

Richard Wagner's *Jesus of Nazareth* and the *Ring of the Nibelung* III  
 Love and Death and Immortality: A Fundamental Wagnerian Constellation  
 VTBS 3 August 2017

## 1. Introduction

Law, freedom and love. Wagner's 'situation ethics' (cf. J. Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 1966).

## 2. Death, Immortality and Divinity

Not a Redemption *from* death but of a reconciliation *with* death.

Marked verse from 1 Cor. 15: 1 Cor. 15:24-26, 31-32b, 36, 46, 55-56.

Death and (sexual) love is an emptying of 'egoism' ('egoismus').

Wagner associates immortality with egoism. 'The last ascension of the individual life into the life of the whole is Death, which is the last and most definite upheaval (aufhebung) of egoism' (PW 8:313; DTB 255).

1 Cor. 15:36: 'Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies' (NRSV) (Luther: 'Du Narr / das du seest / wird nicht lebendig / es sterbe denn').

PW 8:313; DTB 255: 'The plant grows from *one* germ (keime), which is itself: each evolution (entwicklung) of the plant is a manifolding (ver<f>vielfältigung) of itself in bloom and seed, and this process of life is a ceaseless progress unto death'.

PW 8:313; DTB 255: 'Its death is the self-offering of every creature in favour of the maintenance and enrichment of the whole'.

PW 8:313 (modified); DTB 255: 'the creature that fulfils this offering with consciousness, by attuning its free will to the necessity of this offering, becomes a co-creator, – in that it further devotes its free will to the greatest possible moral import of the sacrifice, – it becomes God himself.'

Sacrifice is the essential element in divinity; essential element of sacrifice is love. 'Love is the most imperative utterance of life: but as, materially speaking, in it the ego's life-stuff is voided (entäussert), so in it takes also place the moral process of a riddance of egoism (PW 313; DTB 255). Phil 2.7:

'Sondern eussert sich selbs.'

Loge (WagRS 117):

They're hurrying on towards their end,  
 though they think they will last for ever.

Ihrem Ende eilen sie zu,  
 die so stark im Bestehen sich wähnen.

Loge (WagRS 118):

Hear what Wotan wishes of you:  
 if the gold no longer  
 gleams on you maidens,  
 blissfully bask henceforth

Hört, was Wotan euch wünscht.  
 Glänzt nicht mehr  
 euch Mädchen das Gold,  
 in der Götter neuem Glanze

in the gods' new-found splendour!	sonnt euch selig fortan!
Rheinmaidens ( <i>WagRS</i> 118):	
Trusty and true	Traulich und treu
it is here in the depths alone:	ist's nur in der Tiefe:
false and fated	falsch und <b>feig</b>
is all that rejoices above!	ist was dort oben sich freut!

Note that 'feig' often translated 'cowardly'; but see MHG 'veige' meaning 'doomed to die'.

Wotan (*Siegfried* Act III, Scene 1; *WagRS* 257): 'Fear of the end of the gods / no longer consumes me / now that my wish so wills it!'

Waltraute (*Götterdämmerung* Act I Scene 3; *WagRS* 303):

Holda's [i.e. Freia's] apples	Holda's Äpfel
[Wotan] does not touch:	rührt er nicht an:
wonder and fear	Staunen und Bangen
hold the gods in thrall.	binden starr die Götter.

Hegel, *Phenomenology* (tr. A.V. Miller), 325: 'the first is the *Absolute Being*, Spirit that is in and for itself in so far as it is the simple eternal *substance*. But in the actualization of its Notion, in being Spirit, it passes over into *being-for-another*, its self-identity becomes an *actual*, *self-sacrificing* absolute Being; it becomes a *self*, but a mortal, perishable self. Consequently, the third moment is the return of this alienated self and of the humiliated substance into their original simplicity; only in this way is substance represented as Spirit.'

Wagner: 'through God' Mary gave Christ to the world as redeemer (*PW* 8:331; *DTB* 263).

### 3. Immortality and Birth

*PW* 8:318; *DTB* 257: 'The most complete divestment of my Me (meines Ich's) takes place through death; - for inasmuch as I completely upheave my Me (mein Ich), thus make it naught, I mount completely to the Universal (das allgemeine), which henceforth is something substantial (RHB complete) (das nun vollständig etwas ist) and stands in the same relation to me through my death as I stood to it through my birth.'

