

## ***HOW ELSA SHOWED WAGNER THE WAY TO SIEGFRIED***

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**AN ESSAY BASED ON THE TALK I PRESENTED TO THE BOSTON WAGNER SOCIETY ON 12/4/04, AND INCORPORATING MATERIAL FROM THE CHAPTER OF THE SAME TITLE IN THE FIRST DRAFT OF MY BOOK *THE WOUND THAT WILL NEVER HEAL*. SOME OF THIS MATERIAL WAS FIRST PUBLISHED UNDER THE SAME TITLE IN THE SCHOLARLY JOURNAL OF “THE WAGNER SOCIETY” (OF BRITAIN), WAGNER, IN MAY OF 1995**

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LUDWIG FEUERBACH’S FOUR BOOKS KNOWN TO HAVE INFLUENCED WAGNER IN WRITING THE ‘RING’ AND, IN THREE INSTANCES, EARLIER WORKS:

[TDI] *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* (1830);

[EOC] *The Essence of Christianity* (1841);

[PPF] *The Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (7/9/43);

[LER] *Lectures on the Essence of Religion* (1848) – Based on *The Essence of Religion* – Published in the early 1840’s to fill certain voids left by *The Essence of Christianity*

All quotations from Feuerbach’s four works are identified by the abbreviations tdi, eoc, ppf, and ler. All other quotations, with the exception of one from an English translation of Aeschylus’ play *Prometheus Bound*, are drawn from Wagner’s artworks, writings and recorded remarks: source and page number where the original can be found follows each quotation from Wagner’s writings and recorded remarks. All passages in the context of quotations which are closed off by brackets – “[ ]” – were provided by me as clues to interpretation.

**(1) WHAT DID WAGNER MEAN WHEN HE SAID THAT ELSA SHOWED HIM THE WAY TO SIEGFRIED? PERHAPS LUDWIG FEUERBACH HAS THE ANSWER.**

My talk was inspired by an observation from Wagner's essay *A Communication to My Friends* which has the most far-reaching implications. Wagner says here that Elsa taught him how to strip the historical hero of his historical and natural context, the bonds of fate, in order to create, or rediscover, his mythic, "purely-human" hero Siegfried:

**(1A) (357-358) "I plunged into the primal mythic roots of Germany. (...) I peeled away the layers to find the real 'naked Man' . Historical human subjects offered only relations, which order him instead of him ordering them. (375) With the conception of Siegfried I jettisoned all arbitrary historical garment [Wotan's historical constraints], and his joy in life was unphased by any outward threat or error [Siegfried doesn't feel fear]. Elsa showed me the way to this man: to me he was the masculine embodiment of the eternally and uniquely creative instinct ("Unwillkuer") [the creative unconscious]." (6-8/51 A Communication to My Friends: GS IV, 328; PW I)**

What did Wagner mean? A key clue can be found in Wagner's observation that the atheist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach exposed the human and natural origin of divine myths, a task which Wagner intended to complete in *Lohengrin*:

**(1B) "Not one of the most moving, distinctive Christian myths belongs to Christianity, which inherited them from the purely human intuitions of pagan times. Feuerbach tried to purge these of such alien influences, a task the poet must now complete." (6-8/51 A Communication to My Friends; PW I; 333-335)**

On the whole, throughout his life Wagner dismissed the idea of a personal creator god, and mocked the Christian concept of redemption in paradise as being nothing more than a euphemism for egoistic, self-indulgent fantasy. He agreed with Feuerbach that man is the product of a natural evolution of species, and that man unwittingly and involuntarily invented the gods, including the Christian God. God in Feuerbach's view was the product of the collective imagination – a process of collective dreaming, or unconscious artistic inspiration – shared by the primal folk at the beginning of our human history. This was the final phase in the evolution of our conscious human mind, before we awoke to full consciousness of our status as unique living beings. In a sense, we woke to find ourselves already in full possession of an intact, coherent culture and belief system, just as the gods of Valhalla in Wagner's *Ring* wake to find that the giants – i.e., man's animal instincts of fear and desire – have built Valhalla (religious civilization and its discontents) while they were sleeping.

I just quoted Wagner describing Siegfried (as taught to him by his heroine Elsa) as the "naked man", stripped bare of all historical context, preconditions, and identity. Feuerbach himself described the "naked individual" as the artificial, unnatural, disembodied human being we obtain when we proclaim man's divine origin and

immortality. According to Feuerbach, in order to purge man of all that hinders the free expression of his feelings and imagination, something we do when we imagine ourselves redeemed from the real world in a spiritual, immortal life, we must strip man of all that defines him as a man, strip him of life itself:

**(1C) [tdi133] “Only when history is nothing, when the naked individual who is stripped of all historical elements [Siegfried], all destiny, determination, ... and measure, ... when the vain, abstract, meaningless, empty individual is something, and history is nothing, is the nothing after death something. ... as they [Christians] posit a future life, they negate actual life.”**

Is it possible that Wagner’s romantic opera about the Grail Knight Lohengrin is actually a Feuerbach-inspired critique of religion, and that in this sense Wagner, ironically, collaborates with Ortrud, and with Elsa herself, in exposing the mortal, human, natural identity and origin of the allegedly divine, immortal, and celibate Lohengrin?

**(2) ELSA BUYS INTO ORTRUD’S ACCUSATION THAT LOHENGRIN HAS SOMETHING TO HIDE AND WOULD BE ENDANGERED IF IT WERE REVEALED**

I believe the answer to this question can be found by comparing Elsa’s offer to help Lohengrin protect the secret of his identity, with Bruennhilde’s offer to hear Wotan’s confession of his divine anguish (“Goetternoth”). If we follow through the implications of this comparison to their logical conclusion, we may well unveil Wagner’s inner thought-world, his original source of inspiration, as never before. It all begins with Lohengrin’s injunction to Elsa never to inquire after his true origin and identity:

**(2A) “Lohengrin: Elsa, if I am to be your spouse and guard your land and people, if nothing is to tear me from you, you must make me one promise: never ask me nor desire to know whence my journey brought me, nor my name and lineage!”** (Act I, Scene Three; GS II, 75)

Is Lohengrin demanding traditional religious faith of those to whom he offers redemption, a faith which can’t be explained in words because it is so holy, so noumenal, that it is inaccessible to our reasoning mind? Or, as Ortrud claims, does Lohengrin insist on keeping his identity and origin secret because he has something to hide whose revelation would bring him harm?

Ortrud threatens to reveal that Lohengrin’s power for redemption isn’t divine, but dependent on a magical spell, which we will later recognize as an “artistic” spell:

**(2B) “Ortrud: [to Frederick] ... should he [Lohengrin] be forced to reveal his name and lineage, all his power would be ended which is only lent by magic spell.”** (Act II, Scene One; GS II, 82-83)

**“Ortrud: [to Elsa] It would mean great anguish (“Noth”) for him, so the clever hero forbade the question! (...) This innocence of your hero, how quickly it would be tarnished were he forced to show the source of magic through which he wields such power here!”** (Act II, Scene Four; GS II, 93-94)

The range of meaning of the German word “Noth” embraces need, necessity, lack, anguish, and danger, among other things. It has a very peculiar resonance in Wagner’s artworks (witness the Walsung heroes’ sword “Nothung”), which will become clearer as we proceed.

Elsa, fearing – as Ortrud suggested – that Lohengrin might be in danger if he reveals his true origin and identity, promises herself to guard his secret, but – and here is the key point! – only if he shares it with her:

**(2C) “Elsa: It might well bring him danger, were he to tell his secret here to all the world; woe is me ... if I, whom he saved, should betray him and cause it to be known! If I knew his secret, I would guard it truly! Yet my heart trembles, filled with doubt!”** (Act II, Scene 5; GS II, 97)

Is it possible that deep down Elsa suspects Ortrud’s accusation is true, that Lohengrin’s power, instinctively accepted as divine in origin by both King Henry and his people, has a mundane, earth-bound origin, and that he is merely posing as divine through a magical spell? This seems to be implicit in Elsa’s apparent acceptance of Ortrud’s charge that Lohengrin would be in danger if his true identity was exposed.

If this were true, perhaps Elsa could best show her love for him by preserving his unspoken secret, and thus becoming complicit with him in preserving a fraud. Elsa’s intuition tells her she can express her love by sharing knowledge of this secret with Lohengrin.

### **(3) WAGNER’S PRIVILEGED ACCESS TO THE POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS MYSTERIES OF OUR CREATIVE UNCONSCIOUS**

Wagner has a lot to say about such numinous secrets. According to him, laymen – i.e., the religious faithful, or the artist’s audience – possess in revealed religious texts, or in the artist’s finished artwork, respectively, only a dreamlike allegory, a sort of waking-dream. This waking dream known to the layman is a poor reflection of its original source of inspiration in the religious seer or inspired artist. Speaking of such divine revelations, Wagner says that:

**(3A) “What’s imparted to the people can only be an allegory, i.e., a rendering of the unspeakable, into common human speech and erroneous knowledge. The relation this sacred allegory has to the divine revelation is a relationship like that of the day-told dream to the actual night-dream. (...) If our memory of a deeply moving dream is only an allegorical paraphrase, whose intrinsic disagreement with the original remains a trouble to our waking consciousness, yet this allegory is the only possible**

**way of representing it to the layman. This is how dogma is formed, and the world must take it on authority to become a partner through faith in what the eye never saw. The religious [visionary] is a sharer in salvation through [his own] eye's beholding, while the layman needs unconditional faith."** (64-2/65 On State and Religion; PW IV; 27-28).

This waking allegory is only the conscious manifestation of the true, unconscious source of inspiration, which remains hidden, sometimes even from its author. Similarly, the origin of our own dreams is often mysterious to us. As Wagner once wrote to his friend August Roeckel, for the authentic artist his own artwork remains a mystery: "... how can an artist hope to find his own intuitions perfectly reproduced in those of another person, since he himself stands before his own work of art – if it really is a work of art – as though before some puzzle, which is just as capable of misleading him as it can mislead the other person." (8/23/54 Letter to August Roeckel; SLRW; P. 357)

Why must the source of inspiration remain hidden? Is it because it is so divine, or so much the product of preconscious feeling, that human reason can't grasp it? Or does this magic, the magic of religious faith and art, have a more mundane origin, as Ortrud's charge suggests? I believe this is the key question which *Lohengrin* poses, and that Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*, the next artwork Wagner completed after *Lohengrin*, provides Wagner's answer to it.

As both poet and musician, both conscious architect and unconscious creator of his art – who both willed and dreamed it into existence, Wagner had a unique insight into the creative unconscious, which he sometimes called the "unspeakable" or "unutterable secret":

**(3B) "... there was never another who was poet and musician at once (in my sense), and thus to whom insight into inner processes [i.e., into his own unconscious artistic inspiration] is possible such as to none other."** (12/8/58 Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck; RWLMW, P. 78).

To my knowledge Wagner's earliest reference to this "unutterable secret" is from 1842, a passage in which he suggests that this secret is kept by music: "It is terrifying ... to gaze into the awful caverns of the human heart. For the poet it is impossible to render in words all that passes at the bottom of this stanchless fount, which responds in turn to the breath of God and of the Devil; he may speak to you of hate, of love, of fanaticism and frenzy; he will set before your eyes the outward acts engendered by the surface of those depths: but never can he take you down into them, unveil them to your look. It is reserved for Music alone, to reveal the primal elements of this marvellous nature; in her mysterious charm our soul is shown this great, unutterable secret." (2-4/42 Halevy and 'La Reine de Chypre'; PW VIII; 179)

And in the following passage from 1851 Wagner conflates music, as an expression which is "unspeakable" through the understanding or words, with religion: "... the speaking faculty of the orchestra ... [is] the faculty of uttering the unspeakable. (...) [Music

expresses] ... that which, ... from the standpoint of our human intellect, is the unspeakable. (...) This easy explanation of the ‘unspeakable’ one might extend, perhaps not altogether wrongly, to the whole matter of religious philosophy, for although that matter is given out as absolutely unutterable, from the standpoint of the speaker, yet mayhap it is utterable enough if only the fitting organ [i.e., music] is employed.” (5-1/51 Opera and Drama; PW II; 316-317)

But Wagner, like Ortrud and Elsa, had an intuition that danger might lurk in the secrets kept – kept even from him – by his own creative unconscious. Cosima noted that:

**(3C) “... he [Wagner] says he sometimes has the feeling that art is downright dangerous – it is as if in this great enjoyment of observing he is perhaps failing to recognize the presence of some hidden sorrow.” (7/27/69; CT)**

**(4) ORTRUD’S THREAT TO EXPOSE LOHENGRIN’S SECRET AS WAGNER’S METAPHOR FOR SCIENCE’S THREAT TO OVERTHROW THE GODS BY DESTROYING BELIEF IN THEM**

By taking a closer look at the nature of Ortrud’s threat to undermine faith in Lohengrin, perhaps we can unearth the great problem which I believe underlies both *Lohengrin* and the *Ring*. By challenging the faith Lohengrin has demanded of the people and his spouse Elsa, and instilling doubt in Elsa, Ortrud has, in effect, threatened to expose the natural, human, magical – i.e., artistic – origin of the transcendent Christian God.

She makes the full scope of her threat quite clear to Frederick when she tells him that his belief in the Christian God is an expression of “cowardice”, and says “Give me power and surely will I show you how feeble is that God who shields him.”

It’s important to remember that Feuerbach regarded the pagan gods - such as Wodan and Freia, whom Ortrud worships – as nature gods who, unlike the Christian God, do not claim to transcend the real, natural world, but are instead physical - though superior - beings subject to time and fate (though in Wagner’s *Ring* they proclaim their immortality): [ler86] “The religions or rather mythologies, both of the Greeks and of the Norse if not of other Germanic peoples, both of which, particularly the latter, were nature religions to begin with, looked upon nature as the source not only of men but also of the gods – clear proof that the gods and men are one, that the gods stand or fall with mankind.”

