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 erlö sung 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 Welttat”) (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):

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  Fasolt  Fafner
    |
  ? — Erda — Wotan — Mortal woman
  |
 Three Norns Brünnhilde Siegmund — Sieglinde = Hunding
  |
                Siegfried
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  ?
  |
Woglinde Wellgunde Flosshilde
  |
              Alberich
  |
            Grimhild = Gibich
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**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!

\[\ldots\]

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

Brünnhilde:

- 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
- unspoken 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!
Himmlicher Lenker!
Raunet 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


VIII Literature


BRÜNNH.

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

(Sie erhebt sich allmählich bis zur knei-
(Thus raises herself gradually to a kneeling posi-

geh’n nun die Eh-re mir rauft?
me of hon-our for aye?

sag: Vater! Sieh’ mir in’s Au-ge:
say: fa-ther! Look in my eyes:

schweige den Zorn,
si-lence thy wrath,

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-den-guilt that in cru-el an-ger doth

poco accel.