

Law and/or Justice in Richard Wagner's
“*The Ring of the Nibelung*”

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Abstract:

Usurping ontological stability by the two dictators of Walhalla and Nibelheim opens the question of law and/or justice in Richard Wagner's “*The Ring of the Nibelung*”. The choice of *and/or*, of *yes/no* in the title of this paper is a Derridian *torture*, or (un)decidability between the polemic and the logic of supplement. It is a rewarding deconstructive method of interrogating the *juridico-ethico-political* discourse in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. The power-struggle between gods, giants and gnomes and the subsequent human tragedy show that in the history of law (*droit*), legality is the construct of power, not of justice. Wotan's spear and the immense power given to the Rhinegold owner indicate, both in the libretto and music, the “enforceability of law or contract”, “violence that one always deems unjust”. However, ‘it is just that there be law,’ or the accessibility to law as *law* provides a ‘possibility of justice,’ says Derrida. Reading the supreme piece of Wagnerite music drama in the light of Jacques Derrida's ideas, this study seeks to find new interpretive potentialities. It aims at a deconstructive examination of the text by destabilizing the foundations of law, morality and politics. This study assumes having preliminary musical knowledge on the part of the reader.

Key Words: Deconstruction; Derrida; Justice; Law; Wagner.

مبدأ القانون و/أو العدالة في المسرحية الغنائية "خاتم نيبلونغ" لـ (ريتشارد فاغنر)

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الخلاصة :

إنّ استغلال الاستقرار الكوني أو الوجودي من قبل الدكاتوريين (فالهاالا) و(نيبلهايم) يمهد لمسألة القانون و/أو العدالة في مسرحية (ريتشارد فاجنر) "حلقة نيبلونغ". إن اختيار و/أو نعم/لا في عنوان هذه الورقة هو ما يطلق عليه اصطلاحاً (تعذيب ديريدا)، وهو ما يرتبط بعدم القدرة على الاختيار بين الجدل والمنطق. إنها طريقة تفكيكية مجزية لاستيعاب الخطاب القانوني -الأخلاقي- السياسي في عمل فاغنر "الحلقة الدائرية". يُظهر الصراع على السلطة بين الآلهة والعمالقة والتمثيل والمأساة الإنسانية اللاحقة أنه في تاريخ القانون "درويت"، كانت الشرعية هي بناء السلطة، وليس العدالة. يشير رمح فوتن والقوة الهائلة الممنوحة لمالك رينكولد، سواء في النص أو في الموسيقى، إلى "قابلية إنفاذ القانون أو العقد"، "العنف الذي يعتبره المرء دائماً غير عادل". ومع ذلك، "كل ما في الأمر هو أن يكون هناك قانون"، أو إمكانية تطبيق القانون لأن القانون يوفر "إمكانية العدالة"، كما يقول ديريدا. تسعى هذه الدراسة، من خلال قراءة الدراما الموسيقية الفاغنرية في ضوء أفكار جاك ديريدا، إلى إيجاد إمكانات تفسيرية جديدة. ويهدف إلى إجراء دراسة تفكيكية للنص من خلال زعزعة استقرار أسس القانون والأخلاق والسياسة. تفترض هذه الدراسة وجود معرفة موسيقية أولية لدى القارئ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (التفكيكية، ديريدا، فاغنر، العدالة، القانون)

“The "sufferance" of deconstruction, what makes it suffer and what makes those it torments suffer, is perhaps the absence of rules, of norms, and definite criteria that would allow one to distinguish unequivocally between *droit* [law] and justice”.

Jacques Derrida's "Force of Law"

1. Introduction

At first inspection, the characters assembled in Richard Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung* (1848-1874) seem to be phantasmagorical, ghostly and sometimes even absurd. However, a better acquaintance with this eminent 19th-century German music drama reveals prehistoric meaning(s). Basically, its personages signify simultaneous presence and absence of primordial concepts of law and justice. They represent the gradual evolution of human legal consciousness and formulation of judicial system. They enact a Wagnerian Genesis in which two authoritative figures, Alberich (the deceitful Nibelung gnome) and Wotan (the imperfect chief god) threatened the *law* of nature, represented by the Rhine which 'means clean, clear, pure and innocent' (Lewis, 1906, 1). They ruined the possibility of *justice* and attempted to enforce new universal concepts of *lawful* contracts on their own subjects by *power*. Before the beginning of fictive action, subtle ontological constancies were valid, in Walhalla (the kingdom of gods) and Nibelheim (the home of Nibelung gnomes), but they were unwisely violated. Alberich intruded the merry glee of the 'Weia! Wagal!' song of the Rhinedaughters, stole the Rhinegold from them, created a magical ring and tarnhelmet from this gold and used them to monopolize over the other Nibelungs, turning them into helpless slaves to accumulate more treasures for this gold-insatiable gnome: “The world's wealth is by him to be won, who has from the Rhinegold hammered the ring that helps him to measureless might” (*TNR*, 18). Whenever his brother, Mime attempted to revolt against his despotism, Alberich used the ring and tarnhelmet to abuse and humiliate the rebel: “I serve the mastering son of my mother, who bound me safely in bonds” (*TNR*, 47).

In the same way, Wotan misused his authority over the other gods. He promised to give his sister-in-law Freia, the goddess of youth and beauty to two giants, Fasolt and Fafner, in return of building him a huge beautiful citadel, depriving heaven from the golden apples which grow up in Freia's garden of which all the gods partake in order to enjoy eternal life and youth: “Without shame or shyness you sold them Fria, my flowering sister,' said his wife, Fricka” (*TNR*, 22). When Freia's two brothers, Froh and Donner, confronted the fulfilment of Wotan's contract with the giants and attempted to revolt against his authority, “Wotan stretches his spear between the hostile groups” (Kobbé, 1894: 17). Wotan's spear has the imperative of enforcing law when it is needful, of ending the compacts of the gods. It is a sign of enforcing the power of law, but not necessarily the end of justice. 'There is no law,' says Derrida

(1992, 233), “that does not imply ... the possibility of being *enforced*, applied by force.” “There is no law,” Derrida continues, “without enforceability and no applicability or enforceability of the law without force, whether this force be direct or indirect, physical or symbolic, exterior or interior, brutal or subtly discursive - even hermeneutic - coercive or regulative” (Ibid.). As a chief god, Wotan possesses legitimate authority or public force on both sides of Walhalla: the spiritual power of the minster and the political power of the state. On both sides, law for him is “an authorized force, a force that justifies itself or is justified in applying itself, even if this justification may be judged from elsewhere to be unjust or unjustifiable” (Ibid., 5). To compensate for his inconsiderate bargain, Wotan cunningly re-stole the Rhinegold, magical ring and tarnhelmet from Alberich and submitted them to the giants instead of Freia, then he schemed by begetting semi-gods (The Valkyries led by Brünnhilde) and humans (Sieglinde/Siegmund and their son Siegfried) to restore the treasures to their rightful guardians, the Rhinedaughters, but his attempts ended up with the tragic death of all the humans and the downfall of Walhalla with its deities. At the very beginning, Alberich cursed whoever could possess the Rhinegold and the action was further complicated in the course of a tetra-logy, which is structured as follows:

1. *Das Rheingold* (Rhinegold)
2. *Die Walkure* (The Valkyrie)
3. *Siegfried*
4. *Gotterdammerung* (Twilight of the Gods)

