The last example corresponds more obviously still to the Crucifixion; in all three cases, the Tree/Cross symbolically stands at the *omphalos*, the central point of the world, of both space and time, and there the Saviour enacts the rite, or endures the ordeal, that accomplishes the world's redemption. Cf. Campbell: "The Buddha beneath the Tree of Enlightenment (the Bo Tree) and Christ on Holy Rood (the Tree of Redemption) are analogous figures, incorporating an archetypal World Saviour, World Tree motif, which is of immemorial antiquity. . . . The Immovable Spot and Mount Calvary are images of the World Navel, or World Axis" (33 note 37); "The effect of the successful adventure of the hero is the unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world. The miracle of this flow may be represented in physical terms as a circulation of food substance, dynamically as a streaming of energy, or spiritually as a manifestation of grace. . . . The torrent pours from an invisible source, the point of entry being the center of the symbolic circle of the universe, the Immovable Spot of the Buddha legend, around which the earth may be said to revolve. Beneath this spot is the earth-supporting head of the cosmic serpent, the dragon, symbolical of the waters of the abyss, which are the divine life-creative energy and substance of the demiurge, the world-generative aspect of immortal being. The tree of life, i.e., the universe itself, grows from this point. It is rooted in the supporting darkness; the golden sun bird perches on its peak; a spring, the inexhaustible well, bubbles at its foot. . . . the figure may be that of the cosmic man or woman (for example the Buddha himself, or the dancing Hindu goddess Kali) seated or standing on this spot, or even fixed to the tree (Attis, Jesus, Wotan); for the hero as the incarnation of God is himself the navel of the world, the umbilical point through which the energies of eternity break into time. Thus the World Navel is the symbol of the continuous creation: the mystery of the maintenance of the world through that continuous miracle of revivification which wells within all things." (40–41)

[53] See pp 61–2, 102, and cf. note 52 above. That the scene in the forest should both suggest a parallel to the Buddha's enlightenment *and* prefigure Siegfried's own "crucifixion" shows that Wagner's mind was almost constantly engaged in the conflation of myths from different traditions, and probably not always consciously.

[54] See p 116.

As a result, despite the opera's scrupulous avoidance of any mention of God, and the atheism implicit in its insistence on death as oblivion,

> Tristan and Isolde are not destroyed by external forces or overcome by fate, but instead approach their death in a spirit of quasi-Christian renunciation, wanting nothing from the world save their final union in nothingness. (175)

Both Siegfried *and* Tristan, then, are Christ figures, while still remaining opposite character types. With Siegfried, the emphasis is on atonement for the sins of others and an undercurrent of fertility ritual: cut down in the prime of his youth, brimful of vitality, the hero sheds his blood to bring new life to the world; yet he remains, even in dying, notably free from suffering, his attention as ever absorbed in the object of contemplation (in this instance his beatific recollection of Brünnhilde).[55] With Tristan, on the other hand, it is undoubtedly a matter of enduring a prolonged agony, comparable to the Crucifixion,[56] while his incurable wound, like that dealt Christ by the soldier's spear, is inevitably in his side (a correspondence that becomes overt in *Parsifal*). And it is as though by virtue of suffering this – seemingly *un*endurable – torment, that Tristan at length overcomes the world and attains a kind of serenity.

There is thus a remarkable resonance in Septimus lying high up "on the back of the world" like Tristan, and like him hearing "a shepherd boy's piping", while simultaneously feeling the same oneness with the earth as in the scene where the birds, like Siegfried's, call him by name. This resonance is enriched more deeply by the "[r]ed flowers [that] grew through his flesh", with their evocation of the link between pain and beauty. The colour of blood, passion and sacrifice, they grow *through* his flesh in more senses than one, both piercing it and because of it – an almost Joycean portmanteau effect is at work here, whereby this single image evokes piercing and bleeding, as well as fertility and renewal.

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[55] This moment is almost unbearably poignant for the audience – yet Siegfried himself remains, if anything, ecstatic.

[56] Tanner significantly terms the drama "the passion of passion", ranking it alongside the St Matthew Passion as "one of the two greatest religious works of our culture" (140).

But, as one would expect, it is the combination of these images with continuing references to music that most obviously suggests a Wagnerian connection. The "shepherd boy's piping" itself is the least of it, providing a merely ornamental accompaniment to the "anthem twined round" by it. This, together with the implied quality of music that "began clanging against the rocks" and "cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met in shocks of sound", recalls the contrapuntal density, solemnity, chromatic violence and sheer physicality typical of a late Wagner score – and nowhere more obviously than in *Tristan*'s Act III prelude, where the massive chords seem to tear against one another. That the "shocks of sound" heard by Septimus proceeded to rise "in smooth columns" appears almost to mirror the way those tearing chords give way to a smoothly ascending phrase (likened by Scruton to a lonely seabird flying above a deserted ocean).

The image of "smooth columns" coupled with allusions to one Wagner score also makes it hard to ignore another, closely related to it – *Parsifal*, with its pillared hall of the Grail, and all the more so given Septimus's immediate reaction ("that music should be visible was a discovery"),[57] which suggests a remarkable parallel with Gurnemanz's gnomic remark to Parsifal on first conducting him into the Grail-hall: "Thou seest, my son, here time is one with space" (43).[58] The passage in question is another in which the music notably "cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met in shocks of sound": the Act I Transformation Music, during which "a gate opens in the rock" and the scene passes "through ascending walled paths" (ibid.) Tanner describes it as

[57] Music is visible in another way in *Tristan*, in the opera's frequent examples of synaesthesia, such as the dying Tristan's reaction to the sound of Isolde's voice: "What, hear I the light?" (276). The culminating example is the *Liebestod* itself, in which music, soft airs, perfumed vapours and erotic sensation all merge and yet, through the wondering uncertainty of Isolde's questions, manage to suggest some further, unheard-of, sensation beyond all of them. The confusion of senses implies that one is approaching a state of consciousness that directly apprehends the form beyond appearances. More pragmatically, sounds may of course be conceived visually insofar as they are physical, the product of vibrations. In discussing music, it is almost commonplace to use metaphors of physical form. Indeed, at some point hearing and sight both perceive the same instant, as when a beat is struck. But the vocabulary of much music criticism is far more diverse: thus one hears of a composer's use of "shading", the orchestral "palette", "cascading" keys, a "vanishing" cadence, or the "shafts of light" in a Bach chorale; even the term "chromatic" is a visual metaphor. Moreover, Wagner's is perhaps the most *concrete* music we have.

[58] Furness has this passage in mind when he reminds us that "it is none other than Claude Lévi-Strauss who saw Wagner as the father of the structural analysis of myths, going so far as to claim that those strange words of Gurnemanz on time and space (Act I of *Parsifal*) were the most profound definition of myth in general" (71); see pp 52–3.

> music which, beginning as a march, the least expressive of musical forms, moves into counterpoint which seems to tear apart the very fabric of which it is composed, and climaxes in huge slabs of brass dissonance, an ultimate challenge to any kind of resolution, and flagellated by strings. This passage occupies a unique place in Wagner's *oeuvre*, and indeed in the history of music: pain which can only be conveyed in these terms takes art to the verge of the tolerable. (191)

But by far the closest link to *Parsifal* is that which is implicit in *Tristan* already, the fact that the Grail king Amfortas in a sense *is* Tristan.[59] Like Tristan, he lies stricken by an incurable wound – in his case not for the final act only but the whole duration of the opera (and an unspecified period before that). Where their situations are reversed is that Tristan seeks his salvation in transcendentalised sexual love, whereas Amfortas repents his sexual transgression and seeks to atone for it through renunciation and submission to his promised redeemer. For both of them, however, suffering is intimately bound up with sexuality. What is more, the Christian undercurrents in *Tristan* become, as noted above, overt in *Parsifal* in that Amfortas's wound is, as he himself describes it,

> . . . alike to His,
> And dealt me by the selfsame deadly spear
> That once the Redeemer pierced with pain,
> And, tears of blood outpouring,
> The Holy One wept for the shame of man,
> In pity's godlike yearning;
> And from this my wound,
> The Grail's own chosen,
> The holy relic's guardian,
> Of redemption's balm the warder,
> The sinful fiery flood wells forth,
> Ever-renewed from the fount of longing,
> That, ah! never penance more may still! (53–4)

Amfortas thus provides a link between Tristan's agony and Siegfried's martyrdom; both are echoes of Christ's sacrifice. Moreover, the sexual symbolism implicit in Amfortas being wounded with the very spear he dropped

[59] See pp 82–3, 105.

when overcome by desire again suggests a mythic origin in prehistoric fertility ritual.[60] And like Septimus lying "back in his chair, exhausted but upheld. . . . resting, waiting, before he again interpreted, with effort, with agony, to mankind", Amfortas is taken from his litter and laid upon "a raised couch" (47) in order to minister, with great reluctance, the sacrament of the Grail that renews the strength of the brotherhood even as it causes his wound to bleed anew.

What appears to be happening in the novel, then, is that a number of Wagnerian characters and situations, related to one another through the central symbolism of the Christian ritual of sacrifice and atonement, are echoed – with extreme subtlety – in such close proximity to one another that they in fact overlap and merge. In this way, Septimus's sense of himself as "the Lord who had come to renew society" (26) is reinforced by composite images associated with the overtly Christlike heroes of Wagner's dramas, at the same time as it is undermined by the banality and smallness of his own predicament, that of the disempowered and disregarded veteran used and then discarded by an indifferent society.

Thereafter, passages that continue to develop the same image-patterns abound; Septimus's ordeal, like Tristan's (or Amfortas's), proves unrelenting:

> But he himself remained high on his rock, like a drowned sailor on a rock. I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down, he thought. I went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet am now alive, but let me rest still, he begged . . . and as, before waking, the voices of birds and the sound of wheels chime and chatter in a queer harmony, grow louder and louder, and the sleeper feels himself drawing to the shores of life, so he felt himself drawing towards life, the sun growing hotter, cries sounding louder, something tremendous about to happen. (76)

Motifs from *Tristan* and *Siegfried* here combine, but it is *Tristan* that predominates. There, the sea is emphatically the emblem of death, as the sun is of life, and the hero returns reluctantly from death to prolong his tormented existence:

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[60] See p 62 note 60.

> I that heard behind me crash
> The door of death in closing –
> Wide it stands now once more open;
> The streaming sunlight burst it wide.
> With eyes by brilliance blinded,
> Must I the night relinquish
> For to seek her whom I cherish
> And to greet her and in her alone to perish. (231–2)

For Septimus, however, the hope of a transfiguring death is in danger of being thwarted by Sir William Bradshaw, who would rather have him put away in a home, for society's good and his own. The narrator, however, is firmly on the side of the underdog, and treats Bradshaw with delicious sarcasm, describing those who

> inspired by Heaven knows what intemperate madness, called Sir William to his face a damnable humbug; questioned, even more impiously, life itself. Why live? they demanded. Sir William replied that life was good. Certainly Lady Bradshaw in ostrich feathers hung over the mantelpiece, and as for his income it was quite twelve thousand a year. But to us, they protested, life has given no such bounty. He acquiesced. They lacked a sense of proportion. And perhaps, after all, there is no God? He shrugged his shoulders. In short, this living or not living is an affair of our own? But there they were mistaken. . . . There were, moreover, family affection; honour; courage; and a brilliant career. (113)

Beyond the satire, Woolf appears to be making a political point, and an aggressively antisocial one at that: that the individual has the inalienable right to choose death. By alluding to an opera that so powerfully evokes the hatefulness of life and the seductive consolation of oblivion, she adds weight to this argument. Bradshaw's "family affection; honour; courage; and a brilliant career" (ostensibly absolute values, but conceivably a mask for partisanship, bombast and bellicose nationalism) are precisely the things Tristan rejects in favour of a suicidal passion, a point that is repeatedly emphasised in the opera. Even in the programme note for the Act I Prelude, Wagner described its theme as "world, power, fame, splendour, honour, knighthood, loyalty, and friendship, all scattered like a baseless dream"

(*Selected Prose* 272). After drinking the love-potion, Tristan asks, "What dream was mine of Tristan's honour?" (94–5) and later tells Isolde that he is no longer the dupe of "worldly honour's daylight measure, / With all its splendid, empty pleasure" (147). This association of the public virtues with life and the world of day, as well as the assertion that they are illusory, is then taken up and extended further as the lovers approach the sublime consummation of the *Liebesnacht*:

> Oh, now were we by night enchanted,
> The troublesome day, with envy haunted,
> Part us might [*sic*] with its lies
> But never dazzle our eyes,
> For its empty glare and its glittering light
> Are flouted by all that love the night,
> For its flickering beams, so fitfully flashing,
> Blind our eyes no more.
> Who the night of death lovingly scan,
> Those who have gazed on her secret plan,
> Will hold false daylight's rank and name,
> Honour and power and wealth and fame
> As merely dust that drifteth
> And through the sunlight sifteth. (159–61)

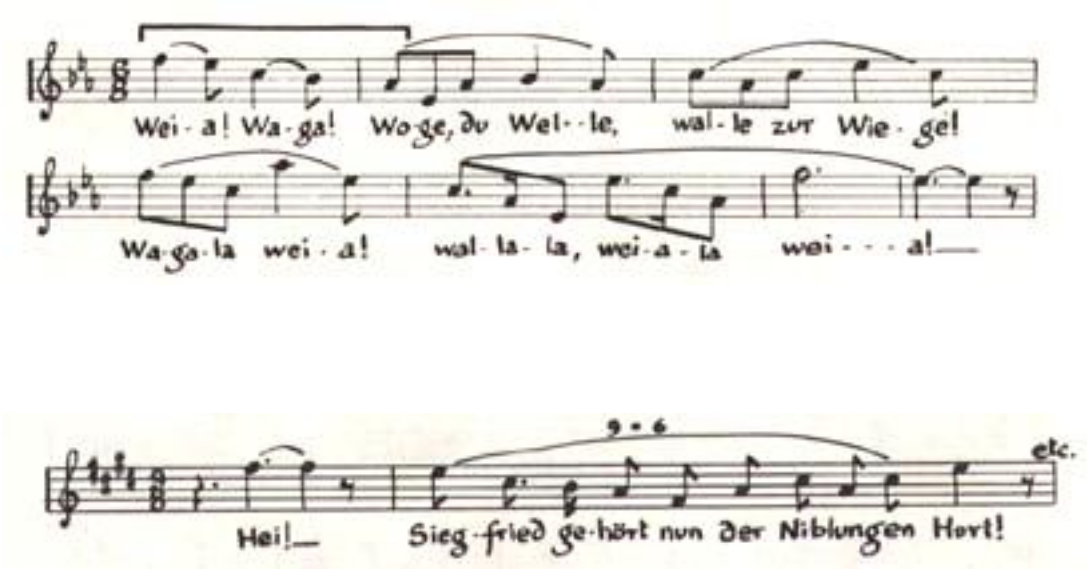
So the opposition the novel sets up between the public virtues meant to act as incentives to live and the rejection of these as "humbug" by those who insist on asking the relentless question "Why live?" is expressed in terms that are identical with those of Wagner's opera. Septimus, like Tristan, is another "death-devoted heart" (*Tristan* 16), while paradoxically remaining, like Siegfried, in love with life. As the end approaches, more motifs recalling both of them are combined. Septimus watches

> the watery gold glow and fade with the astonishing sensibility of some live creature on the roses, on the wall-paper. Outside the trees dragged their leaves like nets through the depths of the air; the sound of water was in the room, and through the waves came the voices of birds singing. Each power poured its treasures on his head . . . he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away. Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more. (156–7)

The references here to "watery gold", "the sound of water", "waves", "power" and "treasures" all taken together make it difficult not to detect a strong resemblance to the famous opening scene of *Das Rheingold*, in which the Rhinegold itself first appears. Its rich warm glow there is awakened by the rising sun and spreads through the water, only to fade when Alberich steals it. There too it is compared to a "live creature", a sleeper wooed by his lover, the sun, to awaken and shed the radiant light of his eyes on the river. At this stage still in its pristine natural state, it represents "power" in potentiality only, a magical wholesome energy that delights its guardian Rhinedaughters, as the sunlight here delights and calms Septimus.

But here too, as if to enrich the effect, are the very trees and singing birds that we earlier found connecting Septimus to Siegfried's "Forest Murmurs". The two strands of imagery are not merely juxtaposed; they are actually *intertwined*: the leaves become nets dragged by the trees "through the *depths* of air", while the birds' voices come "*through* the waves". The images are thus superimposed on one another, and on the prosaic literal setting of the Warren Smiths' sitting room, in exactly the same way that the lonely sea-cliffs from *Tristan* Act III were earlier superimposed on Regent's Park. The effect in both cases is to show the power of the imagination, especially in states of reverie, to transform one's immediate environment, and simultaneously the instinctive human need to transcend the mundanity of its condition through appeals to the timelessness, freedom and healing power of the natural.

What is still more extraordinary is that there is a clear precedent for this particular combination of images in the *Ring* itself. *Siegfried* Act II is not only related to *Rheingold* scene I in that both celebrate natural wholesomeness (in contrast to the very unnatural corruption going on in much of the rest of the cycle); both are also related *musically*. As Deryck Cooke has demonstrated his recorded analysis of the leitmotifs of the *Ring*, the musical fabric of these two scenes (widely separated from one another in terms of the overall timescale) is woven from similar materials. For example, the motifs Cooke associates with the voices of nature, the florid pentatonic lines sung by the Rhinedaughters and the Woodbird, are so similar as to suggest that they are "first cousins" to one another:



But over and above this pre-existing relationship the score of *Siegfried* Act II actually quotes motifs from *Rheingold* scene I: when the hero re-emerges from the dragon's cave bearing the ring, as the forest bird has advised him, the horns begin softly playing the theme of the Rhinedaughters' hymn to their gold in the original sunny key of C major, punctuated by the bright fanfare of the gold itself on bass trumpet. The magical effect thus produced conveys the impression that, despite all the long history of corruption and murder attendant on it, the ring in the innocent hero's hands is returned to its original pure condition. The curse of the ring that will ultimately bring about his downfall is for the time being forgotten, and the world seems once more to bask in the primordial innocence it enjoyed in the beginning.

If one now turns again to reconsider the scene in Septimus's sitting room, the implications are considerable. The episode is a reprise with variations of what happened on the park bench; again Septimus experiences an extraordinary sense of communion with nature, and again accompanied by motifs recalling that of Siegfried in the forest. Only this time, just as the motifs of the pure gold in the river hover in the background of the sunlit woodland scene with its singing birds, so the imagined sight and sound of water washes through the tree-lined avenue with its chirping sparrows. In each case the young man reclining in the centre, relaxed in the full enjoyment of being alive, is presented in opposition to those who succumb to the allure of the gold,

Septimus's momentary contentment standing in contrast to the rapacious ambition of the social-climbing Bradshaws.[61]

Still more central than the hero is the ambiguity of the words "power" and "treasures". In context, the terms have a clearly positive value; the powers referred to are those of nature, all the sights and sounds mentioned in the passage, and the treasures they possess are correspondingly emotional and moral, in a Wordsworthian way. But if we take them in conjunction with the "watery gold" to be veiled allusions to Wagner, a more sinister possibility arises. For the power of the Rhinegold is a two-sided thing, just as it is a treasure in two, conflicting, senses. In its natural state, its value is aesthetic and salubrious. It appears, like the fresh running water and warm sunlight with which it is associated, to be an inexhaustible source of wholesome, life-

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[61] This is reinforced by further subtle allusions that connect the Bradshaws with the corrupt and power-hungry gods of *Das Rheingold.* Lady Bradshaw, clearly a trophy wife, is described as consoling herself with thoughts of "the wall of gold, mounting minute by minute while she waited; the wall of gold that was mounting between them and all shifts and anxieties" (105). In the scathing scene in which the gods pay ransom for Freia, a wall of gold is piled in front of her until she is completely hidden behind it (an obvious allegorical depiction of love being traded for power). That Woolf is using the Bradshaws to demonstrate the same forces at work in the English upper-middle classes is equally clear. Wagner's gods have in fact been through all manner of "shifts and anxieties" to get their hands on the gold in the first place.

One should probably avoid making any association between Freia and Lady Bradshaw, who is rather closer to her sister, and Wotan's wife, Fricka (who looks on – with feigned disapproval – as the gold mounts up). Where Wotan's role is that of supreme ruler of the world, Fricka's is the sanction of respectability that sets the seal on his rulership. Theirs is a union of convenience, not affection – a partnership for the greater furtherance of worldly success. They are therefore, despite their frequent wrangling over personal interests, essentially united in their joint goal. Where Wotan straightforwardly desires ownership of the earth and everything in it, Fricka wants the prestige that comes with this, to be set on a throne and adorned with her husband's spoils. Lady Bradshaw similarly reflects with satisfaction how she is "respected, admired, envied, with scarcely anything left to wish for", and on her life of "large dinner parties every Thursday night to the profession; an occasional bazaar to be opened; Royalty greeted; too little time, alas, with her husband, whose work grew and grew" (105). Fricka likewise complains that she cannot keep Wotan confined in Valhalla with her, since he is more interested in using it as a base of operations. They are in complete agreement, on the other hand, on the need to ransom Freia, whose golden apples of immortality guarantee at least the appearance of youth, however corrupt one may grow within. Like Wotan, who eventually foregoes the apples altogether, Sir William shows himself able and willing, indeed driven, to sacrifice energy and youth in order to attain public eminence and who, ultimately weighed down by the burdens of his power, still maintains a dignified appearance: "[N]o longer young", he has "won his position by sheer ability", "ma[kes] a fine figurehead at ceremonies" and has "a heavy look, a weary look . . . the responsibilities and privileges of his profession [being] so onerous" that "together with his grey hairs, [they] increased the extraordinary distinction of his presence" (106). Septimus, arriving for his appointment, is placed in immediate opposition to him, becoming once again "the most exalted of mankind; the criminal who faced his judges; the victim exposed on the heights; the fugitive; the drowned sailor; the poet of the immortal ode; the Lord who had gone from life to death" (108).

enhancing energy. Once made into the Ring, however, its value is corrupted into mere price, its power thenceforward simply financial and thereby coercive, threatening destruction.[62] For Septimus, as for Siegfried, the gold returns to its watery condition – and yet, for each of them, behind the idyll of peace, lies the threat posed by the greedy ambition of others.

Despite this threat, the moment of communion is invested with a transcendent timelessness. This is indicated by the way the powers are described as pouring their treasures on Septimus's head, an image simultaneously evoking water, light, inexhaustible wealth and beneficent influence. And in this too one can clearly trace a relevant echo of Wagner, in this case one of his most recurrent obsessions. In *Lohengrin*, the Holy Grail "pours its blessings" upon the knight who is consecrated to its service.[63] In *Die Meistersinger* Walther is inspired to create the Prize Song in a vision of "my muse, who from the sacred fount bedewed my head" (543). And Parsifal is solemnly anointed by Gurnemanz with the words "My blessing on thy head / As King I now may greet thee" (146). The underlying similarity of all three, as well as that they share with the nymphs bathing in the light of the Rhinegold and Siegfried at ease amid the beauty of the morning in the forest, points to a more general interest in the figure of innocence fostered by Nature and the mystical-sensual experience of the not-self, conceived under a variety of forms, showering its transformative influence upon one. Woolf's use of the phrase "[e]ach power poured its treasures on his head" suggests a conception, similar to Wagner's *throughout* his works, of the human capacity for spiritual experience necessarily divorced from the prohibitive and constricting structures of church and state.

Nor have we even here exhausted the allusions in the short passage quoted above. The associations of his mood lead Septimus to the memory of "bathing, floating, on the top of the waves", a sensation clearly akin to the others discussed above, especially the swimming Rhinedaughters, but it is

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[62] It is in this aspect that it produces the "wall of gold" associated with the Bradshaws (see note 61 above).

