

GERMANIC MYTHOLOGY IN RICHARD WAGNER'S
'DER RING'

Emile Berger
Department of German Studies
McGill University, Montreal

March 2002

A thesis
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

© Emile Berger, 2002



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-78989-6

ABSTRACT

Richard Wagner, in writing the text which would become the libretto of his four operas comprising the Ring was influenced greatly by German Mythology as well as old Norse writings. His main sources are the Volsungensaga, the Thidreksaga and the Nibelungenlied. Certain portions of the Ring follow closely the events described in some of the sagas, other portions have been changed and elaborated to achieve theatrical effect. I have endeavoured to explain the differences between the sources and the finished masterpiece. Whether his version of the tales was to ensure good theatre or whether he felt that he was improving on the originals is a moot point. The similarities are sufficient to prove that he had totally immersed himself in the literature available and no doubt felt himself to be a worthy protagonist of this culture. There is no doubt that his music is a masterpiece which may be enjoyed with or without any depth of knowledge of its origins.

SOMMAIRE

Richard Wagner, en écrivant le texte qui deviendra le « libretto » de ses quatre opéras qui forment le ring, fut grandement influencé par la mythologie germanique ainsi que par des anciens écrits nordiques. Ses souches principales sont les Volsungensaga, Thidreksaga et Nibelungenlied. Certaines parties du Ring correspondent aux événements décrits dans certaines sagas, d'autres parties de ses œuvres furent modifiées et élaborées afin d'obtenir un meilleur effet théâtral. J'ai essayé d'expliquer la différence entre les sources originales et le chef-d'œuvre. Si les modifications apportées par Wagner à l'histoire de ces sagas étaient pour améliorer la version originale ou seulement s'assurer qu'une bonne pièce théâtrale serait obtenue demeure un point controversé. Les similitudes sont suffisantes pour prouver que Wagner était totalement absorbé par cette ancienne littérature et qu'il se pensait sans doute protagoniste de cette culture. Il n'y a pas de doute non plus que le Ring constitue un chef-d'œuvre qui peut être apprécié, même sans avoir une connaissance approfondie de ses origines.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Professor Dr H. Richter, McGill University, Montreal, for his valuable advice.

Für wertvolle Ratschläge gebührt Herrn Professor Dr H. Richter, McGill University, Montreal, mein Dank.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
SOMMAIRE.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION (Subject matter. Proposed analysis)	1–7
DAS RHEINGOLD	7–32
DIE WALKÜRE	33–46
SIEGFRIED	47–56
DIE GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG	57–67
CONCLUSION	68–70
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	71–73

Introduction

This dissertation is mainly concerned with establishing the mythological Germanic background in Wagner's *Der Ring*. To get a clearer view of the evolution of Wagner's thoughts and the driving factor in the creation of his work it is necessary to examine briefly the historical background which led to this conception.

Richard Wagner was appointed conductor of the Court orchestra, i.e. that is Hofkapellmeister in 1843 in Dresden. By the time the revolution swept across Western Europe Wagner was already an active nationalist and belonged to the Vaterlandsverein. Wagner was planning to compose an opera based on the story of Siegfried. He had completed the first draft of *Der Nibelungen – Mythos*¹

It took Wagner another four years to complete the libretti of the Ring. Over the years he composed the music so that the complete opera took another twenty five years to come to fruition. The influence exercised by meeting and reading the writings of other revolutionaries of this period such as Pierre Joseph Proudhon and Ludwig Feuerbach as well as Karl Marx, Mikhael Bakunin and Max Stirner was of importance in the evolution of *Der Ring*.

¹ Richard Wagner, Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen. Sechster Band. (Leipzig. Verlag von E.W.Fritsch. 1888. Facsimile reprint 1976 Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim). p.156-66.

During the twenty-five year period between the prose resume and the completed four part *Ring*, Wagner wrote other operas and was quite prolific publishing various writings and comments of a political nature. One of these works was '*Die Wibelungen. Weltgeschichte aus der Sage*'.²

In 1887 Richard Wagner published an important essay concerning the mythology on which the *Nibelungen Saga* was based. In the preamble he states that renewed interest in Frederick the Red Beard i.e. Barbarossa, had stimulated him to consider writing for the stage and would start with reviewing the history and evolution of the peoples involved.

a) Das Urkönigthum. The European people originated in the East and Wagner states that the concept of royal power, the keeping of the royal tradition by a certain tribe, and especially the loyalty needed to maintain this state of affairs has a deep meaning in the collective consciousness of a family and a tribe. This includes the strength and power of the head of the family, which derives from the gods. Royalty came to share some of its prerogatives with the priesthood. This concept is recognized by the Greeks but even more so by the royalty of the 'Franks', also known by the name of Wibelungen or Gibelinen. The royal families of the 'Franks' appear in history under the name of Merwingen.

² Richard Wagner, *Die Wibelungen. Weltgeschichte aus der Sage*. (Summer 1848 in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, Zweiter Band, Leipzig, Verlag von E.W.Fritsch, 1887. Faksimile Druck der Ausgabe von 1887. 1976 Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim.) pp. 115-155.

Their system was patriarchal and they chose their kings from among their own people, the *Franks*.

b) *Die Nibelungen*. Wagner states that the *Nibelungen Saga* is the heritage of the '*Franks*'. The oldest mythological lore indicates that Siegfried was considered the god of the sun or of light. Later in the evolution of this hero figure he becomes part of the mythos of the Nibelungen treasure, in the sense of who owns it, or who can rule by using it, becomes a Nibelung. The '*Franks*' who settled in the area of the lower Rhine, had as their leaders at various times, Chlodwig, Merwig, and later Pipingen and Karlingen. The kings of the '*Franks*' fought and vanquished other German tribes such as the '*Alemann*', '*Baiern*', '*Thüringer*' and '*Sachsen*'. Even during the reign of Charlemagne, the animosity between these Germanic tribes did not disappear. Various people, such as the Archbishop of Mainz, tried to achieve mutual understanding between the tribes without much success. Wagner however, concluded that ultimately they joined as part of the Nibelungen. The Wibelungen however disappeared after the beheading of young Conrad in Naples. There was strife between the Wibelungen and the Welfen. In Italian parlance they were known as Guelphi and Ghibelini. In this context it is interesting to examine the origin of the word '*Welfen*' which denotes a four legged suckling, and later became known as the son.

In the second part of the thirteenth century the German tribes claimed their independence from the '*Franks*'.

c) Origin and evolution of the Nibelungen mythos. In the saga of the Franks the god of the sun or light vanquishes the chaos of the night, and that is the actual interpretation of Siegfried slaying the dragon. It is similar to the battle between Appollon and the Dragon Python. But Siegfried also dies, and that makes him human and is symbolic of humanity which goes from life to death, from victory to defeat and from joy to misfortune. This constant shifting finds expression in 'Wuotan', the highest of the gods and the father of all beings. Wagner then turns to Scandinavian mythology and writes that Nifelheim, i.e. Nibel-Nebelheim, is where the spirits of the night lurk underground and are called 'Schwarzalben' in contrast to the heavenly abode of the 'Asen', the Lichtalben. The Schwarzalben, also known as 'Niflungar', are the children of night and of death who burrow in the earth to find the ore for smelting and forging of jewelry and weapons.