The unifying centre that holds these parts together is the long tale of what happens to a supernatural cursed ring in relation to Norse gods, semi-gods and three generations of mortals. In this sense, the opera begins with mythological semi-Christian *original sin* whose gradual punishment implies building up a moral and legal tradition that Wagner intends to cope with the ordinary experience of mankind. In his *Ring Cycle*, Wagner alters the ancient narrative of one of the oldest myths of creation, *Volsunga Saga*, to suit his philosophical themes and purposes. He rejects the Neo-Platonic idealist assumptions that everything is pure *spirit* or incorporeal reality and rejects also Hegel's confidence in *reason*. He resides more with Schopenhauer's sceptical descent into an ultimate darkness prior to reason which is called *will*. The knowing subject (Homo Sapiens), according to Schopenhauer, appears “as an individual only through his identity with the body,” and “the act of will and the action of the body are not two different states,” (1859, 100). Epistemologically speaking, “the action of the body is nothing but the act of will objectified, i.e., translated into perception” (Ibid.). The movements of the body are *representations* of will, “the will is knowledge a priori of the body, and the body is knowledge a posteriori of the will.” “Every true, genuine, immediate act of the will,” says Schopenhauer, “is also at once

and directly a manifest act of the body; and correspondingly, on the other hand, every impression on the body is also at once and directly an impression on the will” (Ibid., 101). In this post-metaphysical will, the *to be* is “to participate [actively] in ... an organic nature alive with a darker, sublimer energy” (Desmond, 2012, 90). For Schopenhauer, since the world is will, “it must be a world of suffering' because will seeks 'want, and its grasp is always greater than its reach” (Durant, 1962, 419-20). Will is always 'hungry' and its 'desire' is never satisfied so happiness is impossible. This conclusion transformed Wagner's vision of the world and his approach to music in *The Ring Cycle*. The tetra-libretti of *The Cycle* reflect consciously Schopenhauer's notion of pessimism, saying that the world of phenomena is an illusion which is perceived via *representations* of the mind or “manifestations of the underlying reality that is *will*”, and by means of “sufficient reason” our perceptive power realizes that underneath outside reality reclines metaphysical striving (Cottingham, 1996, 161). His sense of the dark origin is connected with nihilistic purposelessness. Although the will is primordial, it has no purpose. It is only a blind, insatiable striving force. One might say it is a *dark self* which expresses energy, but there is no point in this striving beyond itself for it ultimately comes to no end: “purposeless, it is endless striving that emerges out of darkness, passes through what looks like a space regulated by more rational norms, only to show that the latter are themselves derivatives, and in the end that is no end, the derivatives are overtaken once more by the purposeless striving or futile Will” (Desmond, 91). Thus, Wagner expresses in the early versions of *The Ring Cycle*, a sense of discrepancy between law as one of the derivative rational norms and justice which is an ideal; i.e., law and justice are not identical.

Schopenhauer's nihilistic line of thought influenced not only Wagner, but also his junior friend and contemporary philosopher Fredrick Nietzsche who says, in *The Will to Power* (1888, 4), that our great values and ideals come finally into their ultimate conclusion and that “we require, sometimes, *new values*.” For Nietzsche, nihilism is deeply rooted in the Christian-moral tradition, and “scepticism regarding morality is what is decisive” (Ibid, 7). There should come an end to the “moral interpretation' of the world, everything is yearning in the doctrine of *nothing*, that “all interpretations of the world are false,” 'everything lacks meaning.' Meaninglessness involves all moral value-judgements so this “preparation to nihilism' is the final 'conclusion of Wagner's Nibelungen,” says Nietzsche (Ibid., 8). Wagner reconsiders the highest values of human civilization without considering “a beyond or an in-itself of things that might be *divine* or morality incarnate.” He denies such hypothetical assumptions built on Christian morality as the absolute value of man in opposition to his “smallness and accidental occurrence,” the advocate of a perfect god “in spite of suffering and evil,” so there is no adequate knowledge of what absolute values are.

By tackling non-earthly worlds, Walhalla and Nibelheim, Wagner digs deep in the buried immoral history of morality to show the essence of what it is and what it is not. He recycles long centuries of moral interpretations to say that “the supreme values in whose service man should live, especially when they were very hard on him and exacted a high price-these social values were erected over man to strengthen their voice, as if they were commands of God, as *reality*, as the *true* world, as a hope and future world” (Ibid, 10). Thus, supreme values are not always what they seem to be, they should be re-evaluated.

This paper questions *the possibility of justice* in spite of its inconsistency with the problematic of *enforcing law* in Wagner's “*The Ring of the Nibelung*”. It attempts to confirm that after Wotan's finding alternative illegal ways to pay his bill and enforcing these ways by the power of law, the universe of the drama turns far from being rational and the human as well as non-human conditions are overwhelmed by endless strife or sacral warfare. It evokes the differential nature of force, force as *différance*, or (un)decidability in relation to the discourses of law and justice, the philosophy of right and the *gift* beyond exchange.

2. Wagner's *Ring Cycle* and Derrida's Philosophy of Law and Justice

Existing human laws are generally inadequate, which implies a claim to what is more just, aspiring to a new kind of better or *higher* law, which though unattainable, should be sought in this world. The problematic relationship between law and justice provides the main *parergon* for Derrida's “Force of Law: ‘The Mystical Foundation of Authority,’ ” an essay dedicated to lawyers addressing legal discourse from within. Derrida picks up the discussion from Walter Benjamin's and Emanuel Levinas' distancing law and justice because “law is based on the enduring possibility of a certain force or violence... by means of which it ensures its applicability”(Gehring, 1994, 155). For Derrida, the 'the enforceability of law or contract' involves the prerequisite of 'violence,' whose judgement is relativistic as either just or unjust, legitimate or illegitimate. “How are we to distinguish,” asks Derrida (1992, 6), “between this force of the law,... and the violence that one always deems unjust? What difference is there between, *on the one hand*, the force that can be just, or in any case deemed legitimate..., and *on the other hand* the violence that one always deems unjust?” The paradox proposed in this query is whether enforcing law is a *predicate* of justice or not, is it 'justice as *droit*,' as Blaise Pascal says in one of his *Pensées* (thoughts), or not? Pascal's setting law together with justice “implies a performative force” (Dokić, 1998, 451). This performativity, which coincides with Derrida's 1990s-turn towards the *other*, “faces a silence - that is, a mystical limit,” Derrida addresses it as “Mystical Foundation of Authority,” the mystic of enforcing unquestionable law by political power. This particular occulto-mystique is well

represented, in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, by the runes, characters from ancient Germanic languages of Scandinavia and Britain that cast a magic spell on the Rhinegold and Wotan's spear. They secure unconditional might and riches to their possessors by force: 'When a ring it rightly is welded, it helps to highest might and wins its master the world' (*TNR*, 36). Thus, by using the unlimited power of the spear and ring, Wotan and Alberich become absolute masters of their own worlds, only cunning could transform power from the chief gnome and the true free-man, Siegfried cuts Wotan's spear in pieces. Siegfried, the human redeemer, separates "the realm of means from the realm of ends," even if the ends seem to be legitimate or divine. He set his own will and law, he did not adhere to the law of his chief god and grandfather, forged his own sword, killed the last giant on earth, won the Rhinegold, found Brünnhilde and dethroned Wotan who said: "he that awakes and openly wins her, mightless makes me for ever!" (*TNR*, 251). This means that "there is no original law, but rather all law was instituted at some time" (Gehring, 155). No doubt, the history of law is built on the history of political power which is *iterable*, in Derrida's terms, so that "law is constructed and can therefore be deconstructed," but "justice is undeconstructible" (Glendinning, 2016, n.p.). The deconstruction of law guarantees the historical progress of political power, "which is arbitrary in the sense that what it constructs as law is simply in the service of its power" (*Ibid.*). The political *foundation of authority* itself, for Derrida, is also mystical. He says: "it is just that there be law," or law provides a "possibility of justice" (Derrida, 1992, 22). Therefore, in its dynamic relation to law, justice is also directly involved with deconstruction (*Ibid*, 15).

As a philosophy of *writing*, of *différance*, deconstruction radicalizes legal theory in general. In deconstructive practices, "law admits no pure solutions, no good decision, and in this sense, it must admit to being violent just as, according to Derrida, language" (Gehring, 159). Law and language adhere to the same different/deferral "structure of mixture, of ungraspability, of a movement which can never be conceived as pure presence, as ultimate, as decidable, as clear-cut" (*Ibid.*). This logic of *différance* shows, by patient reading of texts, how legal discourse is "self-contradictory, ideologically biased, or indeterminate" (Balkin, 1987, 2). A deconstructive reading of texts seeks above all to reform existing doctrines by showing "how arguments offered to support a particular rule undermine themselves, and instead, support an opposite rule" (*Ibid.*). This can be of value to the reader of Wagner's *The Ring Cycle*, offering a new kind of interpretive strategy or a critique of conventional hermeneutics of the text, especially in relation to legal and political discourses. Applying Derrida's philosophy of language to literary criticism makes clear the relationship between what is said in a text and the signs used to express the text's meaning. It denies the *clarity of exposition* because every text carries the seeds

of its self-contradiction within it. Hence, deconstruction is used more as a practice in literary analysis than a philosophical position.

