

EMAIL TO RON DART 10/15/2022:

Dear Ron:

Needless to say, it would take me forever to respond to every detail of your series of lectures on Wagner's *Ring*, of the resemblances of aspects of Tolkien's books to it, and of its massive implications for how we can understand what it is to be human. The primary thing I loved about your lectures is that they provide a window into the innumerable questions which Wagner asks about the human condition and man's destiny. That's my main take-away from your lectures: you ask many of the questions that need to be asked.

So, since a comprehensive response would take me an eternity to complete, I'll just respond briefly to a few of your observations which struck me as having the most resonance, not by way of critique but simply to complement what you said. Since you jump back and forth somewhat from one of the *Ring*'s four parts to the others in each of your lectures, in spite of each lecture being more or less dedicated to one of the *Ring*'s parts, I'll just follow the chronological order of your online lectures rather than try to break them down by the numbered sequence of recordings.

You note the *Ring* asks us to make sense of our life as science or myth, reason or romanticism. The whole point of my *Ring* book has been to demonstrate that Wagner's drama concerns precisely the relationship between these two aspects of man's psyche in the course of history. Of course he's seeking to discover whether they can be reconciled. As Scruton put it, man as object vs. man as subject.

You note, as Deryck Cooke did, that Alberich seeks to compensate himself for the loss of love with the acquisition of power. My book presents this as a metaphor for man's evolutionary transition from our pre-lingual animal ancestors into symbol-using man who, unlike his animal ancestors, is capable of increasing his power over himself and his environment over time cumulatively through the acquisition of knowledge.

You note how Wagner was responding to the 19th Century critique of man's belief in godhead, that this was interpreted as anthropomorphism applied to the natural world, in which man projected his own nature and needs onto the world in spite of

actuality resisting man's arbitrary categories. My book discusses how Feuerbach found the origin of God in man's unconscious and involuntary (as in a collective dream) synthesis of the infinite power and variety of Nature with man's projection of the abstract nature of his own symbolic mind onto a being of his imagination, God.

You note Brünnhilde sacrifices her divinity for love (of Siegfried). My book construes this as Wagner's metaphor for the transition from religious faith (Wotan) into inspired secular art (the love Siegfried the artist-hero and his muse of unconscious artistic inspiration Brünnhilde share), in which man's religious longing for transcendence lives on as feeling (music) when it can no longer be sustained as faith, as belief, which makes an illusory claim to truth. The virtue of secular art, particularly music, for Feuerbach, is that unlike religious faith it doesn't stake a claim to truthfulness which can be contradicted by fact and/or reason, and in music is freed from the conceptual debate between truth and illusion altogether.

You suggest Brünnhilde (Prometheus) is the true hero of the *Ring*, and Siegfried secondary. Since in my interpretation Siegfried and Brünnhilde together represent the artist-hero and his unconscious mind (and source of inspiration), I hold Siegfried to be one with her and therefore of equal significance. She invites this assumption when in the finale she describes him as the greatest of heroes in spite of his having betrayed her. They also describe themselves as identical to each other in T.P.2 (part two of *Twilight's* Prologue), in a manner similar to Tristan and Isolde.

You note that Wagner's *Ring* expresses the notion that the gods must die for man to thrive. My book describes this as stemming from Feuerbach's assumption that man can't be all he can be or ought to be until he realizes that he unconsciously and involuntarily invented God, and liberates himself from the shackles he imposed on himself due to this self-deceit.

When discussing *Rhinegold* you note that the Rhinedaughters' joyful singing and playing around the Rhinegold seem to capture Nature's Wonder, whereas Alberich sees Nature and the gold as having value only as something to exploit for power, an instrumental use. As Alberich asks them, what use is the Rhinegold which inspires them to song and dance and play? As you say, Alberich concludes after

he's rejected thrice by the three, that love will never be his, so he seeks to compensate himself with power instead. This in my book is Wagner's metaphor for the notion that the evolution of man's pre-lingual animal ancestors into symbol-using man is irreversible. However, in Wagner's *Ring* man instinctively seeks to restore that feeling of oneness with Nature, the preconscious bliss Wagner assumes pre-lingual animals enjoyed, but which is forever lost once we become fully human, through first religious myth, then through altruistic ethics (which, frankly, animals don't practice in spite of defense of the young by the mother, for instance), and finally through secular art. Man's Fall on this view consists in his status as a human being: they're one and the same. Wagner's *Ring* defines man's Fall as the consequence of his acquisition of his unique gift (and Curse) of symbolic consciousness.

