

The Positive Influence of Wagner upon Nietzsche

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Lithographic print of Nietzsche by Hanfstaengl, c.1873

There has been much written on the subject of Wagner and Nietzsche, beginning with Nietzsche himself. It is a notoriously difficult theme, which suffers not so much from vigorous partisanship on either side of the eponymous 'and', as from the frequent accompaniment of such partisanship by a quite extraordinary level of ignorance of the opposing figure.¹ Were I to write, for example, on 'Kant and Hegel', I should probably take the trouble first to inform myself on Kant as well as Hegel. Yet anything approximating to Queensberry rules would appear to be suspended when we come to 'Wagner and Nietzsche'. Everybody knows that the two were once close, prior to Nietzsche's self-emancipation from the grip of the Bayreuth 'Master' (or Monster). Whether this parting of the ways should represent a case of good riddance to Wagner or to Nietzsche depends, of course,

upon the side of the 'and' on which one positions oneself. There is then little more for the Wagner partisan to say; he may nod his assent – tacitly or all too vigorously – to Cosima Wagner's melancholy description of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (Human, All Too Human) as 'N.'s pitiful book', and return to more congenial pastures.² His antagonist can meanwhile proceed safely to an explanation of the necessity of Nietzsche's rejec-

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¹ See Mark Berry, 'Nietzsche's Critique of Wagner,' *Wagner*, xx (1999), 38–48.

² *Cosima Wagner: Die Tagebücher 1869–1883*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, 2 vols. (Munich, 1976–7) [CT], 30 April 1878.

tion of Wagner and elucidation of Nietzsche's critique of his erstwhile father-figure. Moreover, those with more balanced constitutions will seldom do otherwise, but will merely express themselves more temperately and add that the chasm results from very different approaches towards the same cultural crisis. It is as though we are stranded on Earth with little knowledge that there exists another side to the Moon. What I should like to suggest, however, is that there exists at least one other side to the Case of Wagner and Nietzsche, a side that will richly repay our attention. Words such as 'Wagner's work closes an epoch; Nietzsche's is the opening to an unknown future' are at best misleading.³ I shall point not to the well-trodden paths of Nietzsche's reaction against Wagner but to the areas in which Wagner's ideas and the origins of those ideas remained of positive importance to the mature Nietzsche, or in which he was less immune – and Wagner, perhaps, still more virulent – than he thought.⁴

First, a few words should be said on the methods adopted by our respective thinkers. It would be an understatement to say that Nietzsche is not a systematic thinker in the conventional sense. It is something of a rarity amongst philosophers to find such a *mélange* of philology, poetry, invective, aphorisms, excursions into the history of ideas, and so on. This, we can be sure, is intentionally so; Nietzsche is not trying and failing to be a latter-day Kant. Wagner represents a more difficult case. His method is not progressively to recant previous 'errors' in his oeuvre, that is to say it is not Socratic (nor is it Socratic in what we might see as the more radical, sceptical sense, exemplified by the *Theaetetus*). Feuerbachian ideas, for example, are not completely replaced by a Schopenhauerian world-view, whatever Wagner himself might claim at times. The obvious alternative to such an approach – apart from a self-conscious opposition to system-building, *à la* Nietzsche – would be a quasi-Hegelian method, sublating the partial verities arrived at hitherto into their allotted places in a complex system of dialectical mediation. Wagner, however, is not really a systematic thinker; his method is far more agglomerative than this. Ideas and influences come to overlap each other in a considerably less sophisticated fashion, somewhat akin to a rudimentary geological overlay. Indeed, some commentators have questioned whether the *Ring* actually makes logical sense, so problematical do they find the intellectual progression evinced by the composer during the long period of its writing and paralleled in the completed work. Whereas Nietzsche divines evidence of spiritual elevation in the display of unresolved struggles between mutually incompatible perspectives, for Wagner it is more a case of combining – and, in some cases, of developing – facets of perspectives which, taken *in toto*, are incompatible. There is no need to go into detail on this matter. Suffice it to say that Wagner's rather more amateurish lack of system provided Nietzsche not only with cheap ammunition – 'Parsifal is the father of Lohengrin! How did he manage that?' – but also with opportunities, rarely acknowledged (perhaps unconscious at times?), to borrow, to steal, to build upon.⁵

³ C.P. Janz, 'Das Gesetz über uns: Friedrich Nietzsche's Wagner-Erfahrung', *'Der Fall Wagner': Ursprünge und Folgen von Nietzsche's Wagner-Kritik*, ed. Thomas Steiert (Laaber, 1991), 13–22 (p. 21).

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner*, §5, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols. (Berlin and New York, 1967–88) [KSA], vi.22.

⁵ Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner*, §9, KSA vi.34–5.

The charismatic hero and the will to power

The most important single area in this respect is that of the will to power. With the possible exception of Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch*, no other idea of his has been so utterly misunderstood and distorted by the popular imagination. At the same time, few would deny its importance. What appears not so much to be denied as to be passed over repeatedly in ignorance is the crucial role played here by Wagner's work.

Historians, whether of politics, society or ideas, do not attach *primary* significance to an object of study simply because it was the 'first ever'; to do so would render them little more than compilers of an antiquarian *Guinness Book of Records*. To take a musical example from a period distinct from our own, Johann Wenzel Stamitz might have beaten Joseph Haydn to the symphonic starting line, but there can be no doubt as to why we might take an interest in figures such as the former; importance attaches to them as precursors of Haydn and Mozart. If the Mannheim School 'discovered' sonata form, then Haydn remains the Great Inventor. Moreover, and in contrast to the curiously unreflective approach so prevalent in practitioners of the natural sciences, priority – 'discovery' – is of no more overriding importance to the historian of ideas than it is to the historian of art. Wagner's idea of the will to power, however, is both crucial in consideration of the genealogy of Nietzsche's conception and intrinsically worthy of attention – the latter facet, of course, making it far more likely to have been of *enduring* importance to Nietzsche.

If pressed to sum up in a single phrase the nature of the concerns dramatised in Wagner's multi-layered *Ring* cycle, many would respond with 'the conflict between power and love'. So long as this spurs us on to deeper probing and does not remain a 'soundbite', we need have no quarrel with this. Whilst bearing in mind the concern of this essay to examine Wagner's positive importance to Nietzsche – as opposed to straightforward exegesis of Wagner's ideas – it would seem vital to examine Wagner's conception more closely, in order to progress from a mere correspondence to an authentic illumination of our object of study.

Taking matters one step at a time, we could say that the *Ring* dramatises the dynamic conflict between the lust for power and the power of love – both between and, still more interestingly, within its characters. Wotan outlines his dilemma when he asks Brünnhilde:

So leicht wähtest du⁶
Wonne des Herzens erworben,
wo brennend Weh'
in das Herz mir brach,
wo gräßliche Noth
den Grim mir schuf,

⁶ The German *wähtest* provides a clear example of Wagner's conception of *Wahn* (illusion), commonly traced to his reading of Schopenhauer. The *Ring* poem, however, was written before Wagner had been introduced to any of Schopenhauer's writings. Feuerbach's work, as early as his *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit* (Thoughts on Death and Immortality, tr. J.A. Massey (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1980)), is suffused with the idea of religion as embodying an illusory projection of the best of this world into the next. Feuerbach does not, however, extend his critique to encompass the illusions of love.

einer Welt zu Liebe
der Liebe Quell

im gequälten Herzen zu hemmen?