[63] That is, according to the programme note provided at the concert Baudelaire attended at the Théâtre Italien in 1860, describing the "content" of the *Lohengrin* prelude (114); Baudelaire described his own impression of this music as conveying "an *intensity of light* growing so swiftly that not all the nuances provided by the dictionary would be sufficient to express *this ever-renewing increase of incandescence and heat*" (117); see p 49 note 44.

calmer, gentler, a relaxed surrender to the buoyant water, evidently a metaphor for the sustaining influence of natural life. Bathing, furthermore, is another, and closely related, Wagnerian obsession. Apart from the Rhinedaughters, there are the examples of Amfortas (again), who must daily bathe his wound in the soothing waters of a sacred lake, or the magical swan in *Lohengrin* that arises transformed from the river as the young duke Gottfried. Similar images are also used figuratively. When wooing Brünnhilde, Siegfried likens her to a glorious flood rolling before him in the sunlight in which he desires to drown himself:

> What though my face it mirrors no more,
> Madly I long in the flood to fling me,
> My fire would I boldly
> Quench in the brook:
> Oh would that its waters in bliss might engulf me,
> My longing be lost in the flood! (*Siegfried* 237–8)

And water in some form is present, and sometimes prominent, in every one of the operas, most obviously in *The Flying Dutchman* and *Tristan*, where the vast expanse of the ocean forms the essential backdrop, ceaselessly raging in the former, oppressively calm and still in the latter. Consistently throughout it is invested with immense, and often sacramental, significance, both life-giving and offering death, sometimes simultaneously.[64]

But it is not only as *content* that water appears in the works. The form itself with its endless stream of motivic play, its protean multiform abundance and its surging potency is commonly, and justly, likened to water. It is an impression most marked in *Tristan*, where Furness takes for granted the presence of an "oceanic ecstasy" (38) and Zuckerman notes Nietzsche's "fondness for [its] images of musical drowning" (75). Ultimately, form and

[64] Of course water as healing agent is an obvious and universal idea, by no means limited to Wagner, but his especial concern with the idea, in the context of the other allusions, suggests a particular relevance. Cf. Furness: "It is fitting that imaginative literature has stressed the link between Wagner's music and water, for the importance of that element and the legends associated with it cannot be over-emphasised for him. . . . The association of deep water, eroticism and death was naturally known to the German Romantics, particularly Novalis . . . . The link between water, love and death is seen most forcibly in *Der fliegende Holländer*, where it is Senta who finds in the sea and in the arms of the Dutchman her ultimate transfiguration, and *Tristan und Isolde* likewise portrays the love-death against the background of an immensity of sea and sky. It is also remarkable that Wagner should have dreamt of Undine figures a few hours before his death" (80–1).

content work together: while the sea itself provides setting and background, the score helps evoke an impression of its continual movement and infrahuman vastness, the combination ultimately functioning as an extended metaphor for the human condition as Wagner conceived it.[65] Nowhere is the effect more moving than when Tristan, almost on the brink of death, sees Isolde

> . . . drawn by deep devotion,
> Hasten o'er the fields of ocean!
> O'er flowery billows fleetly faring,
> Gently now the land she's nearing.
> She smiles me to rest and perfect peace;
> At last she brings me my release. (261–2)

The similarity to Septimus's impression of floating "on the top of the waves" is apparent, especially when one takes the music into account – as this is one of several moments in the score when the oceanic metaphor becomes unmistakeable. Tanner, for instance, describes Tristan at this point as having "vast, serene orchestral waves supporting him" (150):

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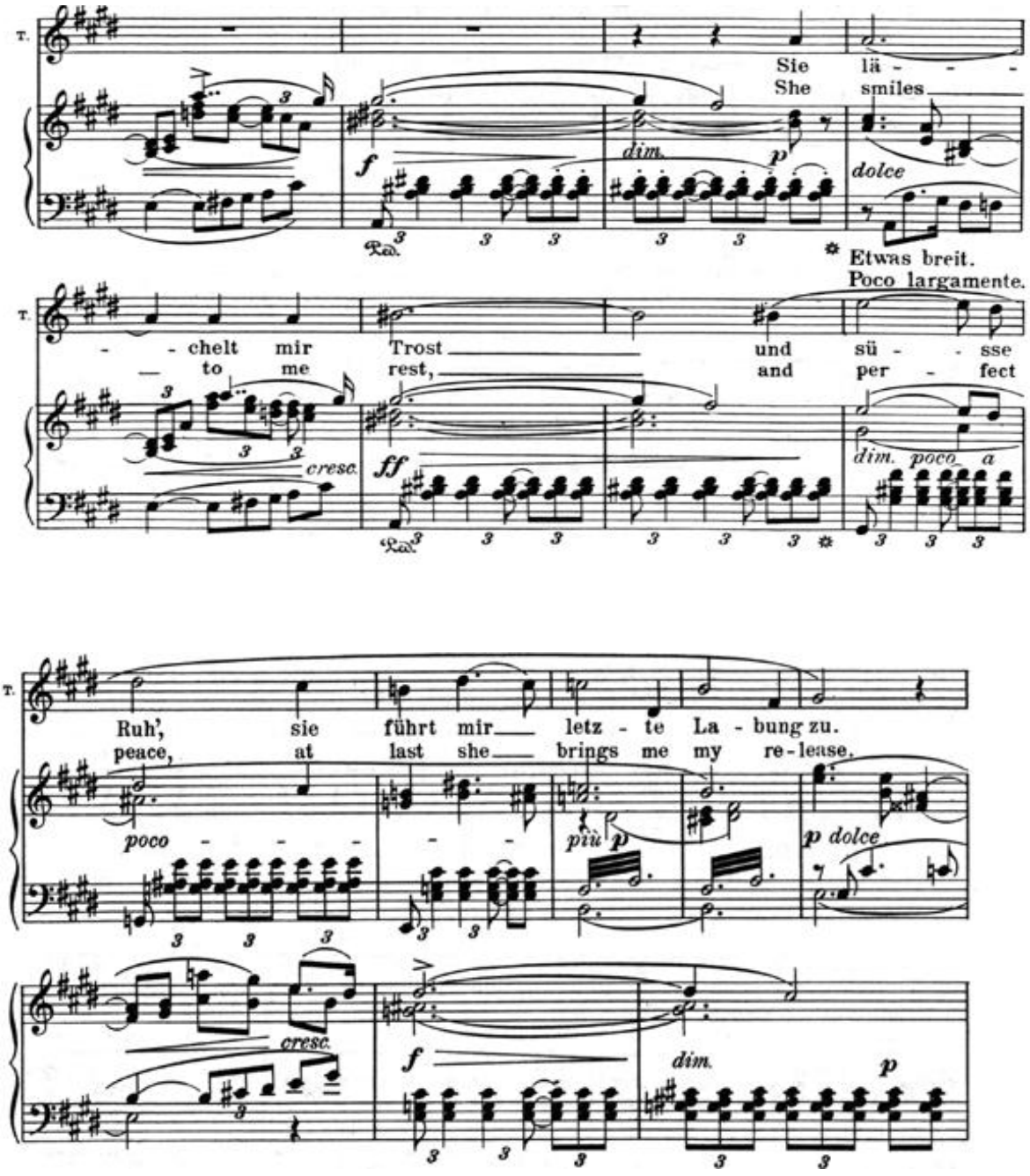
[65] "The first act takes place on the sea, the third act by the shore of the sea, and both are full of the atmosphere of the sea and its message of separation. The second act takes place on land and is set against a royal hunt – that is, an activity affirming the land as a possession, a place of human settlement and dominion. But the lovers manifestly do not belong here: they are creatures of the sea – of the boundless, formless, lawless sea of destiny, from which true love emerges only to yearn unceasingly for its oceanic home. They are visitors from a transcendental realm, and the bustle of the world and all its laws remain strange to them and unintelligible." (Scruton 31–2)

Another way of seeing this is to recognise that the land-sea polarity in the work corresponds directly to its still more emphatic opposition of day and night. Ironically, while the lovers are at sea, the day keeps them apart, and when they are together at night, they are on land – in King Marke's domain. Each act also begins with an offstage sound that signals the external world fading gradually out of hearing as the protagonists' shared inner world comes to dominate the action. In Act II, for example, "we hear the sound of hunting horns, slowly receding through the forest. . . . these horns are like a faint, sad echo of [the Act I] fanfare, softly reiterating the triad of C minor. At the same time an F sounds below them in the orchestra. The effect of this is wonderfully suggestive of the psychic distance between the listening Isolde and the far-off sounds of the royal hunting party." (51–2) The role played by these horns has its counterparts in the sailor's song in Act I (the "Frisch weht der Wind / Der Heimat zu" quoted in *The Waste Land*) and the shepherd's pipe in Act III. All three represent the faint receding sounds of the world that die away into nothingness, and it is easy to see how they support the notion of the lovers as "creatures of the sea" as they are all earthly sounds heard as if from afar by those already drifting into eternity. Septimus "bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away" (157) likewise characterises the sea as the proper home of the isolated hero and the land as distant and foreign to him.



Again like Tristan, Septimus increasingly comes to see death as his only option, and occasionally even suggests Rezia should join him in it, as if trying to coerce her into an Isolde-like role:

> He would argue with her about killing themselves; and explain how wicked people were; how he could see them making up lies as they passed in the street. He knew all their thoughts, he said; he knew everything. He knew the meaning of the world, he said. (73)

As the text draws nearer to the final crisis, several of these themes and motifs are developed and reiterated, as if in a great summation – when Rezia notes how even the slightest incident

> made Septimus cry out about human cruelty – how they tear each other to pieces. The fallen, he said, they tear to pieces. . . . He was drowned, he used to say, and lying on a cliff with gulls screaming over him. He would look over the edge of the sofa down into the sea. Or he was hearing music. Really it was only a barrel organ or some man crying in the street. But "Lovely!" he used to cry, and the tears would run down his cheeks, which was to her the most dreadful thing of all, to see a man like Septimus, who had fought, who was brave, crying. And he would lie listening until suddenly he would cry that he was falling down, down into the flames! (158)

Then, his mood shifting again, the hellfire and agony give way to a passing questioning as to the necessity of playing the martyr at all – prompted, quite unexpectedly, by his noticing Rezia's calming domestic ordinariness (in a passage that quite strikingly juxtaposes epic and quotidian registers):

> Why then rage and prophesy? Why fly scourged and outcast? Why be made to tremble and sob by the clouds? Why seek truths and deliver messages when Rezia sat sticking pins into the front of her dress, and Mr. Peters was in Hull? Miracles, revelations, agonies, loneliness, falling through the sea, down, down into the flames, all were burnt out, for he had a sense, as he watched Rezia trimming the straw hat for Mrs. Peters, of a coverlet of flowers. (160)

Flowers, perhaps the most pervasive image in the novel, here counteract all the accumulated associations of suffering and madness, opposing intensity and passion with a soothing gentleness, just as Tristan's seemingly endless ordeals eventually give way – with palpable relief – to his tranquilising vision of the "flowery billows" wafting Isolde towards him.

The idyll is (in both cases) shattered by a last violent intrusion by the representatives of day (in the opera King Marke and his men, in the novel Dr Holmes) – the busy, bustling people who value life unconditionally and unthinkingly, and who are quite incapable of understanding the "death-

devoted heart". In both cases they are heard approaching from below, shouting and hammering to be let in. Tristan has already defeated them by escaping into the night, but Septimus has only seconds remaining to make a last defiant gesture. This defiance has already been prepared for by the demand made earlier to Bradshaw: "Why live?"[66] It is now made more assertive by Septimus forcefully questioning the authority that would impose itself upon him: "'Must,' 'must,' why 'must'? What power had Bradshaw over him? 'What right has Bradshaw to say "must" to me?' he demanded." (165) Rezia, who has instinctively disliked Bradshaw from the start, finds this attitude encouraging and hopes they might rather run away together and find peace. Though she does not share her husband's death-longing, she nonetheless echoes Isolde's determination to follow Tristan into "the darksome land of night" (210), to put union with him above any earthly consideration: "Even if they took him, she said, she would go with him. They could not separate them against their wills, she said." (166) This gives her, in Septimus's eyes, a sudden authority that outweighs Bradshaw's, and which he exalts in mythic terms: "She was a flowering tree; and through her branches looked out the face of a lawgiver, who had reached a sanctuary where she feared no one" (ibid.) This further helps to corroborate the oddly triumphant quality of Septimus's suicide, the decided impression that it is not an act of despair or weakness, but one of aggression against the establishment, a sacrifice made in the name of freedom:

> It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him). Holmes and Bradshaw liked that sort of thing. (He sat on the sill.) But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. . . . Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings. (168)[67]

[66] See p 127.

[67] Ironically, the real significance of Septimus's suicide is completely lost on Holmes (it could hardly be otherwise): "'The coward!' cried Dr. Holmes, bursting the door open. Rezia ran to the window, she saw; she understood. Dr. Holmes and Mrs. Filmer collided with each other. Mrs Filmer flapped her apron and made her hide her eyes in the bedroom. There was a great deal of running up and down stairs. . . . And why the devil he did it, Dr. Holmes could not conceive." (168) The superb subtlety of the last sentence is that it mocks Holmes's idiom, as if reporting his actual comment on the incident, and at the same time is meant as an entirely literal observation by the narrator – underlying the way Holmes, in his breezy self-assurance, is constitutionally incapable of recognising the higher wisdom of Septimus's world-denial, or of regarding it as anything but madness or cowardice (just as Marke,

Once again, two heroes are combined. Like Siegfried, Septimus feels life is good, but will happily throw it away rather than compromise his freedom,[68] and is in a sense brutally stabbed in the back by the world. But like Tristan, he actively seeks death, and escapes into it from the hated bustle of the world. Overall, it is clear, Septimus is far closer to Tristan (or Amfortas), since, despite moments of (largely delusory) exultation, his life almost constantly verges on torment.

There are, of course, important differences, though it is interesting to note the extent to which these are largely determined by the overarching contrast of heroic and quotidian milieux. In Wagner's larger-than-life figures, human experience is magnified, typically through the use of redolent symbols, Tristan's fatal wound being a case in point: ostensibly a severe sword-wound which only Isolde, thanks to her magical skill, can heal, it is really a metaphor for the desperate agony of being alive at all, and the "cure" Isolde brings is the longed-for oblivion of eternal night. In Woolf's (relatively) realistic characters, on the other hand, human experience is depicted more or less as it is. Hence, Septimus typifies a "real" case of extreme suffering, and death is the only solution available to him at a quite literal level – given the kind of medical assistance on offer. Similarly, while for both hero and antihero alike oblivion is the ultimate object of desire, Woolf presents this too as a straightforwardly literal fact (because the pain will stop), whereas Wagner, pre-empting Freud by half a century, eroticises the death-wish, equating the

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Brangäne and Kurwenal are repeatedly shown to be completely nonplussed by the death wish of Tristan and Isolde).

[68] One of Siegfried's most surprising pronouncements is his stated indifference towards his imminent death: when the Rhinedaughters urge him to escape it by relinquishing the accursed Ring, he heedlessly throws a clod of earth behind him with the words "life and limb, see: / These do I fling afar" (209). Is this levity reasonable? It is, of course, consistent with the hedonism Siegfried displays throughout and there is only an apparent contradiction in his combining an exuberant love of life with a complete indifference to death; in this he is rather like a walking embodiment of Blake's oft-quoted lines "He who can kiss the joy as it flies / Lives in eternity's sunrise". There is at the same time considerable irony in the way the very innocence that earlier rendered him immune to the curse now becomes his fatal flaw, making him uniquely susceptible to the guile of others. A further complication is the contrast between his unabated high spirits and the gathering gloom affecting everyone and everything else. Whereas this cheerfulness had been refreshing in *Siegfried*, it feels gratingly inappropriate in *Götterdämmerung* (a tension Wagner intensifies musically, alternately evoking near manic jubilation and a crushing sense of impending doom).

final obliteration of consciousness with supreme, because lasting, sexual consummation.[69]

Surviving Septimus, Rezia, evidently in shock, soon disappears from the text (as if having served her purpose), but not before undergoing at least a nominal *Liebestod*. Given a sedative, her version of the love-potion perhaps,

> [i]t seemed to her as she drank the sweet stuff that she was opening long windows, stepping out into some garden. . . . She had once seen a flag slowly rippling out from a mast when she had stayed with her aunt at Venice. Men killed in battle were thus saluted, and Septimus had been through the War. Of her memories, most were happy.
>
> She put on her hat, and ran through cornfields – where could it have been? – on to some hill, somewhere near the sea, for there were ships, gulls, butterflies; they sat on a cliff. In London, too, there they sat, and, half dreaming, came to her through the bedroom door, rain falling, whisperings, stirrings among dry corn, the caress of the sea, as it seemed to her, hollowing them in its arched shell and murmuring to her laid on shore, strewn she felt, like flying flowers over some tomb. (168–9)

There are many images here, such as the flowers (which occur superabundantly in this novel and continually throughout Wagner's operas), that recall Isolde's sublime delusion that the dead Tristan survives, translated with her to another plane. Perhaps the most suggestive detail is the "flag slowly rippling out from a mast" in tribute to the fallen hero, which recalls a detail Wagner eventually excluded from the final version of the opera but refers to in the same letter to Liszt that describes the "sedative which has

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[69] Scruton notes that, whereas in "[t]he Vedic vision of human destiny, like Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will . . . . the erotic appears as just one of the many desires that besiege us in the phenomenal world, to be overcome like the others by a process of renunciation . . . . [i]n Wagner's drama the goal is . . . to become forever inseparable from the individual object of love by plunging together with that object into the oceanic darkness". (133)

Septimus, by contrast, differs most obviously from Tristan in this: he shows scant signs of having a sex drive. The closest he comes to one is in his former, idealised passion for his English teacher, the perhaps significantly named Miss Isabel Pole. Isabel echoes La Belle Iseult (a correspondence Joyce exploits in *Finnegans Wake*) though the ordinariness of Pole has a bathetic effect, evident in the sentence describing the way she "lit in him such a fire as burns only once in a lifetime, without heat, flickering a red gold flame infinitely ethereal and insubstantial over Miss Pole" (94). Any Tristanesque quality in this "infinitely ethereal" love is in fact continually undercut by the narrator's mockery of the subject: "He thought her beautiful, believed her impeccably wise; dreamed of her, wrote poems to her, which, ignoring the subject, she corrected in red ink" (ibid.)

finally helped me sleep at night" that he has found in reading Schopenhauer:[70] after composing this "simplest yet most full-blooded musical conception; then I will wrap myself in the 'black banner' which waves over its close and – die" (*Letters* v1.274). At this stage Wagner was thinking in terms of his principal source for the opera, Gottfried von Strassburg's 13th century poem, in which Tristan, like Aegeus, wrongly takes the black flag flown by Isolde's ship as a sign that she is not on board and so dies in despair. In the completed work, he substitutes "[t]he gala flag at the mast-head / Joyful and gay!" (267–8), the signal that Isolde is indeed on board the arriving ship, though she comes too late to save Tristan. But it is the fact that Rezia associates this image with Venice that seems to clinch the connection. Venice was not only the city where Wagner composed the opera's central act (including the *Liebesnacht*) and where he would eventually die himself but, through these events and associations, the city that embodied all he came to stand for:

> The enervating, fetid atmosphere exhaled by the canals, the rippling reflections on crumbling stone, damp walls and ornate bridges produced that "volupté de la tristresse" for which tired souls yearned. . . . to Richard Wagner it was given to exemplify perfectly in his music, his life and above all his death the morbid sensuality of that city. (Furness 48–9)

That Rezia remembers a flag flown from a ship's mast in Venice and thinks of it as a fitting tribute for her dead husband who "had been through the War" (in more senses than one)[71] – and in the same passage that sees her consoled by the sensation of being strewn "like flying flowers over some tomb" (like the "fields of ocean", and "flowery billows" (262) of Tristan's delirium[72] and the floating "waves of perfume and pleasure" (299) of Isolde's *Liebestod*) –

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[70] See p 68 note 65.

[71] In Septimus's interview with Bradshaw, the following exchange takes place, indicating the vast gulf between their perceptions of reality: "'You served with great distinction in the War?' The patient repeated the word 'war' interrogatively. He was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind. A serious symptom to be noted on the card. 'The War?' the patient asked. The European War – that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder? Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed. 'Yes, he served with the greatest distinction,' Rezia assured the doctor; 'he was promoted.'" (106–7)

[72] See pp 134–5.

provides a fitting coda to the Wagnerian theme that has accompanied Septimus throughout the text.

"The greatest message in the world": Contraries reconciled

Although it is only in relation to Septimus that one can discern anything like a consistent pattern of Wagnerian allusions emerging in the text, it is important to recognise that these do not simply stand on their own, in isolation from the rest of the novel. Part of the reason for this is that even though, as Peach reminds us, "Septimus's introduction appears to divide the novel, as if he and Clarissa Dalloway exist in different narratives", this is undermined by the way in which "the novel's different narrative threads interconnect in their exploration of the dominant fictions of post-war Britain" (109–10). I would argue further that there is a great deal more connecting these narrative threads, not least the seamlessness with which they are dovetailed together.[73] While shown to be very different people living in almost antithetical worlds, Septimus and Clarissa are also connected in the way they often share the same thoughts, variously expressed. The most obvious example is the "Fear no more" motif, which runs through both their minds on a number of occasions, in a manner presumably suggested by Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom's shared quotations from *Hamlet* in *Ulysses*. Woolf goes further than Joyce, however, in that, unlike Bloom and Stephen, Clarissa and Septimus never meet at all.

So it is all the more striking to find Clarissa thinking in terms whose exact correspondence to Septimus's hallucinations[74] is immediately obvious:

[73] The novel begins with Clarissa cheerfully setting out through Westminster to buy flowers. While she is in the florist's, the sudden sound of a car backfiring causes a brief commotion outside, in which the narrative point-of-view moves effortlessly into the street to describe the reactions of various passers-by, one of whom is Septimus – who then takes over Clarissa's role as focaliser for some pages. This pattern of gliding fluidly from the consciousness of one character to another remains more-or-less constant thereafter. This in itself might be seen as an example of "the narrative equivalent of Wagner's constantly modulating river of sound" described by Furness (see p 83). It is in fact a fairly standard feature of Wagner's mature dramas that scenes involving one set of characters give way to others involving a different set, usually via an orchestral transition in which the appropriate leitmotifs trade places, and an accompanying alteration of musical colour, tone and mood.

[74] See the "watery gold passage quoted on p 128.

> So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying "that is all" more and more ponderously, until even the heart in the body which lies in the sun on the beach says so too, That is all. Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall. And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking. (42–3)

Only Clarissa, of course, is not hallucinating. At least one function of the correspondence, then, is to show that Septimus is not mad but merely experiencing with unusual intensity a feeling common to many people: that death – *without* an afterlife to follow it – is a consolation. Clarissa also appears to have an innate belief that individual identity is an illusion:

> She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. . . . and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, of herself, I am this, I am that. (7)

This is a recognisably Schopenhauerian outlook,[75] as is the view that individual death is an irrelevance, given that the life-force is all-in-all and inextinguishable:

> [W]hat she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? But that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees . . . part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. (7–8)

[75] See p 34.

The example of the trees is another exact correspondence to Septimus on his park bench[76] (the connection between them is obviously intended as an imagistic confirmation that Clarissa is right to feel herself "part of people she had never met"). It also forms part of a continuing association of images of fertility, life and death with a committed atheism: "moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are, she thought (as if some lovely rose had blossomed for her eyes only); not for a moment did she believe in God" (30–3). At times, this view of things is supported by a markedly Tristanesque image, such as when Clarissa thinks of herself as being "a single figure against the appalling night" (32). Elsewhere, the language becomes overtly erotic – another hallmark of Wagnerian style:

> It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. (34)[77]

Nor is Clarissa alone in giving voice to these correspondences. Elizabeth Dalloway, very much her mother's daughter, "felt herself everywhere; not 'here, here, here'; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that." (171) Then again, she senses

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[76] See pp 113–14.

[77] The erotic is another area obviously not confined to Wagner. Nonetheless, during the early twentieth century, his music certainly offered prominent examples of sexual sensation translated into artistic form that encouraged imitation. Typically Wagnerian qualities of Clarissa's reverie quoted here include the deliberately prolonged succession of phrases, the gradual but steady growth of a wholly pleasurable feeling, the sense of its offering tangible relief for the smarts inflicted by life in general, and of imparting, but not quite revealing, the meaning of the world. "He is, in fact, the composer who can write the sexiest music of anyone" (Tanner 42); "While archetypal psycho-sexual situations are being acted out and discussed on the stage at exhaustive length, the orchestra is pouring out a flood of the otherwise inexpressible feelings associated with them" (Magee, *Aspects of Wagner* 55); "In vain might Max Nordau in his sensational castigation of degeneracy reject Wagner's music as immoral and harmful to the senses, and denounce the composer as a purveyor of sadistic delights . . . the Master of Bayreuth remained the paradigm, the godly dispenser of ultimate *frissons*, the magus who had created his own temple of art, and the supreme fount of unheard-of emotional excesses" (Furness 32).

> Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter – even trees, or barns. It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places, after death. Perhaps – perhaps. (172)

Elizabeth's lesbian admirer Miss Kilman (the significance of the name is evidently intended) suggests an aggressive parody of the *Liebestod*: "If she could grasp her, if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and for ever and then die; that was all she wanted." (148) Even the seemingly unimportant Mr Pargiter – a man in the street, one of many who stop to admire a sky-writing aeroplane – has his quasi-Wagnerian moment, as for him the plane becomes "a bright spark; an aspiration; a concentration; a symbol . . . of man's soul; of his determination . . . to get outside his body, beyond his house, by means of thought" (29), and again as

> the symbol of something which has soared beyond seeking and questing and knocking of words together and has become all spirit, disembodied, ghostly . . . . Unguided it seemed; sped of its own free will. And now, curving up and up, straight up, like something mounting in ecstasy, in pure delight. (30)

But it is Clarissa's old flame Peter Walsh, whom the text subtly hints is himself a Wagnerian,[78] who experiences what is perhaps the novel's most resonant summation of a mythopoeic consciousness in his vision of "myriads of things merged in one thing", a "figure, made of sky and branches" that "had risen from the troubled sea . . . to shower down from her magnificent hands compassion, comprehension, absolution" and "who will, with a toss of her head, mount me on her streamers and let me blow to nothingness with the rest" (63). The explicit combination of a superhuman female figure embodying the whole of the natural world and the attainment of redemption in

[78] See p 97, note 14.

oblivion most closely corresponds to Wagner's goddess Erda in the *Ring*, whom text and music alike identify with the primordial Rhine and the World-ash, the unconscious creative principle from which all life arises, and who first foretells the end of the gods; moreover, it is Erda's daughter Brünnhilde, the inheritor of her mother's all-knowing wisdom, who ultimately inaugurates that ending, and makes possible through it precisely that "compassion, comprehension, absolution" that make it so desirable and necessary.[79] A further correspondence *across* Wagner's operas (akin to those between their various heroes) can also be seen in the way Isolde, in a somewhat different context, achieves a similar transfiguration in death. Peter Walsh's figure "of sky and branches" thus combines several features of the redeeming woman who plays so vital a role in Wagner's complete *oeuvre*. What is more, Peter's reverie soon associates the figure with

> an elderly woman who seems . . . to seek, over the desert, a lost son; to search for a rider destroyed; to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world. So, as the solitary traveller advances . . . the evening seems ominous; the figures still; as if some august fate, known to them, awaited without fear, were about to sweep them into complete annihilation. (64)

Wagner's mother-figures never appear elderly, though they are sometimes both ancient and ageless; their roles also frequently overlap with those of the beloved who presides over the ritual consecrating the fallen hero. Siegfried and Tristan are both obvious examples of "sons [who] have been killed in the battles of the world" (while Parsifal avoids a similar fate through the intervention of his mother, who fosters him "[a]far from arms, from men in madness slaying" (98)). The "solitary traveller", on the other hand, (with whom Peter Walsh evidently identifies himself) is another recurring figure in Wagner, a common variation of the suffering hero, usually an older, world-

[79] By the end of the cycle, according to Kitcher and Schacht, "Brünnhilde is transformed further and reappears with a new authority. . . . She comes to fulfill Wotan's longing for a conclusion, and, at the same time to vindicate his quest for meaning. The forms of valor and love that he has encouraged are conjoined and transfigured into the new nobility she attains and of which she becomes the apotheosis. In her new state she is enabled to love Siegfried anew and differently; to love more wide-rangingly and compassionately, honoring some of the claims of her former comprehensive love; to rise to a new kind of heroism; and to accomplish a higher justice." (176)

weary man; his most prominent incarnations are the Flying Dutchman and the Wanderer in *Siegfried*. The latter especially is suggested in this passage, as the way the traveller approaches the female figure who offers him the boon of nothingness parallels the way the Wanderer (really the disguised god Wotan) comes to consult Erda about making peace with his own "august fate" and to assure her it is indeed "awaited without fear": "The gods' dire downfall no more doth grieve me, / since I willed it so!" (185) Like the Wanderer, also, Peter plays a peripheral role and is largely an observer of the lives of others; his evocation of the fallen soldier immediately reminds the reader of Septimus, just as his vision of the nurturing, redeeming woman who comes "to sweep them into complete annihilation" – merely hinted at in Rezia – is most fully realised in Clarissa Dalloway herself.

