WAGNER AND SCHOPENHAUER

A Closer Look

Milton E. Brener
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All Illustrations were taken from Wikimedia Common and Many of the art works were by such renowned Wagnerian artists as Arthur Rackham 1867-1939 and Ferdinand Leeke (1859-1923)
Wagner] regarded his true career as an artist to have dated from the time he stopped trying to lead from the head and, instead to put his trust in his intuitions, *even when he did not understand them* (emphasis by Bryan Magee).

Practically all authors of note writing about Richard Wagner have agreed that the works of Arthur Schopenhauer, the 19th Century German philosopher, had a huge effect on his artwork. The influence has, I believe, been vastly overstated. The most detailed and scholarly exposition of that alleged influence has been that of Bryan Magee, most particularly in his book *The Tristan Chord*. Though I disagree with much of it, there are many valid insights. By laying bare the basis for what, by most others, are so often only opinions and conclusions advanced as facts, he affords the opportunity for analysis. This aspect of the study constitutes the bulk of this book.

Magee himself seems unimpressed with both the numbers and reputations of the authors who pay homage to Schopenhauer and his allegedly great influence on Wagner. He states that the earliest writers on Wagner did indeed study the philosopher’s writings and understand them. He continues however:

But after their day . . . scarcely any of the well-known writers about Wagner had any knowledge of his philosophy. What this fact led most of them to do was acknowledge the magnitude of his influence on Wagner without attempting to go into the question of what it consisted in. Even Ernest Newman did this. I, personally, doubt whether he ever read Schopenhauer properly—certainly nothing he ever says on the subject would require him to have done so.

From my own reading I think that in this, Magee is entirely correct. Yet Newman to this day is generally considered, justifiably I believe, as the ultimate authority on Richard Wagner.¹

¹ *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, in 2009 described Newman as the most celebrated music critic in the first half of the 20th Century. It
Related to it is another aspect of the analyses of the operas, namely the extent to which some of the texts, far from being influenced by Schopenhauer foretell to remarkable degrees 20th and 21st century thinking. The ideas in those texts were either not at all on the horizon of 19th Century intellectual thinking or ran decidedly contrary to it. Wagner’s ideas were not usually overtly expressed, but lie embedded, in my opinion unmistakably so, in the texts of his operas. Very few authors however have shown interest in that aspect of his works.

Justifiably, Wagner is best known and remembered for his music. Also well recognized are his skills, his genius one could rightly say, for drama and poetry. It is not my purpose to discuss in any broad terms what it is about either the poetry or the drama that render them so vital to the totality. I focus instead, on the subjects which, I believe, are illustrative of his thinking, consciously or otherwise, from what are known as his mature operas, meaning those whose ideas were conceived on or after age 32, in 1845. The earliest of the mature operas to be performed was his Tristan and Isolde in 1865.

The aspects of the book, concerning Wagner as an original thinker, one who’s thinking, or intuition, prefigure ideas that later ultimately came into their own is however a subsidiary to the major purpose of this book. That purpose is to identify the true influences of Arthur Schopenhauer on Richard Wagner, and to lay bare what I see as invalidity, or exaggeration.

Much of this book’s text, therefore, will be concerned with analysis of Bryan Magee’s conclusion, which he claims show a very heavy influence of Wagner’s art. There are basically two aspects to such claims and two broad areas of influence, namely the story, or parts or aspects of it, and, secondly, the music. I believe that by far the most valid of the claims concerns the music of Tristan and Isolde. His book is named “The Tristan Chord,” and subtitled “Wagner and Philosophy.” Comparatively little space is taken up in Magee’s book with what is widely known in the scholarly music community as “The Tristan Chord,” a chord opening that opera which is left unresolved as is much of the remainder of the music until the very end. It is extremely effective in keeping the listener

further commented that his four volume The Life of Richard Wagner was still unsurpassed although research has uncovered much that is new. In his obituary in 1959, the New York Times said that it was “likely to remain the standard biography of Wagner in the English language.”
on edge until the end. The broad subject matter of the book, and the relative brevity of the treatment of that chord and that unique style considered, one might feel that the title and subtitle should be reversed.

Perhaps. But considering the relative importance of the Tristan Chord and the strong, if not definitive, proof that Wagner was influenced in it by Schopenhauer's writings, which will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, the title and subtitles seem perfectly in order. Aside from the philosopher's influence on the music of Tristan, there is little else that is anywhere nearly so clear or convincing.

I believe that what analysis ultimately shows is that the similarities with Schopenhauer's writings found in Wagner's works, other than with the music of Tristan, are often very conscious and deliberate on Wagner's part. The instinctive and deeply felt aspects of Wagner's texts, a big majority of the total, are usually not at all Schopenhauerian, but come from his own unconscious and his own instincts. The two operas where the philosopher's influence on the texts is most pervasive are Tristan and Isolde and Parsifal. In Tristan, the Schopenhauerian influence, highly deformed from the start, is thrown to the winds following Tristan's third act extensive and dramatic episode of self-analysis. The text of Parsifal, showing influence from start to finish, makes nothing quite as clear as it does the difficult aspects inherent in Schopenhauer's philosophy. The work is saved by the overarching magnificence of the music.

A word about translations: I have in a number of instances translated into English original German opera texts which, of course, are always in poetry. When one translates poetry, something has to give. If the translation is for use in performance, the meter and length of the lines are all important. Likewise is the use of rhyme or alliteration. Tristan and Isolde and Parsifal, for instance, contain many instances of rhyme. The four operas of The Ring of the Nibelung rely more on alliteration for poetic effect. In translation the thoughts should remain the same, but the expressions of them might necessarily differ significantly from the original. I believe that it requires poetic skills to translate into poetry the poetry of another language.

A number of very skillfully crafted poetic translations of that nature have been done with the texts of these operas. When, as is the case with the following chapters however, it is the content of the drama that is of prime importance, those elements, meter, length and poetic effects must be secondary.
My concern in these texts being the thought, the mindset, of their author, I have used my own translations, and tried to come as close as possible to the original thoughts and expressions. Further, I have no talent for poetry, and therein lies a second reason for mine being more literal than most others. It should be understood however that 'literal' is never a word for word proposition. The differences in common usages and manners of expression in different languages would often make such a literal translation very awkward, if not unintelligible, to speakers of the second language.

About German names beginning with a 'w', which in German is pronounced like the English 'v' I have used a 'v'. For 'Wagner,' I still spell with the 'w,' almost everyone interested in him knowing how his name is pronounced. The same is true of Wotan. I have used the 'v' for other names which cannot be translated: Valkyrie, Valtraute, Volsung, Valhalla etc.

A word also about the summary of The Ring of the Nibelung in chapter 7: It seemed to me that one not familiar with the story could be quite confused by chapter 8 which undertakes an analysis of the tetralogy, as it is often called, and some major contradictions in it. I needed to furnish enough of the story in chapter 8 to make the thesis intelligible, but not so much that it would distract from the points I wished to make. I am afraid my skills may not have been sufficient for that task, hence I preceded it with a separate chapter summarizing the entire Ring. For those already familiar with the story of The Ring, chapter 7 could well be ignored, except to the extent that the illustrations are found of interest.

For those not already familiar it might be best to read it before chapter 8, or at least to use it as a reference if becoming confused by the narrative in that later chapter. The typical summaries in opera programs are necessarily inadequate, and most of the adequate ones in the Wagner or other opera literatures are for the cognoscenti, often heavy on musical examples,

The Victors, chapter 12, is included though never completed nor set at all to music, or even to poetic text. Hardly anybody except students of Wagner's life have ever heard of it and few of those who have are aware of much of the content. There are however enough of Wagner's ideas in the prose draft and letters about it to see clearly Wagner's own thoughts on the subject matter, women's equality, which are, it will be seen, diametrically opposed to those of Schopenhauer. Wagner's views were quite unpopular when he wrote them.
The German texts on which I have relied are, I believe, among the most authoritative and accurate in comporting with Wagner's originals as first performed. They are taken from a volume entitled Richard Wagner: Die Musikdramen, copyrighted in 1971 by Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, Hamburg. It contains the texts of each of the operas. The softback edition I have used was published in 1981, by Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag. GmbH. & Co. KG, Munich.

It is stated in each edition that "The wording of the text follows the wording in the respective full score, as does the text between them, and the origin and production history of each work. It was done from the beginning in close cooperation with the Richard Wagner Archive in Bayreuth."

And finally, the illustrations: Most of them are sketches done long ago, some for the original performance of The Ring in 1876. They are highly romanticized. For these mythological tales, they should be. The performances themselves until the 1970s seemed to try to follow Wagner's stage directions and his imaginative settings for the ancient mythologies. Since then however, producers and designers have shed all restraint from such original directions and the nature of the stories. They seem to see the operas as opportunities to let their own imaginations run wild—philosophical or political preaching, and modern settings and modern dress, that often seen at war with the stories and the words. Many thought it was a passing fad. But it has been over 40 years now, and traditional settings have all but disappeared. Enjoy the fanciful sketches from long ago, reproduced here; you may never see their likes again.

Milton E. Brener
New York City, March, 2014
CHAPTER 1

The Formative years of Richard Wagner

The year 1813 was a good one for opera. It was the birth year of two of its giants: Richard Wagner on the 22nd of May in the Jewish section (yes, the Jewish section) of Leipzig, known as the Brühl, meaning "a swampy meadow"; Giuseppe Verdi in Le Roncole, in the province of Parma, Italy, on the 10th of October.

Wagner, almost alone among the giants of opera, wrote all of his own libretti, but except for the subject of the union between words and music, the analysis of the content of these texts has, sadly, been treated only skin deep. For specific purposes we will turn to that neglected subject shortly. But, first, for reasons that will hopefully be clear in time, it may be helpful to know something of his early life.

Five months after Wagner's birth, the Battle of Leipzig, fought between Napoleon's retreating army and the pursuing Russians and their allies, occurred very near that city. It resulted in the death of many men and horses, and the horses were thrown in the river that provided drinking water to the city residents. It resulted in what is often described as widespread typhus, though it was more likely typhoid fever. Wagner's father, Carl Frederick Wagner, was one of the victims. Following his death a month after the battle, the infant was raised in the home of his uncle in Dresden.

There still lingers some controversy about Wagner's paternity. One, Ludwig Geyer, had been a frequent guest in the Wagner home, including many periods during the absence of Carl Frederick on official business. Nine months after the death of Carl Frederick, Geyer and Johanna, Richard's mother, were married. There has been speculation beginning in Wagner's lifetime that Geyer was Richard's father and further that Geyer was Jewish. There have been many Jewish persons and also many non-Jewish anti-Wagner persons, who would love to have found proof
that this arch anti-Semite was Jewish. However thorough research into
the ancestry of his mother, Johanna, his legal father, Carl Frederick, and
his suspected father, Geyer, reveals no trace of Jewish ancestry in any of
them.¹ For many, that took the wind out of their sails and ended the
controversy.

But to others, there is a more important reason for the controversy,
involving the subject of genetics. Neither Johanna nor Carl Frederick
showed the slightest spark of aesthetic creativity or significant talent.
Wagner’s father was a clerk with the local police. Like almost all Germans
in those times, he played the piano with satisfactory adeptness, but
otherwise showed no talent for music or any other of the arts. Ludwig
Geyer, on the contrary, showed considerable interest in, and talent for, so
many of the aesthetic areas in which Wagner showed such genius.

Geyer’s life was devoted to the theater. He had a traveling theater
company and was involved in stage craft, acting, singing, the playing of
musical instruments, and writing poetry. He was also a painter, which
Richard Wagner was not. It should be mentioned however that one or
more of Wagner’s four sisters were talented singers and actresses, the most
talented being the eldest, Rosalie, whose father was unquestionably Carl
Frederick. Many hunger for an answer to this question, but it is, alas,
probably unanswerable at this point.

So we turn to other things. Wagner tells us in his autobiography, that
in his bed in his uncle’s home in Dresden he slept in a four-poster, where
he perpetually saw pictures of high-born ladies with hair and faces heavily
made up, and he has described how, during the night, the macabre
pictures came to life. Worse, in the room alone, lifeless objects often
seemed also to come to life, and to move and speak, causing him to shriek
in sheer terror. Glazed beer bottles were lined up along the stairs, which
his overworked imagination saw as laughing devils as they constantly
changed shapes and taunted him.

In addition to the four sisters there was one older brother. It is the
sisters and Wagner’s relationships with them that may be worth some
examination, however cursory. Three were older, one, a half-sister,
was younger. All of them doted on him to the exclusion, it seems,
of the brother. It was Richard who was their object of attention, vocal
admiration, and encouragement. It was the half-sister, Cäcilie, the
youngest, with whom he spent most of his time in childhood, but his
favorite was the oldest sister, Rosalie. In his autobiography he described
his relationship with her as one of purity and sincerity that “could vie
with the noblest form of friendship between men and women.” Sadly she
died in childbirth at age 33; Wagner was then 23.

Those relationships may be of some relevance in his later life, as he
seemed to crave, to a high degree, feminine approval. Some biographers
speak of his extra-marital liaisons as evidence of unbridled sexual appetite.
Closer examination shows that approval of him as man and artist were
important factors. For those who did not understand him, whether male
or female, he had little use.

Geyer died when Richard was eight. In his teen years he was back
in Leipzig, and attending concerts. Wagner tells us in his autobiography
that the sounds of the orchestra warming up threw him into a mystical
excitement. He heard the drawn out sounds of the oboe as a call from
the dead with the purpose of calling forth the other instruments from the
world of spirits.

He started his creative career as a dramatist, not a composer, and
wrote at least one play, at age 13, called Leulbald, which would never have
been heard of today had he not become the great composer he was. He
turned to music at age seventeen, and his instructor, Christian Weinlig,
after several months, said there was nothing more he could teach his
young pupil. That was the end of Wagner’s formal music training. The
printed words of the instructor’s comment, without context, or facial or
voice expressions, could be taken as praise for the pupil’s innate ability,
or disdain for his refusal to follow instructions. I have often wondered
which. Weinlig’s high praise to the youngster’s mother, and refusal to
accept any money for the instruction do not completely eliminate the
doubt.

Whichever it was, he wrote an orchestral piece which he termed
“New Overture” that was performed on Christmas day 1830 by the
Leipzig orchestra. Wagner had forgotten to bring his ticket to the
performance, and had to convince the impressed doorkeeper that he
was indeed the composer of a piece on the program. Unfortunately, the
audience found more humor in the piece than aesthetic pleasure. The
fledgling composer had inserted in one section after every fourth bar, a
pointless fifth bar including a loud blast of the kettle-drums on the second
beat. The audience soon got the drift of the piece’s redundant structure
and joined in with the drum beat with their feet or hands, in addition to
the laughter. Upon leaving the theater Wagner tried to slip out incognito
but came face to face with the now flustered doorman. Wagner tells us he
felt that the look on the man’s face would never go away.
As a conductor at small opera houses he did better, doing stints as music director in the towns of Würzburg and Magdeburg. He was applying for a position with a theater company, whose home was Magdeburg, but spending the summer in the small town of Bad Lauschstädt, where he met and instantly fell in love with a woman four years his senior. She was Minna Planer, an actress who was by several accounts strikingly beautiful, and was meeting with considerable success on stage. Though he planned to reject the employment, he immediately changed his mind and accepted. He was 21 at the time.

It was a stormy relationship to begin with. Wagner was extraordinarily jealous, whether justifiably or not, we could not now know. Minna left her position in Magdeburg and accepted employment in Königsberg, today known as Kaliningrad, on the north coast of the German kingdom of Prussia. It is possible she took the employment to get away from him. He thereupon bombarded her with lengthy overwrought letters of expressions of undying love. Wagner, unsuccessfully seeking employment in Berlin, accepted a junior position in Königsberg to be with her. They were married there on November 24th, 1836 at the Tragheim Church.

She soon realized that his profligate habits would lead only to their ruin. At the end of May the following year she deserted him with a businessman named Dietrich, taking her illegitimate daughter, Natalie, with her. The child had been fathered by a captain of the Royal Saxon Guard When Minna was but fifteen. Minna was sent to relatives in a rural area to hide her pregnancy, and Natalie was continually passed off as Minna’s sister. Not until late in life did Natalie learn her true relationship to Minna. Wagner found Minna in her parents’ home in Dresden and tried to persuade her to return. There was a short period of reconciliation but she ran away again, with Dietrich and Natalie.

Faced with the infidelity, Wagner gave up and took employment as music director in the town of Riga in Latvia, then under Russian domination. He also took steps for a divorce, but Minna, for whatever reason, asked her spendthrift husband for permission to return to him. He accepted her back. For Minna it was a tragic mistake; she had thrown away her last chance for any lasting happiness. She made a stage appearance in Riga on April 18, 1839 in the title role of Schiller’s Maria Stuart and, as fate would have it, that was to be the last stage performance of her life.
He ran up debts in Riga as he had everywhere he had lived. His passport had been confiscated to prevent his departure, but Herr Wagner was not one to be so easily obstructed. With the help of an aging and wealthy admirer, one Abraham Möller from Königsberg, he, Minna, in the first stages of pregnancy, and Wagner's sheep dog named Robber, made it out. Natalie was not staying with them. Wagner, as opposed to his feelings for many humans, loved all dogs; owned one all his life, and insisted on taking this one with them, Minna's objections notwithstanding. Their goal was Paris and Wagner's imagined fame and wealth awaiting him there.

The escape, in late July, 1839, involved Möller bribing a number of Cossack guards, and Wagner and Minna dashing for several hundred yards in darkness to cross the Russo-Prussian border. They were there picked up by Möller in his coach; he had easily crossed the border with his passport. They had next to ride over alternately bumpy and muddy roads to the port of Pillau, as the main road to that seaport town lay through Königsberg, of which Wagner wanted no part. For the same reason he was wanted in Riga, he was a wanted man there and almost every other place he had set foot. Möller had booked passage for them on a ship headed for London, from which the Wagners would proceed to Paris, in ways not then determined.

The decrepit wagon rented for the ride to Pillau overturned throwing Wagner in a heap of manure. Minna landed on solid ground, losing the child she was carrying and possibly her child bearing capacity as well. They sought help in a nearby farm house, though Wagner was first refused admission due to the noxious odor he exuded from the manure. The next test involved crawling through mud and high weeds to a small boat in which they were rowed to a two-masted merchant schooner named the Thetis, with a crew of seven. It had been arranged by Möller.

The trip was supposed to last eight days but took over three weeks. Delay was caused first by an unusual calm in the Baltic, followed by a violent west wind upon rounding the Skagerrack. It made both of the Wagners miserably seasick. Wagner additionally had the chore of keeping under control his companion Robber who took a dislike to one of the crew members, a gentleman named Koske. The canine might have sensed that Koske was drinking too much brandy, which Wagner assures us was the case, the cask being kept under Wagner's bunk.

The captain finally had the ship turn north to seek shelter among the tiny islands that lay along the southeast coast of Norway. They anchored
at one of them, named Boroy, on July 29th at the town of Sandwike. Wagner credits that part of the journey, and the shouted instructions of the seamen, with the inspiration for his first opera destined to endure into the current repertory, *The Flying Dutchman*, later composed by him in Paris. His two prior operas, preceding this voyage, have largely disappeared from the boards and are played only occasionally as curiosity pieces.

A slight detour from the mainline of our story may be instructive. The earliest opera, *Die Feen (The Fairies)* was never produced during Wagner's lifetime. The second of the two, *Das Liebesverbot (The Ban on Love)* suffered typical Wagnerian complications in its premiere in Königsberg with the 23 year old composer conducting. The lead tenor forgot the words and had to improvise. A planned second performance, attended by only three persons, had to be cancelled before the curtain went up due to a fist fight between the lead tenor and the lead soprano's husband, who suspected the tenor of paying too much attention to his wife. A third opera, *Rienzi*, was completed after arriving in Paris and was popular in Germany for some period of time before gradually disappearing from the standard repertory.

To return to our present adventure: After two days in Norway, the Thetis again set sail and met with storms in the North Sea that dwarfed the earlier one in the Baltic. Minna was terrified. She begged her husband to tie her to him so that they might drown together. The crew, apparently needing someone to blame for their misfortune, settled on the pair of stowaway passengers who then had to contend with their curses and accusatory looks. One of their two trunks was washed overboard, taking half of their belongings with it.

They finally arrived in London where they spent eight days, then travelled across the Chanel by steamer, followed by two miserable years in Paris. He there wrote the text and music for his *Flying Dutchman*, but could not get it produced by the Paris Opera. Nonetheless, his unbounded optimism about his future success led him, as was his custom, to spend money he didn’t have, and he finally languished a number of weeks in a debtor’s prison.

The couple, just as they had been previously, was largely supported in Paris by Minna who undertook a succession of menial jobs. She was now also obliged to work frantically to secure his release by borrowing money from friends. Wagner shared his Bohemian life in Paris with three friends whom he later described in a letter to his sister Cäcilie as a “cherished *trefoil.*” One was Samuel Lehrs, seven years older than Wagner,
a philologist and scholar of philosophy. He was usually even more strapped for funds than the other three, including Wagner who at least had a working wife. Another was Ernst Kietz, an artist, and the third was Gottfried Anders, employed by the National Library.

Lehrs developed tuberculosis, then called consumption, possibly from walking the streets of the unbearable Parisian summer. It persisted through the winter, during which Wagner found his friend’s room to be icy cold.

The following spring, in April 1842, the Wagners left Paris for Dresden where much interest had been shown in producing his *Rienzi*. Parting from his friends was emotionally overwhelming, Wagner wrote, but that was obviously truer concerning Lehrs, whom he knew he would never see again. In his autobiography he credited Lehrs with his own lifelong interest in philosophy, partially with his interest in classical medieval poetry and with having furnished him with source material for his next two operas, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, later written in Dresden. He continually wrote from Dresden to Kietz inquiring about Lehrs, and complaining that he was not getting enough information. In February 1843 he ended one of his letters: “I don’t want to know anything about you, only about Lehrs.”

He finally heard directly from Lehrs and answered at once, ending his lengthy letter: “Answer me soon, and be of good courage, my dear brother. Sooner or later we must be together again. So long and enjoy the beautiful spring which will bring you strength.” A few days after receiving this letter, Lehrs died. Wagner learned of his death by letter from Cäcilie. He replied that the news left him “dumb, speechless,” for almost eight days hardly able to lift his head. In August he wrote to Anders: “heartbreaking . . . this brave, wonderful and so unfortunate man will to me be eternally unforgettable.”

This was seven years before his 1850 publication of *Judaism in Music*, his most infamous word evidencing his anti-Semitism. As Wagner well knew, Lehrs was Jewish. He knew that in his Paris days. He knew it when he wrote his essay, and he knew it twenty years later when he wrote in his autobiography that his relationship with Lehrs was “one of the most beautiful friendships of my life.” This was to be only one of very many such puzzling contradictions throughout his life.

*Rienzi* was performed in Dresden to enthusiastic and highly responsive audiences. This happened despite the fact that the length of the opera was such that it had to be given in two parts, on successive
nights. Though some objected to paying twice to see one opera, it played to full houses on both nights. The custom in Germany however was that the composer got royalties only on the first performance receipts. Thereafter the profits belonged to the house. The composer was not protected by copyright under German law.\textsuperscript{13}

In 1843 Giacomo Meyerbeer managed to set up a system in the Berlin opera wherein the composer got a ten percent royalty. When that spread to other cities of the 39 German states is not clear. Verdi, showing much better judgment than Wagner, was born Italian and soon became wealthy, as did many other Italian composers. Wagner, however, based largely on the success of \textit{Rienzi}, was appointed Director of the Dresden Opera.

The six years, from 1843 to 1849 were outwardly (that word must be emphasized) the most settled and peaceful times of Wagner's life. This quiet episode was fully appreciated by Minna, who assumed her troubled times to be over. Her husband had a steady salary and prestigious employment. She could hold her head high in the highest of Dresden society. His newest opera, \textit{Tannhäuser} was premiered in Dresden and conducted by Wagner in 1845. As for Richard—To squeeze this ten foot giant into the suit of an ordinary sized man was a hopeless task.

He was not born to rehearse orchestras to perform the music of others, to interpret the music of others, or to attend the usual functions of the opera cadre. He was born to create. He undoubtedly felt the surge of the growing creative instinct within him and felt stifled. Even while en route to Dresden from Paris he had written Lehrs that “a banal, tiresome good fortune might be necessary to survive . . . my future lies in the hands of the theater riff-raff: May God enlighten their lordships.”\textsuperscript{14} Further, after beginning his employment he found it impossible to live within his means. Even the efforts of the king and his ministers were unavailing.

The final straw that broke his restraint came with the king's refusal to order a production of his newest opera \textit{Lohengrin}, completed in 1849. Revolution had already ignited a year earlier in other German states and other European nations. The threat of it spreading to Saxony weighed heavily on the King. But neither that nor the precarious financial situation of the Saxon government meant anything to Wagner. Compared to his great operatic creations, those matters were insignificant, and he could not understand anyone's inability to see that.

When revolution came to Saxony in May of 1849, Wagner jumped in with both feet. It was exhilarating, far more so than the deadly boring
business of music director. He first wrote fiery pamphlets encouraging armed revolution. The anonymity fooled no one; the fingerprints were his. He attended meetings in which the details of the plot were discussed. He ordered grenades from a brass foundry, and assisted in the publication of a seditious journal. Remarkably, he was not shot while distributing pamphlets urging the Saxon troops to desert. After the fighting started, he attempted to raise reinforcements for the revolutionaries, and with several of them climbed to the tower of the Church of the Holy Cross to direct the fire of the riflemen below. This was accomplished via handwritten notes tied to rocks and thrown to the ground.

With unrestrained braggadocio he claimed that the bullet that could lay him out had not yet been cast. His present day acolytes and admirers can nonetheless be thankful for the presence of a few straw matrasses that served effectively as shields. There are convincing reports detailing his nonstop talk on all manner of high blown subjects, totally irrelevant to the present circumstances, and probably uninteresting to his companions under any circumstances.

The entry of Prussian troops to assist the Saxon soldiers sealed the fate of the revolution. Wagner and all of the surviving revolutionaries were obliged to flee. Wagner was picked up in a luxurious coach commandeered by a few of his comrades, one of whom reported that “All the din, the shouting, and the rattling of arms were drowned out by the flaming talk of Wagner.” With the aid of a passport, “borrowed” with the help of his good friend, Franz Liszt, he made it to Switzerland and safety.

One very important item must be mentioned here. Among the belongings he carried with him was the sketch for an opera entitled Siegfried’s Death, based on medieval legends centered on Siegfried, the mythological hero. It would prove to have been a quantum leap in his aesthetic and artistic growth, and destined to change some basic concepts of music and of opera. He would continue to work on the poetic rendering of that sketch and to serially add other texts to explain what preceded the previous ones. It would morph into four mighty music dramas known collectively as The Ring of the Nibelung.

This was not the end of the mishaps and storms that marked his life to this point; they continued. Some were the results of his laser like devotion to the creation and production of his grandly conceived music dramas, which, he was determined, must meet his exacting standards. He did not write for the singers; the singers would be required to learn to sing what he wrote. He did not write to please audiences; the audiences
must learn to appreciate the merits of his artistic creations. He knew what was right, and what great art must be, and he would not deviate in the slightest degree for whatever reason or for any short term goal. Remarkably the world would eventually accept him on his own terms.

Others of his continuing mishaps were the results of his uncompromising self-centeredness, poor judgment or unconcern for the feelings of others who did not agree with him, not to mention his insatiable need for feminine understanding and admiration.

But he had by now come to grips with the gigantic vision that had been growing within his overactive imagination. He knew where he was going, and now, it must be said, he already was whatever he would be. When he fled to Switzerland he brought with him the germinating seeds of his life’s work. One of the more important seeds was the Saga of the Volsungs, which he first read in the summer of 1848, while still in Dresden. That same year he published the prose draft of Siegfried’s Death, and the original poetic sketch of it.

As early as July 1845, following the premiere of Tannhäuser he had taken a five week vacation from his duties in Dresden to rest at the spa of Marienbad in what is now the Czech Republic. It was a most productive vacation. He there completed a prose sketch of what would become his opera, completed 23 years later, called Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (The Mastersingers of Nuremberg). Following that, still in Marienbad, he busied himself with reading the medieval epic of Parzifal by Wolfram von Eschenbach which 37 years later would be his final opera, Parsifal. Hence all of them germinated for many years.

Tristan and Isolde is the lone exception. It also however did not sprout spontaneously as has often been claimed. It had been tossed around in his mind for some time and a number of factors probably contributed to its relatively sudden impetus for composition, a matter that will be examined more closely in later chapters.

Whatever his life experiences had contributed to the conception of his final goals had already occurred. Nothing from this point was going to change them. But apart from what he knew, instinct below consciousness played a role, both in small details and in gut feelings about great issues entwined in his opera texts. It is with the latter that we deal in later chapters.
A few words now about Arthur Schopenhauer, his forebear Immanuel Kant, and Bryan Magee, author of *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy*. It was in September 1854, while living in Zurich, that Wagner first read Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea,* Almost every serious scholar of the life and work of Wagner has paid tribute to the allegedly profound influence on his life and work by the writings of Schopenhauer. Kant, in turn, is seen as not only a great influence on Schopenhauer, but the foundation upon which Schopenhauer’s work is structured. Bryan Magee has gone to much greater length than any writer of which I am aware in detailing the influences, or claimed influences, of Schopenhauer, on the work of Wagner.

Magee, in his book *The Tristan Chord,* calls Kant’s reasoning “brilliant,” as he does that of Schopenhauer either explicitly or by inference. Magee’s book itself is also called brilliant by the Financial Times of London for one, overtly, and by inference by many others. I make no claim to brilliance, but do claim a fair facility for reading English. I do agree that Magee’s book has indeed many valid insights, and is one of the better books in the vast Wagner bibliography, though I disagree with some vital parts of it. I disagree mostly with his absorption with probably inflated ideas of the influence of Schopenhauer on the work of Wagner. The numbers of writers and reviewers that agree with Magee are impressive, but do not make them valid. As already mentioned, Magee himself is not impressed with either the numbers or reputations of such authors, even doubting that most are familiar

*The word *Idea* was the English originally used as a translation of the German *Vorstellung,* but in recent times the word *Representation* has been substituted.
with, or have even read much, if any, of Schopenhauer's works. Magee himself fails to note some very important original ideas of the composer embedded in the text of some of his operas for which there was undoubtedly no conscious influence of any other person.

What was Schopenhauer's philosophy that supposedly had such a great influence on Wagner and his works? Its structure is built upon the groundwork of Kant. That groundwork is described by Kant as 'reason.' Schopenhauer disagrees. Kant says that all our experience of the external world presents that world to us as if it were in a four dimensional continuity of space and time. Hence, for us the most irreducibly basic conception of the world is a large number of material objects existing in three dimensions of space and one of time. The reason why all is not chaos is that one event causes another. Causality results in things being patterned and interrelated, and thus gives us a world and not just chaos. None of these most fundamental features of experience could exist independently of experience. Space and time are forms of our sensibility, and only in such a realm can there be material objects, or causal connection.

Arthur Schopenhauer 1788-1860, shown here at age 67
Kant has also concluded, however, that there is every reason to believe that our senses can perceive only part of reality, namely that part that we need to survive, but that there must be part of reality that also does exist that is not amenable to our experience, hence not needed by humans. There, causality does not exist, and there are no material objects, no space, and no time. What exists apart from the human experience, and not perceived by its senses, he calls “the thing in itself.” Not the things as we see, feel, hear, smell, or touch. But it is nonetheless, like the world we perceive, a part of reality.\textsuperscript{15}

Kant says we can be all but certain that such reality does exist, though it is impossible for us to conceive of it or what it would look like. Magee adds: “It was all done on the basis of rational arguments, most of which, no one either then or since has conclusively rebutted.” He does not mention however that apparently neither has any one conclusively proved their truth.

Now comes Schopenhauer. He is mesmerized by Kant’s philosophy as expounded mainly in his “Critique of Pure Reason.” Schopenhauer has however a few points of disagreement. First he disagrees that outside the empirical world, the one we see, hear, etc. there could be things in the plural. For a thing to be different from another thing, it needed to be in space and time, but space and time exist only in the empirical world and are not “things in themselves.” They are inventions by humans to enable themselves to gain knowledge through perception. Numbers, for example, exist only in succession, but there can be no succession without space or time.\textsuperscript{16}

These philosophers speak of two worlds, the ‘phenomenal’ world, which we can perceive with our senses, and the ‘noumenal’ world. The noumenal, according to Schopenhauer, is a single, undifferentiated domain—spaceless, timeless, non-material, and like Kant, without causality, and, also like Kant, is inaccessible to our experience or knowledge. Outside the phenomenal world nothing can be the cause of anything else. Hence in the “ultimate ground of our being,” we are the same something, one and undifferentiated, whatever it is.

So, one result is that if I injure you, I am, in some ultimate way, injuring myself. The wrongdoer and the wronged, the hunter and the hunted, are ultimately the same, which explains our compassion and propensity to identify with one another. Those unaware of this unity “sees the difference between the inflictor of suffering and he who must endure
it is only phenomenon . . . the will here fails to recognize itself . . . buries its teeth in its own flesh, not knowing that it only injures itself.”

Schopenhauer says further that “the essential nature of matter consists in the complete union of space and time, a union that is possible only by means of the representation of causality.” That is what we see in our phenomenal world—a representation of causality. Expressed otherwise: “Causality unites space and time . . . The whole essence of matter consists in action, and hence in causality; consequently space and time must also be united . . . As matter has its essential nature in the union of time and space, it bears in all respects the stamp of both.”

Continuing with this explanation of his differences with Kant, he writes that:

Matter is through and for the understanding alone, and the whole faculty of the understanding consists in the knowledge of cause and effect. Thus for the understanding there is united in matter the inconstant and unstable flux of time, appearing as change of accidents, with the rigid immobility of space, exhibiting itself as the permanence of substance. For if substance passed away just as the accidents do, the phenomenon would be completely torn away from space, and would belong only to mere time; the world of experience would be dissolved by the destruction of matter, by annihilation.

Because Schopenhauer believed in the oneness of being, he rejected the conclusion of Kant that the main thing uniting all humans is reason. He claimed that the very nature of existence was the oneness of being, no multiplicity or separateness being possible.

Though the two philosophers disagree about some things concerning the noumenal world, they do have this in common: Neither of them has ever been there, or thinks we can ever experience it in this world. So we will get no first-hand report. Though Kant is not 100% certain that it exists, Schopenhauer has no doubt whatever and further can explain in more detail what the domain is like. This realm is admittedly difficult to visualize.

Apparently Schopenhauer does not envision the noumenal as another place, nor certainly not as an afterlife. He sees the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds, not as physically separated in time or space but as the same reality seen in two different ways. The noumenal way is, as
explained by Magee, a “blind, purposeless, impersonal force or drive,” and he interprets its manifestation in the phenomenal world as “the dumb urge towards existence,” and that consequently “our very existence in itself is a mindless craving, endless and aimless, unassuageable.”

The thinking of these two philosophers, particularly Schopenhauer, is brilliant in the sense that a move in chess, or any mental exercise may be brilliant. Those are exercises made by humans who think logically, generally in straight lines. But nature does not do straight lines, nor is it very logical, and not everyone can follow such thinking. Apparently Wagner was one who could. Not only Magee, but Wagner himself has repeatedly emphasized his own enchantment with Schopenhauer’s writings. He harangued many people about it, and read a number of other writings to which it led him. He also has said how greatly it influenced him, a declaration that probably, and understandably, has influenced others in coming to that conclusion.

Besides the realm of the noumenal, that alternative way of looking at reality, did Schopenhauer have anything more down to earth to say? Yes, this domain of the noumenal is similar to that of Buddhism, and Magee has given us summaries upon which no one could improve: Life consists of “endless willing, trying, hoping, striving, grasping, and yearning.” This endless willing is “inherently unsatisfiable, because the moment a wish is gratified, another takes its place.”

And even the luckiest in life are doomed. “Adversity, misfortune, accident, illness, disappointment, frustration and failure are common human experiences and inevitably overwhelm and obliterate all by death . . . Life is unavoidably tragic.”

Further continues Magee, “He regarded human beings, by and large, as selfish, cruel, greedy, stupid, aggressive and heartless in most of their dealings with one another, and bloodthirsty in their attitudes to the animal kingdom . . . The world seemed to him an appalling place, teeming with violence, crime, poverty, political oppression, exploitation, every little town having its own torture chambers in its hospital and its prison” The world of Nature was no better: literally in every instant thousands of screaming animals are being torn to pieces alive. All of that, at least, is something we can all understand, even if we feel that he has overlooked some rather pleasant things.

He does not advocate suicide. That would be a violent assertion of the will, and would only bring more suffering to the world. He advocates
disengagement, non-attachment, denial of the will, a refusal to be involved.

But is there not some way that a glimpse, at least, of that will to live can be experienced in its purest form, meaning apparently without succumbing to the worst and most self-destructive features of it? Yes, says Schopenhauer, there is sex and there is music:

If I am asked where the most intimate knowledge of that most inner essence of the world, of that thing in itself which I have called the will to live, is to be found, or where that essence enters most clearly into our consciousness, or where it achieves the purest revelation of itself, then I must point to ecstasy in the act of copulation. That is it! That is the true essence and core of all things, the aim and purpose of all existence.\textsuperscript{22}

He manages to sound as if, in all the millennia before Schopenhauer, no one had noticed that. From all evidence Wagner probably knew all about sex anyway though he never wrote about it, so we turn to music, about which the composer wrote very much, very often.

