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“A Door Left Open”: Tracing Shakespeare’s Influence in Richard Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*

Abstract

With the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the “total work of art,” German opera composer Richard Wagner sought the perfect artistic synthesis of music and dramatic theater. Crucial to this vision was the idea that music and drama should be equally well constructed. However, while a considerable amount of Wagner scholarship has focused on the music Wagner composed, less has explored his methods for creating complex and psychologically rich characters. Richard Wagner the librettist spent considerable time and effort reading and studying the works of William Shakespeare, as evidenced by his wife’s journals, the contents of his library at Bayreuth, and his personal accounts. In this thesis, I explore resonances between the dramatic works of William Shakespeare (specifically *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, and *Macbeth*) and characters in Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. This thesis delves first into the father/son relationship, examining how sons react to their father’s “Call to Action” through a study of Hagen/Alberich and Hamlet/the Ghost. Next, it inspects the father/daughter relationship through a daughter acting as witness to her father’s “Inability to Act” through Brünnhilde/Wotan and Miranda/Prospero. Finally, it probes ways female characters experience regret for actions they’ve taken, investigating “Feminine Madness,” guilt, and societal expectations through a comparison of Brünnhilde and two of Shakespeare’s female characters, Ophelia and Lady Macbeth.

Document Type

Thesis

Degree Name

M.A.

Department

Music

First Advisor

Jack Sheinbaum, Ph.D.

Second Advisor

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Third Advisor

Sarah Morelli

Keywords

Der Ring des Nibelungen, Götterdämmerung, Shakespeare, Wagner, Walkure

Subject Categories

German Language and Literature | Music

Publication Statement

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“A Door Left Open”: Tracing Shakespeare’s Influence in Richard Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Lindsay E. Bachman

August 2017

Advisor: Jack Sheinbaum

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ABSTRACT

With the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the "total work of art," German opera composer Richard Wagner sought the perfect artistic synthesis of music and dramatic theater. Crucial to this vision was the idea that music and drama should be equally well constructed. However, while a considerable amount of Wagner scholarship has focused on the music Wagner composed, less has explored his methods for creating complex and psychologically rich characters. Richard Wagner the librettist spent considerable time and effort reading and studying the works of William Shakespeare, as evidenced by his wife's journals, the contents of his library at Bayreuth, and his personal accounts. In this thesis, I explore resonances between the dramatic works of William Shakespeare (specifically *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, and *Macbeth*) and characters in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. This thesis delves first into the father/son relationship, examining how sons react to their father's "Call to Action" through a study of Hagen/Alberich and Hamlet/the Ghost. Next, it inspects the father/daughter relationship through a daughter acting as witness to her father's "Inability to Act" through Brünnhilde/Wotan and Miranda/Prospero. Finally, it probes ways female characters experience regret for actions they've taken, investigating "Feminine Madness," guilt, and societal expectations through a comparison of Brünnhilde and two of Shakespeare's female characters, Ophelia and Lady Macbeth.

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INTRODUCTION

It is no secret to the music world that Richard Wagner considered himself a man of status, destined to take his place in history beside the great artists he admired. Wagner wrote prolifically about his love of Beethoven, Goethe, Schopenhauer, and other great German artists and thinkers. However, for all of his nationalism and passion for “superior German culture,” Wagner had a strong appreciation for William Shakespeare, an Englishman. And yet, despite extensive Wagner scholarship, few examinations of Shakespeare’s influence on Wagner’s dramaturgy exist.

In *Opera & Drama (Oper und Drama)*, Wagner stated that opera composers and librettists had focused too much on the music, abandoning the high-caliber example Shakespeare’s plays had set for them to the detriment of the art itself. While Wagner admired Greek drama for the way it fused music and drama together, in Wagner’s mind, Shakespeare’s dramatic writing had surpassed theirs; in abandoning the Greek Chorus and replacing it with psychologically interesting subordinate characters who carry the plot forward, uninterrupted, through the action of the drama, Shakespeare had advanced spoken drama beyond the Greeks. For Wagner, Shakespeare’s plays were the pinnacle of spoken dramatic art.

Wagner believed that, because Shakespeare had mastered the medium, subsequent dramatists had spent the years since Shakespeare's death in "unexampled confusion,"¹ similarly to how composers had felt after Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. This confusion could be remedied, Wagner asserts, by realizing that "a door had been left open in Shakespeare's drama,"² a space that could only be filled by adding extraordinary music perfectly crafted to well-constructed, psychologically developed characters living a dramatically relevant, well-written story: the fusion of Beethoven-quality music with Shakespeare-quality dramatic writing. It is because of this passion that it is possible to trace some of Shakespeare's influence in Wagner's operatic tetralogy, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

It is impossible, without Wagner's own admissions, to know how much of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was influenced by specific dramatic moments in plays by William Shakespeare. I am not asserting in this thesis that Wagner based his *Ring* operas on specific Shakespearean works. Rather, I am suggesting that we use moments in Shakespeare's plays to inform and interpret certain moments in Wagner's *Ring*, even if a specific comparison was not Wagner's intention. In examining scenes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, and *Macbeth*, and comparing the characters and context with those in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, it is possible to view *Der Ring des*

¹ Richard Wagner, *Opera & Drama*, trans. W. Ashton Ellis, 1893. Reprint (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 234.

² *Ibid.*

Nibelungen through a Shakespearean lens, allowing scholars to examine Wagner's great work in a new light.

CHAPTER ONE: WAGNER, SHAKESPEARE, AND DRAMA

Richard Wagner was not shy about his admiration for William Shakespeare; however, there have been few scholarly publications examining the influences of Shakespeare on Wagner's "music dramas." While there has been some analysis of Shakespeare as it relates to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and Wagner's first dramatic work, the rarely performed *Die Liebesverbot*, there is relatively nothing on Shakespearean influences present in Wagner's tragedies, specifically *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, despite the fact that Wagner held tragedies in high esteem.³ In his autobiography *My Life (Mein Leben)*, for example, Richard Wagner credits his desire to write poetry and, later music, to exposure to Shakespeare's dramas. He admits that, as a young man, Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar, Macbeth, Hamlet... excited and stirred me

³ Modern scholarly examinations of this topic are few and far between. One direct comparison I've found was from 1922. Edgar Istel and Theodore Baker examined Wagner's admiration for Shakespeare, but shied away from drawing parallels between Wagner's operas and specific Shakespearean works. They do discuss how both Wagner and Shakespeare were gifted "stage crafters" who cared about sets and scenery. They discuss Wagner's *Die Liebesverbot* and briefly mention *Rienzi*, but do not go deeper. A second source, *The Influence of Shakespeare on Richard Wagner* by Margaret Inwood, also discusses Wagner's appreciation for Shakespeare. While she looks for similarities between Shakespeare's and Wagner's styles, the book is out of print and difficult to locate. Edgar Istel and Theodore Baker, "Wagner and Shakespeare." *The Musical Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1922): 495-509. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/737855>. Margaret Inwood, *The Influence of Shakespeare on Richard Wagner* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

deeply.”⁴ It was his love for these great plays that motivated him to attempt his first tragedy when he was still a teenager, an unknown work that was never published, but that he discusses in his autobiography. In *My Life*, Wagner emphasizes how important Shakespeare was to his dramatic development. Wagner writes:

I had not omitted the smallest detail that could give this plot its proper coloring, and I had drawn on...my acquaintance with Lear and Macbeth, to furnish my drama with the most vivid situations. But one of the chief characteristics of its poetical form I took from the pathetic, humorous, and powerful language of Shakespeare.⁵

Wagner’s love of Shakespeare did not fade as Wagner aged. Wagner often remarked to his wife, Cosima, how moved he was by Shakespeare’s works. She recorded the following in her diary:

At lunch [Richard] said a true demonstration of how utterly Shakespeare’s characters are living persons, and just as incomprehensible, is given in Hamlet’s monologue. ‘When one sets out consciously to write a monologue about suicide, something emerges like Cato’s monologue in Addison; but Shakespeare’s is as incomprehensible as Nature itself.’⁶

Although Wagner was, at moments, critical of Shakespeare in his *Opera & Drama*, mostly due to the fact that, in his opinion, his mastery of poetry and dramatic situation were not served well by the theaters he worked with, he also credited Shakespeare with the founding of the modern theater, calling his plays “the topmost

⁴ Richard Wagner, *My Life*, ed. Mary Whittall, trans. Andrew Gray, Vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 51.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 38-9.

⁶ Cosima Wagner, *Cosima Wagner's Diaries: 1869-1877*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, trans. Geoffrey Skelton, Vol. 1, 2 vols. (New York, New York: R. Piper & Co., 1976), 320.

flower of that Drama which sprang directly from the Romance.”⁷ In fact, Wagner pays Shakespeare the highest compliment he could in *Opera & Drama*: he credits Shakespeare’s plays as a precedent for his “Artwork of the Future,” much in the way he uses Beethoven to justify his “new music.” Wagner states:

With the fullest necessity did *Shakespeare’s Drama* spring from Life and our historic evolution: his creation was just as much conditioned by the nature of our poetic art as the Drama of the Future, in strict keeping with its nature, will be born from the satisfaction of a need which Shakespearean Drama has aroused but not yet stilled.⁸

Wagner refers to Beethoven in a similar way, as the discoverer of an element of Wagner’s “Music of the Future.” He explains that “the error of Beethoven was that of Columbus, who merely meant to seek out a new way to the old known land of India and discovered a new world instead.”⁹ Both Beethoven and Shakespeare were masters of their respective crafts and Wagner sees himself as the man destined to unite their genius into one “Superart:” “music drama.” Additionally, Wagner believed that both Beethoven and Shakespeare’s masterpieces had been misinterpreted by his contemporaries and were, therefore, not being properly served. Both artists, Wagner asserts, were able to use their respective mediums to honestly convey the depths of the human soul, but, because they did not unite, their art was still left wanting.

Wagner appreciated the emotional honesty of Beethoven’s music and felt that his contemporaries had misunderstood the direction Beethoven’s music had been guiding

⁷ Richard Wagner, *Opera & Drama*, trans. W. Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 124.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

them in. Beethoven utilized music as a means to express the angst of the human condition, a topic that Wagner felt a deep connection to, especially after his first exposure to pessimistic philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer in 1854. Beethoven's music, Wagner claims, is honest because, rather than simply catering to the tastes of his time, Beethoven wrote music that was considered "madness": it was this "mad" music that demonstrated the chaos and fear in the heart of a man who had truly suffered. Wagner writes in *Opera & Drama*:

But from the time when, in concord with the moving sorrows of [Beethoven's] life, there awoke in the artist a longing for distinct expression of specific, characteristically individual emotions,- as though to unbosom himself to the intelligent sympathy of fellow men,- and this longing grew into an ever more compulsive force; from the time when he began to care less and less about merely making music, about expressing himself agreeably, enthrallingly or inspirationally in general within that music; and instead thereof, was driven by the Necessity of his inner being to employ his art in bringing to sure and sizable expression a definite Content that absorbed his thoughts and feelings;- thenceforth begins the agony of his deep-stirred man and imperatively straying artist.¹⁰

Wagner felt that his contemporaries had missed Beethoven's point: rather than follow the path that Beethoven was leading them toward with his Ninth Symphony (the fusion of vocal and absolute music), they tried either to copy Beethoven's symphonies in one way or another or didn't write symphonies at all. In Wagner's mind, he was the only one who truly understood Beethoven's discovery: it was his duty to take the next step, to use music to inspire real, raw emotion through "absolute music's" fusion with poetry in his "music drama."

¹⁰ Ibid., 71-72.

Like Beethoven, Wagner felt that Shakespeare had been abused by 19th century society. Shakespeare's plays had, in the generation prior to Wagner's, become incredibly popular in Germany. This popularity provided not only Wagner's exposure to Shakespearean drama, but also Wagner's determination to rescue Shakespeare's works from their perceived mistreatment. As with any art, Shakespeare's popularity brought with it a slew of poorly done, badly informed productions, ones in which the plays were rewritten or the text was severely altered. Wagner's issue was not only with the terribly inaccurate productions of Shakespeare, but also with German theater as a whole. He says the following in *Opera & Drama*:

While the whole of Europe threw itself on Art, still Germany abode a meditant barbarian. Only what had already outlived itself outside took flight to Germany, upon its soil to blossom through an after-summer. English Comedians, whom the performers of Shakespearean dramas had robbed of their bread at home, came over to Germany to play their grotesquely pantomimic antics before the Folk: not till long after, when *it* had likewise faded out of England, followed Shakespeare's Drama itself; German players, fleeing from the ferule of their wearisome dramatic tutors, laid hands on it and trimmed it for their use.¹¹

As he did with Beethoven, Wagner saw himself as the true heir to Shakespeare's poetic legacy, that his "music dramas" were the natural evolution of Shakespeare's groundwork.

Wagner asserts:

Opera was thus the premature bloom on an unripe fruit, grown from an unnatural, artificial soil. With what the Italian and French Drama *began*, to wit the outer form, to that must the newer Drama first attain by organic evolution from within, upon the path of Shakespeare's Drama; then first will ripen, also, the natural fruit of the Musical Drama.¹²

¹¹ Ibid., 134-35.

¹² Ibid., 133-34.

He states that Germany has yet to have a Shakespeare of its own, lamenting, “We have indeed a *Luther*, whose art soared up to the Religious Lyric; but we have no Shakespeare.”¹³ Wagner believed that, through the fusion of high-caliber, Shakespearean drama with emotional, Beethoven-esque music, he could elevate art far above what either master had managed to achieve on his own.

Thus, Wagner saw himself as a ‘Dramatist,’ not simply as a composer. His concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* was one that advocated the fusion of all arts into a “total artwork.” In Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, visual art, poetry, theater, and music are combined to create one perfect form of art: Wagner wanted to take the best of all of the above genres and merge them into a new form of drama. In ways, Wagner wanted to recreate ancient Greek drama with his *Gesamtkunstwerk*; he perceived ancient Greek drama as the purest, most admirable form of art as it had been the original inspiration for opera during the Renaissance. However, Wagner believed that it could be improved upon. As music had evolved over the centuries and become more complex, Wagner asserted that drama and poetry had also evolved. His *Gesamtkunstwerk* would encompass the best aspects of music and of dramatic writing at the height of their development, while harkening back to the synthesis the ancient Greeks achieved.

One means by which ancient Greek drama could be improved upon was by eliminating the chorus. Wagner lauded Shakespeare’s ability to create psychologically rich, compelling characters that moved the drama forward without the use of a chorus. In Wagner’s mind, the chorus was a less developed means of communicating the plot and,

¹³ Ibid., 134.

by getting rid of it, Shakespeare had elevated his works above that of the ancient Greeks.

Wagner writes in *Opera & Drama*:

The tragedy of Shakespeare stands incontestably above that of the Greeks; in the sense that it has succeeded in dispensing with the necessity of the chorus, for purposes of technique. Shakespeare accomplishes this by means of sheer personal participation in the action on the part of subordinate characters; who act for themselves and entirely from the individual necessities caused by their opinions and situations; just as the principal hero. Even their apparent subordination in the artistic framework consists only in remoter points of contact between them and the principal hero, and does not at all proceed from any technical depreciation, on principle, of characters which are subordinate; for whatever the most unimportant personage shares in the main action, he expresses himself in a perfectly free manner, according to his personal characteristics.¹⁴

Wagner employs this technique in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, using subordinate characters to move the story forward through their psychological and physical needs. There is no chorus in his opera, save for a crowd of Gibichungs in *Götterdämmerung*, but even they are present because they add realism to the act, not because they're needed to explain the story quickly to advance the plot. All of Wagner's characters in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* are complex, regardless of whether they are on stage for one scene or for three operas, with back stories and psychology revealed through relationships with other characters and through leitmotifs, musical motifs with specific meanings, that sound when they are on stage.

Wagner's library reveals his life-long love for Shakespeare. Kristina Unger, a curator of the Library Services of Wagner's Wahnfried house, sent me a list of over 200 titles present in Wagner's personal library upon the date of his death. Using this raw data,

¹⁴ Ibid., 97.

I was able to translate and sort the titles, organizing each book by topic. It is from this list that I was able to ascertain the scope of his Shakespearean library. Wagner had multiple editions of Shakespeare's anthologies and plays in his library at Wahnfried House when he died. Wagner's library contained 28 titles relating to Shakespeare, his life, and his works. He had multiple editions of Shakespeare's dramas, in both English and German, biographies of Shakespeare's life, and editions of his sonnets in English and in German. These works are documented in the below chart:¹⁵

Title	Author	Date	Description
<i>Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Schlegelschen Shakespeare</i>	Bernays, Michael	1872	German scholar Michael Bernay's analysis of translator Wilhelm Schlegel's interpretation and German translations of Shakespeare's works.
<i>Shakespeare: sein Leben und seine Werke</i>	Genée, Rudolph	1872	A biography of Shakespeare and an analysis of his works in German.
<i>Nachträge zu Shakespeares Werken</i>	Ortlepp, Ernst	1840	Additional supplements to Shakespeare's work by scholar Ernst Ortlepp, in German.
<i>Shakespeare's dramatische Werke.</i>	Schlegel, August W.	1874	A translation and analysis of William Shakespeare's plays by German translator and scholar, August W. Schlegel.

¹⁵ I have chosen not to include in this chart scores of fellow composers' settings of Shakespeare to music as well as analyses of these scores, as they were numerous and as I will not be exploring the ways fellow composers' interpretations of Shakespeare influenced Wagner in this thesis. The list of books I relieved from Whanfried House was comprised of titles, authors, and translators/editors, but lacked detailed publication information. I used WorldCat.org to obtain dates of publication for these texts but was unable to locate dates for a small number of books.

<i>Nachträge zu Shakespeares Werken</i>	Schlegel, August W.	Unknown	Additional supplements to Shakespeare's work by scholar August W. Schlegel, in German.
<i>Shakespeare as put forth in 1623: a reprint of William Shakespeares comedies, histories & tragedies / published according to the true original copies</i>	Shakespeare, William	1864	An English edition of William Shakespeare's plays, published in 1864. The book reprinted Shakespeare's works as he originally published them, without editors or translators.
<i>The Works of William Shakespeare</i>	Shakespeare, William (Alexander Dyce Edition)	1877	A collection of Shakespeare's works in the original English.
<i>The works of William Shakespeare in nine volumes: the text revised by Alexander Dyce</i>	Shakespeare, William (Edited by Alexander Dyce).	1875	An English edition of William Shakespeare's works, edited and analyzed by scholar Alexander Dyce.
<i>Nachträge zu Shakespeares Werken / v. Wilhelm Schlegel und Ludwig Tieck; übers. v. Ernst Ortlepp.</i>	Shakespeare, William (Originally translated by August W. Schelegel and Ludwig Tieck, then edited by Ernst Ortlepp).	1840	An edition of August W. Schlegel's and Ludwig Tieck's translations and analysis of William Shakespeare's plays, edited and revised by Ernst Ortlepp.
<i>Shakespeare's dramatische Werke</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by August W. Schelegel and Wilhelm Tieck)	1871	An edition of August W. Schlegel's translations and analysis of William Shakespeare's plays, with input from fellow scholar and translator Wilhelm Tieck.
<i>Shakespeare's dramatische Werke / nach der Uebers v. August Wilhelm Schlegel u. Ludwig Tieck sorgfältig revidier durch die dt. Shakespeare Gesellschaft</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by August W. Schelegel and Wilhelm Tieck, then re-edited by the German Shakespeare Company).	1876-77	An edition of August W. Schlegel's and Wilhelm Tieck's translations and analysis of William Shakespeare's plays, edited and revised by the German Shakespeare Company.

<i>Shakespeare's dramatische Werke</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by August W. Schelegel)	1853	An additional edition of August W. Schlegel's translations and analysis of William Shakespeare's plays.
<i>William Shakespeare's dramatische Werke / übers. v. Friedrich Bodenstedt nach der Textrevision von Nicolaus Delius</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by Friedrich Bodenstedt, then revised by Nicolaus Delius)	1878	Friedrich Bodenstedt's translation of William Shakespeare's plays revised by Nicolaus Delius, one of the most significant English specialists and Shakespeare researchers in 19 th century Germany.
<i>William Shakespeare's Sonette in deutscher Nachbildung</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by Friedrich Bodenstedt)	1873	An additional edition of Friedrich Bodenstedt's translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, re-published in 1862.
<i>William Shakespeare's Dramatische Werke, V. 2</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by Friedrich Bodenstedt)	1871	An additional edition of Friedrich Bodenstedt's translations of Shakespeare's dramatic plays, the second of 2 volumes.
<i>William Shakespeare's Dramatische Werke, V. 1</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by Friedrich Bodenstedt)	1871	An additional edition of Friedrich Bodenstedt's translations of Shakespeare's dramatic plays, the first of 2 volumes.
<i>William Shakespeare's Sonette in deutscher Nachbildung.</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by Friedrich Bodenstedt)	1866	A translation of Shakespeare's sonnets into German.
<i>William Shakespeare's Dramatische Werke.</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by Friedrich Bodenstedt)	1872	A translation of Shakespeare's plays into German.
<i>Othello, der Mohr von Venedig</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by Friedrich Bodenstedt)	1867	Shakespeare's play <i>Othello, the Moor of Venice</i> , as translated by Friedrich Bodenstedt.

<i>Shakespeare's dramatische Werke</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by Hugo Ulrich)	Unknown	An edition of Hugo Ulrich's translations of Shakespeare's dramatic plays.
<i>Shakespeares Gedichte</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by Karl Simrock)	Unknown	An edition of Shakespeare's poetry translated into German by Karl Simrock.
<i>Shakespeares Gedichte</i>	Shakespeare, William (Translated by Karl Simrock)	Unknown	A second edition of Shakespeare's poetry translated into German by Karl Simrock.
<i>Shakespeare's Dramatische Werke.</i>	Shakespeare, William (translated by the German Shakespeare Society)	1854	A translation of Shakespeare's plays into German.
<i>Die Quellen des Shakespeare in Booklen, Märchen und Sagen</i>	Simrock, Karl	Unknown	A scholarly analysis of stories, fairy tales, and sagas that influenced Shakespeare and served as sources for his works, as researched and analyzed by Karl Simrock.
<i>Shakespeare's Vorschule / hrsg. u. mit Vorreden begleitet v. Ludwig Tieck.</i>	Tieck, Ludwig	1823	An edited, earlier edition of Tieck's biography and analysis of Shakespeare's life and works.
<i>Shakespeare's vorschule</i>	Tieck, Ludwig	1823-29	A biography and analysis of Shakespeare's life and works by Ludwig Tieck.
<i>Shakespeare's dramatische Werke</i>	Tieck, Ludwig	1874	A scholarly analysis of Shakespeare's works by Ludwig Tieck.
<i>Shakespeare's dramatische Werke</i>	Tieck, Ludwig	1874	A second copy of the scholarly analysis of Shakespeare's works by Ludwig Tieck.

Wagner collected these titles throughout his life and read the most current scholarship on Shakespeare, evident by his owning of multiple editions of a given scholar or translator's work. He was interested in both the plays themselves and in their inspiration, as well as in Shakespeare's life and in his poetry and sonnets.

Given Wagner's clear and extensive interest in Shakespeare, what aspects of Shakespeare's drama did Wagner utilize? Asking this question will give insight into what one could expect to find in his *Ring des Nibelungen*. I have chosen to focus on the idea of Shakespeare's "Tragic Hero" for this analysis, as the concept of the tragic hero exists in Shakespeare's works, in ancient Greek tragedies, and in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. It is a well established fact that there are similarities between Shakespeare's tragic hero and those present in Greek mythology. However, the main difference is perhaps best explained by poet W. H. Auden, who observed the following about Shakespeare's *Othello* in one of his lectures on Shakespeare, given in 1946 at Manhattan's New School for Social Research:

The particular kind of tragedy Shakespeare writes differs from Greek tragedy. Both assume that the tragic figure is a great or good man suffering from a flaw that brings him to destruction. If one asks, what is the matter with the Greek character, the answer is *hubris*, which is not translatable by our word *pride*. Hubris is the belief that one is omnipotent, a god. This doesn't cause a radical difference in the way you behave, but the tragedy is the Gods' punishment for a man's feeling like this. The envy of the Gods is aroused when someone powerful – a power derived from them – should claim to be their equal. The Gods show the heroes that they aren't. The tragic heroes in Greek drama must therefore be great men, in a worldly sense. Members of the chorus in Greek tragedy can't be heroes. The whole point in a Greek tragedy is that the hero and his tragic fate are exceptional. Shakespeare's tragic characters, on the other hand, suffer from the Christian sin of pride: knowing you aren't God, but trying to become Him – a sin of which any of us is capable. Hubris is the manifestation of overweening self-confidence, of over-security. Pride is the

manifestation of a lack of security, of the anxiety that is due to lack of faith, and of a defiance of one's finite limitations as a human being. It is a form of despair.¹⁶

This distinction between the Greek *hubris* and the Christian *pride* is important because Wagner's tragic heroes follow Shakespeare's rather than the Greek model: Wagner's Wotan, as I will explore next, is a character who experiences an overwhelming sense of anxiety and fear of his own limitations, rather than bullish self-confidence. It is this anxiety that causes his fall, not exceptional faith in his own power: Wotan, though a god, follows a very human, Shakespearean path.

First and foremost, we must draw a distinction between Wagner's Wotan and the mythological figure, Odin, on which he is based. Wagner took inspiration from Norse and Germanic mythology, from the German epic *Nibelungenlied*, the *Poetic Edda* and *Prose Edda*, and the *Volsunga saga*. Odin is described in the *Poetic Edda* in the *Hávamál* (translated from the Old Norse as "Sayings of the High One"), as being all-powerful, the King of the Gods and ruler of the mythical realm. He is a seer, a man of wisdom who uses his power for the benefit of the world. He is also the God of Poetry, Battle, and Death.¹⁷ Odin's power is never in question in the original mythology; he reigns supreme above gods and men, manipulating heroes and guiding humanity's path with omnipotent certainty.

¹⁶ W.H Auden, *Lectures on Shakespeare: Critical Edition*, ed. Arthur C. Kirsch, comp. Arthur C. Kirsch (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, September 29, 2002), 195.

¹⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. "Germanic religion and mythology," accessed May 10, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Germanic-religion-and-mythology>.

Wagner's Wotan differs from the mythological Odin in critical ways. Firstly, Wotan's power is not absolute. His influence is based on his wit, on the treaties and laws he has created. Therefore, Wotan's power always feels somewhat insecure. This insecurity drives him to try to solidify his authority and position. Throughout the *Ring* operas, we see Wotan struggling with moments of powerlessness; we see him forced to compromise again and again. In fact, in the audience's first interaction with Wotan in *Das Rheingold*, we see him struggling with appeasing those around him. Wotan placates where Odin would command obedience. In *Die Walküre*, Wotan is forced to yield to his wife, Fricka, and to abandon his favorite daughter, Brünnhilde. By the third opera, *Siegfried*, Wotan's godly air is nothing more than a veneer, an illusion of power he no longer truly possesses. By the final opera, *Götterdämmerung*, Wotan isn't present at all.

As a means to illustrate the similarities between Wagner's interpretation of the tragic hero archetype and Shakespeare's, consider Wagner's Wotan in light of Shakespeare's Macbeth from *Macbeth*. To organize and facilitate this analysis, I will be following a framework¹⁸ adapted from Robert W. Corrigan, a renowned dramatic scholar and educator who founded and headed numerous college drama programs (including the world-famous programs at the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU and Carnegie-Mellon University.) This framework, used predominantly for literary figures and theatrical works, has not been applied to Wotan prior to this thesis. However, Wotan fits this model

¹⁸ Robert W. Corrigan, *Tragedy: Vision and Form*, 2nd (New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 212-280.

remarkably well, especially when the framework is applied to his evolution over the course of the *Ring* cycle as a whole.

Macbeth, a play that I will explore in more detail in a later section of this thesis, is the story of Macbeth, a Scottish war hero who, on the council of his wife and following the prophecy of a trio of witches, murders King Duncan and takes the throne himself. His rise to power and tragic fall from grace is outlined in *Macbeth*, as his pride and fear brings about his eventual destruction. I selected Macbeth to facilitate this analysis because Wotan's character and evolution are strikingly similar to Macbeth's, allowing for a fascinating comparison.

Shakespeare's tragic heroes cannot be ordinary men; they must either be royal figures, noble figures, or men encountering extraordinary circumstances or magical intervention. Many of Shakespeare's tragic heroes are kings. Corrigan observes the following about Shakespearean tragic heroes in *Tragedy: Vision and Form*, "In many tragedies he begins as a semi-divine figure, at least in his own eyes, and then an inexorable dialectic sets to work, which separates the divine pretense from the human actuality."¹⁹ Macbeth does not begin *Macbeth* as a king. Rather, he is a well-respected Scottish nobleman and war hero. He is also the focus of the witches' prophecy, revealed in Act I Scene iii, that states that he *will* be king. It is this prophecy, along with Macbeth's already elevated station, that puts the crown within Macbeth's reach. Although Wotan *is* a divine figure in the *Ring*, he is not portrayed as a distant, invincible person. He is not invincible or all knowing or all-powerful. Throughout the *Ring* operas,

¹⁹ Ibid., 131.

we see him struggling over and over again with very human emotions: fear, pride, despair, helplessness, and self-doubt.

Additionally, a Shakespearean tragic hero cannot be evil, regardless of his flaws or hubris. Evil council or situations beyond his control put the tragic hero on his downward path, not natural wickedness. Macbeth is not an evil man. In fact, in Act I Scene ii, Macbeth is honored by King Duncan for his bravery and is given titles, lands, and praise as a result. He is trusted and well respected. It is the witches' prophecy in Act I Scene iii that puts Macbeth on his tragic path; when they tell him that he is to be king, the seemingly undeniable truth that the crown is his fate guides his hand for the rest of the play, overpowering his otherwise loyal and honorable nature. In the *Ring*, Wotan's downward spiral begins with Loge, the mischievous god of fire, who advises him to solve his troubles in *Rheingold* by stealing Alberich's gold (the ring in particular). Wotan's manipulations might have been what got him into trouble, but it's Loge's suggestion that leads to his eventual destruction. Had he not sought the ring, the events of the subsequent operas would not have occurred.

Typically, Shakespeare's tragic hero starts off as unusually trusting. After his encounters with the three witches, Macbeth doesn't initially believe them and goes to his wife for council. As he begins to lust for the crown, the ambitious Lady Macbeth manipulates and compels him to act. It is only after multiple emotional conversations with her (and after she formulates the plan and sets it into motion) that he murders King Duncan; he trusts Lady Macbeth's council above all things, in spite of his own reservations. Like Macbeth, Wotan begins the *Ring* operas trusting Loge, despite Loge's established reputation as a trickster. Wotan behaves as if he believes that he is the only

one Loge *isn't* manipulating. The audience, however, can see what Wotan cannot. Wotan should know that he and Loge want opposite things; Loge represents chaos while Wotan strives for order. But Wotan is trusting and does not see it.