[Did you imagine / that love's bliss was acquired so lightly, / When my heart / burned with pain, / When dire necessity / Roused my ire, / When, from love of the world, / The source of love / was stemmed in my aching heart?]

Carl Dahlhaus once wrote that 'the high-minded belief that true understanding can only come from sympathy is an idealistic prejudice that has been obsolete at least since Nietzsche'.⁷ One would have expected so distinguished a Wagner scholar to have traced this back at least as far as Wagner, yet Dahlhaus frequently displayed a curious lack of interest in the dramatic content – as opposed to the form – of the composer's works.⁸ Be that as it may, Wagner's anarchistic hostility towards power *in any form whatsoever* prompts him to the most devastating critique of the will to power ever likely to be penned. We see it acting as an overriding impulse in every one of the principal characters, and with unfailingly catastrophic results. Wotan's lust for that power embodied in Alberich's ring becomes so overwhelming in *Das Rheingold* that at the beginning of the final scene he has become morally indistinguishable from the tyrant of Nibelheim himself. 'I demand the ring,' proclaims the chief of the gods; 'Do what you will with your life.' Long before this, in the extraordinary transition from Scene 1 to Scene 2, melody, harmony and instrumentation have co-operated to transform the motif of Alberich's ring into that of Wotan's Valhalla. Dwarf and god, chromatic ring and diatonic Valhalla, are thus related dialectically in the pursuit of power even before Wotan himself appears onstage. Moving forward to Wotan's theft of the ring from Alberich, the orchestra sounds a terrible distortion of the spear motif (whose dramatic essence is bound up with the idea of Wotan as possessor of powers which, in contrast to those wielded by his antagonist, are at least limited by law). This represents Wotan's transgression of his own laws, sealing not only his fate but that of a string of victims leading up to Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung*. We then hear 'a musical re-creation of the moment when Alberich stole the gold'.⁹ Wotan will now refuse to relinquish ownership of the ring even as ransom for Freia, the pallid, helpless representative of love in a power-intoxicated world. *Die Walküre* will see him forced by the dialectic of his own power-games to sacrifice the life of his son, Siegmund.

This essay is intended to address certain aspects of the intellectual relationship between Wagner and Nietzsche, not to furnish a synopsis of the *Ring*, so there is no need to go any further.¹⁰ Even the forces that come to oppose the ubiquity of this 'erotic desire' for power – first, the illusions of love and then the truths of Schopenhauerian metaphysics and ethics (Schopenhauerian, even if often by correspondence rather than by derivation) – are for us of secondary importance. The mature Nietzsche would have scant sympathy for either. What was most valuable for him in the *Ring* was the

⁷ Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, tr. J.B. Robinson (Cambridge, 1983), 87.

⁸ This lack of interest provides an interesting coincidence with Wieland Wagner's 'New Bayreuth' depoliticisation of his grandfather's works in the wake of the catastrophe of the Third Reich.

⁹ Warren Darcy, *Wagner's 'Das Rheingold'* (Oxford, 1993), 190.

¹⁰ See Mark Berry, *Treacherous Bonds and Laughing Fire: Politics and Religion in Wagner's 'Ring'* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2006).

ubiquity of that 'erotic desire' (*liebesgelüste*) of which Wagner wrote in a letter to Theodor Uhlig.¹¹ Wagner employs the phrase in a passage devoted to Alberich, a character with rich potential for Nietzsche. This 'erotic desire' prefigured – for Wagner, that is – and, upon his reading of Schopenhauer, developed that philosopher's *principium individuationis*. What is it that turns Alberich's erotic desire towards the acquisition of power? It is rejection as ugly and undesirable by the Rhinemaidens, and envy with respect to the charmed lives of the gods: a classic case of Nietzschean *ressentiment*, which leads Alberich in Promethean fashion to transgress the limits of his creaturely existence, to blaspheme against Nature and the gods in Valhalla. When Alberich threatens the gods' 'blissful abandon on radiant heights', he exhibits a classic case of bad conscience towards the idle caste of Valhalla and its fraudulent web of contract, dishonoured promises and domination (both political and religious). Alberich becomes an agent not through the metaphysical abstraction of Kantian free will, but through a dialectic of rejection and oppression, consequent nihilistic despair, and his creative reaction to that plight. What is important for Nietzsche is not Wagner's unwavering hostility towards all forms of power, but the psychology depicted of the *will* to power; man is identified not as the unwitting tool of Hegel's 'cunning of reason', but by his concrete, historical self-creation as a subject: the product of his essential will to power.

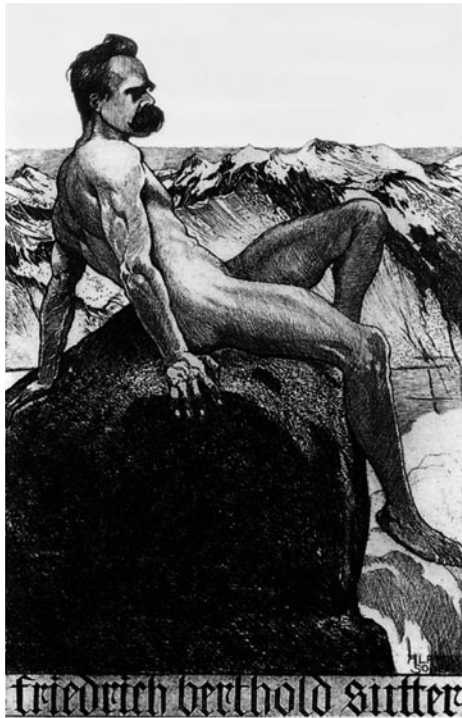
Wotan has done likewise in hewing his spear, representation of political domination, from the World Ash Tree. Yet long before he renounces it, his acquisition and exercise of power strikes the listener as of a rather different order. For Wagner, this was nevertheless illegitimate. For Nietzsche, however, the young, ambitious Wotan, haughtily disdainful of his vassal dwarves and giants, may stand as an unacknowledged progenitor of his noble-race typology. The thoughts leading to the following may have been prompted at least in part by early immersion in the *Ring* dramas, by recollection of Wotan's creative if fateful institution of political power – enshrined in the runes of his spear, and represented by the intimidating magnificence of Valhalla:

This 'bad' of noble origin and that 'evil' from the cauldron of unassuaged hatred – the former is an afterthought, an aside, an additional colour that complements, whilst the other is the original, the beginning, the actual *deed* in the idea of slave morality – how different are those two words 'bad' and 'evil', although both seem to be the antithesis of the same concept, 'good!' [...] We might well feel quite justified in retaining our fear of the blond beast at the centre of every noble race and in remaining on our guard: but who would not prefer, one hundredfold, to fear and to admire at the same time, rather than *not* to fear, but thereby permanently to continue to behold the disgusting vision of the failed, the stunted, the wasted away and the poisoned?¹²

The analogy is far from perfect, yet the similarities are remarkable. A further point of comparison is with Siegfried. Indeed Nietzsche himself, as late as *Der Fall Wagner*, would still allow that Wagner had created, at least in the first instance, that hero as a declara-

¹¹ Letter of 12 Nov. 1851, in *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, tr. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (London, 1987) [SL], 233. Wagner during this revolutionary period refused to bow to the authority of convention and therefore to employ capital letters for common nouns, hence *liebesgelüste*.