Wagner then put forward the theory that the '*Franks*' came from Troy, and Troy being the castle, this is the original Asgard of the Scandinavians and the 'Asciburg' of the Germans. For the Greeks it was 'Olympos' and for the Romans the 'Capitolium'. Wagner continues to expound on the relationship between the

Emperor Charlemagne and Emperor Frederick the First, known as Barbarossa. Wagner alleges that Siegfried is to be equated with Jesus Christ.³

Wagner then elaborates on this theory by saying that the German people claim the oldest royalty in the world since it derives from the son of God known amongst the Germans as Siegfried, but by other people as Christ. The Germans are the oldest nation and their king is blood related to the 'Nibelung'. The emperor also assumes the role of the high priest. Wagner equates the treasure of the 'Nibelungen' with the Holy Grail. So much for Wagner's conception of the 'Nibelungen'. He amplifies these thoughts in the next essay entitled 'Der Nibelungen-Mythus'.⁴

This is a summary of the projected text for his stage play written in 1848. In it he mentions Alberich and his brother Mime, also known as Regin. Wagner comments on the role of the gods in the world who were meant to tie all the elements together by passing wise laws and taking utmost care of the human race. However the peace which enabled them to become rulers was not based on reconciliation but had been arrived at through force, cunning and deceit. The

³ Richard Wagner. p.144

⁴ Richard Wagner. p. 156-66.

raison d'être of the Gods is proper moral conscience, however they themselves had not lived and acted by these standards. There are rumblings of discontent from the depths of Nibelheim because the 'Nibelungen' are still slaves. Injustice has been done to the 'Nibelungen' but Wotan cannot correct it without causing more injustice. Only an independent free will that can accept guilt and atone for it could sever the magic ties which bind them. The gods realize that only in man can be found such free will. Such a man had not yet been born but it has been decided by the Gods that he should be a 'Wälsung'. Then comes the birth of the twins, Siegmund and Sieglinde. The fate of Hunding is somewhat different from that seen on stage. It is not Wotan who kills him, but Siegfried. The projected text corresponds to the stage version and will not be repeated here.

This four part literary creation comprised of *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* will be analyzed proceeding on a chronological basis, describing and discussing each character as he or she appears in the text. Wherever necessary correlation will be made with the locale in which the action takes place. Each of the four operas discussed will be preceded by a synopsis in order to clarify the story line. Furthermore, for every character mentioned by Wagner in *Der Ring*, the mythological sources will be discussed.

Synopsis – Das Rheingold

Scene 1. In this opening scene, the Rhine maidens, Flosshilde, Wellgunde and Woglinde, are swimming in the river. Alberich the dwarf, or Nibelung, appears from the depths and while observing the three women, tries to approach them but is met with sarcastic remarks, especially after they realize how ugly he is. Alberich catches sight of the Rhinegold shining in the sunlight. Wellgunde then states that out of this gold a ring could be made enabling the owner of it to rule the world. However Woglinde warns that in order to create the ring one has to forswear love. Alberich however curses love and steals the gold.

The Rhine maidens

The Rhine maidens are known in mythology as mermaids. The Rhine maidens are Flosshilde, Wellgunde, and Woglinde.

In Germanic mythology they belong to the spirits of the water (*Wassergeister*) also known as 'Nixen'⁵. They are usually depicted as being young girls with long

⁵ Herder Lexikon, Germanische und keltische Mythologie 2. Auflage 1982 p. 131.

hair who entice men into watery graves. However, men can also be water spirits and are known in German as 'Nix', 'Neck' or 'Nöck' and are old and bearded and sometimes drag women into the watery depths.

As to the names of the three Rhine maidens in the Ring, they constitute a creation of Wagner. Woglinde means gentle wave as does Wellgunde

For example, in the *Saga of Thidrek of Bern*, Högni, who will be discussed later, encounters two mermaids.

Högni drew his sword and killed the mermaid
and cut each of them apart through the middle,
the mermaid and her daughter.⁶

This occurrence is described differently in the *Nibelungenlied* where Hagen i.e. Högni meets two mermaids named Hadeburc and Sigelint who warn him about the dangers of crossing the river.

Dô sprach daz eine merwip, Hadeburc was si genant:
'edel ritter Hagene, wir tuon iu hie bekant,
swenne ir uns, degen küene, gebet wider unser wât,
wie iu zuo den Hiunen disiu hovereise ergât'⁷

In Hatto's version this reads as follows:

⁶ Edward R. Haymes, *The Saga of Thidrek of Bern* (Garland Publishing, Inc. New York & London) 1988, p.222.

⁷ *Das Nibelungenlied, 2 Teil*, Mittelhochdeutscher Text und Übertragung. Ed. und trans. Helmut Brackert, (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 22. Auflage) Februar 1999, p.88.

'Hagen, noble knight,' said one of the nixies, who was called Hadeburg, 'if you will give us back our clothes we shall tell you how your visit to Hungary will turn out for you.'⁸

In contrast to his behaviour in the *Thidrek's Saga*, Hagen this time behaves in a gentlemanly fashion and does not harm the mermaids.

Der übermüete Hagene den frouwen dô neic,
Ern redete niht mêre, wan das er stille sweic.⁹

Hatto provides the following version:

Hagen bowed his thanks to the fairies but said not another word.¹⁰

In the interval of about fifty years between the appearance of the *Nibelungenlied* in Austria circa 1200 and *Thidrek's Saga* in Norway, around 1250, changes in interpretation of the story and the description of Hagen's behaviour have occurred, probably due to oral repetition. Wagner radically changes the role of the mermaids who have now become three Rhine maidens and guardians of a treasure of which they are robbed. They have thus assumed a new function, that of being the guardians of the treasure and at the same time oracles who warn

⁸ A.T.Hatto, The Nibelungenlied, (Penguin Books), 1969, p.93

⁹ Brackert, Strophe.1549

¹⁰ Hatto, p.195

Alberich from taking the fateful step disdaining love for base metal. While the mermaids in *Thidrek's Saga* and the *Nibelungenlied* do not interfere with the actions of Högni i.e. Hagen, but restrict their role solely to dire warnings as to what mishap would befall Hagen and his followers, Wagner's Rhine maidens go a step further and actively mock and insult the frustrated Alberich.

For example, Wellgunde says:

If you're in love and lusting for love's delights,
let's see my beauty, just what you are like! –
Ugh! You hairy, hunchbacked fool!
Brimstone – black and blistered dwarf!
Look for a lover who looks like yourself!¹¹

A totally new concept introduced by Wagner from the very beginning of the *Rheingold* is the utmost importance of love, which supersedes every other consideration.

Only the man who forswears love's sway, only
he who disdains love's delights can master
the magic spell that rounds a ring from the gold.¹²

¹¹ Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung, Translator Stewart Spencer 'Bist du verliebt und lüster nach Minne? Lass' seh'n, du Schöner, wie bist du zu schau'n! Pfui, du haariger, höck'riger Geck! Schwarzes, schwieliges Schwefelgezwerg! Such' dir ein Friedel, dem du gefällt!' (Thames and Hudson), 1993, p.61-62.

¹² Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung, Translator Stewart Spencer 'Nur wer der Minne Macht versagt, nur wer der Liebe Lust versagt nur der erzielt sich den Zauber zum Reif zu zwingen das Gold.' p.68

Alberich

He is a famous dwarf of great reputation in Germanic mythology. In the *Nibelungenlied* he served the kings Schilbung and Nibelung as guardian of the Nibelungen treasure. When Siegfried kills the two kings, Alberich attempts to avenge them, but since Siegfried stole his cap of invisibility ('Tarnkappe'), he is unable to do so and Siegfried forces him to guard the treasure forthwith. In the *Thidrek's Saga* the story is somewhat different in that Alberich, now vanquished by the hero Thidrek becomes a defender of his former opponent.

This episode in the *Nibelungenlied* is described thus in Hatto's version.

Furthermore he slew the mighty princes Schilbung and Nibelung and he came in great peril from Alberich who hoped to avenge his masters there and then, til Siegfried's huge strength was brought home to him; for the powerful dwarf was no match for him.¹³

¹³ Hatto, p. 28.

One encounters Alberich under the name of Andvari in the *Poetic Edda*, specifically in *Reginismol* the ballad of Regin. Andvari was a dwarf who had assumed the shape of a pike.

Andvari spake:

Andvari am I, and Oin my father, in many a fall have I
fared; An evil Norn in olden days doomed me in
waters to dwell.¹⁴

In the *Saga of the Volsungs* Regin refers to Andvari as being a pike.¹⁵ In the chapter on the otter's ransom Regin mentioned that there was a dwarf named Andvari. In this chapter Loki seizes Andvari's gold and the ring. The dwarf said that the golden ring would cause the death of whoever owned it and this would apply not only to the ring but to all the gold.

