Abstract

In May 1849, Dresden was plunged into a brutal conflict between pro-democracy rebels and the authoritarian government. The destruction wrought by urban warfare was a tremendous shock; the *Dresdner Journal* wrote that it was ‘difficult to give a picture of the destruction’. Active among the revolutionary party was the composer Richard Wagner, who fled pursued by an arrest warrant when government forces retook the city. He was a witness to some of the bloodiest fighting of the conflict.

Wagner’s experience of the revolution had a profound effect on him, and it led him to the conception of an ‘artwork of the future’. Central to this new genre was a system of repeating musical melodies or motifs that could conjure reminiscences and forebodings on the part of the listener. This thesis argues that Wagner’s experience of the uprising was traumatic. Moreover, it argues that the system of musical motifs that Wagner theorized in the aftermath of the uprising can be understood in the light of modern theories of trauma as they are constituted in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Chapter 1 investigates the historical evidence for Wagner’s encounter with trauma. Chapter 2 establishes the parallels between Wagner’s theoretical conception of motifs and psychological theories of PTSD. Chapter 4 applies this approach to an analysis of a paradigmatic example of a flashback in *Götterdämmerung*. Chapter 3 investigates the ways in which Wagner revisited his earlier works in order to fit with this new theoretical conception. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the Norns’s scene in *Götterdämmerung* demonstrating how the motific processes at work in the scene reproduce the symptoms of PTSD. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes this Thesis by showing how even in a motific analysis that avoids interpreting Wagner’s motifs in terms of poetic meaning—in other words, in a ‘purely musical’ analysis of motifs—traumatic structures are reproduced.
For Trevor
Acknowledgements

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Much of this thesis was written during a difficult and solitary time, and it is no exaggeration to say that I could not have completed it without the love and support of my friends and family. In particular, I would like to thank the other members of my CHASE cohort at the OU. My parents, Clive and Joanne, and my sisters, Georgina and Alexandra have been there constantly to help me get through some of the difficult moments and to share in the enjoyable ones. I was particularly pleased to have the opportunity to show them something of what I’ve been up to when they attended the Wagner Society’s Young Lecturer Prize competition in 2020. Sheila, Mike, Helena, Neale, Fraser and Andrew welcomed me into their family during this PhD. Their love, support and advice has meant a great deal to me. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Christina. I hope that she knows that, more than anyone else, it is her I have to thank for getting me through this.
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### Note on Translations

When available, translated editions of prose texts have, in general, been used. All unattributed translations are my own.

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Abbreviations are presented in the form: [author surname], [abbreviated title], [volume], [page number]


Introduction

On the 3rd of May 1849, the city of Dresden was plunged into a bloody revolution that would cost hundreds of lives and leave hundreds more maimed and wounded. Arson and summary executions were commonplace, and the actions of both sides left deep scars in the fabric of the city. The rebels tore up the cobbles of the streets in order to barricade them. Troops loyal to the government circumvented these obstacles by tearing through the walls of the buildings beside the barricades. Summarizing the ruination caused by the conflict, the Dresdner Journal wrote: ‘it is difficult to give a picture of the devastation that has been wrought in the city. Nothing is left of the plaster, destroyed in countless places, the restoration of which is already being eagerly undertaken. Far greater is the damage to the buildings and artistic treasures.' The city was the home of Richard Wagner, and the revolution was unquestionably to have a profound effect on him. He witnessed some of the fiercest fighting from a distance of just a few hundred metres and came under fire himself. In the aftermath of the uprising, Wagner embarked on a remarkable programme of theoretical writing. This began with Art and Revolution—written in Paris in July 1849—and culminated with Opera and Drama, a book length treatise that laid out a detailed vision for the ‘drama of the future’ Central to this new form of drama was a cluster of techniques centred on the

term ‘motif’, involving poetry, gesture and repeating musical melodies. These motifs would have the power to forebode and recall the events of the drama.

The main contention of this thesis is that Wagner experienced traumatic events during the revolution and that the motific technique that he theorized in the wake of the revolution reproduces the effects of trauma as they are constituted in modern theories of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This is based on a re-reading of historical sources, and new evidence gleaned from archival documents. In addition to this central contention, this thesis also argues that Wagner’s traumatic experiences might explain his use of motifs that reproduce the structures of PTSD in his music dramas. Thus, this thesis aims to contribute to two areas of Wagnerian research. Firstly, it aims to add to the body of research dealing with Wagner’s participation in the May Uprising in Dresden by clarifying his involvement with and experience of the conflict and by investigating the impact of this experience on his mind and his artistic output. Secondly, this thesis aims to contribute to the theory and interpretation of Wagner’s motific techniques in the light of this revised understanding of his biography.

Revolution

The need for these two contributions can be explained separately. Critical and historical understanding of Wagner’s experience of the revolution has been hampered because the existing literature that explores Wagner’s participation in the conflict is largely alienated from the primary evidence, and it is largely concerned with the question of Wagner’s involvement in revolutionary activity. This was an issue of some moral, political and, above all, legal importance in the nineteenth century, but the stakes are no longer so high. Understood through this lens, this body of work falls into four broad categories. The first three treat Wagner as a revolutionary, a bystander and a defendant, respectively, while the final category offers an unsatisfactory synthesis.

The earliest literature tends to depict Wagner as an active revolutionary fighter. It is hard to be certain where the image of Wagner as a revolutionary fighter has its origin; its earliest appearance in print, however, seems be an article of 1850 written by the
revolutionary and member of the Frankfurt Parliament, Julius Fröbel. He writes that Wagner, ‘with a rifle in his hand, shared in the dangers and stresses of the bravest.’ A similar formulation appears in Adolphe Jullien’s 1886 biography. He claims that ‘Wagner did not hesitate to take his rifle and run to the barricades.’ The pseudo-evidential basis for these claims about Wagner seems predominantly to have been anecdote, rumour and common knowledge. Edmond Neukomm, for example, writes that popular tradition in Dresden placed Wagner in the role of Rienzi, ‘preparing for himself a dictatorial seat by means of the rioting.’ Unlike Neukomm, plenty of writers happily take Wagner’s involvement in the uprising as an accepted fact. Emil Naumann’s history of German composers, for example, begins his account of Wagner’s life: ‘Richard Wagner was born on the 22nd of May in Leipzig. The father of the man who would stand on the barricades as a revolutionary in 1849 was a police clerk.’ Arguably, Hugo Dinger’s 1892 biography, *Richard Wagners geistige Entwickelung* belongs to this grouping as a work in which Wagner is depicted as firmly on the side of the revolutionaries, although this book is so transparently and astutely grounded in the files of investigation produced by the Dresden authorities that it stands out from the rest as a work of reliable scholarship. Nevertheless, Dinger thanks a number of individuals for personal correspondence with him, without always disclosing the exact contents of these letters. The work that epitomizes this category, however, is transparently anecdotal.  

*Wagner as I knew him* by Ferdinand Praeger contains an extraordinary account of Wagner’s activities during the

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5 ‘C’est sur ces marches historiques [la terrasse de Brühl (Brühl’s Terrace)] que la tradition populaire place l’auteur de *Rienzi*, jouant pour son compte le rôle de son personnage et se préparant par l’émeute un siège dictatorial qu’il ambitionnait.’ Edmond Neukomm, ‘La Vérité sur le Role de Wagner Pendant la Révolution de 1849: d’après de nouveaux documents’, *Le Ménestrel*, 59/40 (5 Mar. 1893), 75–6 at 75. Neukomm’s own, admirable aim was to redress these rumours using ‘new documents’, which were, nevertheless, rather scant.  
The episodes that he describes are generally scrupulously attributed to mutual acquaintances, and in some cases Praeger claims to have affirmed their truth with Wagner himself. Praeger’s main source was the violinist Julius Haimberger, whom Praeger calls ‘Haimberger’ throughout. Haimberger is, in theory, a perfectly credible source. Wagner himself recalls meeting Haimberger in the town hall on the final night of the revolution after the young violinist ‘had shouldered a gun, and presented himself for service at the barricades’. According to Praeger’s ‘Haimberger’, Wagner brought in convoys and, along with August Röckel, planned to cover barricades in pitch to prevent soldiers from taking them. Most remarkably, Praeger describes an occasion on which Wagner and Haimberger were serving together on a barricade. At around 8 o’clock one morning—Praeger doesn’t specify the date—an 18-year old woman was shot by a Prussian. This soldier was immediately taken prisoner and brought back to the barricade, where Wagner took a musket, mounted the barricade and gave a stirring speech to the assembled crowd. Inspired by his revolutionary zeal, the barricade team set out and took prisoner a number of Prussians that had moved too deeply into the town and become cut off from the main force. Praeger’s other anecdotal source was Max Maria von Weber, the son of Carl Maria von Weber, who, Praeger claims, told him that he saw Wagner with a rifle slung over his shoulder. Weber was certainly present during the revolution. In its immediate aftermath he wrote to Max Jähns describing his experience of it, although he makes no mention of Wagner. Neither Haimberger nor Weber ever publicly contradicted Praeger’s claims. It is, above all, Praeger’s account that is drawn on whenever a biographer wants to depict Wagner the revolutionary. A recent example is Eckhard Kröplin’s Richard Wagner-Chronik, which repeats the

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8 Ferdinand Christian Wilhelm Praeger, Wagner as I Knew Him (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892)
10 Praeger, Wagner, 175–6.
12 Praeger, Wagner, 193.
anecdote about the murdered 18-year old (attributed only to an eyewitness) and Weber’s report of Wagner with his gun (without mentioning Praeger as its source).\footnote{Eckart Kröplin, \textit{Richard Wagner-Chronik} (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler Verlag, 2016), 158.}

In opposition to the depiction of Wagner as a revolutionary fighter stands a group of biographies that downplay his involvement. These accounts tended to be written by those who knew—or were, at least, personally connected with—Wagner. In particular, the first biographies to emerge from Wagner’s friends and family members in Bayreuth might be seen on a coordinated attack on the notion of Wagner as an active revolutionary. Both Carl Friedrich Glasenapp and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Wagner’s friend and son-in-law respectively, cover the revolution in their biographies of Wagner and give highly sanitized versions of Wagner’s activities. In the first (1876) edition of his biography, \textit{Richard Wagner’s Leben und Wirken}, Glasenapp writes that ‘we do not know whether Wagner himself, like Kinkel, carried the flag of the uprising before the crowd; the files of his trial have not been made available.’\footnote{‘Ob Wagner selbst, wie Kinkel, die Fahne des Aufstandes seiner Schaar vorangetragen, wissen wir nicht; die Acten seines Processes sind nicht bekannt geworden.’ Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, \textit{Richard Wagner’s Leben und Wirken: In sechs Büchern dargestellt} (Leipzig und Cassel: Carl Maurer’s Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1876), 268.} This changed with the publication of Dinger’s biography, which reproduced lengthy extracts from these files. In response, the expanded third edition of Glasenapp’s biography, published as \textit{Das Leben Richard Wagners}, devotes an entire chapter to the May Uprising. Nevertheless, this chapter begins with a vague implication that the conflict was precipitated by a government bent on an open battle against its people—absolving Wagner’s political writings and speeches of 1848–1849 of any responsibility for the bloodshed.\footnote{Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, \textit{Das Leben Richard Wagners in Sechs Büchern} (3rd edn., Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1896), 300.} Glasenapp concludes that there was no ‘direct action’ on Wagner’s part other than distributing seditious placards to Saxon soldiers in the earlier days of the uprising.\footnote{‘direkter Bethätigung’ Glasenapp, \textit{Das Leben Wagners} 327.} Despite this absolution of Wagner, Glasenapp nevertheless offers a detailed and honest chronology and description of Wagner’s movements that incorporates, however grudgingly, what Dinger had revealed. Chamberlain, by contrast, gives a fundamentally dishonest account. He devotes fewer than four pages to Wagner’s actual participation in
the uprising and obfuscates wherever possible.\textsuperscript{18} The writer who most passionately engaged with the crusade against these revolutionary accounts was not himself a resident of Bayreuth, but was, nevertheless, intimately connected with Wagner’s family and the burgeoning Wagnerian establishment in Bayreuth. William Ashton Ellis devotes a whole volume, \textit{1849: a vindication}, to demonstrating that Wagner had been unjustly persecuted by the Saxon authorities in the aftermath of the May Uprising.\textsuperscript{19} Whereas Glasenapp’s revisions are addressed to Dinger, Ellis’s target was Praeger, whom he accused of twisting Wagner’s words, glibness and a blinkering desire to prove Wagner ‘a red-handed rebel’.\textsuperscript{20} In this work, Ellis’s summary of Wagner’s involvement ‘in the actual revolt’ suggests that although he brought convoys into Dresden and may have signalled to rebels outside the city from the \textit{Kreuzthurm}, he did not actually fight on the barricades.\textsuperscript{21} Ellis himself soon reversed this position. In his rather free translation of Glasenapp, published ten years later, he adds a section to the end of the ‘May Uprising’ chapter, posing the question ‘what active share [did Wagner have] in the events of this week of May?’.\textsuperscript{22} This time, Ellis concludes that Wagner was complicit in ‘but two tangible acts’: distributing placards (Glasenapp’s ‘single exception’) and a letter written to August Röckel expressing fear that the revolution might break out ‘too soon’.\textsuperscript{23}

For all that Praeger attracted the ire of these writers, it was the publication of Dinger’s \textit{Richard Wagners geistige Entwickelung} that posed the greatest problem for the depiction of Wagner that they would like to have written—a man with revolutionary

\textsuperscript{18} For example, he suggests that Wagner can be trusted because he later wrote to Liszt expressing a hatred of lies. He also implies that the whole legal case against Wagner rested on the idea that Wagner had been implicated in the burning down of the old opera house in the city, which Glasenapp—following Dinger—had attributed to a confusion between Wagner and Hans Woldemar Wagner. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, \textit{Richard Wagner} (JM Dent & Company, 1897), 51–4. In fact, the legal files on Wagner took in the full range of Wagner’s activities and made no mention of this fire. There is, in addition, reason to cast doubt on the idea that a confusion between names is responsible for rumours that Wagner was involved in arson. The first newspaper article that circulated this rumour—published in Vienna—said that men being questioned about the arson claimed they had been ordered to burn the old opera house down by ‘the composer of \textit{Rienzi}’ (‘vom Componisten des Rienzi’). ‘Deutschland’, \textit{Der Lloyd}, 14/272 (9 June 1849), 2.


\textsuperscript{20} Ellis, \textit{1849: a vindication}, 55, 63 and 68.

\textsuperscript{21} Ellis, \textit{1849: a vindication}, 59–60.


\textsuperscript{23} Glasenapp and Ellis, \textit{Wagner}, ii, 358.
sympathies, who was not involved in revolutionary activities. Dinger’s work belongs to a third category of biographies, which use the investigative files of the Dresden authorities, the ‘Acta wider den vormaligen Capellmeister Richard Wagner, wegen Betheiligung am hiesigen Maiaufstande i. J. 1849’, as the basis of their narratives. This file was not compiled immediately in 1849. Instead, it was only after Wagner had contacted the authorities in Dresden in 1856 asking to be allowed to return that the file was put together by copying testimony, interrogations and evidence from other files. Nevertheless, much of this testimony was taken in the weeks and months immediately following the revolution. Moreover, the failure of the authorities to keep a dedicated file on Wagner before 1856 is more likely to reflect the fact that he had escaped custody than any lack of interest in him on their part. Their active interest in Wagner during this period is demonstrated by the fact that they repeatedly and directly questioned prisoners about Wagner. Unfortunately, these files were loaned to the administration of Soviet-occupied Dresden in 1948 and were not returned. Dinger reproduced lengthy extracts from these files as quotations in his biography. As a result, most of what can be inferred about the contents of the official investigation can be found in this work.

There are, however, four further documents that add substantial detail to Dinger’s account. Two were written by archivists in Dresden. Georg Hermann Müller frequently cited the files in his Richard Wagner in der Mai-Revolution. Whereas Dinger’s work is the most helpful for transmitting the contents of the ‘Acta’, the most important contribution of Müller’s text is to indicate some of the limitations in Dinger and some of the additional material that might be held within the archives. Müller points, for example, to omissions in Dinger’s reproduction of the testimony of Hugo von Bosse, which I will address in Chapter. Moreover, according to Müller, two handwritten notes contained in a file of evidence relating to the provisional government were written by Wagner.

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24 I am grateful to Andrea Tonart, clerk at the Hauptsaatarchive in Dresden, for this information.
27 Müller, Wagner in der Mai-Revolution, 27.
28 Müller, Wagner in der Mai-Revolution, 30–1.
Because these notes were not held in the lost Wagner file, they are still available to access at the Hauptstaatsarchiv in Dresden. Müller’s successor as the state archivist in Dresden, Woldemar Lippert, was the final writer to draw on these files at length, in his 1927 biography, Richard Wagner’s Verbannung und Rückkehr. This volume contains a summary of the charges against Wagner. Finally, an alternative summary was put together by Wagner’s lawyer, Adolf Schmidt. He investigated the contents of these files at Wagner’s request. His letter to Wagner, in which he summarized the charges against him was published in 1901 in Zeitschrift der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft.

More recently, Schmidt’s files on Wagner, including the detailed notes he made on the accusation and testimony of the ‘Acta’ have been made available online by the Sächsische Landesbibliothek — Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden.

The status of the archival material referenced and reproduced in these works is somewhat disputed. In particular, Ellis adds a long note to his translation of Glasenapp addressing ‘the judicial inquiry into the case of Richard Wagner’. Above all, Ellis takes issue with the fact that the claims in the ‘Acta’ had never been tested in an open court or made available to the public. Nevertheless, besides Wagner’s own writings, the

30 Woldemar Lippert, Richard Wagners Verbannung und Rückkehr 1849-1862 (Dresden: Paul Aretz Verlag, 1927; facs. edn., Hamburg: Severus, 2012), 17–9. Although Lippert’s note begins by referencing the ‘Acta’, it seems likely that the source of this summary was ‘HStA. Justizministerium Nr. 545 Bd. 46’. This is probably the same file as ‘Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, 11018 Ministerium der Justiz, Nr. 0545/46 “Aufruhr in Dresden” Bd. 46’, still listed in the catalogue of the Saxon State Archive, but unavailable. Lippert notes that the justice minister von Behr wrote an addendum beneath this summary. However, I have not seen any summary similar to this in the extant files of either the Dresden Stadtgericht or the Justizministerium, and I cannot, therefore, rule out the possibility that Lippert put together the summary himself. Lippert, Wagners Verbannung und Rückkehr, 216n.
31 The fact that Schmidt’s summary differs from Lippert’s is evidence that neither summary is produced in the ‘Acta’ itself.
32 The proximal motivation for this enquiry was the pervasive rumour that Wagner had been involved in arson in Dresden during the fighting. Specifically, Wagner wrote that a friend had informed him that he was said to have attempted to burn down the royal castle. The spread of these rumours is discussed in more detail below. Ludwig Schmidt, ‘Wagner-Akten’, Zeitschrift der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft, Dritter Jahrgang 1901/1 (1901), 1–8 at 2.
34 Glasenapp and Ellis, Wagner, ii, 409–18.
35 Ellis also makes rather too much of the distinction between ‘werden’ and ‘sollen’. Schmidt uses the latter to introduce paraphrases from the ‘Acta’. Ellis, quite incorrectly, surmises from this that the evidence of the paraphrased text was not given on oath. Glasenapp and Ellis, Wagner, ii, 411 and 416.
‘Acta’ represented the largest repository of primary material describing Wagner's activities during the uprising. Because Wagner's file was compiled from other pre-existing files, many of which are still held in Dresden, it is possible to revisit some of the testimony referred to by the ‘archival’ biographies of Wagner. One of the main contributions made to the study of Wagner's experience of the revolution by this thesis will be to reproduce extracts from the ‘Acta’ in order to build a picture of Wagner's experience of the 1849 uprising. To my knowledge, this is the first study of Wagner since Lippert's to draw on these files.

Alongside Wagner's own autobiographical writing, these three groups of biographies say everything about Wagner's involvement that can be said. As a result, subsequent biographies have tended to arbitrate between them rather than uncover new material. Among these, Ernest Newman stands out for the depth and rigour of his research. The fundamental shift between this category of biography and its forerunners is that in the wake of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the question of Wagner's participation or otherwise in an armed revolution is no longer the most morally pressing issue in Wagner studies. As a result, Wagner's involvement in the revolution has become an object of study predominantly insofar as it affected and now exemplifies the development of his political and artistic thinking. In this sense, this thesis belongs to this later category, because it aims to investigate links between the uprising and Wagner's theoretical and artistic works. However, this thesis will place much greater emphasis on Wagner's experience of revolutionary conflict than on his involvement in political activism.

Overall, the impression given by more recent biographies is of a top-heavy literature buckling under its own weight. As is so often the case in Wagnerian research, new volumes offering accounts of Wagner's life during the May Uprising have emerged at a steady rate, despite their having little new to say. There has been little advance in terms

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36 I am grateful to the Dresden Trust, whose financial support enabled me to undertake this work.
of the actual evidence presented since Dinger. In fact, it is surely time to abandon altogether attempts to present a coherent account of these 7 days. On this, if on little else, it is easy to agree with Houston Stewart Chamberlain: ‘[r]econstructing history from the hundreds of narratives that are available to us as uncontrollable ‘testimonies’ of such a restless time will always remain impossible.’ Chapter 1 of this thesis does not aim, therefore, at a ‘complete chronological reconstruction’, as Martin Gregor-Dellin claimed to publish for the first time. In contrast, it will set out explicitly the available primary evidence relating to Wagner’s participation in the uprising in search of the limits of Wagner’s possible involvement in and witness to the events of 1849. In achieving this, I aim to demonstrate that there is a sound evidentiary basis for believing that Wagner encountered traumatic events as an observer of the conflict.

**Trauma**

The main arguments of this thesis rely on two contestable terms: trauma and motif. It is therefore worth situating the definitions of these terms that will be used in this thesis in the context of competing meanings. Above all, the word that holds together Wagner’s revolutionary activity and his revolutionary compositional practice in this thesis is trauma. The use of the term trauma in this thesis rests on the twin definitions of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) given in the two major diagnostic manuals of psychiatric diseases: the World Health Organization’s *International Classification of Diseases for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics, Eleventh Revision* (*ICD-11*) and the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision* (*DSM-5-TR*).

The ICD describes three key features: re-experiencing, avoidance and heightened perception of current threat. These features must follow ‘an extremely threatening or horrific [i.e. traumatic] event’.

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To these, the DSM-5-TR adds ‘negative alterations in cognitions or mood associated with the traumatic event(s)’. In both texts, the symptoms are required to last for a minimum length of time (‘several weeks’ in the ICD-11 and a month in the DSM-5-TR).

Moreover, the symptoms of the disorder must cause substantial impairment to the sufferer. Contained within these criteria is the notion of a traumatic event, defined broadly by the ICD-11 as ‘an extremely threatening or horrific event’ and more specifically by the DSM-5-TR as ‘Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence’.

This thesis applies this definition in two quite different ways. Firstly, Chapter 1 investigates Wagner’s encounters with traumatic events during the May Uprising and looks for evidence of a posttraumatic response (i.e. re-experiencing, avoidance and heightened perception of current threat) in Wagner following the revolution. The subsequent chapters of this thesis investigate how the basic features outlined in the diagnostic criteria—in particular the posttraumatic response—are reproduced in Wagner’s scores.

A potential problem with the constitution of the concept of trauma within these criteria is that this diagnosis is historically contingent. The development of PTSD as a disorder is inseparable from the experience of combat veterans in the twentieth century, especially veterans of the Vietnam war. This need not present an issue for interpreting Wagner’s scores because they continue to exist in the present—the era of PTSD; however, it is potentially anachronistic to apply the term PTSD and related terms such as traumatic event to Wagner’s life and experiences. The problem of anachronism as it relates to the diagnosis of historical figures was stated most vividly by the sociologist of science Bruno Latour. In a 1998 article in the French magazine _La Recherche_, he critiqued the ‘diagnosis’ made by French doctors in 1976 of Ramesses II as having died of

42 In particular, this definition of a traumatic even should be distinguished from the broader definition of psychic trauma in psychoanalytical discourse: ‘any experience which calls up distressing affects such as those of fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain may operate as a trauma of this kind’. Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, _Studies on Hysteria_, ed. Alix Strachey James Strachey, Anna Freud and Alan Tyson, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1955), 6; see also Salman Akhtar, _Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis_ (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2009), ‘Psychic Trauma’, 695.
tuberculosis. Latour outlined two possible responses to this discovery. The ‘common sense’ response was that the tuberculosis bacillus had always existed and its discovery by scientists simply lifted the veil that had shrouded its existence. The ‘radical’ response was that Ramesses really did fall ill after his death, and the tuberculosis bacterium did not really exist before its discovery by Robert Koch—Latour provocatively set the ‘anachronism’ of attributing Ramesses’ death to tuberculosis alongside the anachronism of suggesting he was killed by a machine gun. Latour was not satisfied with either of these assertions, which he called (confusingly for Wagnerians) ‘the two dragons, the Faffner [sic] of never-nowhere and the Fasolt of always-everywhere.’ Latour’s goal was to eschew these two extremes by emphasizing the ‘costs’ of reaching back in time to diagnose Ramesses with tuberculosis, which he claimed were analogous to the costs of bringing the mummy from Egypt to France, into a laboratory, under bright lights, through machines etc. His solution was to think of history as a movement through a two-dimensional space, between chronological time and a ‘sedimentary’ dimension in which new information was gradually layered on the past.

This is precisely how we should think of the ‘discovery’ of PTSD in Wagner’s scores. The scores are artefacts that can be subjected to the scientific apparatus of the present. The results of these investigations can then be layered onto our knowledge of Wagner’s scores. The reason that the same cannot be said for Wagner’s psychological experience of the revolution is that there is no equivalent artefact that can be brought into the metaphorical lab. Ramesses’ mummy allowed scientists direct access to Ramesses’ body, even after three millennia. Wagner’s scores are similarly still extant. In the case of Wagner’s mind, though, there is no equivalent artefact; all that remains are the documentary traces left in his essays, letters and scores—the artefacts that can be

45 Latour produced a figure demonstrating this, which is not reproduced here for copyright reasons. It can be found in Latour, ‘L’histoire des découvertes’.
studied directly. The importance of this is that in Latour’s justification, the evidence of the disease can be taken as evidence of the causes of the disease.

It is in this context that Latour’s article attracted a great deal of venom. The usual strategy of Latour’s critics is to take his example of an overly radical and anti-whiggish argument—tuberculosis has no ‘real existence’ before its discovery—and treat it as Latour’s claim. When raised in the context of psychological disease, this argument over the claim that diseases do not pre-exist their discovery takes on a new urgency. The reason for this is in Latour’s writing he is able to make a distinction between a non-human element (the bacterium) and a technological element (such as a machine gun). In the case of many psychiatric diseases, no such distinction is possible because the signs of the disease (cognitive and emotional symptoms) are subject to human, social and cultural factors. The cause of PTSD, traumatic events, does not have a non-human existence. As a result, it is always at risk of falling into a technological, purely invented existence. The writer who has argued most cogently for this position is Allen Young, whose *Harmony of Illusions: inventing post-traumatic stress disorder* critiqued PTSD as an historical and clinical phenomenon. Young was, to some extent expanding on the work of Wilbur J Scott, but the two sociologists had deeply diverging perspectives on the moral of the story. For Scott, the emergence of the diagnosis was an affirmative process in which ‘objective knowledge’ generated ‘new objective realities’: ‘Each new clinical diagnosis of PTSD, each new warrantable medical insurance claim, each new narrative about the disorder reaffirms its reality, its objectivity, its “just thereness.”’ Conversely, Young saw the emergence of PTSD as a constructive and acquisitive process. He sought ‘to describe the mechanisms through which these phenomena [PTSD and traumatic memory] penetrate people’s life worlds, acquire facticity, and shape the self-knowledge of patients, clinicians, and researchers.’

Ultimately, both Young and Scott aimed to understand the nature of the concept of PTSD in the present by tracing its development in the past. However, one of the principal aims of this study is to travel in the opposite direction, to construct a framework for understanding reactions to the distressing events of 1849. The poses two questions: firstly, does PTSD become less real as one goes backwards in time past each of the affirmative diagnoses, insurance claims and so on? Secondly, are there alternative, contemporary diagnoses that, at certain points in history, are more real than PTSD?

Latour’s solution to these problems was twofold. His first step, as previously mentioned, was to acknowledge the ‘sedimentary’ layer of history; to recognize that to say that from his death to 1976, Ramesses II was thought to have died of unknown causes (or a contemporary but obsolete disease), but in 1976 it was shown that he died of tuberculosis captures important truths that are obscured if we simply say that Ramesses II died of tuberculosis. His second was to recognize that the reality of scientific ideas, including diseases, is supported and amplified by a network of ‘associated elements’ or ‘collaborators’, such as ‘machines, gestures, textbooks, institutions, taxonomies, theories, and so on’.[49] This gives rise to an idea that exists more or less tacitly within Latour’s example but which is central to the way that PTSD has been ‘found’ in historical examples: there are two ways of discovering modern diseases in historical patients. The first is to look for the signs of the disease, such as symptoms and biomarkers. In the case of Ramesses, these were the effects of tuberculosis on his lungs, discovered by X-ray. The second is to look for a contemporary disease—Ramesses’ ‘saodowaoth’ in Latour’s coinage—and make an equivalence between this and a modern equivalent.

These two basic approaches are well represented in the literature. On the one hand, a number of psychiatric professionals have scoured the historical record for descriptions

of behaviours, thoughts and feelings that seem to fit the criteria of PTSD. On the other hand, historians have tended to focus on contemporary diseases, case studies and their descriptions. This thesis does not aim to diagnose Wagner with PTSD; instead, my intention is simply to use the diagnostic criteria as a starting point for understanding Wagner’s experience of the revolution and its aftermath. Nevertheless, a brief survey of psychiatric literature relating to several conflicts that were some of the most geographically and historically proximal to the May Uprising—the revolutions of 1848-49, the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 and the Franco-Prussian war—demonstrates the relative benefits of the two approaches and shows where a possible synthesis of the two might lie. Specifically, the works of nineteenth-century, German, military psychiatrists K. F. W. Nasse and Friedrich Jolly emphasize the chronic nature of the combat stressors that they believed affected soldiers in the war of 1866 and the Franco-Prussian war.


epidemics of madness. In particular, Nasse expressed scepticism towards the theory of ‘folie politique’, exemplified by Jacques Étienne Belhomme. Although he talked of ‘explosions of rifle and cannon fire’, Belhomme was unequivocal in his argument that the upheaval of political thought and the ‘political clubs and meetings, the journals that sow discord and civil war’ that it brought with it were themselves dangerous. While Nasse was scathing of Belhommes’s work, he nevertheless concluded that the aetiological explanation for the cases he described was ‘the great number of harmful factors characteristic of a military campaign’, and that the only question was whether these chronic factors were further exacerbated by specific events that took place after battle (such as illness or bereavement), which triggered mental illness.

Jolly’s definition of the mental pathologies of war also focuses far more on the chronic nature of the stresses of military life during war than on individual moments of extreme stress. In the case of a soldier who developed paranoia and suffered from hallucinations, which Jolly attributed to the stresses of the siege of Paris, he noted that ‘the constant stresses and the disturbing things that he saw had so excited him that he came entirely out of his senses and no longer knew what he was doing.

53 Although he does not mention him directly, Nasse likely also had in mind the works of Philippe Pinel, physician at the Bicêtre and Salpêtrière between 1793 and 1810, who routinely ascribed the cause of cases of mental illness to the events of the French revolution. However, in the case of Pinel’s writings, it is difficult to separate out those whose madness was attributed to the maddening environment of the revolution and those who suffered personal setbacks, tragedies and traumas that were connected to the events of the revolution. Relevant case studies can be found in Philippe Pinel, *Traité médico-philosophique sur l’aliénation mentale* (2nd edn., Paris: J.A. Brosson, 1809), 108, 121–3, 165–7, 177–8, 263–264 and 325–326.


56 Jolly, ‘Klinische Mittheilungen’, 443.

57 ‘die bestandenen Strapazen und die beunruhigenden Dinge, die er gesehen, hätten ihn so aufgeregt, dass er ganz ausser sich gekommen sei und nicht mehr gewusst hätte was er thue.’ Jolly, ‘Klinische Mittheilungen’, 456.
battle of Weissenburg, in the absence of hereditary or other predisposing factors. However, during this battle the soldier in question was shot in the right cheek. Jolly himself speculated that receiving such a head wound might lead to mental illness. Certainly, it would qualify as a traumatic event according to a modern understanding.

These writers give us a picture of a disease whose causes were chronic and related to the environment rather than the events of conflict. However, case studies from the same conflict, and from the other revolutions of the period 1848–1849 bear a remarkable similarity to PTSD. One case study given by Lunier in particular bears a striking resemblance to the PTSD criteria in its description of a soldier reliving the battle of Sédan in his sleep:

R...(Emile), a soldier for seven years, was a sub-lieutenant at the battle of Sedan. He was able to escape the clutches of the Prussians and came to Paris, where he was placed at the head of a company of francs-tireurs. He suffered greatly during the siege and experienced many disappointments. Following the surrender of Paris, his friends encouraged him to take leave, having already remarked on a noticeable change in his character and a euphoric tendency. Returning to his family in Châteauroux, he committed numerous unfortunate acts. He got up in the night and experienced hallucinations that transported him to the battlefield of Sedan.

He entered the asylum on 4 April, and I noted all of the symptoms of manic delirium in him. His sensitivity was highly exaggerated, he became irritated at the slightest conflict, he was irrepressibly talkative, his remarks were extravagant, and his dress was often ridiculous. Long baths and rest restored his calm. He left, cured three months later on 11 July 1871.

59 ‘R... (Emile), soldat depuis sept ans, était sous-lieutenant à la bataille de Sedan ; il put s’échapper des mains des Prussiens et vint à Paris où il fut placé à la tête d’une compagnie de francs-tireurs. Il souffrit beaucoup pendant le siège et éprouva beaucoup de déceptions. Après la capitulation de Paris, ses amis ayant déjà remarqué un changement notable dans son caractère et une grande exaltation d'idées, l’engagèrent à prendre un congé. Rentré dans sa famille à Châteauroux, il commet plusieurs actes regrettables ; il se lève la nuit et a des hallucinations qui le transportent sur le champ de bataille de Sedan.'
This demonstrates a fundamental difference in the way nineteenth-century psychiatrists thought of symptoms like these and the way that they might be re-interpreted by PTSD. In the context of PTSD, this soldier’s reexperiencing nightmares of Sedan would be understood as causative of his irritability and arousal symptoms. Lunier, however, is unequivocal in his belief that these symptoms were caused by the prolonged stress of the siege of Paris. It is precisely this shift, from chronic stressor to single traumatic memory that is of such interest to Young. The second thing to note is that R...(Emile) recovered relatively quickly.

Finally, perhaps the most important nineteenth-century psychiatric work when it comes to understanding Wagner’s experience of 1849 is Pierre Briquet’s *Traité Clinique et Thérapeutique de l’Hystérie*, because this volume describes psychiatric symptoms in two patients that experienced violence during the revolutions of 1848–1849. The first description is a detailed case history of former soldier Jean-Baptist Tissier, who developed psychiatric symptoms following capture and the threat of summary execution during the revolutionary violence of June 1848 in Paris (an important precursor to the violence in Dresden a year later), during which he fought with the rebels. The patient was ‘deeply concerned’ by the incident and subsequently ‘became very violent, was often drunk, lost interest in work, and remained subject to convulsive attacks that always occurred as a result of disagreements or excessive drinking.’ Secondly, Briquet makes a less detailed reference to a young woman who began to suffer from hysteria after she unexpectedly found herself ‘in the midst of the fire of a barricade’ during the

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62 Original: ‘vivement préoccupé’; ‘il est devenu très violent ; il s’enivre souvent, n’a plus le goût du travail, et reste sujet à des attaques convulsives qui surviennent toujours à la suite de contrariétés, ou d’excès de boissons.’ Briquet, *Traité Clinique* 22.
same revolution. Briquet grouped this incident with others in the category of hysteria cause by fear, which Briquet believed accounted for a ninth of all cases of hysteria.

Perhaps the greatest danger with regard to the problems of anachronism is that the cases in the historical record that most resemble PTSD draw the attention of the modern perspective and give the impression that PTSD is a temporally stable phenomenon that provides a framework that can be used to interpret reactions to unusually stressful events throughout the past. Nevertheless, case histories such as those of Jean-Baptiste Tissier, R...(Emile) and those found in the works of Jolly and Nasse—case histories closely resembling PTSD and contemporary with Wagner—inevitably lend weight to the conclusion that there is a place for the diagnostic criteria of PTSD in understanding Wagner’s reaction to the events of the revolution of 1849. However, in order to apply these criteria in the most productive way possible it is necessary to recognize that these cases represent only a small part of a much wider literature of reactions to stress and trauma and the categorization (and lack of categorization) of these reactions into diseases. Moreover, despite the breadth of this literature, it inevitably represents an incomplete picture of the past. In seeking to understand Wagner’s reaction to the May Uprising, I therefore suggest that it is reasonable and sufficient to take the diagnostic criteria of PTSD as a starting point, but to augment this position with an understanding of nineteenth century mental illness in its own terms.

**Motif**

The main contribution of this thesis to the study of Wagner’s music is its offer of a new way of understanding and interpreting Wagner’s motifs. It may seem that the Wagnerian literature already offers a plethora of interpretive stances towards this aspect of Wagner’s composition. In reality, most of these can be broken into two broad groups, neither of which can be fully reconciled with Wagner’s writings, and neither of which is

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63 “Enfin, les attaques qui ont été le début de l’hystérie ont toujours été provoquées par des causes très puissantes : ainsi, une femme s’était trouvée inopinément, en 1848, au milieu de feu d’une barricade” Briquet, Traité Clinique, 351.

64 Briquet, Traité Clinique 168–9.
entirely satisfactory. On the one hand, some critics and analysts follow Wagner’s own example from *Opera and Drama* in describing a quasi-mystical, meaningful and sometimes even purely musical device that can serve interchangeably in a range of functions. From this perspective, motifs can never be understood to function as a system, and they constantly threaten to fracture into different categories of meaningfulness and expression. It becomes impossible to speak of motifs in general; only individual motifs can be described and analysed. On the other hand, the practice of labelling Wagner’s motifs with pithy and evocative titles promises a straightforward system of meaning. This system, however, inevitably fails to live up to the promise of *Opera and Drama*, and the method of understanding Wagner’s motifs from labels is rejected even by those accused of practising it. As my close reading of Wagner’s theoretical writings in Chapter 2 will demonstrate, the tension between these two approaches is already present in Wagner’s theoretical writings of the period 1849–1851. However, Wagner was fastidious in constructing a theory of motif in which the definition of a motif was never rigorously or prescriptively limited. This tension therefore belongs predominantly to the reception and analysis of Wagner’s works.

It is important to understand at the outset that the practice of labelling motifs is so universally denounced that even its supposed practitioners are keen to distance themselves from it. It is typically Hans von Wolzogen who is accused of instituting the practice. Strictly, however, the labelling of motifs was developed and popularized by Wolzogen rather than invented by him. Nevertheless, it was Wolzogen’s *Leitfäden durch...* or ‘Leading threads through’ Wagner’s artworks that made this practice so commonplace. These works consisted primarily of detailed accounts of Wagner’s plots.

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66 As early as 1852 in his analysis of *Lohengrin* in the light of *Opera and Drama*, Julius Schaeffer referred to ‘the melody of doubt’ and ‘the melody of the forbiddance’. Nevertheless, in Schaeffer’s analysis these labels sit alongside less semiotically laden nomenclature such as ‘cello melody’, ‘clarinet melody’ and ‘bass figure’. Schaeffer also anticipated the practice of those uncomfortable with motific labels but happy enough with the idea that Wagner’s motifs exist by numbering these motifs. Julius Schaeffer, ‘Uber “Lohengrin” von Richard Wagner mit Bezug auf seine Schrift: “Oper und Drama”’, *Neue Berliner Musik-Zeitung*, 6/20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27 (1852), 153–5, 161–3, 169–71, 193–6, 201–4, 209–11 at 204.
interspersed with short musical extracts that were labelled with names encompassing their significance to the drama. Wolzogen’s aim as it is inferred from this practice is taken to be something like translating musical melodies into poetic or symbolic ideas that can be used to teach audiences the meaning of the music.

In fact, Wolzogen’s theory of motif was more nuanced than this may imply. In the introduction to his guide to the *Ring*, Wolzogen went to great lengths to parse and distil the content of *Opera and Drama* into a brief, coherent theoretical statement. Regarding motifs, he wrote that the fundamental psychological and dramatic concepts of the *Ring* could not be understood through musically induced feeling nor described in words (at least without what he called ‘laborious circumlocution’). Instead, these fundamental concepts or forms within the *Ring* could only be understood through the ‘motifs that connect the poetic and musical elements’.

In other words, for Wolzogen, a motif is neither a musical melody nor a dramatic idea; rather, it is the thing which brings the two together. Moreover, Wolzogen’s introduction outlines an understanding of the capabilities of motif that reproduces the poetic style of Wagner’s own theoretical writings:

> The motif allows the invisible to make itself known, it recalls the past and propheyes the future, it pronounces the inner drama, where the power of poetry fails, just as it gives music the power of poetic representation.

In his later *Leitfaden* to *Parsifal*, Wolzogen explains that he only uses labels in order to be able to speak in terms of motifs, to draw out specific motifs and to make them visible:
memorable. Moreover, he was clear that no label could ever capture ‘the musical soul of the motifs’. 71

There are several reasons that Wolzogen’s nuance has come to be overlooked. He himself is responsible for the first. At the end of introduction to his guide to the Ring, he slips from referring to motif—the thing that interconnects poetic and musical elements—and instead promises to offer ‘an understandable demonstration and explanation of the musical motifs’. 72 For all Wolzogen’s care to complicate the idea of motif, the themes that he catalogues turn out simply to be explanations of the extra-musical meanings of Wagner’s melodies. This slippage was cemented by the genre of guidebooks that his Leitfäden spawned, in which motifs were simply labelled and catalogued without reference to the theoretical subtleties of Wolzogen’s introduction. 73 Perhaps the most important reason that Wolzogen’s analysis has come to be seen as simplistic, however, is the direct attack made on Wolzogen by Deryck Cooke in his unfinished I Saw the World End, the goal of which was a comprehensive ‘musico-dramatic analysis’ of Wagner’s ‘themes’ in the Ring. 74 Cooke offers several criticisms of Wolzogen. Firstly, Cooke argues that by relying exclusively on short musical examples, Wolzogen gives the impression that Wagner’s scores are nothing more than a patchwork of these short melodies. Secondly, Cooke takes issue with the term Leitmotive (although in his original 1876 guide Wolzogen does not use this term,

72 ‘eine verständliche Nachweisung und Erklärung der musikalischen Motive’ Wolzogen, Leitfaden durch Wagner’s Ring, 8.
73 Thorau provides a catalogue of these works. Christian Thorau, Semantisierte Sinnlichkeit: Studien zu Rezeption und Zeichenstruktur der Leitmotivtechnik Richard Wagners (Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft; Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2003), 167–75.
preferring ‘Motiv’).\footnote{The question of who should take responsibility for the term’s popularity is complicated. Wagner himself attributed the term to Wolzogen in On the Application of Music to the Drama (although Wagner refers to him only as ‘one of my younger friends’. In his pre-eminent history of the term’s early use in the context of Wagner, Thomas Grey gives Wolzogen’s first use of the term in print as 1877, but without citation. However, Wolzogen had used the term (in inverted commas) in an article on Der fliegende Holländer as early as 1874. Richard Wagner, Richard Wagner’s Prose Works, vi: Religion and Art, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & CO., Ltd., 1897), 184; Grey, Wagner’s Musical Prose, 353; Hans von Wolzogen, “Der fliegende Holländer”. Bericht über eine Aufführung”, Musikalisches Wochenblatt, 5/10-13 (1874), 120–1, 135–6, 150, 166–7 at 150.}

Cooke’s point is that Wagner’s ‘themes’ (as he preferred to call them) are not atomic but are instead already composed out of smaller ideas. Moreover, Cooke argues, the ‘Leitmotive’ given by Wolzogen and others are often just the first few bars of what are, in context, ‘extended symphonic themes’. Cooke’s third criticism is that Wolzogen overlooks some motifs, and his final criticism is that Wolzogen fails to consider the interrelations of motifs.\footnote{Cooke, I Saw the World End, 37–47. This final criticism seems rather unfair—Wolzogen himself writes that ‘through the relations of the plastic form of individual musical motifs, the relations and the inner connections of the relevant fundamental concepts for the drama will be pointed out, and thus the individual moment will be meaningfully connected with the whole’ (‘Durch die Verwandtschaft der plastischen Form einzelner musikalischer Motive wird auf die Verwandtschaft und den inneren Zusammenhang der betreffenden Grundbegriffe für das Drama hingewiesen und so das einzelne Moment bedeutsam mit dem Ganzen in Verbindung gesetzt.’) Wolzogen, Leitfaden durch Wagner’s Ring, 6. Wolzogen did not catalogue these relations because that was not an aim of his guide.}

Rather than annulling the validity of Wolzogen’s approach, the result of these criticisms is to formalize what Cooke aimed to redeem from Wolzogen’s practice. Specifically, Cooke codified the basic referential framework of Wolzogen’s approach—musical melodies labelled with poetic ideas. Cooke’s criticism of Wolzogen is that he applies this approach inexpertly and, therefore, overlooks the full musical complexity of the system. As a consequence of this (fundamentally music-analytical) oversight, Cooke suggests, Wolzogen also misses some of the dramatic ramifications of the score. Cooke’s fundamental problem with Wolzogen is not that he is wrong to use labels, but rather that his labels are wrong.

Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker have described Cooke’s approach as ‘rewriting the dictionary’.\footnote{Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, Introduction: On Analyzing Opera, ed. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (California studies in 19th century music; University of California Press, 1989), 9.} In truth, however, Cooke’s effort was more radical than this because it involved first stripping Wolzogen’s work of its theoretical context in order to interpret it as a dictionary and then arguing that this dictionary was deficient. Cooke ignored Wolzogen’s notion of motif as something that brought the poetry and music together in
order to express something that they were incapable of expressing individually. For Cooke, ‘motif’ invariably meant ‘musical motif’. It was, therefore, Cooke’s criticism that cemented the contradiction in Wolzogen’s writing between motifs with simple labels and motifs that were able to bring the non-present to mind, to remember and to prophesy, and to expose the deepest psychological and dramatic meanings of the drama.

None of the ways in which the critical and analytical literature has responded to this fundamental contradiction is entirely satisfactory. One approach, found in the works of Carl Dahlhaus and Thomas Grey, is to take the fundamental division between motifs that can be labelled and motifs which cannot be reduced to words and recognize these as separate categories of motif. Motifs can then be assigned to the two categories. Dahlhaus codifies this as a split between ‘allegorical’ motifs, easily expressible in words, and ‘emotive’, ambiguous, motifs. This distinction re-emerged in the writing of Thomas Grey. In the finale of his Wagner’s musical prose: texts and contexts, Grey talks of ‘motifs with a strongly determinate semantic value’ that are set in counterpoint with indeterminate motifs of ‘pure music’. Specifically, he explores the possibility that the conclusion of Götterdämmerung sets ‘determinate’ motifs against the ‘indeterminate’ ‘Glorification of Brünnhilde’ motif. Although he draws away from this position—admitting that it runs fundamentally counter to Opera and Drama—Grey goes on not only to firm up his concept of indeterminate motifs, but he also connects this concept to Wagner’s term, ‘Ahnung’:

when Wagner departs from the epic drama of the Ring for the interior drama of Tristan a character of indeterminate (and yet intensified) Ahnung becomes again the leading motive of the music, largely, but not entirely, displacing previous attempts to cultivate a new semiotic competence in music.

Grey’s conception of ‘Ahnung’ is, if not defined, then thoroughly developed. It is the ‘innate and inexpressible properties’ of ‘pure, absolute’ music. Yet Grey’s appropriation

79 Grey, Wagner’s Musical Prose, 370.
of a Wagnerian term disguises a distinctly anti-Wagnerian manoeuvre in his and Dahlhaus’s categorization. For Wagner, a foreboding is not an indeterminate emotion or meaning but an emotion that ‘has not yet been determined’.[^1] A foreboding is thus predeterminate rather than indeterminate, and Wagner even talks of forebodings predetermining the object through which they are ultimately defined. In other words, Dahlhaus and Grey end up partitioning elements that Wagner and even Wolzogen had been at pains to hold together. For Wagner, all motifs were both emotive and allegorical.

This thesis argues that psychological theories of PTSD offer a framework that can explain how the repetition of musical ideas that have a special connection with the text of Wagner’s work—that is, motifs—can bring to mind the non-present, recall the past and prophesy the future, thus producing a mode of expression that would be unavailable to words or music individually. At the same time, this framework is not threatened by the use of simple labels to describe motifs because these simple labels can always be reconnected with the deeper functions that the motif enacts. In this way, my approach owes a further debt to Latour. Discussing scientific theories, Latour argues that ‘an entity gains in reality if it is associated with many others that are viewed as collaborating with it’.[^2] This thesis does not present a scientific theory; nevertheless, an idea relating to an artwork benefits just as much from becoming more real, in Latour’s terms, as a scientific theory does. The more elements that an intellectual disposition towards an opera—for example, an analytical or historical theory or a production concept—can bring together, the more it enriches our understanding of the

work and the more possibilities it promises to open up for the text and music. It is in these terms that the aim of this thesis is best understood. It is an attempt to bring together in collaboration as many elements as possible—Wagner's biography, theory and artwork, other theories of motif, theories of psychology, and so on—in a coherent interpretive stance towards Wagner's motifs.

In service of this aim, the first chapter of this thesis presents an investigation into Wagner's experience of the May Uprising, drawing on a range of sources including previously unpublished archival material, and an account of his aberrant behaviour and perception in the wake of the uprising. Chapter 2 makes the central argument that Wagner's motifs reproduce structures described in PTSD by bringing together three ‘collaborators’—a close reading of Wagner's theory of motif as it is laid out in *Opera and Drama*, an outline of the key psychological theories of PTSD for my interpretive

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83 Perhaps the key difference between art and science here is that it is easier for an artistic theory to tolerate the reality of competing ideas. This is because an artistic assemblage of collaborators is put together on the basis that some entities will always escape its collaboration, at least in our (post-)modern understanding. Some disdain collaboration entirely. The recent (2022) Valentin Schwarz production of the *Ring* at Bayreuth made a conceit of its incoherence, although this refusal to bring its components into collaboration was routinely identified as its chief failing by critics—Schwarz's 'unwillingness—let us be charitable—to carry though [sic] any coherent correspondence between objects, themes, even often characters, leaves us with an incoherence that does not register as an aesthetic challenge, but simply as a careless mess.' Mark Berry, ‘Götterdämmerung (Valentin Schwarz / Cornelius Meister): Bayreuth Festival 2022 - Der Ring des Nibelungen’, [www.wagneropera.net](https://www.wagneropera.net), 6 Aug. 2022, accessed 30 Jan. 2023. See also Mark Berry, ‘Bayreuth Festival (4): Götterdämmerung, 5 August 2022’, [Boulezian](https://boulezian.blogspot.com/2022/08/bayreuth-festival-4-gotterdammerung-4.html), 6 Aug. 2022, accessed 30 Jan. 2023.

84 In this way, my approach aims to overcome another pertinent critique, namely, the charge of biographism. To adapt a statement of this critique laid out by Andreas Dorschel: many people encounter traumatic events, few go on to write operas and only one has subsequently laid out the theory of motif found in Wagner's essays. Dorschel draws two conclusions that are relevant to this thesis. The first is that artworks are not illuminated by the straightforward piling up of biographical information. I aim to avoid this by showing, rather, that the structures of a scientific theory that is external to Wagner's life and art can be found in both. The second is that art can be related to life in three ways: art can imitate life, life can imitate art (Dorschel says an artist can seek out experiences that fit their ‘artistic vision’; in Wagner's case, he might have added that experiences fitting his artistic vision could be written into his biography whether or not he had bothered to seek them out in reality) and life and art can be set into a negative relation—one can be made to fill an absence or lack in the other. As laid out above, this thesis aims to bring Wagner's life and art into relation, without necessarily prioritizing one of these three modes of relation. Andreas Dorschel, 'Life’s Work: Wagner's “Tristan” and the Critique of Biographism', in Manos Perrakis (ed.), *Life as an Aesthetic Idea of Music* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 2019), 63–78. An exploration of the ways in which Wagner rewrote his biography in order to fit with his artistic aims can be found in John Deathridge, ‘Wagner lives: issues in autobiography’, in Thomas S. Grey (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner* (Cambridge Companions to Music; Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–17.
framework, and a reading of Sieglinde’s Nightmare from Die Walkür, Act I, Scene 5
that argues that she experiences the memory symptoms of PTSD in response to a
musical trigger. The connection between Wagner’s biography and my theory of
Wagner’s motifs is cemented in Chapter 3. This chapter offers evidence that there is a
qualitative difference in the way that Wagner uses motifs before and after 1849, using
the case study of the 1853 Wagner festival in Zürich to show that Wagner was not able
to reinterpret his pre-1849 works in the light of Opera and Drama without making radical
changes. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 then present three case studies demonstrating how the
interpretive framework constructed in Chapter 2 may be used to analyse Wagner’s
scores. Chapter 4 offers an exegesis of Siegfried’s ‘Rhine Journey’ in the light of the
theoretical position outlined in Chapter 2. Finally, Chapters 5 and 6 show how my use of
PTSD-theory to explain and interpret Wagner’s motifs can be incorporated with other
existing critical stances. Specifically, Chapter 5 will analyse the Norns’ scene from the
perspective of an idea that occurs in the work of Cooke and Dahlhaus: the notion that
the musical interrelations of Wagner’s motifs are meaningful. This chapter will
demonstrate how the tensions between my interpretive framework and the pathways of
musical development in the Norns’ scene interact to produce elements of the
symptomology of PTSD. Chapter 6 extends the argument by showing how even in a
motivic analysis that does not deal with the poetic meaning of Wagner’s motifs—in other
words in a ‘purely musical’ analysis of motifs—the structures of PTSD are reproduced.
This chapter offers an analysis of the shepherd’s melody in Tristan und Isolde that
argues that this melody discloses a fundamental monothematicism in the score. Rather
than threatening the status of the score as motific, this monothematicism comes to be
enacted, I argue, as a motif for trauma within the artwork.
Chapter 1

Richard Wagner and ‘The Dresden Bloodbath’

The central argument of this thesis is that Wagner’s motifs reproduce structures that can also be found in PTSD. Moreover, it is my contention that the link between PTSD and Wagner’s motific technique can be explained by Wagner’s own encounter with violence and trauma during the May Uprising in 1849. The goal of the following chapters is, therefore, to investigate Wagner’s experience of the May Uprising and set this experience within its psycho-historical context. The May Uprising was a bloody fight to which Wagner was a close witness. In its wake, Wagner experienced a range of symptoms, including the persistent re-echoing of the sound of gunfire in his ears. In other words, precisely the same coincidence of repeating auditory cue, traumatic event and traumatic symptom can be found in Wagner’s life as in Wagner’s works.

The May Uprising in Dresden was the first battle in the series of events known as the Reichsverfassungskampagne (campaign of the imperial constitution), the culmination in Germany of the revolutions of 1848/49. Politically, the catalyst for these events was the rejection by King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia of the draft constitution for a new, unified German nation on 28 April 1849. This constitution had been proposed to him by a delegation of the national parliament in Frankfurt on 3 April and would have seen the
Prussian king crowned as German Emperor. However, this parliament owed its own existence to the uprisings of 1848, and the Prussian King rejected the offer on conservative, political grounds. Privately, he called it ‘a dog collar... which would bind him indissolubly to the sovereignty of the people’.” Nevertheless, to the delegation he put his refusal in such polite terms—saying he could not accept without the consent of the ‘crowned heads, the princes and free cities of Germany’—that some hope remained for the proposed constitution until it was decisively repudiated in Frankfurt by the Prussian delegate to the parliament on 28 April. In the Kingdom of Saxony, of which Dresden was the capital, the Saxon King Friedrich August II dissolved the pro-democratic and pro-constitution parliament on 30 April. The Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin, a political refugee and friend of Wagner’s sheltering in Dresden, later wrote that this was the catalyst for the outbreak of revolution in the city.