Clarissa's close connection to Septimus – a man she never meets and never could – has already been dwelt on above. Where it is cemented, however, and where the multiple narrative strands of the novel are brought together and resolved, is at the point when the Bradshaws, who are guests at Clarissa's party, apologise for their lateness by explaining how they were held up at the last minute by the "very sad case" of a patient who had killed himself, to which Clarissa's immediate response is the thought "in the middle of my party, here's death" – contrasting the life and gaiety of the party with the figure of death, introduced as if as an uninvited guest, and expressing her sense of shock and resentment at this impropriety, as she sees it: "What business had the Bradshaws to talk about death at her party?" (207) But there is more to Clarissa than the superficial society hostess; moments later it is revealed that she intuitively understands more about Septimus's death than her informants:

> A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (207–8)

Her prescience even extends to recognising how the physician himself must have somehow driven Septimus to it (an insight the reader already knows to be accurate):

> Suppose he had had that passion, and had gone to Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor, yet to her obscurely evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage – forcing your soul, that was it – if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?" (208)

The problem with Bradshaw is that he represents the triumph of materialism, is the embodiment of the view that life is infinitely perfectible, that society can be managed, the world improved and the human race go on conquering, achieving and mastering more and more without check or hindrance (as well as the uncritical assumption that this view is right and just).[80] But this is just the view that romanticism challenges with its assertion that there is a greater value in authenticity, in individual freedom, in suffering, in dying, in actually *being* human, that there is a difference, in fact, between living and Living.

Clarissa recognises nonetheless that Septimus has in some ultimate sense defeated Bradshaw (a defeat as resounding in its way as that which Wagner's heroes routinely deal their opponents). The Tristanesque imagery of "an embrace in death" supports this, as does the recurring motif of light and darkness, night and day:

> There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now[81] with this going on, she repeated, and the words came back to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must

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[80] This again is the view that Wagner satirises in the Wotan of *Rheingold* (see 131 note 61).

[81] This detail closely resembles the wounded Tristan's asking "The light – when dies that spark? / When will the house be dark?" (234), terms whose unmistakable symbolic overtones were already explicit in Act II – with Isolde's extinguishing her light as a signal for her lover to approach, an act performed with high drama and the exhilarating declaration "The torch here, and were it my light of life, / smiling I should quench it" (128). This too is echoed in the novel – as is the conflagration of *Götterdämmerung* (which Brünnhilde likewise gets underway by dramatically swinging a firebrand (254–5)) – in Clarissa's impassioned thought "Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire? Might it consume her anyhow! Burn her to cinders! Better anything, better brandish one's torch and hurl it to earth than taper and dwindle away . . . . Anything, any explosion, any horror was better than people wandering aimlessly." (189)

> go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. (210)

Clarissa's strikingly unusual reaction has been carefully prepared for, so that the reader experiences it as a vindication of attitudes consistently developed throughout the text. Her feeling "glad" is evidently not malicious, but based on a recognition of Septimus's suicide as an act of heroic defiance and self-assertion, not the despair and defeatism that his doctors mistake it for. (The Wagnerian allusions undoubtedly underscore this in that the various self-inflicted – or at least self-invited – deaths of his heroes and heroines are without exception presented as such resounding triumphs over the world that one has difficulty thinking of them as suicides at all.)[82] Moreover, the reader is aware that Clarissa is right, that Septimus has not *lost* his life but defiantly "thrown it away" (a further reminder of Siegfried and his clod of earth).[83] It is implied that there is a harmonious – and in some sense redemptive – balance in his having done this "while they went on living", as well as that the remarkable capacity for insight Woolf portrays Clarissa as having (and that somehow makes her a less – or more – than realistic figure) indeed makes her "somehow very like him". In recognising – and in pronouncing a sort of secular benediction on – the true nature of his death, she achieves a kinship, and perhaps even a union, with him, one that allows her to embody Peter Walsh's "figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world" (64).

The theme of *Tristan*, the immediate product of Wagner's conversion to Schopenhauer, is that intense romantic love makes it possible to recognise another individual as being literally identical with oneself – so that love is a partial, as death a total, dispelling of the illusion of selfhood.[84] One of the

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[82] For Tristan and Isolde, for example, "death is a reward. Tristan dies at a moment of supreme happiness, as if death actually *is* happiness, while Isolde, in rapt contemplation of his body, delivers a song of victory, which announces that freedom exists only beyond human life" (Simon Williams, *Wagner and the Romantic Hero* 104).

[83] See 138 note 68.

[84] See pp 74–9. Cf. also this concise summary of the opera by Magee: "The stage action with which [Wagner] makes this musical conception visible concerns a man and a woman who at first love each other with a passionate but undeclared love which they both assume

work's great ironies, however, is that such love depends upon the exclusivity of another individual (so that truth is only apprehended by means of illusion), whereas Schopenhauer's actual teaching is that *all* individuals (and indeed all *beings*) are identical with oneself – themes Wagner develops further in *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*. In *Mrs Dalloway*, on the other hand, Woolf appears to be taking this notion to its logical conclusion, by suggesting that an individual can recognise herself as being identical not only with someone she does not love – but with someone she has never even met. Moreover, both characters – and many among the supporting cast as well – are consistently (even frequently) shown to recognise their identity with people in general, inanimate objects, the world as a whole.[85] And if this is the case it follows, as Clarissa surmises, that "on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees" (7) – which further helps explain the birds' message to Septimus, that "there is no death" (25).

In comprehending, and thus completing, Septimus's act of atonement, Clarissa comes to play a surprisingly Isolde-like role to his Tristan. Septimus himself, however, while remaining "situated at the social margins of the novel" (Peach 109), emerges as its moral centre – his sufferings, visions and death invoking a damning judgement on the society that has excluded him. In common with Prufrock and Stephen Dedalus, he is a typically ironised modernist version of the disillusioned romantic hero, trapped amid urban decay and longing for a transcendental vision that will deliver him. In his disordered mental states, his consciousness frequently appears to tremble on the verge of such illumination, while his resolute, heavily politicised, final leap into non-being actually appears to achieve it, as at the same time it spurns –

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impossible to satisfy in this world. They seek escape from their intolerable longing in a suicide pact which is itself undeclared; but the devoted and horrified attendant who is ordered to bring poison from a chest of magic liquids deliberately brings the wrong phial. It is a love potion. After drinking it the pair are astounded to find themselves not dying but swept away by the love they had repressed. They slake their longings to the utmost limits of possibility: but their desire for unity is impossible of fulfilment in this world of differentiated phenomena; it is possible only in the noumenal realm, a world which is not this, the world of before birth and after death, outside space and time. So they find themselves longing for that as the only mode of being in which their love can achieve its end. Each finally embraces death not only as the cessation of an otherwise unfulfillable longing but also as the loss of self-identity in an ultimate merging with the other." (*The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 357)

[85] See pp 113–14, 142–5.

with a grandiose, if histrionic, gesture – the banal regime that makes such drastic action necessary by its denial of authentic self-expression.

At the same time an artist-*manqué*, who reminds us that "[t]he lunatic, the lover, and the poet, / Are of imagination all compact",[86] Septimus frequently writes down his thoughts, as he feels an urgent need to communicate them:

> The supreme secret must be told to the Cabinet; first, that trees are alive; next, there is no crime; next, love, universal love, he muttered, gasping, trembling, painfully drawing out these profound truths which needed, so deep were they, so difficult, an immense effort to speak out, but the world was entirely changed by them forever. (74)

Despite the absurdity in hoping to communicate any of this "to the Cabinet" and the crudity of his actual formulations, such as that "trees are alive", Woolf's overall presentation of Septimus allows the reader to appreciate that there is more substance to his incoherent thoughts than he is able to articulate; at the very least they reflect a vastly more sympathetic view of life than the clinical materialism of Holmes and Bradshaw. There is even a sense that they reflect the struggles and insecurities of the true artist, the difficulty of expressing some shining truth in a limited and intractable medium. Septimus's message is even exalted, in the grandiose tradition of the romantic artist, to messianic status: "The millions lamented; for ages they had sorrowed. He would turn round, he would tell them in a few moments, only a few moments, more, of this relief, of this joy, of this astonishing revelation – " (78).

In all these respects, the implied identity with both Tristan and Siegfried lends force and credibility to Septimus. All Wagner's heroes can be construed as projections of the artist, even though only two (Tannhäuser and Walther) are literally artists.[87] Siegfried, for instance, demonstrates his heroic

[86] *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.7–8.

[87] Tanner even alludes to a common perception of the composer that it is not only his heroes who body him forth in this way: "[E]ven though he is writing dramas, Wagner himself is omnipresent in them, in a way that Shakespeare is impressively not in his dramas, or even Racine in his. So the total effect of any of them, at any rate the mature ones, is of coming into contact with a personality all the more powerful for dispersing himself into all his characters" (18).

independence by forging his own sword, thereby achieving a powerful identification with the blacksmith-creator archetype; similarly, in his communion with the forest bird, he conforms to the romantic figure of man in harmony with nature. Tristan, on the other hand, resembles the isolated Byronic wanderer: "an infinitely self-conscious figure, burdened by guilt from a past he cannot reveal and nostalgic for a transcendent love, which cannot be fulfilled" (Williams 10). Both heroes also play a political role in opposition to the social order, Siegfried through militant revolutionary action, asserting unconditional freedom in spite of the gods and even destiny, Tristan more passively – and yet more fundamentally – by denying, in thought, word and deed, the very existence of the phenomenal world. Finally, both become, through their extravagant actions and attitudes, exemplary, quasi-messianic figures.[88]

By having Septimus share Siegfried's gift for understanding the language of birds, thereby immersing or "losing" himself in the natural world, feeling at one with its all-inclusive unity, Woolf prepares him for his voluntary, sacrificial throwing-off of his life. By simultaneously having him stricken like Tristan on sun-baked rocks above the sea, she emphasises the unbearable suffering of the isolated self. The co-existence of both heroes in Septimus is especially relevant to his bipolar personality and makes him all the more convincingly "a young man who carries in him the greatest message in the world, and is, moreover, the happiest man in the world, and the most miserable" (92). But it is Tristan, above all, whose languishing for "the boundless realm of worldwide night" (228) infuses Septimus's knowledge that

> he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know. Holmes had won of course . . . . But even Holmes himself could not touch this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world. (103)

[88] The former for instance enjoys a "divine ancestry [that] places him, like Prometheus, halfway between the gods and humanity", and he seems all set to "create a new world of free heroism" (Williams 86–7); the latter is so transfigured in his death that his "body is engulfed in music that represents intensifying waves of orgasmic passion. Tristan's body is no mere corpse, but is projected upon the stars that, in Isolde's imagination, encircle him" (114).

Chapter III

THE ETERNAL REBIRTH OF THE SOLAR HERO: THE *RING*, *PARSIFAL* AND *THE WAVES*

Woolf's most experimental novel, *The Waves*, is also, by common consent, her "most Wagnerian" (Blissett, *Criticism* 5.3.257).[1] DiGaetani states that "Wagner's influence on *The Waves* is pervasive, despite the fact that his name never appears" (118), while Furness describes the novel as "a pulsating fabric of symbols and motifs, derived incontrovertibly from Wagner" (20). More recently, Gyllian Phillips, in "Re(de)composing the Novel: *The Waves*, Wagnerian Opera and Percival / Parsifal" (1995), takes a more contentious stance, claiming that

> [m]ost critics who suggest that Woolf was influenced by music also suggest that an actual comparison of technical style could be made, but few propose to do so, and the primary evidence they give for a musical influence is thematic rather than stylistic. (121–2)

The problem with this is that it confuses what was previously quite clear, that Wagner's influence on Woolf, as on other modern writers, is twofold: there are *allusions* to the composer and his works, to characters and situations in his music-dramas, and there are *leitmotifs* that form an approximate literary counterpart to the musical ones used in them. Whereas the phrase describing the Westminster chimes as "leaden circles dissolved in the air" in *Mrs Dalloway* (2; 52; 105; 131; 210) is a clear example of the literary leitmotif, as is the recurrent Shakespearean tag "Fear no more the heat o' the sun" (8; 31; 42; 157; 210),[2] there is nothing obviously Wagnerian about their content; on the other hand, the clause "Peter Walsh and Joseph Breitkopf went on about Wagner" (38)[3] is an allusion (of the most casual sort) but not, by any stretch of the imagination, a leitmotif. Now, the distinctive musical

[1] See p 8.
[2] See pp 96–7.
[3] See p 97 note 14.

characteristics of a Wagner opera, of which the most obvious is its use of the leitmotif, can logically be said to influence the style of a novel; conversely, allusions to an opera, which comprise part of a novel's content, are almost always made to its stage action, characters, scenic or verbal imagery – in other words, its dramatic features. Hence, to accuse critics of giving *thematic* evidence for a *musical* influence is to charge them with a patent impossibility.[4]

The issue is further complicated by the identification of two, apparently distinct, areas of thematic influence in the novel. DiGaetani and Furness are in agreement both that the complex of images relating to water, the sun, gold, rings and the cycle of life is derived from the *Ring*, specifically the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* and the cyclical structure of the whole, and also, more simply, that the heroic figure of Percival is modelled on Wagner's Parsifal. The problem here is that the distinction engenders an assumption that there is no link between the two allusions beyond just happening to be to works by the same composer. DiGaetani, as I have already pointed out,[5] even makes a point of emphasising the difference: "Woolf's borrowings from Wagner's *Ring* make her novel reverberate with epic implications that it would otherwise lack. *Parsifal*, on the other hand, helps her to portray the complex nature of her hero" (124); while Furness stresses that, for Woolf, "it was *Parsifal* [rather than the *Ring*] which remained the quintessential Wagner work" (21), a claim probably based on Woolf's expressed preference for Wagner's last opera in her essay "Impressions at Bayreuth" (1909).[6] Phillips takes this a step further, by ignoring the *Ring* allusions altogether and treating the novel as if *Parsifal* were the only Wagnerian work to influence it. As I have consistently stressed all along, however, all Wagner's works (and especially the enormously complex later ones) are deeply interconnected on

[4] The only exception I can think of is where an allusion is made to the music itself (such as the "Dom Dom Dombdomb" (*Finnegans Wake* 197.17–18) that Martin identifies as a reference to the Wedding March from *Lohengrin* (194)). But this is a rarity, most literary allusions being, by their very nature, visual. The watery sunrise of *Das Rheingold* recalled in the opening of *The Waves* is an obvious example: it is the mythic quality of the image that links the two. A well-versed Wagnerian might indeed be able to call to mind the music of this passage, and even note a general similarity to the musicality of Woolf's prose, but this is a secondary matter. Phillips, however, constantly appears to assert that the use of quasi-musical effects such as the leitmotif is itself a form of allusion, for example: "the final musical allusion lies in the rhythm of the gradual intensification of song and light towards the ceremonial peak and the diminution of their intensity" (134).

[5] See p 82.

[6] See p 98.

several levels. Just as the contrasting heroes of *Tristan* and the *Ring* were argued (in the previous chapter) to combine in the figure of Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*, so *The Waves*' acknowledged allusions to both the *Ring* and *Parsifal* make it extremely unlikely that the (almost identical) heroes of those works are not *jointly* relevant to that text.

Before proceeding to a detailed examination of the subject, which in this case necessarily begins by summarising the helpful contributions made by both DiGaetani and Furness, it is first necessary to briefly address the purported "correction" made to these by Phillips, over and above her noted tendency to blur the distinction between allusion and leitmotif. The first arises from her objection that few critics propose to make "an actual comparison of technical style" (122); one imagines there are few who want to. As it is, the implications of this charge are threefold: that earlier critics have overlooked important stylistic evidence for Wagner's influence on *The Waves*; that the article's purpose is therefore to redress this, by revealing what it is that has been overlooked; and that thematic evidence for Wagner's influence is, by comparison, old hat and not really worth further consideration.

In fact, as Phillips briefly admits, Furness had already addressed the question of the novel's Wagnerian style. His chapter "Symbolism and Modernism" is especially eloquent on the subject of leitmotifs, the related concept of uninterrupted melody, and its detailed relationship to stream-of-consciousness and the interior monologue, a process he traces in "the whole vast fabric of Proust's *oeuvre* as well as much of the work of Virginia Woolf and Thomas Mann and many a minor modern writer", arguing that

> to say that a poem, or even a novel, is musical in the Wagnerian sense does not simply mean that there is an allusion to a musical work, or that the use of the tonal and rhythmical resonances of words reinforces their conceptual meaning, but rather that its use of the literary leitmotif intensifies the quality of the feeling by repetition, unifying the various parts of the composition and relating the various parts to the whole. (7)

This, and a good deal more in the same vein (1–21),[7] is, it seems to me, considerably more articulate than the "actual comparison of technical style" Phillips allegedly makes in such claims as that

> [i]n blurring the boundaries between tonal distinctions, music attains the same sort of undirected and irregular rhythm that poetry, and in Woolf's case prose, achieve by questioning the syntactic structures of language (128)

or that "[t]he effect is one of identity moving into (dis)harmony or words sliding into music, and then moving out again" (143). At the same time, despite objecting that "[f]or DiGaetini [*sic*], Wagner's influence on Woolf is entirely thematic, or mythic; he does not develop Blissett's notion of musical effect to any degree" (123), Phillips does not hesitate to make claims about Wagner's thematic influence on the novel either, frequently without distinguishing it from "musical effect". As a result, it is not clear to the reader where one ends and the other begins, or how exactly this can be said to mark an improvement on the research Phillips chooses to condemn.

A second difficulty, which compounds this tendency to obfuscation, is that the article, despite taking "DiGaetini" to task for his alleged shortcomings, itself chooses to bypass the novel's *Ring* allusions altogether and instead persists in seeing thematic and stylistic influences alike exclusively in relation to *Parsifal*:

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[7] I will content myself here with a few further samples: "The unique nature of Wagner's music, its phenomenal power of compressing into a few bars the most profound emotional and psychological experience, and the endless harmonic and orchestral transformations of these 'carriers of feelings', or leading motifs, exerted such an overwhelming influence on literature because psychological cross-reference and associations, and interrelationships between clusters of images and symbols, could be established, the impact being enormously increased thereby. It is here that Wagner's influence is most profound. . . . And further, a drama of suggestion rather than statement, of inner rather than external movement is adumbrated here, where suggestiveness, musicality, mystery and reverie oust the traditional development of character and exploration of human relationships" (7).

"The tendency for the [modernist] novel to reject definite plot and subject matter, to concentrate on the consciousness of the main character frequently to the exclusion of everything else, the tendency for its sections to be related not by some action but by continual cross-references of symbol and image (it was Gurnemanz, it may be remembered, who stressed that *time* had become *space*) provokes a discussion on what is meant by 'musicalisation' and the importance of a leitmotif technique for the advocates of the stream of consciousness or the interior monologue" (15).

"[The leitmotif] is the most consistent contribution of music to fiction, a device most suitable to literature because it was originally a *literary* device taken over by music – by Wagner above all" (17).

See also the examples quoted on pp 13, 83–4 and 97 note 13.

> [t]he most fundamental analogy between *The Waves* and *Parsifal* that I can see is their ambiguous attitude towards form. . . . Both works avoid invoking formulaic expectations of closure within the structure thereby creating a continuous inner tension with no hope of satisfying resolution, and both disrupt even their pretence at linearity by concentrating on the drama of intense emotion rather than action. (129–30)

The unfounded assumption of this claim is that this approach to form is specific to one Wagner opera, when it is actually a recognised characteristic of all his mature works. Most of the features outlined here are as applicable to the *Ring* as to *Parsifal* and all of them even more so to *Tristan*, where "intense emotion rather than action" and "continuous inner tension with no hope of satisfying resolution" are undoubtedly carried to their furthest extreme. Phillips nonetheless insists on seeing all the quasi-musical effects in Woolf's prose as related exclusively to *Parsifal*:

> Like the rise of the Grail motif and the rushing plunge down of Kundry's motif, the wave rises, gathers itself and falls. In the last paragraph of his summing up, Bernard rises and falls on this wave of linguistic flux. (135)

It is as if the relationship of the works' heroes is being construed as grounds for claiming that Woolf is specifically imitating *this* music – in some way that nonetheless remains unspecified; it is difficult enough to establish exactly how the rise and fall of language relates to that of music, without bringing particular motifs into it.[8] In any case, the evidence for this claim is thematic rather than stylistic (precisely the charge Phillips brings against other critics), the rising wave being primarily an *image* Bernard uses and only secondarily the rhythmic cadences of the language used in support of it:

> And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back. (228)

[8] It is questionable, for instance, whether these wavelike effects more closely resemble the score of *Parsifal* than they do say *La Mer* or the first movement of *Scheherazade* – compositions actually intended to suggest such movement, as *Parsifal* plainly is not.

Phillips' claims about "musical effect" (123) are thus quite as rooted in content as DiGaetani's interest in the mythic hero.

But the main thrust of Phillips' argument is, as noted, that novel and opera share an "ambiguous attitude towards form" (129). Quoting Carl Dahlhaus on *Parsifal* (in the *New Grove Wagner*), she asserts that

> the perhaps ironic and competitive contrast between "the strict symmetry of external form" which is "architectural" and the constantly dissolving "inner action" (161) creates a dialectic which is never resolved but makes for a narrative which continually questions its own symbolic ordering system. (129)

What is presumably meant is that there is an inherent contrast between the solid ABA shape of the three acts and the fluidity of Wagner's famous uninterrupted melody. This much, which is taken from Dahlhaus, is clear, but that this contrast implies self-questioning appears based on the unqualified assumption that firmness is always tyrannical and fluidity always subversive, whereas the construction of the individual acts of Wagner's music dramas from seemingly innumerable permutations of their rhythmic and harmonic materials is precisely what gives them their impressive concreteness (as is implied by the self-referential forging of Siegfried's sword Nothung).[9] There is no "question" about them.

Similarly, in discussing the opera's association of diatonic music with the forces of good and the Grail, and chromaticism with those of evil and sorcery, Phillips implies that Wagner, as if unsure of his moral compass, deliberately undercuts this symbolism

> when the music of the sensual flower maidens, the evil Klingsor's creations, becomes completely diatonic and Parsifal's great moment of self-realization, which saves the Grail order, is musically constructed as "a positive, passionate chromaticism which initially outdoes in its avoidance of cadential confirmations the more 'decadent' material of Kundry or Klingsor". (133, quoting Arnold Whittal, "The Music of Parsifal" 77)

[9] See p 84 note 81.

There are actually perfectly good dramatic reasons for this reversal that moreover demonstrate the sophistication of Wagner's musical symbolism. In the case of the flower maidens, the diatonic harmony is offset by the lilting rhythm and diaphanous scoring, an effect both charming and unnerving, and one that perfectly manages to suggest the appearance of innocence masking a more sinister purpose; similarly, the hero Parsifal's "great moment of self-realisation" is searingly chromatic precisely in order to indicate that the intensity of his compassion for Amfortas outweighs even the desire Kundry has awoken in him. Any suggestion that Wagner here pre-empts modernist self-irony is entirely belied by the evidence; he is quite simply, as Tanner has said, "the least ironic of artists" (37).

Congruent Heroes: Percival, Parsifal and Siegfried

The approach taken here is essentially the opposite of Phillips': that Wagner's influence on the *style* of *The Waves* be considered more than adequately handled by previous critics, notably Furness,[10] but that his influence on the novel's *content* be given a thorough reappraisal. What specifically concerns me is the way that the two sets of allusions (to the *Ring* and to *Parsifal*), hitherto treated independently of one another, are intimately connected at almost every point. First, it is necessary to be quite clear as to what each of these are.

For DiGaetani, Wagner's "pervasive" influence on the text

> begins with the italicized descriptions of the progression of the sun and the movements of the sea that open each of the chapters. . . . The symbolic combination of water with predawn darkness suggests both death and rebirth, which is very similar to Wagner's use of light and water in *Der Ring des Nibelungen.* That vast tetralogy also begins and ends in the darkness before the dawn, and rippling water (supported by rhythmic water music) is on stage for both scenes as well. (118)

Furness agrees:

[10] The stylistic aspects of Wagner's influence are, as stated at the outset, not a concern of this thesis (see pp 16–17).

> The cyclical structure, the beginning and the end in water, the images of light and burning gold, the arc of fire gleaming on the horizon and the blazing sea derive specifically from Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen*: to object that these descriptions could refer to any creation myth portraying the coming of light into the darkness of the waters is to forget the prime importance of the *ring* motif in this book. (20–1)

(I shall consider this "cyclical structure" in detail in the following section of this chapter.) The second set of allusions consists of those that are claimed to link Woolf's Percival with Wagner's Parsifal. The argument is essentially that Percival is a heroic figure whom the six speaking characters in the novel[11] all admire intensely (though not unreservedly) and that his name deliberately suggests the traditional hero of the Grail legend. What is principally held to show that Woolf has Wagner's version in mind rather than mediaeval romance is Bernard's reference to "that wild hunting-song, Percival's music" (192). For DiGaetani, for instance, this "provides strong evidence that Wagner's Parsifal is the character she is referring to in *The Waves* and connecting with her Percival" (123) and Furness agrees it is "an allusion to Parsifal's entry in Wagner's music drama and the turbulent music of the huntsman who has just killed the sacred swan" (21).[12] Phillips' contributions in this regard are again somewhat problematic, for example the observation that both Bernard and Gurnemanz "end their narratives in the early morning hours of Good Friday" (125), which seems to contradict both the uncertainty of Bernard's actual words "[a]nother day; another Friday; another twentieth of

[11] Percival is remarkable, among other things, for remaining unheard. He appears, that is, solely through the other characters' reactions to him.

[12] Alternatively, as Briggs straightforwardly asserts, the medieval Percival's "quest for the Holy Grail Woolf would have known through Wagner's opera *Parsifal*" (*Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* 252). It is simply the version she is most likely to have drawn upon, rather than Malory's (in which Sir Percivale's role is overshadowed by the imperfect, human Launcelot's) or even Tennyson's.