¹² Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, I, 11, KSA v.274–5.



Contemporary bookplate of Nietzsche portrayed as his hero Zarathustra

tion of war on morality.¹³ David Wyatt Aiken has pointed to the importance of Siegfried ('Variations on a Siegfried theme') in the formation of Zarathustra. However, Aiken overplays the influence of Schopenhauer's 'pessimism' here, ultimately rejecting Siegfried as a model on the ground that 'Wagner's development of Siegfried was pathetic'.¹⁴ Siegfried's fate may be tragic, but he retains, indeed regains, nobility in the final act of *Götterdämmerung*. In his death, Siegfried attains true consciousness, for the first time, of his revolutionary deeds, not least of which has been his awakening of Brünnhilde, and concomitant raising of hopes for a quasi-Feuerbachian triumph of love-communism. Once the hero has been slain, we hear the motif previously associated with Brünnhilde's awakening, indicating that Siegfried and the revolution have at last been permitted similarly to awaken to what Ernst Bloch termed 'light, [...] life, and the highest form of existence'.¹⁵

In Wagner's drama, Siegfried's power is founded upon charisma – preferable to Wotan's law and certainly to Alberich's capital – but it is power nonetheless, and leads the hero to corruption and ruin. However, Siegfried's Funeral March and even the far less impressive comic-strip heroism of his arrival at the Hall of the Gibichungs ('fight me or be my friend') offer just the 'noble origin' of which Nietzsche speaks. The attitude Siegfried displays toward his enemies shows that he would at worst have regarded them as 'bad', but certainly not as 'evil'.¹⁶ How very different from the intellectual Socrates, who all his life laughed at 'his noble Athenians, who were men of instinct, like all noble men, and were never able to explain adequately the reasons for their actions'.¹⁷ As Michael Tanner has written, 'Siegfried's sense of life, and of its enemies, is so strong that he

¹³ Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner*, §4, KSA vi.20.

¹⁴ David Wyatt Aiken, 'Nietzsche's Zarathustra: The Misreading of a Hero', *Nietzsche-Studien*, xxxv (2006), 70–103, esp. 91–4, 103.

¹⁵ Ernst Bloch, 'Paradoxes and the Pastorale in Wagner's Music', *Essays on the Philosophy of Music*, tr. Peter Palmer (Cambridge, 1985), 163.

¹⁶ Neither Wagner's nor Nietzsche's attitude towards the concepts of 'good' and 'bad' or 'evil', it may be noted, has anything to do with the distinction made in this regard by Schopenhauer. For Schopenhauer, the difference between 'bad' and 'evil' is merely one of degree and relative abstraction. (Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, tr. E.F.J. Payne, 2 vols. (New York, 1966), i.360.)

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, §191, KSA v.112.

instinctively recognises them, whether they become openly aggressive, as Fafner does, or whether they attempt to conceal their loathing for him, as Mime does.¹⁸ Siegfried's lack of historical reflection is prefigured in his isolated upbringing, noted by the expiring Fafner when he calls Siegfried 'You bright-eyed boy, who do not know yourself', and given concrete representation in the fateful, corrupting potion of forgetfulness of *Götterdämmerung*. This is an integral part of his charisma. It contrasts with Wagner's subsequent, more successful 'hero', Parsifal (at least the Parsifal of the second half of Wagner's drama, 'enlightened through compassion'), who is emblematic of everything Nietzsche most despised in Wagner as an apparent convert to Schopenhauerian Christianity. Siegfried can be brutal; whatever the role played by Hagen's manipulation, the hero has no compunction in violating Brünnhilde. Consider, moreover, the ruthlessness of Siegfried's Forging Song, whose steely, heroic music contrasts so vividly with the pathetic *ressentiment* of Mime's plotting to avenge his erstwhile slavery. Moreover, like Zarathustra, Wagner's hero *sings*:

Schmiede, mein Hammer,
ein hartes Schwert!
Hoho! hahei!
hoho! hahei!
Einst färbte Blut
dein falbes Blau;
sein rothes Rieseln
röthete dich:
kalt lachtest du da,
das warme lecktest du kühl!

[Forge me, o hammer, a sword of strength! / Hoho! Hahei! Hoho! Hahei! / Once blood painted your pale blue steel, / Its red trickling reddened you: / Coldly you laughed at that, / And licked the warm blood cool.]

Siegfried stands as a successor to the Left-Hegelian *Philosophie der Tat* ('philosophy of action') of the early 1840s and as a precursor to those 'blond beasts' Nietzsche wishes us both to fear and to admire.¹⁹

Morality: social and individual

We have seen prefigured in Wagner's *Ring* the will to power and even certain aspects of Nietzsche's version of what the young, revolutionary Wagner called the 'man of the future'.²⁰ But there is more to consider. A fundamental distinction Nietzsche would make in his considerations of morality, in preparation for his 'revaluation of all values', would be that between *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*. This is in itself nothing startlingly original; Hegel's *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Philosophy of Right) makes exactly the same distinction between its second and third parts. What would seem to be Nietzsche's advance – or regression, depending upon one's point of view – is the attack upon *Sittlichkeit*, that is

¹⁸ Michael Tanner, 'The Total Work of Art', *The Wagner Companion*, ed. Peter Burbidge and Richard Sutton (New York, 1979), 140–224 (p. 161).

¹⁹ On the *Philosophie der Tat*, see Horst Stuke, *Philosophie der Tat: Studien zur 'Verwirklichung der Philosophie' bei den Junghegelianern und den Wahren Sozialisten* (Stuttgart, 1963).

²⁰ Letter to August Röckel, 25/26 Jan. 1854, SL 308.

morality as social, customary conditioning, and his elevation of *Moralität*, that pertaining to the individual.²¹ Once again, this conflict is anticipated in the *Ring*.