Fighting broke out on Thursday 3 May, when a pro-constitution crowd was fired on by troops stationed in the armoury. The following day, the leaders of the uprising proclaimed themselves to be the provisional government of Saxony, and barricades were erected throughout the city. In the afternoon on Saturday 5 May the uneasy


2 “But, sirs, I would not justify your trust, I would not fulfill the desire of the German people, I would not bring about German unity, were I to make a decision, violating sacred rights and my earlier explicit and solemn assurances, without the free consent of the crowned heads, the princes and the free cities of Germany, which would have the most critical consequences for them and those of the German nation whom they govern.” (“Aber, Meine Herren, Ich würde Ihr Vertrauen nicht rechtfertigen, Ich würde dem Sinne des deutschen Volkes nicht entsprechen, Ich würde Deutschlands Einheit nicht aufrichten, wollte Ich, mit Verletzung heiliger Rechte und Meiner früheren ausdrücklichen und feierlichen Versicherungen, ohne das freie Einverständniß der gekrönten Häupter, der Fürsten und der freien Städte Deutschlands, eine Entschließung fassen, welche für sie und die von ihnen regierten deutschen Stämme die entscheidendsten Folgen haben muß.”) Friedrich Wilhelm IV, So sprach der König: Reden, Trinksprüche, Proclamationen, Botschaften, Karbinets-Ordres, Erlasse u. s. w. Friedrich Wilhelms IV., Königs von Preußen. Denkwürdigkeiten aus und zu Allerhöchstdessen Lebens- und Regierungsgeschichte vom Jahre 1840 bis 1854 in systematisch geordneter Zusammenstellung, ed. Anonymous (Stuttgart: Verlag von Karl Göpel, 1873), 106; Hermann von Petersdorff, König Friedrich Wilhelm der Vierte (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchandlung Nachfolger, 1900), 135–6.

ceasefire between the Saxon troops and the revolutionaries ended, and government forces began to retake the Altstadt. The first Prussian troops, sent in support of the Saxons, began to arrive by train that evening at around 6. Over the next three and a half days, forces loyal to the royal government retook the Altstadt street by street.

Sunday 6 May saw the closest thing to a pitched battle that was to occur during the uprising. The Saxons and Prussians assaulted rebel positions on the Neumarkt, recapturing the Frauenkirche and securing complete control of the square by evening. From then on, fighting continued at close quarters. In order to circumvent barricades, government soldiers fought their way through houses, breaking through the walls. Finally, in the night of Tuesday 8 May, the provisional government abandoned the city. By half past nine the following morning, the minister of the interior proclaimed that the guns had fallen silent and the whole city was in the hands of the troops.

The story of Wagner’s encounter with revolution has been told many times, not least by the composer himself. The resulting literature is of such a cumbersome size and nature that it is worth beginning with a brief overview of the most important sources. Wagner’s first account appeared just 8 days after he had fled Dresden in a letter—dated ‘Ascension day, ’49’ (17 May 1849)—to his friend, the theatrical agent, writer director and actor, Eduard Devrient. In addition to further, short references to his activities scattered throughout his letters, the next account given by Wagner appears in a letter of 15 March 1851 to Eduard Röckel, brother of Wagner’s revolutionary friend, August Röckel. These sources, whose accounts are almost directly contradictory, are, however, largely overshadowed by the two accounts written by Wagner in the 1860s.

The first of these appears in the so-called ‘annals’. These were the notes that Wagner

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4 The precise status of the ceasefire and the time at which it ended differs between sources. It seems likely to have gradually collapsed rather than being brought to a sudden end by a military assault.
6 Waldersee, *Der Kampf in Dresden* 215.
made himself in preparation for dictating his autobiography to his wife, Cosima. They appear in *The Brown Book*, a notebook that served Wagner as everything from a diary to a volume in which to draft his artistic and theoretical works from around 1865 to his death in 1883.\(^9\) The exact status of the annals is contentious. The first publication of *The Brown Book* in 1975, described them as probably written using an earlier diary, *The red pocketbook*, in which Wagner had made notes contemporaneously.\(^10\) The culmination of Wagner's accounts is his autobiography itself, *My Life*. Wagner's reminiscences of the revolution in this work are remarkable in their vividness and level of detail.\(^11\) Both characteristics mark this version out in comparison both to his other retellings of these events and the rest of the autobiography. Particularly noteworthy is that, unlike in the bulk of *My Life*, Wagner is punctilious about dates and times, even going so far as to give the hour of certain experiences. As I will show below, it is this attention to detail that ultimately reveals some of the major fissures in Wagner's account. Moreover, this detail lends the account an undeserved sense of accuracy, which has led numerous Wagner biographers astray.

Wagner's accounts are not simply numerous; they are genuinely heterogeneous. The two epistolary sources capture the fundamental opposition. Wagner's letter to Eduard Devrient was written with the more or less explicit aim of securing permission for him to return immediately to Dresden and to his position as *Kapellmeister*. As a result, this letter downplays the seriousness of Wagner's involvement at every turn, portraying him instead as an observer in 'the most objective outlook in the world.'\(^12\) Devrient himself noted in his diary that he found Wagner's letter unconvincing.\(^13\) Against this stands Wagner's letter to Eduard Röckel. In this letter, which makes only a cursory reference to Wagner's experience of the revolution, Wagner claims to have worked actively for the


\(^10\) Richard Wagner, *Das braune Buch*, ed. Joachim Bergfeld (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1975), 110. In John Deathridge’s ‘Wagner lives’, he goes so far as to say that the second record was created ‘out of the first’, without, however, giving any justification. Deathridge, "Wagner lives: issues in autobiography" 7.


revolutionaries, bringing in revolutionary convoys including one from the Erzgebirge on
the final night of the revolution. In contrast, the accounts in *My Life* and *The Brown
Book* form a slightly more complementary pair. In general, *The Brown Book* adds a
number of details that go missing in *My Life*, while *My Life* turns the gnomic shorthand
style of *The Brown Book* into an apparently continuous and complete account. That is
to say that the tension here is not between the sources *per se*. Instead, it emerges from
the fact that the apparently complete account has gaps that are filled by its shorthand
precursor. In my view, the twin contradictions that emerge in Wagner’s
accounts—contradictory versions of what Wagner did and the contradiction between
the apparent completeness of Wagner’s accounts and the details which are certainly
wrong or missing in them—are fundamentally insoluble. That is to say that the fractured
accounts given by Wagner make it impossible to reconstruct a true version of the full
events of 3–9 May 1849 concerning Wagner. Instead, we are left with an irreconcilable
collection of things that Wagner may have done, with varying degrees of certainty and
probability, which are impossible to reconcile into a single believable account.

In addition to Wagner’s own accounts, the contemporary source that deals with his
involvement at greatest length was the file detailing the evidence held against him by
the authorities in Dresden, the ‘Acta wider den vormaligen Capellmeister Richard
Wagner, wegen Betheiligung am hiesigen Maiaufstande i. J. 1849’. This file, although
not compiled until 1856, includes testimony taken in the period immediately following
the uprising. To my knowledge, this thesis is the first work on Wagner to draw directly

14 Wagner, *SB*, iii, 532.
15 For a full explanation of the archival material that I draw on, see pp. 21–22 of this Thesis.
on archival material relating to the investigation of the Stadtgericht since Lippert. Because the files on Wagner were, in fact, relatively late copies from the other investigations made by the Dresden authorities, it is still possible to reconstruct something of what the files on Wagner may have contained, based on files still held by the state archives in Saxony from which these copies were made. This is not an entirely straightforward task. In addition to the loss of the main file on Wagner produced by the Dresden city authorities, a second file put together by the Saxon Justice Ministry, which likely contained correspondence relating to Wagner’s case, is unavailable. Similarly, the file of the Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin is missing. Given Dinger quotes testimony of Bakunin’s taken from Wagner’s file, it seems likely this file would have contained salient references to Wagner. Nevertheless, enough material remains in the archives of the Free State of Saxony to shed new light on the topic. A comprehensive search for references to Wagner in archival material relating to 1849 in the Saxon archives would be a substantial undertaking, beyond the scope of this thesis. I have therefore confined my efforts to revisiting files likely to contain testimony alluded to by Schmidt, Dinger, Müller and Lippert. These extracts will not, in themselves, recreate the contents of the file on Wagner. Furthermore, it is impossible to say whether any discrepancies between the evidence present by Schmidt, Dinger, Müller and Lippert and the files presented here are attributable to these writers or the original copyists.


17 This is also the file from which Lippert most likely took his ‘Zusammenstellung’. Lippert, Wagners Verbannung und Rückkehr, 17–19 and 216n.
Nevertheless, the original contents of these files bring to light a number of observations missing from the secondary literature that have substantial bearing on the central object of this chapter: investigating Wagner’s experience of the 1849 May Uprising.

**Wagner’s Accounts of the May Uprising**

The inevitable starting point for any investigation into Wagner’s experiences of 1849 are his own accounts, above all the complete account of the revolution that he himself gave in his autobiography, *My Life*. No other source deals with the topic at such length or in such detail. Indeed, this account of the revolution stands out even in comparison to the rest of the autobiography. No other week in Wagner’s life is covered in such detail or with such apparent precision. Each day of the revolution is dated and on more than one occasion Wagner pinpoints events to a precise time of day. The problem for Wagner scholarship has been that this detail and precision is often mistaken for accuracy. The reality is that it is this very precision that reveals the fundamental inaccuracy of Wagner’s recollections. Wagner’s account is in fact two separate stories masquerading as a single memory. In one story, he is a passive observer of drama, absent during the fiercest fighting and no different to any number of other casual spectators to remarkable, but by no means disturbing events. In the other, he is present at several of the key actions of the uprising and comes into close contact with fighting. This binary is irreconcilable, and it has set the pattern for Wagnerian biographies ever since.

In brief, Wagner’s account runs as follows: On 3 May, returning from a meeting of the *Vaterlandsverein*, Wagner heard the bells of the *Annenkirche*, which he took as a sign of the uprising’s outbreak. In response, he went to the house of the singer, Josef Tichatschek, where he advised Tichatschek’s wife to deposit his hunting rifle with the *Vaterlandsverein*—‘a place of safety’. From there, he made his way to the *Altmarkt* where he encountered Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient, who had created Venus in the premier of *Tannhäuser*, fresh from making an impassioned speech to the assembled crowd. On 3 May—the repetition is Wagner’s—he went immediately to the rumoured location of the outbreak of fighting, the armoury. As with his encounter with

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Figure 1.1: Detail and key to numbered buildings from ‘Gefechts-Plan’ von Dresden, Waldersee, Der Kampf in Dresden, nn. The full image may be found at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gefechtsplan_von_Dresden_1849.jpg and http://www.deutschefotothek.de/documents/obj/70301978. The coloured areas indicate the parts of the city retaken by the military each day (beginning with the positions they held on 3 May, marked in blue)
Schröder-Devrient, he arrived just after the well-attested combat, but on his way to the armoury he had encountered one of the revolution’s first casualties, a wounded member of the communal guard. Only when night fell did he return to his home in Friedrichsstadt.

On Thursday 4 May, he ascertained the situation in the city at the town hall and resolved to convince the Saxon troops stationed in the city to fight on the side of the revolutionaries, just as the army of Württemberg was doing at that time. In order to achieve this, Wagner had the printer of the Volksblätter newspaper, which he was editing in August Röckel’s absence, produce large posters asking ‘Are you on our side against the foreign troops?’ Returning to the town hall, he encountered a number of characters who would also be implicated by the authorities in revolutionary activities: the revolutionary anarchist Mikhail Bakunin and the architect Gottfried Semper. On Friday 5 May, Wagner returned to the town hall, where the leaders of the uprising proclaimed themselves a provisional government. This development was announced from the balcony of the town hall by Professor Hermann Köchly, a philologist acquainted with Wagner, to the ‘not very numerous crowd’ below. Wagner saw Semper for the final time in Dresden. Semper was complaining about the construction of several barricades and Wagner directed him to the ‘Military Commission for the Defence’, where, Wagner says, he may have obtained permission to construct further barricades. Wagner returned home, where his nieces were visiting. They discussed the political and military situation across Germany: ‘all heartily approved of the barricades.’

By the next morning, Saturday 6 May, the Prussians had marched into the Neustadt and fighting had begun. In order to get a sense of what was going on, Wagner made his way to the Kreuzkirche and climbed the tower. Although he did not have a clear view from this position, he ascertained that an initial Prussian attack had been repulsed. He

20 They often met during their respective exiles.
21 The charge that Semper was involved in designing and building barricades is frequently reported in the literature.
returned to the town hall to try and learn more. He met Bakunin, who told him that an attack on the Neumarkt had been repulsed. For the rest of the day, Wagner tells us, fighting was confined to skirmishes between sharpshooters, so he returned to the Kreuzthurm. This time, as he made his way to the church he came under fire from troops stationed in the Residenzschloss. Wagner does not talk further about what he saw from the tower, but he does tell us that the tower was occupied by a mixture of fellow spectators and men who had been ordered by the provisional government to make observations and reports. Among this group, he met ‘Berthold’, with whom he passed the night in philosophical discussion while sheltering behind a mattress from Prussian bullets being fired from the Frauenkirche.

Sunday 7 May was, according to Wagner, one of the most beautiful days of the year. He woke to the song of a nightingale. From his position on the tower, he watched various convoys of rebel reinforcements make their way into the town and surmised that the Prussians had resolved to make numerous smaller attacks rather than single concentrated assaults. Around 11 o’clock in the morning, Wagner saw the Old Opera House burn. Eventually, the tower began to fill with armed men expecting an attack on the Kreuzgasse from the east so Wagner made his way home. There, he spent the afternoon in ‘family jollification’.

At the start of Monday 8 May, Wagner made his way back to the town hall. On the way, he met Röckel, who was collecting weapons, for the only time during the revolution. A convoy of gymnasts arrived, and Röckel led them away to the town hall. Taking a different route, Wagner arrived at the town hall, where he learned from Bakunin that the provisional government was resolved to abandon the city. Wagner himself decided to leave with Minna for the safety of the home of his sister and brother-in-law Heinrich and Clara Wolfram in Chemnitz. He hired a carriage in the first village outside of the city. Minna met him there, and they made the journey to Chemnitz, encountering armed reinforcements—apparently from both sides of the conflict—coming the other way.

22 The gymnastic movement functioned as an almost para-military organization during 1848/49.
Rather than remain in Chemnitz, Wagner returned to Dresden ‘at the earliest possible hour’ on Tuesday 9 May. Making his way through the houses that had been broken through by the troops, he reached the town hall for the final time around nightfall. Here, he exchanged updates with Bakunin. The Russian told Wagner that the Prussians were slowly but surely closing in on the town hall, breaking their way through houses rather than going through the barricades. Wagner learned, moreover, that Röckel was missing, presumed captured. In return, Wagner gave a rather optimistic report on the strength of the reinforcements making their way to the city. In particular, he told Bakunin about a group resting in Freiberg, exhausted from their march. Wagner was ‘begged’ to return to them and inform them of the plans of the provisional government. He set off on this mission accompanied by Marschall von Bieberstein, who secured the carriage that they rode. Having successfully conveyed the message in Freiberg, they set off again for Dresden. They came across a convoy coming in the other direction, who informed them that it was ‘all over in Dresden’. With them, Wagner found Bakunin and the revolutionary leader Otto Leonhard Heubner in a carriage, whom he joined on their journey to Freiberg.

On reaching Freiberg, they ate breakfast and Heubner interrogated Bakunin, asking if the Russian’s ultimate aim was nothing short of the foundation of ‘the Red Republic’. Satisfied that Bakunin had no interest in this outcome, Heubner began preparations for electing a representative Saxon assembly to sit in Chemnitz. Stephan Born arrived with at the head of an armed band and they resolved to retreat further to Chemnitz rather than attempt a defence of Freiberg. Later, Wagner observed Heubner working feverishly in the Freiberg town hall. Finally, Wagner made his way separately to Chemnitz, where he settled for the night in the nearest inn. Early the next morning, he returned to his sister’s house, where he soon learnt from his brother-in-law the news that Heubner and Bakunin had been arrested on their arrival in the town. That night, Wagner was taken across the Saxon border to Altenburg, from where he travelled to Liszt in Weimar. There, he learned of the arrest warrant that had been published in his
name, and he was forced to flee beyond the borders of the German states. He crossed into Switzerland on 28 May.

Wagner’s account in *My Life* gives every sign of being precise and accurate. Both characteristics are further underscored by the apparent authority of *The Brown Book*, which, perhaps unsurprisingly, supports the details of *My Life* while adding a few of its own. Nevertheless, even the most cursory attempt to reconcile Wagner’s account of the revolution with any other reveals serious problems with this apparent precision. This must, in turn, raise questions about the veracity of Wagner’s account. The crux of this problem is that the dates and day names that Wagner gives do not match. In other words, the revolution began on Thursday 3 May; there was no Thursday 4 May. This discrepancy has only rarely been subjected to attempts at correction. Ernest Newman, who largely followed the dates given by Wagner, noted only that Wagner’s narrative was ‘a little confused’. The majority of biographies of Wagner ‘correct’ the account by following Wagner’s day names, although few are explicit about this change. An exception is Martin Gregor-Dellin: claiming to write ‘the first complete chronological reconstruction every published’, he wrote that Wagner had ‘telescoped events and jumbled his dates’. This might be more accurately rendered the other way round. Wagner jumbled events and telescoped dates. Wagner’s account of the revolution encompasses a full extra day.

This is important because the two possible accounts that emerge are quite distinct in terms of the experience of revolution that we can infer. If Wagner’s weekdays are correct, then he was most active before fighting had begun, and he left the city just before fighting was at its heaviest. If the dates are correct, then Wagner remained an active observer of the conflict even after it was well underway and did not leave for Chemnitz until it was at its most intense. A moment within Wagner’s account that captures precisely this is his time on the *Kreuzthurm*. If Wagner was on the tower from Saturday until Sunday, he may have seen or heard a few initial skirmishes. Moreover,

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according to this correction of My Life, he would have left the tower around the time that the Frauenkirche was retaken from the rebels. If instead he was on the tower from Sunday 6 to Monday 7, then he likely arrived in time to see the Frauenkirche taken and then witnessed the intense fighting around the Neumarkt on the remainder of that day. Furthermore, he probably left the tower around the time that an attack was made by Saxon troops on the eastern approach to the Kreuzkirche, sallying from the Gewandhaus. He may even have come into contact with this attack at ground level.

Unfortunately, there is no straightforward way of correcting Wagner’s account. His other accounts do not offer a solution. The Brown Book simply replicates the impossible dating of My Life. The letter to Eduard Röckel only describes the final night of the revolution in any particular detail, without giving a date. The only source that offers any clarity is the letter to Devrient. Wagner’s account in this letter largely matches the weekdays that Wagner gives in My Life. For example, Wagner claims to have been on the Kreuzthurm ‘throughout Saturday and Sunday’.[25] Perhaps more importantly, he claimed to have left the city early on Monday morning.[26] Similarly, some of the other events that Wagner describes in My Life fit this timeline. The opera house fire did take place on the morning of Sunday 6, albeit at 7 o’clock rather than 11. The ceasefire ended on Saturday 5, and his depiction of the grim outlook of the revolutionaries of the final night of the revolution—backed up by the equivalent description in his letter to Röckel—must have taken place on the night of Tuesday 8 May, as by the following evening the city was entirely back in the hands of the military. Because of the journey time between Dresden and Chemnitz, he must have left Dresden on Monday 7 May in order to make the round trip. Most probably, he left quite early in the day.[27] Even

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26 Richard Wagner and Millington, Letters of Wagner, 148.
27 According to the 1842 Baedecker travel guide, the journey from Dresden to Chemnitz with the Eilpost took around ten hours; however, it seems reasonable to assume that Wagner and Minna would have travelled somewhat more slowly than this. Nevertheless, he may have arrived back in Dresden well before evening on the 8th, despite what he claimed in My Life. One biographer, Adolf Kohut, claimed to have been told by Julius Dietz, a pianist acquainted with Wagner, that Dietz had seen Wagner on the Oberseer-Gasse on 8 or 9 May ‘buying stockings with greatest haste’ (Wagner ‘in größter Hast ein Paar Strümpfe kaufte’). Despite William Ashton Ellis’s reading to the contrary, this could only have been 8 May, as Wagner, Heubner and Bakunin had all left Dresden by the early hours of 9 May. Adolph Kohut, Aus dem Zauberlande Polyhymnias: Musikalische Geschichten und Plauderein (Berlin: Bibliographiscen Bureaus, 1892), 191–2 [translation mine]; Ellis, 1849: a vindication, 58.
leaving to one side the problems with the reliability of the Devrient letter, simply making this correction, as many biographers do, opens up new problems in Wagner’s account. The reason for this is that many of the events and activities that Wagner describes fit best with the dates that he gives. A case in point is his description of the movements of the Prussians. In reality, they arrived in the Neustadt by train on the evening of Saturday 5 May. The first Prussian attacks therefore took place on the 6th. It was on this day that fighting on the Neumarkt, involving Saxon and Prussian troops, was at its most intense, and there were no troops in the Frauenkirche until late morning. Similarly, Wagner’s account of his activities before ascending the tower fit best with the dates. The day on which he had the Blätter reading, ‘Are you on our side against the foreign troops?’, was most likely Friday 4 May—between the outbreak of hostilities and the end of the unofficial truce the following day.²⁸²⁸ In short, Wagner’s account seems stretched up to 7 May and compressed from the 7–9 May. As a result, any ‘complete chronological account’ has to do more than simply choose to follow either Wagner’s dates or his day names.

**Wagner’s Experience of the May Uprising**

**The Kreuzzthurm**

The purpose of this chapter is not to catalogue Wagner’s activities during the revolution—this has been amply attempted elsewhere. Instead, the central question addressed here is whether Wagner may have encountered events that might have been traumatic. One period, in particular, stands out as important to answering this question, namely, the period that Wagner spent on the Kreuzzthurm. This is the point at which Wagner was most likely to have witnessed fighting. It is also during this period that Wagner describes coming under fire himself. However, because of the confused timings of events as recorded in My Life, it is impossible to be sure from Wagner’s accounts exactly when he was on the tower. Wagner claims to have been on the tower from

²⁸ ‘Seid Ihr mit uns gegen fremde Truppen?’ The publisher Roempler claimed in an 1894 article to have accompanied Wagner as he distributed these placards. He described the events as happening ‘on a day of truce’ when the arrival of the Prussians was still only anticipated. Wagner, *My Life*, 478; Smolian, *Richard Wagner als Revolutionär*, 322.
'Saturday, 6th May' to ‘Sunday (the 7th of May)’[29] He might have spent any length of time and made any number of visits to the tower between Saturday 5 May and Monday 7 May. Therefore, dating Wagner’s time on the Kreuzthurm is crucial to answering the question of what Wagner experienced during the revolution.

Fortunately, this is a question to which the ‘Acta’ can help provide an answer. The main testimony in the ‘Acta’ concerning Wagner’s time on the Kreuzthurm belonged to the Oberkontroleur Oberleutnant Hugo von Boße[30] Boße’s file, held in the Hauptstaatsarchiv in Dresden, contains his testimony on this topic, alongside further statements from Curt Ludwig Bromme, a bookseller, and the towerwatchmen, Löwe, Schindler and Löffler, which I will summarize[31] Boße claimed that early on Sunday 6 May he was given a sign by the bookseller, Curt Ludwig Bromme, that he should join up with a man who was going to leave the town hall and make his way over the Altmarkt. Because he had told Bromme that he wished to make his way home—Boße came from Cölln in Meissen—Boße assumed that he would be leaving Dresden; however, the man made his way to the Kreuzthurm. Boße did not recognize this man, but heard him referred to as ‘Herr Kapellmeister’. Boße estimated that it was around 7 or 8 in the morning that they ascended the tower. At the time, he said, there was no fighting around the tower, but the sound of rifles and small arms fire was audible. The door to the Kreuzthurm was closed and manned by a watchman, who opened the door for ‘the Kapellmeister’. Another man whom Boße did not recognize joined them on the tower and the two men wrote notes that were attached to stones and then thrown down from the tower and taken by watchmen, presumably to the provisional government. Boße could, he said, only speculate on the content of these notes; he thought they may have contained information on the positions and movements of the military. Most pertinently for the question of what Wagner may have observed, von Boße claimed that much of

29 Wagner, My Life, i, 481 and 483.
30 We even know the approximate page numbers of this testimony. Dinger tells us that Boße’s testimony came on pp. 101, 103 and 112. In Schmidt’s notes he gives an unattributed summary of Boße’s testimony with the annotation ‘pp. 102ff.’ (bl. 102flg.) Dinger, Richard Wagners geistige Entwicklung 183–4; Schmidt, Aktenstücke über Wagner, fol. 57.
31 Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, 10057 Kreisamt Meissen, 430: ‘Kreisamts Meissen Untersuchungs-Acten wider Herrn OberControleur, Oberleutnant von Boße zu Cölln. wegen Theilnahme an dem Aufstande in Dresden.’
the fighting was obscured from the tower by powder smoke. When Boße left the tower at around 7 o’clock in the evening on Sunday 6 May, these two men remained. Around this time, the tower was beginning to fill up with teams of insurgents.

Of course, it is impossible to guarantee that ‘the Kapellmeister’ was indeed Wagner. Boße never identified Wagner by name. Moreover, the further statements in Boße’s file fail to identify Wagner conclusively. In Bromme’s account in the same file, the ‘Chargirten’ of the communal guard came into the town hall looking for a ‘sure, reliable man’ to make observations from the Kreuzthurm. Bromme told Boße he should accompany this man. He was asked under interrogation if he had seen Wagner in the town hall at this time. His answer was that although he had definitely seen Wagner in the town hall, he could not say for certain whether Wagner was there at this time. Nevertheless, he said that because of the ‘tumult’ in the town hall, it was possible that Boße had not heard his instruction but only seen his hand gestures. His testimony does not rule out the notion that ‘the Kapellmeister’ was indeed Wagner. Certainly, it would be a peculiar code-name to use given that Wagner himself was repeatedly in the town hall. Finally, Dinger wrote that the towerwatchmen L... and S... had confirmed Wagner’s presence on the tower. According to the testimony in Boße’s file, Löwe does not mention Wagner at all, while both Schindler and Löffler say that they only heard

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32 Guessing at the contents of the notes being thrown down from the tower, Boße speculated: ‘it could very well have been the positions and movements of the military being written down, but much of the battle couldn’t be seen and communicated, because it was obscured by powder smoke.’ (‘Es mochte wohl die Stellungen und Bewegungen des Militärs aufgeschrieben worden; viel konnte man aber von dem Kampf nicht sehen und mittheile, da man von Pulverdampfe gehindert war.’) SächsStA-D, 10057 Kreisamt Meissen, 430, 29v.

33 SächsStA-D, 10057 Kreisamt Meissen, 430, fols. 28–30.

34 ‘Ich erinnere mich bloss nur, daß auf die Frage des Chargirten der Communalgarde nach einen sicheren zuverlässigen Mann, der auf dem Kreuzthurm gehen solle, ich de, in der Nähe stehenden von Boße zugerufen habe, daß er mitgehen könne; er habe gute Augen.’ SächsStA-D, 10057 Kreisamt Meissen, 430, fol. 64r.

35 SächsStA-D, 10057 Kreisamt Meissen, 430, fol. 64v–65r.
later that Wagner had been on the tower. Wagner is not mentioned in the extant files of testimony taken from either Schindler or Löwe.

Two further categories of evidence from the ‘Acta’ need to be taken into account when considering Wagner’s activities on the Kreuzthurm. The first relate to the notes mentioned by Boße. Müller believed that two of the notes sent to the provisional government that had been preserved in the Saxon archive were written by Wagner, based on the handwriting. One described the movement of a convoy from Räcknitz into the city, while the other suggested that more patrols were needed on the Neumarkt. They are written in pencil, as Boße described, and on the reverse of the note describing the approach of the convoy from Räcknitz, the writer notes that the battle at the Frauenkirche is continuing. In terms of dating, this note was, therefore, likely written on the morning of Sunday 6 May; all accounts agree that Wagner spent some time on the tower on this morning. Whether or not Müller’s identification of Wagner as the author of these notes is correct, this observation also suggests that fighting around the Frauenkirche was visible from the Kreuzthurm. It might be that the powder-smoke that Boße claimed obscured the view of the city was caused by the cannon brought up to the Neumarkt in the early afternoon.

The second category of evidence is the testimony concerning Wagner’s companion on the Kreuzthurm, Berthold. Wagner rather downplays the importance of Berthold. In My Life, he is depicted as a simple schoolmaster with a ‘homely anxiety’ for protecting his fellow observers from Prussian gunfire. In fact, Wilhelm Berthold was a significant figure in the revolutionary party. He had taken part in the provisional national parliament

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36 Löwe’s testimony can be found on SächsStA-D, 10057 Kreisamt Meissen, 430 fol. 95r–96v. Schindler refers to Wagner on SächsStA-D, 10057 Kreisamt Meissen, 430 fol. 98r, and Löffler does the same on SächsStA-D, 10057 Kreisamt Meissen, 430 fol. 101v. None of these passages is highlighted in pencil at the margin, suggesting these extracts were not reproduced in Wagner’s file.


38 Müller, Wagner in der Mai-Revolution, 30–1.


40 Wagner, My Life, 1 i, 483.
in Frankfurt. He was present at the election of the Provisional Government in Dresden according to multiple witnesses. Finally, he personally led a convoy of reinforcements from his hometown, Döbeln, to Dresden. This convoy left on 8 May, but by the time it reached the Plauen'schen Gründe in the early hours of 9 May, it was confronted by the mass of retreating revolutionaries and dispersed. Although the tower watchman Johann Friedrich Löwe does not mention Wagner, he did discuss Berthold. In his testimony of 14 May 1849, he ‘admitted’ that the tower had been occupied ‘through all the days’ of the revolution. Moreover, he recalled that Berthold had been present along with men who had thrown letters down from the tower, although Berthold himself had not written any letters. Löwe did not give any indication of when Berthold was on the Kreuzthurm. However, in Berthold’s own file, his colleague, David Sonntag, testified that Berthold arrived back in Döbeln unexpectedly on the night of 7 May. This would fit in with the hypothesis that he and Wagner left the tower together around midday on 7 May. Löwe also gave an account of which watchmen had been working at which times. However, he and Schindler were at the tower from Saturday morning to Sunday morning and from Monday morning to Tuesday morning, so they could have seen Wagner and Berthold according to either correction of Wagner’s timeline.

How then should the testimony in the ‘Acta’ affect our assessment of Wagner’s own accounts? The crucial information in Boße’s testimony is that he accompanied ‘the Kapellmeister’ to the tower at around 7 or 8 o’clock on the morning of Sunday 6 May, and the Kapellmeister remained on the tower when Boße left at around 7 o’clock in the

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42 Beglaubigte Copien, 46–9.

43 Sonntag, ‘Rückblick und Tagebuch’, 27.


45 ‘Ich muß zugeben, daß die ganzen Tage hindurch Besetzung auf der Thurme war.’ SächsStA-D, 10684 Stadtgericht Dresden, 751 n.n.

46 Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, 10684 Stadtgericht Dresden, 751 n.n.

evening. This is more than enough to contradict the account in My Life with its description of a Sunday afternoon of familial jollification. On this point, it seems important that Wagner's descriptions of the afternoon of ‘Friday 5 May’ and ‘Sunday 7 May’ are surprisingly similar. On the former, he talks of his nieces, Clara and Ottilie Brockhaus, making their weekly visit, and remembers that ‘everyone was in a high state of glee about the revolution’. On the latter, he recalled that his ‘nieces helped once more’ to cheer him up, having been made gleeful by the shooting. It is, of course, impossible to be certain, but it seems possible that Wagner could be remembering a single afternoon—presumably on Saturday 5 May—as two separate occasions.

According to Boße, as he accompanied ‘the Kapellmeister’ to the tower, the sound of rifle and small arms fire could be heard in the streets around the Kreuzkirche, although fighting had not yet reached this area. This fits with Wagner's description of his journey to the tower. It suggests, however, that it may have been an exaggeration to say that he actually came under fire.

Another rarely entertained possibility is that Wagner did not, after all, spend a night on the Kreuzthurm. This was, however, asserted in Gustav Kietz's Richard Wagner in den Jahren 1842-1849 und 1873-1875: Erinnerungen von Gustave Adolph Kietz. Kietz wrote that Wagner ‘ascended the tower, like so many other bystanders in order to watch for the convoys. But he never spent the night up there’. Kietz also claimed that Minna confirmed to him that Wagner ‘didn’t spend a single night away from home’ during the uprising. This is not contradicted by anything in the ‘Acta’. However, an addendum to an article on ‘Wagner and the Revolution of 1848’ written in 1893 communicated, second hand, the reminiscences of a ‘Professor Doctor Thum from Reichenbach’, who recalled a long artistic and philosophical discussion with Wagner ‘on a night of the

48 [SächsStA-D, 10057 Kreisamt Meissen, 430, fol. 29.
Dresden May week.\textsuperscript{51} It is not certain, but seems likely that this is the same ‘Thum’ that was living with Berthold at the time of the revolution and was with him in Döbeln at the meeting on the evening of 7 May at which the convoy that Berthold personally led back to Dresden was raised.\textsuperscript{52} On the balance of probabilities, it seems to me that Boße’s testimony refers to Wagner and is likely accurate. If accepted as true, it would suggest that the night which Wagner spent on the Kreuzthurm was the night from Sunday 6 to Monday 7 May. Wagner’s description of a remarkable night accompanied by the clanging of the church bells and the rattle of Prussian bullets against the walls of the tower is matched by a poetic account of the night in \textit{The Dresden Bloodbath}:

Thus this terrible Sunday ebbed away under the dull thunder of the cannon and the cracking of the gunfire, between which sounded again the incessant clanging howl of the alarm bells mixed with the endless roll of the drums.\textsuperscript{53}

The battle on the \textit{Neumarkt}

The primary object of this chapter is not simply to try and disentangle some of the confusion around Wagner’s movements during the revolution. The key reason for attempting to shed this new light on the topic is to make it possible to uncover the reality of what Wagner saw during the May Uprising. The remainder of this chapter will, therefore, examine three moments in which Wagner came closest to observing combat directly. My starting point in this endeavour is the morning of Sunday 6 May, the time at which all evidence points to Wagner being on the Kreuzthurm. The notes in the files of the Stadtgericht suggest that there was a relatively clear view of the Neumarkt from Wagner’s vantage point. Moreover, there are images that can help us to reconstruct Wagner’s view. One of the two notes attributed to Wagner by Müller reported that the battle around the Frauenkirche was ongoing, while the other referred to occasional

\textsuperscript{51} “Mein Gespräch mit W. in einer Nacht der Dresdener Maiwoche auf dem Kreuzthurme war ganz allgemeinen Inhalt” O. Bie, ‘Richard Wagner und der 48er Revolution (Schluß),’ \textit{Neue Zeitschrift für Musik}, 13/34, 35 (25 Aug.–1 Sept. 1893), 488–9 at 489.

\textsuperscript{52} Sonntag, ‘Rückblick und Tagebuch’, 17.

shots on the *Neumarkt*. Other notes report on cannon being advanced on the *Neumarkt*. Similarly, the photographer Hermann Krone produced a panorama from the *Kreuzthurm* around the year 1860 that suggests the area of the *Neumarkt* in front of the *Frauenkirche* was visible.  

According to the military account of the revolution written by the Saxon officer Alban von Montbé, the attack on the *Frauenkirche* began at around 10am. Initially, the military cleared the houses north of the *Frauenkirche*, almost certainly out of Wagner’s view. The military sources are remarkably quiet on the actual occupation of the *Frauenkirche* itself. Nevertheless, an eyewitness account exists which suggests that around twelve o’clock the dome of the church had been occupied by loyal troops who began to fire on the revolutionaries in and around the square below. Around this time according to Montbé, the Saxon Major von Reitzenstein received the order to prepare the attack on the two hotels on the south side of the square, the *Hotel de Saxe* and the *Stadt Rom*. To this end, two cannon were brought out from the armoury. One was positioned to the west of the *Frauenkirche* by the *Topfergasse*, the other to the east at the entrance to the *Salzgasse*. The resulting crossfire was directed towards the barricades on the *Mittel Frauengasse* and the *Moritzstraße*—between the two hotels. Between them, the two cannon fired 39 cannonballs and 37 rounds of canister shot. According to an eyewitness, the impact of this fire against the buildings stirred up such large clouds of plaster that it appeared as if the rebels were firing back from every window. In fact, Montbé recorded that the troops were under heavy rebel fire at this time. One artilleryman was killed and two further wounded, including the corporal commanding one of the cannon teams. The troops providing covering fire to the

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56 See Montbé, *Der Mai-Aufstand* 168–75.
57 This was recorded by Carl Gustav Carus in his autobiography. He claimed to have seen this from his garden in the *Bornstrasse*, to the south of the *Altstadt*, beyond the *Kreuzkirche*. Carl Gustav Carus, *Lebenserinnerungen und Denkwürdigkeiten* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1866), 277–8.
artillery, who were vulnerably placed in the open on the square, fired off around 60 rounds each. The Oberleutnant commanding the two cannon, Derle, was injured in the foot. At around 2pm, the order came through to storm the hotels. Another cannon was brought up to the Augustus-Straße, firing 35 cannonballs and 7 rounds of canister, breaking open the door of the Hotel de Saxe. A fourth fired 12 cannonballs and 15 rounds of canister directly across the square from the Brühlsche Terrasse to the Stadt Rom. In the meantime, the first two cannon continued their barrage, firing predominantly canister against the hotels. In all, Montbé wrote, the fire of the four cannon was so effective that the stone bay windows of the Stadt Rom were shot to pieces. While this bombardment was ongoing, two ‘storm-columns’ were mustered on the Schlossplatz, each formed from a mixture of Saxon and Prussian units. These two columns advanced down the Augustus-Straße, the guns fired a few final shots towards the Hotel de Saxe and the first column ran after them. As they emerged onto the square, they were greeted by a hail of bullets. This temporarily slowed the soldiers’ advance; some were wounded, and some simply fell back. Nevertheless, the column quickly made it across the square and into the relative safety of the Hotel de Saxe, away from the fire of the rebel barricades facing the square. On entering the Hotel de Saxe, the Prussian members of the column began firing on the neighbouring Stadt Rom. Under the protection of this fire, the second column made its way across the west side of the square and reached the Stadt Rom with the loss of eight men, two dead and six wounded. Unlike the Hotel de Saxe, the door of the Stadt Rom had not been broken open by cannon fire so the column was left waiting under the gunfire of the occupying rebels while their carpenters broke through the boarded-up windows of the hotel. According to Montbé, the rebels occupying both hotels fled as soon as the troops entered. With the two hotels taken, the portion of the battle that was at least partially visible to Wagner was over. Further military action to establish and consolidate control over the area around the Neumarkt took place in the Innere Pirnaische Gasse and against the Kindische Häuser on the Western side of the square, but although Wagner would have heard the continuing rifle, musket and small arms fire, these attacks would probably have been out of sight of the Kreuzthurm. Nevertheless, the battle on the
Neumarkt was the most remarkable frontal assault of the uprising, and the fight left several dead and injured. From the tower of the Kreuzkirche, Wagner could certainly hear and probably see the sights and sounds of this battle.

Encounters with violence

The only wounded man that Wagner himself recalls seeing was a member of the communal guard, injured in the fight at the armoury on 3 May. Moreover, his description of this injury completely obfuscates its nature:

I noticed that one of the militia-men, who, carefully taken under the arm by a comrade, was trying to continue to march hastily away, although his right leg seemed to hang limply; a few of the people called out: ‘he’s bleeding’, when they saw that he was leaving drops on the pavement behind him.

Remarkably, Wagner refuses to acknowledge directly either the guard’s inability to use his leg or the fact that he is bleeding. Wagner’s experience of the event is thereby reduced to what is ‘seemed’ and what the crowd says. Even the drops are robbed of their bloodiness. More generally, Wagner’s account of the uprising is by some distance the most bloodless. Even Clara Schumann, who spent much of the uprising outside Dresden, saw fourteen corpses on 4 May. Max Maria von Weber, the son of Carl, describes witnessing summary executions:

The first thing that greeted me in Dresden was the earth-shattering thunder of the cannon, the first sight was a Prussian picket that led four people out in order to summarily shoot them to death.


60 ‘Mir fiel einer der Bürgergardisten auf, welcher, von seinem Kameraden sorgsam unter’m Arm gefasst, hastig weiter zu marschiren sich bemühte, trotzdem sein rechtes Bein willenlos umherzuschlottern schien; Einige aus dem Volke riefen: ‘der blutet ja’, als sie die von ihm nachgelassenen Tropfen auf dem Pflaster gewahrten.’ Richard Wagner, Mein Leben, i, 2 vols. (München: F. Bruckmann, A.G, 1911), 465. I have provided my own translation of this passage in order to clearly present the extent to which Wagner avoids describing, for example, the drops of blood left by the wounded man on the pavement.


62 ‘Das erste, was mich in Dresden begrüßte, war bodenerschütternder Kanonendonner, der erste Anblick ein Pikett Preußen, das vier Leute hinausführte, um sie standrechtlich zu erschießen.’ Jähns, Wilhelm Jähns und Max Jähns, 329.
Of course, in the absence of new evidence, the possibility will always remain that Wagner was fortunate enough not to witness the death or injury of anyone during the fight. But can this be plausible when the fighting was taking place in an area of less than a square kilometre, Wagner lived within two kilometres of the fighting and he claims to have visited the epicentre of the revolution every day? In fact, it is exceedingly unlikely that Wagner could have been the witness that he claimed to be and could have been seen in the locations in which various eyewitnesses placed him without personally witnessing the violence of the revolution.

The last of Wagner’s encounters with violence that I will consider needs to be treated carefully. Its provenance is the biography written by Ferdinand Praeger, who first met Wagner when he hosted him in London in 1855. Praeger’s *Wagner as I knew him* collated a number of anecdotes relating to Wagner’s time during the uprising, but one in particular stands out. Its purported source is Julius Haimberger (called ‘Hainberger’ by Praeger), a violinist who Wagner mentions twice in his *My Life* account. Praeger also claims to have confirmed the truth of the anecdote with Wagner. According to Praeger, at around 8 o’clock one morning Wagner and Haimberger, stationed at a barricade, were preparing to eat breakfast. Suddenly a woman serving on the barricade, an eighteen-year-old baker’s daughter, was shot dead. The Prussian responsible was soon captured and brought back to the barricade, where Wagner took hold of a musket and stepped onto a cart to make a rousing speech:

> Men, will you see your wives and daughters fall in the cause of our beloved country, and not avenge their cowardly murder? All who have hearts, all who have the blood and spirit of their forefathers, and love their country follow me, and death to the tyrant.

Stirred up by Wagner’s rhetoric, the assembled revolutionaries set out from the barricade and took prisoner the Prussian’s comrades, who gave in on realizing they were outnumbered.

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Praeger’s book attracted considerable ire when it was published in its German translation. Rather than including the original text of letters quoted by Praeger, these were retranslated into German. The resulting impression was that Praeger had doctored the text of these letters to make himself seem a more important figure in Wagner’s life than was really the case. The only letter quoted by Praeger on the subject of the revolution, however, was Wagner’s letter to Eduard Röckel. Praeger’s original English translation of the relevant parts of this letter is reasonable if imperfect:

> Although I had not accepted a special rôle, yet I was present everywhere, actively superintending the bringing in of convoys, and indeed, I only returned with one from the Erzgebirge to the town hall, Dresden, on the eve of the last day.

The account of Wagner’s speech in the face of the enemy in response to the young woman’s death is so detailed that many commentators have been reluctant to dismiss it out of hand. Ernest Newman, for example, suggests that ‘while Praeger is, in general, an unreliable witness... the probability is that something of the kind did occur.’ On the other hand, William Ashton Ellis is deeply skeptical of Praeger. Ellis pointed out that there was no suggestion in any work that he had consulted (‘even Roeckel!’) that any of the military were made prisoners by insurgents. However, Röckel’s *Sachsens Erhebung und das Zuchthaus zu Waldheim* claims that the revolutionaries ‘had no lack of prisoners’ and describes a member of the communal guard being taken prisoner by a group of revolutionaries and led to the town hall. Furthermore, Röckel speaks specifically of what was to be done with ‘captured soldiers’, who were to be ‘disarmed and set loose. After all they were forced to fight against us, and it did not occur to anyone to misuse the freedom granted to them to return to the other side.’

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64 Praeger, *Wagner*, 189. The text of the letter appears in the *Sämtliche Briefe* as: ‘Hatte ich auch keine bestimmte rolle übernommen, so war ich doch überall zugegen, wirkte für zuzüge und kam noch am vorabende des endes aus dem Erzgebirge auf das rathhaus nach Dresden zurück’. Therefore, Praeger’s only addition is the idea that Wagner brought a convoy with him when he returned to the town hall on the final night of the revolution. Wagner, *SB*, iii, 532.

statement runs precisely counter to Ellis and suggests at the very least that if something like Praeger’s description of Wagner’s capture of the two Prussians occurred, it is possible that it occurred as Praeger described it.

Praeger’s anecdote needs treating with caution. It comes second hand, and there is no other source that directly corroborates its content. One possibility is that this anecdote is a conflation of some of the many stories that circulated concerning the activity of women in and around the barricade into which Wagner has been inserted. Ellis pointed towards a similar event recounted in Montbé’s account in which a women helped the military rather than the revolutionaries; however, she was neither assaulted nor wounded. Numerous tales also circulated concerning Pauline Wunderlich, who fought on the barricades after her fiancé, a gymnast, was killed early in the fighting. While it is impossible to pinpoint the identity of the murdered woman described by Praeger, the Dresdner Journal und Anzeiger listed seven women among the dead that had been identified. The one who most closely matches Praeger’s anecdote is Agnes Marie Liebsch (earlier named as ‘Lisch’), who is described as a serving girl found in the street.

Although there is no direct support for Praeger’s Haimberger anecdote elsewhere in the literature, it is possible to read Wagner’s My Life account in such a way as to open up the possibility that it is true. The confusion over dates in Wagner’s account means that he may have spent the night of 6 May (Sunday to Monday) on the Kreuzthurm.
the case, Wagner may have left the church on Monday 6 May around the time that a group of Saxon soldiers made a concerted attack on a barricade in the Kreuzgasse, a short street leading from the Kreuzkirche. This fits very closely with Wagner’s description of the circumstances in which he left the church. Wagner recalls leaving the church as a group of armed men arrived to protect the position from an anticipated attack from the Kreuzgasse. Furthermore, Kietz gives the well in the Kreuzgasse as an example of a location in which girls carrying water to the fighters were mercilessly shot down (the likely position of this well is marked by the circle between ‘Kreuz’ and ‘gasse’ in Figure 1.2). This is far from confirming the truth of Praeger’s anecdote. It is, however, enough to suggest that Praeger’s story may have some foundation in truth.

Wagner may have witnessed the gunning down of a young woman, or at least, fled the Kreuzthurm as troops made a concerted attack on the nearby barricades protecting it.

As this final example demonstrates, in all likelihood, the precise truth of Wagner’s activities during the uprising are irretrievably lost. My own suspicion is that Wagner was a passionately committed participant in the revolutionary cause, but that this

75 Wagner, My Life, i, 485.
participation was practically ineffectual. This position is best captured in the recollections of Karl Rolle, a member of the communal guard. In his account of the uprising, published in 1904, he recalled seeing Wagner in the town hall. Wagner ‘had nothing more in mind than the establishment of a provisional government, the necessity of which he proclaimed loudly, although there was no-one in particular around him to whom he addressed the proclamation.’ Nevertheless, just as Rolle confirms that Wagner was present, if ineffectual, in the town hall, there is plenty of evidence that places Wagner as a witness, if not an active one, within the vicinity of fighting. Wagner himself describes seeing the wounded and coming under fire. In addition, the evidence of the files of the Stadtgericht suggest that Wagner witnessed intense fighting on the Neumarkt. It is also possible that Wagner witnessed the death of a young woman at a barricade, or at least, was in the vicinity of a barricade when it came under attack. Whatever the details, on the balance of probabilities it seems likely that Wagner’s experiences would meet the A criterion of PTSD: ‘exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence’ As the remainder of this chapter will show, these experiences had a profound effect of Wagner’s psychology. The argument of this thesis is that they also had a profound effect on his music.

**Wagner, post-trauma**

There is little doubt that Wagner’s experiences during the May Uprising would fulfil the criterion of a traumatic event. He was almost certainly a witness to death and injury. Moreover, he was also personally imperilled, both when he witnessed fighting at close quarters and when he was pursued by the authorities in the aftermath of the Uprising.

In the Introduction to this thesis, I built a picture of posttraumatic illness in the nineteenth-century record that suggests that re-experiencing symptoms were present in some cases, but that in general there was a tendency for doctors and patients to conceptualize posttraumatic symptoms as chronic and nervous. The remainder of this chapter examines Wagner’s own experiences in the wake of trauma in the light of this

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78 APA, *DSM-5-TR*
picture. The aim here is not to diagnose Wagner with either PTSD or a contemporary nervous disease. Instead, the goal is to uncover evidence for the psychological effects that Wagner's experience of revolution may have produced. By uncovering these effects, I aim to show that Wagner's experience of traumatic events and the PTSD-like structures that characterize his motifs are linked by his experience of posttrauma.

Wagner makes several references in *My Life* to re-experiencing symptoms. Specifically, Wagner repeatedly describes the sounds of battle—cannon and musket fire—ringing in his ears even after he has left Dresden behind. Wagner first mentions this as he describes leaving Dresden for Chemnitz with Minna:

While the larks were soaring to dizzy heights above my head, and singing in the furrows of the fields, the light and heavy artillery did not cease to thunder down the streets of Dresden. The noise of this shooting, which had continued uninterruptedly for several days, had hammered itself so indelibly upon my nerves, that it continued to re-echo for a long time in my brain; just as the motion of the ship which took me to London had made me stagger for some time afterwards.  

The first thing to note here is that this fits the criterion of a re-experiencing symptom; Wagner describes hearing sounds that were not currently occurring, but which he was, rather, remembering. The second thing to note is that Wagner describes this in the terms we would expect from a nineteenth-century psychiatric case. He says that the sound of fighting left an impression on his nerves and brain (rather than, for example, his ears). Moreover, they are the result of continuous exposure over a number of days rather than associated with a discrete memory or event.

This example alone is enough to establish a connection in Wagner's experience between trauma, re-experiencing memory and sound. A second description, however, solidifies this connection and extends it from the sonic to the musical:

Till then the noise of the cannonade and musketry in the fighting at Dresden had been persistently re-echoing in my ears, especially in a half-waking condition; now

the humming of the wheels, as we rolled rapidly along the highroad, cast such a
spell upon me that for the whole of the journey I seemed to hear the melody of
Freude, schöner Gotterfunken from the Ninth Symphony being played, as it were,
on deep bass instruments.\footnote{Wagner, \textit{My Life}, ii, 506.}

On their own, these two passages are enough to locate the basis of Wagner’s
mnemonic theory of motifs within his experience. The sound of the guns bears a
striking resemblance to the remembered ‘Non-present’ that colours all emotional
expression, ‘a real, a physically apprehended object which has made a definite
impression on us in another place, or at another time’.\footnote{Wagner, \textit{PW}, ii, 325–6.} All the caveats about the
accuracy of \textit{My Life} in describing the events of the uprising are equally relevant to this
example. In particular, the possibility that Wagner was consciously writing an example
of this kind of memory into his autobiography cannot be ruled out. This is, in fact, an
intriguing possibility because if this were the case, it would mean that Wagner had
concocted something very like traumatic memory for his music and then ‘malingered’
this form of memory into his autobiography. These opposing possibilities are hardly
resolved by the contemporary Wagner documents. His letters of the period are full of a
restless energy but contain relatively few references to anything approaching a concrete
symptom. An exception to this is a vivid description that Wagner gave of his difficulty
sleeping in a letter to his wife Minna on 4 June 1849. He complained that ‘no sooner do
I close my eyes—now that my blood is always boiling—than such images and dreams
come to me that my sleep is turned to torture.’\footnote{‘so bald ich nur das Auge schließe—jetzt, wo mir das Blut immer kocht—kommen mir Bilder u. Träume
vor, die mir den Schlaf zur Marter werden lassen.’ Wagner, \textit{SB}, iii, 71.} Of course, there is no specific hint here
of re-experiencing, although it is one possibility contained within ‘such images and
dreams’. However, sleep disturbances of any kind are listed as a symptom in the
DSM-5-TR (under the arousal criterion).\footnote{APA, \textit{DSM-5-TR}.}

One possible explanation for Wagner’s silence on these symptoms in the contemporary
documentation is that he felt unable to articulate his experience of the revolution and its

\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{Wagner, \textit{My Life}, ii, 506.}
  \item \footnote{Wagner, \textit{PW}, ii, 325–6.}
  \item \footnote{‘so bald ich nur das Auge schließe—jetzt, wo mir das Blut immer kocht—kommen mir Bilder u. Träume vor, die mir den Schlaf zur Marter werden lassen.’ Wagner, \textit{SB}, iii, 71.}
  \item \footnote{APA, \textit{DSM-5-TR}.}
\end{itemize}
aftermath. In some cases, such as his letter to Eduard Devrient discussed in Chapter 1, this reticence is likely the result of political and personal expediency, a desire to acquit himself of the criminal charges against him. However, even in correspondence with those closest to him there is little discussion of the revolution itself. Liszt wrote four letters mentioning Wagner around the time of Wagner’s flight via Weimar, none of which indicate any discussion of the actual events of the revolution. Nor does the contemporary correspondence of Wagner, with the exception of the letter to Devrient, contain any references to what took place in Dresden. Of course, this absence of evidence cannot safely be taken as proof of avoidant behaviour on Wagner’s part. Nevertheless, there is positive evidence in My Life that avoidance was at the root of this silence. Recalling his arrival in Weimar, he wrote that he ‘found it very difficult to confess to this friend [Liszt] that I had not left Dresden in the regulation way’. Similarly, he describes a moment with his relatives in Chemnitz on the day that Heubner and Bakunin were arrested that brings together avoidance and flashback:

He [Wagner’s brother-in-law Heinrich Wolfram] thought it a wonderful intervention of Providence that I had not arrived at Chemnitz with them [Heubner and Bakunin] and gone to the same inn, in which case their fate would certainly have been mine. The recollection of my escape from almost certain death in duels with the most experienced swordsmen in my student days flashed across me like a flash of lightning. This last terrible experience made such an impression on me that I was incapable of breathing a word in connection with what had happened.

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85 Wagner, My Life, 500.
86 Wagner, My Life, 499.
This extract is particularly striking because Wagner himself identifies a memory as the cause of his pathological inability to discuss the events of the uprising.\footnote{Although this early twentieth-century translation makes Wagner's memory sound very like a flashback, the passage might be translated in a less loaded way (without the word 'flashed') as: 'the strange way in which, as a student, I had been saved from expected defeats in duels against the most experienced blades went through my soul like lightning.' ('Wie ein Blitz zog es mir durch die Seele, auf welch’ sonderbare Weise ich schon einmal als Student vor den voraussichtlichen Niederlagen in den mit den erfahrensten Raufdegen engagirten Duellen bewahrt worden war') Wagner, Mein Leben, i, 487.} Again, however, Wagner constructed *My Life* so carefully, that it is impossible to be sure how accurately this represents Wagner's experience.

There are also signs in the documentary record that Wagner was nervous and irritable in his exile. Wagner's 4 June letter to Minna is evidence of sleeping difficulties, and an episode from his initial flight from Dresden offers a further vivid example of this. In Magdala, Wagner stayed with an economist, J. Wernsdorf, who later wrote a memoir of the experience for *Der Chorgesang* (quoted in Glasenapp and Ellis's *Life of Wagner*). He recalls the arrival of Minna one night and notes Wagner's extreme reaction on being woken:

> When I had roused him with 'Get up, friend Wagner; the Frau Kapellmeister has arrived,' he started bolt upright, stared wildly round him, and ejaculated in a tone too loud and peevish, 'What! The woman?'—At one bound he sprang out of bed, but remained standing a moment, striking his forehead with the hollow of his hand; then much more gently, as if to calm his agitation, he added, 'My God! — it's my birthday!'\footnote{Glasenapp and Ellis, *Wagner*, ii, 372.}

Wagner became known for his irritability. Ferdinand Praeger notes his 'nervous excitability', which he attributed to a combination of erysipelas and a delicate nervous system.\footnote{Praeger, *Wagner* ii, 251–2.} The problem here is that it is very difficult to prove that Wagner's irritability did not precede his experience of the revolution. Liszt, for example, attributed Wagner's participation in the revolution to a pre-existing 'painful irritation' caused in part by his
early years of struggle and the stress of his position in Dresden. This echoed a description of Wagner in Alfred Meissner’s autobiography. Meissner, describing his first meeting with Wagner in 1845, said that the composer was ‘constantly excited, irritable and venomous’ on account of his ‘early struggles’. Wagner himself makes frequent references to quarrels between him and Minna in *My Life*. Nevertheless, it seems possible that the very well documented irritability of Wagner’s later years bled into the image of the younger Wagner. Ernest Newman, for example, makes frequent allusions to Wagner’s temper in the first volume of his biography, but the only evidence for this temper that he cites specifically is Meissner (*My Life* is an ever-present, tacit source). In these ‘diagnoses’ offered by friends and acquaintances, the idea that chronic stress rather than short-term trauma resurfaces.