Scene 2. This scene introduces Wotan, who rules over the Gods, and his wife Fricka resting on the mountain. One can see the castle built for them by the giant. Wotan is enthusiastic about his new home but Fricka reminds him that they had to barter her sister Freya, who is the goddess of love, for the labour of the giants who built the castle. Freya enters in a state of great anxiety with the giants Fasolt and Fafner at her heels. There is apprehension in Wotan's voice when he queries the whereabouts of Loge, who is god of the fire and was supposed to find a way out of the contract that Wotan had made with the giants. Wotan wants to pay off the giants in some other fashion rather than barter his wife's sister. Fasolt reminds him that he is responsible for the sanctity of contracts and agreements. Fafner also understands that if Freya is taken away from the gods they will lose their youth as they will no longer have access to her magic apples. At this juncture Freya's brothers Froh and Donner appear trying to

¹⁴ The Poetic Edda, translated from the Icelandic by Henry Adams Bellows (Biblo and Tannen), 1969.p.360.

¹⁵ The Saga of the Volsungs, translated by Jesse L. Byock, (Penguin Books), 1999,p. 58.

prevent the abduction of their sister. They want to use force but Wotan forbids it. Loge appears and is berated by the other gods for not having come up with a solution that would prevent Freya's forced departure. Loge replies that he never promised them a solution but only that he would try to do so.

Unfortunately he could not find any man who would give up love for gold, except for Alberich. In order to pay off the giants gold must be found and the best source would be Alberich. The giants carry Freya off as a hostage and Wotan and Loge descend into the nether regions to find the gold.

Wotan - mythological sources.

In Nordic mythology he is Odin, and the most important deity. He is an accomplice in the killing of Otr who is the son of Hreidmar. Otr would take on the guise of an otter that is killed by Loki. Odin is forced by Hreidmar to give him Andvari's gold as compensation for killing Otr. Odin wants to keep the Andvaranaut ring on which a curse has been placed, but Odin is forced to turn the ring over also.¹⁶

The name of Wotan could be related to the word 'wod', which in old English signified 'mad', 'wild' and 'furious'.¹⁷ In the period preceding the acceptance of the Christian religion in the Northern parts of Europe, Odin is primarily regarded as the god of battle. Davidson writes as follows:

¹⁶ Byock, p.126, 139.

¹⁷ Brian Branston, Gods of the North, (Thames and Hudson), 1980, p.107-108.

In Norwegian court poetry of the tenth century Odin is pictured choosing champions to fall in battle, so that after death they can be enrolled in his warrior band and help him to go out to the last battle of the Gods with a magnificent following.¹⁸

Fricka

She is the wife of Wotan and the goddess of marriage. She, as well as her husband, has prophetic gifts.¹⁹ She is described in the *Deluding of Gylfi* as the foremost goddess and who owns a dwelling known as 'Fensalair'.²⁰ Sturluson says that Fricka, *'though she will tell no fortune, yet well she knows the fates of men'* (*Gylf XX*). Fricka is also mentioned by Sturluson as the wife of Odin and mother of Balder. She also appears in the *Edda* poem *Oddrunargratr* as a goddess to whom women in labour will pray.²¹ Freia i.e. Freyja, who, according to Wagner but not necessarily to the mythological sources, is the sister of Fricka. Freyja is credited with having influence in affairs of the heart, and can be petitioned to help in such matters.²² It appears that there is a close connection between Frigg and Freyja.²³ Snorri Sturluson calls both Frigg and Freyja the holy

¹⁸ H.R. Ellis Davidson, Gods and Myths of Northern Europe. (Penguin Books), 1964, p. 48.

¹⁹ Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda, Tales from Norse Mythology, translated from Icelandic by Jean I. Young, (Bowes and Bowes), 1954, 59.

²⁰ Snorri Sturluson. p.59

²¹ Davidson. p. 111

²² Davidson. p. 115

²³ Davidson. p. 123

ones. As to the origin of the name 'Freyja' it becomes 'Frauja' in Old High German 'fruwa' and 'frowa' and Middle High German as 'frouwe' and 'frou'.²⁴

Freia

She is the sister of Fricka. In the *Deluding of Gylfi* in the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, he writes that Freia is beautiful to look at. When she goes on a journey she sits in a chariot drawn by two cats. She is most readily invoked, and from her name derives the polite custom of calling the wives of men of rank 'fru'. She enjoys love poetry and it is good to call upon her for help in love affairs.²⁵ Freia is fleeing from the giants to whom Wotan has promised her. One of the two giants is named Fasolt.²⁶ In Wagner's *Der Ring*, Fasolt is one of the giants who undertook to build Wotan's castle. Wotan tells Freia not to worry and asks her if she has seen Loge who is also known as Loki. He is a supernatural trickster, companion and sometimes opponent of the Gods. In the *Saga of the Volsungs* he captures the dwarf Andvari and forces him to give up his gold so that the Gods can pay it in compensation for Otr.²⁷ Fricka has a low opinion of Loge whom she characterizes as being untrustworthy.

²⁴ William O. Cord. The Teutonic Mythology of Richard Wagner's The Ring of the Nibelung Edwin Mellen Press, 1991, p. 5.

²⁵ Snorri Sturluson. p.53

²⁶ Herder Lexikon, Germanische Mythologie 2 Auflage, 1982. p.52

²⁷ Byock. p.138

So you still prefer to trust
in that cunning trickster?
Much ill he has caused us already
yet ever again he ensnares you.²⁸

Wotan retorts by reminding Fricka that she was greedy enough to ask him to build the castle.

Was such lust unknown to Fricka
when she begged me for the building.²⁹

But Fricka is not lost for an answer. She tells him that she did it in order to keep her husband.

Heedful of my husband's fidelity, I'm bound in my sadness to brood
on ways of binding him fast whenever he feels drawn away.³⁰

Now Wotan changes tactics. He plays the role of the aggrieved husband and reminds Fricka that he sacrificed one of his eyes to win her for his wife. In Wagner's *Ring*, no explanation for this deed was offered. In the *Deluding of Gylfi* in the *Prose Edda* it is told in the Sybil's vision where he had lost his eye.

I know for certain Odin where you concealed your
eye, in the famous spring of Mimir; mead he drinks
every morning from the pledge of the Father-of-the-
slain. Do you know any more or not?³¹

²⁸ Spencer. 'Dass am liebsten du immer dem listigen trau'st! Viel Schlimmes schuf er uns schon, doch stets bestrickt er dich wieder'. p.73.

²⁹ Spencer. 'Gleiche Gier war Fricka wohl fremd, als selbst um den Bau sie mich bat?' p.71.

³⁰ Spencer. 'Um des Gatten Treue besorgt muss traurig ich wohl sinnen, wie an mich er zu fesseln, zieht's in die Ferne ihn fort:' p. 71

³¹ Snorri Sturluson. The Prose Edda p.43

Freia now enters the scene, fleeing from one of the giants to whom Wotan had promised her. The giant is Fasolt. A short mythological recall is indicated. He is the brother of Ecke in the Middle High German '*Eckenlied*'.³²

In Wagner's Ring, Fasolt is one of the giants who undertook to build Wotan's castle. Wotan tells Freia not to worry and asks her if she has seen Loge. Fricka has a low opinion of Loge whom she characterizes as being untrustworthy. She chides her husband for trusting the wily one who has caused so many misfortunes but still retains the power to confuse and control.

So you still prefer to trust in that cunning trickster?
Much ill he has caused us already yet ever again he
ensnares you.³³

Loge does not appear, so Freia calls for her brothers, Donner and Froh, to help her. Donner, as in Wagner's Ring, is the God of Thunder, while Froh, his brother, is the God of Spring. Donner is known in German mythology as 'Donar' or Thor.³⁴ Froh is Fro, possibly related to Freyr, and at times thought to be identical with Freyr.³⁵

³² Herder Lexikon. p.52.

³³ Spencer. 'Dass am liebsten du immer dem listigen trau'st! Viel Schlimmes schuf er uns schon, doch stets bestrickt er dich wieder'.p.73.

³⁴ Herder Lexikon. p.43.