Ironically, although it does seem undisputable that the allusion is deliberate (especially given Woolf's noted preference for *Parsifal* over Wagner's other works), its primary – literal – meaning is apparently unrelated, since Bernard – the narrating voice or consciousness at that point – is referring only to the Percival he remembers (years after his death) and his "wild hunting-song" is related to the "gramophone" music enjoyed by the other "powerful young men" who remind Bernard of Percival (60). This is far more likely to be Gilbert and Sullivan than anything by Wagner (and certainly not *Parsifal*, which would have still been under the thirty-year embargo on performance anywhere outside Bayreuth (see p 98)). Apart from anything else, the prohibitive length of Wagner's dramas prevented anything other than very selective excerpts from them even being available for commercial recording purposes.

March, January, or September" (228) and the quite unequivocal response of Gurnemanz to the sound of bells offstage: "Midday: the hour is come" (154).

What all three critics agree is that the other characters' collective hero-worship of Percival gives him an aura of splendour approaching that with which Wagner routinely invests his heroes, and none of them more so than the distinctly Christlike Parsifal. What is not immediately apparent is what connection exists between this and the "cyclical structure" Furness states derives from the *Ring*. That there is a connection, and an important one, seems to me indisputable (though it does not necessarily follow that Woolf was conscious of it); it is once again a consequence of the continuity of Wagner's *oeuvre* described by Mann, "the basic unity underlying his perfectly consistent and fully rounded life's work" (112).[13] In my view, careful examination of the text reveals not only a single connection between both sets of allusions, but an intricate and multi-layered relationship, the starting point of which is simply that Parsifal and Siegfried are two incarnations of *the same hero*. This requires closer attention.

There are, as discussed at length in the previous chapter,[14] essentially just two heroes recurring throughout Wagner's entire *oeuvre*, who exist in a direct reciprocal relationship to one another (even when, as in some of the works, only one of them is present): those "who [have] no past" and those "who [have] all too much of a past" (Tanner 186).[15] Siegfried is undoubtedly the defining example of the first type and Parsifal is "of the genus Siegfried at his most untutored, entirely a child of Nature" (188). Both know practically nothing about anything, notably their own origins, live entirely in the moment, are almost irrepressibly cheerful except for recurrent guilt over the deaths of their mothers,[16] and by virtue of their very innocence are redemptive figures whose coming is foretold long before they appear on the scene. Of course, there are also significant differences between them, or at least between the situations in which they find themselves. Indeed, if this were not the case,

[13] See p 82.
[14] See pp 104–9.
[15] See p 105.
[16] The extent to which Wagner foreshadows Freud here is nothing short of extraordinary: Siegfried, never having known a woman's love, longs for his lost mother, a "human wife [*Menschenweib*]" (127), whereas Parsifal is actually told by Kundry, in a deeply disturbing passage, that the first kiss of love she offers him is a last greeting from his dead mother.

Wagner would merely be repeating himself, whereas what the continuity of his works really amounts to is the presentation of a totality viewed from contrasting and complementary angles. So, for instance, Siegfried is a pagan hero and Parsifal a Christian one (though this seemingly simple distinction conceals deeper complexities); Siegfried is a dragonslayer and damsel-rescuer, ultimately a world-overturner, and Parsifal a world-overcomer, a resister of temptation, a peacemaker and healer; Siegfried dies and Parsifal lives. Both, however, achieve a spectacular transcendence in the process, and it is also significant that each simultaneously redeems both another individual (Wotan and Amfortas, outstanding examples of the contrasting type of fatally doomed and suffering hero) and a wider group (humanity in general and the Grail-brotherhood). The redemptive act itself is in each case a highly complicated matter, involves much symbolic paraphernalia, and is difficult to describe in practical terms; each is to some extent achieved jointly by the hero and a female figure. Siegfried's role as redeemer is even overshadowed by Brünnhilde's, whose sacrificial death completes and sets the seal on his own, and whose intervention is crucial in ensuring that the Ring itself be returned to the Rhine and the world freed from its curse. Nonetheless, Siegfried is ultimately responsible for Brünnhilde's awakening in the first place, as, similarly, the highly ambivalent figure of Kundry plays a vital role in helping Parsifal to qualify for redemptive status. Most importantly in the present context, the progress of each hero's quest provides the central narrative thrust of the drama and this is linked inextricably to the structural form of the whole.

It is remarkable to note, at this juncture, by how narrow a margin critics have missed the connection. DiGaetani had already noticed that the solar cycle that gives *The Waves* its structural frame alludes not only to the beginning and end of the *Ring* but also to its central climax: "[t]he high point of the *Ring* . . . when Brünnhilde and Siegfried are first in love, is reflected in the bright sunshine Wagner puts in his stage directions" (119). This strongly implies awareness of the symbolic association of the noonday sun with the hero's triumph. At the same time, DiGaetani is fully aware of the parallel significance of the novel's central climax, aligned with the point of midday in the frame, when the characters are in the prime of life and Percival meets his

shockingly sudden and untimely end. And yet, despite the importance of the Parsifal connection in his argument, he does not equate the two Wagner heroes for a moment.

This is as nothing, however, to the myopia of Phillips' argument, with its curious insistence that *Parsifal* is the only Wagner opera to influence Woolf's text. We have already considered the absurdity of this with regard to musical form; stranger still is the attribution of the cycle image to this work rather than the *Ring*:

> Acts one and three of *Parsifal* begin in the very early morning, before dawn, and climax at the midday Love-feast; as well, *The Waves* begins in the pre-dawn hours of the morning, climaxes at midday and moves down through sunset (130).

This excision of the *Ring* from the argument stands at the opposite extreme from DiGaetani's firm separation of the two operas' areas of influence. On the face of it, the point about the dawn / midday pattern in *Parsifal* is perfectly sound, but to propose this in place of the far more convincing *Ring* analogy (which is not even mentioned) seems misguided; Woolf's combination of cyclical form with images of light, water and mythical females overwhelmingly favours the *Ring* as the principal source. It is also only the *Ring* that shares her use of the complete cycle and its implications about time and eternal recurrence. *Parsifal*, by contrast, uses only the ascending arc, the significance of which is limited to the hero's triumphant progress, as in *Siegfried*. In fact, if one is going to consider the uses of day–night symbolism in Wagner's works outside the *Ring*, one can scarcely afford to ignore *Tristan*, with its emphatic rejection of day, life and social duty in favour of night, death and transcendent love.[17] The dying Tristan's Act III monologue (explicitly likened by Wagner himself to the sufferings of Amfortas in *Parsifal*)[18] with its wistful recollections of "the boundless realm of worldwide night" (228) is strongly suggested in the novel, in conjunction with the ubiquitous ring-image, by Bernard's claim,

[17] See pp 76–7, 117.
[18] See pp 83, 105, 125.

> I have been traversing the sunless territory of non-identity. A strange land. I have heard in my moment of appeasement, in my moment of obliterating satisfaction, the sigh, as it goes in, as it comes out, of the tide that draws beyond this circle of bright light, this drumming of insensate fury. I have had one moment of enormous peace. This perhaps is happiness (87).

And the obverse of *Tristan* is found in *Die Meistersinger*, where a night of folly and madness gives way to the goodwill and enlightenment of Midsummer's Day.

The principal point at issue here remains nonetheless that the cyclical form of the *Ring* and the eponymous hero of *Parsifal*, at best identified to date as quite unrelated allusions to the two operas, are really just the most visible parts of a continuous negotiation the novel conducts with the whole of Wagner's "perfectly consistent and fully rounded life's work". In turning now to a careful examination of the text, we are therefore in a position to unearth a far richer substratum of Wagnerian allusion than has yet been identified there, even in those few places where the ground has been gone over before.

"So vast a bubble that the sun might set and rise in it": Wagner, Woolf and the cycle of history

The *Ring* and *The Waves* are, firstly then, cyclical works: they both portray sequences of events that, in some sense, return to where they started. In each case, these cycles are primarily natural, typified by the eternal alternation and recurrence of night and day, and there is an obvious implication both for individual human life and universal history. In addition, both novel and opera-cycle compound the images of light, water and woman to express a powerful archetypal sense of nature as transcendent and timeless. Each nonetheless takes a markedly different approach to this common material and has a somewhat different purpose in view.

The *Ring*, to begin with, is a drama; it has an impressive forward momentum, driven by events of heightened significance: the rape of the gold, the curse on the ring, the entry into Valhalla, to give just three examples from

the first part alone. Its content, at the literal level, is that of mythological epic, the deeds of gods, superhuman heroes and fantastic creatures, but, at another level, it is a commentary on the modern world, on the politics of power, on the means and the ends of production, on the depletion of the environment, on the emptiness of life. Indeed, it is so vast a work that "[i]t can almost be said without facetiousness to be about everything" (Magee *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 331).[19]

Its cyclical form is first and foremost a function of its plot. The tragic primal events of *Das Rheingold* must be reversed at the end of *Götterdämmerung*: the stolen gold returned to the Rhinedaughters, the Nibelung's renunciation of love counteracted by Brünnhilde's renunciation of the world, the curse on the ring annulled by her and Siegfried's sacrificial deaths, the inauguration of the gods' reign in Valhalla mirrored by their spectacular self-immolation. At the same time, the symbolic dimension of the material links it closely with actual human history, especially as seen in the mid-nineteenth century. *Das Rheingold* in particular is largely what Shaw said it was, an indictment of rampant capitalism.[20] The ring brings its keeper infinite wealth provided he is ruthless enough to use its power. Doing so, he compels an army of slaves to toil under miserable conditions for his exclusive benefit. And as the words of the curse specify, it brings no joy to its master, who is consumed with the fear of losing it, while others enviously long to claim it for themselves – a state of affairs amply demonstrated by the ensuing events of the cycle.

But the target of the work's satire extends beyond post-industrial economy, though that is its most obvious focus and a sign that things in the modern world are worse than they have ever been before. Nonetheless, it suggests that the trouble started much earlier, with the essentially feudal contract between the gods and the giants. The principal culprit here is Wotan, law-giver and founder of civilisation, whose rightful claim to world rule is embodied in his spear, that is in regulations and statutes – as binding to him as to those he governs. In other words, *Rheingold* shows the world's troubles to be as old as history itself and to have begun with the

[19] See p 48.
[20] See p 57.

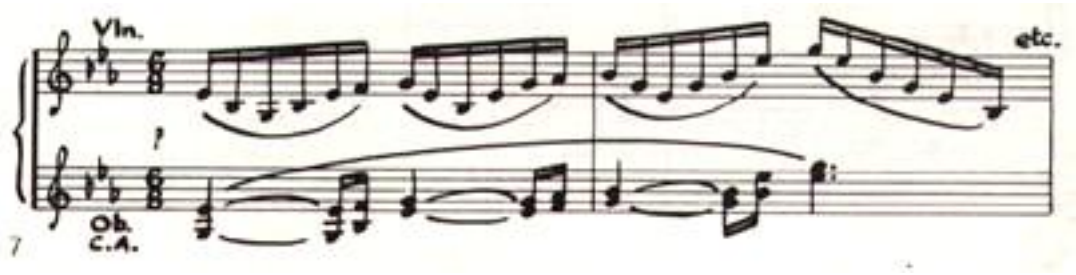
quintessentially masculine act of claiming power, marking territory, carving out a piece of the world to call "mine".

The rest of the cycle is then dedicated to exploring a series of ever more radical efforts to reverse this destructive and worsening lust for power. The first wave of revolution, so to speak, that of Siegmund in *Die Walküre*, is as ruthlessly crushed underfoot as was the 1848 uprising that had such a marked effect on the composer and on the direction his work was taking. Siegfried, associated by Shaw with the anarchist Bakunin,[21] whom Wagner had known in Dresden, demonstrates an ideal and unstoppable impulse to freedom. But finally *Götterdämmerung*, coloured by Wagner's reading of Schopenhauer, sees the final nullity of the world and the inevitability of its destruction, an event the more greatly to be desired in that it is the only real solution to anything.[22]

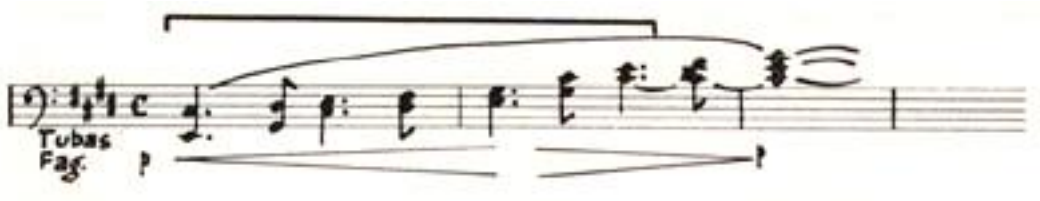
The applicability of the work's cyclical events to real world history, is thus apparent and – in some respects – chillingly prophetic. The first event it depicts, Alberich's theft of the gold, is an obvious version of the Fall, hence a symbolic account of how we came to be in the mess we are. The rest of the work then offers some – highly equivocal – suggestions as to how we might hope to deal with it. But the cycle's historical dimension is not as simple as this outline might suggest; it is compounded by the more profoundly mythic elements of the work, which create the impression of something far greater than merely human history. The first of these is the remarkable prelude to *Das Rheingold* – and to the complete work, which commentators have unanimously taken to portray the creation of the universe.[23] Emerging with infinite slowness out of the silence that precedes it, an at first hardly perceptible drone becomes a fuller, but still formless, sound and only then the inevitable gradual stepwise rhythm of the "Werde" (Becoming) motif:

[21] See p 86.
[22] See p 70.
[23] See p 56.

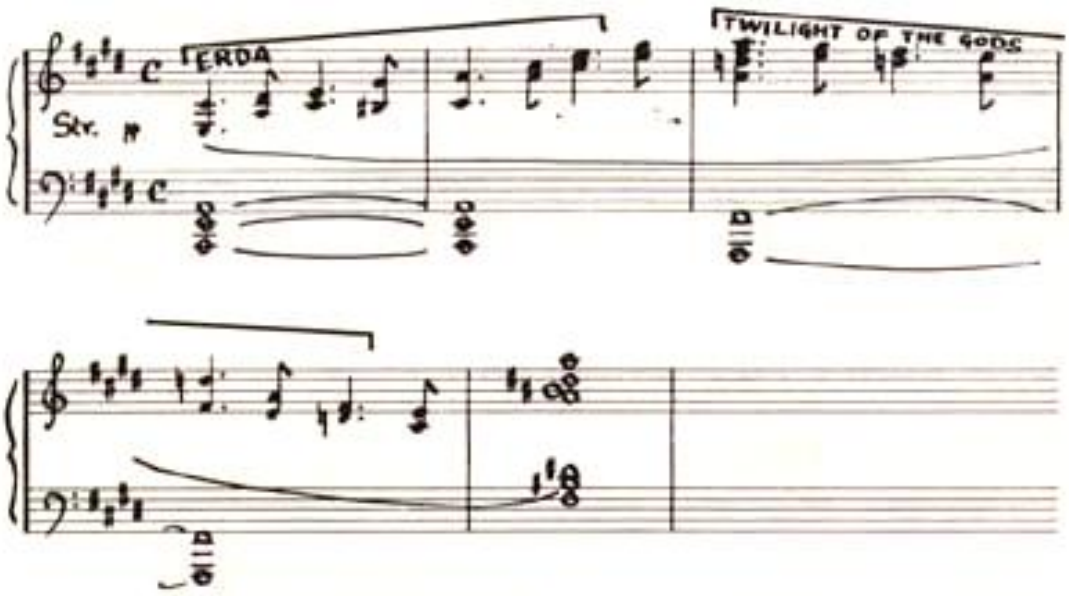
An undulating variation of this then prepares the way for the fuller, more purposeful rhythm and harmony of the Rhine motif proper:



The impression is that of unconscious nothingness without purpose spontaneously generating matter in space and time. And that the same material, when transposed from E flat into C sharp minor, becomes the motif of Erda the *ur*-goddess, helps identify her with this primordial being, makes her its correlative in the human mind – the unconscious, from which our perception of the world likewise emerges:



Finally, the inversion of Erda's rising motif into the sinking motif to which she first predicts the utterly inevitable doom of the gods perfectly illustrates the conception that everything will fall back into that same nothingness from which it arose:



It is thus not only human civilisation that must pass away, but the world itself.

Furthermore, one should not overlook the seemingly obvious point made by DiGaetani that "the ring itself is, of course, a circle" (119). That the gold, the world's wealth, must be made into a circle, the sign of eternity, is perfectly appropriate to its purpose of conferring world mastery upon its keeper. That he wears it on his hand emphasises his claim to power over everything in it. And that the central symbol of the work is reflected in its overall form is especially apt and satisfying.

Turning back to *The Waves*, the novel could, on the face of it, scarcely be more different from this. It is hard to imagine a work with less dramatic momentum. Six ordinary people meet in early childhood at a countryside boarding school, grow up and go their separate ways, continuing to stay in touch and meet from time to time (all six together on just two memorable occasions), until they all eventually cease to be. This near-total non-eventfulness is complemented by the unusual narrative technique. A scarcely existent frame narrator is restricted to reporting what each of the six "said"; the bulk of the text thus consists of their alternating monologues, really their poeticised impressions of lived experience, of varying lengths, one succeeding another without comment and in no fixed order. Although each is given certain distinguishing characteristics, these do not really colour their

speech to any degree, so that the reader sometimes forgets which of them is speaking at a given moment. The impression created by the whole is of a continuous stream of life passing inevitably by, a highly stylised imitation of consciousness in its randomness, its sudden shifts of focus, its seemingly illogical associations, its ceaseless activity.

Prefacing each of the novel's nine sections is an italicised passage describing, in the most vivid detail, the changing effects of the sunlight upon the sea, a garden and a room in a house. As each successive passage charts a later point in the day, progressing from dawn to nightfall, an obvious correspondence is created with the sections of the narrative proper, which likewise follow the characters' lives from childhood to old age. The point is simple but effective: human life is a cycle too, its stages analogous to the hours of a day or the seasons of a year in the manner methodically mapped out by Frye.[24] The poignancy of the whole lies in its verisimilitude; life, as experienced by the individual, is very much like this: an often bewildering succession of experiences, moods and impressions, intensely felt but fleeting, and "rounded with a sleep". The effect is completed with the characters' deaths not being recorded; the book simply ends and they are not there any more.

[24] While the *Anatomy of Criticism* provides the fullest exposition of this theme, which Frye held to have universal significance for *all* literature, a convenient summary is given in his earlier essay "The Archetypes of Literature": "In the solar cycle of the day, the seasonal cycle of the year, and the organic cycle of human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative around a figure who is partly the sun, partly vegetative fertility and partly a god or archetypal being. The crucial importance of this myth has been forced on literary critics by Jung and Frazer in particular, but the several books now available on it are not always systematic in their approach, for which reason I supply the following table of its phases:

1. The dawn, spring and birth phase. Myths of the birth of the hero, of revival and resurrection, of creation and (because the four phases are a cycle) of the defeat of the powers of darkness, winter and death. Subordinate characters: the father and the mother. The archetype of romance and of most dithyrambic and rhapsodic poetry.
2. The zenith, summer, and marriage or triumph phase. Myths of apotheosis, of the sacred marriage, and of entering into Paradise. Subordinate characters: the companion and the bride. The archetype of comedy, pastoral and idyll.
3. The sunset, autumn and death phase. Myths of fall, of the dying god, of violent death and sacrifice and of the isolation of the hero. Subordinate characters: the traitor and the siren. The archetype of tragedy and elegy.
4. The darkness, winter and dissolution phase. Myths of the triumph of these powers; myths of floods and the return of chaos, of the defeat of the hero, and Götterdämmerung myths. Subordinate characters: the ogre and the witch. The archetype of satire." (1452–3)

Cyclical form in this case is not inherent in the plot, unless in the sense that we all come from nothing and go back to nothing; it has to be imposed on the otherwise formless material by means of the frame passages. It is in this respect to be further distinguished from the *Ring*, in that there are no crucial events, no crises to be overcome, only life to be lived – though that is both event and crisis enough.

The importance of the form is determined, rather, by the sunrise / sunset passages and by the implications they have for the image of life that they frame, their relation to the stages of life they preface. The effect, as in the *Ring*, is to present the natural world as an immensity that dwarfs human life and its significance. It also, of course, suggests an endlessly recurring cycle, transcending the finitude of mortality, and there are numerous hints within the text that support this view, such as Louis's awareness of his former lives, Bernard's belief in connecting with others, Susan's sense of kinship with the earth, and so on. At all times, the individual perspective seems to open out on a universe that stretches beyond its purview in all directions.

Despite the novel's preoccupation with the seemingly small lives of ordinary people, then, its scope does extend beyond that of the human lifespan. While eschewing the grandiose conflicts, millennial events and epic significance of the *Ring*, *The Waves* is thus quite as concerned with the timeless and universal. This is even indicated in the "pattern of rings" (Furness 20) dispersed throughout the text, images of infinity occurring here, there and everywhere, "in a loop of light" (5), in grass and steel (28), in glowing "vinous" amethyst (32), in a garland of flowers (41), in Bernard's smoke rings of phrases (49) and so on and on. The form of the whole is again reflected at the level of the image, recurrent if not dramatically central.

It is, however, to the larger pattern formed by the "interludes" that one must turn to gain a full appreciation of Wagner's importance for the novel. The first of these (technically a "prelude" analogous to the *Rheingold* prelude) begins, as DiGaetani says, in "predawn darkness" (118):

> *The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth*

> *became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually.* (3)

In at least one respect this is strikingly non-Wagnerian, that is in its use of homely rather than heroic metaphors. Nonetheless, the almost imperceptible increase in light does indeed provide a close match to that which is evoked by the primordial sounds of the *Rheingold* prelude, with its endlessly repeated wavelike motion progressing steadily from the "gloomy depths" of the opening bars to the "greenish twilight" (1) of the waters "in full flood" (4).[25]

Like the Rhinegold still unseen in the darkness, Woolf's waves are compared to a sleeper, "*whose breath comes and goes unconsciously*", and who is likewise awakened by the rising sun:

> *[T]he arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan. Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire. Gradually the fibres of the burning bonfire were fuzed into one haze, one incandescence which lifted the weight of the woollen grey sky on top of it and turned it into a million atoms of soft blue. The surface of the sea slowly became transparent and lay rippling and sparkling until the dark stripes were almost rubbed out. Slowly the arm that held the lamp raised it higher and then higher until a broad flame became visible; an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all round it the sea blazed gold.* (3)

It is this specific combination of a supernatural female figure with imagery of increasingly bright golden light spreading over the water that unmistakeably suggests the *Rheingold* parallel. There, the Rhinedaughters are established as the guardians of the "sleeping gold" (6) almost immediately and when the dawning sunlight awakens the sleeper there is a marked shift in the music; a muted D major fanfare and rapt lines of praise from the nymphs lead to their jubilant chorus of "Heiajaheia". This in turn gives vivid expression to the effect described in the stage directions:

[25] DiGaetani and Furness both overlook the distinction between sea and river but may be considered justified in so doing in that Wagner's Rhine is less a geographical than a mythical body of water, primordial, life-giving, world-encircling, itself a ring of ever-flowing water and "father" to the bathing nymphs within it, like its Hellenic counterpart, the Titan Oceanus.

> *Through the waters an ever-increasing glow makes its way from above, which gradually kindles, on a high point of the central rock, to a blinding, bright-beaming golden gleam. A magical golden light pours from this over the waters.* (23)

The Rhinegold, it is clear, functions as a reflector or reagent of solar light; indeed it is described at one point as "the dazzling star that dwells in the deeps / And gilds the waves with its light" (27). The effect, in other words, is that of a sunrise *under* the water, with the water itself serving to diffuse and spread the light over the whole scene. The warmth and richness of the colour and the beauty of the maidens bathing in it further add a tangible sense of wholesomeness and sensuality. If fully realised in performance, the impression on the audience should be of ecstatic revelation, of return to Eden or to the womb.[26]

That Woolf recaptures at least some of this effect is apparent, though there are distinctly ironic touches ("*the woollen grey sky*"). On the whole, this passage shares Wagner's concern to recapture the grandeur of the natural world with almost pagan intensity. But it is not only the opening scene of *Rheingold* that is evoked. The spectacular spread of light upwards across the sky, the burning incandescence ascending "*into a million atoms of soft blue*" closely resembles the final scene of *Siegfried* as described in Wagner's detailed stage directions:

> *The clouds have dissolved into a fine rosy mist, which now divides: The upper part disappears altogether, ultimately revealing the bright blue sky of the day. . . . On the edge of the rocky height, which now becomes visible, there still hangs a veil of reddish morning mist, suggesting the magic fire still raging below.* (207)

If this resemblance is also intended, it suggests Woolf paid careful attention to the recurring sunrises in the *Ring*, and even that the midday climax of the hero's ascendancy is already inevitable, being implicit in the dawn that heralds it.

[26] See p 56.

So much for the novel's opening sunrise. As the interludes continue to chart the solar arc, similarities to *Rheingold* grow, if anything, more plentiful. Around the middle of the morning

> *The girl who had shaken her head and made all the jewels, the topaz, the aquamarine, the water-coloured jewels with sparks of fire in them, dance, now bared her brows and with wide-opened eyes drove a straight pathway over the waves.* (54)

As well the Rhinedaughters themselves, who love only the natural beauty and not the worldly value of their treasure (variously described as a "glittering toy" (59) and a "golden trinket" (62)), this passage also recalls their characterisation of the sun as a female deity, "Frau Sonne" (*Götterdämmerung* 192–3), the gold's "wakener" who, "kissing his eyelids, woos them to open" (*Rheingold* 24). Indeed, the novel soon makes the identification overt: "*The sun, risen, no longer couched on a green mattress darting a fitful glance through watery jewels, bared its face and looked straight over the waves*" (81). Finally, at midday,

> *It was no longer half-seen and guessed at, from hints and gleams, as if a girl couched on her green-sea mattress tired her brows with water-globed jewels that sent lances of opal-tinted light falling and flashing in the uncertain air like the flanks of a dolphin leaping, or the flash of a falling blade.* (111)

Given the Wagnerian context, this last detail may suggest Siegfried again, wielding the bright sword Nothung in his heroic ascendancy.