To summarize, there is evidence of Wagner experiencing each of the three posttraumatic symptom clusters described in the ICD-11 (re-experiencing, avoidance and perception of current threat); however, in each case there is a reason to be cautious. Wagner describes the sounds of the uprising re-echoing in his ears for weeks after fleeing. The issue in this case is that the only clear evidence of this re-experiencing comes in *My Life*, an autobiography in which Wagner frequently invents episodes to fit his self-image as an artist. Therefore, it is impossible to rule out the idea.

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90 ‘Sans la douloureuse irritation que lui ont laissée tant d’années de luttes fâcheuses, provoquées par les soucis de sa position, de sa renommée, de son ambition, de son just orgueil (abstraction faite de sa rare organisation de poète et d’artiste, déjà nécessairement irritable de par la grâce de Dieu), il est à présumer qu’il ne se serait aucunement aventuré dans cette confusion, et je suis même persuadé qu’il se trouve plus compromis d’apparence que de fait.’ Liszt and Carl Alexander Grossherzog von Sachsen, *Briefwechsel zwischen Liszt und Carl Alexander*, 23.


92 Another interesting point of intersection here between the pre- and post-revolutionary Wagner’s is highlighted in Emerich Kastner’s *Wagner-Catalog*. He includes a ‘sketch’ of Wagner’s arrest warrant that includes the phrase, ‘special characteristics: quick in movement as in speech’. ‘Besondere Kennzeichen: in der Bewegung wie im Sprechen rasch und schnell’. Emerich Kastner (ed.), *Wagner-Catalog: Chronologisches Verzeichniss der von und über Richard Wagner erschienenen Schriften, Musikwerke etc. etc., nebst biographischen Notizen*, (Offenbach a. M.: Joh. André Musikalien-Verlagshandlung, 1878), appendix B. This might suggest a certain nervousness in Wagner’s behaviour before 1849. In fact, this description is most easily found in the warrant for Carl Johann Heine. ‘Steckbrief’, *Leipziger Zeitung*, Beilage zu Nr. 137 (17 May 1849), 2505 This suggests either that Kastner was in error, or that the description was common enough as to hold no particular significance for our understanding of Wagner’s behaviour.


94 WHO, *ICD-11*.
that Wagner was consciously writing an invented quasi-motific experience into his life in order to better fit with his desired narrative of development as an artist. That is to say that one of the goals of this chapter—to win for Wagner’s motifs an intrinsic position within Wagner’s experience—may have been achieved solely because Wagner set out to achieve precisely the same goal when dictating *My Life*. A similar problem comes into play when examining Wagner’s avoidance symptoms. The only positive evidence for these symptoms—Wagner’s claims to have difficulty discussing the revolution—comes from *My Life*. This evidence is corroborated by an absence of discussion of Wagner’s activities in the letters of those he met with or wrote to in this period; however, this absence can hardly be taken as proof of avoidance. The evidence that Wagner suffered from heightened arousal symptoms is the strongest, stretching from his own description of sleeping difficulties in the aftermath of the revolution to third-party accounts of his irritability. The necessary caution regarding these symptoms relates to the fact that it is difficult to pin these symptoms definitively to the May Uprising.
Chapter 2

Sieglinde’s Mad Scene and Sieglinde’s Nightmare: Trauma and Motif

In Act II, Scene 5 of *Die Walküre*, Sieglinde experiences traumatic memory. Triggered by the sound of the horn of her husband, Hunding, she relives in the present tense her abduction at his hands years earlier. This has been noted in previous scholarship, yet the far-reaching significance of this moment is often overlooked. This passage is an extremely rare example of traumatic re-experiencing in pre-twentieth-century art. Because Sieglinde’s nightmare is triggered by music, specifically by a motif, it invites us to revisit Wagner’s theoretical conception of motifs in terms of his and Sieglinde’s traumatic experiences. No Wagnerian technical device has aroused as much critical debate as his musical motifs. Nevertheless, it is my contention that re-examining Wagner’s theoretical standpoint from the perspective of trauma has the potential to cast

1 Katherine Syer notes only that Sieglinde’s sleep is ‘disturbed... by the refreshed memory of a traumatic event that she describes aloud just before waking’. In fact, although Sieglinde’s words make it clear that she is reliving a traumatic event, her words offer hardly any description of the event itself. Katherine R. Syer, *Wagner’s Visions: Poetry, Politics, and the Psyche in the Operas through Die Walküre* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 156. Christopher Wintle’s reading is closer to mine: ‘Sieglinde is unconsciously re-enacting a childhood trauma.’ However, the psychoanalytical terms in which Wintle analyses Sieglinde’s nightmare differ from my own. As I elaborate below, Sieglinde’s memory is a passive re-experiencing rather than an active re-enactment. Moreover, these terms lead Wintle to overlook how remarkable it is to find such a vivid example of re-experiencing in a nineteenth-century artwork. Christopher Wintle, ‘Analysis and psychoanalysis: Wagner’s musical metaphors’, in Richard Orton John Paynter, Tim Howell and Peter Seymour (eds.), *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought*, ii (London: Routledge), 650–91 at 662.
new light on this debate and on the way in which Wagner's motifs were written and are heard. The goal of this thesis, and this chapter in particular, is to offer this re-examination. Therefore, in this chapter I will lay out the presentation of traumatic memory by Wagner in Sieglinde's nightmare. I will demonstrate how this presentation exemplifies the theory of motif that Wagner presents in *Opera and Drama*. Finally, I will show how this theoretical construction of motif reproduces the structure of trauma as it is constituted by theories of posttraumatic stress disorder just as clearly as the dramatic presentation of Sieglinde's nightmare.

**Sieglinde’s Nightmare**

Sieglinde’s nightmare occurs after she and her brother and lover, Siegmund, flee from Hunding, her husband, at the end of Act I. In Act II, the siblings appear on stage in Scene 3, and Siegmund insists they rest. Sieglinde sleeps through scene 4—the ‘Todesverkündigung’, in which Brünnhilde warns Siegmund of his impending death before relenting and vowing to help him fight against Hunding—and the beginning of scene 5—in which Siegmund hears Hunding's horn and departs to face him. After Siegmund leaves, Hunding's horn sounds twice more, and Sieglinde begins to talk in her sleep:

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Sieglinde

*begins, sich träumend unruhiger zu bewegen*  
She begins to move restlessly in her dreams

*Kehrte der Vater nur heim! –*  
If only father would return home! –

*Mit dem Knaben noch weilt er im Wald.*  
He's still out in the forest with the boy.

*Mutter! Mutter!*  
Mother! Mother!

*Mir bangt der Mut;*  
I’m frightened;

*nicht freund und friedlich*  
the strangers don’t seem friendly or gentle:

*scheinen die Fremden:*  

*Schwarze Dämpfe,*  
Black mists,

*schwüles Gedünst!*  
clowing fumes!

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77
Feurige Lohe
leckt schon nach uns:
es brennt das Haus!
Zu Hilfe! Bruder!
Sieg mund! Siegmund!

Sie springt auf.

Starker Blitz und Don ner

Sieg mund! Ha!

Sie starrt in steigender Angst um sich her:
fast die ganze Büh ne ist in schwarze Gewitter wolken gehüllt.

Der Hornruf Hundings ertönt in der Nähe

The flames
lap around us:
the house is burning!
Help! Brother!
Sieg mund! Siegmund!

She jumps up.

Heavy lightning and thunder
Sieg mund! Siegmund! Siegmund! Siegmund! Siegmund!

She gazed around, increasingly fearful. Almost the whole Stage is covered in black storm clouds.
Hunding’s horn call sounds nearby.

In the remaining moments of the act, Siegmund is killed by Hunding, and Sieglinde flees with Brünnhilde into the darkness.

Sieglinde’s nightmare is striking in the extent to which it seems to represent traumatic re-experiencing in modern terms. During her nightmare, Sieglinde relives the memory of her abduction as if it were occurring in the present. She repeats actions from the traumatic event by calling out to her mother and to her brother. Moreover, the nightmare preserves the original, overwhelming emotional content of the traumatic experience;

2 Walküre, Act II, sc. 5, ll. 1499–1512.
3 This feature, a failure to realize that the memory occurred in the past, is a key characteristic of traumatic memory: ‘The intrusive re-experiencing symptoms in PTSD appear to lack one of the defining features of episodic memories, the awareness that the content of the memory is something from the past.’ Anke Ehlers, Ann Hackmann, and Tanja Michael, ‘Intrusive re-experiencing in post-traumatic stress disorder: Phenomenology, theory, and therapy’, Memory, 12/4 (2004), 403–15 at 404.
Kehr ye der Vater nun heim! Mit dem Knochen noch weiht er im Forst.

Mut auf! Mut auf! nuchacht der Mut—nicht freund und fried ich seh an die Frem—des!

Schwarz ze Dam pie schein les Ge dünst feu ri ge!

a tempo

He he heh schon nach aus er brennt das Haus zu Höl—se.

poco a poco cresc.

Kehr der Seg—seh Seg—seh—seh—seh.
Example 2.1: Sieglinde’s Nightmare, Die Walküre, Act II, Scene 5, bb. 1901–1944

Sieglinde feels the same fear that she felt when abducted. These features resemble the key characteristics of flashbacks, which are closely associated with PTSD.[4]

These aspects of Sieglinde’s nightmare also set it apart from apparently similar moments in other pre-twentieth-century artworks in which characters recall or react to traumatic experiences. In opera alone, there is, after all, a whole category of ‘mad scenes’ whose popularity peaked during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Wagner himself composed a mad scene for his early operatic subject Die Feen. The ‘mad scene’ category is a relatively loose grouping, yet it shares its defining characteristics with Sieglinde’s nightmare: a character, typically a soprano, loses touch with reality and perceives a reality of their own. In Sieglinde’s nightmare, as in the mad scenes of Die Walküre, the character experiences a sudden, vivid, distracting memory of a traumatic event.

[4] The ICD-11 only mentions flashbacks as a symptom of PTSD and Complex PTSD, while the DSM-5-TR only lists it under the diagnostic criteria of PTSD and Acute Stress Disorder (ASD), a condition closely related to PTSD. WHO, ICD-11; APA, DSM-5-TR. One study found that flashbacks, defined broadly as ‘a sudden, vivid, distracting memory’, occurred more than ten times as frequently in female survivors of rape than control participants. Specifically, this study surveyed 54 female participants (34 survivors of rape and 25 control participants) and found that participants who had experienced rape reported an average (mean) frequency of flashbacks more than ten times that of control participants (82.9 (SD=117.1) days per year on which a flashback occurred vs 6.4 (SD=41.7)). Lisa A. Duke et al., ‘The sensitivity and specificity of flashbacks and nightmares to trauma’, Journal of anxiety disorders, 22/2 (2008), 319–27 at 322–3.
scene of Vincenzo Bellini’s *La Sonnambula*, this split between the ‘real’ world and the ‘mad’ world is the result of dreaming. In most mad scenes, however, the mad character experiences something closer to psychosis. Despite being awake, they perceive things that are not there. Lucia’s mad scene in Gaetano Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* is a perfect example. She appears on stage addressing Edgardo, who is not there. She sees a church around her, and she perceives—perhaps smelling as well as seeing—lighted incense. Insofar as a mad character can perceive reality, they often perceive it as something other than what it is. In the mad scene in Donizetti’s *I Puritani*, Elvira recognizes her uncle as her father and her suitor Riccardo as her lover Arturo. The psychiatrists Andreas Erfurth and Paul Hoff argued that, archetypically, a mad scene is borne of the conflict between the brutal strictures of the real world and the character’s own free, private world. Madness arises as a defence mechanism, a ‘refuge’ into which the mad character can retreat. As a result, Sieglinde’s nightmare can be differentiated from most mad scenes in two ways. Firstly, Sieglinde’s nightmare is no refuge. She does not escape her distressing situation into a more pleasant, free world. Instead, the reality that she perceives is just as horrible as the one she escapes. Secondly, Sieglinde’s nightmare is different to other mad scenes in that what she perceives is a single, coherent memory.

My purpose in showing that Sieglinde’s nightmare cannot simply be explained or understood in terms of pre-existing generic or cultural templates (such as the ‘mad scene’) is to open up this passage to an interpretation in anachronistic terms. My reasons for doing so are twofold. On the one hand, I want to legitimize the use of modern conceptions of PTSD as the most appropriate way to understand Sieglinde’s nightmare. If there were a contemporary framework that would explain the passage equally well, it would be unsatisfying to ignore this in favour of a modern one. On the other hand, I want to open the possibility that the simplest and best explanation of the

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6 The only possible exception to this comes in Auber’s *La Muette de Portici*. In Act V, Scene 3, Masaniello seems to relive the experience of leading troops into battle. In many ways, however, this is no typical mad scene. Not only is Masaniello not a woman, but his madness is the result of poisoning.
presence of traumatic memory in Sieglinde’s nightmare is a personal encounter of these kind of memories on Wagner’s part.

**Hunding’s Horn—Wagner’s Motif**

The true importance of Sieglinde’s nightmare is that it is not only a depiction of traumatic memory, but a depiction of traumatic memory triggered by music. Sieglinde’s nightmare stands out as a rare and vivid example of a traumatic flashback in pre-twentieth-century opera and warrants scholarly attention as such. Nevertheless, this moment takes on this deeper significance because it weaves the thread of trauma into the fabric of Wagner’s music. The musical moment that prompts the nightmare is the diegetic sound of Hunding’s horn call, which sounds twice immediately before Sieglinde’s nightmare[7]

The use of Hunding’s horn in this way establishes within Wagner’s works the principle that sound and music can act as triggers of traumatic memory. That is to say, they can evoke a special category of memories—memories that are inseparable from an anxious disposition towards the future. As I will go on to demonstrate, this principle lies at the foundation of Wagner’s post-revolutionary compositional technique.

What makes the use of Hunding’s horn call within Sieglinde’s nightmare critical to understanding Wagner’s scores as a whole is the fact that the horn call exists simultaneously as a motif. That is to say, Hunding’s horn call has a special place within Wagner’s score in addition to the significance that it has as a mnemonic trigger for Sieglinde and a horn call for Hunding. Defining Wagner’s motifs—explaining this special status—has always been, in both general and particular terms, a slippery endeavour. Wagner himself discussed them at great length, without defining them sufficiently plainly to bequeath any kind of tight critical consensus. Nevertheless, for all the ambiguity over their exact nature and significance, Wagner’s motifs have always been the fundamental unit in terms of which his scores are understood. My own interpretation of Wagner’s theoretical disquisition is that the term motif can be applied to any short, repeated melody in Wagner’s score because of an equivalence Wagner

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[7] By ‘diegetic sound’, I mean here: sound that is present as such within the represented world of the Ring. The ways in which the notion of diegetic music interacts with my concept of traumatic motifs will be discussed in far greater depth in Chapters 5 and 6.
makes between ‘musical motive’ and ‘melodic moments’.

Moreover, as Wagner makes clear, each of these motifs should be taken to communicate extra-musical meaning with particular significance to the plot. Nevertheless, as I will discuss below there is apparent motificism in Wagner’s scores that escapes even this broad definition.

Clearly, Hunding’s horn call meets these criteria. As a melody, it is repeated a number of times in both Acts I and II. As a motif, it means, amongst other things, that Hunding is present or approaching. Significantly, this is true both within the fictional world of the Ring (the diegesis) and outside of this fictional world. Sieglinde’s nightmare therefore becomes one of the moments in Wagner’s works in which the theoretical framework of his composition is disclosed within the compositions themselves.

As a result, Sieglinde’s reaction to hearing this motif takes on a deeper importance—it discloses how Wagner’s motifs are heard. In the remainder of this chapter, I will construct an interpretive theory of Wagner’s theory of motif that takes this assertion as its starting point. I will aim to show that Wagner’s theoretical writings on motifs suggest that the traumatic reaction to a motif exemplified by Sieglinde is essential to the experience of hearing a motif. Moreover, I will highlight the structural similarities between Wagner’s temporal and psychological conception of his motifs and the structures of PTSD.

The basis for any discussion of Wagner’s motifs should be his essay, Opera and Drama. Written in Zürich between 1850 and 1851, Opera and Drama is the work in which Wagner sets out his understanding of his motific technique most explicitly and at greatest length. At its most basic, Wagner describes the acquisition of meaning by motifs as a process of clarification through a definite object. This process of clarification introduces a temporal structure of anticipation followed by realization followed by repetition. It is this temporal structure that is central to the similarities between Wagner’s theory of motif and PTSD. Within this framework, a ‘foreboding’ appearance

8 Wagner, PW, ii, 329 and 346.

9 Another example is the composition of the Preislied in Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. Again there is an overlap between the status of the music within and without the fictional world, albeit an ontological overlap. The Preislied is a song both within and without the world of the opera. The scene in which this song is composed reveals the structure of the song as bar form. Alfred Lorenz famously took this as the disclosure of one of the two ‘secret’ forms of Wagner’s works, the other being ‘Bogen’ form.
of a motif is defined simply as an appearance of a motif before it has appeared in the
verse-melody—i.e. before it has been used to sing words by a character—or has
accompanied a gesture. This foreboding is the ineffable expression of an unspeakable
thought and emotion that nevertheless demands to find an expression in words later in
the drama. The extra-musical content of a motif as foreboding is necessarily an
indeterminate, unspeakable anticipation. In order to produce a definite meaning, the
motif must be ‘definitely conditioned by a definite object, and proclaimed by a definite
individual before our very eyes.’ The appearance of a motif within the verse-melody or
in conjunction with a singer’s gesture is this clarification. This is the moment in which an
emotion finds its ‘direct expression’. That is to say, it is these appearances that clarify in
a concrete and, by Wagner’s more or less tacit admission, linguistic way the
(inseparable) emotional and dramatic meanings of a motif. This meaning can then be
conveyed by the repetition of the motif by the orchestra. Or, as Wagner puts it, ‘a
musical motive into which the thought-filled Word verse of a dramatic performer has
poured itself—so to say, before our eyes—is a thing conditioned by Necessity: with its
return a definite emotion is discernibly conveyed to us.’ Remembrance is the echo of
this emotion within the audience when the motif is repeated. Wagner explains this
aspect of the process in terms of ownership. An emotion is shared by a character
through motif in the verse-melody. After this, the emotion belongs equally to the
audience, who can be made to recall and re-experience this emotion by repetition of the
motif. Wagner summarizes this whole structural arrangement quite plainly:

The Foreboding we have taken as the herald of the matter that finally proclaims
itself in the gesture and verse-melody,—the Remembrance, on the other hand, as a
derivative from that matter.

10 ‘a Foreboding is the herald of an emotion as yet unspoken-out, because as yet unspeakable, in the
sense of our customary word-speech.’ Wagner, PW, ii, 330
11 Wagner, PW, ii, 329.
12 As an example of the contradictions in Wagner’s prose, of page 333 of Opera and Drama Wagner is
explicit that a ‘definite emotion’ can only be expressed in the first instance by language in alliance with
music and gesture. Just three pages later he says that the ‘matter’ foreboded and remembered by motifs
can be found in the gesture AND the verse-melody [emphasis mine]. Wagner, PW, ii, 333 and 336
13 Wagner, PW, ii, 329.
14 Wagner, PW, ii, p.327-328.
15 Wagner, PW, ii, 336.
It is easy to see how this position can be matched to Wolzogen’s motific guides. Wolzogen attempts to draw out the meaning of a motif from a particular significant moment in which that motif’s meaning is ‘proclaimed’. This simple reading of Wagner’s motifs constitutes the basic motific technique of all of the scores that he composed after writing *Opera and Drama*. In general, motifs appear in the orchestra in an anticipatory function, pregnant with emotional potential; their meaning is subsequently clarified by an appearance in the verse-melody; and this meaning can be repeated *ad libitum* by the orchestra.

A more or less paradigmatic example of this basic motific process is the Valhalla motif. The music that comprises the Valhalla motif first appears in the second scene of *Rheingold*. In the score, its appearance marks the beginning of the scene. Following a procedure that appears several times elsewhere in the *Ring*—most obviously in Act II, Scene 4 of *Walküre*, the ‘Todesverkündigung’—this passage appears alone in the orchestra and is then soon repeated as an accompaniment to a singing character. The first appearance of this music accompanies the emergence of the castle out of the artificial clouds that have covered the stage. This seems to be precisely the kind of moment that Wagner uses to introduce the foreboding in *Opera and Drama*. It is a passage in which ‘gesture lapses into rest’ and ‘the actor hushes’.[16] The second appearance begins with gestural effect of Wotan fixing his eyes on the castle, further solidifying the association between motif, god and castle. This appearance then acts as the accompaniment to Wotan’s ode to the newly completed Valhalla (Example 5.3):

**Wotan**

Vollendet das ewige Werk! The eternal work is completed!

Auf Berges Gipfel On the mountain's peak

die Götterburg; the gods' fortress;

prächtig prahlt splendid stands

der prangende Bau! the shining structure!

Wie im Traum ich ihn trug, As I beheld it in my dreams,

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wie mein Wille ihn wies, as my will decreed it
stark und schön strong and beautiful
steht er zur Schau: it stands for all to see:
hehrer, herrlicher Bau noble, lordly edifice!

This therefore appears to be a textbook Wagnerian unification of music, words, vista and gesture, and as such a straightforward realization of the procedure laid out in Opera and Drama:

A musical motive (Motiv) can produce a definite impression on the Feeling, inciting it to a function akin to Thought, only when the emotion uttered in that motive has been definitely conditioned by a definite object, and proclaimed by a definite individual before our very eyes.

Wotan’s words and gesture attach the motif to him as the definite individual who shares the motifs meaning and Valhalla as the definite object. The meaning of the motif is anticipated, realized and then repeated. The Valhalla music, according to this reading, contains within it some immanent germ that represents Wotan and Valhalla, which is subsequently solidified in the memory by the words and actions that are presented on stage.

This is equally the case with Hunding’s motif. It appears three times in the opening bars of Die Walküre, Act I, Scene 2. The first two appearances are foreboding, their meaning is unclarified (bb. 381–386). On its third appearance, the motif accompanies the gesture of Hunding’s entrance (bb. 389–390). This process of clarification is underlined by the dynamics of the three appearances; each is louder than the last. As a result, the meaning becomes clearer as the motif becomes more easily audible. This basic structure functions reasonably successfully even for the kinds of motifs that some critics are most keen to label ineffable. Even in Tristan und Isolde, the work that is most routinely painted as conceived in a Schopenhauerian frenzy as the triumph of music

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17 Rheingold, sc. 2, ll. 343–352.  
18 Wagner, PW, ii 329.
Example 2.2: Wotan’s clarification of the ‘Valhalla’ motif (Rheingold, sc. 2, bb. 804–824) along with the ‘foreboded’ iteration of the motif that appears at bb. 769-787 (the separate presentation of the reduction of the orchestra from b. 817 onwards reflects the fact that the orchestral score is identical at bb. 769–781 and bb. 804–816 over language, the most meaningful and emotional motifs can be seen to follow this pattern.

There is perhaps no better example than the motif that begins the whole work, and which appears more often than any other. At the beginning of Act I, Scene 2, Isolde looks at Tristan and uses the motif to sing ‘destined for me, lost to me, noble and strong, brave and cowardly’ (see Example 2.3).

This is the motif that Dahlhaus implies will always escape nomenclature, and yet Isolde’s words can surely be said to encompass the extra-musical meaning of the motif. Inevitably, these words do not capture every meaning that we might possibly look for in the music of the motif, but it is hard to argue that they do not capture the basic outline of the motif’s meaning and, indeed, the basic outline and meaning of Tristan und Isolde as a whole. The same goes for motifs which do not appear across the entire score of the opera. In Parsifal, the motif that Wolzogen labelled the ‘Der Weihegruss für Titurel’ only appears in Amfortas’s monologue at the end of the final act (Example 2.4). Nevertheless, it follows this anticipation-realization-repetition structure. It appears twice in the orchestra—as

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20 ‘Mir erkoren, mir verloren, hehr und heil, kühn und feig!’ Tristan, Act I, sc. 2.
21 Dahlhaus, Wagner’s Music Dramas 62.
22 Wolzogen, Leitfaden durch Parsifal 78.
Example 2.3: The motif(s) that Wolzogen termed the ‘Leidensmotiv’ and ‘Sehnsuchtsmotiv’ as foreboding and moment of clarification
foreboding—and is then used by Amfortas to sing ‘most blessed of the heroes’, after which it appears several more times in the orchestra alone.\textsuperscript{25}

The motific meanings established in this way seem to be remarkably stable even as the musical content of the motif varies. A particularly neat example of this is the motif that the young sailor uses to sing, ‘coolly, the wind blows homeward: my Irish child, where have you got to?’ in \textit{Tristan und Isolde} (Example 2.5a).\textsuperscript{24} From this initial statement emerges a variety of versions of the motif that are connected in meaning: ‘the wind is blowing us homeward; where are you Isolde?’ The first is an almost mocking response from the orchestra to Isolde’s question, ‘Brangäne... where are we?’\textsuperscript{25} It seems to say, ‘weren’t you listening to the sailor? We’re going home’ (Example 2.5b).

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotesize
\item[23] ‘Hochgesegneter der Helden!’ \textit{Parsifal}, Act III.
\end{footnotes}
develops into a ferocious version of the motif that accompanies Isolde as she tries to summon the sea, storm and winds in order to sink the ship (Example 2.5c). Later in the act, the motif functions as a nagging reminder that the ship is nearing Cornwall. It can be heard as Kurwenal tells Isolde to prepare herself as the ‘flag of joy’ is announcing to those ashore that the ship is arriving (Example 2.5d). It follows the interruption of the sailors into the scene between Tristan and Isolde, prompting Tristan to ask, ‘where are we?’ (Example 2.5e). Unsurprisingly, it makes its last appearance in the final bars of the act as the ship reaches the dock (Example 2.5f).

26 'Vom Mast der Freude Flagge, sie wehe lustig ins Land; in Markes Königschlosse mach’ sie ihr Nah’n bekannt.' Tristan, Act I, sc. 4.
27 ‘Wo sind wir?’ Tristan, Act I, sc. 5.
(c) Tristan und Isolde, Act I, Scene 1

(d) Tristan und Isolde, Act I, Scene 4
In a parallel mechanism, Wagner takes the same temporal structure (anticipation-realization-repetition) and applies it to the interrelation of musical motifs with the events of the drama. It is these temporal roles that transform Wagner’s motifs into the narrativizing agents of the drama—they let motifs tell the story. In "Opera and
Drama, a musical foreboding is not simply an indeterminate sense of anticipation. Instead, it is an anticipation that unspeakably demands fulfilment in the subsequent arrival of a ‘definite phenomenon’\(^{28}\) This phenomenon—the dramatic event—therefore appears as a ‘justified foreboding’ when it finally occurs\(^{29}\) This structure is essential to Wagner’s aesthetics because it allows him to escape his own criticism of Meyerbeer as wanting ‘the effect but not the cause’\(^{30}\) Motific foreboding is such an ‘all-powerful’ tool that it can be used to pre-justify any dramatic effect\(^{31}\) Similarly, Wagner ascribes to motifs the power to recall events. He lays out a theory of musical thought that has the power to evoke a real perception of past events. In other words, music can force the listener to repeat past dramatic events as a kind of memory, which Wagner called ‘non-present’ but ‘real’.\(^{32}\) If the definition of motifs in terms of meaning seems to assert the primacy of words over music, this framework reasserts music as an equal or even dominant element. Because music has the power to tell the story—before, during and after it happens—the actual events of the drama are subordinated to music. This relies on a straightforward temporal arrangement. A foreboding must come first. It must be followed by the foreboded event—the ‘justified foreboding’\(^ {33}\) This event is then remembered. This means that Wagner lays out the same basic temporal structure—anticipation-realization-repetition—and applies it to two processes. One process outlines the meaning of the motifs, while the other deals with phenomena—the events of the drama. The critic that best encapsulated this view of Wagner’s motif was Thomas Mann. The basis of Mann’s reading is that motifs capture ‘brilliant allusion, a moving magnificence of musical thought.’\(^{34}\) In Mann’s interpretation, Wagner is thus able to tie together the events of the drama in the score. This tying together approaches the transcendental whenever the music comes together as a memorializing act—the example that Mann gives is Siegfried’s funeral march, which he analyses as ‘an

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28 There is a clear parallel here with the need for a motif’s meaning to be ‘definitely conditioned by a definite object, and proclaimed by a definite individual before our very eyes.’ Wagner, PW, ii 329.
30 Wagner, PW, ii 98.
31 Wagner, PW, ii 331.
32 Wagner, PW, ii 325–6.
33 Wagner, PW, ii 334.
In my view, PTSD can be used to resolve this split between the interpretations of Wolzogen and Mann. By appealing to an external configuration—PTSD—it is possible to accept that a motif can remember and forebode events and meanings both in an endless variety of configurations.

The apparently straightforward temporal structures of Wagnerian motifs that I have outlined can be found in Wagner’s prose; however, this straightforwardness and clarity can only be achieved in paraphrase. Wagner’s own explanation—although it contains this straightforward structure—presents a far more ambiguous picture. In some cases, Wagner even seems to contradict the basic temporal structure. Nevertheless, it is this ambiguity that ultimately reveals that—as in the case of Sieglinde’s nightmare—the mnemonic structure revealed by Wagner is not grounded in normal memory but rather a mnemonic-prophetic structure that resembles modern descriptions of PTSD. The first ambiguity introduced by Wagner in his theory takes the form of the structure that he uses to outline this initial conception of motif as foreboding, verse-melody, and remembrance in Opera and Drama. Wagner’s first outline of his theory of motif comes in a chapter that deals with the orchestra’s ‘faculty of speech’. Instead of outlining it in these temporal arrangements, Wagner begins by outlining the idea that orchestral musical expression is ‘unspeakable’; that is, meaningful in a way that cannot be expressed in words. In this, he argues, it resembles gesture, with which it finds itself combined in dance. Wagner then introduces the verse-melody as an emotional moment in the present that brings together two competing modes of expression: words (unconditioned emotion) and music (conditioned emotion). In this unification, the verse-melody is able to unite the apparently contradictory properties that Wagner has ascribed to words and music: the ‘absent’ and the ‘present’. Wagner goes on to discuss how this emotional moment belongs to the audience once it has been shared by a character and can thus be repeated as remembrance. In the text of Opera and Drama, it is only after introducing these two temporal elements that Wagner comes to

35 Mann, Essays, p. 367.
36 Wagner, PW, ii, 316–33.
37 Wagner, PW, ii, 316–22.
38 Wagner, PW, ii, 322–5.
discusses foreboding. Moreover, Wagner introduces it as a separate capability of the orchestra. Wagner initially outlines foreboding as a power of the orchestra that is not derived from the system of verse-melody-remembrance. Instead, he traces this capability to ‘Absolute-instrumental music’. Wagner’s prose outline of his theory of motif therefore contradicts the simplest reading of this theory in three ways. Firstly, Wagner outlines his theory’s components in an order that contradicts their apparent arrangement in his scores. Secondly, he embeds this contradictory arrangement into his theory by casting foreboding as an extension to the—apparently fundamental—verse-melody-remembrance relationship, which explains this primary relationship’s ‘full compass’. Finally, his outline of past and present subordinates the latter to the former. It is, Wagner argues, impossible to think in the present except by mentally repeating past experiences. All thought thus becomes a kind of memory.

The result of this is that in order to arrive at what I argue is the most straightforward interpretation of Wagner’s conception of motif, it is necessary to resist, to a substantial degree, the structure of Wagner’s prose. The fundamental temporal structure of Wagner’s motifs is anticipation-realization-repetition. However, Wagner introduces them as realization (‘thought’), which can only be constructed as a repetition of past emotion and experience (‘remembrance’); moreover, this thought can be anticipated (‘foreboding’). There are in fact two structures here. The first is the ‘basic’ anticipation-realization-repetition pattern that I have laid out above. The second is the structure in Wagner’s prose: realization-repetition-anticipation. Wagner’s outline of remembrance and foreboding is preceded by analysis of gesture—‘the most present thing’—and verse-melody—‘the most “present” enunciation of an emotion’.

At the same time, the meaning of his prose introduces a third structure. A repetition (‘remembrance’) must precede realization (‘thought’), because thoughts can only be assembled from previous impressions and emotions. When this connection is severed

39 In Wagner’s words, ‘a ‘thought’[Gedanke] is the ‘seeming’ [dünkende] image of an unpresent reality in our memory [Gedenken].’ (‘Ein “Gedanke” ist das im “Gedenken” uns “dünkende” Bild eines Wirklichen, aber Ungegenwärtigen.’) Retranslated after Wagner, PW, ii, 325; Richard Wagner, Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen, iv (Leipzig: Breitkopf et Härtel; C. F. W. Siegel; R. Linnemann, [1912]), 182.

40 Wagner, PW, ii, 325.

41 Wagner, PW, ii, 330.
and the orchestra arouses an emotion disconnected from its impression, the result is anticipation ('foreboding'). This structure is, therefore, repetition-as-realization followed by anticipation. Finally, a fourth structure emerges from Wagner's stipulation that in opera events must be anticipated (in order to appear as 'justified foreboding'). In this structure, any realization must follow an anticipation and repetition, and it will also be followed its own repetition and a new anticipation—anticipation-repetition as realization-repetition as new anticipation and so on. Crucially, these structures maintain some sense of separateness within Wagner's prose, although they are clearly entangled.

Often overlooked is the fact that Wagner not only outlines his theory of motif in *Opera and Drama* but also gives examples that demonstrate it. Surprisingly, Wagner succeeds in maintaining the ambiguity that has sustained this critical debate, even when giving these concrete examples of his system. Demonstrating the pitfalls of bad performance to his newly proposed conception of opera, Wagner made veiled references to *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* that demonstrated his ‘new’ system in practice. The fact that Wagner gave such concrete examples is perhaps overlooked because he does not refer to the two operas by name. Nevertheless, William Ashton Ellis’s translation identified the two works, and it is simple to work out the extracts to which Wagner is referring and to follow his analysis in terms of remembrance and foreboding.

The first example, from *Tannhäuser*, follows straightforwardly the basic interpretation of Wagner’s motif. In this example, Wagner argues that if a singer did not enunciate clearly the words that she sang to the melody of a motif, then its meaning would be lost on subsequent appearance. The motif in question is the one that Carl Waack calls the ‘Liebes-Motiv’ (bb. 23–38, Example 2.6). At its first appearance Elisabeth greets Tannhäuser, singing:

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Elisabeth

So stehet auf! Stand!
Nicht sollet hier Ihr knie’n, denn diese Halle ist Euer Königreich. O, stehet auf!
Nehmt meinen Dank, daß Ihr zurückgekehrt!

The motif begins in the orchestra—as, we might surmise, a foreboding—and Elisabeth joins at the word ‘Halle’. A second statement begins at ‘O stehet auf!’ with orchestra and Elisabeth beginning in unison, but the two separate at ‘dass Ihr zurückgekehrt!’, approximately the point at which she originally joined. When Tannhäuser and Elisabeth part at the end of the scene, Elisabeth looks back at Tannhäuser and the orchestra repeats the motif (bb. 325–359). Wagner claimed that if the words were not understood at the first appearance or if Elisabeth failed to make the appropriate gesture of turning back at the latter appearance ‘the speaking, memory-waking impression’ of the motif is lost.45

In stark contrast to this comes Wagner’s second example, in which memory and foreboding are directly superimposed.46 This second example concerns the ‘Frageverbot’ from Lohengrin (Example 2.7). The statement of the motif that Wagner concentrates on is perhaps the most striking appearances of this motif, and certainly the appearance in which it most clearly stands as ‘leitmotif’. It comes at the end of Act II, when it appears as the surprisingly dark conclusion to the music to which Elsa and Lohengrin enter the Minster (bb. 2098–2100). The role of the motif here, Wagner explained, is to destabilize an apparently settled situation. As Elsa and Lohengrin proceed to their wedding it may well seem that the threads of the story have been resolved. The music of the ‘Frageverbot’ contradicts this and reminds us of the fundamental problem threatening the pair: Elsa may not ask who Lohengrin is or where

44 Tannhäuser, Act II, sc. 2.
45 Wagner, PW, ii, 367.
46 Wagner, PW, ii, 368–9.
Example 2.6: The ‘Liebes-Motiv’, Tannhäuser, Act II, sc. 2, bb. 23–38
Example 2.7: The ‘Frageverbot’, *Lohengrin*, Act I, sc. 3, bb. 777–784

he has come from on pain of his leaving. On this occasion, the non-musical clarification that is essential to the meaning of this motif is made by Ortrud, who has been trying to induce Elsa to ask these very questions. She catches Elsa’s eye and ‘*stretches her hand towards her ominously*’ Wagner argued that without this gesture (and, Wagner repeats, if the initial appearance of the motif is under-enunciated) the motif seems to appear from purely musical considerations or on the whim of the composer.

It is simple enough to see that in this example the music of the ‘Frageverbot’ is at once a memory and an anticipation. On the one hand, the music recalls the moment and the words in which Lohengrin uttered the terms of his prohibition. At the same time, the music is anticipating the moment in which the prohibition will be broken. It is, ultimately, this foreboding that allows the music a destabilizing effect on the apparently settled state of the plot. In this way, the ‘Frageverbot’ resembles the sailor’s motif in *Tristan und Isolde*. The meaning of the sailor’s motif is not foreboded by the orchestra. However, its meaning is itself a foreboding of an event: it means that Tristan’s ship will arrive home. It is this foreboding that is repeatedly remembered as the motif repeats in its various guises across the act. Sometimes, it joins Kurwenal’s jolly anticipation of reaching

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47 ‘*Elsas Blick fällt von der Höhe auf Ortrud herab, welche die Hand drohend zu ihr empor streckt*’. *Lohengrin*, Act II, sc. 5.
home. Sometimes, it interrupts the reverie of the lovers as a reminder of the perils of their situation. The arrival ultimately occurs, as a thoroughly ‘justified foreboding’ at the end of the act (Example 2.5).

The crucial point that these examples demonstrate is that Wagner’s motifs remain decidedly slippery even in their most concrete exemplification. I have presented the ‘Liebes-Motiv’ as simple and the ‘Frageverbot’ as complex because the former has the structure of ‘anticipation’ followed by ‘realization’ followed by ‘repetition’ while the latter superimposes the three. It is equally possible to argue the opposite. In the ‘Frageverbot’ it is far easier to discern the anticipation (the ominous foreboding that the ‘will be contravened), the realization (this iteration of the ‘Frageverbot’ as motif) and the repetition (the recollection of Lohengrin’s original statement of the ‘Frageverbot’ in Act I). In other words, although the three aspects are temporally superimposed, it is easy to tease apart their separate existences in our perception. The ‘Liebes-Motiv’, by contrast, can easily be temporally partitioned. It appears three times, and these three appearances might easily be labelled anticipation (begins with the orchestra alone), realization (the singer ‘clarifies’ the motif with words) and repetition (the orchestra’s wordless repetition of the motif adds meaning to a gesture of the singer). However, it is much harder to perceive the three as such. The anticipation resembles a foreboding because it begins as a wordless statement of the motif by the orchestra, but it hardly resembles Wagner’s description of a foreboding. The scene is not clear nor is the action at rest[48] Equally, it is hard to point to what this moment forebodes, the moment of ‘justified foreboding’. In the terms that I laid out above, it is a foreboding from the perspective of meaning—a motif in want of definite clarification—but not in terms of event. Equally, the integrity of the repetition is threatened by the fact that one bar from the ‘Liebes-Motiv’ is also highly prominent in the love duet that intervenes between the ‘realization’ and ‘repetition’ appearances (bb. 27 and 35 from Elsa’s original clarification, e.g. bb 227–233 in the Allegro section of the duet). Finally, this example demonstrates how dynamic Wagner’s system is. In this moment, the ‘Frageverbot’ is not

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48 Cf. Wagner, PW, ii 333
suspended against its purely musical tendency. Instead, the motif is engaged in a
dynamic forward- and backward-looking process. Simply put, the ‘Frageverbot’ means
something different on this appearance to what it meant when Lohengrin first clarified it;
the motif tells us Elsa will break the ban. Far from freezing the motif, this appearance
develops the emotional and dramatic meaning of the motif. Moreover, this is
accomplished through the mechanisms of foreboding and remembrance.

In summary, Opera and Drama lays out a tripartite structure of motif; however, there is
no end to the complexity with which this structure can be applied and realized. This
structure—anticipation-realization-repetition—can apply to the interaction between the
events of the drama or the meaningfulness of the motifs themselves. It can be used as
a succession of its three components in any order, although by their nature they seem
to demand a single temporal arrangement. Conversely, a single appearance of a motif
may be analysed at once in terms of all three aspects, existing at the same time in the
present, repeating the past and anticipating the future. As a result, Wagner’s prose and
Wagner’s music are set into a particular relationship to each other. Specifically,
Wagner’s prose serves to ground any example from Wagner’s score in a theoretical
concept. The reverse, however, is not true; no concept to be found in the prose can
convincingly be used to infer a system from which no moment in the score can escape.
This is the fundamental problem with the Wolzogen-Cooke approach to Wagner’s
scores. Their purpose is to bridge an unbridgeable gap. The purpose of this
investigation of the remembrance-foreboding structure in Wagner’s prose is not,
therefore, to attempt to ground a new system. Instead, my aim is to illuminate a
structure detailed in Wagner’s prose that seems to operate constantly but
unsystematically in Wagner’s scores.

**Traumatic Motifs**

The central argument of this thesis is that the ambiguities in Wagner’s outline of his
motifs can be resolved by explaining them in terms of the complicated
temporal-mnemonic structures of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as they are
constituted in modern psychological and psychiatric literature. This thesis argues that
PTSD is recreated as theory in *Opera and Drama* just as closely as it is recreated as depiction in Sieglinde’s nightmare. It is this that elevates the remembrance-foreboding structure from a loose grouping of temporal and semiotic dispositions to a coherent thread running through Wagner’s scores. In the era of PTSD, our own era, PTSD can be used to confer a degree of unity on the fundamentally heterogeneous meanings and interactions of remembrance and foreboding in Wagner’s scores and theories. An analysis of Wagner’s music in terms of *Opera and Drama* has to accommodate more slippage in the meanings of terms like foreboding, remembrance and motif than can be borne by anything approaching the level of system. By using the concepts of PTSD to hold together the heterogeneous meanings of Wagner’s terminology, I hope to overcome these obstacles so that, just as we can appeal to music theory to hold together and analyse Wagner’s slippery use of concepts like melody, harmony, an analysis of Wagner’s motifs in terms of his theories is again possible and satisfying. In other words, the heterogeneous meanings of remembrance and foreboding in his theory and the application of these disparate meanings in heterogeneous ways in his scores can be held together as a more or less coherent system by appealing to the external structure of PTSD.

In order to demonstrate this usefulness of PTSD to Wagner’s motifs, I will compare Wagner’s conception of his musical motifs with PTSD as it is constituted in the two predominant psychiatric diagnostic manuals (the *DSM-V* and the *ICD-11*) and in several psychological models. The *ICD-11* outlines four requirements for PTSD to be diagnosed. Firstly, the patient must have experienced a traumatic event. That is, an event ‘of an extremely threatening or horrific nature’. This must be followed by three further types of symptom: re-experiencing symptoms, avoidance, and heightened perception of current threat. Re-experiencing encompasses different forms of traumatic memory, vivid intrusive memories, flashbacks (defined implicitly as memories in which the traumatic event is experienced as happening again), nightmares. Avoidance refers to patients avoiding anything likely to remind them of the traumatic event. A heightened
perception of current threat refers to symptoms including hypervigilance and an exaggerated startle response—for example, an exaggerate response to loud noises—or a sense that the patient or those close to them are in imminent danger. The *DSM-5-TR* includes the same four features as the *ICD-11* (although a traumatic event is defined more specifically as ‘exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence’). In addition, the *DSM-5-TR* adds a further symptom group, ‘negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning or worsening after the traumatic event(s) occurred’. This group of symptoms encompasses a range from difficulties remembering aspects of the traumatic event or distorted beliefs about the event, its cause, and its consequences, to persistent low mood and difficulty experiencing positive emotions. Additionally, both diagnostic manuals set a number of threshold qualifications to exclude cases in which the symptoms are not causing significant impairment to the patient.

The implicit and explicit temporalities contained within these criteria are clear. Firstly, the traumatic event itself and the other symptom clusters are set in a causative temporal relationship. The trauma must precede the posttraumatic symptoms. The one symptom cluster that threatens this is to be found in the *DSM-5-TR*, because the negative cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event may precede the event itself so long as they worsen in its aftermath. A past-present-future structure exists within the posttraumatic symptoms. The past is represented by the re-experiencing symptoms, the present by the avoidance (and, in the *DSM-5-TR*, cognitive and mood) symptoms and the future by the sense of threat. Nevertheless, by their very nature these criteria have a sense of being all-at-once that resists these temporalities. In order for PTSD to be diagnosed, all of these symptoms must be present together now.

Anke Ehlers’s and David Clark’s cognitive model of PTSD (Figure 2.1) goes further in revealing the temporalities of PTSD. This model incorporates four variables that maintain persistent PTSD: ‘Nature of Trauma Memory, Negative Appraisal of Trauma and/ or its Sequelae, Current Threat’ and ‘Strategies to Control Threat/ Symptoms’.
Within these, it is straightforward to discern the basis of a past-present-future structure that is analogous to Wagner’s structure of reminiscence and foreboding. The nature of the traumatic memory—its tendency to be experienced as the present, as sense rather than thought, as overwhelmingly emotional and involuntarily—aligns with Wagner’s ‘reminiscence’[51] Wagner’s motifs are experienced as in the present. Their clarification in the verse-melody ‘materialises the thought,—i.e. the non-present emotion recalled by memory,—converting it into a present, an actually observable emotion.[52] Repeated as music alone, their ‘emotional-contents’ is ‘no longer merely recollected, but made present’[53] In other words, motifs transforms the semantic memory of a previously experienced emotion into the re-experience of that emotion; motifs make you feel memories rather than think them. Wagner is clear that this present-ness is a property of the musical component of motifs. Nick Davis, drawing on Abbate makes the same point, but goes further, suggesting that because music ‘does not have a deictetic shift’, it is incapable of narrating on its own.[54] My reading of Wagner suggests that his motifs reproduce Ehlers and Clark’s model because they do narrate—they call to mind past events—but music’s lack of deictetic shift gives this narration a distressingly present quality.

The negative appraisal of trauma and its sequelae within the cognitive model of PTSD equates to Wagner’s ‘foreboding’. This variable of the model encompasses exaggerated inferences of negative implications from the traumatic event or its consequences, which produce a sense of threat in the present.[55] In this case, the shared orientation towards the future is obvious; whether Wagner’s motifs share the negative affect of the appraisals of trauma and sequelae is less immediately evident. In this case, what is crucial is not Wagner’s description of the operation of his motifs, but the terms in which he sets them out. The German word that William Ashton Ellis translates as ‘foreboding’

52 Wagner, PW, ii, 327.
53 Wagner, PW, ii, 329.
is ‘Ahnung’. As in Ellis’s translation, this word had clear negative associations when Wagner used it. Johann Georg Walch, in his *Philosophisches Lexikon*, offers a definition of the archaic form of the word—‘Andungen’—that captures both the sense of future misfortune and the imprecise origins of this sense that are implied in Wagner’s usage. Walch defines ‘Andungen’ as ‘such feelings that put us in an inner melancholy and dread and indicate some future but unknown misfortune; these feelings emerge not from a specific unpleasant object or its related concepts but arbitrarily.\(^{\text{56}}\) A musical example that seems to enact this definition can be found in Heinrich Proch’s 1844 *Lied*, ‘Des Kindes Ahnung’. The song, clearly heavily influenced by Schubert’s ‘Erlkönig’, tells the story of a child who repeatedly imagines that their father, who is out hunting, has been killed, only to be comforted by their mother and told to sleep. At the end of the song, predictably, it is revealed that the child’s foreboding has indeed come true. By 1843, Brockhaus’s *Conversationslexikon* recognized three categories of foreboding. The first is a conscious foreboding—the example given is of a conscious premonition of

death. The second is unconscious foreboding, a general anticipation of a pleasant or unpleasant experience. The final category is a blurring of the two, a frightening, unconscious foreboding that finds itself assigned to a specific experience after that experience has already occurred. In later editions, these distinctions reverted to a predominantly negative affect with a quasi-Freudian twist. The 1928 edition wrote that ‘Ahnung’ consisted predominantly of ‘a vague feeling of anxiety’ that ‘entered the consciousness against one’s will and disturbed the normal course of ideas.’

It is tempting to read a Wagnerian usage into each of these categories given in Brockhaus. The example Wagner gives from Lohengrin would make a fine example of a conscious foreboding. The use of the ‘Frageverbot’ serves to destabilize the apparently settled scene with the specific fear that Elsa will break the question-ban. This specificity is underlined by the fact that this motific appearance coincides with a gesture of triumph from Ortrud, who has just been cajoling Elsa into breaking the ban. The unconscious type of foreboding might be compared with the general principle of clarification through a definite object. This process seems to be neutral in affect; motifs can take on positive and negative emotions. Moreover, there is a neat parallel between Wagner’s unspoken and Brockhaus’s unconscious, although they are not precisely analogous (Wagner’s unspoken is conscious but unspeakable). It is the third category which explains why the overall affect of Wagner’s forebodings is invariably negative. The ultimate trajectory of each of Wagner post-1849 works leads towards death. Their hallmarks are disaster, apocalypse and annihilation. Even a comedy such as Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg ends with Hans Sachs’s vision of a Germany overrun by ‘false, foreign majesty’.

57 ‘Man unterscheidet 1) bestimmte Ahnungen, bei welchen man sich Dessen, was man ahnet, nicht bloß im Allgemeinen bewußt ist, z. B. die Ahnung eines Todesfalles, bei dem Bewußtsein, daß man ihn erwartet; 2) unbestimmte Ahnungen, welche stattfinden, wenn man im Allgemeinen einem angenehmen oder unangenehmen Ereignisse entgegensicht; und 3) bloße meist beängstigende Vorgefühle, ohne Bewußtsein eines Grundes dafür, bis ein Ereigniß eintritt, dessen Ahnung gehabt zu haben, wir uns nachher leicht überreden.’ Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyclopädie für die gebildeten Stände: Conversations-Lexikon, i (9th edn., Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1843), 161–2.


59 ‘in falscher wälscher Majestät’. Meistersinger, Act III, sc. 5.
These events are played out against a score that consists almost entirely of motifs, each of which has the potential to anticipate and forebode. Of course, this is what differentiates Wagner's post-1849 technique from his pre-1849 technique and from the pre-Wagnerian concept of Erinnerungsmotiv. Before 1849, motifs were few and far between. Each opera contained relatively few, and these few were used more infrequently. As a result, although Wagner was able to exemplify his concept of motif using Tannhäuser and Lohengrin, there is a categorical shift between these operas and the post-1849 works. Jörg Riedlbauer wrote of this shift in rather scathing terms: 'what is novel in Wagner is merely how frequently he uses them [leitmotifs].'\(^60\) In truth, Wagner does not use motifs frequently but rather near-constantly. This is crucial. Wagner’s motifs suspend his listeners in a state of constant anticipation. Moreover, these anticipations are fulfilled without fail. Events occur as justified forebodings, and motifs acquire their clarified emotional and dramatic meaning. As the plots of Wagner’s operas inevitably and inexorably proceed towards cataclysm, this ultimate catastrophe takes on an air of fated inevitability that is written into music. That is to say that the small-scale processes of foreboding in terms of specific events and anticipated meanings come together to create a score which as a whole produces an anxiety that finds fulfilment in disaster.

In Ehlers’ and Clark’s model, the nature of the trauma memory and the negative appraisal of trauma lead to a sense of current threat—intrusion and hyperarousal symptoms. In Wagner’s motifs, remembrance and foreboding produce the expression of the melodic moments. Within both frameworks, this results in the subordination of the present to the past and the future. Wagner’s melodic moments become the site ‘in which we remember a Foreboding, whilst they turn our Remembrance into a prophecy’\(^61\). As in the cognitive model of PTSD, past and future have a direct connection in Wagner’s motifs that is experienced but not mediated through the affect that they produce in the present.


\(^61\) Wagner, *PW, II* 347.
There are two further models of PTSD that it is worth considering in the context of Wagner’s motifs. The first mirrors, remarkably closely, a division found in Wagner’s prose between the sensual and the intellectual, the felt and the thought. It is this division that underpins the distinction between word-speech and tone-speech, poetry and music and phonology and meaning. This distinction is mirrored in the dual representation theory of PTSD, primarily associated with Chris Brewin. Brewin and his colleagues divide neurocognitive representation into two categories, ‘contextually bound representation’ (C-reps) and ‘low-level sensation-based... representation’ (S-reps), each of which was associated with a corresponding category of memory. C-reps are the neurologically higher-level representations. They can be deliberately retrieved and are associated with verbal communications. Moreover, they can integrated with other memories in order to provide a narrative autobiographical account of an event that is continuous with other autobiographical memories. By contrast, S-reps are involuntary and non-verbal representations of sensual perceptions. They are normally quickly forgotten, but persist in PTSD. According to this model, intrusive memories in PTSD occur when an S-rep is encoded without (or with a weaker) corresponding C-rep. This model helps to explain what is fundamentally pathological about Wagner’s system of motifs. The basis of Wagner’s whole system is that the sensual is not subordinated to the verbal. If anything, in the case of remembrances the reverse is true. Wagner wrote the conditioned emotional content of a remembrance was ‘the property of pure music’. Wagner’s musical content is not subsumed by the content of the definite object that conditions it, nor does it become a simple cypher that points back to that definite object. Instead, the definite-ness of the object is subsumed by the motif. Textual content is transformed into the no less definite, but now ineffable emotional vividness of Wagner’s motifs. This combination of sensational, emotionally vivid motifs that have a definite but ineffable meaning finds its precise match in Brewin et al.’s S-reps. Wagner’s post-1849 scores thus become a near-constant barrage of

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64 Wagner, *PW, II* 328.
mnemonically significant sonic sensations. The experience of these sensations is, according to this model, structurally akin to PTSD no matter the affect of their content.

The final theory of PTSD that relates to Wagner’s theory of motif is not strictly psychological but sociological and ethnographic. Allan Young and Naomi Breslau address themselves to a central problem of PTSD as constituted by the psychological and psychiatric professions. This problem is the tension between the apparently irresistible temporal logic of PTSD and the ‘heterogeneous’ reality of its manifestation in the case literature. The temporal logic of PTSD that underpins the diagnostic criteria of the ICD and DSM is that a traumatic event leads to intrusive memories, which leads to avoidance and hyperarousal. This logic underpins models of PTSD such as Ehlers’s and Clark’s and Brewin et al.’s; however, these models struggle to capture this chronology within their models. The cognitive model of PTSD, for example, centres on a self-reinforcing construction of memory, appraisals, avoidance strategies and perception of current threat. But these elements are presented in a closed loop without cause. In the cognitive model, this issue remains implicit. Conversely, there are several points in Brewin et al.’s paper where this threatens to emerge as an issue in its own right. Specifically, this threat appears when Brewin et al. mentions that while they propose a shared mechanism for intrusive memories in both PTSD and other disorders, it is only in PTSD in which these memories are held to be a causal factor. It is also present in their attempt to reconcile their model with the existence of delayed onset PTSD. Brewin et al. argue that this may be caused by long-term stress or depression inhibiting the maintenance of C-reps. This is a new temporal logic; another mental health condition causes a qualitative change in the memory of a traumatic event which leads to the other symptoms of the disorder. Young and Breslau challenged the fundamental logic of PTSD by arguing that there are in fact six distinct PTSD pathways that can be found in case studies: the ‘iconic’ pathway (the pathway outlined in the

diagnostic manuals) and five ‘forms of mimicry’. In the first of these the traumatic memory is supplanted with what they call ‘memories of the future’. By this, Young and Breslau mean an ideation of an injury that the patient remembers and comes to believe is a memory of an event rather than a memory of an ideation. Their exemplar is of Le-Log, a patient of the nineteenth-century neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot. Le Log lost the use of his legs after falling down in front of a wagon. However, whereas Le Log had a powerful memory of the cart running over his legs, witnesses confirmed that it had not. Despite this, Le Log was tormented by recurring dreams of his memory. This pathway lends itself particularly well to neo-Wagnerian terminology as a remembrance of a foreboding, if not to Wagner’s own term ‘prophetic reminiscences’. Young and Breslau then construct two pathways, the latter of which they equate with Freud’s concept of Nachträglichkeit. Firstly, a patient may present with the arousal and avoidance symptoms of PTSD, and, together with their therapist, discover a memory of an event that fulfils the criteria of a traumatic memory. This reversal of the iconic pathway becomes something akin to Freud’s Nachträglichkeit if, instead of stopping here, the patient’s memories of the traumatic event then become intrusive and begin to cause further arousal and avoidance symptoms. Finally, Young and Breslau consider factitious traumatic memories and malingering. The latter is less directly relevant to the present study—it is hard to conceive of a consciously fictitious motif or reaction to a motif. The notion of factitious traumatic memories (in which a patient has come to identify strongly with a borrowed or imagined traumatic event) will resurface in this study in the form of events that critics purport to remember from Wagner that are nevertheless apparently of their own invention. What Young and Breslau expose and begin to resolve is the tension in psychiatric descriptions of PTSD between its iconic temporal logic—a trauma leads to a traumatic memory which leads to PTSD—and the fact that patients necessarily present fulfilling all of the criteria of PTSD at once.