Wotan, we have already seen, has his dynamic side. Nowhere is this more clearly perceptible than in the problems he encounters from his consort, Fricka (shades of Zeus and Hera). In the letter to Uhlig quoted from above, Wagner refers to Wotan's 'struggle between his own inclination and custom (Fricka)'.²² It is Fricka who with chilling logic compels Wotan to bow to the dictates of his laws, and to sacrifice Siegmund, his first, abortive attempt at creating a man of the future. For her, the incestuous union of Siegmund and Sieglinde must be ended not only because it violates Sieglinde's 'sacred' marriage vows but also because custom is outraged: 'My heart trembles, my mind reels: carnal pleasures between brother and sister! When was it ever heard of that siblings were lovers?' Siegmund, it should be noted, has a history of outlawry; 'I was always *geächtet*', he tells Sieglinde and Hunding, the German word *geächtet* having the additional figurative connotation of transgression against *Sittlichkeit*: he was an outlaw and an outcast. 'Whatever I guessed to be right, others thought evil; that which always seemed bad to me enjoyed the favour of others.' The Volsung displays no *ressentiment*; whilst the members of the repressive society with which he comes into contact deem his actions evil, he simply considers theirs to be bad. "'We truthful ones": thus did the nobility of ancient Greece designate itself. [...] The noble type of man considers *himself* to determine values; he needs no approval.'²³

Moreover, in his theoretical work, *Opera and Drama*, well known to Nietzsche, Wagner addresses the same theme in his consideration of the Oedipus myth. Both unions – that of the Volsung twins, and that of Oedipus and Jocasta – produce offspring; Nature shows no disapproval, in marked contrast to the fruitlessness of Wotan and Fricka's formalised marital union.²⁴ The tragedies of the next generation – the deaths of Eteocles and Polynices, capitalised upon by 'the shrewd Creon', thereby bringing about the death of Antigone – are engendered by the 'depravity' of *Sittlichkeitsgefühl*, that emotion representative of a society actually based upon immorality (*Unsittlichkeit*) and hypocrisy. Such a society stands in desperate need of genuine, individual, 'purely-human' morality.²⁵ It needs what Wagner elsewhere defined freedom to be, "'licence?" of course not! [...]: *integrity*. He who is true to himself, i.e. who acts in accord with his own being [...]. Outward constraint is powerless unless it succeeds in destroying the integrity of its victim.'²⁶

And whilst Antigone and her 'love-curse' upon the state are hardly the stuff of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, the criticisms to which they respond are identical. The

²¹ For all the virulence of Nietzsche's diatribes against Kant, it is difficult to see how this does not mark something of a turn back from Hegel(-ianism) to Kant. Hegel identifies *Moralität* with Kantian ethics.

²² SL 233.

²³ Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, §260, KSA v.209.

²⁴ Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, ed. Klaus Kropfinger, 2nd edn (Stuttgart, 1994), 189–90.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 196. Wagner, I should point out, does not actually use the word *Moralität*, but instead refers to a society of true *Sittlichkeit*, 'that is the truly human [*wahrhaft menschlich*]' society. It is probably fair to say that he is even at this stage less single-mindedly individualistic than Nietzsche.

²⁶ Letter to Röckel, 25/26 Jan. 1854, SL 301.

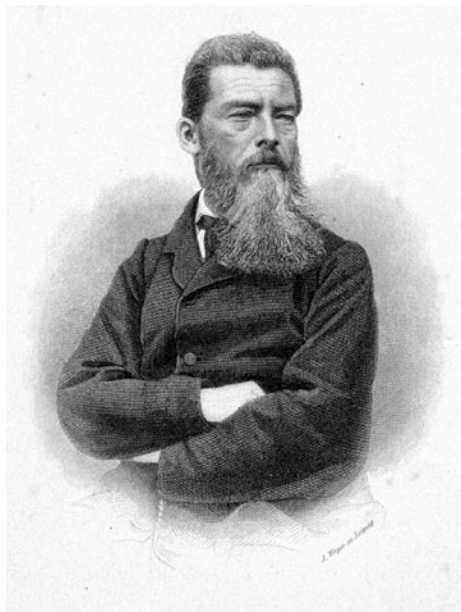
Übermensch, as we have seen, has more in common with Siegfried, and if we interpret the latter as anti-Parsifal – or perhaps better, Parsifal as anti-Siegfried – we come to the heart of Nietzsche’s criticism of Wagner in his essay ‘What do ascetic ideals mean?’ In fact, we can see Siegfried and his Volsung parents as unacknowledged progenitors of Nietzsche’s critique:

Is Wagner’s *Parsifal* his private, superior laugh at himself [...]? [...] Let us recall the enthusiasm with which Wagner followed in the footsteps of the philosopher Feuerbach in his day: Feuerbach’s dictum of ‘healthy sensualism’ – that appeared to be the pronouncement of salvation to Wagner (– they called themselves ‘Young Germans’). Did he finally *learn something different*? For it at least seems that, at the end, he had the will to *teach something different* [...] to preach a straightforward reversion, conversion, denial, Christianity, the Middle Ages.²⁷

So whereas Wagner’s process of self-criticism during the composition of the *Ring* leads him first to replace Siegfried as Feuerbachian hero of the cycle with the resigned Wotan, and then to move on to the undoubtedly Schopenhauerian asceticism of *Parsifal* (or at least this is the linear transition suggested by Nietzsche), Nietzsche wishes us to take the return journey from Parsifal to Siegfried (or Siegmund). The drama *Siegfried* is the ‘fairytale’ or scherzo of the *Ring*. It is not Bizet’s *méditerranisation de la musique*, but at least it retains a considerable amount of that which Wagner himself had termed the ‘Hellenistically optimistic world’. This world he came to see as constructed by his (politicised Feuerbachian) conceptual, dialectical thoughts – as opposed to his unconscious, ‘much more profound intuition’, subsequently confirmed by his reading of Schopenhauer.²⁸ Of course, given that the Feuerbachian element in Wagner’s thought was never completely eroded by the Schopenhauerian renunciatory influence, the former could easily – even if tacitly or with (mock?) disbelief – be discerned by the comprehending Wagnerite the mature Nietzsche *could* be.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, III, 3, KSA v.342–3. An interesting parallel, irrespective of whether Nietzsche was actually aware of it, is provided by consideration of Heinrich Heine’s essay, *Elementargeister* (‘Elementary-Spirits’ or ‘Nature-Spirits’), Heine being one of those very ‘Young Germans’ Nietzsche mentions. It is well known that this essay proved to be an important influence upon Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* (see e.g. Dietrich Borchmeyer, *Die Götter Tanzen Cancan: Richard Wagners Liebesrevolten* (Heidelberg, 1992), 91–143), an earlier, if at times equivocal, celebration of ‘healthy’ sensuality. The pagan gods of pre-Christian Germany have been driven by Christianity underground into popular legend, yet they have not been destroyed. Resurrection of these gods could therefore have revolutionary consequences for a Germany oppressed by the medievalist Roman Catholic Church and nobility. Heine ends the first part of the French (uncensored) version with a vision of Germany liberated by an awakened Frederick Barbarossa, ‘the god of revolution’. Wagner’s dramatic ideas concerning this very same figure were subsumed into the *Ring* project, with Siegfried taking on at least in part the role of Barbarossa. *Parsifal*, however, would return to the world of Christian myth, which Heine placed in stark opposition to paganism. Christian, otherworldly spiritualism disdained the body and stood servile with respect to the Church and other authorities. (Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ernst Elster, 7 vols. (Leipzig, 1887–90), iv.220ff., 618.) It is difficult to believe that when Heine looked forward to the time ‘when we [shall] become the redeemer of God’, he was thinking along lines similar to Wagner in the final line of *Parsifal* (‘Redemption to the Redeemer’). (Heine, ‘Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen’, in *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Klaus Briegleb, 6 vols. (Munich, 1968–76), iv.575.)

