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# Toward a New Understanding of the Wanderer in *Siegfried,* Act III: Wotan's Voluntary Moral Step Backward

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The thesis that Wotan, or Wotan in combination with Siegfried and Brünnhilde, embodies a moral-philosophical progression is hardly new. Aside from Wagner's own explanations, articles in the *Bayreuther Blätter* and the *Richard Wagner Jahrbuch* by authors such as Otto Eiser, Josef Schalk, Alois Höfler, and Robert Petsch contain numerous explanations of Wotan's character development, philosophical and otherwise, in the years immediately following the premiere and into the first decades of the twentieth century.[1] More recent studies include those in which the *Ring* is analysed by comparing it to a philosophical system such as Theodor Adorno's Schopenhauerian, Carl Dahlhaus's Feuerbachian, Sandra Corse's Hegelian and Joachim Köhler's Schellingian analyses, not to mention the numerous analyses dealing with aspects of Wotan's character like Joachim Herz's 'The Figure and Fate of Wotan in Wagner's *Ring*.'[2]

Despite the differing approaches, all of these studies attempt to analyse moral progress in terms of German Idealism rather than the more flexible morality as seen in post-Nietzschean

[1] See Otto Eiser, 'Andeutung über Wagners Beziehung zu Schopenhauer und zur Grundidee des Christenthums,' *Bayreuther Blätter* 1 (1878): 222–30; Josef Schalk, 'Vom Naturmythischen im Ringe,' *Bayreuther Blätter* 19 (1896): 120–31; Robert Petsch, 'Der Ring des Nibelungen in seinen Beziehungen zur griechischen Tragödie und zur zeitgenössischen Philosophie,'*Richard Wagner Jahrbuch* 2 (1907): 284–330; Alois Höfler, *Jahrbuch der Schopenhauer Gesellschaft* (1920): 85–147.

[2] Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Verso, 2005); Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Sandra Corse, *Wagner and the New Consciousness: Language and Love in the 'Ring'* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990); Joachim Köhler, *Richard Wagner: Last of the Titans,* trans. Stewart Spencer (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004); Joachim Herz, 'The Figure and Fate of Wotan in Wagner's *Ring*,' *Wagner* 15.2 (1994): 69–93.

philosophy. As such, there is one common element in all of these analyses: all view moral progress as the abandonment of selfishness leading to selfless sacrifice, and in this regard, all view Wotan as regressing in Act III of *Siegfried.* In Acts I and II, the Wanderer repeatedly states, in conversations with Mime and Alberich, that he is above his desires and no longer acts for his own benefit.[3] Yet in Act III he seems to ask Erda for help in an attempt to change his fate, and he fights Siegfried when Siegfried behaves disrespectfully. Thus Wotan is viewed as regressing into selfishness. Some, like Herz, view everything that the Wanderer does throughout the entire opera as dishonest and purely self-interested.[4] Such a view appears prominently in Harry Kupfer's Bayreuth *Ring* production in which the woodbird seems to be controlled by the Wanderer. In Kupfer's staging, immediately after the first scene of Act II, the Wanderer moves to a position above the stage and observes the events of the second scene. After Siegfried ingests the blood of the dragon, the Wanderer releases the woodbird who then gives Siegfried instructions. From the moment the woodbird first speaks to Siegfried, we see the Wanderer commanding it. After the woodbird finishes giving its instructions to Siegfried—that he should get the ring and *Tarnhelm* from Fafner's nest—it flies back down into the Wanderer's hand, who pats it, congratulating it on a job well done. If the Wanderer is controlling the woodbird, then it is through him, not the voice of nature, that Siegfried is told to take the ring and *Tarnhelm*, and ultimately to go to Brünnhilde. Thus Siegfried is guided by Wotan. Consequently, this makes Wotan a liar as he tells Alberich that Siegfried is independent of him. Considering that Wotan in *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* is a character obsessed with himself and with power, it is easy to dismiss the words of the Wanderer as being in his own self-interest.