In the second half of the novel, as the day begins to die, these images predictably diminish, replaced by occasional hints of the *Ring*'s darker themes:

> *The islands of cloud had gained in density and drew themselves across the sun so that the rocks went suddenly black, and the trembling sea holly lost its blue and turned silver, and shadows were blown like grey cloths over the sea.* (139)

This ominous loss of light echoes the chilling moment in *Rheingold* when the gods, robbed of Freia and her youth-giving golden apples, grow suddenly old as "pale mist, gradually growing denser, fills the stage" (69). This loss, and

that of the Rhinedaughters when Alberich steals their gold, are perhaps also implied in the passage towards sunset when "*the waves, as they neared the shore, were robbed of light*" (159). Finally, with nightfall, the cycle is completed as once again "*[s]ky and sea were indistinguishable*" (181) and the very last words of the novel, following Bernard's embrace of death, provide a suitably infrahuman epilogue: "*[t]he waves broke on the shore*" (228).

Moving from the frame to the substance of the novel, the prominence of the Wagnerian element initially appears to grow less – largely because its presentation of the characters' continually changing impressions of the world necessarily involves an extremely broad range of images and associations drawn, seemingly at random, from every sphere of life. Within this fluid immensity, any specific connection to Wagner becomes diffused.

This is even the case with the "pattern of rings" Furness identifies (21), several instances of which (such as "the ring with the blue stone" that Neville imagines buying in Bond Street (106) or the "rings under glass cases" in "some museum" (122)) are not obviously Wagnerian at all. Others, such as the "hammered ring of beaten steel" (128) Louis plans to forge, are perhaps more suggestive (in this instance of both ring and sword from Wagner's epic). So too is DiGaetani's point that Bernard's opening words – "I see a ring" (5) – immediately follow the sunrise sequence in a way that corresponds directly to the progression from the Rhinegold's "awakening" to Alberich's discovery that it can be made into the magic ring. Bernard, like Alberich, sees it enticingly "hanging above me", but the allusion is hardly developed (or, perhaps, deeply ironised): the "ring" eventually turns out to have been nothing more than a youthful impression of a polished brass knob on a wardrobe door.

This is not to say that the novel has no further connection to Wagner's cycle beyond that suggested in the interludes; rather, it masks an altogether more profound one. In discerning this, it is necessary to develop DiGaetani's rather simplistic formulation that at least "one basic meaning of a ring, its circular form symbolising a circular concept of life's progression, is used in both *The Waves* and the *Ring*" (120). How these life cycles operate in each work has already been outlined above; what remains is to probe into what each appears to be saying about life and time, our relationship to the world, and the possibility of transcendence.

A recurrent idea in the novel is the almost mystical sense of kinship human beings have with the earth and growing things. Early on, Louis, seeming to expand into the World Ash Yggdrassil, thinks

> I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick, and damp earth, through veins of lead and silver. I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs. Up here my eyes are green leaves, unseeing. (7)

Somewhat later, Susan similarly says "I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees" (72), while Rhoda says "I am the foam that sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness; I am also a girl, here in this room (80).

A related concept is the identification of individuals with one another. This is a favourite theme of Bernard's in particular, beginning with his claim that "when we sit together, close . . . we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory" (10). Later he elaborates, using a version of the ring motif always associated with him:

> I do not believe in separation. We are not single. . . . A smoke ring issues from my lips (about crops) and circles him, bringing him into contact. The human voice has a disarming quality – (we are not single, we are one). (49–50)

Later still, he becomes aware of how this unity is threatened by the uniquely human problem of self-consciousness: "It steals in through some crack in the structure – one's identity. I am not part of the street – no, I observe the street. One splits off, therefore" (86). But this separation increasingly becomes something to avoid; amusingly, eating helps:

> I am dissolved utterly and become featureless and scarcely to be distinguished from another. It does not matter. What matters? We have dined well. (172)

And as he reviews his life in the long final section devoted entirely to him, he expresses the almost Schopenhauerian insight that individuation is the cause of all suffering: "We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies" (186). Remembering that satisfying dinner, he wonders "Was this, then, this

streaming away mixed with Susan, Jinny, Neville, Rhoda, Louis, a sort of death?" (215) and remembers pondering "How can I proceed now, I said, without a self, weightless and visionless, through a world weightless, without illusion?" (219), a question redolent of the existential ambiguities of *Tristan und Isolde*.[27]

There are also numerous instances where insights of this type are used in conjunction with the motif of the ring as image of the world. Louis, again as if Yggdrassil, says "My roots are threaded, like fibres in a flower-pot, round and round about the world" (13), while Rhoda says

> I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join – so – and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, "Oh save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!" (14–15)

Neville, after the same dinner party Bernard enjoys so much, feels that "we only wish to rejoin the body of our mother from whom we have been severed. . . . We are scarcely to be distinguished from the river" (179), which is remarkably similar to the symbolic conjunction of Erda the earth-mother and father Rhine in the *Ring*. In addition to the Rhine and Erda motifs discussed above,[28] it is worth noting that a gently swaying version of one or the other is also played wherever a textual reference to the World Ash occurs. It is at the foot of the Ash that Erda's daughters, the Norns, weave the rope of destiny and guard the well of wisdom that nourishes the tree – and which quite logically may be considered the source of the river. The main point is that all three, river, tree and earth-mother, are closely identified cosmic symbols, a point repeatedly emphasised by their shared / overlapping musical material. With this in mind, it seems increasingly suggestive that *The Waves*, in addition to its opening allusion to the *Rheingold* prelude, constantly evokes a similar sense of the composite nature of these symbols. One of the richest passages has Louis once again imagining himself as a world-encircling tree, and this time also an all-knowing earth-spirit, akin to the Erda who claims "My

[27] It is notable that, as in the case of *Mrs Dalloway* (see above, pp 110–11), Wagnerian images are used to strengthen expressions of a metaphysical unity of the kind Wagner himself learned from Schopenhauer.
[28] See pp 165–6.

sleep is dreaming, my dreaming brooding, / My brooding weaving of wisdom. . . . Mist-veiled move in my mind the deeds of men" (*Siegfried* 179–80):

> My roots go down through veins of lead and silver, through damp, marshy places that exhale odours, to a knot made of oak roots bound together in the centre. Sealed and blind, with earth stopping my ears, I have yet heard rumours of wars; and the nightingale; have felt the hurrying of many troops of men flocking hither and thither in quest of civilisation like flocks of birds migrating seeking the summer . . . remembering all this as one remembers confused cries and toppling pillars and shafts of red and black in some nocturnal conflagration. I am for ever sleeping and waking. Now I sleep; now I wake. (71)

This "nocturnal conflagration" unmistakably suggests that of Valhalla, the spectacular end of the gods foretold by Erda from the very beginning. The *Ring*'s ultimate paradox, this ending is also their resounding triumph, the most complete renunciation of power imaginable, a sentiment echoed in the novel by Neville: "We shout with laughter at the sight of ruin. Let solidity be destroyed. Let us have no possessions" (163). Louis also has a striking vision of

> the world moving through abysses of infinite space. It roars; the lighted strip of history is past and our Kings and Queens; we are gone; our civilisation; the Nile; and all life. Our separate drops are dissolved; we are extinct, lost in the abysses of time, in the darkness. (173)

And the same images recur at the close of the novel, offset by the sense of recurrence, as the wheel turns full circle:

> The canopy of civilisation is burnt out. The sky is dark as polished whalebone. But there is a kindling in the sky whether of lamplight or of dawn. . . . There is a sense of the break of day. I will not call it dawn. . . . Dawn is some sort of whitening of the sky; some sort of renewal. . . . Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again. (228)

This is Bernard again, who most often comes the closest to seeing the whole picture, a timeless perspective that includes all within it:

> I could fancy that we might blow so vast a bubble that the sun might set and rise in it and we might take the blue of midday and the black of midnight and be cast off and escape from here and now. . . . hear silence fall and sweep its rings to the farthest edges. (172)

In these, and the other characters', ruminations on eternity, the ring image, together with those of tree, river, light and darkness, recurs constantly, and the context almost always suggests that to relinquish the obsessive instinct to strive and build and achieve, the actions of the world, of business, society and empire, and adopt in its place a tangible sense of detachment, of trancelike stillness, in which large scale movements and events seem small and far off, is to bypass the limitations of individual self-consciousness and of life in time. In this there is a profound affinity with the spirit of Wagner's cycle that goes far beyond mere allusion; it is the achievement of epic distance, of cosmic perspective, of world-overcoming.

"The flames of the festival": death, resurrection and ritual

> Percival is the silent hero whose death at the centre of the novel takes place at noon when the sun is at its zenith. He is Jane Harrison's "Spirit of the Year" whose permanently re-enacted life and death reconcile the human community to the renewal and decay of the natural world. That reconciliation is primarily effected through the Last Supper, as described in the Gospels or the sacred feast and mourning described in Jane Harrison's *Themis*, enacted in the novel as the dinner shared with Percival and the later dinner at Hampton Court. (Briggs, *Reading Virginia Woolf* 108)

While Harrison (an archaeologist of an evidently Frazerian persuasion) appears to have provided Woolf with the initial stimulus for introducing this theme into *The Waves*, there can be no question of Woolf having overlooked the obvious parallels with the one drama she clearly regarded as Wagner's finest.[29] Not only does *Parsifal* feature prominent staged re-enactments of the Last Supper, it has at its centre a hero who comes to renew the significance of the sacred feast, and to re-invigorate the community that

[29] See p 98.

celebrates it. Moreover, as I have been at pains to emphasise throughout, it also, in a sense, "completes" the *Ring* cycle (and Wagner's entire corpus).[30] In Siegfried, the innocent hero, speared in the back by the "cursed boar" (Mann 100), dies for the sins of the world; in Parsifal, he reappears (as if in a new incarnation), witnesses the ritual commemoration of an identical sacrifice – but without understanding its significance until his quest leads him to the compassionate recognition of human suffering. In *The Waves*, a detailed network of allusions connects the text to the *Ring*, specifically to its images of sunrise, sunset and the triumph of the hero at the point of noon. The novel's own "silent hero", who dies at the corresponding moment, is based on (and even named after) the hero of *Parsifal*. And yet critics who have made a point of studying both sets of allusions have routinely failed to remark the correspondence.[31] Having already considered the *Ring* allusions in some detail, let us now give equal attention to those made to *Parsifal*.

Percival's first appearance in the novel takes place when the male characters, when still schoolboys, attend chapel. Even before his appearance, the scene strongly resembles the slow steady march of the Grail knights into the temple of Monsalvat:

> "Now we march, two by two," said Louis, "orderly, processional, into chapel. I like the dimness that falls as we enter the sacred building. I like the orderly progress. We file in; we seat ourselves. We put off our distinctions as we enter" (24).

Neville, like another Nietzsche, prefers to "gibe and mock at this sad religion" but is the first to notice Percival, whose

> blue and oddly inexpressive eyes are fixed with pagan indifference upon the pillar opposite. . . . He sees nothing; he hears nothing. He is remote from us all in a pagan universe (25),

which is precisely the condition of Parsifal in Act I, where he attends the Grail ceremony in baffled incomprehension from beginning to end, though the "pagan universe" rather implies the *Ring*. Actually, it is left ambiguous, in

[30] See pp 61–2, 80–3, 160–3.
[31] See pp 161–2.

Parsifal, at what point the hero becomes a Christian. He is obviously one in Act II, when he sinks to his knees before a vision of the Grail, crying out with an extraordinary rapt passion, "Redeemer! Saviour! Lord of Grace! How for my sin can I atone?" (107–8). But he had not so much as crossed himself in Act I, despite the unmistakably eucharistic content of the ceremony; this may however be due to the transfixing effect on him of Amfortas's suffering rather than an absolute ignorance not only of knightly but also of Christian custom. Siegfried, by contrast, inhabits an entirely "pagan universe" and even there gives scant reverence to gods of any sort (most obviously in his unwitting and easy dismissal of the "old man" in Act III). More fundamentally, there is a sense in which all Wagner's references to religious practice, whether Christian or pagan, are merely there to provide appropriate local colour. Even where the respective works appear to assert the "truth" of a particular system – as the *Ring* does by making the gods real presences and *Parsifal* by the occurrence of signs and wonders, fulfilment of prophecies, answering of prayers and its pervasive atmosphere of profound and unquestionable sanctity – this too is simply a rhetorical device, albeit an exceptionally sophisticated one (and so successful, in the case of *Parsifal*, that many people are still inclined to see it as a conventionally sacred work). In fact, the position adopted in Wagner's works is consistent throughout: a pessimistic humanism most obviously informed by Schopenhauer and, through him, elements of Buddhism; above all, it stresses the need for the annihilation of self.[32]

The true sense of "pagan" in the context of these works then is less likely to be that of pre-Christian practice than an idealised condition of perfect godlessness. This is certainly the only possible sense of the word as Woolf uses it, describing Percival. While the cynical rejection of Christianity expressed by Neville is as believable in a precocious child of the period as the piety of the more conventional Louis, the uncomprehending detachment they detect in Percival is altogether remarkable; it is as if he simply doesn't need what religion traditionally offers, which in turn implies that he may already have it.

[32] See p 56 note 52.

As the boys file out of chapel, the change of setting appears to reverse the order of the "transformation scene" in *Parsifal* from flower meadows to Grail hall:

> we move out of this cool temple, into the yellow playing-fields. . . . Look now, how everybody follows Percival. . . . His magnificence is that of some mediaeval commander. A wake of light seems to lie on the grass behind him. Look at us trooping after him, his faithful servants, to be shot like sheep, for he will certainly attempt some forlorn enterprise and die in battle (26).

Neville, like the stricken Amfortas, feels "apprehensive of intolerable pain" but also, as if emulating his hero, "bound in my adventuring to conquer after huge suffering, bound, surely, to discover my desire in the end" and feels inspired by the image of "our pious founder with the doves about his head. They will wheel for ever about his head, whitening it, while the organ moans in the chapel" (44). This image, above all, powerfully recalls the supreme climax of the opera when Wagner, with extreme daring, has a white dove descend and hover over Parsifal's head in the midst of the temple. It is an image recalled numerous times by Bernard, who remembers thinking of Percival, now dead, as "a leader whom you would have followed. . . . while the doves descended over the roofs and my son was born" (116), implying renewal. More emphatically, he associates the image with the sound of a treble solo, one of the most expressively ethereal effects in Wagner's Grail scenes: "one boy's voice wails round the dome like some lost and wandering dove" (216). The allusion here is precisely that famously made in *The Waste Land* to Verlaine's *Parsifal* sonnet: "*Et, o ces voix d' enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*" (202).[33] Bernard even attempts

> to rise on the shaft of somebody else's prayer into the dome, out, beyond, wherever they go. But then like the lost and wailing dove, I find myself failing . . . while the boy's voice soars in the dome and the organ now and then indulges in a moment of elephantine triumph. . . . The voice petered out in the dome, wailing (217).

[33] This connection is also made, as if in passing, in Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* 252–3.

But the unshakable affirmation of *Parsifal* here proves impossible to recapture: dove and solo voice alike are "lost and wailing" and the triumphant music "elephantine". The modernist sensibility remains moved by the romantic vision but is no longer convinced by it.

Bernard further associates the temple image with the overcoming of sexuality, one of the central themes of the opera, where the maiming of Amfortas is the result of his submitting to temptation, as Parsifal's healing him is made possible through his resisting it.[34] For Bernard, civilised man barely conceals within him "the old brute . . . the savage, the hairy man who dabbles his fingers in ropes of entrails; and gobbles and belches; whose speech is guttural, visceral" but who nonetheless

> has contributed his part to my life. He has given a greener glow to green things, has held his torch with its red flames, its thick and smarting smoke, behind every leaf. He has lit up the cool garden even. He has brandished his torch in murky by-streets where girls suddenly seem to shine with a red and intoxicating translucency. Oh, he has tossed his torch high! He has led me wild dances!
>
> But no more. Now to-night, my body rises tier upon tier like some cool temple whose floor is strewn with carpets and murmurs rise and the altars stand smoking; but up above, here in my serene head, come only fine gusts of melody, waves of incense, while the lost dove wails, and the banners tremble above tombs . . . . When I look down from this transcendency, how beautiful are even the crumbled relics of bread (223).

At this late stage of the novel, Bernard is looking back on a long life; his "hairy man" is a more realistic version of the figure Wagner idealises in Siegfried: the "primitive" who is enviably unashamed of his body. This is counteracted by the temple imagery in a way that reminds one of Wagner's progression from the *Ring*, in which human sexuality is consistently affirmed and celebrated in an unusually frank and earthy manner (at least for the time it was written), to *Parsifal*, which not only depicts the overcoming of desire as a necessary condition for enlightenment but is steeped throughout in an atmosphere of heightened spiritual quietude and resignation.

[34] See pp 80–1.

At this point, the connection between the two groups of allusions begins to emerge: Bernard's association of the temple with the renunciation of desire, an especially close parallel to *Parsifal*, is also appropriate to the closing stages of life, to the descending arc of the life-cycle image derived from the *Ring*. But if this argument should seem contrived, one has only to turn to the text to support it: Bernard, when still in the prime of life, feels "I am now at the zenith of an experience. It will decline. . . . Exaltation, the flight of doves descending, is over. Chaos, detail, return" (117). Here the dove motif is linked to the joy of midday rather than the serenity of evening, with spiritual ecstasy rather than resignation, but this shift of context, typical of motivic development, does not alter the fact that the descending dove of *Parsifal* here occurs in conjunction with the solar arc of the *Ring*.

The reason for this is by now clear: Siegfried and Parsifal are interchangeable figures, associated above all with the blazing midday sun and its ascension into glory, the highest point of the ever-turning wheel. Unsurprisingly, then, this overlapping of *Ring* and *Parsifal* allusions recurs throughout the text and can be traced in a number of places, such as when Louis says:

> Here on this ring of grass we have sat together, bound by the tremendous power of some inner compulsion. . . .
>
> Now grass and trees, the travelling air blowing empty spaces in the blue which they then recover, shaking the leaves which then replace themselves, and our ring here, sitting, with our arms binding our knees, hint at some other order, and better, which makes a reason everlastingly. This I see for a second, and shall try to-night to fix in words, to forge in a ring of steel, though Percival destroys it, as he blunders off, crushing the grasses, with the small fry trotting subservient after him. Yet it is Percival I need; for it is Percival who inspires poetry (28).

Here the novel's prominent use of the ring image (noted by both DiGaetani and Furness) unmistakably overlaps with an allusion to *Parsifal*: In Act I members of the Grail brotherhood, which obviously merits description as "some other order, and better", also sit on the grass in a circle. Phillips is certainly correct in likening Bernard to Gurnemanz, in that both sit among the others, telling them stories, and are rudely interrupted, Gurnemanz by the

violent intrusion of Parsifal shooting the swan, Bernard by Percival's brusque rejection of the story, as he is "always the first to detect insincerity; and . . . brutal in the extreme" (28). Both heroes unwittingly shatter the circle, ultimately to restore it.

Like Wagner's "pure fool, made wise through compassion",[35] Percival makes up in intuitive knowledge what he lacks in intellect: "He reads a detective novel, yet understands everything" (53) and is remembered as

> a great master of the art of living so that he seems to have lived long, and to have spread calm round him, indifference one might almost say, certainly to his own advancement, save that he had also great compassion (118).

In the opera, compassion is Parsifal's great virtue, all the more effective for not being conscious: he literally fails to distinguish between his own sufferings and those of Amfortas. Here, Wagner is faithfully following the doctrine of Schopenhauer, for whom individual consciousness is an illusion, so that if I cause pain to another I quite literally do so to myself. In the novel, Bernard has an inkling of this when he says, "It is strange that we, who are capable of so much suffering, should inflict so much suffering" (225).

Other passages in the text combine *Ring* and *Parsifal* allusions of some complexity. Louis, as discussed above, often identifies himself with a vast tree, like the world ash Yggdrassil.[36] On one occasion this association intrudes into the chapel scene:

> I feel come over me the sense of the earth under me, and my roots going down and down till they wrap themselves round some hardness at the centre. I recover my continuity, as he reads. I become a figure in the procession, a spoke in the huge wheel that turning, at last erects me, here and now. I have been in the dark; I have been hidden; but when the wheel turns (as he reads) I rise into this dim light where I just perceive, but scarcely, kneeling boys, pillars and memorial brasses. There is no crudity here, no sudden kisses (24–5).

Centrally concerned with the theme of individual consciousness emerging from and again merging with something more universal, this

[35] See p 80 note 79.
[36] See pp 174–6.

passage recalls the way Wagner closely links the motifs of world ash and Erda, earth tree and earth mother, twin symbols of the primordial being from which all life arises and to which it returns. The "procession" referred to is thus more than just that of schoolboys filing into chapel but of living forms evolving, of the "deeds of men" that move "mist-veiled" in Erda's mind (*Siegfried* 180). This reading is further confirmed by the image of the huge turning wheel, as always the great ring that is the world, but in this context also the "rolling wheel" of destiny that the Wanderer asks Erda how to avert, knowing full well that it is useless to do anything other than roll with it (ibid.) This passage is indeed especially relevant to the eternal cycle theme in that it features, uniquely in the four operas, both the rising motif of Erda and creation and the falling motif of dissolution and "Götterdämmerung", played in continual alternation.[37] But that the rising wheel of Erda lifts Louis into the chapel that is already linked to the Grail hall of *Parsifal* serves to connect temporal cycle and spatial circle in a profoundly suggestive way: linked to both past and future, Louis is also at one with others in the present. This is also notably reminiscent of Gurnemanz's gnomic utterance that in the Grail realm "time is one with space" (43).[38]

As for Bernard, so for Louis too: the temple image represents an escape from incipient sexuality, a place divorced from the "crudity [of] sudden kisses", a reference to an earlier incident when the precocious Jinny interrupts Louis's first Yggdrassil experience:

> My hair is made of leaves. I am rooted to the middle of the earth. My body is a stalk. . . . She has found me. I am struck on the nape of the neck. She has kissed me. All is shattered (8).

This characterisation of sexual awakening as a destructive, even a sacrificial, act recalls the disastrous consequences of Amfortas's seduction by Kundry, which can only be reversed by Parsifal's resistance to her. The fatal kiss, for Amfortas, maims both him and the order he heads, weakening the unity of the Grail circle; for Louis, it disrupts his sense of communion with the earth, bringing him back into selfhood with a jolt. In chapel, however, he is delivered

[37] See pp 166–7.
[38] See pp 124, 155 note 7.

from temptation, reconnected to the wheel and the male community, in the presence of Percival. The sense of Wagnerian motifs subtly and continually interweaving through the textual fabric in this way becomes increasingly hard to ignore.

Above all, it is at the climax of the novel, the farewell party, or Last Supper,[39] when the six characters are reunited with Percival just before his departure to India – and death, that these motifs attain their highest concentration, somewhat resembling the ganglionic centre of a complex nerve system. This climax, as we have seen, DiGaetani has already connected to both the Grail feast of *Parsifal*, itself a celebration of the Christian Last Supper and the peak of midday, the noontide of life, as in the final scene of *Siegfried*, but without connecting the two. Admittedly, the *Parsifal* allusions appear predominant. Neville, as if cast as Amfortas, endures agonies of suspense waiting for his deliverer: "This is the place to which he is coming. This is the table at which he will sit. Here, incredible as it seems, will be his actual body" – an appropriate hint at transubstantiation, as the entire scene, including at its centre the "metal vase with its three red flowers", a possible Grail substitute, prepares

> to undergo an extraordinary transformation [and] wears the wavering, unreal appearance of a place where one waits expecting something to happen. Things quiver as if not yet in being (88–9).

Like the Grail knights' inability to observe more than maimed rites before the appointed coming of Parsifal, Neville notes, "[n]ow is our festival; now we are together. But without Percival there is no solidity. We are silhouettes, hollow phantoms moving mistily on a background" (91), whereas, with his eventual arrival, "my tree flowers. My heart rises. All oppression is relieved. All impediment is removed. The reign of chaos is over. He has imposed order" (92). Then, looking ahead to his hero's career as colonial administrator in India, Neville foresees "the multitude cluster round him, regarding him as if he were – what indeed he is – a God", while for Rhoda

[39] See p 177.

> [l]ike minnows, conscious of the presence of a great stone, we undulate and eddy contentedly. Comfort steals over us. Gold runs in our blood. One, two; one, two; the heat beats in serenity, in confidence, in some trance of well-being, in some rapture of benignity (102).

("[R]apture of benignity" perfectly describes the atmosphere of the final scene of *Parsifal*, in which Wagner's unequalled gift for depicting – and producing – extremes of ecstasy attains its supreme, and most obviously religiose, height.) For Louis, meanwhile, Percival

> makes us aware that these attempts to say, "I am this, I am that", which we make, coming together like separated parts of one body, and soul, are false. Something has been left out from fear (103).

Here again, one is reminded that Parsifal's power to heal and redeem is rooted in his compassion, understood in the literal Schoperhauerian sense of "suffering with" (as in German *Mitleid*), that is feeling – pre-consciously – another's suffering as one's own.[40] But that the obstacle to this understanding is specifically identified as "fear" appears mysterious until one remembers that it is Siegfried whose qualification for redemptive stature is his inability to experience fear, just as Parsifal's is his failure to distinguish between himself and others. Through these parallel heroes, fear and individuation alike are seen as the most limiting of human impulses. The moral of the *Ring*, according to Wagner, is that "[d]read of the end is the source of all lovelessness" (*Letters* 1.260); it is this desperate need to hold on to one's life, to possess things, to acquire power, to control destiny, that the *Ring* shows Alberich to be enslaved to, Siegfried enviably free of, and Wotan, between their extremes, striving to overcome. That Louis's words at this point recall something of both Parsifal and Siegfried is thus especially appropriate; it suggests that the need for self-definition is akin to the fear of death, that to assert "I am this, I am that" is to sever oneself from the timeless or eternal. And as the supper approaches its close, the six, as if tragically struggling to learn this difficult lesson, try to hold on to the present, to

[40] See p 80.

> this globe whose walls are made of Percival, of youth and beauty, and something so deep sunk within us that we shall perhaps never make this moment out of one man again (109).

But in a way they do. At the second gathering, years after Percival's premature death, there are hints that he is with them still, such as that

> the red carnation that stood in the vase on the table of the restaurant when we dined together with Percival, is become a six-sided flower; made of six lives. . . . [a] mysterious illumination . . . . [b]uilt up with much pain, many strokes (175).

This increasingly sounds like the mystic blood-filled chalice that pours its radiance over the faithful, their union affirmed by their partaking of the transubstantiated flesh of the crucified: "these rolls of bread and wine bottles are needed . . . to spread in wider and wider circles of understanding that may at last . . . embrace the entire world" (171).