²⁸ Letter to Röckel, 23 Aug. 1856, SL 357–8.



Ludwig Feuerbach, c.1870

Nietzsche and Feuerbach

Mention of Feuerbach brings us to questions of Nietzsche's intellectual genealogy, a question of particular importance given Nietzsche's often surprising lack of first-hand acquaintance with philosophical texts.²⁹ Whilst broad brushstrokes will always require refinement, it is nevertheless a tenable generalisation to claim that Nietzsche's rejection of Wagner is closely bound up with his rejection of Schopenhauer, formerly his great 'educator'. Reaction against one figure entailed reaction against the other, the more so as Wagner increasingly trumpeted his adherence to Schopenhauer's philosophy.³⁰ The path Nietzsche took towards revaluation of values after the break with Wagner is well documented: reading of French moralists (Voltaire 'achieved what no German has, for the nature of Frenchmen is far more closely related to the Greeks' than to that of the Germans'), reorientation towards the materialism he had imbibed long before, transformed into 'Réalisme', and so forth: in short, as Thomas Mann observed, a 'self-overcoming'.³¹ What I now wish to do is to pick up once again some of the themes addressed, and to see which less-remarked reorientations Nietzsche could have been pointed to by Wagner's work, in some cases actually to use against the allegedly *reichsdeutsch* composer of Bayreuth.³²

Although Feuerbach's name is seldom mentioned by Nietzsche, he does speak of Feuerbach, as we have already seen. It would seem a reasonable assumption that it was through Wagner – whether personally, through knowledge of influences upon him, or simply as carrier of Feuerbachian ideas – that Nietzsche encountered Feuerbach. Feuerbach's little-noticed return to life in Nietzsche's philosophy seems rather surprising given his sudden disappearance from public awareness during the 1850s and 1860s (that is, following the apparent failure of the revolutions of 1848–9).³³

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²⁹ This can, of course, be exaggerated; see Thomas H. Brobjer, 'Nietzsche's Reading and Private Library,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, lviii (1997), 663–93.

³⁰ Cosima's diaries provide such ample illustration of this that there is no need to single out any particular examples.

³¹ Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, §221, KSA ii.182. Thomas Mann, 'Vorspruch zu einer musikalischen Nietzschefeier', *Gesammelte Werke*, 13 vols., ed. Hans Bürgin and Peter de Mendelssohn (Frankfurt, 1974), x.182.

³² A cursory glance at, for example, Cosima's diaries will show beyond any doubt that this is one of the most unjust accusations Nietzsche levelled against Wagner.

³³ And despite – perhaps because of – Friedrich Engels' celebrated work, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1970), iii.335–76), it was not really until the 1920s and 1930s that scholarship would come to appreciate the importance of Feuerbach in the thought of Karl Marx (whose Paris Manuscripts were published in 1932, an interesting coincidence with the rise of existentialism).

It is less surprising, however, if one bears in mind the following passage from Eugene Kamenka's account of Feuerbach's thought: 'He [Feuerbach] seethed in chagrin while the public turned to the suddenly fashionable Schopenhauerian pessimism. [...] He had become, in Germany at least, primarily a nostalgic memory in the minds of some socialist radicals, still hoping for a second '48.'³⁴ One such radical springs immediately to mind: a radical who endured a lengthy exile from Germany owing to his part in the Dresden uprising, yet who was also an early convert to Schopenhauerian pessimism. It is worth noting here the similarity of Wagner's position to that of the poet Georg Herwegh. In fact, it was Herwegh, who had met Feuerbach in Heidelberg and who was a fellow exile with Wagner in Zurich, who introduced the composer to the philosophy of Schopenhauer.

This is not the place to give a full account of Feuerbach's philosophy, but fundamental is his objection to the entire corpus of modern philosophy – most immediately, that of Hegel, but extending back at least as far as Descartes and Spinoza – 'the accusation of [having made] an unmediated break with sensory perception'.³⁵ That which follows from Feuerbach's emphasis upon 'sensualism' is well summarised in his lectures on *Das Wesen der Religion* (The Essence of Religion):

My teaching, or my viewpoint, may be summarised in two words: Nature and Man. The being that I regard as presupposed by Man, to which Man is indebted for his origin and his existence, is for me *not God* – a mystical, vague, ambiguous word – but Nature – a clear, material, unambiguous word and being. However, the being in which Nature becomes a personal, conscious, rational being, for me, that is Man.³⁶

And the reason this matters so much to Feuerbach is his consequent belief that man is thereby led to seek in heaven, or rather to defer to a chimerical eternity in heaven, that which his feelings of religious dependence prevent him from discovering in his life on earth. The Schleiermacherian emphasis upon religious sentiment so derided by Hegel fuses with an unquestionably post-Hegelian view of self-alienation. This is still more apparent in Feuerbach's attack on theology: 'Theology [...] *negates religion under the appearance of positing it*'.³⁷ For Feuerbach, Wagner and Nietzsche all look more favourably upon religion than they do upon theology. In their different, yet at the same time connected, ways, Feuerbach's *Wesen des Christentums* (The Essence of Christianity), Wagner's *Ring* and Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* are profoundly religious, even if not transcendentalist, works.³⁸ As Marx and Engels write, 'Religion is from the outset *consciousness of the transcendental arising from actually existing forces*'.³⁹ But we must return to the critical aspect of Nietzsche's lineage.

Valhalla stands as the symbol *par excellence* of Wagner's Feuerbachian critique of religion. Built upon fraudulent contract, its moral iniquities contrasting with Fricka's

³⁴ Eugene Kamenka, *The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach* (London, 1970), 17.

³⁵ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie, Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Bolin and Friedrich Jodl, 10 vols. (Stuttgart, 1960), ii.184.

³⁶ Preface to 3rd edition of *Vorlesungen über das Wesen der Religion*, *ibid.*, viii.26.

³⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, 'Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy', *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*, tr. Zawar Hanfi (New York, 1972), 166.

³⁸ So are the works of Gustav Mahler, always very much under the influence of Wagner and Nietzsche.

³⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur (Amherst, NY, 1998), 108.

moralistic strictures to 'vulgar mortals', its aural magnificence overawes Wotan's subjects – or flock – into cowering obeisance. In short, the denizens of this phantasmagoria are 'called gods without their being such'.⁴⁰ However, the words of Loge, the renegade demi-god, towards the end of *Das Rheingold* expose the illusion for what it really is:

Ihrem Ende eilen sie zu,
 die so stark im Bestehen sich wähen.
 Fast schäm' ich mich
 mit ihnen zu schaffen;
 zur leckenden Lohe
 mich wieder zu wandeln
 spür' ich lockende Lust.
 Sie aufzuzehren,
 die einst mich gezähmt,
 statt mit den blinden
 blöd zu vergeh'n –
 und wären es göttlichste Götter –
 nicht dumm dünkte mich das!