Just as Ortrud instills doubt in the validity of the redemption Lohengrin brings, and doubt in his divine origin which the people have simply taken for granted, Wagner came to the conclusion that modern science would ultimately explain away all the mysteries of religion and art:

**(4A) “As the progress of the natural sciences ... involves exposure of every mystery of being as mere imaginary secrets after all, the sole concern must henceforth be the Act of Knowing ... . (...) We justifiably conclude from this that the purely**

**comprehending subject** [i.e., the objective scientist, who leaves subjective feeling, or love, out of his equations] **is left with the sole right to existence** [note that Alberich remains unaccounted for at the end of the *Ring*]. **A worthy close for the world-tragedy!”** (3-7/78 Public and Popularity; PW VI, 75-76).

Wagner’s fear of this historical catastrophe, which Feuerbach looked forward to with optimism, increased the more Wagner formed the idea that his art was the last refuge for mankind’s religious sentiments in a secular age. Though Wagner wrote the above-quoted passage as a critique of his former protegee Friedrich Nietzsche’s recently published atheist books, Wagner could with equal justification be alluding to Feuerbach, who said that:

**(4B) [ler219] “ ... no barrier to human knowledge can excuse us. In the realm of nature, to be sure, there are still many things we do not understand; but the secrets of religion spring from man himself, and he is capable of knowing them down to their remotest depths. And because he can know them, he ought to know them. (...) The elimination of this lie is the condition for a new, energetic mankind.”**

I suggest that the threat which the Nibelung dwarf Alberich poses for the gods of Valhalla – embodied in his curse on his ring – is actually the threat of scientific thought to undermine belief in divinity, i.e., belief in the existence of a spiritual realm which transcends Mother Nature. In this sense Alberich is akin to Ortrud, to Feuerbach, and to Wagner himself to the extent he once embraced Feuerbach.

In consequence I have reinterpreted Alberich’s hoarding of the earth’s – i.e., Erda’s – treasure, as Wagner’s metaphor for historical man’s gradual acquisition of that scientific knowledge of himself and his world which might some day overthrow religious faith and all the values and ideals, like selfless love, which faith supports. According to Alberich his Hoard will ultimately rise from silent depths to daylight and overthrow the gods’ rule. But the essence of Alberich’s curse on the Ring is that all men, particularly those who dispossessed him of it, will seek its power (and by extension the power inhering in the accumulating hoard of earth’s treasure) and thereby renounce love just as he has. Translated into the terms of our new allegorical interpretation of the *Ring*, this means that the human species as a whole has to pay the same price of “Noth” (existential anguish and lovelessness) which Alberich did in order to stake a claim to the power of his objective knowledge of the world, the power of truth.

Metaphorically speaking, historical man, or rather, religious man – for all human societies have gone through a religious phase – will eventually accumulate that hoard of objective knowledge of himself and the real world (Mother Nature, or Erda), which will overthrow belief in divine beings. A couple of passages from Feuerbach which very likely influenced Wagner illustrate my point:

**(4C) [eoc274] “To place anything in god, or to derive anything from god, is ... to withdraw it from the test of reason, to institute it as unassailable, sacred, without rendering an account why. [Think here of Lohengrin’s prohibition on knowledge.]**

(...) **Thus the work of self-conscious reason in relation to religion is simply to destroy an illusion ... .”** [Think here of Ortrud’s and Alberich’s threat against belief in divinity.]

**(4D)** [ler216-17] “[This illusion’s] ... **elimination is the indispensable condition for the rebirth of mankind ... . . . it requires – if we wish to retain the word – a new religion!**”

For Wagner, though, as we will see shortly, this “new religion” which will replace belief in the gods is not necessarily objective scientific thought, but rather, his own artwork of the future, the music-drama. Wagner came to see his redemptive music-dramas as the antidote to the despair which science would bring us if it eliminated the consolations of religious belief. Feuerbach himself noted that as religious faith gradually declines in the face of rising secularism, science and art fall heir to religion’s heritage, science inheriting religion’s role in explaining man and his world, and art expressing religious feeling: [ler209-210] “Everything which later became a field of independent human activity, of culture, was originally an aspect of religion: all the arts, all the sciences ... - for as soon as an art or science achieves a high state of development, it ceases to be religion – were originally the concern of religion and its representatives, the priests.”

#### **(5) LOHENGRIN’S AND WOTAN’S CRIME AGAINST MOTHER NATURE (ERDA): THE SIN OF RELIGIOUS WORLD-RENUNCIATION**

To grasp Wagner’s allegorical logic we should recognize that for him, as well as for his mentor Feuerbach, belief in the actual existence of divine, supernatural beings denies our true mother, Nature, and figuratively kills her. As Feuerbach said:

**(5A)** [tdi86] **“If you imagine nature has its ground outside itself [i.e., that God created the physical world] you strike nature dead.”**

**(5B)** [tdi249] **“ ‘To a pietist maiden’ ”: Young maiden, when you sacrificed nature for belief, you committed your only sin.”**

**(5C)** [ler85] **“How untrue we Germans have become to our source, our mother, and how unlike her, thanks to Christianity which taught us that heaven [or Valhalla] is our home.”**

Clearly, Wagner was on Feuerbach’s wavelength:

**(5D)** **“Let us glance, then, for a moment at this future state of Man, when he shall have freed himself from his last heresy, the denial of Nature, - that heresy which has taught him hitherto to look upon himself as a mere instrument to an end which lay outside himself [i.e., God’s will or providence].”** (6-8/49 Art and Revolution: GS III, 33; PW I, P. 57).

In the following two portions of my essay - (6) & (7) - I'll show how Lohengrin is guilty of this sin, and then describe Wotan's complicity in it:

**(6) LOHENGRIN DESCENDS FROM THE HEAVENLY HEIGHTS TO EARTH (ERDA) TO REDEEM HIMSELF – THROUGH ELSA'S MORTAL LOVE – FROM THE STERILE ABSTRACTION OF HEAVEN**

Just listen first to what Wagner has to say about the Christian God, and compare this with what he says about Lohengrin:

**(6A) “The Classical Era ended with the worship of an abstract god brought from Asia, who wanders aimlessly in the melancholy joy of immortality. (...) Man was thus governed by the incomprehensible will of God [think here of Lohengrin's demand that none share in the secret of his true origin], not instinct, nature's necessity.”** (2/50 Art and Climate; PW I, 255; PH: 148).

Wagner suggests in the following passage that it is Lohengrin who sought redemption from the sterile bliss of the allegedly divine Grail realm in Elsa's mortal, physical love:

**(6B) “... he [Lohengrin] wanted nothing more than to become ... a full and complete human being, able to give and inspire love, - that is, authentically human and not divine ... . Thus he yearned for womankind – the human heart. And so he descended from his blissful but empty loneliness when he heard this woman's cry for help.”** (6-8/51 A Communication to My Friends; GS IV, 296; PW I, 341).

Wagner's critique of the “melancholy joy” of the abstract Christian God brought from Asia is more or less the same as his critique of Lohengrin, and his explanation of Lohengrin's longing to be redeemed from the meaninglessness of his existence in the divine Grail realm through Elsa's mortal love. It is as if the abstract heavenly realm of the Grail from which Lohengrin descended to offer Elsa redemption were lacking the very thing for which those who seek spiritual transcendence long, true substance.

The Grail knights, for instance, are regarded as celibate and immortal. But both Feuerbach and Wagner wrote that the religious man's emphasis on divine celibacy, and his longing for redemption from his earthly, mortal limitations in immortality, express his artificial quest to redeem himself only from those aspects of the earthly life which he finds abhorrent, painful, and frightful, such as misery and death. He then hypocritically smuggles into his conception of heaven the blissful aspects of physical life, artificially purged by the imagination of their necessary connection with life's anguish. As Feuerbach put it when describing the religious man's conception of heaven: [eoc137] “Even if that which pleases him cannot exist without being associated with that which displeases him, the subjective man is not guided by the wearisome laws of logic and physics, but by the self-will of the imagination. Hence he drops what is disagreeable as a fact, and holds fast alone what is agreeable.”

Wagner applied Feuerbach's logic to his own critique of the high value Christianity places on immortality and chastity, i.e., on the denial of man's physical, animal nature. He noted, for instance, that "(343) There is considerable difficulty with this 'Paradise'. (...) (346) This act of denying the will is the true action of the saint: that it is ultimately accomplished only in a total end to individual consciousness – for there is no other consciousness except that which is personal and individual – was lost sight of by the naïve saints of Christianity ... . They were able to deceive their confused imagination by seeing that longed-for state as a perpetual continuation of a life freed from nature [i.e., freed from the body and from Erda's law that all which exists will end]." (6/7/55 Letter to Franz Liszt; SB VII, 204-208; SLRW). And the religious emphasis on celibacy comes under Wagner's axe for the same reason: "We decide that the excesses to which the insistence on chastity led constituted a terrible feature; they were due to the impossibility of realizing something felt to lie deep within the human character, the desire to set oneself outside Nature [i.e., freed from the constraints of man's mortal body and Erda's natural laws] and yet to go on living." (11/3/78 CD II; 188)

In the following two passages Feuerbach describes graphically not only what we can recognize as Lohengrin's desire to restore to himself on earth, through Elsa's love, what is missing in the divine Grail realm, but also provide us with what is arguably the basis for Tannhaeuser's complaints to Venus about his need to escape the endless bliss of his immortal life of love in the Venusberg, and return to the mundane physical world of pain and death:

**(6C) [eoc183] "The soul yearns after its lost half, after its body; as God, the departed soul yearns after the real man. As, therefore, God becomes a man again, so the soul returns to the body, and the perfect identity of this world [Nature] and the other [Spirit] is now restored."**

**(6D) [ler163-164] "[man] ... cannot break with his nature; even the wish fantasies which depart from it are determined by it; they may seem to go far afield, yet they always fall back on it, just as a stone thrown into the air falls back on the ground."**

**(7) ALBERICH'S CURSE ON THE RING IS INTENDED TO PUNISH WOTAN, I.E., PUNISH MAN'S RELIGIOUS IMPULSE, FOR RENOUNCING MOTHER NATURE'S (ERDA'S) OBJECTIVE REALITY**

In a passage from the *Ring* which in my view has been consistently misinterpreted, Alberich seems to paraphrase Feuerbach's denunciation of man's religious impulse to transcend nature, in his denunciation of Wotan for trying to steal what rightfully belongs only to Alberich, his ring of power. By taking Alberich's ring – Wagner's symbol for the very nature of human thought and imagination, which insists on completing what experience of the world presents to it as incomplete – from Alberich, Wotan renounces the objective truth of existence in order to sustain man's delusion that the gods exist, are immortal and rule men and earth. Listen closely:

**(7A) “Alberich: [to Wotan] Be on your guard, you haughty god! If ever I sinned, I sinned freely against myself: but you, you immortal, will sin against all that was, is and shall be [the real world which is bound by time and space] – if you brazenly wrest the ring from me now!”**

Erda, Mother Nature, later confirms Alberich’s accusation that Wotan sins against her and her objective knowledge of the truth which her daughters the Norns spin - knowledge of all that was, is, and will be - by taking the ring from Alberich and keeping it for himself:

**(7B) “Erda: How all things were, I know; how all things are, how all things will be, I see as well ... . (...) All things that are – end. A day of darkness dawns for the gods: I counsel you, shun the ring!”**

When Alberich says he sinned against himself, he is saying that in order to obtain that objective knowledge of the outer world which gives us humans true power, he had to renounce love, our subjective feeling. The god Wotan, on the contrary, sins against the outer world, Mother Nature’s objective reality, by turning inward to find consolation and refuge from the bitter truth in subjective feeling. Though Wotan like Alberich enjoys the power of objective thought, Wotan unlike Alberich wishes to condition his thought through feeling. Thus, as Wotan later explains to Bruennhilde during his confession, even in his power he still wished to preserve love. As Feuerbach says, religion is based on the power of thought, or imagination, that is conditioned by feeling, the longing to escape the constraints of our bodies and the outer world and flatter feeling without limit:

**(7C) [eoc98] “The divine being [Wotan] is the pure subjectivity of man, freed from all else, from everything objective [Erda’s knowledge] ... - his most subjective, inmost self.”**

Where Wotan, in spite of his power, wishes to restore lost love, to condition the power of his thought with subjective feeling, Alberich has renounced love, the influence of subjective feeling, for the sake of the power which only objective understanding of man’s animal nature, and Mother Nature’s laws, can give us.

### **(8) THE SECRET OF WOTAN’S (I.E., GOD’S) TRUE IDENTITY: WHY WOTAN CALLS HIMSELF “LIGHT-ALBERICH”**

Feuerbach provides us what I believe are potent clues to the thinking which underlay Wagner’s conception of Wotan – who calls himself “Light-Alberich” – and of the true nature of Wotan’s relationship with Alberich. Central to this reading is the notion that Alberich is more primal and primary than Wotan, because he stands for the bitter truth, and Wotan is derivative, entirely dependent on Alberich’s forging of the gold into a Ring to construct the gods’ divine, heavenly abode Valhalla. This is because Wotan’s waking-dream Valhalla was actually inspired by the desire to find a refuge from the anguish, or “Noth”, which Alberich’s forging of the ring of human consciousness introduced into the world.