Fasolt and Fafner

Fasolt is now joined by the other giant Fafner and both argue that they are entitled to their reward for building the castle, that is Freia. In scene 2 of the *Rheingold*, Wagner does not tell us much about Fafner. In North European mythology he is said to be the son of Hreidmar and brother of Regin and Ottur. Fafnir comes into possession of a rich treasure which he does not want to share with his father Hreidmar, and consequently kills him. In the *Volsung Saga*³⁵ it is mentioned that Fafnir, as a serpent, lies on great wealth. In the *Poetic Edda*, Fafnir spoke:

"I counsel thee Sigurth, heed my speech,
And ride thou homeward hence;
The sounding gold, the glow-red wealth,
And the rings they bane shall be."³⁷

In *Das Rheingold*, Wotan tries to convince the two giants that they should accept a different reward:

Are you out of your minds with this contract of yours?
Think of some other thanks: Freia isn't for sale.³⁸

Fafner refuses to accede to Wotan's demand but Fasolt realizes that the intrinsic value of Freia does not reside in her female charms but rather that she is the

³⁵ Herder Lexikon, p.59.

³⁶ Byock. p.129.

³⁷ Bellows. p. 377.

³⁸ Spencer. 'Seid ihr bei Trost mit eurem Vertrag? Denkt auf andren Dank: Freia ist mir nicht feil'. p. 74.

keeper of the golden apples which are used by the Gods to maintain their eternal youth and vigour. In mythology these apples are known as the apples of the Goddess Iduna. In the *Prose Edda* it is told that she keeps in her box the apples the Gods have to eat, when they grow old, to become young again, and so it will continue up to Ragnarök.³⁹ These apples are also known as the apples of immortality for they keep the Gods forever young. It has also been surmised that Iduna's apples are an imitation of those in the garden of Hesperides.⁴⁰ In summary therefore, the giants realize that Freia is very valuable indeed and want to depart with her, but are stopped by her brothers Donner and Froh. Donner threatens the giants with his hammer i.e. the hammer of Thor. The hammer has a mythological significance and rock engravings in Scandinavia dating from the Bronze Age show an axe, or hammer. In pre-Christian times it played the role of the cross as a symbol. A weapon shaped like a hammer has been described in antiquity. It was also thought that the hammer signified a thunderbolt. In Nordic mythology the hammer was known as Mjollnir and said to return to the thrower's hand.⁴¹ In *Das Rheingold*, Wotan, who after all is the protector of contracts and

³⁹ Young. p.54.

⁴⁰ Davidson. p.165.

⁴¹ Davidson. pp. 82-85

agreements, stops Froh and Donner from using violence after being reminded by Fasolt of his obligations.

What you are you are through contracts alone: your
power, mark me well, is bound by sworn
agreements.⁴²

Loge

The stage is now set for the entrance of Loge, known in mythology as Loki, who is the God of Fire⁴³ and known to be devious. He was the son of the giant Farbauti so he does not belong to the Gods, although in Wagner's version Loge is the brother of Donner and Froh. He is described as being crafty, cunning, deceitful and sly, but also as being very astute.⁴⁴ Loki occupies an interesting part in Snorri's writings and appears to play a principal role.⁴⁵ The impression one gains is that he is neither totally bad nor totally good, although in Snorri's writings he appears more often bad than good. With the gradual advent of Christianity in Northern Europe Loki metamorphoses as Satan. Strange as it may seem, in spite of his bad attributes listed above, he seems to have been a very sociable character.⁴⁶ In the *Poetic Edda* several examples of his conviviality are given such as:

Loki spoke:

⁴² Spencer. 'Was du bist, bist du nur durch Verträge: bedungen ist, wohl bedacht deine Macht'. p.75.

⁴³ Herder Lexikon, p.113.

⁴⁴ Herder Lexikon, pp.113-114.

⁴⁵ Davidson. p. 176.

⁴⁶ Davidson. pp.176-182.

Thirsty I come into this thine hall,
 I, Lopt, from a journey long,
 To ask of the gods that one should give
 Fair mead for a drink for me.

Why sit ye silent, swollen with pride,
 Ye gods, and no answer give?
 At your feast a place and a seat prepare me,
 Or bid me forth to fare."⁴⁷

In Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* there is a Loki and a Logi. Both take part in a contest as to who can eat the fastest. 'Loki sat down at one end and Logi at the other, and each of them ate as fast as he could'.⁴⁸ These character traits of Loki are well interpreted by Wagner in Scene 2 of *Das Rheingold* when Loge, eagerly awaited, finally appears, and is chastised by Wotan who says:

Loge at last! Have you come in such haste
 to resolve the bad bargain you struck?⁴⁹

Loge, as is his wont, prevaricates and does not provide a clear answer to Wotan's question, for which the latter chides him again by saying:

Slyly you seek to elude me; take care, in truth,
 that you don't deceive me.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Bellows. pp. 154-155.

⁴⁸ Snorri Sturluson. p.73.

⁴⁹ Spencer. 'Endlich Loge! Eiltest du so, den du geschlossen den schlimmen Handel zu schlichten?' p.77.

⁵⁰ Spencer. 'Arglistig weich'st du mir aus: mich zu betrügen hüte in Treuen dich wohl!' p.78.

Loge retorts that he promised to look for solutions, not that he would find one.

Fricka also lambasts Loge by saying to Wotan:

See what a treacherous rogue you trusted!⁵¹

Froh joins the fray with a Wagnerian play on words: 'Your name is Loge but I call you liar'.⁵² And his brother Donner joins in with another play on words:

Accursed flame I'll snuff you out!⁵³

The two brothers threaten Loge with physical abuse, but Wotan interferes by saying that Loge provides wise counsel. The giants, Fafner and Fasolt join the argument by insisting on being paid i.e. taking possession of Freia. There follows a long monologue by Loge in which he tells Wotan that he did find one instance where a man preferred gold to a woman's charms, that male being 'Nacht-Alberich' as aforementioned. At this stage, Wagner introduces the concept of a malevolent nocturnal creature because originally Alberich has been derived from the Old Norse 'alfr', 'alfar' which means a small creature inhabiting the universe. Alfr appears in Old High German as Alp, Alb as well as Elb,⁵⁴ and also as Elf. Originally this figure was regarded as being friendly but later came to denote a

⁵¹ Spencer. 'Sieh', welch' trugvollen Schelm du getraut!' p.78.

⁵² Spencer. p.79.

⁵³ Spencer. 'Verfluchte Lohe dich lösche ich aus!' p.79

⁵⁴ Herder Lexikon, p.11

dwarf, an unfriendly character. In the *Prose Edda* three different types of 'alfar' are described. The light, the black and the dark, the light being in German, the 'lichtalp', a friendly creature. The black alp became known as a night alp, a nefarious character.⁵⁵ In Wagner's Ring he is the 'Nacht-Alberich'.

Loge having informed the other participants in this scene of the existence of the gold and its present owner, sows the seeds for an alternative solution of the Freia dilemma by giving the giant the gold instead of Freia, and this seems to find favour with the giants. Interestingly enough, once Fricka hears about the gold, she wants to know if it can be used as an ornament:

Might the golden trinket's glittering gem be worn
by women and serve a fair adornment?⁵⁶

The question now is how to get the gold back from Albrich? Loge comes up with a solution which greatly displeases Wotan because it would mean giving up love for gold. Loge then says that the other solution would be to steal the gold from Alberich and that this would not really mean theft because Alberich had stolen it in the first place. Then, adds Loge, one could return the gold to the Rhine maidens.

⁵⁵ Cord. pp.91-93.

⁵⁶ Spencer. 'Taugte wohl des gold'nen Tandes gleissend Geschmeid auch Frauen zu schönem Schmuck?' p.81.

This suggestion however is anathema to Fricka who utterly distrusts the maidens:

Of the watery brood I'd rather not know;
for many a man - to my grief! – they have
lewdly lured to their watery lair.⁵⁷

Fricka thus confirms the seductive character of the Rhine maidens conveyed by Wagner in Scene 1.