[They hasten to their end, / they who imagine themselves so strong and enduring. / I am almost ashamed / to associate myself with them; / I am tempted / to transform myself once again / into flickering flames. / To burn those / who once tamed me, / rather than to die foolishly / with the blind – / even though they be the most divine gods – / that seems not so foolish to me!]

Piercing the unsettling grandiosity of Valhalla's revels come the final words and poignant tones of the Rhinemaidens' lament:

Rheingold! Rheingold!
 Reines Gold!
 O leuchtete noch
 in der Tiefe dein laut' rer Tand!
 Traulich und treu
 ist's nur in der Tiefe:
 falsch und feig
 ist was dort oben sich freut!

[Rhinegold! Rhinegold! / Pure gold! / Would that your lustrous glitter / still shone in the depths! / Only in the depths / are there harmony and truth: / false and fated / is the rejoicing above!]⁴¹

With this scene, a death sentence has already been passed upon the Faith; the 'false consciousness' of Valhalla has been readily exposed.⁴² Whilst the self-deluding gods cannot yet see this, save for a brief display of unease from Wotan, the reality is just as clear to Loge and the audience as is the death of God to Nietzsche. Günter Metken, reflecting upon early presentations of Patrice Chéreau's celebrated centenary *Ring* at Bayreuth, commented: 'About this refuge of the Gods, no longer so intact as once it was, wafts

⁴⁰ Bloch, *Essays on the Philosophy of Music* (note 15), 62.

⁴¹ For the reading 'false and fated' I am indebted to Stewart Spencer, who points out in the annotation to his *Ring* translation (*Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington, London, 1993), note 35, that 'feig' echoes the Middle High German 'veige' (doomed to die).

⁴² This is not to say that a death sentence has been placed upon religion as such.

something of the unhealthy air of Venice, of the Vendramin Palace, of *Death in Venice*. It is one of those select visions of death the previous [19th] century summoned up in order to repress the rapacity of everyday life.⁴³

Theodor Adorno would have nodded his head sagely in agreement. What must now be done is to clear this air of *décadence* more effectively than Donner and his hammer of delusion. The situation left in Christendom's wake, wherein 'the slave has not become a freeman, but the freeman has become a slave', must be put right.⁴⁴ These are words from what we might term Wagner's Hellenistic period – more accurately, his *most* Hellenistic period, this strain of thought never being completely submerged in lugubrious pessimism – but they could equally well have been part of a Nietzschean excoriation of slave morality. Ernest Newman, in his diatribe against Nietzsche, writes of the 'old self-flattering German fantasy of Germans as spiritual heirs of Greece', somehow managing to forget that Wagner shared both enthusiasm and ambivalence in this respect with Nietzsche.⁴⁵ In Hegelian terms, we might say that Germany – even if Germany should consist only of Richard Wagner or Friedrich Nietzsche, and have nothing to do with the Second Reich – represented for both men the *Aufhebung* of Greece.

Nietzsche and Hegel

This brings us to Hegel himself, in particular to his *Philosophie der Geschichte*. It is not difficult to see in Siegfried a great deal of the Hegelian world-historical individual, particularly given the status of the *Philosophie der Geschichte* as the sole work of modern philosophy in Wagner's Dresden library.⁴⁶ When the impetuous young Volsung's sword, Notung, is fearlessly plunged into Fafner, the lazy *rentier*, hoarder of treasure, and it goes on to shatter Wotan's spear of legal authority, there are represented on the economic and political levels hopes both for the revolutionary sequestration and freeing of capital and for the anarchistic abolition of the state. Either of these events may stand as a moment to count as world-historical to the most exacting observer (even if they would be anathema to the accommodationist tendencies of Hegel's positive political philosophy):

a Moment which produces an Idea, a Moment which strives after and drives towards Truth. Historical men, *world-historical individuals* are those in whose purpose lies such a Universal Purpose. [...] They may be called *heroes* insofar as their purpose and calling have been created not by the [...] existing, sacrosanct order, but from another source, whose content is concealed and does not flourish in contemporary existence, by the Inner Spirit, still subterranean, which bursts through the shell of the external world, for it is a kernel different from that belonging to the shell.⁴⁷

One can readily divine what Nietzsche would have made of the idealist language in which this thought is expressed, but there is more than a little of the idea itself in his

⁴³ Günther Metken, 'Eine neue Ära der Bilder', *Programmheft der Bayreuther Festspiele*, 1978, iv, 1–9, and v, 1–11: iv.3.

⁴⁴ 'Die Kunst und die Revolution', *Richard Wagner: Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 4th edn, 10 vols. (Leipzig, 1907) [GS], iii.33.

⁴⁵ Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, 4 vols. (London, 1933), iv.338.

⁴⁶ Curt von Westernhagen, *Richard Wagners Dresdener Bibliothek 1842–1849: Neue Dokumente zur Geschichte seines Schaffens* (Wiesbaden, 1966), 93.

⁴⁷ Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Werke*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, 20 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1969–72), xii.45–6.

heroic 'symphony', *Zarathustra*. There is, however, an important difference. Nietzsche's prophet exhibits more consciousness of the significance of his acts than either the naive Siegfried or Hegel's typical world-historical individual; in this, at least, he stands closer to Siegmund, the elder Volsung hero.

Siegmund and the *Übermensch*, indeed Wotan at his finest, create their own values; they are not unconscious agents of the World-Spirit.⁴⁸ There nevertheless remains a strong affinity, part of a world-view far removed from – or, at the very least, sitting uneasily with – the anti-historical philosophy of Schopenhauer.⁴⁹ Neither Nietzsche nor the later Wagner is complimentary towards Hegel, but neither is able to shake him off completely, whatever the rhetoric – and, to be fair, it is often more than mere rhetoric – of Eternal Recurrence or renunciation of the Will. Nietzsche as well as Wagner must contend with an unresolved friction between Hegelian and Schopenhauerian elements in his thought; the historical outlook will not depart the stage nearly so readily as we might be led to believe by prophets of a so-called 'Age of Positivism'. After all, one of the most important subtexts – perhaps *the* most important subtext – of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* is that Hegel, very much like Spinoza in the eighteenth century, is in no way a 'dead dog' and will most definitely return.⁵⁰

Max Stirner and the death of Young Hegelianism

One of the most radical followers of Hegel in the intellectual generation preceding Marx and Wagner was Max Stirner, celebrated then as now for a single book, *Das Einzige und sein Eigentum* (The Ego and its Own). There has often been speculation as to whether Nietzsche knew Stirner's work, since so much of what Nietzsche and his successors have to say is pre-figured in this extraordinary book of 1844, the tract that sounded the death-knell of Young Hegelianism. Whilst Stirner is nowhere mentioned in Nietzsche's



Max Stirner.