Finally, Shakespeare's tragic heroes need to experience a moment of crushing remorse when they realize the part they've played in the tragedy that is unfolding around them. "The tragic character," scholar Robert B. Heilman writes, "is essentially a divided character..." torn "between the moral ordinance and the unruly passion."²⁰ Macbeth is consumed with remorse and guilt after King Duncan's murder, but the act does give him what he wanted: he becomes King of Scots, Lady Macbeth becomes queen as she'd wanted, and no one seems to be the wiser. However, Macbeth's guilt and remorse make him paranoid and he spends the rest of the play fighting to keep the crown rather than enjoying being king. His moment of crushing remorse occurs in Act III Scene iv, when Macbeth encounters the ghost of Banquo, Macbeth's former friend whom he murdered to help cement his place on the throne. From this point on, Macbeth is on a downward spiral; those around him begin to suspect what he's done and plot to remove him from his position.

Just as Macbeth is torn between his desire for power, his love and admiration for Lady Macbeth, and his conscience in *Macbeth*, Wotan is pulled between wanting to solidify and increase his power and wanting desperately to experience freedom, love, and joy. Wotan's moment of remorse and despair happens when he is forced to relinquish his favorite daughter at the end of *Die Walküre*, the one person who he can truly love and

²⁰ Ibid., 206-207.

trust, in order to maintain his power. He rails against her but, afterwards, he spends the final minutes of the opera lamenting that he must let her go. “Farewell, you bold, wonderful child! You, my heart’s holiest pride! Farewell, farewell, farewell!” he sings, “If I must reject you and may not lovingly greet you again with my greeting...if I must lose you whom I loved, you, laughing joy of my eyes...For only one shall win the bride, one freer than I, the God!”²¹ He realizes that he is giving up the one person he truly loves and who truly loves him but he feels powerless to stop it; forgiving Brünnhilde after her disobedience would nullify the very laws that made him the Allfather.

After reviewing the aspects of a Shakespearean tragic hero, Wagner’s Wotan fits the mold just as Shakespeare’s Macbeth does. We know that Wagner’s Wotan, though similar to Odin, is quite different from the god of Norse mythology. He is more human than Odin is; we see him struggling as humans do with emotions and internal conflicts and feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness and guilt. Though it is impossible to know whether Wagner purposely altered the mythic Odin to create a character that fit within a Shakespearean tragic framework, it is intriguing to realize that Wotan does fit. In fact, he meets every qualification.

In order to compare Wagner’s work to Shakespeare’s, we must also look at how Shakespeare chose to structure his tragedies. Richard B. Sewall, professor of English at Yale University, defined ‘Dramatic Tragedy’ as a “drama that treats in a serious and dignified style the sorrowful or terrible events encountered or caused by a heroic

²¹ Richard Wagner, *Die Walküre* (New York, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1978), 653-663.

individual.”²² Not only does the *Ring* cycle meet the basic definition of “tragedy,” the structure of the operas together fits very well with the Shakespearean model developed by Corrigan. In a Shakespearean tragedy, the play can be broken into seven main thematic elements that create a tragic story arc. To help illustrate this point, I will utilize Corrigan’s framework from *Tragedy: Vision and Form* to examine the *Ring*, again using Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* as an example.²³

First, in a Shakespearean tragedy, there is an “Exposition.” This exposition reveals the setting of the story, provides a glimpse into the mood of the play, and gives the audience a brief peek into the overall world of the drama. In *Macbeth*, the exposition occurs in Act I Scenes i and ii. In Act I Scene i, the three witches are introduced (accompanied menacingly by thunder and lightning) as they plan their encounter with Macbeth on his way home from war. In Scene ii, King Duncan of the Scots discusses Macbeth’s valor in battle with his two sons and gifts Macbeth, whom we have yet to meet, with the Thane of Cawdor’s title and lands. Before Macbeth even appears on stage we know all about the forces at play around him, about his life, and about other’s views of him. In *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, this Exposition occurs in the first scene of *Das Rheingold*, when Alberich encounters the Rhinemaidens and the audience learns why he desires the Rheingold, about the curse, and sees him steal it. The audience needs to know these things *before* the tragic hero is introduced so they can understand what is to come.

²² Richard B. Sewall, Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. “Tragedy,” accessed June 12, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/art/tragedy-literature>.

²³ Corrigan, *Tragedy: Vision and Form*, 212-280.

Next comes the “Inciting Force.” The tragic hero is introduced and is immediately put into a situation that establishes the conflict, setting the rest of the action into motion. In *Macbeth*, the “Inciting Force” is Macbeth’s encounter with the witches in Act I Scene iii when they reveal their prophecies about his royal future. Macbeth appears and is immediately placed in a challenging position. Had this prophecy not been revealed it is likely that Macbeth would have gone back to his castle, content with the honors and titles he’d earned, and would never have embarked on his murderous and dishonorable path, a path which brings about his own death. The “Inciting Force” in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* occurs in *Das Rheingold*. Wotan and the rest of the Gods are introduced and are immediately thrown into turmoil when the giants demand the goddess Freia as payment for building Wotan’s fortress, Valhalla. This conflict incites Wotan to steal Alberich’s gold, including the ring made from the stolen Rheingold. Wotan will spend the rest of the *Ring* operas under the ring’s curse as he and Alberich obsessively seek its power. His desire for the ring will bring about his tragic fall.

The next moment in Shakespearean tragedy is called the “Error in Judgment.” This is when the tragic character’s character flaw is revealed to the audience, the flaw that will lead to his eventual downfall. It is important to note that, at this moment in Shakespeare’s tragedies, the heroic figure still seems in control of their fate. This moment occurs in *Macbeth* in Act I Scene vii, when Macbeth, after reflection, tells Lady Macbeth that he cannot murder King Duncan; his love for the king, his conscience, and his fear of eternal damnation won’t allow him to do it. Macbeth seems to be in control of his destiny, refusing the witches’ prophecy and doing what he thinks is right. Macbeth’s tragic character flaw, however, is his pride and devotion to his wife. Lady Macbeth,

furious that he's changed his mind, calls Macbeth a coward and accuses him of not loving her. Her words weaken his resolve and, by the end of the scene, he agrees to murder the King. His path is set; he murders King Duncan in Act II and his fate is sealed.

Wotan's character flaw is his desire for control. When he seizes the ring from Alberich and feels its power, he is intoxicated by it. Near the end of *Das Rheingold*, Erda appears and urges Wotan to relinquish the ring to the giants as part of their payment or else risk the treaties keeping him in power and the immortality of the Gods. As Wotan considers her wisdom, the audience can see his struggle. Though he relents, seemingly in control of his desire, it becomes clear that his yearning for the ring never subsides. Though the audience doesn't realize it until *Die Walküre*, Wotan will spend the subsequent operas trying to escape the ring's pull and, through his plotting, will set his own destruction into motion.

The fourth moment in Shakespearean tragedy is called the "Crisis." This section is the turning point for the tragic hero, when his fortunes take an irreparable downward turn and any hope that the hero might escape unscathed is lost. It is crucial to understand that, in this moment, the tragic hero, who had seemed so in control before, is exposed as being helpless against the events around him. In *Macbeth*, the "Crisis" occurs in Act III Scene iv, when he is literally haunted by the ghost of his murderous actions. While holding a banquet, Macbeth is confronted twice by the ghost of Banquo, his friend whom he had had killed earlier that day. No one but Macbeth can see the ghost and, as Macbeth reacts to it, everyone thinks he's lost his mind. His hold on power (and on his sanity) is revealed to be very thin as his erratic behavior arouses suspicion in his guests. After a troubled Macbeth resolves to meet with the witches again, two truths are revealed in the

subsequent scenes. First, the witches, who know Macbeth will be coming back, meet with their goddess, Hecate, who orders them to reassure Macbeth that everything will be fine, even though they know he's doomed to die. Secondly, it is revealed that the other Lords suspect that Macbeth committed the murders and support the growing resistance bent on overthrowing him. Macbeth is doomed by both fate and his actions.

The "Crisis" in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* occurs in *Die Walküre* when Wotan's favorite daughter, Brünnhilde, defies his orders to support Hunding in battle, choosing instead to support Siegmund, moved by his forbidden love for his sister, Sieglinde. Her actions force Wotan to destroy Siegmund or else risk unraveling the treaties that maintain his authority. These same treaties had prevented him from killing the giant Fafner and seizing the ring himself in *Das Rheingold*. Wotan had needed an independent hero to slay the giant and claim the ring without his prompting: he had hoped Siegmund, his secret illegitimate son, would have been the one to do it. Once Brünnhilde defies him, this becomes impossible. Not only does he have to kill Siegmund, but he has to renounce and punish Brünnhilde for her disobedience. He condemns her to sleep, helpless, on top of a mountain, surrounded by magical fire, and become the mortal bride of whatever man wakes her. It becomes clear by the end of *Die Walküre* that the treaties Wotan had written to gain authority have cost him everything he loved, that he is now living the ring's curse: he has had to renounce love in favor of power. We see a broken Wotan, doomed to live a loveless, lonely life, more controlled by the world around him than in control of it.

The next moment is the "Tragic Force," when, after the Crisis, the tragic hero's downfall is further intensified and sets into motion the falling action. In *Macbeth*, the "Tragic Force" occurs in Act IV, when it is revealed that another nobleman, Macduff, is

leading a rebellion to overthrow Macbeth and restore Duncan's son, Malcolm, to the Scottish Throne. The witches had promised Macbeth that any man born of woman could not kill him and, as Macbeth is twisted by paranoia and power, he becomes increasingly cruel, embracing the darkness his conscience had once kept at bay. In Act IV Scene iii, Macduff demonstrates his nobility and true patriotism, presenting himself as a foil to the now ruthless, brutal, and self-serving Macbeth. After proving his loyalty to Malcolm, the rightful heir to the throne, Macduff learns that Macbeth has had his family murdered. Consumed with righteous anguish, Macduff resolves to march his massive army from where it was gathering in England and make war on a doomed Macbeth. The audience can see that Macbeth's pride and belief that he cannot be defeated is foolish and that Macbeth will not escape justice for his heinous actions.

In Wagner's *Ring* operas, the "Tragic Force" happens in *Siegfried*. Before it occurs, Wotan appears as Der Wanderer, a persona he has created to try to force himself not to interfere in mortal affairs. He continuously asserts that he is present "only to observe" but still manages to meddle with those tied to the ring. He recognizes Siegfried, the son of Sieglinde and Siegmund, as a hero capable of winning the ring from Fafner and sees it as an opportunity for himself. He tells Mime that Siegfried needs to re-forged the sword, Nothung to kill the giant Fafner, who has transformed himself into a dragon. He also meets with Erda, Brünnhilde's mother, and lays out his plan to evade the ring's curse: he will use Siegfried, a hero born from love who does not know who Wotan is, to defeat Fafner, hoping his nobility and fearlessness will destroy Alberich's curse on the ring. Their daughter, Brünnhilde, will then fall in love with Siegfried and will "redeem

the world.” Wotan claims to be indifferent to his own fate, but it becomes clear that this isn’t entirely true.

The “Tragic Force” occurs in Act III Scene ii when Wotan, still disguised as Der Wanderer, confronts Siegfried before he reaches Brünnhilde’s rock. Siegfried, having slain Fafner and claimed the ring, mocks Wotan and wants nothing to do with him. Wotan asks him “who made the sturdy splinters from which you forged yourself the sword?”²⁴ This was Wotan’s attempt to claim part of Siegfried’s victory, as he was the one who had originally made the sword for Siegmund. But Siegfried laughs at him, not at all interested, and, as he has no knowledge of the Gods, claims the victory entirely for himself. A frustrated Wotan realizes that Siegfried is not controllable and, after Siegfried repeatedly insults him, attempts to bar him from reaching Brünnhilde using his spear, upon which were inscribed all of the laws and treaties Wotan had made; it is the symbol of his power and authority. The “Tragic Force” occurs when Siegfried, annoyed with Wotan, smashes Wotan’s spear with Nothung, destroying it. Suddenly, the audience sees Wotan defeated, without even the illusion of control left to him. Wotan disappears and, though he is not seen again, his presence is felt in the later opera as his tragic fall is completed.²⁵

²⁴ “*Doch, wer schuf die starken Stücken, daraus das Schwert du dir geschweisst?*” Richard Wagner, *Siegfried* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1978), 328.

²⁵ There are many interpretations of this scene in *Siegfried*. In some productions, Wotan is testing Siegfried at this moment and wants him to break his spear. Wagner leaves the scene itself somewhat ambiguous, providing little direction for the actors. I believe that the most compelling interpretation is that Wotan, in a moment of weakness, tries to reclaim the power he feels slipping away. This interpretation is consistent with Wotan’s actions earlier in the cycle. From the moment he tries to claim the ring as his own, his

The next moment in Shakespearean tragedy is called the “Final Suspense.” This is a brief moment when it seems like the tragic hero may not actually fall prey to their fate, that there is a chance for them to escape. This point is always short-lived and is immediately followed by a moment that reveals that the hero is, in fact, doomed. In *Macbeth*, the “Final Suspense” occurs in Act V Scene iii. In this scene, Macbeth, facing mounting odds against him, seeks solace in the witches’ prophecy, which he believes is proof that he cannot be defeated. He reminds himself, and the audience, that the witches had said his defeat wouldn’t come until Birnam forest marched on Dunsinane, an impossible act. He sees himself as invincible and the audience, having seen the witches’ prophecies be proven true earlier in the play, is tempted to trust him. It seems that Macbeth might just survive after all. However, in the next scene, Malcolm orders his army to camouflage themselves with branches from trees in Birnam forest as they march to Dunsinane, fulfilling the witches’ prophecy and sealing Macbeth’s fate.

power begins to wane. I also feel this more human version of Wotan is more emotionally and intellectually gripping; Wotan has not been portrayed the “all-knowing” god up to this point. He is relatable in his complex relationship to his own power. On the one hand, he desperately wants love and freedom, but on the other he can’t seem to let the power go. He continuously sacrifices the things that make him happy, that make his existence personally worthwhile, to preserve his power. I believe that, in this moment with Siegfried, we see Wotan wrestling with this very contradiction. After all, Siegfried is the hero Wotan has been waiting for. But, at the same time, Wotan knows what that means. Siegfried is truly independent. He does not need Wotan. He is not afraid of Wotan. Until this moment, Wotan has been unable to let that stand. It is fitting, then, that Siegfried is the one to take Wotan’s power from him; Wotan has, up to this point, been unable to relinquish it on his own. By destroying Wotan’s staff, Siegfried proves that he is the hero Wotan needs in the end. After this moment, we don’t see Wotan again. He goes to Valhalla and prepares for the end of the world, cutting down the World Ash Tree and piling the kindling around him. Whereas Brünnhilde embraces her fiery end in *Götterdämmerung*, Wotan resigns himself to death, waiting for someone else to set it into motion.

In *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the “Final Suspense” occurs in the last opera of the cycle, *Götterdämmerung*, in Act I Scene iii, when Brünnhilde is confronted by her sister, Waltraute, who tries to convince Brünnhilde to give the ring (which Siegfried had given her as a token of his love) back to the Rhinemaidens and save the Gods (and Wotan) from destruction. In fact, Waltraute serves as Wotan’s mouthpiece here, quoting his words to Brünnhilde; Waltraute tells her he said, “If she would return the ring to the Rhine’s daughters in its depths, from the weight of the curse would the Gods and the world be freed.”²⁶ It seems for a brief moment that Brünnhilde might save her father, as they had been so close. But she refuses, citing that the ring is a symbol of her and Siegfried’s love. Casting it away, in her mind, would be the same thing as renouncing the love she’d found with Siegfried. After they argue more, Brünnhilde sends Waltraute away, sealing Wotan’s fate.

The seventh moment in the structure of Shakespearean tragedy is called the “Cataclysm or Catastrophe,” and is when the tragic hero and all the characters that supported him die. This is unique to Shakespeare; in traditional Greek tragedies, only the tragic hero dies (unless another character’s death is needed as part of that tragic hero’s fall). Wagner follows Shakespeare’s model; every character that supported the tragic hero, Wotan, is destroyed at the summation of the *Ring* operas. In *Macbeth*, the “Cataclysm or Catastrophe” occurs over the course of Act V in Scenes v-viii. First, Lady Macbeth kills herself in Act V Scene v, driven mad by guilt and fear. As the supporting

²⁶ Barry Millington and Stewart Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington, trans. Stewart Spencer (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1993), 303.

character that led Macbeth down his dark road, Shakespeare's model dictates that her death is essential. Then, in the ensuing battle in Scenes vi-viii, as Macbeth's army is overwhelmed by Malcolm and Macduff's men, Macbeth, still holding onto hope that he will survive because the witches had told him he couldn't be slain by any man borne from a woman, faces Macduff in battle. Macduff reveals that he was delivered by Caesarean section, not technically born from his mother in the natural sense, and Macbeth realizes that the witches had steered him to his own destruction. Macduff kills him and cuts off his head to present to Malcolm. By the end of this moment, all of the characters that had a hand in Macbeth's evil plans are dead.²⁷

In *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the "Cataclysm or Catastrophe" occurs in Act III Scene iii of *Götterdämmerung*. Hagen and the Gibichungs have just killed Siegfried in Scene ii, Brünnhilde has been betrayed and forced to marry Gunther, and she suddenly understands what she must do. She brings all of the Gibichung plots to light and, after setting Siegfried's body alight on his funeral pyre, throws herself into the flames, using fire to purify the Rheingold and the world. Wagner specifies that the flames from the pyre consume everything: Siegfried, Brünnhilde, the Gibichung halls, and Valhalla. Wotan is destroyed alongside the corrupt world, ending his tragic journey.

In a Shakespearean tragedy, there is one final moment after the death of the hero. It is called the "Glimpse of a New Future" or "Glimpse of Restored Order." Shakespeare never ends his tragedies with the death of the hero; he always gives an introduction to the new social order or harmonious world the death of the hero brings about. Shakespeare's

²⁷ The witches, though they facilitated Macbeth's rise, are not among those killed. The witches, being magical, otherworldly beings, are not subject to this fate.

tragedies end with hope for a better future. In *Macbeth*, this moment happens when Macduff, carrying Macbeth's head, hails Malcolm as the new King of Scots. Malcolm then promises to right Macbeth's wrongs in a final monologue, evoking God's grace and his own will to restore Scotland to what it was when his father ruled. The audience is left with the sense that Malcolm will be a noble, virtuous king and that Scotland will be better for his rule. Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ends with this same optimism. After the fire destroys the world, the Rhine River swells up and puts it out, flowing over the pyre so the Rhinemaidens can reclaim their gold. The Gods are seen in Valhalla being consumed by flames. Suddenly, out of all of the chaos, the beautiful motif called the "Glorification of Brünnhilde,"²⁸ so named by Wagner scholar Allen Dunning, sounds in the high strings (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: "Glorification of Brünnhilde"²⁹



The rising action of the melody evokes hope, and the fact that it sounds above the lower, darker tones is symbolic of the way Brünnhilde's wisdom and love has risen above the darkness of her world. It is optimistic and the audience is left with a sense that the world has been reborn.

²⁸ Paul Heise, *Wagnerheim*, 2011, <http://www.wagnerheim.com/page/15> (accessed February 2, 2016).

²⁹ Robert Donington, *Wagner's 'Ring' and its Symbols: The Music and the Myth* (Faber and Faber Limited: London, 1963), 283.

After examining both Shakespeare's tragic hero and the overall structure of his tragedies, it is apparent that Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and his tragic hero, Wotan, are fascinatingly Shakespearean in their construction. It is now possible to compare specific moments from *Der Ring des Nibelungen* to different Shakespearean plays.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on scenes from three Shakespeare plays and three scenes from Wagner's *Ring* operas. I have chosen to examine the way Shakespeare and Wagner treat "action" in their works as a means to analyze them through a framework of my own design. After all, it is the ability for Shakespeare to propel the dramatic action forward I do not mean "action" as in stage movement or narrative speed. Rather, I interpret "action" as the way characters interact with the plot. A prominent difference between Shakespeare and Greek Drama, a difference that Wagner lauded as elevating Shakespeare above Greek Drama, was the way both minor and major characters moved the drama forward in the absence of a chorus. Wagner admired Shakespeare's character-focused treatment of drama and his influence can be felt in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

The first scene that I will examine is from Act II of *Götterdämmerung*, the intriguing nighttime interaction between Hagen and his father, Alberich. This scene bears striking resemblance to Act I Scene v of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where the wronged Ghost of Hamlet's father appears before his son in the dark of night, calling for

vengeance. Both of these scenes represent a “Call to Action,” where a minor character calls upon a major character to avenge a betrayal.³⁰

The second scene I will examine is from Act II of *Die Walküre*, a scene in which Wotan expresses his intimate thoughts, his past, and his fears with his daughter, Brünnhilde. A similarly introspective scene occurs in Act I Scene ii of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* when Prospero discusses his power, his past, and his exile with his daughter, Miranda. These two scenes represent a powerful character that is “Unable to Act” because of fear. Both of these characters choose to open up to their daughters, trusting only them with their innermost selves.

The final moments that I will examine from the *Ring* are a bit more complex: I will examine the end of Act II through the Finale of *Götterdämmerung*, observing Brünnhilde’s behavior from Siegfried’s betrayal, through Brünnhilde’s decision to assist in the plot to murder him, to her suicide. This analysis will feature an examination of two Shakespearean plays. First, I will explore the concept of “feminine hysteria” that gained a cultural foothold in Shakespeare’s era and maintained relevance in Wagner’s time. By comparing Ophelia’s madness in *Hamlet* with the vassals’ interpretation of Brünnhilde’s “mad” behavior in *Götterdämmerung*, I will explore what it means to be “mad” in both these worlds. I will also examine multiple scenes, namely Act I Scene vii through Act II Scene iii, and Act V Scenes i-v, in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, looking at Lady Macbeth’s reaction to her choice to murder Duncan and the nature of her suicide. Both Lady

³⁰ It could be seen as irksome to refer to Alberich as a minor character, given the important role he plays in the narrative of the *Ring* and in the progression of the plot. However, given that this is his only appearance in *Götterdämmerung*, I am going to consider him a minor character in this opera specifically.

Macbeth and Brünnhilde, who were conspirators in murder plots, are emotionally devastated by a “Regret for their Actions.” However, I will demonstrate that, while Lady Macbeth’s private suicide signals her fall from power, Brünnhilde’s public suicide is the apex of her importance in the opera. Lady Macbeth’s suicide is portrayed as shameful, while Brünnhilde’s redeems the world.

CHAPTER TWO: “CALL TO ACTION” AND THE FATHER/SON RELATIONSHIP

Before a character acts, they must be compelled to do so. This is what I am calling the “Call to Action.” Both Wagner and Shakespeare employed fathers to facilitate this moment, imploring their sons to act on their behalf. One of the most psychologically potent scenes in *Götterdämmerung* occurs between Hagen and his father, Alberich, in Act II Scene i. As this chapter will explore, the interaction between Hagen and Alberich bares striking resemblance to the iconic Act I Scene v interaction between Hamlet and his father’s ghost in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The most important similarity between both scenes is that in it the son, be it Hagen or Hamlet, is “Called to Action” by his father, who needs the son to act on his behalf; both fathers beseech their sons to seek vengeance for them, to seek justice, as the fathers can no longer do so themselves.

Act II Scene i of *Götterdämmerung* is an odd one in the scope of the *Ring* cycle. It is the only scene in the opera devoted solely to Hagen, despite the fact that he is the opera’s most predominant villain. In this scene, the audience gets a rare glimpse into Hagen’s motives, his relationship with his Nibelung father, Alberich, and his personality. What is odd about the father/son interaction in Act II Scene i is that Wagner gives us very little information about the basic nature of their conversation. The audience is left with a lot of questions. Is Alberich there in person, sneaking into the city under the cover of

darkness to speak to his son? Or is he a figment of his son's dream, a product of Hagen's conscience? Why is Alberich trying to influence Hagen rather than go after the ring himself? Is he even alive at this point in the opera? While these questions are important to contemplate as we try to decipher Hagen's character, it is also crucial to look at the purpose of the scene dramatically. It gives us insight into why Hagen wants the ring so badly, why he is going to betray his half-siblings, the Gibichungs, and Siegfried. It also enlightens us to the sway Alberich still has over the dramatic action in *Götterdämmerung*, despite the fact that, like Wotan, his physical presence on stage in the operas has decreased substantially since *Das Rheingold*.

Before we look at the scene itself, it is important to examine the changes Wagner made in interpreting Hagen's character when he wrote *Götterdämmerung*. If we examine Wagner's sources for Hagen, we find that Wagner made some interesting characterization choices. Hagen does not play a role in the original Norse *Edda*. However, he does exist in one of Wagner's other inspirations, the *Nibelungenlied*. The Hagen of mythology is quite different from the character presented in Wagner's operas. The Hagen of the *Nibelungenlied*, though he is half-dwarf, is *not* Alberich's son. There is no mention in the *Nibelungenlied* of any familial relationship between Alberich and Hagen. In fact, the Hagen of myth uses Siegfried's vanquishing of Alberich as a reason why people should support Siegfried when he arrives on Hagen's peoples' shore. Whereas Wagner's Hagen praises Siegfried in Act I of *Götterdämmerung* as a means to manipulate and drug the hero, the Hagen of myth is genuine in his admiration of him. He says:

This is mighty Siegfried...I do not know his purpose here, but we must treat him with respect. He is the great warrior who slew the Nibelungs, then took possession of their treasure, a hoard so immense that it filled a

hundred freight wagons. In addition to gold and precious stones, the treasure also included the famous sword Balmung. The dwarf Alberich, keeper of the Nibelung treasure, attempted to avenge his former masters by attacking Siegfried, but to no avail. The brave prince overpowered him forthwith, then took from him the magic cloak of invisibility. Thereupon Alberich swore loyalty to Siegfried, the new lord of the Nibelung treasure, and thus continued his post as keeper of the treasure.³¹

Additionally, in the *Nibelungenlied*, Hagen is portrayed as an honorable, loyal warrior who only betrays Siegfried out of loyalty to his queen. The Hagen of myth is described as one of “the best warriors whose deeds were ever told, strong, brave, and resolute in sharp encounters.”³² Though the Hagen of the *Nibelungenlied* is a hotheaded warrior, he makes it clear that his loyalty to his brother’s wife, Brunhild, is what leads him to hate Siegfried. As in Wagner’s *Ring*, Brunhild accuses Siegfried of being the man who took her virginity, not Gunther. However, whereas the Brünnhilde of Wagner chooses Siegfried as her lover initially, the Brunhild of the myth finds it out via an interaction with her sister-in-law, Siegfried’s wife, Kriemhild. Brunhild’s romantic interaction with Siegfried was not consensual: Brunhild had thought she was making love to Gunther, but it was, in fact, Siegfried. Kriemhild, in an argument with Brunhild, asserts, “My dear husband Siegfried was the first to enjoy your lovely body, since it was not my brother who took your maidenhead. Where were your poor wits? It was a vile trick.”³³ Hagen is tormented by Brunhild’s dishonor and cites her pain as his reason for

³¹ Anonymous, *The Nibelungenlied*, trans. A. T. Hatto (Penguin Books: New York, 1965). 28.

³² *Ibid.*, 18.

³³ *Ibid.*, 114.

wanting to murder Siegfried.³⁴ In the myth, Hagen is portrayed as the only man on Brunhild's side. Her husband, Gunther, is portrayed as too morally and physically weak to stand up to Siegfried. Hagen states the following on two occasions. First, he vows, "His boast that he enjoyed my dear lady shall cost him his life, or I shall die avenging it!"³⁵ Then, on a second occasion, he says, "You [Gunther] just say nothing at all, and I fancy I shall manage this so well in secret that he will repent of Brunhild's weeping. I declare that I, Hagen, shall always be his enemy!"³⁶ It is Hagen who takes revenge on Brunhild's behalf, stabbing Siegfried in the back while they are hunting together. The Hagen Wagner was inspired by was a man of deep moral character, loyal to his family, who was willing to do whatever was necessary to achieve justice for someone who could not do it for herself.

So why should we consider this mythological Hagen when we examine his interactions with Alberich in Act II of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*? It is because we know that it was *Wagner's* choice to change Hagen's identity from a noble, honorable knight defending his lady into a maniacal puppeteer, manipulating everyone into doing evil so that he can obtain the ring for his father. The mythological Hagen is "called to action" by his conscience, by pity, and by his sense of honor. In *Götterdämmerung*, it is

³⁴ The *Nibelungenlied* says the following of this moment: "But Brunhild was so dejected that Gunther's vassals could not but pity her. Then Hagen of Troneck came to his liege lady, and, finding her in tears, asked her what was vexing her. She told him what had happened, and he at once vowed that Kriemhild's man should pay for it, else Hagen, because of that insult, would never be happy again." Ibid., 116.

³⁵ Ibid., 117.

³⁶ Ibid., 118.

Alberich who acts as this force for Hagen. It is Alberich who, though verbal prodding, calls Hagen to act. Wagner's Hagen, though he does many of the same actions as his mythological counterpart, does them with a different motive, one revealed to us in Act II Scene i, through his interaction with Alberich.

In Act II Scene i, we find Hagen keeping watch alone at night. At this point in the drama, Hagen has behaved as a master manipulator. He has already convinced his half-siblings, Gunther and Gutrune, to drug and deceive the trusting hero, Siegfried. We do not, however, have any reason to believe that Hagen is influencing his siblings for any reason other than to advance them: for all the audience knows at this point, Hagen is simply a good brother looking to procure honorable marriages for his siblings. It isn't until his brief soliloquy at the end of Act I Scene ii that we learn of Hagen's true motives. And it is his interaction with his father that affirms the selfish reason why he is so interested in controlling Siegfried.

In Act II Scene i, Alberich appears to Hagen at night when he is alone. This is important because it is the only time in the opera we see Hagen completely alone, explicitly alone, for an extended period of time. It is only when Hagen is isolated at night, semi-conscious, that Alberich appears, tormented by the stolen ring, and calls upon Hagen to avenge Wotan's slight by returning the ring to his Nibelung bloodline.

Wagner instructs that Alberich should not enter: rather, through a stark lighting cue, he should appear before Hagen. Wagner states:

Hagen, his spear on his arm, his shield at his side, is sitting asleep, leaning against one of the doorposts of the hall. At this point the moon suddenly appears from behind a cloud and casts its harsh light on Hagen and his

immediate surroundings: Alberich can be seen crouching in front of Hagen, his arms resting on the latter's knees.³⁷

Alberich's appearance is jarring. In fact, Alberich appearing out of nowhere is ghost-like.

This moment raises an important question: is Alberich really there? There are two possibilities. The first is that Alberich has sneaked into the Gibichung palace under the cover of night to avoid detection so he can speak to his son and use Hagen's half-asleep state to elicit honest responses from him. The second is that Alberich is not present, that he is a product of his son's exhausted mind, the manifestation of years of interactions between Hagen and Alberich. Based on the evidence in the libretto and in the music, I believe that Alberich is *not* physically present and is a product of his son's conscience, as it demonstrates the complexity of Hagen's psychology and his relationship with the Nibelung half of his personality.