Feuerbach's thesis is that our invention of god is the product of our misery and our egoism: [ppf48] "... god is derived only from man ... . This is shown with particular clarity ... in the Neo-Platonists' determination of god as the self-sufficient and blissful being, for where else than in the pains and needs of man does this being who is without pain and without needs have its ground and origin? With the lack of need and pain, the imagination and feeling of bliss also collapse. (...) Only in man's wretchedness does god have his birthplace." And Feuerbach more bluntly describes religious faith as founded squarely on human egoism: [ler49] "... to the horror of hypocritical theologians and philosophical fantasists, I use the word egoism to designate the ground and essence of religion." [ler300] "... it is not generally recognized that egoism alone is the secret of faith as distinct from love ... ." In other words, God the Father, Wotan, is an expression of Alberich's ring power, Alberich's egoism, and the gods' abode Valhalla is a product of man's dissatisfaction with the real world, as expressed perhaps in Alberich's inability to find love in the world. Alberich's frustrated quest to find love is the cause of that "Noth" (anguish) which prompted Alberich to forge the ring of power to compensate himself.

This is implicit in the fact that during the transition from Scene One to Scene Two of *The Rhinegold*, the Ring motif transforms into the Valhalla Motif. In order to grasp the full implications of this motival transformation, it is crucial to recall that Alberich alone, not Wotan, was able to so completely renounce love that he could forge his ring from the Rhinegold. Therefore the precondition for the construction of Valhalla by the giants Fafner and Fasolt, in accordance – as Wotan says – with Wotan's will and as imagined in his dream – was Alberich's forging of the Ring.

Wotan's – the gods' – dependence on Alberich is also implicit in the fact that while Wotan calls himself Light-Alberich, Alberich never calls himself Dark-Wotan. Evidently Alberich, in some sense, is not only more primal than Wotan, but subsumes Wotan, and thus subsumes the gods.

The dependence of the gods upon Alberich's forging of the Rhinegold into his ring – the symbol for our uniquely human gift of reflective, symbolic thought – is also implicit in the following startling passage from Wagner's essay of 1848-1849, *The Wibelungen*. In this study for the *Ring* Wagner links the worlds of Lohengrin and the *Ring* in his remarkable thesis that the Nibelung Hoard, representing earthly (i.e., Erda-based) power, was sublimated into the Holy Grail, the symbol for the transcendent world of the spirit:

**(8A) "There's a legend that a knight of the Grail [Lohengrin] appeared at the Nibelungs' seat, but vanished when asked forbidden tidings of his origin. The legend of the Grail arises as the Kaiserdom becomes more ideal and the Nibelung's Hoard loses in material worth; the spiritual ascension of the Hoard [say, Alberich's Ring and its motif] into the Grail [perhaps the gods' heavenly abode Valhalla, i.e., the gods themselves] was accomplished in the German conscience. The quest of the Grail henceforth replaces the struggle for the Nibelung Hoard."** (6-8/48 *The Wibelungen*, revised summer of 1849; PW VII, 292-294)

So, it is as if Feuerbach and Wagner are telling us that the egoistic desire to satisfy primal physical needs was the precondition, the ultimate source of inspiration, for our involuntary invention of the gods who satisfy those needs in an ideal sense. Feuerbach tells us that [ler156] the doctrine that god is not only a spiritual being but also a physical being “... originated with certain older mystics, notably Jakob Boehme, who was born in 1575 ... .” He was “A shoemaker by trade. (...) He distinguished positive and negative attributes in God, light or fire and darkness, good and evil, ... love and wrath, in short, spirit and matter, soul and body. (...) ... all of us are materialists [say, Nibelungs?] before we become idealists [the gods of Valhalla, or the Waelsing heroes?], we all serve the body, the lower needs and senses, before we rise to spiritual needs and sensibilities.”

And, clinching the point, Feuerbach adds that: [ler294-295] “... the first definition of “god” ... is simply that a god is what man requires for his existence, and specifically for his physical existence, which is the foundation of his spiritual existence, so that a god is a physical being; ... man’s first god is need [perhaps “Noth”?], and specifically physical need ... . (...) The first and oldest God, the god before and behind the ethical and spiritual God [Wotan?] is the physical God [Alberich?]... .”

Evidently Feuerbach’s thinking on this subject made a decisive impact on Wagner, who wrote: “The quintessence of ... life, at last in “Wuotan” (Zeus) found expression as the chiefest God, the Father ... . Though his nature marked him as the highest god, ... yet he was nowise an historically older god, but sprang into existence from man’s later, higher consciousness of self; consequently he is more abstract than the older Nature-god [think here perhaps of Alberich’s alliance with Erda, Mother Nature], whilst the latter is more corporeal and, so to phrase it, more personally inborn in man.” (6-8/48 *The Wibelungen*; revised in the summer of 1849; PW VII; 275)

What Feuerbach has to say on this subject of the true origin of our concept “God”, in the very nature of our mind (i.e., Alberich’s Ring), of our thought, is instructive:

**(8B)** [ler97] “... **reason [Alberich], not yet disciplined by observation of the world, regards itself uncritically as the essence of the world** [the ring seems to promise him omnipotent power], ... [which] **leads necessarily to the idea of divinity** [Wotan, or Light-Alberich].”

**(8C)** [eoc35] “... **the understanding [Alberich, forger of the Ring] ... is the superhuman, ... the impersonal power in man. Only through the understanding has man the power of exalting himself to general ideas ..., of distinguishing the object from the impressions which it produces on his feelings ...** [in other words, Alberich renounces subjective love in exchange for the power of objective thought]. **... science ... is the practical proof, because it is the product of this truly infinite and divine reality.**”

It can, I think, plausibly be asserted that Dark-Alberich and Light-Alberich (Wotan) represent, respectively, the objective and subjective aspects of our human mind – i.e., Alberich’s Ring and its power – which we have demonized by calling it Satan, or

idealized by calling it God, as the case may be. But the real world is always regarded as belonging to the Devil, and the spiritual world to God. As both Wagner and Wotan suggested, the world belongs to Alberich. Feuerbach put it this way:

**(8D) [eoc268] “Love is the subjective reality of the species [Wotan], as reason [Alberich] is its objective reality.”**

And finally, apropos of the contrast between Light and Dark Alberich, in arguing his case that man’s mind is a product of nature, and God in turn a product of man’s mind (the very idealization of our mind through our projection of its virtues on to a being of our imagination), Feuerbach says that:

**(8E) ([eoc87] “... it is self-contradictory that the impure should proceed from the pure, darkness from light. How ... can we remove these obvious difficulties in the way of assigning a divine origin to nature? Only by positing this impurity, this darkness in god, in distinguishing in god himself a principle of light and a principle of darkness. In other words, we can only explain the origin of darkness by renouncing the idea of origin, and presupposing darkness as existing from the beginning. ... spirit without nature is an unreal abstraction; consciousness develops itself only out of nature.”**

**(9) HOW WOTAN’S JOURNEY INTO THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH (ERDA – “ERDE NABELNEST”, OR NIBELHEIM) TO OBTAIN ERDA’S KNOWLEDGE, AND HIS WANDERINGS OVER THE SURFACE OF MOTHER EARTH (ERDA) IN QUEST OF KNOWLEDGE, FULFILL ALBERICH’S CURSE ON THE RING**

The hoard of objective, scientific knowledge man acquires over time, through which he will eventually undermine his own religious beliefs, and overthrow the rule of gods, in favor of a truer understanding of the world he lives in and his own animal nature, is based on man’s – i.e. Alberich’s – objective understanding of Mother Nature and of himself. And this truer understanding, freed from the shackles of religious belief which Feuerbach regarded as man’s sin against our true mother, Nature, will restore Mother Nature’s rights which have been trampled underfoot by religious world-renunciation. As Feuerbach suggested:

**(9A) [eoc286-7] “To reason [say, Alberich] alone belongs the great work of the resurrection and restoration of all things and beings – universal redemption and reconciliation.”**

Alberich’s authentic power stems from the fact that by amassing his hoard of the earth’s treasury of knowledge, he taps into the objective, latent power of nature herself, which sleeps in her until man awakes it. While Feuerbach said that God’s primary attribute is power, he also quoted [ler274] the great philosopher of science, Bacon, as saying that knowledge is power. The implication of this is that Alberich – who represents cold, hard, objective reason unfettered by the consolations of feeling - is in alliance with Mother Nature, Erda, as she is known to us through objective understanding. It is through her –

i.e., Erda's – foreknowledge that Wotan learns of the inevitability of the gods' destruction by Alberich's curse.

But it is the essence of Alberich's curse that through Wotan's very efforts to escape its consequences, Wotan will fulfill it. For he who dispossesses Alberich of the ring which is rightfully his alone, for which he alone was willing to pay the price, is predestined to follow Alberich's footsteps in renouncing love for the sake of the power inhering in the ring – the power inhering in our human mind - and its gradual accumulation of a hoard of knowledge in the course of history. And this accumulation of a hoard of objective knowledge, by man himself, will culminate in his overthrow of the gods who ruled his heart for millennia. For Feuerbach, this decisive historical moment is the hinge upon which world history turns: [eoc270] The necessary turning point of history is ... the open confession that the consciousness of god is nothing else than the consciousness of the species ... .":

**(9B)** [eoc 336]. **“Christians worship the human individual as the supreme being, as god. Not indeed consciously, for it is the unconsciousness of this fact which constitutes the illusion of the religious principle. (...) The history of Christianity has had for its grand result the unveiling of this mystery – the ... recognition of theology as anthropology.”** [i.e. our acknowledgment that we mortal humans involuntarily and unconsciously created our gods, taking products of our imagination for realities. Thus, God did not create us in his image, but rather, we created him in our image]

It may surprise some to learn that Wotan (Light-Alberich) continues to amass Alberich's hoard of knowledge of the real world, or Erda, after Wotan has dispossessed Alberich of his ring, Tarnhelm, and hoard. To understand this we need to consider Feuerbach's scientific definition of god:

**(9C)** [ppf17] **“... man's conception of god is the human individual's conception of his own species, [and] god as the total of all ... perfections is nothing other than the total of the attributes of the species – dispersed among men and realizing themselves in the course of world history.”**

According to Feuerbach, a primary perfection of the human species, which realizes itself through our history, is the gradual accumulation of a hoard of knowledge of ourselves and of Nature based on our historical experience of the world:

**(9D)** [eoc152] **“My knowledge, my will, is limited, but my limit is not the limit of another man, to say nothing of mankind; ... what is impossible, inconceivable to one age, is to the coming age conceivable and possible. (...) The most striking proofs of this are presented by the history of philosophy and science.”**

The god Wotan, understood in Feuerbach's sense as Wagner's metaphor for historical man, accumulates Alberich's hoard of knowledge of the earth by visiting Erda. As he himself says in Scene Four of *The Rhinegold*, Wotan goes down to Erda to obtain knowledge from her of all that Alberich would teach Wotan to fear, and hopefully also to

obtain knowledge from Erda of how Wotan can forget the fear she taught him. And Wotan continues to acquire a hoard of knowledge of the earth, or Erda, by wandering over the surface of the earth as the Wanderer who seeks knowledge.

Wotan's travels in quest of knowledge of that truth which both Alberich and Erda have taught Wotan to fear, that truth which will extirpate the gods' place in our heart, is a product of Alberich's curse on the Ring: the Ring is Wagner's metaphor for the nature of our human mind, and it is the nature of our mind to acquire knowledge and correct our errors about ourselves and our world, such as the errors of superstition and religious belief, over the course of time. For Alberich declared in his curse that those who dispossess him of the ring, i.e., those religious folk who have most to lose in acknowledging the truth of this objective knowledge, will seek the ring's (i.e., truth's) power but find instead only fear and dismay.

Religious man, for instance, stakes a claim on the truth by claiming to possess the truth, but were he ever to possess the actual truth which he proudly claims to seek, he would undermine the very reason he had sought the truth in the first place, since in religious belief man is not seeking the truth at all, but rather, emotional satisfaction. As Feuerbach said: [ler204] "... although in theory the theists place truth above good cheer, in practice the power to provide consolation is their sole criterion of truth or untruth; they reject a doctrine as untrue because it provides no consolation, because it is not as comforting and comfortable, as flattering to human egoism, as the opposite doctrine, which derives nature from a personal being who guides the course of nature in accordance with the prayers and desires of man."

It is this desire to flatter feeling (i.e., love) at the expense of truth (power) that is the basis of Alberich's accusation that Wotan doesn't deserve to wield the power of Alberich's ring, the full power available to us through the conscious acquisition of knowledge, because Wotan isn't willing to pay its (the truth's) price. Thus, if Wotan takes the power of the ring (the power of the mind) away from Alberich to support the gods' self-delusions, Wotan will be sinning against reality - Erda's knowledge of all that was, is, and shall be - itself. Feuerbach summed up the contrast I've drawn here between Alberich and Wotan, and the nature of Wotan's crime against the truth, in the following succinct formulation: [eoc188] "I would rather be a devil [Alberich] in alliance with truth, than an angel [Wotan, the Light-Elf] in alliance with falsehood."

This explains, I think, why Wotan seeks two entirely different types of knowledge from Erda. On the one hand, as she is leaving him to meditate in fear on the fate she foretold, he tells her that: "If care and fear must consume me, then I must seize you and find out everything." On the other hand, after witnessing a graphic illustration of the power of the Ring curse in Fafner's murder of his brother Fasolt (a blunt illustration of the unbearable truth that power and egoism trump love), Wotan changes his mind and says instead: "Care and fear fetter my thoughts - how I shall end them Erda shall teach me: to her I must descend." Their daughter Bruennhilde is, of course, the product of Wotan's desire to learn from her mother Erda both objective knowledge of what he fears, and how to forget the fear Erda taught him. I believe we will find that these two kinds of knowledge are the

objective knowledge and subjective feeling (i.e., aesthetic intuition) we discussed earlier, which express the contrast between the power of thought, and love.