Max Stirner
von Friedrich Engels,
London 1892.

⁴⁸ Cf. 'I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything.' (Max Stirner, *The Ego and its Own*, tr. Steven Byington, ed. David Leopold (Cambridge, 1995), 7) Patrice Chéreau has written the following in seeking to elucidate what he sees as the central issue of the *Ring*: 'Is it possible to speak of freedom with regard to someone who is unconscious of his freedom? Are not unconsciousness and freedom contradictory?' (Pierre Boulez and Patrice Chéreau, 'Commentaires sur "Mythologie et Idéologie"', *Programmheft der Bayreuther Festspiele*, 1977, vi, 1–19, 86–102 (p. 17))

⁴⁹ Cf. 'For we are of the opinion that anyone who imagines that the inner nature of the world can be historically comprehended [...] is still infinitely far from a philosophical knowledge of the world.' (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (note 16), i.273)

⁵⁰ To these 'resurrections', one might now add Jacques Derrida's reminder, in the wake of the apparent capitalist

'Max Stirner. Drawn from memory by Friedrich Engels, London 1892.'



Engels' caricature of the Young Hegelians. The captions read, from left to right: 'Ruge, Buhl, Nauwerck, [Bruno] Bauer, Wigand, [Edgar] Bauer, Stirner, Meyen, stranger, Koppen the Lieutenant'. The squirrel in the top left corner represents the Prussian minister Karl Friedrich von Eichhorn.

writings, the testimony of Franz Overbeck has been invoked to present a direct link.⁵¹ What is far less remarked upon is the possibility of Stirner's influence on Wagner, particularly in the *Ring*, let alone the consequent possibility of Wagner acting as a missing link in the intellectual chain from Stirner to Nietzsche. It is not even as if Stirner seemed a minor figure to contemporaries. Marx and Engels spent the greater part of *Die deutsche Ideologie* refuting Stirner, and Arnold Ruge described *Das Einzige und sein Eigentum* as 'the first readable book of philosophy Germany has produced'.⁵² Engels, moreover, would subsequently describe the erstwhile 'Sankt Max' as 'the prophet of contemporary anarchism – Bakunin [whom Wagner knew from the Dresden barricades] has taken a great deal from him', and wrote of Bakunin's 'blending him with Proudhon and [...] [labelling] the blend "anarchism"', pointing us to an obvious possible route to Wagner. Not only was the composer unquestionably acquainted with Proudhon's work, but he also heard Bakunin derive his 'whole new moral order of things' from 'the socialist theories of Proudhon and others'.⁵³ Although this might be thought to be going too far down the route of circumstantial evidence, it even happens that *Das Einzige und sein Eigentum* was first published in 1845, in Saxony: the very time at which and the very kingdom in which Wagner served as Kapellmeister.

Enough of circumstances: internal evidence is more compelling. George Bernard Shaw labelled Siegfried 'Bakunin'.⁵⁴ Without wishing so restrictively to allegorise, I

triumph of 1989, that Marx himself may be temporarily cowed but is far from defeated (*Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris, 1993)).

⁵¹ C.A. Bernoulli, *Franz Overbeck und Friedrich Nietzsche: Eine Freundschaft*, 2 vols. (Jena, 1908), i.135–7, 148–53, 238–9, 427–30.

⁵² Letter to his mother, 17 Dec. 1844, in Arnold Ruge, *Briefwechsel und Tagebuchblätter aus den Jahren 1825–1880*, ed. Paul Nerrlich, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1886), i.386.

⁵³ Engels, 'Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy' (note 33), 343, 360; Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin (Munich, 1963); tr. Andrew Gray as *My Life*, ed. Mary Whittall (Cambridge, 1981), 373.

⁵⁴ George Bernard Shaw, 'The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Niblung's Ring', *Major Critical Essays*, ed. Michael Holroyd (Harmondsworth, 1986), 177–308 (p. 227).

should contend that there is symbolically a great deal of Stirner's egoist – however imperfectly understood or even travestied – in Wagner's unsuccessful hero. It should be stressed that Stirner's 'egoism' is not readily translatable into Wagner's pejorative use of the word, which stands much closer to that of the *Vormärz* 'true socialists'. Whilst it would be wrong to jump to the other extreme, however, and simply to characterise Stirner's egoist – or Siegfried, for that matter – as a Nietzschean *Übermensch*, there is a more positive side (at least when Stirner is approached with a degree of sympathy, not the easiest of tasks for many readers).

Siegfried is a figure of opposition towards established authority. In *Das Einzige und sein Eigentum*, Stirner stands opposed to every conceivable form of authority, each one a more or less covert religious ideology. Conventional religion, the state, the family, truth, even love and freedom, are seen as alienating abstractions. Clearly there are parallels here with the *Ring*, and not just with regard to Siegfried. Wagner, as we have seen, is openly hostile towards the bourgeois family, particularly as held together by marriage. As Stirner had pointed out, and Nietzsche would repeat, criticism such as that of Loge might have chipped away at Christian theology, even at the Christian state, but Christian-bourgeois morality remained as entrenched as ever, perhaps even more so as its underpinnings fell away:

Take note how a 'moral man' behaves, who today often thinks he is through with God and throws off Christianity as a bygone thing. If you ask him whether he has ever doubted that the copulation of brother and sister is incest, that monogamy is the truth of marriage, that filial piety is a sacred duty, then a moral shudder will come over him at the conception of one's being allowed to touch his wife as his sister also. And whence this shudder? Because he *believes* in those moral commandments. [...] Much as he rages against the *pious* Christians, he himself has nevertheless as thoroughly remained a Christian, namely a *moral* Christian. In the form of morality, Christianity holds him prisoner [...] Monogamy is to be something sacred, and he who may live in bigamy is punished as a *criminal*; he who commits incest suffers as a *criminal*. [...] So then, the religious heroes of faith are zealous for the 'sacred God', the moral ones for the 'sacred good'.⁵⁵

This closely resembles not only the conflict outlined above between Siegmund and the pious, unbending morality of Fricka, but also Nietzsche's arguments many years later, when he attacks these very same moral fanatics, of whom he takes George Eliot to be an exemplar. 'G. Eliot. – They have rid themselves of the Christian God, and thus believe that they must cling all the more firmly to Christian morality [...] In England, one must, in response to the smallest emancipation from theology, reassert one's position in awe-inspiring fashion as a moral fanatic.'⁵⁶

For Stirner, Wagner and Nietzsche, morality as law is just as restricting and fallacious as is political or religious observance as law. Siegmund and Wotan, then, perhaps even Brünnhilde, have something of Stirner's 'voluntary egoist' about them, whilst the unthinking Siegfried is closer to the 'involuntary' form. Fricka might win her battle with Wotan, and force him to sacrifice the Nietzschean 'immoralist', Siegmund, but Wotan's progressive inclination will triumph in the longer term over moralistic *Sittlichkeit*. Siegfried, born of the incestuous, adulterous union of Siegmund and Sieglinde, will

⁵⁵ Stirner, *The Ego and its Own* (note 48), 45.