The first clue we have that this interaction is occurring within Hagen's mind is the way that Wagner discusses Hagen's physical appearance in this scene. After Alberich's first sung passage, before Hagen speaks, Wagner instructs that Hagen responds, "Softly, without moving, so that he still seems to be asleep, even though there is a glassy stare in his permanently open eyes."³⁸ This direction tells us that Hagen is either sleeping or in some sort of trance. Hagen is physically but not consciously present at this moment in the opera. Throughout the scene, Wagner reminds the actor playing Hagen to keep himself detached, telling Hagen to perform "as before" prior to every section he sings. Even in

³⁷ Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 309.

³⁸ Richard Wagner, "Gotterdammerung," *Götterdämmerung: Voice and Piano Reduction* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1875).

the final moments of the scene, after Alberich has faded away, Hagen is not allowed to move. The stage directions read that, “Hagen, who has remained in the same position, stares motionlessly and fixedly at the Rhine, over which the light of dawn is already beginning to spread.”³⁹ We never see Hagen awaken. He does not react to Alberich’s departure, yet another clue that Alberich and Hagen’s interaction was all in his mind.

Alberich’s and Hagen’s music is strikingly different as well. They never sing at the same time and their sung lines are isolated in separate musical sections. Alberich dominates the scene by explicitly listing the wrongs done to him, wrongs he feels that Hagen must avenge. In his trance-like state, Hagen’s responses feel disconnected from Alberich’s stories. Hagen’s answers are 1-2 short sentences long while Alberich sings line after line to him. As I will explore later, the music that accompanies their conversation varies greatly based on who is singing; it feels disjointed.

Hagen also never shares new information with Alberich, even though it proves he’s doing as his father asks. It is as if Hagen feels sharing his progress with Alberich won’t have any effect. As Alberich urges Hagen to get the ring at any cost, Hagen never once reveals to Alberich that he has already set a plan into motion to do just that. While Alberich continuously tries to control Hagen through his manipulative language, Hagen never shows any emotion toward his father. They seem to be speaking to each other from two different worlds.

This scene is a detailed psychological study of Hagen and his relationship with his father. Hagen has been the mastermind of all of the Gibichung plans up to this point; he

³⁹ Millington and Spencer, *Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 312.

appears to be a man of action prior to this scene with Alberich. However, we have to consider that Hagen is not ignorant of who his father is. In Act I Scene i, for example, Hagen is the only character to press Siegfried about the items crucial to Alberich's power in *Das Rheingold*; Hagen asks him about the Nibelung gold, the Tarnhelm, and the ring. Hagen also refers to himself as "the Nibelung's son" in his soliloquy at the end of Act I. At this point in the cycle, Alberich and his brother, Mime, are the main Nibelungen in the opera. Mime, we know through *Siegfried*, has no children, as he spent years raising Siegfried before Siegfried kills him. This leaves only Alberich, "the Nibelung" referred to in the title of the cycle, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Through this statement, that he is "the Nibelung's son," Hagen has given us a hint as to the role Alberich has to play in the drama.

From a musical perspective, Wagner takes care to continuously refer to leitmotifs associated with Alberich when we first meet Hagen in Act I of *Götterdämmerung*. He also can feel the darkness of his father's influence within himself. When asked to share in the "Blood Brotherhood oath" in Act I, Hagen responds, "My blood would mar your drink! It doesn't flow truly and nobly like yours; stubborn and cold it curdles within me, refusing to redden my cheek. So I keep well away from your fiery bond."⁴⁰

When Hagen sings the first line of this section, "My blood would mar your drink," the "Ring" leitmotif sounds (See Figures 2 and 3).⁴¹ This leitmotif, first heard

⁴⁰ Ibid., 298.

⁴¹ I will be focusing primarily on Robert Donington's analysis of Wagner's leitmotifs, as his interpretations of the leitmotifs' meanings is closely aligned with my own analysis and interpretation of the Ring Cycle.

associated with Alberich in *Rheingold*, hints at who Hagen’s father is, foreshadowing Hagen’s own struggle with the ring’s pull. This connection is evident at the beginning of Act II Scene i, when the first motif we hear is one connected with Alberich’s relentless ambition, his never-resting will (See Figure 4). Before Alberich even appears, the music triggers his memory. By having it sound when Hagen is alone, after Wagner has hinted as Alberich’s connection to Hagen, Wagner is pointing out the part Alberich’s ambition plays in Hagen’s choices.

Figure 2: “The Ring” leitmotif in *Das Rheingold*⁴²



Figure 3: “The Ring” as underlying purpose leitmotif in *Götterdämmerung*⁴³



Figure 4: Alberich’s Will/Ambition⁴⁴



And yet my musical analysis of this scene, while it mentions leitmotifs from time to time, does not focus on them entirely. Indeed, this scene, and the others I will analyze,

⁴² Ibid., 282.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 282.

is relatively stagnant. Wagner used leitmotifs to advance the psychological, physical, and musical story. They can evolve and change based on who is singing them, or the situation, or they are used ironically, or as a memory, etc. They play a deep role in advancing the plot. The occasional popular criticism of leitmotifs as “calling cards” is contrary to Wagner’s intent. In *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the orchestra functions as the voice for the character’s inner worlds. The leitmotifs are more than a musical representation of a physical object, an emotion, or an idea: they are the embodiment of all the interactions surrounding the object they are representing, of the thematic and psychological implications of that object. So, for example, when we hear Wotan singing about his regrets in *Die Walküre*, he does not, in that moment, explicitly mention the ring. However, as he sings, we hear “the Ring” leitmotif sound, informing the audience that Wotan’s regret stems from his conflicted desire for the ring and regret for taking it from Alberich in *Das Rheingold* (see Figure 2 above).

Act II scene i is structured to facilitate a specific father/son interaction based on a “lecturer/lecturee” relationship. The father character (Alberich/Ghost) lectures the son character (Hagen/Hamlet) about avenging the wrongs that have been done to him, wrongs he can no longer right himself. This structure of lecturer/lecturee discussion is present in the way Wagner organizes this music. Leitmotifs, while some are present, tend to play the role of inspiring recollection in characters rather than advancing the plot. For example, when Alberich is telling his son the story of his lost ring and of Wotan’s theft, we hear “the Ring” leitmotif sound (see Figure 3 above). However, this is not an unexpected event: Alberich is recalling the ring in his speech, so it sounds in the accompaniment.

Instead of leitmotifs, Wagner employs other musical devices to illustrate the gulf between Alberich's reality and Hagen's. Act II Scene i begins with slow "nighttime" music before the curtain rises. Wagner instructs that the music in this scene should be played "Sehr mässig bewegt" (very moderately moved), which helps to give the scene a soft, restrained feel. The dynamics recede from *forte* to *piano* in two measures before a crescendo increases the tension as, in two more measures, the dynamics reach *forte* again.⁴⁵ This lilting, wave-like progression from *piano* to *forte* to *piano* over the course of a few measures continues until Alberich's first sung section five pages into the scene.

Wagner's choice of instrumentation helps to create soft, yet dark music. He calls for, by Wagner's standards, relatively few instruments at the start of Act II (only twelve independent parts). This instrumentation makes the music feel melodically static, despite its undulating dynamics. We hear three trumpets, one trombone, one bass tuba, and one contrabass tuba holding pitches. Occasionally, one will swell briefly, but they always end up holding a pitch. Meanwhile, the strings pulse on a single pitch, alternating between duple and triplet figures, again creating a rising and falling, wave-like pattern. When the woodwinds enter (three flutes, three oboes, three clarinets), they remain on a single pitch for the first six measures as the horns had before them. The contrast of the woodwinds, playing high in their register, with the horns, playing near the bottom of their registers, creates a thin, veiled texture (see Figures 5 and 6 below). As the Prologue progresses, the sections that had been holding notes become slightly more active, playing ascending and descending passages, building tension. However, it is important to note that, with the

⁴⁵ Wagner, *Gotterdammerung: Full Orchestral Score*, 246-247.

exception of a transitional ascension in measure seven, no more than three parts are playing “melodic” material at a time. The material is passed from instrument to instrument in a way that, again, creates a rolling, wave-like feel. The descending melody, with its syncopated rhythm, feels like “nodding off” music: you can imagine a person lolling to sleep with every descending bounce.

The curtain rises five pages into the Prologue and the music fades from *piano* to *pianissimo*. Wagner instructs that the music should progress “Allmählig noch langsamer” (gradually, even slower) as the music anticipates Alberich and Hagen’s interaction. The dynamic pulse (*forte-piano-forte*) from the prior section disintegrates into *piano* and *pianissimo* measures as Hagen is revealed to be sleeping on stage.

Suddenly, Alberich appears.⁴⁶ When Alberich comes into view and for every sung section following, his music is marked “Lebhaft” (Lively) where a half note in the previous section is equal to a quarter. This is a dramatic shift from the lolling, quiet music the audience has experienced prior to his entrance. Alberich’s music is characterized by this tempo shift and by the sudden appearance of familiar leitmotifs: the ring leitmotif is present in the first violin’s music immediately before Alberich sings his first phrase (see Figure 3 above). The rest of the instrumental music accompanying Alberich’s sung lines is melodically static, but the quick syncopated rhythmic figures present in six of the instruments (three clarinets, the bass clarinet, the viola, and cello) that fade from *piano* to

⁴⁶ *At this point the moon suddenly appears from behind a cloud and casts its harsh light on Hagen and his immediate surroundings: Alberich can be seen crouching in front of Hagen, his arms resting on the latter’s knees. Ibid.*

pianissimo help to build tension as the figure clashes against Alberich's more melodic sung line.

The first thing Alberich says is "Are you sleeping, Hagen, my son?"⁴⁷ (see Figure 5 below). This is the first moment where the audience knows for certain that the Nibelung Hagen referred to at the end of his soliloquy in Act I is Alberich. Alberich goes on, "You're asleep and do not hear me, whom rest and sleep betrayed."⁴⁸ This is an interesting phrase because we watched Alberich lurking restlessly in *Siegfried* outside of Fafner's lair: his lust for the ring was so strong that he could not sleep for fear of missing an opportunity to obtain it. Now, Alberich is continuing this sleepless cycle with his son, whose sleep he is disturbing with his unrelenting longing for the ring's power. Alberich's desire and greed are so strong that they have been transferred Hagen's psyche; his father's obsession is a part of him, and their current interaction is a manifestation of their strained, purpose-driven relationship.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "Schläfst du, Hagen, mein Sohn?" Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 309.

⁴⁸ "Du schläfst und hörst mich nicht, den Ruh' und Schlaf verriet?" Ibid.

⁴⁹ It is important to observe that this father-using-the-son relationship is not unique to Alberich and Hagen. Wotan has, in the previous operas, tried to use his offspring to obtain the Ring. He needed a hero brave enough to fight Fafner in dragon form to win the gold (and the Ring with it), so Wotan mated with a mortal and had Siegmund and Sieglinde, Siegfried's parents. In *Die Walküre*, we meet this hero, Siegmund. But Siegmund is killed fighting Hunding, Sieglinde's husband (after Wotan's wife Fricka ordered Siegmund's destruction for going against nature and the sanctity of marriage by falling in love with his twin sister). Siegfried eventually takes the Ring, but Wotan has no influence over his grandson and isn't able to obtain the Ring for himself.

Figure 5: Alberich's first sung line over static accompaniment⁵⁰

ALBERICH (leise.)
· Schliffst du, Ha - - gen, mein Sohn?

When Hagen finally speaks, the music shifts back to its “Erstes Zeitmaass” (First Tempo) where a quarter note in the prior section equals a half. Alberich’s vocal line was jumpy, with irregular intervals in the melody and rhythmic variety: his short two-sentence phrase contains everything from a 16th note to half notes. Hagen’s lines, however, are far more controlled and regular. Melodically, the first half of Hagen’s sung line consists of repeated pitches while the second half is an ascending scalar passage with one final leap. Rhythmically, Hagen’s section feels like it has a pattern to it. This distinct difference in rhythmic patterns can be seen in Figure 6 below.

⁵⁰ Wagner, *Götterdämmerung: Voice and Piano Reduction*, 140.

Figure 6: Contrast of Hagen's first sung line to Alberich's ⁵¹

Linguistically, Hagen responds dutifully to his father, saying “I hear you, evil elf: what do you have to tell me in my sleep?”⁵² However, whereas Alberich calls Hagen “my son,” Hagen never refers to Alberich as “my father.” Hagen calls him instead “evil elf” and, in his subsequent responses, never uses a term of endearment toward him. Alberich, on the other hand, seems to go out of his way to flatter Hagen and remind him of his responsibilities, calling Hagen “my son,” then “my hero,” then “beloved hero.”⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., 141.

⁵² “Ich hö-re dich, schlimmer Al-be: was hast du meinem Schlaf zu sagen?” Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 309.

⁵³ “mein Sohn,” “mein Held,” and “Trauter Helde.” Ibid., 309-312.

Alberich dominates the dialogue in this scene. His sung sections are lengthy and his language is controlling and manipulative, while Hagen's brief responses are cold and distant.

This first interaction characterizes the way the two react to one another for the rest of the scene. Alberich's music is always separated from Hagen's by a double bar line, signifying the dramatic transition from Hagen's "Wieder langsam" (again slowly) music into Alberich's "Wieder Lebhaft" (lively again). However, when the sun begins to rise, Alberich's music changes. His "lively" music transforms into the music from the beginning of the scene, music that signified not only the real world but also Hagen, who was living in it.

Despite the fact that Alberich is intruding into Hagen's world, Alberich is clearly the character with authority. One way we can see how Alberich dominates Hagen is to count the words they both sing: Alberich sings over 230 words in this short scene while Hagen only sings 67.⁵⁴ Alberich spends most of his interaction with his son telling him the story of how Wotan stole the ring from him, even after it becomes clear that Hagen has heard it all before. Near the end of the scene, for example, after Alberich has finished reminding Hagen that he had been brought up to "feel stubborn hatred" and "avenge [Alberich] and win the ring in contempt of the Wälsung and Wotan," Hagen retorts, "The ring I shall have: only be patient!"⁵⁵ The fact that Hagen needs to tell Alberich to be patient is a clue that Alberich has been calling Hagen to act for some time. In other

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "*Den Ring soll ich haben: harre in Ruh'!*" Ibid., 311.

words, this is not the first time the two have met to discuss this topic. This is reinforced by Hagen's reactions to his father's story. He hardly seems interested. Hagen usually responds to Alberich's lengthy stories with short, single sentence questions, never physically reacting or asking about details. He is detached.

Alberich is not sharing new information; Hagen has already put his plan to manipulate Siegfried into place before the audience sees him talking with Alberich. Had Hagen not known about Siegfried's connection to Brünnhilde and the ring, there would not have been a reason to drug him and make him swear allegiance to the Gibichungs. Hagen knew all about Siegfried's slaying of Fafner in Act I, about his taking possession of the Tarnhelm and the ring: if this was the first time Alberich had appeared to his son, Hagen wouldn't have had all of that background knowledge. He wouldn't have had a reason to want Siegfried under his control.

This repetition of old information is also telling evidence that Alberich is not physically present, but an echo of an earlier interaction. If Alberich were actually physically there, he would not need to repeat stories that Hagen already knew. They would likely talk about the plan Hagen has, at this point, put into motion. But Hagen never mentions his plot to obtain the ring. Instead, Hagen listens to his father and responds with answers that are either cryptic references to his strategy or a comment on the story Alberich is telling. For example, after Alberich tells him about Siegfried's love for Brünnhilde, Hagen responds with a vague: "To his own destruction [Siegfried] serves me even now."⁵⁶ Alberich does not react to this potentially illuminating sentence and

⁵⁶ "Zu seinem Verderben dient er mir schon." Ibid., 311.

continues with his description of Siegfried's love for Brünnhilde. Again, if Alberich were physically present, one would think that he would at least acknowledge that his son had spoken or ask what Hagen keeps alluding to.

Why is this scene, which does not advance the greater plot, does not utilize leitmotifs in the way one expects, and portrays an interaction between a character that isn't physically present and a character in a trance-like state, in the opera? Some might argue that the scene is present because Wagner wants to remind his audience of what happened in *Rheingold*. However, the prologue to Act I of *Götterdämmerung*, where the three Norns recount many of the events of the tetralogy witnessed thus far, serves this purpose. Act II Scene i is present to demonstrate the level of psychological influence that Alberich has over Hagen. It is present because it is crucial to understanding Hagen's frame of mind as *Götterdämmerung* progresses.

What could help inform us about this scene and its meaning? Given Wagner's intense interest in Shakespeare, one can look to Shakespearean drama for a lens through which to examine this strange scene. Not surprisingly, in one of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a scene exists that bears striking similarities to our Hagen/Alberich interaction in *Götterdämmerung*.

In Act I Scene v of *Hamlet*, Prince Hamlet communicates with the ghost of his murdered father, King Hamlet. There is one glaring difference between Hamlet's interactions with the ghost of his father and Hagen's interaction with Alberich: other people can see the Ghost in *Hamlet* whereas there is no proof that others can see Alberich in *Götterdämmerung*. Therefore, the ambiguity surrounding Alberich's physical presence

in *Götterdämmerung* does not exist in *Hamlet*; the Ghost is, without a doubt, physically there.

In Act I Scene iv, Hamlet's friends Horatio and Marcellus beg him not to follow the Ghost, but he refuses to listen:

MARCELIUS:
You shall not go, my lord.

HAMLET:
Hold off your hands.

HORATIO:
Be ruled, you shall not go.

HAMLET:
My fate cries out,
And makes each pretty artere in this body
As hardy as the Neumean lion's nerve,
Still am I called, unhand me gentlemen,
By heaven I'll make a ghost of him that lets me!
I say, away! Go on, I'll follow thee.⁵⁷

Hamlet's friends' reactions to the Ghost help to prime the audience for how they should feel about the Ghost, but it also demonstrates that Hamlet does not feel that same fear. Something about the Ghost makes Hamlet feel at ease. When, at the beginning of the Act I Scene v, the Ghost explicitly reveals his identity as Hamlet's father by saying, "I am thy father's spirit,"⁵⁸ Shakespeare does this for his audiences' benefit. Just as Wagner had Alberich reveal his identity as Hagen's father by calling Hagen "my son," Shakespeare

⁵⁷ Ibid., 889-90.

⁵⁸ William Shakespeare, "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark," in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Cambridge Text Established by John Dover Wilson for the Cambridge University Press*, ed. Philip Brockbank, 883-921 (London: Octopus Books Limited, 1980), 889.

makes the relationship between Hamlet and the Ghost plain. However, this occurs *after* Hamlet has already demonstrated that he is comfortable being alone with the Ghost. In fact, Hamlet is drawn to him and obediently follows after him, despite his friends' protestations.

The beginning of Act I Scene v reinforces Hamlet's familial comfort with the Ghost through Shakespeare's contrast of Christian expectations with Hamlet's reaction to it. The Ghost orders Hamlet to "Mark [him]" and Hamlet replies obediently, "I will."⁵⁹ After Hamlet agrees to listen, the Ghost describes the horrors that await him once he returns to the afterlife.

GHOST:
My hour is almost come,
When I to sulph'rous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.

HAMLET:
Alas poor ghost!⁶⁰

The Ghost has just talked about how he must surrender himself to torment when he is finished talking to Hamlet: Shakespeare's use of Christian Hell imagery ("sulph'rous and tormenting flames") would have made his audience immediately think that the Ghost was some sort of demonic spirit. Given the prominent role that Christianity played in everyday life during Shakespeare's time, it is easy to imagine that the audience would have shrunk away from the Ghost and been surprised when Hamlet didn't do the same. Instead of crossing himself or trying to flee, Hamlet demonstrates sympathy for the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 891.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

tormented spirit. He says, “Alas, poor Ghost!” revealing that his first instinct is inclined to sympathy, not fear. Hamlet’s reaction is all the more powerful because, at this point, the Ghost has not explicitly revealed his identity as Hamlet’s father.

Hamlet’s inherent recognition of the Ghost is demonstrated by his behavior as the scene continues. Hamlet does not interrupt the Ghost with a surprised exclamation after the Ghost reveals that he is Hamlet’s father, further demonstrating that he already knew the truth on some level. Hamlet has no qualms about interrupting the Ghost when he states facts that surprise him: he interrupts the Ghost twice when the Ghost discusses how he had been murdered and once when he finds out his uncle is the murderer. But Hamlet doesn’t interrupt when the Ghost reveals:

GHOST:
I am thy father’s spirit,
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away.⁶¹

Hamlet’s lack of surprise, coupled with his initial response to pity the Ghost, serve as clues that, while everyone else in the play (and in the audience) has thought this Ghost was a demonic spirit, Hamlet recognizes him and trusts him.

When Hamlet and the Ghost begin to speak, the similarities to the interaction between Alberich and Hagen become more evident. The Ghost dominates the scene through sheer verbal presence, effectively muzzling the normally verbose Hamlet. The scene is very short and, considering that the play is famous for Hamlet’s long soliloquies, is strikingly devoid of Hamlet’s voice. Instead, the Ghost takes charge, giving lengthy

⁶¹ Ibid.

monologues while Hamlet mostly listens. The Ghost says over 600 words while he is on stage while Hamlet speaks only 52. It is only after the Ghost vanishes that Hamlet seems to find his voice again.⁶²

Act I Scene v propels the drama forward, despite its short length. Though the Ghost is only present for the first half of the scene, his revelations dramatically change the course of Hamlet's life. Whereas the scene between Hagen and Alberich feels stagnant, like it has happened a hundred times before, the conversation between Hamlet and the Ghost is clearly happening for the first time. The Ghost's language is rich with imagery, heightening the drama. When he begins to reveal the reason for his visit, the Ghost cries:

GHOST:
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand an end,
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine,
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love-⁶³

The Ghost, in this long, winding sentence, builds the tension as he discusses the terrors he experiences in Purgatory. This leads to one of the most dramatic moments in *Hamlet*, the moment when the conflict in the play is revealed, when the Ghost divulges why he is walking the earth:

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

GHOST:
Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET:
Murder!

GHOST:
Murder most foul, as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.⁶⁴

The Ghost, like Alberich, has an urgent message to convey to his son: Hamlet must avenge his father's murder, despite Hamlet's reluctance to act. Hamlet has, up to this point in the play, been struggling morally with his father's sudden death and his mother's remarriage to his uncle, Claudius, but he has done little to remedy it. After the Ghost instructs Hamlet to avenge his murder, he describes his murderer, giving his son the tools to carry out his father's will:

GHOST:
'Tis given out, that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me, so the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged process of my death
Rankly abused: but know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.

HAMLET:
O, my prophetic soul!
My uncle?

GHOST:
Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce; won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen;
O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there!⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid.

The Ghost laments that his queen, Hamlet's mother, has been seduced by the very man who murdered him, confirming Hamlet's qualms about his uncle's rise as his king and stepfather. The Ghost uses Hamlet's morality to sway him toward revenge in his long, final monologue. He dramatically describes his murder, detailing how Claudius dripped poison into his ear as he napped under a tree in the orchard, inciting Hamlet's natural anger through his vivid retelling.

As morning dawns, the Ghost realizes his impending departure and leaves his son with a final message. The Ghost urges Hamlet not to take revenge on his mother for marrying his uncle, ordering Hamlet to leave her to "heaven, and to those thorns that in her bosom lodge to prick and sting her,"⁶⁶ namely, to God and her conscience. It is Claudius who must be destroyed to free the Ghost's soul. The moral quandary of murdering someone dominates Hamlet's mind for the rest of *Hamlet*, spurring the action from this moment forward. As the Ghost departs, he bids Hamlet, "Adieu, adieu, adieu" and begs his son, "remember me" as he vanishes.⁶⁷

After examining the father/son interaction in *Götterdämmerung* and in *Hamlet*, it is possible to discern some compelling similarities and telling differences between the two. Most notably, the supernatural nature of the fathers, their similar message of revenge, their appearance at night and need to vanish before morning, and the way the fathers dominate the scene are distinctly similar. On the opposite end, their sons'

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

reactions to their fathers' appearances are dramatically different, as is the level of ambiguity about the father's physical presence.

In both scenes, the fathers are not a part of their sons' world. In *Götterdämmerung*, I have argued that Alberich is not physically present but is rather an echo of a previous interaction between Hagen and his father. In *Hamlet*, the father is a ghost. We hear about "the Ghost" throughout the play, but it is only in Act I Scene v that we learn the spirit's identity as old King Hamlet, Hamlet's father. Similarly, in Act II Scene i of *Götterdämmerung*, we learn definitively that Hagen is Alberich's son. The fact that the fathers' identities influence the audiences' interpretation of the sons' actions for the rest of both stories makes these revelations very important. Once the sons learn of their fathers' desires for them to avenge the two very specific wrongs (Alberich's stolen ring and the Ghost's murder), this motivation becomes a guiding factor for both the sons' actions and for the audience's perceptions of the sons' characters.

The stakes are high for both fathers if their sons fail at their tasks: Alberich is frantic, tormented by the ring in *Götterdämmerung* just as he was in *Rheingold* when Wotan stole it from him.⁶⁸ The Ghost, in a similar vein, is trapped in Purgatory, suffering

⁶⁸ Alberich is being tormented by the very curse he himself placed on the Ring. This curse occurs in Scene iv of *Rheingold*. After Wotan rips the ring off Alberich's finger, he releases him, telling him that he's free to go on his way. To this, Alberich replies:

"Am I free now? (*laughing wildly*) Really free?- Then let my freedom's first greeting salute you!- Just as it came to me through a curse, so shall this ring be accursed in turn! Just as its gold once endowed me with might beyond measure, so shall its spell now deal death to whoever shall wear it! No joyful man shall ever have joy of it; on no happy man shall its bright gleam smile; may he who owns it be wracked by care, and he who does not be ravaged by greed! Each man shall covet its acquisition, but none shall enjoy it to lasting gain; its lord shall guard it without any

fiery torment as he pays for his sins, unable to rest until his murder is avenged. Both fathers have made this explicitly clear to their sons, through both their verbal domination of the scenes and their theatrical delivery of this information. Alberich utilizes frenzied, dramatic music while the Ghost employs rich imagery to keep his son's attention.

Additionally, the fathers are urgent because they are only allowed to communicate with their sons at night. Both Alberich and the Ghost must withdraw at the first sign of morning. In *Götterdämmerung*, Wagner uses the stage directions to indicate that, as the morning sun rises, Alberich must retreat. In the final moments of the scene, he writes, "From this point onwards, an increasingly dark shadow starts to envelop Alberich again. At the same time, the first streaks of light begin to appear in the sky."⁶⁹ Wagner, through this direction, juxtaposes night and day through Alberich and the morning. Alberich, existing in a different reality, cannot exist in daylight when Hagen's conscious mind is in control. As the morning light grows brighter, Wagner indicates that Alberich should fade away. The end of the scene proceeds as follows:

profit and yet it shall draw down his bane upon him. Doomed to die,
may the coward be fettered by fear; as long as he lives, let him pine
away, languishing, lord of the ring as the slave of the ring; till the stolen
circlet I hold in my hand once again!- And so in direst need the
Nibelung blesses his ring."

Alberich's behavior in the subsequent operas demonstrates that this curse has held him fast: he is "the lord of the ring as the slave of the ring." He spends most of his life after cursing the ring stalking it. The next time we actually encounter Alberich is in Act 2 scene 1 of *Siegfried*, where Wotan stumbles upon him lurking outside of the Dragon's lair, waiting for a young hero to slay the dragon so he can safely reclaim his ring. Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 105-106, 228-234.

⁶⁹ "(Von hier an bedeckt ein immer finsterer werdender Schatten wieder Alberich. Zugleich beginnt das erste Tagesgrauen)" Ibid., 311.

HAGEN:

To myself I swear it:
Silence your care!

During the following Alberich's form gradually disappears from sight, while his voice grows more and more inaudible.

ALBERICH:

Be true, Hagen, my son!
Beloved hero-be true!
Be true! True!

*Alberich has disappeared completely. Hagen, who has remained in the same position, stares motionlessly and fixedly at the Rhine, over which the light of dawn is already beginning to spread.*⁷⁰

As the morning dawns, Alberich disappears, leaving Hagen alone in the real world.

In *Hamlet*, the Ghost also is forced to flee at the first sign of morning. However, unlike Alberich, the Ghost actually remarks on the impending sunrise, acknowledging that it is forcing him to leave:

GHOST:

But, soft! methinks I scent the morning air;
Brief let me be.⁷¹

After this observation, the Ghost becomes task-oriented, ensuring that Hamlet understands what he needs to do after the Ghost is pulled back to Purgatory.

There are distinct differences between these scenes as well, namely the way Wagner and Shakespeare handle the fathers' presence. There is no ambiguity around the

⁷⁰ HAGEN: Mir selbst schwör' ich's; -schweige die Sorge! ALBERICH: (*wie er allmählich immer mehr dem Blicke entswindet, wird auch seine Stimme immer unvernembarer*) Sei treu, Hagen, mein Sohn! Trauter Helde! - Sei treu! Sei treu! - Treu! (*Alberich ist gänzlich verschwunden. Hagen, der unverändert in seiner Stellung verblieben, blickt regungslos und starren Auges nach dem Rheine hin, auf welchem sich die Morgendämmerung ausbreitet*) Ibid., 312.

⁷¹ Shakespeare, "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark," in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Cambridge Text Established by John Dover Wilson for the Cambridge University Press*, 891.

Ghost's physical presence; multiple characters in the play see the Ghost. He reveals his identity only to Hamlet, but in previous scenes, others have seen him as a phantom on the walls. For example, in Act I Scene i, watchmen Bernardo and Marcellus tell Hamlet's friend Horatio that they have seen a ghostly apparition that resembles old King Hamlet on the ramparts, but that the Ghost won't speak to them:

MARCELLUS:
Question it, Horatio.

HORATIO:
What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march? by heaven I charge thee, speak!

MARCELLUS:
It is offended.

BERNARDO:
See, it stalks away!

HORATIO
Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!
Exit Ghost

MARCELLUS:
'Tis gone, and will not answer.⁷²

There is no doubt that the Ghost exists. However, we don't know who he is until he interacts with Hamlet. The fact that others have seen the Ghost in *Hamlet* is distinctly different from the way Wagner portrays Alberich in *Götterdämmerung*.

As I have mentioned previously, Alberich's physical presence in *Götterdämmerung* is ambiguous. Alberich was alive and physically present in *Siegfried*

⁷² Ibid., 889.

when he interacts with Wotan. Act II Scene i marks the only time that Alberich appears in *Götterdämmerung* and only Hagen acknowledges him. Whether Alberich is alive or dead isn't something we can know. We do know that he speaks with Hagen, but that he is not in sync with Hagen's reality; Alberich's music is drastically different from Hagen's. In *Götterdämmerung*, Wagner makes the scene ambiguous where Shakespeare makes the Ghost's physical state explicitly known.