You note the stock interpretation of Alberich as a captain of industry exploiting his fellow Nibelungs in the mines for the sake of power acquisition, but in my interpretation the Nibelungs' endless, coerced labor is Wagner's metaphor for man's nature per se, who, as the Bible says, must now toil in the dust to live, after the Fall. In translation, this means man can no longer depend upon pure feeling, pure instinct, to survive, but has to reason his way to survival through trial and error, through learning and passing his knowledge on culturally. And this is laborious and endless.

You note that Wotan like Alberich has paid a price to take possession of Valhalla, the realm of divinity. In my interpretation man's acquisition of consciousness (Alberich's forging of his Ring) was a precondition for man's involuntary and unconscious invention of the gods (Wotan and Fricka sleep while the Giants - representing man's two primary animal instincts of sexual desire [Fasolt] and the self-preservation instinct or fear [Fafner] - build Valhalla). Wagner captures this by orchestrally transforming Alberich's Ring Motif into Wotan's Valhalla Motif during the transition R.1-2. It's also worth noting that in his article "The Wibelungs" Wagner stated that the Nibelung Hoard was sublimated into the Holy Grail: this has an obvious parallel in Alberich's Ring being sublimated into Wotan's Valhalla.

My book explains the Giants' claim to Freia on the basis that man's religious belief in the infinity of love's bliss and the immortality of the soul (Freia and her golden apples of sorrowless youth eternal) is man's imagined absolute satisfaction of his

instincts of sexual love (Fasolt) and self-preservation (Fafner). Loge's and Wotan's purpose in retrieving Alberich's gold to pay off the giants so they won't stake their claim to Freia is Wagner's metaphor for religious man's need to deny the animal, corporeal origin of his religious longing for transcendent value. In other words, Wotan with Loge's help must deny his true debt both to the Giants and to Alberich. You note Alberich's enslavement of his fellow Nibelungs. My book shows how this makes nonsense of the thesis that Alberich is Wagner's metaphor for Jews, since anti-Semites hold that the Jews as a race are a threat to Christian Europeans, not that the Jews exploit their own people. Similarly, Wotan, the alleged God of the Aryans, confesses to Brünnhilde that his underlying though hidden motives were ultimately no higher than Alberich's. It's no accident that Wagner said on several occasions that Siegfried becomes a Nibelung by virtue of taking possession of the Nibelung Hoard. So much for a simplistic reading of anti-Semitism into Wagner's conception of his characters!

You note that the Tarnhelm allows one to become invisible or change guises, so Alberich can use its magic to manipulate others. My book posits that the Tarnhelm is a symbol for the human imagination which can either discern the laws and powers of Nature in order to obtain ever greater power (as in science and technology, Alberich's realm), or distort the truth to invent and sustain consoling illusions as in religion or art (Wotan, Brünnhilde's, and the Wälsungs' realm). Loge in particular, one of whose motifs gives birth to the Tarnhelm's two motifs (and also to the Potion Motif from *Twilight*), is in my book Wagner's metaphor for man's gift of artistic self-deceit, which is precisely the role he plays for Wotan. He deceives Wotan into imagining he can possess both power and love without contradiction.

You speak of Alberich's Ring Curse as a symbol for addiction, our enslavement to the things we're attached to. In my book possession of the Ring leads necessarily to the gradual accumulation of a hoard of treasure, which is Wagner's symbol for man's accumulation of that hoard of objective knowledge which grants man power in the course of history. In other words, man's quest for both self-knowledge and knowledge of his world (which are one and the same) is one of collective, historical man's primary drives, stemming from the self-preservation urge. Note that Alberich and Fafner share the Dragon Motif. Note also that Alberich's accumulation of his hoard of treasure within the bowels of the earth (Erda) is

continued by Light-Alberich, Wotan, after Wotan with Loge's help has dispossessed Alberich of his Hoard, Tarnhelm, and Ring, in his role as Wanderer, since the Wanderer accumulates a hoard of knowledge in his travels over the earth (Erda). Wagner intended us to grasp this connection, and also made it clear in the *Ring* libretto that Siegfried wins possession not only of Alberich's Nibelung Hoard of Treasure, but also inherits Wotan's hoard of knowledge by waking and winning the love of Wotan's daughter Brünnhilde, who is Wotan's safe repository for his confession to her, as Brünnhilde herself tells Siegfried in T.P.2.