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, 'Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen', §5, KSA vi.113.

shatter the spear on which moral and legal commandments are engraved, Valhalla, in any case, having been long ago exposed as a fraudulent fiction of domination. Siegfried needs to shatter Wotan's spear. Or, in Schopenhauer's words, 'the intellect is physical, not metaphysical'; it 'exists merely to serve the Will'.⁵⁷ We see in Siegfried a remarkably proto-Nietzschean conception of ideas as tools of the will to power, as opposed to Hegel's view of the passions as agents of ideas and ultimately of Spirit.

Fricka, on the other hand, she of Stirner's 'pious shudder', will reappear only as a redundant deity to whom fruitless sacrifices are offered in the ill-fated nuptials of *Götterdämmerung*. Chéreau writes, 'One is almost compelled to read *Götterdämmerung* as a succession of the wild rituals of a people in search of a religion or a morality who can only celebrate cults as a palliative for the absence of divinity.'⁵⁸ The 'involuntary egoist' has brought about a situation in which Nietzsche would feel more at home. This is not the England of George Eliot, for 'With us it is different. When one relinquishes one's Christian belief, one deprives oneself of the *right* to Christian morality.' It is 'immoral to say: "What is good for one person is good for another."' In other words, it is time to 'let go of your hypocritical endeavours, your ridiculous mania to be something other than what you are'.⁵⁹ It is time to join with Siegmund and Siegfried in the rejection of authority, be it as widely accepted as that of Agamemnon in the *Iliad* or Wotan in the *Ring*, and to shatter the sceptre or spear. For society, not isolation, 'is our *state of nature*', certainly an impression furthered by the depiction of the brutal society of Hunding in *Die Walküre* and the nihilistic 'civilisation' of the Gibichungs in *Götterdämmerung*. Any union must resist such crystallisation, proceeding no further than a coalition (*Vereinigung*). 'The state wants to make something out of man, therefore live in it only *made* men; every one who wants to be his own self is its opponent and is nothing.'⁶⁰ Wagner and Nietzsche would find themselves in such a situation *vis-à-vis* the Bismarckian Reich. They would both feel compelled to adopt a 'pathos of distance' towards the new order.

Wagner and Nietzsche: thoughts in conclusion

In conclusion, Wagner is a figure of crucial, positive importance in the development and formulation of Nietzsche's mature philosophy. The above is intended only as an introductory assessment; there is doubtless much more to be said, both on the areas I have considered and upon other topics. What I hope it will help to show is that an understanding of Wagner is crucial to an understanding of Nietzsche, and not only in order to appreciate the virulence of Nietzsche's reaction towards his erstwhile mentor.

⁵⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Some Observations on the Antithesis of the Thing-in-itself and the Phenomenon', *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, tr. E.F.J. Payne, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1974), ii.97.

⁵⁸ Boulez and Chéreau, 'Commentaires sur "Mythologie et Idéologie"' (note 48), 99.

⁵⁹ Stirner, *The Ego and its Own* (note 48), 149; Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, §221, KSA v.156.

⁶⁰ Stirner, *The Ego and its Own* (note 48), 271, 201–2. Regarding the nihilism of *Götterdämmerung* – or rather of the world depicted therein – Chéreau writes perceptively that this 'is in every instance a world in which values no longer exist, which ought to be yet another element of its relationship to the modern world. Siegfried and Brünnhilde are probably the only ones who still believe in anything [...] But now Siegfried assaults Brünnhilde; Notung is no longer good for anything but the execution of misdeeds and the concealment of lies.' (Boulez and Chéreau, 'Commentaires sur "Mythologie et Idéologie"' (note 48), 99)

There are also implications for the classical thesis of a *coupure épistémologique* in Nietzsche's thought. I do not wish to claim that the Nietzsche of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, let alone that of *Götzen-Dämmerung*, is identical with the writer of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. Yet the other extremity of a once-and-for-all rupture seems equally untenable. Maybe it is rarely stated so baldly as the parallel Althusserian claim for Marx; perhaps for that very reason it has remained more difficult to lay to rest.⁶¹ The 'unsystematic' nature of Nietzsche's thought, to which I referred in my introductory remarks, is thereby called into question. To present Nietzsche as a Cambridge analytical philosopher *manqué* would be ludicrous, but the continuities in his writing – of which the 'Wagnerian' influences are but one example – show the need for some refinement, at the very least, of the 'unsystematic' interpretation. The manner, or 'voice', of Nietzsche's delivery may mislead those readers more attuned to the sobriety of logical symbol or syllogism. To warn against this danger may help to combat the complacent claim, still heard even today, that Nietzsche is 'really' more poet than philosopher and thus can safely be dismissed whilst philosophers attend to the more pressing agenda of their Anglo-Saxon inheritance. Moreover, if we address Henry Staten's 'psychodialectical' exploration of the dialectic between Nietzsche's 'conscious' project and the 'erotic influences' upon his writings in the light of the arguments advanced in this essay, the Wagnerian 'erotic influence' may be seen in a rather different, more complex light. Wagner is surely the prime candidate for a Freudian approach to Nietzsche's writings.⁶²

Likewise, knowledge of Nietzsche's work is of vital importance for the study of Wagner reception in more ways than has generally been recognised. Wagner's influence in this area is far from a merely negative one. Nietzsche's position is equivocal, and not simply in the sense of Thomas Mann's 'panegyric with the wrong label'.⁶³ And for a figure so preoccupied as Nietzsche with issues of genealogy, it seems only right that we should seek out the roots to his own ideas. Nietzsche may have hurled insults in just about every direction, but that does not mean that there was no 'European feminism (or idealism, if one would rather hear it that way)' in what he had to say.⁶⁴ As he mockingly writes of Hegel, "'Contradiction moves the world; all things are themselves in contradiction'" – for we [Germans] are, even in the realm of logic, pessimists.⁶⁵ *Pace* Nietzsche, no one can justly call his path totally '*his alone*'.⁶⁶ Such a conclusion, indeed, is part of the ultimate message of the *Ring*. Siegmund and Siegfried fail, this failure thereby pointing the way forward to a very different type of hero, 'enlightened through compassion'. Enlightenment can take many forms. Logically, there is no compulsion to proceed via the offices of Christian–Schopenhauerian compassion. Be that as it may, the road of Stirner-like solipsism swiftly comes to an end, with an empty pot at the end of the rainbow – a matter appreciated only too well by Wagner and Nietzsche.



⁶¹ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, tr. Ben Brewster (New York, 1969); Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, tr. Ben Brewster (London, 1970).

⁶² Henry Staten, *Nietzsche's Voice* (Ithaca, NY, 1990).

⁶³ Thomas Mann, 'Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner', *Essays of Three Decades*, tr. H.T. Lowe-Porter (London, 1947), 307–52 (p. 314).

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, 'Morgenröte', Vorrede, §4, KSA iii.16.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, §3, KSA iii.15.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, §2, KSA iii.12.