The second means of taking us out of ourselves, even momentarily, to that other, noumenal, realm is music. Everything in our phenomenal word is representational. Art, except for music, is representational, but it is not the individual object that is represented, but something that is itself represented by individual objects. We are getting close to Plato when we say it, but, according to Schopenhauer, the chair we see is merely representative of a universal concept, called chair. Everything we see in life is the embodiment of some universal concept. However when we see a painting of a chair, it is representational of the concept, chair, not a particular chair. These ideal concepts, or forms, of items, such as a chair are real; they exist, but not in time or space. When we are viewing the work of art, we likewise are not in time or space.

But music is different. It is not representational. It is self-expression of something that cannot be represented, namely, the noumenal. It consists only of tones, and speaks to us from much greater depth than any other art. Though it manifests itself to us in the phenomenal world, it comes to us also as music and can thus be seen as an alternative world. It gives us expressions of existence far superior to that of other arts. It tells us the profoundest wisdom, spoken in a language our intellects are unable to comprehend and which cannot be translated or understood as concepts.
What it can do is to give us "the most profound, ultimate and secret information on the feeling expressed in words, or the action presented in the opera. It represents their real nature, and makes us acquainted with the innermost soul of the events and occurrences, the mere cloak and body of which are presented on the stage." This was not all he had to say about music, and when we look at chapter 5, on Tristan and Isolde, we will see ideas that undoubtedly influenced the unique structure of that music.

Wagner was thrilled of course, even with this abstract explanation of the superiority of music over all other arts. Though his reaction is understandable, it is somewhat surprising that he nowhere mentioned in this context his own book length essay, published in 1851, three years before his introduction to Schopenhauer. It was entitled Opera and Drama, and contained a surprisingly readable explanation of his various theories, including the superiority of music.

It is surprising because it argues, in much clearer language than does Schopenhauer, which is quite an anomaly. Schopenhauer has often been praised for the directness, clarity and readability of his language. I have read his World as Will and Idea (more recently called representation) and agree with that assessment of the clearness of his writing. The gods were very generous with Wagner in the endowment of artistic genius of many facets, but gave him nothing to help with prose writings. Typically he tried anyway. Turgid and obtuse are two of the most generous descriptions by the critics and it would be most difficult to counter their judgments. But then he writes on so many things with which he has no expertise. When he writes about things he knows something about it is different. What does he say in Opera and Drama?

He argues that music, unlike words goes directly to the seat of emotion. "The primal organ of utterance of the inner man is tone speech," which is the primitive expression of pure emotion, namely the vowel sounds. These are, still today, the intense expressions of joy, fear or anger. But as humans became civilized, and society more complex, these emotions gave way to the "clang of talk," and we lost "the instinctive understanding of our own speech roots." Words must first be absorbed by the intellect, and their meaning "delineated in a thousand details" before they may be conveyed to the heart. The artist can master these primitive roots only through music, which, like the primal sounds themselves, express and evoke raw emotion.

According to Wagner, however, even music standing alone does not reach its full potential as a form of expression. It is only by enhancing
the poetry and action of the drama with music that the artist can most effectively bypass the intellect and directly reach the emotion of the spectator.

Let us turn our attention back to Wagner and see if we can get a clue to his rapture with Schopenhauer. We had left him in Zurich where he arrived after fleeing Dresden with a price on his head. He was joined shortly thereafter by his angry and unforgiving wife Minna. She had made it clear she felt she had no other choice: "I would cut a pretty picture in Dresden as your abandoned wife," she had written. It was the beginning of the end of their marriage.

The impetus for the long simmering *Tristan and Isolde* happened after fleeing Dresden, and was given a boost upon his reading *The World as Will and Representation* in 1854, while living in Zurich. By the end of 1855 he had a definite conception of it as the basis for *Tristan* with the third act as the seed for the entirety. He was at the time also under the spell of the attractive, poetically inclined Mathilde Wesendonck, the wife of his benefactor and landlord. He and Minna had grown even further apart following his enforced exile from their settled life in Dresden, but in Mathilde he found a true soul mate, a woman who understood and fully respected and admired him as man and artist.

Whether he was driven to write the opera because of his, probably unrequited, yearning for her, or whether she was merely his real life embodiment of the fictional Isolde, can never be definitively answered and must remain as subject for the eye of the beholder. Whatever the case, tension between him and Minna forced his solitary removal, first to Venice where he completed the second act, and then to Lucerne where he wrote the third and final one, completing the entirety in 1859.

The composer turned his attention from *The Ring* not only for the three years it took him to complete *Tristan*, but the additional six years it took him to find an opera house to produce that opera based on the medieval love stories. The premiere finally took place in 1865 in Munich by order of King Ludwig II of Bavaria. This is the opera most often, and with most justification, claimed to have been influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer, a subject that needs to be further examined in chapter 5.
I plunged deeply into my work, and on September 26th completed the exquisite fair copy of the score of Rheingold. In the tranquility and stillness of my house I now also became acquainted with a book, the study of which was to assume vast importance for me. This was Arthur Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Idea.

Herwegh told me about this book which had in a certain sense been discovered only recently, though more than thirty years had lapsed since its initial publication. It was only through an article relating these circumstances, by a Herr Frauenstädt, that his own attention had first been directed to the work. I felt myself immediately attracted by it and began studying it at once. I had repeatedly experienced an inner impulse to come to an understanding of the true meaning of philosophy. Several conversations with Lehrs in Paris during my earlier days had awakened this desire within me, which up to this time I had tried to satisfy by attempts to get something out of the Leipzig professors, then from Schelling, and later from Hegel; those attempts had all daunted me before long, and some of the writings of Feuerbach had seemed to indicate the reasons for it.
Samuel Lehrs, it will be recalled, was a young Jewish man and one of three close friends to the Wagners in Paris. Wagner acknowledged being indebted to him for his lifelong interest in philosophy and medieval literature and for furnishing him with the material for Tannhäuser and Lohengrin. Georg Herwegh had taken part in the revolution in the state of Baden, bordering on the west of Wagner’s Bavaria. As in Bavaria the uprising failed, and Herwegh fled first to Zurich, then to Paris.

In addition to the other influences Wagner mentions, we have the diary entry of Cosima for December 12, 1878: Later when we are already upstairs, he says he had felt the urge to express himself symphonically for once, and that led to Tristan. But no mention here of Schopenhauer.

To continue with the autobiography:

But now apart from the interest elicited by the strange fate of this book, I was instantly captivated by the great clarity and manly precision with which the most abstruse metaphysical problems were treated from the beginning. As a matter of fact I had already been struck by the verdict of an English critic, [John Oxenford] who had candidly confessed that his obscure but unconvincing respect for German philosophy had been attributable to its utter incomprehensibility, as represented most recently by the works of Hegel.

John Oxenford, born in London nine months before Wagner, was a dramatist, critic, translator, and song-writer. In April 1853, he wrote for the “Westminster Review” an essay on Schopenhauer’s philosophy which is said to have founded the fame of that philosopher both in England and abroad. Continuing with the autobiography:

In reading Schopenhauer, on the other hand, he [Oxenford] suddenly realized that it had not been his dim-wittedness but rather the intentional turgidity in the treatment of philosophical theories which had caused his bafflement. Everyone who has been aroused by great passion by life will do as I did, and hunt first of all for the final conclusions of the Schopenhauerian system; whereas his treatment of aesthetics pleased me immensely, particularly his surprising and significant conception of music, I was alarmed, as will be everyone in my frame of mind, by the moral principles with
which he caps the work, for here the annihilation of the will and complete self-abnegation are represented as the only true means of redemption from the constricting bonds of individuality in its dealings with the world. 25

At this point in his life, Wagner, before reading Schopenhauer, and always seeking a philosophy to which he might grab hold, had thought he had found it in Ludwig Feuerbach. Feuerbach did not believe in the existence of any god nor did he accept as truth the existence of God or any gods of other cultures. He saw the human race as projecting on the gods they created all of the attributes they wanted for themselves. Many of the gods created by early, and largely uncivilized or ancient humans have all of the attributes of humans of their time, jealousy, envy, hatred etc. But humans of modern times project in their god the traits they now prefer for themselves, primarily love. Love was the source of redemption for the world.

Richard Wagner 1813-1883, shown here at age 49.

As written by Wagner, the gods of his Ring of the Nibelung are immoral and corrupt and it was the race of humans that would save the world after their downfall. That downfall results initially from the dishonest act
of the king of the gods, Wotan, in making a promise, to the giants, to
give them the goddess of love in return for their construction of the gods’
castle Valhalla. It was a promise he never intended to keep and results in
one dishonest or corrupt act after another in an attempt to stave off the
gods’ destruction. In the ending as written by Wagner when still under
the influence of Feuerbach, the final words, sung by Brynhilde, are “I
now bequeath to that world my most sacred wisdom’s hoard—. . . not
smooth-tongued custom’s stern decree: blessed in sorrow love alone can
be,”

This was his mental and emotional status when he first laid eyes of
Schopenhauer’s book. About his reaction to the book he continues in his
autobiography:

For those seeking in philosophy their justification for political
and social agitation on behalf of the so-called “free individual”,
there was no sustenance whatever here, where what was
demanded was the absolute renunciation of all such methods of
satisfying the claims of the human personality . . .

This insight into the essential nothingness of the world of
appearances lies at the root of all tragedy, and every great poet,
and even great man, must necessarily feel it intuitively. I looked
at my Nibelung poems and recognized to my amazement that
the very things I now found so unpalatable in the theory were
already long familiar to me in my own poetic conception.
Only now did I now understand my own Wotan myself and,
greatly shaken, I went on to a closer study of Schopenhauer’s
book. I now saw that before all else I had to comprehend the
first part of the work, which elucidates and enlarges upon
Kant’s doctrine of the ideality of the world, which hitherto had
seemed so firmly grounded in time and space. I considered I
had taken the first step toward such an understanding simply
by realizing its difficulty.

“Only now did I understand my own Wotan,” has been often quoted.
and is a remarkable insight into an aspect of Wagner’s thinking. He
continues now with words that will be extremely interesting when we
come to examine the influence of Schopenhauer on Wagner’s Tristan in
chapter 5:
From now on this book never left me entirely through the years, and by the summer of the next year I had already gone through it for the fourth time. Its gradual effect on me was extraordinary and, at any rate, decisive for the rest of my life. Through it, I was able to judge things which I had previously grasped only instinctively, and it gave me more or less the equivalent of what I had gained musically from close study of the principles of counterpoint, after being released from the tutelage of my old teacher Weinlig. All my subsequent writings about artistic matters of special interest to me clearly demonstrate to me the impact of my study of Schopenhauer and what I had gained by it . . . . I continued with the composition of the music for Valkyrie . . .

"The summer of the next year" means the summer of 1855. He began the prose draft of Tristan in August 1857. Hence we should bear in mind that when he began the prose draft he had already gone through Schopenhauer's work four times. More about that in chapter 5.

We should also bear in mind his language that all his subsequent writings about artistic matters of special interest clearly demonstrate to him the impact of his study of Schopenhauer and what he had gained by it. If any of his vast writings show acknowledgment of such influence by the philosopher on the text of his operas, I have been unable to find them. He does acknowledge influence with regard to music. The influence there is, particularly in Tristan, undeniable.

His description of the influence of Schopenhauer, Tristan and Isolde and Parsifal aside, is generally as non-specific and as general as is the description by most Wagner scholars. The exception to the vagueness is the very detailed descriptions by Magee of the philosopher's influence on all of the remainder of Wagner's "mature operas", The Mastersingers, the Ring operas beginning with Siegfried the third of the four, and Parsifal. We will deal with those detailed descriptions of Magee, and their validity later. There were other references to Tristan in Wagner's autobiography. Though they leave little doubt that Tristan was indeed influenced by Schopenhauer, they also makes clear that he had been nursing the idea of that opera for some time.

The music probably was shaped in part, and in certain important respects, by the ideas of Schopenhauer, namely the constant yearning and seeking without end. This could well show itself in the long delayed,
resolution of phrases and themes of the opera. Further, it appears that the major contribution by Schopenhauer to the text was the symbolism of day and light as illusory, and night and darkness as the reality. The final act however appears to fly in the face of that philosophy:

While I was simultaneously in the throes of composing the ecstasies of the third act, [it] had the strangest, even uncanny, effect on me; for it was in just those first scenes of this act that I realized with complete clarity that I had written the most audacious and original work of my life in this very opera, which it was believed, quite unwarrantably, would turn out to be easy to produce. While I was working on Tristan's big scene I had to ask myself often enough whether I was out of my mind in thinking I could give such a thing to a publisher to be printed for use in the theater. And yet I did not want to part with a single accent of suffering, even though the whole thing tormented me myself to an intense degree.

It is impossible to read that passage from the autobiography and accept Magee's opinion that except for Schopenhauer there would have been no *Tristan and Isolde*. It might have been different in some respects, but *Tristan and Isolde*, like a force of nature, was inevitable.

The question still remains: Why would Wagner be attracted to such a morose, misanthropic point of view as that of Schopenhauer? A more cogent question: Why would he not? From early on, Wagner knew he was different and knew that he harbored an extraordinary genius. Unfortunately he could never understand why everyone else could not see that, a matter that left him often despondent.

In June 1842, for one example, he was in route from a miserable two years in Paris to gainful and prestigious employment as music director in Dresden. Did that make him more contented? Recall that from Teplitz he wrote Samuel Lehre, still in Paris, that when he realized that a "banal tiresome good fortune" might be necessary to survive, "a shudder came over" him. For opera houses and theaters he had only contempt: We have seen in his letter the dread with which he looked forward to his new employment.²⁶ He later wrote in his autobiography that when considering a lasting contract with even one of the finest German opera houses, he felt "degraded again" and a deep contempt. He wondered,
he said, what else he could do to hold his ground “between disgust and desire in this strange world.”

The inevitable result for Wagner was an inability to relate with others, and to look upon them often with disdain if not contempt. Both he and Schopenhauer undoubtedly felt that there must be something better than this life. Schopenhauer’s appeal to many others who felt the same discontent was probably rooted in the conviction that when speaking of humanity as cruel, greedy, grasping and aggressive, he had in mind the rest of humanity, “but not me.”

One of the byproducts of such unusual genius may have been Wagner’s overactive imagination as a young child, one that drove him to the fits of screaming at imagined supernatural happenings that have been described earlier.

He was a man in search of a philosophy. He tried them one after another: Laube, Proudhon, Hegel, and Feuerbach whose view that love made the world go round Wagner appropriated for one of his earlier versions of the ending of his four opera Ring of the Nibelung. His interest in Feuerbach ended only with his life-long infatuation and devotion to Schopenhauer.

He was also a very bitter and angry man. Wagner hated money, as well as the concept of private property but even worse he hated his poverty. He felt the world owed him a living, and it did indeed, and its failure to deliver in the sums he needed was one other thing he could not understand about the rest of humanity. He saw the world filled with people he viewed as insignificant and petty, but surrounded with wealth and luxury. His importance and poverty by comparison left him embittered.

Conscious not only of his genius, but of the growing creativity within himself, he endured the hardships of the most abject poverty, determined to convert into living monuments his visions of great art. His confidence in himself and his vision could never permit him to compromise for the rewards of popularity through creation of the superficial showpieces he despised. Late in life he claimed that there was hardly a day when he did not entertain thoughts of suicide until his fifties. That happens to be the decade in which he was rescued from failure, poverty and oblivion by King Ludwig II of Bavaria, and in which he and Cosima openly admitted their love for each other.

He seemed to suffer from paranoia, but, as has been often observed, even paranoids have enemies. Among Wagner’s enemies, or perceived
enemies, were the opera administrations and the press, most of which was bitterly and maliciously critical of him and his works. He saw both as dominated by the Jews. To an extent that was true; to the extent it was, it was their enforced position resulting from centuries of prohibition against their engaging in most other work, something Wagner grudgingly acknowledged in his infamous essay *Judaism in Music*, published in 1850.

Among Wagner's worst episode of poverty were his two years in Paris beginning in 1839, including a few weeks in a debtors' prison. The entire miserable Paris experience he blamed on the French, whom he never forgave. He was not as preoccupied with that animosity as extensively as he was with the Jewish presence in his own country, but the bitterness ran just as deep.

In addition to his emotional problems he suffered from numerous physical ailments. From age 21, when he was courting Minna, he had bouts of a painful and unsightly skin condition known as erysipelas, an acute inflammation of the skin, caused by a blood infection. It usually affects the face and head, but can, as was the case with Wagner, affect other parts of the body. Healing in one part can often be accompanied or followed by the onset in another. He called it the "roses."

He tells us also that the outbreaks would cause his face to become swollen and disfigured to the extent that he did not want to leave the privacy of his room. In December 1855, the year after his first exposure to the writing of Schopenhauer, he wrote to Franz Liszt that "the thorns of my existence have now been supplemented by blooming roses." In the spring of 1855, he interrupted his composition of *The Valkyrie* to accept a temporary employment as conductor of the Old Philharmonic Orchestra of London, for the sorely needed salary. Among his close friends in London was Ferdinand Praeger. Praeger also stayed with Wagner in Zurich in July 1857 and saw him in Paris during the winter of 1860-61.

Praeger's comments enlighten us on his condition and its effects from the time of the disease's onset and throughout his life. He wrote that Wagner's "nervous excitability and volcanic outbursts," in large part could be attribute to his attacks of erysipelas, the result of which was that his "nervous system was delicate and sensitive," causing irritability. The touch of cotton, he continued, caused a shuddering throughout his body. His preference for silks and furs rather than cotton made him often a target for both criticism and ridicule.

His autobiography ends in 1965 with the arrival on the Bavarian throne and into Wagner's life the 18 year old king Ludwig II. From
January 1, 1869 until his death on February 13, 1883, we have the rather remarkable diaries of Cosima, his second wife. Among the wealth of information these daily accounts contain, are records of his various bouts of chest pains and spasm, problems with digestion, with teeth and with bowels. No doubt among the many chest spasms were several heart attacks, though medical science of the time was ill equipped to diagnose such occurrences, and could not effectively treat them even when diagnosed. His health was poor enough that we might well assume he suffered from multiple ailments even before his discovery of Schopenhauer.

Whatever influence the philosopher had on the content of Wagner’s artistic output, the composer obviously benefitted tremendously on an emotional level. It seemed to convey meaning and a universal nature to human suffering. It wasn’t just him, unique though his may have been. There was no doubt an intellectual affinity there. But neither can there be any doubt that there was much emotional nourishment also, to which Wagner hung on for dear life.

Cosima recorded in her diaries that after extolling the philosopher once again, he said of Schopenhauer, in an often quoted line: “How can I ever thank him enough?” Thank him for what he never specified. Could it have been for giving scholarly support and an air of legitimacy to much that Wagner had been thinking and being unable to verbalize or even to explain to receptive ears?

This expression to Cosima about the philosopher was after both Tristan and Mastersingers had been premiered in Munich in 1865 and 1868 respectively, both to much acclaim, and after Wagner had become the idol of Bavarian king Ludwig II. At Mastersingers, to the consternation of much of the audience, he had shared the royal box with the king. Both loved and hated, by then Wagner’s reputation was established and his genius recognized throughout Germany and elsewhere in Europe.

The philosopher had been ignored, as had his seminal work when first published in 1818. It gained increasing notice upon publication of the second edition in 1854, the year of Wagner’s first acquaintance with it. It was not until 1859 upon publication of the third edition that his fame spread so rapidly so suddenly. That was but one year before his death, but Wagner had already begun, and continued after Schopenhauer’s death, to write letters to his friends and to talk and write enthusiastically about him.
Karl S. Guthke is the Kuno Francke professor of German art and culture and a Corresponding Fellow of the British Institute of Germanic Studies. He has expressed the opinion that Wagner’s reputation may have been a major cause of the fame and honors finally heaped upon Schopenhauer and that it was Schopenhauer who should have thanked Wagner.

We will have occasion to hear more from Guthke later with some rather interesting information about the Wagner-Schopenhauer relationship.
Chapter 4

Cosima’s Diaries

Magee holds the two volumes of Cosima’s diaries as important, if not prime exhibits, of the high esteem in which her husband held the philosopher, and of the profound influence he had on his artwork. For the high esteem, there is evidence in abundance for both the laudatory and the idolatrous. Evidence of his influence, though present, is most often superficial, despite Wagner’s own frequently expressed contrary opinion. My reason for so saying must await our discussion of the individual music dramas.

Magee claims that Schopenhauer was “woven into the tapestry of that [Wagner’s] life as an everyday part of its texture. All the evidence—and it exists in abundance—shows that Schopenhauer was close to being an obsession with Wagner.” He claims that there are over 200 page entries in the index for him. The actual number is about 165. The 200 would include the publisher’s notes, which are not utterances by Cosima or her quotes or summaries of others. This is not really cricket, but we shan’t quibble. Actually, on some few pages he is mentioned in more than one day’s entries, so we will use Magee’s number.

The diary has daily entries over a period of 14 years and 41 days of the year of
Wagner's second wife, 1837-1930. For 14 years she kept a diary, a written record of his activities, moods and thoughts. She is shown here at age 67.

Wagner's death, or a total of 5162 days. They are filled with references to philosophers, writers, poets, musicians, generals, statesmen, and tyrants, from all lands and all ages: Plato, Aristotle, Solon, Pericles, Disraeli, Bismarck, Aristophanes, Cervantes, Calderon, Ibsen, Alexander the Great, Frederick the Great, and Barbarossa among others. There are not many scientists; Darwin did make the list, though not the honor roll. Using Magee's figure of 200 entries it figures to one mention every 25 or 26 days. Leaving out contemporaries that Wagner saw frequently in person, it appears from a quick glance that Shakespeare, Goethe and Schiller scored better. There are others that can be counted by anyone with the time and interest, including a plethora of composers.

Wagner's admiration for the philosopher however knew a few bounds, those bounds being where they conflicted with Wagner's own views. Most of the entries have little to do with our point of focus, the nature of Wagner's reliance on Schopenhauer and influence by him. Many, as emphasized by Magee, simply said "read Schopenhauer," or, in
one instance, "no Kant-Schopenhauer." We start with one that tells us something about Wagner's reactions to being contradicted, evidence of which is also abundant from other sources.

On October 15, 1881, Cosima notes among other matters:

I ask him about Humboldt and Schiller; he observes that it was not until Schop that a certain precision in philosophical matters was achieved, before his time there had always been a tendency to drivel. When, in agreeing with him, I say that both he and Schopenhauer turned this whole world upside down, yet this did not seem to me what the preface was about, R. does not allow me to continue and this reveals a characteristic feature of him—namely, that when he has said something, he likes to regard the matter as settled, and he does not like people to take up an idea of his in order to raise another aspect of the subject. When we discuss this, he tells me it looked as if I was trying to say that this was not the standpoint from which to regard the book, and the remark did not interest him.—

His anger shows itself quite forcefully if anyone questions the word of Schopenhauer. The reaction is emotional; calm logical discussions are seldom to be found in that context. We have several examples of the exchange that often occurs when the philosopher's word is questioned.

On September 25, 1878, he takes sharp issue with one Herr Lipiner:

During the late afternoon he gets very heated with Herr Lipiner about Schopenhauer, since Herr Lipiner claims to detect illogicalities in the great philosopher. But soon after he has gone away, R. repents of his violence.

On September 26, 1878 we have another general expression of contempt for those not sufficiently convinced of Schopenhauer's infallibility:

Splendid to listen to R.'s summary of Sch's philosophy! This morning he gave me another short account of it while expressing disgust with people who profess to understand him and then accuse him of illogicalities.

On January 4, 1873, there had been a more specific reference:

Richard had discussion with a dean who was reading Hartmann's Philosophy of the Unconscious. Richard argued heatedly against a philosophy that gives pleasure, the dean against Schopenhauer, whom he has not read.

Whether Wagner had read Hartmann we do not know.

On February 26, 1873, Hartmann is again the target but so are natural scientists as a group and likewise "people" in general:

We talk about the arrogance of natural scientists, who imagine they can solve the riddle of existence and believe they are reaching positive results, though every ten years the results are changed... Talked about
Hartmann, the fashionable philosopher; people's absurd misunderstanding of Schopenhauer, their assumption that his teaching leads to suicide.

On November 13, 1874, there is again a sweeping indictment against not only those who disagree with his favored philosopher, but those also who have not heard of him:

Richard is always roused to indignation by new evidence of how little known Schopenhauer is, but apart from that, he also finds it an interesting example of English culture.

Nature itself does not escape his criticism or his wrath: In the entry of September 18, 1870, we read this:

I was recently reminded forcibly of Sch’s genius when I read what he had to say about the differences between human beings. He regards it as an ineptitude of Nature not to have created yet another species, since between gifted and ungifted human beings there is indeed a gap wider than between some human beings and animals. (According to the publisher’s note, the reference is to the differences between human beings in Schopenhauer’s “Aphorismen Zur Lebensweisheit” (Schopenhauer’s Aphorisms of Life’s wisdom).

Wagner’s feelings about scientists and, indeed, science itself, are revealed in his comments about Charles Darwin, the celebrated English proponent of the evolution of plants and animals, including humans. His “Origin of Species,” beginning with its publication in 1859, had shattered widely accepted beliefs in the origin of life; later, most particularly, human life. Wagner, probably reluctantly, turned finally to that powerful treatise on January 10, 1873. In Cosima’s entry for that day, we read:

In the evening we begin Darwin’s Origin of Species, and Richard observes that between Schopenhauer and Darwin the same thing has happened as between Kant and Laplace. The idea came from Schopenhauer and Darwin developed it.

When Wagner writes or talks about opera, music, theater, stagecraft, poetry or related matters we frequently read the clearest insights. Unfortunately he often speaks with the same tone of authority when he speaks about anything else, but often displaying the most embarrassing ignorance. Evolution means change. It is all about change. Darwin was indeed preceded by many others and no doubt influenced by many: Aristotle, Leonardo, Abraham Trembley, Denis Diderot, Georges Cuvier, and Jean Lamarck, to name a few. But not by Schopenhauer. As many times as Wagner reread the philosopher’s seminal work, he either missed, or forgot this (Vol. II, 322.): “Each specimen of its kind, every insect,
every flower, every leaf, still appears just as carefully perfected as was the first of its species. We therefore observe that nature by no means wearies or begins to bungle, but that with equally patient master-hand she perfects the last as the first.”

It is possible that Wagner had in mind a few passages in Schopenhauer emphasizing the extent to which nature has seen to it that each species is well adapted to its own environment consistent with its need to survive. He also notes how “The objective, the species, manifests itself as indestructible, the subjective, consisting merely in the self-consciousness of these beings [the individuals], seems to be of the shortest duration and to be incessantly destroyed.”32 It is to be hoped that Wagner did not think that to be the sum total of Darwin’s treatise. That much could be observed by anyone with eyes.

We hear nothing further about Darwin until 1881. On October 8th of that year, Cosima noted that a newspaper contained an article “Kant and Darwin,” and Richard pointed out how much superior Schopenhauer’s interpretation of instinct is to that of Darwin.

On October 15th:

_We also talk about history, in which he can no longer take much interest, since he has come to the conclusion that there is no hope for any improvement . . . . In the evening there was much talk about the first human beings, their descent from one couple; R. had already observed yesterday that present day theologians base themselves on Darwin: “He can still be made to look completely silly.”_

Frederick Nietzsche, according to Wagner, drew from the same intellectual source as did Darwin. The entry of February 3, 1883 was only ten days before Wagner’s sudden death. His thinking on matters that we have already discussed continued unabated, and almost predictable:

_Richard reads something by Nietzsche. Glances through it, only then expresses his utter disgust with it. The things in it of any value, he says, have all been borrowed from Schopenhauer, and he dislikes everything about the man._

The last phrase of that entry is somewhat baffling. Who is “he,” and who is “the man.” To us it really doesn’t make a lot of difference. One could fill in the name of any of the players in either of the two slots, and probably be correct, or at least supportable.

Unsupported, today at least, are a number of observations scattered about in the diaries like stray leaves being blown by the wind. It is understandable that not only such harmless views, but some regrettable
behaviors of the great composer would convince many to avoid such a person no matte his creative genius

But there is an old Native-American saying, the source of which I do not remember, that we should not criticize another until we have walked in his moccasins. Never having been a great creative genius, or any other kind of genius, I feel totally unqualified, short of a heinous felony, to pass judgment on Richard Wagner, Beethoven, or a small number of other greats. I feel we take them as they are, warts and all, and I cite some matters involving Wagner, not to belittle him, or to lessen his stature, but for whatever they may show or however they may enlighten us about him.

With that proviso I cite two entries from the diary of his devoted second wife: On January 29, 1881, she wrote this:

Vanishing races still bring forth heroic women: “The Renaissance was brought about by women,” he says,—adding that it is remarkable how closely this corresponds to the Schop theory that one inherits character from one’s father, intelligence from one’s mother.

More than about Wagner, the comment says something about Schopenhauer. He made that ‘observation’ on a number of occasions. On October 16, 1882, four months before Wagner’s death, we hear this from him through his wife’s diary:

We come back to the subject of race, wondering which theory is right, Schop’s or Gobineau’s. R. feels they can be reconciled: a human being who is born black, urged toward the heights becomes white, and at the same time a different creature.

In addition to other considerations, we must sometimes take into account the times in which Wagner and Schopenhauer lived. We cannot expect 20th and 21st century attitudes in all matters, even by the most brilliant of those living and steeped in the culture of 19th century Europe. All the more remarkable does that render some deeply embedded ideas in some of the Wagnerian operas, which we will consider in the next chapters.

But first some evidence of the fact that, as Magee concludes, Wagner often quoted Schopenhauer, mostly approvingly, at times with mild disapproval. Following are a few examples:

On Feb 3rd '70, Richard on the subject of a musical theme: How much more significant does such a theme appear than any spoken thought! Schopenhauer is right; music is a world in itself; the other arts only express a world.

Jan 30 '71: Richard: As Schopenhauer said, this is the way a musician works, he expresses life in a language which reason does not understand.
May 29, '71: R compares Sophocles with Aeschylus: *he does the right thing without knowing it*. Richard compares that with Schopenhauer saying about musicians that they speak the highest wisdom in a language that their reason does not understand.

July 1 '73: Schopenhauer is right in his assertion that one wakes to death from life as if from a frightening dream, and the death agony resembles the struggle which the sleeper makes to keep himself from waking and through which he tries to retain possession of his bad dream.

Dec 22nd '74: We talk about the Ring and R. remarks how curious it was that he designed it as he did without knowing the philosophy of Schopenhauer. *If I had known it, I should have been less uninhibited in my choice of expressive means.* He says, when I first read Schopenhauer, I did not understand him at all, because I was no longer armed with the strength with which I wrote my poem.

Dec 28th '74: R. is very angry, and we spend a grim evening until the children at last return. *One must take care never to give in to weakness, to a craving for enjoyment, not even for one's children.* (This also involved a discussion of Schopenhauer's chapter on "Apparent Deliberateness in the Fate of an Individual.")

Feb 15th '81: We soon go back to the topics that concern us and to Sch ... Regarding his errors in the application of his theories, so right in themselves, R. says *It makes one feel that an artist can be a philosopher, but not a philosopher an artist.*

Nov 12th '81: When Schop's remarks are discussed, R. says, *He was a philosopher, but no sage.*

We turn now to analyses of Wagner's mature operas for a twofold purpose: 1) the extent to which they do or do not reflect the philosophy of Schopenhauer, which seems rooted in the past, and 2) the extent to which they do or do not look forward to intellectual thought not current, or at least not popular, until the 20th and 21st centuries.
Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* is, by general agreement, something unique in opera. The uniqueness has been mostly identified by other composers and music scholars variously as the opening chord that begins sequences, themes, and dissonances, that remain unresolved until the opera's conclusion; the thematic unity of the piece; the perpetually changing keys to fit the changing mood of the scene or the singers as they come in turn to dominate the action. The opening "Tristan chord," has, according to many music scholars, been the subject of more analyses than any other phrase in music history.

It is pointless to look at any writings of Wagner to determine the spark, or sparks, that started him finally working on it, whether the presence, and his love, of Mathilde Wesendonck, enchantment with the philosophy of Schopenhauer, his desire to write a more symphonic piece, which this opera is, or other factors. Bryan Magee has several times emphasized Wagner's own subconscious as a driving force, and writes that often Wagner himself did not understand his reasons for his own works.

Magee wrote in his *Aspects of Wagner*, 1988, for one example, that Wagner "regarded his true career as an artist to have dated from the time he stopped trying to lead from the head and, instead to put his trust in his intuitions, even when he did not understand them" (emphasis by Magee). In his later *Tristan Chord*, speaking of the diverse elements that went into Wagner's compositions, he wrote. "I do not believe that he can have accomplished it at the level of conscious thought. Most of it, I am fairly sure, took place subliminally, or in the unconscious depths of his mind, and over long periods of time."

In none of this do I have any point of disagreement.

It is *Tristan and Isolde* above all that most scholars and analysts find to be "pure Schopenhauer." More than anyone I have read, Magee tells us
why, and more than any other author he gives reasons for his conclusions concerning influence by Schopenhauer in other Wagnerian operas also. There are two aspects to any such comparisons, the text, which is the story line, and, at least in the case of Tristan, the music itself, which is of more importance. I find this widespread opinion about Schopenhauer's influence on Tristan convincing as to music, much less so in the story line.

In telling the story Wagner used as metaphors Schopenhauer's night and day, daylight and darkness as symbols for illusion versus reality, or their love for each other versus the need to pretend or to hide. Magee himself repeatedly emphasizes that most of the opera audiences and even the readers of his book will not have read Schopenhauer nor be familiar with the philosopher's writings. Much of the dialogue could be understood without familiarity with Schopenhauer, but some other passages might make little sense.

There is, for one thing, some discussion during the second act love duet about the word, “and,” as in Tristan and Isolde. I first listened to the opera in my mid-teens, unfamiliar with Schopenhauer or the story, except in the most general way. I thought it an odd place and time for a discussion of some obscure point of grammar. It was some time before I knew that the idea was that the two lovers would be united one. As Magee himself notes, they would, as per Schopenhauer, be one not only with each other but also with, King Marke, Kurvenal, Brangâne, Melot, and everyone else who ever lived, and that's before we even get to the animals and the non-biological world. It doesn't really sound very enticing.

But Magee faces this dilemma head on. In the realm of night, the noumenal realm, all being is one. So, as per Schopenhauer, there is only one way in which “individuals can while in any sense identifiable as individuals partake literally of the same mode of being” (emphasis by Magee). That way, says Magee, is noumenal oneness through compassionate love, while still in the phenomenal world. But, continues Magee, this requires the denial of their wills as individuals.

Other than the use of those metaphors, which alone would not make the opera Schopenhauerian, the yearning of the lovers for unity with each other and continuation of their romantic and sexual love through death is contradictory to the philosopher's ideas. It is quite a conundrum, and Magee first fastens the fault on Wagner's only "half-grasp" of the subject while composing Tristan. He goes further in explaining where Wagner
went awry, and lost his way here, but for that we will wait for a discussion on *Parsifal*.

It is worth noting at this time however that it is rather jarring that Wagner should be said to have only a half-grasp of the Schopenhauer material upon writing *Tristan*. We have it from both Magee and from Wagner himself just how obsessed the composer had become from his first reading of *The World as Will and Representation* in October 1854. The first prose sketch for Tristan, which fully exhibits that “half-grasp” nature of Schopenhauer’s philosophy was in August 1857. According to Wagner, as we have seen, he read the whole of that 1000 page tome four times between October 1854 and the end of the following summer, which would be 1855. He wrote the entire prose draft of *Tristan* in August and September 1857. According to Magee, he returned to Schopenhauer’s work perpetually for the rest of his life.\(^{35}\)

The matter at issue here, involving two becoming one and resuming their passionate love in the noumenal world, is not at all in the Schopenhauerian scheme of things. What he has to say about that world, and its union of everything into one, without time, space or individuation or causation, is not some obscure aspect of it. On the contrary it is Schopenhauer 101. How could Wagner have overlooked it? Or did he just decide that it was wrong. If so, what kind of Schopenhaurian is that?

He apparently was of the kind who thought his idol was wrong, and was at least half convinced, and at least for a while, that he could explain to the philosopher the error in his ways. In Christianity, Schopenhauer had said,\(^{36}\) “we see the seed of asceticism unfold into full flower.” While working on Tristan Wagner meant to show the philosopher that sexual love was one of the ways to reach both self-awareness and self-denial and began a letter with precisely that intent. Wagner must have soon thought better of it and never sent, or even finished the letter. It is not hard to understand why. This subject was no minor aspect of Schopenhauer’s philosophical edifice. It was one of the cornerstones. Wagner kept it however and it is now to be found among his vast collection of correspondence.\(^{37}\) There was no other correspondence, either completed or incomplete between the two men, and they never met personally.

As stated above, we return to this in our discussion of *Parsifal*.