There is a couple of deconstructionist practices that will be of issue in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*: the hierarchies inversion and the liberation of the text from its author. The first is essential to Derrida's deconstructionist project which dethroned biased hierarchies in the history of Western civilization; such as speech over writing, presence over absence, identity over difference, and text over margin. In all these examples the second term is considered as *parasitic* or inferior to the first, which is given priority or privileged position. In this way, identity in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, is canonical, the personae are destined to be gods, gnomes, giants, or humans. It is also destined that the gods should be domineering over the other species that strive in their turn to free themselves from the gods' fetters in the master-slave historical relationship: "You gods I will fall on together," said Alberich, in one of his most powerful moments, to Wotan and Loge, god of fire (*TNR*, 53). So, "the individual's role in choosing and shaping his own identity is the countervailing theme" (Lincoln, 4). In so doing, rebels, like Alberich, attempt to reverse ontological hierarchies, overturn the privileged position of some species over the other. However, the new gained priority "is not meant to be permanent, for it may in turn be reversed using identical techniques" (Balkin, 5). Thus, even if all the Nibelungs stumbled at one moment under Alberich's bent, at another he was turned into a worm and deprived of all his privileges. The most significant opposition, in the dramatic action of Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*, is between two *responsible* subjects: "the subject of law and the subject of morality, of the juridical or moral person, of intentionality" (Derrida, 1992, 8). If Wotan is considered as the supreme *subject of law* who is given, as a god, privileged position in common-sense ontological structure, Siegfried is the clearest emblem of the *subject of morality*. This god vs. man hierarchy is a subject of deconstruction because, for Wagner, the privileged status of the god-figure, the subject of law is an illusion. In the Wotan/Siegfried hierarchy, the property ascribed to the god is true of the man and vice versa; i.e., "A depends upon B as much as B depends upon A.... Having reversed the hierarchy, we are able to see things about both A and B that we have never noticed before" (Balkin, 6). If A is the god and B the human, the hierarchical opposition between them depends on our coherence of the differentiation between them, the relationship between them is "one of mutual dependence and difference, or *différance*" (Ibid, 11). In each case, the god bears *traces* of the human and the human bears *traces* of the god. The *trace* makes deconstruction possible, it is "a metaphor for the effect of the opposite concept, which is no longer present but has left its mark on the concept we are ... considering" (Ibid.). By identifying the traces of the god and the human in each other, "we identify their mutual conceptual dependence." Hence, there is no point in our accustomed

hierarchical modes of thought that differentiate concepts or persons, none of them has self-sufficient, *originary* foundation. Instead of judging the two according to the discriminating polemic, each one can be seen as a supplement to the other, added to the other, infect, alter or even replace its other. Wagner's play is given new insights when the privileged subject of law (Wotan) is turned from absolute power to downfall, as the subsequent sections of this paper will show.

Liberating a text from its author is another deconstructionist practice which validates many possible readings/re-writings of texts. These different, sometimes contradictory, readings can take place in dissimilar contexts which provide dissimilar meanings to the same text. Some of these meanings are correct, others are incorrect or escape from the loop of authorial intention. Yet, who knows the exact intention of an author? Wagner's interpretations fall under 'one of two tones of voice: emphatic or enraged,' says Carl Dahlhaus (1971, 1). Authors evaluate Wagner's music dramas either positively, as Nietzsche and Chamberlain, or negatively, as Theodor Adorno, depending on their presuppositions of Wagner's intentions and ideologies. However, under the bearings of some deconstructionist escape from biographical approaches that linked Wagner with Nazism, his intellectual and political significance is now part of literary, rather than ideological, history and must be viewed with objectivity.

3. Richard Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*

3.1. *The Rhinegold*

The introductory piece of *The Ring Cycle* is anthropomorphically-based, where non-human entities are represented. Wagner retold the Norse myths of creation whose heroes are gods, dwarfs and giants. He “deployed the power of myth,” says Tanya Perkins (2018, 165), “reworked through his own creative impulse, to reveal the consequences of violating nature in order to realize absolute political power,” so his myth-making “weaves porous boundaries between human and non-human.” Wagner said, as early as 1850, “from the moment when Man perceived the difference between himself and Nature, and thus commenced his own development as *man*, by breaking loose from the unconscious of natural animal life,- when he thus looked Nature in the face and from the first feelings of his dependence on her, thereby aroused, evolved the faculty of Thought,- from that moment did Error begin, as the earliest utterance of consciousness” (*The Art-Work of the Future*, 12). “But Error is the mother of Knowledge,” Wagner continued, ‘and the history of the birth of Knowledge out of Error is the history of human race, from the myths of primal ages down to the present day’ (Ibid.). In this sense, the Rhine and his three daughters stand for Nature, which “engenders her myriad forms without caprice or arbitrary aim..., according to her need..., and therefore of Necessity.” As long as they keep their Rhinegold, it is assumed that there would be no universal problem similar to cosmic harmony in pre-Fall Biblical genesis. The work opens with a wonderful

descriptive prelude on the Rhine where the Rhinedaughters guard their Father's treasure. Woglinda, Wellgunda and Flosshildr were carelessly singing in what is called the 'Rhinedaughters language,' and dashing in playful sport. They were totally convinced that their golden treasure would not be stolen because no-one dares to renounce love, the only condition to possess this enchanted gold: "life without love is unknown of" (*TNR*, 20). The marvellous simple music depicts the transition of the scene from the quietude of the Rhine's water-depths to the wavy life of the Rhinedaughters. Only the note of double basses intones E flat is heard during four bars. Then three contra bassoons adjoin a B flat. The chord, formed here, sounds until the 136th bar. Starting with the sixteenth bar, there flows over this seemingly immovable river-bed the current of water with the Rhine motive, which goes as follows:



In a similar grandeur, the beginning of the second scene, a dream-world in the midst of Wotan's slumber, is very peaceful and enchanting that one would not expect the cosmic disturbances that will follow its majesty. When the beautiful citadel of Walhalla that the Giants, Fasolt and Fafner had built for the chief god, Wotan is first seen, the Walhalla motive is heard, which goes like this:

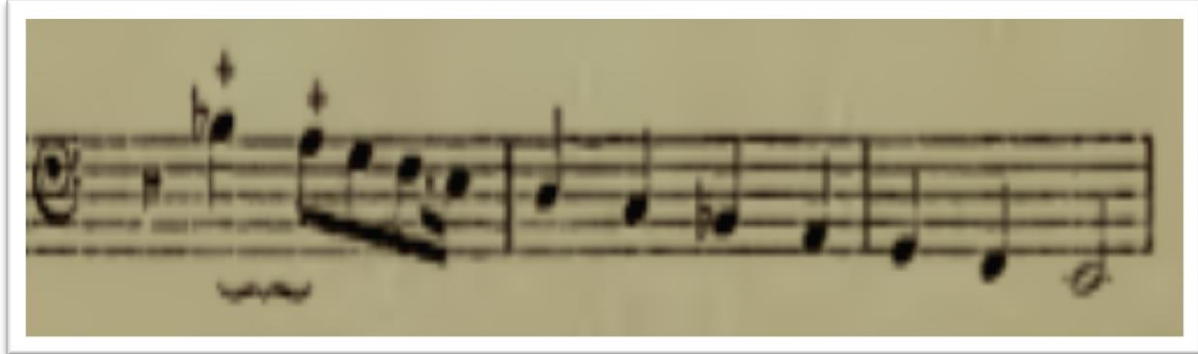


It goes on for a while. You cannot help but identify the vision of Walhalla in the distance with the music you hear the brass players playing in the orchestra. As a result, whenever Walhalla gets mentioned in the future, that music plays. And pretty soon, it is not long before the audience can hear that music without seeing Walhalla, or hearing anybody mention it, and know what the singing actors should be thinking of. 'Walhalla,' says Gostav Kobbé (13), "is the dwelling of gods and heroes and its motive is divinely and heroically beautiful.... It often assumes a tender mood, like the chivalric gentleness which every true hero feels toward woman." In opera, music makes grand drama even grander. Wagner seeks "natural cooperation between music and the drama" in his works (*Opera and Drama*, 1851, 26). The greatest development in Wagner's music dramas is the use of motives, which reached its climax in his *Ring Cycle*. The motives are recurring musical phrases that indicate specific places, individuals, states of mind or supernatural phenomena. These motives are not so much composed to label what is seen as to use what is seen to label the music, so that