Young’s solution to this problem is to argue that clinical cases that do not conform to the

68  See p. 184
iconic pathway are no less worthy of being classified as PTSD. This overcomes one of the apparent distinctions between Wagner’s motifs and PTSD. While the iconic pathway can be found in Wagner’s prose—an event can lead to a remembrance which can be turned into a foreboding—it by no means predominates over other pathways. Young and Breslau give us a way of holding together the heterogeneity in Wagner’s prose in the face of the apparently irresistible temporal logic of the iconic pathway of PTSD.

What might this resemblance between Wagner’s theory of motif and PTSD allow us to capture? and what might yet escape? The first advantage of acknowledging the correspondence between the two is that it allows Wagner’s theory to be instrumentalized. Attempts to analyse Wagner’s motifs in terms of a system tend to prove unsatisfactory. They impose fixed meanings that sometimes run counter to more straightforward interpretations, and they close themselves off to entire categories of meaning that Wagner seems to aim at in Opera and Drama. Of course, this latter fault is even more pre-eminent among those critics eager to ignore or strip away—or bracket within scare quotes—the idea of a ‘motivic “system”’ entirely. Central to this problem is that it is only Wagner’s scores themselves that are able to hold together Wagner’s prose as anything like a system. Wagner’s own exemplars demonstrate this. The ‘Frageverbot’ brings together such disjointed theoretical concepts as the foreboding and reminiscence of meaning and event, foreboding and remembrance as separately discernible entities and prophetic reminiscences as their combination. Naturally, within Wagner’s prose the systematizing work of the ‘Frageverbot’ is undone by the counterexample of the ‘Liebes-Motiv’ from Tannhäuser which elaborates something closer to the Wolzogian system. The result is a hopeless circularity; the theoretical outline for a motific system in the ‘Drama of the future’ is only held together as a system by its practical application in the dramas themselves. The practical effects of this circularity are important.

Recognizing the structure of PTSD within Opera and Drama offers an alternative method by which to elevate Wagner’s motifs towards the status of a system without appeal to the scores that Opera and Drama purports to anticipate. At the same time,

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69 Grey, Wagner’s Musical Prose, 357.
because PTSD represents an equally heterogeneous structure, it need not supplant Wagner’s prose theories in our contemporary—that is, post-PTSD—understanding. It can simply hold them together. That is to say that it is not necessary to analyse Wagner’s motifs in terms of triggers, flashbacks, hyperarousal and so on. Nevertheless, these concepts work with their Wagnerian counterparts to allow us to redeem something like an analytical approach from *Opera and Drama*. This approach, as I envision it, rests on the argument that the entirety of Wagner’s post-1849 scores can be analysed in terms of foreboding and remembrance and that these terms have a meaningfulness both alone and in combination that can be held together by PTSD.

The theories of PTSD as I have construed them confer this system on Wagner’s motifs as an external structure. In the previous chapter, I argued that PTSD can also be used to understand Wagner’s experience of the 1849 May Uprising. As a result, PTSD has an internal place within Wagner’s works through his position in the works as composer. However, it also has an internal place in Wagner’s works in the psychological presentation of Sieglinde. I have already shown how Sieglinde’s nightmare operates as a bridge between PTSD and Wagner’s motifs because she seems to be experiencing traumatic memory, and this remembrance is triggered by a musical motif. To conclude this chapter, I will demonstrate the other ways in which Sieglinde’s story knits together the two theories from within Wagner’s works.

**Sieglinde’s ‘Prophetic Reminiscences’**

Sieglinde’s nightmare appears to be a pure traumatic memory, insulated and disconnected from the normal progression of her biography. Act II of *Die Walküre* also contains an apparently pure foreboding on Sieglinde’s part, a flashforward to Siegmund’s death. This flashforward is also triggered by the sound of Hunding’s horn. The fleeing lovers enter at the beginning of Scene 3. Sieglinde anxiously urges Siegmund to continue running, but he insists they rest. He tries to calm her, but after embracing him she recoils, fearfully revolted by their incestuous violation of marital and moral law. In this overwhelmingly emotional state, Sieglinde hears the sound of
Hunding's horn (bb. 1349–1350). This triggers a perception of Hunding waking, rousing his kinsmen and setting off in pursuit. This perception is so overwhelming that Sieglinde ‘gazes ahead as if mad’ and loses sight (Example 2.8). She then hears the horn again and this time she perceives Siegmund chased down by Hunding’s pack and torn to pieces by the dogs (Example 2.9). Again, she seems to lose touch with reality, and she slips into unconsciousness. This is a remarkable moment of foreboding, but it is perhaps not quite as pure as it may have seemed. Firstly, Sieglinde’s first ideation—Hunding waking and putting together his party—seems to belong in the past. As such, it seems to be the kind of ‘memories of the future’ that so interested Young and Breslau. This seems to be a traumatic flashback the content of which is a ‘memory’ that Sieglinde never actually experienced. More subtle, and yet more striking is a particular intrusion of memory into Sieglinde’s second ideation, which is otherwise less equivocally a flashforward. The last things Sieglinde sings in this flashforward are: ‘the sword breaks into pieces: the ash falls; the trunk breaks!’ In these three statements, Sieglinde mixes remembrance and foreboding in all its complexity as ‘prophetic reminiscence’. Any talk of ash trees necessarily engages the idea of the fall of the World Ash tree. This is underlined by the appearance of a motif linked to the World Ash tree as Sieglinde sings (bb. 1425–1428, cf. Example 5.7, p. 206). As an event that is never depicted, the death of the tree has an existence that is impossible to fix as memory or foreboding until the Norns confirm its demise in the prologue of Götterdämmerung. There is a precise foreboding here, however, because it is the broken trunk of the World Ash tree that will provide the fuel for the fire which will cleanse the world at the end of Götterdämmerung. There is also a mnemonic image here. In Siegmund’s memory of

On this occasion the motif is played by the orchestra and split between the horns and trombone, but Sieglinde tells us that she hears it although Siegmund does not. This could be interpreted several ways. Perhaps Sieglinde is imagining the horn and the orchestra is ‘making plastic’ this imagination. Equally perhaps she really can hear the horn call and Wagner avoids sounding it onstage because this would make Siegmund’s deafness to it surprising.

‘Sie starrt wie wahnsinnig vor sich hin.’ Walküre, Act II, sc. 3.


This is the subject of Chapter 5.
the abduction of Sieglinde, a broken tree stump, in this case an oak stump, features prominently among the ashes of his home beside the body of his mother. Thus, the image of the broken trunk—‘burnt to a stump the oak’s blooming stem’ in Siegmund’s narrative—features prominently in both Sieglinde’s abduction and her foreboding of Siegmund’s death.[75] This ties together Sieglinde’s foreboding of Siegmund’s death and her remembrance of her own abduction. As a result, we could interpret the structure of Sieglinde’s foreboding and reminiscence in Act II as foreboding—which can be broken down into a ‘false’ memory and a foreboding culminating in a prophetic reminiscence—a remembrance (her nightmare) followed finally by a traumatic event, Siegmund’s eventual death.

Sieglinde in Act II of Die Walküre, therefore, presents a near-paradigmatic remembrance and a near-paradigmatic foreboding. Moreover, all that keeps them from being paradigmatic only is that they are made to bleed into each other, to become a single ‘prophetic reminiscence’. Thus, Siegmund’s death at the end of the act knits together her foreboding of his death with her traumatic memory. If we expand the frame once more beyond this act to Sieglinde’s life as a whole, the impossibility of finalizing this pattern of remembrance of foreboding is revealed. The first time that the motif of Hunding’s horn appears in Act I, it is accompanied by a moment of anxiety on Sieglinde’s part. As it is played, she hears Hunding outside and starts up suddenly. This anxiety is clearly oriented towards the future, and its focus soon becomes clear. In response to a ‘grave, questioning look’ from Hunding, Sieglinde begins to make hurried excuses for the presence of Siegmund.[76] Naturally, this is not the first time that Sieglinde has heard the horn call. In fact, this first appearance comes from the pit rather than the stage so she may not hear the motif at all at this point.[77] We can imagine—although it is not made certain by the text—that she first heard it when she was abducted. However, we cannot be sure at what point if became a source of foreboding for her. The question, ‘did Sieglinde feel anxious when she first heard the

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[76] ‘Hunding wendet sich mit einem ernst fragenden Blick an Sieglinde’. Walküre, Act I, sc. 2.
[77] Whether Sieglinde herself can hear the motif at this point is an issue that will be explored at greater length in subsequent chapters.
Horch! die Harfe, höre die duftige Harfe, Sieglinde!

Hör, du bist erwacht, aus Wald und Gau geht es her.

Von wundem Gesänge; aus Wald und Gau geht es her.

Hun-de ruht er aus, sein Men; aus thug geht.
Example 2.8: Sieglinde’s Flashforward, *Die Walküre*, Act II, Scene 3, bb. 1349–1375
Example 2.9: Sieglinde’s Flashforward, *Die Walküre*, Act II, Scene 3, bb. 1390–1432

horn, or is she now anxious on hearing the horn because its first hearing was followed by her abduction’ cannot be answered. It is, therefore, impossible to be certain whether the motif begins as the traumatic event itself or the anxious anticipation of it. Moreover, there is a distinct separation between the pattern of remembrance and foreboding that belongs to the audience—the pattern established within the text and score of the *Ring*—and Sieglinde’s own pattern which begins beyond the text.

What this insoluble superposition of event, remembrance and foreboding in Sieglinde’s past reveals is the limit of taking Sieglinde’s experience as a hearer of motifs as analogous to our own as a Wagnerian audience. Sieglinde has an existence beyond the events depicted in the text, which encompasses her experience of Hunding’s horn. In general—and certainly as far as Wagner was concerned when he was theorizing—an audience hearing Wagner’s motifs has no knowledge of these motifs beyond their appearances in the score. For the audience, the first appearance of a Wagnerian motif in the score simply is its first appearance. Superficially, this may seem to force the audience into the simplistic model of Wagner’s motifs. Wagner’s music anticipates an event until an event happens; after an event, Wagner’s music can repeat its memory. Once again, however, Hunding’s horn call reveals that the reality is more complicated. This is because the horn call is never used as a trigger of memory for the audience in
this simple sense. This is because its final appearance occurs just before the event that it ‘should’ be associated with. It appears as Sieglinde implores Hunding to murder her instead of Siegmund, directly before he kills Siegmund. In other words, it only appears as a foreboding, which is finally fulfilled in the moments following its final appearance. Nevertheless, this interpretation is still not entirely satisfactory, and in exploring the reasons that it is unsatisfactory, the superposition of remembrance and foreboding in Wagner’s music from the perspective of the audience finally emerges.

The first reason that it is unsatisfying to think of Hunding’s horn as pure foreboding is that the audience’s understanding of the motif is fundamentally reliant on memory. This reveals the fracture between the two separate processes outlined in Opera and Drama that rely on the simple anticipation-realization-repetition structure: event and meaning. Whereas the event in which the primary foreboding of Hunding’s horn is realized—Siegmund’s death—is only ever anticipated by the motif, its meaning is revealed archetypically according to the structure. The motif appears twice (in immediate repetition) as foreboding. Its third appearance, which immediately follows at a louder volume, accompanies Hunding’s first appearance. The motif’s meaning is clarified by the gesture of Hunding’s appearance. From this point on, the remembrance of this moment of clarification ‘by a definite object’ anchors the meaning of the motif as Hunding. Of course, as Hunding’s role as antagonist and threat becomes clear, this mnemonic definition begins to spawn its own foreboding. Its appearance comes to signal not only Hunding’s appearance, but the threat associated with Hunding’s appearance. That is to say that the motif’s foreboding of event emerges out of and strengthens the reminiscence of the motif’s meaning.

The second reason that Hunding’s horn call is more than a foreboding is that we are not disconnected from the memories of the characters. On the contrary, their memories are often intrinsic to our understanding of motifs. In this way, our position in relation towards motifs is, if anything, more complex than that of Wagner’s characters. In the case of Hunding’s horn call, as I have already discussed, its first appearance already demonstrates the superposition of reminiscence and foreboding. Moreover, Sieglinde’s
reaction when the motif first appears shapes the audience’s perception of it as a foreboding in terms of both event and meaning. The motif is an anxious foreboding because it is—even at its first appearance—conditioned by Sieglinde’s anxiety—sustained at once by her own reminiscence and foreboding—with which it coincides. Nevertheless, while Sieglinde’s trauma colours the audience’s perception of the horn call from its very first appearance, the audience does not understand this memory until Sieglinde’s nightmare, which occurs only shortly before the horn call appears for a final time. The memory that is intrinsic to understanding Hunding’s Horn call is always present but is not itself remembered. Alternatively, this mnemonic meaning of Hunding’s Horn can be understood from the moment it appears in Siegmund’s narrative as he explains that Hunding and his relations ransacked his home and abducted his sister. That is to say that it belongs to our semantic memory—our memory for the fact that Hunding abducted Sieglinde—before it belongs to our autobiographical memory—our own mnemonic experience of Sieglinde’s flashback and Siegmund’s death.

The conclusion that follows from this is that foreboding and reminiscence are no less superimposed in our own experience of the motifs than in the experiences of the characters. A memory can live at once in the past and in the future. A motif can simply forebode, but memory is always central to the functioning of a motif as such. Past memory can lead to future foreboding. What remains unchanged is that when a motif appears it always conditions the experience of the present, often overwhelmingly so. This superposition is captured in perhaps the most evocative of Wagner’s definitions of melodic moments. Wagner writes that in these moments we ‘remember a Foreboding, whilst they turn our Remembrance into a prophecy’.[78] In other words he directly contradicts his argument of just a few pages earlier that a moment could only forbode or remember. However, far from being a mistake, it is precisely the repeated contradictions of Wagner’s prose that best express the nature of these motifs. By their nature, they are at once straightforward and paradoxical, in the present but of the un-present. They are

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simultaneously, independently and inextricably remembrance and foreboding. Nevertheless, for all this insoluble superposition, the heterogeneous meanings of foreboding and remembrance, the divergent perspectives of character and audience and so on, Wagner argued that the ultimate achievement of motifs would be to confer a unity of expression on his works that would displace the classical unities and overcome fractures in the text.\(^79\)

The central contention of this thesis is that the structures of PTSD, external to Wagner’s theories and artworks, can explain and confer this unity and expression. Just as Sieglinde’s foreboding and remembrance are held together by the traumas of her abduction and Siegmund’s death, Wagner’s motifs can be held together by PTSD-theory. The reason for this is that this theory is already holding together equivalent concepts (traumatic memory, sense of current threat, appraisal of trauma sequelae) in the face of similar heterogeneity, as outlined by Young and Breslau. As a result, the theory of PTSD can be used to re-open the possibility of a coherent, unified analysis of Wagner’s motifs as more than purely musical elements. Such an analysis does not capture the totality of what Wagner’s motifs are nor of what they can be used to do. Nevertheless, it has the power to achieve two important goals. Firstly, this reading uncovers what is useful and powerful about the ever-dominant Wolzogian interpretation of motif, while simultaneously adding depth to this reading and reconciling it with alternative readings (notably Mann’s). Secondly, it reveals the fundamental unity of expression that Wagner promised in his music. Specifically, it explains why motivic expressions of meaning and event—as opposed to the ‘purely musical’ parameters of melody—are the sources of this unity.

\(^{79}\) Wagner, *PW. ii* 349.
Chapter 3

‘The Artwork of the Future’: Motifs in the Wagner-Festival of 1853

Donald Tovey famously described extracts from Wagner’s operas performed in concert as ‘bleeding chunks of butcher’s meat’—severed tissues vivisected from the works with which they formed an organic whole, deprived of the life they enjoyed as parts of this living organism and served up to the tastes of the bourgeois dilettantes whom Wagner had apparently condemned in Art and Revolution. More recently, Chris Walton has repeatedly applied this caustic metaphor to Wagner’s own use of these extracts in relation to his music festival in Zürich in 1853. Laurence Dreyfus likewise used it to refer to a very similar programme given by Wagner in Paris at the Théâtre-Italien in 1860. The implication is clear: to hear Wagner’s music in this way was to experience it

1 Donald Tovey, Essays in Musical Analysis, ii (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 71. A colourful example of this condemnation comes in Wagner’s metaphorization of an English banker as Mercury in his guise as the god of ‘cheats and sharpers’: ‘ye may see him embodied in a strait-laced English banker, whose daughter perchance has been given in marriage to a ruined peer. Ye may see him in this gentleman, when he engages the chief singers of the Italian Opera to sing before him in his own drawing-room rather than in the theatre, because he will have the glory of paying higher for them here than there; but on no account, even here, on the sacred Sunday. Behold Mercury and his docile hand-maid. Modern Art!’ Richard Wagner, Richard Wagner’s Prose Works, i: The Art-Work of the Future, &c. Trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & CO., Ltd., 1892), 41.
improperly in the form of a carelessly assembled *potpourri*. Dreyfus found it ‘ironic’ that it was through the concert at the Théâtre-Italien that Charles Baudelaire came to know and love Wagner’s art, while Walton can only imagine Wagner’s motives to be solipsistic—a desire to hear the music of *Lohengrin*. The reality, however, is that the programme of the 1853 Zürich Wagner festival was carefully and deliberately assembled by Wagner and formed the basis of his concertizing from 1853 onwards. It was a programme intended as a sample of the ‘artwork of the future’ that would reassert the value of his pre-revolutionary artworks in the face of his theoretical writings. Central to this effort of reclamation on Wagner’s part was a re-reading of the role of motifs in his pre-1849 works to conform with the theory outlined in *Opera and Drama*, the theory that forms the basis of my own reading of Wagner’s motifs as traumatic. Jörg Riedlbauer has pointed out that the shift between *Lohengrin* and the *Ring* is characterized by a quantitative increase in the number of motifs and the number of times that they appear[4] The 1853 festival exposes the reality that the difference between Wagner’s pre-1849 ‘motifs’ and post-1849 motifs is also qualitative.

The artefact that reveals this qualitative change is the programme for the festival in which Wagner gave ‘programmatic explanations’ of the works being performed. These explanations narrated these pieces in terms of their melodies, which Wagner now interpreted as motifs. However, in order to achieve this, it was necessary for him to reverse the order of performance so that the Overtures now followed extracts from the operas that clarified the meanings of the relevant motifs. The content of the operas became introduction, while the operas’ introductions became the main content. In enacting this reversal, Wagner fashioned these ‘bleeding chunks’ into the harbingers of the artwork of the future, the first publicly performed realization of the theories of *Opera and Drama*. This thesis advances two main arguments: Wagner encountered traumatic events during the May Uprising in 1849, and Wagner’s motifs reproduce features of PTSD. In addition to these two main contentions, I argue that the two are linked. A musical technique that reproduces features of PTSD—motifs—became central to

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Wagner’s work because he had encountered traumatic events in 1849. In part, this can be evidenced by the temporal coincidence of the two. As Riedlbauer suggests, motifs are prevalent in the scores of Wagner’s works after 1849 in a way that they are not in his earlier music. The programme for the 1853 festival, however, provides more secure evidence, because it shows that Wagner could not simply reinterpret his earlier scores in the light of his post-1849 theorizing. Instead, the works themselves had to be wounded, butchered, and reassembled in order to make a reinterpretation of them in Wagner’s post-1849 terms possible. Wagner’s operas had to be recomposed as ‘artwork of the future’.

The 1853 music festival in Zürich consisted of three performances on 18, 20 and 22 of May, conducted by Wagner and consisting of a programme of extracts drawn from Der fliegende Holländer, Tannhäuser and Lohengrin, preceded by a march from Rienzi (see Figure 3.1). Before the concerts, recitations of the poems to Holländer, Tannhäuser and Lohengrin were given, and open rehearsals were held, to which ‘everyone thinking to attend one of the musical performances [was] warmly invited.’ The whole event is

sometimes described as ‘the first Wagner festival’. Inevitably, this moniker has invited comparisons with the festival that Wagner established in Bayreuth, which was ‘demonstrably connected’—as William Ashton Ellis put it—to the 1853 festival. However, while some attention has been given to the development of Wagner’s organizational and commercial practice in preparation for the great festival of three dramas and a preliminary evening that he had begun to plan, the later festival has rather overshadowed the importance of the Zürich festival as a musical and artistic enterprise. Its success was not simply logistical in assembling musicians from across Switzerland and southern Germany, or even in attracting an audience from a broader geographical area; instead, the great project of the festival was to memorialize Wagner, the composer of the ‘romantic operas’, while simultaneously organizing excerpts from those operas into an evangelical foretaste of the promised artwork of the future.

The festival was an extraordinary act of self-memorialization on the part of a living composer. Music festivals were a comparatively recent innovation in Germany. Most commonly, these were not dedicated to any particular figure or event. They were usually centred around performances of symphonies and oratorios, perhaps supplemented by a miscellany concert consisting of a mixture of arias, choruses and shorter instrumental works. Wagner’s 1853 festival, however, fits into the smaller category of commemorative festivals. Some of these commemorated specific events. In 1848, Dresden had commemorated the 300th anniversary of the founding of the royal orchestra of which Wagner was Kapellmeister with a ‘Historico-musical Festal Celebration’ featuring music composed by past and current Kapellmeisters including the first performance of music from Lohengrin—the end of the first act (see Figure 3.2).

7 Glasenapp and Ellis, Wagner, iv, 115.
8 Walton, Richard Wagner’s Zürich, p.60-2.
9 A famous example of this format was the Lower Rhine Music festival, established in 1818, which by the 1850s had settled into a programme of three concerts: one oratorio, one symphony and one miscellany. Cecelia Hopkins Porter, ‘The New Public and the Reordering of the Musical Establishment: The Lower Rhine Music Festivals, 1818-67’, 19th-Century Music, 3/3 (1980), 211–24 at 220.
Zur 300jährigen Jubelfeier der K. musikalischen Kapelle.
Freitag, den 22. September 1848
mit allerhöchster Genehmigung
im Königlichen Hoftheater:

Historisch-musikalische Festfeier,
veranstaltet und ausgeführt
von der Königl. musikalischen Kapelle,
mit gütiger Unterstützung

der Fräulein Wagner, Schwarzbach, Marpurg, Berg, der Herren Tichatscheck, Mitterwurzer, Lindemann und des Theaterchorpersonales.

Prolog
von Dr. Carl Gutakow, gesprochen von Fräulein Berg.

Erste Abtheilung.
1) Choral von Johann Walther (1548—1555), ausgeführt vom Chorpersonale.
2) Zwei Chorfreitagsgeflüge von Heinrich Schütz (1615—1672), ausgeführt vom Chorpersonale.
3) Sanctus aus einer Messe von Johann David Heinichen (1717—1720), ausgeführt von Fräulein Wagner, Herrn Tichatscheck und dem Chorpersonale.

Zweite Abtheilung.
7) Ouverture zur Oper: „Sargino“ von Fernando Pâr (1803 bis 1807).
9) Sanctus aus der Messe in Es-dur von Carl Maria von Weber (1816—1826), ausgeführt von Fräulein Wagner und dem Chorpersonale.

Zum Beschluss:
Jubelouverture von Carl Maria von Weber.

Die Eintrittspreise betragen die Anschlagsettel.

Der Verkauf der Billets gegen baren Bezahlung findet von jetzt an in der, in dem unteren Theile des Rundbaues befindlichen Expedition, auf der rechten Seite nach der Elbe zu, früh von 9 bis Mittags 12 Uhr und Nachmittags von 3 bis 4 Uhr statt.

Einlass 5 Uhr. Anfang 6 Uhr. Ende nach 8 Uhr.
lives and anniversaries of composers and artists. These seem to have begun with festivities commemorating the death of Mozart. As early as 1791, a concert for the benefit of Mozart’s widow was held in Vienna.\footnote{Armin Brinzing, ‘Bey Mozarts Grabe: frühe Kompositionen zum Andenken Mozarts’, in S.D. Fabian, R. Thomsen-Fürst, and J. Knüchel (eds.), \textit{Oper – Südwest: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Oper an den südwestdeutschen Höfen des 18. Jahrhunderts} (Heidelberg: heiBOOKS, 2020), 131–64 at 136.} His death had subsequently been commemorated annually with performances of his music in the house of Baroness Josepha Ursula Maria von Herding in Munich, and by 1809 a cantata in his honour, written by Carl Cannabich, was performed annually in Munich.\footnote{Brinzing, ‘Bey Mozarts Grabe’, 144–5.} The same day in 1812 saw a performance of music exclusively by Mozart as part of the regular concert season in Leipzig.\footnote{‘Nachrichten’, \textit{Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung}, 15/2 (13 Jan. 1813), 19–40, p.28.} By the late 1820s, Carl Möser, the royal music director in Berlin, was holding regular concerts commemorating the birthdays and death-days of Mozart and Beethoven.\footnote{See ‘Nachrichten’, \textit{Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung}, 29/7 (14 Feb. 1827), 105–22 at 112; ‘Nachrichten’, \textit{Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung}, 31/2 (14 Jan. 1829), 26–33 at 26. These seem to have been received as something of a novelty, in 1832 the correspondent of the AGM asked ‘if it is a praiseworthy thing to remember the Coryphe of art on his birth- or death-day in their works, then why isn’t the memory of Joseph Haydn equally worthy of the honour?’ (‘Wenn es eine löbliche Sitte ist, sich der Coriphäen der Kunst an ihrem Geburts- oder Todestage in ihren Werken zu erinnern, wesshalb wird dann nicht auch Joseph Haydn’s Gedächtniss einfallen nach Verdienst geehrt?’) ‘Nachrichten’, \textit{Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung}, 34/10 (7 Mar. 1832), 156–8, col. 157.} These seem to have been either infrequent or on a comparatively small scale, an exception being the two-day festival to celebrate Mozart’s birthday in Breslau in 1824.\footnote{‘Mozarts Geburtstag, in Breslau Gefeiert’, \textit{Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung}, 26/11 (11 Mar. 1832), 171–5.} The trigger for rapid growth of these festivals was the Albrecht Dürer festival in Nuremberg on the 6 and 7 of April 1828, the focus of which was the laying of the foundation of ‘the first monument to an artist in Germany’—the statue that still stands in \textit{Albrecht-Dürer-Platz}—on the 7th.\footnote{‘So wirkte das Beispiel eines Kunst und Wissenschaft ehrenden Königs, welcher das erste Denkmahl für einen Künstler in Deutschland anordnete und dadurch dieses Fest begründet hatte’. Wendt, ‘Das Albrecht-Dürers-Fest in Nürnberg’, \textit{Zeitung für die elegante Welt}, 28/78, 79, 80, 81, 82 (21–26 Apr. 1828), 617–9, 627–30, 633–7, 641–5, 649–53, col. 653.} The combination of ceremonial, physical memorial and commemorative music that this festival established was soon echoed in similar festivals commemorating composers. On 18 October 1839 the \textit{Dürerverein} of Berlin staged a feast at which effigies of Goethe and Mozart were paraded as...
personifications of literature and art.\textsuperscript{17} In 1842, Mozart's statue in Salzburg was unveiled during a three-day festival from 4–6 of September. The unveiling itself was accompanied by fanfares, a cantata with new words set to themes from Mozart's music and concluded with a march from \textit{La Clemenza di Tito}.\textsuperscript{18} April 23 1843 saw the unveiling of monument to Bach that featured a frieze of his face, described as a ‘Byzantine shrine’ by the contemporary press.\textsuperscript{19} The monument, which was the idea of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, was paid for by a series of church concerts that had begun in 1840 with an organ concert of works by Bach and improvisation performed by Mendelssohn.\textsuperscript{20}

Wagner was personally connected to this nascent tradition through his friend Franz Liszt. Since 1839 Liszt had been the financial and artistic powerhouse behind the erection of a statue to Beethoven in Bonn, which was finally unveiled as the centrepiece of a three-day festival on 11 August 1845. Liszt had donated 10,000 francs to the project and was ultimately involved in ‘no fewer than five separate functions: as the chief donor, committee member, soloist, and not least as a conductor and composer’, having composed a festal cantata for the occasion.\textsuperscript{21} It was through Liszt that Wagner began to orient himself within this burgeoning tradition. On 5 August 1845 Wagner wrote to Liszt expressing his desire to erect a similar monument in the honour of Carl Maria von Weber, implicitly drawing comparisons between the Beethoven festival and a far more modest reinterment ceremony held for Weber in Dresden on 15 December 1844 at which Wagner had given an address and for which he had composed a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item ‘Nachrichten’, \textit{Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung}, 42/42 (14 Oct. 1840), 863–4 at 863.
\end{thebibliography}
However, it was in connection with the 1850 Herder festival in Weimar that Wagner became most intimately involved in Liszt's festivals, because it was here that *Lohengrin* received its premiere. This led to a remarkable review of ‘Three Days in Weimar’ by Wagner's disciple Theodor Uhlig in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* that confined its description of the festival to half a paragraph, while its discussion of *Lohengrin* was spread over five subsequent issues. Liszt included the Overture to *Tannhäuser* and *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* in the programme for the Third Music Festival of Anhalt-Bernburg at Ballenstedt in 1852. In response, Wagner wrote to him: ‘am I really going to figure at the next Musical Festival? People say that I am a famous “made” man; if that is true, who is the maker?’ Liszt's proselytizing culminated in a set of performances of *Der fliegende Holländer, Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* in Weimar in February and March of 1853 that were dubbed ‘Wagner week’. Wagner's own festival, given in Zürich two months later, might be interpreted as a distillation of Liszt's Wagner week. Crucially, by presenting a programme of extracts rather than full performance of the three works, Wagner was able to shift the focus of his festival from the works themselves, using them instead as autobiographical vignettes that told the story of his development as an artist.

This shift from the works to their creator meant that, even considering Liszt's evangelizing efforts, the self-commemoration on Wagner's part during the festival was extraordinary. The final concert, on Wagner's fortieth birthday, culminated with the presentation to Wagner of a laurel wreath and the recitation of a poem. This ceremony, part coronation and part memorial, clearly echoes those dedicated to the

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23 As part of Liszt's efforts to canonize Wagner in the pantheon of German artists alongside Beethoven, Goethe and Herder, the premier took place on Goethe's birthday, 28 August.
25 Wagner and Liszt, *Correspondence*, i, 204.
memory of Mozart or Beethoven and was remarkable in being (self-)conferred on a living artist. It was a living deification, the elevation of a mortal into the pantheon.

Exactly who was commemorated and who was coronated was made clear in Wagner's frequent efforts to connect the festival with his essay A Communication to my Friends, which had been published as a preface to the publication of the poems of Holländer, Tannhäuser and Lohengrin. In a letter to Uhlig of 13 December 1851, Wagner had called the festival programme ‘a musical performance of the preface’. This essay, a blend of autobiographical Bildungsroman, theoretical essay, synopsis and myth, tells the story of Wagner's development as an artist up to the point of its publication (including veiled references to the May Uprising and his planned elopement with Jessie Laussot). A Communication closes with a plan for the Ring and a promise: ‘only with my Work, will ye see me again!’ This is the key to understanding the 1853 Wagner-festival. It represented the interment of the composer of the Romantische Oper and the coronation of the artist of the future.

At the same time, as a developmental narrative, A Communication attempted to resist the division between the pre- and post-1849 works by presenting the earlier operas as integral to Wagner's development. Within the autobiographical content of the essay, this resistance required a substantial rewriting of the biographical details of Wagner's life. It also required substantial re-theorizing of the musical content of these works.

Unsurprisingly, motifs were a central part of this process of reclamation. In A Communication, Wagner was at pains to present them not as a de novo invention but as the development of a technique already at work in his earlier scores. Some of this


29 Wagner, PW, i, 392.

30 Barbara Eichner has characterized the publication of A Communication alongside the libretti of the ‘romantic operas’ as ‘Wagner’s attempt to recapture interpretive control over life and work in a literary stroke of liberation’ (‘Die Herausgabe der drei Libretti mit ihrem erläuternden Vorwort stellt also Wagners Versuch dar, in einem schriftstellerischen Befreiungsschlag die Deutungshoheit über Leben und Werk zurückzuobern’). Barbara Eichner, ‘Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde: Lebens- und Schaffensmythen in der letzten Zürcher Kunstskrift’, in Christine Fornoff and Melanie Unseld (eds.), Wagner – Gender – Mythen (Wagner in der Diskussion; Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2015), 92. Eichner deftly mirrors this literary stroke of liberation in her description of Wagner's attempt to recast his escape from Dresden as an ‘overdue stroke of liberation’ (‘überfälligen Befreiungsschlag’). Eichner, Lebens- und Schaffensmythen, 95.
work had already been accomplished. As I have previously discussed, *Opera and Drama* discusses two motifs in *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*. Similarly, Julius Schaeffer’s review-analysis of *Lohengrin* discusses named motifs in a way that clearly anticipates Wolzogen’s thematic guides. The centrepiece of this effort within *A Communication* was a new analysis by Wagner of Senta’s Ballad from *Holländer*. Wagner presented this extract as at the centre of a motific web:

> the thematic picture, thus evoked, spread itself quite instinctively over the whole drama, as one continuous tissue; I had only, without further initiative, to take the various thematic germs included in the Ballad and develop them to their legitimate conclusions, and I had all the chief-moods of this poem, quite of themselves, in definite thematic shapes before me.  

According to Wagner, he then repeated this process in *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, although he claimed that there is no single extract in *Lohengrin* that brings together all of the opera’s motifs in this way. This is apparently a foreshadowing of the decentred network of motifs in the post-1849 works.

The programme of the 1853 concerts is a working out of Wagner’s biography that reifies the autobiographical and analytical positions of *A Communication*. It was set out chronologically from *Rienzi* to *Lohengrin*, outlining Wagner’s artistic development and culminating, on the final night, with Wagner’s coronation with laurels. Within the sections presenting *Holländer*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, however, Wagner played with chronology. For *Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*, two excerpts from the operas were presented followed by the Overtures. This allowed Wagner to read these Overtures in terms of the motifs presented in them, some of which had been clarified by the preceding extracts. Wagner did this in ‘programmatic explanations’ of the Overtures printed for the concert. The paradigmatic relationship here was between Senta’s ballad and the Overture of *Holländer*, which Wagner now made to tell a story. In the ballad, Senta outlines the legend of the Dutchman, how he came to be cursed and how he

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31 Schaeffer, Über “Lohengrin” von Richard Wagner mit Bezug auf seine Schrift: “Oper und Drama”.
33 Wagner, *PW*, 370.
might be redeemed by the love of a woman. These two themes are presented by Senta using two distinct and contrasting groups of musical themes (See Table 3.1). In his programmatic explanation of the Overture to *Holländer*, ‘The Dutchman’s Sea-Voyage’, Wagner used the appearance of these melodies to signal the arrival of their related narrative themes. In other words, Wagner interpreted these melodies as motifs in a way that can be reconciled with *Opera and Drama*. This process underpinned each of Wagner’s programmatic explanations for the festival. However, just as Senta’s Ballad was chosen as the exemplar for the invention of motifs in *A Communication*, it was his programme for the *Holländer* Overture that constituted the paradigm because it allowed him to introduce the most motifs, most clearly using the themes of the ballad and *Matrosenchor*. In the remainder of this chapter, I will outline how Wagner used this paradigmatic relationship to read the Overture to *Holländer* in the light of the theory that he had laid out in *Opera and Drama*. I will then problematize this reading by showing how it is resisted by the original—perhaps ‘purely musical’—composition of the Overture. Moreover, I will expose the fissures between the theory of *Opera and Drama* and the supposed practice of *Holländer*. Ultimately, I will nevertheless argue that Wagner’s attempts to overcome these problems in constructing his programme for the 1853 festival by robbing the Overture of its role as an overture and re-interpreting it as a narrative piece make the festival all the more remarkable. The effort required by Wagner in order to make the motifs of *Holländer* fit the description given in *Opera and Drama* reveals that the change heralded in that essay was not only quantitative but also qualitative. This locates the idea of motif, rather than just the proliferation of motifs, in the period after Wagner encountered traumatic events in 1849.

Wagner’s reading of the Overture to *Holländer* is based on the Dutchman and Senta motifs of Senta’s ballad, supplemented by the melody of the *Matrosenchor*, which was also performed before the Overture, used as a third motific grouping. Out of the alternation of these three groups of motifs, Wagner wrote a narrative based on the three groups of characters they represent: the Dutchman and his crew, Senta and Daland’s crew. Wagner’s programme begins with the Dutchman’s ship navigating the coast in a
### Table 3.1: Thematic Motives in Senta’s Ballad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive Group</th>
<th>Bar Number</th>
<th>Verse 1 Text</th>
<th>Verse 1 Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dutchman Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1 (a)</td>
<td>bb. 1-4</td>
<td>(bb. 11-15)</td>
<td>Johohoe!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Johohoe!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hejohoe!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td>bb. 5-8</td>
<td>(bb. 32-35)</td>
<td>Hui! Like an arrow it flies,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Without target, without rest, without peace!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1 (b)</td>
<td>bb. 8-9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3 (a)</td>
<td>bb. 15-17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3 (b)</td>
<td>bb. 17-19</td>
<td>(bb. 35-6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[without] peace!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Senta Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4</td>
<td>bb. 24-27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>bb. 39-42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>bb. 47-50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Dutchman— and we, the audience— then hear a melody that promises his redemption, the Senta motifs of bb. 65–79. He responds by becoming ‘somber and despondent’ (bb. 79–96). As the music of the Overture recapitulates the Dutchman’s aria ‘Die Frist ist um’ (motif D1 (b) in Table 3.1), Wagner cannot resist an allusion that goes beyond Senta’s ballad. He echoes the text of *Die Frist ist um* by exclaiming ‘How many times the unfortunate man has gone through this routine!’ He sails back into the storm, hoping to be drowned but the ocean refuses to claim him. This passage equates to bb. 79–202, written with the Dutchman motifs. At this point, as the Matrosenchor plays (bb. 203–216), another, happy crew passes the Dutchman’s ship. Wagner reads the alternation of the ‘Matrosenchor’ with the Dutchman motifs (bb. 217–228) as the Dutchman’s crew intimidating the others into silence. The Dutchman falls further into despair as he fears he will never find the woman who can be his saviour (the Dutchman motifs and the S1 motif, bb. 228–266). Suddenly, a light breaks through the darkness (the *Matrosenchor* interspersed with D4 (b), bb. 267–284). The Dutchman finally perceives the woman who can save him (the Senta motifs interspersed with Dutchman motifs, bb. 285–320). In the Overture’s apotheosis, in which Senta and Dutchman motifs are blurred into one another, Wagner sees the Dutchman swallowed by the deeps only to rise from the waves and be led by the hand by his saviour ‘toward the rosy dawn of sublime love’ (bb. 322–390).

It is easy enough to connect Wagner’s reading with the *Oper and Drama* concepts of remembrance and clarification through a definite object. Senta’s ballad and the *Matrosenchor* clarify the meanings of these ‘motifs’. The Overture recalls them, and Wagner interprets these recollections quite freely to construct a narrative. In particular, this mode of interpretation recalls Hans von Wolzogen and Thomas Mann. Like Wolzogen, Wagner recognizes concrete associations with characters—Senta, the

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Dutchman and the sailors—and concepts (particularly redemption). Like Mann, Wagner seems to recognize motifs’ ability to recall events. The Dutchman’s seven-yearly trip ashore is signalled by the D3 motifs in bb. 151–161, the passage in Wagner’s narrative in which the Dutchman recalls these trips. Similarly, the whole effort of Wagner’s explanation might be read as equivalent to Mann’s reading of Siegfried’s funeral march as ‘an overwhelming celebration of memory and mind’. It is also possible, if less straightforward, to reconcile Wagner’s reading with the notion of foreboding. Senta’s ballad might be read as the abstract foreshadowing of a myth that is then made plastic in the Overture and Wagner’s explanation of it. The ‘justified foreboding’ is thus the events outlined in Wagner’s explanation. This is, of course, a reversal of the normal progression outlined in Opera and Drama: the foreboding of Senta’s verse-melody is realized in the purely orchestral Overture.

Wagner’s motivic reading is satisfactory; however, it seems to be resisted by the musical structure of the Overture. Typically, the Overture is taken as being in sonata form. James Hepokoski even designated it as paradigmatic of later nineteenth-century sonata forms that relied on ‘maximally contrasting’ themes embodying the masculine and the feminine. Underpinning, if often tacitly, analytical attempts to find a sonata form within the Overture to Holländer is Wagner’s article, ‘On the Overture’. This article was written for the Gazette Musicale in January 1841, just months before Wagner wrote the Holländer Overture. In this article, Wagner sketched out a fiercely advocated but imprecisely defined vision for the ideal overture, in the context of a polemical history of the genre. The central thesis of On the Overture is that overtures should tend towards a dialectical construction, which Wagner presents in opposition to the potpourri forms that ‘belong, not to the history of Art, but to that of theatrical entertainment’. In this cause, he constructs a history of the overture from a formulaic ‘conventional

35 Mann, Essays, 367.
bridge—exemplified by the overture to *Messiah* in which Handel is obligated to rely on ‘the resources of the art of counterpoint’ because of the unavailability of more fitting means of expression—to a piece able to ‘reproduce the characteristic idea of the drama by the intrinsic means of independent music’. Central to this history are Gluck, Mozart and Beethoven and their Overtures to *Iphigenia in Aulis, Don Giovanni* and *Leonora*. Despite the potential for such an approach, Wagner largely sidesteps the idea of a teleological succession between the composers. Instead, Wagner praises each of the three individually for writing overtures that captured the essence of the drama to follow, ‘without toiling to express what music neither can nor should express, the details and entanglements of the plot itself’. Capturing this essence was a necessarily dialectical enterprise. For both Gluck and Mozart, Wagner argues, it is the hostile interaction of two opposing themes that give the overtures their impetus. However, as Wagner’s own narrative explanation makes clear, the Overture to *Holländer* is not straightforwardly dialectic. In addition to the Dutchman and Senta, Daland’s crew (represented musically by the Matrosenchor) make frequent appearances. This exposes another tension within Wagner’s programme for the festival. As Barbara Eichner points out, gender dynamics are a key theme of *A Communication* that Wagner uses to knit together its autobiographical elements with the passages that interpret the dramatic and content of his works. Within the festival, therefore, the Overture was performing contradictory roles. As a depiction of Wagner’s development as a composer, it had to represent and masculine-feminine dialectic; as a realization of his new theory of motif, this dialectic had to be complicated to incorporate Daland’s crew.

While there is a broad consensus that the Overture is in sonata form, there is little agreement on the precise turning points of this form. The sonata-form interpretation can be traced back to Tovey’s *Essays in Musical Analysis*, which has been followed by the detailed analyses of Thomas Grey’s, ‘Wagner, the overture, and the aesthetics of

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musical form’ and, more recently, Stefan vande Moortele’s ‘Form, Narrative and Intertextuality in Wagner’s Overture to Der fliegende Holländer’. Despite this apparent consensus, there is widespread disagreement between those writers who have analysed the form in detail as to how it is operating in Wagner’s Overture. For Tovey, the Overture begins with a substantial introduction (bb. 1–96), which is followed by an exposition (bb. 97–ca.216) after which the form becomes ‘unorthodox’. According to Tovey, a long section in which Wagner develops each of the themes previously introduced (including those from the ‘introduction’ section) is followed by an apotheosis of the Senta motifs in the tonic major, which supplants a traditional recapitulation. Grey rejects Tovey’s designation of the first 96 bars as an introduction, not least in the light of its ‘clearly expository function’. Moortele, on the other hand, is quite sympathetic to Tovey’s reading on the grounds that multi-tempo introductions were an open possibility within sonata forms, and the section ends on the dominant. Additionally, a long introduction was de rigeur for the grand operatic style that was predominant in Paris where Wagner conceived Holländer, as is exemplified by his own Overture to Rienzi. The result is that both Grey and Moortele are forced to double a portion of the sonata. For Grey, there is a double development (Dev. 1 from b.97-b.202 and Dev. 2 from b. 203-284). Moortele, on the other hand, sees the exposition as doubled, a ‘functional’—that is, rhetorical—exposition (bb.1–96) gives way to a ‘structural’ exposition that conforms to the strictures of sonata form. Neither reading is entirely satisfactory. The problem with Grey’s reading is relatively straightforward; it cannot explain the highly unusual move of a return to the tonic at the beginning of a development section. Moortele’s failing is less obvious, but poses an equally serious problem to his analysis. He places far too much emphasis on the apparent lack of a perfect authentic cadence in the second theme, arguing that this function is not fulfilled until the PAC in the sailor’s chorus theme (b.210). However, the basic gesture of the

44 Tovey, Essays in Musical Analysis, ii, 116–7.
45 Grey, Wagner, the Overture, and the Aesthetics of Musical Form, 13.
46 Moortele, Form, Narrative and Intertextuality in Wagner’s Overture to “Der fliegende Holländer”, 59.
second theme is a PAC in the relative major (the very first gesture of S1 is I-V-I), and, while it is certainly true that the move to V\(^7\) of VI unsettles the cadence, the same is true of the cadence in the sailor's chorus theme. The PAC is perfunctory and followed by a repeat of the concluding phrase of the theme, which this time refuses to settle into a PAC.

There is similar disagreement over the existence and nature of the recapitulation. Moortele again sides with Tovey. They both assign the function of recapitulation to the version of the Senta theme that appears in the tonic major (bb. 329–374), although whereas Moortele is happy to call this a recapitulation for Tovey it is ‘not a recapitulation but a triumphant apotheosis’ Grey on the other hand shares Tovey’s reticence to use the term ‘recapitulation’. Instead, he refers to a ‘“recap” or “substitute recapitulation”’. Rather than applying this term to the tonic major appearance of the Senta theme, however, Grey sees the reappearance of the Senta theme in its original key (bb. 285–321). Again, no single reading is entirely satisfactory. Moortele’s analysis offers the strongest explanation of the tonal plan of the work, in the light of the appearance of subordinate material in the tonic and even Wagner’s brief inverted dominant pedal at b. 328. On the other hand, Grey’s reading seems to fit the rhetoric of the Overture more closely. The reappearance of the S1 motive in its original key of the relative major feels like a substantial moment of arrival to which we have been propelled by the stringendo from b. 277 to b.284 and to which we are pulled by the poco ritenuto. As Moortele and Grey agree, the passage from b.322 to the end has the character of a coda, even if, as Moortele argues, it serves the tonal and rhetorical functions of a recapitulation.

A partial explanation of the variance between different analytical readings the Holländer Overture might be found in the fact that the Overture seems to conform to the potpourri conventions that Wagner so vehemently denounced in On the Overture. On the whole, commentators have ignored this. Moortele, in his The Romantic Overture and Musical
Form from Rossini to Wagner, groups it with other potpourri overtures, but this is on the basis of a much looser definition of the term than that set out by Wagner. Moortele calls any overture that quotes the music of its opera ‘potpourri’, distinguishing between ‘potpourri procedure’ – the use of melodies from the opera – and ‘potpourri form’ – the ‘loose’ stringing together of melodies.[50] Wagner clearly reserves the term for overtures that consist only of a succession of melodies because for him the term potpourri is essentially derogatory and he is explicitly in favour of making musical references to the opera in the overture. In fact, although Wagner specifies that potpourri forms consist of stringing together melodies taken from the opera, the example that he gives, Guillaume Tell, suggests that it is the stringing together of melodies that he considers essential to the term potpourri. What has been overlooked is that the Holländer Overture conforms to this second, Wagnerian definition. The Overture can easily be understood as alternating between three numbers from the opera, Senta’s Ballad, the Dutchman’s aria ‘Die Frist ist um...’ and the ‘Matrosenchor’. It does not simply take the themes from each number as a starting point. Wagner presents a strophe of each number almost verbatim. In this alternative reading form of the Holländer Overture’s form, it consists of three cycles through the three numbers on which it is based. The first 228 bars are expositional, presenting each number in succession. This is followed by a truncated second presentation in which the order of the numbers are rearranged and their themes treated more freely (bb. 229–320). The Overture then concludes with an apotheosis cycle based on Senta’s Ballad.

Because he cycles through the numbers more than once, Wagner sidesteps the strictest interpretation of his definition of potpourri overture (Guillaume Tell, for example, features each number that it quotes without repetition). There is a pre-existing model for the form of potpourri overture that Wagner is using, Le pré aux clercs, the opera by Ferdinand Hérold that was revived at the Opéra Comique in Paris a few months before Wagner wrote On the Overture for the opening of the new Salle Favart (see Table 3.2).

In On the Overture, the overture-composer that Wagner endorses are all German –

Table 3.2: A structural comparison of the Overtures to Der fliegende Holländer and Le Pré aux clercs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bars of the Overture</th>
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<th>Bars of the Overture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>171-182</td>
<td>313-320</td>
<td>373-390</td>
<td>322-340</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Introduction</th>
<th>Theme I</th>
<th>Theme II</th>
<th>Theme III</th>
<th>Theme IV</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cycle B</td>
<td>1-12</td>
<td>13-39</td>
<td>40-67</td>
<td>68-107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Cycle C            | 229-266 | 267-292 | 258-284  | 258-284 |
| Cycle D            | 229-266 | 267-292 | 258-284  | 258-284 |

| Cycle B            | 1-12    | 13-39    | 40-67     | 68-107  |

| Cycle B            | 1-12    | 13-39    | 40-67     | 68-107  |

| Cycle B            | 1-12    | 13-39    | 40-67     | 68-107  |
Gluck, Mozart, Beethoven and Weber. Conversely the composers that he criticizes are all French or writing in and for Paris—Rossini, Spontini and Hérold (of course, Gluck too was writing for Paris, but it is clear that he belongs on the German side of Wagner’s implicit dichotomy). However, Holländer was originally written in the hope that it would be performed in Paris. It is clear that the bivalent form of the Holländer Overture is the result of Wagner’s incorporation of French musical structures into his overture composition, while maintaining the aesthetic framework that he had outlined in his theoretical work. The Overture deftly combines sonata form, with its diametric opposition of two main themes as praised in On the Overture, and potpourri, which Wagner raised specifically in opposition to the dithematic form. If Wagner’s criticisms are laid aside, this is clearly a strength of the work rather than a weakness. However, the structure of Wagner’s Overture was at risk of revealing a Francophile position with loosely treated motives that was dangerously at odds with his 1853 self-image. In order to overcome this, Wagner wrote the explanatory programme note that reinterpreted the structure of the Overture as a narrative based on an anachronistic reading of the motives of the Overture as post-Opera and Drama motifs.

Crucially, each of these three ways of analysing the Overture to Holländer contradict the idea that it was conceived in terms of motives. It is straightforward to see how the two formalist analyses contradict this claim. The sonata-form readings of the Overture resist the claims that Wagner made in A Communication and in his programmatic explanation because they suggest that the work is predominantly dialectic. They elevate the structural aspects of Wagner’s music above the meanings of individual ‘motifs’. Arguably, the potpourri interpretation resists Wagner’s writings even further. Firstly, it exposes that far from being a break with traditional forms, Holländer conforms to them even more closely than Wagner wished to acknowledge when writing the Overture.

Perhaps more important is the question of cyclicity. Certain potpourri forms lend themselves to narrative readings because the succession of musical themes presented...
mirror the progression of events in a narrative. As a cyclical form, the *potpourri* form used by Wagner resists this progression. This resistance bleeds out into Wagner’s reading. The Dutchman sails out of the storm and then back into it. The Senta motifs return again and again to taunt the Dutchman with their promise of redemption. The *Matrosenchor* seems first to represent the arrival of the sailors singing it and then the appearance of a light in the darkness.

It is equally true that Wagner’s motivic reading of his overture ultimately reveals that it was not originally written with this motivicism in mind. In the context of the 1853 concerts, the moment in which the Dutchman and Senta motifs are clarified is Senta’s ballad. However, Senta’s ballad is strophic. As a result, it introduces a second cyclicity that is problematic for Wagner’s programmatic explanation, because the motifs are ‘clarified’ at least every strophe and sometimes several times in each strophe. Therefore, precise meanings for these motifs are difficult to articulate. Of course, it is this very imprecision that allows Wagner to overcome the cyclicity of the *potpourri* form. By reducing the association between the motif and its clarification to an association between motif and character, each reappearance of the motif can be read as a different narrative event.

The other problem with Wagner’s theoretical reading in *A Communication* that he overcomes in his 1853 programme is that Senta’s Ballad and the Overture give a false impression of the extent to which the score is suffused with a narrow and interconnected motivic web. This was the criticism that Dahlhaus aimed at Wagner. Much of the musical material in *Holländer* has no direct connection with either number. By presenting a twenty minute vignette consisting of the Ballad, the *Matrosenchor* and the Overture, therefore, the 1853 festival gave a false account of the role of motifs in *Holländer*. This is likewise exposed by the fact that Wagner’s programmatic explanation bears no particular resemblance to the plot of *Holländer*. In other words, in its original presentation, the Overture cannot be read as a foreboding for the upcoming plot.

Instead, as might be expected in the light of *On the Overture*, it seems to be a musical working out of the two central ideas of the opera, the cursed Dutchman and Senta’s promise of redemption.

In the 1853 festival programme, Wagner attempted to overcome the written properties of *Holländer*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* and re-compose them as artworks of the future, recognizable as definite developmental steps on the path to *Opera and Drama* and after that the *Ring*. This attempt on Wagner’s part took substantial effort. He had to cut the operas into extracts and reorder these extracts in order to open up the possibility of motivic readings. Moreover, he wrote out these readings as programmatic explanations, new narratives that only made sense in the context of the programmes that he presented. Because this effort was so substantial, I argue that this endeavour must be seen as an attempt by Wagner to obscure a genuine qualitative change in his use of motifs after his encounter with traumatic events in 1849. This qualitative change was the emergence of foreboding and reminiscence—the terminology that I link to PTSD—terms that can only meaningfully be applied to *Holländer* in the precise configuration that Wagner created in 1853.

The 1853 festival was Wagner’s opportunity to introduce the public to a new way of hearing. Above all, in the case of the three *Holländer* pieces, the audience were exposed to a tight net of motifs for twenty minutes. These were first clarified by Senta and the Sailors. Finally, the Overture knitted them into a sensory, mnemonic narrative. Nevertheless, it was a remarkable preview of how this theory would ultimately be realized in the post-1849 works. By cutting his works into ‘bleeding chunks’ with scant regard for their original content or context, Wagner was able to reconstitute them into a foretaste of the future. Wagner presented in miniature a new work in which the whole score was built from a few basic motifs with extra musical meanings. These motifs forced their listeners into the temporal perspectives of remembrance and foreboding. In Wagner’s letter to Uhlig, he made a bold claim:

> If I wished to present myself completely—as a dramatist—I could only do this now in an incomplete appearance: I therefore purposely show myself incompletely,
displaying merely one side of my nature, so as thus at least to escape appearing
full of gaps and void of clearness. If you want the whole of me, then do your part to
make it possible.\textsuperscript{53}

A full performance of Holländer, Tannhäuser or Lohengrin would have revealed many
such gaps. Gaps in the fabric of ‘motifs’ presented by the scores. Gaps between the
use of these ‘motifs’ and the theories of Opera and Drama. In the very incompleteness
of the ‘bleeding chunks’, Wagner was able to trim out these gaps and present a
narrative of his own development and an analysis of his motific technique that was, for
all its incompleteness, the wholly new artform conceived in the wake of the Dresden
bloodbath.