For now let us look at the Schopenhauerian influence on the music of *Tristan*. Much of Schopenhauer’s explanation\(^{38}\) about music is technical, but he was thoughtful enough to put the essence of his ideas in language
intelligible to laymen such as yours truly. Magee does a very creditable job of summarizing it. But it might be better to hear it first directly from Schopenhauer, and then from another who, in my opinion, does the best job of explanation for laymen. First, Schopenhauer:

Melody consists of two elements, one rhythmical and one harmonious; the former is concerned with the duration of the notes, the latter with their pitch and depth . . . The true nature of melody consists in the constantly renewed discord and reconciliation of the rhythmical with the harmonious element . . . The discord of those two fundamental elements consists in the fact that the demand of the one being satisfied, that of the other is not. But reconciliation consists in the two being satisfied simultaneously and at once” (Italics by Schopenhauer).

Schopenhauer explains at length the how and the why of the discord, something that need not be repeated for our purposes. More important are the following explanations:

The constant discord and reconciliation of its two elements which occurs here is, metaphysically considered, the copy of the origination of new desires, and then of their satisfaction. Precisely in this way the music penetrates our heart's by flattery, so that it always hold out to us the complete satisfaction of our desires.

He then strikes somewhat closer to home with matters that could well have been of more importance to Wagner. Schopenhauer here speaks of suspension and its effects. It explains quite clearly why we may justifiably find his influence in the music of Wagner's Tristan.

It is a dissonance delaying the final consonance that is with certainty awaited; in this way the longing for it strengthened, and its appearance affords the greater satisfaction. This is clearly an analogue of the satisfaction of the will which is enhanced through delay . . . Therefore music consists generally in a constant succession of chords more or less disquieting, i.e., of chords exciting desire with chords more or less quieting and
satisfying; just as the life of the heart (the will) is a constant succession of greater or lesser disquietude through desire or fear with composure in degrees just as varied... A sequence of merely consonant chords would be satiating, tedious and empty, like the languor produced by the satisfaction of all desires. Therefore, although dissonances are disquieting and have an almost painful effect, they must be introduced, but only to be resolved again into co consonances with proper preparation.

Schopenhauer notes that some may say that to the extent that music exalts our minds and speaks of worlds different from and better than ours, it nevertheless flatters only the will-to-live, since it depicts the true nature of the will, gives it a glowing account of its success, and at the end expresses its satisfaction and contentment. To those he answers with a passage from the Veda, a repository of Hindu faith: "And that rapturous which is a kind of delight is called the highest Atman (Sanskrit word for breath) because wherever there is a desire, this is a part of its delight."

If this is not sufficiently accessible, there follows a piece by Alessandro Pinzani,39 entitled "How much Schopenhauer is there really in Wagner?" He uses the word "tonic," which is the first note of a scale, or key, the note from which it takes its name (A, B flat, C sharp, etc.). Most music is written in a particular key and is called tonal music. This mean that the music creates a sense of gravitation toward a key center.

According to Pinzani:

The philosopher writes that music raises expectations in its hearers and leads them to desire that its melody resolve itself in its tonic. If this does not happen, we feel frustrated, as if the melody had remained unfinished, interrupted. This is why Schopenhauer says that "music consists generally in a constant succession of chords more or less disquieting, i.e. of chords exciting desire, with chords more or less quieting and satisfying; just as the life of the heart (the will) is a constant succession of greater or lesser disquietude, through desire or fear, with composure in degrees just as varied". In this context, Schopenhauer mentions musical suspension. This is given when what we thought to be the penultimate [second to last]
chord of a musical piece is not followed by the last chord and by the resolution on to a concord, [a harmonious combination of simultaneously sounded tones], but by another discord [An inharmonious combination of simultaneously sounded tones; a dissonance], by a chord that prolongs this resolution, creating an effect of surprise and desire, so that when the resolution finally comes the feeling of satisfaction is even bigger. (Explanations in the square brackets are mine).

Speaking more specifically about the application of those ideas to Tristan, Pinzani continues:

In a sense one could claim that the whole Tristan and Isolde is just a single suspension, since the real resolution only occurs at the last chord of the opera. The Tristan chord with which the opera starts contains two dissonances and only one of them is resolved, while the resolution of the other is prolonged—and this goes on for the whole opera: every resolved chord is followed by an unresolved one, so that the hearer remains at the same time satisfied and unsatisfied and the suspense is maintained till the end.

If neither of the above descriptions are accessible, I suggest a shorter, and pithier one by a writer whose name, unfortunately, now escapes me. "In Tristan" he says, "one is always waiting for the next shoe to drop."

Magee pointed to the resistance Wagner met in the musical world to such a work that had "broken free of tonality and could not be analyzed in conventional terms." It was felt that must be in a particular key, and structured in accordance with conventional understanding. He was looked upon as a "musical anarchist who, if he were allowed to get his way, would destroy all that was best in the Western musical tradition." In Tristan "it had been the single chord that defied analysis, but eventually

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For those not familiar with that expression: It involves a man whose room was below that of another who always came home late from work, and always wearing heavy boots. One at a time, he dropped them on the floor with a noise that woke the lower tenant who saw no point in falling asleep until both had dropped. Occasionally, for some reason, the second boot was not dropped until much later, and sometime not at all, which caused the nervous lower tenant much loss of sleep, always waiting for the other shoe to drop.
it would be whole works,” says Magee, “and of course this is precisely what happened in the generation after Wagner’s death. And when it did the pioneers of atonalism gave the need to go beyond Wagner as the justification of what they were doing.”

Act II love duet from premiere of Tristan and Isolde in Munich, 1865. The lovers here were real life husband and wife. Ludwig died a few months after the performance, widely believed at the time to be the result of the strenuous effort required by the opera.

The validity of much of Magee’s conclusions concerning the philosopher’s influence as affecting the metaphors of night versus day, and darkness versus light, as long as they lasted, are acknowledged, though Schopenhauer never used them himself. But what prevailed in the end were Wagner’s instincts, and there is nothing Schopenhauerian about it.

Many composers and other professional musicians, as well as laymen, have been most entranced by the second act love duet for its sheer intensity and captivating beauty. Less often has the third act been singled out as the high point of the drama, though Wagner himself, in April 1859 wrote to Mathilde Wesendonk from Venice:

“Child! This Tristan is becoming something frightful! This last act!!! - - - - - - I fear the opera will be forbidden—Only
through bad performances will the whole thing not be parodied—: Only mediocre performances can save me. Completely good ones will drive people mad,—I can’t think otherwise!! Thus far has it already come with me. Oh Lord!" (The dashes are his.)

That third act is not Schopenhauerian; it is Freudian. In it, we see, decades before Freud, a man on the couch. It does not deal with substantive ideas of Freud such as meaning of dreams or symbolism. It prefigures his process of psychoanalysis.

The last entry in Wagner’s Annals for 1855 reads: “Tristan conceived in more definite form: Act III point of departure for mood for whole.” He made it clear in later years however, that, like so many others, it was the second act that held him most in thrall.

Nonetheless, in his autobiography, My Life, Wagner wrote that homage to the third act, which was quoted in chapter 2 above. It bears repeating here:

While in the throes of composing the third act—one long ecstasy—wielded over me a strange, almost uncanny influence: for in the first scenes of this act it was made clear to me that in this opera . . . I had embodied the most daring and most exotic conceptions in all my writings. While I was at work on the great scene of Tristan [I] found myself asking whether I was not mad to want to give such work to a publisher to print for the theater. And yet I could not have parted with a single accent of that tale of pain, although the whole thing tortured me to the last degree.

There is plenty of action throughout that act, but it all occurs within the psyche of the dying Tristan. Few writers single out the third act. One who did was a prolific author of many books on music and musicians, Henry Theophilus Finck. He compared the third act to Beethoven’s last quartets and termed that act “the supreme emanation of unrestrained melodic wealth.” He made no reference, however to a comparison of episodes, events or characterizations in the opera to the ideas of Sigmund Freud.

Joseph Kerman, in the first edition of his Opera as Drama (1952), says flatly that the last act, “which is the greatest in every way, is concerned specifically with the conversion of Tristan in a long scene known as the
'Delirium.'" It was not until a later edition (1988) that he came closer than any other to a description, brief though it was, of the importance of the whole psychoanalytic process and the "Delirium" scene's closeness to it.

It is the nearness of that relationship that is our main focus here and so we start,

Sigmund Freud 1856-1939

not with ideas or theories of Wagner, but rather, those of Freud. With Schopenhauer we look back from Wagner's time a few years. For the last act we will look forward a few decades, and we will see that Wagner's own instincts got the better of the Schopenhauerian influence.

Born in 1856, Freud began his practice of psychiatry, a discipline of which he is often called the 'father', in 1881.\(^\text{45}\) That was only two years before Wagner's death. But it was 22 years after the completion of Tristan in 1859, and 16 years after its first performance in 1865.

It was not until 1895 that this "father of psychoanalysis" first wrote about the mental processes underlying what was then called hysteria.\(^\text{46}\) The only other possible claimant to the quoted term might be Josei
Breuer. In 1880 Breuer treated the case of one, Bertha Pappenheim, referred to in subsequent writings by the pseudonym “Anna O.” She was suffering from paralysis of her limbs and problems with both vision and speech. The treatment lasted two years beginning in 1880.47 Freud, as he stated in later lectures, was a student working for his final examinations at the time. He was, and remained, for a number of years, closely associated with Breuer. Freud also acknowledged that “Never before had anyone removed a hysterical symptom by such a method.”48

The method in question involved Breuer’s observation that after describing her symptoms to him, they were markedly reduced, and after confronting the trauma that initiated them, were eliminated. The term “hysteria” was at the time used to describe symptoms that showed no underlying physical cause. In more recent times it has been called “conversion disorder,” the conversion being from the conscious confronting of the painful realities, to involuntary physical behaviors or symptoms, sometimes harmful or at least obsessive.

Following the centuries old explanation that such patients were possessed by the devil, the new scientific dogma was to the effect that such things were unexplainable. That was a conclusion that Freud could never accept. To him, human behavior was indeed explainable, but only in terms of mostly hidden memories, processes or states of mind. He believed that logic and causality required that such hidden factors exist, as there was usually nothing in the conscious mind to account for the neuroticism. Thus he turned from pure interpretation of dreams and from hypnosis to psychoanalysis.

His starting point was the case of Anna O, and he believed that only through lengthy psychoanalysis could the suppressed material be brought to consciousness. Interestingly, Anna O. herself first called the method “chimney sweeping,” later referring to it as her “talking cure,” better terms perhaps than those of the psychiatrists.49 It was only one of several methods of psychoanalysis Freud developed.

The method, which is of most relevance to our interest in the final act of Tristan, involved encouraging the patient to talk. Freud wanted the patient to speak, to the extent possible, spontaneously, without inhibition or even forethought. The subject of the flow of words was intended to be about the earliest occurrences of the symptoms, until finally remembering the initial trauma that started them. Freud acted on the assumption that the repressed material, most often causing conflicts of one nature or another, were buried deeply in the unconscious portion of the brain.50
The purpose was to re-establish a harmonious relationship between the elements of the mind by excavating and resolving unconscious repressed conflicts. It is now sometimes called "talk therapy," and in Act III Tristan does indeed do much talking. Breuer's account of the cure of Anna O has been under attack in more recent times, as her history, not surprisingly, is today inconsistent with the notion of a cure. In later years, Freud and Breuer fell out, but Breuer's treatment of Anna O. remained the touchstone of Freud's widely acclaimed methodology.

According to Freud, on occasions his patients undergoing talk therapy experienced dramatically intense and highly emotional recollection of traumatic experiences. Some claimed it was like reliving the experience again. That often resulted in feeling a sense of renewal, or of being cleansed. The Greeks had a word for it. They called it "Catharsis."

Catharsis means purification or cleansing, and has been used to describe the climaxes in the tragedies of ancient Greece. They involved overwhelming feelings of pity, sorrow, or other emotion. According to Freud, these episodes often afforded deep insights into the long suppressed inner turmoil. It has been most often defined as an emotional release needed to resolve unconscious conflicts. The source word in Greek means "to purge or to clean," and "cathartic" describes something that is cleansing in nature or brings about a release or purging of emotions.

With all of this in mind, we return to Tristan and Isolde. That third act of an opera premiered decades before Freud may have been the earliest illustration of psychoanalysis, or talk therapy. It is in this third act that the orchestra is at its most eloquent and the most successful in conveying the subtle nuances of the many and varied highly emotional aspects of the inner drama.

It is the reality of night and darkness that the lovers seek. The light of day is blinding, and illusory. Like most such tales it comes to grief, and in the third act we will see the wounded, dying Tristan reliving some of the salient fact of his life. Much of what he says we, the audience, already know from earlier monologues: the first act narrative of Isolde, the chorus of sailors, and a narrative of King Marke, Tristan's uncle. To Kurvenal, Tristan's faithful attendant, we perhaps may legitimately ascribe the role of psychiatrist, at least to the minimum extent played by the doctor in cases of free association.

What we already know by act III is that Tristan was born on an estate known as Kareol on the north coast of Brittany in France. His father died before he was born; his mother died giving birth to Tristan. He was
raised by his uncle, King Marke who reigned over Cornwall in southwest England. We can assume that his earliest upbringing was in Cornwall, though he obviously returned to Kareol when mature enough to be in charge of the castle and its servants.

Still later, as a widely respected knight, Tristan was sent to fight the Irish, who had come to Cornwall to exact tribute. In single combat with Morold, an Irish knight, on an island, Tristan, wielding his sword, slayed his opponent with a blow to his head. In the process a fragment of Tristan's sword lodged in the head of the Irish Knight. The head of Morold was sent by the victorious English, in mockery, to Ireland.

But Tristan, seriously wounded, is drifting in a boat to the Irish coast. There he is treated with tender care by a young Irish princess, Isolde, mistress of many cures and magic powers of healing. Unknown to Tristan however she had been the betrothed of Morold.

Tristan attempted to disguise himself to the Irish maid by telling her his name was Tantris. But Tristan could not fool this young woman. She had removed the fragment from Morold's severed head and had kept it on her person. Tristan's sword lay near his pain wracked body, and she quickly found that her keepsake fit perfectly into a notch in the sword.

She approached him, sword in hand, planning, as she later said to her attendant, Brangäne, to get revenge for Morold. In one of the most moving lines in the opera, dramatically and vocally, she says: From his berth, he looked at me, "not at the sword, not at my hand; He looked me in the eye." His suffering unsettled her. She let the sword drop, thus sparing the life of her betrothed's killer.

But some time later, after the rejuvenated Tristan returned to Cornwall, the widowed, childless, King Marke considered marriage. Many urged him to do so, but none more strongly than Tristan. Tristan even threatened to leave his kingdom unless the king permitted Tristan to win a bride for him. The king relented and Tristan, knowing exactly who he wanted, sails to Ireland. Peace is sworn to by Ireland and Cornwall and Isolde is chosen by Tristan to be the bride of the aged King Marke.

The first act of the opera is set on the ship that carries Isolde and Tristan to Cornwall. As a well-known 18th Century English dramatist put

* One wit has called this akin to Winston Churchill walking into the German High Command in WWII, saying "hello, my name is Tonwins Hillchurch and I would like to work with you."
it, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." The furious Isolde is clearly a woman scorned. She calls upon the elements to smash this ship and drown everyone aboard. Brangäne is mystified that her mistress has been so morose, even before the beginning of the voyage.

We soon learn why. Despite having saved Tristan’s life, he has now arranged with the Irish to have their Princess Isolde marry King Marke. And he now refuses to even look at her. She sends her maid to insist that Tristan, who commands the ship, come below to see her. He finally does so, but not before Isolde had told the horrified Brangäne that when drinks were ordered she was to bring a death potion from the chest of potions that her parents had given her before she set sail. When Tristan finally comes she bitterly taunts him. She mimics his imagined pride upon presenting her to his "lord and uncle." Dripping with irony she describes Tristan as explaining to the king how he had killed her betrothed and sent his head home to Ireland, and that she had later saved his life with her tender care.

She plans for both she and Tristan to drink from the cup. But when she does order the drink, it is, unknown to the two principals, a “love potion.” Brangäne has substituted it for the poison. Tristan was thus given, and both of them drank, a potion which they thought would bring death, but it did not.

It is clear to us that he was indeed deeply in love with Isolde. Whether it was as clear to him however we cannot be so sure. He knew, or thought he did, what the potion was from much of what Isolde in her fury had implied. Why did he drink it? Was it because of the alternative prospect of a life of unrequited love? Guilt for his longing for the bride of King Marke who had done so much for him? Or for having brought into an unwanted marriage the woman who had saved his life?

In this first act Isolde has skillfully done much to place the heaviest possible burden of guilt on him. The unrequited love was most certainly one reason for Isolde seeking death with the poison even if not the only one. Tristan was in any event willing to accept death. But now he, like Isolde, must live, and endure whatever agony it was that motivated him to end his life. After they had both drunk their portions, they each knew they would live and that they each would have to endure. Whatever the motivation had been, after drinking the potion they no longer knew anything but their mutual love for each other. They threw restraint to the winds, and fell into each other’s arms, and into a brief, but rapturous duet.
In act II, Tristan, apparently believing, or having convinced himself, that his unquenchable love for Isolde has been caused by the potion, is now engaged with her in a torrid illicit affair. During an assignation, with its intensely penetrating love music, possibly the most ravishingly beautiful of all such operatic duets, both of them praise the magic of the potion and the ecstasy it has brought them. But Isolde has earlier in that act told her guilt ridden maid that it was not she, the maid, but the love goddess who caused this intense love.

In this duet we hear, clearly, that day and light shine on a world of illusion; nothing to be seen is real. Only darkness and night contain reality. This was indeed the influence of Schopenhauer. In fact it was Schopenhauer undisguised.

But then, to the two lovers, there is the sudden unwanted appearance of King Marke and a contingent of knights. One of the knights is Tristan’s supposed friend Melot. It was Melot who betrayed him to the king. If the guilt caused by Isolde’s previous bitter verbal attack on Tristan was not sufficient to cause him to seek release by death, the softly spoken dressing down by the broken hearted king, more in shock than anger, certainly was. Tristan asks Isolde if she would follow him to the place where sun never shines. She unhesitatingly agrees. Filled with guilt on both counts, and possibly with the dread of a life without Isolde, he invites death by drawing his sword against Melot, then lowers his shield, allowing Melot to run him through with his sword. Tristan drops to the ground.

All of this has set the stage for act III, the focus of our attention now. However it might be well to use this intermission to examine what some of the Wagner scholars have had to say about the “talk therapy” to be engaged in by Tristan, and the catharsis he will undergo. The similarity of the teachings of Freud to some of the individual events that Tristan relives and how he reacts to them, have been frequently noted. But the larger picture of the entire process Tristan undergoes and its similarity to the process of psychoanalysis, largely initiated by Freud, have been mostly, with one possible exception, ignored by the writers.

Magee, for one example, writes:

He had the most remarkable understanding, long before psychology or anthropology, of the psychic import of myth. He realized a half a century before Freud that ‘today we have only to interpret the Oedipus myth in a way that keeps faith with its essential meaning to get a coherent picture from it of the whole
history of mankind . . . the essentials of modern psychology seem to be present, uncoordinated, in his writings.

"Uncoordinated" is, rather, a good description of the references made by the scholars to Freud. They do not look at his processes, only at bits and pieces of psychiatry's substantive teachings that seem to be so similar to bits and pieces of Wagner's drama, and it must be said, to human behavior in general.

Elsewhere, Magee speaks of Wagner operas as being like "animated textbooks of psychoanalysis," but sees only the orchestra as the entity revealing the innermost aspects of the drama. He speaks of "proto-Freudian and proto-Jungian insight," using the Oedipus myth as the example. But Freud drew his conclusions from observing and hearing people. When humans continue to behave as they have for so many centuries now, it seems of doubtful value to term such continued behavior "Freudian." What is new with Freud, aside from his systematic interpretation of dreams, is his methodology and procedures.

It is Joseph Kerman who comes closest to utilizing the entire Freudian edifice:

It is tempting to substitute a Freudian mythology here for the one offered by Wagner. The long "Delirium" scene is a record of the man pulling himself back together, dredging through his past life and feelings to reach a new synthesis. The process, which I have called Tristan's conversion, is the greatest dramatic feat in the opera, and, I would be inclined to say, in all of Wagner's works.

The Delirium scene is, of course Act III. And I would be "inclined to say" it is the greatest dramatic feat in all stage representations I have seen of any kind, and I cannot imagine any that could strike any deeper or rise to greater heights. It is time now to return to the opera and Act III.

The mortally wounded knight had been brought by his faithful servant Kurvenal to the castle, Kareol, where Tristan was born. And it is during

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I say this despite the fact that Wagner himself bestowed that honor on the powerful final scene of Mozart's Don Giovanni. And his comment was uttered almost six years after he had completed Tristan though it was still unperformed. The comment came also just a few days before his rescue from abject poverty by King Ludwig II.
this act that we see, figuratively speaking, a man on the couch. Wagner depicts him undergoing self-analysis, probably the only case of analysis, self or otherwise, in opera as opposed to the traditional operatic narration to others, which is usually a device to educate the audience on past history.

In this act he recounts some of the events of his early life, practically all of which we already know. As he does however we see the process of his ultimate coming to terms with himself. His words are poignant, the orchestra, commenting on his every expressed thought, even more so.

True psychotherapy may require many months or years before showing results. Some Wagnerophobes claim that this scene does indeed seem that long, but this process is telescoped into no more than forty or forty-five minutes.

The short orchestral prologue pictures (to me), appropriately huge waves moving slowly toward shore and abruptly breaking on rocks near it. At the start of the act, the severely wounded Tristan is sleeping near the shore. The faithful Kurvenal stands nearby, talking to an old shepherd who plays a mournful tune on his pipe. Kurvenal is waiting for a ship, and the shepherd agrees to play a happier tune should he spot it from his elevated ground. The sad tune the shepherd plays as he leaves awakens Tristan, who recognizes it from long ago. He hears from Kurvenal that he is in Kareol, not Cornwall, and how he got there, carried as he was, by Kurvenal himself.

Tristan is thoroughly disoriented and seems to remember nothing. His speech is slow and halting, and uttered with difficulty. He answers Kurvenal’s assurances that he is safe in Kareol: “Do you think so? I know different,” he tells Kurvenal, “but what, I cannot tell you. Where I awoke I didn’t stay, though where I stayed, I cannot tell you. I never saw the sun, nor land or people, but what I saw I cannot tell you. I was where I always was, and where I will always go: in the broad kingdom of the world’s night.”

His gathering thoughts at first involve his ceaseless longing for Isolde. But Kurvenal explains he has sent for her, and a loyal man is bringing her over the sea. Tristan is now exultant. “Kurvenal, my loyal friend,” he exclaims, “how can I thank you? My shield, my protection! Get to the lookout tower, quick.” But Kurvenal is afraid to leave him as he is obviously delirious. Tristan thinks he sees the ship; Isolde is waving; the flag is at the mast. “The ship, the ship! Don’t you see it?”

No, says Kurvenal sadly, he does not see it. The sad tune of the shepherd’s pipe confirms that there is no ship in sight. Tristan sinks into
the depths of despair. The shepherd's tune continues. It was that tune that he says he heard long ago, in the evening silence, when he was first told of his father's death. Through a morning's greyness he was still more fearful as he heard the tune when learning how his mother died. To what chosen fate was he born, he asks, only to yearn and to die? The shepherd's pipe stops and we hear the orchestra's wafting repetition of a theme recalling earlier days when she healed him.

No. No, he calls out. "In dying ever yearning, though yearning brings no dying. What never dies, yearning now calls the distant healer for the peace of death." Suddenly he seems to be venturing into reality. To the accompaniment of themes and variations heard in the earlier acts, He recalls some of the emotional highs and lows of his life. Both what he recalls and what he does not are significant aspects of his half-conscious recollections. There is also a developing and painful recognition that he had succumbed to an existing, unexpressed love for Isolde, which long predated the potion.

"Daylight's deceitful glare" he cries. Only by nearness to Isolde can he return to the night. He remembers his first meeting with that distant healer, as he was dying in the boat, and the wound's poison neared his heart. He claims again that he heard the painful piping even as the wind blew him closer to Ireland's child. He now engages in either a bit of imagination, or perhaps more likely, symbolic language: "The wound that she closed and healed, she ripped open again." In the next two musings he bypasses much history: "She let the sword fall: She gave me poison to drink." Bu he ignores his role in the interim, namely, arrangement of her marriage in a foreign land to his elderly uncle. But whatever he ignores, he will soon have to face.

He continues, still recalling the potion: "As I hoped to be glad for it, a searing magic came over me: that I would never die; that I would inherit eternal grief. The drink! The drink! The frightful drink! How from heart to brain, it wildly went through me! No cure, no sweet death can ever free me from that longing need: Never, never can I find peace. Night throws me to day so that eternally to my suffering the sun will ever shine. Oh, this sun, searing rays, how its scorching torment burns my head. For this searing, burning pain, no cooling shadow of enveloping night! For this searing, horrible pain, what potion can give me relief?

Whatever definition we may use for "catharsis" and there are many, what happens next will fit any of them:
“I, I myself have brewed it; out of my father’s needs and my mother’s pain; out of tears of love, then and now, out of laughter and crying, wonders and wounds, I have found the drink’s poison. That which I brewed, that which I tasted, I devoured that ecstasy, and enjoyed it. Cursed be that frightful drink! Cursed be him who brewed it,” referring now, necessarily, to himself.

He has faced the truth; he has accepted responsibility. After this emotionally exhausting catharsis, Tristan faints; Kurvenal, first fearful that he is dead, is relieved that his master is still breathing. He soon regains consciousness, and demands to know, “The ship, don’t you see the ship?” Yes, says Kurvenal, certainly. It will arrive today. It cannot be delayed much longer.

And Tristan now, for the second time, describes the ship that brings Isolde to him. This is also an hallucination but this time it is different. He was then in wild excitement. But now he seems to be a man at peace with himself. The all-knowing orchestra understands and once again paints a tonal portrait of the sea.

This time however we neither see nor hear waves breaking against rocks. The orchestra quietly paints, and we hear, and see in our minds, a calm sea with wavelets leisurely rising and dropping, and the ship rocking gently with them in the breeze. Neither the orchestra nor the voice of Tristan betrays any tension. The cathartic scene was delivered in a rapid fire white heat. This one is fed to us as though in slow motion; a single phrase, sometimes a single note, and plenty of time to digest each; a soothing palliative:

“And on it, Isolde. How she waves—how sweetly she drinks reunion: Don’t you see her? How she blissfully, majestically and tenderly, wanders through the ocean’s paths. By delightful flowers, the gentle swells, she is drawn softly to shore. Her smiles bring consolation and sweet rest; she guides me to my last repose. Isolde, Ach Isolde. How beautiful you are!”

We should hear again from Joseph Kerman: “The miracle, this time, has been accomplished: Tristan achieves a new integrity, a state of felicity, in which he can invoke Isolde with a purity apart from or above yearning, without undertones of day or anxiety or passion or curse . . . It is one of the great moments in the opera.”56 I find it one of the greatest moments in all opera.

Then comes the shepherd’s pipe again, but now the tune is a happy one. This time it is no hallucination. Kurvenal confirms it: “wonders, joy; from the north I see it approach.” He now rushes to the watch tower and
looks out. Tristan does indeed see the ship approach. In his recall of life’s events, culminating in a powerful catharsis, he has rid himself of the notion that he was born to this misery by fate; likewise of the notion it was caused by the drink.

But it has not rid him of his love for Isolde. That is not a notion. That is real and he is ecstatic at the news. But there are dark rocks near the shore, causing Tristan more fear. When the ship is past them and reaches the shore he orders Kurvenal down from the “Help her. Help my lady.”

Tristan’s joy is boundless. No more talk now of night. He exults “Oh this sun,” but the tone is now joyful, this “glorious” sun. (happened to Schopenhauer?). No more yearning for death: “Tristan hero,” he exclaims, “with bleeding wound you’ve come back from edge of death,” but through a cruel irony those words come just mor before he dies in the arms of Isolde. But not before he stands, tear bandage from his wound and rejoices that Isolde comes like a hero to him forever. He dies uttering her name.

Nothing that happens thereafter, with one possible exception, has relevance to our present focus: Not the arrival of a second ship, but the king, Brangäne,
Melot, and others of the king's entourage; not the unnecessary fight by Kurvenal against the arriving knights, not even his death, Melot's death, the laments of King Marke and Isolde, or her "Liebestod," the "Love Death". That last segment, a frequently performed concert piece, is akin to a benediction or something spiritual, if not religious.

It has all been a miraculous depiction of an inner drama, a miracle also of orchestration. Had Wagner, like Freud, but 50 years before him, perceived for his own purposes, the value of an unrestrained flow of talk to unleash inner, unrecognized conflicts? The evidence of it is most convincing.

* * *

A few thoughts on the entire subject: Magee's treatment of the opera and his argument for the strong influence of Schopenhauer is quite cogent and persuasive—except, that is, for the final act. His treatment of act 3 is for me the biggest disappointment of his entire book. The stark drama of it has apparently escaped him: "This act consists largely of Tristan's "rememberings [recollections?], ravings, and yearnings." At last Isolde does arrive, whereupon Tristan deliriously tears off his bandages and dies in her arms—after which she dies too."

Magee has shown himself to be a scholar and a prescient analyst. In this passage he makes himself sound more like a novice, viewing the opera for the first time. His treatment of Isolde's fate at the end is no less artless: "Wagner's heroines are much given to dying from no evident cause other than obedient response to some such stage direction as 'sinks lifeless to the ground', and this is a case of it, only here she sinks lifeless on to Tristan's body." "Lifeless" is a word added by Magee. It is not in the text nor in the stage directions.

Practically all Tristan opera programs, synopses and other literature say that she dies, but I am still waiting for someone to tell me where in the text or stage directions it says so. The final stage directions say that she sinks "wie verklaert," which can only translate "as though transfigured." Transfigured, or verklaert is defined the same way in both languages, and can mean "transfigured, glorified, or radiant" (Cassell's German-English Dictionary). It can mean to "change the figure, form or outward appearance," or "to transform so as to exalt or glorify" (Webster's New World Dictionary). A dead person can be transfigured, but so can a live one.
I am quite aware that it was Wagner himself who first used the term *Love Death*, but that appellation can refer to many things other than a death of Isolde. It is used in the second act love duet between the two principals, and it does not mean death as most think of it. It could mean a Schopenhauercian death, namely entry into another stage of being, something that Magee, of all people, should have recognized:

Nur banne das Bangen,
Holder Tod,
Sehnend verlangter
Liebestod!
In deinen Armen,
Dir geweiht,
Unheilig Erwärmen,
Von Erwachen’s Not befreit!

Now banish the fears
Sweet death
Long yearned for
Love in Death!
In your arms
Dedicated to you
Unhallowed warmth
Freed from waking’s needs!

Wagner knew very well how to tell us that a person dies in the conventional sense. He tells us unequivocally that Tristan dies. He used the word about Isolde in his prose sketch and told us exactly how she died: “She is transported by bliss, rushes in the sea to drown. To forget! Supreme release, redemption!—She sinks down, blissfully transfigured and dies.” No, she did not die without cause. She drowned.

But in the poetic rendering he changed it. He omitted the drowning, and also the death. And said only that she seemed to be transfigured. Millington, in his 1984 volume, (*Wagner*, p.236), and Robert Donnington (*Opera and Its Symbols*, p.129), among a few others, agree that there is no basis for saying she dies. The former says it doesn’t matter. I think it does.

The climax of Tristan’s ravings and “rememberings” is most unSchopenhauerian. He is happy to be alive and looks forward to life
with Isolde. Never mind darkness. He is thrilled by the light. I cannot help but wonder if that is the cause of Magee’s curt dismissal of the third act, namely, it is so un-Schopenhauerian. But could the deliberate use of ‘transfiguration’ and the discard of death be a final, if cursory acknowledgment of his idol’s philosophy?

It is worth a bit of discussion. It obviously meant something to Wagner. What it was we can only guess. One guess, and perhaps a good one: The change, evident only in ‘transfiguration,’ for death, may have meant a turn to asceticism. The merits of such a life are described throughout Schopenhauer’s seminal work. In Christianity, he says,57 “we see the seed of asceticism unfold into full flower . . . Besides the purest love, these preach also complete resignation, voluntary and absolute poverty, true composure, complete indifference to all worldly things, death to one’s own will and regeneration in God, entire forgetting of one’s own person and absorption in the contemplation of God.”

Further: “Voluntary and complete chastity is the first step in asceticism or the denial of the will.”58 The philosopher quotes with approval and concurrence from Der Katholik, “That In Catholicism the observance of perpetual chastity as an end in itself sanctifies and exalts man, is, as every instructed Catholic is convinced, deep rooted in Christianity according to its spirit and express precept.”59

What else would she do with her life now? Wagner may have ultimately preferred that she go the way of Noumena or Nirvana. We might have thought that Bryan Magee, more than anyone, might have picked up on this. If she were going to live now with her aged husband she may have had no other choice. But that would be nothing new. As we will see in the Ring operas, Wotan always welcomes his fate when he has no other choice. This may not be the right answer, but it might be better than the disdainful and contrived response Magee made to the ending of that monumental structure.

* * *

Patrick Carnegy spent 40 years writing his much heralded Wagner and the Art of the Theater, published in 2006. In 2007, in recognition of the value of that book, he was awarded The Royal Philharmonic Society prize for “creative communication.” During the same period he served as assistant editor of the London Times Literary Supplement in the 1970s; music books editor at Faber, a well-known English publisher
in the 1980s; and dramaturge at the Royal Opera House from 1988 to 1992. Who would be better qualified to talk about the ideal staging for Wagner's operas?

He wrote about this one in the English National Opera Guide 6, for the 1981 performance of Tristan and Isolde:

There is a powerful line of argument that a concert performance of 'Tristan' preferably heard with one's back to the singers and orchestra, is the ideal performance, and that any stage representation is a sin against the essential nature of the work. For, of all Wagner's dramas, 'Tristan' is the most sheerly musical, the most perfect expression of Schopenhauer's assertion of the supremacy of music over all other arts.

To which I have nothing to add, except that Carnegy's scenario seems a passable, if unintended, metaphor for Tristan on a psychiatric couch, rather than running around a stage emoting.
CHAPTER 6

The Mastersingers

About this opera, Magee has said: “one could go into a performance of it with all the trouble of the world on one’s shoulders and come out truly reconciled to life with all its folly and grief. There is an extraordinarily powerful . . . life-assertion, an acceptance that life is, after all, worth living.”

I have no argument. Mastersingers is a great experience, but I challenge anyone to read any significant number of pages of Schopenhauer’s works and let us know that the author thinks life is worth living.

He has given his opinion of it in dozens of ways. We would all be better off, he states, not having been born. That notion goes back at least as far as 6th century B.C. Greece and the lyric poet Theognis, repeated by Sophocles 50 years later and by many throughout the centuries. It is doubtful however if anybody has ever hammered it home with such force or detailed reasons as does Schopenhauer. Life is meant by nature to be painful, says Schopenhauer. Pleasures are illusory. “There is only one inborn error, and that is the notion that we exist in order to be happy . . . For at every step, in great things as in small, we are bound to experience that the world and life are certainly not arranged for the purpose of containing a happy existence.”

The Mastersingers is many things, has been called many things, and described in many ways, but Schopenhauerian it is not. Magee went into his analysis of the opera determined to find influence of Schopenhauer somewhere. Naturally he found it. It wasn’t hard, but he made much more of it, I believe, than it was really entitled to.

Though Wagner had made his first prose sketch of Mastersingers during his vacation in Marienbad in 1845, he later made an entirely new one, the one ultimately used in drafting the poetic text, in November 1861. This latter date was seven years after first reading The World as Will and Representation. He made it a point to stick in two minor
episodes based on language he had found in Schopenhauer's book, neither of which are of major importance to the thrust of the story or the opera's major theme.

For those unfamiliar with it, we start with a summary of the story. Unlike his other operas, the story of this one is original with Wagner; it is not based on any ancient or medieval history or legends, though there was a real 16th century poet named Hans Sachs. The major theme is the artistic advantage of having the same artist compose both the poetry and the music. The vehicle is a simple story based on a typical plot of young lovers and their attempts to overcome all obstacles to their plans for a life together. In 16th century Germany, the obstacles, as in all of Europe, could be formidable.

Walther von Stolzing, a young knight is enamored of Eva, a beautiful, if somewhat scheming young woman. She resides with her father, Veit Pogner, a wealthy goldsmith. Walther (Stolzing) has come to Nuremberg and stays in the home of Pogner, with whom he was already acquainted. His overtures to Eva are welcomed, but, alas, Pogner has offered the hand of his daughter in marriage to the winner of a song contest to be held the following morning. Contestants must be unmarried and must be a member of the guild of mastersingers.

To qualify as a member he also must display competency in a song, the music of which must be his own creation to words that he alone has written, a la Wagner himself. He is given instruction in the poetry rules by David, the apprentice of Hans Sachs, the shoemaker, and those concerning the acceptable musical structure by Fritz Kothner, the town baker. There is a meeting of the guild that very morning. All members, including the town clerk, Sixtus Beckmesser, and eight others of the membership (one is out sick) are present.

Beckmesser, being single, happens to be one of the only two eligible contestants for the following morning's songfest. The other is the highly respected Hans Sachs, a widower, who is not likely to compete. Sachs is up in years and has taken part in raising Eva after the death of her mother, Pogner's wife.