Another important difference is that the relationship between Hamlet and the Ghost is different than that of Hagen and Alberich. Hamlet grew up with his father, King Hamlet, in his life. He was a part of Hamlet's childhood. Hamlet's respect for the Ghost and his sullen, pensive attitude since his death demonstrate the psychological and emotional pain King Hamlet's death has caused young Hamlet. This close relationship is also revealed in Hamlet's reactions after the Ghost is forced back to Purgatory. After the Ghost vanishes in Act I Scene v, Hamlet spends time reflecting on what he has learned from him:

HAMLET:

O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee!
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven!⁷³

⁷³ Ibid., 892.

Hamlet reflects on the promise he has made to his father and steels his resolve to avenge King Hamlet's murder, taking the time to write down his pledge. Hamlet spends the rest of the play wrestling with this obligation and it becomes the main driving force behind the action in the story.

In *Götterdämmerung*, there is no such reflection from Hagen after Alberich vanishes. Hagen doesn't seem to think too much about what Alberich is saying. Hagen's restrained music and lack of engagement with Alberich demonstrates that this information isn't as exciting to Hagen as the Ghost's revelations were to Hamlet. The audience has learned that Hagen's human mother conceived him either by selling herself to or being raped by Alberich. The father/son relationship that exists between Hagen and Alberich is present in their shared blood alone: there is no evidence that Alberich played any positive role in Hagen's childhood.

In fact, Hagen seems to be fixated on the power the ring could bring to *him* rather than on obtaining it out of loyalty to Alberich. Hagen has spent most of his life positioning himself to be the brain behind Gunther's crown, ruling through his half-brother via complex manipulations. Hagen voices his frustration at being relegated to second-class status because of Alberich; his blood means that Hagen is not allowed to rule, despite his mental supremacy. He says to Gunther in Act I Scene i:

HAGEN:
You who are said to be true-born
I deem worthy of envy:
she who bore us brothers both, the Lady Grimhild',
gave me to know the reason why.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ “*Dich echt genannten acht' ich zu neiden: die beid' uns Brüder gebar, Frau Grimhild'*”

A major difference between both scenes lies in the motivations of the sons: Hamlet is motivated to right the wrong done to his father because he cares about his father's soul and is morally repulsed by his uncle's behavior, whereas Hagen is motivated to obtain the ring by his desire for power and vindication, not by Alberich's urgings.

After examining the father and son interactions in both Act II Scene i of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* and Act I Scene v of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, it is apparent that the two scenes share many similarities. While the sons have different motivations for engaging in their fathers' "missions," both scenes deal with a spectral father and earthly son, the father imploring the son to "right the wrongs" done to him in life, and both scenes, though short, give invaluable insight into the father/son relationship. Both sons are being "Called to Act" by their spectral fathers; they must right the wrongs done to their fathers because their fathers are unable to do it for themselves.

hiess mich's begreifen." Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 288.

CHAPTER THREE: “INABILITY TO ACT” AND THE FATHER/DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

Just as the father played a crucial role in his son’s behavior, he bears similar responsibility for his daughter’s. However, the father/daughter relationship is dramatically different from the father/son relationship discussed in Chapter Two. As with the father/son interaction, the father is crippled by his own “Inability to Act,” and turns to his child for help. However, the help his daughter provides is different than the help the father sought from his son. In both *Die Walküre* and *The Tempest*, the father relies on his daughter to help him come to terms with his own choices, with his past, and with his doubts. The daughter acts as an extension of the father, listening to him contemplate these larger questions and providing emotional and psychological support. However, this insight into their fathers’ hearts also provides the daughters with the tools they need to grow and form their own identities. When they are exposed to romantic love for the first time, both daughters’ place as their father’s confidante is challenged as they set out to create their own lives.

In Act II Scene ii of *Die Walküre*, Wotan and his favorite daughter, Brünnhilde, are faced with the ramifications of Wotan’s desire for power when Wotan’s own laws force him to abandon his son, Siegmund, in battle. In Act II Scene i, Wotan orders Brünnhilde to ensure that Siegmund triumphs in his battle with his sister/lover’s husband,

Hunding. Because the relationship between Siegmund and Sieglinde is both incestuous and adulterous, Wotan's wife, Fricka appears. As the goddess of marriage and family, she is appalled that Wotan is not destroying a union that is an assault on her domain. She asserts that Wotan is jeopardizing not only her authority, but the authority of all the Gods by not defending Hunding, who is technically in the moral right. Wotan realizes that, in order to maintain his power as King of the Gods, he has to sacrifice Siegmund.

Despite the problematic nature of Siegmund and Sieglinde's relationship, Wagner clearly wants the audience to empathize with them. Not only does Siegmund's love for Sieglinde represent the first depiction of romantic love in the world of the *Ring*, but Hunding is portrayed as a cruel, cold man who views his wife as property. Also, Siegmund is a crucial player in Wotan's grander plan to obtain the ring; in order to claim the ring without breaking any of his own laws, Wotan needs a hero to kill Fafner and take it. Wotan fathered Siegmund and Sieglinde, raised them just to the point where he could instill a sense of duty in them, and then abandoned them. He placed important items in their path (Nothung, the sword, for example), items they would need if they were to obtain the ring. He groomed Siegmund to be the ultimate hero, but Wotan's favor is Siegmund's downfall: the curse of the Rheingold is that one must forsake love if they lay claim to it. Wotan, as he took the ring from Alberich in *Das Rheingold*, laid claim to that gold and, as long as he tries to recover it, he is forced to sacrifice those he cares most for it. In Act II Scene i, Wotan is filled with enthusiasm and pride. He is convinced that the object of his desire is within his grasp. His years of patience, of grooming Siegmund into the ideal hero, are about to pay off. But the curse is still there and, after Fricka reminds him of his duty as King of the Gods, he is frustrated and downtrodden. He realizes that

his plan has failed and he will have to sacrifice Siegmund, thwarting his carefully laid plan to get the ring.

In Act II Scene ii, Brünnhilde returns to her father's side, ready to fight for Siegmund, only to find Wotan in a deep depression. Brünnhilde is taken aback by this sudden change in Wotan's state of mind and asks:

BRÜNNHILDE:
What is it father,
your child must learn?
Sad you seem and downhearted.

WOTAN:
Dropping his arm in a gesture of helplessness and allowing his head to sink on his breast.
In my own fetters
I find myself caught:-
I, least free of all things living!⁷⁵

Until this point, the only character Wotan has confided in is Loge in *Das Rheingold*. Even then, Wotan revealed only what was necessary to keep Loge as a co-conspirator in his scheme to use Alberich's stolen gold to pay the ransom the Giants asked for Freia. Wotan sees Loge as an assistant, as a means to an end, and exploits his cleverness to gain more power. Wotan does not see Loge as his equal and only confides in him as a means to influence him.

Loge realizes that he has been used and resents it. When Loge discovers that Wotan isn't going to right any of the wrongs committed against the Rhinemaidens, he is

⁷⁵ BRÜNNHILDE: "Vater, was soll dein Kind erfahren? Trübe scheinst du und traurig!"
WOTAN: (lässt den Arm machtlos sinken und den Kopf in den Nacken fallen) "In eigener Fessel fing ich mich: ich Unfreiester aller!" Ibid., 148.

disgusted and judges Wotan. This judgment is important, as it contrasts with how Brünnhilde reacts to Wotan later. Loge says:

LOGE:
They're hurrying on towards their end,
though they think they will last forever.
I'm almost ashamed
to share in their dealings;
to turn myself
into guttering lame
I feel a seductive desire.
To burn them up
who formally tamed me,
instead of feebly
fading away with the blind-
and were they the godliest Gods-
that seems to me not so foolish!
I'll think it over:
who knows what I'll do!⁷⁶

When Wotan hears the Rhinemaidens calling out for their gold, the gold he just used to pay for his own schemes, Loge mocks him, calling sarcastically to the Rhinemaidens, "You there in the water! Why weep at us up here? Hear what Wotan wishes of you: if the gold no longer gleams on you maidens, blissfully bask henceforth in the Gods' new-found splendor!"⁷⁷ Wotan chooses, in *Das Rheingold*, to blindly solidify his own power, regardless of the means it takes; Loge judges him for it.

⁷⁶ LOGE: "*Ihrem Ende eilen sie zu, die so stark in Bestehen sich wöhnen. 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 vergehn, und wären es göttlichste Götter! Nicht dumm dünkte mich das! Bedenken will ich's: wer weiss, was ich tu'!*" Ibid., 117.

⁷⁷ WOTAN: *Welch' Klagen klingt zu mir her?* LOGE: *(späht in das Tal hinab) Des Rheines Kinder beklagen des Goldes Raub!* WOTAN: *Verwünschte Nicker! (zu Loge) Wehre ihrem Geneck!* LOGE: *(in das Tal hinabrufend) Ihr da im Wasser, was weint ihr herauf? Hört, was Wotan euch wünscht! Glänzt nicht mehr euch Mädchen das Gold, in*

We see in Act II Scene ii that Brünnhilde has a very different reaction to her father's past mistakes. She meets him not with judgment but with empathy, allowing him to open up to her in ways he had been unable to before. This is because, unlike other characters, Brünnhilde can truly understand Wotan. Carolyn Abbate argues in *Unsung Voices* that Act II Scene ii is an example of "Narrative Song," a style of music that Wagner utilizes to expose inconsistencies between what the music is conveying and what the character is telling us, "operatic music's...capacity to speak 'falsely.'"⁷⁸ It is true that, in this moment, we are hearing Wotan's version of events, as he wants Brünnhilde to understand them. But Abbate also states:

The monologue asks us to distrust music's voice: that voice may *ring false*. Yet there is one figure within the *Ring* itself who is able to perceive Wotan's monologue in precisely this way, and that is Brünnhilde, the all-but-silent person who sits, only faintly illuminated, at the edge of the spotlight that tracks Wotan's performance. As the second individual in the scene, the listener that every narration (in being a performance) must postulate, she may seem to represent a merely passive function, or a reflexive projection of opera's own real audience. So, too, she might be taken as a character that seems merely to follow the dictates of others' desires. She is often defined as a conduit for Wotan's thought, as "Wotan's Will"... Her initial act of subversive behavior (the decision to side with Siegmund against Wotan's command) is inspired by Siegmund's own persuasive voice. Her presence and identity as a listener, however, is in fact extremely complex...this identity reconstrues Brünnhilde as a focus of moral acuity and tragic skepticism, one whose interpretation of narration is predicted on a unique gift of hearing. This ambiguous gift- rather than some blind execution of

der Götter neuem Glanze sonnt euch selig fortan! Ibid., 117-118.

⁷⁸ Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*. (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1991) 204.

Wotanic commands- is what brings her to the Hegelian stroke that ends the *Ring's* world.⁷⁹

Whereas Loge is an accomplice, Brünnhilde is a confidante. Abbate discusses how Brünnhilde is a “conduit for Wotan’s thought,” the physical manifestation of his “Will,” but that this insight into her father’s thoughts empowers her to act on his behalf of his heart, even as his logical mind rebels against it. She is not as passive as she appears. She attends to Wotan with empathy and an open mind. She does not judge him; she hears him, truly hears him, in a way no other person can.

Brünnhilde’s relationship with Wotan, with the story he tells her, and with the drama to come is unique because she actually understands him. She understands that a god can say one thing and mean another; Brünnhilde and only Brünnhilde possesses the insight needed to interpret Wotan’s orders rather than blindly obey them. In *Die Walküre*, Brünnhilde is not a tool for Wotan to use. Rather, she becomes the only person in the *Ring* cycle that Wotan trusts with the truth behind his behavior, with his motivations for acting. In Act II Scene ii, we see the human side of Wotan. We see him wrestle with his past choices and the influence they have over his present desires. When Wotan admits “In my own fetters I find myself caught:-I, least free of all things living,⁸⁰ he is acknowledging that the very laws he created to keep himself in power are preventing him from doing what he desires. He feels defeated.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 204-205.

⁸⁰ WOTAN: *In eigener Fessel fang ich mich: ich Unfreiester aller!* Millington and Spencer, *Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 148.

Wagner establishes, even before this interaction, that Brünnhilde's relationship with Wotan is unique because Brünnhilde is unique. She is a daughter of Erda, which means she possesses exceptional insight. This insight, combined with her close relationship with her father, makes her uniquely suited to understand Wotan's heart. To demonstrate this, Wagner utilizes Wotan's lost eye as a metaphor for Wotan's inability to understand himself: he gave his eye for the ability to see the world clearly, for the ability to comprehend it and, therefore, gain power over it. Owen Lee observes:

Wotan says he [gave] an eye to know the secret of the world...henceforth, he will see, with his remaining eye, what he has asked to see-the world without. And he will understand it. But he will not see the world within. He will need help to understand himself.⁸¹

Brünnhilde takes on the role of Wotan's missing eye in Wotan's world. As the daughter of Wotan and the Goddess of Wisdom, Erda, Brünnhilde possesses the insight and wisdom Wotan traded away.

Brünnhilde has acted up until this point as an agent of her father's Will, following his orders and operating as his "active hand" in the world. Wotan remains in Valhalla while his daughter goes into the world, fighting battles and selecting heroes to join the Gods in Valhalla based on Wotan's needs. She operates as a piece of him: she does not have an independent identity. Eva Rieger observes in *Richard Wagner's Women*:

[The Valkyries] are also called 'Wunschmädchen' ('Wish Maidens') in the sources- hence, Wotan's reference to Brünnhilde as his 'Wunschmaid'... Wotan is responsible for the fate of heroes and for battles. By accompanying the fallen to Valhalla (to heaven in Grimm), the Valkyries carry out Wotan's wishes and are thus both dependent

⁸¹ M. Owen Lee, *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Round, Commentaries on the Ring of the Nibelung*, (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1990), 55.

upon him and subordinate to him. The dependence of the Valkyries on make authority is a given right from the start.⁸²

Brünnhilde has a strong bond with Wotan because he is the one who gives her purpose, who guides her life. Wotan finds a connection to the world through Brünnhilde and has a genuine emotional bond with her.

It is this connection that makes Brünnhilde and Wotan's relationship unique.

Brünnhilde loves her father deeply and encourages him to confide in her:

BRÜNNHILDE:

(Startled, throwing down shield, spear and helmet and sinking down at Wotan's feet in anxious solicitude)

Father! Father!

Tell me, what ails you?

How you startle your child and fill her with fear!

Confide in me:

I'm true to you;

see Brünnhilde begs you.⁸³

Wagner instructs in his stage directions that, at this point, Wotan "gazes at length into her eyes, after which he strokes her hair in a gesture of spontaneous tenderness. As if emerging from deep thought, he finally begins [to speak] in whispered tones."⁸⁴ This moment is very important to the scene because, for the first time in the *Ring* operas,

⁸² Eva Rieger, *Richard Wagner's Women*, trans. Chris Walton (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), 128.

⁸³ BRÜNNHILDE: *(wirft erschrocken Schild, Speer und Helm von sich und lässt sich mit besorgter Zutraulichkeit zu Wotans Füßen nieder) Vater! Vater! Sage, was ist dir? Wie erschreckst du mit Sorge dein Kind? Vertraue mir! Ich bin dir treu: sieh, Brünnhilde bittet!* Ibid.

⁸⁴ *(blickt ihr lange ins Auge; dann streichelt er ihr mit unwillkürlicher Zärtlichkeit die Locken. Wie aus tiefem Sinnen zu sich kommend, beginnt er endlich sehr leise).* Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 148.

Wotan shows genuine affection for and trust in another person. It is not planned or manipulated; he is unburdening himself to someone he feels will understand. This action demonstrates Wotan's connection with Brünnhilde: he loves her enough to trust her with his true self. He does not reveal it to manipulate her or as a tool to get his way, but because he needs to emotionally.

Wagner's musical choices, however, remind the audience of Wotan's internal conflicts. In the moment before Wotan touches Brünnhilde's hair, we hear variations on a leitmotif representing Wotan's spear and contracts, his power (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Wotan's Spear leitmotif:⁸⁵



Much of Wotan's power has come from him manipulating others to get what he needs. His power has come from him remaining emotionally distant and cold. The presence of this leitmotif before he touches Brünnhilde's hair demonstrates how his daughter has the ability to break down his walls. It is only after the leitmotif sounds and he gazes into Brünnhilde's eyes that he voices one of his deepest concerns:

WOTAN:
If I let it be spoken aloud,
shall I not loosen
my will's restraining hold?

BRÜNNHILDE:
(very quietly)
To Wotan's will you speak

⁸⁵ Donington, *Wagner's 'Ring' and its Symbols: The Music and the Myth*, 282.

when you tell me what you will:
who am I
if not your will?⁸⁶

Brünnhilde convinces Wotan to speak to her about his emotions by telling him that she is a piece of him, an agent of his will, who will not betray him. Wotan, who has not shown genuine love toward another person until this point, demonstrates his trust in his daughter by going on to tell her his secrets, the things he has never revealed before.

M. Owen Lee observes in *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Round*:

Could Wotan not have seen that this would have to be? No. Wotan cannot see into his own self. But there *is* a character that really sees into Wotan. The character for whom the second opera of the *Ring* was named, the Valkyrie daughter Brünnhilde. Fathered from the intuitive Erda, she is a special Valkyrie, violent as the others, but also intuitive. That is why, in Act II, she stays with her father when he looks into himself.⁸⁷

When Wotan begins to reveal his private self, Wagner's music illustrates this inward turn by placing the focus squarely on Wotan's words. The accompaniment drops away, leaving only Wotan's voice over an instrumental drone comprised of a string bass, cello, trombones, and bass trombones. The low timbre in the instrumental accompaniment brings to mind the low E-flat that begins Act I of *Rheingold*, pushing the audience to remember the beginning of the saga along with Wotan. Additionally, the low drone gives his words a sense of dark gravitas.

⁸⁶ WOTAN: *Lass' ich's verlauten, lös' ich dann nicht meines Willens haltenden Haft?*
BRÜNNHILDE: *(ihm ebenso erwidernnd) Zu Wotans Willen sprichst du, sagst du mir, was du willst; wer bin ich, wär' ich dein Wille nicht?* Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 148-149.

⁸⁷ Lee, *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Round*, 58-59.

WOTAN:
(*very quietly*)
What in words I reveal to no one,
let it stay,
unspoken for ever:
with myself I commune
when I speak with you.⁸⁸

As Wotan continues, three of the four instruments that made up the drone drop out, leaving only Wotan's voice and a string bass drone. As his story builds in intensity, the music builds as well, with instruments returning to the fold to add texture. The cellos enter after Wotan sings, "I won for myself the world."⁸⁹ In the beginning of *Rheingold*, the world of the opera begins to take shape as more and more instruments join the low E-flat and the harmonies become more complex. Similarly, as Wotan starts to retell the events of *Rheingold* (and before), instruments join the drone gradually, and begin to make the music more and more texturally complex.

While the texture of the music gets thicker, the musical "meat" stays relatively sparse. The drone makes the moments in Wotan's retelling when a leitmotif appears all the more poignant. The first motif that appears is a "Woe" motif from *Das Rheingold* that Alberich first sings when he is trying to entice the Rhinemaidens into falling in love with him (see Figure 8). This motif sounds when Wotan sings "Alberich severed [the gold's]

⁸⁸ WOTAN: (*sehr leise*) *Was keinem in Worten ich künde, unausgesprochen bleib' es denn ewig: mit mir nur rat' ich, red' ich zu dir.* - Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 149.

⁸⁹ WOTAN: *Wüten gejagt, gewann ich mir die Welt.* Wagner, *Die Walküre*, 242.

bonds.”⁹⁰ This musical reference reminds the audience of Alberich’s theft of the Rheingold; the action that set all of the events in *Walküre* into motion. It is also symbolic of the sadness and strife that the theft of the gold and the subsequent curse brought into the world, not only for Alberich but also for the Gods and society as a whole.

Figure 8: “Woe” Leitmotif:⁹¹



Leitmotifs serve to remind the listener of what has transpired earlier and give the audience (and Brünnhilde) insight into Wotan’s state of mind as the events occurred. As Wotan sings “cunningly Loge lured me on, but vanished while roaming the world”⁹² we hear a leitmotif that we heard for the first time earlier in Act II (see Figure 9) when Wotan was first confronted with his obligations and how they impede his desire. This leitmotif, “Wotan’s Power (Valhalla),” makes its first appearance in the final sentence of Fricka’s long lecture on family, morality, and Wotan’s own laws in the previous scene as she destroys Wotan’s hope that he had created an “independent hero” who could take the ring. Fricka points out that Wotan has already interfered in Siegmund’s life too much for him to be autonomous, that, by abandoning him as he did while providing him with a way

⁹⁰ WOTAN: *Alberich, brach ihren Bund*. Millington and Spencer, *Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 149.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁹² WOTAN: *listig verlockte mich Loge, der schweifend nun verschwand*. Wagner, *Die Walküre*, 242.

to the great sword Nothung, he has inadvertently created a puppet hero rather than an independent one.

Figure 9: Wotan's Power (Valhalla):⁹³



Finally, Fricka dashes his final hopes, reminding him that, while Sieglinde's husband is a repugnant human being, Hunding is in the legal right, reminding Wotan that his own laws, the laws that give the Gods their authority, state that he must support Hunding. As she sings, "My husband cannot want such a thing, he'd not profane the goddess so,"⁹⁴ we hear the leitmotif that signals Wotan's torment, his obligations to his own power that go against his desire (see Figure 10). This leitmotif's meaning is hit home only one line later when the following interaction takes place:

WOTAN:
(somberly)
What do you demand of me?

FRICKA:
Abandon the Wälsung!⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid., 282.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ WOTAN: (*finster*) *Was verlangst du?* FRICKA: *Lass von dem Wälsung!* Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 146.

When Fricka sings “Abandon the Wälsung!,” we hear the “Wotan’s torment” leitmotif again, reaffirming its meaning as Wotan is forced to destroy the hero he has so painstakingly created. The leitmotif sounds again when Wotan gives Fricka his oath that he will back Hunding in the battle to come, not Siegmund, and then again, as Wotan contemplates his situation at the end of Act II Scene i as Brünnhilde enters. In these same moments, we hear the “Curse” leitmotif, reminding the audience that it is Alberich’s curse that is behind “Wotan’s Torment” (see Figures 10 and 11).⁹⁶

Figure 10: Wotan’s Torment:⁹⁷



Figure 11: Alberich’s Curse:⁹⁸



Brünnhilde listens to Wotan’s words, but, given her insight, she can also see into Wotan’s heart as he speaks. After their Act II Scene ii conversation, she can hear Wotan’s internal torments: the woe and curse and Wotan’s frustration. When he orders her to abandon Siegmund, Brünnhilde knows it isn’t what he really wants; Wotan desires Siegmund to live and Hunding to die. Brünnhilde agrees to side with Hunding and collect

⁹⁶ The “Wotan’s Torment” leitmotif occurs repeatedly in multiple instruments on page 234 alongside sections of “The Curse” motif.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Siegmond for Valhalla, but she can't forget what she learned. All it will take for her to act on her father's desires and not his words is a little push.

Brünnhilde's exposure to new ideas and experiences eventually changes things. When Wotan shares his internal conflicts with her, he inadvertently offers her a spark of doubt; what does it mean to serve Wotan's Will? Does it mean obeying his words at the expense of his true desires? Or does it mean acting as Wotan wants her to act, despite his protestations to the contrary? Philip Kitcher and Robert Schacht remark in their philosophical analysis of Wagner's *Ring*:

Love for her father and compassion for his despair begins the process of Brünnhilde's transformation into an independent agent- a process that will be completed by her recognition of the nobility of Siegmund and Sieglinde and the strength and praiseworthiness of their mutual love.⁹⁹

It is Wotan's confession of his doubts that opens the door for Brünnhilde to have doubts of her own.

Unfortunately for Brünnhilde and Wotan's relationship, their bond is based on being in sync. Just as children must find their own way in the world by separating themselves from their parents through exposure to new experiences, Brünnhilde is exposed to romantic love for the first time in Act II Scene iv of *Die Walküre*. This is the catalyst that inspires her to serve her father's heart and not his orders. As a Valkyrie,

⁹⁹ Philip Kitcher and Richard Schacht, *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner's Ring* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 109.

Brünnhilde was “created for battle, not for love.”¹⁰⁰ Romantic love is a new and powerful force in the world of *Die Walküre* and it will try the bond between father and daughter.

In Act II Scene ii, Wotan is unable to act as he wishes he could. Through his interaction with Brünnhilde and his confessions to her, it is possible to understand his true desires. Now, we must examine the consequences of his choice to confide in Brünnhilde, as they also mirror Shakespeare. Brünnhilde now is faced with a choice: does she obey Wotan’s words or does she do what she now knows he wishes he could do? Her decision further illuminates the complexities of the father/daughter bond Wagner was showcasing.

It is only when Brünnhilde confronts Siegmund in Act II Scene iv of *Die Walküre* that her loyalty to the laws of her father is tested and the doubts brought to light by Wotan’s confessions are strengthened. Brünnhilde has told hundreds of heroes of their impending doom and, initially, Siegmund asks her questions she expects: Will Siegmund see his father there? Will there be beautiful women to greet him? He is satisfied with her answers to those queries. But then he asks about Sieglinde, “Can this brother take with him his sister and bride? Will Siegmund embrace Sieglinde there?”¹⁰¹ Brünnhilde answers, “She must still breathe the air of the Earth. You will not see Sieglinde there, Siegmund.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 128.

¹⁰¹ “*Begleitet den Bruder die bräutliche Schwester? Umfängt Siegmund Sieglinde dort?*” Wagner, *Die Walküre*, 340-41.

¹⁰² “*Erdenluft muss sie noch atmen: Sieglinde sieht Siegmund dort nicht.*” Ibid., 341-42.

Siegmond's behavior astonishes her. He tells her that she can greet Valhalla, Wotan, his father, the heroes and the maidens for him because he will not follow her, stating, "Wherever Sieglinde lives, in pleasure or sorrow, Siegmund must stay. Your gaze has not yet made me grow pale. It will never force me from her side."¹⁰³ Brünnhilde is angry at first, calling Siegmund a fool for refusing the great honor she is offering him, for choosing Hell over Valhalla, and for mocking his unchangeable fate. But her anger gives way to genuine confusion as she asks, "So little do you value everlasting bliss? Is she everything to you, this poor woman who, tired and sorrowful, lies limp in your lap?"¹⁰⁴ At this moment, Brünnhilde begins to feel something new for Siegmund; she pities him. Both Schopenhauer and Wagner believed that pity was an emotion that could part a person from the Will:¹⁰⁵ in this case, the pity Brünnhilde feels for Siegmund separates her just enough from Wotan's orders for her to begin to see the nobility of Siegmund's emotion, and the tragedy of his situation. She begins to understand why Wotan didn't want Siegmund to die. She begins to question her orders and her heart; reflecting on her conversation with Wotan, she begins to question whether to follow his will or his words. For the first time, she senses how different those two courses of action are.

The music reflects this shift. Brünnhilde's music prior to this moment had been bombastic repetitions of Wotan's numerous motifs ("Wotan's Will," "Wotan's

¹⁰³ "Wo Sieglinde lebt in Lust und Leid, da will Siegmund auch säumen: noch machte dein Blick nicht mich erbleichen: vom Bleiben zwingt er mich nie." Ibid., 345-47.

¹⁰⁴ "So wenig achtest du ewige Wonne? Alles wär' dir das arme Weib, das müd' und harmvoll matt von dem Schosse dir hängt?" Ibid., 357.

¹⁰⁵ David E. Cartwright, "Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche on the Morality of Pity." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, no. 1 (1984), 83-98.

Frustration,” “Wotan’s spear,” “Valhalla,” etc.) but at this moment, the music thins to a sparse homophonic texture and Brünnhilde sings a sad, soft, mid-range melody with the strings. The tenderness achieved by this abrupt shift informs the listener of the modification of Brünnhilde’s psychology; just as the music is softening, Brünnhilde’s heart is softening too. Her vocal line consists of meandering, chromatic intervals that have no distinct tonal center, as if Brünnhilde can’t quite wrap her mind around Siegmund’s logic and reflects the existential crisis she’s experiencing. Brünnhilde has been raised by Wotan to believe that power and glory are the most important aspects of life, but Wotan’s own doubt and heartache about killing Siegmund hint to her that there is something more important than power. Now, having been exposed to Siegmund’s passionate love for Sieglinde, Brünnhilde is beginning to understand what Wotan is choosing to sacrifice for supremacy and glory: love.

Siegmond doesn’t relent, forcing Brünnhilde to make a choice. He raises his sword over Sieglinde and sings loudly, “Two lives smile on you here! Take them, Nothung, most precious sword, take them with one blow!”¹⁰⁶ The music that accompanies Siegmund’s phrases is frenzied, with dynamic shifts from fortissimo to piano in single measures in the brass and woodwinds and with un-resolving, building dissonance up to the moment Siegmund finishes, almost interrupted by a desperate and terrified Brünnhilde. “Stop Wälsung! Hear what I say!” She sings high in her range (a

¹⁰⁶ “Zwei Leben lachen dir hier: nimm sie, Nothung, neidischer Stahl! Nimm sie mit einem Streich! Millington and Spencer, *Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 365-67.

G/A). Then, her music transforms: the texture fills out, the notes begin ascending, and the dissonance dissipates. Brünnhilde has made her decision:

BRÜNNHILDE:
Sieglinde shall live
and Siegmund will live beside her!
It is decided:
I'll change the fight's outcome;
for you, Siegmund,
I'll procure favor and victory!
Do you hear the call?
Now prepare, hero!
Rely on your sword
and wield it boldly!
The weapon will be true to you,
just as the Valkyrie will truly protect you!
Farewell, Siegmund,
beloved hero!
On the battlefield I shall see you again!¹⁰⁷

Brünnhilde defies Wotan's orders for the first time, disregarding his command to let Siegmund fall. Instead, she sides with him as she senses her father truly wishes he could. In this moment, Brünnhilde is no longer able to blindly obey Wotan's words: the insight Wotan gave her into his soul allowed her to act on his heart's wishes instead.

Kitcher and Schacht remark:

Brünnhilde sees that the love between Siegmund and Sieglinde may be heroically true unto death and beyond, but that it is love's values rather than those of valiant heroism that rule this ill-fated pair. The truth and ultimacy of their love, vouchsafed by the unconditionality of their commitment to it, is precisely what becomes so profoundly authoritative in Brünnhilde's eyes. The sequence of judgments Siegmund delivers with

¹⁰⁷ "Halt' ein Wälsung! Höre mein Wort! Sieglinde lebe -und Siegmund lebe mit ihr! Beschlossen ist's; das Schlachtlos wend' ich: dir, Siegmund, schaff' ich Segen und Sieg! Hörst du den Ruf? Nun rüste dich, Held! Traue dem Schwert und schwing' es getrost: treu hält dir die Wehr, wie die Walküre treu dich schützt! - Leb' wohl, Siegmund, seligster Held! Auf der Walstatt seh' ich dich wieder!" Ibid., 367-75.

respect to her summons to Valhalla and her clear recognition that he really means what he says, move her powerfully, in a way and direction making possible both her own immanent rebellion and her eventual utter commitment to Siegfried.¹⁰⁸

The father/daughter bond, which was so strong, has been fractured by Brünnhilde's apparent defiance. Father and daughter are no longer in sync. Brünnhilde is doing what Wotan wishes he could, not what he commanded. Wotan gave her this power when he confided in her; when it became clear to her that his words did not match his will, he gave her the opportunity to make a choice. And, after seeing firsthand the might love could command, Brünnhilde could not fathom sacrificing it for the sake of a law. She is untouched by Alberich's and the Rheingold's curses and can therefore act on love's behalf in a way that Wotan cannot; she has not traded it for power like her father did.

