

Wagner's *The Rheingold* Scene One: Theological Reflections on "Creation" and "Fall"
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1. Rheingold, Creation and Innocence

Norse mythology in Elder Edda (the poetic Edda) and Prose Edda: Muspell, with its fire in the south and a land of snow and ice in the north. Great giant Ymir.

Wagner's Prelude in Eb major (cf. Beethoven's Eroica symphony and Emperor concerto). Gen 1:2 "darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters".

Rhinemaiden Flosshilde: "Father warned against such a foe"; "Father told us and bound us over to guard the bright hoard wisely".

Thomas Mann: "It was too much to ask that they should give the name of 'music' to the E flat major triad that shapes the *Rheingold* prelude. Nor indeed *was* it music. It was an acoustic idea: the idea of the beginning of all things".

N. Vazsonyi: this "grandest aquatic example . . . almost biblically suggests: 'In the beginning was the Sound.'"

Ragnarok: "[e]arth will arise from the waves, fertile, green and fair as never before, cleansed of all its sufferings and evil".

T. Grey: "As Woglinde's 'natural' melody (based on the triad and added sixth) emerges from the crest of the prelude's vast tonic surge, the words move tentatively from playful nonsense syllables to articulate speech and back . . . experimentally conjoining the various 'musical' vowel sounds with – aptly enough – the 'liquid' consonants 'L' and the vowel-like 'W'".

'Weia! Waga! / Woge, du Welle, / walle zur Wiege! / Wagalaweia! / Wallala weiala weia!'

Rousseau: "But for moving a young heart, or repelling an unjust aggressor, nature dictates accents, cries, lamentations. There we have the invention of the most ancient words; and that is why the first languages were singable and passionate before they became simple and methodical".

Wagner in *Opera and Drama*: "The most primitive expressive organ of man's inner nature is the language of tone, as the instinctive mode of expressing some inward feeling motivated from without".

Gen 2:11-12 tells of the river Pishon which "flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold, and the gold of that land is good".

Wagner's open letter to Nietzsche (12 June 1872): he had moulded J. Grimm's "Heilawâc" (water drawn from a river or well at some divinely appointed hour) into "Weiwaga" and likens this to the familiar word "Weihwasser", ("consecrated water"); from there he passed on to "its next of kin", "wogen" (to heave) and "wiegen" (to rock), "wellen" (to billow) and "wallen" (to seethe) "and thus built up a root-syllabic melody for my watermaidens, after the analogy of the 'Eia popeia' ['hushabye'] of our nursery-songs".

Wagner to Cosima (17 July 1869): "the movement of the waves in *Das Rheingold* . . . is, so to speak, the world's lullaby".

Nature is manifest in the waves of the Rhine and the waves in turn are manifest in the Rhinemaidens (the names Woglinde and Wellgunde are derived from the waves of the Rhine, "wogen" = "to heave" and Welle "wave").

2. Rhinegold and Cosmology

Adolf Wagner; Fichte, Schelling, Hegel; Weisse.

Kant's view (*Theory of the Heavens*, 1755): whole cosmos was "a vast network of systems and subsystems, all locked into Newtonian regularities".

Wagner (*Opera and Drama*): "Science, which dissected Nature into fragments, without ever finding the real bond between those fragments, could only fortify the Christian view of Nature".

D. Borchmeyer: "The prosaic outlook of life which typifies the modern period, and the banishing of the gods from the phenomenal world (in other words, the displacement of imagination and feeling by intellect, science, politics, and history), were developments which, in Wagner's view, must be laid at the door of Christianity".

3. Rheingold and the Fall

Alberich's "rape" of the Rhinegold ("he tears the gold from the rock with terrible force"). 1848 sketch: "Alberich seized the **clear and noble** Rhine-gold, **abducting** it from the depths of the water . . ."

Rhinemaids: "Why, faint-hearted dwarf, did you fail to bind fast the maiden that you love (das du minnst)?"

Woglinde: "Only the man who forswears love's sway (der Minne Macht), only he who disdains love's delights (der Liebe Lust) can master the magic spell that rounds a ring from the gold".

Wellgunde: "since all that lives must love (was nur lebt will lieben); no one wants to abjure its delights".

Wellgunde: "Least of all he, the lecherous elf: he's almost dying of lustful desire (Liebesgier)!"

Flosshilde speaks of "the flames of his lust (Minne Brunst)".

Wellgunde: "with the frenzy of love (Zorn der Liebe) he sizzles aloud".

Rhinemaids: "love (Minne) has driven him mad".

Alberich: "In every limb a blazing fire burns and glows! Rage and desire (Minne), wild and all-powerful, throw my thoughts into turmoil!"

"Though love can't be gained by force, through cunning might I enforce its delights?"

Still not afraid?

Bangt euch noch nicht?

Then whore in the dark,
you watery brood!

So buhlt nun im Finstern,
feuchtes Gezücht!

Your lights I'll put out,
wrench the gold from the rock
and forge the avenging ring:

Das Licht löscht ich euch aus,
entreiße dem Riff das Gold,
schmiede den rächenden Ring:

so hear me, you waters: -

denn hör' es die Fluth -

thus I lay a curse on love!

so verfluch' ich die Liebe!

Hesiod *Works and Days* 90-95: "For previously the tribes of men used to live upon the earth entirely apart from evils, and without grievous toil and distressful diseases, which give death to men. [For in misery mortals grow old at once.] But the woman removed the great lid from the storage jar with her hands and scattered all its contents abroad - she wrought baneful evils for human beings".

Nestor in *Iliad* 1.260-65: "Ere now have I consorted with warriors that were better men than ye, and never did they set me at naught. Such warriors have I never since seen, nor shall see, as Peirithous was and Dryas, shepherd of the host, and Caeneus and Exadius and godlike Polyphemus, and Theseus, son of Aegeus, peer of the immortals".

1.271-72: "with them could no man fight of all mortals that now are upon the earth".