The giants also are now inclined to accept the barter, to take the gold for Freia and urge Wotan to get the gold, but the latter is hesitant which prompts the giants to take Freia hostage until Wotan returns with the hoard. Freia's brothers Donner and Froh want to give chase but realize that their strength is waning because they had not tasted Freia's golden apples that day without which they lose their youth and vigour. Fricka, who has been nagging Wotan since the beginning of Scene 2, heaps more abuse on her husband:

Wotan, my husband, unhappy man!⁵⁸

Wotan now realizes that he has no other choice but to follow Loge's suggestion and steal the gold back from Alberich. In order to reach the dwarf's abode in the nethermost parts of the earth, Wotan must either descend through the Rhine as

⁵⁷ Spencer. 'Von dem Wassergezücht mag ich nichts wissen: schon manchen Mann - mir zum Leid - verlockten sie buhlend im Bad.' p. 83.

⁵⁸ Spencer. 'Wotan, Gemahl, unsel'ger Mann!' p. 86.

slyly suggested by Loge, or climb down through sulphurous ravines. He chooses the latter option in order to avoid meeting the Rhine maidens face to face, being ashamed of his plan to redeem the gold and not return it to them. Scene 2 closes with Fricka emoting about her husband's imminent departure, fearing that he may not return and praying that he may soon come back to his anxious wife.

O come back soon to your worried wife!⁵⁹

Scene 3. (Nibelheim) This is the domain of Alberich. He now has the ring made out of the Rhine gold and is now able to force the other Nibelungs to do his bidding. He forces his brother Mime to forge the Tarnhelm, a helmet which renders the wearer invisible. He beats his brother Mime who cannot defend himself. Alberich leaves the scene and Loge and Wotan arrive. When Alberich returns he wants to know what they want. Alberich boasts about the powers of the Tarnhelm and Loge inveigles him to change into a huge reptile. Then Loge asks him to transform himself into something small which he does by becoming a toad. Seizing the opportunity, Wotan and Loge grab him, tie him up and drag him to the surface.

Mime

A new participant appears in Scene 3. He is Mime and Wagner has chosen to depict him as the brother of Alberich. In Germanic mythology he is also known as 'Mimir', a very talented smith and armourer. He is also the guardian of the spring in which the tree Yggdrasil has its roots, according to Snorri.⁶⁰ Mimir is

⁵⁹ Spencer. 'O kehre bald zur bangenden Frau!' p. 88.

⁶⁰ Davidson. p. 166.

described as being very clever, maybe the wisest of the Aesir. Mimir is also known as 'Mimr' and 'Mimi'.⁶¹ Mimir is also mentioned in the *Poetic Edda*:

I know where Othin's eye is hidden,
Deep in the wide-famed well of Mimir;
Mead from the pledge of Othin each morn
Does Mimir drink: would you know yet more?⁶²

He is also mentioned in the saga of *Thidrek of Bern*, specifically in the story of *Velent the smith*. In it he is described as being a smith in Hunland and the brother of Regin. Mimir finds Sigurd as a child and brings him up. Sigurd kills Regin and later Mimir.⁶³ In Wagner's third scene of *Das Rheingold* he is being mistreated by his brother Alberich for not working fast enough. Alberich departs and Wotan and Loge appear. Mime complains bitterly about his brother and Loge tells him that he and Wotan will set him free. Alberich returns and overhears the conversation, he berates them but Loge reminds him that he is the cousin who gave him light and warmth, for which Alberich should thank him.

In mythological sources, especially the *Edda*, Alberich is the dwarf Andvari,⁶⁴ who shows Loki all the gold, and there is no mention of Mime.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Davidson. p. 166.

⁶² Bellows. p. 13.

⁶³ Haymes. p. 40, 105-109.

⁶⁴ Herder Lexikon, p.11,14.

⁶⁵ Georges Dumézil, *Loki* Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1959. p. 3.

Wagner then describes in great detail how Loge manages to hoodwink Alberich by praising his great inventiveness. He convinces the dwarf to change himself into a toad which makes him easy to capture. They tie him up and haul him up the gorge through which they had previously descended:

Hold him fast until I've bound him.
Quickly up now! There he'll be ours!⁶⁶

In this third scene of *Das Rheingold*, Wagner considerably simplifies the story of the acquisition and loss of the golden treasure, as well as the background of the protagonists. Loki's name appears to be a combination of 'lux' which is Latin for light and Lucifer, which signifies the bearer of the light. In Old Icelandic, Logi is Lohe but he could be related to the Germanic lukan, which means 'to close'.⁶⁷ However, as has been discussed before, Loki is not a benign personage and the fire he carries is of the destructive kind. This is all exemplified by his family relationships as related by Snorri and other writers of that period. Loki's father is not a god but a giant named Farbauti, which means 'a dangerous smiter'.⁶⁸

One version of the discovery of the Niflung golden hoard involves Odin, Hoenir and Loki. This is the story as related by Snorri and resembles the one found in

⁶⁶ Spencer. 'Halt' ihn fest, bis ich ihn band. Nun schnell hinauf! Dort ist er unser.' p.100.

⁶⁷ Herder Lexikon, p.114.

⁶⁸ Branston. p. 166.

the *Volsunga Saga* (XIV, *the Otter's Ransom*).⁶⁹ The three figures mentioned above arrive at the waterfall where an otter is eating a salmon. Loki kills the otter with a stone. The three companions arrive at Hreidmar's farmhouse and show him the otter, recognized by Hreidmar as his son. The three visitors are arrested by the brothers of the otter who demand 'weregild' in compensation for the loss of their brother. In German it is called 'wergeld'.⁷⁰ The 'wergeld' in this instance amounts to all the gold necessary to stuff the hide of the otter and cover it. Odin now sends Loki to the land of the dark elves which equates with the domain of the Nacht-Alberich, here called Andvari, who has assumed the body of a fish and is caught by Loki. The latter forces Andvari to reveal the location of the gold.⁷¹

A slightly different version of these happenings is found in *Reginsmal*, as well as in the *Prose Edda*. Odin, Hoenir and Loki arrive at Andvari's waterfall where he had assumed the body of a pike. Then follows the story of stuffing the otter's hide with gold. In the '*Skaldskaparmal*' the names of the two sons of Hreidmar are given as Fafnir and Regin.⁷²

From this brief review of mythological sources concerning the lost and found gold treasure, it appears clearly that Wagner has used only certain elements of the legends as a basis for his story of the action in *Das Rheingold*. This lends more coherence to the sequence of events as portrayed in the opera.

⁶⁹ Byock. p.57-58.

⁷⁰ Herder Lexikon, p.183.

⁷¹ E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964. p.138

⁷² Dumézil. pp 18-20.

Scene 4. Wotan and Loge bring the captive Alberich to the surface where he is persuaded to turn over the gold. He wants to keep the ring and the Tarnhelm but his captors force him to surrender them. After being freed he places a curse on the ring which will bring death to whoever wears it and envy to those who do not. They all inspect the golden treasure and the giants return with Freia but Fasolt insists that the gold cover Freia so that she is hidden from view. Fafner demands even the ring which is now on Wotan's finger and who refuses to give it up. Then the earth goddess Erda appears to warn Wotan that keeping the ring means utter destruction for him. Wotan throws the ring onto the pile of gold and the giants begin quarreling with the result that Fafner kills Fasolt. Wotan now understands the meaning of the curse. The gods get ready to enter the castle by crossing the rainbow bridge while the Rhine maidens bewail the loss of their treasure.

Loge and Wotan have succeeded in dragging the bound Alberich to the surface and are now engaged in forcing him to give up the treasure. He has to give up the gold and the helmet of mail, but tries to hold on to the ring, however Wotan wrenches it from Alberich's finger. The dwarf curses the ring.

Mythological sources: Alberich is indeed relieved of the treasure and the helmet of mail, but not in the way described by Wagner. In the *Nibelungenlied* it is Siegfried who subdues Alberich in a face to face battle which is described thus in the *Nibelungenlied*: 'Alberich hoped to avenge his masters there and then, 'til Siegfried's huge strength was brought home to him; for the powerful dwarf was no match for him. They then ran towards the cavern like raging lions',⁷³ In

⁷³ Hatto. p.28

German it reads as follows 'Done kunde im niht gestriten daz starke getwere. Alsam die lewen wilde si liefen an den berc'.⁷⁴

Furthermore, while Loge and Wotan coerce Alberich to give up the hoard and then let him loose, Siegfried in the *Nibelungenlied* is much more magnanimous and appoints the dwarf as guardian of the treasure after having vanquished him in a battle fair and square. 'Alberich was made lord treasurer'.⁷⁵ In *Middle High German* it reads 'Alberich der vil starke dô die kameren gewan'.⁷⁶ The dwarf having descended back into his sulphurous ravine after cursing the gold and the ring, the giants now approach with Freia. They are not about to free her without measuring the golden treasure in the most detailed fashion. This is done by piling up the gold between staves which surround Freia until she is completely covered and can no longer be seen.

