

Redemption in Wagner's Ring cycle. St Mary's Nottingham. 22 June 2016.

Richard H Bell (with Leah Jones and John Keys).

I The Ring of the Nibelung

The Rhinegold, The Valkyrie, Siegfried, Twilight of the Gods (Götterdämmerung).

II What is redemption ("Erlösung")?

Martin Luther's German bible.

Ransom of Freia (Holda):

Does Holda really seem to you
worthy of ransom?

Dünkt euch Holda
wirklich der Lösung Werth?

Sketches for *Jesus of Nazareth*:

Jesus announces his true mission, his quality
as son of God, the redemption of all peoples
of the earth through him.

Jesus verkündigt seine wahre sendung –
seine eigenschaft als gottes sohn, die
erlösung aller völker durch ihn.

St Paul: "you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6.20; 7.23).

Possible influences from Greek tragedy, Norse mythology, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schopenhauer.

III From what is one redeemed?

Original sin in the *Ring*. The sin of Wotan and Alberich.

IV Who is the redeemer figure?

The Nibelung Myth (1848): Siegfried "has innocently taken on the guilt of the gods".

Verse draft for *Siegfried* (completed 24 June 1851): Siegfried "through a free deed / takes away the guilt" (Strobel, *Skizzen*, 173).

Final version of *Siegfried* Act III Scene 1: Brünnhilde "will work the deed that redeems the world" ("erlösende Weltentat") (end of 1852). Letter to August Röckel of 25/26 January 1854: Brünnhilde "becomes the true, conscious redeemer".

V Wotan's plans to regain the ring and how they go wrong

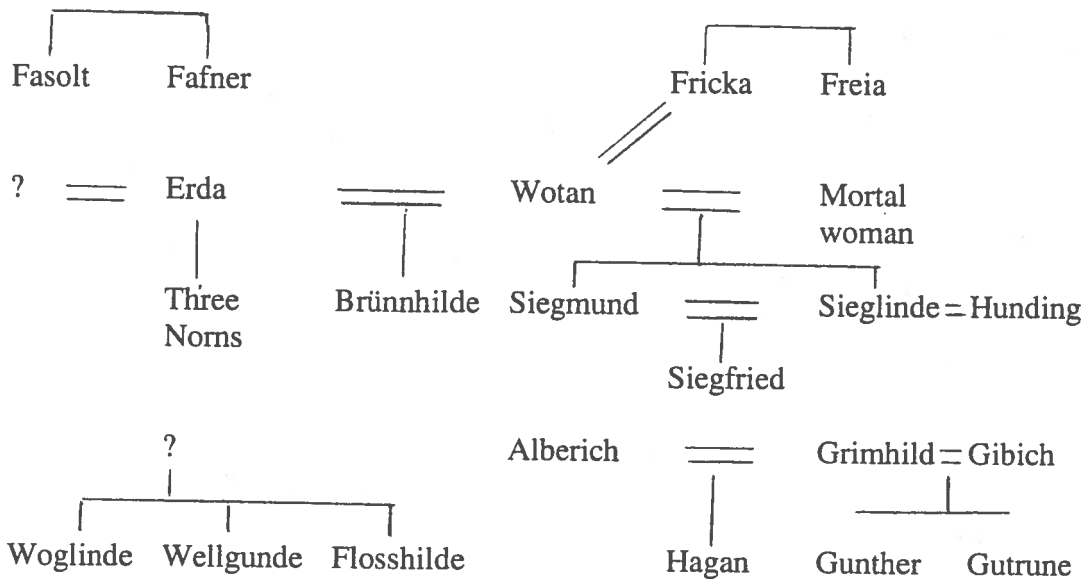
Rheingold Scene 4. Wotan (very resolutely, as though seized by a grandiose idea):

Thus I salute the stronghold,
safe from dread and dismay.

So – grüß' ich die Burg,
sicher vor Bang und Grau'n.

Use of the sword motif: points to his plan for a hero.

Family trees (simplified):



Walküre Act II Scene 2

Brünnhilde: "Father! Father! Tell me what ails thee? With dismay thou art filling thy child".