You mention Nietzsche's critique of religion in relation to Wagner's *Twilight of the Gods*. My book notes that Nietzsche's mature philosophy was heavily influenced by both Feuerbach and Wagner, yet Nietzsche somewhat disingenuously claimed he'd entirely severed himself from Wagner and so far as I know never acknowledged Feuerbach's influence. I believe the roots of Nietzsche's concept of the Will to Power stem both from Schopenhauer and from Wagner's *Ring*.

You examine Siegmund's tragic life and his loving and self-sacrificial relationship with his sister-wife Sieglinde. In my interpretation Siegmund was Wagner's metaphor for the secular hero of social-revolution, the lonely man who fights for justice and love in an unjust and unloving world ruled mostly by unquestioned tradition and hierarchies of power. Siegmund is a secularist because he refuses Brünnhilde's offer of immortal life in Wotan's heaven Valhalla in favor of Siegmund's mortal love for his sister Sieglinde. However, most commentators misunderstand Siegfried as the social revolutionary. In my book Siegfried represents specifically the secular artist-hero who falls heir to religious man's longing for transcendent value when religious faith (self-doubting Wotan) is dying out in the face of man's (Alberich's and Wotan's) gradual accumulation of a hoard of objective knowledge. Both Alberich and Light-Alberich (Wotan) accumulate hoards, in Alberich's case of treasure, and in Wotan's case of knowledge, in the course of Wotan's world-wanderings as the Wanderer over the earth (Erda - Mother Nature).

Wagner stated in his autobiography that what he got from Feuerbach was essentially that in the modern, secular world, once religious faith is no longer viable, secular man still seeks to satisfy his longing for transcendent value in self-sacrificial love for his fellow man (Siegmund and Sieglinde) without justification

by religious faith, and in inspired secular art (Siegfried and Brünnhilde, who has renounced her divinity for mortal love), which are the gods' (Wotan's) heirs, so to speak. Wagner stated that these two things are the only truly immortal things.

You note that an older idea of god (Wotan) is that he can't be questioned, that he can do as he wishes, that he's a totalitarian. Wagner, following Feuerbach, felt that what we call religious faith is actually disguised egoism and fear (fear of questioning). Wagner expressed this by making Elsa his true heroine in *Lohengrin*, because he praised her in "A Communication to My Friends" for asking Lohengrin the forbidden question re his true identity and origin, thus breaching his demand of absolute faith. Feuerbach said that God hides his true identity and origin in Nature, falsely claiming to be wholly transcendent and autonomous. You note, for instance, that the Valhallan gods ignore the song of nature (Rhinedaughters) as they take possession of their new, divine home, Valhalla.

Wagner modeled Brünnhilde's disobedience of the god Wotan's injunction on Elsa's disobedience of Lohengrin's demand that she have unquestioning faith in him. Wagner also modeled Wotan's acquiescence to Brünnhilde's plea that Wotan share with her the thoughts he dare not speak aloud about his bitter, divine "Noth," on Elsa's insistence that Lohengrin share with her the forbidden knowledge of his true identity and origin, so she can, as she tells him, help protect him from that "Noth" he'd suffer if his secret was betrayed. She wants him to share his forbidden knowledge with her so she can earn his trust by helping him keep his secret. The difference is that, whereas Lohengrin refused to share his forbidden self-knowledge with Elsa in love's night, Wotan did confess his forbidden self-knowledge to Brünnhilde (which he said he dare not speak aloud in words - but suppose it be spoken aloud only as music?). This is the explanation, I believe, for Wagner's transition from traditional opera (in *Lohengrin*), in which according to him music still only had a mechanical relationship to the libretto/plot, to revolutionary music-dramas (in the *Ring*), in which music and words are bonded in loving union. Wagner identified Brünnhilde with music, and Siegfried with drama.