During this procedure Fafnir substitutes the word Holda for Freia meaning 'the lovely one'. The giants insist on taking the ring also which Wotan refuses to relinquish until a new 'dramatis persona' appears. It is Erda. It is possible that Wagner used the German goddess lord, which in English means earth, as a role model. In the *Poetic Edda* she appears as Fjorgyn, meaning Jorth i.e. earth, and she is Thor's mother. *Stanza 65* reads as follows:

⁷⁴ Das Nibelungenlied, 1. Teil, Mittelhochdeutscher Text und Übertragung. Ed. and trans. Helmut Brackert, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 25. Auflag September 1999, verse 97.

⁷⁵ Hatto, p.28.

⁷⁶ Das Nibelungenlied 1, verse 98.

Harbarth spake:

To refuse it is little, to fare it is long;
 A while to the stock, and a while to the stone;
 Then the road to thy left, till Verland thou reachest;
 And there shall Fjorgyn her son Thor find,
 And the road of her children she shows him to Othin's realm."⁷⁷

Thor is the son of Othin and Jorth (earth).⁷⁸ In mythology she is said to be the mother of Donner, at times she is mentioned as being the wife or even the mother of Wotan. She is also known as the daughter of the night in the *Prose Edda*.⁷⁹

Erda now prevails upon Wotan to hand over the ring to the giants adding that this is also the opinion of the Norns (in German mythology the three Norns are the goddesses of fate and are named 'Urd', 'Verdandi' and 'Skuld', that is of the past, the present and the future. They live near the spring Urdarborn beside the ash tree and bring luck or misfortune to people. (Skuld also determines the end of life). In the *Poetic Edda* specifically in *Voluspo*, the wise woman's prophecy, stanza 20 reads as follows:

⁷⁷ Bellows. p.136.

⁷⁸ Bellows.p.170.

⁷⁹ Cord. p.116.

Thence come the maidens mighty in wisdom,
 Three from the dwelling down 'neath the tree;
 Urth is one named, Verthandi the next, -
 On the wood they scored, - and Skuld the third.
 Laws they made there, and life allotted
 To the sons of men, and set their fates.⁸⁰

The giants having obtained the ring now depart but start arguing about the division of the spoils and Fafner kills Fasolt. Wotan realizes that the curse of the dwarf has come true:

Fearful now I find the curse's power!⁸¹

Wotan, Loge, Fricka, Donner and Froh now walk off towards the castle crossing the rainbow bridge while the Rhine maidens clamour for the return of the gold. Thus ends Wagner's *Das Rheingold*.

⁸⁰ Bellows. p.9.

⁸¹ Spencer. 'Furchtbar nun erfind' ich des Fluches Kraft!' p.114.

DIE WALKÜRE

Introduction

The same type of analysis used in examining *Das Rheingold* will be applied in the study of the *Die Walküre*, i.e. an attempt will be made to ascertain if the *dramatis personae* have some relationship with the individuals mentioned in Germanic mythology.

Synopsis – Die Walküre

Act 1 A weary man, it is Siegmund, stumbles into a hut in the forest which belongs to Hunding. Siegmund is unarmed and sits down near the fireplace. The hut is built around a huge tree in which is embedded a sword. Sieglinde, who is the wife of Hunding, appears and offers Siegmund water and then later, mead. Having regained some of his strength, Siegmund gets up to leave but she persuades him to stay on. Hunding appears and right from the beginning, expresses his distrust of this unwanted visitor especially when he finds out that Siegmund belongs to an inimical clan. Hunding warns Siegmund that he will fight him in the morning but the laws of hospitality must be obeyed and he is permitted to stay overnight. After Hunding retires Sieglinde tells the story of her unhappy marriage to Hunding and gradually they fall in love with each other and towards the end of this fateful encounter they realize that they are brother and sister. Act 1 ends with Siegmund pulling the sword out of the tree.

Siegmund, as 'Sigmund' appears in the Herder Lexicon of Germanic and Celtic Mythology and is described as follows⁸²:

In the medieval *Nibelungenlied* he appears as a king, ruler of Xanten. He is the husband of Siglind and the father of Sigfrid. He is also known as Sigmund the

⁸² Herder Lexikon, p.154-155.

Völsung and the husband of the beautiful Hiördis, the father of Sinfjötli and Sigurd. He was killed in the battle against Lyngi. With his dying breath he decreed that his shattered sword be reforged and named Gram then given to his son Sigurd.

Other mythological sources indicate that Siegmund is the brother of Sieglinde. These are the Völsung twins, fathered by Wotan, with a mortal woman. That Siegmund is the brother of Sieglinde will be established later in Act 1.

Sieglinde: In the *Nibelungenlied* she is presented as one of the two river maidens who warns Hagen not to cross the river.⁸³ She is also described as being the mother of Siegfried.⁸⁴

In Act 1 of *Die Walküre* an exhausted Siegmund, stumbles into the hut where Sieglinde lives, who has been forced to marry Hunding, a member of the Neiding clan⁸⁵. Sieglinde explains the family relationships:

This house and this wife are Hunding's own⁸⁶

⁸³ Brackert, v.1539. 'Dô sprach daz ander merwip, diu hiez Sigelint: ich wil dich warnen Hagene.

⁸⁴ Brackert, v. 20. 'Dô wuohs in Niderlanden eins edelen küeges kint, des vater der hiez Sigemunt, sin muoter Sigelint.

⁸⁵ Cord p. 547. Neiding is a Wagnerian creation and consists of two words, 'Neid' meaning envy or jealousy and the suffix 'ing' which is a derivative of an archaic word 'ingr' inferring 'an offspring of' usually the father. The suffix of 'ung' also denotes a similar relationship and could be used to indicate an elevated status.

⁸⁶ Spencer, p.123. 'Dies Haus und dies Weib sind Hunding'

After preliminary discussion Sieglinde makes a fateful remark about her unhappy relationship with her husband:

Nicht bringst du Unheil dahin,
wo Unheil im Hause wohnt!

At this stage Hunding appears and discovers a striking similarity between Siegmund and Sieglinde.

Wie gleicht er dem Weibe!
Der Gleissende Wurm
glänzt auch ihm aus den Augen

Siegmund tells his story, that he was born with a twin sister and that their mother was killed by the Neidings. Gradually it dawns upon Hunding that Siegmund belongs to an enemy clan and warns him that he will fight him in the morning. He nevertheless extends nocturnal hospitality to Siegmund.

Mein Haus hütet,
Wölfin, dich heut',
für die Nacht nahm ich dich auf:
mit starker Waffe
doch wehre dich morgen;

Some indications as to where Wagner obtained his mythological sources is given by Sieglinde as she tells Siegmund about her marriage to Hunding.

Er freite ein Weib,
das ungefragt
Schächer ihm schenkten zur Frau

Sieglinde describes how an old man clad in a gray cloak and a hat which covered one of his eyes, proceeded to plunge a sword into the ash tree which grows in

the middle of the room, saying that the sword will belong to the one who is strong enough to extract it.

A similar episode is related in the *Völsungasaga*⁸⁷ where Odin embeds his sword in the tree and says

He who draws this sword out of the trunk
shall receive it from me as a gift, and he
himself shall prove that he has never
carried a better sword than this one

These events are not recorded in the *Nibelungenlied*. In Wagner's *Die Walküre*, although Siegmund comes to realize that Sieglinde is his sister, it does not change his infatuation with her and they become lovers.

Act 2. The actions in this act concern primarily the dilemma in which Wotan finds himself for he has to change from a supporter of the twins, Siegmund and Sieglinde, to an enforcer of the rules of behaviour and contracts as insisted by Fricka. In concrete terms he has to take the side of Hunding in his mortal combat with Siegmund and oppose his own daughter Brünnhilde in her desire to help Siegmund. Act 2 ends with the banishment of Brünnhilde.