the spectators can then get inside the heads and the hearts of the singers in the music play. Via the recurring motives, one can hear what the characters feel and think of. The personae do not have to say it, which is one of the principal uses of motives in terms of music drama. The compositional morphology of the motives works like a language which bestows universal significance: "The language of music is universal, and ... melody is the absolute language by which the musician speaks to every heart," said Wagner (*Beethoven*, 1870, 34). The listener needs attentive musical observation to realize the various musical motives and the way they re-occur as their relationships and contexts change. The dramatic function of the motivic substance is the perception of feelings and ideas, making them present to the listener even in the absence of stage action and verbal utterance. They have their own declamatory function, 'not only the function of reminiscence but also that of presentiment' (Dahlhaus, 86). The motives are Wagner's way of giving everything in nature a voice so his themes are revealed in the orchestra playing these motives as much as in the words of the songs.

Harmony, or adhering to the law of nature, which opens the first two scenes of *The Rhinegold* as endowed by the Rhine and Walhalla musical motives, is unlawfully broken. "Man erred," said Wagner (1850, 12), "when he set the cause of Nature's workings outside the bounds of Nature's self," and "knowledge consists in the laying of this error, in fathoming the Necessity of phenomena whose underlying basis had appeared to us Caprice." Thus, nature grows conscious of herself verily by man as he makes Nature his 'object' or violates his community with her. The immediate reason behind the subsequent dramatic agony in *The Ring* is the burning desire for gold and power that Wotan and Alberich show very early in this opera. After Alberich's stealing of the Rhinegold and Wotan's breaking his promise to the giants, the law of Necessity tries its best to bring life back into its primal 'un-capricious and un-arbitrary' condition again, to restore harmony. The Rhinedaughters do not participate in the following action immediately, they only appeal to other helpers to bring their gold back and set the world right again. Wotan, as the emblem of divine authority, tries 'to enforce the law,' "to reserve the possibility of a justice, indeed of a law that not only exceeds or contradicts law but also, perhaps, has no relation to law or maintains such a strange relation to it that it may just as well demand law as exclude it" (Derrida, 2002, 233). Wotan, the ruler-god, ruled by means of the laws and contracts inscribed on his spear. One of his contracts was held with the giants, Fafner and Fasolt, but he changed the terms of this bargain suddenly by shifting from Freia's golden apples of youth to the Rhinegold which is basically stolen from its lawful keepers. Handing it to the giants, he was left with the problem that "as enforcer of law, [he] is obliged to return the stolen gold to the Rhine, not use it for his own purposes" (Dahlhaus, 86). The moment he opened his eyes on the magnificence of Walhalla and sang of its glory in the beginning of the Sc.2, part 1, Fricka, his spouse

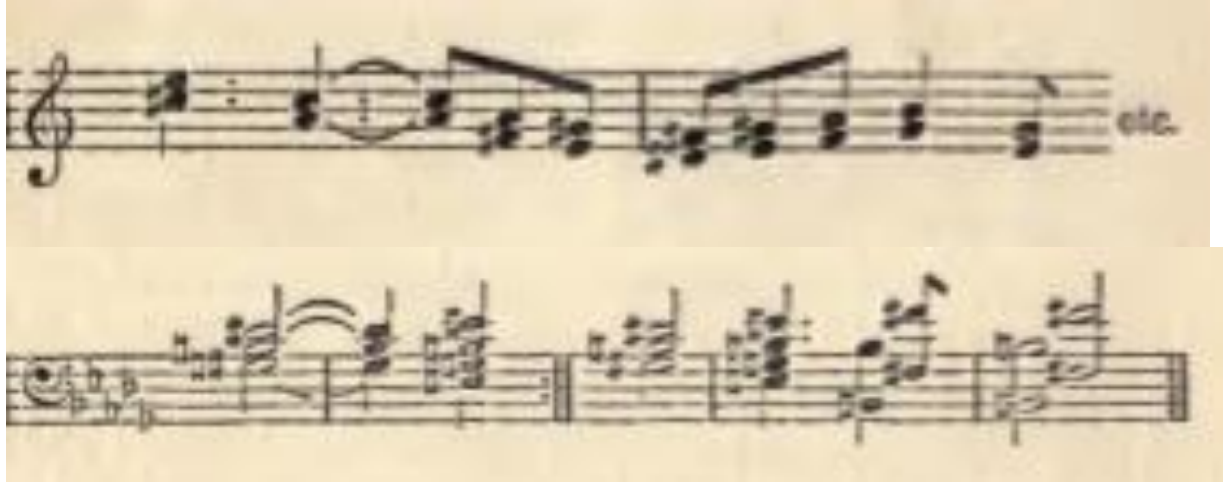
and goddess of marriage, reminded him of the contract he made with the giants who built it: “Waken and be not unmindful to what a meed thou art bound!” She blamed her husband that he sold Freia, her flowering sister to obtain more power, “What you men for worship is meet, when your minds are on might?” (TNR, 22). Here, Wagner introduces on cellos and double basses the motive of contract which runs as follows:



The contract motive expresses “the binding force of law... It has the inherent dignity and power of the idea of justice” (Kobbé, 14). It meets the audience again and again in the cycle of *The Ring*. Yet, often as it occurs, is usually confused with its characteristic variation in the spear motive because, on his spear, Wotan inscribed his contract with the giants. Legally speaking, the contract 'bases obligation upon individual will and intention' when it is decided (Balkin, 28). If Wotan's written agreement with the giants is a “paradigmatic case of contractual obligation,” there is undocumented 'implied promise' he made very early to Fricka as she was blaming him for abandoning her sister, Freia, in which he said: “For the pay fret not thy thought” (TNR, 24). His saying means that he intended to contradict the law he legislated, to break his promise to the giants. He thought that he could find some way to re-adjust his promissory words with the giants. Thus, he undermined the hierarchy between 'explicit promise,' whose obligation is more binding in commonsense legal thought, and 'implicit promise,' which is considered as more *parasitic* or secondary. He conducted himself to his implied promise to Fricka: “Basing the obligatory nature of implied promises upon explicit promises opens that way for a deconstructive reversal of the hierarchy, a reversal that may tell us something new about why promises are binding” (Balkin, 29). There is a difficulty in the traditional explanation of contract arises with the person who does not intend to pay his fare in it. Intention, then, does not create obligation in the explicit promise because, in Wotan's case, he lacks the intention that he should pay his part of the contract. If the source of obligation does not lie in the contractor's intention, then it is built on the nature of the conduct itself, which creates a more binding obligation that will be translated into dramatic action. Wotan realized that his promise to the giants is totally mistaken. The gods were waning on the verge of death after losing the golden apples of Freia that supply them with everlasting youth as she was taken as a hostage by the giants for

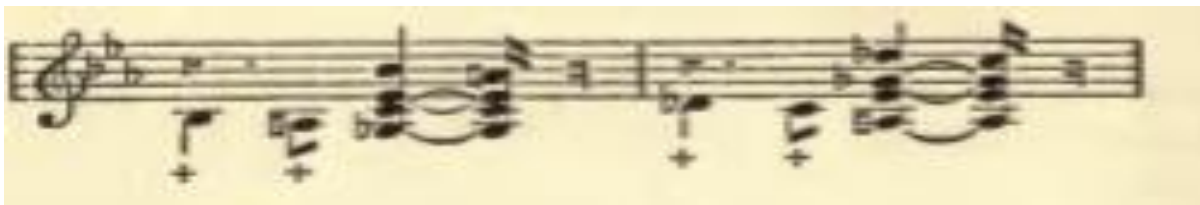
few hours only. Thus, Wotan re-stole the Rhinegold and convinced the giants to take it instead of the goddess of love and youth, which complicated the action further and led to all the subsequent tragedies.