\textsuperscript{53} Richard Wagner, Richard Wagner’s Letters to His Dresden Friends: Theodor Uhlig, Wilhelm Fischer, and
Ferdinand Heine, trans. John South Shedlock (London: Grevel, 1890), 156.
Chapter 4

Siegfried’s ‘Rhine Journey’: an Analysis

Sieglinde's experiences in Act 2 of Die Walküre give us a prototype for the operation of trauma in Wagner's dramas that we can substantiate through Wagner's two other 'languages', word and gesture. It is, nevertheless, possible to point to a purely musical moment—in the sense that it is without words or gestures—that demonstrates the same point, namely, Siegfried's Rhine Journey at the end of the prologue to Götterdämmerung. In this passage, the orchestra itself can be understood as experiencing a traumatic flashback. Triggered by the musical and dramatic presence of the Rhine, the orchestra recapitulates the events that took place there in Das Rheingold. In this chapter, I will analyse Siegfried’s Rhine Journey using the trauma-centric approach that I developed in Chapter 2. In doing so, I hope to show how these analytical tools can offer an understanding of the operation of memory and foreboding, trauma, and motif in Wagner's scores.

Siegfried's Rhine Journey is the orchestral passage that concludes the prologue to Götterdämmerung. Following the Norns' scene, Siegfried and Brünnhilde emerge onstage. Brünnhilde tells Siegfried that she must allow him to leave and accomplish new deeds. In order to assuage her fear that he will forget her, Siegfried leaves
Brünnhilde with the ring ‘as sacred expression of [his] fidelity’.

Once they have sworn to be inseparable in spirit, Siegfried departs, and we are left to read the progress of his journey in Brünnhilde’s gestures.

Before the musical and physical transition to the next scene is complete, the curtain falls. Indeed, the bulk of this passage of music takes place with the curtain covering the stage. This is, therefore, as close to a purely musical moment as is possible within Wagner’s scores. Our interpretation of Wagner’s music in this passage—the final 170 bars of the prologue of Götterdämmerung—is not directly mediated by words and gestures onstage. Wagner himself seems to play with the idea of ‘pure music’—in something like Carolyn Abbate or Thomas Grey’s sense of the term—in this passage. At one point, he threads several motifs into a fugato section. Unlike in the case of the contrapuntal style Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, it is far from straightforward to justify this contrapuntal technique in dramatic terms, and the use of a fugal texture here certainly threatens the status of motifs as extra-musically meaningful units. They are at risk of reverting to their (predominantly) musical statuses as subject, counter-subject, and so on. In opposition to this tendency, the absence of any stage-action—indeed, the absolute occlusion of the stage by the curtain and the resulting collapse of any visual or textual narration—brings motifs to the fore as agents of memory and foreboding. It is profoundly difficult to read this passage except in terms of the motivic meanings that Wagner calls upon. In a Wagnerian score, the more ‘purely musical’ a passage becomes the more the music talks. Interpreted in this way, a narrative emerges that extends the story told in Siegfried and Brünnhilde’s scene and then Brünnhilde’s gestures into the first scene of Act I.

At first, the meaning of Siegfried’s Rhine Journey that seems to emerge from this reading seems to be a straightforward act of narration. The passage begins with the characters still visible on stage. A version of Siegfried’s horn call (bb. 635–639) is followed by the motif that Siegfried sang when he first left Mime in Siegfried (bb. 1 'als Weihegruß meiner Treu'!

Götterdämmerung, Prologue, l. 209.
640–648). This leads to an alternation between motifs associated with Brünnhilde and the love between her and Siegfried (bb. 649–669). These then give way to the offstage sound of Siegfried’s horn (bb. 670–676 and bb.683–688) surrounding an appearance of Brünnhilde’s motif (bb. 677–683). After an interruption by a strikingly dissonant passage as Brünnhilde’s joyful smiles reflect the parting Siegfried’s demeanour (bb. 688–700), the motif Siegfried sang when leaving Mime re-emerges, preceded this time by a new figure derived from the bass line at the end of its previous appearance (bb. 701–716).

An important inter-motific relation is discernible here: the same falling fourth-rising third pattern occurs locally in both the ‘Siegfried’s Mission’ motif and the Brünnhilde motif that appears in the Rhine Journey (Example 4.1). In this way, Wagner binds together the idea of Siegfried leaving and the idea of Brünnhilde. At the same time, the emergence of this specific, local meaning (Siegfried is leaving Brünnhilde) moderates against the specificity of the memory of Siegfried leaving Mime i.e. the event remembered by the ‘Mission’ motif. That is to say that this inter-motific relation allows Wagner to rewrite, in a purely musical manner, the meaning of these motifs. This rewriting nevertheless draws on the central concepts of remembrance and foreboding.

At this point, the curtain falls, and the orchestra gives an extended fugato on Siegfried’s horn call interwoven with the motif of Siegfried leaving Mime (bb. 717–786) and against a contrapuntal section is suddenly punctured by an appearance of the Rhine motif from the beginning of the Rhine Journey (bb. 797).

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2 In Siegfried, the eponymous youth uses this motif to sing: ‘Out of the wood, into the world: never shall I return!’ (‘Aus dem Wald fort in die Welt ziehn, nimmer kehr’ ich zurück!’) Siegfried, Act I, sc. 1, l. 405–406.
3 Wolzogen calls this the first motif simply the ‘motif of Brünnhilde’ (‘Motiv der Brünnhilde’). Wolzogen, Leitfaden durch Wagner’s Ring, 98–9. The second motif is the one to which Siegfried and Brünnhilde sing ‘Oh Hail to the Mother that bore me/you!’ (‘O Heil der Mutter, die mich/dich gebar!’) at the end of Siegfried. Siegfried, Act III, sc. 3, II. 2440–2441 and 2446–2447.
4 In strictly motivic terms, these bars are based on the first four notes of the ‘Flight/Freia’ motif, which Cooke discussed at such length. Nevertheless, what is most striking here is, without doubt, the extraordinary and (in every sense) unprepared dissonance. Of course, this is another sense in which ‘pure music’ can threaten Wagner’s motivicism. It seems to me that this basic idea—dissonance, as a ‘purely musical’ phenomenon, threatens the meaningfulness of Wagner’s motivicism—is implicit in Dahlhaus’s argument that a developed chromatic technique and language was necessary for Wagner to depict alienation (in the sense of forgetfulness) in music in Götterdämmerung. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Carl Dahlhaus, ‘Entfremdung und Erinnerung: Zu Wagners “Götterdämmerung”’, in Christoph-Hellmut Mahling and Sigrid Wiesmann (eds.), Bericht über den Internationalen Musikwissenschaftlichen Kongress, Bayreuth 1981 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1992), 416–20.

(b) ‘Brünnhilde Motif’ (example) *Götterdämmerung* prelude, bb. 677–679.

(c) ‘Siegfried’s Mission Motif’ (new version) *Götterdämmerung* prelude, bb. 701–704.

Example 4.1: Inter-motivic similarities in *Götterdämmerung*, prelude
Interrupted by an appearance of the renunciation motif (bb. 811–818), the Rhine motif returns from bb. 819–842.

Everything up to this point seems to be telling a fairly straightforward story. Firstly, the music tells us that Siegfried (bb. 635–639) is leaving (bb. 640–648) Brünnhilde (bb. 649–669). Then it shows us the same using the diegetic sound of his ever more distant horn. The motifs run: Siegfried (bb. 670–676)—Brünnhilde (bb. 677–683)—Siegfried (bb. 683–688)—is leaving (bb. 701–716). The orchestra then tells us the same thing a third time, this time by binding together the motif that means ‘Siegfried’ (his horn call) with the motif that means ‘Siegfried is leaving’ contrapuntally. This apparent tautology is interrupted at b. 787 by the musical arrival of the Rhine—surely indicating Siegfried’s arrival at the river. The appearance of the renunciation motif (bb. 811–818) hints that Siegfried’s departure might have more profound significance than is yet apparent, but this foreboding is not allowed to overtake the passage’s basic narrative quality. The Rhine motif returns, and it seems Siegfried’s journey is proceeding smoothly. All of this can be inferred from a traditional Wolzogian reading, moderated perhaps by Cooke’s critique.

At this point, however, something overcomes the orchestra (b. 843). As if triggered by the appearance of the Rhine and renunciation motifs, the orchestra’s temporal focus splits. The bassoons, bass trumpet, bass trombone and cellos retain some sense of the present, repeating a fragment of Siegfried’s horn call, while the rest of the orchestra is suddenly in the past, recapitulating the Rhinemaidens’ original cries of Rheingold from Rheingold, Scene 1. The horn call fragment stops after two bars, and the bass trumpet then also slips into the past, repeating the Rhinegold fanfare. At this point, motifs from Rheingold have entirely taken over, and a new narrative emerges. As it did in Rheingold, the Rhinegold cries (bb. 843–859) give way to Wellgunde’s explanation of the power of the gold (bb. 860–863). This follows the same path of transformation towards the ring motif as it did the first time around (without the ring motif itself appearing), repeating Alberich’s greedy exclamation, ‘could I win for my own the wealth of the world through you? I can’t make love mine. Yet through cunning I can make
This culminates in two restatements of the renunciation motif. Then the Rhinegold fanfare leads into the ‘Frohn’ motif and ‘Herrscherruf’, which transforms into the Gibichung music.

This moment can be interpreted every bit as straightforwardly as Sieglinde’s nightmare. In response to mnemonic musical ideas (the Rhine and renunciation motifs), the orchestra’s—and, therefore, our—sense of the present disappears, and we are reliving the plot of Rheingold. As in the case of Sieglinde’s nightmare, this makes it a remarkable moment, and it is hard to resist interpreting it as a traumatic flashback. The orchestra relives the experiences it witnessed in Rheingold. This orchestral flashback is remarkable because it so closely recapitulates Rheingold, and it presents the mnemonic motifs here in almost exactly the same order. The Rhinegold set of motifs (bb. 843–859) are followed by the motif used by Wellgunde to explain that the whole world would belong to one who made a ring from the gold (bb. 860–863). This becomes Alberich’s menacing restatement of this motif (bb. 864–867), which is followed by the renunciation motif (bb. 868–874) developed by Loge in Scene 2 of Rheingold, and, finally, the ‘power of the ring motif’ (or ‘Herrscherruf’, bb. 883–886), used to accompany Alberich in Rheingold, Scene 3 as he sings ‘Tremble and cower, broken host! Obey the lord of the ring immediately!’ In other words, we can interpret this simply as the plot of Scene 1 of Rheingold. The Rhinemaidens sing to the gold. They reveal the gold’s secret to Alberich. He renounces love and steals the gold, subsequently fashioning it into the ring. This basic narrative does not require us to go far beyond the analysis of Wolzogen to produce, but by inserting this narrative here, Wagner has introduced a memory whose recapitulation cannot be justified in simple dramatic terms. It has no direct relation to the action taking place between Siegfried and Brünnhilde. The orchestra has been overcome by this memory, much as Sieglinde is in her nightmare. They both lose track of what is present as they relive what is past.

6 ‘Der Welt Erbe gewänne zu eigen, wer aus dem Rheingold schüfe den Ring, der maßlose Macht ihm verlieh.’ Rheingold, sc. 1, ll. 262–266, bb. 599–604.
7 ‘Zittre und zage, gezähmtes Heer! Rasch gehorchst des Ringes Herrn!’ Rheingold, sc. 3, ll. 1140–1143.
It is particularly noteworthy that the culmination of the narrative as it is told in the music is the ‘Herrscherruf’, the cry with which Alberich subjugates the Nibelungs in Rheingold, Scene 3. There is a strong case for arguing that this is the most fundamentally traumatic moment in the Ring, because it is one of only two occasions when the ring is actually seen to be used as an instrument of power. Before the shout, Alberich ‘takes the ring from his finger, kisses it and holds it out threateningly.’\(^8\) In response, the Nibelungs howl and scatter. For all Wotan’s anxiety over the power of the ring, the only other time we see such instrumental power is when Alberich uses precisely the same gesture to summon and disperse the Nibelungs in Scene 4 of Rheingold, at which point he is totally within Wotan’s power. This is, in fact, the only moment in which the central focus of anxiety in the Ring—the ring itself—is able to inflict unrestrained suffering and trauma. It is the moment from which all fear of the ring stems.

This point, too, is indicated by the music. The ‘Herrscherruf’ is immediately preceded by a minor version of the Rhinegold fanfare, which elsewhere in the Rhine Journey has appeared in its typical, major form. The minor iteration first appears in Rheingold, immediately before Alberich takes the gold. However, its most prominent appearance is perhaps its sounding as part of the combination of motifs by which Wotan professes to renounce the world and leave it as the inheritance of Alberich in his Walküre, Act II monologue. This moment is prominent not only because it is so striking in its own right, but also because it attracted Wagner’s own critical attention in On the application of music to the drama.\(^9\) The importance of this passage to the ‘Herrscherruf’ is that this is Wotan’s most pronounced expression of his fear of Alberich. Within the Rhine Journey, this moment therefore demonstrates the emotional power of the split focus of Wagner’s motifs. At once, this moment shows us the event when the ring was most terrifying (when Alberich wielded it, recalled by the ‘Herrscherruf’) and the moment in which a


character experiences this terror most profoundly (when Wotan understands that his fears about Alberich will be realized in his *Walküre*, Act II monologue).

Nevertheless, this reading is by no means complete. The first way in which we have to problematize this basic reading is by acknowledging that the iteration of the Rhinegold motifs that Wagner uses here contains more meaning than can be captured in a Wolzogian label. This is because while the motif that begins this passage (bb. 843–859) is the Rhinemaidens’ shout of ‘Rheingold’ as it appears in *Rheingold*, Scene 1, the rest of the passage closely recapitulates the Rhinemaidens’ lament from the end of *Rheingold*, Scene 4. This is the passage in which they first beg Wotan to return the gold as he crosses with the other gods into Valhalla. In fact, the only differences between this later passage and the Rhinegold music from Siegfried’s Rhine Journey are the key and, more importantly, the harmonization of the cry of ‘Rheingold’. In *Rheingold*, Scene 1 and Siegfried’s Rhine Journey, the first chord is harmonized with a half-diminished chord, whereas in the Rhinemaidens’ lament in Scene 4 it is harmonized as a dominant seventh (see Example 4.2b). In fact, Siegfried's Rhine Journey is the first time that the ‘Rheingold’ cry is harmonized in this way after *Rheingold*, Scene 1. In other words, whereas in the semantic reading this passage stands straightforwardly for the Rhinemaidens’ initial state of joy in the gold, in a reading that takes into account mnemonic links to the earlier events of the drama, this meaning has already been blurred.

My explanation for this blurring is that the orchestra’s perspective is, at this moment, entirely split. That is to say that this is truly a traumatic memory and a prophetic reminiscence in the sense that this is memory that already contains within itself an awareness of its tragic outcome. I have already mentioned that it is here (b. 843) that the orchestra’s perception splits between Siegfried in the present (who soon recedes entirely out of auditory view) and the Rhinemaidens in the past. I would argue that a second split occurs at b. 845. In this case the division is between the orchestra’s re-experiencing of the events *Rheingold* and its awareness of the trajectory of this memory. The flashback itself is carried by the cry of ‘Rheingold’ that appears in bb.
Example 4.2: Three versions of the ‘Rheingold’-cry.

843–844. Because this is the first time that the original harmonization has appeared since *Rheingold*, Scene 1, these bars establish a direct connection to the scene that the orchestra is reliving. The ‘Rheingold’ cry is, unsurprisingly, one of the most important motifs in the *Ring*. Wagner himself used the motif as an example of the variety that could be derived from a single motif:

One would have to follow this uncommonly simple theme—recurring in manifold alliance with almost every other motive of the drama’s wide-spread movement—through all the changes it receives from the diverse character of its resummoning, to see what type of variations the Drama can engender.\(^{10}\)

Its appearance here in its original harmony for the first time in three days seems, therefore, highly significant. Nevertheless, the Rhinemaidens’ lament is equally perfectly recapitulated in bb. 845–859, and the original meaning of this passage was clear. The Rhinemaidens sing how beautiful the gold was, lament its absence and ask Wotan to return it:

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\(^{10}\) Wagner, *PW*, vi 187.
Woglinde, Wellgunde, Flosshilde [Rhinemaidens]

Die drei Rheintöchter in der Tiefe des Tales, The three Rhinemaidens in the depths of the
unsichtbar valley, out of sight
Rheingold! Rheingold! Rhinegold! Rhinegold!
Reines Gold! Pure gold!
Wie lauter und hell How clear and bright
leuchtetest hold du uns. You shined proudly on us.

Um dich, du Klares, For you, o clear one!
wir nun klagen: Now we lament:

gebt uns das Gold give us the gold
gibt uns das Gold! give us the gold!
O gebt uns das reine zurück[11] O give us back the pure one!

I would, therefore, argue that the flashback is interrupted by the appearance of the lament in bb. 845–859. However, this interruption does not belong to the present as such but is instead a kind of foreboding. The intrusion of the lament reinforces the orchestra’s and audience’s understanding that the end of this flashback will be the theft of the gold and its transformation into the ring. This is particularly clear if we consider bb. 851–852. In the lament, this music was used by the Rhinemaidens to sing ‘For you, o clear one! [b. 851] Now we lament [b. 852]’. The substitution of a diminished seventh in b. 852 for the half-diminished chord of b.851 seemed to underline the Rhinemaidens’ lament and their memory of the gold’s loss. Here, these two bars are a perfect case of the orchestra ‘[turning] our reminiscence into foreboding’. The diminished sonority does not now look backward to the gold’s loss in Rheingold as it did in its original appearance, but forward to when the gold will be lost later in the flashback. In summary, the intrusion of the Rhinemaidens’ lament from Rheingold, Scene 4 underlines the status of the orchestra’s flashback as a traumatic memory, because it wraps the

11 Rheingold, sc. 4, ll. 1854–1857 and 1859–1862.
 orchestra’s sense of where this memory leads—on other words, a foreboding—into the orchestral memory.

Moreover, I believe there is a sound analytical basis for my interpretive assertion that it is the ‘Rhinegold’-cry that predominates in this passage, while the Rhinemaidens’ lament is a bracketed intrusion that dictates the emotional perception of the flashback and forebodes its tragic outcome. The basis for this assertion is that the inclusion of the original harmonization of the ‘Rheingold’ cry disrupts the recapitulation of the Rhinemaidens’ lament. The version of the of the ‘Rheingold’ cry—harmonized as \( V^7 - \flat VI \)—that appears in the lament has a poignancy that the original version lacks. There is a nice music-theoretical reading of the reharmonization of the cry of ‘Rheingold’ that explains why this is the case, although the reharmonization is less straightforwardly dissonant, and in a literal sense, therefore, less painful. The use of a dominant seventh, rather than half diminished, chord on G shifts us into the key of C. The resolution to A\( ^\flat \), therefore, takes us away from the home key, while at the same time clarifying that this home key is C minor rather than major. As a result, the meaning is clear. The Rhinegold is no longer home, and this is something to lament. Robbed of this initial affect, the character of the lament being recapitulation is transformed. It is predominantly in the major mode—the exception is the moment of foreboding at b. 852 that I have already identified. Moreover, it recycles a number of melodic ideas that appear before the theft of the gold in Rheingold. This, coupled with the fact that the cry of ‘Rheingold’ appears first, means that in Siegfried’s Rhine Journey the ‘Rheingold’ cry appears as vivid repeat while the lament has a modified character. Its appearance seems an evocation of its meaning more than a repeat of it as event.

The result of Wagner’s blurred repetition of the Rhinegold themes—the split in focus between Scenes 1 and 4 of Rheingold—means that the orchestra’s memory of the events of Rheingold, Scene 1 in this passage is inextricable from the outcome of these events. That is to say that even as the orchestra plays the motifs associated with the Rhinemaidens’ enjoyment of the gold, it understands that this is a state of affairs that will be put to an end later in the memory. Closely related to this is the way that blurring
in this passage means that it manifests as memory: a narrative told in the present but manufactured from the events of the past, in a way that is perceptible as such to the audience. The importance of this is that, as in the case of Sieglinde’s memory, it is clear to the audience that the orchestra is remembering. In Sieglinde’s nightmare, her remembering can be discerned as we can infer from her words that she is perceiving things that we cannot see. In the case of the orchestra in Siegfried’s Rhine Journey, we can perceive the orchestra’s flashback as memory, because we can see that it is a novel construction of the motifs that make up this passage. The novel form of the Rhinemaidens’ lament (bb. 843–859) is one example of this. Another example is the contraction of the whole story of Rheingold into a far shorter space of time. Motifs that were previously separated by several minutes of music and text—or even whole scenes in the case of the ‘Herrscherruf’—are directly juxtaposed in Siegfried’s Rhine Journey. The result is that this passage satisfies the quasi-paradoxical features of a traumatic flashback. On the one hand it is of the present and in the present. It is a novel construction of motifs. On the other hand, it is a vivid repetition of the past. There is no moment in the Ring in which the orchestra relives earlier events so precisely or at such length.

Thus far, I have presented the reading of this moment as a traumatic flashback as the most reasonable, if not the only reasonable, reading of this passage. In fact, one alternative reading was offered by Wagner himself. In an 1875 concert in Vienna, Wagner presented excerpts from the Ring, which would first be performed as a complete cycle the following year in Bayreuth. As had become a central element of his concertizing practice at this point, Wagner prepared a set of programme notes for these extracts. In the case of the prologue to Götterdämmerung, he also offered a justification for their use:

(For the purposes of presenting the orchestral-symphonic portion of this dramatic prologue it was necessary to implement some cuts in accordance with the suppression of the vocal parts, which would not make sense outside the context of

12 In this way, Wagner’s motifs seem to overcome Davis’s claim that music lacks a deictetic shift. Davis, “Inside/Outside the KleinBottle” 11.
an actual stage production. Since the imagination of the listener must now be called upon to supplement the scenic directions which cannot otherwise be realized here, the following description is offered by way of an explanatory program to the present excerpts; it is meant to suggest the action something in the manner of a pantomime.\footnote{13}

Clearly, Wagner thought of his programme note as nothing more or less than the realization in words of the plot of the prologue. The way in which he realizes the narrative of Siegfried's Journey is, therefore, striking:

Siegfried leads his horse down the mountainside, Brünnhilde calls joyously after him until he suddenly disappears from view, as if behind an outcropping, and she can only follow him by the sound of his horn from the valley depths. But then she spies him again, as he boldly forges ahead into the distance; overcome, she waves once more to him. He passes through the fire protecting the mountain; the bright tones of his horn seem to set the flames dancing merrily about him as he proceeds on his way. Reaching the Rhine he is welcomed by the Rhine Maidens, who regard him as their champion and savior and who speed him safely on his way. They accompany him as far as the court of the Gibichungs, where he will meet his destiny through Hagen, the heir to the Nibelung's ring.\footnote{14}

This reading is highly problematic on two counts, which I will expand on below. Firstly, it is hard to reconcile with the wider plot of \textit{Götterdämmerung}; secondly, it is weaker than my reading of this passage in more strictly mnemonic and fatidic terms. As a result, Wagner's programme offers an insight into Wagner's own (in-)ability to conceive of his music in these terms, particularly in concerts, where the mnemonic-fatidic framework underpinning his motivic system was necessarily lacking.

It is difficult to reconcile the idea contained in this programme note that Siegfried meets with the Rhinemaidens on his journey to the Gibichungs with the experience of the \textit{Ring} as a whole. Only a very generous reading of the text would be consistent with this idea.

\footnote{13} Wagner, \textit{Wagner Introduces Wagner (and Beethoven)} 516.  
\footnote{14} Wagner, \textit{Wagner Introduces Wagner (and Beethoven)} 517.
Specifically, one might argue that Siegfried seems sufficiently unsurprised to encounter the Rhinemaidens in Act III that it is possible he met with them earlier. When they call him by name, he does not ask them how they know who he is. This stands in direct contrast to his reaction on being greeted as ‘Siegfried’ by Hagen in Act I. On that occasion, Siegfried turns to Hagen and asks if they have met previously. Against this stands the complete lack of positive evidence in the text for an earlier meeting between Siegfried and the Rhinemaidens. He never mentions meeting them, nor gives any positive indication of having met them previously on seeing them in Act III. Some of this might be explained as the effect of Gutrune’s potion—Siegfried’s amnesia seems to begin just before the forest bird tells him of Brünnhilde’s existence—but he still could have mentioned his encounter with them in Act I. Added to this is the absence of any evidence for this meeting in any of the other meta-textual sources (sketches, drafts, programme notes, letters etc.). Perhaps for this reason, this imagined meeting is not discussed in secondary Wagnerian literature.

If the text of *Götterdämmerung* provides an absence of evidence for a meeting between Siegfried and the Rhinemaidens during Siegfried’s Rhine Journey, then the music comes closer to evidencing the absence of this meeting. I have already discussed the intricacies of the connections between the Rhinemaidens’ lament in this passage and its earlier appearance in *Rheingold*. In this earlier appearance, the Rhinemaidens remember the gold, lament its loss, and plead with Wotan for its return. If we treat this passage as a straightforward paraphrase of this lament, it is hard to reconcile this with Wagner’s description of Rhinemaidens greeting Siegfried as their champion and saviour and guiding him towards the Gibichungs. Instead, if one were to read these motifs in this way, it would surely be assumed that they would be asking Siegfried to return the gold as they earlier asked Wotan. This is, equally, more consistent with their appearances in general; after *Rheingold*, Scene 1, they never appear without pleading for the gold’s return or, in the case of the end of *Götterdämmerung*, actually achieving this return. Of course, as I have pointed out, this passage is no straightforward paraphrase of the motifs from *Rheingold* because the cry of ‘Rheingold’ has, for the first
Example 4.3: The ‘Rhinegold’-cry in *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, Scene 1

This all comes into even sharper relief when we consider the deep contrast between the music of the Rhine Journey to which Wagner supposes a meeting between Siegfried and the Rhinemaidens and the music that accompanies their actually depicted meeting in Act III, Scene 1. Firstly, in the Rhinemaidens’ invocation to ‘Frau Sonne’ to help them retrieve the gold, which takes place before Siegfried enters, they use a new form of the ‘Rhinegold’ cry. At first, this seems to restore the half-diminished chord of the original, but this time the chord never resolves within the cry of ‘Rhinegold’. Instead, the Rhinemaidens progress to a new half-diminished chord an augmented second higher (on B♮). Moreover, before this chord can resolve to C major—as precisely the same chord did in the very original cry—this becomes a dominant seventh on G through a melodic pattern seen in the Rhinemaidens’ lament at the end of *Rheingold* (Example 4.3). That is to say that the original cry of ‘Rhinegold’ is not restored as it is in the Rhine Journey. In addition to this, once he enters the Rhinemaidens repeatedly call Siegfried using a version of the ‘Rhinegold’ cry (Example 4.4a). This might seem to support the idea that the appearance of this motif in the Rhine Journey represented their cries of


(b) The Rhinemaidens’ second ‘Siegfried’-cry. *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, sc. 1, b. 185

(c) The Rhinemaidens’ third ‘Siegfried’-cry. *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, sc. 1, bb. 310–306


welcome to him. However, once again these cries are thoroughly distorted. Their initial greeting to Siegfried uses a vi-I progression that is harmonized by the orchestra as vi\(^7\). Their second uses another unresolved half-diminished chord (Example 4.4b). Finally, their last enjoinders, which precede their warning that the ring will bring him ill luck, return to the half-diminished chord but resolve first to the dominant seventh a minor third below and finally to the half-diminished chord a minor third below (Example 4.4c). All this is to say that whereas the text allows us to say that there is no evidence Siegfried meets the Rhinemaidens before *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, we can infer from the score that the music of the Rhine Journey is not the music that the Rhinemaidens would use to greet Siegfried. This is because it is not the music that accompanies the meeting when it finally occurs before our eyes. This point is all the stronger when we consider that there is little reason for the Rhinemaidens to think of Siegfried as their saviour and no evidence that they do so.

In addition to the fact that Wagner’s programme note is hard to reconcile with the text and music of the *Ring*, it also fails to capture a lot of the musical detail in Siegfried’s Rhine Journey. This is particularly clear in comparison with my own reading and especially true of the passage that I have treated as a traumatic flashback. Wagner’s reading can be divided into five parts, each of which is given a sentence. First is the
part of the journey we can all see and then—through the diegetic sound of Siegfried’s horn—only hear. Then comes the part of the journey that only Brünnhilde can see. Thirdly, Siegfried passes through the magic fire and thus out of Brünnhilde’s sight. He reaches the Rhine and is welcomed by the Rhinemaidens. Finally, they bring him to the court of the Gibichungs, within which Wagner brackets Siegfried’s eventual tragic fate. The first three of these sections are well balanced in several senses. They capture most of the motifs that appear between bb. 635 and 786. The only one that is not addressed directly is the motif Siegfried used to leave Mime, which is encapsulated in any case in Wagner’s entire paraphrase. Equally, these sections are balanced temporally in terms of bar numbers. Siegfried’s departure to the bar before Brünnhilde’s second glimpse of him lasts 53 bars (bb. 635–687). From this point to the bar before the fire motif appears lasts 50 bars (bb. 688–737), and from the appearance of the fire motif to the bar before the entry of the Rhine motif lasts 51 bars (bb. 738–787). At this point, Wagner’s reading loses this sense of balance. Initially, this is indicated by the fact that his reading entirely fails to address the striking appearance of the renunciation motif at b. 811. At the same time, the pace of the reading and the music has slipped from the level of one sentence per section. A single phrase: ‘Reaching the Rhine’ now covers 55 bars (bb. 788–842). These problems only become more pronounced at the Rhinemaidens’ entry at b. 843. Within my reading, the Rhinemaiden motifs here contain the bracketed idea of the loss of the gold (bb. 845–859) within the original cry of ‘Rhinegold’ (bb. 843–844). This is not immune to criticism. For example, the balance between the primary idea (the original state of the Rhinegold) and the bracketed idea (the gold’s fate) seems somewhat backward. Nevertheless, it stands up well compared with Wagner’s reading in which not only these bars but also the appearances of the various forms of the world inheritance motif, the renunciation motif, the bondage motif and the ‘Herrscherruf’ are all reduced to one idea that is clearly present in the music—the Rhinemaidens—and another that is, for all the reasons discussed above, hard to reconcile with the music—their welcoming Siegfried as champion and guiding them to the Gibichungs. In fact, the appearance of any theme related to the Gibichungs occurs very late with the entry of the ‘Hagen’ motif at b. 889. This not only means that Wagner’s reading has lost
all sense of balance—his final sentence encompasses only 4 bars—but he has either ignored all the motific activity between bb. 860 and 888, or imposed on them the unlikely meaning of the Rhinemaidens welcoming and guiding Siegfried. It seems that Wagner himself is amnesic in the face of the mnemonic power of his own motifs. Just as his autobiographical accounts of the revolution are faintest at the moments he was most likely confronted with violence and combat, confronted with the full force of the orchestra’s reminiscences, he falls silent.

I would interpret Wagner’s silence here as indicating, on several levels, a lack of the vocabulary necessary to interpret Siegfried’s Rhine Journey convincingly. At its most basic, this is a return of the problem that characterizes all Wagner’s programme notes: he is forced to infer musical meanings that he has not had an opportunity to establish. When presented as a concert piece with this programme, Siegfried’s Rhine Journey was the only occasion on which the audience heard this configuration of the Rhinegold/Rhinemaiden motifs. As a result, the intratextual musical inferences about the motifs that are available on the basis of the score of the Ring as a whole were not accessible to the audience. They were not in a position to recognize the ‘Rheingold’ cry, let alone recognize that this particular iteration originated in the Rhinemaidens’ lament at the end of Rheingold. This means that the orchestral memory was not perceptible as such to the audience on purely musical terms. In his programme note for another of the extracts presented, ‘Siegfried’s funeral march’, Wagner was forced into a convoluted circumlocution in order to represent the mnemonic role of the orchestra in his programme note:

The vassals lift the body upon the shield to accompany it slowly in solemn mourning over the mountain. This last action is accompanied by the orchestra in the manner of a tragic chorus, at once celebrating and mourning the origins, the glory, and the sad fate of the hero, praised now as a figure of divinity.\[16\]

In this description, the orchestra’s memory is only represented insofar as the events that the orchestra celebrates and mourns are in the past. Moreover, Wagner is reliant

\[16\] Wagner, \textit{Wagner Introduces Wagner (and Beethoven)} 518.
on the allegorical evocation of the ‘tragic chorus’ Of course, Wagner could have employed a similar device in his note for Siegfried’s Rhine Journey. He might have said: as Siegfried travels along the Rhine, the orchestra, in the manner of a tragic chorus, recalls the theft of the gold from the Rhinemaidens many years earlier. However, this would be laying an extremely heavy burden on the programme note. In addition to having to make the orchestral reminiscence absolutely explicit, Wagner would have to have admitted that the orchestra were remembering something that had little direct bearing on Siegfried’s journey. Given the fundamentally commercial nature of the concert, introducing such an apparently esoteric mnemonic device into the programme note might well have undermined Wagner’s purpose and doubtless provided further ammunition to the critics who were most sceptical of his motivic technique.

Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that Wagner lacked the vocabulary to describe a memory that was so vivid it seemed to be occurring in the present. I have discussed at some length the reasons that the Rhinemaidens’ physical presence at this point in the drama is exceedingly unlikely, and yet Wagner felt that their presence in the music is so overwhelming that their presence had to be acknowledged in his programme. What Wagner’s reading tells us, in other words, is that the Rhinemaidens’ presence in the music goes beyond the mnemonic recollections that we hear in Siegfried’s funeral march. If we reject their genuine presence, for all the reasons discussed above, then we are forced to accept their presence as a vivid, re-occurring memory. Wagner, of course, lacked the pseudo-medical vocabulary that has now entered the vernacular to describe these experiences. The best explanation for the orchestra’s music is that they are experiencing something akin to Sieglinde’s nightmare. In order to avoid bestowing the power of dreaming on his orchestra, Wagner, therefore, invented this rather improbable encounter between them and Siegfried.

In Chapter 2 I argued that Sieglinde’s reaction to the motivic sound of Hunding’s horn can be understood as a model for our own hearing of Wagner’s motifs. Wagner himself

17 As Grey points out, there is an ambiguity here as to whether Wagner means ‘mourning chorus’ or ‘the chorus of ancient Greek tragedy’. Wagner, [Wagner introduces Wagner (and Beethoven)] 528n53.
laid out the effect of these motifs in terms that map straightforwardly onto structures
described in contemporary theories of PTSD. Siegfried’s Rhine Journey demonstrates
this again. The orchestra hears the motifs that it has just played and this triggers a vivid,
traumatic memory, pregnant with foreboding and anxiety that overtakes the orchestra’s
perception of the present. However, because it is the orchestra that experiences this
flashback, because this flashback is, therefore, presented in music rather than words,
this passage goes beyond simply exemplifying the psychological effects of motif that I
laid out in the previous chapter. Because the orchestra’s memories are themselves
motific, we necessarily join the orchestra in its traumatic memory. An idea that I will
explore in more detail in Chapter 5 is that the beginning of Götterdämmerung is
dramaturgically difficult for Wagner. The end of Siegfried seems to have settled the
problems of the Ring; there is no need for the drama to continue. By ending the
prologue to Götterdämmerung with a traumatic memory, Wagner forces the audience to
confront the fact that the open wounds of the Ring have not been healed after all.
Chapter 5

‘An end to eternal knowledge’: Motifs and Temporality in the *Ring*

The Norns’ scene in *Götterdämmerung* is a scene in which the present is totally overwhelmed by the past and the future. It is a scene out of time, inhabited by characters whose very purpose is to remember and to forebode. Unsurprisingly, the score of the scene is littered with motifs that reach deep into the previous action of the *Ring* and look ahead to the apocalypse depicted at its end. In other words, this is a scene that exemplifies the traumatic theory of motif that I outline in Chapter 5. Nevertheless, it is also a scene that goes beyond this basic theory. In the final two chapters of this thesis, I examine two examples from Wagner’s dramas that reveal how musical processes operating on a larger scale to that of individual motifs reinforce the similarities between Wagner’s music and the symptoms of PTSD: the Norn’s scene from *Götterdämmerung* and the shepherd’s melody from *Tristan und Isolde*. In the Norns’ scene, this larger musical process is the process of developmental interrelation between motifs. I argue that the Norns collapse this process, shattering the illusion that the score of the *Ring* can be understood as a coherent, progressive narrative. This fracture reproduces the ‘sense of foreshortened future’ symptom of PTSD—a patient’s
perception that they are faced with ‘a world that is incompatible with the possibility of an open and progressive life story.’

In order to demonstrate this, I show first that the Norns’ scene represents a crisis of storytelling in the Ring, because the Norns present an account of the Ring that seems to contradict the story presented in Das Rheingold, Die Walküre and Siegfried. The Norns’ account is, therefore, an anti-narrative gesture; it is an act of storytelling that problematizes the status of narration within the Ring. Secondly, I show that this scene can be interpreted in terms of the basic analysis of motifs that I described in Chapter 2. The Norns’ scene is the point at which motifs relating to Valhalla pivot towards motifs relating to the World Ash tree. This pivot makes the scene a moment that looks backwards towards Valhalla and forwards towards the cataclysm that engulfs the gods and the world at the end of the Ring. Finally, I show that the anti-narrativity of the text of the Norns’ scene is underpinned by its music. I present an analysis that overturns an idea that is referenced repeatedly in analyses of Wagner—the notion that the developmental relationships between motifs are meaningful. In rewriting these developmental relationships, the Norns present a musical account of the Ring to match the anti-narrativity of their textual account. Taken together, these two anti-narrative gestures embody a symptom of PTSD that was not discussed in detail in Chapter 2. This symptom is a sense of foreshortened future—a patient’s perception that they are faced with ‘a world that is incompatible with the possibility of an open and progressive life story.’ By undermining the textual and musical storytelling of the Ring, the Norns turn the world of the Ring into such a world.

The Norns, the uncanny and the wound

In writing the first scene of Götterdämmerung, Wagner was faced with a dramaturgical challenge. At the conclusion of the previous opera in Wagner’s Ring, Siegfried, the eponymous hero has faced down and defeated all comers, crossed the barrier of magic

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2 Ratcliffe, Ruddell, and Smith, ‘What is a “sense of foreshortened future?” A phenomenological study of trauma, trust, and time’ 8.
fire and won the heart of the heroine Brünnhilde who lay sleeping beyond.

Representatives of the two major antagonistic tribes of the drama, Mime of the Nibelungs and Wotan of the gods (and the Wälsungs, his human descendants), have been defeated. Their contrasting schemes of world domination have been thwarted, and the ring they coveted that promised dominion over the world to its wearer is in the hands of a man with no intention to use it. So pure, indeed, is Siegfried, the ring’s new owner, that we are given reason to hope that the curse placed upon the ring that threatened the destruction of its wearer has no power over him. Nevertheless, the drama continues. In the prologue to Götterdämmerung, three Norns appear at Brünnhilde’s Rock and attempt to foretell the future. Siegfried and Brünnhilde then emerge on stage and he bids her farewell, leaving in search of new brave deeds.

In order to justify this continuation, the first scene of Götterdämmerung, the Norns’ scene, destabilizes our understanding of all that we have seen in the previous three dramas, and it is the processes of traumatization that constitute the primary mechanism of this destabilization. Wagner introduces a new trauma into the Ring, announced by its newly revealed victims: the death of the World Ash tree, the Norns’ home, at the hands of Wotan. At the surface, the audience’s encounter with this new wound—as the Norns call it—guides them towards a form of vicarious traumatization, a radical shift in their understanding of their relation to the world of the Ring underpinned by the transtemporal dynamics of Wagner’s motific theory of remembrance and foreboding.

But the Norns’ scene also triggers a fracture on a deeper level. The snapping of the Norns’ rope embodies the fragmentation of temporality in the text and music of the Ring and thus the sense in which the events of the Ring can be arranged into a single

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3 Wanderer—Wotan in disguise—tells us ‘Joyful in love, free from envy, Alberich’s curse is powerless against the noble one, for fear remains a stranger to him.’ (‘Liebesfroh, ledig des Neides, erlahmt an dem Edlen Alberichs Fluch: denn fremd bleibt ihm die Furcht.’) Siegfried, Act III, sc. 1, ll. 2136–2140.

Although this immunity could be undermined by the fear Siegfried subsequently feels on encountering Brünnhilde, in Götterdämmerung Alberich reiterates that the curse is failing in the face of Siegfried’s disinterest: ‘in the face of the fearless hero even my curse fails; because he doesn’t know the ring’s value, he doesn’t use it’s hateful power.’ (‘An dem furchtlosen Helden erlahmt selbst mein Fluch; denn nicht kennt er des Ringes Wert, zu nichts nützt er die neidlichste Macht.’) Götterdämmerung, Act II, sc. 1, ll. 888–893.

4 The first thing Brünnhilde says when they walk onstage is ‘On to new deeds, dear hero! How could I love you if I didn’t let you go?’ (‘Zu neuen Taten, teurer Helde, wie liebt’ ich dich, liess’ ich dich nicht?’) Götterdämmerung, Prologue, ll. 149–152.
coherent narrative. This inability to engage with the *Ring* as a coherent temporal experience is the impetus for the cataclysmic momentum engendered by the Norns’ scene that propels the *Ring* once again towards the gods’ twilight.

The gateway to this dramatic re-evaluation of the previous dramas of the *Ring* is the affect of uncanny that pervades the scene. The close but imperfect resemblance of the music that we hear, the characters that we see and the stories that we are told to those which we have already seen instils a sense of discomfort and paradoxically heightened unfamiliarity. The audience’s sense that their previous experience of the *Ring* was true is repeatedly assaulted. The sense of déjà vu which characterizes the first scene of *Götterdämmerung* is cultivated from the very first chord of the piece. Rendered unmistakable by its spacing and orchestration, this is the chord that accompanied ‘Brünnhilde’s awakening’ in the final scene of *Siegfried*, and yet something has slipped (Example 5.1). The chord has sunk from E minor to E♭ minor. Nevertheless, the impression of recapitulation, albeit an imperfect one, is immediately compounded. The chord’s progression to the relative major parallels the one heard the previous night, but in place of a grand arpeggiated figure played on three harps, this chord is accompanied by a motif in the strings that reaches back further in the drama to the prelude of the *Ring’s* first work, *Rheingold*. As in ‘Brünnhilde’s awakening’, the initial chord returns and then proceeds to D♭ minor (the sunken equivalent of the previous night’s D minor), but again the harp figure is displaced by the motif from the prelude to *Rheingold*. Just as in *Siegfried*, the initial chord returns a third time, but now it is followed by a more radical departure that finally breaks with the pattern of ‘Brünnhilde’s awakening’. The fate motif displaces that of the joyful figure that represents the apotheosis of this passage in ‘Brünnhilde’s awakening’ and the softly undulating quavers break free of the pattern of *Rheingold*, instead outlining a sequence of diminished and half-diminished harmonies. All this occurs before the curtain rises, but already it encapsulates the essence of this scene. A point of familiarity, in this case the music of ‘Brünnhilde’s awakening’ is rendered neither unrecognizable nor unfamiliar, but eery in its similarity.
(a) ‘Brünnhilde’s Awakening’, *Siegfried*, Act III, sc. 3, bb. 1077–1091
This effect is only strengthened as the curtain rises. The scene is the Valkyries’ rock, the setting of the final acts of both Die Walküre and Siegfried. Onstage are three women, just as at the beginning of Rheingold. The potential for mistaken identity is reinforced by the music. Although the motif of undulating quavers that interrupts the recapitulation of ‘Brünnhilde’s awakening’ is used twice in references by Erda to the Norns (Example 5.2), it is closely related to the § version of the motif that appears in the prelude of Rheingold and accompanies the swimming of the Rhinemaidens in that opera’s first scene.
Example 5.2: Norns’ ‘Nature’ Motif
The same trick is played one final time in the first lines that they sing:

**Erste Norn**

Welch Licht leuchtet dort? What light shines there?

**Zweite Norn**

Dämmert der Tag schon auf? Does the day break already?

**Dritte Norn**

Loges Heer Loge’s host

lodert feurig um den Fels. blazes fiery about the rock.

Noch ist’s Nacht. It is still night.

Nothing is as it seems. The dawn—evoked by the music of ‘Brünnhilde’s awakening’ and the light shining ‘from the depths of the background’—is, after all, a false one. This final example also illuminates the fact that it is not only the audience that has been taken in by the illusion of the dawn, but also the characters onstage. It is the first indication that the omniscience of the Norns is at an end. The cumulative effect of all this sleight of hand is to undermine the veracity of our understanding of what we are seeing. The light is no dawn. The women are no Rhinemaidens.

Each of these examples is an uncanny resemblance that threatens the audience’s trust in the reality of the scene. But the true impact of uncanny in the scene is the threat that the Norns’ narrative, which makes up the bulk of the scene, poses to our faith in the preceding dramas. It is this new narrative that elevates the atmosphere of uncanny in the scene from an unsettling trick that throws the scene off balance to the more profound impression of an ‘anxious uncertainty about what is real caused by an apparent impossibility’, as Mark Windsor defined the uncanny. This narrative is subdivided into three tales, each of which focuses on a particular character and is

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5 *Götterdämmerung*, Prologue, ll. 1–5.
subdivided into three songs—one for each of the Norns. First is the tale of Wotan, although it is by no means the story with which we are familiar based on the preceding three works. The focus here is on the spear. The Norns tell how Wotan broke a branch from the World Ash tree—a ‘wound’ that has caused the tree to wither and die. He used this branch to form the spear’s staff, carved contract runes into the staff by which to rule the world, saw the spear broken by Siegfried and has now felled the remnants of the World Ash tree to serve as the kindling that will set Valhalla aflame. The Norns exist in a state of failing vision, shrinking horizons and dimming lights. Exemplifying this decay, which foreshadows the demise of fate itself, the Norns apparently become distracted from their recital of the fate of the world by the proximal sight of Loge’s fire circling the rock:

Erste Norn

bei ihrer Beschäftigung nach hinten looking behind as she works away blickend

Dämmert der Tag? Is day dawning?
Oder leuchtet die Lohe? Or the firelight shining?
Getrübt trügt sich mein Blick; My vision is clouded and deceives me;

We are told in the second tale that Loge once burned as bright flame, was tamed by Wotan—hence, presumably, his human appearance in Rheingold—but gnawed in rebellion at the runes carved in Wotan’s spear. For this crime, he was bound by Wotan to surround Brünnhilde’s rock. The Norns then return to their task of foreshadowing the conclusion of Götterdämmerung by prophesying that Wotan will plunge the shattered

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8 Patrick McCreless, following Alfred Lorenz, made this same observation, although he calls them ‘speeches’, ignoring the fact that the Norns repeatedly describe each other as singing. Patrick McCreless, Schenker and the Norns, ed. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (California studies in 19th century music; University of California Press, 1989), 278–80 The final tale is an exception in that the third Norn’s contribution is so short and frantic that it hardly seems to qualify as a song. This may explain why the Norns’ refrain, ‘Sing sister! I cast it to you. Do you know how it will be?’ is reduced to a version of the final question after the first tale—a reduction that McCreless points out but in which he sees no significance. (‘Singe, Schwester, dir werf’ ich’s zu: weißt du, wie das wird?’) Götterdämmerung, Prologue, ll. 41–43. In the second and third tales, this becomes ‘Weißt du, was aus ihm wird?’ ll. 93 and 104.

9 Erste Norn ‘In the long passage of time the wound consumed the wood’. (‘In langer Zeiten Lauf zehrte die Wunde den Wald’) Götterdämmerung, Prologue, ll. 29–30.

10 Götterdämmerung, Prologue, ll. 86–88.
splinters of his spear into Loge’s breast. This will begin the fire that will consume Valhalla. The final tale sees a return to something like the story of the *Ring* with which we are familiar. It tells how Alberich stole the Rheingold and placed a curse on the ring. But more than this, Alberich’s curse is eating at the fabric of fate, and in their vain attempt to see how the tale will end, the Norns break their rope.

In several senses, this narrative provides a counterpoint to the story of the *Ring* as it is presented before *Götterdämmerung*. The tripartite structure of the story as it is presented by the Norns mirrors the structure of the same story as it has been told through music drama. However, its organization into tales oriented around single characters is a radical departure from the dramas. *Rheingold, Walküre* and *Siegfried* all repeatedly and easily shift their focus from Nibelungs and nixies to gods to Giants and to Humans, but they preserve the apparently chronological order of events. Each scene seems to happen after the preceding scene. The Norns, by their very nature, are not tied to time in this same way and are gifted with the ability to look beyond the present in both directions. They therefore escape and challenge the storytelling of the *Ring*.

Having expressed a need for his myths to be presented in musical drama, Wagner nevertheless legitimizes another way of presenting the story.

While the structure of the Norns’ narrative is a challenge to the storytelling of the *Ring*, the more obvious challenge comes in the form of the new events presented by the Norns. In each of the three tales that they tell, the narrative presented by the Norns differs substantially from the version that has been presented as drama in the *Ring*.

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11 Precisely the same description might be applied to motifs. They are free to look backwards or forwards, but they are tied to a particular meaning by the moment in which they are clarified. In this sense, the Norns’ can be said to be narrating motivically.

12 Carolyn Abbate addresses her analysis of Wotan’s monologue in *Die Walküre* at Wagner’s claimed need to make the events of *Siegfried* ‘plastic’, to make them visible to the audience rather than described in narration. Abbate, *Unsung Voices* 159–60. Wagner made the same point in a letter to Liszt of 20 November 1853, highlighting the importance of representing events dramatically to his system of motifs:

In order to give everything completely, these three dramas must be preceded by a grand introductory play: *The Rape of the Rhinegold*. The object is the complete representation of everything in regard to this rape: the origin of the Nibelung treasure, the possession of that treasure by Wotan, and the curse of Alberich, which in *Young Siegfried* occur in the form of a narrative. By the distinctness of representation which is thus made possible, and which at the same time does away with everything of the nature of a lengthy narration, or at least condenses it in a few pregnant moments, I gain sufficient space to intensify the wealth of relations, while in the previous semi-epical mode of treatment I was compelled to cut down and enfeeble all this.

Wagner and Liszt, *Correspondence*, 172–3.
From *Rheingold* onwards, Wotan’s story has been that of a god dealing with the consequences of making a contract that he was unwilling to fulfil (the exchange of Freia for the construction of Valhalla, and the existential threat posed to him by the emergence of a potentially greater power: Alberich in possession of the ring). Wotan’s desire to resolve these two problems is presented as the prime motivator of his actions in the *Ring*. His theft of the hoard from Alberich, his fathering of the Valkyries and the Wälsungs and his abandonment of Siegmund are all explicitly presented as attempts to escape his contractual obligation and combat the threat of Alberich. The Norns relegate both of these issues to a secondary role. In their version, Wotan’s story begins with the violation of the World Ash tree. Wotan’s goal is nothing other than hegemony over the world. This domination is guaranteed not by Valhalla, but by the spear until it is shattered by Siegfried. Valhalla is nothing more than the hall in which he entombs himself awaiting his own destruction. Loge’s story also finds itself cast in a very different light. Firstly, the Loge of the *Ring* is a man; the Loge that the Norns’ describe is first and most prominently a flame. His human form in *Rheingold* is explained through the magic of the spear, which ‘tamed’ him.\(^1\) Secondly, the Norns sing that he gnawed at the runes carved into the spear’s shaft and that this is the reason that he was bound to encircle Brünnhilde on the Valkyrie’s rock. This story recalls two moments in the *Ring*. His treasonous words at the end of *Rheingold*, ‘I feel a deep desire to consume those who once tamed me’ constitute a comparable rebellion to gnawing at the spear, and his binding to Brünnhilde’s rock is played out in *Walküre*.\(^2\) But in this enacted representation, this same event is presented as part of the punishment of Brünnhilde, Wotan’s acquiescence to Brünnhilde’s desire to be protected from cowards, disconnected from any action of Loge’s. Only in singing Alberich’s tale, do the Norns return to something like the narrative with which we are familiar, but even here there is a twist. Not only has Alberich’s curse claimed the lives of those who have possessed the ring (Fasolt and Fafner), but it is also eating away at the very fabric of fate. The Norns’ narrative is, therefore, a different *Ring*-story told differently. This severely undermines

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\(^1\) ‘Through the magic of the spear, Wotan tamed him’. (‘Durch des Speeres Zauber zähmte ihn Wotan’.*) *Götterdämmerung*, Prologue, ll. 94–95.

\(^2\) ‘spür’ ich lockende Lust: sie aufzuzehren, die einst mich gezähmt’. *Rheingold*, sc. 4, ll.1845–1847
the integrity of the Ring. Even in a poem that ‘contains the beginning and end of the world’, events have been omitted, and those that are included are susceptible to rearrangement.\(^\text{15}\)

The alternative version of events presented by the Norns is thrown into even sharper relief in comparison with the first draft of the scene that Wagner made in 1848. The Norns of the 1848 draft relate: firstly, that Alberich stole the Rheingold and forged the ring, is condemned to slavery and will be freed by the return of the gold to the Rhine; secondly, that Wotan stole the ring to pay the Giants for building his castle, is now riven with concern and will be brought peace by a free hero fighting on his behalf; and finally that Siegfried slayed the dragon conceived by the Giants to guard the ring and woke Brünnhilde, who will bring peace to the gods, although Siegfried will betray her. In other words, the 1848 narrative conforms to the stereotype of these narrative moments in Wagner’s operas as straightforwardly rehearsing the earlier events of the drama.\(^\text{16}\) The 1848 draft lacks much of what made the 1852 version so rich. Unlike their 1852 counterparts, the Norns of 1848 are not subject to any doubt or the kind of digression that led the 1852 Norns into the tale of Loge. Their final utterance is strongly affirmative: ‘What we have spun, binds the world.’\(^\text{17}\) Moreover, the 1848 scene lacks both the challenges to the integrity of the Ring-story that the 1852 draft makes, because there was no Ring to challenge. Strikingly, although Wagner retained the structure of the 1848 draft in the later version (drafted in 1852), he departed radically from the events depicted in both the 1848 version and in Rheingold, Walküre and...
Siegfried. Wagner decided that the story the Norns told in the 1848 should be told differently, and the story told by the Norns in 1852 should be a different one.

The fundamental aspect of this new story that underpins the operation of trauma in this scene is the sense that the audience cannot trust in its own memory of the earlier works of the Ring. The Norns’ retelling of the Ring-story challenges the primacy of the earlier dramas of the Ring as the narrators of the Ring-story. However, the culmination of uncanny within the scene is not simply the Norns’ restructuring of the Ring-story or the alternative teleology behind the events of the Ring that they present. Instead, the deepest moment of uncanny within the scene is tied to the ‘new’ trauma that is presented in the Norns’ narrative. The Norns’ very first act of narration transports us to an Eden-like, picturesque, natural location, but it is not the depths of the Rhine, the Eden-like, picturesque, natural location that serves as the setting for the beginning of Rheingold. The setting described by the first Norn is, instead, the World Ash tree, the spring at its foot and the forest formed by its holy branches. We are presented with a different beginning for the Ring. This is followed by a story that runs parallel to that of Alberich and the Rhinemaidens. ‘An audacious god’, seeking—in contrast to Alberich—wisdom rather than sexual gratification, came to drink from the spring and gave in return one of his eyes. The transactional nature of the exchange also echoes the relationship between Alberich and Grimhild. Like Alberich, however, this god then inflicted an injury on this paradise, breaking a branch from the tree for the shaft of his spear, causing the tree itself to wither and die and the spring to dry up. This is a shocking revelation. Although Wotan has alluded to the creation of the spear already in the riddle scene of Siegfried, in that scene this event is not depicted as an act of desecration. Wotan, in the guise of Wanderer, frames it as a mystical and sacred act of creation. ‘The trunk [of the World Ash tree] may wither’, he tells Mime, ‘but the spear will never fail.’

18 ‘Ein kühner Gott trat zum Trunk an den Quell; seiner Augen eines zahlt’ er als ewigen Zoll.’ Götterdämmerung, Prologue, ll. 21–24.
19 ‘dort der Stamm, nie verdirbt doch der Speer’. Siegfried, Act I, sc. 2, ll. 565–566.
infallible and indestructible in the object of the spear. But the first Norn tells us that the tree is gone, destroyed by the very act by which Wotan purported to preserve it.