Summing up our argument in this first half of this essay, we can say that the transcendent Christian God, and belief in the gods in general, is under threat by Ortrud and Alberich, respectively, and that this threat is a metaphor for Wagner's concern that belief in divinity and all the human sentiments and ideals bound up with the idea of divinity are under threat by scientific knowledge, which exposes the human and natural basis for all that we call divinity.

In the second half of this essay which follows, I will describe how Elsa's and Bruennhilde's breach of Lohengrin's and Wotan's trust provides the only possible redemption from the fated doom of religious faith.

**(10) HOW ELSA, REINTERPRETED AS LOHENGRIN'S UNCONSCIOUS MIND, OFFERS TO KEEP THE SECRET OF DIVINITY'S ORIGIN IN NATURE AND THUS PRESERVE LOHENGRIN FROM HARM**

Sensing that Lohengrin's wellbeing will be under threat if his secret is exposed to the world (a far cry from what we normally would consider the basis of "faith"), and thereby concurring with Ortrud's accusation against Lohengrin to this extent, Elsa offers to help Lohengrin keep his secret if he will share that secret with her:

**(10A) "Elsa: [to Lohengrin] As you found me gravely accused, oh that I knew you also in distress ("Noth"). That bravely I might bear troubles, I wish I knew of dangers threatening you! Would the secret which you conceal from all the world be of this kind? Perhaps disaster would await you if it became known to all the world? Oh were it thus and I allowed to know it, if I had it in my power, no threats could tear it from me ... ! (...) Let me share your secret that I may clearly see who you are! (...) Say without regret whence you came, that the power of silence be proved in me!" (Act III, Scene 2; GS II, 103)**

Lohengrin's secret which Elsa wishes to learn and to keep safe, is that Lohengrin is not of divine, but rather, of natural origin, a mortal human, as suggested by Feuerbach's following observation:

**(10B) [ler320-22] "... the god of Christian monotheism is a withered, dried-out god in whom all traces of his origin in nature is effaced; there he stands like a creation out of nothing; on pain of the rod he even forbids the inevitable question [as Lohengrin forbids inquiry into his origin and true identity]: 'What did God do before he created the world?' or more correctly: 'What was he before nature?' In other words, he makes a secret of his physical origin, hiding it behind a metaphysical abstraction."**

Elsa's offer to help protect Lohengrin from danger by sharing with him the burden of knowing his identity, and preserving his dangerous secret, provides the hinge on which

Wagner's transformation from a romantic opera composer of such works as *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhaeuser*, and *Lohengrin*, into the creator of the revolutionary music-drama - consummated most completely in the *Ring* - turns.

In view of the fact that, according to Feuerbach, Ortrud, and Alberich, religious belief is historically fated to fall before the skepticism of modern scientific inquiry, in what sense could Elsa keep Lohengrin's secret, since her very insistence he share his secret with her will ultimately breach religious faith and compel him to withdraw from the world? It seems, in other words, as if Elsa's insistence on asking Lohengrin the fateful question regarding his true origin and identity constitutes collaboration with Ortrud's and Frederick's conspiracy to expose Lohengrin's fraud.

Wagner provides the key in his essay *A Communication to My Friends* of 1851. Here, Wagner describes Elsa as Lohengrin's unconscious, involuntary mind, in whom his conscious ego seeks redemption, redemption specifically from conscious knowledge:

**(10C) "In Elsa I saw from the outset the antithesis to Lohengrin that I was looking for – not, of course, an opposite in the absolute sense but rather the other half of his own being [Note that Bruennhilde describes herself to Wotan as "one half of yourself"]. Elsa is the unconscious, the instinct in which the conscious, purposive element in Lohengrin's character seeks to redeem itself."** (*A Communication to my Friends*: GS IV, 301; PW I, 346-347)

The implication of this fact, that Elsa can be considered a metaphor for Lohengrin's own unconscious mind, is that Elsa is potentially the repository or storehouse for knowledge which Lohengrin himself possesses, but of which he remains, and perhaps must remain, unconscious. That is, through her offer to share and to keep his secret he can possess a secret which remains, so far as his conscious mind is concerned, unknown even to him. Perhaps this is the gift, the true redemption, which Elsa is offering to him. If Lohengrin is the unwitting, unconscious perpetrator of a fraud which it would be dangerous even for him to acknowledge, if Lohengrin is deceiving himself, Elsa could redeem him from the danger of exposing this knowledge to both himself and others by keeping it a secret in the most inward sense, a secret of which even he remains unconscious.

This concept that Elsa is Lohengrin's own unconscious mind reveals not only the underlying similarity of the plots of *Lohengrin* and the *Ring*, it also contains the secret underlying their crucial distinction, i.e., the distinction between Wagner's romantic operas and his revolutionary music-dramas.

Taking into account our Ortrud-inspired thesis that what we call divine is merely a product of our very human and very natural desires which merely pose as divine, i.e., which our imagination falsely posits as divine, and that this knowledge is fated to rise from the silent depths to the light of full consciousness, Lohengrin can obtain redemption through Elsa, his unconscious mind, by committing the secret of his natural origin - which undermines religious faith - to her. He can do this also by making her guardian of the bitter knowledge that man's religious longing for redemption from reality is futile.

In this way she can become the muse for Lohengrin's (i.e., religion's) heir, the unconsciously inspired secular artist, who falls heir to religious feeling, religious longing for redemption from reality, when religious thought in the form of faith, belief, and dogma, must fall before the skepticism of modern science. As Bruennhilde tells Siegfried, what Wotan thought, she felt. The redemption of dying religious faith by art is, I believe, the key to both *Lohengrin* and the *Ring*. I believe also that this is the true foundation of Wagner's concept of redemption by love.

Before proceeding on to portion (11) of this essay, I interpolate at this juncture some concepts from my chapter on *Lohengrin* in the first draft of my comprehensive study of Wagner's ten canonical artworks, *The Wound that Will Never Heal*, in order to explain more completely what may lie behind Elsa's apparent collaboration with the villains of *Lohengrin*, Ortrud and Frederick. There are two primary clues to this mystery. The first is the poet Charles Baudelaire's accurate description of Wagner's Elsa as "the eternal Eve." Clearly, Elsa's curiosity, her breach of Lohengrin's trust, which forces the divine Lohengrin to banish her from his presence, and compels Lohengrin to withdraw from mankind, bears a striking similarity to Eve's breach of God the Father's injunction that neither she nor Adam should ever eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. It was Eve's breach of God's injunction which according to the *Book of Genesis* inspired God to banish Adam and Eve (i.e., mortal man) from paradise, where they had not known death, fear, or shame, i.e., they had not known "Noth".

One can't help noting also a curious similarity in the situation Eve creates by breaching faith to obtain divine - but prohibited - knowledge, and our contemporary situation in which man's historical acquisition of scientific knowledge has eroded religious faith. This latter situation is like a second "Fall". It is this second "Fall" of which Elsa stands guilty by forcing Lohengrin to share with her (and with the world) the secret of his true identity and origin.

Here we find our second clue to the mystery of Elsa's collaboration with Ortrud's conspiracy to subvert faith in a transcendent god. The key is Elsa's remark to Lohengrin during their night of love, quoted above, that "As you found me gravely accused [of fratricide, i.e., of killing her brother Godfrey], oh that I knew you also in distress ("Noth")." Elsa, in other words, is suggesting that her alleged crime of fratricide is in some sense equivalent to the crime of which Ortrud accuses Lohengrin, the crime of fraud, of being natural in origin yet posing as divine.

For, if we acknowledge that Eve may be the basis for Wagner's characterization of Elsa, some extraordinary consequences follow from pursuing this metaphor to its ultimate conclusion. I am suggesting that it is possible that, just as Lohengrin may actually be guilty of the crime of fraud of which Ortrud accuses him, Elsa also may in some sense be guilty of the crime against her brother Godfrey of which Ortrud accuses her. For Elsa's relationship with her brother Godfrey may be Wagner's metaphor for Eve's relationship with her brother (and perhaps, lover?) Adam. In this case Ortrud's accusation that Elsa killed her brother Godfrey is not literally true, but only figuratively true, since, by sharing with her brother Adam the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Eve is supposed to

have introduced death, fear, and shame into the world. Perhaps the nature of Elsa's crime is that she shared this fatal knowledge with Godfrey, a crime which prompted Lohengrin to offer her and her brother Godfrey – as Christ offers all the heirs of Eve's original sin - redemption, the restoration of lost innocence. There is of course no direct evidence for any of this reading in the actual libretto of *Lohengrin*, so we can only speculate on what Wagner may have had in mind, but there is a vast quantity of circumstantial evidence in the libretto, and highly suggestive documentary evidence in Wagner's relevant writings and recorded remarks, which point in this direction.

To grasp this concept, however, we need only consider that Eve's breach of God's injunction against the acquisition of divine, forbidden knowledge was the necessary precondition, or source of inspiration, for the redemption from original sin which Christ the savior is supposed to have offered mortal man. In other words, if we understand religious belief as merely a product of man's artistic imagination, as Feuerbach did, then those byproducts of the power of our mind (i.e., of Alberich's ring) such as our ability to foresee our inevitable death, and the fear of death which is foresight's consequence, can be considered the muse which inspired us to create those gods who in our imagination are capable of redeeming us from death and from fear. It is precisely this promise of actual redemption from the real world which Feuerbach proclaims a fraud perpetrated by man against himself. Similarly, in Wagner's view, modern science's erosion of religious faith is the precondition for the redemption Wagner offers secular man, Wagner's substitute for lost religious faith, his music-dramas. I will revisit this problem in the final pages of this essay.

One last helpful suggestion before returning to our main argument is that in my much more detailed discussion of *Lohengrin* in the first draft of my book *The Wound that Will Never Heal*, I propose that Frederick's collaboration with his wife Ortrud to undermine faith in Lohengrin provided Wagner with a prototype for his far more developed concept that Alberich, the proponent of the bitter truth, is the champion of Erda's – i.e., Mother Nature's – objective reality, and thus is figuratively speaking the father of modern science, represented in the *Ring* by Alberich's son Hagen.

In that chapter the pagan Ortrud's banishment by the Christian hero Lohengrin's magical spell is construed as a metaphor for Christianity's renunciation of Mother Nature (Erda), and its necessary censorship of scientific inquiry. As Feuerbach said: [eoc219] “The heathen philosophers busied themselves with the natural origin of things. But the Christian religious consciousness abhorred this idea as heathen, irreligious, and substituted the practical or subjective idea of creation which is nothing else than a prohibition to conceive things as having arisen in a natural way, an interdict on all physical science.” Frederick's collaboration with Ortrud to restore her lost power – i.e., restore the rights of Mother Nature - by eliminating the Christian usurpers' artistic spell (which creates the Folk's bond of loyalty with Lohengrin since he offers them emotional consolation), is discussed in the light of its possible influence on Wagner's conception that Alberich is in alliance with Erda – in the sense of affirming objective knowledge of Mother Nature - to overthrow the gods of Valhalla.

**(11) HOW WAGNER'S MUSICAL MOTIFS - THE LANGUAGE OF THE UNCONSCIOUS – PRESERVE THE SECRET OF THE MUSIC-DRAMATIST'S AIM**

Musical feeling for Wagner is, of course, the mainspring of all artistic and religious creativity and imagination. Interestingly, and apropos of Elsa's status as Lohengrin's unconscious mind, Wagner associates musical composition, in his sense of the term, with unconscious, involuntary artistic inspiration, as we experience it in our own dreams:

**(11A) “Where creation passes from consciousness to an unconscious act, i.e., where the poet no longer chooses his esthetic form, but it's imposed on him by inner vision (Anschauung) of the idea itself ... lies the difference between the poet and musician.”** (9-12/70 Beethoven; PW V, 63-64).

Similarly, the dream is clearly our own product, yet we do not feel consciously responsible for its events, which seem like a divine revelation or unconsciously produced artistic creation, welling up from our deepest, most hidden, most secret self. The poet, Wagner says, realizes his aim by keeping it a secret to himself, and thus redeems his ego:

**(11B) “The poet can only realize his aim when he keeps it a secret to himself, i.e., when he no longer speaks it in a language wherein alone it could be imparted as an intellectual aim.”** (50-1/51 Opera and Drama; PW II, 233-234).

We might say more accurately that thanks to the poet's unconscious artistic inspiration his aim is kept secret even “from” himself, rather than merely “to” himself. Lohengrin's true motives, his true aim in returning to earth to find his own redemption in Elsa, may have remained secret even from him.

And what is the language that can keep the poet's aim secret, as Elsa offers to keep Lohengrin's secret, if not music? It is, specifically, Wagner's musical motifs which keep this secret, by taking on the burden of carrying our most tragic thought, our unbearable consciousness of the bitter truth, and sublimating it into feeling, thus temporarily redeeming us from Alberich's curse of consciousness:

**(11C) “The poet's [Wagner's] aim is to exhibit characters' strengthened acts through exposing their motives to feeling [through Wagner's musical motifs]. Understanding [say, Alberich, or Light-Alberich] is thus driven ... to wed itself with that element [music] which can take the poet's aim into itself as a fertilising seed, to shape this seed as the redeeming utterance of feeling [love]. (...) The Eternal Womanly draws manly understanding out of its egoism.”** (50-1/51 Opera and Drama; PW II; 235-236)

By receiving Wotan's confession Bruennhilde, Wotan's unconscious mind and wish-womb, becomes the means whereby his bitter thought is repressed and sublimated into feeling. It is Bruennhilde, the creator of his unconscious language music, who converts his thoughts into Wagner's musical motifs, thus redeeming them from egoism, redeeming his conscious purposiveness and motivation into involuntary dreaming. In this way she

can keep the secret of Wotan's divine "Noth" ("Goetternoth"), the secret which according to Wotan must remain "forever unspoken". And what was Wotan's hidden aim which he confessed to Bruennhilde in the expectation it would remain forever unspoken? It was his acknowledgment that the gods, i.e., man's religious beliefs, are predestined to destruction, and his hope for a hero freed from those disadvantages which foredoomed the gods' rule, in whom divinity can in some sense live on:

**(11D) "... to me alone was Wotan's thought revealed. The thought which I could never name, the thought I did not think but only felt ... ! Because that thought ... was but my love for you [i.e., her inspiration of the artist-hero Siegfried's redemptive art]."**

Compare Bruennhilde's remark with Elsa's rumination on her inability to name Lohengrin and the similarity of their situations becomes clear: "Elsa: [to Lohengrin] Is this but love? What can I call it - this word, so ineffably delightful as, alas! Your name, which I must never know, by which I can never call my greatest treasure! (...) If only in the seclusion of love's peace [i.e., unconscious artistic inspiration of the poet by his muse, music] you'd permit me to pronounce it! (...) Alone, when no one is awake, never will the world hear it!" Elsa has, in effect, asked Lohengrin to let her help him maintain his taboo on knowledge by sharing that knowledge with her in sexual union, their "night of love."