Wotan is confronted by his desire for power and his bond with Brünnhilde, which, for the first time, are at complete odds. Brünnhilde's actions *are* what Wotan wanted in his heart, but not what he ordered her to do: supporting Siegmund jeopardizes all of the treaties and laws that keep him on his throne in Valhalla. But Wotan cannot choose love as Brünnhilde did. He is forced to punish his supposedly obstinate daughter, sacrificing the one relationship Wotan has that is built on substance, not ambition, to maintain his power. In Wotan's world, love and power cannot coexist; his choice to covet the ring has robbed him of this.

The third act of *Die Walküre* provides insight into both Brünnhilde's interpretation of her own behavior as well as into her now shattered relationship with Wotan, who, as a punishment, rips his "Will" out of his world and condemns her to a

¹⁰⁸ Kitcher and Schacht, *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner's Ring*, 146.

mortal life. In Act III Scene ii, Wotan descends on Brünnhilde's Valkyrie sisters in a vengeful rage, bellowing for them to relinquish Brünnhilde to him. In an attempt to paint for them the depth of her betrayal, he laments:

No one knew my inmost thoughts as she did!
 No one but she knew whence my intentions sprang!
 She herself was the fertile womb of my wishes!
 Now she has broken the sacred alliance...
 she has defied my Will,
 she has openly scorned her master's orders
 and taken up arms against me.¹⁰⁹

When Brünnhilde appears, Wotan bombards her with a series of statements in which he compares the Brünnhilde of Act II Scene ii with the Brünnhilde who stands before him in Act III Scene ii.¹¹⁰ Wotan conceives the perfect punishment for Brünnhilde: because she turned against him for the sake of love, he condemns her to the life of a mortal woman, stripping her of all her power and forcing her to submit to the first man

¹⁰⁹ “*Keine wie sie kannte mein innerstes Sinnen; keine wie sie wusste den Quell meines Willens! Sie selbst war meines Wunsches schaffender Schoss: - und so nun brach sie den seligen Bund, dass treulos sie meinem Willen getrotzt, mein herrschend Gebot offen verhöhnt, gegen mich die Waffe gewandt,*” Wagner, *Die Walküre*, 560-61.

¹¹⁰ “I do not punish you myself. You made your own punishment. Through my will alone you existed, and you have willed against it. My orders alone you carried out, but you gave orders against me. I made you agent of my wishes, but you turned your wish against me; I made you bearer of my shield, but you raised that shield against me. I made you disposer of fates, but you disposed fate against me. I made you the inspiration of heroes, but you inspired the heroes against me. Wotan has told you what you once were. Tell yourself what you now are! You are not my wish's agent. Your Valkyriehood is over.” (*Nicht straf' ich dich erst: deine Strafe schufst du dir selbst. Durch meinen Willen warst du allein: gegen ihn doch hast du gewollt; meinen Befehl nur führtest du aus: gegen ihn doch hast du befohlen; Wunschmaid warst du mir: gegen mich doch hast du gewünscht; Schildmaid warst du mir: gegen mich doch hobst du den Schild; Loskieserin warst du mir: gegen mich doch kiestest du Lose; Heldenreizerin warst du mir: gegen mich doch reiztest du Helden. Was sonst du warst, sagte dir Wotan: was jetzt du bist, das sage dir selbst! Wunschmaid bist du nicht mehr; Walküre bist du gewesen*) Ibid., 563-568.

who finds her. He asserts that the shame of a mortal life (aging, forced to be a wife to a mortal man) is the only sentence strong enough to sufficiently punish Brünnhilde for the indignity and loss of power her disobedience could have caused him.

Act III Scene iii mirrors Act II Scene ii in that they are both scenes in which Wotan and Brünnhilde speak to each other honestly and plainly. Brünnhilde attempts to explain herself to her father, hoping to help him comprehend what she now knows. She asserts that she carried out Wotan's command, despite his revised decree, stating:

BRÜNNHILDE:
When Fricka made
your own intentions foreign to you,
when you took her point of view,
you were your own enemy...
I am not clever,
but I knew one thing,
that you loved the Wälsung...
Because my eyes are yours
I held to the one thing
which the alternative forced you...
and this time I only saw
what you could not see...
I only knew that this was the lot I must choose.
One man's love breathed this into my heart;
one Will it was
that allied me with the Wälsung:
and faithful to you inwardly,
I disobeyed your command.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ "Als Fricka den eignen Sinn dir entfremdet; da ihrem Sinn du dich fügtest,..Nicht weise bin ich, doch wusst' ich das Eine, dass den Wälsung du liebtest...warst du selber dir Feind.Weil für dich im Auge das Eine ich hielt, dem, im Zwange des andren...Weil für dich im Auge das Eine ich hielt, dem, im Zwange des andren... Der diese Liebe mir ins Herz gehaucht, dem Willen, der dem Wälsung mich gesellt, ihm innig vertraut - trotz' ich deinem Gebot." Wagner, *Die Walküre*, 603-20.

Brünnhilde attempts to make her father understand the world she now comprehends, the beauty of love when compared with the exhausting drive for power, and insists that it was what Wotan truly wanted too. Siegmund's willingness to abandon his hero's death for the chance to die with Sieglinde was magical to Brünnhilde, something far more powerful than anything she had encountered up to this point. It reinforced the longing she felt in Wotan's heart when he confided in her; Wotan is tired of striving for control. Brünnhilde knows now that what Wotan wants more than anything is freedom to act as he feels he should, freedom to love, to be himself. To serve this end, Brünnhilde was doing what had to be done; it was what Wotan wanted done, even if he couldn't voice it. He didn't need to say it: her insightful nature and his candid confession to her in Act II Scene ii exposed the subtext to his orders. In her mind, she didn't betray him at all.

But Wotan cannot change course; when he took Alberich's ring, he was touched by the curse. To possess the Rheingold one must sacrifice love. Wotan may want to keep Siegmund alive, he may not want to punish Brünnhilde, but he must. Wotan is a tangle of issues: he is touched by the curse which robs him of love, and he gave his eye for worldly wisdom, sacrificing self-awareness. He sees only his power and security and how Brünnhilde's decision jeopardized them. For Wotan, love is nothing compared to the law.

Brünnhilde, however, due to her exposure to Siegmund and Sieglinde's love firsthand, the insight she inherited from her mother, Erda, and her understanding of Wotan, can see beyond the laws Wotan created and power. Because Brünnhilde has operated as Wotan's "lost eye" into himself, she developed a sense of empathy that Wotan is incapable of understanding. Kitcher and Schacht observe that "Love of this sort

springs from the heart rather than from the mind and will; it has nothing forced or strained about it, for it is not dependent on commitment to abstract ideals or principles.”¹¹² Brünnhilde has learned something about the world she cannot share with Wotan and, therefore, she can no longer be his “lost eye.” She can no longer embody his Will: his confessions in Act II Scene ii gave her a choice; there is no going back from it. She knows too much now about Wotan, about the world, and about love. She truly loves her father and would rather give him his heart’s desire than obey his words.

These two perspectives cannot coexist anymore. Brünnhilde has gone to a place where Wotan cannot follow. Wotan, despite his own pain, can only follow the laws he created, can only act to maintain his power, not with his heart. He severs his bond with his favorite child, removing her immortality and relinquishing her to a mortal life. There will be no further interaction between Wotan and Brünnhilde.

The philosophical and psychological consequences of this separation are explored in the two final operas in Wagner’s *Ring* cycle. Without Brünnhilde to act as his eye, Wotan becomes aware of his blindness in *Siegfried*, becoming “Der Wanderer” and spending the entirety of the opera as a wandering observer, struggling to know his own heart as he learns about the world. When Siegfried destroys Wotan’s staff in *Siegfried*, Wotan’s power is destroyed. With his will separated from him, his power gone, and no love to fill the void, Wotan in *Götterdämmerung* longs for death, for the world built through his Will to be destroyed and replaced by something better.

¹¹² Kitcher and Schacht, *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner’s Ring*, 150.

Brünnhilde evolves as well. After discovering love with Siegfried in *Siegfried*, she gives herself to him as his wife. She chooses to sacrifice her knowledge and power in favor of love, making the opposite choice her father made. The two characters, once so close that they knew the other's thoughts and emotions without effort, now are on opposite paths. Brünnhilde and Wotan never see each other again.

Shakespeare explores the fragile intimacy of the father/daughter relationship in his final play, *The Tempest*. In *The Tempest*, we meet Prospero and his daughter, Miranda, living exiled on an island where Prospero, a sorcerer, is able to control every aspect of their lives through magic. Just as Wotan and Brünnhilde share a close bond that allows Wotan to reveal his innermost self to her, Prospero and Miranda share a closeness that was uncommon in Shakespeare's time. And, just as Wotan and Brünnhilde's bond was impacted by her exposure to romantic love, Prospero and Miranda's relationship is changed by Miranda's romantic desire for Ferdinand. Just as Wotan is unable to act without Brünnhilde, a reluctant Prospero is pushed to re-enter the world by his daughter's desire for love and marriage. Both men feel incapable of action and are moved to act by their daughters' choices.

By the end of his career, Shakespeare had moved away from comedies and tragedies into more ambiguous, dark explorations of humanity. He was drawn to examining the relationship between fathers and daughters. In fact, four of his final plays, characterized by scholars as "Shakespearean Romances," focus on the relationship between fathers and daughters. In these four plays, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, "Shakespeare exhibits a preoccupation with daughters... In each of these plays the relationship between father and daughter is central to the story; these

daughters are strong women that are indisputably kind, fair and virtuous.”¹¹³ In *The Tempest*, the relationship between Prospero and Miranda is stronger than the father/daughter relationships in the other three plays. They are not only isolated with only each other for company, but *The Tempest* is the only one of the later romances where there is no reconciliation scene between the father and daughter, as it is not needed. In the other three plays, the father and daughter are parted, but this is not the case for Prospero and Miranda:

Miranda, having grown up on a deserted island, is entirely unaffected by the outside world. Until the arrival of the strangers on the ship, the only other human she has ever known is her own father, Prospero. Her scope of existence rests solely in him and his teachings. Unlike the other romances, there is no reunion scene between father and daughter, for there never is a parting.¹¹⁴

In fact, the only conflict between Prospero and Miranda have is when Prospero pretends to forbid Miranda from interacting with Ferdinand (in reality, Prospero is trying to bring them together). It is important to note that Prospero and Wotan respond differently to their daughters' desires to change the course of their lives: Prospero enables it willingly whereas Wotan's hand is forced. However, one must note that, in both cases, the fathers are certain that they're giving their daughters to worthy men. Prospero knows that Ferdinand is a noble, important man just as Wotan knows that Brünnhilde will only be awoken by the bravest, most worthy of heroes. It is also important to note that, while Brünnhilde and Wotan part at the end of *Die Walküre*, Brünnhilde does have a moment of

¹¹³ The Shakespeare Theater, "About *The Tempest*," *ShakespeareTheater.org*, http://www.shakespearetheater.org/_pdf/first_folio/folio_tempest_about.pdf, (accessed July 22, 2014), 21-22.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

spiritual reconciliation with her father in *Götterdämmerung*, which I will explore later in this thesis, but they never see one another again. Meanwhile, Prospero's connection with Miranda is far stronger than any other father/daughter relationship in Shakespeare because Prospero is Miranda's entire world. He is her tutor, her only family, and her protector on the island.

It is interesting to consider whether, in these plays, Shakespeare was acting out his reconciliation with his own daughter, Susanna (which happened in the last years of his life). Shakespeare spent more time traveling between London and his family's home in Stratford, England, in the last years of his life than he had ever done previously as Susanna and her sister, Judith, approached marriage age. Perhaps, as Prospero began to agonize over Miranda's future in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare felt a similar fatherly responsibility to his daughters. It was no secret that he admired Susanna's intelligence and business savvy. He named her and her husband executor of his will and left the majority of his belongings to her.¹¹⁵ While it is impossible to say for certain whether Shakespeare based his later plays on his own life, it is intriguing to consider that Shakespeare's literary interest in the father/daughter relationship coincides with his feelings toward his own daughters, particularly his clever eldest daughter, Susanna.

Another crucial aspect of the father/daughter dynamic in these final plays is the mother's absence from the story. In *The Tempest*, we hear about Prospero's wife briefly, but she is not a character of importance. This absent mother figure is also a fixture in the

¹¹⁵ Amanda Mabillard, *Shakespeare of Stratford: Shakespeare's Children*, August 20, 2008, <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/biography/shakespearechildren.html> (accessed July 24, 2014).

other three plays. It is possible to hypothesize that Shakespeare left the mother figures out of the stories in order to illuminate the father/daughter relationship. During the Elizabethan era, the focus of family life was on producing male heirs. Daughters were seen as “treaty builders” who, through marriage, could improve their family’s standing both financially and socially. Women had little power over anything outside of their roles as hostess and homemaker. It is possible that Shakespeare left the mothers out of the plays because, normally, a wealthy male would have little to do with child-rearing, especially with his daughters. While fathers could train sons in “manly arts,” daughters were often under the guidance of their mothers or female staff until they were married. Their relationships with their fathers were ones built on subservience and respect. In order to examine how loving and special the relationship between a noble-born father and his daughter could be, the mother and staff needed to be removed. Only when the mother was absent, when it was the father’s duty to raise the daughter, could their bond be examined closely.

Although Act I Scene ii is short, it sets up the dynamic between Prospero and Miranda for the rest of the play. In it, Prospero has to confront Miranda’s impending adulthood. His brother, who wanted to steal the Duchy of Milan from him, exiled Prospero and a very young Miranda on an island where Prospero develops as a sorcerer. Prospero uses his magic to protect Miranda from the outside world, choosing to educate her in isolation where he can always be present; this absence of other people (especially mother and staff) allows Shakespeare to set up the ideal father/daughter relationship.

Prospero and Miranda’s shared isolation creates a strong bond between them, but it isn’t until Act I Scene ii that Prospero begins to discuss his past and his internal realm

with 15-year-old Miranda, revealing a whole new world to her. For more than 10 years, Prospero kept his previous life a secret from his daughter. It is only when the outside world impedes on theirs that Prospero decides to tell Miranda about his motives, his life before the island, and his philosophy on life. In Act I Scene ii, Prospero tells her, “I have done nothing, but in care of thee, my dear one,”¹¹⁶ and this sentiment propels Prospero to reveal the truth behind their isolation, exposing Miranda to a side of him that she has not seen before. He stops treating her like a child for a moment, like something to be protected, and opens up to her as a person instead.

Prospero is motivated to share his inner world with Miranda when she is upset by an action he has taken. Miranda, upon watching a ship sink in her father’s magically created storm, is visibly upset. Her distress motivates Prospero to tell her about their past and the choices he had to make. “Lie there my art: Wipe thou thine eyes, have comfort,” Prospero tells her, reassuring her that, “the direful spectacle of the wreck, which touched/ The very virtue of compassion in thee.../I have with such provision in mine art/ So safely ordered, that there is no soil,/ No, not so much perdition as an hair,/ Betid to any creature in the vessel.”¹¹⁷ In this moment, something changes between them. While he has kept their shared past a secret to protect her, in this scene Prospero recognizes his daughter’s maturity and readiness to accept what he has to say. Prospero looks at Miranda and

¹¹⁶ William Shakespeare, "The Tempest," in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Cambridge Text Established by John Dover Wilson for the Cambridge University Press*, ed. Philip Brockbank, 17-40 (London: Octopus Books Limited, 1980), 20.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

realizes that he can speak freely to her, that the time has come to give her insight into his motivations.

In this way, Prospero is different from Wotan: though Wotan recognizes Brünnhilde's concern for him, he tells her of his past and emotions as a means of catharsis for himself, not to benefit her. Prospero is moved by his daughter's tenderness and, concerned that she might think him a murderer, tells her about their past as a means to explain himself and give moral weight to his actions up to this point. He determines that she is ready to hear about their life before the island. Miranda recognizes that something has changed and says:

MIRANDA:
You have often
Begun to tell me what I am, but stopped,
And let me to a bootless inquisition,
Concluding 'Stay: not yet.'

PROSPERO:
The hour's now come,
The very minute bids thee ope thine ear,
Obey, and be attentive...¹¹⁸

Prospero dominates the action from this point onward, asking Miranda occasional questions to gauge her attentiveness and listening to her occasional exclamations, but monologuing for the majority of the scene. In fact, from the moment Prospero begins telling Miranda about his past (line 27), he speaks 1188 words, allowing her only brief interjections, until another character enters (line 187). Miranda is doting and attentive throughout Prospero's story, speaking to demonstrate she is listening, but not contributing to the momentum of the plot.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 20.

Miranda's age plays a part in the nature of their relationship. It's important to remember that Miranda, at 15, is much younger than Brunnhilde, an immortal goddess, and so her relationship with Prospero is different from Brunnhilde's relationship with Wotan. Her interactions with Prospero are very child-like. Where Brunnhilde's reactions seemed to come from a place of intellectual and emotional curiosity, Miranda's exclamations are based solely in emotion. Her questions do not dig deep and she seems quite satisfied by whatever Prospero tells her. Additionally, Brunnhilde is intuitive and wise because her mother is Erda, the wisest member of the pantheon. Miranda is naïve and innocent in a way that Brunnhilde cannot be. It is important to stress, however, that, while their relationships with their fathers are different, both daughters respect and love them. Both daughters begin their respective journeys as dutiful and loving children, eager to please their elevated fathers.

Prospero and Miranda's relationship, though close, is one in which Miranda reveres Prospero as her father and submits to him as his daughter. This father/daughter relationship was the standard in Renaissance Europe, a patriarchal society with a strict hierarchy. Prospero, as the father, is at the top of that hierarchy, responsible for protecting his daughter and ensuring her future. It is important to note, however, that Prospero took on a more nurturing, emotional role with Miranda because she had no mother on the island with her. Emotionally, he became both mother and father to her, while maintaining his status as "father." Historian Sarup Singh notes that "Prospero is both a father and a mother to her and all his actions are motivated by only one desire: to secure a happy

future for her.”¹¹⁹ Prospero has a responsibility to Miranda that a man of his noble breeding would understand: as a girl, Miranda’s future depended solely upon her ability to marry a worthy man and produce children. Prospero believes that, by sinking the ship, he is providing Miranda with a future by potentially producing a worthy husband for her on the island. He is in full control of her, both as she lives on the island and her future.

Miranda plays the part of the Renaissance daughter perfectly. She obeys her father in everything and trusts him fully to do what is best for her. Prospero commands her to “Obey and be attentive”¹²⁰ and Miranda does exactly that. There is no sign that she resents his dominance: not once in this scene does she doubt or voice opposition to him. In fact, Miranda addresses him with a tenderness and respect as “My dearest father.”¹²¹ Prospero also demonstrates the Renaissance father/daughter hierarchy by having Miranda sit while he talks to her while he stands, physically demonstrating his authority over her.¹²²

Prospero selected the princely Ferdinand for Miranda and knew that she would fall in love with him because he was the only man Miranda had ever seen other than Prospero and Caliban (the subhuman son of the witch Sycorax—hardly someone who

¹¹⁹ Sarup Singh, *Family Relationships in Shakespeare and The Restoration Comedy of Manners* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), 52.

¹²⁰ Shakespeare, "The Tempest," in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Cambridge Text Established by John Dover Wilson for the Cambridge University Press*, 20.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

Miranda would be attracted to). Hallett Smith observes in *Twentieth Century*

Interpretations of the Tempest that:

The young lovers Ferdinand and Miranda are characterized very economically. Miranda's modesty and innocence are appropriate to the romantic situation in which she is placed—that of never having a young man before...Ferdinand, a pampered prince, gladly undergoes servitude and labor for his love.¹²³

Wotan's relationship with Brünnhilde mirrors Prospero's with Miranda in that he wants the best for his daughter's future. Just as Prospero chooses Miranda's mate, Wotan, in a final act of love and fatherly responsibility, ensures that only a hero worthy of Brünnhilde can marry her. After he removes her godly powers and puts her into a deep sleep on a hidden mountaintop, he places a spell on her that will allow the first man to wake her to claim her as his wife, a prospect that terrifies her. Brünnhilde, unlike Miranda, is not used to being subservient to men; the only man she submits to is Wotan. Wotan does, however, attempt to secure a happy future for Brünnhilde by surrounding her in a magical fire that only a hero who has never known fear can cross, ensuring that a scoundrel like Hunding will never be able to claim Brünnhilde as his bride. In this moment, we see Wotan take similar care with Brünnhilde's future as Prospero does with Miranda's; he cannot bear the idea of giving his beloved child to someone who is less than worthy of her.

Though the father/daughter relationships in *Die Walküre* and *The Tempest* are different in some ways, there are many similarities. Shakespeare was interested in the complexity and tenderness found in the father/daughter relationship, outside of society's

¹²³ Hallett Smith, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Tempest"* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Publications, Inc., 1969) 5-6.

expectations, due to his focus on it in the last plays of his life. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare creates a magical world outside of society's influence where Prospero can take on the role of primary caretaker and teacher to Miranda without cultural repercussions. Similarly, Wotan in Wagner's *Die Walküre* is the sole caretaker of his daughter, Brünnhilde, because her mother is Erda, the Earth Goddess. Erda is not present in Brünnhilde's life because she dwells, sleeps, and observes the world away from the other Gods. It fell upon Wotan to take care of their daughter.

Just as Shakespeare set *The Tempest* on an island away from outside influence, Wagner set *Die Walküre* in a world outside of his own. The opera takes place in a setting forged from a mixture of mythologies, in which Wotan and Brünnhilde are set apart because they are Gods. They watch the world pass by and interfere as needed, but they are not a part of it, just as Prospero can use magic to control his world but is isolated from it by the island. In addition, it is only through their daughters that the fathers can actually become a part of the world outside their realms. Prospero is able to return to Milan because of Miranda's marriage to Ferdinand and because his love for her has humanized him, allowing him to forgive his treacherous brother. He gives up his magic in the Epilogue of *The Tempest* and returns to the "real world." Similarly, after Wotan relinquishes Brünnhilde to the mortal world, he begins to spend more time away from Valhalla. He becomes "The Wanderer" in *Siegfried* and (though he can't help but interfere in the affairs of the mortals around him) he begins to relinquish his need to control the world and chooses to interact with it instead. By the end of the *Ring* cycle, Wotan gives up all desire to rule, relinquishing his authority and choosing to burn to death with the rest of the Gods rather than continue living as he was.

Both daughters are responsible for freeing their fathers from prisons of their own making. Miranda's love for Ferdinand frees Prospero from his island prison. Brünnhilde frees Wotan from his own laws and lust for power. It is the fire from Siegfried's funeral pyre that consumes the Gods, including Wotan and Brünnhilde. Wagner portrays their death as a magical, amazing act where all of the fear, anger, and negativity brought about by Alberich's coveting of the Rheingold is destroyed and the world is brought back to nature. We are supposed to celebrate their deaths because they are finally free from the continuous Schopenhauerian striving for power, life, wealth, love, etc. Both Wotan and Prospero relinquish their extraordinary powers because of their daughters: both fathers are relieved when they can finally give up control (though it does take Wotan a good deal more time to come to that place).

In Act I Scene ii of *Die Walküre*, we see Wotan open himself up to his daughter and confess his innermost fears, thoughts, and emotions to her for the first time. Though he does not realize it at the time, this act empowers Brünnhilde to become more than his obedient handmaiden; she is able to interpret his desires and act independently because of their interaction, freeing her. Because Wotan is unable to act, to do the right thing, it becomes Brünnhilde's duty to do what must be done in *Götterdämmerung*. In Act I Scene ii of *The Tempest*, we see Prospero reveal his inner world to his daughter, Miranda, for the first time as well. He is crippled by fear from his past, unable to take the action he needs to in order to rejoin the world. He, like Wotan, is unable to act and reveals this aspect of himself only to his daughter. It is through Miranda and her love for Ferdinand that he is finally forced to take action and return to the civilized world. Both fathers are haunted by their past choices and it falls on their daughters to save them from themselves.

Both fathers are “Unable to Act,” before they open up to their daughters. It is this sharing of their private thoughts that empowers the daughters to act on their behalf, allowing them to form their own identities which they use to do what their fathers cannot.

CHAPTER FOUR: “REGRETTING ACTION”: FEMININE MADNESS, GUILT, AND REDEMPTION

The final Shakespearean aspect in Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* that I will explore is a connection between the idea of “Feminine Madness,” regret for actions taken, and redemption. Such a constellation of thematic elements drive the drama in Shakespeare’s plays *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, and in Brünnhilde’s behavior in *Götterdämmerung*, the final opera in Wagner’s *Ring*. I have called this shared remorse “Regretting Action,” as both characters regret the choices they have made. I will primarily focus on the connection between Lady Macbeth and Brünnhilde. Both women make a choice to participate in a murder and, in both cases, the women are consumed with regret. Both women commit suicide as a result, though the wider power and emotion surrounding this choice are dramatically different. As a means to evaluate and understand these women, I will also reflect on Ophelia’s madness in *Hamlet* as a means to demonstrate the difference between her situation and that of Lady Macbeth and Brünnhilde.

The idea of “madness” as being a female malady was common throughout Europe during the times that both Shakespeare and Wagner wrote. Women, seen as more emotional and fragile than men, were believed to have been particularly susceptible to fits

of madness. The modern definition of “madness” is extremely broad, just as it was in the 1600s and in the 1800s. A “mad” person is defined as “extremely foolish or unwise” with “imprudent, irrational” behavior, as being “wildly excited or confused or frantic,” also as being “overcome by desire, eagerness, enthusiasm” or as being “wildly gay or merry, enjoyably hilarious” and also as “mentally disturbed, deranged, greatly provoked or irritated.”¹²⁴ Because the definition is so broad and can apply to multiple behaviors in multiple situations, it is important to note that it is the observer who labels a person as being “mad”: though there are now modern means to assess whether a person is insane or not, the way the word is still used places an enormous weight on how people *interpret* a person’s behavior rather than the nature of the behavior itself. This distinction is important in both the Shakespearean context and the Wagnerian.

“Madness” was a cultural phenomenon in Europe, especially in Shakespeare’s time, spurring extensive philosophical and physiological study. Literary scholar Carol Thomas Neely states in her article “Documents in Madness: Reading Madness and Gender in Shakespeare's Tragedies and Early Modern Culture,” that numerous scholars have “recognized that England in the period from 1580 to 1640 was fascinated with madness.”¹²⁵ In treatises from the time, physicians tried to pinpoint the causes of different “emotional afflictions” as well as determine who was more likely to be affected by them.

One popular view of madness in Elizabethan England is that madness could be

¹²⁴ Douglas Harper, "Mad," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mad> (accessed August 17, 2015).

¹²⁵ Carol Thomas Neely, "Documents in Madness: Reading Madness and Gender in Shakespeare's Tragedies and Early Modern Culture.," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42, no. 3. (Autumn, 1991), 316.

caused either by a malady in the physical body, mental instability, or by spiritual disquiet. The distinctions between these causes are documented in a treatise by Edward Jorden titled *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*, which was written for members of the English College of Physicians as a means to help them distinguish between maladies of the body, the spirit, and the mind. This was important because, at the time, there were calls to come up with concrete ways to determine whether a woman was acting a certain way due to physical maladies (labeled “hysteria” at the time) or “bewitchment” caused by witchcraft. Jorden attempted to tackle this problem in his treatise, observing that “the passive condition of womankind is subject unto more diseases and of other sortes and natures then men are: and especially in regard of that part from whence this disease which we speake doth arise.”¹²⁶ Women were seen as particularly susceptible to what we would, nowadays, classify as mental illness. Physicians believed that hysteria, nicknamed “the mother,” was a “feminine condition” because the “origin of the fantastic and disconnected symptoms of the disease- swooning, paralysis, choking, convulsions, numbness, delirium, epilepsy, headaches— is the wild peregrinations of the uncontrollable uterus and its capacity to corrupt all the parts of the body,” including the mind.¹²⁷ Thus, physical madness was brought about by a woman’s uterus, not her mind. Men, having no uterus, were considered immune from it.

Jorden’s assertions that there is a specific kind of madness brought about by female physiology were supported by another physician from the time, Robert Burton,

¹²⁶ Ibid., 320.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

who commented on male and female mental illness in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton distinguishes between male and female “maladies” in his treatise, asserting that “melancholy” is a male disease, one that specifically affected male “scholars, philosophers and geniuses like Democritus and himself” while “fits of the mother” affected:

Noble virgins, nice gentlewomen, such as are solitary and idle, live at ease, lead a life out of action and imployment, that fare well in great houses and Ioviall companies, ill-disposed peradventure of themselves, and not willing to make any resistance, discontented otherwise, of weake judgment, able bodies, and subject to passions.¹²⁸

Both Jorden and Burton both prescribe “marriage” as the cure for female madness, as they both believed the cause had to do with female sexuality and, therefore, could be cured by marriage.

The belief that female hysteria was brought about by inherent feminine weakness and could be identified by observing her behavior was explored and redefined in Elizabethan drama, first by Shakespeare in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, then by other writers such as Kyd and Barlowe. Neely observes:

The plays, by representing both madness and the process of reading madness, theatricalize and disseminate the complicated distinctions that the treatises theorize. In the drama, as in the culture outside it, madness is diagnosed by those who observe it- both specialists and laypersons.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Ibid., 320-321.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 321.

In essence, Shakespeare's observations of madness involved not only the behavior of someone suspected to be "mad" but also how the interpretations of that behavior from characters around the "mad" character affected how the audience perceived them.¹³⁰

To examine these ideas further, we must look at two of Shakespeare's prominent "madwomen": Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*. Shakespeare utilized language as a means to show that the character was suffering from madness. Neely observes the following in her article "Documents in Madness":

Shakespeare's language of madness is characterized by fragmentation, obsession, and repetition, and most importantly by what I will call "quotation," which might instead be called "bracketing" or "italicization." The mad are "beside themselves"; their discourse is not their own. But the voices that speak through them are not...supernatural voices but human ones- cultural ones perhaps. The prose that is used for this mad speech (although it includes embedded songs and rhymes) impedes disorderly shape, associates madness with popular tradition, and contributes to its colloquial, "quoted" character. These quoted voices, however, have connections with (or can be interpreted to connect with) the mad characters' pre-mad gendered identity and history, their social context and psychological stresses- as well as with larger themes of the plays and of the culture.¹³¹

Shakespeare uses madness as a way to examine who the character used to be prior to going mad, and how they are once they are deemed mad. He is careful to make connections between the life the character lived prior to being mad and their "current" mad state, connecting the cause of their madness with the wider world around them. No

¹³⁰ The idea of "perception" becomes very important in Wagner's interpretation of "female madness" with the character of Brünnhilde in Act 2 of *Götterdämmerung* when the "civilized" people interpret her legitimate feelings of betrayal and confusion as madness. The audience can see the injustice being done to Brünnhilde and can understand her reaction, but, to every character on stage, Brünnhilde is behaving hysterically. This idea of isolation and perception of madness will be explored further later in this chapter.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 323.

characters in Shakespeare who “go mad” do so without an examinable, clear cause: Ophelia suffers from “female hysteria” caused by Hamlet’s behavior in *Hamlet* and, whereas other characters are driven mad by supernatural possession and witchcraft in *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth’s madness is due to her own guilt after the murder of Duncan. Both women can be described as being alienated from the rest of the characters in the play due to their odd behavior and their strange speech. Both women are deemed “mad” by the people around them.