And as you can see, Wagner modeled Wotan's eternal separation from Brünnhilde on Lohengrin's tragic separation from Elsa. Last but not least, in his "A Communication to my Friends" Wagner stated that Elsa is Lohengrin's unconscious in whom he seeks redemption. When Wotan confesses his thoughts

that are so unbearable that he dare not speak them aloud as words to Brünnhilde, in my interpretation he's repressing such thoughts into his unconscious mind. This is Wotan's unbearable knowledge of his true identity. It's precisely this hoard of forbidden knowledge which Siegfried inherits when he wakes Brünnhilde so she can become his muse of unconscious artistic inspiration. This explains how Wotan's hidden motives and fears can motivate Siegfried without Siegfried becoming conscious of them. This also explains why Siegfried feels fear of waking Brünnhilde, and also why, once she's been awakened, Brünnhilde expresses her fear of consummating loving union with Siegfried. He's instinctively afraid of Wotan's forbidden knowledge which she possesses, and she's afraid that in succumbing to his love she'll be risking that Siegfried might reveal the forbidden knowledge which Wotan had intended to conceal. This explains what Brünnhilde means when she tells Siegfried in S.3.3 that what he doesn't know (accompanied here by the Fate Motif), she knows for him. What she knows for Siegfried is Wotan's confession of his hoard of unbearable knowledge, which he repressed into his unconscious mind Brünnhilde.

Another aspect of this arcane subject is that by virtue of repressing his dangerous self-knowledge and knowledge of the corruption in world-history into his unconscious mind Brünnhilde, Wotan is sublimating this hoard of knowledge into redemptive musical motifs. As Brünnhilde tells Siegfried in S.3.3, what Wotan thought (i.e., his confession to her), she felt, and she describes what she felt as her love for Siegfried. Her love for Siegfried is her unconscious inspiration of his art. And this also means that Wotan's hoard of forbidden knowledge which he confessed to the "womb of his wishes" Brünnhilde, is Siegfried's unconscious source of artistic inspiration.

You ask, where do we find meaning? What if our idols betray us? Wagner's *Ring* of course asks this not only about religious faith in God, but about our most intimate loving relations, as you point out.

You note that Siegfried must break with a person whom he thought was his parent (Mime). In my book this has a special resonance. Mime's name involves mimesis, and Wagner on several occasions noted that the artist must first imitate what he loves before he can rise to the higher, transcendent level of being an original artistic interpreter of the world. Hence Siegfried's debt to Mime, but also

Siegfried's desperate desire to deny that debt and disown Mime's influence and Mime's claims on Siegfried. This is directly paralleled in Wotan's relationship to Siegfried. Note that Wotan can't make a sword for Siegfried, who must reforge his father Siegmund's sword, the sword that Wotan provided for Siegmund. Mime, similarly, can't make a sword for Siegfried.

You refer to the Ring Curse, that its possessor must lust after gold without rest, and that the quest of the Nibelungs' mining under Alberich's whip is never fulfilled. This of course parallels Schopenhauer's notion of the unassuageable Will, but it also parallels Feuerbach's notion that man throughout history perpetually labors to acquire knowledge and the power it brings.

You note that Fafner becomes a dragon after killing his brother Fasolt (an obvious parallel to man's Fall in *Genesis*, Cain and Abel), and that all relations for Fafner are with objects, not subjects. In my interpretation Fafner initially represents one of man's two primary animal instincts, the instinct of self-preservation which, once man has become man by acquiring reflective consciousness (Alberich's Ring), inspires him to imagine (the Tarnhelm of imagination) the possibility of divine, immortal life, as a means to assuage his fear of death. Note that he sits on the inert Nibelung Hoard without striving to acquire more of it or to use its power. Fafner in my book at this point becomes a symbol for Wotan's (collective, historical man prior to the victory of science over religious faith) fear of knowledge, which in Wagner's reading is identical with religious faith (i.e., a refusal to examine one's assumptions due to fear of the truth). Fafner, sitting on the Nibelung Hoard of knowledge and warning everyone else away from it, represents religious faith's censorship of freedom of inquiry. It's noteworthy that in the finale of S.3.3, Siegfried's and Brünnhilde's first love duet, Brünnhilde inherits Alberich's and Fafner's Dragon Motif. This is presumably because she's Wotan's safe repository for his Hoard of forbidden knowledge, which parallels Alberich's Nibelung Hoard of Treasure. And of course Fafner the Dragon is identified with existential Fear in the *Ring*, the fear Siegfried feels for the first time just before waking Brünnhilde.