That said, this study will take Wagner at his word when he spoke of Wotan to August Röckel in the well-known letter from January 1854, writing that one must not view the Wanderer as ever acting in his own self-interest:

> By insisting, for ex., that Wodan's appearance in 'Young Siegfried' should be invested with a greater sense of motivation than is at present the case, you risk destroying the intentional sense of instinctiveness in the development of the whole which I have been at pains to achieve. Following his farewell to Brünnhilde, Wodan in truth, is no more than a departed spirit: true to his supreme resolve, he must now allow events *to take their course*, leave things as they are, and nowhere interfere in any decisive way; that is why he has now become the "Wanderer": observe him closely! he resembles *us* to a tee; he is the sum total of present-day intelligence, whereas Siegfried is the man of the future whom we desire and long for but who cannot be made by us, since he must create himself on the basis of *our own annihilation*. In such a guise, Wodan—you must admit—is of extreme interest to us, whereas he would inevitably seem unworthy if he were merely a subtle intriguer, which is what he would be if he gave advice that was *apparently* meant to harm Siegfried but which in truth was intended to help not only Siegfried but, first and foremost, himself: that would be a deceit worthy of our political heroes, but not of my jovial god who stands in need of self-annihilation.[5]

[3] 'I came to watch, not to act,' and 'Him whom I love, I leave to his own devices, let him stand or fall!'. (*Siegfried*, Act II, scene 1) Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 6 (Leipzig: E.W. Fritzsch, 1887–8), 124–6.

[4] Herz, 'The Figure and Fate of Wotan in Wagner's *Ring*,' 89–90.

[5] Richard Wagner, letter to August Röckel, 25 Jan. 1854. *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (New York: Norton, 1988), 308. Wagner's emphasis maintained in italics; underlined emphasis added by author.

Is there a way to view the events of Act III in this same light? This study proposes that there is: specifically, with every confrontation in the opera Wotan excises and annihilates a part of his self, until the primary identifier for Wotan—the spear—is destroyed by Siegfried. This happens alongside the simultaneous destruction of the part of his self which rules the world by law. By following this path of slowly annihilating aspects of his character in favour of assisting his counterparts in each of these conversations in *Siegfried*, Wagner is making Wotan embody a common notion of moral progress from German Idealism: that moral progress takes place when an individual abandons selfishness and embraces selflessness for the benefit of others.[6]

By examining each conversation in turn, the abandonment of self and selfishness becomes apparent. The Wanderer's first appearance is in a conversation with Mime in Act I, scene 2 of *Siegfried*. The Wanderer enters as Mime is lamenting that his master plan for obtaining the ring has a fatal flaw. He imagines that if he could fix Siegmund's sword, Nothung, he could give it to Siegfried, and with it, Siegfried could kill Fafner and could obtain the ring for Mime. As the Wanderer enters, Mime sings that because he is unable to fix the sword, his plan will never come to fruition. The situation is immediately recognisable from Wotan's monologue in Act II of *Die Walküre* in which Wotan lamented that his grand plan for obtaining the ring had a fatal flaw and would not come to fruition. In Wotan's case he needed a sword and a hero beyond the influence of the gods, and as Siegmund was not beyond Wotan's influence, his plan was doomed to fail. In Mime's case he has a hero, but does not have the sword, making his plan also doomed to fail. Ironically, as Mime sings of his inability to achieve his goals, it is to the same music—the 'woman's worth' motive—in sequence that accompanied Wotan when he too sang of his inability to achieve his goals during his monologue in Act II of *Die Walküre*.[7] Example 1 shows Wotan singing that he must forsake and murder Siegmund, whom he loves, accompanied by the 'woman's worth' motive (indicated by brackets), which is followed by his famous uttering, 'one thing I desire, the end, the end.' In Example 2, we see Mime declaiming that he is unable to reforge Nothung, accompanied by the same motive, which is immediately followed by the entrance of the Wanderer.

After the Wanderer's final question to Mime, 'Who will reforge Notung?,' Mime again breaks out of his state of calmness and laments the fact that he does not know how to resolve his problems. The same 'woman's worth' sequence is heard at that moment, as it was at the beginning of the scene (as depicted in Example 2, and by Wotan in Example 1). Once again, the Wanderer comes to Mime's rescue, and prevents him from surrendering to the futility Wotan felt at the end of his monologue in *Die Walküre*, Act II.

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[6] For a summary of the abandonment of the self in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century moral philosophy see (among other writers): Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire, and Loss in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), especially 237. For specific comments by select Enlightenment philosophers on this transition from selfishness to selflessness see: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13–14; G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991), 42; and Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969) 1, 392. For an in-depth study of Wagner's thinking through his writings and operas and its connection to notions of moral progress from German Idealism, see Solomon Guhl-Miller, The Path of Wagner's Wotan: German Idealism, Wagner's Prose Writings, and the Idea of Moral Progress (PhD thesis, Rutgers University, 2012).