An odd concept perhaps, but sexual love as a metaphor for the exchange of a hidden hoard of knowledge is the very essence of Wotan's bond with Erda (Mother Nature), since Wotan joins her in sexual union both to learn the full truth about his fearful fate, and also to learn from her how he can forget it, i.e., forget his fear of it. And of course Siegfried will in turn learn from his lover and muse Bruennhilde - the product of Wotan's union with Erda - the meaning of fear, and through her love's blessing forget the fear she taught him:

**(12) WOTAN'S CONFESSION TO BRUENNHILDE – BASED ON ELSA'S OFFER TO PRESERVE LOHENGRIN FROM HARM BY KEEPING THE SECRET OF HIS IDENTITY AND ORIGIN FOR HIM [I.E., KEEPING IT SECRET EVEN FROM HIM] – IS A METAPHOR FOR REPRESSION OF UNBEARABLE KNOWLEDGE (THE "SEED" OF THE DRAMATIST'S AIM) INTO THE WOMB OF THE CREATIVE UNCONSCIOUS AND ITS SUBLIMATION INTO INSPIRED ART**

The key difference between the plots of *Lohengrin* and the *Ring* is that, where Lohengrin refused to share with his lover and potential redeemer Elsa the secret of his true identity, the burden of his conscious ego, the burden of his guilt which would bring him harm ("Noth") if it were made known to the world (and perhaps to him), Wotan acquiesces in Bruennhilde's plea to hear his confession of his divine "Noth".

Wotan's divine "Noth" is his tragic acknowledgment that the gods - in punishment for

their (i.e., our) hubris in proclaiming their autonomy from Mother Nature (Erda) and her law that all things must end - are predestined to destruction by Alberich's son Hagen. Hagen is Wagner's metaphor for modern science, which is born of our collective historical acquisition of a hoard of objective knowledge of ourselves (Wotan) and our world (Erda). It is scientific knowledge which will bring to an end the millennia old dependence of mankind on belief in divine beings.

Through Wotan's confession to Bruennhilde his conscious ego finds redemption in his unconscious mind by repressing his unbearable thoughts into it, and in this way also Wotan's aim in seeking redemption from his guilt through the free artist-hero Siegfried is kept a secret:

**(12A) "Wotan: O righteous disgrace! O shameful sorrow! Gods' direst distress ("Goetternoth")! Gods' direst need ("Goetternoth")! (...) Grief neverending! The saddest am I of all living things! Bruennhilde: Father! Father! Tell me what ails you? (...) Confide in me: I'm true to you; see, Bruennhilde begs you. Wotan: If I let it be spoken aloud [i.e., consciously], shall I not loosen my will's restraining hold? Bruennhilde: To Wotan's will you speak when you tell me what you will: who am I if not your will? Wotan: What in words I reveal to no one, let it stay unspoken for ever: with myself I commune when I speak with you."**

Wotan's aim, as confessed to Bruennhilde, is kept a secret specifically from Siegfried, who, thanks to Bruennhilde, will inherit knowledge of Wotan's aim, his intent and purpose, without becoming conscious of its influence upon him. Wotan's hoard of unbearable knowledge, acquired from Erda (Mother Nature), and embodied ultimately in Alberich's ring which Siegfried inherited from the dead Fafner, will be Siegfried's unconscious source of artistic inspiration. This is another way of saying that Alberich's curse on his ring is Siegfried's unconscious source of artistic inspiration, which is one reason that Siegfried will later say that the ring contains the virtue of all of his deeds, i.e., his heroic deeds of art. That Alberich's ring was also the hidden source of inspiration for Wotan's waking dream, the gods' heavenly abode Valhalla, was of course implicit in the fact that the ring motif transforms into the Valhalla Motif, the Valhalla motif being a variant of the ring motif, just as Wotan - Light-Alberich - is himself a reflection of Alberich.

And in this way Wotan's (i.e., mankind's) unconscious mind Bruennhilde - the source of that collective dreaming through which the primal Folk involuntarily created the gods, and also the source of the individual artist's unconscious inspiration - becomes the guardian of those religious mysteries which according to Feuerbach it is the purpose and destiny of science to expose to the light of day:

**(12B) [eoc140-141] "Feeling [Bruennhilde] is the dream of nature [her mother Erda]; and there is nothing more blissful, nothing more profound than dreaming. But what is dreaming? The reversing of waking consciousness [Wotan's redemption from his conscious ego, i.e., redemption from the Alberich in Light-Alberich's soul]. ... in dreaming, I take the spontaneous action of my own mind for an action upon me**

**from without, my emotions for events, my conceptions and sensations for true existences apart from myself [Wotan speaks to himself when he speaks to Bruennhilde]. (...) It is the same ego, the same being in dreaming as in waking; the only distinction is that in waking, the ego acts on itself; whereas in dreaming it is acted on by itself as by another being. (...) Feeling is a dream with the eyes open; religion the dream of waking consciousness [think here of Wotan's waking dream Valhalla, the abode of the gods built for them by the giants while they slept, and dreamed]: dreaming is the key to the religious mysteries."**

And Feuerbach provides further evidence not only that Bruennhilde, the god Wotan's daughter, is also Wotan's unconscious mind, but also suggests a reason why Wagner conceived of Bruennhilde as Erda's - Mother Nature's - daughter:

**(12C) [Ier310-11] "The object of religion is nature [Erda], which operates independently of man and which he distinguishes from himself. But this nature is more than the phenomena of the outside world; it also includes man's inner nature [Wotan's unconscious mind Bruennhilde], which operates independently of his knowledge and his will. This statement brings us to our most crucial point, the true seat and origin of religion. The ultimate secret of religion is the relationship between the conscious and unconscious, the voluntary and involuntary in the same individual. (...) Man with his ego or consciousness stands at the brink of a bottomless abyss; that abyss is his own unconscious being ... ."**

**(13) HOW WOTAN - BY PLANTING HIS UNCONSCIOUS WISH-WOMB BRUENNHILDE WITH THE "SEED" OF HIS CONFESSION, GOD'S "WORD" - GIVES BIRTH TO WOTAN'S REINCARNATION AS THE INNOCENT ARTIST-HERO AND HOPED-FOR SAVIOR OF THE GODS SIEGFRIED**

Wotan confesses to Bruennhilde the entire burden of his corrupt history, the fatal knowledge he obtained from her mother Erda (Nature). The content of Wotan's confession is the entire historical context from which the Wotan's desired must be freed in order to make this hero the free, fearless, naked man of Wotan's imagination. Erda has foretold that the gods are predestined to destruction by Alberich's curse through Alberich's agent and son Hagen. This is just another way of saying that belief in gods is predestined to destruction by the inevitable advancement in scientific knowledge. Wotan's free hero must therefore no longer be vulnerable to contradiction by the truth; i.e., the hero mustn't suffer the disadvantage of religious belief, which stakes an indefensible claim on the truth.

Wotan also confesses to Bruennhilde his futile longing to transcend himself, to lose his true nature and take on a new nature (somewhat in the Christian sense of being dead to this life and reborn in the spirit), to create a hero free from all that Wotan loathes in himself, his egoism and fear and guilt:

**(13A) "I find with loathing always only myself in all that encompass."**

Therefore Wotan's hero can only freely perform the act which Wotan himself is unable to do, that act which Wotan hopes will redeem the gods (i.e., religion) from destruction, if the hero is not conscious of Wotan's influence upon him. Wotan's hero must do Wotan's will, i.e., act upon Wotan's fear of the truth, without becoming conscious that it is Wotan's fear which motivates him. It is as if by storing knowledge of his loathsome identity and history in his unconscious mind Bruennhilde Wotan could repress his intolerable self-knowledge into his unconscious mind and forget it, thus losing himself and his guilt in her. Another way of understanding this is that Siegfried must wholly sever art, our aesthetic intuition (Bruennhilde), from its tainted roots in religion.

Wotan, godhead, wishes in other words that his unconscious mind Bruennhilde will free him from the baggage of his conscious mind, his egoism, and his corrupt history, so that he can be reborn in innocence as the artist-hero Siegfried, the naked man. Siegfried the artist-hero is Wotan (the embodiment of religious belief), stripped of his historical context and fate. Siegfried is Wotan minus consciousness of his true identity and heritage. It is Bruennhilde's offer to receive Wotan's confession of his divine "Noth", his unspoken secret, which made this possible, since Bruennhilde can now keep Wotan's secret a secret even from Wotan himself, in his new incarnation as Siegfried.

Since Bruennhilde won Wotan's agreement to confess the secret of his divine "Noth" to her, the secret which must remain forever unspoken, only after she called herself his "will" and he acknowledged her as such, Wotan's following remark to Bruennhilde acquires an immense significance:

**(13B) "... what use would my own will [Bruennhilde] be to me? I cannot will a free man ... ."**

Wotan repeats this question rhetorically when confronting Bruennhilde's mother Erda for the second and last time in *Siegfried* Act Three Scene One. Erda had suggested that if Wotan is seeking knowledge he should consult her daughters the Norns, who spin the rope of her knowledge of all that was, is, and will be, i.e., the knowledge of natural law, or fate. Wotan protested that he could not accept the Norns' knowledge because they spin their rope "... in thrall to the world", i.e., in thrall to the truth. Since Wotan has renounced reality, renounced the truth, and thus sinned against Mother Nature and her knowledge, Erda suggests that Wotan seek knowledge instead from their daughter Bruennhilde, precisely because if Wotan can't live with the truth, Bruennhilde can offer him redemption from it. Wotan then asks:

**(13C) "What use would it be to question her [Bruennhilde]?"**

Bruennhilde's (Wotan's will's) use to Wotan is precisely that through her he can will a free man, Siegfried, the man freed from Wotan's burden of conscious knowledge, into existence. This is implicit in Wotan's answer to his own question, as he exultantly tells Erda:

**(13D) “The wisdom of primeval mothers draws towards its end: your knowledge (“Wissen”) wanes before my will [Bruennhilde].”**

Thanks to Bruennhilde, who holds Siegfried’s knowledge of his true identity, origin, and fate for him, Siegfried’s (i.e., Wotan’s) conscious mind will be freed from all that Wotan loathed about himself, and freed from Wotan’s – religious man’s – fear of truth. It was that fear which originally inspired man to involuntarily invent and worship gods and invest those gods with unquestioning faith.

Siegfried’s heroism, his fearlessness, therefore depends upon Bruennhilde’s gifts. Through her, his unconscious mind which protects him from the wounds of consciousness, Siegfried remains unconscious of his true identity as heir to Wotan’s legacy and fear, because Wotan has bestowed the burden of keeping the secret of his own tragic history and fate upon his daughter Bruennhilde, whom Wotan himself has acknowledged is his creative unconscious:

**(13E) “Wotan: [to Bruennhilde’s Valkyrie sisters] No one, as she did, knew my innermost thinking; no one, as she did, watched at the well-spring of my will; she herself was my wish’s life-giving womb.”**

Siegfried is freed from Wotan’s knowledge and fear, and is a hero, only because, as he tells Fafner, he doesn’t know who he is:

**(13F) “Siegfried: [to Fafner] I still don’t know who I am” (Siegfried, Act II, Scene 2; GS VI, 138)**

That Siegfried doesn’t know who he is, and is granted protection from those wounds of consciousness which paralysed Wotan into inaction, Siegfried can thank Bruennhilde, his unconscious mind, who – as she tells Siegfried – knows who he is for him:

**(13G) “Bruennhilde: [to Siegfried] Your own self am I, if you but love me in my bliss. What you don’t know I know for you.” (Siegfried, Act III, Scene 3; GS VI, 168).**

The related concept, that Bruennhilde protects Siegfried from Wotan’s foreknowledge of his fated end (taught to Wotan by her mother Erda), and thus redeems Siegfried from Wotan’s fear of the end, is dramatically illustrated by Bruennhilde’s confession to Hagen and Guenther that, unbeknownst to Siegfried, her magic protects him only at the front from wounds:

**(13H) “Bruennhilde: [to Hagen and Guenther] Not a single art was known to me that did not help to keep his [Siegfried’s] body safe! Unknown to him [i.e., Siegfried was unconscious of the fact that:], he was tamed by my magic spells which ward him now against wounds. Hagen: And so no weapon can harm him? Bruennhilde: In battle, no! Never, I knew, would he yield to a foe, never, fleeing, present his back, so I spared it the spell’s protection.”**

In other words, Bruennhilde protects Siegfried only at the front, presumably from Wotan's foreknowledge of the gods' inevitable, shameful end, and thus frees Siegfried from Wotan's paralysing fear. It is noteworthy in this regard that Bruennhilde describes herself to Wotan – who unlike Siegfried does feel fear, and thus figuratively does turn his back to and run from what he fears – as:

**(13I) “She who, in battle, guards Wotan’s back ... .”**

**(14) THE INFLUENCE OF FEUERBACH’S CONCEPTION OF THE HINDU CREATOR-GOD BRAHMA, AND OF WAGNER’S IDIOSYNCRATIC READING OF AESCHYLUS’ *PROMETHEUS BOUND*, UPON WAGNER’S CHARACTERIZATION OF BRUENNHILDE AS WOTAN’S UNCONSCIOUS MIND**

Lest anyone remains skeptical of this new interpretation of the nature of Bruennhilde's relationship with her father Wotan and lover Siegfried, consider the following passages from Feuerbach, from Wagner, and from Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. We find here plausible sources for Wagner's concept that Bruennhilde redeems Wotan by keeping secret, even from him, the intolerable burden of his self-knowledge, and the foreknowledge taught by her mother Erda. That is, we find in these two sources a basis for our reading that, by virtue of storing Wotan's abhorrent self-knowledge in his unconscious mind Bruennhilde through his confession to her, Wotan is reborn in innocence as the fearless, creative artist-hero Siegfried.