You mention Siegfried's reforging of his father Siegmund's sword. In my book I note Deryck Cooke's observation that the primary five-note portion of the Sword Motif replicates the initial motif in the *Ring*, the so-called Primal Nature Motif. The significance of this is that the sword Nothung (the Needful) represents man's

religious longing to restore the innocence of the time before the Fall (before Alberich's renunciation of love, theft of the Rhinegold, and forging of his Ring of Power, and therefore before Wotan's contract with the Giants to build Valhalla, an act dependent on Alberich's initial Fall), as expressed by religious belief, altruistic ethics, and inspired secular art, particularly the art of music. It represents man's historical quest to restore lost paradise, to escape from the contradictions of conceptual thought (the war between bitter truth and consoling illusion) into the womb of feeling, or music, to restore the Ring to the Rhine, as it were.

You note the Woodbird guides Siegfried to Brünnhilde. In my book the Woodbird's songs are Wagner's metaphor for his musical motifs of reminiscence and foreboding. Wagner said that through such musical motifs the inspired artist's audience obtains access to the profoundest secret of the artist's aim. Such music is, according to Wagner, a portal to the inspired artist's unconscious source of inspiration, in this case Siegfried's muse Brünnhilde. The Woodbird subliminally inspires Siegfried to take possession of Alberich's Hoard, Tarnhelm, and Ring which, significantly, Siegfried leaves in Brünnhilde's, his unconscious mind's, protective hands, so that its inherent power, the truth, won't be expressed consciously. Siegfried in this way takes possession of the sources of Alberich's objective power aesthetically, thus temporarily neutralizing his Ring Curse of consciousness. But it becomes the unconscious source of inspiration for Siegfried's art, whose purpose is to mask the bitter truth and replace it with a consoling illusion. In other words, the Nibelung Hoard is sublimated unconsciously into the Holy Grail.

You mention that Wotan and Erda give birth to Brünnhilde. Wagner once stated that God (Wotan) and Nature (Erda) are two parallel lines which come together outside of time and space. Wagner also identified Brünnhilde with the special music of his music-dramas, and therefore also with his musical motifs (the Woodbird's Song). He noted that the "Wonder" of his musical motifs is that they seem to transcend the limits of time and space by making every incident or symbol or person or emotion with which they've been associated in the course of the drama seem present, here and now, every time they sound, so that in effect Wagner's musical motifs grant us an intuition of the entirety of the drama and its most hidden implications in a flash of insight. Thus, the secular Wonder of Wagner's musical motifs of reminiscence and foreboding, which seem to transcend

time and space, is Wagner's substitute for dying religious faith. Wagner also stated in his prose scenario for his Buddhist drama *The Victors* that the Buddha knows all the past lives of anyone who comes before him as if they're all present, here and now, and he grants this knowledge as a gift to certain individuals who need salvation from their entrapment within eternal rebirth. Wagner stated that this fact made his musical motifs of particular value for reminding his audience of the past lives of the characters in his music-dramas (think here of *Parsifal*). You mentioned that Siegfried has certain things in common with Odin/Wotan. Wagner wrote to King Ludwig II of Bavaria that Wotan is reborn in Siegfried as the artist is reborn, but forgotten, in his work of art, that the more the artist's influence remains unconscious the freer the work of art.

You mention Wotan's insistence that thanks to Loge's protective ring of fire around Brünnhilde only a fearless hero can wake her. Note Hans Sachs's influence in ensuring that only the truly inspired artist-hero Walther win the hand of Eva, the muse of unconsciously inspired art (Walther sees his muse Eva, i.e., Eve in Paradise, who like Elsa and Brünnhilde breached God's insistence on unquestioning faith, in his dream of inspiration he dreams after the Act Two riot.). Wagner modeled Sachs's secret confession to Eva of his bitter "Noth" during his Act Two cobbler song on Wotan's confession to Brünnhilde. Sachs's confession to Eva is the secret source of Walther's unconscious artistic inspiration by his muse Eva which gives birth to Walther's redemptive master-song, just as Wotan's confession to Brünnhilde is Siegfried's unconscious source of artistic inspiration.