[7] Deryck Cooke, *An Introduction to Der Ring Des Nibelungen*, Vienna Philharmonic, cond. Georg Solti, Decca Record Company 443 581–2, 1995, 2 compact discs.

**Example 1.** Wagner, *Die Walküre,* Act II, scene 2, bb. 904–16, piano reduction by Karl Klindworth (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1908), 127

Wotan

Was ich lie - be, muss ich ver - las - sen mor - den wen

je ich min - ne true - gend ver - ra - ten, wer mir trant!

**Example 2**. Wagner, *Siegfried,* Act I, scene 2, bb. 1282–7, piano reduction by Karl Klindworth (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1900), 50

Mime

des Ni - blun gen Neid, Not und Schweiss, nie - tet mir No - tung

Just as Wotan was in *Die Walküre*, Mime in *Siegfried* is now trapped in his own failed plan with no hope of achieving his goals. This similarity of situation is made clearer by the music. The difference, however, is that Wotan had no one to give him a solution to his problem, and so he had to give up on his goal. In contrast, the Wanderer recognises Mime's situation and offers his assistance, thus saving Mime from the pain experienced by Wotan. By assisting Mime, the Wanderer confronts the part of himself that aspired to win the ring back by indirect means and thus surrenders that aspect of himself.

This scene also reveals a change in the character of the Wanderer and the way in which he views himself and the nature of his authority since last seen in *Die Walküre.* Not only is this the first time he refers to himself as Licht-Alberich, denoting his ability for critical reflection, but here he explains that Wotan rules the world because he holds the spear and through the laws of the spear:

> From the holiest branch of the primeval Ash he cut himself a shaft: though the trunk withered, the spear shall never decay; with its point Wotan governs the world. Holy contracts he carved into its shaft. Custody of the world lies in the hand of he who controls the spear.[8]

This is in stark contrast to what Wotan explains in his monologue in *Die Walküre*, in which he describes how he 'won the world:'

> When the pleasure of youthful love began to wane, my spirit sought after power: spurred on by the fury of ever-new and changing desires, I won for myself the world! Unknowingly deceitful, I practiced treachery and bound by treaty that which contained evil; Loge craftily tempted me, now he's wandered off for good.[9]

In *Die Walküre*, Wotan views the treaties as getting in the way of his ruling the world—a world he won through his will and desire—while in *Siegfried* he rules specifically through the laws, and crucially, through the spear. The difference is clear: a Wotan who rules through his will does not need the spear to rule, but a Wotan who rules because he is the holder of the spear will cease to rule once the spear is gone. This distinction is of vital importance.

The next two conversations—between Wotan and Alberich, and between Wotan and Fafner—reveal two further older aspects of Wotan: Fafner represents the Wotan we see at the beginning of scene 2 of *Rheingold*, who wants a tool by which he will be secure in his rule, just as Fafner wants the ring only as a tool to retain his security. Alberich represents the Wotan from the end of the second scene who wants the ring because of the power it will give him over the world. By facing these other Wotans and assisting them, he further negates his being, and so continues to travel on the path towards self-annihilation.

When the archenemies meet at the beginning of Act II, the Wanderer refuses to fight, much to Alberich's disappointment. Alberich throws insult upon insult at the Wanderer, which might have led to conflict had the Wanderer still been Wotan from *Die Walküre*. The Wanderer instead treats Alberich like a colleague, offering assistance rather than insults and threats. The music aligns with this description: when Alberich is singing of the Wanderer, the music accompanying this description is that of the Wanderer in his old guise (as Wotan from *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*) using the older motives of 'Wotan's frustration' and the spear. When the Wanderer sings of himself, however, the music accompanying him depicts him as he is, using the Wanderer and nature motives. There is a constant back and forth in the orchestra between Alberich's perception of Wotan (with the Valhalla, spear, and 'Wotan's frustration' motives) and the Wanderer as he views himself. One prominent example of this exchange is the lengthy description Alberich gives of Wotan's past, in particular his inability to get the ring from Fafner without breaking the contract with the giants and thus turning the spear to dust.