Similarly, both women are also used as foils to their male counterparts’ odd behavior. Whereas Hamlet’s “madness” is a ploy, used as a means to an end by Hamlet, Ophelia’s madness is a clear case of what doctors in Shakespeare’s age would call “female hysteria.” Her eventual suicide is interpreted by characters in the play as a natural purification, a “return to nature” and balance that frees her feminine soul from hysteria. In *Macbeth*, Macbeth’s “madness” is interpreted as a powerful, violent, manly fury whereas Lady Macbeth’s is an embodiment of her true weakness, a mental breakdown caused by her inciting the murder of King Duncan. Lady Macbeth overstepped herself, going outside of the traditional gender role allotted to her, and pays for it by slowly going mad and eventually killing herself. Her suicide doesn’t purify her soul like Ophelia’s did. Instead, it restores her husband’s masculinity. Both women are alienated by the gender roles in their society and both women’s attempts to deal with these roles end in their suicides.¹³²

¹³² Richard Wagner takes the idea of feminine suicide-purification a step further with Brünnhilde’s suicide at the end of *Götterdämmerung*: her suicide not only purifies her

The first Shakespearean character to examine closely is that of Ophelia in *Hamlet*. On the surface, Ophelia appears to be a one-dimensional character with very little personality of her own. She lacks the subtlety and complexity of the other characters in the play. Instead, her entire identity seems to originate from the men around her. The men in her family, her father and brother, view her as a living “Virgin Mary,” the perfect image of Elizabethan purity who will be the ideal wife and mother when she is married. She must live up to this expectation. Because of this, they do not approve of her love of Hamlet, who they assert will only ruin her, as his status makes it impossible for him to marry her. To Hamlet, Ophelia represents temptation and corruption. To him, she is an object and, although Ophelia believes that Hamlet loves her, Hamlet never admits that he does.

Ophelia struggles throughout the play to reconcile opposing expectations she is supposed to meet. As a woman in her patriarchal society, the men around her dominate her life. And yet, their contradicting views of her are impossible to live up to. No matter how she behaves, she cannot make both sets of men happy. This makes her vulnerable to manipulation. It is this manipulation, which begins in Act II Scene i of *Hamlet*, that triggers Ophelia’s “feminine hysteria.”

Before diving into Act II Scene i, however, it is important to understand its context in the rest of the play. To do this, we must look first at Act I Scene iii. In this scene, Polonius, Ophelia’s father, orders Ophelia in a domineering, commanding fashion,

love for Siegfried, it purifies the entire world. The fire from the pyre she burns herself destroys Valhalla, the Gods, and the corrupt world of men she had been forced to live in. It purifies the Rheingold, removing Alberich’s curse, and returning it to nature and the Rhinemaidens where it belongs. This will be explored in greater detail later in this thesis.

to spurn Hamlet's affections.¹³³ First, he reproaches her for believing Hamlet would ever truly love her, calling her "a green girl" for believing his "tenders" or words of love.¹³⁴ An embarrassed Ophelia seeks her father's approval and advice, asking him what she should think. He again chides her for being so open to Hamlet's words, telling her to "Think yourself a baby" and warning her that her unwise behavior would "tender [him] a fool" and reflect poorly upon her family.¹³⁵ Ophelia, in a last attempt to sway her father, tells him that Hamlet has always spoken of his love for her "in honorable fashion" and that he had always "given countenance to his speech, my lord, with almost all the holy vows of heaven," but Polonius is not really listening to her.¹³⁶ He brushes her off, using phrases like "Go to, go to" and sarcastic "Ay"s when he answers her.¹³⁷ Finally, after ensuring that Ophelia is ready to listen, he tells her that Hamlet likely said what he felt he needed to say to arouse passion in her. He warns her of the ease in which men like Hamlet make vows, likening his words to flames that "give more light than heat."¹³⁸ He then tells her:

POLONIUS:
In few, Ophelia,
Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers

¹³³ Ibid., 177.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 177-78.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 179-180.

Not of that dye which their investments show,
But mere implorators of unholy suits,
Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds,
The better to beguile. This is for all:
I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,
Have you so slander any moment leisure,
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.
Look to 't, I charge you. Come your ways.¹³⁹

This scene is important to the context of Act II Scene i because it establishes that Polonius sees Ophelia's behavior as a reflection on himself and his family while also demonstrating the level of sway he holds over his daughter. Ophelia is young and, despite her own love for Hamlet and belief that he is honorable and true, she ultimately acquiesces to Polonius, agreeing to keep her distance from Hamlet for his honor's sake, not because she wants to. This also exposes a double standard between men and women: if anyone is going to shame the family, it is the inconsiderate and foolish Polonius, not Ophelia. Nonetheless, Ophelia ends the conversation by saying simply, "I shall obey, my lord."¹⁴⁰ And she does her best to obey his command, avoiding Hamlet until Hamlet forces an interaction.

In Act II Scene i, Ophelia returns to her father after Hamlet, pretending to be mad, compels her to interact with him. Ophelia reports to Polonius that Hamlet came to see her while she was in her sewing room. She describes how Hamlet frightened her with his behavior. She tells him the following story:

OPHELIA:
My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 180.

Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;
No hat upon his head; his stockings fouled,
Ungartered, down-gyvèd to his ankle;
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosèd out of hell
To speak of horrors- He comes before me.

POLONIUS:
Mad for thy love?

OPHELIA:
My lord, I do not know.
But, truly, I do fear it.¹⁴¹

Ophelia's passive nature does not allow her to disagree with her father, even when he blames Hamlet's behavior on her actions, actions he demanded that she take. When something goes wrong, Polonius tends to place the responsibility squarely on Ophelia's shoulders. Ophelia agrees that Hamlet is madly in love with her, but only after Polonius suggests it first; she does not dare disagree with him. She becomes the scapegoat because, as a woman surrounded by powerful men, she is an easy target. Of course, the only reason Hamlet would be "mad for [Ophelia's] love" is because Polonius explicitly forbid her from interacting with him in Act I Scene iii. Ophelia obeyed her father and yet is still being blamed for Hamlet's mental state. It is no surprise that she feels responsible for Hamlet's behavior in the scenes to come; it seems that, no matter what she does, she is causing Hamlet harm.

Ophelia is torn between her own desires and her need to be a good daughter to Polonius. She wants desperately to meet her father's expectations and yet, she does love

¹⁴¹ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. G.R Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press , 1987), 200-202.

Hamlet. She obediently tells her father about the rest of her interaction with Hamlet, hoping that her honesty will satisfy him and that he will provide her with comfort and support, as Hamlet's behavior scared her:

OPHELIA:

He took me by the wrist and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of his entire arm,
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. Long stayed he so.
At last, a little shaking of mine arm
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And, with his head over his shoulder turned,
He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out o' doors he went without their helps,
And to the last bended their light on me.¹⁴²

Polonius is, again, convinced that Hamlet's actions are those of a spurned lover, and resolves to bring it to the attention of the king. He observes that "This is the very ecstasy of love, / Whose violent property fordoes itself / And leads the will to desperate undertakings / As oft as any passion under heaven / That does afflict our natures."¹⁴³ He is referring to the "melancholy" madness attributed to Elizabethan men. Ophelia asserts that she did spurn all of Hamlet's advances, which only makes Polonius more convinced that his "madness" stems from "melancholy." Polonius insists that Ophelia's love "hath made him mad"¹⁴⁴ and orders Ophelia to come with him so they can tell King Claudius

¹⁴² Ibid., 200-202.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 202.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 202.

what has happened, once again placing the responsibility for Hamlet's behavior squarely on her.

Ophelia is confused and profoundly troubled by the contradictory directions she is being given. She feels guilty and yet cannot understand what she did wrong. It is not her fault; the men around her are giving her conflicting messages. She is first told by Polonius in Act I Scene iii that Hamlet does not and will never love her, but then in Act II Scene i Polonius tells her that, by spurning Hamlet's affections, Ophelia has driven him mad. Ophelia is in love with Hamlet: in Act I Scene iii, she admitted that she believed that Hamlet loved her and that she loved him. In this same scene she asserts that Hamlet always treated her with respect and kindness. But, despite her own feelings and understanding of things, she still bows to her father and brother's wills. She has no choice: her society orders her to obey the men in her life without thinking. In fact, Polonius tells her exactly what he expects of her:

OPHELIA:

I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

POLONIUS:

Marry, I'll teach you. Think yourself a baby
That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,
Which are not sterling.
Tender yourself more dearly,
Or—not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
Running it thus—you'll tender me a fool!¹⁴⁵

Polonius tells Ophelia that, if she tries to handle this situation on her own, she will make a fool out of him and her whole family. She is no more capable of self-governance than a baby is.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 178.

The problem is that Ophelia is a human being, capable of thought and emotion. The men in her life do not recognize this and misjudge her constantly. She has no mother to advocate for her, to teach her to navigate the patriarchal world she lives in. Ophelia's emotions or preferences are never taken into account. Although she has no autonomy in her society, she is held responsible for events and actions for which she is not responsible: she does as she is told, as her society expects, and is blamed for it going wrong.

Through his constant micromanaging of Ophelia's behavior, Polonius is actually the one responsible for the tragedies that befall his family later in the play. He dominates Ophelia and insists upon controlling every aspect of her life. He does not consider for a moment that she might know Hamlet better than he does or that she might have insights to boost their understanding of the situation. Polonius, who has shown himself to be a fool again and again, takes charge. In Act III Scene i, he orders Ophelia to entrap Hamlet, walking her through each moment.

POLONIUS:
Ophelia, walk you here.
(to CLAUDIUS)
Gracious, so please you,
We will bestow ourselves.
(to OPHELIA)
Read on this book
That show of such an exercise may color
Your loneliness.—We are oft to blame in this,
'Tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage
And pious action we do sugar o'er
The devil himself.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 238-239.

By taking so much care in micromanaging Ophelia and Hamlet's encounter, Ophelia should be blameless. However, in this society, she remains the scapegoat.

Ophelia's confusion, combined with how cruelly she is treated, lead to her going mad. Hamlet's behavior when he enters in Act III Scene I is the catalyst to Ophelia's madness; she is already in a fragile place, torn by her father's contradictory messages and by her conscience, which implores her not to betray Hamlet, and Hamlet's treatment of her pushes her over the edge. As they speak, Hamlet denies ever loving her or giving her gifts, and, when she doesn't tell him where her father is, he accuses her of being dishonest and curses her for it. Hamlet is the one being dishonest: he lies to her face about his love, his gifts, and his intentions in this scene, but, when she obeys her father and doesn't disclose his location, she becomes a terrible, untrustworthy person. She confronts him about his dishonesty.

OPHELIA

My lord, I have remembrances of yours
That I have longèd long to redeliver.
I pray you now receive them.

HAMLET

No, not I. I never gave you aught.

OPHELIA

My honored lord, you know right well you did,
And with them, words of so sweet breath
composed
As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,
Take these again, for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
There, my lord.

HAMLET

Ha, ha, are you honest?

OPHELIA
My lord?¹⁴⁷

Hamlet mocks her and insults her, leaving Ophelia confused and hurt. She has only done as she was told and is not returning his gifts because she wants to return them: she is being ordered to refuse his affection by her father and brother. Hamlet asserts that Ophelia was a fool and “should not have believed” him when he told her he loved her because “I loved you not.”¹⁴⁸ Hamlet goes on to attack her character:

HAMLET

If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry. Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go. Farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go, and quickly too. Farewell.

OPHELIA

Heavenly powers, restore him!

HAMLET

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God has given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble, and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on 't. It hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages. Those that are married already, all but one, shall live. The rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go.¹⁴⁹

To say that Ophelia is devastated by Hamlet's behavior would be an understatement. Not only is Hamlet not speaking in the noble iambic pentameter, as he is accustomed to, his words are harsh and cruel. Ophelia is surprised, frightened and feels betrayed. To add

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 242.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 243-44.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 244-45.

insult to injury, she knows that King Claudius and her father are listening to him insult and debase her.

She foreshadows her own madness in her monologue after Hamlet's exit. She recalls how Hamlet used to be, how he was the best of men, with a "noble mind...the courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state, The glass of fashion and the mould of form."¹⁵⁰ She cared deeply for him, but she can't reconcile his behavior before with the abuse she just received. She laments:

OPHELIA

And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;
That unmatched form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy. Oh, woe is me,
T' have seen what I have seen, see what I see!¹⁵¹

Ophelia's references to music in this monologue predicts her eventual hysteria in Act IV Scene v, where her madness is evident in her singing nonsense songs and using music to communicate her thoughts. Those around her perceive her desperation and confusion as madness when she is a product of her situation.

Brünnhilde experiences a similar sense of isolation and injustice in *Götterdämmerung* when she is betrayed by Siegfried and forced from her natural home to live in the corrupt world of Gunther and the Gibichungs. At the start of *Götterdämmerung*, Brünnhilde and Siegfried declare their undying love and loyalty for one another. Siegfried wants to go into the world and Brünnhilde supports him, asking

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 245.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 245.

only for him to keep her in his heart. To prove his love and fidelity, he gives her Fafner's ring of power (not realizing that it is Alberich's cursed ring made from the Rheingold).

Unfortunately, the unpolluted and naive Siegfried is no match for the corrupting world of man he encounters when he meets the Gibichungs. Their scheming with Hagen leads them to drug him with a love potion, forcing all thought of Brünnhilde out of his mind and replacing his love for her with love for Guttrune, Gunther's sister. The potion can be seen as a metaphor for the corrupting influence of power, wealth and "civilization" on innocence and purity. This corruption causes Siegfried to abandon the unsullied, real relationship he has with Brünnhilde and betray her, trick her and force her to marry Gunther.

Up until this point in the story, Brünnhilde did not fit into the nineteenth century's view of femininity and womanhood. She was a warrior, independent, fighting the fights of men. She has a warhorse, a symbol of her independence, and godly knowledge that no earthly man has. Rieger notes that, when she fell in love with Siegfried, Brünnhilde chose to relinquish her independence in order to become Siegfried's wife. Rieger states:

A strong woman, capable of resistance against her own father, here subordinates herself to her husband and freely gives him her horse, the symbol of her independence. She thus represents an 'ideal' type, a representative example of the contemporary definition of the feminine.¹⁵²

Brünnhilde chooses to give up everything that had made her unique in order to please and elevate her husband.

¹⁵² Rieger, *Richard Wagner's Women*, 152.

Brünnhilde has surrendered everything that used to constitute her identity: she has invested her entire being into Siegfried and, now, she finds value only in his opinion of her. She confirms this in *Götterdämmerung*'s Prologue when she tells Siegfried "What the Gods have taught me I gave to you: a bountiful store of hallowed runes; but the maidenly source of all my strength was taken away by the hero to whom I now bow my head."¹⁵³ She describes herself as being "Bereft of wisdom but filled with desire; rich in love yet void of strength."¹⁵⁴ She gives Siegfried all of her heavenly knowledge (which, he admits, he didn't understand), leaving her with nothing but Siegfried. Brünnhilde unknowingly sets the stage for her own betrayal and demise by giving Siegfried so much power over her.

Keeping with the nineteenth century feminine ideal, a loyal Brünnhilde adamantly defends her love of Siegfried and his devotion to her, even when presented with the fact that the ring he gave her as proof of his love was tainted by a curse and is destroying her family. Earlier in this thesis, I explained that Wotan and Brünnhilde had a uniquely close relationship. Upon giving up her independent identity in the Prologue, Brünnhilde completely disregards all relationship ties other than hers with Siegfried. This relinquishment of her former life is illuminated by her interaction with her sister, Waltraute.

¹⁵³ "Was Götter mich wiesen, gab ich dir: heiliger Runen reichen Hort; doch meiner Stärke magdlichen Stamm nahm mir der Held, dem ich nun mich neige." Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 284-285.

¹⁵⁴ "Des Wissens bar, doch des Wunsches voll: an Liebe reich, doch ledig der Kraft." Ibid., 285.

In Act I, her sister, Waltraute, comes to visit her and tell her of the terrible state Wotan and the Gods are in. Initially, Brünnhilde is excited to see her. She begs Waltraute for news of Valhalla, asking “Might Wotan’s heart have relented towards me?”¹⁵⁵ all the while voicing her excitement and joy at being found by Siegfried:

BRÜNNHILDE:

So his punishment made me thrice blessed:
the most glorious of heroes won me as his wife;
in his love, I exult and glory today.-

(She embraces Waltraute with passionate demonstrations of joy, which the latter attempts to ward off with timid impatience)

Were you lured here, sister, by my lot?
Do you want to feast on my joy
and share in the fate that befell me?¹⁵⁶

Waltraute is perplexed and alarmed by her sister’s strange behavior. Waltraute is shocked that Brünnhilde would think she would defy Wotan just to immerse herself in Brünnhilde’s romantic life. Waltraute vehemently asserts that Brünnhilde is wrong: “Share in the frenzy that’s seized you, you fool?- Something else drove me in dread, to break Wotan’s behest.”¹⁵⁷ It is only when Waltraute calls her a fool and voices her agitation that Brünnhilde notices her mood. She is so out of touch with the world around her that the formerly perceptive Brünnhilde doesn’t notice how upset her sister is.

¹⁵⁵ BRÜNNHILDE: *So wagtest du, Brünnhild' zulieb, Walvaters Bann zu brechen?* Ibid., 301-302.

¹⁵⁶ BRÜNNHILDE: *So zur Seligsten schuf mich die Strafe: der herrlichste Held gewann mich zum Weib! In seiner Liebe leucht' und lach' ich heut' auf. (Sie umarmt Waltraute unter stürmischen Freudenbezeugungen, welche diese mit scheuer Ungeduld abzuwehren sucht) Lockte dich, Schwester, mein Los? An meiner Wonne willst du dich weiden, teilen, was mich betraf?* Ibid., 301-302.

¹⁵⁷ “Teilen den Taumel, der dich Törin erfasst? - Ein andres bewog mich in Angst, zu brechen Wotans Gebot.” Ibid., 302.

Waltraute laments how the ring's curse has caused a disastrous turn of events in Valhalla. Siegfried shattered Wotan's spear at the end of *Siegfried*, the spear on which all of the laws and treaties that kept him in power was carved. Wotan had lost his beloved daughter, the ring he had risked everything for, and, finally, the symbol of his power and wisdom. Distraught, he ordered the World Ash Tree, Yggdrasil, destroyed and its wood piled around Valhalla while he and the other Gods wait for the world to end. Brünnhilde is consumed with her love for Siegfried, so much so that she is relatively un-phased when her sister tells her of her family's despair. Waltraute begs Brünnhilde to return her ring to the Rhinemaidens and end the curse to save the Gods. She evokes her father's name, hoping Brünnhilde's love for Wotan will sway her:

WALTRAUTE:
Upon your hand, the ring-
that's it: o, heed my counsel!
For Wotan, cast it away from you!

BRÜNNHILDE:
The ring- from me?

WALTRAUTE:
Give it back to the Rhinedaughters!

BRÜNNHILDE:
To the Rhinedaughters-I-the ring?
Siegfried's pledge of love?-
Are you out of your mind?¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ WALTRAUTE: (*heftig*) *An deiner Hand, der Ring, - er ist's; - hör' meinen Rat: für Wotan wirf ihn von dir!* BRÜNNHILDE: *Den Ring? - Von mir?* WALTRAUTE: *Den Rheintöchtern gib ihn zurück!* BRÜNNHILDE: *Den Rheintöchtern - ich - den Ring? Siegfrieds Liebespfand? - Bist du von Sinnen?* Ibid., 304-305.

Brünnhilde is horrified by the idea of giving away Siegfried's token of love and refuses. The love she had for her father has been replaced by her passionate, submissive and consuming love for Siegfried. Waltraute, who had seen Brünnhilde's close relationship with Wotan, is surprised by her adamant refusal to help him. When she presses the issue, asserting that the fate of the Gods and the world hangs upon Brünnhilde's ring, Brünnhilde is not at all sympathetic:

BRÜNNHILDE:
Ha! Do you know what it means to me?
How can you grasp it,
you unfeeling child!-
More than Valhalla's bliss,
more than the glory of the immortals
the ring is to me:
one glance at its bright-shining gold,
one flash of its noble fire
is worth far more
than all the Gods' eternal joy!
For Siegfried's love-
if only my rapture could speak to you!-
That love the ring embodies for me.

Go hence to the Gods'
hallowed council;
of my ring tell them only this:
I shall never relinquish love,
they'll never take love from me,
though Valhalla's glittering pomp
should moulder into dust!¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ BRÜNNHILDE: *Ha! Weisst du, was er mir ist? Wie kannst du's fassen, fühllose Maid! - Mehr als Walhalls Wonne, mehr als der Ewigen Ruhm ist mir der Ring: ein Blick auf sein helles Gold, ein Blitz aus dem hehren Glanz - gilt mir werter als aller Götter ewig währendes Glück! Denn selig aus ihm leuchtet mir Siegfrieds Liebe: Siegfrieds Liebe! - O liess' sich die Wonne dir sagen! Sie - wahr mir der Reif. Geh' hin zu der Götter heiligem Rat! Von meinem Ringe raune ihnen zu: die Liebe liesse ich nie, mir nähmen nie sie die Liebe, stürzt' auch in Trümmern Walhalls strahlende Pracht!* Ibid., 305.

Brünnhilde's old life is of no concern to her; Siegfried is now all that matters. Waltraute, still struggling to understand how Brünnhilde has changed so dramatically, asks Brünnhilde "Is this your loyalty? So, in grief, would you lovelessly send your sister away?"¹⁶⁰ But Brünnhilde is unsympathetic and scoffs, "Betake yourself hence; Fly off on your horse: you'll never take the ring from me!"¹⁶¹

In this scene, we see a Brünnhilde very different from the one we saw in *Die Walküre*. In *Die Walküre*, she had listened so attentively to Wotan and her unique insights, inherited from her mother Erda, allowed her to understand him in a way no one could. Now, with Waltraute, Brünnhilde refuses to listen. Abbate observes that Siegfried is her "one seeming deaf spot."¹⁶² In investing so much of her identity in Siegfried's love, Brünnhilde has chosen to ignore the godly attributes she still possesses: her instincts, her insight, and her reason. Abbate observes:

This refusal to listen is made ironic by subtle and fragmentary musical references to the *Todesverkündigung* within Waltraute's narrative, and music that Brünnhilde once heard so acutely (and acted upon so completely) now apparently goes unnoticed...The entire argument about the ring should serve to remind us that the curse (for the moment) touches Brünnhilde: it is the cause of her deafness. The curse, which acts to kill narrators and narration, acts here to defeat Waltraute's narrative by veiling it from Brünnhilde's ears, and when the curse filters that narration, Brünnhilde hears it as *meaningless* sound.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ WALTRAUTE: *Dies deine Treue? So in Trauer entlässest du lieblos die Schwester?* Ibid., 305-306.

¹⁶¹ BRÜNNHILDE: *Schwinge dich fort! Fliege zu Ross! Den Ring entführst du mir nicht!* Ibid., 306.

¹⁶² Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 229.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 229-234.

The *Todesverkündigung*, meaning “Annunciation of Death or Fate,” refers to Act II Scene iv of *Die Walküre* when Brünnhilde appears before Siegmund to tell him that he is to die and come with her to Valhalla to join Wotan’s other heroes. It is significant that it reappears in this moment, as it is now Brünnhilde who is refusing to listen. Just as Siegmund was blinded by love in *Walküre*, so Brünnhilde is in *Götterdämmerung*.

The conflict with Waltraute demonstrates how profoundly Brünnhilde’s perspective has shifted. Waltraute leaves Brünnhilde, distraught, lamenting that her sister has chosen her new life over her family. Brünnhilde is resolute, voicing her willingness to sever all ties with her family as Waltraute leaves: “Flashing storm clouds, borne by the wind, rush on your way: never again head back to me here!”¹⁶⁴ Her loyalty to Siegfried, at the cost of any relationship with her family, is striking, both because of her former closeness to Wotan and because of the events that transpire immediately following this interaction: Siegfried’s betrayal.

Abbate aptly describes Brünnhilde, at this moment, as a “romantic victim.”¹⁶⁵ Brünnhilde has never been a victim: she was a warrior goddess, the most beloved child of Wotan, protected by holy fire. She still sees herself this way, despite the fact that she has surrendered this identity to Siegfried, has given her wisdom and strength away to him in the hope that he will be her protector. When he betrays her, she has no recourse anymore, no shield. Abbate observes that “Brünnhilde as ‘romantic victim’ is in no psychological

¹⁶⁴ BRÜNNHILDE: *Blitzend Gewölk, vom Wind getragen, stürme dahin: zu mir nie steure mehr her!* Millington and Spencer, *Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 306.

¹⁶⁵ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 235.

condition to interest herself in Waltraute's account of disaster in Valhalla, having herself been stripped of divinity, and discovered earthly love with Siegfried."¹⁶⁶

Thus, when Siegfried comes disguised as Gunther by the Tarnhelm and drugged by the Gibichungs, to force Brünnhilde to be Gunther's bride, she is not the same woman she was when she was first awoken. When Siegfried initially found Brünnhilde, she overwhelmed him. In fact, he was so struck by her power and appearance that he was shocked to discover that the sleeping warrior was a woman. He was hesitant and respectful of her after she awoke and treated her with reverence. Now, Brünnhilde has no power: she has given all of her power and knowledge to Siegfried, submitting to him and becoming a "normal" woman:

This scene is clear in the first prose draft of *Der Nibelungen-Mythus*: 'Already robbed of her maidenhood by Siegfried, she has also lost her superhuman powers. She has given all her knowledge to Siegfried-who does not use it- and she is as powerless as a normal woman and can offer only ineffective opposition to this new, daring suitor.' As a Valkyrie she could have defended herself, but as a 'normal woman' she is helpless in the face of this attack.¹⁶⁷

There is an emphasis placed on virginity, similar to the emphasis on virginity in *Hamlet*. Brünnhilde's virginity was her power and, once it is gone, her power is gone as well. Siegfried comes to her this time with no sense of awe or admiration: he makes it clear that, as a "normal" woman, she has no right to refuse him and he has no obligation to respect her. When Brünnhilde asks who he is, Siegfried responds, "A hero who'll tame

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 235.

¹⁶⁷ Rieger, *Richard Wagner's Women*, 155.

you, if force alone can constrain you.”¹⁶⁸ Brünnhilde realizes that he will rape her if she refuses and, with her Valkyrie strength gone, she is left only with Siegfried’s symbol of love as her protection.

BRÜNNHILDE:
(*threateningly stretching out the finger on which she wears Siegfried’s ring*)
Keep away! Fear this token!
You’ll never force me into shame
as long as this ring protects me.¹⁶⁹

Brünnhilde, by relinquishing her individuality to Siegfried, has surrendered her self-agency. Her ring does not intimidate Siegfried because, without Siegfried’s physical protection, the ring has no power. By giving her entire identity to Siegfried, Brünnhilde has given him complete control over her. She has no way to defend herself and no clout with which to assert herself. Siegfried easily takes control, usurping the symbol of love and using it to bind her against her will to Gunther.

SIEGFRIED:
Let it give Gunther a husband’s rights:
be wedded to him with the ring!

BRÜNNHILDE:
Away, you robber!
Impious thief!
Make not so bold as to near me!
The ring makes me
stronger than steel:
you’ll never steal it from me!

¹⁶⁸ “*Ein Helde, der dich zähmt, bezwingt Gewalt dich nur.*” Millington and Spencer, *Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 307.

¹⁶⁹ BRÜNNHILDE: (*indem sie den Finger, an dem sie Siegfrieds Ring trägt, drohend ausstreckt*) *Bleib’ fern! Fürchte dies Zeichen! Zur Schande zwingst du mich nicht, solange’ der Ring mich beschützt.* Ibid., 307-308.

SIEGFRIED:
To wrest it from you
you teach me now.

Wagner describes what happens next in the stage directions, which paint a vivid, violent picture of how Siegfried “woos” Brünnhilde for Gunther. Whereas he was gentle and kind in *Siegfried* (Wagner describes him as being “Profoundly moved by her appearance and voice,” touching her “tenderly” and “Softly and shyly,” etc.¹⁷⁰), Siegfried is forceful and aggressive in *Götterdämmerung*.

[Siegfried] makes to attack her. They struggle. Brünnhilde breaks free, runs away and then turns to defend herself. Siegfried seizes her again. She escapes; he catches her. They wrestle violently with each other. He seizes her by the hand and tears the ring from her finger. Brünnhilde screams violently. As she sinks down in his arms, as though broken, her gaze unconsciously meets Siegfried’s. He lowers her fainting body on to the stone terrace outside the rocky chamber.¹⁷¹

Brünnhilde is completely overcome by Siegfried and is described as “broken” by the interaction. She suddenly realizes what it means to be a “normal” woman. Whereas the Siegfried she knew respected and adored her, other men see her as a possession.

There is much speculation as to whether Brünnhilde is raped by Siegfried at this point in the opera. It is important to note that, in Wagner’s time, sexual assaults or

¹⁷⁰ SIEGFRIED: *Mannesrecht gebe er Gunther, durch den Ring sei ihm vermählt!*
BRÜNNHILDE: *Zurück, du Räuber! Frevelnder Dieb! Erfreche dich nicht, mir zu nahn! Stärker als Stahl macht mich der Ring: nie - raubst du ihn mir!* SIEGFRIED: *Von dir ihn zu lösen, lehrst du mich nun!* Ibid., 266-275.