The destruction of the World Ash tree can be understood as a fundamental wound or trauma that has set the plot of the Ring in motion, equivalent to Alberich’s theft of the Rhinegold. Wotan’s act of desecration, like Alberich’s, causes the tragic events that are to follow. But whereas the wound inflicted by Alberich forms the opening of the work, the Norns’ wound remains concealed, revealed gradually and obliquely. The story of the creation of the spear emerges entirely backwards. Wotan’s act is first represented in the presence of Wotan’s spear from the second scene of Rheingold onwards. The spear must, after all, have been created from a tree in order to exist. It reappears in the riddle scene of Siegfried as an act of creation, a fashioning of order out of chaos that would parallel the 1848 Norns’ scene. Only finally does the narrative emerge in its fullest form, the Norns’ narrative, in which it is a catalyst not for the ordering of the fabric of the world, but for its destruction. Not only did the World Ash tree wither and the spring of knowledge dry up, but the spear itself was also shattered by Siegfried and now sits along with the other broken boughs of the tree as kindling around Valhalla. The first shock of the Norns’ scene is, therefore, that the spear was not a guarantor of the immortality of the World Ash tree, a monument that would unchangingly exist no matter the fate of the monumentalized tree. Instead, it was the cause of the tree’s demise and was itself fallible.

This constitutes the depiction of trauma at the surface of the Norns’ scene. However, in critical commentaries on this scene, a riddle emerges that uncovers the operation of trauma at a deeper level within the Ring. This operation takes place not only in the text but also in the music. Moreover, it does not simply rely on the well-documented and widely acknowledged mnemonic potency of the music, which, as I have discussed elsewhere, can function as a vivid representation of traumatic memory, but operates at a global level, destructuring the fundamental inter-motific principles of the Ring. The parallelism between the god and the Dwarf has long been remarked on by commentators—Deryck Cooke’s table outlining the correspondence between the
Alberich went to the Rhine, the Well of Wisdom, with its three guardian spirits the Rhinemaidens. His desire for love being frustrated, he made from the Rhinegold a talisman of unconditional power, which was the Ring; but first he had to renounce love, and the result impoverished nature through the disappearance of the Gold and the consequent darkening of the Rhine. Wotan went to the Well of Wisdom, the Norns. His desire for knowledge being satisfied, he made from the Tree of Life a talisman of power conditioned by law, which was the Spear; but first he had to lose an eye and thus become blind to the claims of love and the drying up of the Well and the withering of the Tree.

Table 5.3: Table Outlining the Parallels between Alberich and Wotan, Deryck Cooke, *I Saw the World End: A Study of Wagner’s Ring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 159

actions of the two characters is an early example (Table 5.3). The parallelism between the two characters is also marked explicitly within Wagner’s texts. Wotan’s self-designation of the gods as ‘Lichtalben’ and himself as ‘Licht-Alberich’ in his riddle contest with Mime matches his nomenclature for the Nibelungs as ‘Schwarzalben’ and Alberich as ‘Schwarz-Alberich’ earlier in the same scene.\(^{20}\)

The idea that Wotan and Alberich are on parallel paths is uncontroversial. However, many commentators go further and suggest that Wotan’s violence against the World Ash tree, the Norn’s trauma, actually precedes the theft of the Rhinegold. This interpretation has been repeated so often that it has become something of a platitude. For Cooke, it is a ‘primal act’ that results ‘in an impoverishment of nature’; Carolyn Abbate believes that ‘it is Wotan who first brought violence into the world’; Slavoj Žižek calls it ‘the source of all evil’, and J.P.E Harper-Scott labels this crime ‘the true source of

the tragedy’. In each case, this characterization requires confident supposition about the chronology of the *Ring* that cannot be pinned down to the text. In order to justify this interpretation, each of these writers is forced to make a somewhat flimsy supposition about the chronology of the *Ring*. Cooke describes Wotan’s actions at the well and the World Ash tree as having ‘happened long before the curtain rises on Scene 1 of *The Rhinegold*’; Abbate places it ‘much earlier in history’, while Žižek and Harper-Scott both place the same event ‘long before’ the first scene of *Rhinegold*.

Patrick McCreless makes this same double supposition when he describes the Norns’ scene as ‘the only scene in the *Ring* that encompasses within a narrative not only the story of the entire cycle (from the theft of the gold to the destruction of Valhalla), but time before the theft of the gold as well’. This chronology is repeatedly asserted, but it cannot be grounded with any certainty in the text. Neither the Norns, nor anyone else ever say which happened first. Indeed, sometimes it is even asserted despite the direct evidence of the text. A particularly egregious example is Robin Holloway’s assertion that the Norns’ scene is when ‘we learn for the first time the history of the World Ash-Tree’, despite Wotan giving his own account of this same story in *Siegfried*. Instead this ‘new’ event reveals a discontinuity in the chronology of the *Ring* as it is presented in the text, because its temporal position cannot be resolved in relation to the other events represented in the *Ring*.

This fissure in the story of the *Ring* might be understood as a narrative wound that has been glossed over by interpreters. The discontinuity is most obvious in the largest over-arching frameworks that govern the representation of time in the *Ring*. Time in *Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* is bounded by the bodies of first Sieglinde

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22 Cooke, *I Saw the World End*, 248; Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 175; Žižek, ‘Why is Wagner Worth Saving?’


24 Some productions explicitly negate this interpretation. In the transition from scenes 1 to 2 of *Rheingold* in Keith Warner’s 2005 *Ring* at Covent Garden, Wotan limped onstage clutching his freshly wounded eye, suggesting the events at the World Ash coincided with or followed the theft of the Rhinegold.

and then Siegfried, one of whom appears in every act of each of these three works. We assume that, as humans (rather than gods or demigods like Wotan and Brünnhilde) they age as humans. As a result, their presence within each of these works sets a loose limit for the span of these works; they span the duration from Siegfried’s conception to adulthood. *Walküre* and *Siegfried* are bound together fairly precisely—they are separated by the time in which Siegfried is born and reaches young adulthood. *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* are bound less tightly—we know only that Siegfried has not tarried long enough with Brünnhilde to succumb to his mortality, to grow old and die. Conversely the apparent immortality of all the characters in *Rheingold* separates it from the rest of the *Ring*. There is no ultimate limit on the timing of the events that occur between *Rheingold* and *Walküre*, the time it takes for Wotan to lose his joy in Valhalla, pursue Erda, and father Siegmund and Sieglinde. Immortal bodies, as bodies that cannot be harmed by the passage of time, cannot embody time. The result is an intraversable temporal gap within the *Ring*.

Another way to categorize this dismemberment of *Rheingold* from the rest of the *Ring* is to apply—if somewhat loosely—Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of the depiction of time in film. Describing the category of cinema that he called ‘movement images’ (classically structured films constituting the archetype of pre-WW2 cinema), Deleuze argued that ‘each movement-image expresses the whole that changes, as a function of the objects between which movement is established... From this point of view, time depends on movement itself and belongs to it’. What emerges from this movement is not time itself, but is ‘a perspective on a real Time’, an impression of the passage of time, rather than an experience or a representation of time. As David Martin Jones puts it in his commentary on Deleuze, ‘the causal movement of the protagonist – from the perception of their surroundings, to an action based upon this perception – is used as a means of indirectly expressing time’s passing.’

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movement and time governs our perception regardless of scale, but for the present purposes, it is most useful to appropriate his theory in order to construct a framework for understanding time in the *Ring* on the largest possible scale. The durational movement of *Walküre* is Sieglinde’s from Hunding’s house to the forest in the east. In *Siegfried*, it is Siegfried’s journey from the forest to Brünnhilde’s rock. This journey is extended in *Götterdämmerung* from the rock to the funeral pyre in the hall of the Gibichungs. This is, in effect, the journey of a single body through the space of the *Ring*. Siegfried’s body is simply an extension of Sieglinde’s. *Rheingold* centres on a different movement: Wotan (accompanied by Loge) travels from the mountaintop down to Nibelheim and then up to Valhalla. Following each of these journeys, the standard procedure is for the theatre to leave a little after the characters it is following and arrive a little before. In *Rheingold*, scene 2, the stage moves after Wotan and Loge disappear into a cleft and begin their descent to Nibelheim. The stage arrives in Nibelheim before the two gods for the exchange between Alberich and Mime, but does not move again until they leave the scene. The stage then arrives back at the mountaintop in time for Wotan and entourage to emerge again from the cleft. The break between this movement and the Sieglinde-Siegfried movement occurs when Wotan leaves for Valhalla. The stage never follows and Valhalla remains unseen until the closing moments of *Götterdämmerung*. Wotan’s movement is itself detached from the first scene of *Rheingold*. The *Ring* breaks into three parts that can be arranged along the direction of time, but the dimension of time between them is not fixed. Scene 1 of *Rheingold* is limitlessly before scene 2 and *Rhinegold* is limitlessly before *Walküre*. It is because of the first of these narrative wounds that it is impossible to say which came first, Alberich’s theft of the Rhinegold or the wounding of the World Ash tree by Wotan. Wotan has unlimited time both before and after the first scene of *Rheingold* in which to destroy the World Ash tree.

This is what makes the Norns’ narration an anti-narrative gesture. The world of the *Ring* has no independent existence; instead, it is a world that is created by story. This remains true however the author of the story is conceptualized. Whether one prefers to think of the *Ring* as the creation of Wagner, of the dramas, of the characters or some
other being, the world of the *Ring* remains a created world. As a result, when conflicting narratives create irreconcilable stories, there is no sure way of mediating between them. Sometimes these conflicts can be passed over simply by picking a side. In *Rheingold*, Wotan reminds Loge that he promised to free Wotan from his pledge to the Giants. Loge corrects him: “To think on how to solve it with utmost care” that’s what I promised.\(^{29}\) Anyone watching can simply choose whom to believe. In the case of the conflict between Wotan’s and the Norns’ conception of the *Ring*-world, however, this becomes uncomfortable, because this choice is not simply between two versions of events. It is, rather, a choice between two metaphysical explanations of the events of the *Ring*: have they been set in motion by the theft of the Gold or the destruction of the World Ash tree? The fact that the critics outlined above turn collapse this metaphysical problem into a single version of events (which cannot, in fact, be grounded in either the Norns’ or Wotan’s words) is demonstrative of how profoundly troubling, if hard to address, this problem is. In their scene, the Norns offer an oblique riposte to the criticism of them made by Wotan (as Wanderer) to Erda: ‘The Norns’ weaving is bound by the world, they cannot change or alter anything.’\(^{30}\) The world of the *Ring* is, ultimately, a world created by story. By constructing a new narrative of the *Ring*, the Norn’s claim their status as active agents within the world they inhabit. Far from being bound by the world, in *Götterdämmerung* the Norns have the power to radically change the story. By changing the story as they do, the Norns place the most profound question about the world of the *Ring*—what is the metaphysical cause of the events of the *Ring*?—beyond the text of the *Ring*. As a result, the idea that the text of the *Ring* can be cohered into a single story, and, thus, a single reality, collapses. The worlds of the *Ring* are revealed as cleft, dismembered, and unhealably separated.

### The moving stage: a perspective on time

So far, I have talked predominantly in terms of wounds, fissures, dismemberment and so on. I have adopted this terminology because the cracks that spread across the


\(^{30}\) ‘Im Zwange der Welt weben die Nornen, sie können nichts wenden noch wandeln.’ *Siegfried*, Act III, sc. 1, ll. 2035–2037.
Norns’ scene are pathological and cry out for healing. The evidence for this is that they have produced a well-established but false reading of the primacy of the destruction of the World Ash tree as the original sin of the Ring, which simultaneously glosses over the existence of the narrative breaks within the Ring. It is, however, possible to be more direct in linking the Norns’ scene to PTSD as a specific configuration of psychological trauma. The symptom that makes this possible is a ‘sense of foreshortened future’.

This symptom may be described as the expectation on the part of their patient that they cannot enjoy a normal lifespan, or experience aspects and milestones typical of the progression a ‘normal’ life. Matthew Ratcliffe, Mark Ruddell and Benedict Smith have argued that this phenomenon arises from a fundamental shift in the way that traumatized people perceive the world around them:

> It is not just that one will no longer get married, have children or have a successful career. One confronts a world that is incompatible with the possibility of an open and progressive life story.

In the face of a world in which project-making is impossible, in which devastating events are inevitable and in which people cannot be trusted to collaborate in our plans, it becomes impossible to narrativize a life-story in a coherent way. Equally, the Norns’ scene reveals the Ring to be a drama in which it is impossible to construct a single coherent narrative, because it is impossible to pinpoint the timing of one of its most fundamental events. Central to this impossibility are the narrative breaks in the Rheingold.

These fissures, which become apparent when reflecting on the Norns’ scene, open up a gulf between the experience of time while watching Rheingold and the representation of time in the text of Rheingold. The passage of time in Rheingold seems to pose a

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31 This symptom was listed explicitly in the fourth edition DSM-IV. In the DSM-5 it was superseded by the D2 criterion: ‘Persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs or expectations about oneself, others, or the world’. This change reflected, in part, worries that a sense of foreshortened future was being interpreted too narrowly as an expectation of a shortened or changed life. Matthew J. Friedman et al., ‘Considering PTSD for DSM-5’, Depression and Anxiety, 28/9 (2011), 750–69 at 758–9 As Friedman et al. point out, the new criterion can be thought of as an expansion and retention of the sense of foreshortened future symptom.

32 Ratcliffe, Ruddell, and Smith, ‘What is a “sense of foreshortened future?” A phenomenological study of trauma, trust, and time’ 8.
unique problem within the Ring. The prelude of Rheingold is routinely interpreted not only as the beginning of the work, but also, whether literally or metaphorically, as the beginning of the world that the work inhabits. As Warren Darcy puts it, the prelude to Rheingold ‘serves as a musical metaphor for the creation of the world and depicts the gradual evolution of impersonal natural forces into human consciousness’, although there seems no particular reason to think of the creation of the world of the Ring through the prelude as metaphorical. The prelude really is the beginning of the text, of the music, of the performance, and of the world of the Ring itself. It is the beginning of the representation and the representation of the beginning. Before it there is no Ring. This is an idea that Wagner himself seems to have originated. As mentioned above, he wrote to Liszt on 11 February 1853 that the Ring ‘contains the beginning and the end of the world.’

After the curtain rises, Rheingold is then suffused with temporal signifiers that are largely absent from the rest of the Ring. Primarily these relate to the lighting of the stage. Scene 1 begins in the early twilight, and the sun dawns halfway through the scene, illuminating the Rhinegold. Scene 2 takes place in the dawn light, beginning as ‘the breaking day illuminates a castle with growing radiance’. When Donner clears the mists in scene 4, the stage is illuminated ‘In the radiance of the evening sun’. This progression from morning to evening is also marked by the characters’ comments on their environment. When the giants exit in scene 2 they announce that they will return in the evening, and they subsequently reappear in scene 4. In his second hymn to Valhalla, in scene 4, Wotan relates his actions in Rheingold according to the passage of the sun through the day:

Wotan

Abendlich strahlt

der Sonne Auge;

The sun’s eye

shines in the evening;

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34 Wagner and Liszt, Correspondence, i, 257.
35 ‘Der hervorbrechende Tag beleuchtet mit wachsendem Glanze eine Burg’. Rheingold, sc. 2.
36 ‘im Glanze der Abendsonne’. Rheingold, sc. 4.
in prächtiger Glut the castle shines
prangt glänzend die Burg. radiantly in the splendid glow.
In des Morgens Scheine In the morning’s light
mutig erschimmernd, bravely shimmering
lag sie herrenlos, it lay lordless,
hehr verlockend vor mir. sublime and alluring before me.
Von Morgen bis Abend, From morning to evening,
in Müh’ und Angst, in toil and anxiety,
nicht wonnig ward sie gewonnen! not easily was it won!
Es naht die Nacht: Night draws on:
vor ihrem Neid from its envy
biete sie Bergung nun. the castle now offers shelter.

Nevertheless, the progression of the sun through Rheingold is interrupted several times. After the dawn in scene 1, ‘thick night’ suddenly covers the stage when Alberich tears the Rhinegold from its rock. When the giants take Freia in scene 2 the stage is filled with fog to which is added a sulphurous vapour when Wotan and Loge descend into Nibelheim, which soon fills the whole stage. Scene 3 takes place in the underground chasm of Nibelheim, and the mists that obscured the stage in scene 2 only clear towards the end of scene 4, revealing the sun’s passage from dawn to dusk. In other words, the sun’s movement takes place only as a beginning and an end. As with each of the other grand movements of the Ring, the movement of the sun consists of an origin and a destination rather than a continuous motion.

There is a countermotion to the movement of the sun that is continuous: the passage of the stage through the world of the Ring. Perhaps more remarkable than this is the fact that, as a result, the opera seems to take place in real time. At least according to Wagner’s stage directions, the curtain never falls during Rhinegold. Instead, changes of

37 Rheingold, sc. 4, ll. 1815–1828.
38 ‘Dichte Nacht’. Rheingold, sc. 1.
scene take place according to precise instructions intended to give the illusion that the theatre itself is in motion:

**Scene 1 to Scene 2**

*In dichtester Finsternis verschwinden die Riffe, die ganze Bühne ist von der Höhe bis zur Tiefe von schwarzem Gewoge erfüllt, das eine Zeitlang immer nach abwärts zu sinken scheint.*

*The reefs disappear in thickest darkness, the whole stage is filled with a swelling black motion from top to bottom that seems to sink continually downwards.*

*Allmählich sind die Wogen in Gewölk übergegangen, welches, als eine immer heller dämmernde Beleuchtung dahintertritt, zu feinerem Nebel sich abklärt.*

*Gradually the waves pass into clouds, which, as an ever brighter dawning light appears behind them, clear into fine mist.*

*Als der Nebel in zarten Wolkchen, sich gänzlich in der Höhe verliert, wird, im Tagesgrauen eine freie Gegend auf Bergeshöhen sichtbar.*

*When the mist becomes delicate clouds, rising upwards and disappearing, an open space on the mountaintops becomes visible in the dawn light.*

**Scene 2 to Scene 3**

*Er steigt Loge nach in die Kluft hinab: der aus ihr dringende Schwefeldampf verbreitet sich über die ganze Bühne und erfüllt diese schnell mit dichtem Gewölk. Bereits sind die Zurückbleibenden unsichtbar.*

*[Wotan] descends into the cleft after Loge: the sulphurous vapour expelled from it spreads over the whole stage and quickly fills it with thick cloud. Already those remaining behind are out of sight.*

...
The sulphurous vapour darkens into totally black cloud that rises from below; this then changes into a dark, solid, stone cleft that rises ever upwards, so that it creates the appearance of the stage sinking ever deeper into the earth.

From various sides a dark red light emerges in the distance: a growing noise as if from metalworking is heard from all around.

The clangour of the anvils fades. A subterranean cleft that continues backwards beyond perception becomes visible, on all sides narrow shafts seem to lead away.

Scene 3 to Scene 4

The scene transforms as before, only in reverse. The transformation leads past the smiths again.

Transformation continues upwards

The effect is positively proto-cinematic. The proscenium arch moves, like a camera through the world of the Ring. Of course, the motion of the stage is, as such, another Deleuzian perspective on time. Naturally, Deleuze was concerned with the equivalent

41 Rheingold, sc.2
42 Rheingold, sc. 3.
43 In fact, it is probably best realized in cinematic realizations such as Herbert von Karajan’s 1978 film version, and the shortened animated version produced by Operavox in 1995.
cinematic movement, the movement of the mobile camera, which he likened to ‘a general equivalent of all the means of locomotion that it shows or that it makes use of’[44]. The motion of the mobile camera, and thus its perspective on time, becomes something like the sum of the movement of the elements captured by the camera and the movement of the machinery of and around the camera itself. But in Rheingold these elements are completely obscured. Wagner noted that to reveal the machinery behind the stage was to ‘destroy all vestige of illusion’[45]. In any case, the dominant movement—the apparent movement of the stage—is a virtual movement that is not directly accomplished by machinery, seen or unseen, but rather inferred by the audience from the actual movements of the elements on the stage. These real movements can be under the control of the stage-hands (for example, the movement of the rising cleft at the end of Rheingold, scene 2) or not (for example, the movement of the artificially created vapour around the stage in the same scene). Moreover, this primary movement is always eventually obscured, whether by darkness or clouds or vapour. Wagner establishes an origin, a direction and a destination, but at some point the movement is made invisible. It is hard not to be reminded by this of Hugo von Boße’s claim that the battle on the Neumarkt in Dresden was obscured by powder smoke[46].

Wagner’s staging parallels a moment from his own life in which crucial events were obscured from view. Something like this effect appears on one other occasion in the Ring: Siegfried’s ascent of Brünnhilde’s rock in Siegfried, Act III. On that occasion, the stage effects do not give any indication of movement but obscure the stage in fire and then cloud as the stage completes the same movement as Siegfried.

The indirect representation of time in the scene changes of Rheingold is therefore triply obscured from the audience. The audience has three ways of marking time, the aging bodies of the characters, the movement of the sun and the movement of the characters. In Rheingold, all three are problematized. The characters are all immortal and, thus,

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[44] Deleuze, Cinema 1, 22.
[46] The parallel between Wagner’s ‘Schwefeldampf’ and Boße’s ‘Pulverdämpfe’ is especially striking. SächsStA-D, 10057 Kreisamt Meissen, 430 fol. 29v.
ageless. The sun disappears when the Rhine is covered in darkness and when the action moves underground. Finally, no moving character appears in both scenes 1 and 2, leaving these two scenes irrevocably parted. As a result, *Rheingold* is held together by an alternative single motion, the apparent continuous movement of the stage through the world of the *Ring*. As a result, real time appears to supplant represented time. However, this apparent movement is, in reality, only imagined, because during this movement, the stage is repeatedly obscured from view, so there is no way to tell if the movement is really happening.

The result is a fracture between represented time and experienced, real time. This presentation of fracture is a radical innovation on Wagner’s part. The normal temporal fragmentation in theatre occurs when a dropped curtain severs the continuous progression of events on stage allowing for the close temporal juxtaposition of events that are disconnected in the time of the narrative. The fracture between the narrative time of the stage and real time in the theatre is achieved by physically partitioning the time of the narrative. No such partition occurs in *Rheingold*. Instead, narrative time is continuously observable, but its duration moves beyond perception. This is the first way in which the Norns’ scene reproduces a sense of foreshortened future. The audience can perceive the passage of time, but it is impossible to reconcile the Norns’ tale with the apparently continuous events they have witnessed, and thus to create a single coherent account of the theft of the Rhinegold and the destruction of the World Ash tree. No ‘progressive’ story of the *Ring* is possible.

**Wagner’s storytellers, Norns and motifs**

The Norns’ scene constitutes a crisis of storytelling in the *Ring*. It is not simply a different way of arranging the events of the *Ring*, but it is a new *Ring* story that breaks open the fissures in *Rheingold* that were papered over by the experience of Wagner’s stagework. In this sense, the text of the Norns’ scene represents a remarkable anti-narrative gesture. Robert Scholes called the function of anti-narrative, ‘to problematize the entire process of narration and interpretation’.

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of the *Ring*-story represents just such a problematization. Reflecting on the story of the *Ring* after the Norns’ scene, one is presented with a range of possibilities all of which violate the experience of watching the *Ring*. Does the *Ring* inhabit a universe that extends beyond its own witnessed genesis? Does the audience experience time as continuous, unable to perceive its fragmentation before their very eyes? The second part of this chapter will examine the ways in which Wagner’s music interacts with this problem, and the inextricable entanglement of this problem with the incorporation of the structures of trauma into Wagner’s scores. Firstly, I will present a motific analysis of the Norns’ scene that demonstrates how the fundamental characteristics of remembrance and foreboding are reproducing PTSD in the music of the scene, in accordance with the theoretical principles outlined in Chapter 2. Secondly, I will explore a well-established interpretive stance towards Wagner’s music that reads the musical interrelation of motifs as meaningful, and I will argue that this reading produces a temporal interpretation of the development of Wagner’s motifs. This interpretation suggests that Wagner’s score presents a single, coherent, in other words, ‘open and progressive’ narrative. If this reading were applicable to the Norns’ scene, it would mean that the music were working to undermine the radical rewriting of the *Ring*-story that takes place in the Norns’ scene. Finally, I will show that the Norns’ scene offers a remarkable challenge to the idea that the interrelation of motifs can be held to be meaningful on anything more than the smallest scale. Specifically, I will invoke Matt Baileyshea’s concept of ‘fully diegetic music’ to show how the Norns undermine the apparent cardinality of Wagner’s music, and I will argue that this violation reproduces a further symptom of PTSD in the scene.

Trauma and woundedness are explored explicitly in the text of the Norns’ scene, but, as suggested in Chapter 2 they are also written into the music of this scene in the form of Wagner’s motific system of remembrance and foreboding. This can be demonstrated by an analysis of two motifs associated with Wotan, Valhalla and the spear that traces their trajectory through the *Ring* to the Norns’ scene. The importance of these two motifs derives from the fact that motifs bearing a resemblance to these two motifs come to
represent the World Ash tree in the Norns' scene and then in Act I, Scene 3, in which Waltraute describes to Brünnhilde the ultimate fate of the World Ash tree.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the Valhalla motif (Example 5.3) first appears in the second scene of Rheingold, in which it accompanies an ode that Wotan sings on seeing the completed fortress.\(^\text{48}\) Perhaps the most pregnant moment of foreboding—in the sense of an anxious anticipation of future events—within this motif is the move to the minor mode in its thirteenth bar (see Example 5.3 bb. 781/816). In Wotan's ode this aligns with the text ‘as my will appointed it’ \(^\text{49}\) The moment is clearly emphasized within the motif. In the four bars in which the orchestra repeats the opening of the motif, first in F major and then in F minor, the melody that Wotan uses closely shadows the orchestra—more closely, in fact, than elsewhere in the ode (bb. 814–817). Clearly, this is a moment in which a motif is ‘definitely conditioned by a definite object, and proclaimed by a definite individual before our very eyes’.\(^\text{50}\) At the time, it is difficult to imagine a reason why Wotan’s will should engender a shift to the mode of tragedy and sadness. Why should this motif contain within it such a moment of pathos? The castle, after all, seems to stand as a superb monument to the gloriousness of Wotan’s will.

An answer to this puzzle can be found by tracing this part of the motif through the rest of the Ring to the Norn’s scene. In the riddle scene from Siegfried, in reply to Mime’s question, ‘which race lives in the cloudy heights?’, Wotan, in the guise of Wanderer, describes Valhalla and the gods who live there, accompanied by the Valhalla motif.\(^\text{51}\) Initially, it appears that Wanderer is accompanied by the full version of the motif, rather than a shorter extract from the motif as is more commonly the case in the Ring. In the riddle scene, the orchestra first departs from the full motif in its sixth and seventh bar (bb. 1533–1534), which extend, over I\(^\text{7}\) harmony, the rising figure that dominates the second quarter of the Valhalla motif. However, this hardly breaks the effect of this being a full recapitulation of the group. The real, important interruption to the recapitulation

\[^{48}\text{See pp. 86–87 of this thesis.}\]
\[^{49}\text{‘wie mein Wille ihn wies’. Rheingold, sc. 2, l. 349.}\]
\[^{50}\text{Wagner, PW, ii 329.}\]
\[^{51}\text{‘welches Geschlecht wohnt auf wolkigen Höh’n?’ Siegfried, Act I, sc. 2, ll. 554–555.}\]
Wotan bb.804-824

Valhalla Motif bb. 769-787

W. bb. 804-824

bb. 769-787

W. bb. 804-824

bb. 769-787
Example 5.3: Wotan’s clarification of the ‘Valhalla’ motif (Rheingold, sc. 2, bb. 804–824) along with the ‘foreboded’ iteration of the motif that appears at bb. 769-787 (the separate presentation of the reduction of the orchestra from b. 817 onwards reflects the fact that the orchestral score is identical at bb. 769–781 and bb. 804–816)

comes as Wanderer’s answer turns to the World Ash tree. In accompaniment to the lines ‘From the holiest branches of the World Ash tree he [Wotan] fashioned a shaft’, the orchestra turns to the nature motif associated with the Norns and the Rhinemaidens. However, at this point, Wagner maintains the same harmonic plan as at the equivalent point in the Valhalla motif—the moment of foreboding that I have identified. The nature motif outlines an F major chord and then an F minor chord. The same modal shift that first accompanied Wotan’s will now accompanies his violence against the World Ash tree.

The musical and dramatic foreboding of this combination—the shift to the minor in the Valhalla motif, the nature motif and Wotan’s violence against the World Ash tree—is realized as a ‘justified foreboding’ in the Norn’s scene. When the first Norn begins her storytelling, she starts with the words ‘Once, I wove at the World Ash tree’. The melody that she uses is a very close approximation of the melody to which Wotan sings ‘completed, the eternal work!’ Now in the minor mode, this reappears throughout the

52 ‘Aus der Welt-Esche weihlichstem Aste schuf er sich einen Shaft’. Siegfried, Act I, sc. 2, ll. 562–564.
54 ‘Vollendet das ewige Werk!’ Rheingold, sc. 2, l. 343.
scene both as a vocal melody when the Norns refer to the tree and as an instrumental musical motif. For example, it reappears sung by the Third Norn as she describes the remnants of the tree stacked around Valhalla and utters plaintively, ‘this was once the World Ash tree!’ In other words, this melody becomes the motif for the World Ash tree, its fall and the desolation that replaces it (Example 5.4). In addition to the melodic and tonal similarities, the relationship between the Valhalla motif and the World Ash tree motif is underlined by the appearance of the figure that ends the Valhalla motif, which coincides with the line ‘sublime, glorious edifice!’ This figure first appears as a coda to the Valhalla motif when it accompanies Wotan’s ode. In the Norns’ scene, it appears twice in the first Norn’s description of the tree, after she sings ‘sacred woodland’ and ‘there I sang of holy things.’ The sublime glory that Wotan ascribes to Valhalla turns out to have been stolen from the World Ash tree.

A second motif associated with the World Ash tree appears in the Norns’ scene. Specifically, a motif emerges in the scene that represents the tree in its broken state after it has been wounded by Wotan. Like the first World Ash tree motif, this motif resembles a motif linked to Wotan, in this case the spear motif. Unlike the first, this musical figure appears in the same form used in the Norns’ scene earlier in the Ring. Once again, the crucial scene is the riddle scene of Siegfried. As Wotan, in the guise of Wanderer, recalls breaking a branch from the tree to fashion the shaft of his spear, he is accompanied by an appearance of the spear motif in the orchestra. Out of this emerges a loose inversion of the spear motif laid out in a dotted quaver-semiquaver rhythm. This new inverted spear figure is apparently an extension spear motif, and in the remainder of the riddle scene it only appears alongside the spear motif. It is not until the Norns’ scene—twenty-four hours later if the Ring is being performed on consecutive nights—that this figure appears in the verse-melody and a motific meaning independent

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55 ‘die Weltesche war dies einst!’ Göttterdammerung, Prologue, l. 74.
56 It is not routinely asserted as such in the Leitfäden-literature, although Roger Scruton calls it a ‘motif associated with the World Ash Tree’ and a variant of the Valhalla motif, without elaborating on this observation in his The Ring of Truth. Roger Scruton, The Ring of Truth: The Wisdom of Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung (Allen Lane, 2016), 345.
57 ‘hehrer, herrlicher Bau!’ Rheingold, sc. 2, l. 352.
58 ‘weihlicher Äste Wald’ and ‘da sang ich heil’gen Sinn.’ Götterdämmerung, Prologue, ll. 15 and 20.
Example 5.4: *Götterdämmerung*, Prologue, bb. 46–64
of the spear is proclaimed by the Norns. Initially, it is the first Norn who uses this motif as the melody for her line: ‘Wotan broke a branch’\footnote{‘brach da Wotan einen Ast’. \textit{Götterdämmerung}, Prologue, l. 26.} This is answered, as she explains that Wotan made his spear from this branch, by an appearance of the spear motif in the orchestra (Example \textbf{5.5}). The two motifs still appear together, but their order has been reversed. It is a combination of themes that it is taken up by the second Norn. In a passage thoroughly reminiscent of Act I, Scene 2 of \textit{Siegfried} she explains the power of the spear and the treaty runes carved into its shaft. The most noticeable change from the riddle scene is that once again the ‘inverted’ figure comes first. The independence of this new motif is finally asserted by the third Norn when she prophesies Wotan’s doom. She uses the figure to sing ‘felled boughs piled high’, describing the felled remnants of the World Ash tree piled around Valhalla\footnote{‘Gehau’ner Scheite hohe Schicht’. \textit{Götterdämmerung}, Prologue, ll. 70–71.}. The orchestra continues to repeat the motif until it gives way to the other World Ash tree motif as she sings ‘This was once the World Ash tree!’ , perhaps the most poignant moment in the whole
Like the first World Ash tree motif, this figure makes a reappearance in Act I, Scene 3 of *Götterdämmerung*. This dotted motif seeps into Waltraute’s description of the dismembered boughs of the tree: ‘he commanded the trunk to be piled in logs as a towering heap around the sacred hall.’ In these last two examples the motif has clearly come to signify the broken remnants of the World Ash tree independently of Wotan’s spear, which is only one such remnant. There is no mention in the poetry of the spear by either the third Norn or Waltraute, unlike in the corresponding examples from earlier in the Norns’ scene and in *Siegfried*. Given that this motif is, from its first appearance, interwoven with poetry describing broken pieces of the World Ash tree (Wotan’s spear and then the felled boughs of the tree heaped around Valhalla) it seems reasonable to think of this as a broken World Ash tree motif. This opens an interesting interpretation of its use in conjunction with the spear, namely that in the earlier appearances of this motif, it functions as a kind of modifier on the spear motif. It emphasizes the spear as a broken part of the whole World Ash tree rather than an entire entity in its own right.

The scene which knits all four of these motifs together into a tight knot of remembrance and foreboding is in Act I, Scene 3 of *Götterdämmerung*, the scene between Waltraute and Brünnhilde. When Waltraute repeats the story of Wotan commanding the heroes of Valhalla to cut down the World Ash tree, she uses the same E♭ minor arpeggio to sing ‘(with a silent sign he [Wotan] commanded Valhalla’s finest to the forest) to fell the World Ash tree’ (Example 5.6). The orchestral version of the motif follows the second Norns’ lament, ‘the ash sank; the spring ran dry forever’ (Example 5.7). It is in Waltraute’s narrative that the Norns’ prophecy is made a remembrance, but at the same time it is re-rendered as prophetic, because it is the accompaniment to Waltraute’s words composed of the broken world ash tree motif and the first Valhalla motif that more directly anticipates the conclusion of *Götterdämmerung*. Waltraute’s version of the broken World Ash tree motif punctuates Brünnhilde’s concluding monologue, coming

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61 ‘die Weltesche war dies einst!’ *Götterdämmerung*, Prologue, l. 74.
63 ‘(Mit stummen Wink Valhalls Edle wies er zum Forst,) die Weltesche zu fällen’. *Götterdämmerung*, Act I, sc. 3, ll. 642–645. I have added brackets to show the words that precede the arpeggio.
64 ‘die Esche sank; ewig versiegte der Quell.’ *Götterdämmerung*, Prologue, ll. 58–59.
Example 5.7: The orchestral World Ash tree motif *Götterdämmerung*, Prologue, bb. 141–143

Example 5.8: The first appearance of the World Ash tree motif within the Valhalla motif *Götterdämmerung*, Act I, Scene 3, bb. 1259–1260

immediately after her injunction ‘rest, rest, you god!’ as she directs Gunther’s vassals to lift Siegfried’s body onto their funeral pyre. Moreover, the use of the Valhalla motif accompanied by the broken World Ash tree motif that accompanies her is recapitulated in the closing bars of the work. The appearance of the Valhalla motif in Waltraute’s narrative is also the first to incorporate the melody of the World Ash tree motif (in the major key) in the orchestra, played by the third clarinet (Example 5.8). The melody first used by Wotan that was always a potential within the motif is finally given an orchestral voice. The scene that Waltraute remembers—Wotan surrounded by the boughs of the World Ash tree awaiting his end—is the vision that the audience will see consumed by fire at the conclusion of the opera. Waltraute is remembering a scene that the music prophesies. When these motifs come together again at the end of *Götterdämmerung*,

the audience remember a prophecy that Waltraute introduces as a memory—prophetic reminiscences indeed.

It bears repeating that this motific web writes trauma into the scene in a way that is not contingent on the narrative fissures that the Norns’ tales have revealed. The basic PTSD-like structure of motif that I outline in Chapter 2 is at play in this scene in the interplay of foreboding and reminiscence. In the case of the Norn’s scene, a further link can be made between this basic reading and PTSD. This is because the foreboding, the modulation to the minor in the very first appearance of the ‘Valhalla’ motif, only becomes perceptible as at once prophetic and mnemonic after the fact. In her study of the effects of traumatic experience on patients’ sense of time, Leonore Terr identified a widespread phenomenon that she called ‘omen formation’, a tendency to believe that a traumatic event was presaged by events that foretold its inevitability. Moreover, some patients had in fact experienced these moments of foreboding after the traumatic event itself, but subsequently remembered them as having preceded it. This seems to be the process followed in the Ring. Wagner exploits the separation between the experiences of the audience and the characters so that Wotan’s mnemonic-prophetic ‘as I beheld it in my dreams, as my will decreed it’ is perceived as prophetic after the fact. It is only when the Norns clarify the meaning of the World Ash tree motif that the audience can understand this modulation as at once recalling Wotan’s violence against the tree and prophesying the decay of the world that the Norns describe. This seems all the more relevant given that the omen formation of Terr’s patients occurred overwhelmingly in dreams that they subsequently interpreted as prophetic.

It might seem then that it is the temporal structure of Wagner’s motifs that draws the audience towards a traumatized perspective, a sense in which we always knew that the Ring began with the desecration of the World Ash tree and would end with cataclysm. Certainly, this is one explanation for the routine assertion that the desecration of the World Ash tree takes place before the events of Rheingold. It is an event that has to be

perceived obliquely in mnemonic-prophetic music and must, therefore, take place before the score begins. There is, nevertheless, a temporal problem with this reading. This problem relates closely to the problem of storytelling in general in the Norns’ scene. Specifically, in this reading I have argued that the World Ash tree motif is foreboded within the Valhalla motif; however, what is foreboded within the Valhalla motif is not the destruction of the tree—this has already occurred—but the Norn’s revelation of this destruction. That is to say that the motifs involved in the sequence of foreboding and remembrance that I have outlined above are just as entangled by the problematic interaction of story and its telling that is at work in Wagner’s staging and the Norn’s storytelling. In this sense, the ‘basic’, motific structure of PTSD in this scene is in conflict with the deeper traumatic fissures in the storytelling. By connecting the story into a single network of anticipation, realization and repetition the motifs seem to assure the listener that the Ring does consist of a single story, albeit one that is fundamentally tragic. This is why Terr’s concept of omen formation explains the desire of critics to cast the destruction of the World Ash tree before the beginning of the Ring: It allows them to hold on to the idea that the Ring presents a coherent narrative. The basic structure of motifs demands that every event in the Ring be anticipated. The destruction of the World Ash tree is a moment that could be held to cause—and thus anticipate—all of the tragic events of the Ring. Therefore, critics have assumed that it occurred before the beginning of Rheingold as the prime mover of all the events of the Ring. In so doing, they have overlooked the possibility that it occurred between Scenes 1 and 2 of Rheingold, and all the misery of the Ring was not, after all, inevitable. In order for the music to reinforce, rather than resist, the narrative wounds that are so important to the operation of trauma in the Norns’ scene, it is necessary for the music to go beyond the basic remembrance and foreboding structure of motifs. Precisely such a meta-structure of motif has been explored repeatedly in the Wagner literature, namely, the meaningfulness not only of individual motifs but also of the musical, developmental relationships between these motifs. Just as the text of the Norns’ scene contradicted the prior storytelling of the Ring, the music of the scene violates the principles of this developmental meaningfulness. In doing this, the music of the Norns’ scene opens
comparable fissures in the musical storytelling of the Ring. Opening these narrative wounds supports the text of the scene in producing the sense that the Ring cannot be understood as a single coherent story, a sense of foreshortened future.

**Threads and webs: motific narration in the Norns’ scene**

The use of the Valhalla and spear motifs in the Norns’ scene exemplifies the orthodox structure of motif that Wagner described in Opera and Drama, which I linked to PTSD in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, this is not the most interesting way in which trauma suffuses the score of the scene. Instead, this scene is of special significance for understanding trauma in the Ring is because the music of the scene becomes entwined with the aberrant narration that the Norns’ stories expose. The basic prophetic-mnemonic structure of Wagner’s motifs joins his stage machinery in covering up some of the fissures in the Ring that the Norns’ scene exposes. The reason for this is that motifs are often taken to reinforce our normative experience of narrative time in Wagner’s works. As Thomas Grey put it, ‘through leitmotif... the orchestra was meant to obtain mastery over dramatic time, to speak freely of what is past, passing, and to come’.

As the text of the Norns’ scene threatens to destructure the temporal organization of the Ring, the music should reorient it along the past, present and future model. The basis of this counterbalance is a reading of depiction of temporality in Wagner’s music, independent from the action on stage, that originated with Wagner and has formed the dominant basis of critical interpretations of motificism in Wagner’s works. The fundamental principle of this reading is that musical development, transformation or, in Wagner’s terminology, ‘mutation’ is a temporally organizing and, therefore, narrativizing process. The key theoretical text in this case is not Opera and Drama, but ‘On the Application of Music to the Drama.’

This essay was published in the Bayreuther Blätter in 1879 as a stern rebuke to the ‘Professors’ that Wagner felt had misunderstood his methods and as a gentle corrective to the approach of Wolzogen. In this text, Wagner offered two analyses that established the basis for a reading of the development of motifs as

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69 Wagner, PW, vi 173–92.
temporalizing. Specifically, he analysed a ‘motive-cast’ or combination of motifs that appears prominently in Wotan’s monologue in Walküre (Example 5.9) and the Rhinemaiden’s cries of ‘Rhinegold! Rhinegold!’\(^{70}\) In the case of the ‘motive-cast’, Wagner argued that to use it in an overture would be ‘a piece of downright nonsense’\(^{71}\) It could only make sense as the combination of two motifs that had already been developed ‘in closest sympathy with the rising passions of the plot’, the motif heard on the first appearance of the Rhinegold (Example 5.10) and the Valhalla motif (Example 5.11)\(^{72}\) This analysis establishes several principles that mean that the development of motifs—or at least certain kinds of development—embody the unidirectional progression of time: firstly, a combination of motifs has to follow its constituent motifs (to avoid becoming nonsense). Secondly, the meaning of these constituent motifs within the combination can only be understood by following the development of these constituents of the motifs alongside the plot. Moreover, this development is inseparable from the plot itself. This second principle becomes clearer in his second example, the

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\(^{71}\) As I argue in Chapter 3, this could only be overcome (and then only partially so) by performing an overture after its motifs had been explained in vocal extracts.

\(^{72}\) Wagner, PW, vi 185–6.
Example 5.11: Wagner’s third example from ‘On the Application of Music to the Drama’

Example 5.12: Wagner’s fourth example from ‘On the Application of Music to the Drama’

Rhinemaidens’ cries of ‘Rhinegold’ (Example 5.12). In order to analyse this motif, Wagner writes, it would be necessary to follow every musical development of this basic form not only in isolation but also in combination with other motifs. Only such an analysis could reveal how ‘true dramatic art’ could modify the expressive meaning of a theme while leaving it recognizable. Underlying both Wagner’s analyses is the idea that motific development operates on a global scale throughout his works. Each new development adds to the developing meaning of his motifs, and once it is layered on in this way it cannot be separated from the overall chain of development.

The principle that Wagner introduces into his music in these analyses is the concept of cardinality in the sense that Roland Barthes used it in his *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative*. In Barthes’s narratology, ‘cardinal functions’ are ‘the risk-laden moments of narrative’, the points of no return. These are the events that

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73 Wagner, *PW*, iii, 187–8. My own analysis of the Sailor’s motif in *Tristan* on pp. 92–95 of this thesis might be understood as a small-scale attempt at such an analysis.

have consequences and cannot, therefore, be undone.\textsuperscript{75} Because these cardinal events cause other events, they are able to resist the structure of the narrative in which they appear. It is possible to reconstruct the ‘true’ order of events depicted in a narrative even if this is not the order in which they are arranged in that narrative. Cardinal functions, therefore, allow narrative to escape becoming ‘a systematic application of the logical fallacy... post hoc, ergo propter hoc’\textsuperscript{76} On one level, the cardinality of motifs in Wagner’s reading derives from the cardinality of the plot itself. Valhalla and the Rhinegold must come before Wotan’s tortured emotional reaction to his use of the latter to pay for the former. For this reason, the motifs for Valhalla and the gold must precede their musical combination. In this sense, the motivic pattern of the score acts as a musical trace of the cardinal events of the plot.

This reading of the cardinality of Wagner’s music—in which the cardinality of Wagner’s music is borrowed from the plot—is the one implied by the ‘traditional’ interpretation of Wagner’s motifs. The developmental interrelations of Wagner’s motifs that I argue are temporalizing have been addressed frequently in the leitmotivic literature. Deryck Cooke stands out both as a remarkably positivistic interpreter of Wagner’s motifs and as the commentator who has come closest to establishing a school of interpretation to supplant Wolzogen’s. He addressed his neo-Wagnerian theory of motifs both to the public, as Wolzogen had, in his record, An Introduction to Der Ring des Nibelungen, and at the same time to the scholarly community in his unfinished magnum opus I Saw the World End. In this book, Cooke formalized Wagner’s critique into four specific failings on Wolzogen’s part.\textsuperscript{77} Most importantly for understanding the Norns’ scene, Cooke criticized Wolzogen’s failure to take into account the relationships between motifs. It is clear that the processes of motivic interaction and motivic mutation are foremost in Cooke’s thinking. The importance of this alternative conception of Wagner’s

\textsuperscript{75} Barthes contrasts these cardinal functions with ‘catalytic functions’, in effect, events that can be undone (i.e. they are not ‘risk-laden’), and do not fit within an important network of causality within the narrative and are, therefore, assumed to take place in the order in which they are depicted (i.e. they are not consequential).

\textsuperscript{76} Barthes, An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative 248.

\textsuperscript{77} These are discussed in detail in the Introduction to this thesis (pp. 36–37). Cooke, I Saw the World End 38–43.
motifs is clearest in the radically different arrangement of the motifs in Cooke’s study. Rather than being interposed within an outline of the plot, as in Wolzogen’s guides, or added as annotations to the score, a common practice dating to Wagner’s lifetime, Cooke’s *Introduction* grouped motifs into ‘families’ of musically related themes to give the impression of a tree-of-life structure. ‘A few basic motives’ branch out in an evolutionary pattern creating lines of descent and last common ancestors. But Cooke is less interested in this developmental structure as such, which is a fairly uncritical working out of the basic outline of ‘On the Application of Music to the Drama’, and more in the interpretive implications that he can infer from it. Thus, for example, the ‘perhaps surprising’ resemblance of Gunther’s motif to other ‘Hero’ motifs exemplifies the basic heroism of his, nevertheless unrealized, aims\(^{78}\).

Although Cooke claimed that the musical interrelation of Wagner’s motifs was important, he only exemplified this claim. Cooke never sought to establish any rules or principles that could help to explain these relationships. Matthew Bribitzer-Stull went a stage further, however, in seeking to codify the ways in which Wagner developed his motifs (Figure 5.1)\(^{79}\). Bribitzer-Stull’s work on the leitmotif is consciously indebted to Cooke. He repeated, for example, Cooke’s four critiques of Wolzogen\(^ {80}\). Bribitzer-Stull’s codification formed the basis of a ‘transformative approach in which the methods of thematic developments themselves function as a hermeneutic for reflecting upon the drama.’\(^ {81}\) Notably, both Cooke’s and Bribitzer-Stull’s approach to the interrelation of motifs establish a cardinal property that borrows its cardinality from the plot. That is to say that the musical transformation from the ‘Giants’ motif to the ‘Fafner as dragon’ motif, to use an example from Bribitzer-Stull, is cardinal because of the order of these concepts in the plot, not because of any solely musical property. The development of

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The 'Giants' motif into the 'Fafner as dragon' motif is only irreversible because, within the plot, Fafner the dragon cannot go back and become the giants.

There is, however, a sense in which the reverse seems to be true: the plot derives its sense of irreversibility from the music. In order to arrive at this notion of strictly musical cardinality, it is necessary to look to those writers that are less directly influenced by Wolzogen. In his analysis of *Götterdämmerung*, Carl Dahlhaus argued that the processes of development that motifs underwent was meaningful not as an indication of shared characteristics between two concepts signified by motifs, but as a process that was meaningful in itself. The potion that took away Siegfried's memory could, he said, be expressed in a leitmotif, but loss of memory itself could only be represented by the interplay between motifs. Specifically, Dahlhaus argued that the forgetfulness triggered by the potion was depicted by an ever growing sense that each musical idea in the *Ring* was connected to every other in an inescapable labyrinth. This overarching sense drains away the meanings of individual motifs just as Siegfried had been robbed of his memories by the potion—hence, Dahlhaus argued, the appearance of seemingly inappropriate motifs in the second act of *Götterdämmerung*, which he considered the
crux of alienation in the *Ring*. On the surface these processes might seem to be anti-temporal, not least because the metaphors to which Dahlhaus so often returns to describe the interrelation of motifs are spatial rather than temporal. He refers to ‘networks’, ‘webs’ and ‘labyrinths’. Nevertheless, the process of forgetfulness that Dahlhaus describes is temporal, because it is an irreversible process that is occurring in time. Once the score has revealed a connection between two previously unconnected motifs, this connection cannot be hidden again.

Abbate’s analysis can be read in a similar way. She argued that Wagner’s attempts to imbue motifs with referential meaning were resisted by ‘gravity’, a force that drew motifs away from the referential back to the ‘purely musical’ as they grew more distant in time from the ‘exceptional and solemn moments’ at which they had ‘absorbed’ meanings. She gives an example of this in her analysis of Wotan’s monologue in Act II, Scene 3 of *Walküre*. She argues that the music of the monologue resists the digressions in the text by repeating recognizable, paradigmatic iterations of motifs. From this argument we can infer a belief on Abbate’s part that when a motif is allowed to develop, to deviate from the paradigm and become less recognizable, its referential meaning degenerates. For Abbate, this disintegration of the referential meanings of motifs is not a process which is in itself meaningful; it is instead the process of music reasserting itself as a non-referential artform in defiance of Wagner’s attempts to ascribe referential significance to motifs. Nevertheless, this is another irreversible temporal process, one which can only be resisted by the repetition of motifs without developing them, by freezing them in time.

In summary, the idea that the development of Wagner’s motifs represents an irreversible process is an idea that reoccurs across conflicting interpretations of the motifs’ referentiality. Cooke and Bribitzer-Stull go furthest, because for them, the musical development is entirely inextricable from the dramatic concept with which it is

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84 Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 177.
associated (either by ‘associative qualification’ or ‘associative connection’, in Bribitzer-Stull’s terms). They see the cardinality of the score and the cardinality of the text as inextricable. Nevertheless, the idea of irreversibility is equally present in Dahlhaus or Abbate. For Dahlhaus, as musical developments suggest associative connections between dramatic concepts that appear unconnected, the meaningfulness of the motifs is inevitably unravelled. This is a process that Wagner is able to use intentionally in order to give his motifs the power to forget. Abbate argues that no such intention on Wagner’s part is necessary. Whenever a musical theme changes, ‘gravity’ leaches away its extra musical meanings, a loss that cannot be reversed. Connecting each of these stances is the idea that in Wagner’s scores, musical development has an irreversible effect of musical meaning. To conclude this chapter, I show that the Norns’ scene threatens this prevailing view in Wagnerian scholarship. The Norns appear to redevelop motifs, suggesting alternative pathways of associative connection to those outlined earlier in the scores of the *Ring*. This means that at precisely the point at which the Norns’ tales collapse our perception of a coherent, progressive *Ring* story, the music makes an equivalent gesture. Musical development in the *Ring* turns out to be meaningless. As a result, the score reinforces rather than resists the anti-narrativity of the Norns’ storytelling.

What makes the Norns’ scene stand out as a moment in which trauma takes on a more far reaching significance, beyond that which I set out in Chapter 2, is that the apparently irreversible processes of musical development in the score are reversed. As a result, this scene reveals that not only the text of the *Ring* but also its score produces a world in which progressive stories are impossible. It is this, more than anything, that destabilizes the apparent balance reached at the end of *Siegfried* and sets the world of the *Ring* itself on its path towards destruction. Just as the patients in the case studies outlined by Terr are convinced that their lives and the lives of those around them will end in disaster, after the Norns’ scene, we understand how the *Ring* must end.

Again, it is the Valhalla/World Ash tree and Spear/Broken World Ash tree motifs that exemplify this rewriting. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the Valhalla motif is the
Example 5.13: The transition from the ring motif to the Valhalla motif between scenes 1 and 2 of *Rheingold*

way in which it appears to grow out of the ring motif at its first appearance (Example 5.13). It seems in this passage that Wagner is making the developmental process that fashions the Valhalla motif out of the *Ring* motif explicit. It is almost as if we hear Wagner working the Valhalla motif out at the piano. This passage constitutes a temporal expansion of the moment of elision between the two motifs, the moment in which it is impossible to designate the orchestral theme as either the ring motif or the Valhalla motif. Just as the waves of the scenery become mists that clear to reveal Wotan and Fricka and, finally, Valhalla itself, the musical mists descend on the ring motif and are solidified into the motif of Valhalla. Surely for this reason, commentators have repeatedly imagined a connection in meaning between the two motifs, derived from their musical connection. Mark Berry’s description is particularly poetic: ‘darkened river
and celestial mists, chromatic ring and diatonic Valhalla, Schwarz-Alberich and Licht-Alberich: all are related dialectically in the pursuit of power. The same point recurs frequently in commentaries on the *Ring*. Wolzogen remarked that the ring motif represented the ‘ideal connection’ between the two scenes because the gods had been captured by the same lust for power as Alberich. Cooke made much the same point, arguing that the melodic similarities of the two motifs expressed the identical nature of Wotan and Alberich’s aims. The message of the music elucidated by these commentaries is clear. The Valhalla motif grows out of the ring motif in the transition between the first two scenes of *Rheingold*, and the resulting familial resemblance between the two motifs reveals, even before the mists around the castle have cleared, that the same corruption that Alberich wears on his sleeve festers too in the hearts of the gods. An aspect of this reading that is rarely made explicit is the implicit causality within this reading. The blurring at the motifs’ point of contact gives the impression that the Valhalla motif emerges from the ring motif. If the ‘Valhalla’ motif is a musical consequence of the ‘ring’ motif, then the prevailing critical opinion outlined above would lead us to conclude that the existence of Valhalla is a consequence of the development of the ring. By suggesting that Valhalla emerges because of the ring, this developmental relationship runs precisely against the Norns’ narrative in which the destruction of the World Ash tree precedes and even causes the theft of the Rhinegold. This is a clue that something in the Norns’ scene is violating this developmental process.

In my first analysis of the Norns’ scene, which took a global view of the Valhalla/World Ash tree motif, I suggested that the emergence of the World Ash tree motif could be understood as an analogous development. The World Ash tree motif develops as the combination of the melody that Wotan sings at the beginning of his ode with the minor-mode moment of foreboding that occurs later in the Valhalla motif. If we read this according to Cooke’s or Bribitzer-Stull’s analytical principles laid out above, we can infer

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significance in a number of features of this development. Wotan’s ode and the World Ash tree motif share a melody because Wotan’s project is inextricable from his violence against the tree. The minor turn in the Valhalla motif is an ominous prophecy of the revelation of the destruction of the World Ash tree. Most important is the synthesis of the two: the Norn uses the melody of Wotan’s ode in a minor key because this is the moment in which the negative consequences of Wotan’s violence, which have been long prophesied, are revealed.