The 'Wotan's frustration' motive (indicated below with a bracket in Example 3) is set to Alberich's: 'Beware! Your methods I know well; but where you are weak, is also unhidden from me.'[10] When Alberich sings, 'What once you promised the foolish Giants remains still today on the runes of your spear's mighty shaft. You are not permitted to retrieve from the Giants what you once paid to them,' the orchestra accompanies this statement with the motive

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[8] Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften,* 103–4. *Siegfried,* Act I, scene 2.

[9] Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften,* 37. *Die Walküre,* Act II, scene 2.

[10] Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften,* 124. *Siegfried,* Act II, scene 1.

associated with the contract with the giants, as seen in Example 4, with the 'Contract with the Giants' theme delineated by brackets.[11]

**Example 3.** Wagner, *Siegfried*, Act II, scene 1, bb. 206–9, Klindworth, 67

**Example 4.** Wagner, *Siegfried*, Act II, scene 1, bb. 226–31, Klindworth, 68

Alberich sees the Wotan of the past whereas the Wanderer responds to Alberich as the Wotan of the present. This is accompanied not by the bombastic collection of leitmotifs but by the serene motive of the Wanderer as demonstrated in Example 5. This finally concludes with Wotan declaring he will no longer seek the ring.

**Example 5.** Wagner, *Siegfried* Act II, scene 1, bb. 239–44, Klindworth, 69

Wotan even goes so far as to offer to assist Alberich in getting the ring from Fafner, at which point even Alberich can no longer hold back his surprise, asking: 'What is the wild one doing? Would he really allow it?'[12]

[11] Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 124–5. *Siegfried*, Act II, scene 1.

[12] Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 127. *Siegfried*, Act II, scene 1.

In assisting Mime, Wotan enables him to complete his plan. Mime's attempt to get the ring is merely conceptual as the specifics of physically taking the ring are not fully formed. Similarly, in *Die Walküre*, Wotan focuses on the alignment of all of the factors that would permit the hero to conquer the dragon, but not the physical gaining of the ring. To Alberich, who only desires the ring and has no plan to gain it (at least not in this scene), the Wanderer offers help with procuring the ring. In each case, Wotan uses his sympathy to discover what each character needs and wants, and attempts to get it for them. Fafner never has a desire for world domination, (as made clear in *Das Rheingold*) but is only interested in security and safety. By using Fafner's fears, the Wanderer makes his appeal, saying: 'One has come, to warn you of danger: he will repay you with your life, if for your life you will pay him with the treasure that you guard.'[13] This simple language piques his interest, and it is only after Alberich begins to speak that Fafner rejects the proposal to give up the ring. However, the meeting between dwarf and god is not about Alberich: it is about Wotan facing his opposite. Just as he did with Mime, the Wanderer excises further parts of his selfish will when offering assistance to Alberich and Fafner. Wotan recognises in Fafner's desire for security his own desire for Valhalla. Similarly, in Alberich's lust for power and authority he recognises his own desire for the ring. The subjective sensual aspects of himself are being burned away by these two confrontations, leaving Wotan closer to existing purely objectively as a part of the world.

The major difference between Acts II and III is that Wotan changes from a will-less watcher of events, assisting others in achieving their own ends (as Erda once did for him) into someone actively willing the end of his reign. Wagner writes in the same 1854 letter to Röckel:

> [W]e must learn to *die* and to *die* in the fullest sense of the word … the poem is concerned to show how necessary it is to acknowledge change, variety, multiplicity and the eternal newness of reality and of life, and to yield to that necessity. Wodan rises to the tragic heights of *willing* his own destruction. This is all that we need to learn from the history of mankind: *to will what is necessary* and to bring it about ourselves.[14]

Although Wotan has ceased to will anything for his own selfish gains, an act of will must take place if he is to bring about his own destruction. This is the crucial component of the conversation between the Wanderer and Siegfried in Act III.

The preceding three dialogues were concerned with Wotan facing the selfish aspects of himself. He is now ready for the next step, to act again, not as an individual, but as the embodiment of the spirit of nature capable not only of giving advice as Erda can, but of acting in the interests of the world, which is beyond her power. Erda's inability to answer Wotan's questions proves that he has usurped her position. What he excises then, in his meeting with Erda, is his need for a guiding higher power, first seen in *Das Rheingold* after Erda warned him of the dangers of the ring.