Our hero is Sachs, wise, gentle and tactful, and then we have Beckmesser, a rude, clumsy, boorish fellow. Beckmesser is uptight about the new applicant for admission to the guild, but luckily for Beckmesser he is the 'marker' for Walther's audition. this means that he shuts himself in a cubicle with drawn curtains and, whenever the singing contestant violates one of the many stringent rules of the guild, makes a mark on a
blackboard with chalk. As Walther sings, Beckmesser furiously marks the board, finally jumping out and shouting that there is no more room for marks about this terrible song.

Most of the guild members agree that the young knight is not qualified. But Sachs is obviously more modern, not only than the 16th century, but also the 19th century when the opera was written. Sachs takes issue with the other members, saying that we should let the applicant use his own rules and listen with open minds. Things turn personal between Sachs and Beckmesser.

That night Beckmesser plans to serenade Eva. But Eva is in the dark as to what happened at the audition. She goes to see Sachs, knowing he is attracted to her, and would answer her, and learns that Walther has failed entry to the guild. She subtly lets him know that she would hope he would not let her be married to Beckmesser, but Sachs insists he is too old for her. Angrily she lets enough slip that Sachs realizes she is in love with Walther. Plans are soon made between Walther and Eva to elope. Sachs now suspecting such plans by the young couple has moved his awl from his shop, which is within easy sight of Pogner’s home, onto the street where he works on the shoes Beckmesser needs to wear to the songfest. He also lets the light from the shop shine onto the street, which inhibits the elopement as the couple can then be easily seen.

Beckmesser’s serenade is interrupted first by Sachs’s loud singing, supposedly to himself. Then in a more devilish plan, Sachs agrees to Beckmesser’s request that the shoemaker keep quiet, and also critique his song. But Sachs insists, with obvious irony, that he must work on the shoes and will strike the awl with his hammer when the clerk makes a mistake. The strikes on the hammer come faster and faster as do the arguments between the two men.

Eva has had her servant, Magdelena, who lives also in Pogner’s home, appear at the window in place of Eva, while she, Eva, is hiding downstairs with Walther. David, the apprentice, watching from Sachs’s home, thinks that Beckmesser is courting Magdelena, with whom he is in love, and runs out on the street and cudgels Beckmesser. Sachs shouts for him to stop. It takes little time for neighbors to shout for quiet, and then for apprentices, journeymen and finally masters to join in, and for cobbler, tailors, locksmiths, joiners, barbers, cooper, or grocers, to look for, and blame each other for starting it all. They scatter when the night watchman comes through warning all to beware of goblins and ghosts.

The next morning Sachs, alone in his shop, delivers a piece known as the “Wahn, monologue” meaning madness among other things. He laments the violence of the
Hans Sachs: “Madness everywhere, wherever I look, in state or world chronicles.”

previous evening and tells us, like a well learned lesson from Schopenhauer, that people do not realize when they hurt another, they are also biting into their own flesh. This, according to Magee, is influence # 1. Walther, who had spent the rest of the night in Sachs’s home has come downstairs and is looking for Eva, but she is not around.

Under Sachs’s guidance, Walther composes, based on a dream he had that night, two of the three stanzas required for a song. This is Episode # 2 that Magee claims to be Schopenhaurian. He recites the two stanzas and Sachs writes them down. Walther has trouble with the third which he says should describe a woman, “as fair and beautiful as I have never seen.” Confident of Walther’s coming success, Sachs suggests they both dress appropriately for the coming song fest.

While the two are dressing, Beckmesser enters, limping from the cudgeling he took the previous evening. He looks around and sees a freshly written poem in Sachs’s handwriting, and when Sachs enters, Beckmesser accuses him of planning to enter the competition that morning. Sachs denies it, whereupon
k shows him the poem. Sachs tells him that he can have it and
tell anyone he composed it, which of course he didn't. The exul-
errer, limping, and ecstatic to have a poem by Sachs, runs out.

a enters, supposedly to complain about the shoe pinching,
again suggesting that Sachs should enter the contest for her
riage. Sachs overcome with his own lot in life and the poss
with this beautiful young woman tells her as he tries on her
has reconsidered her suggestion. But he gets no answer as, u
self, Walther has entered elegantly dressed and the young c
mediately entranced with each other. Sachs hears Walther s
verse of his song which he has now composed, and Sachs la
t lot as an older man (We will hear more details about this l
Eva falls weeping on his breast. He responds that he know
ory of Tristan and Isolde and does not wish to play the role of
and steps aside for the young knight.
the song contest, Beckmesser is humiliated when he obviously
le to set the poem to music. He then announces that it was
rote it. Sachs announces that it was Walther von Stolzing
it and that the young knight

Staging of Prize song, last act of Meistersinger at the
Metropolitan Opera House in 1898. In later times, the dress of
both performers and audience has drastically changed
would sing the proper music to it. Walther does so, is acclaimed by the assembled crowd, admitted to the guild and wins Eva as his bride.

So how can anyone find Schopenhauer's pessimism, let alone misanthropy, in that story? There are mainly the two particular items mentioned that Magee finds to be the influence of Schopenhauer. We will discuss them in the reverse order of their appearance in the opera. There is additionally a general proposition that Magee apparently believes that Sachs lives in the world of the noumena, or perhaps has reached the Nirvana of the Buddhists.

First we consider the subject of dreams. Magee tells us that some relationship between "art and dreams", which he describes as a "distinctive idea of Schopenhauer," made its appearance in Act III of The Mastersingers. What was the distinctive idea? Magee tells us that Schopenhauer firmly believed that all of us dream for most of every night, but upon awakening have no recollection of what we dreamt. Where Schopenhauer says this is rather difficult to find, and Magee gives us no inkling, though hardly anyone would dispute it. These dreams, Magee says, are the workings of our unconscious minds. Says Magee further:

However when we begin drifting up to the surface, we will go on dreaming, often until we wake; and when we do it is these morning dreams (Emphasis supplied) that we remember: for what they have been in our minds, and the degree of unconsciousness in which we were dreaming them was shallow for we were already on our way back to consciousness . . . This makes them a form of contact between our conscious selves and an unconscious to which we have no direct access. Thus they were able to disclose to us . . . the truest depth of our inner world.

What is the source for all of this? It appears to be a fleeting reference to what is perhaps the only serious mention by Schopenhauer of any kind of dreams or dreaming. By way of illustrating the calm of one who has completely overcome the will to live, in his imagined final moments of life Schopenhauer says, "He looks back calmly . . . Life and its forms merely float before him as a fleeting phenomenon, as a light morning dream to one half awake, through which reality already shines, and which can no longer deceive; and like this morning dream, they too finally vanish without any violent transition." (Emphasis supplied)
So, in Act III, Wagner has Walther, the young knight, after telling Sachs that he had slept lightly, but deeply and well, further say he had a very beautiful dream, but fears that even thinking about it may drive it away. Wagner may indeed have taken it from the lines of Schopenhauer just quoted, though he does not have Walther call it a “morning dream.” “Soundly and well” sounds just the opposite. Sachs then replies:

My friend, this is precisely the poet’s task,
To note and interpret his own dreaming.
Believe me, the truest fancies a human being has
Are revealed to him as dream;
And all creativity and poetizing
Are nothing but the elucidation of dreams that tell us truth
(Emphasis supplied).

So there is no mention by Wagner (or Walther) of “morning dreams.” That is mentioned only by Magee who quotes Schopenhauer’s incidental reference to it.

There were many who contributed to the growing field of psychoanalysis in the 19th and early 20th centuries, for which Freud is usually given full credit. Among them are usually listed the names of Mesmer, Adler, Jung and Pierre Janet among others. But with a certitude that must have surpassed even the Wagnerian variety, Magee wrote: “All of this, of course, was taken from Schopenhauer by Freud, who called dreams the royal road to the unconscious.”

All of what of course? Dreams in general? The interpretation of dreams? Schopenhauer’s writings may well have contributed to Freud’s ideas in a number of areas, but certainly not dreams. Though Freud states that he read nothing of Schopenhauer until late in life that would not rule out the possibility that he knew from other sources something of Schopenhauer’s ideas, but it was undoubtedly nothing about dreams.

There appears no possible justification for Magee’s “all of this was taken from Schopenhauer by Freud.” There are many aspects to the philosophical writings of Schopenhauer, such as knowledge, logic, mathematics, rhetoric, metaphysics, syllogisms, teleology, genius, madness, history, aesthetics and a host of other subjects. Interestingly, however, he says almost nothing about our subject matter here: dreams. The most frequent claim of Schopenhauer’s influence on Freud involves the proposition that the “will” of Schopenhauer is the “unconscious” of
Freud. That latter word became one of common usage and some writers equate the two. We need not get into that controversy at all. Our subject is dreams, about which there is very little in Schopenhauer, and even less of significance.

There are many facets to Freud's work also, but we need only mention his Interpretation of Dreams to make the point that he was much more vitally interested in dreams and dreaming than Schopenhauer. There are scant mentions of dreams in Schopenhauer's seminal work, about 33, scattered throughout the 1180 or so pages of the two volumes of The World as Will and Representation.65

Without exception they are not relevant to our subject. They undoubtedly show the lack of importance of dreams in the thinking of Schopenhauer. A possible exception is the one fleeting passage, already mentioned, about a 'morning dream,' used merely to illustrate a point. At another point he spends two pages discussing sleep, in which he mentions only twice the word 'dream,' and then nothing of significance.66 There is one other which stands out from all of the other uses of "dreaming." It is lengthier than the others but it is quoted here in its entirety, because, superficially at least, it comes closer than any other to containing matter that could bear on our subject.

Schopenhauer mentions an episode reported by Socrates, about which he then says:67 "Here we are also reminded of the daemon, by virtue of which he had the feeling that he must leave undone an action expected by him or lying near him without knowing why; for his prophetic dream about it was forgotten." The daemon does not sound like a dream. It resulted in a "feeling," not a dream. Nonetheless, he then continues with this:

We have quite well authenticated cases analogous to this in our own day; I therefor call these to mind only briefly. One person had booked his passage in a ship, but when it was about to sail he positively would not go on board, and was not aware of any ground or reason; the ship went down. Another goes with companions to a power magazine; when he arrives in its vicinity, he absolutely refuses to go any further, but quickly turns round; he is seized with fear without knowing why; the magazine blew up; A third person at sea feels induced one evening without any ground or reason not to undress. He lies down with his clothes and boots and even with his spectacles
on. In the night the ship catches fire and he is one of the few who are saved in the boat.

Schopenhauer's conclusion is that "All this depends on the dull after-effect of forgotten fatidical [prophetic] dreams and gives the key to an analogous understanding of instinct and mechanical tendencies." But his assumption that dreams were involved in his examples is not shown to be backed up by any claim that any of these persons did have a dream, any dream, let alone a prophetic dream. None of them, as far as we know, said anything about a dream. Magee apparently assumes that there were dreams but were forgotten.

In any event, what are we to make of such reports? Does Schopenhauer believe that these tragic events were preordained? By whom? He has told us he does not believe in any God or gods. Did whoever preordained them pick these particular passengers to warn of the coming catastrophes?

Things seem to have settled down a bit, but it was not too long ago that there was hardly an aviation disaster that did not produce a story, usually prominently reported and displayed, about some prospective passenger, all set to go, but who had that bad feeling and decided not to board. I have personally seen a few cases of that. It would be inevitable that sooner or later in those early days of flying, when so many still feared going aloft, there would be a convergence here and there of a "bad feeling" and an airplane crash.

There is no evidence that Wagner, or his characters Hans Sachs, or Walther, ever talked of "morning dreams." Magee gratuitously added that to his description. All that Walther said was that he had a dream.

Was Magee talking about interpretation of dreams? Is it interpretation for which Magee gives all credit to Schopenhauer? That likewise is not in Schopenhauer's repertory. But there is, in any event, absolutely nothing new about people interpreting dreams. It goes back thousands of years. As Magee has emphatically said, everyone dreams. Dream interpretations were documented in clay tablets dating back to 3000 to 4000 B.C.68

Wagner apparently had no trouble recalling his dreams. He seems to have had a lot more interest in dreams than did Schopenhauer. His accounts of them, as recorded in Cosima's diaries, are scattered throughout. However we do not hear a single instance of his attempt to interpret any of them.

I recently thumbed through the texts of the two volumes of approximately 1000 pages each containing the daily entries of Cosima:
5153 days, and 5153 entries. I had previously read them all, once for
general interest and later for particular references. This time I was looking
specifically for entries mentioning dreams, but they are too many and too
frequent to note them all.

So I chose pages at random, very few of the total. I estimate, guessed,
based on my small sample that about once a week he described a dream to
Cosima which she noted later in the day in her diary. I saw 23 descriptions
of dreams in days numbering a bit over 3% of the total number of days I
estimate he would have described his dreams. Very unscientific, but I do not
think I can be too far off. Wagner seemed to have excellent recall of dreams,
but no apparent interest in looking for any meaning or significance.

We turn to the second matter brought up by Magee. This one
certainly is the influence from Schopenhauer, or as in the case with
Tristan, it is Schopenhauer, unfiltered. The reference is to that part of the
‘Wahn’ monologue that speaks of aggressors biting into their own flesh.
So we start with Schopenhauer’s belief that the universal will is that of
which we are all a part, and that individuation is an illusion. We are all
one. We revisit that thought and it is worth repeating here, though it has
been quoted earlier, in chapter 2:

The misery inflicted on others, and that experienced by
himself . . . , always concern the one and the same inner being . . .
He sees that the difference between the inflictor of suffering
and he who must endure it is only phenomenon, and does
not concern the thing-in-itself, which is the will that lives in
both . . . the will here fails to recognized itself; seeking enhanced
well-being in one of its phenomena, it produces great suffering in
another. Thus in the fierceness and intensity of its desire it buries
its teeth in its own flesh, not knowing that it always injures only
itself, revealing in this form through the medium of individuation
the conflict with itself . . . Tormentor and tormented are one.69

We turn first to Act II of the opera. As summarized above,
Beckmesser plans to serenade Eva, not aware that Eva and Walther
are hidden nearby in front of Pogner’s home. Sachs sings as though
to himself, greatly disturbing to the would-be Romeo, Beckmesser.
As explained above, it leads to a free-for-all that ends only with the
appearance of the night watchman.
We turn to Act III, pass over a scene between David and Sachs in Sachs's workshop, and turn to the episode that is clearly Schopenhauerian, word for word. Sachs is alone in his workshop. We hear the piece known as the "Wahn" monologue. But what is it doing there? Parts of it have nice thematic music, but much of it is so heavy and serious, and to some, myself included, for the most part, is uninspired. It seems all out of synch with the subtly humorous undertone of this great comedy.

The narration in much of it sounds as close as Wagner ever came in his mature operas to "recitative." The term refers to stretches of conversation or soliloquy that are accompanied by no musical theme, the only music, often by few instruments, following the rhythm of the spoken words. It abounded in Italian, well as other operas, from that art form's beginnings in about 1600 through the early 19th century.

There are some who refuse to call this opera a comedy. Too bad. There is plenty of humor, but it is Wagnerian humor, quite subtle. Call it what you like. Except for this monologue, there is no deep probing into philosophical matters, except, to a limited, and appropriate degree, the very happy ending. Once again, as in Tristan we will see it is Schopenhauerian until it isn't. Let's read the pertinent parts of this Wahn monologue. Without the music, the verbal content, standing alone will be much clearer, if less inspiring.

Madness! Madness!
Everywhere madness!
Wherever I research
In city or world chronicles
To find out the reason
Why, until it turns bloody
People torment and injure each other
In unnecessary rage.
It rewards no one
Nor gives thanks.
Forced to fight
He chooses to hunt;
But does not hear his own
Cry of pain
When he digs into his own flesh,
Choosing to give himself pleasure!
Sachs then describes how peacefully and contented there lies in the middle of Germany "my dear Nuremberg." The musical theme accompanying the brief description about Nuremberg is more strikingly beautiful and obviously inspired than most of the balance of the monologue. Then, continuing with his monologue, comes his recounting, from his point of view of course, of the previous night's madness: Late one evening, he says, in order to prevent a misadventure caused by youthful ardor a man doesn't know what to do. So

A cobbler in his shop
Pulls at the thread of madness:
How soon in alleys and streets
It begins to rage!

There follows a graphic description of the evening's free for all. God knows how that happened, he continues. "A glowworm could not find its mate; that arranged the harmful doings. Then his very un-Schopenhauerian conclusion:

Now we see how Hans Sachs does it
So that the madness can be linked to do more noble work:
For if madness won't let us rest,
Especially here in Nuremberg,
So may it work
Which it seldom does for ordinary things,
And never without a bit of madness succeed.

We can't stop madness, but wise old Sachs will turn it into something good. As it turns out, it will be at the expense of Beckmesser, but that's OK; he is the villain.

So the entire population of this small town was biting into their own flesh. It seems a harsh sentence. Certainly no one was killed in the melee, and it appears doubtful that anyone was seriously injured. Beckmesser, who suffered blows with a cudgel throughout the donnybrook, was probably the most injured. Yet in the morning he limps in to Sach's workshop, with nothing on his mind but Eva and the song he needs.

This was not a holocaust or mass murder, or a lynching or any unnecessary cruelty to anyone. It was a common neighborhood brawl, and this recitation of Schopenhauer can seem a bit out of place. What we
have is a disparate, starkly anomalous picture of a 16th century cobbler spouting some obtuse 19th century philosophy: like using 8 inch guns to sink a raft; or a blunderbuss to kill an insect. It is a jagged rock sticking above an otherwise calm sea. These are admittedly matters of opinion. Still, let's not talk about Schopenhauer's influence. The meaning of the lines do not show the influence of Schopenhauer; as in Tristan, they are Schopenhauer, some of them word for word.

It was Sachs's apprentice David who started it all. He had obviously not read Schopenhauer; he was born too early, and lacks the modern outlook of his master. Sachs himself was not exactly blameless. Some violence following yowling late at night when other were trying to sleep should cause little surprise. It's happened since, and undoubtedly before the 16th century.

Magee has repeatedly emphasized that most audience members of Mastersingers performances, and even readers of his book, have not read Schopenhauer, something he fully understands. But what would such a spectator make of those lines, assuming he or she had heard or read them in performance, that speak of people who hit each other as biting into their own flesh?

Is physical harm to another the only kind that results in harm to the offender? Was the public humiliation of Beckmesser an injury? Schopenhauer says that when the aggressor feels guilty, so does the victim. Did Sachs also feel humiliated?

Magee then moves from the particular to the very general. Sachs, he says, is “the ideal Schopenhaurian man, and is, specifically, the embodiment of Schopenhauer's ideal of personal nobility.” He quotes from the philosopher’s major work, that such a noble character has a “certain trace of noble sadness” and that it comes from a consciousness that has resulted from “knowledge of the vanity of all possessions and of the suffering of all life, not merely of one's own.”

Magee explains further: “Sachs, now middle-aged and living alone, has lived through the death of his wife and all his children.” And he quotes further from Schopenhauer about personal tragedy in general: “If the will is to a certain extent broken by such a great and irrevocable denial of fate, then practically nothing more is desired and the character shows itself as mild, sad, noble and resigned.”

There are however lines both in the opera and in Schopenhauer of interest. The ones from Schopenhauer are quoted in Magee's book. They involve the description of the “mild, sad, noble and resigned
person” as being distinguished from “constant peevishness over daily annoyances (that would be an ignoble trait, and might lead us to fear a bad disposition.)” the pertinent lines from the opera however are not mentioned by Magee. They show a different side of the cobbler.

They are lines uttered by the disappointed cobbler when Eva makes clear that her choice is Walther, as she sobs on Sachs’s breast. Wails Sachs: “If one didn’t have to make shoes, and were I not a poet, I would no longer make shoes. It is wearying, drudgery! Too wide for this one, too narrow for the other one. From all sides, crowds and crushes; ‘it clops,’ ‘it’s loose,’ ‘here it’s tight’ ‘there it pinches.’ The cobbler should know everything, repair what’s always torn. And if he’s also a poet, on that end they won’t give him any peace either. And if he’s also a widower, one takes him for a fool. The young girls who are short on men, they demand that he court them, whether he understands them or not. To all of them whether he says yes or no, in the end he smells of pitch, and is taken for dumb, deceitful and insolent, ah, I am only sorry for my apprentice. He will lose all respect for me. Lena is already making him act strangely.

Mild, sad, noble and resigned it is not. Peevishness over daily annoyances it may be. But it makes Sachs more human than all of his high blown philosophizing in his Wahn Monologue.

If Wagner wanted to hammer some lines into the score, such as the Wahn monologue, as an honor to Schopenhauer, so be it. But that is scant reason to justify the reverential solemnity with which such lines are treated by most of the scholars and authors. They seem to almost line up trying to outdo each other in describing the solemn majesty of these lines, and the seriousness of what is not, they say, really a comedy. Magee approvingly, refers to the very fine Wagnerian conductor, Reginald Goodall concerning the conductor’s views on this opera:

He [Goodall] used to express exasperation when people described it as a comedy. He believed that it expressed a resignation and sadness that are at the very heart of life—the ultimate fact that for each one of us everything, all of it, has to be given up, is lost, and forever. The ridiculous vanity, foolishness and petty ill-will of human beings are exposed, so there is plenty of comedy in that sense, but a deeper level of attitude to these things, evinced by the work as a whole, is one of heart breaking regret and resigned acceptance.
Much as I hate to disagree with my betters, Mastersingers is a comedy. What is the regret and acceptance of which he speaks? It certainly is not Beckmesser’s. I imagine it refers to Sachs and perhaps to his loss of a momentary hope to marry the young woman, Eva, and the fact that he must give her up. Eva, the same woman he just rejected the previous day. He showed good sense when he did.

Or perhaps it is the tragic loss of his wife and children that moved maestro Goodall. Tragic it was, a tragedy that happens all too often, but before we, with Reginald Goodall, shed tears for him, note that Eva, who must have been at least seventeen, was carried by Sachs in his arms as an infant. Sachs, by then, had already lost is family. This we hear when, in Act II she is flirting with Sachs, trying to snag him as a husband and a way out of life with Beckmesser.

So the loss of his family must have been at least 17 years before this opera. Passing strange it is that a man of such wonderful traits, if he had wanted, did not find another wife in all that time while he was much younger. We don’t know his age, but he seems well advanced. Perhaps he lost his family much earlier than the infancy of Eva.

So now Sachs is getting old! That is a great tragedy of life? Were there no women in Nuremburg more his age? I find more compelling the sentiments of Georg Solti, also a great conductor: “I think I love Die Meistersinger more than anything else which Wagner wrote. It’s such a positive life-giving piece.”

To me there is much more to the comedy of human life than can be seen from the perspective of Goodall. One might try looking more at some of the many purely comical scenes. I would recommend especially the one involving Sachs and Beckmesser, also in Act III. Sly and subtle humor abounds, overflows in fact. There are many lines pregnant with comically human qualities. The following is just one of them.

Contrary to my explanation about using literal translations, the simple rhyme of the lines adds too much to ignore. So I have taken liberties with the German text in order to put it into rhyme. I hope I have retained the spirit of the delicious irony that permeates the entire episode, however obvious it makes my total lack of poetic skills.

Beckmesser, in Sachs’s shop, has found the text of the song dictated by Walther but written down by Sachs as a convenience to the young knight. Beckmesser is convinced now that Sachs plans to enter the competition.
I dare say, in all honesty,  
The worst of rascals you must be.

Sachs denies it and says he will give it to Beckmesser as a gift, knowing that the clerk is not going to be able to compose anything worthwhile with it. He answers:

May be. Still I have never pilfered  
What I saw on someone else's table.  
So that folks will not think ill of you,  
Keep the sheet; use it if you're able.

Beckmesser is at a loss to understand why, after causing him so much trouble yesterday, Sachs now wants to be his friend by giving him the song. Recall that Sachs stayed up late mainly to restrain an elopement, more than to make shoes for Beckmesser. He wound up doing it also to interfere with Beckmesser's serenade, and also, we may be sure, to annoy him. But Sachs, answers only, with a calm sugary voice, accompanied by even sweeter, mocking orchestration:

To make your shoes, I stayed up late.  
Would I do that for one I hate?

More than the words, the music so playfully mocks the slyness in the outwardly friendly tone of the cobbler.

And unlike with Tristan, there is no basis for finding any influence by Schopenhauer in the music of this opera. There is marvelous music, but it is totally unlike Tristan, and its form is unlike anything suggested by Schopenhauer.

What this is, is comedy, good comedy. It makes us forget, or overlook, the false and devilish nature of Sachs himself. Such lines, and such music, tell us so much more about the characters involved than all of the philosophizing and lamenting, and all of the grandiloquent, pedagogic Schopenhauerian based pessimism.
CHAPTER 7

Summary of *The Ring of the Nibelung*

We begin our analysis of *The Ring* with a straightforward account of the story as told on stage. This is for the benefit of any readers who are totally unfamiliar with the story, or perhaps not familiar enough to follow the analysis in the following chapter (8). For those fully familiar with the opera, this chapter would be superfluous and could be skipped (except perhaps for the illustrations). There will be considerable duplication among the two chapters, except that the current one will be as the operas unfold on stage, while the next one, chapter 8, will involve bits and pieces necessary to explain the significance and contradictions that are the focus of our study, and not necessarily in strict chronological order.

Wagner’s grandly conceived and even more grandly created *The Ring of the Nibelung* (*Der Ring Des Nibelungen*) is a sprawling work involving an amalgamation of northern mythologies, with a smattering of some from Asia. It involves gods, giants, dwarfs, ordinary humans, and among others, three “Norns” who predict but cannot change the future; three Rhinemaidens, who look and act like mermaids; a knowledgeable bird that speaks wisdom though in its own language; and nine Valkyries, women warriors who fly on winged horses, whom we will include among the goddesses.

It was all created by Wagner over a period of about 25 years, including an eleven year distraction with the composition of *Tristan and Isolde* and *The Mastersingers*. Despite it all, it is a remarkably unified piece, musically and dramatically, but probably not philosophically.

In such a grandiose project there are, almost inevitably, some contradictions. Most will be minor and of no consequence. Others however will be quite significant. Why and how they are significant we leave for the next chapter.
Summary

Das Rheingold

Scene 1: In the depths of the Rhine River three playful Rhinemaidens are interrupted by the appearance of an ugly dwarf, Alberich. Frightened at first, the maidens are amused to find that he is seeking a love relationship with one of them—any one. One after another he is led on by the three who cruelly slip away on the slimy rocks. As the last one dashes his dreams of love, or satisfaction of his lust, a beam of light shines on a hoard of gold. The maidens tell him that anyone in possession of the gold, and who forswears love, will be able to fashion a ring from the gold that will have such magical power as would enable him to rule the world. They assure themselves that the lustful Alberich would never do that. But Alberich has been unlucky enough in love that he does do that, and runs off with the gold.*

Scene 2: Daybreak. High atop a mountain peak is a newly completed castle. Wotan, king of the gods and his wife Fricka, goddess of marriage, are sleeping nearby. Fricka awakens, sees the castle and awakens her husband. It was built by two giants, Fasolt and Fafner, to whom Wotan, as payment, has promised to deliver the sister of his wife, Freia, goddess of love and youth. He has assured his angry wife that when the time came he would find something else that the giants would accept as a substitute.

But the two giants will accept nothing else. Freia's two brothers, Donner and Froh, enter and threaten violence against the giants, but Wotan will have none of it. He rules by virtue of runes, marks, on his spear and his promise to the Fates (or someone) to live by his treaties and promises. If he does not, the gods will be destroyed. Wotan explains that Loge, a (half) god of fire, and a trickster, has been sent by him to search the world for a substitute for Freia, with which the giants would be satisfied.

Loge finally arrives, but says though he went to every corner of the world and asked what men would take in place of the love of a woman. "they only laughed at my foolish question." "Except one man," he adds

* If the critics ever tire of noting that Siegfried, the alleged hero of the Ring seems at times intellectually challenged, I would respectfully nominate as substitute, the three Rhinemaidens.
He then tells the gods about Alberich and the ring. The giants agree that they could not allow the dwarfs to have such power, and give the gods until nightfall to get this gold and the magic ring for them in place of Freia. They keep Freia as security in the meantime and leave with her. How can the gods get the gold, including the ring, from the dwarfs? Says Loge: What a thief stole, you steal from the thief. Wotan and Loge go down in a cleft in the earth to Nibelheim, the home of the Dwarfs.

**Scene 3:** Nibelheim. Wotan and Loge find the race of dwarfs now enslaved by Alberich. Mime, Alberich’s brother dwarf, tells them how he was forced to make a “tarnhelm”, a cap woven from the gold. This has given Alberich the power to make himself invisible or to change his shape to that of some other creature.

Alberich enters, orders Mime away, and greets his guests. He gives a chilling account of how he will soon rule the world and how the women will be at his disposal. He also boasts of the power of the tarnhelm, and Loge, pretending to be impressed, asks him to make himself into something that will terrify him. Alberich complies by turning himself into a fierce dragon. Loge trembles, voluntarily but realistically, and tells the dwarf that his trembling shows he is convinced of the power of the tarnhelm. But says Loge further: if you need to be small, can you make yourself tiny? No, I guess that would be too hard, he says.

Hard for a dumbbell like you, says Alberich, but easy for me. He does turn himself into a tiny frog, which Loge and Wotan quickly capture and bind. As the dwarf returns to his natural shape, he finds himself bound.

**Scene 4:** On the surface of the earth. Alberich is told by Wotan that the price of his freedom is the hoard of gold. Alberich, unperturbed, knows he still has the ring and tarnhelm, so he summons the enslaved dwarfs to bring the gold to the surface. He then demands his freedom, but also wants return of the tarnhelm which Loge is now carrying. Loge says it belongs to the hoard and throws it on the heap. The dwarf is still not very perturbed. He retains the all-important ring, and he again seeks his freedom. But Wotan then demands the ring from his finger.

Now Alberich is adamant. But to a resounding cry of protest, the ring is very forcibly taken from him. Finally satisfied, Wotan has him untied and tells Alberich he is free, whereupon the dwarf delivers a blood curdling curse on the ring, including: “Death to him that wears it.” The curse will last, he says, until once again he wears it on his finger.
The giants return with Freia and demand the gold. The giant Fasolt is enamored of Freia, and insists that the gold must be sufficient to completely cover the goddess from his sight before he will agree to her release. A lock of hair is still not covered by the gold, but Wotan surrenders the tarnhelm to cover it. Fasolt then claims that an eye of the goddess is still visible. Fafner demands the ring to cover it, however Wotan now refuses.

Despite the entreaties of the other gods, his refusal lasts until Erda the Earth Goddess, arises from deep within the earth. Give way, Wotan, she advises. Her advice ends with the cryptic admonition: “A day of despair will dawn on the gods.” Whether despair will come only if he not does give up the ring, or whether it will not come even if he does give it up, she does not say.

The prophecy fills Wotan with dread, but before he can question her further she sinks back into the earth. He then gives up the ring. The giants quickly become entangled in an angry argument over the spoils. Fafner kills Fasolt and walks off with all the spoils, gold, tarnhelm and ring. Wotan hopes to find Erda and explain her cryptic prophesy.

Following the departure of Fafner and his booty, Donner, god of thunder, strikes his hammer on a rock, and the mist and clouds disperse to reveal the towering castle. Wotan calls it Valhalla. A rainbow bridge also appears, stretching over the valley to the castle. As the gods begin to cross it to Valhalla, they hear the cry of the Rhinemaidens for their lost gold.

The Valkyries

Act I: about 20 or so years later; a hut in a forest, built around a sturdy tree. The handle of a sword, can be seen sticking out from it, the balance of the sword obviously thrust deep within it. A young man, exhausted, slightly wounded, and drenched from pouring rain enters the hut to rest, regardless of who may own it. As he sleeps, a woman, Sieglinde, who seems about his age, enters and brings his water which he quickly downs. This house, she tells him belongs to Hunding, her husband. “Stay till he comes. He’ll welcome you.”

The stranger says he has lost his spear and shield in a fight. He had to flee the hunters, but he feels better now. He prepares to leave, explaining that “misfortune pursues me wherever I go.” Stay, she replies, how can you bring misfortune where misfortune already lives? The stranger, apparently intrigued, or sympathetic, agrees to stay.
Hunding returns. He shows little emotion as his wife explains that
the stranger was cold and hungry and asks if they can shelter him for the
night. Then, as responding to a barbarian custom, he says "my hearth
is holy. Keep my house holy," probably meaning "Stay away from my
wife." He tells his wife to fix "us men" something to eat. As she does, the
stranger, answering his host's questions, recounts his early years.

He does not know his name, His father was named Wolfe. I was
one of a pair, he continues, my sister and I were twins. One day he and
Wolfe returned from the hunt and found the home destroyed by fire, the
mother was dead and the sister had disappeared. Sieglinde is fascinated.
"Tell us more, stranger. Where is your father now?"

His father vanished without a trace, answers the stranger, leaving
only a wolfskin. He, the stranger, soon forsook the woods and sought the
company of others. But they all scorned him. Whatever he thought right,
others saw as wrong. What looked evil to him, others saw as right.

Sieglinde asks how he lost his weapon. The stranger answers: A
child was being forced into a loveless marriage. He went to her rescue.
In the ensuing fight he killed the girl's brothers. With cries of grief she
clasped her dead brothers. Their kinsmen came to the site. His spear and
shield protected her until they were wrested from him. Weaponless and
wounded he saw the girl die.

Hunding becomes threatening: "I know a wild race; it is hated by all
and by me. I was called to avenge the blood of my kin. I arrived too late
and came home to find the criminal's tracks in my own house. My house
protects you tonight, but arm yourself tomorrow for battle. Sieglinde is
ordered out of the room. As she leaves she tries unsuccessfully to attract
the stranger's attention to the sword handle on the tree.

Alone in the room, the stranger calls out that his father had promised
him a sword at time of greatest need. He now calls on his father: Where
is the sword? He does not see the handle, only the light that shines from
it. Sieglinde soon enters and explains that she drugged her husband with
a potion and tells him to listen carefully as she wants to guide him to a

She had a twin brother. But as a young child she was kidnapped and
later forced into marriage with Hunding. At the wedding feast all the
men were drinking as she sat alone with her tears. A stranger entered. He
carried a sword and wore a hat that hid one eye, but the other eye caused
terror to the other guests. She alone found warmth in his glance. Then he
drove the sword deep into the tree. Whoever can pull it out will own it,
said the intruder. Many men have tried, continues Sieglinde, but no one could. Then, she says, I knew who it was who had thrust the sword into the tree, and who could withdraw it. If I could find that one, I would win back all that I had lost, and clasp that friend in my arms. The stranger embraces her and assures her that he is that friend and that she will be avenged.

A spring breeze blows the door open. He sings a melodious song “the brother has freed his bride-sister . . . love and spring are made one.” She responds with a melodious song of her own: “You are the spring.” Some further talk about the name of the father confirms what is already suspected, that they are brother and sister, that they are of the tribe of Volsungs (or, in German, Wälsungs) and that the sword was left for him by their father.

The brother invites his bride and sister to give him a name and she chooses “Siegmund,” a reference to victory. He, now the exuberant Siegmund, grasps the sword, and cries “Needful (Nothung)! Your name shall be Needful,” and thereupon pulls it from the tree. There is a shriek of delight from Sieglinde. Siegmund exults: So flourish the Volsung’s blood. The joyous pair flee the hut, and run through the forest.

Act II:

The ground at the base of a high peak. Wotan tells Brynhilde, the Valkyrie, who is ready for battle, of the coming fight between Hunding and Siegmund. The Volsung (Siegmund) must win, he tells her. Brynhilde warns that Wotan will have his own fight as Fricka is approaching. She quickly leaves.

Fricka arrives in a chariot drawn by two rams. “Hunding called on me for help. Marriage’s guardian heard him and I promised to punish the deed.” Wotan’s reply: Was their act so bad? Love’s magic enchanted them. Fricka: “How foolish you are to think I would not complain about dishonor of the holy vows of marriage.” Wotan: “Unholy I hold the oath that unites those without love.” Whoever heard of marriage between brother and sister, she demands. You have heard it now, he replies, so bless them joyously for the love that bound this pair. This sets the tone for a debate that Wotan cannot win.

Fricka’s next attack involves his begetting of the Volsung twins, a couple of ordinary humans, whom, she says, he has thrown at her feet. Wotan: “You’ve never learned what I wanted to teach you, and which you never can learn, for first they would have to occur. Only the usual
can you understand; yet what never has yet happened are the things that occupy my thoughts."

Turning to the all-important matter of recovery of the ring, he continues: "Need makes a hero, who free from godly protection, is free from godly laws." He grew by himself, says Wotan. I did not shield him. Then don't shield him now, she answers, you promised him a sword, and you led him to it.

I'll give him no aid, promises the already half beaten god. But Fricka wants more: "And keep Brynhilde out of his way." She does not rule herself; she obeys you. A beaten Wotan gives his word. Brynhilde enters as the triumphant Fricka leaves.

Anxiety ridden, fearful and morose, Wotan confides to his daughter the events of his life and what has brought him to this stage. He also tells his daughter that a mortal woman is bearing Alberich's son, who will continue the quest of the dwarfs to recover the stolen ring. He also explains to her that she must protect Hunding, not Siegmund, who must die in the coming battle. As for himself, he can now only await "the end," to which he looks forward. "The end." When the shocked Brynhilde questions her father and shows reluctance to obey, he is furious and as he leaves, warns her against disobedience.