Alberich is conscious of Wotan's legalized authority which implies *originary violence* to enforce law. Hence, as *counter-sign* to Wotan's spear, he forged a magical ring and a tarnhelmet from the Rhinegold. The ring enables its possessor to have absolute power and the helmet's wearer becomes invisible or assumes any shape he wants. The motives of the ring and tarnhelmet run as follows, respectively:



Alberich used the ring and tarnhelmet as devices to enslave the Nibelungs including his own brother Mime who was violently tortured so he trembled with terror and pain. In the form of invisible ghost, Alberich announced that he is all-powerful and the gnomes are his enslaved subjects. The race of the Nibelungs is restlessly active like worms in the bowels of the earth, “they heat, refine and forge hard metals” (Dahlhaus, 87). They are the mythical instance of the modern *industrial proletariat* who suffer from traumatic exploitation under the unjust laws of industrialism and totalitarianism. Theodor Adorno's *In Search of Wagner* (1952), is the first “Marxists reading of a musical work of art as a cipher of social antagonisms,” (Žižek, 2005, viii). Although Adorno intends to concentrate on the ideological roots of Nazism in Wagner, he establishes the critical debate on 'Wagner and Politics.' In his long essay, Adorno criticizes “Wagner's music as a monument to betrayed revolution, paradoxically combining the conservative rejection of capitalist modernity with formal elements of the very commodity fetishism he was fighting” (Ibid.). In the character of Alberich, he brings into view “the rule of money embodied in Jews,” which is the opposite of German true spirit (Ibid). Alberich, a spectral invisible master, his spectrality makes him unbound to any law, he said: “Nibelungs all, bow down to Alberich!/He is everywhere, watching you!/ ...You must work for him, though you cannot see him!/When you don't think he's there, you would better expect

him!/'You're subject to him for ever!' (TNR, 51). However, Alberich is more than a Jew, he is a representative of “modernity, the reign of exchange, of the dissolution of organic bonds, of modern industry and individuality” (Žižek, x). Modern industry is given Alberich's face whose rule over the Nibelungs “is founded on an act of illegitimate violence” (Ibid., xi). Here, the orchestra plays the motive of Nibelungs' servitude in four bars:

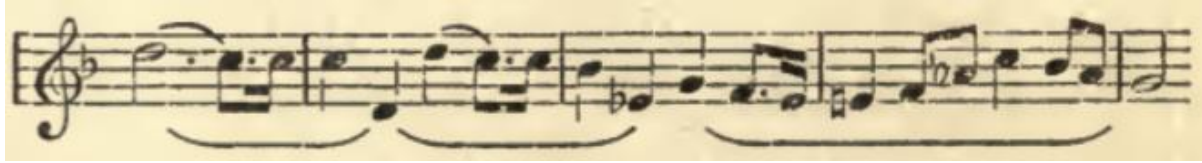


Before his defeat, Alberich boasted over Wotan and Loge, the diplomat of gods, that he will enforce his own law even over the gods who are now laughing and loving in the enjoyment of youth and beauty, but they will be subjugated by him, they should fear the advancement of his absolute power into their world. There will come time, he threatened, when the night-begotten host of the Nibelungs shall rise from Nibelheim into the realm of daylight in Walhalla, “through the power gained by the Rhinegold that Alberich hopes to possess himself Walhalla” (Kobbé, 23). The notion of hierarchies inversion is so clear here, “In the realm of the gods,” says Lewis (10), “here had ever been two great fears. One of these fears was that the power of the gods ultimately would be overthrown; and the other,...was that the little dwarfs would multiply very greatly in the underworld and be the fatal instruments of this destruction.”

Consequently, both Wotan's and Alberich's intentions, decisions and dramatic actions prove that one can have monopoly over law, if he has authority or political power, but not necessarily monopoly over justice. Hence, Wotan decided that he must create other species to replace Norse gods, earth giants and dwarfs, a new race that gradually dominates over other races because it will develop better moral standards.

3.2. The Valkyrie

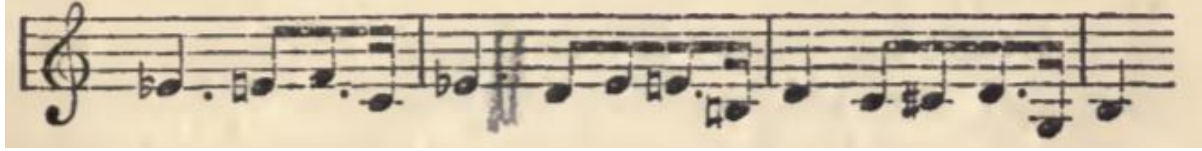
In the second part of *The Ring Cycle*, Wotan descended from Walhalla to earth, impregnated the all-wise woman and goddess of earth, Erda who brought him nine warrior-daughters, the Valkyrs, “the wild horsewomen of the air, who on winged steeds bore the dead heroes to Walhalla” (Kobbé, 29). Wotan's second marriage broke *matrimonial obligations* violently, especially if we know that his first wife, Fricka is the goddess of marriage sacred vows. The Fricka motive is heard all the time with reference to marriage, “it is a caressing motive of much grace and beauty,” says Gustav Kobbé (Ibid., 14). It runs as follows:



Fricka was contented with building Walhalla so as 'to hold him [her husband] at home' (TNR, 25). She thought that, with the persuasive beauty of Walhalla, her husband might lead a more stable domestic life and quiet faithful marriage. Yet, soon after breaking the law of contract, he broke the law of marriage. He wanted the Valkyrs and the heroes to protect Walhalla from enemies of the gods so that he would dedicate himself to "the formation of higher beings embodying those qualities through which the perfect race is developed" (Lewis, 49). Wotan counted on the new race's perfection to set the world right again and return the Rhinegold to their legitimate owners in order to get rid of the curse Alberich assaulted against whoever possessed the gold. It was the same curse, Wotan believed, that led Fafner to kill his brother Fasolt who was interested in having Friea more than the Rhinegold. So his greedy brother stabbed him and took the cursed gold, used the tarnhelmet to change his shape into a dreadful dragon and spent the rest of his life guarding the gold alone in a dark cave. Wotan thought that only a perfect disinterested being is able to get rid of the hunger to gold and power and restore the gold to the bed of the Rhine. He was aware that no such being is available so he busied himself in a long process of *industrializing* a perfect hero, a higher human race.

In this part of *The Ring*, there is a sudden shift from the divine myth to heroic drama, although they are linked by the Walsung progeny. Wotan (Walsung) roaming the earth in disguise as a common mortal (Wanderer with a spear), married for the third time a mortal woman and impregnated her with the twin: Siegmund and Sieglinde. Their creation was not a miracle of an all powerful deity, but it took the time required for a common mortal to be born, grow up and be responsible for his moral judgements and actions. Wotan created a new human race from disorganized materials to amend the imperfect world that he participated in its corruption. The dramatic action begins inside "the cottage of Hunding, a forest warrior and hunter" who married Sieglinde against her will, raising the issue of loveless marriage. She considered herself as his commodity rather than his wife, saying: "The woman and house are wealth of Hunding" (TNR, 86). Suddenly, the door opened and a tired young outlaw came through the entrance, Siegmund who met Sieglinde without recognizing their kinship. To our surprise, they did not know each other although they realized their physical resemblances. Later on, we know that Wotan brought these siblings into life, and dogged them with ill-fortune, which separated them very early from each other and brought them evil all the time; hence, "both moved by an emotion that they do not understand" (Lewis, 53). Each saw his own features

reflected in the other, giving material to musical unison that indicates self-reflexive love. Here, the basic motive which is heard in this part is love motive, “one of the most tenderly expressive phrases ever penned” (Kobbé, 85). It is played by a single “cello, expressing in *mournful beauty* a love story 'from its inception to its consummation” (Ibid., 86). It is played as follows:



Hunding, after his arrival, offered Siegmund a meal and bed for that night, not as a typical prerequisite for the law of *hospitality*, but to avenge the next morning a crime Siegmund had done previously against one of Hunding's tribesmen. This casts light on “the antagonism between Siegmund and Hunding, the vagrant and the settled man, each of whom is right in the opinion he holds of the other”(Dahlhaus, 191). Sieglinde under the conditions of unhappy marriage found an excuse to break its law and elope with Siegmund, especially when he was able to wield the supernatural sword that Wotan-Wälzung left in the ash-tree for a promised saviour on her wedding night and no man save him was able to use it. Fricka, as a 'wedlock's warder,' stood with Hunding against “the mad mannerless pair, who put the husband to harm” (TNR, 107). Their love was not considered as a sign of free-men romantic idealist revolution against predestined ill-fortune, rather it was a sin of incestuous love, basically, by Fricka who argued angrily with Wotan on the value of *connubial virtue*. Wotan, on the other hand, regarded the marriage oath unholy “where love lent not his hand” (TNR, 108), a judgemental opinion not alien to the Wagner-Cosima love affair in spite of Cosima's marriage to the conductor Hans von Bülow which was not formally ended until 1870, leaving Wagner and Cosima “ree to legalize their union and legitimize their already well-established domestic household.' Wotan emphatically wondered, “What so dreadful was the deed they did by spell of the Spring?” For him as for his librettist, “the might of love had made them mad; they bear not it's wonder's blame!” Their romantic love conceptualizes Derrida's *gift*, his primordial *Yes*, our openness to *dissemination*, of giving without expecting to receive something in return in the world of contracts and social exchange. Thus, they were the best race that can achieve Wotan's desire to bring the 'out-of-joint' world into primal balance again.

Wotan's and Fricka's antithetical approaches to the law of marriage signify the contrast between “an authentic intersubjective bond of love and the demands of the objective social order of contracts and laws” (Žižek, ix). It is the contrast between loveless marriage and lawless love. This complicated case troubled Wotan who, “as both law maker and enforcer, ... could not have been unaware of the imperative that the social order he himself created now imposed upon him” (Prkins, 168). Fricka pushed on him to take the decision of terminating the new humans who were

delivered from the oppressive rule of gods and were free to enjoy love: “When was it a man should mate with the child of his mother?” For Fricka, the lovers victory means “there is an end of our godhood for ever” (*TNR*, 112). Wotan was very enthusiastic in the beginning with the free-love venture of his children, Siegmund and Sieglinde. He knew that they were the only hope of saving the world from chaos by returning the Rhinegold to its final destination: “A hero we wait, unshackled by gods with their shelter and loose in the grasp of their law, fitly forward the work to befriend, which, though by gods it is wanted, the hands of a god may not help” (*TNR*, 114). But he decided at the end to stand, opposite to his will, with contractual law against love: “My own fetter on me falls; all are freer than I am” (*TNR*, 118). He gave his orders to Brünnhilde, leader of Valkyrs to give assistance to law over love, to let Hunding kill Siegmund. He betrayed his revolutionary ideals, surrendered 'to the reactionary resignation and disavowal of the very will of life - in a paradigmatic case of ideological mystification” (Žižek, viii). Wotan's betrayal of the revolutionary force coincides with Wauer's inflation of the defeat of the French Revolution in his *Art and Revolution* (1872, 4), saying: “Almost universal is the outcry raised by artists nowadays against the damage that the Revolution has occasioned them,” “it is the protracted character of the latest convulsions, that is so mortally affecting the artistic efforts of the day.” He changed his philosophical thoughts, like his Wotan, from the feverish excitement of Ludwig Feuerbach to Schopenhauer, from revolution to resignation.

Wotan's decision to adhere to the 'gods'-need' was not supported by Brünnhilde who represented nothing but her father's will, “what would she be, were not Brünnhilde thy will?” However, he betrayed even his own will: “born was to bargains my strength, but to bargains still I must bend” (*TNR*, 123). He was so outrageous that the deed which he spent long years preparing, the manufacturing of “the birth of a free-man,' he must leave this deed undone. His children elopement is nearest to Wotan's own wish, but he had to unshelter his friendly foe,” saying: “How make him other than all I am, to work with his might what I may but will?' He was ashamed that he could not support the free-men he created, that “slaves are the best I can breed!” He longed for the excellent traits of the free-man, the one who 'boldly against the gods' counsel kindled his bent” (*TNR*, 127). He regretted that he must abandon the hero who he created and took care of: “What I love must so be forsaken, murdered what most I lean on, met with betrayal his trust in me!” Thus, he broke Siegmund's sword into pieces by his spear; i.e., he enforced the absolute reign of law against love. Only Brünnhilde revolted against her father's will, she saved Sieglinde's life who was with Siegmund's child: “Let not, O woman, his life be wasted!/Live for the pledge that he placed in thy life; a Wälsung lies in thy womb” (*TNR*, 150). She knew that Sieglinde was carrying 'the highest hero of earth' and she gave him the name, Siegfried. The

debate between Wotan and Brünnhilde is as important as the debate between him and Fricka. This time, the chief god was arguing with his daughter on the discrepancy between obedience to the gods' will and free-will. The accompanying motive to Brünnhilde is the ride of the Valkyrs motive which is a variation of the storm motive that opens the second part of *The Ring Cycle* as an opposite to the Rhine-bed quietude at the beginning of the first part. The storm motive and the ride of the Valkyrs motive run as follows:



These motives indicate revolution, but the motive of servitude, which is met before with the Nibelungs, is heard all through Wotan's debates with Fricka and Brünnhilde. He submitted, like a slave behaving against his will, to Fricka's demands and punished the two Wälsungs with death, and when Brünnhilde disobeyed him by saving their child's life, he punished her with terminal sleep around uncontrollable fire until a true hero would come and rescue her: "In shelterless sleep shall thou be shut, till falls the maid to the man, who shall find her and wake by the way" (*TNR*, 157).

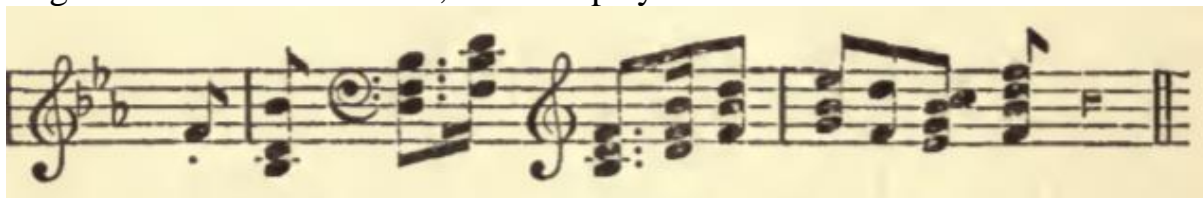
In the rest of *The Ring Cycle*, Brünnhilde, a fallen Valkyr now and a mortal woman, would be the basic character. She addressed her father, foreshadowing the human-centred actions of the next parts, saying: "Forget not the race thou begot'st, from its root no coward can come; the holiest hero - I know it - from the Wälsungs' blood is at hand!" She adopted a rebellious attitude, in her judgement of the Wälsungs, that went beyond traditional morality. For her, unlike Fricka's inflexible opinion, there is no universal moral truth. Values are relativistic in relation to different times, individuals and contexts. So everyone needs to discover his/her truth to build the foundation of new ethics: "morality is a long, audacious falsification," said Nietzsche (1985, 241). She developed a critical sense of interrogating the dogmatic moral premises. She believed that laws should not be followed blindly all the time, they are not paradigms of absolute moral values. Ethics, which, in Hegel's philosophy of right, are derived from the three institutions determined by law: "the family, bourgeois or civil society, and the state," put Siegmund and Sieglinde outside the dominant logic of filiations because, for them, the masculine in the conventional fatherly family- or state-form as well as the feminine motherly in the filial story are absent, they met as two strangers

rather than siblings”. (Derrida, 2000, 45). They felt prone to build their own family/state institution because they have only each other. In the “critical moment of decision-making”, said Laurent Milesi (2014, 51), the *ethical choice* involves “responsibility and political action.” The Wälsungs only felt their responsibility to each other, they wept at the long miseries of each other. They saw their features reflected in each other's face. They did not stand for the queer sister/bride or brother/groom relationship as they stand for rectitude, righteousness, correctness in feelings, thoughts and actions. They represented *universal love*: “With the typical union of Siegmund and Sieglinde, the heroic and gentle virtues [of the world] are beginning to be seen as united in individual character,” said Mary E. Lewis in her *The Ethics of the Ring of the Nibelung* (1906, 63-64). They are the mythical representation of the two basic values, gentleness and heroism, that will perfect the world. However, in Wagner, there is no place for the perfect union of the Platonic *Psyche* and *Epipsyche*. They were terminated without mercy or justice by the binding 'force of law.'