¹⁷¹ (*Er dringt auf sie ein; sie ringen miteinander. Brünnhilde windet sich los, flieht und wendet sich um, wie zur Wehr. Siegfried greift sie von neuem an. Sie flieht, er erreicht sie. Beide ringen heftig miteinander. Er fasst sie bei der Hand und entzieht ihrem Finger den Ring. Sie schreit heftig auf. Als sie wie zerbrochen in seinen Armen niedersinkt, streift ihr Blick bewusstlos die Augen Siegfrieds. Lässt die Machtlose auf die Steinbank vor dem Felsengemach niedergleiten.*) Ibid., 308.

violence were rarely depicted on stage. Instead, much of the action was left to “metaphor and implication. The deed itself was neither described nor shown and the conquests of the bedroom took place outside the action.”¹⁷² Yet the score in this passage is telling. It is violent music: we first hear the Valkyrie motif as Brünnhilde tries to fight back, but then an augmented version of the “Siegfried’s heroism” and “Siegfried’s love” motifs play and low horns sound. In this moment, Brünnhilde is changed. She realizes her true powerlessness and, as if disgusted with herself, she laments, “How could you stop him, woman most wretched!”¹⁷³ When Siegfried commands her to return to the chamber where he will spend the night with her, she obeys weakly: she is so broken, all she needs is a “gesture of command” from him and she obeys.¹⁷⁴ This moment is transformative for Brünnhilde. She realizes the consequences of exchanging her Valkyrie authority for love. Although she is weak in this moment, she will spend the rest of *Götterdämmerung* trying to reclaim her identity and power. Rieger observes:

Brünnhilde shows her helplessness. She has just refused to give the ring back to Wotan on account of her love for Siegfried and now she undergoes a shameful physical assault. Brünnhilde’s horror has nothing to do with jealousy or injured vanity, though one sometimes reads this in the literature. The truth is that she is damaged in her very identity. The reason for this lies in her all-encompassing love for Siegfried. The rape leaves her inwardly destroyed and she has to avenge herself...After this brutal scene, Brünnhilde is no longer herself.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Rieger, *Richard Wagner's Women*, 156.

¹⁷³ “*Was könntest du wehren, elendes Weib!*” Millington and Spencer, *Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 308.

¹⁷⁴ (*Siegfried treibt sie mit einer gebietenden Bewegung an. Zitternd und wankenden Schrittes geht sie in das Gemach*) Ibid., 308.

¹⁷⁵ Rieger, *Richard Wagner's Women*, 156.

It is important to understand Brünnhilde's mental state after this terrible interaction with Siegfried because it influences her decisions for the rest of the opera. Brünnhilde does not realize that it is Siegfried in Act I of *Götterdämmerung*, but once she does, she is left so destroyed and feels so betrayed that she is driven into a state of madness by it.

Brünnhilde has two outbursts of "madness" in *Götterdämmerung*. The first is in Act II Scene iv, when she realizes that Siegfried has married Gutrune and she is married against her will to Gunther. In this scene, the crowd around her perceives her as "mad," though the audience knows her emotions are justified. In this scene, we can draw a similarity between Ophelia's perceived "hysterical" Feminine Madness and Brünnhilde's perceived madness. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia is presented as suffering from an exaggerated female hysteria:

Ophelia's madness, as the play presents it, begins to be gender-specific in ways that later stage representations of Ophelia and of female hysterics will exaggerate. Her restlessness, agitation, shifts of direction, her "winks and nods and gestures" suggest the spasms of "the mother" and show that madness is exhibited by the body as well as in speech; gesture and speech, equally convulsive, blend together: Ophelia "beats her heart, /Spurns enviously at straws." The context of her disease, like that of hysteria later, is sexual frustration, social helplessness, and enforced control over women's bodies.¹⁷⁶

Wagner, being well versed in dramatic literature and knowing the works of Shakespeare well, would have been familiar with Ophelia and her demise. It is no coincidence that we see Brünnhilde exhibit similar "symptoms" of madness when she finds herself socially helpless.

¹⁷⁶ Neely, "Documents in Madness: Reading Madness and Gender in Shakespeare's Tragedies and Early Modern Culture," 325.

Wagner's language in Act II Scene ii paints a clear picture of Brünnhilde's new life as an unwilling member of the Gibichung society. Siegfried describes to Gutrune and Hagen how he "acquired" Brünnhilde for Gunther. Whereas Siegfried views his "wooing" of Brünnhilde as justified, it is Hagen who states the truth when he asks if Siegfried "overpowered Brünnhild"¹⁷⁷ in order to bring her to the Gibichungs. Siegfried ignores his question and instead, explains to Gutrune how he "easily wooed" Brünnhilde for Gunther.¹⁷⁸ Women are clearly viewed as possessions in this scene: Siegfried obtained Brünnhilde for Gunther so he could win Gutrune. The women themselves have no control over their own bodies or destinies, nor is it even considered that they might have an opinion. Siegfried has completely succumbed to the Gibichung culture and, in his innocence, he has absorbed all of their views and expectations. He asserts that he has done the right thing by forcing Brünnhilde to obey him as he pretended to be her new husband, Gunther. His interaction with Gutrune makes what happened on Brünnhilde's rock clear:

GUTRUNE:
So you overcame the intrepid woman?

SIEGFRIED:
She yielded- to Gunther's strength.

GUTRUNE:
And yet she was wed to you?

SIEGFRIED:

¹⁷⁷ "So zwangst du Brünnhild'?" Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 312.

¹⁷⁸ Siegfried: "The woman was easily wooed." *Ibid.*, 313.

Brünnhild obeyed her husband
for the whole of the bridal night.¹⁷⁹

Although arranged marriages were common in Wagner's time, the contrast he draws between the passion, joy, and love in Siegfried's marriage to Brünnhilde and the terror, dread, and callousness of Siegfried the Gibichung's interaction with her is stark. Though Siegfried refers to Gunther and Brünnhilde as "the lovers," the phrase is meaningless, as the audience knows there is no love between them. The audience, having felt Brünnhilde's joy at being with Siegfried, would have felt her pain at being disgraced and defamed at the end of Act I. The audience knows that the person who harmed her was Siegfried and can feel that betrayal, though Brünnhilde has yet to comprehend how painful her situation truly is.

When Brünnhilde is presented to the Gibichungs in Act II Scene iv, we see how her rightful rage is perceived as female hysteria by the ignorant society around her. Society, represented by the chorus of vassals, misinterpret her behavior because they do not fully understand what has happened; her demeanor makes plain that something terrible has happened to her, but no one seems to notice. When she is presented to the crowd, she is described as following Gunther solemnly, "pale-faced and with downturned eyes."¹⁸⁰ In fact, she is described as "never once raising her eyes" as Gunther sings her praises to the crowd.

¹⁷⁹ GUTRONE: *So zwangst du das kühne Weib?* SIEGFRIED: *Sie wick - Gunthers Kraft.* GUTRONE: *Und vermählte sie sich dir?* SIEGFRIED: *Ihrem Mann gehorchte Brünnhild' eine volle bräutliche Nacht.* Ibid., 314.

¹⁸⁰ (*Gunther geleitet Brünnhilde, die nie aufblickt, zur Halle, aus welcher jetzt Siegfried und Guttrune, von Frauen begleitet, heraustreten.*) Ibid., 318.

The contrast between the ways Brünnhilde has been treated and Gunther's description of her is sickening. Gunther describes her as the "most hallowed of women...a nobler wife was never won"¹⁸¹ even though she was "acquired" by force and violence. She has been treated neither nobly nor respectfully: his words are completely empty. Gunther sings as Siegfried and Gutrune enter:

GUNTHER:
Two blissful couples
I see here resplendent:
(He draws Brünnhilde closer towards them.)
Brünnhild'- and Gunther,
Gutrun'- and Siegfried!¹⁸²

Though the vassals don't realize how Brünnhilde was "won," the audience knows that there is nothing "blissful" about her marriage to Gunther. It is this contrast, between what the audience knows and what the vassals know, that makes the vassals' view of her as "mad" even more painful to watch.

Brünnhilde is not mad, but this scene illustrates how madness is diagnosed by society; Brünnhilde is called mad because the people around her do not have the full picture of what has happened to her. As soon as Gunther mentions Siegfried, Brünnhilde begins to understand what has happened to her. Wagner writes that, upon hearing Siegfried's name: "Brünnhilde raises her eyes in alarm and sees Siegfried; her gaze remains fixed on him in amazement. Gunther has released her violently trembling hand

¹⁸¹ "*Brünnhild', die hehrste Frau, bring' ich euch her zum Rhein. Ein edleres Weib ward nie gewonnen.*" Ibid., 319.

¹⁸² GUNTHER: *(hält vor der Halle an) Gegrüsst sei, teurer Held; gegrüsst, holde Schwester! Dich seh' ich froh ihm zur Seite, der dich zum Weib gewann. Zwei sel'ge Paare seh ich hier prangen: (Er führt Brünnhilde näher heran) Brünnhild' und Gunther, Gutrun' und Siegfried!* Ibid., 319.

and, like the others, shows genuine perplexity at her behavior.”¹⁸³ Gunther, having been raised in a society where women were property without opinions, is genuinely confused by Brünnhilde’s feelings. He knows that she is in love with Siegfried: he was there before Siegfried was drugged, when Siegfried sang of his love for and devotion to Brünnhilde in Act I. However, it is telling that Gunther had never imagined that Brünnhilde would be anything but submissive and obeying, even though she was forced into their marriage. The interaction that follows demonstrates how the vassals, Siegfried, and Gunther misinterpret Brünnhilde’s legitimate reaction to her trauma as female hysteria.

SOME VASSALS:

What ails her?

Is she distraught?

(Brünnhilde begins to tremble.)

SIEGFRIED:

(Taking a few steps toward Brünnhilde)

What troubles Brünnhilde’s features?

BRÜNNHILDE:

(scarcely able to control herself)

Siegfried...here!...Gutrune..?

SIEGFRIED:

Gunther’s gentle sister:

wedded to me,

as you are to Gunther.

BRÜNNHILDE:

(with terrible vehemence)

I...Gunther..? You lie!-

¹⁸³ *(Brünnhilde schlägt erschreckt die Augen auf und erblickt Siegfried; wie in Erstaunen bleibt ihr Blick auf ihn gerichtet. Gunther, welcher Brünnhildes heftig zuckende Hand losgelassen hat, sowie alle übrigen zeigen starre Betroffenheit über Brünnhildes Benehmen.)* Ibid., 319.

(She sways and appears about to collapse; Siegfried supports her.)

The light is fading from my eyes...
(In his arms, looking weakly up at him.)
Siegfried... knows me not!...

SIEGFRIED:

Gunther, your wife's unwell!

(Gunther joins them.)

Wake up, woman!

Here stands your husband!

*(Brünnhilde sees the ring on Siegfried's outstretched finger and starts up with terrible violence.)*¹⁸⁴

At this point, Brünnhilde begins to display some of the symptoms of female hysteria: she is described as trembling, fainting, and having a sudden mood swing. Whereas Ophelia is legitimately mad in *Hamlet*, Brünnhilde is dealing with a serious shock. Because she displays *some* of the symptoms of female hysteria, those around her assume she is simply mad.

Brünnhilde's anger and shock are justified, however no one except Hagen listens to her: it is only when Hagen gets involved later in the scene and restates her words that people take her accusations somewhat seriously. When Brünnhilde realizes that Siegfried, not Gunther, is wearing the ring, she begins to understand what has happened. Not only is Siegfried pretending not to know her (she doesn't know he was drugged), he is the one

¹⁸⁴ MANNEN UND FRAUEN: Was ist ihr? Ist sie entrückt? *(Brünnhilde beginnt zu zittern)* SIEGFRIED: *(geht ruhig einige Schritte auf Brünnhilde zu)* Was müht Brünnhildes Blick? BRÜNNHILDE: *(kaum ihrer mächtig)* Siegfried... hier...! Guttrune...? SIEGFRIED: Gunthers milde Schwester: mir vermählt wie Gunther du. BRÜNNHILDE: *(furchtbar heftig)* Ich.... Gunther... ? Du lügst! *(Sie schwankt und droht umzusinken: Siegfried, ihr zunächst, stützt sie)* Mir schwindet das Licht *(Sie blickt in seinen Armen matt zu Siegfried auf)* Siegfried - kennt mich nicht! SIEGFRIED: Gunther, deinem Weib ist übel! *(Gunther tritt hinzu)* Erwache, Frau! Hier steht dein Gatte. *([Brünnhilde] erblickt am ausgestreckten Finger Siegfrieds den Ring und schrickt mit furchtbarer Heftigkeit auf.)* Ibid., 319-320.

who raped her on Gunther's behalf. She orders Gunther to demand the ring back, as *he* was the one who ripped it from her finger on the mountain. Gunther, knowing nothing of the ring, is confused and asserts that he never gave Siegfried the ring and doesn't know what she is talking about. This sends Brünnhilde into a justified rage as she realizes how deeply she has been betrayed.

BRÜNNHILDE:
(thoroughly perplexed, Gunther says nothing. Brünnhilde flares up in her rage.)
Ha! He it was
who wrested the ring away from me:
Siegfried, the treacherous thief!¹⁸⁵

Brünnhilde's accusations are legitimately emotional. However, her emotional state causes those around her to view her reasonable reactions as insanity. It is only when Hagen steps forward in this scene and gives an unemotional, male voice to her words that Siegfried and Gunther begin to worry that the vassals will be swayed and their plan discovered.

HAGEN:
(stepping between them)
Brünnhild', intrepid woman!
Do you recognize the ring?
If it's the one that you gave to Gunther,
then it is his alone
and Siegfried won it by fraud,
for which the traitor must pay!

BRÜNNHILDE:
(crying out in the most terrible anguish)
Deceit! Deceit!
Most shameful deceit!

¹⁸⁵ BRÜNNHILDE *(wütend auffahrend)* Ha! - Dieser war es, der mir den Ring entriss: Siegfried, der trugvolle Dieb! Ibid., 321.

Betrayal! Betrayal-
as never before avenged!¹⁸⁶

Gunther notices that the vassals are listening to Hagen and tries to subdue Brünnhilde, demanding “Brünnhilde, wife! Control yourself!”¹⁸⁷ But Brünnhilde is not an ordinary woman; she did not grow up in this society. She knows that Gunther has no right to claim her as his wife and she is not afraid to tell him as much. “Keep away, betrayer!” she cries, pointing at Siegfried as she asserts, “Know then, all of you: not to him, but to that man there am I wed!”¹⁸⁸

Siegfried, as a member of this patriarchal society, realizes that he can use those societal expectations to influence the crowd and insists that Brünnhilde is mad, despite knowing the truth. As far as Siegfried knows, he has kept true to Gunther, and he uses this knowledge to justify his behavior. He assumes that there must have been an issue with the Tarnhelm, which caused Brünnhilde’s confusion on the rock. Siegfried knows that he was the one who “won” Brünnhilde, the one who technically claimed her, not Gunther: he realizes that there is some truth in her accusations. However, he also knows that he can discredit her by playing off the societal expectation that women are subject to wild emotions. He reminds them that Gunther is responsible for Brünnhilde, that her

¹⁸⁶ HAGEN: (*zwischen sie tretend*) *Brünnhild', kühne Frau, kennst du genau den Ring? Ist's der, den du Gunthern gabst, so ist er sein, - und Siegfried gewann ihn durch Trug, den der Treulose büssen sollt'!* BRÜNNHILDE: (*in furchtbarstem Schmerze aufschreiend*) *Betrug! Betrug! Schändlichster Betrug! Verrat! Verrat! -wie noch nie er gerächt!* Ibid., 321

¹⁸⁷ GUNTHER: *Brünnhild', Gemahlin! Mäss'ge dich!* Ibid., 322.

¹⁸⁸ BRÜNNHILDE: *Weich' fern, Verräter! Selbst Verrat'ner - Wisset denn alle: nicht ihm, - dem Manne dort bin ich vermählt.* Ibid., 322.

emotions are embarrassing Gunther, not just Siegfried. He settles the crowd by playing off the entire situation, saying:

SIEGFRIED:
Gunther! Stop your wife
from shamelessly bringing dishonor upon you!-
Grant the wild mountain woman
a moment's respite and rest
that her brazen rage may abate,
which a demon's
cunning craft
has roused against us all!-
You vassals, withdraw
and leave this woman's wrangling!
Like cowards we gladly give ground
when it comes to a battle of tongues.¹⁸⁹

He tries to reason with Gunther, who he believes understands why Brünnhilde might be confused, saying, "Believe me, it angers me more than you that I took her in so badly: I almost think that the Tarnhelm must have only half concealed me."¹⁹⁰ He reassures Gunther by insisting that "women's resentment quickly passes: that I won her for you the woman will surely be thankful yet."¹⁹¹ He asserts that Brünnhilde will get over her emotions, as women always do. Female hysteria was tied to female sexuality, after all, and a few days of marriage to Gunther would easily resolve her hysteria and calm her

¹⁸⁹ SIEGFRIED: *Gunther! Wehr' deinem Weibe, das schamlos Schande dir lügt! Gönnst ihr Weil' und Ruh', der wilden Felsenfrau, dass ihre freche Wut sich lege, die eines Unholds arge List wider uns alle erregt! - Ihr Mannen, kehret euch ab! Lasst das Weibergekeif! Als Zage weichen wir gern, gilt es mit Zungen den Streit.* Ibid., 324-325.

¹⁹⁰ SIEGFRIED: *(Er tritt dicht zu Gunther) Glaub', mehr zürnt es mich als dich, dass schlecht ich sie getäuscht: der Tarnhelm, dünkt mich fast, hat halb mich nur gehehlt.* Ibid.

¹⁹¹ SIEGFRIED: *Doch Frauengroll friedet sich bald: dass ich dir es gewann, dankt dir gewiss noch das Weib.* Ibid.

down.¹⁹² He believes that Brünnhilde will eventually thank them both for bringing her into their society and marrying her to an important man.

Had Brünnhilde been male, it is likely that her emotional response would not have been interpreted as hysteria and so easily disregarded. The belief that hysteria was a primarily female ailment was prevalent in Wagner's time just as it had been in Shakespeare's. In the 19th century, Sigmund Freud reinforced that female sexuality was the cause of hysteria. According to psychoanalysis:

The hysterical symptom is the expression of the impossibility of the fulfillment of the sexual drive... The symptom is thus a "primary benefit" and allows the "discharge" of the urge - libidinal energy linked to sexual desire. It also has the "side benefit" of allowing the patient to manipulate the environment to serve his/her needs. However, it is a disease of women: it is a vision of illness linked to the mode (historically determined) to conceive the role of women. The woman has no power but "handling," trying to use the other in subtle ways to achieve hidden objectives. It is still an evolution of the concept of "possessed" woman.¹⁹³

It makes sense that Wagner's 19th century imagining of Siegfried would be susceptible to this view. Though Freud voiced it after the opera's composition, the view that female

¹⁹² Scholars from the Romantic era noted on multiple occasions that Wagner focused on madness that stemmed from sexuality in his operas and worried that this sort of "erotic madness" would spread to the audience. Max Nordau, a physician, wrote in 1893, that the erotic nature of Wagner's music and the situations presented on stage in his operas could cause women in the audience to suffer from sexual hysteria as well. He states that "The lovers in his pieces behave like tom-cats gone mad, rolling in contortions and convulsions over a root of valerian... It is the love of those degenerates who, in sexual transport, become like wild beasts." He worries that Wagner's music brings out "reckless sensuality" which can cause women's sensibilities to "surrender... to unbridled passion." Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 161-163.

¹⁹³ Mauro Giovanni Carta, Bianca Fadda, Mariangela Rapetti and Cecilia Tasca, "Women and Hysteria in the History of Mental Health," *Clinical Practice & Epidemiology in Mental Health* 8 (2012), 115.

sexuality was to blame for hysteria was a cultural fact in the 19th century: the idea had been present in European society since Shakespeare's time. Siegfried and the Gibichung society are able to discount Brünnhilde's feelings and opinions by labeling her as "hysterical" and treating her as mad. He believes that a few nights releasing her sexual desires with Gunther will cure her and bring her around to their point of view.

Siegfried actively dehumanizes Brünnhilde in this scene. Notably, Siegfried does not refer to Brünnhilde by her name, instead choosing to call her "the woman." Women are property, and should be honored to be married to men of high status, regardless of how they were "acquired;" they are not individuals. Siegfried reinforces this belief when he turns his attention again to the vassals:

SIEGFRIED

(He turns to the vassals.)

Cheer up, you vassals!

Follow me to the feast!-

(to the women)

Be happy to help

at the wedding, you women!-

May blissful delight

now laugh out aloud!

In garth and grove

you shall see me

gladdest of all today.

He whom love delights,

let the lucky man

share in my happy frame of mind!¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ SIEGFRIED: *(Er wendet sich wieder zu den Mannen) Munter, ihr Mannen! Folgt mir zum Mahl! -(zu den Frauen) Froh zur Hochzeit, helfet, ihr Frauen! - Wonnige Lust lache nun auf! In Hof und Hain, heiter vor allen sollt ihr heute mich sehn. Wen die Minne freut, meinem frohen Mute tu' es der Glückliche gleich!* Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 325.

Siegfried is able to sway the crowd, but Brünnhilde, Gunther, and Hagen realize how empty and meaningless his words truly were. Wagner instructs in the stage directions that:

Siegfried throws his arm around Gutrune in exuberant high spirits and draws her away with him into the hall. The vassals and womenfolk, carried away by his example, follow him. The stage has emptied. Only Brünnhilde, Gunther, and Hagen remain behind. His face covered, Gunther has sat down to one side in a deep shame and terrible dejection. Brünnhilde remains standing at the front of the stage, gazing in anguish at the disappearing forms of Siegfried and Gutrune, before lowering her head.¹⁹⁵

The biggest issue with Siegfried assuming that Brünnhilde is suffering from “female hysteria” is that she isn’t. She is rightfully angry at Siegfried’s betrayal. Whereas Ophelia in *Hamlet* sinks into despair and eventually drowns herself, righteously freeing herself from her hysteria, Brünnhilde chooses to seek moral vengeance. Ophelia is hysterical, the foil to Hamlet’s pretend madness. Brünnhilde is accused of suffering from “hysterical madness” by those around her, but the audience and some characters on stage know that her rage has nothing to do with madness.

The music in this scene is disconcerting for the audience because it only reflects the society’s point of view, shunning Brünnhilde’s suffering entirely. The music is triumphant, cloyingly happy and glorious. The contrast between this music and Brünnhilde’s pain is creates considerable psychological and emotional tension: Wagner’s

¹⁹⁵ (*Er schlingt in ausgelassenem Übermute seinen Arm um Gutrune und zieht sie mit sich in die Halle fort. Die Mannen und Frauen, von seinem Beispiele hingerissen, folgen ihm nach. Die Bühne ist leer geworden. Nur Brünnhilde, Gunther und Hagen bleiben zurück. Gunther hat sich in tiefer Scham und furchtbarer Verstimmung mit verhülltem Gesichte abseits niedergesetzt. Brünnhilde, im Vordergrund stehend, blickt Siegfried und Gutrune noch eine Zeitlang schmerzlich nach und senkt dann das Haupt.*) Ibid.

music has always tied perfectly with the action on stage. In this scene, though, the music is ignoring Brünnhilde. The music is reflecting the Gibichung perspective and their power over Brünnhilde. Brünnhilde is feeling the most intense, negative emotions imaginable on stage and, yet, the music around the wedding is jubilant. The musical disconnect demonstrates that the female perspective doesn't matter in the Gibichung world; it's reflecting her true helplessness. She has no voice, not even in the music; her reaction while it happily carries on seems hysterical.

The audience, however, knows Brünnhilde isn't mad. Wagner forces the audience into Brünnhilde's shoes. The audience feels her anger, her pain, and her confusion, knowing the truth, and knows the injustice she has suffered. We know she isn't hysterical. The music, with its nauseating cheerfulness, brings the audience to Brünnhilde's side. We are with her when she makes her next choice and it is this support from the audience that keeps her from becoming a villain like the other two conspirators.

* * *

Brünnhilde's rage leads her to take action, action that she will later regret. She decides to conspire with Hagen and Gunther to destroy Siegfried, giving them information that allows them to assassinate him. She is driven to this act because she believes Siegfried has knowingly betrayed her and discarded her to take a new wife, squandering all of the knowledge and power she gave up when she relinquished her independence and married him. Brünnhilde, even though she is no longer a goddess, still possesses a warrior's spirit and pride. Having seen and experienced what her new status as "mortal woman" buys her, she is desperate to gain some power back over her own life. This quest for power is similar to that of another Shakespearean woman, Lady Macbeth.

Both Brünnhilde and Lady Macbeth are strong women who find themselves in situations where they have no autonomy or power. Brünnhilde chooses to find her power by destroying Siegfried, the person who took it from her. Lady Macbeth chooses to use her husband, Macbeth, to elevate their entire family's status, raising herself with them.

Lady Macbeth is ambitious and driven, while her husband, Macbeth, is much less motivated. She is frustrated by his lack of drive and pushes him throughout the first act of *Macbeth* to advance himself. Using the tools at her disposal, specifically her intelligence, ruthlessness, and sexuality, she manipulates Macbeth into murdering King Duncan with the intent that Macbeth take the throne upon his death. In Act I Scene v of *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth makes the conscious decision to drive Macbeth forward. She is alone, reading a letter from Macbeth. In this scene, Shakespeare gives us a window into Lady Macbeth's motivations and psychology. She justifies her behavior using the witches' prophecy, determining that, if Macbeth is to be king as they foretold, she must be the one to push him. Thinking of Macbeth, she says:

LADY MACBETH:
Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'ld'st have, great Glamis,
That which cries, "Thus thou must do," if thou have it,
And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
And chastise with the valor of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem

To have thee crowned withal.¹⁹⁶

She determines that she must push him to take whatever action is necessary to fulfill this destiny the witches foretold, no matter the cost. She says that he is too kind, too gentle and noble, to do what must be done for his own advancement. Lady Macbeth knows that her husband's love for her will allow her to "pour [her] spirits in [Macbeth's] ear" and push him how she would like. She knows her power over him and plans to exploit it.

As she ponders what to do, a servant appears and tells her that both King Duncan and Macbeth will be coming to the castle to stay the evening. In this moment, Lady Macbeth realizes that she must put aside her own conscience and gentleness in order to do what she needs to do. To murder King Duncan, who treated her and her husband well, she must put all thoughts of kindness out of her mind. She calls upon dark spirits to keep her resolve strong:

LADY MACBETH:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood.
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry "Hold, hold!"¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 1992), 31.

In this monologue, Lady Macbeth calls upon the spirits to “unsex” her, to remove the innate feminine nature she feels holds her back from carrying out a murder. She is afraid of having second thoughts or misgivings, but she is determined that killing Duncan is what she must do.

Shakespeare portrays Lady Macbeth’s choice to “unsex” herself and take on a more masculine role as a perversion of the natural order, one that must be remedied. Lady Macbeth has usurped Macbeth’s role in society, emasculating him. Whereas men were supposed to be the leaders of the household, defenders of the family honor, and “keepers” of the women, Lady Macbeth has taken charge, pulling these responsibilities out of Macbeth’s hands. In an analysis of Lady Macbeth from the Victorian era (1887), Robert Munro speculates that, by using her feminine wiles to commit an inherently masculine act, Lady Macbeth has overstepped herself. She corrupts the heroic Macbeth, an act that must have consequences. He states:

With rare psychologic insight she read his soul as if it had been an open book. She knew his strength and weakness, his hopes and fears, and with skill that is almost demoniac, and too horrible to conceive as existing in woman, the weaker vessel and ministering angel, she played upon his nature with as much ease as if she were fingering the strings of her native harp. It was, however, that last touch of hers that taunted him with cowardice that made him her slave, not only in thought-for he was that already- but in deed as well. He was a genuine Celt, to whom reputation for bravery was dearer than conscience, dearer than even life itself; and so he was goaded and lashed by the “valor” of his wife’s tongue into doing an act from which his soul otherwise utterly recoiled.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁹⁸ Robert Munro, "Lady Macbeth: A Psychological Sketch," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (Penn State University Press) 21, no. 1 (January 1887): 31.

Lady Macbeth, Munro argues, only has the power of her words because, as a woman, she is unfit to take this action herself. She is not in charge of the Macbeth family destiny: her husband is. She oversteps herself in her ambitions and goes against her nature in her violent aspirations. This “unnatural” suppression of Lady Macbeth’s true feminine nature is what drives her to madness later in the play. Whereas Macbeth can, as a man, put aside emotion because he has the “muscular and nerve power needed for being such a great and persistent criminal,”¹⁹⁹ Munro observes the opposite with Lady Macbeth:

With Lady Macbeth... she had no way of escaping from her own thoughts, no way of plunging into such a course of action as might help to keep away the remembrance of the past or to relive the present. It was hers to suffer silently and alone. She had obtained the object of her desires, but it was, in the attainment of it, turned into fire and ashes on her lips. The crown was placed on her head, but it weighed upon her heavier than lead. Among all her gettings there were some things she did not count upon, and of those were remorse and its black train of crushing years.²⁰⁰

Lady Macbeth cannot successfully suppress her feminine nature, with its emotional predispositions. Both Shakespeare and Munro claim that her femininity dooms her to madness, that her attempts to act as a man are fruitless because women are innately emotional whereas men are action driven. By their logic, Lady Macbeth is consumed with remorse because women weren’t designed to murder the way men were. Macbeth, though distraught after murdering Duncan, chooses to continue to murder and, with each killing, seems less and less affected by it. His wife, however, who was stoic and logical after Duncan’s murder, becomes more and more distraught with each death. As Macbeth

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 32.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 33.

reclaims his masculinity through murder, Lady Macbeth is forced back into her feminine role. Whereas a man can kill because suppressing his emotions is part of his nature, a woman is designed to nurture and emote: Lady Macbeth cannot escape this aspect of herself, so when guilt begins to simmer within her, she is overcome by the full weight of it. Her mind cannot handle it and she goes mad.

Like Brünnhilde, Lady Macbeth's madness is diagnosed by the people around her. Lady Macbeth's madness becomes noticeable in Act V of *Macbeth*, when Lady Macbeth's servant and a physician, who is there to diagnose and treat her, assess Lady Macbeth's behavior. Lady Macbeth is acting out her guilt in her sleep, when her conscious mind and logic are unable to control her: she is running purely on emotion. Her doctor and the "gentlewoman" observe her washing her hands and speaking in her sleep:

GENTLEWOMAN:

It is accustomed action with her to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

LADY MACBETH:

Yet here's a spot.

DOCTOR:

Hark, she speaks. I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

LADY MACBETH:

Out, damned spot, out, I say! One. Two. Why then, 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier and afeared? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call out power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, 163.

Similarly to Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Lady Macbeth does not speak in poetic iambic pentameter as she is acting out her madness. This lack of structure and nobility in her speech is a sign that she is not in control of her wits, that her education and status are not influencing her behavior. Shakespeare often had characters speak in prose rather than in iambic pentameter when they were emotional or “musing” (thinking aloud without direction). In this scene, we get a glimpse into Lady Macbeth’s unconscious mind and see first-hand the guilt that is consuming her:

LADY MACBETH:

The thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? What, will these hands ne’er be clean?
No more o’ that, my lord, no more o’ that. You mar all with this starting.

DOCTOR:

Go to, go to. You have known what you should not.

GENTLEWOMAN:

She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that. Heaven knows what she has known.

LADY MACBETH:

Here’s the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O!

DOCTOR:

What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.