The warrior-maid hears Siegmund and Sieglinde approach, and she leaves the immediate scene. Sieglinde is exhausted, guilt ridden, and hallucinating. She falls asleep, and Brynhilde enters. She tells Siegmund that he will die in the coming battle, but that he will be then carried to Valhalla. He asks a series of questions about Valhalla, and whom he will see there. His last question concerns Sieglinde: Will she accompany him there? No, says the Valkyrie, she must remain here.

The angered Siegmund then draws his sword and claims that it will save him. She answers that its force has been taken away and that its creator has doomed him. He is crushed by the news but even more for the fate now of Sieglinde. "Trust her to me," says the Valkyrie. Never, says Siegmund, no one but I can touch her. If the sword is useless against the foe it will be useful against the friend.

As he is about to slay the sleeping woman, the horrified warrior maiden shouts for him to stop. Overcome with empathy for him, she promises that "For you, Siegmund, I give blessing and victory." Sieglinde awakens to more hallucinatory visions of Hunding, but the real Hunding, arrives. The two men duel, Brynhilde attempts to aid and protect Siegmund, but Wotan suddenly appears and intervenes. Siegmund's
sword breaks against Wotan's spear, and he is slain by Hunding, dying in Wotan's arms. Brynhilde collects the pieces of the broken sword, helps Sieglinde onto Brynhilde's horse and rides swiftly off with her.

Go kneel before Fricka, Wotan contemptuously tells Hunding. Tell her Wotan's spear avenged her shame. He Points his spear at Hunding, and repeats, "Go." Hunding dies at once and his body drops. But as for Brynhilde, says Wotan, terrible will be the punishment when my horse overtakes her flight.

Act III: The summit of a rocky mountain. A forest to the right. Rocks form an embankment to the precipice where four Valkyries are gathered. Four others arrive bearing dead heroes on their horses. They see Brynhilde is still missing. She arrives, and the others are surprised to see not a dead man, but a live woman, carried with her on her horse, Grane.

Brynhilde pleads for help, and explains why she is fleeing. The sisters are not sympathetic at first, and refuse to help escape. Brynhilde tells Sieglinde she must live. "Love wills it. A Volsung grows in your womb." Sieglinde's wish for death turns suddenly now into a determination to live. Rescue me, rescue my child she pleads. Brynhilde tells her to flee by herself and that she will stay, facing Wotan's wrath, but delaying his pursuit of Sieglinde.

Endure every trial, she tells Sieglinde, your womb holds the world's most glorious hero, and she names him "Siegfried." She points Sieglinde to the east where the dragon, Fafner, lives in a cave with his hoard of gold, and where, she says, Wotan is afraid to go." Sieglinde, alone, heads rapidly eastward.

Wotan arrives. The pathetically ineffective attempts by the Valkyries to hide Brynhilde quickly fall apart. He tells the Valkyries that he intends to remove the godhood from Brynhilde, and that she will no longer ride with him into battle. Their attempts to persuade their father to have mercy result only in a contemptuous response. The Valkyries, except for Brynhilde, flee as ordered by their father.

Left alone, Brynhilde learns that she will be put to sleep on the rocky cliff, and there so remain until awakened by any man who wishes, and will lead the life of an ordinary housewife. She pleads with her apparently

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* About 20 years later, in the next opera, Wotan does go to the area of the cave, apparently without trepidation. Perhaps in 20 years he has overcome his fears.
immovable father who says she has earned her own punishment for disobedience. She asks, finally, to be encircled with a ring of fire that will frighten away all but the bravest hero. He is for the first time moved by her plea. He bursts into a rapturous farewell, and agrees to surround her with flames so that only one may win the bride “who is freer than I, the god.” He puts her to sleep and calls upon Loge to surround her with frightful flames. As the fire roars and ascends, Wotan says that “whoever fears my spear point will never walk through this fire.” Wotan himself walks through it and leaves as the fire rages.

**Siegfried**

**Act I**: About 20 or so more years later. A portion of a rocky cave, used as a smithy. Mime has been trying unsuccessfully to make a satisfactory sword. In his despondency he complains to himself that even the mightiest sword, the “boy” just snaps in two. “But there is one sword that he could not break. Needful! If I could weld the strong pieces together, but I do not know how to do it.” If he could, he says, Siegfried could finish Fafner the dragon, and the ring would be his.

Siegfried enters. He is Sieglinde’s child, quite young, about 20 perhaps. Shyly, Mime shows the youngster the sword he has been making. The youth promptly slashes it on the anvil, causing the sword to shatter to bits. The dialogue then continues with Mime telling Siegfried how much he has done for the boy, and Siegfried telling Mime how much he hates and cannot stand the sight of him.

What Mime could not teach him, says Siegfried is why he, Siegfried, keeps coming back when he so much more enjoys the company of the forest animals. Says Mime, you come back because you love Mime. But Siegfried has noticed that the animals, such as birds and foxes, always come in pairs; the young ones have mother and father. Where do you have the loving wife, Mime, that I can call mother. Ach, you are dumb, says Mime, I am your father and mother together.

You lie, says Siegfried, I have seen that the young resemble their parents. I came to a clear stream. I saw my own picture, very different from you. I think it’s like frogs and fish.

This ends with Siegfried grabbing the dwarf by the throat and demanding to know who his father and mother were. Mime decides to tell all. He heard a crying woman in the wild forest. He helped her to his cave to care for her by the warm hearth. She carried a child in her
womb and she bore it here. Her pain was great; she died, but Siegfried was born. A saddened Siegfried responds: “So my mother died for me.” How come I am called Siegfried, asks the youth. The mother told me says Mime. The mother’s name? Sieglinde, says Mime, but he does not know the father’s name.

What proof do you have that you’re not lying, demands Siegfried. Mime produces the two fragments of the sword. She said your father used it in the last battle, when he was killed. Siegfried demands that the dwarf meld them together. What will you do with the sword, asks Mime. He will leave the forest, says the exuberant youth, and go into the world, and never come back. “You are not my father.” And out he goes.

Alone now, Mime wonders how he can meld the fragments, and worse, how can he keep the youth there to kill Fafner. But there is soon another visitor. He startles Mime out of his wits. Who are you he asks. He is our Wotan, but is now called the wanderer, the name he tells to Mime. Then wander some more, says the inhospitable dwarf. He has learned much and given much information, says the wanderer, saving many from their nagging worries. But Mime says he has knowledge enough; he doesn’t need any more. The wanderer is insistent. He will wager his head. Mime can take it if he asks any three questions he wishes, and if the wanderer does not give him the information he needs.

Realizing he cannot get rid of this pest, Mime asks three questions, all simple, pointless, and easily answered. So, says Mime, you have won both the questions and your head. Now go your way. But the intruder is not leaving yet.

“What you need to know, you should have asked,” he says. According to the obligation of betting I take yours as pledge if you don’t answer three questions I will ask. Mime calls on his deceased mother for help to save his head.

Three questions are posed by the Wanderer, the first two of which gave Mime no trouble, including Sieglinde and Siegmund, as parents of Siegfried.* The third question causes more trouble: Who shall meld the sword that Siegfried will use to kill Fafner?? This he cannot answer. The terrified dwarf is panic stricken. Says the Wanderer what you needed to

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* Never mind that a few minutes earlier, Mime, with no apparent reason to lie, said he did not know the name of Siegfried’s father. One of the inevitable minor contradictions in a text of this complexity.
know, it never occurred to you to ask. I've won your wise head, but hear: "Only one who has never known fear can meld Needful anew." I leave your head of wisdom to fall to him who has never learned fear. With that, Wotan-Wanderer leaves.

Siegfried breezes in as Mime, still frightened is hiding under the Anvil. An amused Siegfried asks about the sword Mime is supposed to be forging for him. But Mime, gathering his thoughts, remembers that his head is forfeit to him who never knew fear. So, he tells the youth that he thought of something important for him to know. I promised your mother I would teach you fear, so now you cannot go forth into the world until you learn fear. What is it, asks Siegfried.

The dwarf describes what he conceives as a frightening picture of the forest, dark and gloomy with grisly sounds and feelings. With a look of pleasure, Siegfried mutters "How wonderfully strange that must be." Mime tells him about the dragon, who can surely teach him fear. He lives in Hate Cave, at the end of the forest "not far from the world," says Mime. Lead me to it; be quick demands Siegfried. Since the dwarf cannot forge the sword, Siegfried will do it himself, and he amazes Mime with his speed and skill, first shredding the pieces of the sword to small bits.

Mime is in a quandary: If the dragon teaches him fear, Mime's head is safe, but then how could Siegfried defeat the dragon if he is fearful? Mime's answer: He'll finish Fafner with that sword, but after the fight he'll be tired and will need a drink. Mime will have just the drink for him, and he will be gone, and out of Mime's way. Then Mime will have the hoard and the ring.

Siegfried tells Mime to name the sword, and Mime answers "Needful . . . your mother told me the story." As the youth molds the sword, Mime is brewing the drink that he expects to finish off Siegfried. Siegfried takes the refashioned sword, and triumphantly slashes it on the anvil, as he had done earlier. But this time it is the anvil that shatters; the sword is still pristine.

Act II

Night. A forest near the mouth of Hate Cave. Alberich is lying near a cliff. He believes this will be the fateful day, and is taken by surprise when the wanderer (Wotan) appears. Their conversational exchanges are full of bitterness and threats, mostly by Alberich. The Wanderer's assurance that he is here only as observer, lowers somewhat the tone of the dwarf's anger. He tells Alberich "If you warn the dragon of his death, he may give you the toy."
He then calls out to Fafner. When the dragon answers, Alberich takes over by telling the dragon of the approach of a strong hero who wants to kill him. He wants the ring, but “give it to me,” and you can live in peace with the hoard. But the dragon says he will hold it himself and goes back to sleep.

The wanderer laughs, then gives Alberich some very significant advice. “All things go their own way. You cannot change them.” Wotan-wanderer rides away on his horse.

As dawn breaks, Siegfried and Mime approach. Mime assures Siegfried that here he will learn fear, and describes the terrible appearance and danger posed by the dragon. Siegfried is fed up with Mime and demands that he go elsewhere and leave him alone. Mime advises the youth to let him know when the fight is over, as it may exhaust him and that Mime could help.

Siegfried hears the chirping sound of a woodbird. Wishing to understand their language, he cuts a reed with which to echo the bird, but it doesn’t work. Finally he takes out his own horn, and blows his usual theme. But what it attracts is Fafner, the dragon.

The youth’s reaction: I have attracted a beauty. “Here is one who doesn’t know fear, can you teach it to me. The dragon says that now he will eat as well as drink. A battle is joined. It ends with the dragon mortally wounded.

After a civil exchange of biographies and feelings, the dragon dies. Siegfried feels the dragon’s blood, burning his hand like fire. He licks it, and now is surprised that he can understand the language of the woodbird. The bird says that Siegfried now owns the gold, which is in the cave. But if he takes the tarnhelm he can do wonderful things. And if he takes the ring, that will make him ruler of the world. Siegfried says he will follow the bird’s advice and enters the cave.

Mime comes to confirm Fafner’s death, but his way into the cave is blocked by Alberich. The two brother dwarfs engage in much petty bickering about who is entitled to what. It ends as they see Siegfried slowly leaving the cave. They see he has the tarnhelm and the ring. The dwarfs run off in different directions. Siegfried does not seem to know what to do with the objects he took, but gets good advice. Now, says the bird, don’t trust Mime. Because of the blood you tasted, you can hear what is in his heart.

He can indeed. Mime enters and whatever he says, Siegfried hears something different. His tone is gentle and loving; the words Siegfried hears are not: Siegfried, my child, I have always hated you and your kind . . . While you welded the sword, I brewed this drink, now if you
drink it, I will win your trusty sword, and with it the tarnhelm and hoard. When Siegfried, angered, questions the dwarf about all he has heard, Mime is astounded. Open your ears, he says.

What Siegfried hears next is the dwarf saying, just drink it. “With the sword you made so sharp, I will hack off the head from the child, and then I’ll have peace, and also the ring.”

To the dwarf’s increasing bewilderment Siegfried makes clear to the dwarf what he has heard. But the more he says, the more threatening he is to the youth. Finally he pours the drink and gives it to Siegfried: “Drink and choke to death; never will you take another drink.” But Siegfried with one thrust of his sword kills him.

Siegfried throws the bodies of Mime and the dragon in the cave and then sits down and laments his loneliness. He calls again on the woodbird. There is a wonderful woman, it tells him. She sleeps on a high rock, surrounded by fire. Who walks through the fire and wakes the bride, Brynhilde then would be his. Only he who never learned fear can awaken Brynhilde. I’m burning with desire to learn it from Brynhilde. How can I find my way to the rock? The bird flutters, then crosses over Siegfried showing him the way. Siegfried follows him.

Act III

Night. The foot of a rocky mountain, on a higher cliff of which Brynhilde is sleeping. The wanderer enters and stands by a cave opening.

He calls upon Erda to awaken. He calls her the earth goddess, variously referring to her as the Vala (a prophetess), eternal woman, ancient wise woman, and all-knowing. He needs the benefit of her wisdom. She soon appears. He tells her he has wandered the earth seeking knowledge. It is said that what flows through mountains and valleys, air and water, everything is known to her. Erda answers: while I sleep the Norns are awake. They weave the rope, and spin what I know. Why do you not wake the Norns?

In the grips of the world, says Wotan, the Norns weave. They cannot change or vary. But I want to know how to stop a rolling wheel. By force I was once overcome by a conqueror she answers, For Wotan I bore a wish-maiden. She is bold and wise. Why wake me and not Erda’s and Wotan’s child?”

* The reference is to Brynhilde. When Wotan followed her into the bowels of the earth after her cryptic prophesy Brynhilde was conceived.
She defied the master of storms, said Wotan. War-father punished the maid; in her eyes he forced sleep. She will be awakened only by a man who courts her as a wife. What good would it do me to ask her?

Erda is incredulous. He who taught defiance, punishes defiance? He who sparked the deed, now scowls at the deed? Let me leave again. Sleep will seal my wisdom. But Wotan is unyielding: You mother, I will not let you go; If you are the world’s wisest woman, tell me now, how can a god conquer his cares?

Answers Erda: You are not what you claim. Why did you come, wild spirit, to disturb the Vala’s sleep? Wotan: You are not what you say . . . Your wisdom gives way before my will. Do you know what Wotan’s wills? The end of the gods causes me no fear, since I now will it. What in the wild pain of conflict I doubtfully decided, I now happily pursue. I leave my inheritance to the most glorious Volsung. Free from malice, he is protected from Alberich’s curse. Brynhilde will be awakened by the hero. Your wise child will do the deed that will save the world. So leave, Erda. Away, away to eternal sleep. She slowly descends into the earth.

There soon enters Siegfried. The woodbird has left him at the foot of the mountain. He sees Wotan, and asks the way to the sleeping woman. Wotan, again as a wanderer, asks a series of harmless questions, but they soon turn serious. “Tell me the way to the maid, Siegfried demands, or get out of my way. When he notes that the wanderer is missing an eye, the answer is that the missing eye is used by the youth to look upon the wanderer. The boy laughs, but orders the elder out of his way. He knows the way. The woodbird has shown him. In anger, the wanderer tells him he shall not go that way. “Who are you to bar my way?” the boy asks.

The wanderer is determined: The sleeping maid is chained by my might. He who wins her makes me powerless forever. A sea of fire surrounds the woman. Look toward the height. It illuminates your head. The flames can devour you. “Stand back, babbler,” is the answer. “Where the blaze is I must go to Brynhilde.” Then the Wanderer must bar his way. “The sword you swing was broken once on this shaft. Once more then it will splinter against the eternal spear.”

Siegfried realizes that this was his father’s foe. Now is the time for vengeance. But this time it is the spear that is broken by the sword. As the wanderer sadly gazes at the pieces that have fallen to his feet, he softly murmurs “Go. I cannot stop you.”

Siegfried reaches the rock where the sleeping Brynhilde is surrounded by fire. The sleeping horse is also still there as are shield and spear. He
cuts open the breast plated armor, to allow easier breathing, and for the first time realizes that "this is no man." He gently kisses her and she awakens. Both are exhilarated, but Siegfried ultimately says that the flames that burned around her, now burn in his breast. Though it is mutual love at first sight, the maid is shy and reticent. "Awaken now and be a wife, urges Siegfried."

Her eyes dim; there is anxiety and confusion. You have seen your picture clearly in a still stream, she says. Disturb the waters, and you see your picture no more. So do not disturb me. He turns the metaphor around. He is burning with desire, and only the clear water of the stream will dissipate it. Be mine, he pleads. She throws her shyness to the winds. They sing joyously together, and restraint disappears.

Götterdämmerung (Twilight of the Gods)

Prologue and Act I
First Scene of the Prologue

On the mountain where Brynhilde was sleeping. Three women, the Norns, tall and dressed in flowing dark garments speak and spin.

The first Norn speaks of the past. She describes how Wotan once stopped at the spring in the shadows of the World Ash Tree. He yielded an eye as his payment for power. He broke a branch from the tree, from which he carved the shaft of his spear. With the passage of much time, the wound to the forest grew worse. The leaves fell serenely, then blight affected the tree. Sadly it overcame the water's source and its songs were troubled thoughts. Why did all of this happen?

The second Norn speaks of the present. She says that Wotan cut runes (treaties and laws) into the spear's shaft, and held it as the shaft of the world. She describes how the spear was broken. He had Valhalla's heroes cut down the Ash Tree and its boughs and slice them to pieces. The Ash fell, eternally overcoming the spring. "Do you know why that is?"

The third Norn takes us into the future: Wotan now sits in Valhalla surrounded by heroes and gods. Heaps of wood from the world ash form a pyre around the castle and wait for the torch. When that happens the eternal gods will have reached the end of their day. If you want to know more, she says, wind up the cord again and catch it. She throws the cord to the second Norn who throws it to the first. Day is dawning. The cord is now slack. As they attempt to stretch it, it breaks. The three sadly agree: this is the end of their wisdom.
Second Scene of the Prologue
Brynhilde's rock; it is now daylight, Brynhilde, with horse in tow, and Siegfried emerge from the cave. How much time has passed since the awakening of Brynhilde we are given no clue, but they are obviously still enchanted with each other. Siegfried however, with Brynhilde's blessing, is about to leave for new adventure. Brynhilde gives Siegfried her horse, Grane; Siegfried gives Brynhilde the ring, still not realizing its alleged power. Nothing, they agree, can ever tear them apart. Siegfried is then off with Grane to sail down the Rhine seeking adventure.

Act I
Scene 1
The hall of the Gibichungs on the Rhine. From the hall there is a clear view of the river. At a table sit Gunther and Gutrune, brother and sister. Also seated is Hagen, their half-brother. Gunther, acknowledging he has title and will inherit the throne, is just smart enough to know that Hagen may have inherited all the brains in the family. He seeks assurance from Hagen that he too has contributed to the fame of the Gibichungs.

Hagen however offers no encouragement, pointing out that, despite their advancing age, neither of his two half-siblings have married." Asked by Gunther to give a hint as to whom he should court, the wily Hagen mentions Brynhilde, as well as the rock, and the flames. Gunther: Could I accomplish that? No, Hagen says, it requires one stronger than you to conquer the flames, namely Siegfried. And Gutrune should marry him.

Hagen narrates to Gunther the slaying of the dragon that had been guarding the Nibelung hoard. No one else can get through the blaze. Why stir my mind about a treasure I cannot win, asks Gunther. If Siegfried should bring the bride to you, says Hagen, would she not be yours? He will soon be forced to do your bidding should Gutrune hold him in thrall first.

Gutrune: "How could I? The fairest women must have sought him." Hagen reminds her of a drink kept in a chest which could bind him in love to her. The Gibichung siblings both enthusiastically praise the plan.

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* Hagen is the son of Alberich and Grimhild, Queen of the Gibichungs, and thus half-brother to the other two siblings. They are the offspring of Grimhild and Gibich, the king of the Gibichungs. All of this is mentioned, however fleetingly in Wagner's text.

* There is no indication that Hagen is married either.
of their clever half-brother and Grimhild who bore him, but ask how Siegfried can be found. When looking for adventure, says Hagen, he will come even to the home of the Gibichungs.

Hagen is spot on. He no sooner speaks than the unmistakable sound of Siegfried's horn can be heard. He docks his boat and, with the horse, Grane, comes ashore. He is looking for Gibich's son, and tells Gunther "Your fame is known the length of the Rhine. Now fight with me, or be my friend." Forget the fighting, says Gunther, you are welcome. Through clever questioning Hagen learns that Siegfried, after slaying the dragon, has taken the tarnhelm and the ring, but nothing else. The ring is on the hand of a wonderful woman, says Siegfried.

Drinks are served. Siegfried's toast is to Brynhilde. But after his first sip of the drink he is mesmerized by a heretofore unnoticed beauty of Gutrune. That bright gaze, he says, now consumes all the blood that flows through his veins. Too shy to speak, she now demurely leaves the room and Siegfried asks Gunther if he has a wife.

No, says Gunther, but his mind is set on one who dwells on a rock and is surrounded by fire. Whoever wakes her wins Brynhilde for his wife, but he, Gunther, could never brave the fire. Though some faint memories are awakened in Siegfried by this tale, his consuming interest is in Gutrune. Siegfried assures this heir apparent that "I fear no fire; I will free the woman for you," and that the bride would be Gunther's, but only on condition that Gutrune would be given to Siegfried. Gunther is happy to swap his sister to his guest, in return for the woman sleeping on the rock.

With the tarnhelm's magic, says Siegfried. I will take your form. This calls for an oath, says Gunther. Siegfried agrees: "I will swear an oath of blood brotherhood." The most significant part of the oath they take: Death to either who breaks the oath. Siegfried is anxious to get going, and instructs Gunther to wait by the shore for one night until he arrives there with Brynhilde, whom Gunther will escort home, the hall of the Gibichungs.

After the two men leave, Hagen sits by the river, gloating over the realization of his plot and his anticipated possession of the ring.

Scene 2: Brynhilde's Rock. Brynhilde is awake and admiring her ring. Through the air comes Waltraute, a sister Valkyrie, who has come to tell her of the sad state of affairs in Valhalla. She describes how the wandering Wotan has come home one day with his spear broken in two by a hero. He sent Valhalla's nobles to the forest to chop down the world ash tree
and had them stack the branches in the hall. The Valkyries are in disarray now, she says, and there he sits; the pieces of his spear fast in his fist, and says not a word. "I pressed myself weeping into his breast."

Then, continues Waltraute, his glance broke; he thought of you, Brynhilde, he sighed deeply, closed his eye, and slowly mouthed these words: If she should again give the ring to the Rhine’s purest children, then God and the world would be freed from the burden of the curse. I reflected on it, stole forth and rode in storms to you.

The pleas of Waltraute for return of the ring are in vain and she sees tragedy to everyone as she rides off on her horse.

Brynhilde then has another visitor. This one, Brynhilde first assumes to be Siegfried, but her joy soon turns to terror. It is a stranger. He says he is here to court her and is not afraid of the flames. "Who are you, horrible man," she screams. I am a Gibichung and it is Gunther whom you will follow, he answers. Her attempt to use the ring as protection fails and he forces it from her finger, then orders her into the cave. He brandishes Needful, his sword, places it between himself and Brynhilde, and says it will bear witness that he has chastely courted.

**Act II** By a wall of the hall of the Gibichungs. Night. Hagen is sleeping in the moonlight, Alberich can be seen speaking to him, probably a dream or hallucination: Do you not hear me whom rest and sleep avoid? Hate the happy, but love the one free from joy, burdened by sadness. He repeats to his son the events leading to the present challenge. He no longer fears Wotan the robber who merely waits for his end. Siegfried knows nothing of the power of the ring, says Alberich, and to the fearless hero, my curse is useless. We must now plot how to destroy him.

Alberich continues: If a wise woman who loves him advises him to give up the ring, the gold will be lost to me. I raised Hagen to live in hate; he must now avenge me, win the ring. Swear to me, Hagen, my son. Then, as he slowly disappears, whether as a dream or in the flesh, he murmurs, "Be true, Hagen, my son" He repeats the command as he leaves, or disappears.

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* This line by the villainous dwarf may be the most ‘Schopenhauerian in the *Ring.*

** Add Alberich to the list of those who seem to know, or apprehend, how things will end.**
Then with a flourish Siegfried enters from the river bank and calls to Hagen. He explains to Hagen that he had come swiftly and that Brynhilde and Gunther will soon arrive. Hagen calls to Gutrune to come out and join the two men. Siegfried explains to her and Hagen, “I resembled him to the hair; it worked as Hagen said it would.” Brynhilde was not harmed by the fire, he continues. She followed him though the valley he made as he walked through the dying flames.

Hagen spots the sails of the boat carrying Gunther and Brynhilde. Gutrune asks Hagen to call all the men to Gibich’s Hall for a wedding. He calls loudly for both men and women. The announcement of a wedding is boisterously received. Gunther’s boat approaches, and Gunther announces that he has brought the noblest woman as a bride. He also greets his sister, Gutrune, and brings Brynhilde closer. Her eyes are cast downward. He then proclaims: Two blessed couples, Brynhilde and Gunther, Gutrune and Siegfried.

A shocked, stunned, and silent Brynhilde looks up, sees Siegfried and is visibly shocked. The assembled guests are concerned: “What ails her?” Siegfried to Brynhilde: Gunther’s gentle sister will marry me, as Gunther you. Brynhilde: You lie, then to herself: Siegfried doesn’t recognize me. She sees the ring on Siegfried’s finger. A triumphant Hagen says to all assembled: Now mark well, what the woman accuses. “I saw a ring on your hand, “she says. Pointing to Gunther, she proclaims that he forced it from her, and demands to know how he, Siegfried, got it. Siegfried: I didn’t get the ring from him. She angrily tells Gunther that he took it from her when she ‘married’ him. So, demand your right; demand it back. Gunther is understandably confused: “The ring? I gave him nothing. But—do you know him well?”

The confusion grows. Says Brynhilde about Siegfried: “Here’s the man who took the ring from me—Siegfried, the fraudulent thief.” No, says Siegfried, and he tells about his acquisition of the ring from the dragon. About that he has forgotten nothing. Hagen tells Brynhilde, that if she gave it to her spouse, then it is his and Siegfried got it through fraud. And he must pay for the theft. Brynhilde is overcome with anger over perceived betrayal, and she calls on the gods for vengeance. Further, not Gunther, she says, but Siegfried is her real spouse. Gutrune, Gunther and the assembled men all call for Siegfried to attest to his innocence of what she implies, or confess his shameful guilt.

The always helpful Hagen graciously offers his spear which is the “guardian of the honor of the oaths.” First Siegfried, then Brynhilde place
their hands on the spear point and swear that they have told the truth. In
the view of each, they both have. Siegfried and Gnutrune start to enter the
hall to celebrate the marriage. Siegfried tries to persuade Gunther to join
them, explaining that perhaps the tarnhelm did not fully work. Brynhilde
will soon get over it, he assures Gunther. Gunther does not dismiss the
matter so easily. He, Hagen and Brynhilde remain outside while the
others enter the hall.

With Hagen’s prodding, they soon agree, but Gunther most
reluctantly, that Siegfried must die. Brynhilde announces that she has
treated Siegfried with a potion (There is one for everything) that will
protect him, but did not bother with his back as he would never turn his
back on an enemy. Hagen says that there he will strike him. Gunther is
agonizing and reluctant, but hesitantly joins in the conspiracy. Gunther is
worried about his sister. He had given her to Siegfried, and if they killed
him, “Could we stand to face her?”

Hagen: We will go hunting tomorrow, and a nobleman will go
on ahead and find that a boar has brought him down. Gunther, still
reluctant, joins the trio to pledge fealty to each other in their venture.

Act III. Scene 1 The Rhine river bank where it flows through a wild
rocky valley. The three Rhine maidens still lament the loss of the gold.
They hear Siegfried’s horn and dive below the water. Siegfried appears
and has his own lament. He is lost. The three water sprites emerge from
the water. They make light talk until he asks what they want. It is the
golden ring they see on his finger. No, his wife would be upset. More
light talk and they dive again Out of their hearing, he says to himself that
if they come again he would give it to them.

But when they reemerge they solemnly tell him of the curse on the
ring, and that he should be glad to have them lift it. They tell him also he
will be killed that day. But Siegfried unfortunately knows no fear and will
not yield to threats. The maidens decide he is hopeless. A noble wife will
today succeed to your toy. She’ll listen better than you.” He leaves, and
they disappear beneath the waters.

Hagen and the hunting party, including Gunther arrive. Siegfried says
he killed nothing. He only met some water birds who predicted his death
today. Gunther is very morose despite Siegfried’s efforts to cheer him.

* Add the three Rhinemaidens to the list of those who know what will happen.
Siegfried finally offers the gloomy man to sing tales of his younger life. This he does, and gets to the point where he killed Mime. While Hagen is mixing another drink, the men ask whether the woodbird had anything more to tell him then. Hagen offers him a drink from the newly brewed one. That will help him remember every detail, says Hagen. Siegfried does remember, namely that the bird told him of a wonderful woman who sleeps high up on a rock surrounded by fire, and that she would belong to the man who walks through the fire and awakens her. Did you follow his advice, asks Hagen. He went without delay, is the response, and he describes how he walked through the flames and awakened her with a kiss. Gunther is stunned: "What am I hearing?" Two ravens fly out from the bushes, and fly off.

Do you also know what those ravens are saying, asks Hagen. As Siegfried turns to look at the birds, Hagen shouts: "They call on me for revenge." With that, he thrusts his spear into the back of Siegfried who immediately falls mortally wounded. "Hagen what have you done," demand the shocked hunters. "Perjury avenged," answers Hagen, who then walks away from the scene. Siegfried sings his last lament, which is a mental recreation of the awakening of Brynhilde. He dies. The men begin to slowly carry him back to the Gibichung Hall.

Scene 2: Night. The hall of the Gibichungs. Guutrun walks out of her room to the river bank. She thought she heard Siegfried’s horn, but realizes she did not. Her tension is interrupted by the call of Hagen. He cruelly tells her she will never hear Siegfried’s horn again. No more battles and never again will he court wonderful ladies. The men are now bringing in Siegfried’s body. What are they bringing, she demands. His answer: A wild boar slayed him.

Gutrune, grief stricken, cries out and throws herself on the body. Dear sister, Gunther pleads, talk to me. She pushes her brother away, accusing him of killing her husband. He pleads his innocence, and points to Hagen as the ‘boar’ that did the deed. Hagen freely admits it. Siegfried had sworn perjury on his spear, he has avenged it, and he now claims his right to the ring. Gunther calls it Gutrune’s dowry, and tries to stop him but is killed by Hagen. Hagen starts to take the ring from the deceased’s finger, but is horrified when the corpse raises his arm, as if in defiance. At that moment, Brynhilde enters.

The two women soon seem to understand it all. Brynhilde claims that fire will cleanse it. All that is left is the destruction of the gods, as has
been foretold by the Norns, the Rhinemaidens, Alberich, and by Wotan himself. She calls for the great logs to be brought to the river bank, and also for her horse. She tells the Rhinemaidens to take their ring from the ashes of her body, and calls on the fire god to spread the flames to Valhalla.

The fire is lighted. Brynhilde rides her faithful and obedient horse. Grane, into the flames The Rhine overflows its banks. The last word spoken is that of Hagen. “Away from the ring,” he shouts to the Rhinemaidens. These are also his last words as he is then drowned by the maidens. The fire spreads to Valhalla, which goes up in flames. Hence the gods, including Wotan are all destroyed, as are all the characters of The Ring, except for the ones who started the tetralogy, Alberich and the Rhinemaidens. But according to Wagner’s stage directions, “From the ruins of the fallen hall, men and women, greatly agitated, are watching the growing firelight in the sky. “This is something not often shown on stage. No words, even in the stage directions explain it.

It is now all left to the orchestra. The overwhelming power of the music renders irrelevant the mostly unsuccessful efforts of producers and stage directors to depict on stage Wagner’s almost impossible directions.
End of the first scene of *The Rhinegold*. Rejected by the Rhinemaidens, Alberich renounces love and steals the gold.

In Act I of *The Valkyrie*. Siegmund pulls the magic sword from the t
Valkyrie Act II. Brynhilde tries to dissuade Wotan from removing the magic from Siegmund's sword, which will result in his death.

The fight between Sieglinde's husband, Hunding, and her lover Siegmund. His sword shattered by Wotan's spear, Siegmund is killed.
Brynhilde begs her sister Valkyries to shield Sieglinde from Wotan's wrath. Brynhilde alone will stay to face him.

As punishment for her disobedience, Wotan kisses away her godhood, and puts Brynhilde to sleep.
Wotan's farewell and the magic fire. Wotan has acceded to Brynhilde's plea that only a hero should be able to claim her. His final words before leaving his sleeping daughter: “He who fears my spear point shall never pass through these flames.”

In Mime's Cave: The frustrated dwarf cannot refashion Nothung, the broken sword.
Siegfried himself mends the sword, while Mime brews a poisonous potion for Siegfried to take after he kills the dragon.

Wotan and Alberich before Hate Cave where the dragon lives. Just before the Wanderer leaves he utters this bit of wisdom: "Everything goes according to its own way: you cannot stop it."
Siegfried tastes the blood of the dragon and finds he can now understand the language of the woodbird.

While Siegfried is in the cave, Alberich and Mime argue over the spoils of the slain dragon.
Siegfried, following the bird’s advice, climbs the mountain and sees the sleeping Brynhilde.

Siegfried awakens Brynhilde from her long sleep.
Brynhilde, thrilled at finding herself awake, sings “Hail to the mother who bore me; hail to you, dear sun.”

Siegfried, during a beautiful duet, persuades the shy maiden to be his ‘wife.’ They fall into each other’s arms.
Siegfried, seeking adventure, chances to come to the hall of the Gibichungs on the Rhine, where he is greeted by Gunther and Gutrune, not shown here. The slouching guard comes in only through the imagination of the artist.

In the final scene of Wagner’s epochal Ring Brynhilde rides her horse, Grane, into the flames that will devour the hall of the Gibichungs, Valhalla, the gods, the scheming Gibichungs and everyone but Alberich and the Rhinemaidens.
CHAPTER 8

Analysis of the Ring and Its Contradictions

Despite its unity, its underlying message, can be, and often is, a subject of considerable debate. To some it is a story of the triumph of love over power, for which we can blame its composer who started out with that idea, but changed in mid-stream. By all evidence, Wagner himself might see it now either as one, Wotan, rising to the tragic height of willing his own destruction, or an instance of the inevitable hopelessness and pain inherent in all life. Less overtly, I think the subject of fate versus free will, the history and direction of which we will discuss in the next chapter, is the moving force of the drama.

The source of the uncertainty is Wagner’s interest in philosophy and the many changes, particularly of the ending of the last of the four operas. Most particularly it is the change from his attachment to the philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach to that of Arthur Schopenhauer. Insofar as his influence on Wagner is concerned, Feuerbach’s philosophy can be abbreviated to one of his main theses, the liberation of humans through love. The liberation of which he speaks is the prevalent notion that some direct power between humans and nature exists. He was an atheist, a revolutionary, and a socialist; love, not religion, nor government was, he believed, the human salvation.

The philosophy of Schopenhauer and its impact on Wagner, and more to the point of our focus, on the message of the Ring, cannot be so easily or so simply described. Schopenhauer was even more than Feuerbach, openly, publicly, and overtly an atheist. He nonetheless believed that the phenomenal world, the empirical world, the world of our senses, all three meaning the same thing, was but a temporary state, that the multiplicity of people, animals and things was only existent to our perceptions.
Wagner fused words and music, as well as drama, into an alloy that makes all elements complementary to the others, and necessary to the whole. It must be granted nonetheless that it is the music indeed that could stand alone, and the music alone that conveys the largest bulk of the emotional content.

After Wagner had completed the text of Siegfried's Death in Dresden in early December 1848 he made changes in the ending later that month and again in May 1850 in Zurich. In December 1852 to reflect his new thinking influenced by the then currently popular Ludwig Feuerbach. He put into the mouth of the Valkyrie Brynhilde her last words extolling the power of love, and ended the opera with the destruction of the gods, brought down by their immorality and obsession for power. "Rapture in joy and sorrow comes from love alone,"71 are her final words. He also added the rise of the race of humans who would have been motivated by love, rather than the loveless power centered behavior of the unsavory gods.

Only two years later Wagner turned to Arthur Schopenhauer, whose philosophy fascinated him and kept him mesmerized for the balance of his life. In 1856 he wrote a prose draft of a new ending, the 'Schopenhaurian' ending, the final words of Brynhilde being "I saw the world end." He wrote in his autobiography that he was surprised to see that he had instinctively portrayed what Schopenhauer had taught in his, Wagner's, own writings. Wagner's texts will have to stand on their own in determining the efficacy of that observation. It is the texts he wrote, not his opinion, nor even his own writings that tell the tale. However there are some things of which we should take cognizance before examining those texts.