Cf George Santayana (1863-1952) (*The Life of Reason*): 'the fact of being born is a poor augury of immortality.'

### 4. Love and Death

Gratitude is the love of a child 'to its begetters, nourishers and bringers up' (*PW* 314; *DTB* 257). In contrast to gratitude is 'sexual love' ('geschlechtsliebe'): 'The first act of surrender-of-oneself (entäusserung) is sexual love (geschlechtsliebe); 'it is a giving away of ones' own vital force: in sexual love, and the family, man multiplies himself physically through the physical necessity of his death, as with the plant.' Man would never die if he did not multiply himself through procreation 'but

devoted himself to his procreative force, so to say, to the constant reconstruction of his own body'. This however would be 'the most complete and irredeemable egoism.' This ultimate egoism 'lies at the bottom of the monk's renunciation' (*PW* 8:315; *DTB* 255).

Erda to Wotan (*WagRS* 112):

All things, that are – end.	Alles was ist, endet.
A day of darkness	Ein düst'rer Tag
dawns for the gods:	dämmert den Göttern:
I counsel you: shun the ring!	dir rath' ich, meide den Ring!

Wagner to Röckel (25/26 January 1854): 'Only what changes is *real*: to be real, to live – what this means is to be created, to grow, to bloom, to wither and to die; without the necessity of death, there is no possibility of life. . . . Only as *man* and *woman* can we *human beings* really love, whereas all other forms of love are mere derivatives of it.'

*PW* 8:315; *DTB* 255: 'Death therefore amounts, for the unit, to the giving-up himself in favour of the multiplying of himself' ('Der tod wird somit dem einzelnen zum aufgeben seiner selbst zu gunsten der vervielfältigung seiner selbst').

*PW* 8:315; *DTB* 255-56: '[i]f the relationship of the family is pure, if death comes naturally and in advanced old age, with a numerous existing progeny, then death—we see in patriarchal life (patriarchalleben) – has never seemed bitter or terrible.'

*PW* 8:315; *DTB* 256: '[I]n Universal Love-of-man, as taught by Jesus, reconciliation with death is established for all time, since egoism finds through that love its most complete contentment in its most complete repeal (seine vollständigste befriedigung in der vollständigsten aufhebung).'

*PW* 316; *DTB* 256: 'But Jesus further teaches us to break through the barriers of patriotism and find our amplest satisfaction in the weal of all the human race.' Hence 'the ampler do I make the satisfaction of universal love to man, so much the more do I destroy my egoism, through ascent into the Universal (das allgemeine); and the completest – as also the most necessary – annihilation of this me-aloneness (dieses einzelnen Ichsein's) is reached in death, the giving up alike of life and self (selbst).'

*PW* 8:317; *DTB* 256: 'in that man shapes, reacts and begets, he annihilates himself, and his life is therefore a continual slaying of himself for the benefit of something new, enriched and diversified, that issue from him'. He reiterates that death is 'the upheaval of all unproductive egoism, a making place for life (das aufheben eines unproductiven egoismus, somit ein raum geben an das leben). If we are conscious of this, and act upon that consciousness, we are even God himself, namely the energising of eternal love. . . . Death is accordingly the most perfect deed of love: it becomes such to us through our consciousness of a life consumed in love.'

## 5 Love, Death and Atonement

## 6 Conclusions

Valhalla (1)

4

340

*ff* *più ff*

power of the gods → P. P. P. P. P. P.

twilight of the gods

*poco dim.* Valhalla (3) *poco f* *cresc.* Siegfried *f marc.*

*ff* Siegfried

Helle Flammen scheinen in dem Saale der Götter aufzuschlagen.  
(Bright flames appear to seize on the hall of the gods.)

(Als die Götter von den Flammen gänzlich verhüllt sind, fällt der Vorhang.)  
(As the gods become entirely hidden by the flames, the curtain falls.)  
Etwas zurückhaltend.

*Brennkilde* → *p* *poco f* *dim.*

*dim.* *p* *bequest* *bequest* *poco f*

P. P. P. P. P. P. P.

*a tempo.* *p* *cresc.* *ff dim.*

P.