GENTLEWOMAN:

I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity of the whole body.²⁰²

Both the doctor and the woman observe that this “madness” is coming from Lady Macbeth’s heart, an “unnatural trouble” as the doctor surmises during his diagnosis. This is no issue of “the mother,” of hysteria as Ophelia had: this is a case of spiritual illness, not physical. The doctor asserts that, because of this, he cannot help her. He diagnoses

²⁰² Ibid., 163.

her in iambic pentameter, demonstrating that he is coming from a place of knowledge and competence:

DOCTOR:
Foul whisp'rings are abroad. Unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles. Infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.
More needs she the divine than the physician.
God, God forgive us all. Look after her.
Remove from her the means of all annoyance
And still keep eyes upon her. So, good night.
My mind she has mated,²⁰³ and amazed my sight.
I think but dare not speak.²⁰⁴

When the Doctor tells Macbeth of Lady Macbeth's ailment in Act V Scene iii, Macbeth demands he cure her at any cost. When the Doctor says that she is "Not so sick, my lord, as troubled by thick-coming fancies," Macbeth is frustrated and accuses the Doctor of not knowing his craft, unable to accept the Doctor's assertion that only Lady Macbeth can cleanse her heart of its crippling emotion.²⁰⁵

Lady Macbeth is doomed by her own hubris; the influence she thought she was claiming by murdering the king proves to be nonexistent as she meets her end off stage, as far from power as she could be. The problem is that no one can help Lady Macbeth but herself: only confessing the murder and freeing herself from the guilt will cure her sleepwalking. But Lady Macbeth cannot confess without implicating her husband in the murder of King Duncan and losing the throne they had worked so hard to obtain. Her

²⁰³ The word "mated" in Shakespeare's time was a synonym for "stupefied."

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 171-173.

desire for power is too strong. She succumbs to her madness and dies at the beginning of Act V Scene v. There is no description of her death, only a short discussion of it at the beginning of the scene. The characters hear a woman scream and it is reported to Macbeth that “The Queen, my lord, is dead.”²⁰⁶ This scene is about Macbeth, about everything he is going to lose, not about Lady Macbeth. We do not know how she died or why she died. Her death feels like a minor event. For all of her power and importance in the beginning of the play, her death is merely a small plot point.

Like Lady Macbeth, Brünnhilde is a noble woman trapped in a patriarchal world. She had been used to her Godly autonomy, an autonomy that had put her above human men, but had willingly given it up to become Siegfried’s wife, putting her life and fate into his hands. Both women turn to murder to advance themselves (though it is important to note that both women are implicit only in the planning of a murder and do not do the killing themselves), though they do it for different reasons. Whereas Lady Macbeth advocated murder as a means to climb socially, Brünnhilde turns to murder as a means to right the wrong done to her, to reclaim the power she had given to Siegfried and that he squandered. Despite their different motives, neither murder would have happened had it not been for these female conspirators. Afterwards, both women are consumed by guilt. However, while Lady Macbeth is consumed by guilt she cannot give conscious voice to and dies anticlimactically, Brünnhilde takes control of her regret and uses her death to cleanse the world.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 177.

When we examine Brünnhilde in Act II Scene v of *Götterdämmerung*, we find a woman who is left powerless after being raped, betrayed, and abandoned by Siegfried, the man who she had pledged her knowledge and love to. She is out of options; married to a man she despises and views as unworthy of her, she is forced to watch her true husband, Siegfried, pledge himself to another woman. As her emotions from the previous scene cool she begins to question her situation, and the warrior from *Die Walküre* begins to reappear. At first, she blames herself for thoughtlessly giving so much to Siegfried:

BRÜNNHILDE:
Where now is my wisdom
against this bewilderment?
Where are my runes
against this riddle?
Ah, sorrow! Sorrow!
Woe, ah woe!
All my wisdom
I gave to him:
in his power
he holds the maid;
in his bonds
he holds the booty
which, sorrowing for her shame,
the rich man exultantly gave away.²⁰⁷

In her sorrow, we hear one of the leitmotifs from the love duet between Brünnhilde and Siegfried in *Siegfried*. As Brünnhilde sings “All my wisdom, I gave to

²⁰⁷BRÜNNHILDE: (*in starrem Nachsinnen befangen*) *Welches Unholds List liegt hier verhohlen? Welches Zaubers Rat regte dies auf? Wo ist nun mein Wissen gegen dies Wirrsal? Wo sind meine Runen gegen dies Rätsel? Ach Jammer! Jammer! Weh', ach Wehe! All mein Wissen wies ich ihm zu! In seiner Macht hält er die Magd; in seinen Banden fasst er die Beute, die, jammernd ob ihrer Schmach, jauchzend der Reiche verschenkt!* Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 326.

him,²⁰⁸ a leitmotif sounds. This leitmotif is one we first heard in Act III Scene iii of *Siegfried* when Brünnhilde sings, “so long have I loved you, Siegfried!”²⁰⁹ (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Siegfried’s Love:²¹⁰



This leitmotif means two things: the first is that Brünnhilde is remembering Siegfried’s pledges of love from their first meeting, recalling why she gave so much up for him. The second meaning is for the audience: they know that Siegfried still believes in that vow he made to her, that he is under the spell of the love potion and would never have forsaken her had he not been under its influence. To underscore this, Wagner has the magic potion leitmotif (see Figure 13) sound as she sings her next question, “Who’ll offer me now the sword with which to sever those bonds?”²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Wagner, *Götterdämmerung: Full Orchestral Score*, 387-88.

²⁰⁹ Wagner, *Siegfried: Full Orchestral Score*, 393.

²¹⁰ Donington, *Wagner’s ‘Ring’ and its Symbols: The Music and the Myth*, 283.

²¹¹ BRÜNNHILDE: *Wer bietet mir nun das Schwert, mit dem ich die Bande zerschneid’?* Millington and Spencer, *Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 326.

Figure 13 : Magic Potion leitmotif: ²¹²



In this moment, Brünnhilde, feeling betrayed and deserted, is susceptible to Hagen's persuasion. Hagen, who has engineered this entire situation, who is the true cause of Brünnhilde's pain, offers himself as her defender. Had Brünnhilde retained her Godly insight, had she not become a "romantic victim," deaf to the truth, it is probable that she would have been able to see Hagen's motives clearly. After all:

Hagen brings this about, for like all great tacticians, he knows his antagonist and exploits Brünnhilde's tendency to listen and interpret, along with the wariness toward narrative consequent upon both. Hagen arranges that Brünnhilde see Siegfried in wedding dress, see him with Gutrune, see him with the ring. Hagen, however, also elicits *narration* from Siegfried, a false retelling of certain critical events. Siegfried's narration (which is false) and not his behavior, dooms him; his narration justifies his murder and brings Brünnhilde into the conspiracy.²¹³

Hagen offers her his spear as a means to take her vengeance on Siegfried, but she scoffs at him, not because she doesn't trust him, but because she thinks he's a fool. She asserts that there is no way for him to harm Siegfried as she used every rune and magical art she knew to keep him safe. But she didn't protect Siegfried fully: she symbolically left his back unprotected, rationalizing that he would never turn his back on a foe. When she shares this information with Hagen, we understand the darkness of the act that is going to

²¹² Donington, *Wagner's 'Ring' and its Symbols: The Music and the Myth*, 283.

²¹³ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 235.

take place. Siegfried will have to be literally stabbed in the back; the ultimate cowardly act, attacking a man when his back is turned, is how the conspirators must kill Siegfried. It is the definitive act of betrayal, symbolically and literally.

Brünnhilde has little admiration for either man with her in this scene: she feels that Gunther is spineless and pathetic and, though she has lost some of her insight, something about Hagen still unsettles her. Their uneasy alliance is made clear in their dark, suspicious conversation as they plot mutual revenge:

BRÜNNHILDE:
(to Gunther)
O craven man!
False companion!
Behind the hero
you hid yourself,
that the harvest of fame
he might reap for you!
The much-loved race
has sunk far indeed
that fathers such faint-hearts as you!

HAGEN:
No brain can help you,
no hand can help you,
only Siegfried's death can help you!

GUNTHER:
(seized with horror)
Siegfried's death!²¹⁴

²¹⁴ BRÜNNHILDE: *(zu Gunther)* O feiger Mann! Falscher Genoss! Hinter dem Helden hehltest du dich, dass Preise des Ruhmes er dir erränge! Tief wohl sank das teure Geschlecht, das solche Zagen gezeugt! ... HAGEN: *Dir hilft kein Hirn, dir hilft keine Hand: dir hilft nur - Siegfrieds Tod!* GUNTHER: *(von Grausen erfasst)* Siegfrieds Tod! Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 328.

Brünnhilde refers to Gunther as a member of the “much-loved race,” referring back to the Gods’ (particularly Wotan’s) love for and protection of humanity. She and her Valkyrie sisters fought beside human warriors, taking only the bravest back to Valhalla to live among the Gods. Until now, her exposure to human men had been restricted to some of the best of the race: the worthy warriors on the battlefield, Siegmund, and Siegfried. Gunther is cowardly and weak, the opposite of Siegfried, the man who, to Brünnhilde, represented the most heroic and noble traits of humanity. She feels insulted that Gunther would deem himself worthy of being her husband.

Brünnhilde also hesitates to trust Hagen, whom she can tell is trying to manipulate the scene. She makes it clear that she thinks both men are deceivers and betrayers.

BRÜNNHILDE:
You he betrayed,
and me have you all betrayed!
If I had my due,
all the blood in the world
could never make good your guilt!
But one man’s death
will serve me for all:
may Siegfried fall to atone for himself and you!²¹⁵

Brünnhilde states plainly that, because Hagen and Gunther are “lesser men,” the only person who betrayed her whose blood can atone for their communal wrongs is Siegfried. They are unworthy. She chooses to ally herself with them because, on a certain level, she knows that they are necessary: as a woman, she has no power on her own. Just as Lady Macbeth needed her husband to act for her, Brünnhilde needs Hagen and Gunther.

²¹⁵ BRÜNNHILDE: *Dich verriet er, und mich verrietet ihr alle! Wär' ich gerecht, alles Blut der Welt büsste mir nicht eure Schuld! Doch des einen Tod taugt mir für alle: Siegfried falle - zur Sühne für sich und euch!* Ibid., 329.

Wagner spends the first part of this scene focused on Brünnhilde's torment and inner turmoil, allowing the audience to understand her psychological state and empathize with her. Yes, the audience understands that Siegfried is acting as he is only because of the love potion, but they also can feel Brünnhilde's agony. Rieger examines the effects this dramatic exploration of Brünnhilde's pain has on the story and audience:

By depicting her turmoil, Wagner takes her side. Her decision to play her part in Siegfried's murder by admitting that he can be wounded in his back is at first startling, as is her participation in an 'oath of vengeance' together with Gunther and Hagen. But if we observe her transformation, her actions appear no longer as cheap revenge but rather as logical development. In her new role, she saw herself as part of her beloved. After he has betrayed her, there is no point to her life anymore. His death is also her death. Although she is part of a murder plot, she remains without a moral stain.²¹⁶

Brünnhilde's participation in the murder plot is a turning point for the story, represented by a dramatic musical moment: the only operatic trio in the entire cycle of operas. The three co-conspirators sing of death and betrayal: Hagen has orchestrated Siegfried's downfall through deception and betrayal, driven by ambition, while his two co-conspirators are pushed by emotion. Gunther and Brünnhilde profess that Siegfried's betrayal is cause enough for his death, that only his death can purify him and that Wotan will sanctify their oath.

GUNTHER AND BRÜNNHILDE

So shall it be!
May Siegfried fall:
let him purge the shame
that he caused me!
The oath of loyalty
he has betrayed:

²¹⁶ Rieger, *Richard Wagner's Women*, 157.

with his blood
let him cleanse his guilt!
All-wise,
avenging god!
Oath-knowing
guardian of vows!
Wotan!
Turn this way!
Bid your awesomely
hallowed host
come hither to hear
this oath of vengeance!²¹⁷

Meanwhile, Hagen sings his own text, revealing his ulterior intentions. He reveals that he is motivated by greed, saying, “So let him die, the radiant hero! Mine is the hoard, it must be mine; so let the ring be wrested from him!”²¹⁸ He addresses Alberich next, recalling the legacy his father left him as he says, “Elfen father, fallen prince! Guardian of night! Nibelung lord! Alberich! Heed me! Bid the Nibelung host obey you anew, the lord of the ring!”²¹⁹

While Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* is motivated to murder because of her own ambition, Brünnhilde is provoked to enter into this plot by Siegfried’s betrayal and her need to regain the aspects of her identity she gave to Siegfried when she became his wife.

²¹⁷ GUNTHER UND BRÜNNHILDE: *So soll es sein! Siegfried falle! Sühn' er die Schmach, die er mir schuf! Des Eides Treue hat er getrogen: mit seinem Blut büsst' er die Schuld! Allrauner, rächender Gott! Schwurwissender Eideshort! Wotan! Wende dich her! Weise die schrecklich heilige Schar, hieher zu horchen dem Racheschwur!* Barry Millington and Stewart Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 330-331.

²¹⁸ HAGEN: *Sterb' er dahin, der strahlende Held! Mein ist der Hort, mir muss er gehören. Drum sei der Reif ihm entrissen.* Ibid., 331.

²¹⁹ HAGEN: *. Alben-Vater, gefallner Fürst! Nachthüter! Niblungenherr! Alberich! achte auf mich! Weise von neuem der Niblungen Schar, dir zu gehorchen, des Ringes Herrn!* Ibid.

Both women are forced to have male co-conspirators, as females in their societies are unable to act on their own. However, after the murders occur, we see some vast differences in how Lady Macbeth and Brünnhilde deal with the aftermath and the regret they both feel for their actions.

Earlier in this chapter, I examined how Lady Macbeth was driven mad by guilt after Duncan's murder. By attempting to repress her feminine nature and act in a masculine way, her emotional, feminine side overtook her. Overwhelmed by the power of her suppressed emotions, Lady Macbeth acts out the night of the murder in her sleep, unable to move forward from it. Eventually, this leads her to commit suicide.²²⁰ For a woman who seemed to roar with influence and power at the beginning of the play, she dies abruptly, off-stage, so quickly that someone who stepped out of the theater for a minute would miss it. She is gone in an instant and her final act is mentioned in passing parentheses only after her husband is killed dramatically on stage. She dies a shadow of who she was, a woman whose ambition gave her such power and then whose guilt stole her glory away. Brünnhilde also feels regret for her part in the murder plot against Siegfried and also chooses to take her own life. However, her final moments are powerful and end up redeeming the corrupt world.

Brünnhilde changes after she participates in Hagen and Gunther's murder plot; she takes her power back. We do not see her on stage again until the final scene of the

²²⁰ It is made clear in Act 5, Scene 8 of *Macbeth* that Lady Macbeth died by her own hand, not from any accidental cause. Malcom states in the closing lines: *Producing forth the cruel ministers/ Of this dead butcher and his field-like queen/ (who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands/ Took off her life)* Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, 191.

opera, but we hear of her actions through Guttrune in Act III Scene iii. Guttrune reflects on being awoken from troubled sleep by “Brünnhilde’s laughter” and wonders aloud whether it was Brünnhilde she saw walking down to the Rhine in the middle of the night.²²¹ She sings:

GUTRUNE:
Brünnhilde’s laughter
woke me up. —
Who was the woman
I saw going down to the shore? -
I’m afraid of Brünnhild’! -
Is she within?²²²

Guttrune is afraid of Brünnhilde because she senses, on some level, the power that Brünnhilde has taken back. Brünnhilde is no longer playing by the societal rules Guttrune is subject to. She is wandering alone to the Rhine, a symbol of nature and purification, reconnecting with the natural world rather than succumbing to the Gibichung society. Brünnhilde is also, we learn later, conversing with the Rhinemaidens. The Rhinemaidens, mythical goddess-like creatures, counsel her about the Rheingold, the curse, and what must be done to end it. In consulting with them, Brünnhilde is reclaiming her godly responsibility over the well being of the world. Brünnhilde is regaining the identity she sacrificed to be with Siegfried, taking back the power and wisdom she gave up.

After Siegfried’s body is brought back to the Gibichung city, Brünnhilde dominates the scene and any lingering questions about her “madness” are rebuked. Her presence is undeniable as she rebukes those around her and gives commands to the

²²¹ Millington and Spencer, *Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 344.

²²² GUTRUNE: *Lachen Brünnhildes weckte mich auf. - Wer war das Weib, das ich zum Ufer schreiten sah? - Ich fürchte Brünnhild’! - Ist sie daheim?* Ibid., 344-345.

vassals, who obey her without question. Everyone around her recognizes this new Brünnhilde; she is clearly different from the “raving wild woman” who they encountered when she first arrived. The leitmotifs that accompany her voice identify the power that Brünnhilde has reclaimed: we hear the motifs for Valhalla, the Rheingold, the Curse, the Ring, and many of the motifs that we first heard in *Rheingold* repeated over and over as she sings, motifs that we have not heard associated with her before. Brünnhilde’s language also overwhelms the scene: just as Wotan dominated their interaction in Act II Scene ii of *Die Walküre*, Brünnhilde dominates the end of the opera. She sings a total of 468 words from the moment she steps onto the stage to her suicide. Gutrune interrupts her briefly twice, but is put in her place both times and ends up dying from despair early in the scene.

Brünnhilde’s self-actualization makes Gutrune’s death necessary. Gutrune’s death serves two purposes. First, Gutrune must die in order for Brünnhilde to reclaim her identity: Gutrune is the pretender, the false wife Siegfried took as a result of the corrupting societal influence he unwittingly subjected himself to when he left the natural world. With Gutrune gone, Brünnhilde can take her place as Siegfried’s rightful wife. Second, Gutrune is incapable of performing the redeeming act necessary to right all of the wrongs done since Alberich corrupted the Rheingold. Brünnhilde the Valkyrie, daughter of Wotan, bound to Siegfried by pure and noble love, is the only woman with enough wisdom and love to redeem Siegfried, the Rheingold, and the world.

Brünnhilde’s reclaiming of her identity is also reinforced by the musical choices Wagner makes. As Brünnhilde begins her final actions, Wagner brings back a motif only heard once before. The motif, referred to earlier in this thesis as the “Glorification of

Brünnhilde” motif (See Figure 1 above), is first heard when Brünnhilde helps Sieglinde, pregnant with Siegfried, escape Wotan’s wrath after Siegmund’s death in *Die Walküre*. Sieglinde sings her praise of Brünnhilde to the same melody (see Figure 1 above). It is no coincidence that this melody first appears the first time after Brünnhilde acts to save true, romantic love and then appears for the second time when Brünnhilde, in her wisdom, resolves to heal the world through her love for Siegfried. This motif, with its arching melody and triumphant emotion, is the only motif in the operas that can be called Brünnhilde’s alone: she doesn’t have to share it with Siegfried, with her Valkyrie sisters, with the ring, or the Rhinemaidens, or Wotan or anyone. It refers only to her and the glorious sacrifices she makes for love. This assertion is confirmed by numerous scholars and by Cosima, Wagner’s wife, in her diaries:

Numerous sources confirm that the theme has to do with Brünnhilde. At Richard’s behest, Cosima answered a query thus: ‘The motif that Sieglinde sings to Brünnhilde [is] the glorification of her that is taken up at the close of the work by the whole assembly, as it were.’ We find further such references in her diaries. ‘This morning Richard sang to me the theme of Sieglinde to Brünnhilde and said to me: “that’s you”-.’ At a rehearsal on 23 April 1875 Cosima is ‘shattered, the whole close is really a paraphrase of the words left uncomposed: “Not the glitter of gold etc., blessed in suffering and joy, let love alone remain”- the whole world of the Gods, the powers of nature, the heroes all serve the sole purpose of glorifying this noblest of women!’ And Richard said: ‘I am happy that I kept back Sieglinde’s praise of Brünnhilde, to use as a kind of choral song in praise of the heroine.’²²³

Brünnhilde realizes, after playing her part in Siegfried’s death, that her love for him remains unconditional, despite the betrayal. Brünnhilde’s love for Siegfried is now part of her identity; she cannot go back to being the warrior, the loveless Valkyrie. The

²²³ Rieger, *Richard Wagner's Women*, 161-162.

knowledge about the power of romantic love that she gained in *Die Walküre*, experienced in *Siegfried*, and whose sting she felt in *Götterdämmerung* has enabled her to comprehend all aspects of its power. She realizes that love is the only force that can heal the curse of the ring, and utilizes her ultimate act of love, sacrificing herself on the Siegfried's funeral pyre, as a means to cleanse not only their mutual betrayal, but also the corrupted world of the Gibichungs and Gods.

By the end of the opera, Brünnhilde's evolution is complete, her power undeniable, as she rises above the world that has imprisoned her and does what must be done to redeem it. Brünnhilde speaks her final monologue without interruption and, in her final words, she reclaims her power by not only acknowledging the wrongs done to her, but taking responsibility for resolving them. The bitter, raging, and vengeful Brünnhilde of the earlier acts is gone, replaced by a woman who understands her responsibilities and is rising to the challenge. Brünnhilde begins by discussing Siegfried, his betrayal, and how her love for him remains after all the sadness and rage has dissipated. She explains that, while he betrayed her, he did it without knowledge; he did it because he was loyal to his friends to a fault:

BRÜNNHILDE:
False to his wife
-true to his friend-
from her who was faithful
-she alone who was loyal-
he surrendered himself with his sword.-
Never were oaths
more nobly sworn;
never were treaties
kept more truly;
never did any man
love more loyally;
and yet every oath,

every treaty,
the truest love-
no one betrayed as he did.²²⁴

Brünnhilde realizes that, in order for her to live up to her potential, to become independent and wise once more, Siegfried had to betray her. She acknowledges that, as a piece of Siegfried, she would never have been able to do what she needed to do to redeem the corruption of the Rheingold. While she is angry with the Gods for putting her through such a terrible trial and sacrificing Siegfried for her education, she realizes that it is only by experiencing such a devastating loss could she have the courage and wisdom to do what needs to be done. She sings to the Gods:

BRÜNNHILDE:
By the bravest of deeds,
which you dearly desired,
you doomed him
who wrought it to suffer
the curse to which you in turn succumbed:-
it was I whom the purest man
had to betray,
that a woman might grow wise.-
Do I now know what you need? -²²⁵

Brünnhilde's struggles have returned her wisdom to her; she is no longer a "romantic victim". Instead, she has found a middle path, a way to rediscover her unique

²²⁴ BRÜNNHILDE: *Wie Sonne lauter strahlt mir sein Licht: der Reinste war er, der mich verriet! Die Gattin trügend, - treu dem Freunde, - von der eignen Trauten - einzig ihm teuer - schied er sich durch sein Schwert. Echter als er schwur keiner Eide; treuer als er hielt keiner Verträge; lautrer als er liebte kein anderer: und doch, alle Eide, alle Verträge, die treueste Liebe - trog keiner wie er!* Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 348-349.

²²⁵ BRÜNNHILDE: *Durch seine tapferste Tat, dir so tauglich erwünscht, weihtest du den, der sie gewirkt, dem Fluche, dem du verfielst: mich musste der Reinste verraten, dass wissend würde ein Weib! Weiss ich nun, was dir frommt?* Ibid.

identity while also using what her relationship with Siegfried has taught her. After experiencing the curse of Alberich's ring firsthand, Brünnhilde is able to do what she was unable to do when her sister Waltraute approached her in the beginning of the opera: she is ready to return the Ring to the Rhine. But before she can return it, she must use her love and the fire of Siegfried's pyre to purify the Rheingold and free it from the negativity of the curse. She sings:

BRÜNNHILDE:
Let the fire that consumes me
cleanse the ring of its curse:
in the floodwaters
let it dissolve,
and safely guard
the shining gold

that was stolen to your undoing.-

(She has placed the ring on her finger and now turns to the pile of logs on which Siegfried's body lies outstretched. She seizes a great firebrand from one of the vassals, brandishes it aloft and points it at the back of the stage.)²²⁶

A selfless Brünnhilde, through the fire representing her love for Siegfried, is able to transcend the temporal realm and transform all aspects of the world for the better. Brünnhilde's final act does not only to use fire to purify the Rheingold, but also to purify the Gods, who were made corrupt and weakened by their connection to the ring and curse. She calls on her father's ravens to tell Wotan what has transpired, to tell him that Loge is coming to set fire to the logs of the World Ash Tree that Wotan has piled around Valhalla. Brünnhilde is uniquely able to perform both purifications through love and fire:

²²⁶ BRÜNNHILDE: *Das Feuer, das mich verbrennt, rein'ge vom Fluche den Ring! Ihr in der Flut löset ihn auf, und lauter bewahrt das lichte Gold, das euch zum Unheil geraubt. (Sie hat sich den Ring angesteckt und wendet sich jetzt zu dem Scheiterhaufen, auf welchem Siegfrieds Leiche ausgestreckt liegt. Sie entreisst einem Manne den mächtigen Feuerbrand). (den Feuerband schwingend und nach dem Hintergrunde deutend) Ibid., 350.*

she can use her love for Siegfried to purify the Rheingold and her love for Wotan to purify Valhalla. Only Brünnhilde is able to fit both roles as wife and daughter. Her deep connection with Wotan is still present, even after they separate in *Die Walküre*; Brünnhilde is able to act as his Will and give him what his heart longs for. Brünnhilde speaks to her father through his ravens:

BRÜNNHILDE:
Fly home, you ravens!
Whisper to your lord
what you heard here by the Rhine!
Make your way past Brünnhilde's rock:
tell Loge, who burns there,
to haste to Valhalla!
For the end of the Gods
is dawning now:
thus do I hurl the torch
into Valhalla's proud-standing stronghold.²²⁷

In the moments leading to her death, Brünnhilde separates herself from her Shakespearean counterpart fully. Where Lady Macbeth's death lacked drama and was seen as a weak, shameful suicide, Brünnhilde greets her death with joy and confidence, with pride and strength. Brünnhilde transforms into a new version of herself. She is not the same as she was in *Die Walküre*: her exposure to romantic love has made such a return impossible. But she is no longer the "romantic victim" either; she is taking charge, dominating the stage and celebrating her own uniqueness. She finds strength in her love for Siegfried by acknowledging his faults.

²²⁷ BRÜNNHILDE: *Fliegt heim, ihr Raben! Raunt es eurem Herren, was hier am Rhein ihr gehört! An Brünnhildes Felsen fährt vorbei! - Der dort noch lodert, weiset Loge nach Walhall! Denn der Götter Ende dämmert nun auf. So - werf' ich den Brand in Walhalls prangende Burg.* Ibid.

Brünnhilde is a fully formed person, no longer acting on the behest of anyone else or under anyone else's influence; she is finally the person she was meant to be. The "Exaltation of Brünnhilde" motif soars around her, symbolic of her reclaiming her ability to listen, to infer: as Abbate observes, this motif is purely hers and its "motivic recurrence hypostatizes Brünnhilde's ear: only Brünnhilde has *heard* this music. It never otherwise returns, and Brünnhilde alone can bring it back by resinging it at the end."²²⁸ She becomes the Valkyrie again, mounting her horse and riding him into the fire with a Valkyrie "Heiajaho," her final words being "Siegfried! Siegfried! See! In bliss your wife bids you welcome!"²²⁹ As she disappears into the flames, the "Exaltation of Brünnhilde" motif sings above the chaotic music below it, reinforcing the power and magnificence of her death. Whereas Lady Macbeth's suicide foretells the tragic downfall of her family, Brünnhilde's death frees her family from the curse that dooms them. While Lady Macbeth's denying of her female side causes her death, Brünnhilde reclaims her strong, feminine identity through hers. In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth's femininity is what destroys her in the end, whereas in *Götterdämmerung*, Brünnhilde's femininity becomes the source of her strength.

²²⁸ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 244.

²²⁹ "Siegfried! Siegfried! Sieh! Selig grüsst dich dein Weib!" Millington and Spencer, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, 350-351.

CONCLUSIONS

Richard Wagner stated that combining the drama of Shakespeare and the music of Beethoven would close “a door left open” by both artists, a figurative call to future generations to elaborate upon their works. I suggest that the study of Wagner’s Shakespearean influences is a similar door left open in music scholarship, that examining Wagner through a Shakespearean lens can offer new and insightful interpretations of Wagner’s stories, characters, and dramatic construction.

I believe there are many more connections to be made between *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and Shakespeare’s works. This thesis examined the *Ring* via a framework based on “action.” The fathers issued a “Call to Action” to their sons and were freed from their “Inability to Act” by their daughters. Brünnhilde’s perceived madness made her lash out in anger, leading to her “Regret for Actions,” which bore similarity to Lady Macbeth’s feelings of guilt and regret. As I watch these moments in the *Ring* now, I find that my understanding of the Shakespeare has allowed me to see them in a different light. Scenes that had felt expository and flat before, such as Act I Scene ii of *Götterdämmerung*, now resonate with me in a new way. I can see the echo of the Ghost in Alberich, can feel how Hagen’s biological connection to his father forces him to carry the weight of Alberich’s choices on his own shoulders; like Hamlet, Hagen is unable to escape the fate his father has crafted for him. I can see Lady Macbeth’s desire to seize

control of her own life in Brünnhilde as she joins Gunther and Hagen for their haunting trio in *Götterdämmerung*. I appreciate Wagner's talent as a librettist as well as a composer and, as I watch his artful character development and well-crafted storylines play out on the stage before me, I cannot help but wonder what other connections await discovery.

I mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis that Wotan can be interpreted as a "tragic hero" in a Shakespearean sense, drawing a brief connection between his journey and Macbeth's. Shakespeare wrote a number of tragedies, many following the rise and fall of powerful men such as King Lear, Antony, Othello... I cannot help but wonder how each of these characters would compare to Wotan, how their stories might have inspired Wagner to shift his Wotan away from Odin's all-powerful, omnipotent God to a more relatable, sympathetic character. Wotan's struggle to understand how to balance power with his emotions bears striking similarity to Antony's conflict in *Antony and Cleopatra*. If Brünnhilde's final action equates to reconciliation between her and Wotan, then King Lear experiences something akin to it with his daughter Cordelia in *King Lear*. Wotan's emotional isolation influences his actions in a way similar to how Othello's social isolation shapes his behavior in *Othello*. Additionally, there is a well of potential scholarship considering how the psychology of the "tragic hero" unfolds in these plays in comparison to Wotan's journey in the *Ring*. Knowing that Wagner took considerable direction from Shakespeare in regards to character development, I am excited by the understanding we might glean from these comparisons.

I also find myself wondering what Shakespearean influences are present in Wagner's other works? For example, I wonder if the concept of "Liebestod" in *Tristan*

und Isolde relates to Shakespeare's perception of romantic love as an all-consuming force, an idea he explored in *Romeo and Juliet*. Parallels have been drawn between Beckmesser in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* as well and examining the characters in greater depth could yield additional insights into Wagner's character construction and thematic considerations.

Of course, without Wagner's words, we cannot know how many of these connections were intentional. However, intentional or not, these correlations between Wagner and Shakespeare can allow us to explore Wagner in new and fascinating ways; the door is open. When we pass through it, I do not doubt that countless stimulating and intriguing interpretations await us.

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