We must remember that they had been completed before he turned, for the first time, to Schopenhauer. After reading the seminal work of the philosopher he changed none of the texts significantly with the exception of the final narrative of Brynhilde, recited before plunging on her horse into the flames that were devouring the hall of the Gisilungs. The ideas underlying the change were that the downfall of the gods was not caused by moral failings peculiar to the gods. On the contrary, their failings were universal and part of the nature of things, and contrary to Wagner's earlier naïve belief, their destruction would not bring forth a new and happier day based on love.
The overriding issue of the Ring is a subject we will examine from the perspective of free will versus fate. Wagner finally decided, wisely, to also remove that final Schopenhauerian, narrative, and to let the orchestra say it all. So the Ring ends with a glorious musical tapestry woven of many themes from the four operas, but with no narrative and no paean to any philosophy. Nonetheless, some few productions in modern times, still have a crowd of humans enter to watch the flames in the distance destroy the gods and their home, Valhalla. It seems pointless, even though the stage directions still call for it.

We should also consider one other matter before examining the texts, namely that the poetic renderings of the operas were written in reverse order from which they are played in Ring performances. The poetic text of Siegfried’s Death, later termed Götterdämmerung (The Twilight of the Gods), the last Ring opera, was completed in November 1848; Siegfried, the third opera, in June 1851; The Valkyrie, the second, in June 1852; The Rhinegold, the first, in November 1852. All were preceded by prose drafts. Wagner’s introduction to Schopenhauer’s work was late September 1854.

With all of this in mind, or somewhere nearby, let us look at the pertinent portions of the texts from the point of view of Wotan’s exercise of free will versus his domination by the forces of fate.

The gods are destined to be destroyed because of a promise Wotan, king of the gods, made that he never intended to keep. This fraudulent promise was a violation of the pledge he had made to the Fates (or whomever—Wagner never really says), to live by his promises and treaties in return for the right to rule over the gods. To obtain this power he had given one of his eyes.

The promise he broke was to give Freia, the goddess of love and/or youth, to the giants in return for their construction of an abode for the gods, namely Valhalla. He always assumed he could find a substitute gift. His wife Fricka had hoped that the luxurious castle would keep her husband at home instead of wandering the world seeking slings with both goddesses and mortal women. It was, of course, a vain hope.

Or perhaps the violation was the more serious transgression that it led to, the theft of the Rhinegold hoard from the dwarf Alberich. Whoever forged a ring from that gold, it was said, would have unbounded power and could rule the world. Alberich had stolen the gold from the Rheinmaidens, who were supposed to be guarding it, and post haste had forged a ring.
Wotan’s attempt to escape the consequences of his broken agreement(s) and the theft is intertwined with a struggle for possession of the “magic ring.” Wotan seems to think, possibly with good reason, that the transfer of the ring to the Rhinemaidens, from whose gold the ring was forged, would rectify the offenses. This would enable the gods to continue their decadent presence on Earth. Any effort to get the ring from Fafner, now a dragon, however would have to be without Wotan’s help, which help would be an additional transgression, as he had given the ring to the giants.

There are inevitably contradictions in any story involving the supernatural and Wagner’s tetralogy, as it is often called, is no exception. But the contradictions are mostly minor. There is however one contradiction in the Ring, far different from any of the minor ones. It is played out in many of the episodes, but most obviously in two of the finest ones, musically, poetically and dramatically, in the entire Ring. Perhaps that is the reason why, in all of the millions of words dissecting most of the texts, no one has paid much attention to this blatant contradiction. It is one of those things that may just look like a loose string, another instance of carelessness on the part of the composer dramatist.

But on closer inspection it could be much more. Pull on this harmless looking string, and you can just keep pulling. Eventually you reach the same contradictions and the same dilemmas that has baffled and occupied philosophers, psychologists and ultimately scientists, since the ancient Greeks. We will get to those two great scenes, as well as others related to the same issue, in time, but first, some broader views of the landscape.

The whole controversy seems played out in the character of Wotan. Is his will all powerful, or is his future determined by other forces, whether fate, the machinations of others, or his own unconscious inner self? Many have denigrated the character Wotan as being a helpless creature, moved by others and by outside events instead of being an actor and motivator.

Bryan Magee says that in the course of writing the Ring, Wagner’s leading character, Wotan (my vote goes to Brynhilde), “rises to the tragic heights of willing the annihilation not only of himself but of the whole world he has created.” Presumably that is also what Wagner meant when he wrote in his autobiography that he was surprised that what had caused him so much concern upon reading Schopenhauer he had already done without conscious intent. Wagner said that he felt the philosopher would
have been distressed to know Wagner had reached similar conclusion before even reading his book.

We will see about that, but clearly Wotan's entire being is now directed to trying to avert the threatened destruction of the gods, including himself. It is a tough dilemma the god faces. He needs either to have someone get the ring from the dragon and to give it to the Rhinemaidens, or alternatively to have it kept from the hands of the evil dwarfs. But the deed must be done without his help, thus by an agent free from the influence of the god.

On what evidence do Bryan Magee, and presumably Wagner, claim that Wotan has risen to tragic heights by willing his own destruction. Magee points us to the lengthy second act narrative of Wotan in the second Ring opera, The Valkyrie.

Sometime between the first and second operas, Wotan has thrust a magic sword into a tree. It was intended for Wotan's human son, the offspring of Wotan and a human woman, member of the race of Volsungs. It was to be used as a weapon to kill the dragon Fafner who has possession of the magic ring. Thus he thought to have his long abandoned human son do the job without any help from himself. Rather shallow thinking, even for a god.

Wotan's tough willed wife, Fricka, however, has just disabused him of any thought that in letting his son, Siegmund, do his unpleasant and prohibited deed for him, that the son is not acting with the active support of Wotan himself. It was, she pointed out, Wotan who had left for Siegmund the magic sword, and it was Wotan who had guided him to the place where he would find it. As the guardian of marriage vows, she demands that Wotan, and his favorite Valkyrie daughter, Brynhilde, abstain from any help for Siegmund.

When she left the scene of the confrontation with Wotan, he was a thoroughly beaten and depressed man. There were simply no answers to her arguments. Now he unburdens to Brynhilde his deepest feelings, including his fears, and openly reveals the depth of his depression. In the course of his expiation of his innermost fears and deepest gloom he describes the impossibility of his situation.

Wotan is frightened not only by the schemes of Alberich, but even more so by the news that a woman now bears Alberich's child and he knows that the child will continue the effort to gain the ring. The child will be Hagen, of whom we will see much in the Ring's final opera.
This is the point at which Mage, and presumably Wagner, feel that he instinctively traveled the road that Schopenhauer had described, the point at which Magee tells us that the god had risen to the tragic heights of willing his own destruction. He tells his daughter:

"I am sick of finding eternally only myself in everything I achieve . . . . Farewell, then glory and pomp and boastful shame of godlike splendor. Let what I have built fall apart. I renounce my work. There is only one thing I still want: the end—the end!"73

So Wotan says he wants the end. It is a very slender reed with which to support the claim of tragic height in willing his own destruction. When he realizes, in the depths of depression, that there is nothing he can do to stop it, he now wants it. This is not the last time we will see Wotan willing his destruction when he knows he cannot stop it. He seems to make a habit of it.

He hints again at his own lack of power to control events at the end of that opera, The Valkyries. Brynhilde had been ordered by him, contrary to his previous instruction, not to protect Siegmund in a coming fight between Siegmund, with whom Sieglinde has eloped, and Hunding, the wronged husband of Sieglinde. Realizing that this is not really what her father wants, and how tragic such outcome will be for him, Brynhilde disobeys and starts to protect Siegmund.

Sieglinde is Siegmund's long separated twin sister. She was kidnapped as a child and given to the very unpleasant Hunding, now her husband. Sieglinde fell in love with Siegmund who happened to enter Hunding's home, apparently by chance but more likely through Wotan's magic doings. The sword left by Wotan was in a tree growing in Hunding's living room and it is retrieved by Siegmund, for whom it was obviously intended. Siegmund plans to use it in the coming fight. Brynhilde, in starting to protect Siegmund in his battle with Hunding, was motivated by the all too human trait of empathy as well as the realization that it hurt Wotan very much that his son would be killed without his protection.

But Wotan suddenly appears and thwarts his daughter's intentions. As Siegmund swings his sword, it is shattered in two on Wotan's spear. Siegmund is killed. Wotan then strips Brynhilde of her godhood as punishment for her disobedience, and decrees that she lie asleep on a mountaintop until awakened by any man who would claim her as his wife. Overcome by his daughter's pleading he ultimately consents to surrounding her with a magic fire so that only the bravest could cross it.
He calls forth the fire and as it blazes around his daughter, at the end of his farewell, he says of the fire that now “only one may court the bride, he who is freer than I the god.” So even at that early time Wotan does not consider that he is free, but in the hands of an inevitable fate, whether he wills it or not.

The third opera, Siegfried, takes place in another 20 years or so after Brynhilde began her sleep on the mountaintop. During the first two acts we see the god king, disguised as a wanderer, attempting to bring about the salvation of the gods by trying to have a dwarf get the ring from the dragon, and presumably having it returned to the Rhinemaidens in some way or other. By all events however it must be done without his help.

In the first scene of that opera, Siegfried has forced Mime to tell him the truth about his parentage. The mother was Sieglinde who was dying in childbirth. Her child was Siegfried himself. The pieces of the sword owned by Siegfried’s father are shown as proof of the Siegfried’s paternity. Siegfried, overjoyed to learn that the hideous and repulsive dwarf is not his father, runs joyously into the open forest.

In comes Wotan now playing the role of a wanderer. He visits, and terrorizes, Mime in his smithy. Mime learns from Wotan, now the wanderer, that only the one who never knew fear will be the one to slay the dragon. But he also delivers the chilling news that Mime’s life will also be taken by the same fearless person. He then leaves the frightened and trembling dwarf. So Mime too is faced with a dilemma. The one who knows no fear is obviously Siegfried, but how does he get the ring from Siegfried after the youth kills the dragon and gets the ring from it.

Mime quickly solves that problem. When the rejuvenated Siegfried returns, he now smelts the pieces and molds them together. As he does, Mime is mixing a potent poison for him to drink after he slays the dragon.

But before that plot can play itself out, the wanderer, in act 2, appears at the entrance to the dragon’s cave, named appropriately “Hate Cave,” where he sees Alberich lying in wait, presumably for a chance to regain the ring. Since Mime will not get the ring, having blown his chance by failing to ask the wanderer for the information that would have saved him, Wotan now tries to get Alberich to do the job. He suggests that if Alberich warns the dragon of approaching danger the dragon may give up “his toy.”

Wotan graciously offers to call Fafnir for him, and does so. Alberich tries to sell the dragon on the idea of giving up the ring. But Fafnir is not
interested in negotiations. He only wants to sleep. So, as Wotan chortles, “that didn’t work.” Alberich leaves.

We then, to a haunting theme, hear from Wotan another morsel of his world view: “Everything goes its own way, and you cannot stop it.” This is sound and realistic thinking, but does not sound like a man, or god, necessarily rising to tragic heights, or even exercising free will.

There is still the matter of Siegfried, who Mime expects to kill the dragon and whom Mime then expects to kill with poison. But after Siegfried kills the beast, he licks some of Fafner’s blood off of his hand, and suddenly can understand the language of the talking wood bird. The bird explains that now Siegfried can also hear what Mime is thinking as opposed to what he is saying. What he is thinking causes Siegfried to dispatch him from this world with the sword. The prodigious bird then tells the youngster to take the ring and the tarnhelm from the slain dragon. It then shows him the way to the mountain where Brynhilde lies sleeping. So the ring is now in the hands of Wotan’s own grandson, Siegfried.

We turn now to the beginning of Act III of Siegfried, the first of the two great scenes mentioned at the outset of this chapter. Every attempt made by Wotan to wrest the ring from Fafner and to give it to the Rhinemaidens has failed. At the foot of the mountain, on the peak of which Brynhilde lies sleeping, the god calls forth Erda, the Earth goddess who has been sleeping in the bowels of the earth. It was she who persuaded Wotan to give up the ring to the giants to gain the freedom of Freia in the opening opera. She had warned him “A dark day looms ahead for the gods”

He now awakens her. She, according to Wotan, is the world’s wisest woman. He calls her “Vala,” “Vache Vala,” “Awake, Vala.” Vala is from northern mythology and refers to a seeress, a prophetess, a woman who can foretell the future. “I have roamed the world in quest of knowledge,” he tells her . . . “Wherever there is life your breath blows . . . Everything, it is said, is known to you . . . That I now gain knowledge I have awakened you from your sleep.”

Her sleep is dreaming, she says, dreaming is thinking, her thinking mastery of wisdom. But the Norns are awake. They weave the rope of fate, and piously spin what Erda knows. Why not ask them? But, says Wotan, it is in the clamp of the world that the Norns spin, they cannot alter or change it. “It is from your wisdom I would want to know how to stop a rolling wheel.”
"To stop a rolling wheel." It is a clear reference to the rolling wheel of Buddhism, about which Wagner, at this point in his life, had been immersed. And that interest was indeed derivative from Schopenhauer. In Buddhism there is the rolling wheel of life, death, and rebirth. He has tried to stop this onrush of events and has met only with frustration. Now he pleads with this all-knowing goddess for help. But she then refers him to the daughter that she bore for him, namely Brynhilde. Why does he not consult with her?

Wotan explains why he was ‘forced’ to punish her, and that she has been asleep for lo these many years. Erda has little sympathy for him: "He who taught defiance punishes defiance? He who ignited the deed, is angered by the deed? Does he who praises right and protects oaths, denounce right and rule through perjury? Let me descend again! Sleep will seal my wisdom."

He refuses, he says, to let her go. "Ancient wise one, you once thrust the thorn of worry into my courageous heart; with fear of a shameful death by my enemies, your knowledge filled it, and fear bound its courage. If you are the world’s wisest woman, tell me now: how does a god conquer his worry?" She is still not moved: "You are not what you claim. Why did you come, you stubborn wild man, to disturb my sleep?"

Wotan answers in words that may appear baffling, but they tell us much about himself and unwittingly his inner turmoil.

"You are not what you believe yourself to be!
Ancient mother’s wisdom is ending.
Your wisdom yields to my will.
Do you know what Wotan wills?

After a moment of tension filled silence he continues:

You, ancient wise one, I speak into your ear,
That free of worry, eternally you may sleep.
About the end of the gods, fear does not grip me.
Since I wish it and will it.
What in the wild pain of my dilemma
Doubtfully once I decided,
Happily and joyfully
I now pursue.
In angry disgust I granted the world to the Nibelungs’ envy,
To the glorious Wälsung I now leave my heritage.
He who was chosen by me, but never knowing me,
The bravest youth to receive my advice,
Has gained the Nibelung’s ring.
Happy in love, free from envy
Alberich’s curse is paralyzed by the nobility
As fear remains a stranger to him.
Brynhilde, whom you bore for me
Will be awakened softly by the hero:
On waking, the wise child will do the deed
That will redeem the world.

That is ultimately what happens. But he must have known all of that when he awakened the goddess. It seems that almost everyone knows it. He describes the same end to Siegfried in the very next scene. So he has learned nothing from Erda, who seems to merely put one more nail in the already sealed coffin. So why the sudden change of will? He had tried every avenue that might lead to salvation of the race of gods, including himself. Every door was slammed in his face. When there was nothing left, he decided to will the end of the gods himself. This was his ‘free will’?

But the desperate attempt was not over. We will see just how much he wills the destruction of the gods. It starts with the following scene. Wotan confronts Siegfried at the foot of the mountain where Brynhilde sleeps. The talking bird has left the young man there and flown off. The initial conversation between the two men, grandfather and the grandson, the latter being ignorant of the relationship, is harmless enough. It begins with the youth saying to himself that he will continue on the way his ‘guide’ has shown him, but upon hearing the voice of an older man, asks the way up the mountain.

But it is the elder who takes over the questioning. The Wanderer asks the youth seemingly endless questions, which the youngster answers until he gets tired of the delay. The young man has had enough. “If you can show me the way, say so. If you don’t, stop your mouth.” Patience the Wanderer advises. “If you think I am old you should offer me some respect.” As long as I’ve lived the grandson answers, an old man has stood in my way. If you persist in obstructing me any longer, look out, I say, that you don’t go the way of Mime. But why do you wear so big a hat? That is the way of wanderers, is the answer, when they walk against the wind [a double entendre no doubt].
But, answers the young man, one eye is missing, probably struck out by someone whose way you blocked. Take off now, or you might easily lose the other one. Wotan, the wanderer: “I see, my son, that you know nothing . . . With the eye that is missing, you yourself are looking at the one that remains to me for sight.”

The young man laughs. “From laughter you make me happy. But listen. I can’t chatter any longer. Quickly show me the way, and then you go your way. There is nothing more I need from you.”

Things are turning tense. Replies the Wanderer: “If you knew me, insolent sprout, you would spare me the insults. I have so much trust in you your threats are painful to me. I have always loved your radiant stock, my raging anger, also giving you reason to fear. To you that I love so, the highest of all, don’t awaken my anger today: it would destroy you and me.”

Siegfried angrily tells the elder man to get out of the way; he knows the way to the sleeping bride. The bird told him before it suddenly flew away. The Wanderer says it flew to save itself. “The lord of the ravens (referring to himself) it learned was here: harm to him who they catch! The way that it showed you, you shall not follow.” Siegfried laughs. “Who are you that wants to stop me?” Wotan tells Siegfried why he wants to stop him. But his words will mean more to us than to Siegfried:

Fear the rock’s guardian!
My might holds the sleeping maid locked:
Who wakes her, who wins her,
Leaves me powerless forever!
A sea of fire flows around the woman,
Glowing flames lick around the rock:
He who wants the bride,
Will be confronted by the burning fury.

The wanderer Wotan tells the youngster to look up and describes the fiery scene. Soon he says, “The raging fire will consume and scorch you. So, go back, rash child.” But Siegfried does not fear the fire. Then, says the Wanderer, “my spear will bar you from the way! My hand still holds the cloak of lordship: The sword that you swing this spear once shattered: once again it will break on the eternal spear.” Wotan would have done better to follow the bit of wisdom he uttered in Act II: “Everything goes its own way. You cannot stop it.”
Siegfried’s reaction: My father’s foe! Have I found you here? Revenge, he says, is now in his grasp. So once again we see a clash between the same spear and the same sword, then wielded by Siegmund. The outcome this time is different. It is the spear that is broken in two by the sword. Wotan, the wanderer, his spirit as broken as his spear, says “Go on. I cannot stop you.” Siegfried does go on, awakens Brynhilde, who becomes his bride, in fact if not in law, after a rapturous duet.

What is the meaning of this last episode? Wotan sounds serious enough about keeping his grandson from waking his daughter, Siegfried’s aunt,—not because of the incest involved, but because Brynhilde will perform the act, namely giving the ring to the Rheinmaidens, which will deprive Wotan forever from his exalted place as king of the gods, who will be replaced by the race of humans.

There is yet the possibility that Wotan is only seeking once more to hinder Siegfried in his unknowing destiny, giving the ring through Brynhilde to the Rheinmaidens, so as to prove once and forever his lack of complicity as helping attain this goal. Perhaps all of the machinations with the dwarfs had been for the same purpose.

However the last word on this is convincing that he does not at all will the destruction of the gods. It is undoubtedly his purpose to survive, and to continue to reign over the gods who are, supposedly, the rulers of the Earth, and all things occurring on it. That last word comes not from Wotan, but from another Valkyrie. Toward the end of the first act of the final opera, Brynhilde is alone on the rock where she had been awakened, when one of her sister Valkyries, Valtraute, arrives.

This is the second of the two great scenes mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. In this scene Brynhilde thinks Valtraute has come to bring news of her father’s forgiveness of her disobedience. But she has no such message. Valtraute begins a narrative that paints a truly remarkable portrait, with words and music, of the dispirited Wotan. He has obviously hoped to disregard his own wisdom, that “everything goes its own way,”

Since he was separated from you, never again did he send us into battle, says Valtraute. Without order or command we rode fearfully as an army. Valhall’s brave heroes avoided Valvater (as they called him). “Alone on his horse, without pause or rest, he traveled the world as a wanderer. Recently he returned home. In his hand he held the fragments of his spear that a hero had struck. With a silent gesture, he pointed Valhall’s nobles to the forest to chop down the world ash tree [The reader is referred to the previous chapter. In the prologue to the first act of this, the last opera,
Götterdämmerung, we heard from the Norns that Wotan's spear was carved from a branch of the world ash tree. Previously wisdom whispered from a spring in its shade; its branches flourished with greenery. After Wotan cut the branch the wound ultimately consumed the forest; the faded leaves fell from the branches. The tree decayed and died.

The logs from the trunk, continues Valtraute, he had them build to towering height in circles around the holy hall. With holy grace he took the throne. By his side he bade the fearful gods to sit. In rings and rows the heroes filled the hall. Valtraute continues:

Thus he sits and says no word,
On his throne, silent and grave,
The spear's pieces tight in his fist

*   *   *

His two ravens
He sent on journeys;
If they should once return
With good news,
Then once more,
For the last time,
The god will smile eternally.
Surrounding his knees
Lay us Valkyries;
Blind he remained to our entreating glances;
Terror and endless anxiety consume us all.
Weeping, I pressed myself to his breast:

Then, to tones of the most melting beauty:

Then his glance broke.
He thought of you, Brynhilde!
He sighed deeply and closed his eye,
And as in a dream he whispered the word:
If she would give the ring back
To the purest daughters of the deep Rhine,
From the burden of the curse,
God and the world would be saved.
The details of Brynhilde's emotional refusal to give up the ring are not relevant here to our thesis. This last description, however, of the god's pitiful yearning for the daughter he disgraced to "return" the ring to the Rheinmaidens speaks volumes. This was not to keep the ring from the dwarfs. It was not to advance the goodness of Siegfried. It was not to have Brynhilde perform the act to save the world. That was all empty bluster to a disdainful Erda, the Earth goddess.

Wotan, immortal or not, was driven as a womanizer, the downfall of many men otherwise seen as heroes, if not gods. He built the castle Valhalla to satisfy his demanding wife. The giants could build the castle, but wanted Freia in return. Again he did what he had to do, he promised them Freia without any intention of giving them his wife's sister, which the wife would never permit anyway. Only the gold from the deep would suffice as a substitute. He again did what he had to do. And every further step showed him doing what he had to do to stay alive and to continue his sway over other gods and humans.

We need now to remember the order in which the texts were created. This last narrative of Valtraute, and the entire text of Götterdämmerung, though last in performance and in the story, was written first. It paints a picture of the god, sitting with the now useless shards of his once mighty spear, defeated, helpless, pathetic, and yearning for help from the daughter he had treated so harshly.

Wagner apparently decided against any changes other than the ending. Wotan's other pronouncements and his other behaviors could perhaps be explained away, though not very well, in support of an argument in favor of his free will, his tragic heights, his willing of his own destruction. This all could have been seen as an effort to completely distance himself from his grandson Siegfried.

But regardless of when it was written, Valtraute's narrative comes last in performance. Wagner's only hope to save Wotan as an heroic figure would require either an excision of the scene, or, more problematic, a redoing of it. It flies right in the teeth of Magee's, and Wagner's theory of our great god rising to tragic heights. It is to Richard Wagner's even greater credit however, and to his greater glory, that he let it stay. This was an artist rising to artistic heights.

Do not think that Wagner was unaware of the contradiction. But he was certainly not going to admit that it was indeed a contradiction. Listen to his explanation to Cosima which she recorded in her diary on March 29, 1878:
It does not say much for Schop that he did not pay more attention to my Ring des Nibelungen. I know of no other work in which the breaking of a will (and what a will, which delighted in the creation of a world!) is shown as being accomplished through the individual strength of a proud nature without the intervention of a higher grace, as it is in Wotan. Almost obliterated by the separation of Brynhilde, this will rears up once again, bursts into flame in the meeting with Siegfried, flickers in the dispatching of Waltraute, until we see it entirely distinguished at the end in Valhalla.” At supper he returns to this and says: “I am convinced Sch would have been annoyed that I discovered this before I knew of his philosophy.

As Wagner described his god king, his alter ego perhaps, he is a master flip flopper, one that could put any modern politician to shame. Cosima may or may not have believed that convoluted explanation. He could better have said “To have removed or changed that scene would have been a travesty, a mortal sin against the opera; philosophy and consistency be damned.”

It is indeed one of the most beautiful, most effectively combined poetic and musical portraits in the entire tetralogy, an epic filled with magnificent episodes, and dramatically it seems right. Whether Wagner instinctively preferred to leave him as a helpless pathetic victim of fate rather than some pompous hero I could not know. I would guess he did, but to me it doesn’t matter why.

Magee, it must be said, also tied himself in knots trying to save the “stain” of inconsistency from one of his two idols. He wrote: “We can speculate as freely as we like about why Wagner did not rewrite the earlier parts of The Ring in light of his changed ideas; but it seems to me probable that the obvious reasons are also the right ones.” What does he mean by the “earlier” parts? The operas with the biggest, most blatant contradictions are in the two last operas the two that come at the end of the completed work, but were written earlier than the first two. It seems that not much, if any, rewriting would need redoing for Rhinegold or Valkyrie which are the first two operas.

Whatever Magee meant, here in essence is what he said: When writing Das Rhinegold he assumed that “revolutionary criticism of existing society was the work’s cutting edge,” and Wagner portrayed the world of the gods as the corruption that lay in social and political activity. But he
later came to change his ideas about the remedy for the world’s ills. In the
final opera he had come to see those ills as caused by metaphysical, not
political problems, “not anything topical or social, but something endless
or timeless.”

So what he had to change, he did, namely the final episode of the
last opera, Götterdämmerung. The change in Wagner’s thinking otherwise
left the last two operas with the more serious contradictions, though still
filled with some of the Ring’s finest episodes. Magee’s explanation as to
why more was not rewritten: “Composing the Ring once was an almost
insuperable task, but to have created long stretches of it twice would have
been an all but impossible one.”

What long stretches? It was only the text of the first opera that he
wrote when he was still naïve and yet not disillusioned by the failure of
the 1849 uprising. It was, and is, the final opera in performance, but
the first that was written, and the only one written before that great
disillusionment. The other operas, starting with Siegfried in 1851, came
as he lived with his disillusionment in Zurich. Valkyrie and Rhinegold
followed, and it is difficult to see why either of them would have needed
to be changed.

If consistency had really been important to Wagner, he could have
merely excised the Waltraute scene from Götterdämmerung and changed
the dialogue from the Wotan-Erda and the Wotan-Siegfried scenes from
the last act of Siegfried—which of course would have greatly lessened
the poetical and musical effect of the act. There are merely a couple of
lines from the Valkyrie, mentioned previously in this chapter that might
be changed or eliminated—or left alone. The question that Magee
asked could be answered more simply then he did. The answer was that,
Schopenhauer notwithstanding, Wagner was first an artist with his own
instincts, and he was not going to sacrifice them for Schopenhauer or
anyone else.

From reading Schopenhauer in 1854, he concluded that corruption was
not a limited commodity, but a characteristic of our phenomenal world. But
how that would have required the extensive changes Magee described, I am
at a loss to see. Magee, despite his usual intensity of detail and explanation,
offers no examples of what would need to have been changed in Rheingold
and Valkyrie on that account. I see nothing. In the end, he decided to use no
text at all for the ending. He let the orchestra say it all.

It should be mentioned that Wagner also let stand the stage directions
in which that last scene of the tetralogy is depicted. It includes this:
"From the ruins of the fallen hall, men and women, greatly agitated, are watching the growing firelight in the sky." This seems to say that the end of the degenerate gods has brought forth the domination of the world by humans, presumably to lead the world to some glorious love filled place. This is not Schopenhauerian; this is the Feuerbachian philosophy that he had supposedly supplanted with Schopenhauer. It would have taken precious little effort to eliminate those directions. Further, unlike the Valtraute scene this seems to add nothing of artistic value to the drama. It is usually ignored in modern productions.

I do not believe that Wagner was thinking of free will when he wrote this text. I think he was following his own instincts, instincts that have guided some of the greatest thinkers in history, and, it must be said, guided some of them to opposite conclusions. This exercise would not be complete without some exposure to their thinking and some new thinking based on the advances in modern science, which we will peruse in the following chapter.

* * *

First, however, now with a better idea of the story of the Ring, it would be more meaningful to hear further from Dr. Guthke. On Christmas Day in 1854, barely two months after beginning *The World as Will and Representation*, Wagner sent to its author a copy of the text of The Ring in which he inscribed "In veneration and gratitude." There was no covering letter sent with it, nor did Schopenhauer ever acknowledge receipt of it. We already know what Wagner thought of Schopenhauer. He revered him. But what did Schopenhauer think of Wagner? Though he wrote no document containing his thoughts he did make extensive notes on the copy. For the information available to the public, we are indebted to the labors of the professor of German art and culture and Corresponding Fellow of the British Institute of Germanic Studies, Karl S. Guthke, whom we met earlier in chapter 5.

He tells us that Wagner had reports from two friends who had conversations with Schopenhauer and had told the composer that Schopenhauer "had made significant and favorable comments on my poem." But Guthke had read the copy with its many penciled comments by the philosopher and he tells us that he found nothing that would qualify as favorable. Guthke referred to Schopenhauer as the "universally
acknowledged master of German prose.” As previously mentioned, the philosopher is well known for the clarity of his writing.

Schopenhauer’s comments are interesting, not necessarily for the validity of the aspersions he casts on Wagner’s use of language, but for the efficacy of Wagner’s belief that they were significant or favorable. Read only as a text, it is understandable that anyone, especially a skilled writer, and even more especially one whose forte was prose, would not find much of merit in Wagner’s texts. He also criticized the amorality in the story, but once again the music comes to its rescue: even the incestuous relationship of the Volsung twins, the Siegfried affair with his aunt Brynhilde and the “ingratitude” of Siegfried toward Mime who raised him from childhood (only so that he might kill the dragon).

Speaking of Schopenhauer’s notes, Guthke said that the remarks that reached Wagner had apparently been “purified to unadulterated flattery,” to tell Wagner what he would want to hear. As late as January 1969 Cosima was quoting in her diary supposed words of Schopenhauer that “I admire Wagner as a poet, but a musician he is not.” Not one of the marginal notes to The Ring Guthke continues “appears favorable by any stretch of the imagination.”

That is not surprising. The texts were written with the music in mind. Many passages of the original text have musical notations in the margins. The text, that is, the poetry, and the music were born out of the same artistic impulse. The texts were not intended to be read as literature, and many another critic has stumbled badly in criticizing them purely from that viewpoint. Wagner himself stumbled in thinking that Schopenhauer could react well to it without the music. This text was sent to Schopenhauer in 1854. Not until 1869 was Rhinegold performed; not until 1870, The Valkyries. The last two operas as part of the entire Ring, were not performed until 1876. Schopenhauer was long dead for all of them.
Wagner claimed that His guiding light from about age 41 to the end of his days, was Arthur Schopenhauer. Wagner never really told us specifically the essence of what he found so appealing in Schopenhauer’s works. But there is one element in Schopenhauer, namely the issue of free will, which was not explicitly mentioned by Wagner in any of his writings, and missing almost entirely in Feuerbach, the philosopher he abandoned in favor of Schopenhauer.\footnote{75}

In the whole course of the world, a mote in a sunbeam could never describe any line in its flight other than the one it has described, nor could a man act in any way different from that in which he has acted. No truth is more certain than this, namely that all that happens, be it great or small, happens with complete necessity. Consequently, at every given moment of time the whole state or condition of all things is firmly and accurately determined by the state or condition that just preceded it; and so it is with the stream of time back to infinity and on to infinity. Consequently, the course of the world is like that of a clock after it has been put together and wound up ... The chain of causality with its universal strictness—that brazen bond of necessity and fate—produce every phenomenon irrevocably and unalterably, just as it is.

But perhaps none of what Schopenhauer had to say was so subject to more speculation about its meaning, or more frequently quoted in recent times as this: “Man can indeed do what he wants, but he cannot will what he wants.”\footnote{76}
It was in his essay “On the Freedom of the Will,” published in 1841 at the age of 53 that he dealt so specifically with the subject of free will. In that essay that he made clear his feeling that humans, by their very nature from birth, were not free to exercise will, but to be under the complete domination of the will. The will he speaks of is the inborn will to live, acquire, and to find happiness, which he believed to be a hopeless search.

To what extent did his philosophy affect Wagner’s *Ring of the Nibelung*? In 1852 Wagner changed his ending of the final opera (written first but shown as last in productions), a monologue of Brynhilde to reflect the thinking of Feuerbach. It dealt with love as the ruling principle of the world, but it and some later endings, all involved the destruction of the gods and Valhalla.

In 1856, having become absorbed with Schopenhauer, he again changed the ending, as sung by Brynhilde. Wagner dealt now with Schopenhauer’s theme, essentially that of the Buddhists: the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Enlightened by love, Brynhilde achieves Nirvana, a state essentially of non-being.

The prose draft that he wrote for her:

I flee forever the home of delusion . . . redeemed from incarnation, the enlightened woman now goes. The blessed end of all things eternal, do you know how I attained it? Grieving love’s profoundest suffering opened my eyes for me: I saw the world end.

In both instances, the Feuerbachian and the Schopenhauerian, he also changed the orchestration of the ending of the *Ring*.

Neither of the two endings were ever set to music. Of the two texts for Brynhilde, only the 1856 text, the Schopenhauerian, was turned to poetry, and then not until the early 1870s, just a few years before the first *Ring* production in 1976. He completed scoring of the *Ring* in 1874. Although he reverted to the music as he scored it for the 1852, the Feuerbachian revision, both of the texts, those from 1852 and 1856, wound up only as footnotes in the final printed edition. Included in the notes was a statement that although he preferred the Schopenhauerian lines, he thought the meaning of the drama was better expressed by the music alone. Hardly any who has seen or heard the opera would disagree.
Much as he admired Schopenhauer, when his own artistic instincts conflicted with his admiration, his instincts won out. What we hear at the end of the *Ring* is not Schopenhauer, not Feuerbach; it is pure Wagner, in both action and music.

Without ever having specifically discussed the matter, Wagner had come down heavily on the side of what is today called determinism. Free will, or triumph of the will, is totally missing. From the transgression shown in the second scene of *The Rhinegold*, the first *Ring* opera, every act, every scene, leads inexorably to the preordained ending. The events seem to follow the preceding ones in logical sequence. The characters, including Wotan are powerless to stop it. And the ending seems to have been known in advance by almost every *Ring* character.

Is that really the way things are? Or could things really have been different, but for . . . ? The answer, in a sense, seems to be yes to both. The view of many philosophers and scientists seems to be that as we look ahead, we seem to have choices, the future is unpredictable. As we look behind, at the past, almost everything seems obviously to have been inevitable.

The subject has been controversial since ancient times, but the terms in which it is debated have significantly changed over the centuries. The issue involved in earlier times, was most often, though not always, the degree for which God, or the gods, had preordained everything that ever has, or ever will happen. As of the last half century there are probably not many who still believe that. What has not changed however is that the reasoning of both sides is often self-contradictory, often resulting in a compromise with the fancy name of "compatibilism."

Until the scientific advances of the last thirty or so years, even some of the strongest proponents of "determinism," as denial of free will is often called, seemed unable to rid themselves of the idea of at least a modicum of free will. And even the strongest proponents of free will usually acknowledged some decisions to be beyond the control of their will.

The conflict between the two views, many times carried on in the individual's own thinking, begins even in the earliest creation myths. Those myths often involve making choices and causing consequences, yet mixed with tales of gods who have foreknowledge of events. This is one form of the situation now called by philosophers "compatibilism,"
In attributing the composition of all matter to ‘atoms,’ meaning ‘indestructible,’ he was far ahead of his time. He was also among the earliest to reject the idea of free will.

The ancient Greeks seem to have been the first, as they were in so many things, to look to nature as the controlling forces rather than gods. The Greek philosophers Democritus and Leucippus preached that everything was made of atoms whose motions were controlled and caused by laws. They saw two great forces controlling us, physical determinism and logical necessity. Leucippus particularly saw no basis for chance: “Nothing occurs at random, but everything for a reason and by necessity.”

According to Democritus, whose life spanned the late 5th and early 4th centuries B.C., all matter was composed of tiny, indestructible units called atoms. It might be an amusing, if not instructive sideline to mention the thoughts of Schopenhauer on these two ancient Greeks. He refers to the “fiction of atoms,” which now, in his mid-19th century time has become “atomism, as happened in its childhood at the hands of Leucippus and Democritus.” It has now, says Schopenhauer, reached its second childhood, the reason for which he describes “in the hands of the French who “have never known the Kantian philosophy, and of
the Germans, because they have forgotten it.” It is even stranger in its second childhood because now “not only are solid bodies said to consist of atoms, but also fluids, water, even air, gasses, and light.” Apparently some of our modern scientists likewise have not read Kant, or even Schopenhauer. In his skepticism about light, Schopenhauer was right, light is not consist of atoms, but he might have found it shocking nonetheless to hear about an even smaller item called photons.

We return to more serious matters. According to Democritus, Just as the atoms are eternal and uncaused, so is motion; it has its origin in a preceding motion, and so on ad infinitum. He believed that there were fixed and necessary laws. Everything can be explained by a purely mechanical (but not fortuitous) system, in which there is no room for the idea of providence or an intelligent cause working with a view to an end. This may well be the beginning of the free will controversy. 80

The thinking of these two Greek philosophers was also the thinking of the Greek Epicurus in work that spanned the 4th and 3rd Centuries B.C. and the Roman Lucretius in the 1st Century B.C., but they also felt the need to make room for free will. Epicurus claimed that there were occasions when atoms would swerve, initiating new causal chains, which allowed us to be responsible for our actions. In short, he saw a randomness that Lucretius also adopted as enabling free will.