But Percival's strongest link with Siegfried is simply the fact of his death, precisely at the point of midday. Where Wagner's Parsifal achieves a living triumph so absolute in its implications that he effectively passes beyond time into eternal splendour, his Siegfried dies in such a way as to mark him out as the sacrificed sun god, whose innocent blood renews the earth.[41] In this respect, then, Woolf's Percival is closer to him than to his namesake.

This theme of a sacrificial victim appears early in the novel. While still a child, Neville is haunted by the report of a suicide who

> was found with his throat cut. The apple trees became fixed in the sky; the moon glared . . . we are doomed, all of us, by the apple trees, by the immitigable tree which we cannot pass (17).

This is but a faint foreshadowing of the much fuller development of the theme in association with Percival. At the farewell party, as if in anticipation of his imminent death, there is an extraordinary visionary sequence, combining transcendent eroticism ("Our hands touch, our bodies burst into fire. The chair, the cup, the table – nothing remains unlit. All quivers, all kindles, all

[41] See pp 61–2.

burns clear") with Dionysian music ("Horns and trumpets . . . ring out") and climaxing in an explicitly pagan sacrifice:

> The flames leap over their painted faces, over the leopard skins and the bleeding limbs which they have torn from the living body.
>
> The flames of the festival rise high . . . . The great procession passes, flinging green boughs and flowering branches. Their horns spill blue smoke; their skins are dappled red and yellow in the torchlight. They throw violets. They deck the beloved with garlands and with laurel leaves, there on the ring of turf where the steep-backed hills come down. The procession passes. And while it passes, Louis, we are aware of downfalling, we forebode decay (105).

Several motifs here recall Wagner most emphatically, not only the ever-recurring ring. Siegfried's Funeral Music accompanies "a solemn procession over the rocky height" (*Götterdämmerung* 238), which is met by "men and women, with light and firebrands" (245), who "strew plants and flowers" (256) on his pyre, the mounting flames of which are merely a prelude to the conflagration that consumes Valhalla and signals the downfall of the gods, the end of all things. Most fundamental to both passages is the sense of the hero's death as ritual expiation, voluntary though undeserved, promising renewal and redemption, like Mann's "Tammuz and Adonis, slain by the boar, Osiris and Dionysus, torn asunder to come again as the Crucified One" (100). And Louis's comment "Death is woven in with the violets" (106) could easily be an epigraph for the whole novel, or for Wagner's entire corpus.

Further motifs suggesting ritual sacrifice continue to reverberate through the text, most notably – and beautifully – of all: "Percival was flowering with green leaves and was laid in the earth with all his branches still sighing in the summer wind" (155). Related to this is the mythic theme of the hunter become the hunted, suggested in the

> crash and rending of boughs and the crack of antlers as if the beasts of the forest were all hunting, all rearing and plunging down among the thorns. One has pierced me. One is driven deep within me (135).

That the speaker here is the promiscuous Jinny reminds us of the sexual symbolism implicit in this myth,[42] as well as that the stricken hero is always greatly beloved, his loss irreparable. For Neville, also, the suddenness of Percival's actual death has universal implications:

> He fell. His horse tripped. He was thrown. The sails of the world have swung around and caught me on the head. All is over. The lights of the world have gone out. There stands the tree which I cannot pass (114).

There is simultaneously an enormous sense of outrage at "the depravity of the world, and the flight of youth and Percival's death, and bitterness and rancour and envies innumerable" (138). It is as if the wasteful and unnecessary loss of a man of heroic potential in the prime of his life becomes a focus of everything that is wrong in the world. In Siegfried's case, an almost appalling anger is evident in the very music, in the shattering blows of the funeral motif, and suggests that demonic and hateful forces must be at work in a world where the great and noble are lost while the small and petty prosper at their expense. The death of the hero, someone who would have "ridden alone at the head of troops and denounced some monstrous tyranny" makes Bernard reflect that

> there is a grinning, there is a subterfuge. There is something sneering behind our backs. . . . Percival fell; was killed; is buried; and I watch people passing; holding tight to the rails of omnibuses; determined to save their lives (115).

In spite of this, as Briggs reminds us, the hero's "permanently re-enacted life and death" is necessary if it is to "reconcile the human community to the renewal and decay of the natural world" (108), the inevitability of both being the central theme of the novel. One is reminded of Mrs Dalloway's feeling "glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living" (210).[43] Balance is restored; lives shorn of meaning are given new value through the fact of an inestimable loss. At the same time, the limitless horizons of the great circle are provided with a centre, the archetypal point "around which the

[42] See p 62 note 60.
[43] See p 148.

earth may be said to revolve" (Campbell 40).[44] Despite the likelihood of Woolf's personal preference for *Parsifal*, it is the *Ring* allusions that give the text its breadth and its sense of immensity, of the balance of life and death, youth and age, time and eternity.

[44] See p 122 note 52.

Chapter IV

"THE ENDLESSNESSNESSNESS": WAGNER'S DRAMAS AND *FINNEGANS WAKE*

In contrast to Virginia Woolf, James Joyce was manifestly fascinated by Wagner throughout his artistic life, although his attitude towards the composer was decidedly ambivalent, went through several adjustments and was perhaps never fully resolved. Timothy Martin, extending and elaborating a view shared by several earlier commentators, argues that what began as an ardent infatuation cooled as Joyce's own ambitions led him to feel a form of professional jealousy towards his greatest forbears, which tended to mask itself behind disparaging comparisons.[1] Coupled with this went his almost obsessive need to move against the current, so that it suited him to espouse Wagnerism while still in Ireland, where the composer was relatively unknown, but to distance himself from it in Europe, where the operas were frequently performed and their creator accorded near godlike status. Nonetheless, his own work consistently reveals an abiding interest in Wagnerian themes, characters and techniques, usually treated obliquely and with extreme subtlety, and in a way that exhibits both wide knowledge and deep understanding of its subject, particularly in the three great novels.[2]

So, for example, one finds – after a few Tristanesque patterns in *Chamber Music* and a handful of possible allusions in *Dubliners* – a clear connection being drawn between Stephen Dedalus in the final chapter of the *Portrait* and the youthful hero of Wagner's *Siegfried*. More overt but less

[1] Martin's stated aim is "to correct or at least to qualify the impression that the Irish writer, in holding himself aloof from his age and in denigrating recent art and thought at nearly every opportunity, helped create: that his most important influences are to be found only among the arcane and the antique. Precisely because Wagner's impact on Joyce transcended the merely local use of allusion and extended into theme, structure, aesthetics and scale, it becomes necessary to count the German composer among the most important of Joyce's more contemporary influences – with Flaubert, perhaps, and Ibsen." (xiv) See also Furness's remarks quoted on p 13, and Mahaffey's and Martin's on p 84.

[2] I use the generic term for convenience, though there have been those who, with some reason, query its applicability to *Finnegans Wake* (and occasionally even *Ulysses*). William York Tindall, for example, finds the *Wake* unclassifiable, having "the expansive abundance of the novel, the texture, rhythm, and density of the poem, yet it is neither one nor the other" (*A Reader's Guide to* Finnegans Wake 239–40).

artistically interesting are the references made in *Exiles* to *Tannhäuser*, the *Ring* and *Tristan*. Then, in *Ulysses*, the Stephen-Siegfried parallel of *Portrait* is more fully developed, enriched with further allusions to *Götterdämmerung* – and to the cycle as a whole – and combined with additional parallels between Leopold Bloom and Wagner's Flying Dutchman, and Molly Bloom and the all-important figure, ubiquitous in Wagner, of the redemptrix.

But it is in *Finnegans Wake*, as one might expect, that Wagner's operas – along with everything else thrown into the mix – are subjected to the most extreme development. Not only are all ten of the major works present in some degree, but they are combined with one another, with circumstances of the composer's life (as well as Joyce's own and those of several other suffering artists), with other musical works, with their own medieval sources, with biblical exegesis, Celtic mythology, Irish history and politics, the topography of Dublin and the text's own singular accretion of these and other details around its own principal figures, according to the technique Roland McHugh terms "personality condensation", whereby they become "fluid composites, involving an unconfined blur of historical, mythical and fictitious characters, as well as nonhuman elements" (*The Sigla of* Finnegans Wake 10). Specifically Wagnerian allusions, then, are only a relatively small part – albeit an important one – of a practically endless series of coinciding relationships. It is essential that the specialist investigator bear this in mind, in order to avoid the danger of assuming "his" subject to carry greater weight than it does; the text is manifestly not *about* Wagner, not even in the limited sense that it can be said to be about Joyce, or Dublin. A proper sense of proportion is that suggested by Matthew Hodgart, one of Martin's most important predecessors in the field, in his excellent *James Joyce: A Student's Guide:*

> there is a lot of Wagner scattered about the *Wake*, mainly *Tristan* but also much of the *Ring*. There is even more of the Scandinavian myths, known from the *Edda*, that form the basis of Wagner's *Ring*; and there is still more of the ancient Irish epic material, such as the *Cattle Raid of Cooley* and other parts of the Ulster or Cuchullin cycle, while the title and chief character of the book is taken from the other heroic cycle, that of Finn MacCool. The first chapter of Book I is especially rich in giants

> and battles which suggest Homer's *Iliad* (rather than his *Odyssey*), and the wars of the Old Testament. A reader of the *Wake* must enjoy Genesis as literature, and probably he ought to know even more of the Bible than is necessary for the understanding of *Ulysses.* (131)[3]

The *Wake* is, however, sufficiently concerned with specifically Wagnerian elements to amply justify their continued examination, particularly in the light of the pre-existing relationships between different Wagner heroes I have repeatedly emphasised.[4] In this respect, indeed, Wagner can be seen to have prefigured Joyce, certainly to have provided him much ready-made material; if he does not go as far as "personality condensation", it is nonetheless true, as Tanner claims, that the music-dramas' "interrelationships are vital to understanding them, and that characters in one reappear, almost, with a different name, in another" (42).

Considering the scope of the subject, and the rigorous critical attention it has received (far outweighing that given to Woolf's more tenuous relationship to Wagner),[5] my own task here must be a carefully limited one: to pay close attention to only the most prominent occurrences in the *Wake* of those two related patterns identified at the outset as being my special concern: the cycle of history and the contrasting heroes.[6] In doing so, a number of marked parallels with Woolf's treatment of these themes will arise naturally, though I will refrain from drawing any detailed comparisons until the conclusion (which is the proper place for them). A most striking example, one that provides the starting point for this stage of the argument, is that what one might reasonably call the principal Wagnerian influence on *Finnegans Wake* is precisely the same as that we have already found in *The Waves*: the direct and deliberate imitation of the cyclical form and theme of the *Ring*, supported by marked allusions to the images of river, woman, and solar cycle. Indeed all the specific points made above about the similarities between the *Ring* and

[3] Hodgart speculates that such appeal as *Finnegans Wake* does enjoy, despite its "truly appalling" difficulties, may be due in part to this proximity to "mythology and epic, fantastic stories of gods and heroes such as are found in Wagner or Tolkien. . . . for if Wagner is Tolkien for grown-ups, then the *Wake* is Wagner for rather learned and linguistically sophisticated grown-ups." (130–1)
[4] See pp 104–9, 160–1.
[5] See pp 12, 91–2, 97, 99.
[6] See p 89.

The Waves[7] are equally applicable to the *Wake*. It has to be said that one of the most astonishing oversights in the critical study of this subject is that, while both instances of this influence have received critical attention, no critic has previously specified the (really quite remarkable) similarity of the two cases.[8] DiGaetani, it will be remembered, described Wagner's "pervasive" influence on *The Waves* being evident in "the progression of the sun and the movements of the sea" and the "symbolic combination of water with predawn darkness suggest[ing] both death and rebirth" (118); Furness, likewise, the "beginning and the end in water, the images of light and burning gold, the arc of fire gleaming on the horizon . . . . the coming of light into the darkness of the waters [and] the prime importance of the *ring* motif." (20–21)[9] The similarity is immediately obvious from even a cursory examination of Martin's work:

> In *Finnegans Wake*, as in the *Ring*, our end is at our beginning – with the river and the song of the Rhinedaughters: "A way a lone a last a loved a long the" (628.15–16). ALP has returned to her source – "For as Anna was at the beginning lives yet and will return" (277.12–13) – and the gold to the Rhine. The cycle is complete. (134)

Each of the two works

> expresses its rhythm in its cyclical structure, in the presence of the river at both its end and its beginning, in the triumph of eternal Nature over ephemeral civilisation. . . . Like the *Ring*, the *Wake* portrays individual tragedy but asserts, in its comic rhythm, the omnipotence of life. (141)

As the previous chapter outlined the broader purpose and nature of this circularity in Wagner's case (and in Woolf's), it will here be helpful to offer a similar overview of Joyce's.

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[7] See p 163.

[8] This is even the case with the two critics, DiGaetani and Furness, who deal directly with *both* of them. One can only assume that the sheer breadth of ground each covered by each rendered the similarity invisible (DiGaetani covers the complete output of five major novelists, Furness the entire range of Wagnerian literature and culture, from symbolist poetry to comics and movies).

[9] See pp 158–9.

"Tiers, tiers and tiers": Joyce's eternal recurrence

Where the *Ring* and *The Waves* form vast single cycles, *Finnegans Wake* offers multiple ones, continuing – it would seem – into infinity. At least ostensibly a novel,[10] this unfathomable, interminably convoluted dream-narrative appears to retell the same simple story (an indistinct and crudely comic domestic version of the Fall of Man) times without number. This endless repetitiveness is cyclical in itself – and decidedly counter-dramatic, while the inexhaustible, kaleidoscopic permutations, uproarious Hibernian grotesquerie and sheer audacity of the language so overwhelm the reader as to render any sense of narrative movement both incoherent and irrelevant.

The overall structure of the novel (to call it so at least for convenience) is well known to be based on the four-part cycle of history outlined in Giambattista Vico's *La Nuova Scienza*. Hence, the text itself falls into four parts, and there are four subcycles of four chapters each (two sets of four in the first part and one set in both the second and third parts, the fourth consisting of just a single chapter), creating an almost mechanical or astronomical sense of cycles endlessly revolving within further cycles (some *Wake* specialists have even managed to decode still smaller subdivisions within the chapters, as well as other patterns that overlap and complicate the fundamental one-two-three-four rhythm), a movement referred to in the (relentlessly self-reflexive) text as, for example, a "millwheeling vicociclometer" (614.27). Equally well known is that the sentence that starts at the end of the last page is finished at the beginning of the first and so "brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back" (3.2) to where we started.

This circularity appears to be primarily a matter of form, to an even greater degree than in *The Waves*, but it ultimately derives from the content, from the idea underlying the whole vast construction: that all human experience is infinitely recurrent and its pattern is that of perpetual rise and

[10] See p 191 note 2.

fall; consequently, all times, events and personages throughout history and literature are as one. In this sense, the same story really is being enacted and recounted over and over again and the *Wake* is thus a faithful reflection of the way things are. Even its baffling inscrutability mirrors that of the real world, as suggested by several passages that appear to be describing both simultaneously, as for example "a puling sample jungle of woods" (112.4) that

> has its cardinal points for all that. These ruled barriers along which the traced words, run, march, halt, walk, stumble at doubtful points, stumble up again in comparative safety. . . . But by writing thithaways end to end and turning, turning and end to end hithaways writing and with lines of litters slittering up and louds of latters slettering down, the old semetomyplace and jupetbackagain from tham Let Rise till Hum Lit. Sleep, where in the waste is the wisdom? (114.7–20)

So it is that the principal characters of the *Wake*, the Earwicker family – father, mother, daughter and two sons – are simultaneously everyone else in every story ever told, from Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel to the Duke of Wellington, and from Finn MacCool and Diarmuid and Grania to Charles Stewart Parnell and Kitty O'Shea, and from Tristan and Isolde to Humpty Dumpty, and from Christ and Satan and the Archangel Michael to a mountain, a tree, a river, a salmon and a hen. Such seemingly absolute all-inclusiveness makes the work even more obviously about everything than Wagner's *Ring*.[11]

Unlike *The Waves*, then, the *Wake* shares the *Ring*'s overt interest in history as a whole, as well as in pre-history or mythology, in the epic, the cosmic, the immense, the superhuman; but, unlike the *Ring*, it shares *The Waves*' interest in the ordinary, the everyday, the seemingly trivial. Where it differs from either is in the degree to which it conflates the two, making everything analogous to everything else, great and small alike. And whereas the *Ring* only hints at the possibility of the whole vast cycle beginning over again, the *Wake* loudly asserts that it will never cease from doing so.

Ring images, often overt allusions to Wagner, are just part of the text's self-referential obsession with cycles. Martin notes several of these, including

[11] See p 48.

"ringsome on the aquaface" (3.14), "ringsoundingly by their toots ensembled" (225.2–3), "rainstones ringing" (279.2), "I'm seeing rayingbogeys rings round me" (304.8–9), "Sing him a ring" (441.21), "ringstresse" (547.33) and "they ring the earthly bells" (621.34). Like Woolf, Joyce here embeds the image of the whole within the text, not as the central symbol but as one among multitudes.

Also like *The Waves*, *Finnegans Wake* begins alluding to Wagner right at the outset, indeed, as Martin reminds us, "in the first word" (117).[12] By beginning the whole vast text with "riverrun" (3.1), Joyce provides an exact verbal equivalent to the primordial "Werde" motif from which the subaqueous world of the *Rheingold* prelude emerges. Furthermore, the way the novel's final "the" (628.16) returns the reader to the opening is a counterpart for the inversion of the rising "Werde / Rhine / Erda" motif to the falling "Götterdämmerung" motif.[13] That "riverrun" continues "past Eve and Adam's" reminds us of the primacy of the Fall theme in the *Wake*; it would not have been lost on Joyce that the opening scene of *Das Rheingold*, in which Alberich disrupts the timeless innocence of the Rhinedaughters, dares the unthinkable, in a sense forbidden, renunciation of love, seizes the numinous object and thereby sets in motion the chain of events that effectively brings sin and death into the world, is Wagner's version of the Genesis story.

Martin also notes that the phrase that ends the novel's second paragraph,[14] "rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface" (3.13–14), "may be an allusion to the rainbow bridge that appears at the end of *Rheingold* and 'ringsome' a reference to the entire *Ring*" (117). I believe one can safely claim a good deal more than this. Taken purely on its own, the phrase condenses (with a typically Wakean compactness) the circular structure of the *Ring*: it alludes simultaneously to the closing tableaux of the tetralogy's first and last parts. At the end of *Rheingold*, the gods cross the rainbow (German "Regenbogen") into Valhalla, which they have paid for with the gold that rightly belongs to the Rhinedaughters, whose laments and

[12] See p 9.
[13] See pp 165–7.
[14] The same paragraph that begins "Sir Tristram, violer d'amores" (3.4) – but to unpack Joyce's combination of two Wagnerian myths at this stage will overcomplicate matters unnecessarily. I will attempt a fuller consideration of this issue in the following section.

accusations can meanwhile be heard rising up from the depths. In the obviously parallel scene at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, the swimming Rhinedaughters are seen triumphantly holding up the recovered ring in the reflected firelight from on high as Valhalla goes up in flames. Moreover, the "end to the regginbrow" is both spatial, Valhalla itself – and the goal of the gods' ambition, and temporal, their ultimate downfall – which is already implicit in the hollow blazing grandiloquence of the *Rheingold* finale. Joyce is thus alluding to the way Wagner highlights the circularity of his epic – at precisely the point where he is doing the same thing himself, by announcing that several prelapsarian events have not yet started happening all over again and that we are once more back at a beginning that already contains the seeds of its inevitable ending.

In contrast to the interludes of *The Waves*, the *Wake* indicates its circularity through continual self-reference (as in "the book of Doublends Jined" (20.16), an ingenious coupling of "double ends joined" and "Dublin's giant" – or the sleeping Finn who will rise again). In addition, there is the constant presence, at macro- and micro-levels, of the four-part Viconian structure. The basic idea behind this, as any introduction to the *Wake* explains, is that the cycle of history falls into four distinct arcs, which Vico had termed the divine or theocratic age, the heroic or aristocratic age, the human or democratic age and the "ricorso" or turn, a period of chaotic collapse after which the gods would return in thunder and begin a new cycle.

Martin is certainly correct in emphasising the parallel between Vico's system and the four-part structure of the *Ring*, since it is a happy coincidence that Joyce could scarcely have overlooked.[15] Coincidence it undoubtedly is, however, the circumstances under which the *Ring* came to be written in four parts – the text backwards, and the music forwards – having more to do with tactical necessity than any philosophical consideration (and there is no evidence that Wagner had read Vico). The story in a nutshell is that, having outlined all the material he would eventually use, Wagner planned only to

[15] The parallel is neatly summarised by Stoddard Martin: "*Finnegan* is a world-historic epic on the scale and even the pattern of the *Ring*. Using Vico, Joyce constructs a tetralogy which, like Wagner's tetralogy, shows human history to develop through four distinct stages: theocracy or the age of gods (*Finnegans Wake* Book One/*Rheingold*); aristocracy or the age of heroes (Book Two/*Walküre*); democracy or the age of men (Book Three/*Siegfried*); and chaos/*ricorso* (Book Four/*Götterdämmerung*)." (153)

expand the last part of this into a drama (to be called "Siegfrieds Tod"), using back-narration to relate the events of the earlier parts. Realising what an unwieldy beast this would result in, he decided first to preface this with a lighter work ("Der Junge Siegfried"), and then, after further consideration, another two, resulting in the tetralogy we know today. But although this story has now become almost part of musical folklore, it is rarely noted how polished the final structure is, and specifically how much care Wagner has lavished on giving each of the four parts a distinct identity, despite their ultimate subsumption into the greater whole. It is also notable how both the deployment of characters and the progressively changing tone of each part work to reflect the gradual shift from an entirely pre-human golden age (though its gold is, ironically, tainted) to a tired grey latter-day world from which the gods of old have all but vanished. So neatly do the four operas indeed correspond to Vico's cycle that it would be unthinkable for Joyce, knowing them as well as he did, not to have added them to the mythic mix of the *Wake*. Martin has even identified an instance of one of the text's many references to the Viconian ages taking on a distinctly Wagnerian colouring: "a good clap, a fore marriage, a bad wake, tell hell's well" (117.5–6), which he suggests allude to the clap of thunder in *Rheingold*, the "poor marriage" of Sieglinde and Hunding in *Walküre*, the awakening of Brünnhilde in *Siegfried*, and Valhalla [*Walhall*] burning in *Götterdämmerung* (114). The last two are all the more likely in that Siegfried can be said to have "bade her wake" and Brünnhilde instructs Wotan's ravens to fly home to Valhalla and tell him all's well. On the other hand, "fore marriage" is more likely to refer to the prophecy that the valkyrie will wed the man who awakens her. This reading has the further advantage in that all four now allude to the final climaxes of each work.

The *Ring* is of further value to Joyce's method in the *Wake* in presenting him with some colourful characters to add to his already immense cast. His eternally rising and falling hero HCE (or Here Comes Everybody), for example, in addition to being God the Father, Adam, Ibsen's master builder (who falls from his own tower) and the bricklayer Tim Finnegan (who falls from his ladder in the popular ballad that gives the book its name), almost effortlessly takes on the personality of Wotan as well, particularly in his

role as first lawgiver and founder of civilisation. The erection and destruction of his fortress Valhalla parallels that of Babel (which provides an obvious parable for the polyglottal nature of the text) and Wall Street (which it not only chimes with but also resembles in being founded on – possibly ill-gotten – gold). The fortress's superhuman immensity, with just a hint or two of its ultimate fate, are, for instance, vividly conveyed by Joyce as

> a waalworth of a skyerscrape of most eyeful hoyth entowerly, erigenating from next to nothing and celescalating the himals and all, hierarchitectitiptitoploftical, with a burning bush abob off its baubletop and with larrons o'toolers clittering up and tombles a'buckets clottering down. (4.35–5.4)

Like Wotan using the fortress as a base of operations while, to his wife Fricka's chagrin, populating the world, "Haveth Childers Everywhere" is a procreator of note, "our awful dad" (136.21), "his suns the huns, his dartars the tartars, are plenty here today" (135.25–6) and "a farfar and a morefar and a hoar father Nakedbucker in villas old as new" (139.5–7) – literally all our daddies.

His consort ALP resembles Erda the *ur*-mother, who bears Wotan's favourite daughter Brünnhilde and corresponds to him generally as female to male principle, far more closely than she does Fricka, Wotan's queen and the guardian of wedlock, whose union is nonetheless barren. That she is embodied in Anna Liffey, the river woman, strengthens this connection; as we have seen, Wagner too associates woman and river as joint symbols of the life-force. But for Joyce ALP subsumes all women, as HCE all men; and that each is the other's true spouse at every level of their complex identities is shown in that both are united in CHAPEL, just as the river Liffey and "Howth Castle and Environs" are geographically united in the north Dublin suburb of Chapelizod, the novel's primary setting, named for the Chapel of Isolde. In this too, Joyce echoes Wagner's contrasting but complementary symbols of female river, the everflowing, eternal stream of life, and male mountaintop fortress, the symbol of dominance asserted over the world but doomed to pass away time after time. It is notably man who rises and falls, sexually and historically, and woman who endures unchanging.

This pattern is then taken over in the succeeding generation. The couple produce one daughter, Issy (also Isolde), who in time comes to take her mother's place, effortlessly and without struggle, as the river flows out to sea and rises anew in the mountains. By contrast, they have two sons, Shem and Shaun, who are also all rival brothers and all warring nations, perpetually divided against one another, until such time as they reunite to rebel against and overthrow their father. In this way, they become a new HCE, as they are the two poles contained within his all-inclusive personality.

This theme of typically male conflict, particularly that of father and son, is a recurring theme throughout Joyce's works, and it is almost always – in *A Portrait*, in *Exiles*, in *Ulysses*, and now in the *Wake* – reinforced by its classic image in Wagner, the clash of the free hero Siegfried with his grandfather Wotan, whose power and authority are jeopardised by the younger man's ascendancy. Wotan is certainly indicated by HCE's appellation "Riesengebirger" (133.6), a clear echo of Wotan's description of Valhalla as "der Burg, die Riesen mir bauten" (the castle the giants built for me). Far from an isolated reference, however, "Riesengebirger" is parenthesised immediately after "ex-gardener", obviously HCE as Adam, which again suggests Joyce's recognition of the inbuilt Genesis parallels in the *Ring*, and shortly followed by his further attributes as he who "giveth rest to the rain bowed" (133.31), possibly Wotan's fellow gods (whom he leads to their eternal home over the rainbow), and "moves in vicous cicles yet remews the same"(134.16–17), a further allusion to his eternal recurrence. A few pages later, one of numerous references to ravens, normally associated with Wotan (they are the birds that bring him news of events in the world) is immediately preceded by the clear statement "a house he has founded to which he has assigned its fate" (136.12). Given the many other proximate allusions to Wotan, at least one interpretation of this is that it refers simultaneously to Valhalla, Wotan's "house" in one sense, and the Volsungs, the heroic family he has sired and doomed to the tragic destiny of redeeming his own past sins. And the last scion of the Volsungs is Siegfried, who ultimately breaks Wotan's spear, and with it his power, in a scene strongly suggested some pages earlier. (This section of the novel, 126–39, is a catalogue of HCE's achievements in various incarnations.)