Feuerbach tells us, for instance, that:

**(14A) [tdi250] “*Maya* [illusion, Wahn] **once drove away the melancholy of the ancient Brahma** [the world-creator God in Hinduism] **so that a depressed person** [say, Wotan during his confession to Bruennhilde] **was changed into a creator of the world.**” [i.e., the melancholy and self-destructive Wotan was transformed into the fearless, creative, ever-loving artist-hero Siegfried who takes aesthetic possession of the terrible world – Alberich's hoard and ring – through his musically inspired art]**

The equivalent concept in the *Ring* allegory would be that man's religious impulse, incarnate in Wotan, is depressed and paralysed into inaction by religious faith's impotence in the face of Alberich's ever growing hoard of scientific knowledge which Wotan himself (historical man) has continued to increase. However, if that religious impulse is reborn in the creative artist-hero Siegfried, who unlike Wotan stakes no false claim to the truth (Alberich's ring) which is subject to contradiction, Siegfried can be freed from religious man's paralysing fear and freely create redemptive artworks.

Cosima recorded the following remark by Wagner which expresses a virtually identical concept, applied in this case however to Prometheus, whose name, significantly, means “foresight” or “foreknowledge”:

**(14B) “Prometheus’s words ‘I took knowledge away from man’ ... gave me a profound insight; knowledge, seeing ahead, is in fact a divine attribute, and man**

[Wotan] **with this divine attribute is a piteous object, he is like Brahma before the Maya [illusion; Wahn] spread before him the veil of ignorance, of deception; the divine privilege is the saddest thing of all.**" (CT 11/29/71)

It is noteworthy that Wotan, suffering from the foreknowledge of the gods' inevitable end taught by Erda, and suffering also from his acknowledgment that any hero who attempts to redeem the gods (i.e., man's religious impulse) from its predestined destruction will suffer the same fate as the gods, calls himself, just prior to his confession to Bruennhilde, "the saddest ... of all living things."

Just to be certain I wasn't reading too much into Wagner's remark about Prometheus, I checked the following relevant passage from an English translation of *Prometheus Bound*:

**(14C) "Prometheus: Through me mankind ceased to foresee death. Leader of the Chorus: What remedy could heal that sad disease? Prometheus: Blind hopes I made to dwell in them. Leader of the Chorus: O merciful boon to mortals."**

Here we find, again, that just as Erda taught Wotan fear by granting him foreknowledge of his end, yet granted Wotan freedom from the very fear she taught by bearing Wotan's daughter Bruennhilde (evidently in answer to Wotan's hope to learn from Erda how he can end his fear), so Prometheus, who like Erda grants man the divine gift of foresight, also redeems man from the fear inherent in foresight of the end, by inspiring blind hopes. These blind hopes are equivalent to Feuerbach's veil of Maya, self-deception, illusion, which blind man to the terrible truth. This veil of Maya is, in Wagner's thought-world, the religious beliefs and artworks which man's anguish and fear of the truth inspires his imagination to create. In the *Ring* this veil of Maya or Wahn is represented by Loge's cunning and Loge's protective ring of fire around Bruennhilde. Only the inspired music-dramatist can gain privileged access to the terrible truth hidden within the unconscious behind the veil of Maya, the veil of self-deceit and ignorance.

**(15) WOTAN'S PUNISHMENT OF – AND SEPARATION FROM – BRUENNHILDE, IS BASED UPON LOHENGRIN'S PUNISHMENT OF – AND SEPARATION FROM - ELSA**

We'll conclude with a consideration of the implications of Lohengrin's farewell to Elsa, in the light of its apparent influence on Wagner's conception of Wotan's farewell to Bruennhilde. As all veteran Wagnerians know, almost the entire third act of *The Valkyrie* is taken up with Bruennhilde's eloquent plea to her angry father Wotan that if he must leave her and forever cut himself and the gods off from her, he should at least insure that if she is to be wakened and won by a man, this man be a true hero, i.e., an artist-hero worthy of the authentic muse. Elsa's plea with Lohengrin for clemency is somewhat different but is, I hope to show, conceptually identical to Bruennhilde's plea. Both are, of course, to be punished for breaching the allegedly divine being's trust:

**(15A) “Elsa: [to Lohengrin] You mustn’t turn from my bitter renunciation; I lie here to receive your punishment. (...) If she atones by misery for her great guilt, do not deprive the wretch of your presence! Do not reject me, however great my crime! Do not, ah! Do not leave me, wretched that I am! Lohengrin: There is only one punishment for your crime! (...) We shall be separated, torn asunder: this is your punishment and atonement!”** (Act III, Scene 3; GS II, 111)

**(15B) “Wotan: Now I must shun you and nevermore share any whispered council with you [one thinks here not only of Wotan’s confession, but also of Elsa’s insistence that Lohengrin share his secret with her]: divided, we may not act in close concert; wherever there’s life and breath, the god may no longer meet you.”**

The remainder of this essay will trace the surprising implications of the similarity in Elsa’s and Bruennhilde’s situation.

## **(16) WAGNER’S MUSIC-DRAMA AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR RELIGIOUS FAITH, IN THE MODERN, SECULAR, SCIENTIFIC WORLD**

The people are plunged into consternation by Lohengrin’s withdrawal from their world. If religion’s blessing must leave them, where will they find solace?:

**(16A) “The People: [To Lohengrin] Woe! That you must leave us, you noble man, whom God sent! If heaven’s blessing is to leave us, where then shall we find solace? (...) What sore Noth you inflict upon us!”** (Act III, Scene 3; GS II, 111)

The Folk will find solace, according to Wagner, in unconsciously inspired art, Wagner’s music-drama, which is the sole place in which God, whom our own skepticism has banished, can find refuge in the modern, secular, scientific world. And of course when we speak of God now, we are really speaking of the unconscious artistic inspiration through which the Folk first involuntarily deceived themselves by inventing their gods and then proclaiming their gods to be real, existing beings, the true foundation of reality. As Feuerbach put it: [ler183] “... unless religion enters in, an artist merely expects his images to be faithful and beautiful; he does not claim that a semblance of reality is reality itself. Religion, on the other hand, deceives people, or rather people deceive themselves in religion; for it does claim that the semblance of reality is reality, that an image is a living being. But this being lives only in the imagination ... .”

According to Wagner, when religious faith, belief in its truth, is in decline, when God (i.e., our belief in God) must leave us, the religious longing for transcendent meaning and value lives on, reborn, deep in the inmost heart of the individual artist, whose aesthetic or musical sense magically takes possession of our hoard of knowledge – our hoard of experience – of the outer world, in order to redeem that world from cold science’s claim to it. Similarly, Siegfried takes possession of Alberich’s ring, Tarnhelm, and hoard, after killing Fafner, who represents – as we shall see shortly – Wotan’s fear of the truth. In this way Siegfried is unwittingly spurred to action, to take the ring from Fafner, by Wotan’s fear that if Alberich regains the ring he will use its power to destroy the gods.

This I believe is the reason why Lohengrin and Wotan withdraw from involvement in the world, leaving Godfrey and Siegfried, respectively, their heirs. In both cases also, the allegedly divine being separates himself from the heroine ostensibly to punish her for her disobedience, just as God the Father punished Adam and Eve, but particularly Eve, for stealing God's prerogative, knowledge, by exiling them from paradise. It is well to recall here that the very essence of Hans Sachs' confession to Eva (Eve) during his Act Two cobbling song in *Mastersingers* is his exhortation to her to compensate man for the exile from paradise her breach of God's trust brought down us, by inspiring the artist-hero Walther, through his morning dream, to produce the mastersong, or music-drama, that "Wahn" which will redeem the Folk from consciousness of their mortality. As Sachs suggests, the shoes he cobbles are a metaphor for art as a substitute for religious faith, since a well-fitting shoe (i.e., an authentically inspired work of art) makes us unconscious of the gravel beneath our feet, unconscious of our mortality, so that we seem to have regained the paradise first lost to us through Eve's transgression.

As Wotan confessed to Bruennhilde, the downfall of the gods at the hands of Alberich's son Hagen, i.e., at the hands of modern science, is inevitable. Therefore it was inevitable that both Elsa and Bruennhilde would breach the divine being's trust. But this was the only means to free Wagner's new religion, his music-drama, from the constraints of religious faith which made it vulnerable to science. The breach of faith in religion, the second Fall, was the necessary precondition and source of inspiration for Wagner's creation of our second possibility of redemption from reality, the music-drama.

In Wagner's thought-world Eve therefore becomes the archetype for the muse of his art, man's secular substitute for lost religious faith. The true source of Wagner's artistic inspiration might well be his subliminal acknowledgment that man's religio-artistic impulse expresses a futile longing to restore lost innocence:

**(16B) "The state of innocence could not come to men's consciousness until they had lost it. ... the yearning ... and struggle for its reattainment, is the soul of the whole movement of civilization ... . It is the impulse to depart from a generality that seems hostile to us [i.e., the real world], to arrive at egoistic satisfaction in ourselves... ."** (1-2/49 Jesus of Nazareth: SS XI, 305; PW VIII, 320)

I believe this explains why Lohengrin's and Wotan's punishment of the heroine's transgression in breaching the allegedly divine trust and faith ultimately becomes, at least in Bruennhilde's case (and implicitly in Elsa's), her blessing. This is because thanks to Bruennhilde's severance from the gods (religion) she can now become the muse for Siegfried's heroic deeds of art, which are unfettered by the guilt of association with dying religious faith and belief. In other words, our exile from paradise and sense of having fallen, our "Noth", our feeling of a gap or breach in the world, is the ground of inspiration for Wagner's art. In effect, Alberich's inability to find love in the real world is Wagner's source of inspiration for his artificial substitute for lost love and innocence, his surrogate for Mother Nature, *The Ring of the Nibelung*. Art is for Wagner our veil of Maya, or Wahn, the veil of self-deception which protects us from the unbearable, harsh light of consciousness of our bitter existence.

Wagner himself asks:

**(16C) “Is religion dead?”**

No! he says:

**(16D) “It lives only at the primal source, the sole dwelling, the holiest inner chamber of the individual, where [there] never surged a conflict between the rationalist and the supernaturalist [i.e., between science and religion; between Alberich and Wotan].”** (64-2/65 On State and Religion; PW IV, 29-30)

Wagner told Cosima that in our modern world art must replace faith in supernatural beings:

**(16E) “In our times, R. continues, religion should seek to influence ethics, and allow faith to be represented by art, which can transform illusion into truth.”** (11/14/79 CD II, 395)

In the *Ring*, religious faith – which Feuerbach describes as merely a euphemism for fear of objective knowledge of the truth, and an expression of egoism [ler300], is represented by Fafner. As the guardian of Alberich’s hoard, Tarnhelm, and ring, Fafner represents religious faith’s taboo on freedom of inquiry. He neither exploits the power latent within Alberich’s ring and hoard, nor allows anybody else to do so, just as religious man’s faith, his fear of the truth, keeps a lid on the expression of anything, or the pursuit of any knowledge, which might contradict religious belief. And Alberich can’t hope to regain his hoard and ring until Fafner, man’s fear of the objective truth, no longer guards them.

It is Bruennhilde, of course, who teaches Siegfried the meaning of fear, the fear which Fafner failed to teach him. But it is also through the magic of Bruennhilde’s love that Siegfried is able to forget the fear she taught him. Wagner’s notion that in modern times his inspired art replaces lost religious faith explains, I think, why Bruennhilde inherits Fafner’s Serpent (Dragon) Motif, which is first heard when Alberich transforms himself into a serpent (or dragon) to display the Tarnhelm’s power to Wotan and Loge. This musical motif is Wagner’s musical metaphor for fear, the very fear Siegfried failed to learn from Fafner but learned instead from Bruennhilde. And of course, it follows from the logic of our interpretation that Siegfried learns Wotan’s fear from Bruennhilde as he is waking her, since Bruennhilde has now become the repository for Wotan’s hoard of fearful knowledge, knowledge which was so fearful to Wotan that he could not bear to speak it “aloud”.