The first who had tried to reconcile an element of human freedom with that dogma, were Socrates and Plato. But it was Aristotle who first expounded the idea of chance as playing a role also. Five hundred years after Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias took his cause further, and argued that some events do not have predetermined causes, and that man was responsible for his decisions and could choose to do or not to do some acts, another early example of compatibilism.

In later times, in the 16th Century Martin Luther, to the contrary, was opposed to the idea of free will: “Free-will is an empty term. [It] cannot will good and of necessity serves sin.” 81 Of the same mind was Spinoza, the strict determinist, of the 17th Century. He saw an unbreakable fatalism without room for contingency or free will.

Thomas Hobbes, also in the 17th Century, saw God as the Author of all causes and effects. His is perhaps the most complete materialist philosophy of that century. Hobbes rejected Cartesian dualism [body and soul] and believed in the mortality of the soul. He rejected free will in favor of determinism. His “determinism” however treated freedom as
being able to do what one desires. His way out of that straitjacket was to subscribe to an authoritarian version of the social contract.  

When we look at the rather complex thoughts of modern philosophers, we see that in most instances, particularly among those who most strongly espouse the existence of free will and personal responsibility, most especially among those who are very religious in their beliefs, say, that God endowed humans with free will, testing them in their choices between good and evil.

We should know first that it is highly unlikely that any of this would have affected our subject to any significant degree. Wagner, despite his many peremptory pronouncements about religion, and writings that included references to God, he was apparently an atheist.  

On September 20th, 1879, about 4 years before his death, he stated to his wife, Cosima, as recorded in her diary, “I do not believe in God, but in godliness, which is revealed in a Jesus without sin.” The following month in a letter to Ernst von Weber, an activist in the crusade of the antivivisectionist, today called animal rights activists, he wrote “I do not believe in God, but in the divine as revealed to us by the person of a sinless Jesus.” Friedrich Nietzsche, a close friend of Wagner for over a decade beginning about 1868, referred to him as “an avowed atheist.” Nietzsche’s sister, Elizabeth, termed him a “pronounced atheist.”

I have read extensively in the Wagner literature, but can recall having seen only two references to his ever having set foot in a church, the first being his first marriage at age 23; the second, late in life, when he was in preparation for Parsifal, and it was undoubtedly not religious reasons that brought him there. There is no mention of any priest, pastor or other religious leader speaking at his funeral and burial.

The debate continues, but on more scientific bases. A report on scientific experiments, authored by John Tierney, as published in 2011, posed the hypothetical question about ‘Mark’ who cheats yearly on his income tax, and ‘Bill’ who falls in love with his secretary and pays to have his wife killed. Is either, or both, morally responsible for their actions? According to modern psychologists, in a deterministic world, neither would be. One is no more responsible than another. That, unsurprisingly, was not the verdict of the persons responding to the question, all of whom had been heavily exposed to the deterministic point of view, namely no free will.

Over half would give the tax cheater a break; he would not be responsible. Over 70% would hold the murderer responsible. Says
Tierney: In one way it makes perfect sense to hold Bill fully accountable for murder. His judges pragmatically intuit that regardless of whether free will exists, our society depends on everyone believing that it does. Other tests he reports show that people behave less honestly when they doubt that free will exists.

We could even go a bit further. There is a strong argument to be made that we have evolved to believe in free will just as we have evolved to believe much else, even when we know it contradicts proven scientific facts that we indeed accept.

We have already seen something of the work of Sigmund Freud. I cannot, of course, claim to have read all, or even a significant portion, of his accounts of therapy with his patients, but I have read some. I never read, and don’t expect I ever would read anything by Freud to the effect that any of his patients did any act of his or her free will or that free will could have overcome previous life experiences, or innate tendencies. Free will was simply not in his tool kit.

Freud’s methods have been much criticized, but his influence, particularly on the role of the unconscious on our decisions in life, has taken strong root in the 20th and, thus far, in the 21st Centuries. That influence has been buttressed, or perhaps eclipsed, by the findings of modern scientific electronics. Scientific study of the brain has revealed some very interesting results.

To oversimplify a bit, those areas of the brain that are repositories of our emotions, and largely outside of our realm of consciousness, are known collectively as the “limbic system.” Our ability to reason and to make decisions is the function, termed by scientists the “executive function,” and resides in the prefrontal lobes of the brain. What has been found by electro-encephalogram (EEG) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) seems to many to undercut any notion of free will.

Studies with EEG have showed that activity in the brain’s motor cortex can be detected almost a third of a second before a person feels that he has decided to make a certain movement. Other studies, with fMRI, involved subjects asked to press one of two buttons while watching a random sequence of letters appearing on a screen. They reported which letter was visible at the moment they decided to press one of the buttons. It was found that two brain regions contained information about which button would be pressed a full 7 to 10 seconds before the decision was consciously made. According to Harris, recordings from the cortex
showed that activity of as little as 256 neurons could predict with 80% accuracy a person's intention to move .7 of a second before becoming aware of it.\textsuperscript{86}

There has been much written on the subject, but perhaps one of the more incisive and more lucid efforts is a short, but very potent, book by Sam Harris entitled “Free Will.” He begins with the description of an agonizingly horrific crime by two perpetrators. “As sickening as I find their behavior,” he wrote, “I have to admit that if I were to trade places with one of these men, atom for atom, I would be him.” Harris’s conclusion: “Free will is an illusion. Our wills are simply not of our own making. Thoughts and intentions emerge from background causes of which we are unaware and over which we exert no conscious control.”\textsuperscript{87}

Harris concludes that he could “no more initiate events in my prefrontal cortex [that area where logic, pre-planning and judgments take place], than I can cause my heart to beat.”\textsuperscript{88} There is every reason, he writes, to believe that the brain, in its material structure and its functional state entirely dictate our thoughts and actions. Many claim that we have a soul separate from the body, and that this soul is the repository of our free will. But if true, the situation would not change, says Harris. “The unconscious operations of a soul would grant you no more freedom than the unconscious physiology of your brain does.” There is no way I can influence my desires, he writes. What tools would I use? Other desires? His: analogy: “A puppet is free as long as he loves his strings.”\textsuperscript{89}

Many who take the opposite view of free will, point to the new science of quantum mechanics. Unlike the world of our senses, one cannot predict the course of any individual atom or subatomic particle. Scientist can only talk about percentages and probabilities in that micro-world. Some conclude that quantum mechanics are said to undercut the “determinacy” argument, namely the lack of free will. But the conclusions of all determinists’ or even of a substantial part of them today, do not rely on “predetermination.” Quantum indeterminacy “does nothing to make free will scientifically intelligible.”\textsuperscript{90}

Harris takes pains to explain at length that determinism is not the same as fatalism. Though he frequently describes the notion of free will as an illusion, he explains the difference at length. Further he acknowledges that for “all the world” it seems like we do have free will.

Regardless of how one sees the matter, there seems little cause for doubting the possibility of its illusory nature. If free will is an illusion, it seems like less of an anomaly than many other illusions which have
evolved to enable us to live in this world. We have evolved to hear sounds. That in itself is an illusion as what exists are vibrations in the atmosphere. There are no sounds. We see colors, when there are only differences in frequencies of light rays various objects emit. We see solid objects, though in fact all objects, whether animal, vegetable or mineral, are composed of 99.99+ % empty space. We are all made of atoms, composed of a nucleus and electrons that whirl, or exist in a cloud, around them. They are extremely tiny and relatively far apart from each other. But even more to the point, each atom is itself mostly empty space.

To put the size in simple terms, if the diameter of the nucleus were a half millimeter, 1/2,000 of a meter, less than 2% of an inch, the first electron cloud would be about 50 meters, over 54 yards, away. If the nucleus were the size of a golf ball, with a diameter of 1.68 inches, the first electron cloud would be about one kilometer, or about 0.62 miles from the ball, the second cloud about four kilometers, the third, nine.91

But in giving us the illusion that the objects around us are solid, evolution has permitted us to avoid our electrons having damaging repulsive contact with like charges, namely the negative charges of other electrons, the outer portion of the atom. The laws of quantum mechanics have made the exactness of such measurements questionable, but for our purposes they are undoubtedly adequate to convey the point.

The world is not as we perceive it. Considering the highly illusory nature of our perceptions, is it really so difficult to envision that our perception of free will is likewise illusory. How else could we have survived? We have evolved to believe in it. And we will continue to live by it though knowing the truth need not interfere with our everyday behavior—except perhaps to engender more understanding and empathy, and more charity in our judgments.

The difficulty in accepting that our free will is illusory is on display in a volume of one of the most distinguished scientists of our time. The scientist is Michael S. Gazzaniga and his book, published a year before Harris's 2012 publication is “Who's in Charge?” The subtitle is Free Will and the Science of the Brain. It is a wide ranging book seeming to cover the entire waterfront, but the main focus is on free will versus determinism.

As a scientist he is thoroughly familiar with the EEG and fMRI experiments, and accepts their validity. He acknowledges that unconscious brain processes have been honed by evolution. But he, unlike Harris and like-thinking scientists, does not believe we are only atoms. What else we
may be seems to give him some trouble. He invokes a phenomenon which he says is accepted in physics, biology, chemistry, sociology, and art. It is called "emergence." To do so, he seems to turn from hard science to social science. But he seems to be attacking a dogma long dead, a corpse, namely the idea that everything that happens has been preordained and flows from first causes. The cause, or causes, according to that thinking are either those of God, or some rules of physics.

This however is all a far cry from the thinking of determinists of modern times. Hardly anyone believes that all actions and decisions in this complex world have been preordained from the time of creation by God or anyone else. What is predetermined, possibly for a fraction of a second, are our decisions, and the determinants are from the unconscious. This role of the unconscious has been attested to repeatedly by scientific studies.

What the scientists have to say is very relevant to the subject of free will. It is attested to in mathematics, for example, by Poincaré. He describes creativity as involving the appearance of "sudden illumination, a manifest sign of long unconscious prior work" and "the uncontestable role of the unconscious." In physics, Albert Einstein has described physical, even "muscular entities," in his thoughts that preceded words or other symbols that have to be sought laboriously. The phenomenon is not limited to mathematicians and physicists, or to creative genius of any stripe.

Dr. Jonathan Bargh claims that all of us make almost instantaneous, unconscious judgments that come to the conscious mind with values already attached. It is all part of the "preconscious processing" of information that comes before it reaches awareness. These judgments are made within the first quarter of a second of perception, says Bargh. Peter Debye, 1946 Nobel Prize winner for X-ray diffraction: "Our science is essentially an art which could not live without the occasional flash of genius in the mind of some sensitive man, who, after the smallest of indications knows the truth before he has the proof."

Like the creative genius, we are all at the mercy of unconscious judgments and drives that originate in our subconscious from too many sources for us to begin to understand. Much research that postdates Bargh would seem to show that the conscious overriding of unconscious judgments come only when other unconscious judgments, tell it to.

Hardly any determinist would argue that criminal behavior should not be punished, if for no other reasons, that it will keep society safer,
and that it will deter others. Recent or long absorbed knowledge, of
punishment of others can be one of the factors from the subconscious
working on the potential miscreant. Perhaps the only difference in
motivation between the two camps lies in the desire for retribution on
the part of the believers in free will. Harris however acknowledges that
"Clearly, vengeance answers to a powerful psychological need in many of
us."

Gazzaniga concludes that the question of the unconscious brain's
decision before we are aware of it is "moot and inconsequential." Harris
believes otherwise: "Clearly, we can respond intelligently to the threat
posed by dangerous people without lying to ourselves about the ultimate
origins of human behavior."

Into this morass of controversy stepped Richard Wagner. Was the
composer-dramatist of the *Ring* trying to tell us of the illusory nature of
the free will? Did he instinctively feel that this idea of free will, including
the will of the supposedly all powerful gods, was illusory? Was it to
represent the last dying gasp of Wotan to hold on to the illusion?

Was Wagner conscious of all or any of these issues? I would doubt
it. I would believe that, as with so many other of his aesthetic decisions,
this was intuition. Whether it had reached the level of consciousness I
do not know. But however conscious or unconscious it may have been,
the line he placed in *Siegfried*, "All things go their own way—you
cannot stop them" meant something. And whatever it was, it was later
proved, contrary to most of the equivocations of his predecessors and
contemporaries, to be ultimately affixed to the more or less solid bedrock
of 20th and 21st century science, the ‘unconscious’ of Sigmund Freud, and
the electronic studies of the neuroscientists.

So it seems strange indeed that Magee would find influence
of Schopenhauer in a single line in the second *Ring* opera, about
Wotan wanting and waiting for “the end.” He calls it “willing his own
destruction” and sees it as Schopenhaurian. But the philosopher himself
did not believe in free will, and the vacillations of Wotan in the last two
operas, while very human, fall a good deal short of high tragedy, even if
Wagner did think otherwise as Magee implies.
CHAPTER 10

Schopenhauer's Views on Women

Wagner's last opera, *Parsifal*, deals with sex, abstention, and/or asceticism. Up to this point any discussion concerning Schopenhauer's influence on Wagner has been limited to the content of his philosophy concerning what he and Kant termed phenomena and noumena. Almost all of our references were to *The World as Will and Representation* and only as they had bearing on the matter at hand.

As a prelude to the next chapter, on *Parsifal*, we are obliged to look deeper, most particularly to his views of women in general and to his private life that may, or may not, have influenced those views. The reason, in short, for the latter inquiry is to determine whether we are dealing entirely with the philosopher's abstract reasoning, or whether there was some emotional underlay.

He was born in 1788 in Danzig, now Gdansk, Poland. His father, Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer, was a successful merchant and ship owner. The family was living in Hamburg, when his father, Heinrich, in 1805, committed suicide. For two years thereafter Schopenhauer continued to work in his father's business, but finally left at age 19 to prepare for university studies. He went to live with his mother, Johanna Henriette Troisiener Schopenhauer, who had moved to Weimar after her husband's death.

She there opened a salon and became well known in social, intellectual and artistic circles. She established a friendship with, among others, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to whom she introduced Arthur. She also became a well-known writer in her own right, producing a voluminous assortment of essays, travelogues, and novels. The relationship between her and her son was filled with tension for which he blamed his mother, specifically for what he considered disrespect for his father's memory and the superficial ceremonious ways of her salon. By
all accounts her marriage had not been a happy one and she seemed to be enjoying her newfound freedom. The

In the meantime, in 1809, Schopenhauer began studies at the University of Göttingen, where he remained for two years, first studying medicine, and then, philosophy. He next studied at the University of Berlin from 1811 to 1813. His studies in both universities included courses in physics, psychology, astronomy, zoology, archaeology, physiology, history, literature and poetry. At age 25, and ready to write his doctoral dissertation, he moved in 1813 to Rudolstadt, a small town located a short distance southwest of Jena.

In that same year, Schopenhauer submitted his dissertation to the nearby University of Jena and was awarded a doctorate in philosophy in absentia. His first book, originally his doctorate dissertation, was On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. His mother told him the book was incomprehensible, to which he angrily replied that his work would be read long after the "rubbish" she wrote would be forgotten. She found him morose and critical to an unbearable degree. The climax came when he was 30, and his mother requested that he never see her again.

Whether his troubled relationship with his mother was a cause of, or caused by, the misogynous views later expressed in his writings, or whether relevant at all to them, we can never be sure. There are, in any event, other matters of more likely relevance of which we should be aware.

In the same year in which he was awarded his doctorate, he fathered an illegitimate child with a servant. The child died shortly after birth. In 1820 he was engaged by the university for a short time as lecturer. However he attracted few students and though remaining on the list of lecturers he became contemptuous of academic philosophy. During his time in Berlin he was sued by a seamstress, one, Caroline Luise Marguet, for having beaten and kicked her after she refused to leave his doorway. His defense was that she had raised her voice while standing outside his doorway. There was also testimony from a woman that she saw Marguet lying prostrate outside his apartment. After five years of litigation, the court ordered him to pay her 60 thalers per year for the rest of his life. She lived for 20 more years. When she died, he wrote on a copy of her death certificate "the old woman dies, the burden is lifted."

In 1821, at the age of 33 he began an affair of several years duration with a 19 year old opera singer, one, Caroline Richter. He discarded marriage plans however, and wrote in his diary "Marrying means to halve
one's rights and double one's duties,” and that “Marrying means to grasp blindfolded into a sack hoping to find an eel among an assembly of snakes.”

In 1831, at the age of 43, he made overtures to a 17 year old named Flora Weiss. His advances apparently included the offering of some grapes at a boat party. She recorded the event in her diary thus: “I didn’t want the grapes because old Schopenhauer had touched them, so I let them slide quite gently into the water.” The Leuven Philosophy Newsletter is reported to have written that “an examination of his life reveals a yearning for marriage frustrated by a train of rejections.” Though the source gives Newsletter page numbers (42-43) it gives no date nor any other particulars.

Whatever role these matters play in the overall scheme of his life, the writings leave little doubt of his views of women in general, contradictory though some of it may be. We start with an essay entitled Of Women published by him in 1851, at the age of 63. This was seven years after publication of a major part of The World as Will and Idea, including The Metaphysics of Sexual Love, and three years before Wagner’s discovery of Schopenhauer. Of Women must certainly represent the apogee of his misogyny. Considering the intensity of his absorption with the works of the philosopher, it would be difficult, If not impossible, to believe that Wagner wrote the text of Parsifal, beginning with the Prose sketch for King Ludwig II in 1865, without familiarity with the content of the essay.

Speaking of women in general, the philosopher starts with a short paragraph whose essence, in one of the pithier sentences, is “She expiates the guilt of life not through activity but through suffering, through the pains of childbirth, caring for the child and subjection to the man to whom she should be a patient and cheering companion.” This seems a short warmup for paragraph two:

Women are suited to being the nurses and teachers of our earliest childhood precisely because they themselves are childish, silly and shortsighted, in a word, big children, their whole lives long: a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the man, who is the actual human being, ‘man.’

He sees in almost all cases of perceived romance, illusions contrived by nature to propagate the race: “Thus nature has equipped, as it has all its creatures, with the tools and weapons she needs for securing her existence, and at just the time she needs them.” Thus far, primitive
though we are entitled to find such thinking, it was no doubt closer, in the 19th century, to opinions held by more males, expressed and unexpressed, than would be the case in later years. The thoughts perhaps could possibly have been expressed in more moderate language without raising too many eyebrows, if it did in fact raise any.

His writings do not always reflect the reasoned calm with which he seems to try to wrap his package. After discussing her "Natural Weapons," which might have caused a few to look askance even then, he turns to another subject which he terms "Female Truth" and gets right to the point:

"This originates first and foremost in their want of rationality and capacity for reflection but it is strengthened by the fact that, as the weaker sex, they are driven to rely not on force but cunning: hence their instinctive subtlety and their ineradicable tendency to tell lies."

It is becoming increasingly difficult to find excuses for his language, though some still try. Such sweeping indictments may legitimately be considered indicative of emotional heat, rather than reasoned discourse. Most everything that follows in this essay only strengthens the initial conviction: "This fundamental defect which I have said they possess, together with all that is associated with it, gives rise to falsity, unfaithfulness, treachery, ingratitude, etc." To all this he adds what should by now be self-evident to any who have been impressed with what has come already: "Women are guilty of perjury far more often than men. It is questionable whether they ought to be allowed to take an oath at all."

Having exhausted that subject, as well as some of his readers, he turns to another, "Feminine Charms:"

Only a male intellect clouded by the sexual drive could call the stunted, narrow-shouldered, broad-hipped and short-legged sex the fair sex: for it is with this drive that all beauty is bound up. More fittingly that the fair sex, women, could be called the unaesthetic sex [emphasis by Schopenhauer]. Neither for music, nor poetry, nor for the plastic arts do they possess any real feeling or receptivity . . . Man strives in everything for direct dominion over things, either by comprehending or by subduing them. But woman is everywhere and always relegated to an indirect domination by means of a man, who is consequently the only thing she has to dominate directly.
He next tackles her alleged "Absence of Genius," which he begins by pointing out that the most eminent heads of the entire sex have proved incapable of a single truly great, genuine, original, achievement in art. The reason for this we are told is that they lack all objectivity of mind, which is what painting demands above all else. He ends his mode of attack with this flourish: They are the inferior second sex in every respect. "One should be indulgent toward their weaknesses, but to pay them honor is ridiculous beyond measure and demeans us even in their eyes."

He is further pleased to point out for our edification that peoples of antiquity and of the Orient have recognized the proper position for women far better than have we, by whom he means, he says, that old French gallantry and insipid women veneration which has resulted in our "Christian-Germanic stupidity." It has served to make women so rude and arrogant that they remind one of the "sacred apes of Benares which, conscious of their own sanctity and inviolability, thought themselves at liberty to do whatever they pleased."

Monogamy is another target. He, to the surprise of no one by now, is against it. Rather than try to summarize, I give, to those who are interested, the most significant portion of his section, about one third of the total, make of it what you will:

Because of the unnaturally privileged position enjoyed by women as a consequence of monogamy and the marriage laws accompanying it, which regard women as entirely equal to men (which they are in no respect), prudent and cautious men very often hesitate before making so great a sacrifice as is involved in entering into so inequitable a contract; so that while among the polygamous people every woman gets taken care of, among the monogamous the number of married women is limited and there remains over a quantity of unsupported women who, in the upper classes, vegetate on as useless old maids, and in the lower are obligated to undertake laborious work they are constitutionally unfit for.

From what we have seen, we may count him among the prudent and cautious. The above language is extracted and set forth here, not because it is the most extreme expression, but because, on the contrary, it is the most 'reasonable' and 'logical' of the entire section, which, admittedly,
is not really saying a great deal. He devotes another section in praise of polygamy. He points out that we all live in polygamy, "at least for a while," and the fact that men may sire many, many infants in a year, while women can handle one at the most. Polygamy would hence restore women to their natural position as the subordinate one and "abolition from the world of the lady, with her ridiculous claims to respect and veneration."

There are still other sections that should not be ignored. One is entitled "Property and Inheritance." Schopenhauer pays homage to the system that obtains in India, namely that women are never independent, but stand under control of the father, husband, brother or son. He acknowledges that it is revolting that they often immolate themselves upon their husbands' funeral pyre, but also revolting, perhaps equally so, that a woman should spend her husband's money "for which he toiled his whole life long, in the consoling belief that he was providing for his children." In almost all nations, "even amongst the Hottentots," property is inherited by the male descendants alone. It is only in Europe that "a departure has taken place, but not among the nobility." He recommends, as a solution in Europe, the same process. In his own words:

That the property which has cost men long years of toil and effort, and been won with so much difficulty, should afterwards come into the hands of women, who then, in their lack of reason, squander it in a short time, or otherwise fool it away, is a grievous and a wrong as serious as it is common, which should be prevented by limiting the right of women to inherit.

In my opinion, he continues, the best arrangement would be that by which women . . . should never receive anything beyond the interest for life on property secured by mortgage, and in no case the property itself, or the capital, except when there cease to be male descendants. In such cases, he recommends that a guardian should always be appointed and further that women should never be given the free control over their own children.

Nor should we allow to pass unnoticed two related sections from *The World as Will and Idea*, one entitled "Life of the Species," the other, "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love." There is no significant evidence of misogyny in either. The thesis is that the attraction between the sexes, as the lovers see it, is a sexual attraction motivated by ideas of happiness for
themselves, or other "selfish" reasons, whereas in reality that is a disguise by nature.

Nature, he says, is motivated solely by the all-pervasive will to continue the species. That is an interesting, if perhaps a cynical way to put it. But hardly anyone will dispute that the attraction has evolved over hundreds of millions of years precisely because of its role in continuation of the species. Had sexual relations not been so pleasurable, the race might well not have survived, instead of proliferating as it has, and recovering as it has from so many catastrophes.

He backs up his claim, self-evident though it may be, with innumerable examples of mutual attraction, involving who is attracted to whom and why, all based on his own observations, which may often be of doubtful validity. There seems little reason to get into his examples, as they are, whether valid or not, irrelevant for our purposes.

Had these sections come later than the essay we have just viewed, it could be seen as a softening of the steely cutting edge of the essay. However the essay, with all of its obviously emotional, possibly personal, underlay came seven years later than these sections from his World as Will and Idea.

He states that fertilization or impregnation is followed in the case of "every animal individual by momentary exhaustion and debility of all its powers, and in the case of most insects even by speedy death." In the case of man, "the loss of the procreative power shows that the individual is approaching death . . . At every age excessive use of that power shortens life, whereas moderation enhances all the powers, especially muscular strength." He cites in support, the Greek athletes who, he claims were trained to abstinence and moderation.99

What about more spiritual love, transcendent love, as are depicted in books, poems, plays and everywhere else? According to Schopenhauer: All amorousness

. . . Is rooted in the sexual impulse alone, is in fact absolutely only a more closely determined, specialized, and indeed, in the strictness sense, individualized sexual impulse, however ethereally it may deport itself . . . Next to the love of life, it shows itself here as the strongest and most active of all motives, and incessantly lays claim to half the powers and thoughts of the younger portion of mankind. It is the ultimate goal of almost all human effort; it has an unfavorable influence on the
most important affairs, interrupts every hour the most serious occupations, and sometimes perplexes for a while even the greatest minds.

His comment on such things: “It does not hesitate to intrude with its trash, and to interfere with the negotiations of statesmen and the investigations of the learned.”

However loudly those persons of a lofty and sentimental soul, especially those in love, may take issue with the gross realism of his view, they, says Schopenhauer, are nevertheless mistaken. ‘For is not the precise determination of the individualities of the next generation a much higher and worthier aim than those exuberant feelings and immaterial soap-bubbles of theirs?’

The above should be adequate to give a clue as to his thinking concerning women and their role in society, a subject we should ponder before grappling with some issues raised by the story of Parsifal, claims of his influence with Wagner, and failure of Magee to point to matters more indicative of such influence.
CHAPTER 11

Parsifal

Much of the story of this opera was taken by Wagner from medieval tales, but primarily from Parzifal by Wolfram von Eschenbach. Some of it is Wagner's original creation, including some that will be under discussion here.

It takes place in medieval times in northern Spain. The knights of the Holy Grail are guardians of the grail from which Christ drank at the Last Supper, and of the spear that pierced his side as he was dying on the cross. Their home is the castle of Monsalvat. The knights have taken vows of chastity and there is a regular reenactment of the Last Supper on Good Friday during which they drink from the grail. Their first king was Titurel. Christ's messengers had placed the relics in his charge, and he built Monsalvat as a sanctuary for them.

Prior to the events occurring during the opera, a knight, Klingsor, otherwise unable to restrain his sexual drives, castrated himself hoping thereby to be qualified for the order. The knights however, repulsed by this act, turned him away. But his act had given him magical powers which he used to attempt to gain possession of both the grail and the spear. He constructed his own castle in the northern mountains near Monsalvat and made from the wilderness a pleasure garden in which there grew "devilishly" beautiful women, drawing the knights of the Grail to "evil lusts and hell-fire." Many of the knights succumbed, and were expelled from the order.

In old age Titurel left the lordship of the Knights of the Grail to his son, Amfortas, who strove to put an end to this witchcraft. However Amfortas, on one of his forays, armed with the holy spear, was himself tempted by the most beautiful of the flower maidens and as he lay with her, he was stabbed with the spear by Klingsor. Klingsor still has
possession of it. He uses it to wound other knights. Amfortas’s wound has never healed and causes him agonizing pain.

As Amfortas lay in the sanctuary, pleading for a sign of pardon, he heard from above: “Through pity made wise, the innocent fool; await him whom I have chosen.” Until then he will live in pain, unrelieved by death.

When the opera begins we first see a clearing in the forest on the castle grounds. Gurnemanz, an elderly knight wakens two young squires. Amfortas and his attendants are coming toward them. Just as Gurnemanz tells the squires to prepare the king’s bath, they see and describe Kundry, a mysterious wild haired woman flying through the air on her mare. She is the only female resident of the grounds, but disappears sometimes for long periods.

She falls to earth, and gives to Gurnemanz a vial of balsam she obtained from Arabia. The king, groaning in pain, carried by his entourage, arrives. Gurnemanz asks him to try the balsam brought by Kundry, and he agrees. The squires are both disdainful and suspicious of her motives. Amfortas is taken away to his bath.

What harm has she done to you asks Gurnemanz of the squires. When there’s danger she helps; she flies through the air, and never asks for thanks. Still met with the distrust of the squires, he continues: She may be cursed and lives here perhaps for atonement for a debt from a former life.

Asked if it is her fault that evil has come to them, Gurnemanz slowly answers: “Yes, I have known her many years.” He found her recently returned again when Amfortas lost the Holy Spear. To Kundry, he calls. “Hey, you there, where were you wandering when our lord lost his spear?” “I—never help.” Replies Kundry.

Gurnemanz continues: Near the castle, the hero was snatched from us. A fearsomely beautiful woman had bewitched him. In her arms he lay there entranced. The spear was then sunken in him. I dashed to him: from there Klingsor laughingly disappeared, he had stolen the Holy Spear. I fought to cover the king’s flight, but the wound burned his side: the wound that never heals.

The returning squires report that Amfortas has received some relief from the balsam. Gurnemanz then replies with a narrative of the history of the knights and Monsalvat. Just as he finishes his narrative there are shouts from knights and squires in the distance. A swan, wounded in the wing, flutters down and dies. A young man with a home-made bow and
arrow is brought in. Gurnemanz scolds the intruder and has him look at the pitiable remains. Overcome with guilt, the youngster breaks his bow.

Gurnemanz questions the young man: Why did he kill the swan? From where did he come? Who is his father? Who showed you this path? He answers to each, “I do not know.” Your name, then? “I’ve had many but I don’t know them any longer.” Gurnemanz sends the squires away to help Amfortas. To the young stranger: “Something you must know.” His mother is named Herzeleide, the young man answers. He made this bow himself. Kundry interjects: his father, Gamuret was killed in a fight. She wanted her son to be weaponless. A mad woman.

The youth describes how one day he followed men on horseback but could not keep up with them. He then wandered, lost, with only a bow. Kundry again interjects: Yes, the wicked feared him. She also tells him “Your mother is dead. I saw her die, and to you, fool, I bring her greeting.” She mysteriously settles down in the weeds.

Gurnemanz turns to the youth: the king comes home from his bath. It is time for the pious meal. “If you are pure, then from the grail you will have food and drink.”

They walk toward the castle. The young man: “I hardly move, yet I seem to have gone far.” Gurnemanz: “You see my son, time here becomes space.” The two soon enter the Hall of the Grail. The old king, Titurel, is nearing death. He begs his son Amfortas to uncover the grail and perform the ceremony, the sacrament. It keeps him alive. Amfortas is resistant. The ceremony keeps them both alive, and gives vigor to the knights. For Amfortas however death will be the only relief from his suffering and he longs for it. He finally relents to the urging of all to “uncover the grail.”

In answer to Gurnemanz’s question “Do you know what you have seen?” the youth puts his hand over his heart, but shakes his head. An angry Gurnemanz says: “Out of here! Go your way.”

We next see the grounds of Klingsor’s magic castle. Klingsor sees the approach of the youth. Kundry appears before Klingsor. It was he who called her back as his prime seductress of the young lad. She tries to defy Klingsor, but cannot resist, and soon disappears from sight. Klingsor is enthused over the coming entrapment of the boy as both he and the castle disappear simultaneously with the rise of the magic garden. The boy gazes in astonishment as he sees a bevy of beautiful maidens rush in.

What follows is the equivalent of a feeding frenzy by sex hungry young women. Just as the competition between them reaches its climax, with each claiming to be the fairest, the maidens disperse at the call:
"Parsifal, stay," the first time we have heard the young man's name. It comes from Kundry, the wild haired, unkempt woman we saw earlier on the grounds of Monsalvat. She is now the most beautiful of the flower maidens. "In my dream, my mother once so called me," he says. Kundry tells the other maidens to scatter which, laughingly they do: "Farewell, proud one, simpleton."

Kundry begins by telling Parsifal touching stories of his mother, her pain on the death of her husband, and the disappearance of her son. He is filled with guilt. She describes the love that seized his father, Gamuret, when Herzeleide's fierce flames consumed him. And now she says, in a mother's last blessing, may love bring you this first embrace. Whereupon she kisses him at length.

Suddenly, with the appearance of highest terror, he gives a loud cry: "Amfortas, the wound! It burns in my heart; oh, the cry!" He makes it clear to us he is feeling Amfortas's wound. I saw the wound bleed. Now it bleeds in me!"

She persists unsuccessfully in her attempt to seduce him. If he can feel another's pain, then feel mine, she tells him. The climax comes as she describes her own torment: "I saw Him, Him, and laughed," a blood chilling, moment, followed by a pregnant pause. "Then his look fell on me. Now I seek him from world to world," followed by her recitation of the agony of her existence. Parsifal, will not yield, but says he will show her the way to redemption.

She desperately calls on Klingsor for help. Klingsor appears with the Holy Spear, and throws it at him. It miraculously stops in midair and hovers over Parsifal's head. Parsifal seizes it and makes the sign of the cross. The castle and garden crumble. He says to Kundry: "You know where you can find me again," and leaves with the spear.

We are again on the grounds of Monsalvat, on Good Friday some year later. Gurnemanz, is an old man now. He soon sees Kundry in weeds nearby. He tells her to arise. He tries to talk to her, but her only words are her last in the opera: "To serve; to serve." She sees, and points out to Gurnemanz a knight approaching in dark armor.

It is Parsifal, soon recognized by Gurnemanz who greets him with great emotion. Parsifal says he is seeking Amfortas. There is a holy deed to be done today, says Gurnemanz. So let him be washed of all stain. Kundry washes his feet. Gurnemanz anoints his head with contents of a vial, as Parsifal is declared and crowned king.
Parsifal seems entranced with the blooming meadows, which Gurnemanz describes. It is a hypnotizingly beautiful episode known as the Good Friday music. As it ends, a bell strikes. Midday, says Gurnemanz and the three, Gurnemanz, Kundry, and Parsifal, lance in hand, walk toward the castle and the Hall of the Grail. Inside, the body of the deceased Titurel is brought in by knights from one side; from the other Amfortas in his litter and the shrine covering the grail. Amfortas again rejects the pleas, and the demands, that he drink from the grail. Defiantly he rises from the litter, opens his shirt and begs the knights to end his suffering. “Come you heroes. Kill the sinner, and the grail will shine brightly.”

Final scene of Wagner’s last opera, Parsifal. Amfortas has been forgiven and healed by a touch of the Holy Spear brought back by Parsifal; Kundry finally dies and finds peace from her tormented life.

At that moment, Gurnemanz, Kundry, and Parsifal with the lance enter the hall. Only one weapon suffices replies Parsifal and he touches Amfortas with the spear. The wound is healed. Voices in the castle and barely audible voices from above sing “Redemption to the Redeemer.” Amfortas and Gurnemanz kneel before Parsifal. Kundry collapses and dies.
So we ask as we did in other chapters. Where is the influence of Schopenhauer? And where do Magee and possibly others say it is? Mage says that it is an opera “every bit as Schopenhauerian as Tristan.” In truth it is even more so than is Tristan, which departs markedly from the catechism laid down by Schopenhauer. And in the last act of Tristan, the hero, as a result of his ‘self-psychoanalysis,’ his ‘talk therapy,’ has apparently cured himself of his Schopenhauerian tilt, found joy in the “glorious” sunlight, and eagerly looked forward to seeing again the object of his passion. Parsifal permanently rejects such earthly pleasures and looks forward to taking on the burdens of a tragic and miserable humanity.

Apart from the story, the other place to look for Schopenhauer’s influence is the music. In Tristan the music seems consonant with Schopenhauer’s writings about music and what it should be. Of Parsifal Magee says, “It is not only the content of Parsifal that is profoundly Schopenhauerian but also the character of the vehicle in which this content is conveyed: the medium as well as the message.”

Magee is a good writer and what he says is usually quite clear. What he is saying here, not so much. What is the medium, the vehicle? One might presume it is the music, but except for extolling the beauty of it, any claim of Schopenhauer’s influence is not to be found. He says, in so many words, it fits the story and its message. This is something that any operatic music should do, and which all of Wagner’s operas in fact do, none more so than his early opera, The Flying Dutchman. It was written thirteen years before he first read Schopenhauer.

Even before he began work on Parsifal in 1878 he told his wife, as recorded in her diary, that the music of that opera was to have the softness and the shimmer of silk. It was to be like “cloud layers that keep separating and combing again.” There does not seem to be any of Schopenhauer’s dicta about music apparent in that score, unlike in Tristan where it can be readily heard. If the music however is not the medium Magee refers to, what is? The drama? Magee leaves us hanging.

Actually, there are some serious problems with the story and the telling of it. I mention here what to me is the most serious. Mystery of mysteries: How does it happen that this “pure fool,” this “innocent child,” having heard nothing of the adventure that brought this suffering of Amfortas about, draws not merely empathy for the suffering, but factual knowledge of that unexplained episode that caused it, all through a kiss of a beautiful woman? Is this story the medium, the vehicle, about which Magee spoke?
There is a highly important fact about this story, something much more than a slight incongruity. No one, neither Amfortas, nor anyone in the Hall of the Grail, nor anyone else after Parsifal’s entrance, has ever mentioned the cause of the painful wound. As far as shown in the text, no mention of Amfortas’s fall into temptation has ever been uttered in his presence. Nor is there any indication that the ignorant youth has any knowledge or experience himself, and he has undoubtedly has none. True it is that many unearthy and magical things appear in the opera, Kundry’s horse that flies, flowers that turn into maidens, the touch of a spear that heals the wound of Amfortas, to name the most obvious. But the kiss of a beautiful woman to turn a ‘pure fool’ into an all knowing and all seeing seer seems an odd way, even for an Almighty, to bring about this miracle.