You noted that, whereas the Woodbird warns Siegfried against drinking Mime's sleep potion (through whose efficacy Mime hopes to make Siegfried vulnerable to having his head cut off by Mime during Siegfried's sleep), Siegfried evidently isn't quiet enough to hear the Woodbird later when he unwittingly drinks Hagen's potion of forgetting-and-love offered by Gutrune. In my interpretation this is because Siegfried, like all other modern men, is becoming too conscious to be able to retreat to the womb of his unconscious mind Brünnhilde for artistic inspiration. This is the meaning of Alberich's Ring Curse, that ultimately all the living will quest for gold (i.e., acquire that objective knowledge which precludes illusory consolations). Siegfried can no longer retreat to the Rhine. This is the hidden meaning of Hagen's remark to Siegfried when the Gibichung hunting party finds him on a bank on the Rhine (after Siegfried's confrontation with the

Rhinedaughters), that they've discovered where Siegfried retreated. Hagen says this just prior to soliciting Siegfried to tell the tale of how he learned the meaning of the Woodbird's Song (i.e., how Wagner unearthed the forbidden knowledge of how and why religious man retreated to music when he could no longer sustain his faith conceptually), which culminates in Siegfried becoming truly aware of who he is, and dying at Hagen's hands, stabbed from behind by Siegfried's re-awoken memory.

You note that though Siegfried is fearless he nonetheless learns fear from Brünnhilde. My book explains that this is because Brünnhilde is the safe repository of Wotan's confession of self-knowledge so abhorrent that he couldn't bear to say it aloud (i.e., think it consciously) to himself. Wagner employs musical motifs from the moment just before Wotan's confession to Brünnhilde of his secret hoard of unbearable knowledge in V.2.2, when he exploded in her presence in despair, at the very moment Brünnhilde expresses her fear of consummating a loving union with Siegfried in S.3.3. Siegfried's fear in the presence of Brünnhilde expresses Siegfried's intuition that in waking her he's inheriting Wotan's hoard of forbidden knowledge. If Siegfried truly discovers who he is, Siegfried will recognize himself as not only Wotan's (religious faith's) heir, but as Wotan himself reincarnate.

Wagner saved the full measure of the implications of such self-knowledge for the moment when Parsifal recognizes himself (the artist-hero as heir to religious man's sin of world-denial, denial of Mother Nature) as in effect the author of all the harm that the Grail Knights and King Amfortas have suffered, at the moment Parsifal receives Kundry's kiss, for Kundry is Venus, Elsa, Brünnhilde, Isolde, and Eva reincarnate, the reincarnation of the artist-hero's muse, who has known for him what he didn't consciously know, his true identity as the killer of his mother Herzeleide. Note that Siegfried and Tristan both hold themselves in some sense responsible for their mothers' deaths, since their mothers died giving them birth, and Parsifal learns from Kundry that through his neglect his mother died of a broken heart. The hero's mothers in all three cases are Wagner's metaphor for Mother Nature, whom Wotan (religious man) sinned against by denying his true mother, Nature, in favor of an illusory realm of the gods, Divinity, transcendence, the Supernatural. Wagner captured Wotan's (religious man's) sin in Alberich's accusation that if Wotan takes possession of Alberich's Ring (i.e., takes possession of the human mind, taking it prisoner, as religious belief did for millennia before

the modern age of science), Wotan will be sinning against all that was, is, and will be. Erda (Mother Nature) tells us that she knows all that was, is, and will be. In other words, religious man, through his sin of world-denial in favor of an illusory realm of the supernatural, sins against and figuratively kills Mother Nature. This is the meaning of the Good Friday Spell in *Parsifal*, that man no longer tramples Nature, no longer despises all that lives and perishes in favor of the illusion of immortality, but restores Mother Nature's innocence.