A local reading of the development of the World Ash tree motif suggests an alternative narrative of its development that upends the logic of the first reading. Specifically, within the Norns’ scene, the World Ash tree motif can just as easily be understood as a development from the rising-arpeggio nature motif that immediately precedes it by the processes of inversion and modulation. Likewise, the coda figure from Wotan’s ode seems to grow out of the nature motif that precedes it as the Norn sings ‘holy forest’\(^{88}\). Furthermore, the appearance of the Valhalla motif at b. 68 now appears to be a development of the World Ash tree motif. They share the same initial rhythm, and they follow the same arpeggiated melodic outline, although the Valhalla motif is displaced, beginning on the dominant rather than the tonic. The whole mutational genealogy of the Valhalla motif therefore finds itself reversed in the Norns’ scene. In the context of the story of the *Ring*, this genealogy makes far more sense. The World Ash tree is an embodiment of nature. Moreover, the tree is older than Valhalla, and, before Wotan’s act of violence, it had an existence separate from Valhalla. It is this existence that the Norn is recalling. On this scale, the same is true of the spear motif. Instead of the broken World Ash tree appearing as the inversion of the spear motif, in the Norns’ scene the broken World Ash tree motif comes first and the spear motif appears as its inversion. The sense that this is the proper way to understand the developmental relationship between the two motifs is underlined by the fact that at this point the second Norn is revealing that the spear was made from the tree, reversing the musical logic that the tree motif is made from the spear motif. In the Norns’ scene, therefore,

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88 ‘weihlicher Äste Wald’. *Götterdämmerung*, Prologue, l. 15.
two irreconcilable musical narratives intersect. In the first, the World Ash tree motifs are a logical tragic consequence foretold within the Valhalla and spear motifs. In the other, the World Ash tree motifs have their own independent developmental origins that are not contingent on motifs belonging to Wotan. This fracture parallels the fracture that appears in the Norns’ storytelling in the scene.

More recently, a new interpretive stance has been put forward that contains within it a challenge to the basic temporal scheme that has dominated Wagnerian scholarship and which poses a more radical link between Wagner’s motificism and traumatic experience. Based on Edward T. Cone’s supposition that operatic characters were perhaps the composers of their own songs, Matt Baileyshea suggested that we could imagine the music of the *Ring* as ‘a mythical element, like air or water’ that was fully susceptible of manipulation by the characters that inhabited the world of the *Ring*. In this case, the score of the *Ring* could be understood as a kind of compositional act on the part of these characters as they tried to manipulate the world around them. Of the eight basic examples Baileyshea gives of ways in which characters can control the music of the *Ring*, two deal with leitmotifs: ‘eliciting or altering a familiar leitmotif’ and ‘creating a new leitmotif’. Baileyshea understands these processes in much the same way as other commentators. Therefore, in practice, Baileyshea’s system does not always challenge and undermine the traditional reading, because although he introduces a new group of composers (the characters), the compositional activity of these characters can run parallel to, rather than against, the traditional agents of causality: Wagner and the principle of developmental organicism. However, Baileyshea’s stance also opens the possibility for characters to resist perspectives that have been laid out by Wagner and by other characters. By writing their own accounts of the development of motifs, characters win the musical ability to tell the story of the *Ring*.

It may be helpful to take stock of the ways in which the Norns’ scene violates the analytical expectations set up by Cooke and Bribitzer-Stull and Dahlhaus and Abbate.

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The violation of Cooke and Bribitzer-Stull’s principles is more straightforward. In their reading of Wagner’s scores the irreversibility of musical development is derived from the plot. When the Norns re-develop motifs, therefore, they are in effect rewriting the plot. As a result, just as the Norns’ textual storytelling produces an overall narrative of the Ring that is insolubly incoherent, the music of the Norns’ scene obscures the true primal cause of the events of the Ring. In the music, as in the words, we can never know how the story of the Ring really started. The violation of Dahlhaus and Abbate is more subtle. The cardinal processes I have read in their analyses deal with meaning. More precisely, they both suggest ways in which the meanings of motifs can be leached away in time. I argue that the Norns violate this expectation, because their redevelopment does not strip meaning away from the motifs involved. Instead, they create a second, contradictory narrative of the development of the Valhalla and spear motifs. What is left is not a negative loss of meaning, but a positive contradiction. In other words, the Norns show that introducing new or surprising connections between motifs need not necessarily destroy motific meanings. After the Norns’ scene, the text of the Ring contains two cardinal accounts of the Ring, one begun by Wotan the other by Alberich. The music contains two cardinal accounts of the Valhalla and spear motifs. Under this pressure, the hope that the Ring can be resolved into a single narrative of coherent cardinal events dissolves.

In his essay, ‘The “Uncanny”’, Freud described the uncanny as ‘in reality nothing new or alien, but something familiar and old—established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression’. The story of the Norns is the version of the Ring that has been repressed by Wotan. In Act III of Siegfried, Erda cannot understand why Wotan will not consult the Norns. The truth is that Wotan cannot allow the Norns to speak. The story that they will tell has the potential to undermine the validity of the whole project that he has made the focus of Rheingold, Walküre and Siegfried. The great irony of the destruction of Wotan’s spear and the end

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of his power is that the very act that seems at the end of *Siegfried* to have resolved all the problems of the *Ring*, the act that Wotan himself promised would be the end, is the same act that releases the Norns from Wotan’s repression. Unveiled, the Norns then reveal that the fabric of the world of the *Ring* is itself in an apparently insoluble decline. This decline is foretold by the Norns and then again by Waltraute, and this prophecy can be read back into a moment of foreboding in the very first appearance of the Valhalla motif in *Rheingold*.

This consequence of the Norns’ unveiling threatens Wotan’s grand project, his attempts to keep Alberich in check; however, the release of the Norns unveils an even more potent threat. When the Norns are free to tell their story, they inscribe a version of the events of the *Ring* into the works text and scores that cannot be reconciled with the experience of watching and listening to the *Ring*. In the Norns’ scene, the audience learns that events have taken place in the world of the *Ring* that are impossible to fix in time. This reveals that the narrative of the *Ring* is cracked, fissured and wounded, just as the World Ash tree was. Perhaps more importantly, the Norns’ recomposition of the development of the World Ash tree motifs reveals that the processes of musical development that so many writers, not least Wagner himself, have held to be meaningful can also be challenged and rewritten by the *Ring*’s characters.

**Conclusion**

The central gesture of the Norns’ scene is the breaking in two of the narrative of the *Ring*. On the stage, this break is enacted physically as the snapping of the Norns’ rope, the fabric of fate in the world of the *Ring*. The same fracture is, however, equally present in the text and music of the scene. In the text, the Norns present a narrative that contradicts and challenges the story that has been told in the operas of the *Ring*. The two torn lengths of rope are matched by two irreparably separate narratives. In Wagner’s music, this same duality is achieved through the conjunction of two motivic processes in the World Ash tree motifs. Firstly, these two motifs tie together the Norns’ scene, Waltraute’s prophecies in Act I, scene 3 and the very final scene of *Götterdämmerung*. The Norns’ use these motifs to forebode the annihilation of the gods
at the end of the *Ring*. This prophecy is repeated by Waltraute and then fulfilled in the *Ring*’s final vista as a vision of Valhalla penetrates the flames rising above the stage. Moreover, this musical prophecy is connected to the earlier music of the *Ring*. The World Ash tree motif is a minor version of the first melody that Wotan sings in his Ode to Valhalla, the moment in which the meaning of the Valhalla motif is first established. The broken World Ash tree motif is an inversion of the spear motif. This is all consistent with the conception of motifs in terms of PTSD that I outline in Chapter 2. The World Ash tree motifs in the Norns’ scene recall Valhalla and Wotan’s spear as the two most prominent symbols of Wotan’s power. This remembrance is turned by the Norns into a foreboding of the fall of the gods. Secondly, the World Ash tree motifs are engaged by a further motific procedure that is not dealt with in Chapter 2. Many of Wagner’s motifs are interrelated by their musical characteristics. These interrelations have been interpreted by numerous critics as being meaningful, and they might be understood as conferring a sense of cardinality on the music, a sense that the musical developments in the score cannot be undone any more than the dramatic events of the *Ring*. The Norns, however, undermine this sense of cardinality, by seeming to rewrite the developmental history of two motifs related to the World Ash tree. Across the *Ring* as a whole, these motifs seem to develop out of the Valhalla and spear motifs by a change of mode and inversion respectively. Within the Norns’ scene, however, these interrelations are reversed. The World Ash tree motif seems to develop from the nature motif and then leads on to the Valhalla motif. The broken World Ash tree motif precedes the spear motif, which, therefore, appears to be the inversion of the spear motif rather than vice versa.

The result is that Wagner’s traumatic experience of the May Uprising can be related to the Norns’ scene in two distinct ways. Wagner’s experience of traumatic events and their aftermath are written into the scene in precisely the way that I have described in Chapter 2. The Norns’ scene destabilizes the apparently settled situation reached at the end of *Siegfried* by calling up a set of motifs that awaken an anxious foreboding in the audience. This foreboding is oriented around the Norns’ memory of a past traumatic event—the destruction of the World Ash tree by Wotan—and their anticipation of the
calamitous end of the gods that awaits at the end of Götterdämmerung. This recreates the anxiety of Wagner’s position in late May 1849, caught between the sound of gunfire echoing in his mind and a fear of being captured that led him to pace all night in his room the day before he crossed the Swiss border. What elevates the Norns’ scene from a case study that demonstrates the parallels between PTSD-theory and Wagner’s motifs to one that deepens the connections between the two is that the Norns’ scene also recreates an important aspect of Wagner’s recollections of his experience of the revolution. As outlined in the Introduction to this thesis and in Chapter [1], there is no coherent account of Wagner’s activities from 3 May to 9 May 1849, and, despite the claims of some of Wagner’s biographers, no such account can be reconstructed. My Life presents a self-contradictory account, and Wagner’s recollections in his letters contradict this version of events yet further. In addition, the story of Wagner’s involvement in the revolution is complicated by the eyewitness testimony of others. The result is that while some moments within the period of the Uprising are susceptible to investigation in some detail—notably in this thesis, Wagner’s lookout from the Kreuzthurm—it is ultimately only possible to write in terms of what is possible and what is likely. Because of the Norns’ scene, the same is true of the text and music of the Ring. The story that the Norns’ tell contradicts the story that the Ring seems to have presented from Rheingold to Siegfried. It was not, they tell us, Alberich’s theft of the Rheingold that has poisoned the world; it was Wotan’s violation of the World Ash tree. At the same time, the Norns’ use of the World Ash tree motifs retells the story of the development of these motifs. The result is that, as in Wagner’s recollections of the revolution and the various accounts of the Ring, it is impossible to resolve the score of the Ring into a single developing account of motifs.

The result of this insoluble textual and musical narrative is a new biographical—this time in the sense of writing about life—connection between Wagner’s experiences of 1849 and his post-1849 artworks. At the same time, the narration of the Norns’ scene reproduces a further characteristic of PTSD. A feature of PTSD that is described in the DSM-5-TR and Anke and Ehlers’s cognitive model is a set of exaggerated negative
beliefs about oneself and the world. Ratcliffe, Ruddell and Smith, using the terminology of the *DSM-IV*, argue that this feature relates to an aberrant experience of time after trauma, a sense of foreshortened future. They argue that the breakdown of interpersonal trust associated with trauma renders the possibility of long term project building impossible. As a result, events no longer seem to build on each other in a structured and meaningful way. Watching the Norns’ scene engenders the same perception of the *Ring*. After the revelations in the text and the breakdown of cardinality in the motific relations of the Norns’ scene, it is no longer possible to orient the events of the *Ring* as the inevitable consequence of either Alberich’s theft or Wotan’s act of violence. This, more than anything else, unsettles the equilibrium that has been reached at the end of *Siegfried*. What the Norns tell us, in words and in motifs, is that it does not matter that Wotan’s spear has been shattered and Alberich’s curse has no power over Siegfried. Siegfried, Brünnhilde and the gods will perish, simply because the world of the *Ring* demands to end in such a cataclysm. August Roeckel famously asked Wagner why the gods had to die even after Brünnhilde had returned the ring to the *Rhine*—a change to the 1848 draft. Wagner could only answer that ‘that the necessity for this downfall had to arise out of our own deepest convictions’[91] In the Norns’ scene, we see the *Ring* for the fragmented object that it is, and these deepest convictions arise from the knowledge there is no single coherent narrativization of the story of the *Ring* to be drawn from its text. This, more than any intrigue of magic potions, deprives Siegfried and Brünnhilde of their happy ending and propels the *Ring* again towards its all-destroying conclusion.

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Chapter 6

The ‘Old, Sad Tune’:
Structures of Traumatic Repetition in
Tristan und Isolde

In her article, ‘Wagner, “On Modulation”, and Tristan’, Carolyn Abbate expresses a view that is at odds with my conception of Wagner’s motifs in terms of theories of trauma:

My own view is that Wagner’s motifs have no referential meaning; they may, and of course do, absorb meaning at exceptional and solemn moments, by being used with elaborate calculation as signs, but unless purposely maintained in this artificial state, they shed their specific poetic meaning and revert to their natural state as musical thoughts. The Ring, perhaps, is unique in that so much energy is used to keep the motifs suspended against gravity, in this complex semiotic condition; certainly Wagner did not try this in any other opera, and in Tristan the motifs are, all in all, without poetic significance.

As Chapter 2 of this thesis makes clear, my own view is that the motifs of Tristan und Isolde are just as susceptible to interpretation in terms of the poetry through which they are clarified as the motifs of the Ring (Example 2.3, p. 91). Nevertheless, as a final act of Chapter 6, I explore the motifs of Tristan in more detail, focusing on their role in the play of memory and the trauma of repetition.
of collaboration (to return to Latour’s terms), this chapter concludes this thesis by taking Abbate’s position as a premise in order to investigate how much of the traumatic quality of motifs remains if they are allowed to shed their ‘referential’ meanings. What this chapter aims at, therefore, is an elaboration of Dahlhaus analysis of *Götterdämmerung*. He argues that Wagner’s music could resist ‘an imprecise musical hearing’ in terms of the precise individual meanings of motifs because such a hearing would, nevertheless, be unable to ignore the ever growing network of interconnections between motifs. For Dahlhaus, it is this inescapable network that gave the music of *Götterdämmerung* the power to escape its referentiality in order to depict forgetfulness. If anything, the ‘web of connections’ between motifs in *Tristan und Isolde* is even more explicit and even more inescapable. The questions this chapter asks are whether this motific web can fruitfully be understood in terms of trauma if Abbate’s ‘gravity’ is allowed to strip away any specific extra-musical meanings, and what remains of Wagner’s motifs are analysed as ‘musical thoughts’.

An answer to this question emerges from the text of *Tristan und Isolde* itself. In Act III, Scene 1, the eponymous knight engages in a remarkable duet. Rather than joining with another character, Tristan sings with and, more unusually, to a melody. It is the shepherd’s melody, a tune that is played throughout Act III by a shepherd keeping lookout for Isolde’s ship. Tristan addresses this melody as ‘you old, sad tune’, and he recalls that the melody has accompanied each of the traumatic events that he has experienced. In turn, he describes it sounding at the deaths of his father and his mother, and then as he lay wounded at the hands of Morold. Now, it sounds once again

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3 As Dahlhaus puts it, ‘not only are motives related to one another... but they also blend into one another and are finally lost in shapeless intangibility.’ Dahlhaus, *Wagner’s Music Dramas*, 62–2.

4 Wagner refers to it as ‘*einen Hirtenreigen*’, perhaps most directly translated as ‘*a shepherd’s roundelay*’. *Tristan*, Act III, sc. 1.

as he lies suffering from the sword-blow inflicted on him by Melot at the conclusion of the previous act. Most extraordinarily, Tristan claims that this melody expresses to him the fundamental nature of his fate: he is doomed ‘in dying to yearn, from yearning not to die!’ As in my reading of Wagner’s motifs, Tristan understands a musical melody as tying together memories of past trauma with an experience in the present, while anticipating further trauma in the future.

This chapter brings together Abbate’s view of motifs and Tristan’s interpretation of the shepherd’s melody in order to argue that the traumas suffered by the characters of Tristan und Isolde are produced by the score. The chapter begins by applying Abbate’s view as a premise, analysing the shepherd’s melody as a ‘musical thought’. I then explore the implications of this analysis for our understanding of the score as a whole by considering how the shepherd’s melody interacts with the music played by the orchestra. Two questions in particular are foregrounded: what does the shepherd’s melody reveal about motivicism in the score of Tristan und Isolde? And what does the shepherd’s melody reveal about reality of the score within the depicted world of Tristan und Isolde (i.e. is the score diegetic)? The answers to these questions are knitted together with Tristan’s experience of trauma using his interpretation of the shepherd’s melody. This reveals how Tristan’s traumas are produced as his reality by the score. Finally, this chapter presents the Liebestod as a moment in which Isolde learns to engage with the motivic processes of the score in order to overcome the traumas that she has suffered.

The Shepherd’s Melody and the Shepherd’s Voice

The shepherd’s melody represents a particularly appealing passage to those who wish to take a music-analytical approach to understanding Wagner’s music, because it is a self-contained piece that can, apparently, be considered without regard to the text of Tristan und Isolde as a ‘purely musical’ extract. It is quite different in this regard to other orchestral excerpts such as ‘Siegfried’s funeral march’, ‘the ride of the Valkyries’ or the Prelude to Tristan und Isolde, which are constructed from motifs that are scattered

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6 ‘Im Sterben mich zu sehnen, vor Sehnsucht nicht zu sterben!’ Tristan, Act III, sc. 1.
throughout their respective dramas and find themselves hopelessly entangled with the text. Analyses of these extracts on solely musical terms are possible, but it is obvious such analyses are cut off from perhaps the most important aspect of hearing these extracts in context. The shepherd's melody does not present this problem. Although for Tristan it is the ‘alte Weise’, it seems always to retain an independence from the orchestra and from the singers. They can hear the melody, but, as the shepherd tells us, it is only the arrival of Isolde’s ship on the horizon that can change the tune.\footnote{The shepherd tells Kurwenal: ‘you would hear a different melody then, as jolly as I can make it.’ (‘Eine andre Weise hörtest du dann, so lustig als ich sie nur kann.’) \textit{Tristan}, Act III, sc. 1.}

Nevertheless, while there is scope to analyse the shepherd’s melody in terms of what it is (a ‘purely musical’ piece by Wagner), it is still possible to analyse it in terms of what it purports to be—a tune of unknown provenance played by the shepherd. I would argue that, understood in these terms, the evidence of the score and the text suggests that the melody is a work of improvisation by the shepherd. I argue this for three reasons: the dramatic context in which Wagner presents the shepherd’s melody, the internal musical processes of the melody and the way in which Wagner presents the melody in the printed score of the work. Analysed in this way as the spontaneous musical utterance of the shepherd, it becomes possible to discuss this passage as a ‘musical thought’. Because we are witnessing and hearing a compositional act by the shepherd, we can analyse the musical thinking that underpins this composing.

There are three ways in which the shepherd’s melody is revealed to be the improvised composition of the shepherd: the musical processes of inexact repetition that characterize the melody, the dramatic context in which it appears, and the way in which the melody is ‘transcribed’ by Wagner. Considering the melody as a ‘musical thought’, it appears to be improvised by its performer-composer rather than written out before performance. The melody gives this impression because it is built on the inexact repetition of a single idea, creating—as Wagner might have put it—an endless set of variations built up in a kaleidoscopic effect.\footnote{Wagner, \textit{PW}, vi, 187.} Each time the shepherd repeats his melody, he does so inexacty, but even within a single iteration there is plenty of

\begin{footnotesize} 
\footnotetext{7}{The shepherd tells Kurwenal: ‘you would hear a different melody then, as jolly as I can make it.’ (‘Eine andre Weise hörtest du dann, so lustig als ich sie nur kann.’) \textit{Tristan}, Act III, sc. 1.} 
\footnotetext{8}{Wagner, \textit{PW}, vi, 187.} 
\end{footnotesize}
evidence for the primacy of variation—that is, inexact repetition—in the shepherd’s composition and performance. If we take the first appearance of the melody, it is clear that the shepherd is frequently repeating material, but rarely repeating it exactly.

My analysis of these inexact repetitions can be found in Example 6.1. This analysis recognizes a hierarchy of three levels of repeated musical units. Each unit at the first level features a prominent interval of a perfect fifth and is labelled ‘a’ or ‘b’. For example, \(a_1\) begins with a perfect fifth, and \(b_3\) outlines an (enharmonically respelled) perfect fifth (\(B^\#-G^b\)). The second level consists of units that do not feature a prominent perfect fifth; these are labelled with a Greek letter. The third level consists of short rhythmic or melodic pattern that appear in more than one of the first- or second-level units. These are labelled with an ‘(X)’ or ‘(Y)’ after the relevant Latin or Greek letter.

The basic division in the analysis presented in Example 6.1 between ‘a’ units and ‘b’ units captures a fundamental contrast between the two groups of units that is difficult to ignore. The ‘a’ units are long, legato passages, while the ‘b’ units are characterized by staccato articulation and triplet quavers. Nevertheless, there are fundamental ties between the two. A comparison of \(a_1\) and \(b_1\) reveals that the same basic melodic idea underpins both, a rising perfect fifth followed by a falling third (Example 6.2). In this sense, \(b_1\) can be understood as a compression and inexact repetition of \(a_1\). Moreover, \(b_3\) can be understood as a further simplification of this pattern, in that it omits the final falling third. The unit \(b_3\) can also be understood as combining the content of the ‘a’ and ‘b’ units, in that it has the essential characteristics of a ‘b’ unit, but escapes from the final falling third of \(b_1\) and \(b_2\) using a melodic pattern that can be found in \(a_1\) (a pattern of falling steps after an early upward leap, Example 6.3). Jean-Jacques Nattiez, in his analysis, points out another link between \(a_1\) and \(b_1\), namely, that the ‘lower voice’ of \(a_1\)

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9 In my analysis of the shepherd’s first performance of his melody, I follow the example of Jean-Jacques Nattiez example by giving internal bar numbers from 1 to 42 for this iteration of the melody, although it takes place from bb. 52 to 93 of Act III. My analysis of the remainder of the score (in particular, from p. 241 onwards) gives the bar number of the score. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Musical analyses and musical exegesis: the shepherd’s melody in Richard Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde, trans. Joan Campbell Huguet (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2021).

10 The units labelled \(\gamma\) and \(\delta\) do contain this interval; however, they are both subordinate to the \(B^\#-G^b\) ‘perfect fifth’ of \(b_6\) (\(\gamma\) interrupts it, and \(\delta\) extends it.)
Example 6.1: Analysis of the variation of basic ideas by the Shepherd in his melody. 
*Tristan und Isolde*, Act III, Scene 1 bb. 52-93
The melodic pattern underlying the two basic units

Example 6.2: The two ‘fundamental’ units of the shepherd's melody and the shared melodic pattern that underpins them

(A-G-F) sets the pattern for the triplet quaver figure in b1. What these underlying patterns reveal is that even the most apparently contrasting ideas within the melody are, in fact, inexact repetitions.

By contrast, the shepherd uses exact repetition very rarely. It is really only between bb. 29 and 35 that the melody can be characterized in this way. Specifically, the shepherd repeats the same figure (labelled $\gamma_3$ in Example 6.1) once in b. 29 and twice more in b. 35. He also repeats a figure ($\gamma_3$) twice in b. 30 and a further figure ($\delta_3$) once across bb. 33-34. These repetitions are all small-scale and mostly immediate (only the first repeat of $\gamma_3$ in b. 35 is non-immediate). Overall, the image that emerges in the shepherd's melody is of a tight motivic web in which everything is related, but almost nothing is exactly repeated. As a result, the shepherd's melody turns out, like the Norns' scene, to be a moment that discloses an underlying monothematicism in the score.

The basic tendency towards variation that is already present within the first appearance of the melody is amplified as it repeats throughout Act III, Scene 1. The melody is

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11 The context of this observation is that Nattiez recognizes an alternative fundamental division to me. For Nattiez, the basic split is between an upper voice and a lower voice—‘this monody is in fact a piece in two voices’. This division is outlined in his Example 1.25, which is not reproduced here for copyright reasons. Nattiez, *Musical analyses and musical exegesis*, 70–2.
Example 6.3: A comparison with Jean-Jacques Nattiez’s analysis of the shepherd’s melody (from Example 1.25 in Nattiez, *Musical analyses and musical exegesis*, 71.) showing how the shepherd borrows an underlying melodic feature from unit a₁ to delay arriving at the initial rising perfect fifth in unit b₃

remarkably unstable through its several appearances in Act III. The result of these repeats is that inexact repetition characterizes the shepherd’s melody on both the smaller scales (i.e. between individual units) and on its largest scale (i.e. when something like the original 42 bars are repeated at b. 634). It is this inexact repetition that I contend musically signals that the shepherd’s melody has been improvised.

The resemblance between this tendency in the melody and Tristan’s interpretation of it is striking. Tristan interprets the basic message of the melody as his fate—he is doomed to suffer a yearning that he can never escape in death. This fate is expressed in repeated but varied traumatic events: learning of the violent death of his father and the death of his mother in childbirth, and experiencing physically and psychologically traumatic wounds at the hands of first Morold and then Melot. Just as the shepherd’s melody varies across its repetitions in Act III, each of these traumas must have had its own iteration of the ‘alte Weise’. Tristan recognizes in the melody a fundamental pattern in his life. In this, it is hard to ignore the double meaning carried within the word ‘Weise’, which can mean both melody or tune and way or manner. The melody is constructed out of a single underlying shape—a rising fifth and a falling third). The way of Tristan’s life also has a single underlying pattern—he is parted from his loved ones, unhealably wounded, and unable to die.

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12 This has led to some friction between analysts. Nattiez complains that Allen Forte’s analysis of the melody differed from the other analyses that he considered ‘in that it does not analyze the English-horn solo that immediately follows the Act III Prelude, but instead discusses two later passages from Scene 1 in which the English-horn melody returns in an orchestral setting, modified through substitution, extension, and reordering.’ Nattiez, *Musical analyses and musical exegesis*, 37.
The implication that this is a tune improvised by the shepherd is confirmed by the dramatic context in which it appears. The audience first hears the shepherd's melody coming ‘from outside’ (or, in reality, from a cor anglais ‘on the stage’) as the curtain rises on Act III. Of course, although Wagner designates it in this way in his stage directions and performance instructions, the most that can probably be perceived is that the sound is not emanating from the orchestra pit. The performer is unseen and the ability of the characters onstage to perceive the melody is unclear. After the first statement of the melody ends, the shepherd appears onstage and, in a conversation with Kurwenal, reveals that he is the originator of the melody and that it is he who chooses the tune. Should he see Isolde’s ship on the horizon, he will play ‘a different melody... as jolly as I [the shepherd] can make it’. Finally, we watch the shepherd make the melody; ‘he takes the pipe to his lips and leaves, playing’. The melody begins as ‘pure’ music, detached even from the orchestra, and is then incorporated into the drama, first in words and then in actions. In this process, we learn not only that the shepherd plays the melody, but also that he composes it and will change (recompose) it if he sights Isolde’s ship.

Like the Norns’ scene, the shepherd’s melody is characterized by separateness from the drama in which it is nested, but the nature of this separateness is in a state of flux. Initially, it is separated from the two primary musical spaces of the theatre, the stage and the orchestra pit. It is dislocated music whose provenance and meaning are thereby obscured. Secondly, it is separated from the score of Tristan und Isolde, because, at least nominally, it is composed by the shepherd rather than by Wagner. Finally, when the singer playing the shepherd places the pipe to his lips and mimes playing, the sight of the shepherd’s melody is disconnected from the actual physical production of the melody, which is, in reality, occurring offstage. Throughout, the

13 ‘From outside is heard, as the curtain opens, a shepherd’s melody, yearning and sad, played upon a pipe. Finally, the shepherd himself appears, his upper body above the parapet, and looks in participatingly.’ (‘Von der Aussenseite her hört man, beim Aufziehen des Vorhangs, einen Hirtenreigen, sehnsüchtig und traurig auf einer Schalmei geblasen. Endlich erscheint der Hirt selbst mit dem Oberleibe über der Mauerbrüstung, und blickt teilnehmend herein’). The cor anglais is directed to be played ‘Auf dem Theater’. Tristan, Act III, sc. 1.
15 ‘Er setzt die Schalmei an den Mund, und entfernt sich blasend’. Tristan, Act III, sc. 1.
shepherd maintains his own separateness, his position as a somewhat detached observer commenting, musically, on the state of the plot more than participating in it. Therefore, as with the Norns’ scene, the shepherd’s melody has the potential to advance a musical and dramatic standpoint from outside the rest of the text and score, which offers an opportunity to unlock key issues in the rest of the drama. The Norns’ scene opens the problem of the genesis of the world of the Ring and challenges our understanding of the interrelation of motifs in the Ring. I will argue that the shepherd’s melody offers a new way of understanding the restless development of motifs in the score of Tristan und Isolde and opens up the problem of understanding diegetic and non-diegetic elements in Wagner’s works. By investigating these problems, it is possible to interrogate Tristan’s traumas through the melody that he identifies as accompanying and perhaps even announcing these traumas, the ‘alte Weise’.

There is a final, further argument in favour of considering the shepherd’s melody to be improvised by the shepherd rather than (pre-)composed by Wagner. Unlike the bulk of the music in Tristan und Isolde, the shepherd’s melody does not sit entirely comfortably within Wagner’s notation of it. The shepherd’s melody features several moments in which prominent aural features of the melody are obscured by Wagner’s enharmonic spelling. As I have argued above, the fundamental gesture that ties together a and b units is the span of the perfect fifth, with which these units always open. However, in units b3 and b6, this interval is spelled as a diminished sixth. Similarly, Wagner’s spelling obscures one of the inexact repetitions within the shepherd’s melody. As noted above, β3 is a repeat of β2, enharmonically respelled with the initial triplet quaver extended by a semi-breve. The only heard difference is the rhythmic change. The metre of the shepherd’s melody also seems to resist the straightforward 4\(\frac{4}{4}\) time signature that Wagner uses. There are ties across the first two barlines, and 15 ties that cross barlines in total. The sum of this repeated de-emphasizing of the (written) first beats of bars throughout the melody is to hint at alternative metrical interpretations of the melody. For example, the first unit could have been written as two bars of \(\frac{5}{4}\) followed by a bar of \(\frac{3}{2}\) (Example 6.4). A related phenomenon is the way in which Wagner’s
Example 6.4: An alternative interpretation of the metre of the opening unit of the shepherd’s melody

transcription of the shepherd’s rhythm seems to come under strain whenever the shepherd invents a new figure. At the emergence of each of the α, β, γ and δ units, repeats are marked by rhythmic diminution, but in some cases these seem to have the character of a written out accelerando. In particular, across the gamma figures the note values approximately halve. In quavers, the ratios for the three figures are 8:5:1 for γ₁, 5:2:1 for γ₂, $\frac{2}{3} : \frac{2}{3} : \frac{2}{3}$ for γ₃ and $\frac{2}{3} : \frac{2}{3} : \frac{2}{3}$ for γ₄. This gives the impression of Wagner attempting to quantize the shepherd’s rubato. The cumulative effect of these slippages between the sound of the shepherd’s melody and its appearance on the page is that Wagner seems only to have an imperfect understanding of what the shepherd’s melody is. In other words, the shepherd is the composer of the shepherd’s melody because only he has direct access to it. To the reader of his score, Wagner appears to be the transcriber rather than the composer.

The essence of improvisation is that it is a real-time activity. Largely, this implies a spontaneous activity, but a skilled improviser can also plan, even on a relatively large scale. Improvisations can take themes or chord progressions as their basis, but they may also be, to varying degrees, free and unconstrained by an external pattern or plan. What distinguishes improvisation from other forms of composition is that it is temporally bounded; one cannot go back and change an earlier bar. Therefore, repetition is possible, but it is limited by the performer-composer’s ability to remember earlier material. This urge to revisit without perfectly replicating the past can be central to improvising. Improvisation can be characterized by a searching quality. Miles Davis reportedly once said that he could play all night looking for a single successful line.¹⁶

Within the 42 bars that I have analysed closely, the shepherd is constantly producing variations, quite possibly in search of the ‘successful’ variation. Equally, when the whole melody is repeated, he makes changes, perhaps seeking the ‘successful’ version of the melody. Certainly, this seems to set apart improvisation and the variation seen in the shepherd’s melody from variation in other genres. The shepherd’s melody can also be differentiated from (pre-)composed theme and variations in terms of memory. In a theme and variations, the variations are made to the same original theme, but in the shepherd’s improvisation each variation is best explained as a variation of a variation.

This begins to explain why Tristan implies that the music has trapped him in a cycle of traumatic experiences. In my reading of the *Ring* (see Chapter 5), I argued that the development of motifs appeared to be a cardinal—that is irreversible—process. This musical cardinality mirrored the apparent cardinality of the narrative. By offering a different account of the development of a set of motifs relating to Valhalla and the World Ash tree, the Norns are able to shatter this illusion of musical cardinality. This has two consequences. Firstly, it allows the Norns to disclose their traumatic experience of violence at Wotan’s hands. Secondly, it reproduces the PTSD symptom of a sense of foreshortened future, the belief that an open progressive life narrative is impossible. In the shepherd’s melody, no such moment of escape is possible. The reason for this is that each musical unit within the melody is already too similar to every other unit. In order for the Norns to present their account of the development of the motifs of the *Ring*, they had to redevelop the World Ash tree motif out of the nature motif. Within the shepherd’s melody, by contrast, no such redevelopment is possible because every idea is already too similar to every idea.

There are, therefore, three categories of evidence that support the interpretation that it is the shepherd who is the author of his melody. Firstly, the music itself seems to be improvised because inexact repetition is very prominent and exact repetition is almost completely absent. Secondly, the dramatic context of the melody reveals that it belongs

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17 This is true even when the shepherd switches between ‘a’ and ‘b’ material. For example, a₂ is an iteration of a₁ that incorporates the A♭-G-G♭-F descent that occurs from b₁ to a₂. In other words, it can only be explained of a₁ and b₁, not a₁ alone.
to the world in which Tristan und Isolde takes place, and the shepherd himself suggests that he has ultimate control over the music that he plays. Finally, the orthography of the melody externalizes Wagner. The melody’s discomfort in Wagner’s notation implies that his knowledge of the melody is imperfect. The shepherd appears to be just as much an author of his melody as any character is the author of their textual utterances. It is, therefore, possible to extend my approach and analyse the shepherd’s music in the same way that we analyse the text: in terms of what the shepherd’s music means, his intentions, and what his melody tells us about him. In other words, we can analyse the melody as a ‘musical thought’ and the shepherd as a musical thinker. The importance of such an analysis is that the nature of trauma in Tristan und Isolde can be understood in musical terms. These are, after all, the terms in which Tristan understands his traumas. To fully understand how trauma is produced in Tristan und Isolde, therefore, it is necessary to understand the ‘musical thought’ that produces this music.

It is worth beginning this analysis by returning to the dramatic context of the shepherd’s performance. It seems that he is playing for the pleasure of no-one but himself and has unlimited time to fill. He is keeping watch for Isolde’s ship and will play an ‘andre Weise’, ‘as merry as [he] could make it’ if he spots her, but this seems to owe as much to his own choice as to Kurwenal’s command. As a result, the shepherd has the time to try and extract every possibility from his melody and from his instrument—as in Davis’s search for a successful line—and he has no need to worry about the aesthetic concerns of others. His musical ideas can be allowed to fail, and his mistakes can be covered or forgiven.

The shepherd’s melody opens with the perfect fifth, which, as I have shown, becomes ubiquitous. There is something basic about this interval. On some brass instruments, this is the lowest interval that can be played.\footnote{It is the interval between the second and third harmonics. On many brass instruments the first (fundamental) harmonic is unplayable or rarely used.} It appears in this capacity as the first melodic interval in the primal music of the Prelude to Rheingold, played on a horn in E♭. There is some ambiguity as to exactly what instrument the shepherd is playing. In the
stage directions, Wagner refers to it as a ‘Schalmei’, a shawm, often translated as ‘pipe’. The ‘alte Weise’ is performed on the cor anglais; however, the ‘andre Weise’ played by the shepherd later in the act, presumably on the same fictional instrument, has been performed on a variety of instruments including the cor anglais, the Holztrompete, Tristan Schalmei and the Tárogató, as well as combinations of instruments such as the cor anglais and clarinet or oboe. Wagner wrote that the effect should be of a ‘very powerful natural instrument such as the Alphorn.’ No genuine ‘natural’ instrument could play the intricate chromaticisms of the shepherd’s melody. It seems that there is something magical about the shepherd’s instrument. It is chromatic when it needs to be, but (pseudo)-natural in the ‘andre weise’. Nevertheless, this opening fifth certainly taps into something primal. It is the sound of a brass player warming up, of the *Last Post*, or the evocation of the dawn in Strauss’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. The shepherd is trying out the most basic melodic facility of his instrument.

The upper note, C, is the longest of first unit, stretching beyond the bar line and perhaps buying the shepherd time to plan the rest of the unit. The first unit establishes a pace of thought on the part of the shepherd that allows him time to plan at the beginning and end of the unit with a relatively rapid, premeditated quaver passage in the middle. Unit b₁ immediately inverts this pattern, opening with the triplet quaver idea, presumably planned in the generic close of a₁. The central minim of b. 5 gives the shepherd time to plan the alteration of the triplet quaver idea in b₂. Both b₁ and b₂ can, on a second order, be seen understood as planning time for b₃, which is the most radical unit in the melody. Firstly, the shepherd appears to evade the rising perfect fifth that has so far been fundamental to each unit. He then prolongs this apparent mistake using a version of what Nattiez calls ‘voice 1’ from a₁ (which he calls ‘IA’—see Example 6.3), before finally settling on the G♭ that (enharmonically) settles a perfect fifth away from the B(♮) in the quaver triplet. At this point the shepherd has reached something of an impasse.

The final perfect fifth that he has outlined is maximally distant from the opening F-C, 19 ‘Das englische Horn soll hier die Wirkung eines sehr kräftigen Naturinstrumentes, wie das Alpenhorn’. Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1860; facs. edn., New York: Kalmus), 371
being a tritone away. My explanation for the prominence of this note is, therefore, that the shepherd has, at this point, put the melody as such into crisis, and to recover the melody without surrendering to an overwhelming sense of disunity requires a greater length and depth of thought from the shepherd than any other moment of planning within the melody. Ultimately, he decides to begin again.

There is a second aspect of the melody that seems to emanate from the thoughts of the shepherd. As observed above, the repeats of \( \alpha, \gamma \) and \( \delta \) are written-out accelerandi. It is possible to think of this as a purely aesthetic choice on the part of the shepherd; however, it is also possible that as the shepherd becomes more familiar with these figures he learns to play them faster. In particular, the \( \gamma \) figures resemble a vocal solfeggio exercise or a lip flexibility exercise on a brass instrument. The overall effect that the shepherd's melody has something in common with an articulation exercise is, of course, furthered by the fundamental alternation between staccato and legato.

What I hope to have demonstrated with this analysis of musical thought is that Wagner has written the shepherd's melody in such a way as to allow us to use it to ask questions of the shepherd, not only of Wagner. To some extent, to talk about the shepherd's melody in this way is, I would expect, uncontroversial. Just as we accept that the words of Tristan or Isolde are in some (fictional) sense generated by Tristan and Isolde, or perhaps Wagner-as-Tristan and Wagner-as-Isolde, it is surely necessary to think of the shepherd's melody as not originating with Wagner. It could be that the originator is Wagner-as-folk-composer; however, as I have argued above, there is a strong case to be made that the composer is Wagner-as-the-shepherd. Certainly, for the shepherd's melody to function as it does, it must be written by Wagner-as-not-Wagner.

At the same time, this analysis of the shepherd's thought process reveals a fundamental division between the shepherd's 'musical thought' about the melody and Tristan's. As listener, Tristan hears the variation within the melody as always too similar to be novel. This mirrors his reading of his own life as a sequence of seemingly novel events that turn out to be repeats of the same pain, separation and yearning. As
composer, the shepherd always seems to be striving to make each new idea a novel version of something that preceded it. In other words, it is Tristan’s passivity that makes the shepherd’s melody traumatic for him (and not so for the shepherd). The remainder of this chapter brings these two revelations together by showing that the orchestra can also be understood as a ‘Wagner-as-not-Wagner’ composer. That is to say that the orchestra is an active agent in shaping the plot. I then show that Tristan and Isolde are finally able to escape the cycle of trauma that Tristan describes by learning to listen to and then demonstrate their independence from the orchestra. By doing this, they are able to escape from the traumatic, passive, listener role that Tristan experiences when hearing the shepherd’s melody by becoming, like the shepherd, musically active composers.

The Shepherd and the Orchestra

Tristan says that the ‘alte Weise’ tells him his fate: he is to yearn and not be released from this yearning in death. So far, I have written that this equates to an implication that the melody is directing Tristan’s fate, causing the repeated cycle of traumatic events that he remembers. My contention is that Tristan not only implies this, but that he correctly realizes that it is music that is controlling the events of his life. This argument rests on the idea that the shepherd’s melody is not so disconnected from the rest of the score as it might appear. That is because after the shepherd plays his melody at the beginning of Act III, he is answered by the orchestra. The shepherd and the orchestra go on to engage in a musical dialogue, and the thought processes disclosed in the orchestra’s utterances are just as susceptible to analysis as those disclosed in the shepherd’s melody. Moreover, these thought processes reveal the same patterns of variation that underpin the ‘alte Weise’. This has two implications. Firstly, the orchestra, like the shepherd, is an active musical agent, the composer of its own music. Secondly, the music that the orchestra plays in Tristan und Isolde can be interpreted in the same way as Tristan interprets the shepherd’s melody: it is a musical prison that has trapped him in a repeating cycle of trauma.
In response to the shepherd, the orchestra repeats $b_1$ in a new transposition, outlining a $D\flat$ major chord. This is followed by $b_2$, outlining the same chord (i.e. without the sequential relationship that the two units have in the shepherd's melody itself). The orchestral response terminates with an iteration of $b_3$ in which the $A\flat$ is shortened to a crotchet and, more importantly, terminates on G rather than $G\flat$ (bb. 93–96). That is to say that the orchestra responds with a novel figure based on $b_3$ that fails to reach the perfect fifth, disobeying one of the conventions established by the shepherd. The orchestra then returns to material derived from the opening music of the act, which immediately preceded the shepherd’s melody. At b. 119, however, $b_1$ returns at the head of a passage based on ‘b’ material. In b. 120, a new version of the $\beta$ figures follows (Example 6.5). It is, in effect, a version of $\beta_2$ in which the second interval of the triplet quaver is augmented to a major second. The result is a version of the triplet, which is so prominent in the shepherd’s melody, that has not appeared in the shepherd’s melody itself. The orchestra then generates a second novelty, a variation of $b_1$ (or $b_2$) in which the new form of the quaver triplet is followed by a filling out of the falling third with a new accented quaver passing note (b. 121). At b. 122, there is a return of $b_1$ in a new transposition. Most important, however, is the new unit that appears at b. 123. Initially, this appears to be another ‘failed’ reprise of $b_3$. The unit is a conventional repeat of $b_3$ until the third beat of b. 124, at which point the orchestra digresses into a new idea. There is something of an ostinato character to this idea, a characteristic it shares with motifs such as the Nibelungs motif in the Ring. As a result, this idea comes with a strong expectation that, as in the Nibelungs motif, it will return endlessly to its highest note. This expectation is reinforced by an immediate repeat of the idea, the first of which closes the loop of the idea’s first iteration ($C-B\flat-A\flat-(C)$). However, the end of the repeat subverts the expectation by finishing on $B\natural$, a gesture that closes the perfect fifth that seemed to have been left open. The orchestra has found a new and longer way of prolonging the act of outlining a perfect fifth that is central to the character of $b_3$. In this case the perfect fifth is spelled as such; it seems the orchestra is more familiar with the orthography of Western notation than the shepherd.
This passage is open to exactly the same kind of inferences relating to thought processes as the shepherd’s melody itself. It is as if the orchestra hears the shepherd’s melody and attempts to imitate it at b.94 but goes wrong with its attempt at $b_3$ at b. 95 (which misses the perfect fifth). The return to the shepherd’s melody at b. 119, therefore, comes across as a second attempt in which the orchestra demonstrates its mastery over ‘b’ material. It accomplishes this firstly by repeating $b_1$ on its original notes (displaced by an octave) and then by generating novel ‘b’ units that conform to the shepherd’s convention of always outlining a perfect fifth. This culminates at bb. 123-6 with a unit in which the orchestra demonstrates, almost with a sense of cheek, its comprehension of this convention by finding a new version of $b_3$ that seems destined to fail to reach the perfect fifth and then suddenly and defiantly reaches it. Above all, this reading emphasizes the spontaneity in the orchestra’s response to the shepherd, a spontaneity that implies, as it did in the shepherd’s melody itself, an improvisational compositional process.

The sense that the orchestra and the shepherd are in dialogue is further developed in the rest of the act. After a brief exchange with Kurwenal, the shepherd leaves the stage playing his pipe. He leaves playing new versions of the $\gamma$ and then $\delta$ figures, from which he launches into a repeat of $a_1$ (the first verbatim repeat of a whole unit). This is followed, as in the shepherd’s melody, with $b_1$ and $b_2$, but at this point the orchestra interrupts with a transposition of $b_1$. Once again, the orchestra is showing off its control over the shepherd’s material in that this interpolation breaks the pattern of the shepherd’s melody while fulfilling the same function as the unit it replaces ($b_3$). The function of $b_3$ in the shepherd’s melody is to disrupt the pattern established by $b_1$ and $b_2$. Although $b_3$ continues the pseudo-sequential pattern of the two preceding units, the
substitution of a minor sixth for the perfect fifth is an obvious departure, which, as discussed above, forces the shepherd into a change of pace in order to plan his next step. The new iteration of $b_1$ is not an analogous departure. It simply continues the pseudo-sequential pattern of the preceding two bars (that is to say that the first note of the triplet in b.161 is the final note of the triplet in b. 160). However, this is a departure of a different kind, because by continuing too perfectly the sequential pattern of $b_1$ and $b_2$, this becomes the point of departure from a verbatim repeat of the ‘original’ shepherd’s melody. This poses a new problem: having overextended the sequence, how is the sequence to be closed? The orchestra’s solution is elegant (Example 6.6).

The orchestra concludes the pattern using a version of $b_1$ with the version of the triplet quaver that the orchestra invented at b.120 (i.e. the first interval is a semitone and the second is a tone). This allows the orchestra to appear to continue the downward pattern that characterizes every B passage, while in fact stopping this motion dead by hitting the same perfect fifth and falling third.

The orchestra’s actions seem a remarkable challenge to the shepherd, a statement that says ‘this belongs to me now’. But can the shepherd hear the orchestra? The evidence that he can comes later in the act, when the shepherd clearly responds to the orchestra’s challenge. The shepherd returns at b. 626 with another passage constructed from $\gamma$ and $\delta$ figures, perhaps because this gives the impression of a re-emergence in media res—Wagner wishing to give the impression that the shepherd has, in fact, been playing constantly without our hearing him—or perhaps simply to avoid straightforward repetition (maintaining the sense of improvisation). This is followed by a verbatim repeat of the beginning of the shepherd’s melody from bb. 634-655. This may seem like no response at all; however, I would argue that this ‘deafness’ on the part of the shepherd is itself a disdainful response. This is my
contention, firstly, because this seems to be how the orchestra interprets the gesture. At b. 656 the orchestra, we might say angrily, interrupts the shepherd with a sequence of $\beta$ figures culminating in $b_2$ at its original pitch—another provocative alteration of novelty and repetition by the orchestra. More important, however, is how the shepherd responds to this interruption. Initially, it seems that he continues to be deaf to the orchestra. He seems to be repeating $b_5$. But on the third beat of b. 662, instead of proceeding to $G\flat$ the shepherd repeats the $B\flat$(appoggiatura)$-A\flat-G$ idea, an idea that he repeats a second time in b. 663. He finally reaches $G\flat$ at b. 664. The shepherd has written a new prolongation of the fundamental melodic perfect fifth and, moreover, it is a longer prolongation than the orchestra managed. It is a clear case of ‘anything you can do I can do better’. The orchestra responds in terms that the shepherd can hardly match for emotional or physical power. The bars between b. 699 and 713 are surely the emotional climax of Tristan’s monologue, which the shepherd and orchestra have accompanied. It does not seem too much to suggest that the more-or-less verbatim iteration of $a_1$ that the shepherd responds with in bb. 715-719 are a concession that there is nothing to be gained from further discussion between the two, and the orchestra soon moves on to the ‘Motiv des siechen Tristan’ at b. 727 (motif no. 7 in Carl Waack’s table of motifs in Tristan und Isolde, Figure 6.1).

The point of this interpretation of the interplay between the shepherd and the orchestra is to demonstrate that the orchestra is just as susceptible to analysis as a music-making character as the shepherd is. The orchestra seems to have a personality, an ability to communicate and, above all, compositional agency, just as the shepherd does. One result of this is that the inexact repetitions that characterize the shepherd’s melody through Act III do not belong solely to the shepherd. Instead, they are the result of collaboration—or competition—between the shepherd and the orchestra. Significantly, the moment in which the dialogue of the orchestra and the shepherd leads to the shepherd’s new prolongation of the fundamental melodic perfect fifth (bb. 656–664) is contained within the passage in which Tristan describes learning of the deaths of his parents and hearing the ‘alte Weise’. That is to say that the melody that Tristan
interprets and addresses doesn’t belong to the shepherd alone. It is, rather, shared by the shepherd and the orchestra. The shepherd introduces himself as an observer; he tells us that the melody he plays matches the situation he sees, and he will play a new tune if he sights Isolde’s ship. It is by no means clear, however, what the role of the orchestra is in constructing the tune that has haunted Tristan since birth. After demonstrating that the orchestral score reproduces the same pattern of inexact repetition that Tristan hears as traumatic, I argue below that the role of the orchestra is to shape the reality perceived by the characters.

The Orchestra’s Inescapable Labyrinth of Motifs

So far, I have interpreted the spontaneity of the orchestra’s musical invention as a competitive response to the musical invention of the shepherd. But the orchestra has been making music since long before the appearance of the shepherd, and there is no particular reason to believe that this faculty of the orchestra’s is awakened by the shepherd. In fact, the same spontaneous, restless invention that characterizes the shepherd’s melody and the orchestra’s response is a feature of all the orchestra’s utterances throughout the score. In consequence, the same inescapable musical labyrinth perceptible within the shepherd’s melody, in which Tristan is encountered with a new trauma at every turn, characterizes the whole score.

A paradigmatic example of this can be found in the last scene of Act II (just before the shepherd’s melody, in the score if not in time). One of the most prominent motifs of this scene is what Carl Waack called the ‘Marke-Motiv’ (Number 23 in Waack’s table of motifs, Figure 6.1). In the very final bars of the act, the opening four-note idea continues upwards, returning to the first note of the motif, in effect creating a rearrangement of the four-note idea. Before the curtain has even been raised, in the initial bars of the next act, this new idea is presented as a ‘new’ motif, which Waack analysed as part of the ‘Motiv der Oede und des Sehnens’ (This ‘chain’ of development is summarized in Example 6.7). In other words, the orchestra has found a new figure in exactly the way that the shepherd finds the $\alpha_1$ figure, by rearranging a pattern of notes.
The transformation from the Marke-Motiv to the ‘Motiv der Oede und des Sehnens’ in the closing bars of *Tristan und Isolde*, Act II

Example 6.7: The invention of the ‘Oede und Sehnen’ motif out of the ‘Marke’ motif by the orchestra
Both of these figures, the openings of the ‘Marke’ and the ‘Oede und Sehnens’ motifs, are tetrachords. They are four-note ideas that span a perfect fourth. In fact, melodies based on tetrachords seem to constitute a distinct category of motifs within the opera. In addition to the ‘Marke’ and ‘Oede und Sehnens’ motifs, the ‘Tristan’ motif is a loose melodic inversion of the ‘Marke’ motif, differing only in that its final interval is a major, rather than minor, second. Similarly in the sailor’s song that immediately follows the Prelude, the figure that becomes the ‘Meeres-Motiv’ (in Waack’s analysis) is constructed from two juxtaposed tetrachords, the same tetrachord as in the ‘Marke’ and ‘Oede und Sehnens’ motifs and its inversion. The ‘Glückseligkeitsmotiv-Motiv’ (no. 15 in Figure 6.1) that appears in Act II begins with a descending tetrachord. A final figure, based on a tetrachord (again the ‘Marke’ tetrachord) that then contracts before expanding chromatically (Waack’s ‘Sehnsucht-Motiv (neue Form)’, no. 27 in Figure 6.1) appears at b. 516 of Act III. The preponderance of tetrachord figures is no doubt partly down to the fact that tetrachords are relatively common. There are three unique tetrachords (i.e. consisting of a unique pattern of three intervals) within the major scales, and a further tetrachord makes up the upper four notes of the harmonic minor scale. Nevertheless, the recurrence of these tetrachords suggests a further network of variation by the orchestra and variation, moreover, of very limited melodic resources. Significantly, it is this moment of variation that the shepherd’s melody emerges from at the beginning of Act III.

This view can be supported if we consider the interrelation of these figures (as tetrachords) to a four-note theme that is one of the most fundamental musical ideas in Tristan und Isolde, namely, the four-note chromatic theme that appears simultaneously in a falling and rising form in the first three bars of the opera. The rising form of this fundamental motif is the oboe line in bb. 2-3, and the falling version is split between the cello and the cor anglais in bb. 1-3. Interpreted in this way, in this moment the orchestra begins to vary a figure before it has even been fully played. I refer to these two forms of the theme as the falling fundamental theme and the rising fundamental theme. Even within the Prelude, the rising figure finds itself expanded into a tetrachord. At b. 17, the
first figure not to feature the four-note chromatic theme begins with a tetrachord, the final note of which is displaced by an octave, and two further tetrachords appear between bb. 19 and 21. A pseudo-tetrachord (F♯-G♯-A-A♯-B i.e. A and A♯ are superimposed) appears in bb. 25-25 and is followed by a ‘true’ tetrachord (E-F♯-G♯-A) in bb. 27-28. At the key change in the Prelude (b. 43) the chromatic theme is juxtaposed with another tetrachord. A new tetrachord figure appears at b. 52 out of a pseudo-tetrachord in b. 51. In fact, the first truly prominent theme that does not have a clear melodic connection with the fundamental theme does not appear until bb. 63-64. Even this theme uses a rhythm that has already been well established throughout the Prelude. These motifs and the development of tetrachordal themes in the Prelude are summarized in Example 6.8.

Finally, there are two diminished pseudo-tetrachords (i.e. tetrachords that only span a diminished fourth, the ‘Todes-Motiv’ (used by Isolde to sing ‘Todgeweihtes Herz!’ in Act I, sc. 2, no. 5 in Figure 6.1) and the figure used by Tristan to sing ‘Tristans Ehre’ and ‘Tristans Elend’ before he drinks Isolde’s potion (Example 6.9).

Of course, this is just one of the ways in which the four-note chromatic theme is developed by Wagner and the orchestra. The melodic pattern of the fundamental theme appears in its two original forms throughout the opera. Waack even labels one repetition of the descending fundamental theme as a motif in its own right, the ‘Fluch-Motiv’ (Example 6.10e and no. 8 in Figure 6.1). Rearranged, the fundamental theme forms the basis of the (b) section (as Waack labels it) of the ‘Tristan’ motif (no. 11 in Figure 6.1). Similarly the ‘Zorn-Motiv’ simply elaborates the descending fundamental theme, including the initial A that precedes it at its first appearance (Example 6.10f and no. 4 in Figure 6.1). The ‘Motiv der seelischer Erregung’ ends with the descending fundamental theme, and its upper four notes are a diminished ‘tetrachord’ (Example 6.10g and no 12 in Figure 6.1). Moreover, there are a whole group of themes that are related to the fundamental theme on the basis of their chromaticism. Within the Prelude, the first way in which the theme is developed is by extending it with a fourth rising semitone at b. 10. This is extended to a full chromatic scale in bb. 23-24. This
Example 6.8: The tetrachords developed by the orchestra out of the initial 4-note chromatic theme in the Prelude of *Tristan und Isolde*
second chain of development is summarized in Example 6.10. The ‘Motiv des siechen Tristan’ begins with a further extended descending chromatic idea. Moreover, its connection with the opening theme is made explicit by the orchestra. After the ‘Motiv des siechen Tristan’ first appears, it is repeated once. This repeat is followed immediately by the rising fundamental theme and then the extended rising fundamental theme. These are followed by three consecutive appearances of the falling fundamental theme, which finally break out into a third appearance of the ‘Motiv des siechen Tristan’ (pp. 38–39). The whole passage is rounded off by two appearances of the falling fundamental theme, which are themselves extended by a further semitone and segue into a figure taken a song sung by Kurwenal earlier in the act (Example 6.11).