3.3. Siegfried

'Young Siegfried,' said Dahlhaus (127), “is a typical fairy-tale hero, without memory or inhibitions and therefore called upon to face dangers and experience marvels which he hardly recognizes as such.” He met the audience, in the third part of *The Ring Cycle*, without any pre-references or pre-conceptions of law, justice or morality. In him, the natural and the supernatural are linked unreservedly. Parentless, he was reared by Mime, the Nibelung gnome that was met in the first part of this opera. Mime continued his laborious efforts that were seen earlier, but now he is smithing a sword from the remains of Siegmund's sword, which Wotan shattered into pieces by his spear. He is planning patiently to industrialize his own hero and weapon to murder Fafner and obtain the golden ring to achieve his old dream of absolute power over the gods of Walhalla.

Siegfried is a natural man who is not hindered by fear. This is very clear in the fresh, joyful nature and wild spirit he enjoyed in the woodland life. It is echoed in the Siegfried the Fearless motive, which is played as:



The only thing that Siegfried is tired of is Mime's company. Although Mime told him that 'he is his father and mother in one,' he realized that Mime is not akin to his race, he is different. The most important thing lacking in the Siegfried-Mime relationship is love, the young hero longed for a more pleasant and affectionate company. He saw the birds mating, the deer paring and the she-wolf nursing her cubs. So the first kin

that he wished to know is his mother and he asked Mime about her. Here, the love motive resonates as Mime told him of Sieglinde's death while giving him birth.

In the Wotan-Mime scene, an excellent dramatic dialogue was written by Wagner, in which Mime asked the chief god three questions that indicate cosmic ontological hierarchy. He asked about the races that live in the bowels of the earth (Nibelungs), on earth (giants), and on cloudy heights (gods). Wotan answered all these questions correctly, then he asked the dwarf questions of the noble race that Wotan loved most but he had to deem it ruthlessly (the Wälsungs), the sword that Siegfried must use to kill Fafner (Nothung, Siegmund's sword), but Mime could not answer Wotan's last question, who can repair the fragments of the sword? Here Wotan uttered the prophecy of the fearless hero: "A boy of nameless boldness, at none of my bidding, 'the world he will rule with his will'" (TNR, 228). Thus, with Mime's desperation to fulfil the job, Siegfried forged his own sword. "Like a shout of victory," says Kobbé (73), "the Motive of Siegfried the Fearless rings out and the orchestra fairly glows as Siegfried heaps a great mass of coal on the forge hearth." At last, the work was done, "with the crash of the sword motive, united with the motive of Siegfried the fearless, the orchestra dashed into a furious *plestissimo*, and Siegfried, shouting with glee, hold his sword a loft" (Ibid.). Ready with the suitable sword, he entered the mortal combat with Fafner. Yet, his motivation to kill Fafner is a bit ambiguous, Siegfried has a spontaneous noble human nature, he believes what he is told without questioning. His source of information about Fafner is Mime who pushed Siegfried to achieve his own plans of matchless wealth and power. So we are not sure about his legal motivations to commit Fafner's murder. He has no personal enmity against the giant that he killed. It can be because of the naivety of the romantic noble savage, the simple innocence which will make him a vulnerable tool in relation to the atrocious plans of Alberich and his son, Hagen in the next part of *The Ring*.

Siegfried has a special relationship with nature, he can be viewed as Nature's high priest. At the beginning, he could not understand the birds voices, insects humming or the amorous quiver of the branches. He attempted to imitate these voices by playing on a reed he turned into a pipe with his sword, but he failed. Only on his silver horn, he could play a *woodland tune*, which 'makes the forest ring with its note' (Ibid., 75). After killing Fafner, he licked the monster's blood which remained on his fingers, and this gave him the supernatural power of understanding the birds language. A bird, this time, became Siegfried's informative agent. He told the hero of the sacred magic of the ring and helmet that Fafner kept in his cave. So he brought theme from the darkness of the cave to the daylight. Siegfried's communal relationship with nature indicates that he is the one hero who will restore natural order and harmony. The bird told him also of Mime's plotting to poison him. Hence, he murdered Mime and went to the forest again, hoping that the bird would tell him

where he could find a friend. The music quickens with “the first joyous thrill of passion in the youthful hero” (Ibid., 77). Here the motives of love's joy and love-life are played as follows:



The bird told Siegfried of the slumbered maid on the fire-guarded rock and he followed it to find Brünnhilde. If he succeeds to unite with Brünnhilde, the world's

mastery might finally be changed from the gods to the humans. To indicate this future possibility, the motive of the dusk of the gods is heard here, as follows:



Wotan repudiated, in his noble dialogue with Erda, the empire of the world. He let the era of human love prevail over the human dynasty, removing the mighty currents of the gods, giants and gnomes. Their twilight would be the dawn of the human race, which is suggested by the motive of world's heritage:



In the last combat, Siegfried shattered Wotan's spear with his own sword. He broke “the spear with which it was the chief god's duty to enforce compacts” and laws (Ibid., 80). In the moment Siegfried saw Brünnhilde, both the Valkyrs ride and Fricka motives are played together. It is a musical mixture of the heroic free venture and the birth of love which will be subjected to subsequent lawful oath of marriage between the two lovers. Siegfried and Brünnhilde are united, she is changed to a mortal woman, “with that complete faith in her lover which is perhaps the most sublime attribute of woman's love” (Ibid., 86). Siegmund and Sieglinde paid their penalty for disobeying earthly law, but their “heroic and gentle virtues have united in character and in the world, passing into a higher expression and marking the period in the world history whose exponent is love - love that is without fear and which is the fulfilling of the law” (Lewis, 93). Their son, Siegfried represents “the completed moral being,” “presupposes the highest and truest standards” (Ibid., 109). He is “the lifter of life,” “world's delight,” and 'life of the earth” (TNR, 261). Evolutionally speaking, “as every stage of advancement contains the elements of the next higher one, he should possess well-defined spiritual perception” (Lewis, 109). He succeeds where everybody else fails, proving that the remnant of old political and legal power cannot serve the higher being of a new power that arises in the world: “The sword of the spirit advances spiritual perception, which is the dawn of spiritual power” (Ibid.,

110). So perishes the old law with its magic, runes, contracts and *force of law*. There might be given a new chance for *justice*. Brünnhilde celebrates this moment in her beautiful aria, saying: “Away Walhalla's lighting world!/In dust with thy teeming towers be down!/Farewell, greatness and gift of gods!/End in bliss, thou unwithering breed !/You Norns, unravel the rope of runes!/Darken upwards, dusk of the gods” (TNR, 265).