According to Wagner the poet’s “wonder”, which is free from any claim to the power of truth, replaces religious wonder, or faith, which is based both on a false claim to possess the truth, and on fear of the actual truth, and fear of that doubt which might reveal the terrible truth:

**(16F) “(213-214) The poet’s wonder is distinguished from the wonder in religious dogma since it doesn’t upheave the nature of things [i.e. it isn’t supernatural], but makes nature comprehensible to feeling [i.e., we experience the tragic world through music]. (...) Religious wonder depends on its being incomprehensible, denying understanding. Absolute faith is demanded ... [as in Lohengrin’s prohibition on knowledge]. The poetizing intellect [the music-dramatist Wagner] wants to display a great connection of natural phenomena [or hoard of knowledge] in a swiftly understandable image ... [through his musical motifs, which in a flash of intuition carry the weight and power of every incident, symbol, or character with which they have been associated in the course of the drama]. The characteristic of religiously dogmatic wonder [faith] is that, through the obvious impossibility of explaining it, it tyrannously subjugates the understanding despite understanding’s instinctive search for explanation.”** [Whereas according to Wagner the inspired music-drama need not answer the question “why?” because it fully satisfies feeling without exposing those contradictions which compel feeling to rise to the level of thought] (64-2/65 On State and Religion; GS VIII, 28-29; PW VI, 33-34)

**(17) SIEGFRIED AND THE HEROINES ELSA AND BRUENNHILDE BREACH RELIGIOUS FAITH IN ORDER TO PRESERVE RELIGIOUS FEELING, TO REDEEM IT FROM THE THREAT OF SCIENTIFIC SKEPTICISM, IN THE HERO’S ART WHICH THEY WILL UNCONSCIOUSLY INSPIRE**

As Feuerbach said, religious faith, through its fear of truth, takes our reason prisoner by making inquiry into our articles of faith off-limits. This is a primary example of Wotan’s sin against all that was, is, and shall be, Erda’s knowledge of the real world:

**(17A) [eoc205] “The denial of a fact is not a matter of indifference; it is something morally evil – a disowning of something known to be true. Christianity made its articles of faith objective, i.e., undeniable, unassailable facts, thus overpowering the reason, and taking the mind prisoner [as Wotan and Loge take Alberich prisoner] by the force of external reality.”**

By killing Fafner, Wagner’s symbol for the stranglehold of fear which sustains unreasonable custom, tradition, and unquestioning religious faith, the artist-hero Siegfried frees human thought, and liberates musical feeling (Bruennhilde), the essence of our religious longing for transcendence, from its bond with dogmatic religious belief (the gods), so that the artist-hero can express himself freely:

**(17B) “(195) The poet’s [Wagner’s] necessary task is to represent the battle of the individual [Siegfried] to free himself from the state [Wotan’s spear of authority and law and custom] and religious dogma.. (...) (197) The first purely human freedom is manifested in breaking the bond of religious dogma [killing Fafner], forcing the state to grant thought’s freedom.”** (50-1/51 Opera and Drama; PW II)

Feuerbach’s following observations praising Eve’s breach of God’s trust, by offering man the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge which exiled him from the fool’s paradise of unquestioning religious faith, surely had a huge impact on Wagner’s characterization of

such heroines as Elsa, Bruennhilde, and of course Eva in *Mastersingers*. It is worth mentioning also that Wagner wrote the following to King Ludwig II about the anti-heroine Kundry in *Parsifal*: “What is the significance of Kundry’s kiss? – That, my beloved, is a terrible secret! You know of course the serpent of Paradise and its tempting promise: ‘Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.’ (...) Adam – Eve: Christ. – How would it be if I were to add to them: Anfortas – Kundry: Parsifal? But with considerable caution!”

In the passages from Feuerbach which follow we find a startling new clue which may help to explain why Wagner made Bruennhilde Erda’s (Nature’s) daughter, a clue which may also tell us something about the special influence which Ortrud (whom I take to be an as yet undeveloped model for Wagner’s Erda) has on Elsa: [tdi188] “To the noble human species she [Nature, i.e., Erda] gave reason. Faith alone she left defenceless because it is contrary to her.” And in Feuerbach’s following description of Eve as “reason”, and Adam as “faith” we find our intriguing clue, since if Feuerbach tells us that nature gave us reason and tells us in turn that Eve was reason, then it is clear that Eve is, figuratively speaking, Nature’s daughter:

**(17C) [tdi246-247] “Eve was reason, Adam was faith. “The curtain rises on the lost paradise of faith.” In the beginning faith was alone and in a condition of innocence ... . Adam developed a strong yearning for a female companion. God pitied his plight, took a rib out of the body of faith, and created for him Eve, that is, reason. (...) But alas, Eve! She seduced upright faith into plucking the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, and an angry god drove the pair out of paradise, the land of simple innocence. ... the lovely Eden of belief is lost forever.”**

This helps to explain also why so many of Wagner’s heroines, including Elsa, Bruennhilde, Isolde, and Kundry, collaborate in some sense with the apparent villains’ plans to expose the Wagnerian heroes, particularly his foolish, innocent heroes, to destruction. As Feuerbach put it: [tdi230] “It was high time that Adam had knowledge of the vulnerability of simple innocence, and gathered a more noble fruit.” Thus Feuerbach extolled Eve’s breach of God’s demand of faith as the basis for a revolution in our human existence, a revolution in which Wagner himself wished to participate:

**(17D) [tdi250] “... we should celebrate gratefully the day when Eve misled Adam, for she did it out of her love for us.” [tdi250-251] ‘An appeal to the fair sex’: Dear maidens and women! Take the noble ancients as your example and once again drive away theology [i.e., drive out the gods].”**

**(18) THANKS TO BRUENNHILDE, WOTAN IS REBORN IN SIEGFRIED AS MAN’S RELIGIOUS IMPULSE IS REBORN – FREED FROM THE CONTRADICTIONS OF RELIGIOUS DOGMA AND THE FEAR OF TRUTH WHICH INSPIRES RELIGIOUS FAITH – IN THE INSPIRED ARTIST**

Feuerbach and Wagner are in agreement that authentically inspired secular art can preserve religion’s non-dogmatic essence, its feeling, when religious thought, religion as

a body of beliefs which mistake self-deception for truth, can no longer be sustained in the face of modern science:

**(18A) “The yearning to renounce the world would necessarily impel him [i.e., the “truly religious man”, or the “higher man”], were there not (...) a certain distraction from the world’s earnestness [i.e., existential fear] which otherwise is ever present in thought. (...) What renders possible this noble illusion is a work of man-redeeming Wahn, which spreads wonders ... . [Such] Wahn must be candid and confess itself in advance for an illusion ... . [It] must never afford a loophole for bringing back life’s earnestness [existential fear] through any possible dispute about its provable foundation on fact, as religious dogma does. (...) This is fulfilled by art, (...) ... the kindly saviour [the music-dramatist Siegfried inspired by his muse Bruennhilde] who doesn’t really lead us beyond this life, but within life lifts us above it and shows it as a game of play ... .”** (64-2/65 On State and Religion: GS VIII, 28-29; PW IV, 33-34).

“The yearning to renounce the world would necessarily impel” Wotan were there not the alternative of Siegfried’s redemptive art, expressed by Wotan in his despairing, nihilistic confession to Bruennhilde that he now wills his end, the end of all his hopes, and the end of the gods, because the gods are predestined to destruction by Alberich’s son Hagen. In his despair Wotan is certain that Erda’s prophecy is true, that Hagen, Wagner’s metaphor for modern science, will inherit the godless world and utterly demolish Wotan’s ideal legacy. But Wotan is ultimately redeemed from his despair by Bruennhilde, Wotan’s will, before whom Erda’s foreknowledge of the gods’ end wanes, since Bruennhilde becomes the artist Siegfried’s muse of unconscious artistic inspiration.

In the following passages - which unquestionably deeply influenced Wagner – Feuerbach says more or less the same thing: religious faith is predicated on egoism and fear from which art is potentially free:

**(18B) ([Ier47] “The object of religion ... is not ... wonder, but ... blessing, i.e., ... god not as an object of astonishment, but of fear and hope; he is worshiped ... not because of those attributes that arouse astonishment and admiration, but because of those that establish and preserve human existence ... .”**

In other words, our existential fear (i.e., “the world’s earnestness which ... is ever present in thought”) is the basis for our worship of god, or gods:

**(18C) [Ier196] “... the religious imagination is not the free imagination of the artist, but has a practical egoistic purpose ... . (...) This feeling of anxiety, of uncertainty, this fear of harm that always accompanies man [expressed with special vigor by the Nibelung dwarf Mime, who has learned fear for Siegfried and is determined that Fafner will teach Siegfried the meaning of fear], is the root of the religious imagination ... .”**

**(18D) [Ier287] “When we explain religion by fear, we must ... take into account not only the lowest form of fear, fear of one natural phenomena or another, ... the fear that is circumscribed in time and space, but also the fear that is limited to no**

**particular object, the perpetual, ever present fear which embraces every conceivable misfortune, in a word, the infinite fear of the human soul.”**

I have no doubt that it is this universal fear described by Feuerbach which Siegfried, prompted by Mime, hoped but failed to learn from Fafner. It is this fear which Siegfried learned from Bruennhilde, and this same fear that he was able to forget through the magic of her loving inspiration of his heroic deeds of art.

Our most striking piece of evidence of the pervasive influence of Feuerbach on Wagner’s thinking on the subject of his art, especially as expressed in his musico-dramatic allegories (even long after 1854, when Wagner claims he renounced Feuerbach for the sake of Schopenhauer’s philosophy), is the following passage which more or less says the same thing that Wagner did in our passage “(18A)” quoted above from his 1865 essay *On State and Religion*:

**(18E) [ler180-181] “... a god is an imaginary being, a product of fantasy; and because fantasy is the essential ... organ of poetry, it may also be said that religion is poetry, that God is a poetic being. If religion is taken as poetry, may it not be inferred that to abolish religion, to break it down into its basic components, is to do away with poetry and all art? (...) My adversaries throw up their hands in horror at the hideous desolation to which my doctrine would reduce human life, since in their opinion it would destroy poetry along with religion and so deprive mankind of all poetic drive. (...) Far from annulling art, poetry, imagination, I deny religion only insofar as it is not poetry, but common prose. (...) In a sense it is poetry, but with one important difference: poetry and art in general do not represent their creations as anything but what they are, namely products of art, whereas religion represents its imaginary beings as real beings.”**

Wotan, Wagner’s metaphor for our religious impulse, our longing for gods, is reborn in his heir, the artist-hero Siegfried, as Lohengrin in a sense seems to be reborn in his heir, Elsa’s rejuvenated and redeemed brother Godfrey, whose redemption in some strange way seems to have depended on Lohengrin’s withdrawal from the world:

**(18F) “[Wotan] ... knows what Erda’s primeval wisdom doesn’t know, that he lives on in Siegfried (...) as the artist lives on in his work of art: ... the less trace it bears of the creative artist, so that through the artwork the artist himself is forgotten, ... the more satisfaction the artist feels.”** (11/4/64 Letter to King Ludwig II of Bavaria; SLRW; 626-627).

**(19) HOW GOD THE FATHER – I.E. MAN’S RELIGIOUS IMPULSE - FINDS REFUGE IN MUSIC WHEN HE CAN NO LONGER SUSTAIN BELIEF IN HIMSELF AS A FACT**

And, as Wagner and Feuerbach put it, when religion as a conceptual belief system falls to science, religious feeling, God, lives on in music. Religious faith, which once openly staked an indefensible claim on the power of truth (Alberich’s ring), now seeks refuge from the actual truth in the unconscious realm of tone:

**(19A)** “The men of science persuade us that Copernicus reduced the ancient church-belief to ruins with his planetary system, since it robbed God almighty of his heavenly seat. (...) ... our professors have done him much harm ... . Yet this approachless god had begot much within us, and when at last he [Wotan, or Lohengrin?] had to vanish, he left us, in eternal memory of him, MUSIC [Bruennhilde, or Elsa?]. (...) ... to us she gives the power of all regeneration and new-birth; but only while we hold her holy.” [Wagner here also calls music] “our last religion.” (12/25/79 Introduction to the Year 1880; PW VI, 34-35).

**(19B)** [eoc283] **Only where ... the distinction between the divine and human being is abolished** [i.e., when the gods are recognized by us as products of our own artistic imagination] **... is religion made a mere matter of feeling, or ... feeling the chief point of religion. The last refuge of theology therefore is feeling. God** [Lohengrin, or Wotan] **is renounced by the understanding** [Ortrud, or Alberich]; **he has no longer the dignity of a real object, of a reality which imposes itself on the understanding; hence he is transferred to feeling** [i.e., transferred to the artists Godfrey and Siegfried via Elsa and Bruennhilde, their musical inspiration]; **in feeling his existence is thought to be secure. And doubtless this is the safest refuge.”**

And, just so there is no mistaking Feuerbach’s point, that what he means by “feeling” is “music”, he tells us in the following passages: [eoc63] “What would man be without feeling? It is the musical power in man. (...) Just as man has a musical faculty and feels an inward necessity to breathe out his feelings in song; so, by a like necessity he in religion sighs and tears stream forth the nature of feeling as an objective, divine nature.”:

**(19C)** [ler291] **“Fortunately, despite his servitude to theology, Luther found, outside of religion or theology, antidotes to the power of sin, hell, the devil or ... divine wrath. ... he writes that music, too, gives man what otherwise only theology can obtain, namely, a tranquil and serene mind, that the devil, the author of all cares ...** [say, Alberich and his curse on the ring, the cause of Wotan’s fear?], **takes flight at the sound of music as he does at the word of theology.”**

## **(20) HOW LOHENGRIN AND WOTAN, REPRESENTATIVES OF MAN’S DYING RELIGIOUS FAITH, LEAVE THE ARTISTS GODFREY AND SIEGFRIED HEIR TO THEIR UNRESOLVED PROBLEM**

And so, in the end, Godfrey, like Siegfried, inherits a horn, sword, and ring:

**(20A)** **“Lohengrin:** [to Elsa] **When he** [Godfrey] **comes home and I am far from him in this life, this horn, this sword and this ring you shall give to him! ... by the ring he will remember me, who once freed you from shame and Noth** [i.e., Godfrey will inherit Lohengrin’s legacy, his futile quest to redeem the world from the knowledge which Eve gave Adam]! **Fare well (Leb Wohl)! Fare well! Fare well, my sweetest wife!”** (Act III, Scene 3; GS II, 112-113)

**(20B)** **“Wotan:** [to Bruennhilde] **Fare well, you valiant, glorious child! You, my heart’s most hallowed pride, fare well (Leb Wohl)! Fare well! Fare well! (...)** ... for

**one man alone shall woo the bride** [i.e., the artist-hero alone will inherit Wotan's hoard of fatal knowledge which he imparted to Bruennhilde in his confession, and inherit Wotan's futile desire to redeem himself from the truth], **one freer than I, the god!**" [Wotan, our religious impulse, was not free to breach faith and retrieve the ring from Fafner in order to keep Alberich from regaining its power, but the artist Siegfried is free to do so.]