You note that in *Twilight of the Gods* man's (Wotan's, Siegfried's, Brünnhilde's) tragic flaws are exposed. You also note that Siegfried's lack of self-reflection undoes him. Man's tragic flaw according to Wagner's *Ring* was his unwitting, involuntary, and unconscious, collective invention of the gods and dependence on belief in the supernatural to make his life livable. As Loge says to Wotan mockingly, you gods depended on Freia's golden apples of immortality and the Giants knew it and took advantage of it, putting your lives at risk. Note that Waltraute describes Wotan in the end as forsaking Freia's golden apples. He's renounced man's age-old bid for transcendent value. Similarly, Amfortas refuses to serve the Holy Grail which won't allow him to die (i.e., to accept death as final). And Siegfried's tragic flaw is that in order to be able to live as a creative, secular artist-hero in whose art man's religious longing for transcendent value can live on after religion as a faith, a belief, can no longer survive in the face of modern science, he had to remain unconscious of the truth. He had to retreat from thought to feeling, to music. As you say, his lack of self-awareness undoes him. Thus, Hagen can kill him by reminding him of who he really is. To do this Hagen has to prompt Siegfried to interpret the Woodbird's Song consciously (by revealing the unconscious programme which inspired man to retreat from faith to feeling, revealing his true relationship to his muse of inspiration Brünnhilde) and thus betray the secrets of his unconscious mind and muse Brünnhilde up to the light of day. Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* has a similar plot (in that the hero Tristan, as if under a spell, abducts his own true love to give her to another man, and thus dooms himself, as Wagner himself said in "Epilogue to *The Nibelung's Ring*").

You mention Siegfried at the end of the Prologue to *Twilight of the Gods* riding out on adventure, leaving Brünnhilde behind in possession of his (Alberich's) Ring. In my interpretation this is Wagner's metaphor for the fact that Siegfried, having received unconscious artistic inspiration for his art from his muse Brünnhilde

during their loving union (the subject of both S.3.3 and T.P.2), goes out into the world to create and produce his inspired, secular, work of art for an audience, for mankind. The work of art he creates and performs for his audience is the song narrating the story of his heroic life, and how he came to understand the Woodbird's Song, which Hagen prompts him to sing for the assembled Gibichungs during a hunt Hagen organized with Siegfried in mind as their prey. This is similar to the hunt that Melot organizes for Tristan on the pretext of granting him and Isolde safe privacy for their loving but adulterous union. The meaning behind Hagen prompting Siegfried to sing the song which will convey the meaning of his heroic life is that Siegfried is now becoming too conscious, too subject to Alberich's Ring Curse of consciousness, to be capable of obtaining unconscious artistic inspiration from his muse Brünnhilde any longer, but instead will unwittingly betray the secret of the formerly forbidden hoard of knowledge she's been protecting. Siegfried betrays her secret by both abducting her to give her to Gunther (Wagner's audience), and by interpreting the Woodbird's Song conceptually, in words. Wotan had told her that what he confessed to her must remain forever unspoken "in words." But the Woodbird spoke it out in music (musical motifs), which Siegfried now interprets consciously thanks to Hagen's antidote to the potion which Guttrune gave Siegfried to drink. And as you say, Siegfried can no longer hear the Woodbird's warning. Let me add that Wagner employs the Potion Motif for both Hagen's Potion of Forgetting/Love and for his antidote to it, the Potion of Remembrance. In other words, both potions are essentially the same. And their musical motif is derived from Loge via the Tarnhelm's two motifs.

The sum of all this is that the song Siegfried sings at Hagen's behest narrating Siegfried's heroic life and how he came to grasp the meaning of the Woodbird's Song is Wagner's metaphor for his own *Ring of the Nibelung*. Wagner had stated that through his musical motifs of remembrance and foreboding he shared with his audience the profoundest secret of his poetic aim, but Wagner said elsewhere that the ultimate meaning of his art could be as mysterious to him, the artist, as to his audience. This explains Siegfried's lack of self-awareness. He only becomes fully aware of who he is at the moment of his death, which is brought about by virtue of Siegfried remembering who he really is.

You note that Brünnhilde betrays the fact to Gunther and Hagen that though her magic (PH: Siegfried's unconsciousness which she bestows on him by knowing for him what he doesn't know) has made Siegfried invulnerable at his front (PH: from foresight of his Fate, foreknowledge of the fated doom of the Gods and their proxies which had so paralyzed Wotan that he had to repress it into his unconscious mind Brünnhilde), he's vulnerable at his back (PH: vulnerable to remembrance of things past, remembrance of his true identity).