The shepherd’s melody is also inextricable from these tetrachordal shapes. The first unit of the melody, $a_1$, the closest thing the melody has to a starting point, is written out of the natural minor scale. This is the only scale to consist of two ‘Tristan’ tetrachords ($F-G-A♭-B♭; C-D♭-E♭-F$). See no. 11 (a) in Figure 6.1. This might further explain why Tristan believes that the melody has a special significance for him. Moreover, the descending chromatic tetrachord appears as $A♭-G♭-F$ at the end of $b_3$ into $a_2$ and then again in what Nattiez would call the ‘lower voice’ of $a_2$. All this suggests that the shepherd’s melody is not truly separable from all the variations that have been
Example 6.10: Chromatic themes developed from the chromatic, 4-note themes
generated before it by the orchestra. To put it more evocatively, the shepherd's melody seems to have been written by someone—and we know this someone is the shepherd—who has heard the orchestral music that preceded it.

The importance of the dialogue between the shepherd and the orchestra is, therefore, twofold. On the one hand, the orchestra and the shepherd are able to engage in a dialogue with each other because they are both the authors of their own music. On the other hand, their interaction uncovers the fundamental monothematicism of the orchestra’s contribution to the score. Stretching back to the very opening bars of the work, the orchestra has been involved in a constant process of variation that has fashioned a myriad iterations of a few basic ideas. This process is made plain and transparent in the orchestra’s musical conversation with the shepherd. This is enough to extend Tristan’s description of the ‘alte Weise’: it is the whole score that says to him that his fate is to experience a repeating cycle of traumas, always yearning, never dying.

The Orchestral Voice

The instrumental music of Tristan und Isolde does not just ‘say’ what Tristan’s fate is. It is, rather, the cause of this fate. Central to this interpretation of the role of music in Tristan's traumatic experiences is the issue of the nature of the existence of music within
the world of the narrative or, as the question is normally put in modern terms, when is
the music diegetic (present in the world in which Tristan and Isolde live) and when is it
not? This question is easy enough to avoid when discussing the shepherd because no
one is likely to interpret the performance of his melody as lacking an existence within
the world represented by Tristan und Isolde. The melody’s performance is represented
onstage visually and outside the orchestra pit aurally, and the shepherd, Kurwenal, and
Tristan all discuss the melody. One can, therefore, not merely assume, but also infer
that the shepherd’s melody is diegetic. I have already advanced beyond this somewhat,
by arguing, for the reasons outlined above, that not only the melody but also its
composition are diegetic. That is to say that the composition of the melody is also
represented onstage and occurs within the world of Tristan und Isolde. By suggesting
that the shepherd and the orchestra can hear and respond to each other, I have taken a
definitive step outside of the normal conventions of opera. In order to begin to settle
what this suggests about the nature of the orchestra—in particular, what this tells us
about Tristan’s musical interpretation of the repeated traumas of his life—it is worth
complicating this issue further and giving a fuller account of what it means to accept
that the shepherd and orchestra consciously interact.

To begin with, it must be acknowledged that the terms ‘diegesis’ and ‘diegetic’ have a
complicated history and somewhat contentious existence in modern scholarship. The
origins of the problem might be traced back to ancient Greek thought. In Book 3 of The
Republic, Plato describes three modes of representation, narrative in the poet’s own
voice (plain diegesis), in the voice of the characters within the narrative (diegesis by
mimesis) or a mixture of the two (mixed diegesis). What concerns Plato is where these
words purport to come from. Ultimately, he praises the poetry of Homer above tragedy
(the paradigmatic example of diegesis by mimesis) because tragedy involves the
mimicry of immorality, and the actor is at risk of taking on the immoral tendencies that
he imitates. Modern approaches to the question of diegesis address themselves to

more or less precisely the opposite problem. The questions for modern theorists are ‘who can perceive narrative phenomena?’ and ‘how should these phenomena be perceived?’. Above all, this approach is associated with film studies. The modern originator of the term diegetic is normally taken to be Etienne Souriau. In his 1951 filmological work, *La structure de l’univers filmique et le vocabulaire de la filmologie*, Souriau divides film into seven levels of reality, each of which functions, in effect, as its own independent reality.22 The same might be done for opera. There is the level perceived by the characters, the level perceived by the singers, the level perceived by the audience as represented (for example, the characters), the level perceived by the audience as representational (for example, the singers), the level perceived as non-representational (including the conductor and the theatre staff) and so on.

In Chapter 5, I adopted Matt Baileyshea’s concept of a ‘fully diegetic’ orchestra, in which ‘the orchestra is a constant presence even when silent... a mythical element, like air or water, a medium through which the characters of the cycle continually move, speak, sing, and act.’23 In the case of *Tristan und Isolde*, however, this standpoint is unsatisfactory. This is because in Baileyshea’s conception, the orchestra is ‘fundamentally passive and reactive.’24 This may be true in the *Ring*, in which characters really do seem to take hold of the orchestra and instrumentalize it, but in *Tristan und Isolde*, the orchestra has the appearance of an active agent. This is true in two senses. Firstly, as we have seen, the orchestra is a musically active agent that generates a large range of motific variations for itself. Secondly, the orchestra puts this generative ability to use. When responding to the shepherd, it actively generates new material from the shepherd’s ideas and seems to issue these as a challenge to the shepherd. Finally, very few characters show the same awareness of the orchestra that Baileyshea requires to underpin his interpretation. The opera begins with a perfect example of this deafness. At the very beginning of the opera the orchestra imitates the

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song of the young sailor. The orchestra proceeds in a similar manner to its response to
the shepherd, quickly generating numerous variations on the sailor’s idea. However,
unlike the shepherd, the sailor seems deaf to the orchestra’s developmental challenge.
When he repeats his melody at the start of Scene 2, it is unchanged. One might even
read a certain sense of disappointment into the orchestral accompaniment to this
repeat. The orchestra begins with a tense tremolo that gradually subsides from G
chromatically down to D. The orchestra thins out during this slide, the basses dropping
out after they reach F Sinking (with the orchestra’s spirits, one might think) until Isolde
raises the dynamic and the orchestra follows her back upwards. In other words, it is the
characters who are fundamentally passive and reactive. When he hears the shepherd’s
melody, Tristan realizes that he has been the paradigmatic example of this; his fate has
been dictated by the ‘alte Weise’.

This issue, the nature of the orchestra, was addressed explicitly by Wagner. In his
essay “Zukunftsmusik”, which was written in part to introduce Tristan und Isolde to
Paris in the hope of securing a performance there, he set out a vision of the orchestra
as a neo-classical theatrical device, a latter-day Grecian chorus. In Wagner’s
description, the orchestra has a persona—as the Grecian chorus does—but it is a
suspended presence, caught between the ‘reflective’—surely equivalent to Baileyshea’s
‘passive and reactive’—role of the Grecian chorus, and the ‘active personage’ of the
contemporary chorus. One way to think about this suspension is that the orchestra
does not sit comfortably within any of the diegetic levels of the work. It does not have
the same status as the operatic chorus within the diegesis, as ‘active personage’, nor is
its role fundamentally spectatorial, as Wagner describes the Grecian chorus. This
dislocation is embodied and spatialized. As Wagner imagines it, the Grecian chorus
became the operatic chorus when it ‘climbed the stage itself’. An apt comparison might
be made with the way that Souriau spatialized the levels of filmic reality. He

It is not at all clear that Wagner’s distinction between the ancient and modern choruses holds up. In the
only passage of his Poetics that deals substantively with the chorus, Aristotle argued that the chorus
should ‘share in the action’. Aristotle, Politics & Poetics, trans. Benjamin Jowett and S. H. Butcher, with
distinguished between the world of the reel and the world of the projection as well as the entirely physical world of our reality and the entirely virtual world of the film. All this remains relatively implicit in Souriau’s theory, and he takes comparatively little interest in the physical nature of the cinemas in which films are played. In the case of theatres, this is harder to ignore, because they divide so clearly into interrelated narrative spaces. There is an atheatrical world outside the theatre, which marks the theatre as such—everything that is not the theatre helps to mark the theatre as a narrative space. Additionally, most theatres, and certainly most opera houses, have peri-theatrical spaces, large lobby areas, restaurants, shops and box offices that are part of the narrative of a night at the opera, but not directly part of the narrative of the opera being staged. Finally, there are the four main narrative spaces; the spaces that not only mark the narrative as such, but actually depict the narrative. First is, naturally, the stage—the space on which the narrative is physically represented. Second is the backstage or offstage area. This area allows at once the characters, as well as the actors, to leave that part of the diegesis that is represented on the stage and allows the technical team to manipulate this onstage representation by means of lighting, sets etc. The third space is the auditorium, the space in which the audience construct an internal representation of the diegesis out of its physical representation on the stage. The final space, however, is by far the most problematic. It is the orchestra pit, and it does not belong fully to the stage or to the auditorium, although to emphasize it as an independent narrative space also seems uncomfortable. Wagner was explicit that the orchestra should be invisible, writing in his 1862 preface to the poem of the Ring that:

> I next should lay especial stress on the invisibility of the orchestra... which should be almost as carefully concealed from him as the cords, ropes, laths and scaffoldings of the stage decorations which, seen from the wings, as everyone knows, destroy all vestige of illusion.\(^{27}\)

The problem here relates to the physical nature of music. Any sound that is heard can be modelled as being produced by a vibrating body, being communicated as a series of

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compressions and rarefactions through a medium (in reality a series of media e.g. the air in the theatre-the eardrum-the ossicles-the oval window of the cochlea) before being turned into an electrical signal by the cochlea that is perceived as sound (this is further complicated by the fact that human hearing is binaural). But without a point of origin, the orchestra’s music has an equal existence in each of these spaces and, therefore, across realities.

For this reason, Wagner is remarkably fastidious in the way in which he spatializes diegetic instrumental sound in his scores. We have already seen that the shepherd’s melody is disconnected from the orchestra, coming from a cor anglais in the theatre. This manoeuvre is the rule rather than the exception. In Siegfried, Act II, Siegfried’s attempts at playing a homemade reed instrument are also accompanied by a cor anglais from the theatre, just as his horn call is produced by a French horn from the theatre. The clearest example of this practice as a fastidious act comes, however, in Parsifal. Immediately following the Prelude to Act I, each of the main themes of the Prelude are played by brass from the theatre. All the musical ideas that have existed only in the pit—in a more ‘purely musical’ state, perhaps—are wrenched out into the diegetic space. Against this, the orchestra pit stands out as an intentionally despatialized entity. This is generally true for opera, but it is particularly true in Wagner. Robbed of its site of production, the orchestra becomes a transgressive element that is able to cross between the theatrical spaces. It is this transgression that allows the orchestra its intimacy at once with the drama and with our feeling.

This spatialization of music makes room for Abbate’s terms for diegetic and non-diegetic, phenomenal music (heard by the characters) and noumenal (unheard) music (in practice, the category of ‘noumenal music’ inevitably collapses into ‘music played by the orchestra’). The true divide is, therefore, not the internal divide between what characters can and cannot hear, but the external, spatialized distinction between what they should hear and what they should not hear: onstage music against orchestral music. This distinction is underpinned by an implicit appeal to a convention—characters

28 Abbate, Unsung Voices 119.
do not normally hear the music played by the orchestra. However, this convention is by no means well established. As we have seen, Wagner seems to invent his own convention; diegetic music must come from the theatre not the pit. However, there is a more fundamental issue here. Abbate is blending two fundamentally distinct viewpoints. In theory, her terms are defined roughly from the perspective of the diegesis. What the characters hear is phenomenal. Unheard music is noumenal. This definition is already reliant to some extent on the second, spectatorial perspective, in which all music is heard. Stage music is phenomenal; music from the orchestra pit is noumenal. In Abbate’s framework, hearing advances to the foreground. The different types of music are defined, although not entirely transparently, in terms of shared and unshared hearing. It is perhaps better to think in terms of our shared deafness. I would argue that the fundamental division between phenomenal and noumenal, to appropriate the terminology of Abbate, is not a division between heard music (shared between us and the characters) and unheard music (that belongs only to the composer and us). Instead, it is the somewhat different division between music, which is fundamentally noumenal, and all of the other elements in Wagner’s works—texts, set, singers, gesture etc.—which are the phenomenal realization of the music as drama.

In his essay On the name ‘Musikdrama’, Wagner said that his preferred name for his works would be ‘deeds of music brought to sight’. As theorized by Wagner, we do not experience music as such, but rather as ‘Feeling’. Our experience of the noumenal is, therefore, no more direct than it is for the characters, who experience ‘the deeds of music’ as reality. To put it more plainly, music is the immediate expression of the emotional content of the plot to the audience and the events of the plot to the characters. Because, in Tristan und Isolde at least, the orchestra writes its own music,

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29 To give some counter examples, in ‘Voi che sapete’ from Mozart’s Il Nozze di Figaro, the pizzicato strings of the orchestra are surely intended to be understood as the ‘phenomenal’ sound of the accompanying guitar. Similarly, the dance of the seven veils in Salome is most easily understood as some form of diegetic or phenomenal music. In Handel’s Giulio Cesare, Act II, Scene 2, Caesar hears the orchestra as music just as he hears Cleopatra’s ‘V’adoro pupille’ as song. That is not to say that any of the characters involved hears the orchestra as such, but they hear something that is represented, if perhaps not literally, by the orchestra.

this means that the orchestra is the author of the traumatic events that Tristan has suffered.

The question remains, of course, what is the nature of this orchestral character whose imperceptible-as-such action spins the plot. In answering this, I must return to a problem that I have opened up for my interpretation of the Norns’ scene (see Chapter 5). If Baileyshea’s conception of the orchestra is flawed—if the orchestra is not a passive character, but, in effect, the only active character—then how were the Norns’ able to shape the actions of the orchestra? It strikes me that the only possible answer is that the Norns, like the orchestra, have a share in shaping the plot. Just as the orchestra cannot be fixed to any single theatrical space, after the destruction of the World Ash tree the Norns are despatialized beings. Finally, they are not directly accessed by the characters of the Ring. The orchestra functions as a fourth Norn, but there is a crucial difference. In Götterdämmerung, the Norns had begun to lose their grip over the world after Wotan’s violence against them. This culminates in the unravelling of their rope at the end of their scene. In Tristan und Isolde, the orchestra seems to have retained its instrumental power over the world. Nevertheless, I believe that the introduction of the shepherd’s melody triggers an analogous unravelling of the orchestra’s power. This culminates in the unveiling of the orchestra qua orchestra, a moment in which both we and the characters of the opera are able to perceive the noumenal directly.

Phenomenal Voices

I have, so far, presented my interpretation of the nature of music in Tristan und Isolde and the leading role of the orchestra in shaping this music in terms of Wagner’s own theories. Music is the progenitor of the drama. The orchestra is able to actively and consciously shape the music that engenders the drama. As a result, the orchestra bears responsibility for the traumas that Tristan has suffered, and Tristan is quite correct to identify his repeated pattern of suffering as musical. Tristan’s interpretation of the shepherd’s melody, therefore, reproduces Wagner’s theoretical stance within Wagner’s artwork. The shepherd, as a playing-composer rather than as a singer, is likewise an active musical agent and therefore takes his own share in shaping the drama. He tells
us so himself when he reveals that Isolde’s arrival will be enacted musically by a
change in his melody. For Tristan to escape from the repeating cycle of trauma that he
is bound to by the ‘alte Weise’, he would need to engage with the score as a similarly
active agent. To discover if this is possible it is necessary to invert the question of
diegesis as I have presented it so far. The question is not ‘what can the characters
hear?’, but rather ‘what sound are the characters making?’

This is a question that is all too easily passed over. In *Unsung Voices*, Abbate calls the
conventional inference that characters in operas are unaware that they are singing ‘a
basic perceptual code in hearing and viewing opera’. Similarly, in his article, *On
“Diegesis” and “Diegetic”: Words and Concepts*, Stefano Castelvecchi gives an account
of Act II, Scene 2 of *Il Nozze di Figaro* and argues that ‘anyone familiar with the
conventions of opera’ should be able to discern when the characters are singing,
although the actors are singing throughout.

In Wagner, however, this convention is clearly inverted; it is only the characters who
fully know if they are singing or speaking. Wagner’s characters refer to themselves as
singing in *Das Liebesverbot*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Das Rheingold*,
*Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

Moreover, they recognize a mode of utterance that is not singing, which they call
‘speaking’. Wagner uses the verb ‘sagen’ in each of his completed operas. Within the
world of *Tristan und Isolde* the characters are capable of singing and speaking, but the
only way that the audience can distinguish between the two is when the characters use
the text to tell them.

A perfect example of this reality—in Wagner it is the audience that is unsure if the
characters are singing—can be found in *Tristan und Isolde*. In Act I, Kurwenal offers a

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31 This is much closer to the problem of diegesis as it was first posed by Plato.
34 Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen* [in 16 vols.] (Leipzig: Breitkopf et Härtel; C. F. W. Siegel; R. Linnemann, [1911–6]).
derisory response to Isolde’s demand that Tristan should come to pay her homage. In
the printed text, it is quite clear that Kurwenal’s outburst divides into two. It begins with
his ‘spoken’ answer and ends with a song. Wagner’s stage direction dictates that the
second part is sung, and the song is placed within speech marks. This is obscured by
the text. Kurwenal refers to his answer as a call (‘Ich ruf’s’) that Brangäne should say
(‘du sag’s’), and there is no mention of singing until the next scene with the words of
Isolde: ‘when they laughingly sing their songs, what a reply I could give them!’ By this
point it is not at all clear that she is talking about Kurwenal’s song; Isolde was equally
riled by the words of the sailor atop the mast. As Castelvecchi suggests, we might look
for clues deriving from the ‘conventions of opera’, and Wagner’s conventional style in
particular. Kurwenal’s song has an end-rhyming scheme, which stands against the
Stabreim that typically structures the poetry of Wagner’s post-1849 works
(Meistersinger is the exception). Nevertheless, this is hardly a unique example of
end-rhyme within Tristan und Isolde. The eponymous pair frequently lapse into
end-rhyme while duetting in Act II. Nor can this be understood, simply, as the ecstasies
of love overflowing into the poetry, as not only Kurwenal, but also King Mark slip in and
out of end rhyme. This is not to say that Tristan, Isolde and Mark are not singing, but in
these examples no-one (including Wagner) explicitly states that they are. Given that the
characters seem to spend most of their time speaking, end-rhyme is too frequent and
haphazardly used to be taken as a conventional marker of sung-ness.

Of course, the convention that I have advanced as the basic perceptual code of
Wagner’s works—that the characters understand what is sung and what is said, but the
audience cannot—might well seem to fit with a well-known alternative interpretive
stance to the basic convention outlined by Abbate and Castelvecchi. Edward Cone in
from Delft. Selected Essays argued that we might, indeed should, understand operatic

35 ‘As Tristan tries to stop him with gestures, and Brangäne indignantly turns to withdraw, Kurwenal sings at
the top of his voice to the hesitating, departing woman’. (’Da Tristan durch Gebärden ihm zu wehren
sucht, und Brangäne entrüstet sich zum Weggehen wendet, singt Kurwenal der zögernd sich
Enterrnenden mit höchster Stärke nach.’) Tristan, Act I, sc. 2.
36 ‘Ich ruf’s: du sag’s, und grollten mir tausend Frau Isolden!’ Tristan, Act I, sc. 2. ‘Wie lachend sie mir
Lieder singen, wohl könnt’ auch ich erwidern!’ Tristan, Act I, sc. 3.
characters as always singing, precisely in opposition to Abbate’s code. Briefly, Cone argued that because we know that operatic characters sometimes compose their own songs—he gives the example of Alfredo’s improvised drinking song in *La Traviata*—and it is impossible to distinguish between these songs and their other musical utterances, we can, or indeed should, understand operatic characters as always being the authors of their own music. In Wagner’s works, it is surely true that there is no clear distinction that we can discern between song that has been composed by Wagner’s characters (such as Walter’s *Preislied*) and song that has not been. Nevertheless, this distinction does seem to be scrupulously maintained by Wagner’s characters. That is to say that at any time they could communicate to us, through the text, whether they or another character is singing, but they only do so infrequently. Far from understanding ‘that they live in a world of music, and that they express themselves and communicate with one another in song’, Wagner’s characters are the only ones who truly understand that they have an existence in which they do not communicate with one another in song.

My basic point in this discussion is that Wagner has fundamentally severed a link between the world of *Tristan und Isolde* and the real world in which it is performed. As an audience, we cannot follow Abbate’s ‘basic perceptual code’, because we are told that sometimes the characters are singing. At the same time, as I have tried to demonstrate, no appeal to the poetical or musical conventions of opera in general or Wagner’s style specifically can make the distinction between the characters’ singing and speaking, as they do for Castelvecchi in Mozart. Even Cone’s radical alternative is unavailable to us because the distinction between singing and not singing is not truly dissolved, but simply moved beyond our capacity to perceive it. Isolde can tell us if Kurwenal is singing or speaking; we can only hear the singer sing.

In other words, this is another way of dividing phenomenal and noumenal music in Wagner’s works. His characters experience all of his music as reality, but the audience can distinguish between the music that the characters hear (phenomenal) and the

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37 Cone, *The World of Opera*.
music the characters experience through their other senses as reality (noumenal). Wagner’s audience hears the characters' voices as sung. Only the characters can tell the audience whether the musical content of this singing is (for them) phenomenal or noumenal (i.e. whether it is sung or spoken). In order to take on an active role in shaping their reality, a Wagnerian character must learn to intentionally access this noumenal content by hearing their reality and singing whenever they want to. The shepherd’s melody leads Tristan to the threshold of this realization. Finally, Isolde learns to make this their reality.

**Die alte Weise: Perception and performance in Tristan’s monologue in Act III, Scene 1**

On hearing the shepherd's melody as its dialogue with the orchestra continues, Tristan exclaims ‘must I understand you thus you old sad melody with your plaintive sound?’ He then recounts that this melody has been present as each of the physical and emotional traumas that have afflicted him were enacted. He heard it as he learned of the death of each of his parents, and as he drifted wounded to Ireland after his fight with Morold. Now, he reminds us, the melody means that Isolde’s ship has not been sighted. Perhaps most importantly, however, Tristan comes in this monologue to believe that it is the shepherd’s melody itself that has trapped him within this traumatic cycle, suffering without dying:

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**Tristan**

Die alte Weise sagt mir’s wieder: The old melody
mich sehnen — und sterben! says to me again
Nein! Ach nein! yearning and death!
So heisst sie nicht! No! Oh no!
Sehnen! Sehnen! That's not what it means!

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Im Sterben mich zu sehnen, In death to yearn,
vor Sehnsucht nicht zu sterben! 40 from yearning never to die!

Tristan becomes, if only for a moment, aware of the noumenal music that directs his reality. Moreover, he discloses to us the meaning of this musical reality. It is a repeating monothematic cycle that dictates the repeating traumas of his life, the bereavements, the wounds, and the yearning that will survive even his own death. As we have seen, and, I argue, as Tristan himself comes to perceive, this monothematicism is a feature not only of the ‘alte Weise’ that Tristan hears but also of the whole orchestral score that Tristan perceives as reality.

In other words, at precisely the point where the shepherd is revealing the orchestra as a monothematic entity with a real, if hard to define existence within the world of the narrative, Tristan interjects and explicitly narrativizes the nature of music within that world. According to Tristan, it is the musical labyrinth that always surrounds him which has trapped him in an inescapable cycle of traumatic suffering. But it is in precisely this passage, as Tristan seems resigned to the same musical path of longing, never dying, that he shows signs of breaking himself free from this constraint. What makes this escape possible is that Tristan finds a quite different way of singing with the shepherd’s melody compared with his way of singing with the orchestra before this passage, and this new way of singing with the shepherd’s melody leads him to a new way of interacting with the orchestra. This new way of singing is a kind of heterophonic texture. Tristan maintains a loose unison with the shepherd and with the orchestra, which is displaced from true unison by rhythmic offsets between the two voices or by the two voices diverging before returning to unison. This texture gives the impression that the singer and the orchestra are listening to and responding to each other, just as the shepherd and the orchestra interacted. As in the case of Kurwenal’s ‘sagen’ and ‘singen’, what is most important about this texture is that it communicates to the audience that the singer and orchestra can hear each other. In the cases of perfect

40 Tristan, Act, III, sc. 1.
unison and of counterpoint, the singer and orchestra can only be kept together by some kind of prior knowledge of the melody. This can be interpreted in a number of ways. In reality, it is because both are following a score laid out by Wagner, but it could also be that Tristan or the orchestra or both know what the other will play or sing before they do so. Importantly, this is only known by those on stage. Only the musicians know for sure the agreed score; only the characters are sure if they know what the orchestra is playing. These textures, therefore, render improvised dialogue between the orchestra and the shepherd impossible. As a result, as far as the audience can see, the onstage character has been totally subjugated either to the composer or to the orchestra, the being whose music dictates the nature of the character’s reality. The ‘loose’ unison that Tristan engages in, however, can be interpreted as such a dialogue. Moreover, it is a dialogue that Tristan discloses to the audience. Tristan copies and anticipates the orchestra in a way that opens up the interpretation that he can hear and respond to the orchestra. If Tristan can do this, then he can engage with the musical creation of his world as an active agent.

Before this passage, Tristan, like the other characters, tends to sing either in unison or some kind of counterpoint with the orchestra. I have given two examples of this already. In both extracts presented in Example 6.9, Isolde and Tristan simply add text to the pseudo-tetrachords that the orchestra is working out. After the shepherd begins to play at b. 626, Tristan begins singing in relatively close unison with him at b. 642. The only disunity between the two is that Tristan subdivides the shepherd’s melody rhythmically in order to fit in the text. This is, of course, quite different to singing in unison with the orchestra, because we can be sure that Tristan can hear the shepherd’s melody. In fact, by singing in unison with the shepherd’s pipe, Tristan is demonstrating his familiarity with the melody, a point that he underlines in the next line that he sings by anticipating the shepherd’s melody at beat 4 of b. 645 and beat 2 of b.646. This is all the more true as the shepherd’s melody is, to at least some extent, a fixed pattern; it is possible for Tristan to predict what the shepherd will do next.
This combination of anticipation and following characterizes Tristan’s relationship with the shepherd’s melody until the shepherd ceases to play in b. 719. He frequently arrives at the same note as the shepherd either just before or just ahead of him. As we have seen, however, in this passage, the shepherd is also engaged in an exchange with the orchestra, which takes over from the shepherd at b. 670. Initially, it may seem that Tristan reverts to a straightforward unison with the orchestra in bb. 670-4. The only two rhythmic offsets are in b. 673 between Tristan’s D♭ and the bass clarinet which joins him, and between the second violins on A♭ and Tristan who joins them (an octave below) on the last quaver of the bar. However, in the next unit Tristan demonstrates his perception of the orchestra and asserts his independence from it.

At b. 674, the orchestra returns to unit a₁ from the shepherd’s melody. Against this, Tristan sings a line in which he begins by naming ‘die alte Weise’. The melody that he uses to intone this line is the final melody from the Act II love duet (which Waack called the ‘Scheidegesang’), the motif that Isolde will sing in the ‘Liebestod’. Twice, this motif appears to be pointing towards an escape for Tristan from the tragic, repeating path laid out for him. In Act II it seems to be pointing towards the consummation of the love duet before it is interrupted by the arrival of King Marke. In the ‘Liebestod’ it does, finally, lead to the end of the opera, culminating in the final resolution of the so-called ‘Tristan chord’. The most remarkable aspect of its appearance as Tristan sings ‘die alte Weise’, is that Tristan finds the ‘Scheidegesang’—his own ‘and’re Weise’—within the ‘alte Weise’ (Example 6.12). More important than this, however, is how Tristan finds this melody. He picks it out using his new texture. He finds this motif, which promises relief from the labyrinthine cycle of trauma, within the orchestra’s rendition of the ‘alte Weise’. At b. 691, he repeats the trick, again singing ‘die alte Weise’ to the tune of the ‘Scheidegesang’. But this time the accompaniment is provided by the shepherd, whom there can be no doubt that Tristan hears.

What I am proposing is, therefore, a revision of Baileyshea’s ‘fully diegetic music’. Above, I criticized two aspects of Baileyshea’s idea in terms of Wagner’s theories. I argued that the passivity of the orchestra as he construes it cannot be reconciled with
Example 6.12: ‘Die alte Weise’: the melody of the ‘Scheidegesang’ is bracketed

Wagner’s description and that character’s unawareness of the orchestra was the norm rather than the exception. Nevertheless, I would argue that Tristan’s monologue is a more or less archetypal ‘struggle for control’ as Baileyshea describes it. It is not, however, a struggle between two characters for control of the orchestra, as he would expect. Instead, it is a struggle between the orchestra and Tristan for control of the music and, thus, of the drama. This is, however, a struggle that Tristan loses. Precisely as he exclaims ‘In death to yearn, in yearning never to die!’, the orchestra takes him back into its power (Example 6.13). A final moment of lucidity follows as he echoes the orchestra in bb. 719-727, singing ‘What never dies, yearning now calls her, the distant healer, to the peace of death’. At this point, the orchestra returns to the ‘Motiv des siechen Tristan’, and, as if overwhelmed by the memory, Tristan loses his ability to perceive the orchestra and, in direct unison recounts the first time that Isolde healed his wound.

At this point, it is necessary to abandon the opening premise of this chapter. I have made every effort to refer to the motifs of Tristan und Isolde without relying on their referential meanings and to treat them as musical thoughts. According to Cooke’s designation of Wagner’s motifs as ‘symphonic themes’, the shepherd’s melody itself might be understood as a single motif. I have treated it as non-referential, and yet it has

41 ‘Im Sterben mich zu sehnen, vor Sehnsucht nicht zu sterben!’ Tristan, Act III, sc. 1.
42 ‘Die nie erstirbt, sehnhend nun ruft um Sterbens Ruh’ sie der fernen Ärztin zu.’ Tristan, Act III, sc. 1.
had a lot to say. However, when Tristan sings with the melody, it is a moment in which a character’s verse-melody clarifies and defines the referential or poetic meaning of a motif, precisely as I described in Chapter 2. When Tristan tells us what this motif says to him, he is also conditioning the motif’s meaning as this utterance. What the shepherd’s melody refers to according to the structure of PTSD laid out in Chapter 2 is Tristan’s fate—to experience repeated traumas, to yearn without the release of death. When Tristan sings with the shepherd, therefore, two systems of meaning-making collide. According to both my referential and my (pseudo-Abbatean) musical interpretive standpoints, Tristan is saying ‘I hear this music and understand it shapes my fate; I too can sing and shape my own fate.’

‘Liebestod’, ‘Verklärung’ and Conclusion

‘Liebestod’ and ‘Verklärung’

When Tristan loses his struggle with the orchestra, he nevertheless points the way towards the passage in which a character will, finally, assert independence from the orchestra’s control, Isolde’s ‘Liebestod’. There are two ways in which Tristan’s monologue does this. The melody that Tristan used to assert his autonomy is the same that Isolde hears in the ‘Liebestod’, the ‘Scheidegesang’. Just as Tristan tells us that he
can hear the shepherd's melody, Isolde tells us that she begins hearing the
‘Scheidegesang’ immediately after Tristan dies. ‘Listen! He is waking!’ she exclaims.\footnote{‘horch! Er wacht!’ Trist\(a\), Act III, sc. 2.}
The ‘Liebestod’ itself clarifies that what she is hearing is this melody. She asks, for
example, if ‘only I can hear this melody?’ using the ‘Scheidegesang’.\footnote{‘Höre ich nur diese Weise?’ Trist\(a\), Act III, sc. 3.} However, even
without the text, we might infer that she can hear Tristan’s new ‘Weise’ from the way in
which she sings with the orchestra, because, like Tristan, she adopts the same
heterophonic texture, alternately listening to and leading the orchestra.

One of the peculiar aspects of the ‘Liebestod’ is that Isolde is, in a sense, superfluous.
Donald Tovey notes that Liszt’s piano transcription of the ‘Liebestod’ includes just seven
notes that belong uniquely to Isolde’s line and to the fact that Wagner himself had
simply omitted Isolde’s part when giving the piece in concerts. John Deathridge weaves
this, alongside Wagner’s original prose sketch for the scene in which Isolde is drowned
in the melody—which appears to rise from Tristan’s soul—into a reading in which Isolde
‘is transformed into an innocent shell serving only to receive the sounds of Tristan’s
music’.\footnote{John Deathridge, Wagner: Beyond Good and Evil (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of
California Press, 2008), 141. A striking rhetorical gesture in Deathridge’s analysis is the gradual making
real of the music emerging from Tristan’s body. It begins as ‘melodies of love, which appear to rise up as
if out of Tristan’s soul’ in Deathridge’s quotation of Wagner’s sketch, becoming ‘music that... seems to
ascend out of the body of Tristan’ and, finally, ‘the music arising out of his body’ in Deathridge’s reading of
the scene. Deathridge, Wagner, 140, 141 and 148.} But the superfluousness that Tovey seems to imply characterizes Isolde’s
line—‘little essential to Wagner’s invention’, he calls it—is, in fact, its most important
characteristic.\footnote{Donald Tovey, Essays in Musical Analysis, vi (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 104.}

This is best understood in comparison to the original appearance of this melody in the
Act II love duet. The ‘Scheidegesang’ is the most prominent melody in two passages of
the duet; Tristan begins both, the first with ‘thus we die’ and the second with ‘how to
catch it’.\footnote{‘So starben wir’ and ‘Wie sie fassen’. Trist\(a\), Act II, sc. 2.} In both passages the singers and orchestra are in a close unison. Indeed,
the unison is so close that even when both singers sing at once, both their lines are
normally represented more or less exactly by the multivalent orchestral voice. As I have
argued, in such a texture there can be no illusion of spontaneity, and the existence of the external composer becomes evident. But we might go further. If we understand the voice of the orchestra as Wagner argued that we should in “Zukunftsmusik”, as an active musical agent passing judgement on the action, then the characters that simply follow the orchestra—perhaps even unaware that their actors are singing—are reduced to the status of marionettes. Tovey argued that Liszt was justified in silencing Isolde in the ‘Liebestod’, but in the love duet the characters are already musically silent, they merely add text to the utterances of the orchestra. And in Wagner’s works, because the action of the drama is the deed of the music, such silence indicates an impotence. The ‘Liebestod’ is quite different. As Tovey points out, Isolde ‘is singing for sixty-eight bars, and in twenty-five of these she is able to deliver the main theme, constantly broken’. In the other forty-three bars she is, he says, ‘descanting in counterpoints’\textsuperscript{48} This perhaps under- and overstates the break between the ‘main’ (i.e. orchestral) theme and Isolde’s line. In other words, we are not in the situation where the singer’s and orchestra’s lines are so different that they can only be held together by the intervention of a composer. Instead, this is precisely the same situation as with Tristan and the shepherd. Isolde shows that she can perceive the music as such, and she resists being folded into the music of the orchestra.

I have said that we can be sure that Tristan can hear the shepherd’s melody, and that the way he sings demonstrates a perception of the orchestra. I do not mean by this that Tristan is singing diegetically. And yet I do believe that there is a sense in which Tristan has come to sing in this passage. The voice that Castelvecchi identifies as encapsulating the operatic convention of diegesis in its pre-cinematic form is that of André Grétry. His bon mot, ‘there is singing for speaking and singing for singing’, seems to capture the essence of Abbate’s ‘basic perceptual code’\textsuperscript{49} In opera, there simply is singing that is speaking as well as singing that is singing. In reality, however, Grétry’s apparent binary quickly breaks down. Grétry’s explanation is formulated in platonic

\textsuperscript{48} Tovey, \textit{Essays in Musical Analysis, vi}, 104.


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terms. That is to say that he refers to singing that is pretending to be speaking and singing that makes no pretence at being anything other than singing. However, he reaches this formulation in response to a problem that he sets out in the perceptual terms of Souriau, Abbate and Castelvecchi. In composing his *Richard Coeur-de-Lion*, Grétry agonized over how to make his audience perceive the romance sung by Blondel as sung (diegetic), even going so far as to consider making it the only music within the work. This may seem a paradigmatic instance of ‘chanter pour chanter’, but Grétry immediately gives an entirely contradictory example:

There is singing as speaking and singing as singing. In *Isabelle and Gertrude*, for example, Isabelle sings ‘Quel air pur!’ with a full orchestral accompaniment; her mother, who is in the pavilion, does not hear. Dorlis enters and pulls at her skirt. She utters a small cry; her mother awakes in fear. People must singularly enjoy the pleasure of giving themselves over to the illusions of the theatre. It is a good thing, because too much severity would destroy the dramatic art.

‘Chanter pour chanter’ seems, therefore, to mean two contradictory things. In the example of *Richard Coeur-de-Lion*, the singer onstage sings to make Blondel sing. Isabelle’s song, however, does not represent speech; it is singing for the sake of singing. This, indeed, is the way that Grétry’s prescription was translated contemporaneously. The cinematic discourse on diegesis may seem to have made these two modes—‘singing for [i.e. to represent] singing’ and ‘singing for the sake of singing’—into irreconcilable poles. Castelvecchi, for example, wraps precisely the kind of singing exemplified by Isabelle within ‘chanter pour parler’. What Grétry is giving us, however, is a way to reconcile the divisions within operatic singing between spoken and sung and realistically and operatically sung, without having to collapse them into a single category.

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52 ‘as any operagoer knows, the singing that does not mean “singing” is conventionally used to represent not only the characters’ “parler” but also their thoughts and feelings (as are the words of spoken drama).’ Castelvecchi, *On “Diegesis” and “Diegetic”: Words and Concepts* 150.
of absolute singing, as Cone does. The two modes of ‘chanter pour chanter’ that Grétry sets out can be justified as a single category in platonic terms. In both modes, we are really hearing the characters sing. In *Richard cœur-de-lion*, Blondel is singing in his romance, but in *Isabelle et Gertrude*, Isabelle is also singing her air. The difference is only on the side of perception. We perceive Blondel’s singing as verisimilitude and Isabelle’s singing as absolute artifice. That is, in Souriau’s terms, Blondel is singing within the diegetic universe. The universe in which Isabelle is singing is the opera *qua* opera, the universe in which we give ourselves over to the illusions of the theatre. This is what distinguishes Grétry from Castelvecchi, for whom singing must at least represent an internally expressed thought if not an outwardly expressed utterance.

I would argue that the only way we can understand the ‘Liebestod’ is as ‘singing for singing’ in the true, ambiguous sense that Grétry coined. As Isolde begins to sing, we approach a state of absolute artificiality. The sense that the singing is representational is stripped away. The sounds made onstage no longer depict ‘sagen’ or ‘singen’; they simply are singing. The person onstage no longer represents Isolde; Isolde simply emerges before us onstage. This is not Isolde of Cornwall, a character produced by a text and a score. Instead, she is an Isolde who resides knowingly within an operatic work. She recognizes that she is a deed of music brought to sight, and in recognizing this she becomes something more: no longer a musical deed, but a musical doer.

It is in engaging with her existence on these terms that allows Isolde to take control of her own destiny. When she sings the ‘Liebestod’ using the heterophonic texture discovered by Tristan, she crosses out of the world represented in *Tristan und Isolde* into our own, the world in which the orchestra is audible and the theatre visible. Her escape, and Tristan’s, from the monothematic web spun by the orchestra is into the world of music and composers. But I would argue, against Cone, that this world of music is not the operatic world, but our own. It seems to me that it is precisely this denouement that was staged in Peter Konwitschny’s production of *Tristan und Isolde* in Munich in 1998. Isolde performs the ‘Liebestod’ with Tristan in front of a closed theatrical curtain. As she finishes singing, they depart, only for the curtain to part,
revealing their graves, mourned by Mark and Brangäne. One version of Tristan and Isolde are free to die, the other to depart. It is well known that Wagner’s preferred term for this passage was ‘Verklärung’, transformation, and that he reserved the name ‘Liebestod’ for the Prelude. The distinction in this terminology captures something inescapable. Isolde does not simply die in the closing bars of the opera, but she wins for herself and for Tristan a new kind of existence, an existence within opera on operatic terms. It is this victory that liberates Tristan from the cyclicism of trauma that is encoded within the score.

**Conclusion**

In Chapter 2, I argued that all of Wagner’s works after 1849 could be understood in terms of the theory of motif that I laid out in that chapter. In the light of previous critical literature, it may seem that this claim cannot hold true for *Tristan und Isolde*, because Wagner’s use of motifs in this work differs from the template outlined in *Opera and Drama* and realized in the *Ring*. This is the view expressed by Abbate, and it can also be grounded in Wagner’s own prose writings. In ‘Zukunftsmusik’, Wagner claimed to have forgotten his theoretical premises as he wrote *Tristan und Isolde*, writing with ‘utter disregard of every theoretic scruple’ and outstripping the ‘system’ that he had earlier outlined.\(^\text{53}\) The significance of the shepherd’s melody, therefore, is that it is a motif that refers to an extra-musical meaning in terms of foreboding and remembrance. Moreover, the shepherd’s melody is recognized as such by a character when Tristan laments that the melody dictates his fate. Just as Wagner outlines in *Opera and Drama*, the shepherd’s melody first appears as a foreboding in a moment of relative stasis in the drama. Later in Act III, as the orchestra plays the melody, Tristan uses the melody to explain its meaning. The shepherd’s melody tells him his fate is to yearn and not to die. In this way, the shepherd’s melody functions as the very thing trapping Tristan in the kind of self-reinforcing structure of persistent PTSD described in Ehlers’s and Clarke’s model. The shepherd’s melody functions as something more than a trigger. Because Tristan ‘heard’ this melody blowing the sails of his ship to Ireland as he sought Isolde’s

\(^{53}\) Wagner, *PW, iii* 327.

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healing, the shepherd’s melody seems more like a traumatic memory in itself. It is a vivid sensory memory that he associates with the death of his parents. At the same time, the fact that the shepherd continues to play this melody makes Tristan’s memories of his past traumas inescapable. Finally, Tristan hears the melody itself as inextricable from the consequences these traumas.

At the same time, the shepherd’s melody reveals that this cycle of repeating trauma is written into the score as a whole. As Tristan reveals that his fate is controlled by music, the shepherd is engaged in a dialogue with the orchestra. Each takes it in turn to vary the shepherd’s melody. This brings to the surface a fundamental monothematicism in the orchestra’s music across Tristan und Isolde. Writing of the Ring in 1854, Wagner wrote that there was ‘scarcely a bar in the orchestra which is not developed out of preceding motifs.\(^{54}\) The same is true of Tristan und Isolde. From the first bars of the Prelude, the orchestra is engaged in a process of restless development in which each motif seems to emerge by the variation of a previous one. The result is a kind of repetition that matches the repeating cycle of traumas described by Tristan. Just as the fate expressed by the ‘alte Weise’ has been realized in a sequence of varying but inescapably repeating traumas, the score of Tristan und Isolde consists of an endlessly varied but fundamentally repeating set of motifs. Within the work itself, these two processes of variation are brought together in the moment in which Tristan reveals the meaning of the ‘alte Weise’. The orchestra and the shepherd are engaged in a dialogue that consists of variations on the shepherd’s melody at precisely the moment that Tristan explains what this melody means. These processes are also held together by Wagner’s prose writings. Wagner described his post-1849 works as ‘deeds of music brought to sight’\(^{55}\). In Tristan und Isolde, the sequence of varied repetition of motifs is realized as the reality of the repeated traumas suffered by the eponymous characters.

At the beginning of this chapter, I expressed a desire to understand whether the motifs of Tristan und Isolde could be understood in terms of trauma if they were stripped of

\(^{54}\) Wagner, Richard Wagner’s Letters to August Roeckel, 108.

\(^{55}\) Wagner, PW, v, 303.
their referential meanings. In a world that consists of the deeds of music, when motifs are connected through an underlying monothematicism, reality itself becomes a series of varying repetitions. For Tristan this is realized as the ‘alte Weise’, unceasing reminders of the past traumas of his life wrapped up in a foreboding that new traumas await in the future. Nevertheless, Tristan reaches towards a musical mechanism through which he might escape this cycle. By engaging with the orchestra as an equal, as the shepherd does, a character may be able to shape the music that produces their reality and thus achieve agency. This is precisely what happens in the Liebestod at the conclusion of the opera. Reproducing the texture that Tristan first uses when revealing the meaning of the ‘alte Weise’, Isolde engages in a dialogue with the orchestra as an equal. This leads to a final parallel with Wagner’s biography. In My Life, Wagner recalls the sound of cannon and musket fire echoing intrusively in his mind for several weeks following the May Uprising. These intrusive sounds were brought to an end by the intrusion of music into the sounds of Wagner’s world. Travelling from Strasbourg to Paris at the beginning of June 1849, Wagner recalled that because of the sound of the wheels of his carriage, it seemed to him that he could hear Beethoven’s ‘Ode to Joy’ as if played on ‘deep bass instruments.’ Just as Tristan and Isolde are liberated from the repeating musical cycle of trauma that they are trapped in by perceiving the musical reality of their world, so Wagner was relieved from the echoing sound of gunfire by hearing a musical dimension within the real world. This raises a final point about the division between reality and art. In My Life, Wagner claims to be reproducing his recollections from 1849. In reality, as the author of this autobiography, he has the power to shape the narrative. Andreas Dorschel reminds us that the life of an artist and their art exist in a complicated relation: art can imitate life; life can be lived in a way that imitates art; art can make up for something absent from life. To this can be added, in Wagner’s case, that life can be written up in a way that demonstrates the proper connection with his art. Ultimately, this is the power that allows Isolde to escape from the fate proclaimed by the ‘alte Weise’. It is the power of an author, the power that Wagner used to write his own healing.

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56 Dorschel, Life’s Work, 69.
Conclusion

Trauma has a remarkable presence in the life and works of Richard Wagner. There is substantial evidence that Wagner was a witness to traumatic events during the May Uprising of 1849, and the aftermath of this traumatic experience can be read in every area of his subsequent output. In his theoretical works, he outlined a musical device, the motif, in terms of inescapable memory and anxious foreboding. In his artistic works, this new device came to be the fundamental unit of his scores. He reinterpreted his earlier works in these motific terms, and he used these motifs as mnemonic triggers for traumatic events within his dramas. More than this, the characters of his post-1849 artworks seem to inhabit worlds that reproduce a traumatized perspective on the world. At the beginning of Götterdämmerung, the Norns reveal that the world of the Ring cannot be understood in terms of a single coherent musical and poetic narrative. The result is that the audience cannot fully trust what they have seen and heard, and the possibility of an open and progressive story of the Ring is foreclosed. In Tristan und Isolde, Tristan reveals that his reality is dictated by a repeating musical structure that condemns him to repeat the traumatic events that have characterized his life. In the introduction to this thesis, I set out my aims in the terms of Bruno Latour: I intended to use trauma, and PTSD in particular, to hold together Wagner's life, theory and artworks in a coherent and convincing configuration in order to produce a 'real' interpretive standpoint towards Wagner's motifs. In response to this aim, I have argued that Wagner experienced traumatic events during the revolution and that this led him to develop the motific technique that he theorized in the wake of the revolution, a technique that
reproduces the effects of trauma as they are constituted in modern theories of posttraumatic stress disorder.

This needs to be complicated in one final way. At the end of Chapter 6, I drew a parallel between Wagner's release from traumatic re-experiencing and Tristan and Isolde's release from the traumatic reality of their world. Wagner no longer experienced the re-echoing sound of gunfire after the music of Beethoven's Ninth symphony intruded into his perception of the real world. Isolde escapes the repeating cycle of trauma in Tristan and Isolde when she learns to engage with the fundamentally musical reality of the world that she inhabits. Wagner's reminiscences of hearing the sound of gunfire for weeks following the uprising are a striking depiction of sonic re-experiencing. As such, the sound seems akin to a Wagnerian motif; it is a sonic intrusion from the past into the present that carries with it the anxiety of a past trauma. The problem is that this recollection cannot, however, be verified by any third-party account, nor even by a contemporary source authored by Wagner. All of Wagner's autobiographical works have a problematic status. As John Deathridge points out, Wagner's purpose in writing them was to 'construct himself as an evolving subjective presence at odds with the “fact” of real chronological time, fully cognizant of the philosophical implications of such a move.' The episode in which Wagner is relieved of the echoes of gunfire thus reveals a certain circularity in Wagner's encounter with trauma. Wagner experienced traumatic events in 1849, and following this experience he produced a series of theoretical and artistic works that realize this trauma as a mnemonic musical device. In addition, when Wagner comes to dictate his autobiography, his trauma finds itself rewritten as a sonic experience that brings together memory and anxiety and which can only be healed by music. In other words, Wagner himself is already complicit in the reality-making act of collaboration between life, work and trauma that I outline in the Introduction to this thesis.

As a result, the moment in which Wagner is healed of the re-experienced sound of gunfire by the music of Beethoven is a moment that draws together many of the threads

57 Deathridge, *Wagner lives: issues in autobiography*, 16.
explored in this thesis. As in Chapters 1 and 3, it is an episode in which Wagner’s autobiographical recollections must be problematized. It encapsulates the mnemonic-prophetic capacity of sound explored in Chapters 2 and 4. Perhaps most intriguingly, this moment reproduces the problematic storytelling of the Norns’ scene, analysed in Chapter 5. We cannot trust *My Life* to be an accurate representation of Wagner’s experience, but nor can we discount the possibility that it may accurately represent this experience. It is impossible, therefore, to be sure if the re-echoing sound of gunfire belongs to 1849 or to Wagner’s recollections of 1849, whether in any sense honest or not, when dictating *My Life*. This is not a problem for my main argument, as there is reliable evidence that Wagner was exposed to traumatic events in 1849, but it does reproduce the fractured storytelling of the *Ring* and the circularity of persistent PTSD as it is represented in Ehlers’s and Clarke’s cognitive model.

This episode brings together music and perceptions of altered reality in the same way that Isolde’s *Liebestod* does. Both Isolde and Wagner find themselves in a world in which music has a greater existence than it does in reality. The result, I would argue, is an Isolde and a Wagner who have become at once more real and more artificial than before. Isolde is more real, in that she has won an awareness of her place within reality and begins to operate in the real world. She is more artificial, in that this awareness is inextricable from her position as a made character, the invented creation of a written-out score. Wagner is more artificial, in that he exists as a rewritten entity who may or may not reflect his lived reality. At the same time, he emerges as more real in Latour’s terms, because his experience has been made to echo and foreshadow the repeating motific soundworld of his post-1849 works. As in Wagner’s description of motifs—‘in which we remember a Foreboding, whilst they turn our Remembrance into a prophecy’—his journey to Paris is caught between foreboding the musical developments of his later artworks and remembering them into his biography.

It strikes me that this is the position in which this thesis leaves Wagner’s motifs. They were made, at considerable effort, in Wagner’s prose. I suggest they were made in this

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way because of Wagner’s encounter with traumatic experiences in the May Uprising. The echoing gunfire ringing in his ears in the weeks following the revolution led him to elevate the marginal Erinnerungsmotive of the pre-1849 works to be the fundamental unit out of which the post-1849 works were built. At the same time, I hope to have left them more real than I found them. In my Introduction, I laid out this aim in terms of Latour’s notion of collaboration. This thesis has shown that theories of trauma can be used to make various interpretive stances towards Wagner’s motifs work together, despite their apparent differences. Perhaps most importantly, this thesis has addressed a particular wound in the reception of Wagner’s motifs. When Hans von Wolzogen severed his theory of motif from his dictionary of musical motifs, he inflicted a peculiar kind of wound on Wagnerian scholarship. Those who followed him have been ailed either by a feeling that they were subjecting a fluid musical meaning to a static, reductive textual meaning, or a feeling that it was impossible to address the meanings of his motifs in words.

If it seems that there is a tension here between artifice and reality, that may be Wagner’s fault. A recurring theme in the Zürich essays, the works that theorized Wagner’s motifs, is the need to escape from the artificial. In Art and Revolution, Wagner writes that revolution is the mechanism that will cause nature ‘to hurl the whole cramping burden [of culture] from her, with one sole thrust’ [59]. In the opening section of The Art-work of the Future, titled ‘Nature, Man, and Art’, he argues, ‘man will never be that which he can and should be, until his Life is a true mirror of Nature, a conscious following of the only real Necessity, the inner natural necessity, and is no longer held in subjugation to an outer artificial counterfeit’ [60]. In Opera and Drama itself, Wagner employed the conceit of music as the fragrance of a flower. Rossini is dismissed as ‘the uncommonly handy modeller of artificial flowers’. Mozart’s music, whenever the poetry it accompanies falls short can only ‘uphold its false, unnecessary life by artificial measures’. [61] In one passage, ‘artificial’ even comes to capture the fundamental division of poetry and music

[59] Wagner, PW, i, 55.
[60] Wagner, PW, i, 71.
that Opera and Drama addresses: ‘melody had hitherto been propagated artificially as vocal melody,— i.e. melody which, parted from the poetic conditions of its base, yet obtained in the Singer’s mouth or throat fresh conditions for its further cultivation’.

It seems possible to map this tension onto the division I have highlighted in the reception of motifs. Abbate is explicit that the ‘natural state’ of Wagner’s motifs is to be musical and non-referential. Whenever they are burdened with referential meanings, they are forced into an ‘artificial state’. This echoes, although it does not precisely reproduce, the division in Wolzogen’s guides that I identified in the Introduction. Naturally, ‘the motif allows the invisible to make itself known, it recalls the past and prophesies the future, it pronounces the inner drama, where the power of poetry fails, just as it gives music the power of poetic representation.’

The captive, artificial motifs presented in the remainder of his guide are simply musical tags.

I find it hard to accept that a motif can have a natural state. It takes a great deal of ‘elaborate calculation’ to produce any motif, referential or not. In this sense, we can draw on another strain in Wagner’s prose. Wagner’s motifs are the product of an entire community consisting of, amongst others, a theorist, a composer, a dramatist, publishers, directors, producers, an orchestra, conductors, singers, architects, set designers and, perhaps above all, financial backers. If Wagner himself took on more of these roles than is customary, he nevertheless recognized the need for collaboration.

This thesis has, therefore, uncovered—or perhaps inflicted—one final Wagnerian wound. I have addressed my argument at a fundamental division in the reception of Wagner’s motifs between their, rather esoteric, natural state and their apparent use as musical-poetic labels. I have attempted to mend this division, by using theories of PTSD to show how a single theoretical framework can connect these two modes of motific existence. This is because both the mnemonic-prophetic esoteric meanings of motifs and their simple referential meanings can be explained in terms of reminiscence of foreboding and, therefore, theories of PTSD. When Isolde breaks into the real world as

62 Wagner, PW, ii, 69.
63 Wolzogen, Leitfaden durch Wagner’s Ring, 6–7.
64 See p. 35 of this thesis.
a character aware of her own artifice, however, it reveals that this division is already predicated on a reading of Wagner’s aesthetics that prioritizes the natural over the artificial. In other words, while Abbate’s reading of Wagner’s motifs as non-referential runs counter to his prose, her refusal to accept their referentiality, which relies on a supremely artificial effort on the part of Wagner and others, is perfectly consistent with the Zürich essays. Wagner’s motifs are a meta-artificial assemblage of artificial elements, a combination of artificial music, poetry and stagecraft, produced by ersatz characters and played out by singers. Faced with these fakes, Wagner’s motifs become, for anyone hoping to reconcile them with Wagner’s aesthetics, a new cramping burden to be hurled away into a purely musical oblivion.

The final gesture of this thesis is, therefore, not to heal Wagner’s wounds, but to dislocate them. As I laid it out in the Introduction, the problem of Wagner’s motifs was the creation of Wagnerian reception. It relied on a division made by Wolzogen and then cemented by Cooke, Dahlhaus, Abbate and others. By addressing this wound as I have, the division simply moves and becomes internal to the Zürich essays. The new problem is to reconcile Wagner’s conception of motifs—which are not only inherently artificial, but lead to artifice overtaking reality at the end of Tristan and Isolde—with the condemnation of artifice that precedes it. In Latour’s terms, the question is: can Wagner’s motific practice be made to collaborate with Wagner’s aesthetic ideals? The Liebestod, I believe, offers hope for just such a collaboration. It is a moment in which reality, artifice, text, music and motif work together to produce something coherent. One might well call this something: the Gesamtkunstwerk. On one of the relatively few occasions that Wagner himself used this term, he called it: ‘the great United Art-work which must gather up each branch of art to use it as a mean, and in some sense to undo it for the common aim of all’\[65\] This undoing is itself a wounding, and in my reading of Isolde’s ‘Verklärung’, it is made perceptible. We watch as she undergoes a transformation into something that holds together reality and artificiality and the motific and the purely musical in spite of their attempts to resist. By healing the old wound of

65 Emphasis mine. Wagner, PW, i, 88.
Wagner’s motifs, therefore, this new wound can be made a collaborator in the ‘United Art-work’.
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**Musical Scores Referenced**

The musical examples in this thesis are adapted from the following editions of Wagner's scores.

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