Wagner introduces a new player. It is Brünnhilde who is Wotan's daughter and one of the Valkyries, the others being Gerhilde, Helmwig, Waltraute, Schwertleite, Ortlinde, Siegrune, Grimgerde and Rossweisse.

Mythological Sources

Brynhild, Brünhild, Brunhilde.⁸⁸ Her name signifies 'fighter in a coat of mail'. In the northern mythology the main source being the *Edda*.⁸⁹ Brynhild is a Valkyrie who, against the express orders of Odin, enables Agnar to win a battle.

⁸⁷ Byock. p.38.

⁸⁸ Herder. p. 30-31.

For this misdeed she is banished to a castle, which is surrounded by a flickering flame (Waberlohe), where she falls into a deep sleep and from which she is rescued by Sigurd. In the *Nibelungenlied* she is a mighty warrior who has been wooed by many men.

In Act two of Wagner's *Die Walküre*, Brünnhilde is summoned by her father Wotan to protect Siegmund in his coming fight with Hunding. Wotan says

Brünnhilde stürme zum Kampf,
dem Wälsung kiese sie Sieg!

While he adds that Hunding is of no use to him in Valhalla. Things do not go as smoothly as planned by Wotan because Fricka, his wife and goddess of marriage approaches and he exclaims that he must stand firm against her.

Der alte Sturm,
die alte Müh!
Doch Stand muss ich hier halten.

Brünnhilde, who saw Fricka approach, warns her father of Fricka's imminent arrival:

Fricka naht, deine Frau...
zornig fährt sie zum Zank!

Indeed, the moment she arrives she starts to berate Wotan:

Wo in Bergen du dich birgst
der Gattin Blick zu entgeh'n.

⁸⁹ Sturluson. p.113. 'Sigurd rode on then until he came to a hall on a mountain. In it was sleeping a woman in helmet and coat of mail. He drew his sword and cut the mail-coat from her. Then she woke up and said she was called Hild. Her name was Brynhild and she was a valkyrie'.

She tells her husband that she came to defend Hunding whose honour has been besmirched by the unacceptable behaviour of the twins. Wotan, who does not quite see it that way answers:

Was so Schlimmes
schuf das Paar,
das liebend einte der Lenz?
Der Minne Zauber
entzückte sie:
wer büsst mir der Minne Macht?

Fricka, being the guardian of the sacredness of marriage, chastises Wotan for his attitude in excusing the unnatural union of brother and sister.

Dass Blutschande entblüht
den Bund eines Zwillingspaars.

Blutschande, meaning the shame of the blood, is a much more powerful expression than the rather tame English 'incest' but Wotan is still not convinced and replies:

so segne, lachend der Liebe,
Siegmunds und Sieglindes Bund!

Fricka retorts 'What can I expect from an oaf like you':

Die treue Gattin
trogst du stets:
wo eine Tiefe,
wo eine Höhe,
dahin lugte
lüstern dein Blick

Fricka is unyielding in her argument that the twins must be punished for having thus offended against the sanctity of marriage and insists that Siegmund must not be allowed to win the fight against Hunding. Wotan, being the God in charge of contracts, rules and regulations, has to acquiesce in her demands and instructs his daughter Brünnhilde not to defend Siegmund. He hates himself for doing this and confesses to her all the mistakes he has made by engaging in all kinds of, what one would call nowadays, political activities in order to compensate for the loss of his manly power.

Als junger Liebe
Lust mit verblich,
verlangte nach Macht mein Mut:

There follows a long discussion between Brünnhilde and her father in which the latter tries to explain why he has to do Fricka's bidding.

The scene now shifts back to Siegmund and Sieglinde, the latter being now overcome with shame and remorse for what has happened between her and her brother.

Hinweg! hinweg!
flieh die Entweihte!.....
Schande bring' ich dem Bruder
Schmach dem freunden Freund!

Observations on incest in mythology

The English word 'incest' is derived from the Latin *incestum* a combination of *in* which is 'not' and *castus* which means 'chaste', or 'pure', and that is meant to apply to the twins. There are two schools of thought about this story of illicit relationships in *Die Walküre*. The first one which can be called traditional in the light of present day thought is that an incestuous relationship is an aberration, to be condemned by society as well as the penal system. The second school of thought points to the time period of the early Middle Ages when such relationships were described in Northern mythology as not being necessarily unnatural. It appears that the Gods were bisexual and, as an example, Loge is cited. He transformed himself into a mare in order to attract a stallion and the fruit of this union was the horse of Wotan named 'Sleipnir'. In other stories this horse is also known as 'Grane'. Also in mythology we find that Freyr and Freyja known in the Ring as Froh and Freia had as parents Njorth and his sister Nerthus, i.e. another incestuous relationship. Snorri Sturluson wrote about a similar situation in the *Ynglingasaga*. The writing which had most influenced Wagner was the *Volsungasaga*. In this epic, Sigmund and his sister have been fathered by Volsung, who in turn was the progeny of Wotan. Apparently Sigmund's sister pays a nocturnal visit to her brother, the visit extending for three nights, a son being the result of this encounter. This recurring theme of incest is

also found in the *Edda* and *Volsungasaga*. Here Signy visits her brother Sigmund, stays three nights with him and a son named Sinfjotli is the product.

Wagner therefore perceives the relationship between brother and sister, not as an incestuous one, but pertaining to the customs of the age when the *Ring* action takes place. These two different attitudes are very well exemplified by Wotan who accepts the twin's involvement as a perfectly natural expression of their love and Frika's condemnation and disdain for this behaviour which she qualifies with the very harsh epithet of *Blutschande*.⁹⁰

Act 2 (cont'd)

While Sieglinde reproaches herself for what she has done, Brünnhilde appears, to announce to Sigmund that he will follow her to *Walhalla*, and explains that this is the home of the Gods where the fallen heroes are taken to be nurtured for the final battle. Sigmund is not keen to follow Brünnhilde:

zu ihnen folg' ich dir nicht.

Confronted with the misery of the loving couple, Brünnhilde changes her mind again and says:

Sieglinde lebe –
Und Sigmund lebe mit ihr!

⁹⁰ Cord, p. 252-255, 493-494.

But this is not to be since Wotan is compelled to do Fricka's bidding. Hunding appears and the combat between him and Siegmund begins. Brünnhilde encourages Siegmund, but before he can strike the mortal blow Wotan appears and places his spear between the two fighters causing Siegmund's sword to shatter. Hunding plunges his spear into Siegmund's chest and kills him. Wotan, disgusted by Hunding's action, slays him in turn, bidding him to tell Fricka that her shame has been avenged.⁹¹ Brünnhilde flees, with her father in hot pursuit.⁹²

Act 3. The action now switches to the Rock of the Valkyries where Brünnhilde arrives with the unconscious Sieglinde. Brünnhilde is met by her eight sisters who try to protect her from the wrath of Wotan who ultimately punishes Brünnhilde by banishing her behind a wall of fire.

Brünnhilde's eight sisters are now introduced: Gerhilde, Helmwige, Waltraute, Schwertleite, Ortlinde, Siegrune, Grimgerde and Rossweisse. These names were Wagner's word constructions and would signify for Gerhilde, the fighter who carries a spear. Helmwige, is related to a helmet, Waltraute, devoted to a fallen hero, Schwertleite, related to the principle sword, Ortlinde, ort, the tip of the spear and *linde* in the sense of calming and assuaging as in *die Schmerzen lindern*; i.e. to calm the pain. Siegrune is the 'Rune' related to victory.⁹³

⁹¹ Richard Wagner, Die Walküre. "Geh hin, Knecht! Kniee vor Fricka: meld' ihr, dass Wotans Speer gerächt, was Spott ihr schuf. Geh! Geh!"

⁹² Wagner, Die Walküre. Doch Brünnhilde – weh der Verbrecherin! Furchtbar sei die Freche gestraft.