Wotan's questions to Erda—'How can the rolling wheel of fate be stopped?' and 'How may the God conquer his fear?'—seem as if they are from another time in Wotan's life and so inevitably call into question why he is asking them now.[15] Is Wotan, having smiled in the face of death and now ready to assist Alberich in regaining the ring now afraid again? The answer

[13] Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 127. *Siegfried*, Act II, scene 1.

[14] Wagner, letter to Röckel, 25 Jan. 1854, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, ed. Spencer and Millington, 306–7.

[15] Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 153, 155. *Siegfried*, Act III, scene 1.

is no, but only because his questions come from another time. They are likely to be the same questions he asked Erda when he first followed her and gained wisdom from her. She allayed his fears at that time and assisted him in formulating a plan that might prevent her prophecy of a shameful end for the gods from coming to fruition. Wotan now returns with these very same questions, phrased as if he were fresh from learning fear, as can be seen in the line: 'you once thrust the thorn of fear into Wotan's bold heart: with fear of a shameful end brought about by his enemies your knowledge filled him, so that fear fettered his spirit, since you are the world's wisest woman, tell me now, how may the god conquer his fear?'[16] Rather than getting answers, he gets advice to seek out others—an indication of Erda's inability to act on her own. In response, he informs her of the reasons why he cannot go to them. The Norns do not know if fate can be changed; they are mere chroniclers. Brünnhilde was punished and banished by, as the Wanderer says, 'the lord of the storm' and 'the father of battles.'[17] Again, not 'me,' but the old Wotan. Erda's knowledge had not been updated since before the birth of Siegfried, and therefore Wotan must instead enlighten her, which only makes her want to return to sleep all the more. The situation has reversed from the earlier meeting; she now does not know what will happen in and to the world, and he does. One musical hint that the Wanderer is acting out the part of his earlier self with Erda occurs early on in the scene, just after she wakes. The Wanderer says:

> I am the awakener, and I used my knowledge, to wake, far off, that which deep slumber encased. I have travelled through the world, wandered a great deal, searching for knowledge to gain ancient wisdom. There is no one known such as yourself: you know what lies in the deep, and what is woven into the mountain and valley, air and water.[18]

The first sentence praises his own abilities in waking her. The second speaks of his wandering, and so is accompanied by the motive of the Wanderer. In the third sentence (Example 6, 'there is no one known such as yourself,') we hear the Valhalla motive in the upper winds, a motive associated with the older Wotan. Why would this motive be used here? We must remember the scene with Alberich. When leitmotifs associated with the earlier more selfish Wotan are heard, this does not necessarily mean that the Wotan of the present has reverted, but instead that they refer to a Wotan from the past. To Wotan, not the Wanderer, Erda was the fount of all knowledge and there was no one like her. The Valhalla motive, with some minor metric alterations, is clearly visible in the score as indicated by the brackets in Example 6:

After Wotan's final question to Erda—'How can the god conquer his fear?,' phrased in likely the same way he phrased it to her in their last encounter after the events of *Das Rheingold*—she realises that this is a farce, and refuses to answer his questions, declaring, 'You are not what you appear to be.' Now that Wotan sees Erda as powerless to act on her own he takes control, and in a twist of fate, the Wanderer now tells her that because of *his* willing, she need not fear any longer, and can rest eternally in 'fearless sleep.' In *Das Rheingold,* Erda taught Wotan to fear. When Erda appears frightened for the future, the Wanderer, in attempting to allay her fear actually excises his own. Wotan has usurped her and is now ready to will the end of his rule. He will do this by acting out the deed he alluded to at the end of *Die Walküre* and the destruction of the spear by he who is not afraid of it: Siegfried.

[16] Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften,* 155. *Siegfried,* Act III, scene 1.

[17] Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften,* 154. *Siegfried,* Act III, scene 1.

[18] Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften,* 152–3. *Siegfried,* Act III, scene 1.

**Example 6.** Wagner, *Siegfried,* Act III, scene 1, bb. 157–62 (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1876), 298

Wotan's description of the events to come is of vital importance. He tells Erda: 'she whom you bore, Brünnhilde, will awaken to the hero: awakened, the child of your wisdom will perform the deed that will redeem the world.'[19] He already knows that Brünnhilde, not Siegfried, will perform the redemptive deed of returning the ring to the Rhine cleansed of the curse. The Wanderer's lack of faith in Siegfried, and thus any new order brought about by him, is often cited as a reason for the fight between Siegfried and the Wanderer. However, as he knows that the redemptive deed will be performed by Brünnhilde, and Siegfried's job is only to destroy the spear and awaken her, his disappointment in Siegfried cannot be the reason for the fight. Wotan already knows Siegfried is just a fearless thug.