Here, Martin suggests that HCE's having "put a matchhead on an aspenstalk and set the living a fire" (131.13–14) is a possible allusion to the burning of Valhalla, which begins when Wotan sets light to the riven boughs of the World Ash Tree. On the face of it, this seems to be stretching the bounds of probability a little far, until one notices a point that Martin surprisingly omits: that this passage immediately continues "speared the rod and spoiled the lightning", which combines proverbial parental advice, a spear and a lightning rod. Not only does lightning flash from Wotan's spear as his grandson breaks it, an act the god secretly welcomes, but it is with the broken pieces that Wotan will later start the final conflagration, thereby destroying the building his spear was originally designed to protect. The spear, moreover, was originally made from a shaft Wotan broke from the Ash Tree, another primordial act of despoiling that sets history in motion, analogous to the Nibelung's theft of the Rhinegold or Adam's partaking of the fruit of that forbidden tree. And on the selfsame page such continued suggestive phrases as "he made the welkins ring . . . god at the top of the staircase . . . firm look in readiness, forward spear" (131.16–35), not to mention the juxtaposition of Vico's four ages with the generational weapons of the *Ring* in "Pa's new heft and Papa's new helve he's Papapa's old cutlass Papapapa left us" a few pages later (136.24–5), make the possible permutations of meaning appear literally incalculable.

In the end this is the challenge and potential stumbling block of any *Wake* criticism: finding a logical place to stop in the face of its interminable layers of text and convolutions of cycles within cycles. While Martin is certainly right in claiming that the importance of Wagner for Joyce had long been underestimated, I am not convinced that his importance necessarily rivals that of the best-known primary influences upon him, Homer and Vico, Dante and Shakespeare, Catholicism, Irish history, Parnell, his own family and sexual life. In dealing with such an encyclopaedic consciousness as Joyce presents in his fiction, there is a danger for the specialist in assuming his own field of interest to hold a more central position than it in fact does.[16] Having said that, there is actually more work to do rather than less for

[16] See p 192.

scholars interested in Joyce's Wagner allusions, since it remains to be seen in what relationship these can be said to exist with the innumerable other allusions in the text.

Without attempting to even begin that mammoth task here, I will instead conclude this section by considering a few examples that are especially noteworthy for the close similarity they bear to those found in *The Waves*. One that we have already noted is the motif of the river-woman.[17] Connected both with this, and with HCE as Wotan, is the world-ash, which, as discussed above,[18] completes the *Ring*'s trinity of primal nature symbols. It is from the ash that Wotan originally breaks the branch that forms the shaft of his spear, an act Deryck Cooke has shown to stand in elaborate parallel to Alberich's theft of the Rhinegold (*I Saw the World End* 148–9). Both despoil the natural world for the sake of individual, and again typically masculine, power. And almost all aspects of this are suggested in the *Wake*'s numerous world-ash allusions (one of which we have already quoted: HCE's "aspenstalk" (131.13)). Some others Martin catalogues are "the gigantig's lifetree . . . whose roots they be asches" (55.27–30), "An evernasty ashtray. . . . An overlisting eshtree? Oakley Ashe's elm" (503.7–32) and "Esch so eschess" (588.28).[19] HCE himself is also an "Yggdrasselmann" (88.23), an immense tree being one of his chief manifestations, just as the river is of his wife's; this, in combination with Wotan's attributes as lawgiver, builder of the bridge to Valhalla (and civilisation), and matchless male potency, is contained in the description of him as "secondtonone mither rector and maximost bridgesmaker was the first to rise taller through his beanstale than the bluegum buaboababbaun or the giganteous Wellingtonia Sequoia" (126.10–12). And the cosmic tragedy of Wotan's violation of the ash is echoed in "Woe! Woe! So that was how he became the foerst of our treefellers? – Yesche and . . . the fanest of our truefalluses" (506.15–18).

Curiously, the gender roles Joyce ascribes to tree and river directly invert those found in the *Ring*, where the Rhine is the "father" referred to by his three daughters. This fact is easily overshadowed, however, by Wagner's

[17] See pp 170–2.
[18] See p 175.
[19] Joyce could hardly have forborne from exploiting the potential meanings Wagner had inadvertently offered him by making an "ash" the fuel for the gods' conflagration.

consistent association of natural symbols with female figures, and of artefacts (ring, spear, sword, even Valhalla itself) with male ones. For Joyce, on the other hand, the river is almost always female whereas the tree is generally male, "our sovereign beingstalk . . . [with] cock robins muchmore hatching out of his missado eggdrazzles for him" (504.18–36), a "treemanangel" and an "Upfellbowm" (German *Apfelbaum* or apple-tree), so tall that "nobirdy aviar soar anywing to eagle it!" (505.17–33)

One final result of the *Wake*'s complex of mythic image-clusters (in which Wagnerian, Old Icelandic, biblical and other allusions exist in intimate co-relationship) is its "jocoserious" image (*Ulysses* 597), almost a diagram, of the world. The passage describing the cosmic tree (from which the examples above are taken) is a typical instance, where the hatching "cock robins" suggest, in close-up, the profusion of life erupting at all points from the whole vast superstructure and, at the same time, the perkiness of HCE's sons. The prevalence of present participles, typical of such passages, in conjunction with abundantly listed detail and the continual presence of topical local allusion (a striking contrast to timeless universal myth), creates the wonderfully vivid impression that this is the world as it is *right now* – but also, of course, as it always has been and will be. As more and more such details agglomerate, the effect is one of panoramic immensity, as well as interminably proliferating chaos. This, as well as a marked tendency to reduce broad historical movements to juvenile, not to say simian, enterprise ("climbing to her crotch for the origin of spices . . . gibbonses and gobbenses, guelfing and ghiberring . . . chucking overthrown milestones up to her to fall her cranberries" (504.29–33)), creates an overall tone of genial bemusement, of contemplating the human insects from a standpoint of achieved serenity – comparable to Wagner's at the end of the *Ring*, but substituting humour for grandiloquence.

Tristopher, Hilary and the "two Richard Wagners"

As all the principal themes of *Finnegans Wake* are related to the interrelations of the five family members, a major subplot is naturally the eternal conflict of

the twin sons, Shem and Shaun. Their primary models, equally naturally, are Cain and Abel, but they also take on the roles of as many rival brothers as Joyce can lay his hands on; at the autobiographical level, for instance, they are himself and Stanislaus (or, alternatively, what James himself might have been had he followed the advice of others).[20] Throughout the text, their relationship provides a major motivic pattern. This is clearly seen in the many vaudeville routines: "Mutt and Jute" (16–18), "Butt and Taff" (338–55), "Muta and Juva" (609–10); retold fables: "The Mookse and the Gripes" (152–9), "Burrous and Caseous" (161–7), "The Ondt and the Gracehoper" (414–19); and other episodes featuring similar pairings: ("Justius and Mercius" (187–95), "Glugg and Chuff" (222–6), "Dolph and Kev" (286–303). One of the earliest occurs towards the end of the first chapter, in the tale of Jarl van Hoother (HCE) and the Prankquean (ALP) who keeps mysteriously abducting, swapping and returning his two sons Tristopher and Hilary disguised as, or transformed into, one another (an example of a further theme, the interchangeability of their – and perhaps all – identities). In this particular case, their names (derived from Giordano Bruno's motto *In tristitia hilaris, in hilaritate tristis* – "joyful in sorrow, sorrowful in joy") are indicative of the essential distinction between them. The presence of Bruno is no accident here. After Vico, he is the philosopher whose mark on the novel is strongest and he is especially connected with the theme of the warring brothers, who ultimately signify his doctrine of the necessity of the union of conflicting opposites in all things. The brothers typically stand for two contrasting poles of (male) human nature that are found together only in the gigantic figure of their father.

In this instance, then, the distinction is one of mood: there is a sad twin and a happy twin, rather like the emblematic masks of tragedy and comedy, or the figures of Harlequin and Pierrot. It is not always clear which is which, given their tendency to swap roles almost as Beckett's characters swap hats. So, Shem (James himself, another portrait of the artist) is sometimes gay and carefree, sometimes sunk in self-pity, and Shaun similarly alternates between humourless solemnity and breezy optimism. On the

[20] Cf. Hodgart: "The two sons are twins and rivals, Shem being a Bohemian artist, Shaun a successful man of the world, combining the roles of tenor, politician, and priest." (134)

whole, though, it seems fair to say that Shem is the dark twin, the Cain figure, the outcast, Shaun the good boy, the Abel figure, the faithful, dependable son. This distinction is underscored at several points in the text; one notable example characterising them as "the bold bad bleak boy of the storybooks" (219.24) and "the fine frank fairhaired fellow of the fairytales" (220.12–13) has the further advantage of drawing attention to their archetypal existence throughout literary and folk traditions.

Despite this ubiquity, there is no question that one of Joyce's most prominent models for this characterisation of opposing male figures is once again Wagner, not in one work only but in a major preoccupation that spans his entire *oeuvre*. The name "Tristopher" alone suggests this; it is one of innumerable variations on "Tristan" in the novel, where the legend (in Wagner's and other versions) is a major presence, arguably second in importance only to the central theme of the Fall. Nor is the significance of Tristan's name overlooked in any version of his story; Wagner alludes indirectly to it in his third act, where the hero recollects how he was born and christened in sorrow and thereby doomed to an unhappy fate himself.[21] By contrast, Siegfried, Wagner's archetypally "happy" hero, is given his name prophetically by Brünnhilde to signify "joyous in victory" (*erfreu sich des Siegs*) (*Walküre* 167).

Once again, then, the relevance of Wagner's two heroic types is evident, as is that of the "two Richard Wagners" associated with them (Mahaffey 237):[22] the wildly Utopian world-reformer and the disillusioned world-renouncer. For Mahaffey, only the former is of interest to Joyce, as sharing his own optimistic humanism, but both need to be taken into account if one is to fully appreciate Wagner's relationship to the eternally warring opposites of the *Wake*. Indeed, given the frequency of its allusions to all Wagner's operas (especially *Tristan* and the *Ring*), in conjunction with the prominence given in the text to the theme of the rival brothers, it is unsurprising to find a number of passages where the twins are simultaneously likened to different Wagner heroes.

[21] See p 109 note 34.
[22] See pp 105–6.

A prime example of this tendency, the episode of Jarl van Hoother and the prankquean occupies a single long paragraph (21–3) towards the end of the first chapter. As this *is* the first chapter, it is doubly associated with Vico's divine age, in that it is the first part of the first subcycle. For this reason, it is largely concerned with beginnings, with remote antiquity, or pre-history, with creation myths and the Golden Age (or the period of *Rheingold*): "lang time agone . . . [when] everybilly lived alove with everybiddy else" (21.5–9). The episode is carefully crafted and offers an excellent short example of one of the more prominent narrative techniques used in the book, repetition with variation. Three times the prankquean comes to Jarl van Hoother's "homerigh, castle and earthenhouse" (21.13) and asks him the riddle "why do I am alook alike a poss of porterpease?" (21.18–19) (containing a clear hint of the phrase "as like as two peas"). Each time the outcome is slightly different, but the corresponding events are always related in the same order, and with phrases that deliberately echo one another. For example, each occasion begins with a phrase that sets the scene by describing what Jarl van Hoother was doing at the time, firstly with "his burnt head high up in his lamphouse, laying cold hands on himself" (21.10–11), secondly with "his baretholobruised heels drowned in his cellarmalt, shaking warm hands with himself" (21.35–6) and thirdly with "his hurricane hips up to his pantrybox, ruminating in his holdfour stomachs" (22.22–3). Here as elsewhere in the text, the central theme of history repeating itself is thus coded into the very structure. In addition, in it is worth noting the suggestions of weather, emphasised throughout this episode, and HCE's distinctive attribute of containing opposites within himself, allowing him here to reduce the extremes in his extremities, and combine all in his centre.

The two brothers are treated, throughout the episode – as indeed on several occasions, as very young children, the "jiminies"(21.11), despite the fact that forty years are said to elapse between each recurrence. This telescoping effect is another typical feature of the work, and just one of many ways it tends to flatly contradict good sense, thereby creating a perpetually distorted, dim and dreamlike appearance. This particular way, collapsing large spans of time and keeping the twins in a permanent infancy, has the double effect of suggesting their essential identity remains the same under

the appearance of different individuals in successive generations, and of satirising a large part of all human activity as fundamentally juvenile. When we first meet Tristopher and Hilary, they are "kickaheeling their dummy [apparently a substitute for their sister] on the oil cloth flure" (21.12–13), that is participating in co-operative violence towards another. When van Hoother denies her entrance, the prankquean "kidsnapped up the jiminy Tristopher . . . . for to tauch him his tickles and she convorted him to the onesure allgood and he became a luderman" (21.21–30), that is a ludic Lutheran or cheerful protestant, secure in the knowledge of grace. Meanwhile, Hilary is left alone with the dummy, "wringing and coughing, like brodar and histher" (22.2), that is not very healthy, but behaving themselves. Denied a second time, the prankquean returns the "convorted" Tristopher and takes Hilary in his stead and "punched the curses of cromcruwell with the nail of a top into the jiminy . . . to touch him his tears and she provorted him to the onecertain allsecure and he became a tristian" (22.14–17), that is a melancholic catholic, lamenting original sin. Tristopher, now "Toughertrees", is meanwhile misbehaving with his sister: "belove on the watercloth, kissing and spitting, and roguing and poghuing, like knavepaltry and naivebride" (22.24–6). While not obviously an allusion to *Tristan*, "Toughertrees" is nonetheless exactly that; it inverts Tristopher in precisely the way Tristan inverts his own name to Tantris, a detail of the story the *Wake* alludes to several times, suggesting it was particularly significant for Joyce, and hence worth closer attention.

In Wagner's version (in this instance largely faithful to the sources), Tristan, having slain Isolde's betrothed (originally her uncle) Morold and sent back his head to Ireland in lieu of the tribute he had come to exact but having in turn received a severe wound, comes to Ireland himself, where he is not known and there gives his name as Tantris to conceal his identity, Isolde tending him until he is healed. She nonetheless penetrates his disguise, by discovering a notch in his sword that perfectly matches a sliver found earlier in Morold's head. Her vengeful rage is quieted, not as in the sources by the intervention of her mother and her attendant, but by Tristan himself looking pitifully up at her from his pallet. What makes the opera still more strikingly

original is that it is this moment, and not the later incident of the potion, that is clearly pinpointed as the beginning of Tristan and Isolde's great love.[23]

Tristan's inversion of his name thus carries considerable significance. It is first and foremost an alias, an attempt to protect himself by concealing his identity from his enemies when he is at his most vulnerable. It is hence also associated with the period of his wounding and, by association, the wound itself, which later recurs and will eventually kill him. It is also, for all its simplicity, evidence of his craftiness, his competence under pressure, and an act of fraud. It ultimately fails to deceive Isolde, though she then unexpectedly becomes complicit in his deception; her discovery of his true identity is here linked to her love for him, which she in turn attempts to conceal. Metaphorically, then, the suffering Tantris, trying to preserve his life against harm, hides Tristan, the hero who opens himself up to love and death. Finally, the reversed name in itself foreshadows in embryonic form the matchless verbal ingenuity of the *Wake*. This, together with its relation to the themes of guilt and concealment, makes it natural for Joyce to allude specifically to it a number of times.

Apart from a straightforward "Tantris" (486.6), Martin notes "tramtrees" (5.31), "trysting by tantrums" (189.5) (as well as "tantrums" again (490.24)), "tan tress" (480.4), "tistress" (486.20) and "tanderest" (594.18), the closely related "Mr Trickpat" (487.23),[24] and the more explicit references to "tristurned initials" (100.28–9) and "tantrist spellings", the latter preceding an acrostic for "Tamtris": "take a message, tawny runes iles sallow" (571.7–8). Then there is the remarkable passage that features Tristan reversed, "fairescapading in his natsirt", together with "Tuesy" (Yseut), "throw . . . Kram of Llawnroc, . . . gink" (worth Mark of Cornwall, king) and his "Wehpen, luftcat revol" (nephew, tactful lover)[25] (388.1–4). Wagner's hero is hidden almost everywhere, it seems, more effectively than he hid himself.

To return to the prankquean episode, it is now clear that "Toughertrees" is precisely a variation on the Tantris theme, that is it is once more Tristan disguised, trying to conceal his presence. This makes it a

[23] See pp 51–2, 74–5.
[24] Suggesting Tristan improbably disguised as St Patrick.
[25] To say nothing of “mild aunt Liza”, one of seemingly endless comic variations on “Mild und leise”, the opening words of the *Liebestod*.

further addition to the allusions already evident in the passage, both in "Tristopher" and "tristian", and in the suggestions of illicit love noted above. That being the case, one can now consider the significance of these allusions in the context of what Joyce is doing in the episode as a whole.

To summarise its content as far as we have considered it, the prankquean first abducts Tristopher, that is the unhappy twin, the Shem figure, and converts him to his opposite, a "luderman", and then returns him and takes Hilary, the cheerful twin or Shaun figure, in his place and does likewise with him, making him a "tristian". Upon her third visit, she returns "Larryhill" (obviously Hilary inverted in precisely the same way as Tantris and Toughertrees). This time, Jarl van (actually now von) Hoother does not deny her entrance but instead comes noisily out to confront her. The climax is given a marked emphasis by the presence of the second of the book's hundred-letter thunder-words (there are just ten in total, plus an eleventh with a hundred and one letters). Their primary significance is to signal the Viconian *ricorso*, the return of the gods in thunder to begin a new cycle. In this instance, it leads to a reconciliation, the twins reunited peaceably and both mother and father figures ruling conjointly in their respective spheres. The whole episode is in one sense a microcosm of the complete cycle of history (as indeed is shown by its three plus one structure). Its especial emphasis is, however, the theme of the two brothers, and it outlines as clearly as anywhere in the text their chief features, namely their mirroring of one another, their paradoxical opposition and their mutual tendency to swap places, or identities, to disguise themselves as one another.

One of the more obvious general applications of this theme is that all men are brothers, and that all rivalries, wars, oppositions and partisanships are formed by a mutual self-definition of the other party as antithetical to oneself and everything one stands for, when beneath this artificial appearance each is identical to the other. Only the whole man (associated in the novel with the father figure) can comfortably combine conflicting tendencies; the famous words of Whitman, "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself! / (I am large, I contain multitudes)",[26] apply

[26] *Song of Myself* 51.6–8.

perhaps nowhere else more obviously than they do to "Here Comes Everybody". His sons, on the other hand, unknowingly limit themselves through their rejection of and separation from one another.

Attributes and tendencies in one form or another are nonetheless an ineradicable part of human identity; as literature traditionally reflects this in the delineation of character, certain stock types become readily identifiable. This enables Joyce, in the *Wake*, to help define his twin brothers through multiple associations and, while they may exchange identities, the identities themselves, like theatrical costumes, remain intact and carry a peculiar mystique of their own. Obviously, the tragi-comic, or "jocoserious", opposition seen in Tristopher and Hilary forms a distinctive part of this. Tristan, as much as Hamlet, epitomises the brooding, melancholy hero; his obverse, the sanguine young man, is most purely embodied in folk-tale form: Jack the Giant Killer, Peer Gynt and, again, Wagner's own Siegfried.

It is Tristan who takes precedence in this episode, most emphatically, as we have seen, in practising illicit love under the guise of an inverted name. As in all such episodes in the novel, HCE, here van Hoother, takes the role of Tristan's cuckolded uncle, King Mark. This is signalled here primarily by the prankquean, who calls attention to her riddle with, respectively, "Mark the Wans", "Mark the Twy" and "Mark the Tris", the last managing to combine uncle and nephew. The most ingenious addition here, though, is the central one of Mark Twain, one of several authors who feature prominently in the book: as the nom de plume of Samuel Clemens, this is yet another alias, this one masking the cheerful twin, Clemens suggesting clement, hence even-tempered. Father and two sons are thus ultimately all in all.

Joyce compounds the *Tristan* allusions here with a further one to the *Ring*. The "arkway of trihump"(22.28) is the rainbow bridge that leads to Valhalla, suggests Martin, who argues consistently that such proximate allusions to different Wagner operas render one another more credible, that is they are less likely to be coincidental. There is in fact further evidence in this instance, as in numerous others, to support Martin's assertion but also, more importantly, to help explain why Joyce combines allusions to these works. The "arkway" reference occurs at the point where the prankquean makes her final visit to van / von Hoother, and continues with a description of his

alarming emergence "with a fork lance of lightning . . . out through the pikeopened arkway of his three shuttoned castles . . . a rudd yellan gruebleen orangeman in his violet indigonation, to the whole longth of the strongth of his bowman's bill" (22.31–23.3). That this leads directly to the thunder-word and the declaration of universal peace almost certainly makes it a composite allusion to the final scene of *Das Rheingold*, with its spectacular thunderclap heralding the revelation of the rainbow bridge to Valhalla, which the gods proceed over to inaugurate their millennial reign.

To clarify this, briefly: *Rheingold* is the first of the four *Ring* operas and tells of how the world originally came to be in its current condition (by the same token *Walküre* exemplifies the present and both *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* predict conjectural futures – the coming of a messiah and the ultimate destruction of the world). The ending of *Rheingold*, the inauguration of Valhalla and all it stands for – law and order, political power, the state, civilisation, can thus be seen to dramatise the beginning of both human history in general and the modern period in particular. The event is unmistakably epochal and singular.

The *Wake*, by direct contrast, presents the historical cycle as infinitely recurrent. The first of the four Viconian ages (as in the *Ring* the age of the gods and their rule), after giving way to the succeeding ages of heroes, common men and anarchic chaos, will inevitably return. So, far from being as unique as Wagner presents it, it is merely a phase, endlessly repeated, in the natural order of things.

A further complication is that, in addition to the simultaneous ongoing recurrence of cycles within cycles on all levels and scales, from the cosmic down to the domestic, Joyce occasionally inverts the direction of movement – so that we move backwards from misrule, through the democratic, aristocratic and theocratic ages, before collapsing into chaos again. The interesting thing is that this hardly makes a difference: the pattern of rise and decline and fall and resurrection is much the same either way. The reversed form of the cycle is also, of course, a mirror image, so that it corresponds in temporal terms to the Brunonian union of opposites; it is thus especially appropriate that it occurs in *this* episode, where the subject of the interchangeable twins is uppermost. The thrice-repeated riddle leads to resolution and apparent

global harmony, a state of affairs reinforced by the way the passage ends with a version of the motto of Dublin – another prominent leitmotif in the text, and one specifically associated with civic peace and prosperity. At the same time, the episode's reversal of Vico's cycle is also a reversal of Wagner's, in that the concluding section alludes to its *first* part.

The *Rheingold* allusions in themselves thus help to add a certain mythic weight to this conclusion – at the same time as they are farcically parodic. As Wotan, Jarl van Hoother can the more effectively bluster his way over all opposition and bring to a halt the incessant warring and place-changing of his sons. At the same time, the very precariousness of his rule is also underscored by the comparison, as the splendour of the *Rheingold* finale is so overblown as to undercut itself – leaving the audience in no doubt that the gods are deluding themselves. In the *Wake*, inevitable collapse is even more obviously implicit in the very act of self-assertion, so much so that the two are sometimes even seen as one and the same thing (yet another union of opposites), as when the thunderous rumble announcing the gods' return in power is simultaneously the earth-shaking sound of their fall. The gravity of law is here the law of gravity.

What we have yet to consider is whether there is any significance in this episode alluding to both the *Ring* and *Tristan*. Martin, as we have seen, locates numerous instances where more than one Wagner opera is alluded to in the same passage, but without inferring an implied relation between the works in question, and his argument as a whole largely treats the influence of specific operas as separate from one another. My own position is that, given his abiding interest in the underlying identity of all appearances, Joyce is unlikely to draw on two Wagnerian works in a passage without being aware of their relationship to one another and *its* applicability to his own text.

In this instance, the *Rheingold* parallel is the slighter of the two, emerging only at the end of the episode to emphasise its firm conclusion, and the father's re-establishing control over his wife, sons and realm. References to *Tristan*, on the other hand, abound in this passage and even play an important structural role, in that the Tristan / Tantris inversion of names recurs throughout, as does the identity-swapping of the brothers, to which it is closely tied. At the same time, the regularly placed mentions of "Mark" make

it clear that van Hoother is here, as HCE is generally, placed in the role of Tristan's uncle. Given that the primary effect of the *Rheingold* allusion is to align him with Wotan, it is here – with his role – that a connection must lie, assuming there is one. What then is the relationship of Wotan and King Marke?

First of all, obviously, they are the authoritarian father figures in their respective works, but there is a more detailed parallel than this. Both come into direct conflict with their heirs, are displaced by them and, despite initial resistance, are ultimately reconciled to this. Wotan needs a free hero to do what he, bound by his own laws, cannot do (namely, win back the accursed ring). When he realises that, by destining his own son Siegmund for this role, he has inadvertently compromised the whole enterprise – since he cannot legitimately play any role, even from behind the scenes – he is obliged to withdraw the help he has made available to Siegmund, even though he thereby ensures his death and consigns his own rule to inevitable ruin. It is only when his son's son, Siegfried, quite unwittingly performs the longed-for deed that Wotan gets what he wants, though it is by now clear to him that he cannot benefit personally and that Siegfried's triumph necessitates his own demise. Wotan thus progresses from an unscrupulous autocrat to a genuinely moving figure, tragically resigned to his own supersession.[27]

Marke, by contrast, is passive from the outset. He does not particularly want to marry the young bride Tristan insists on bringing him and is the more perplexed when his nephew betrays him with her. He is not, at this stage, privy to the secret of the love-potion – synecdoche for the fated nature of Tristan and Isolde's love, their complete helplessness to resist it. When he learns of it, he immediately renounces her (it is made quite clear that the marriage is unconsummated) for the younger man's sake, though it is by then too late to avert the tragic outcome.

