

Redemption in Wagner's Ring Cycle. Trinity College, Oxford. Richard H Bell. 28.11.2016

### **I The Ring of the Nibelung**

Richard Wagner (1813-83): *Siegfried's Death* (1848). *Ring: Das Rheingold; Die Walküre; Siegfried; Götterdämmerung*. Libretto completed late 1852 (but small changes later made).

### **II: What is Redemption?**

Freia (scene 4 of *Rheingold*) (all *Ring* translations are taken from *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, ed. S. Spencer and B. Millington (London, 1993)):

Does Holda (ie Freia) really seem to you worthy of ransom?	Dünkt euch Holda wirklich der Lösung Werth?
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Wotan exclaims to Freia "You are freed, you are bought back" ("Du bist befreit: wieder gekauft").

Cf. Fricka's earlier words of Freia's "begging silently for redemption (Erlösung)".

*Jesus of Nazareth* (I. Vetter and E. Voss (ed.), *Dokumente und Texte zu unvollendeten Bühnenwerken* (SW 31; Mainz, 2005), 244):

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
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Luther, Shorter Catechism ("Of Redemption")! P. and D.S. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids, repr. 1993), 3:79 (*Bekennnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen, 10th edn 1986, 511)):

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord; who has redeemed me (der mich . . . erlöst hat), a lost and condemned human being, secured and delivered me [even] from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with the holy, precious blood, and with his innocent sufferings and death; in order that I might be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns forever. This is most certainly true".

Schopenhauerian ending (1856):

to the holiest chosen land, free from desire and delusion, the goal of the world's migration, redeemed from reincarnation, the enlightened woman now goes.	nach dem wunsch- und wahnlos heiligstem Wahlland, der Welt-Wanderung Ziel, von Wiedergeburt erlös't, zieht nun die Wissende hin.
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### **III: From what is one redeemed?**

1. Alberich "He tears the gold from the rock with terrible force", and then adds "Impenetrable darkness suddenly descends on all sides".
2. Wotan, the "dauntless god".
3. Rheinmaidens. Bifurcation (Entzweiung).

### **IV: Who is the redeemer figure?**

Sketches of the Ring (October 1848) "[Siegfried] has innocently taken on the guilt of the gods" ("Er hat schuldlos die Schuld der Götter übernommen") (E.R. Haymes, *Wagner's Ring in 1848* (Rochester, NY, 2010), 54-55).

Brünnhilde: "Hagen did not strike him down, no, he marked him for Wotan, to whom I shall now lead him" (*Ring in 1848*, 58-59).

Addressing the "lordly gods" she says "your injustice has been erased. Thank him, the hero, who took your guilt upon himself".

"The fire that burns me will also purify the evil jewel" (*Ring in 1848*, 58-59).

In second version of *Siegfried's death* Brünnhilde:

Blessed atonement	Selige Sühnung,
I saw for the holy,	ersah ich den heiligen
sacredly ageless	heilig ewigen
and only gods!	einigen Göttern!
Rejoice	Freuet euch
in the freest of heroes!	des freiesten Helden!
To the greeting of his brotherly gods	Göttlichem Brudergruß
his bride is bringing him now!	führt seine Braut ihn zu!

*Siegfried* (this verse draft was completed 24 June 1851) Act III Scene 1: Wotan tells Erda that Siegfried "through a free deed / he takes away the guilt / which a god once created" ("durch freie that / tilgt er die schuld / die je ein gott einst schuf"; O. Strobel (ed.), *Richard Wagner: Skizzen und Entwürfe zur Ring-Dichtung* (Munich, 1930), 173)).

Cf. "tilgen" in Luther's bible:

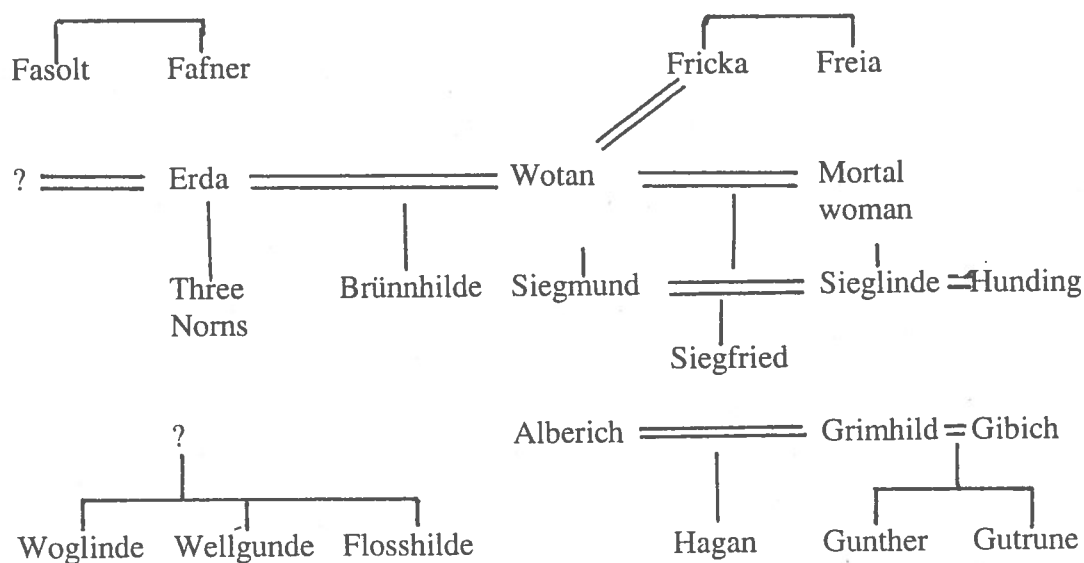
Ps 51.3b; tilge meine Sünde / nach deiner grossen Barmherzigkeit.

Ps 51.11b: Vud tilge alle meine Missethat.

Is 43.25b: Jch /Jch tilge deine Vbertretung vmb meinen Willen.

Final version of *Siegfried* (end of 1852) Wotan tells Erda that Brünnhilde "will work the deed that redeems the world" ("erlösende Weltentat").

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



### VI: Brünnhilde's incarnation.

First sketch for the Ring Wagner describes her as a "divine virgin".

Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek (ed.), *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Carl Emil Doepler Kostümbilder für die Erstaufführung in Bayreuth* (Leipzig, 2012), 39.

Wotan's final words to his beloved daughter:

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.

H. Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing the Ring* (ET; Cambridge, 1983), 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’ one must for the first time see Wotan’s spear slipping from his hand!”

Brünnhilde in her incarnation becomes vulnerable. She becomes “God forsaken”.

*Götterdämmerung* Act II Scene 4:

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 Sacrifice of Siegfried and Brünnhilde

Siegfried: “I thirst” (“Mich dürstet”). Exactly the words of Luther’s translation of John 19.28.

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

Waltraute’s quotation of Wotans’ words to Brünnhilde (*Götterdämmerung* Act I Scene 3):

If she gave back the ring  
to the deep Rhine’s daughters,  
from the weight of the curse  
both god and world would be freed

des tiefen Rheines Töchtern  
gäbe den Ring ~~er~~ wieder zurück,  
von des Fluches Last  
erlös’t wär’ Gott und Welt!

Brünnhilde’s Schlussgesang: “Rest now, rest now, you god” (“Ruhe, Ruhe Du Gott”).  
Possible backgrounds:

1. Hebrews 4.
2. Augustine, *Confessions* I.1: “for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee”.
3. Matthew 11.28-29: “Kompt her zu mir /alle die jr mühselig und beladen seid . . . . So werdet jr Ruge finden fur ewre Seele”.
4. *requiescat in pace* (catholic subjunctive); *requiescit in pace* (protestant indicative). Brünnhilde uses imperative (*requiesce in pace*; ruhe in Frieden).

Waldtraute Act I

ring

woman's worth

raunt' er das Wort: spoke the words: des tie-fen Rheines Töchtern if e'er the ri-ver maidens gä - be den Ring sie wieder zu - rück, win from her hand again the ring,

*pp*

P.

von des Fluches Last from the curse's load er - löst wär Gott und Welt! re - leased were god and world!

Rhinegold

Langsam. Valhalla (3)

*dolcissimo* *pp* *ppp*

P.

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Brünnhilde Act III

bang er-sehn-ter Botschaft send' ich die Beiden nun heim. ti-dings long de-sired, I send now thy messengers home.

*pp* *molto tenuto* *pp*

P. |||

Rhinegold

Ru - he, ru - he, du Gott! Rest thou, rest thou, o god!

*rall.* *riten.*

Valhalla (3)

*rallent.* *sehr langsam. espress.*

*più p* *pp* *più p*