But does the fight occur because Wotan is regressing into his old selfish self? If Siegfried does not face the spear, and does not fight with Wotan, then he is tacitly complying with the laws that the spear represents. In this case, the new world order cannot come about: Brünnhilde will not be awakened, and so she will not be able to perform the world-redemptive deed. The world will stagnate and remain under Wotan's law. Equally, if the Wanderer allows Siegfried to break the spear, then the new world order will have come from the old, thus again continuing Wotan's law. The Wanderer understands this and makes the only possible choice: for the greater good, he consciously takes an objective moral step backwards into subjectivity and selfishness, so that they may battle and Siegfried may legitimately defeat him.

This willing on Wotan's part is especially clear because Wagner had specifically changed this scene from the original version of the drama so that Wotan would act. Wagner had already written a scene in the original version of what became *Siegfried,* in which the Wanderer and Siegfried speak with each other cordially, and do not fight. Rather than barring his way, the Wanderer notes that the fire is burning strongly and brightly, and that most would be afraid of such a flame.[20] In this scene there is no confrontation: when Siegfried begins to climb up the mountain to Brünnhilde, Wotan fades away never to be heard from again. Had this scene been

[19] Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 156. *Siegfried,* Act III, scene 1.

[20] Otto Strobel, *Skizzen und Entwürfe zur Ring-Dichtung* (Munich: Verlag der F. Bruckman, 1930), 179–80. See also Stewart Spencer, 'Zieh' hin ich kann dich nicht halten,' *Wagner* 2 (1981): 98–120, especially 99.

carried over into the revised *Siegfried* drama, the laws of the spear would have still been in place and Wotan would have remained in power. Wagner made a specific decision to change this scene from its original form and to make Wotan act in this seemingly contradictory way. This is the only way for Wotan's rule to end, and for Siegfried to be free of Wotan's rule.

Wotan's change is musically depicted by the motives in the accompaniment: the Wanderer initially has no accompaniment, until Siegfried asks about his eye-covering hat, at which point the motive of the Wanderer begins. The 'Wotan's frustration' motive and the spear motive are finally heard when Siegfried begins to behave disrespectfully toward the Wanderer. Thus, we hear the Wanderer's voluntary step back into selfishness as the motives accompanying his words become increasingly Wotan-oriented. But Wotan and Siegfried must fight, and Wotan must behave such that the spear and the basis of his rule may be destroyed. In other words, he must do as Wagner said: he must will, rather than watch, in order to bring about his own destruction.

A discussion of *Götterdämmerung* and Wotan's completion of his self-annihilation by his destruction of his last identifier, Valhalla, after Brünnhilde returns the ring to the Rhine is beyond the scope of this article. Even so, it is clear that Wotan is a character who wills what is necessary and brings it about himself. [21] What does this new interpretation of Wotan mean? First, it allows us to take Wagner at his word in regard to the plot. Scholars such as Newman and Dahlhaus have stressed Wagner's ignorance as a way to justify dismissing his writings on aesthetics and philosophy from the Zürich period. However, now that we see the consistency behind Wagner's explanations of Wotan (there are of course plenty of inconsistencies elsewhere), we are obliged to re-examine Wagner's writings in reference to his artworks.[22] Consequently, habitual elements of past productions ought not to be repeated in the future. This includes elements such as the woodbird being controlled by Wotan, and LePage's recent 'unrolling' of the spear during the prelude of Act III of *Siegfried,* before it was destroyed, thus leaving the laws intact and completely missing the point of the necessary destruction of the spear. Wotan deserves better than this, and we as an audience, when faced with such a staging, miss the point that Wagner worked hard to make: that of Wotan's steady trajectory towards self-annihilation throughout *Siegfried*. Wotan knew what he was doing, and so did Wagner.

[21] I discuss this thesis in much greater detail in my doctoral dissertation: Guhl-Miller, The Path of Wagner's Wotan.

[22] See Carl Dahlhaus, 'Theoretical Writings,' *The New Grove Wagner*, ed. John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus, (New York: Norton, 1984), 86–7; and Ernest Newman, *A Study of Wagner* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), 220–2.