3.4. *Twilight of the Gods*

In the finale of *The Ring of Nibelung*, Siegfried and Brünnhilde are consecrated to love: “Brünnhilde, as the world's highest ideal; Siegfried, as the highest expression of that ideal” (Lewis, 143). Innocent and *unlearned*, Siegfried is indulged in a teacher-learner relationship with Brünnhilde, he is still unable to know the world but via outside informative sources. She taught him the wisdom of the ancient runes. He almost worshiped her. He gave her the magical ring as a bridal gift, and she gave him her horse, which is not magical anymore but brave, he promised to be 'her arm.' Next, he went to the world unaware of Alberich and Hagen who were the evil agents actively plotting against spiritual truth and rightful power. Without love, due to the early renunciation of love contract he held with the Rhinedaughters, Alberich wedded Gibich's widow who brought him Hagen, half-brother to Gibich's twin: Gunther and Gudrun. In the world of temptation, Siegfried, armed with wisdom and courage, faced Hagen with all his hypocrisy and subtlety. Hagen convinced Gudrun to make a spell upon Siegfried so that all memory of women should be wiped from his mind to give her his heart amorously. Legally speaking, after the spell Siegfried is not responsible for all his subsequent actions and decisions. Here comes the potion of oblivion motive, “which is to cause Siegfried to forget Brünnhilde, and conceive a violent passion to Gudrun” (Kobbé, 92). It runs as follows:



Drinking Gudrun's enchanted wine, Siegfried showed growing infatuation with her and asked for her hand in marriage. To complicate the situation even further, Gunther asked in return for Gudrun's hand that Siegfried should use the tarnhelmet to disguise as Gunther to make Brünnhilde his own bride. No single response came from Siegfried to show that he was conscious of his behaviour, Hagen succeeded in turning him into a mere passive tool to fulfil his criminal plot. The motive of compact was

repeated again when Siegfried united himself with the Gibichungs “by the sacred compact of blood-brotherhood.” Mingling their blood with wine and drinking it, the ceremony recalls the compact written on Wotan's spear with the giants, and here a new motive is introduced, the motive of the vow:

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in G major and 4/4 time. The lyrics are: "Blü - - hen - den Le - bens la - - - ben - des" and "Blos - - som - ing life - stream, lib - - er - al". The piano accompaniment consists of a simple harmonic pattern in the left hand. Dynamic markings include *mf molto sostenuto.* and *dim.*

Brünnhilde, unaware of the potion of oblivion, accused Siegfried of double deception for her and the Gibichungs. She raged with great anger and demanded vengeance. Siegfried, drugged and forgetful, swore on Hagen's spear that all Brünnhilde's accusations were not true, Hagen deviously plunged his spear into the young hero's back. With his final death-song, “Siegfried's last ecstatic greeting to his Valkyr bride has made us realize the blackness of the treachery which tore the young hero and Brünnhilde asunder and led to his death; and now we are bowed down with a grief too deep for utterance” (Kobbé, 103). Like national grief at the funeral of a noble hero, “Wagner voices for us in music of overwhelmingly tragic power feelings which are beyond expression in human speech” (Ibid.). With the eclipse of the last Wälsung, the night falls and the orchestra voices the funeral oration of the “world's greatest hero.” Brünnhilde knew from the Rhinedaughters all about Hagen's conspiracy, so she flung herself, like a self-willed Hindu *Sati*, into Siegfried's blazing pyre after throwing the ring to the waves of the Rhine to end the curse of the world. Finally, “a deep glow illumines the heavens. It is the dusk of the gods. Walhalla is seen enveloped with flames” (Ibid, 106). At the end of *The Ring Cycle*, which proves that

the world of laws and contracts is a complete failure, it is legitimate to wonder where lies justice? Especially if we know that Hagen killed Gunther leaving Gudrun weeping remorsefully on her brother's corpse. Unlike Shakespearean tragedies, the villains, Hagen and Aberich are not punished with death. But they were deprived of the crucial aim of their lifelong deceptive labour, they did not re-win the Rhinegold, ring and tarnhelmet. The treasures return to the Rhine, so how does this end affect human notions of law and/or justice?

As a matter of fact, the end of *The Ring of the Nibelung* had been changed several times which confuses Wagner's commentators and divides their attitudes to the work. In the 1852-version, Wagner transformed "the cheating covenant of cheerless contracts" into "rapture... from love alone," claiming "a realm of freedom' arising from the old world of enforced laws" (Dahlhaus, 139). Freedom of human consciousness signals a hope in the future of a new Utopia where the gods destroyed themselves in this human creation: "Brünnhilde's love for Siegfried features as the alternative to Wotan's resignation and renunciation of the world" (Ibid., 141). In this early stage of composing *The Ring Cycle*, Wagner was composing in the light of Hegel's philosophy of history in which this opera presents one stage in the evolution of the world: "the transition from a *world of contracts*, where law and coercion unite in an unhappy alliance, to a *realm of freedom*, anticipated in the original state of the love of Siegfried and Brünnhilde, before the tragic confusion" (Ibid, 103). In 1854, Wagner read Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*. Thus, in the 1856-version of *The Ring*, he re-wrote the end almost in the spirit of Schopenhauer, saying: "I depart from wish-home, I flee the delusion-home for ever; I close behind me the open doors of eternal becoming: where there is no wishing or delusion, to the holiest chosen land, the goal of world-wandering, released from [the cycle of] rebirth, made wise I now go.... Sorrowing love's deepest suffering opened my eyes: I saw the world end" (Ibid). Schopenhauer was not an optimist, he "condemned optimism as *wicked*, and it was in that spirit that Wagner demolished and denied the utopianism of *The Ring*" (Ibid). In this sense, Wagner exchanged the philosophy of history into existentialism, abandoned amorous Utopianism where love destroys itself into blind resignation, futility in which it is impossible to interfere so that any attempt to make essence (love) part of the world fails. "The only thing left is resignation," concludes Dahlhaus (103), "and the tragic hero of *The Ring* is not Siegfried but Wotan." The moralist commentator, Mary E. Lewis (154) agrees with this conclusion saying: "Siegfried has yielded to the temptation of the world, the flesh and the devil, and has forgotten for the time his high union with the wisdom and love of Brünnhilde." 'Therefore,' Lewis continues, "the union between the world's highest ideals and their highest expression is of necessity still incomplete." At the end, love fails to evade law. So, does this mean *law* victors over *justice*?

In 'critical legal studies,' where law is analysed according to its relationship to politics and power, "law cannot ground itself lawfully" (Wortham, 2010,53). It asserts itself via political power or expediency, it is "simply forceful or violent at its origin." Thus, its authorial construction or establishment 'cannot justly be claimed' (Ibid.). As such, "acknowledging the inherent force of law..., deconstruction does not try to effect law's *illegitimation* or delegation. Instead, law should be contrasted with justice" (Ibid., 54). Unlike law, justice cannot be predetermined or prejudged, it cannot be calculated in advance. Hence, "ustice is, precisely, unrepresentable and never fully or *justly* present," which is very clear at the end of Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. In the dénouement, the author does not thematize or objectify justice in concrete terms, he does not give us the means to know justice as we know the agents of law. Unrepresented as such, justice rises to the practice of the *impossible*, or *undecidable*, the *aporia*, which is one of Derrida's favourite terms. He argues that "there is no justice without the ordeal or call of impossibility. To remain within an already possible possibility is to remain in some sense within the *law*, which paradoxically allows no real possibility worthy of its name. Radical possibility is thus what is promised by the *impossibility of justice*" (Ibid., 55). As can be seen in the end of *The Ring Cycle*, law and justice are heterogeneous, law enforces itself at the expense of tragic injustices. All lawful contracts, in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, are Faustian bargains that involve curses to the contractors: 'All contracts,' says Lincoln (1997, 5), 'contain the seeds of their self-destruction by breach.' Hence, Fafner, the giant told Wotan: 'All that you are because of your laws and contracts,' predicting that Wotan's doom is related to his 'staff of the laws.' Obviously, no character, in *The Ring Cycle*, was ever redeemed by law, the whole opera is generally about the downfall of a world of law and force. However, although Siegfried and Brunnhilde are victims of this fallen world, they are the first representatives of the new. Their ultimate death is an atonement that lift the curse of the Rhinegold from the world. They end the political struggle against dictatorship and despotism. But their victory short lived, when their love challenged the real world, it failed. Love, which was the promise of the future, "is destroyed by an outside agency and falls victim to a world in opposition to it" (Dahlhaus, 104). The world is still in search of ultimate *justice*.

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