I do not believe that what Lohengrin reveals to the world about his true identity and origin as a Grail knight and son of Parsifal - having been forced to expose this knowledge by Elsa's insistent questioning - is quite the truth. I believe the truth is contained in the ring which Lohengrin passes on to Elsa so that she can impart its secrets to Lohengrin's heir Godfrey. This is the ring which must serve to remind Godfrey of Lohengrin's futile quest to redeem Elsa from her shame and "Noth". And I believe this ring is a model for Alberich's ring and its curse, which will bring an end to the gods. When Siegfried retrieves Alberich's ring from the dead Fafner's cave but leaves Alberich's hoard behind, Alberich's ring in effect becomes Alberich's entire hoard of knowledge, and it is this to which the artist-hero Siegfried has fallen heir that he might transform it, through the magical "wonder" of his musically-inspired art, into a symbol of the love he shares with his muse Bruennhilde. Wagner felt that through the art of music he could reconcile us to the terrible world.

Before moving on to my final thoughts I present here four passages from the *Ring* which provide what I think is crucial evidence that Siegfried has in fact fallen heir not only to Alberich's hoard (which is self-evident), but more particularly to Wotan's hoard of knowledge which he learned from Erda and confessed to Bruennhilde. For both Alberich's hoarding of the earth's treasure in Nibelheim and Wotan's accumulation of a hoard of knowledge through his travels into and across the earth (Erda) are merely Wagner's metaphors for historical man's advancement in knowledge.

When, for instance, Wotan informs Bruennhilde that he is going to punish her for her disobedience and banish her from the abode of the gods, Bruennhilde asks her father: "Will you take away all that you ever gave me?" And Wotan answers: "He who subdues you will take it away?" I don't think it can properly be argued that what Bruennhilde alludes to is that Wotan gave Bruennhilde her virginity, which Siegfried's love will surely take away. I believe instead that Wotan and Bruennhilde are alluding to the hoard of knowledge which Wotan imparted to Bruennhilde, and which Siegfried will inherit when he wakes, woos, and wins her [there's some Stabreim for you!].

The following passages seem to confirm this:

**(20C) "Bruennhilde: [to Siegfried] What gods [i.e., Wotan] have taught me I gave to you, a bountiful hoard ("Hort") of hallowed runes."**

What Wotan taught to Bruennhilde, and what she imparted in turn to Siegfried, was surely the substance of his confession of his "unspoken" secret to her. In fact, in Wagner's study for the *Ring* entitled *The Nibelung Myth* (6-8/48; PW VII, 301-11), and

also in the prose sketch for *Siegfried's Death*, Wagner conflates the “secret lore” which Wotan taught her, and the “runes” which she imparted to Siegfried, with Bruennhilde’s own “knowledge”, with the “ring’s runes”, and with the Norns’, or “ur-law’s runes,” which is the same as saying Erda’s knowledge or “wissen.” And Bruennhilde declares that with Siegfried’s death these runes which she taught to Siegfried “come back to me.”

Since, thanks to Bruennhilde, Siegfried is the heir both to Alberich’s hoard of treasure and Wotan’s “bountiful hoard of hallowed runes”, it is no wonder that Bruennhilde hails him, at the height of ecstasy in their love duet in *Siegfried* Act Three, as:

**(20C) “Hoard (“Hort”) of the world”,**

and as the:

**(20D) “foolish hoard (“Hort”) of loftiest deeds.”**

For it is through Bruennhilde that Siegfried has fallen heir to Wotan’s hoard of knowledge of the world which Erda (Mother Nature) taught to him, a hoard of terrible knowledge which cannot harm Siegfried because Bruennhilde not only protects Siegfried from the wounds that might be caused by this knowledge, but through her protection these dangerous runes subliminally inspire the foolish Siegfried to create lofty deeds of redemptive art. Siegfried the artist-hero has indeed taken aesthetic, musical possession of Alberich’s hoard, transforming its horror into the inspiration of his art, which sublimates power and fear into loving bliss.

Two final pieces of evidence from the *Ring* provide further confirmation of our reading. As Siegfried prepares to leave Bruennhilde in order to undertake the heroic adventures (i.e., works of art) she has inspired, he has a premonition that he might himself inadvertently reveal the unspoken secret which Bruennhilde, his unconscious mind, keeps for him. Referring directly to the “bountiful hoard of hallowed runes” which Wotan taught to Bruennhilde, and which she in turn imparted to Siegfried, Siegfried tells her:

**(20E) “Siegfried: [to Bruennhilde] You gave me more, o wondrous woman [a possible reference to the “wonder” of Wagner’s musical motifs], than I know how to cherish [keep; or guard]: chide me not if your teaching left me untaught.”**

It appears that Siegfried is having a premonition that he will in some sense betray the unspoken secret which Bruennhilde, his unconscious mind, is keeping for him, and keeping from him. Siegfried’s remark that she should not chide him if her teaching left him untaught is strongly suggestive of the concept that Bruennhilde is his unconscious mind, since it is through our unconscious mind that we can possess and be subliminally influenced by knowledge which yet remains unconscious for us. Similarly, though the Woodbird – which in my interpretation is considered one of Wagner’s metaphors for music, specifically his musical motifs - taught Siegfried the “use” of Alberich’s hoard, Tarnhelm, and ring, Siegfried has already forgotten their use after emerging from

Fafner's cave with them: "What use you are I do not know: but I took you from the heaped-up hoard of the gold since goodly counsel counselled me to do so."

Our final evidence that Siegfried has unwittingly become the guardian of Wotan's unspoken secret, the hoard of knowledge he repressed into his unconscious mind Bruennhilde, Bruennhilde provides herself. Complaining to Hagen and Guenther of Siegfried's betrayal of her love (i.e., Siegfried's betrayal of Bruennhilde's function as his unconscious repository of Wotan's unspoken secret and muse of inspiration for his art), Bruennhilde describes this betrayal as follows:

**(20F) "Bruennhilde: "Where now is my wisdom against this bewilderment? Where are my runes against this riddle? Ah, sorrow! Sorrow! Woe, ah woe! All my wisdom I gave to him: in his power he holds the maid; in his bonds he holds the booty which, sorrowing for her shame, the rich man exultantly gave away."**

This is not the place to discuss the nature of Siegfried's betrayal of his muse Bruennhilde, since I discuss this subject at length in my essay *The 'Ring' as a Whole*. But it is clear from this final piece of evidence from the *Ring* libretto that the essence of Siegfried's betrayal of Bruennhilde is that he has in effect taken from her her wisdom and in a sense exposed it to view by giving her, his muse, and her knowledge, away to another man, Guenther. Siegfried had left the power of Alberich's ring in Bruennhilde's safekeeping, hidden behind Loge's protective ring of fire, the veil of Maya. But in betraying her love he forced the ring from her protective hands, exposing the hoard of runes hidden within the silent depths of his own unconscious - which had kept his secret in silence, unspoken - to the light of day, leaving him vulnerable to Alberich's curse.

We'll close this discussion now with a few final thoughts.

## **(21) HOW ELSA SHOWED WAGNER THE WAY TO HIS REVOLUTIONARY MUSIC-DRAMA, *THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG***

The sum of my argument is that Elsa's breach of Lohengrin's faith was Wagner's inspiration for the creation of his revolution in opera, the music-drama, as Wagner himself said:

**(21A) "This woman [Elsa] ... , who goes from worship [religious faith] to love [inspired art] by the outbreak of her jealousy ... - I had now discovered her: and that random arrow that I had shot at the target that I had sensed but not known was there was in fact my Lohengrin, whom I had to give up as lost if I was to find the certain path to the truly feminine that would one day bring redemption to me and everybody else, after the masculine egotism, even in its most exalted form, had broken in self-immolation in the face of it. Elsa, the woman, (...) made me a revolutionary in one stroke. She was the spirit of the folk to which I, too, as man and artist turned for my redemption."** (A Communication to my Friends: GS IV, 301-302; PW I, 347-348).

In the simplest terms, Wagner's transformation from the composer of relatively conventional romantic opera, into the creator of revolutionary music-dramas, is described by him as follows: "[Speaking of *Lohengrin* Wagner writes that:] my musical expression ... continues to be related only supersensually to language: a substantial, sensual relation between the two has escaped me till until now. But this is not something I have worked out theoretically – in spite of the fact that you will set eyes on my theory before you encounter the practical demonstration from which it derives: the theory came to me through my poem *Siegfried's Death* [the basis for *Twilight of the Gods*, the first part of the *Ring* poem which Wagner completed], in which I chanced quite spontaneously upon the language necessary for the music." (5/31/51 Letter to Adolf Stahr; SLRW; 224-225) In other words, after having completed his last romantic opera *Lohengrin*, in which according to Wagner the music's relationship to the drama and its words was still too mechanical or artificial, he attained in the writing of the *Ring* poem and the composition of its music an inseparable bond between music, drama, and word.

Wagner's metaphor for the drama and its words was the conscious male, and his metaphor for music was the intuitive female: "... if I wish to demonstrate that music (as a woman) must necessarily be impregnated by a poet (as a man), then I must ensure that this glorious woman is not abandoned to the first passing libertine, but that she is made pregnant only by the man who yearns for womankind with true, irresistible love." (11/25/50 Letter to Franz Liszt; SLRW; 220-221). Since this is so, it is my thesis that Lohengrin's refusal to share with Elsa the burden of his thoughts, his unspoken secret, presents a striking parallel with Wagner's notion that up through the creation of *Lohengrin* Wagner had still not discovered the secret of how to fuse music with the drama and its words sensually. Therefore Wotan's acquiescence in Bruennhilde's request that he confess the burden of his thoughts - the basis of Wagner's conception of his drama *The Ring of the Nibelung* - to her, likewise presents to us a remarkable parallel in the plot with Wagner's discovery of how to fuse his music (the female) with his drama (the male) through the musical motifs and continuous development of his music in the revolutionary music drama.

By giving his musical motifs (the woman Bruennhilde) the burden of carrying the dramatic characters' motives (i.e., Wotan's motives or aims, as expressed to her in his confession), Wagner was able to restore what he described as mythic naivete to his drama. The innocent, foolish Siegfried, who is naïve and acts entirely on unconscious instinct, is the product of Wotan's confession to Bruennhilde, since her music redeems Wotan's thought from its egoism and conscious intentionality. Wagner never spelled this out more clearly than in his following remark to Cosima: "Siegfried lives entirely in the present, he is the hero, the finest gift of the will [i.e., of Bruennhilde]." (3/12/72 CD I; 466) Here is how Wagner described music's restoration of modern drama's mythic potential, its naivete and innocence: "Through the fullest application of this legacy of our great masters [composers] we have [i.e., Wagner has] arrived at uniting Music so completely with the Drama's action, that this very marriage enables the action itself to gain that ideal freedom – i.e., release from all necessity of appealing to abstract reflection – which our great poets sought ... . By incessantly revealing to us the inmost motives of the action [i.e., Wotan's aim, the unspoken secret of his confession to Bruennhilde], in

their widest ramifications, Music at like time makes it possible to display that action itself in drastic definition: as the characters no longer need to tell us of their impulses or 'grounds of action' in terms of the reflecting consciousness, their dialogue thereby gains that naïve pointedness which constitutes the very life of Drama. ... while antique tragedy had to confine its dramatic dialogue to separate sections strewn between the choruses delivered in the orchestra – those chants in which music gave to the drama its higher meaning – in the modern orchestra, the greatest artistic achievement of our age, the archetypal element goes hand in hand with the action itself, unsevered from the dialogue, and in a profounder sense may be said to embrace all the action's motives [i.e., Wotan's aim] in its [Bruennhilde's, i.e. the musical motifs'] mother-womb." (2/73 Prologue to a Reading of *Twilight of the Gods*; PW V; 305-306).

Thus Siegfried's naivete, his innocence, his restored ability to act solely upon instinct rather than upon conscious reflection, the burden under which Wotan suffered, is the direct consequence of Wotan's confession of the burden of his unbearable conscious thoughts to Bruennhilde, the wish-womb of his unconscious, whose musical motifs redeem Wotan's thought from its intentionality, transforming historical man into mythical man. And Wagner could not have expressed this more clearly than in the following passage from *Opera and Drama*: "These melodic moments [i.e., musical motifs] ... will be made by the orchestra into a kind of guides to feeling through the whole labyrinthine building of the drama. At their [Bruennhilde's] hand we become the constant fellow-knowers of the profoundest secret of the poet's aim [i.e., of the unspoken secret Wotan confessed to Bruennhilde] ... ." (50-1/51 *Opera and Drama*; PW II; 346)

I believe it was for these reasons that Wagner concluded that:

**(21B) "I remain convinced that my Lohengrin (...) symbolises the most profoundly tragic situation of the present day, namely, man's desire to descend from the most intellectual heights to the depths of love, the longing to be understood instinctively, a longing which modern reality cannot yet satisfy. (...) This is where my art must come to the rescue: and the work of art that I had no choice but to conceive in this sense is none other than my Nibelung Poem."** (1/26/54 Letter to August Roeckel; SB VI, 66-67; SLRW, 306).

And that is how Elsa showed Wagner the way to Siegfried.

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