What we have then are parallel studies in renunciation (of power and love, respectively, though these things are inevitably intertwined in both cases). The Oedipal role of the son / grandson / nephew is to supplant the older man, in direct contravention of his authority, though at some level he

[27] See p 66.

accepts and even welcomes this. An interesting inversion is that, in the *Ring*, it is the father-figure who is conflicted, whereas, in *Tristan*, it is his son: Siegmund and Siegfried both fight instinctively for freedom, overturning the old order through violence, in perfect ignorance of Wotan's dilemma (whether to oppose their doing this or to encourage it); Tristan, on the other hand, has always been the dutiful nephew, a paragon of virtue, and is tormented by his betrayal of the king.

Already in this, there is much fertile material for Joyce's interest in contradictory counterparts and role-swapping heroes. Insofar as Jarl van Hoother embodies two Wagnerian rulers, his Wotan-like appearance of supreme authority at the end of the episode is undermined not only by hints of his looming *Götterdämmerung* ("all the flamend floody flatuous world" (23.10)), but also by his having allowed himself, like Marke, to be cuckolded by "knavepaltry and naivebride" (22.26).[28] One emphatic difference from all Wagner's noble renouncers, however, is that the comic HCE is either blissfully ignorant of his predicament or else vainly fulminating against it, usually in grotesquely scatological terms ("clopped his rude hand to his eacy hitch [ECH] and he ordurd and his thick spch spck for her to shut up shop"(23.3–5).

A more serious complication, one that it is essential to be clear about in negotiating so bewildering a text, is that we are no longer dealing with two, but with three, male figures – the twin sons and their father. This pattern is simple enough in itself, one of the many sure things in the *Wake* that can be relied upon to keep resurfacing. What complicates matters is the infinity of historical and fictional persons, or roles, that the three may appear disguised as, so that the challenge is to "idendifine the individuone" (51.6). The point, of course, is to illustrate the multiple recurrences of the same basic archetypal relationships throughout all of human experience. As Sydney Bolt describes it, in *A Preface to James Joyce*,

> Fixed rôles are played repeatedly in different circumstances by many different actors, but despite the flickering swarm of names in the text the number of rôles as such is small, and each rôle

[28] See p 208.

> retains its identity. Only the identity of the actor playing it is fluid. Instead of being read as a linear narrative about a series of specific characters, *Finnegans Wake* can therefore be read as repeated performances of a limited set of rôles by a varying cast, the different names being different values of constant functions. . . . The action is determined by these functions, which, by a process of continuous allusion are seen to apply not only in the dream but also to other literature, as well as history, myth and legend. (165)

As far as the three principal male roles are concerned, the purpose is usually to illustrate the workings of two forms of rivalry, that of the twin brothers, and that of father and son. In some instances, all three figures are involved, such as when the brothers unite (as Brutus and Cassius, for example) against their father (as Caesar).

It follows, then, that in those cases where Wagnerian identities are adopted, only two out of three roles are involved – unless more than one of the operas is being alluded to. Where one or another of the brothers plays the part of Tristan, for example, the father figure is inevitably King Marke.[29] Where HCE is Wotan on the other hand, one of his sons may, by association, become Siegmund or Siegfried. Twin brothers, however, do not occur as such in any of Wagner's works, though they are clearly analogous, as I have specified, to the two basic types of Wagnerian hero. What appears to be an insurmountable difficulty in relating all three figures to a single opera, then, falls away automatically when we consider the dramas as a composite whole.

It will be helpful in this context to offer a brief recapitulation of the more prominent examples in Wagner's canon,[30] in terms of the three character types found in the *Wake*. The simplest case is, again, *Tristan*: the tragic, suffering hero is involved in a straightforward rivalry with his father figure, Marke.[31] In the *Ring*, *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*, it is the young, innocent

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[29] Cf. Martin: "Shem and Shaun together are Tristan, though the highly sexed Shem is perhaps more so, and their assault on authority in the person of their father parallels Tristan's betrayal of his uncle." (97)

[30] For more detail, see pp 104–9.

[31] There is no point in trying to cast Tristan's jealous fellow knight, Sir Melot, in the role of the other brother, as Melot is flagrantly unheroic, an example of the small-minded, petty individual who is wholly eclipsed by the hero's altogether peerless stature (see p 104 note 27). In any given Wagner opera, the hero is a singular, outstanding individual; in the few cases where *two* heroes occur, they represent different generations (hence, a father-son relationship).

redeemer-hero who must supplant an older man, himself an example of the suffering hero. In *The Flying Dutchman*, the most important of the earlier operas for Joyce, the prototypical suffering hero appears alone.[32]

The *Wake*'s allusions to the last-named, as Martin reminds us, are "pervasive and detailed" (70). As an older man, the role of the Dutchman naturally falls to HCE, not one of his sons, but seeking a (potentially incestuous) relationship with a younger woman – Senta / the Issy-Isolde figure. There is thus a built-in (irregular) correspondence to the Tristan allusions (where one or another of the interchangeable sons supplants their father in her affections). Two versions (one older, one younger) of the displaced, doomed, homeless, seafaring, death-seeking hero co-exist in the text, reminding the reader that this story too is eternally recurrent, the Shem / Shaun of one generation being inevitably destined to become the HCE of the next (as Issy too repeatedly becomes the next ALP); as the Dutchman, HCE gets the girl but, as Marke, loses her to the younger hero, who re-enacts his quest.

Nor is this the only instance of Joyce "splicing Wagner's operas together" (72).[33] The "Norwegian captain" episode (311–332) is not only drenched in allusions to *The Flying Dutchman*, but also combines several of them with further references to the *Ring*. For example: "hiberniating after seven oak ages, fearsome where they were he had gone dump in his doomering this tide where the peixies would pickle him down to the button of his seat" (316.15–18) combines the Dutchman's seven year term of wandering with one of the *Wake*'s innumerable *Götterdämmerung* puns (plus a hint of the Rhinedaughters); "it marinned down his gargantast trombsathletic like the marousers of the gulpstroom. The kersse of Wolafs on him" (319.26–7) conflates two Wagnerian curses, the Dutchman's and Wotan's, together with the appropriate orchestration; and "the bugganeering wanderducken, he sazd . . . the bloedaxe bloodooth baltxebec . . . he sazd, donconfounder him, voyaging after maidens . . . after Donnerbruch fire" (323.1–9) fuses

[32] The "rival", Erik, and potential father-in-law, Daland, are further examples of characters who are pointedly ordinary and unheroic. The latter is, if anything, a comic type, interested in nothing but getting rich. What is more, neither he nor anyone else could be a father figure to the immortal / ageless Dutchman.

[33] Typically, Martin notes the coincidence of allusions to more than one music-drama, but without unpacking the significantly pre-existing relationships between the works in question.

Vanderdecken, the blood-oath (between Siegfried and Gunther in *Götterdämmerung*), the thunder god Donner who forges the rainbow bridge at the end of *Rheingold* and the final conflagration.[34] But the important point is that these juxtapositions are not arbitrary. They underscore the fact that Wotan and the Dutchman are both versions of the older, world-weary Wagner hero who longs for the final apocalypse as the only thing that can guarantee his own destruction.[35] What is more, at least one example ("Eh, chrystal holder? Save Ampsterdampster that had rheumaniscences in his netherlumbs. – By the drope in his groin" (319.16–18)) appears to blend the Dutchman and Amfortas (holding his crystal chalice): both long to be saved, the Dutchman remembers his lost homeland, Amfortas is reminded of his fatal transgression by the symbolic wound in his side.

All too clearly, one could go on cataloguing and annotating examples like this *ad nauseum* – a wearying task for compiler and reader alike. What really matters is that the evidence suggests that Joyce (even more than Woolf) was almost certainly aware of the identity of several (if not all) of Wagner's heroes, and of the relationships between them. Throughout the *Wake*, the same pattern is repeated: a fallen man woos and wins a wife, and bears two sons (who embody his dual nature), one or both of whom supplant him and take his place, repeating the process anew. The woman wooed is likewise supplanted by her daughter. Man and woman alike ultimately vindicate one another, often in quasi-Wagnerian terms:

> In imagery of light and darkness *Tristan* and the *Wake* assert that there is an alternative or even a higher reality in unconsciousness: in day are deceit and pain, in night truth and comfort. *Tristan* opens just as dawn breaks, and it is therefore appropriate that Tristan himself should join Adam and Eve on the first page of the *Wake*. (Martin, *Wagner and Literature* 104)

As for the last page, it is strangely fitting that so long and exasperatingly difficult a book, for the most part grotesquely comic, bizarre and anarchic, should end with a *Liebestod* of its own, elegaic and almost unbearably

[34] This last example blends the beginning and end of the *Ring* in much the same way as we saw "rory end to the regginbrow" doing earlier (see p 197).
[35] See p 106.

poignant. It does in fact allude not only to Isolde and the Rhinedaughters, but also to "the final situations and in some cases the very last words of several [other] tragic operas" as well as "the endings of Shakespearean tragedies" (Hodgart 186). Still more apparent are the images of religious redemption, or transcendence, and Molly Bloom's final "Yes", but the broader context is above all else Wagnerian: a great summation and culmination, gathering momentum from the immense weight of the work behind it, and bestowing a benediction as sweeping in its way as the stupendous coda to the *Ring*. There, after the final descending wave of the "Götterdämmerung" motif[36] has closed the circle, the "Redemption" motif[37] "appears to resonate even beyond the ending itself. . . . as if Wagner were inviting us to break the circle of history". It is taken up by "the silent chorus on stage . . . the audience and probably the entire world as well" (Deathridge 9).

> If I seen him bearing down on me now under whitespread wings like he'd come from Archangels, I sink I'd die down over his feet, humbly dumbly, only to washup. Yes, tid. There's where. First. We pass through grass behush the bush to. Whish! A gull. Gulls. Far calls. Coming, far! End here. Us then. Finn, again! Take. Bussoftlhee, mememormee! Till thousendsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the (628.9–16)

[36] See p 167.
[37] See p 74.

Conclusion

> James Joyce and Virginia Woolf obviously stood at the opposite extremes of the modernist literary sensibility: he sensual and she cool, he prolific with words and she parsimonious, his world large, crowded and lavish, hers highly concentrated. (Gay 203)

> Literature as resonance, as tonality, as a seamless web of continuity, a narrative swelling to symphonic proportions – Wagner's method and imperious example revised the entire course not only of musical, but also of literary, development. The dissolution of all boundaries and the commemoration of the infinite unity of the world could not fail to enrich the traditional structure of prose. (Furness 143)

That Joyce and Woolf, despite their extreme difference of, above all, temper, should prove the outstanding examples of this Wagnerian method in modernist fiction, testifies to its inexhaustible richness. The exquisite lyricism of *The Waves* and the comic abundance of *Finnegans Wake* are about as different from one another as each of them is from the massive dark intensity of the *Ring*. And yet each appears to take more from it than motifs and images only, and echoes its tone in modified form. For Woolf, it is the cycle's lighter textures, the watery sunlight, babbling nymphs and forest birds, that are evoked, as are the subtler and gentler harmonies of the work she ultimately preferred, *Parsifal*. For Joyce, it is almost the opposite: crude pagan brutality, lumbering giants, thunder and booming chthonic noises are emphasised, transformed by genial caricature and a kindred likeness to his own "favourite Wagnerian opera", *Die Meistersinger* (Ellmann, *James Joyce* 473).[1]

It is also fairly clear that Joyce alludes to Wagner (as to everything else) in far more detail than Woolf; this is not to say that *The Waves* is not a highly allusive text by normal standards, but normal standards do not apply to

[1] Cf. Stoddard Martin: "the Wagner work which bears the closest spiritual affinity to *Ulysses* is *Meistersinger*, the one drama in which the *Meister* came down from his ideal realm of myth to treat the reality of petty burghers. Wagner treated this with such unusual sympathy that Chamberlain was to call it a tribute to the 'Purely Human', and its hero, like Bloom, a symbol of the capacity for 'greatness of soul' inherent in the common man." (151, quoting Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *The Wagnerian Drama*) While "greatness of soul" is not readily apparent in the *Wake*, the jovial humour of the whole is if anything even more marked than in *Ulysses*.

Finnegans Wake, where "every word will be bound over to carry three score and ten toptypsical reading" (20.14–15) and even individual letters, such as H, C and E, may have multiple significances, one of which is a musical chord (in which H in German notation corresponds to English B flat).[2]

The *Wake* also alludes to a great deal more of Wagner than *The Waves* (where the only other clear correspondence is the one to *Parsifal*); Martin cites several references not only to the *Ring* operas but also to all the others, especially *Tristan* and *The Flying Dutchman*, as well as to aspects of the composer's life and theories.[3] In general, this suggests a strong intellectual interest in Wagner and his ideas that contrasts with the predominantly atmospheric and emotive use of allusion by Woolf. Indeed this aggressively cerebral approach is antithetical to Woolf, who tends to satirise it as a hallmark of patriarchal dominance. One thinks especially of Mr Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, but also of Peter Walsh in *Mrs Dalloway*, who "went on about Wagner" (38):

> It was the state of the world that interested him; Wagner, Pope's poetry, people's characters eternally, and the defects of her own soul. . . . everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable. (6)

In the end, the similarities outweigh the differences. Joyce and Woolf alike are clearly attracted above all to Wagner's impressive use of ancient myth to express a modern *Weltanschauung* (one that notably offers a congenial alternative to the Judaeo-Christian tradition that both had substantially repudiated). For Joyce, perhaps the most attractive feature of the *Ring* is the way it shows how "[t]he work of man is self-destructive, sterile, fleeting; the work of maternal nature is resilient, self-sustaining, eternal" (Martin 115). For Woolf, similarly, the operas offer a rare depiction of life as a fluid stream of impressions best enjoyed by self-surrender and immersion

[2] I cannot help wondering here whether the character Ш (a version of the sigil representing Earwicker) might not also be read as "E flat", the key in which the *Ring*'s own "riverrun" prelude opens. Puns functioning with such extreme ingenuity over whole sections of text are typical of Joyce, as for example the "sweepstake" business in the Cyclops episode of *Ulysses*.
[3] See p 192.

than vain efforts to impose control.[4] In both *The Waves* and the *Wake*, no less than in the *Ring*, the universe itself is the principal subject: vast, random, inexplicable, seemingly everlasting (though perhaps arising from and returning to nothing), entirely bypassing all human categories of good and evil, and – despite its vastness – an indivisible entity in which all things are interrelated. Human beings, in their constant but rather foolish efforts to pretend they are separate and autonomous, are perhaps better advised to seek absorption in one another, in the community, in fruitful activity, contemplation of natural objects, enjoyment of physical sensation, the acceptance of passing time, change, transience and ultimately one's own death, the extinction of consciousness, as the greatest possible good.[5] All three artists indicate the possibility of final transcendence through love, from Anna Livia's final monologue,[6] through Bernard's affirming that "[t]here was no past, no future; merely the moment in its ring of light, and our bodies; and the inevitable climax, the ecstasy" (*The Waves* 194), to Brünnhilde's unsung farewell to life:

> From the realm of desire I depart,
> the realm of illusion I abjure for ever;
> I close behind me
> the open gates
> of endless becoming:
> to the free-from-desire, free-from-illusion,
> holiest, chosen land –
> the goal of worldwide wandering –
> she who has achieved wisdom now goes.
> Do you know how I reached
> this blessed end
> of all that is endless?
> My eyes were opened
> by the profoundest suffering
> of grieving love.
> I saw the world end.[7]

[4] See p 176.
[5] Cf. the description of Wagner's world-view presented in the first chapter, pp 46–7.
[6] See p 219.
[7] These lines, the so-called "Schopenhauer ending", Wagner added to the text of *Götterdämmerung* after reading the philosopher, though he eventually decided not to set them to music, believing their spirit was more than adequately expressed in the orchestral peroration that closes the work (see p 74). In some editions, they are printed at the end of the score.

This Schopenhauerian spirit that so suffuses Wagner's later dramas is one quality that aligns them more closely in some respects with Woolf's writing than with Joyce's, despite the latter's more overt Wagnerism. Even though it disguises more deep-seated similarities, there is no denying the noisy mockery that is so abundantly present in the *Wake* – an extreme difference of mood that critics have repeatedly emphasised. Even Stoddard Martin, who sees Joyce and T.S. Eliot as the two culminating cases of Wagnerian influence in English literature,[8] makes a point of stressing this. Joyce's "scribble-dehobbled . . . . version of *Tristan*", for example,

> follows Blissett's three rules of the *Finnegan* method: (I) whatever it is, make it sound Irish; (2) take it down and lay it low; (3) make it funny. Thus Wagner's final fate at Joyce's hands is to be stood on his head and genially mocked. (152)

What is more, this is put down to a fundamental difference of attitude:

> The temperament that exploded the interior monologue of *Ulysses* into the comic/anarchic multilogue of *Finnegans Wake* was not, finally, a Wagnerian temperament. . . . [but a] willing acceptance of the divine comedy of all things. . . . The Schopenhauerian pessimism that marked Wagner's mature works at least as much as youthful death-yearning had marked his early ones could only be viewed as ludicrous amid the helter-skelter of "Circe" and *Finnegan*. (159)

Indeed, that Joyce's sometimes unrelenting levity and facetiousness recall Nietzsche's, especially *vis-à-vis* this subject, is hardly surprising. For Stoddard Martin, it is Nietzsche who provides the "absolutely indispensible link between the godly grandeur of Wagner's vision and the mortal vulgarity of the great Modernist's (167)".

> The accomplishment of Joyce was much like what Nietzsche had been calling for: a new, joyful, realistic yet classical European art, based on the foundations of a partly repudiated Wagner and German Romanticism with its dialecticism, its pantheism, its Goethean joy, its Schopenhauerian pessimism, its ultimate Love, and its transcendentalism. (166)

[8] See p 13.

It is significant here that the most philosophically serious reason for Nietzsche's break with Wagner was precisely this "Schopenhauerian pessimism". While his own philosophy was undoubtedly rooted in Schopenhauer's, Nietzsche came to repudiate the latter's life-denial, and metaphysics generally, with a vengeance, affirming this world and the Will to Power as the only values worth troubling with. In this respect, Joyce's attitude is much closer to Nietzsche's (and the early Wagner's – the first of the "two" distinguished by Mahaffey).[9] The features of Joyce's work that most resemble Wagner's, catalogued by Timothy Martin as "[t]otal art, a mythic method, a romantic mythology of women, a redemptive philosophy, religious scepticism, irrationalism, a fascination with sin, sexuality, the problem of exile" (178), are all clearly present and fully developed in Wagner's case before his conversion to Schopenhauerism, and are in general those qualities approved by Nietzsche, insofar as they are life-affirming and suitably *übermenschlisch*. On the other hand, the increasing other-worldliness and resignation that the music-dramas express after Wagner's conversion are anathema to the Rabelaisian Joyce, as can be clearly seen in the extent to which he drags Tristan down to earth.[10]

In Woolf's novels, on the other hand, imagery, atmosphere, subjectivity, impressionism, ephemera, emotionalism, all combine in a richly neo-romantic manner that frequently recalls Wagner and Schopenhauer almost simultaneously. *The Waves* is especially rich in examples:

> Oh, to awake from dreaming! . . . Let me pull myself out of these waters. But they heap themselves on me; they sweep me between their great shoulders; I am turned; I am tumbled; I am

[9] See pp 105–6, 206.

[10] The distance between the sublimity of the drama, which even Nietzsche continued to venerate to the end, and the gleeful naughtiness of the *Wake*, would appear to be effectively immeasurable: "kiddling and cuddling and bunnyhugging scrumptious his colleen bawn and dinkum belle, an oscar sister, on the fifteen inch loveseat, behind the chieftaness stewardesses cubin, the hero, of Gaelic champion, the oneliest one of her choice, her bleaueyedeal of a girl's friend, neither bigugly nor smallnice, meaning pretty much everything to her then, with his sinister dexterity, light and rufthandling, vicemversem her ragbags et assaucyetiams, fore and aft, on and offsides, the brueburnt sexfutter, handson and huntsem, that was palpably wrong and bulbubly improper . . . in the vulgar ear cuddling and kiddling her, after an oyster supper in Cullen's bar" (384.20–5.1).

> stretched, among these long lights, these long waves, these endless paths, with people pursuing, pursuing. (19)
>
> Then suddenly descended upon me the obscure, the mystic sense of adoration, of completeness that triumphed over chaos. . . . Nobody guessed the need I had to offer my being to one god; and perish, and disappear. (37)
>
> I am rooted, but I flow. All gold, flowing that way, I say to this one, "Come". Rippling black, I say to that one, "No". . . . This is the most exciting moment I have ever known. I flutter. I ripple. I stream like a plant in the river, flowing this way, flowing that way, but rooted, so that he may come to me. "Come," I say, "come." Pale, with dark hair, the one who is coming is melancholy, romantic. And I am arch and fluent and capricious; for he is melancholy, he is romantic. (76)
>
> Rippling small, rippling grey, innumerable waves spread beneath us. I touch nothing. I see nothing. We may sink and settle on the waves. The sea will drum in my ears. The white petals will be darkened with sea water. They will float for a moment and then sink. Rolling me over the waves will shoulder me under. Everything falls in an immense shower, dissolving me. (158)

Even the earlier *Mrs Dalloway*, less obviously impressionistic, yields equally suggestive examples.[11] Indeed, the prevalence of distinctly Tristanesque images of dissolution in the night of non-being throughout Woolf's writing might almost be thought obsessive.[12]

In the psychological torments endured by Septimus, Woolf has translated Wagner's archetypal Christlike sufferer into believable human terms, making explicit what was implicit in *Tristan*: that the hero's agony is that felt by us all, the "isolation full of sublimity" that comes from being a creature detached and adrift in a world of phenomena.[13] The same figure is hidden beneath the deceptively merry labyrinth of *Finnegans Wake* as well, as an "always sadfaced man" (533.9). Both cases also reveal the contradictory / complementary face of the hero as well: the innocent intuitively at one with the numinous in everything, the sacrificial lamb who

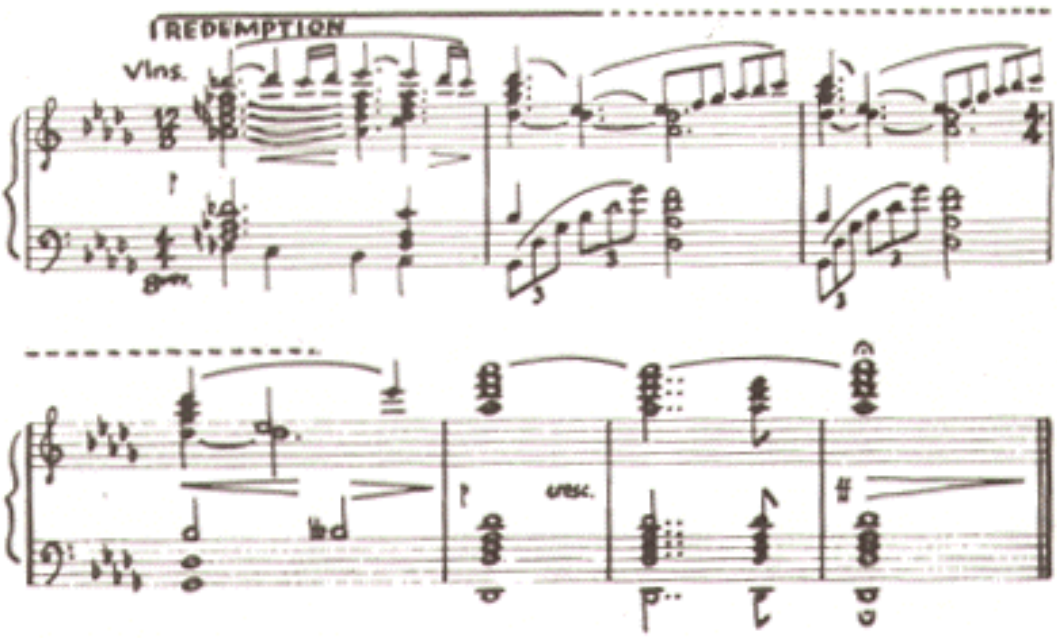
[11] See for example the passage quoted on p 143.
[12] Consider, for example, the "down-pouring of immense darkness" in the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse* that leaves "scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say 'This is he' or 'This is she'" (143–4).
[13] See p 151.

returns yet again in *The Waves* to hold the community, life, time, space and being together around his charismatic personality, as if providing a universal centre of gravity. Both are ultimately one, the rising sun bringing new light and life into the world, the lost wanderer seeking solace in the oblivion of eternal night: two reciprocal arcs of the same all-inclusive circle.

It is my belief that in turning to Wagner's dramas for the material of their most modern works, both Joyce and Woolf were guided by aesthetic instincts that were ultimately stronger than their conscious attitudes towards the composer, which were often ambivalent and occasionally hostile. In doing so, they availed themselves of a creative conduit through which an abundance of mythic meaning poured and shaped itself anew and in the vestures of the modern world. Through their uniquely creative manipulations of this material, each was able to reveal, in a multiplicity of forms, the availability of myth for each of us today, but stripped of the tyranny of religious dogma and freed from the limitations of a materialist universe. Wagner's "attempt to conceive the possibility and attainability of a special kind of humanly attainable significance – one that is beyond all optimism and pessimism alike, and that is at once deeply tragic and profoundly affirmative" (Kitcher and Schacht 62), might be thought to be but dimly shadowed in the ironic reserve and irreverence of his heretical twentieth-century disciples – or these too might be recognised as stages in an ongoing revolution of consciousness. Transcending superficial differences, what is most illuminating in the work of each is its commitment to a form beyond appearances, Clarissa Dalloway's sense of "the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance" (34), or Anna Livia's vision of "my cold mad feary father, till the near sight of the mere size of him, the moyles and moyles of it, moananoaning, makes me seasilt saltsick and I rush, my only, into your arms" (628.2–4).

> The essence of oneself and the essence of the world: these two are one. Hence separateness, withdrawal, is no longer necessary. Wherever the hero may wander, whatever he may do, he is ever in the presence of his own essence – for he has the perfected eye to see. There is no separateness. . . . The spell of the past, the bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes. The dream-web of myth fell away; the

mind opened to full waking consciousness; and modern man emerged from ancient ignorance, like a butterfly from its cocoon, or like the sun at dawn from the womb of mother night. (Campbell 386–7)



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