Wotan:

In my own fetters
I find myself caught: -
I, least free of all things living!

.....
If I let it be spoken aloud,
shall I not loosen
my will's restraining hold?

In eig'ner Fessel
fing ich mich: -
ich unfreierster Aller!

.....
Lass' ich's verlauten,
lös' ich dann nicht
meines Willens haltenden Haft?

Brünnhilde:

To Wotan's will you speak
when you tell me what you will:
who am I
if not your will?

Zu Wotan's Willen sprichst du,
sag'st du mir was du willst:
wer - bin ich,
wär' ich dein Wille nicht?

Wotan:

What in words I reveal to no one,
let it stay
unsspoken for ever:
with myself I commune
when I speak with you. - - -

Was Keinem in Worten ich künde,
unausgesprochen
bleib' es denn ewig:
mit mir nur rath' ich,
red' ich zu dir. - - -

VI Brünnhilde's incarnation

The Nibelung Myth (1848): Brünnhilde as a "divine virgin".

Walküre Act III Scene 3

Wotan:

And so – the god
turns away from you:
so he kisses your godhead away.

Denn so – kehrt
der Gott sich dir ab:
so küßt er die Gottheit von dir.

Porges, *Rehearsing the 'Ring'*, 76: "A remark of Wagner's that has an important bearing on the action must be cited: at the end, 'And so – the god / turns away from you: / so he kisses your godhead away' ('Denn so kehrt der Gott sich dir ab, so küsst er die Gottheit von dir'), one must for the first time see Wotan's spear slipping from his hand!"

In *Götterdämmerung* Act II Scene 4 Brünnhilde is betrayed by Siegfried; she becomes "God forsaken".

Brünnhilde (WagRS 322):

Hallowed gods!
Heavenly rulers!
Was this what you whispered
within your council?
Would you teach me suffering
as none yet suffered?

Heil'ge Götter!
Himmlischer Lenker!
Rauntet ihr dieß
in eurem Rath?
Lehrt ihr mich Leiden
wie keiner sie litt?

VII Siegfried and Brünnhilde as dual redeemer figures

Götterdämmerung Act III Scene 2

Siegfried: "Mich dürstet". Cf. John 19.28 (and Bach St John passion).

Stage direction: "Siegfried has placed himself between Hagan and Gunther". Cf. Luke 23.39-43.

VIII Literature

Bell, Richard H. "Are Wagner's views of 'Redemption' relevant for the Twenty-first Century." Pp. 71-86 in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft: Perspektiven der Wagnerrezeption im 21. Jahrhundert*. Edited by Sven Friedrich. Wagner in der Diskussion 11. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014.

Porges, Heinrich. *Wagner Rehearsing the 'Ring'*. Translated by Robert L. Jacobs. Cambridge: CUP, 1983.

Richard Wagner: Skizzen und Entwürfe zur Ring-Dichtung. Edited by Otto Strobel. Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1930.

Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion. Edited by Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington. London: Thames & Hudson, 2010.

Wotan's spear

f *fp*

mutual recognition

f *p*

BRÜNNH.

War es so ehr - - - los, was ich be-ging, dass mein Ver-
 Was then my crime so dark with dis-hon - - our that it

cresc.

Siegmund's rebellion

(Sie erhebt sich allmählich bis zur knieenden Stellung.)
(The raises herself gradually to a kneeling position.)

geh'n nun die Eh - - re mir raubt?
 robs me of hon - - our for aye?

f *p* *p*

Wotan's frustration

... recognition

sag': Va - ter! Sieh' mir in's Au-ge: schweige den Zorn,
 say: fa - ther! Look in my eyes: si - lence thy wrath,

p espress. *cresc.*

poco accel.

zäh-me die Wuth, und deu-te mir hell die dunk - le Schuld, die mit star - rem Trot - ze dich
 soft - en thy rage, and shew to me clear the hid - denguilt that in cru - el an - ger doth

più cresc. *ff* *dim.* *p* *cresc.*

poco accel.