

Inside Opera: Opera North's Ring Cycle – 8 June 2016

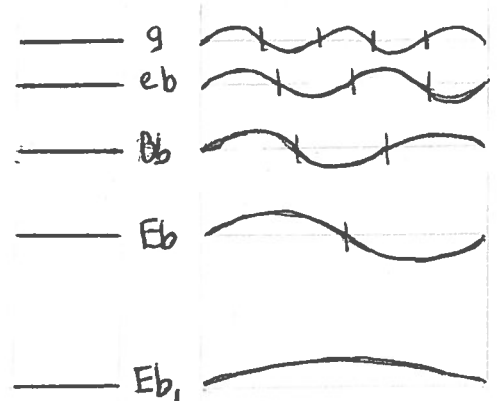
Nature, law, sexual ethics, the state, and love: a central constellation in  
Wagner's Ring

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**I. Looking back to *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre***

N. Vazsonyi, *Wagner* (2010), 138, on Prelude to *Rheingold*: this “grandest aquatic example . . . almost biblically suggests: ‘In the beginning was the Sound.’”

Harmonic series:



Evolution in nature.

Hegel and Schelling; telos = goal (teleology).

Evolution in culture. Woglinde:

Weia! Waga!  
Woge, du Welle,  
Walle zur Wiege!  
Wagalaweia!  
Wallala weiala weia!

Weia! Waga!”  
Heave, you wave  
wave around the cradle!  
Wagalaweia!  
Wallala weiala weia!

Alliteration (Stabreim). Contrast Lohengrin:

Nie sollst du mich befragen,  
noch Wissens Sorge tragen,  
woher ich kam der Fahrt,  
noch wie mein Nam' und Art!

Never shall you ask me  
nor trouble yourself to know,  
whence I journeyed,  
what my name is, or what my origin!

Wagner, *Opera and Drama* (PW 2:271): soft consonants: G, L, D, W; “energetic consonants”: K, R, P, T; “strengthened” consonants: Sch, Sp, St, Pr (see e.g. Alberich “Stör ich eu'r Spiel, / wenn staunend ich still hier steh'?”)

J.J. Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (1753): “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, *Opera and Drama* (PW 2:224): “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.”

Letter to Friedrich Nietzsche (12 June 1872; PW 5:297):

1. likens “Wagalaweia” to “Weihwasser” (“consecrated water”).
2. Nature is innocent (cf. “Eia popeia”).

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

Irenaeus on Genesis 2 (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 12): “the man was a little one, and his discretion still undeveloped, wherefore also he was easily misled by the deceiver.”

In the Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* the first Norn tells of this “dauntless god.”

Desecration of nature and culture.

1. Law of the Jews: Jesus “thunders against the Pharisees and the Law, against oppression and injustice” (*Jesus of Nazareth*, PW 8:291).

Wagner’s Jesus says “man and wife are one flesh, God (Love) hath knit them into one . . . So it was from the beginning, - i.e. this is the law of Nature. The first sin against this law would thus be a marriage without love . . .” (*Jesus of Nazareth*, PW 8:319, alluding to Genesis 2.24; Matthew 19.4-6).

Wagner as a Marcionite. His disdain for the Old Testament law is a clue to the nature of his anti-Judaism (that is his criticism of the Jewish *religion*) and his anti-semitism (his criticism of the Jewish *people*).

2. Law of the Roman imperial power.

Wagner at the barricades of Dresden with August Röckel and Mikael Bakunin.

## II Looking forward to *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*

Siegfried as anarchist (Bakunin).

*Siegfried* Act III Scene 2:

Mach’ dich jetzt fort!	Be off with you now!
Sonst könntest du leicht	Or else you could easily
das and’re auch noch verlieren	lose the other one, too

The Ring as opposition of law (represented by Wotan’s spear) and nature (represented by Siegfried); or opposition between law and love.

Love between Siegmund and Sieglinde, although flouting “law”, is in harmony with nature.

*Walküre* Act I: the darkness of Hunding’s hut is overcome by the full moon which shines in (Siegmund: “Spring shines into the hall!”)

This could be seen as 1. “Easter” moment (spring and full moon); 2. return to nature.

Winterstürme wichen	Winterstorms have waned
dem Wonnemond,	before Maytime,
in mildem Lichte	in gentle light
leuchtet der Lenz;	Spring is aglow;
auf <b>linden</b> Lüften	on <b>gentle</b> breezes,
leicht und lieblich,	soft and lovely,
Wunder webend	working wonders
er sich <b>wiegt</b> .	he <b>rocks</b> himself.

“lind” = gentle (“Woglinde” from wogen (“to billow”) and lind (“gentle”)); “wiegen” = “to rock” (cf “Wiege” = “cradle”).

PW *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*. Translated by William Ashton Ellis. 8 vols. New York: Broude Brothers, 1892-99.