You observe that though the Rhinedaughters warn Siegfried to give them the Ring or he'll suffer the consequences of its Curse, Siegfried refuses to give it to them. I noted in my book that Brünnhilde similarly refuses to act on her sister Waltraute's advice to cast the Ring into the Rhine to end its Curse. The meaning of this is that Wagner's art (the product of their loving union) is so persuasive that the risk of revealing the dangerous self-knowledge which it conceals remains unconscious. As you suggest, they're not forewarned now, but this is because they're on an inevitable trajectory towards self-consciousness, which is the Ring Curse. This also proves, by the way, that the redemption the Rhinedaughters offer through dissolving Alberich's Ring and its Curse in the Rhine, is wholly distinct from the redemption Wotan thought the love which Siegfried and Brünnhilde shared could bring, i.e., the secular redemption Wagner's revolutionary art, the music drama of the future, could bestow.

You say that Brünnhilde's initial response to Siegfried's evident betrayal of their love makes her a fiery cynic bent on revenge, but that in the end she sees clearly both his tragic flaws and her own. Wagner's notion (his perhaps subliminal doubt that goodness and beauty are also truth which in my view remained unconscious for Wagner even though it heavily influenced his creation of what he himself regarded as his unconsciously inspired artworks) of the tragic flaw which is the basis for the *Ring* drama is that man should never have depended on self-deceit, on the consoling illusions of religious faith (the gods of Valhalla), social revolution (the self-sacrificial love Siegmund shares with Sieglinde) and inspired secular art (Siegfried's and Brünnhilde's loving union), in the first place. Amfortas's torture by the Grail Service (Wagner's symbol for religious man's matricide, denial of the world, man's figurative murder of Mother Nature, since the Grail represents man's bid for transcendent, supernatural value and suppression of his origin in Nature) in my interpretation stems from man's dedication to this illusion. The purpose of

Alberich's Ring Curse was to punish those who followed this path by stealing his Ring (which represents consciousness, of fact, of truth) in order to preserve and sustain their illusions.

In my interpretation Brünnhilde in the end reconciles herself to the evils of the world, recognizing like Feuerbach that both good and evil are necessary and natural components of existence, and her final figurative reunion with Siegfried in death is in my interpretation Wagner's symbol for the aesthetic impact his *Ring*, now complete, has on us, his audience. Brünnhilde in the end shares her mother Erda's cosmic wisdom, since Erda is Mother Nature. Brünnhilde ceases to function as man's collective unconscious since she's become fully awake.

You mention that Brünnhilde may have reconciled with Siegfried after she realizes he betrayed her under the influence of Hagen's potion, but Hagen's potion in my interpretation represents an aspect of Siegfried's own destiny, his character, something inevitable which Siegfried owns. Wagner makes it clear in *Tristan* that the so-called Love Potion which Brangaena gives Isolde in deceitful substitute for the Death Potion Isolde had chosen doesn't materially change what was already true of the lovers, though evidently they think they can now openly proclaim their forbidden, adulterous love since they're dedicated to death anyway. Tristan confesses in Act Three after he wakes from his coma that he himself brewed this potion.

You close with reflections on *Twilight of the Gods* as Wagner's meditation on the necessity for the end of religious belief and man's acceptance of responsibility for his own existence (existentialism). But you note that Wagner warns us against optimism, that Siegfried and Brünnhilde have displayed their dark sides. You note therefore that we must be skeptical of man's secular order. You also note that *Parsifal* questions in what sense we should understand the concept "God." We're left with the question: what do we humans value in the face of god's death, so to speak? What should we live for? Your questions correspond with many that I and of course Wagner also asked.

Well, my fingers are wiped out. Needless to say I'm looking forward to hearing at some point in the future convenient to yourself what you think of this or that aspect of my *Ring* interpretation in my newly published *The Wound That Will Never Heal*.

By the way, I had no idea that you had serious responsibilities of international scope in Amnesty International. What a fine thing to devote your life to! At some point I'd like to contribute in any way I can to this cause also.

Your friend from www.wagnerheim.com,

Paul