This is not cited merely as a curiosity. It is part of a bewildering mystery that strikes at the heart of the story. Yet Magee can claim, among other magic of Wagner, “The dramatic skill evidenced is extraordinary, and applied with such mastery that it is easy to overlook it, to take it for granted.” With due respect to Magee, the skill and the mastery reside in the music, and in the music alone, though there is admittedly much fine poetry. The story, shorn of the music, is rather convoluted.

To me the miracle in this opera is the education this lad got from a mere kiss. Was ever a kiss so enlightening? Did anyone ever find empathy, not only for a human who was suffering, but also for the Savior about whom he apparently had little instruction, and finally for all mankind through a kiss? Let us hear from Magee: He describes that second act scene and the meeting with Kundry. Then:

With her characteristic insight she arouses Parsifal’s sexuality for the first time in his life by evoking his relationship with his mother. Partly because of this he experiences with her the onslaught of sexual desire in all its ferocity—and realizes what had happened to Amfortas. Ravaged by desire at its most terrible and imperious he does not flee from it, despite his terror, but lives it through without evasion, and finally succeeds in overcoming it.

“Finally”? I don’t know what is meant by finally. This conversion from pure fool to conviction of the sinful nature of sex and his duty as savior of mankind generally takes, depending on the production, at most about
7 to 10 seconds of contact with the lips of Kundry. Continuing with Magee:

The experience constitutes a breakthrough for him in understanding and insight. Through it he achieves compassionate empathy not only with Amfortas but with suffering mankind in general, eternally stretched out on its rack of unsatisfiable willing. He understands its need for redemption, and also what it means to be a redeemer who takes on himself the burdens of humanity—and therefore the significance of the Last Supper which he had witnessed so uncomprehendingly at Monsalvat. All becomes clear to him.”

It does not however become clear to many in the audience. We quote Magee again: “Over the years quite a number of acquaintances in the audiences of Parsifal have come up to me afterwards, or during one of the intervals, and said things like ‘I think the music is marvelous—but can you explain to me what on earth it is about?’ Magee says there is no way he can explain it in five minutes, but he elsewhere indicates one cannot explain it at all, terming it in such ways as “unverbalizable,” and quoting with approval the language of Richard Cavendish’s King Arthur and the Grail, (pp 125-6) that the “inner mystery of the Grail cannot be explained, because it is ‘that which the heart of man cannot conceive nor the tongue relate.’”

Rupert Christiansen, in reviewing a 2013 performance of Parsifal at London’s Royal Opera House for The Telegraph, had this to say: “Several bemused Telegraph readers accosted me after this performance and flatteringly said that they hoped my review ‘would tell them what it was all about.’ Alas, I’m not sure I can oblige. Parsifal is, for a start, the most elusive and illusive texts: a hall of dark mirrors, where meanings and identities implode or dissolve stretching into infinity.” He wrote despairingly about the prospects of “illuminating a path through the murk.”

In chapter 5, concerning Tristan and Isolde, we left off further explanation by Magee about Wagner’s “half-grasp” of Schopenhauer. The explanation is necessary to explain how, in this so thoroughly Schopenhauerian opera, Tristan and Isolde, the lovers are depicted as looking forward to reunion and their torrid love relationship in the realm of the noumenal, namely night and darkness. The balance of Magee’s
explanation of Tristan is better understood here in the context of Parsifal. Continuing his explanation about Tristan Magee says this.

[Wagner] was still in the process of working his way through to a full grasp of it, for these were still early days in his acquaintance with Schopenhauer's philosophy.

Early days? Wagner says he read it four times before the end of the summer of 1855, over two years before even starting his prose sketch of Tristan. Magee continues with the explanation that the story of Tristan demonstrates:

Both his project of arguing to the philosopher himself that denial of the will could be achieved through sexual love, and also his abandonment of the attempt. In the course of time he came to understand that, according to true Schopenhauerian principles, shared between individuals, was possible in this world only, and on the basis of a compassionate love that involved the denial of individual sexuality; and precisely this was to become the central theme of Parsifal.105

There is much significant new material here. Denial of the will could be achieved through sexual love? Another bit of proof that Wagner was a Schopenhauerian except when he wasn't? Perhaps the most vital part of denial of the will is abstention from sex. How much influence did the philosopher have on Wagner when he could reject the axel that turned the whole wheel? But he did come around when, in 1878 at age of 65, an older age than it is now, he wrote the text of Parsifal. Does that not prove he was a true Schopenhauerian? What it proves is the adage that many men give good advice when they are too old to set a bad example.

There is a relatively minor factoid that deserves mention. The least flattering thing about women in the entire opera is embodied in the flower maidens. The sexual aggression by the bevy of young women is one of a relatively few items that Wagner did not seem to derive from any of his sources. If it is derivative at all, the most likely source is that of the Roman d’Alexandre, a medieval poem of the early 12th century. The subject refers to Alexander the Great. He finds in a forest many beautiful
maidens held fast as part of a tree. They cannot leave the forest alive. Alexander is told they go underground in the winter and in the spring blossom as flowers. The central bud is the girl's body; the leaves are her clothing. It seems the closest there is in the literature, but still a far cry from the aggressive, competing determination of the assault described by Wagner.

But whatever the medium, Magee, claims the message of the opera to be compassion, sometimes termed empathy or pity, not through logic, but through feeling. He barely mentions, and then more like afterthoughts, that the path to salvation from the tragedies of this world lies in asceticism, rejection of the sexual impulse, along with all other worldly pleasures. Schopenhauer's book is filled with the call to asceticism. It oozes likewise from the pages of the Parsifal text. The unflattering portrait of the female sex seems itself fertile ground in which to find influence from the pervasive misogyny of Schopenhauer, but in his analysis Magee hardly touches it.

He just doesn't go there. He is not interested in the subject of misogyny. He turns instead to the praiseworthy subject of compassion, empathy, or pity, and explains Schopenhauer's "musico-dramatic" expression of it in Parsifal thusly:

The foundation of ethics is not rationality but compassion, and that it is through compassion, not through cleverness, that the deepest understanding of things is to be attained; that this is the case because in the ultimate recesses of our being all living creatures are one, and therefore the sufferings of each are the sufferings of all; that because the realm in which we are all one is not the empirical it is not in this empirical world that ethics and values have their source, nor the real significance of our lives its being, but in a realm that is transcendent.106

Stripped of Schopenhauer's personal view of things, Magee says, ignoring misogyny and misanthropy, that the important theme is compassion. No one, presumably, is opposed to compassion (or empathy, or, pity) where it is appropriate. It is universally claimed to be a goal worth seeking, so much so as to render such a theme for itself in a full drama as to be almost banal, except that Schopenhauer has his own formula for attaining that goal of compassion, mainly abstinence, and all worldly pleasures.
But what gives Schopenhauer special claim as an authority on the subject of compassion, or what sacrifices are required to make one compassionate is just one more mystery. Empathy was the hallmark of the ancient Greeks and areas, such as Rome, influenced by them. It has been accepted dogma ever since the Renaissance, and the subject of drama, novels, philosophies, and religions. It seems, at least in modern times to be an inborn trait in most humans without study or understanding, or ever having heard of Schopenhauer, or certainly of having practiced abstinence.

It has been the subject of extensive literature analyzing empathy, another word close to or identical with compassion. Scholars in this subject ask rhetorically why so many thousands, or hundreds of thousands of persons send donations when moved by pictures of human suffering in floods, earthquakes, famines or other disasters, and not bother to tell anyone about it. Why do so many give money to save, wales, foxes, elephants or other creatures, especially those threatened with extinction, and tell no one about it? Why does a motorist stop to help a stranger, one whom he will never see again, but whose car is stranded on a highway? Why does someone tip a waiter in a restaurant she will never revisit?

Two episodes in recent times typical, of many others, will tell us more about compassion, empathy, or ‘pity’ if you prefer, than will Parsifal or all of Schopenhauer.

In January 1982, an airliner taking off from a Washington D.C. airport crashed into the Potomac River on a bitterly freezing day. The next few hours are replete with accounts of ordinary citizens spontaneously exposing themselves, and risking their lives by going into the freezing waters to rescue trapped or otherwise helpless passengers. I don’t know any of those people, but I would give long odds that none of them had ever read Schopenhauer, practiced abstinence, or ever heard of, nor would they have cared about noumena.

Neither, I feel sure, would an African-American named Wesley Autrey have been a Schopenhauerian scholar. One day in 20007 he was standing at a subway stop in Manhattan waiting for a train. A white man he did not know and had never seen, apparently the victim of a seizure, fell onto the tracks in front of an approaching train. Without hesitation he jumped onto the tracks and, covering the fallen man with his own body, and held him down while the train passed over them and ground to a stop. There is no way to practice for such things, nor is it anywhere recommended,
nor is there any public announcement of the available space below a
subway train. He obviously did not practice abstinence as he had with
him, standing on the platform, his two young daughters.

Does the fact that Parsifal learned compassion, combined with
the fact that Schopenhauer touted its virtues constitute any reason to
call such portrayal, as does Magee in this opera, Schopenhauerian? If
the philosopher had recommended drinking beer as a way to spiritual
enlightenment, would we attribute Schopenhauerian influence to someone
in a play drinking beer? Perhaps some of us would.

Schopenhauer finds total abstention from sex, followed by all other
worldly desires to be the best, perhaps only means of salvation from the
powerful pull of the universal will. After discussing and finding fault with
other doctrines, he continues: “They are the way of sinners, as we all are.”
Though he denies belonging to any religion, or even to faith in God, he
still uses the religious vocabulary.

He spells it out. The other way, he says, is the narrow path of the
elect, of the saints, and consequently to be regarded as a rare exception:

But we struggle against entering on this path, and strive
rather with all our might to prepare for ourselves a secure and
pleasant existence, whereby we chain our will ever more firmly
to life. The conduct of ascetics is the opposite of this, for they
deliberately make their life as poor, hard, and cheerless as
possible, because they have their true and ultimate welfare in
view. Fate and the course of things, however, take better care
of us than we ourselves do, since they frustrate on all sides our
arrangements for a Utopian existence, whose folly is apparent
enough from its shortness, uncertainty, emptiness, and
termination in bitter death.\[107\]

Elsewhere, he has explained that voluntary and complete chastity is
the first step in asceticism, and of the denial of the will-to-live. It thereby
denies the affirmation of the will which goes beyond the individual life
and thus announces that the will, whose phenomenon is the body, ceases
with the life of the body.\[108\]

Does he not realize that universal embrace of what he deems the
highest and best course of conduct would result in the end of the human
race? Not to worry. He does indeed but obviously feels it would be a
blessing, and that nothing of value would be lost in the demise of this
illusory, unreal world. The will is destroyed with the body. And, the human race would not be the only race destroyed; all of the animal world would go with us. Their unknowing instinctive obedience to the will cannot survive without us. Considering the connection of all phenomena of will, he deduces this:

"I think I can assume that, with the highest phenomenon of the will, the weaker reflection of it, namely the animal world, would also be abolished, just as the half-shades vanish with the full light of day. With the complete abolition of knowledge the rest of the world would of itself also vanish into nothing, for there can be no object without a subject." Citing two writers, he claims that "the masters certify to us that all creatures are made for the sake of man." 109

His masters, identified as one from Asia, and one from Germany, like himself are thinkers and writers. Schopenhauer studied many diverse courses in two universities, as we have seen. Either the courses were deficient, or he has forgotten much. When writing this, he obviously did not know that millions of species existed before the first humans. We could assume he could not have known the numbers were that high, but there is much he could have, and should have known.

Charles Darwin's "Origin of Species" was published in 1859, only a year before Schopenhauer's death. However controversies and disputes, as well as many discoveries proving prehistoric life, were all in the air for many decades before Schopenhauer's major treatise. A French philosopher, G.L.L. Buffon, wrote in the late 18th century that the approximately two hundred species of mammals then known, were probably descended from as few as thirty eight original animal forms. 110 By 1792, when Schopenhauer was but four years old, Lord Monboddo Burnett had written much about the idea that humans had descended from primates, apparently not including humans also as primates as do modern evolutionists, and that over long periods of time creatures had transformed their characteristics in response to the environment. 111

Perhaps most inexcusable of all is the philosopher's ignorance, deliberate or otherwise, of a much discussed tome by Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, in 1796 suggesting that all warm blooded animals had arisen from "one living filament." 112 In 1802 he described in verse the rise of life from minute organisms living in mud to all of its modern diversity. 113

Throughout the later decades of the 19th century, the controversy over evolution raged all around Europe and America. Apparently
Schopenhauer, certain of the facts, knowing all that mattered, let it rage. The main issue was whether theories of evolution were compatible or not with the teachings of various religions, or whether it mattered at all. Schopenhauer seemed to feel as did one woman of London society, who said she doubted that we were descended from apes, but that if we were, she certainly hoped it wouldn't get around. That Wagner was able to set this obtuse and rather convoluted story to such hypnotic, shimmering, translucent music makes his achievement all the more remarkable. His music, unique in the entire repertoire, can and does make us overlook the story's faults, large and small. Despite my impatience with them, I freely confess to shedding tears on more than one occasion upon the final entry and pronouncement of Parsifal "Nur eine Waffen thagt," (Only one weapon suffices.) It is not the story that causes them; it is the penetratingly delicate, majestic nature of the music. It makes high drama out of something that standing alone might have little if any dramatic worth; and magnificent poetry out of some that could never have breathed on its own.

* * *

At the conclusion of the scene in the meadow in Act one of the opera, a little over half of the act we have the following dialogue between Gurnemanz and Parsifal as they walk toward the castle:

Parsifal: "I hardly move, but it seems I have already gone far."
Gurnemanz: "You see my son, time here becomes space."

Among all of the passages in the opera it is one of the most frequently analyzed and interpreted, by scholars and laymen alike. It sounds more like a 20th or 21st century scientist than a medieval knight, or even a 19th century composer.

Albert Einstein's special theory of Relativity was published in 1905, 23 years after the premiere of Parsifal. It was 1908 before the term "spacetime" was used. It was coined by Hermann Minkowski, also a renowned scientist: "Henceforth space by itself and time by itself are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind union of the two will preserve an independent reality."114

He was explaining relativity. Einstein had demonstrated to a certainty that for a moving body as compared to one at rest, time does slow down. At normal speeds for earthbound people this dilation of time is miniscule, almost undetectable. But as objects, such as spaceships, approach the
speed of light, time does become space. As speed increases, years pass on earth while only days seem to pass aboard the ship; all processes of the body or of clocks or of other machinery slow dramatically.\textsuperscript{115}

Some scholars claim to have found Schopenhauerian thought in that line. But whatever the line meant to Wagner, it seems to come closer to Einstein’s laws of relativity than do the writings of Schopenhauer. Perhaps Wagner’s love of unity in the arts spilled over to his ideas about the cosmos and the relationship between time and space, well before Einstein’s formulation of special relativity.

Schopenhauer did, admittedly write much about time and space, but never did he say that time became space. Nor, as far as I can find, neither did anyone else before Minkowski. The line seems closer to the theory of Einstein, decades before the great scientist formulated his laws of relativity, and some writers so said. In 2005 it was written by Vincent Vargas in his blog post:

Gurnemanz’s gnomic observation became prophetic when Einstein, through his special theory of relativity, showed the interconnection of space and time. The year 2005 is the hundredth anniversary of that great discovery. Is Parsifal to be re-envisioned in terms of today’s understanding of nature and cosmology?\textsuperscript{116}

In the September 2003 edition of the BBC Music Magazine, an article on Parsifal included Gurnemanz’s line and added: “It was twenty years before Einstein figured that one out.” Another author in another blog refers to the line of Gurnemanz as “Einsteiniand.” Still another as a “magical bit of metaphysics.”

Now with apologies to the memory of Arthur Schopenhauer we turn to a struggle and to a tale with a happy ending.
CHAPTER 12.

Women's Liberation in the 19th Century:
The Victors (*Die Sieger*)

There were women's movements for equality afoot in Europe in the 19th Century, as there were in the United States. Unsuccessful as were the results in America there was even less in Europe, and results in Germany were at least as poor, possibly more so, than elsewhere in Europe. Following uprisings in many of the 39 or so independent German states in 1848-49, even harsher restrictions were imposed.

The armed uprisings were primarily for greater civil and economic rights and democratization of the political system, still headed by royal lineages in each of the states. But the fledgling women's groups had also joined the rebellions seeking primarily the right to participate in public life. Louise Otto-Peters, probably the best known and remembered of the early activists, in 1848 wrote an impassioned description of the oppression of German woman workers in *The Speech of a German Girl.* She was a writer by profession, and she and about a dozen other women's voices were active in encouraging all women to demand equality, political and otherwise.

German women had much reason for complaint before the uprisings, even more after their suppression. Both before and after, girls were often prohibited from attending school beyond the age of fifteen. After the revolts, many German states, including Prussia, the most powerful among them, passed jurisprudence prohibiting the participation of women in political organizations of any kind. In 1871 however, all the states were joined into an empire under the hegemony of Prussia. The one bright spot for women was the system of laws enacted in and after that union, giving women certain rights, and fewer restrictions than previously had prevailed.
After the unification, only one woman, Hedwig Dohm, spoke publicly during the 1870s in favor of women's suffrage. During the 1890s the battle for the right of women to attend universities was joined. About 1900, during the course of Prussia's attempt to unify the German Law Code, the most restrictive aspects of laws regarding German women were imposed on all German states, some of whose laws had been more liberal. Although the bans against socialist groups were lifted in the 1890s, those against women remained in force until a number of years later...

* * *

Where does Wagner fit into all of this? He was born in 1813; died in 1883. As already mentioned, he took part in the armed uprising in Dresden, kingdom of Saxony, in 1849. For the next eight years he was living as a fugitive in Zurich, Switzerland. It may be worth noting that women did not get the vote in Switzerland until 1971. He began living with his paramour, Cosima, wife of his friend, Hans von Bülow, in Lucerne, Switzerland in 1866. He and Cosima were married in 1870. They continued to live in Lucerne until 1872, when they moved to Bayreuth, Germany, in the state of Bavaria.

We see or hear little from Wagner during most of his lifetime concerning his feelings about women's rights, or the justice of their demands for equality. But many of his writings have seen daylight only after his death. The struggle was going on all around him, but he apparently took no personal part in it for either side. He never seemed to want to get involved in political movements. His participation in the Dresden uprising, it appears safe to say, was motivated, not by ideals of democracy, freedom, or any other such concepts as motivated most of his comrades. He was fighting, rather, against what he perceived as the great injustice of the King's refusal to order a production of his new opera, Lohengrin.

Despite the ferocity of his written diatribes against the Jews, he twice in 1880 refused to sign petitions to the German government protesting the recent granting of full citizenship rights to them. He explained to his bewildered, and possibly angered contemporaries and think-a-likes, that he preferred just to write and to leave such action to others. So his lack of overt interest in the women's movements should not be surprising. As
Cosima’s former husband, who did sign the petition, so bitterly put it: “Wagner poked the ashes, but let other get their fingers burned.”

What the documents gathered after his death have to tell us however, is very interesting. His former home in Bayreuth is now a museum, which includes, among other things, a well-stocked library of books that Wagner owned during his lifetime. They include two volumes of interest to us now. One is Schopenhauer’s The World as Will and Representation; the other is à l’Histoire du Bddhisme Indien, by Eugène Burnouf. About the first, we already know. Schopenhauer was himself absorbed in Eastern religions, particularly Buddhism. The Burnouf book furnished Wagner with the legends that became the groundwork for an opera he had been considering since early on. He had made a prose sketch for it while living in Zurich, on May 16th, 1856. It was named from the beginning Die Sieger (The Victors). This was about the same time as the rewriting of Brynhilde’s final words at the end of Götterdämmerung, known as the Schopenhauerian ending.

There was evolution of the sketch in later years. The ongoing struggle for women’s rights, during which Wagner worked on it, on and off for the balance of his life, make it all the more worthwhile to look at this first sketch. It tells much of the growth of his thinking and maturing world view.

It involves the future Buddha, named Shakyamuni; his disciple, Ananda (a male, despite the “a” ending); and Prakriti, a “Chandala” girl. A Chandala, whatever it may mean today, in the time of Buddha, meant the lowest of the castes, an untouchable, and probably the same in Wagner’s day. Other characters, mostly minor, include Prakriti’s mother, various Brahmmins, members of the highest caste, disciples and representatives of the general population.

To summarize Wagner’s sketch of May 1856: The Buddha is on his last journey with his disciple Ananda. The disciple is given water from a well by Prakriti who is very much in love with him. Ananda’s reaction is one of consternation. Prakriti is in the grips of love’s agony. Her mother brings Ananda to her. Distressed and moved to tears, Ananda is released by the Buddha, Shakyamuni, from his service. Prakriti, in order to plead for union with Ananda despite the caste difference, goes to the Buddha under the tree at the city’s gate. The Buddha asks if she is willing to fulfill the “stipulations” of such a union. It is a word with a double meaning, interpreted by Prakriti to mean chastity. She sinks sobbing to the ground.

Ananda is persecuted by the Brahmmins who vocally disapprove of Buddha’s contacts with a Chandala girl. The Buddha’s response is to
attack the entire spirit of caste. He narrates the story of Prakriti's previous life: She was in her former life the daughter of a proud Brahmin; the Chandala King. Remembering his own former existence as a Brahmin, he had craved the Brahmin's daughter as a bride for his son. The son had felt an almost violent passion for her. But the proud daughter had arrogantly refused and mocked the advances of the son. She had now been reborn as a Chandala to expiate the torments of a hopeless love, to renounce her passion, and to be led to redemption by acceptance into Buddha's flock. Prakriti answers Buddha's question with an unrestrained yes. Ananda welcomes her as his sister.

Less than a year after the sketch of May 1856, there are minor changes as evidenced in a letter to a friend, Marie Sayn-Wittgenstein, in March 1857 including a change in the name of the Chandala girl to Savitri. But two years and five months after that draft there is the letter dated October 5th, 1858, sent by him to Mathilde Wesendonck, the attractive wife of his former landlord, friend and generous financial supporter in Zurich. Wagner and Mathilde, as we have previously seen, were soul mates, something neither could claim with their own mates. Whether the relationship went any further is, as we have also seen, based on circumstantial evidence, doubtful.

Wagner had been living in Venice since August of 1858 when marital difficulties, which are irrelevant to our focus here, forced him to abandon the home in Zurich.

The content of the letter of October 1858 is one of many important clues to Wagner's mindset. The first matter of interest is his finding in history an "unheeded feature that was very welcome to me, and probably will lead to an important point." What was the important point?

Shakyamuni, the Buddha, at first was quite against the admission of women into the community of the elect. As late as the early days of 1858, Wagner had read in Burnout's book that the Buddha had even rejected his "beloved" aunt who had raised him, and that the Buddha relented only after repeated requests by Ananda. Wagner himself had previously expressed the view that women are far too subjected by nature to the sexual function. They were consequently, so the thinking went, too much subject to caprice, waywardness, and attachment to personal existence, ever to attain that concentration and breadth of contemplation whereby the unit cuts itself loose from the natural drift, to arrive at redemption.121 Hence, they were excessively under the control of the will as explained by Schopenhauer. However Wagner unashamedly wrote to Mathilde that
by replacing the old aunt with the voluptuous Prakriti, Wagner said he gained something important.

And what was the important point it would lead to? "It was his favorite pupil, Ananda, the same to whom I had already assigned his role in my Sieger who finally induced his master to depart from his severity and allow women also to be received into the flock."

As stated in the letter:122

Shakyamuni was initially opposed to the idea of admitting women into the community of saints ... It was his favorite pupil, Ananda—that same Ananda to whom I have already allotted a part in my The Victors—who was finally able to persuade the master to relent and open up the community to women.

The climax in the development of the Buddha, and perhaps of Wagner himself, is in the following paragraph of the letter:

Without any contrived means, my project gains a great and powerful expansion. The difficulty here was to make the Buddha himself—a figure totally liberated and above all passion—suitable for dramatic and, more especially, musical treatment. But I have now solved the problem by having him reach one last remaining stage in his development whereby he is seen to acquire a new insight—is conveyed not by abstract linkage of concepts but by intuitive emotional experience, in other words, by a process of shock and agitation suffered by his inner self; as a result, this insight reveals him in his final progress towards a state of supreme enlightenment. Ananda, who is loser to life and directly affected by the love of the Chandala girl, becomes the agent of his ultimate enlightenment ... His human compassion ... becomes so overwhelming that he cannot help allowing her, for his own final transfiguration, to join the community of saints ... thus he regards the existence in the world, was to benefit all humans, as completed, since he had become able to offer deliverance—without meditation—also to woman.

The "ultimate enlightenment," the "supreme enlightenment," hence is the Buddha's acceptance of women. Lest there remain any doubt o
Wagner's feelings on the matter, we need only look at the very last words he put to paper. Wagner died of a heart attack on February 13th, 1883. He was at his writing desk at his temporary home in Venice, and had left word that he did not want to be disturbed. He was working on an essay, entitled "About the Feminine in Humanity." He had barely begun. He had written "Ideality of man-naturalness of woman—Buddha..." Nevertheless the process of emancipation of woman happens only accompanied by ecstatic spasm. Love-tragedy."

Then, his very last written phrase, obviously referring to Buddha and his own planned opera: "It is a beautiful feature of the legend that the Victoriously Perfect One is moved to accept woman."123 That there is no influence of Schopenhauer on this issue need not be belabored.

This was 1883. Not in Germany, not in all Europe, not in the United States, had women been accepted into the body politic with anything approaching full rights. They could not vote. In some jurisdictions their legal rights were minimal. They could not, in Germany, even belong to political organizations. That the Buddha should have accepted "woman" into the religious body, Wagner found "beautiful."

Today Wagner is still vilified for his prejudice against an entity, to him, seemingly amorphous, the Jews, despite the fact that he is never known to have refused the friendship of any person, Jewish or otherwise, because of religion or race. He sometimes seemed surrounded by Jewish friends. His acceptance of women as fully equal and capable in the midst of a sea of unjustified exclusion and bias seems totally forgotten. We remember where he was wrong. We have forgotten where he was right.
A few words first about Wagner:

As far as I know, he has never committed high crimes. What I do know is that he has left treasures of far more value than that of the loss to his creditors, or targets of his malice or questionable morals. His anti-Semitism is a subject I have dealt with at length in one of my earlier books, Richard Wagner and the Jews. I have said everything about that subject I care to say and I do not intend to revisit it again at any length.

I will say only that while he, in his writing, maliciously attacked the Jews, in his mind some amorphous entity, he never refused either the help or the friendship of any individual Jewish person. On the contrary he enjoyed a close and intimate relationship with many of them, based on mutual respect and admiration. He wrote and talked a good, or bad, game, but never, actually did anything maliciously to any of them, nor, with the possible exception of Giacomo Meyerbeer, said anything malicious about them.

The magnificence of his music dramas is beyond words, or at least beyond my talent for words, and any nonsense he uttered, or read and believed, I accept without judgment. I have never walked in his moccasins.

If Arthur Schopenhauer’s ideas have influenced ‘only’ the structure of the music of Tristan and Isolde, he has bequeathed an inheritance of inestimable value, at least to those who have found pleasure in, and have been awestruck, by the unique sounds of that opera.

The claim that his influence is pervasive throughout the entire Wagnerian repertory is an altogether different subject. Its most pernicious effect is to take attention away from his the one great accomplishment, perhaps his one great impact on the work of Wagner, which is in the field of music. The spotlight placed on any influence of Schopenhauer in
Parsifal, for instance turns it also on the worst feature of the philosopher's writings. Despite his obvious disdain for the Jewish religion, he did not attack the Jews as a culture, or 'race.' He saved his vitriol for an indictment of the entire human race, most particularly that half of it consisting of women, with some very detailed, malicious, misogynous writing.

His essay, "On Women" is ignored by Magee, and presumably by a host of other admirers. Or perhaps it is secretly, or overtly, itself admired by some misguided men (Magee certainly not included) who cheer Schopenhauer for what they lacked the opportunity or the vocabulary to write themselves.

The defense of some of his admirers is that his expression is simply tracking the feelings of the time; the then prevalent view of most men toward women. As a defense it fails completely. We simply have too much literature from his century, essays, poetry, novels and other writings, to accept Schopenhauer's calumnies against women, either in tone or content as representative of the 19th century.

He denies acceptance of any religion, referring to all of their underpinnings as stories to mollify the masses whose minds cannot handle the unvarnished truth, and who miss the mark as to what is required to reach Schopenhauer's vision of salvation. Ideally we would all be ascetics, as only asceticism is the proper road to renunciation of the will, though he admits that only few of us could handle the overpowering force of nature to overcome it.

In neither his disdain of all humanity, nor in his even more pronounced contempt for women is there the slightest amelioration or suggestion that there may indeed be some small aspect of life that may be worthwhile. Whatever so seems is necessarily part of the grand illusion, the all-enveloping falsehood at which we so desperately clasp and grab for scraps of happiness. All is in vain. And if you momentarily seem ahead of the game—you had best forget it. Death is his ace in the hole. It happens to everyone. It is all for nothing as everyone dies. Those who think that they are getting pleasure from children and other descendants, are even more self-delusional, as the descendants themselves only meet with all the yearning and grasping, tragedy, and heart break and ultimately death, thus adding to the sum total of misery in the world.

Why did Wagner, for all his own misery, look to Schopenhauer and his writings to find relief from his torments? It is most likely for the same reasons that we all cling to arguments or selected parts of
them for which we have a predilection in advance. Wagner, without influence from anyone, was a cynic. He had lost faith in many things. People had just not done what he expected of them. They seemed incapable of understanding him, of giving him the support he needed. It was a miserable world in which he found himself, and he was looking to philosophy for help. Feuerbach and his message that the purpose of life was love apparently appealed to him. But then he discovered Schopenhauer. What Schopenhauer told him, and everyone who would listen, was that it’s not you; it’s the world. People that are happy are fooling themselves. This is not the real world; this world is illusory. Deprive yourself of momentary enjoyment; only through such deprivation will you find ultimate salvation from the will, the constant searching and yearning for some immediate pleasure.

It was a life raft to a drowning man. There may have been some logical appeal to Wagner in this philosophy, but it got to him mainly on an emotional level. Any critic of this philosopher, or his work, he attacked with anger. He defended the purity of his hero the way a man would defend the honor of his wife. The philosopher was right in everything he did or said. Even right for things he never did, or said except in Wagner’s imagination. Darwin, for one, was much ado about nothing. Everything Darwin said was a copy from Schopenhauer—Schopenhauer, who said that all species were the same as they have always been—Schopenhauer who said that animals could not live without humans, something we know they did for over a half billion years before the first human drew breath. All despite the fact that some antiquity of animals had been known even in Schopenhauer’s own time.

If we follow Magee’s views and reasonings, we see almost everything the composer did after meeting Schopenhauer was because of his influence. If we look a little closer we see a lot less.

The text of Tristan and Isolde may show more of Schopenhauer’s influence than most of the other mature Wagnerian operas, all in fact except for Parsifal, but still a lot less than has been advertised. Night and Darkness represent the real world in the opera. In Schopenhauer’s scheme of things escape is not so easy, nor is sexual love so rewarding. It would, admittedly however, be hard indeed to depict the solidified world described by the philosopher, with no individuation, nor causation, nor time or space as the place where two lovers meet to continue their highly sexual liaison. But we can charitably dismiss the night and darkness metaphor in the context of union of lovers after death as poetic license.
But to accept this text as an accurate portrayal of Schopenhauer, or anything close to it is no less naïve than the acceptance of any work of fiction as truth.

Except for the talk of night and day, darkness and light, even that slim effect of Schopenhauer is gone in the third act, forgotten by spectator and Tristan alike. Tristan dies happily in the arms of his beloved, after glorifying the brilliant sun. Isolde sinks down transfigured, possibly since there was nothing else left for her.

It would be hard to imagine a less likely candidate for the description as Schopenhauerian than *The Mastersingers*. True, Wagner grabbed a couple of unlikely items, one about aggressors eating their own flesh, the other about morning dreams, and stuck them in his text. That latter is one instance where Magee outdid even Wagner, claiming that Freud took his conclusion about dreams from Schopenhauer—Schopenhauer who never seemed to give a second thought about dreams, but mentioned “morning dreams” in passing as a way to make a point about something unrelated. Neither the joy in life, however, nor the happy ending, would have had Schopenhauer’s stamp of approval.

The four opera Ring of the Nibelung? Is there truly anything Schopenhauerian about it? Magee points to a cry of inner pain by Wotan, king of the gods, that all he wants is the end. The end. Seriously, half seriously, or jokingly, how many times have we heard that from live people, even those who never read Schopenhauer? And when he faces that end, he tells Erda, the Earth Goddess, one thing, namely, that he now welcomes the end, then, minutes later, says, and shows to his grandson Siegfried, the false nature of that braggadocio claim. He shows, that is, a determination to live, even if it means stopping his grandson from waking Wotan’s own daughter. Moreover, in the next opera we hear that he has confirmed that determination to Valtraute, as well as to her sister Valkyries, begging to have his empty life extended. Even the Schopenhauerian ending Wagner wrote for Brynhilde to sing at the grand conclusion of the Ring, he canceled and let the orchestra say it all. His artistic instincts were unerring, and overrode all philosophy and even consistency in his obeisance to words and music. And nonetheless it survives as undeniably great drama—thanks to the music.

It is in *Parsifal*, where the influence of Schopenhauer is most pervasive. Magee dwells mainly on the fact that “the foundation of ethics is compassion, which comes not from rationality but feeling.” He mentions only in passing that the challenge to the will includes
“mastery of our sexuality,” and that “redemption may be achieved by a self-transcendence attained through a wholly selfless, non-sexual and compassionate love for others.” That is Magee’s one of only two references to asceticism, though he does not deign to use the word.

That is in stark contrast to the extended treatment of the subject by Schopenhauer. In his most important book the subject and the word appear in no less than eighteen pages. In Magee’s book, it is compassion that gets top billing in Parsifal, despite the emphasis that the opera places on asceticism as the main road leading to it. King Amfortas is ‘sentenced’ by some benevolent spirit On High, not merely to a lifetime of extraordinary painful suffering for that momentary lapse, but to a life of suffering that never ends. Tellingly we have the only women in the opera, Kundry and the other flower maidens portrayed in a most unfavorable light as temptresses, and all but Kundry, as rather crude ones. Schopenhauer could not have done a better job himself of demonizing women. It sounds like a likely source of influence by the philosopher, but Magee neglected that possibility altogether.

Magee compares similarities between Wagner and Schopenhauer at length and in various places in his book, even to emphasizing Cosima’s belief that they looked alike. But she forgot to mention some differences. Schopenhauer apparently never had a decent, or satisfactory, relationship with a woman, including his mother who finally let him know when he was thirty that she did not wish to see him again. There seems little point in spelling out details, but Wagner had close and very warm relationships with his mother, and his five sisters, especially Rosalie, the eldest.

Relationships with Minna were spotty, but he had obvious pity for her, something apparently of prime importance here, supporting her faithfully until the end of her life. His relationship with Mathilde Wesendonck, wife of his Zurich landlord, was close and very friendly, if not more, the two sharing so much in their respective loves of art. There was his eighteen year relationship and marriage with Cosima, the closeness of which requires no further evidence than that already shown. There were other affairs, which may or may not have been more than platonic, including in 1848 one Jessie Laussot, a young English woman, married, as was Wagner. There was a flirtation, if not more, with another English woman, Carrie Pringle in the mid-1870s. She was one of the flower maidens in the initial Ring performances in 1876.

He was no paragon of virtue, but hardly the uninhibited Romeo seeking flings indiscriminately as has at times been depicted. More
than anything he seemed to need feminine understanding and had no use for those without it. He had in fact no use for anyone who did not understand him. His prose sketch for *The Victors* was not only unSchopenhauerian, it amounted to a complete rejection of the philosopher’s “On Women.”

Is there any generality to be drawn as to what was and was not influenced by Schopenhauer? I believe that there is. Foregoing *Tristan* and *Parsifal*, what was ‘influenced’ seems shoved and sometimes dragged into a text, forced and inappropriate; not really influencing, but almost copied. When he breaks away from his few tributes to Schopenhauer, the real Wagner is easily identified. Frederick Nietzsche ridiculed the idea of Wagner writing about asceticism and he can hardly be faulted for doing so. Magee barely mentioned that subject and dropped it like the proverbial hot potato. Some of these deliberate insertions from Schopenhauer stand out starkly as such. The remarkable thing is how well they can be smoothed over with the meld of music and poetry by that magician of the arts. It is mainly when one reads the text without hearing the music—something very difficult for those to whom the music is familiar—that the misplacements and misfits become jarring.

Contrary to *Tristan*, where the Schopenhauerian influence disappears in the final act, in *Parsifal*, to the very end the obscure, almost convoluted story is beautifully hidden by the magnificent music.

Exalt the artist to the skies. For The poetry, the drama, and above all for the music, no praise can be excessive. But Wagner as a moralist, ethicist, or philosopher? Check such anticipations at the door before you sit down.
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