⁹³ Herder Lexikon, 1982, p.145-146. Rune is related to the *Middle High German rûne* which means 'the secret'. *Runo* means song and is possibly of Celtic origin. The runes are the oldest example of a German alphabet. This alphabet was supplanted by the Latin with the advent of Christian culture. It is thought that *runen* had some magic property and they were scratched on wood, stone and bones. The oldest inscription using *runen* dates back to the second century A.D. and was of non-Germanic origin, but possibly from the Roman Etruscan alphabet originating in northern Italy, and even possibly from Greek letters. Odin has been credited with the creation of the *runen*.

Grimgerde signifies the grim maiden of the spear, familiar terms both in German and in English. Rossweisse signifies the white horse.

The Valkyries - mythological sources.

They were entrusted by Odin i.e. Wotan to gather the fallen heroes and transport them to Valhalla where they nurtured them with food and drink and where Odin received them. The concept of Valhalla dates back to the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries A.D.⁹⁴ according to the *Atlakvida*⁹⁵ which is the oldest portion of the *Edda*.

Origin of the word Walküre.

It is a compound word from the Old Norse, *Wal* meaning slaughter in battle and *Kyrja* signifying the woman who makes a choice. In due time it evolved into *Middle High German kiesen* which means to choose and which name Wagner used on several occasions in *Der Ring*. To summarize therefore, the names of seven of the Valkyries were created by Richard Wagner, only Brünnhilde and Siegrune having some mythological connotation, the latter being renowned for her beauty.⁹⁶ In the earliest writings, the Valkyries were described as reveling in violent killings and cannibalism. An early depiction is found in the Icelandic *Njal's Saga*.⁹⁷ At a later stage the Valkyries became known interchangeably as

⁹⁴ Herder Lexikon, p. 181.

⁹⁵ Herder Lexikon, p. 19.

⁹⁶ Herder Lexikon, p. 155.

⁹⁷ Author anonymous. *Njal's Saga*. Translator Magnus Magnussen. Penguin Classic. 1996.

the Norns. In earlier writings the Valkyries were depicted as aggressive females, later they are shown in a softer light, comforting the fallen heroes in Walhalla.⁹⁸

Act 3 (cont'd)

The only new player introduced in this act is neither god nor mortal, but a horse named **Grane**. He bears an exhausted Brünnhilde and Sieglinde on his back and collapses at the place where the other Valkyries have gathered.

Zu Grunde stürzt
Grane der starke

Mythological sources: Grane, known as 'Grani'⁹⁹ in the *Edda*, is a stallion ridden by Sigurd who traverses the wall of flames to reach Brynhild and bring her the treasure of the Nibelungen.¹⁰⁰ A different version can be found in the *Volsungasaga* where a youthful Siegfried chooses a horse relying on the advice of an old man who is Wotan. Yet another version is found in the *Thidrekssaga* where Grani is Brynhild's horse which she gives to Siegfried at his request. Grane was held in such high regard that runes were inscribed on his chest, the only two other locations for such runes being the tip of Wotan's spear¹⁰¹ and on the bark of the World Ash tree.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Cord. 1991, p.500-504.

⁹⁹ Byock, *The Saga of the Volsungs*. Penguin Books, 1999 p.131. Grani (*Grani*) Sigurd's horse.

¹⁰⁰ Herder Lexikon. p. 74.

¹⁰¹ Wagner, *Das Rheingold*. In scene one there is a reference made to the runes written on Wotan's spear and it is Fasolt, one of the two giants, who berates Wotan for trying to evade the agreed contract, viz. 'Was sagst du? Ha! Sinnst du Verrat? Verrat am Vertrag? Die dein Speer birgt, sind sie dir Spiel, des berat'nen Bundes Runen?' Spencer p. 74.

¹⁰² Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*. In act I, one of the Norns says that Wotan broke a branch off the World Ash tree to fashion himself a spear and later carved runes onto the shaft of the spear. Viz. 'Von der Weltesche brach da Wotan einen Ast; eines Speeres Schaft entschnitt der Starke dem Stamm' and 'Treu beratner Verträge Runen schnitt Wotan in des Speeres Schaft'. Viz. 'Von der Weltesche brach da Wotan einen Ast; eines Speeres Schaft entschnitt der Starke dem Stamm' and 'Treu beratner Verträge Runen schnitt Wotan in des Speeres Schaft'. Spencer.p.281.

This exemplifies the importance of this animal in Teutonic mythology.¹⁰³ In still another version Grane is the only horse that can swim across the river, being a descendant of Sleipner, the eight legged stallion of Odin.¹⁰⁴

Act 3 (cont'd)

Sieglinde escapes into the woods, Brünnhilde being unable to protect her from Wotan's ire.

Mythological sources: Sieglinde's role and function has been changed drastically by Richard Wagner. He was obviously inspired by the *Nibelungenlied* in which Sieglinde plays an altogether different role. She is the Queen and loving mother of Siegfried.

Down the Rhine, in the splendid, far-famed city of Xanten in the Netherlands, there grew up a royal prince, a gallant knight named Siegfried, son of Siegmund and Sieglind.^{105 106}

¹⁰³ Cord, 1991 p. 200-203.

¹⁰⁴ Grimm, Wilhelm. *Die Deutsche Heldensage*. Dritte Auflage von Reinhold Steig. Gütersloh. Druck und Verlag von E. Bertelsmann. 1889, pp. 93,94,430-431.

¹⁰⁵ Hatto. p.20.

¹⁰⁶ Brackert, Verse 20. 'Dô wuohs in Niderlanden eins edelen küneges kint, des vater der hiez Sigemunt, sin muoter Sigelint in einer rîchen bûrge, wîten wol bekant nidene bî dem Rîne: diu was ze Sântén genant.'

In summary, Sieglinde plays a rather minor role but Wagner chose to make her a key figure in the evolution of the Ring. In the Nordic sagas she is not mentioned but appears in the *Volsungasaga* as Signy and is the twin sister of Sigmund, the children of Volsung. She visits her brother in disguise and spends three nights with him, the issue of this union being Siegfried.

Act 3 ends with the banishment of Brünnhilde but not before Wotan grants her wish that her resting place be surrounded by a wall of fire as protection.

Wer meines Speeres
Spitze fürchtet,
durchschreite des Feuer nie!

Mythological sources – the significance of fire.

The description of the fire is to be found in the *Volsungasaga* and the protagonists are Sigurd and Brynhild.

The fire began to flare
And the earth to shudder
And the high flames
To heaven towered.
Few of the king's men
Had courage enough
To ride into the fire
Or to leap across it.¹⁰⁷

It appears that Wagner was inspired by this description and used it in his libretti to great dramatic effect.

¹⁰⁷ Byock. p.80-81.

SIEGFRIED

Introduction

An identical methodology will be utilized to correlate events described in this third opera of *Der Ring*, with mythological sources.

Synopsis – Siegfried

Act 1. Act one takes place in a forge where Mime fashions swords for Siegfried whom he has brought up since infancy after finding his dying mother in a cave. Siegfried has grown up into a willful, strong young man, who causes his adoptive father a great deal of grief. The young man is constantly asking about his origins and yearns to escape from the confinements of the cave in which he lives with Mime. Siegfried asks Mime to reforge Siegmund's broken sword and while Siegfried wanders off into the woods, Mime receives a visit from Wotan who appears as a wanderer. When Siegfried returns and finds that Mime is still unsuccessful he reforges the sword himself.

Act 1

Mime: is the brother of Alberich and previously worked for him as smith and armourer. In this act the role of Mime as surrogate father of Siegfried is described in bringing up Sieglinde's son Siegfried whose mother died in childbirth. This proves to be a difficult task since Siegfried is a very unruly and restless youth, cajoling Mime to repair the shattered sword of his father Siegmund.

Mythological recall concerning Siegfried:

In Old Norse he is also known as Sigurd. In Germanic mythology he is Sigfrid (Siffrid). He is also found in *Thidrek's saga* then in a song dating back to the late medieval period entitled *Hürnen Seyfrid*.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Herder Lexikon, Germanische Mythologie 2. Auflage 1982 p. 154.

It is generally accepted that the story about Sigfrid in *Das Nibelungenlied* was written in the Middle High German at the beginning of the thirteenth century (1203) by an unknown author. It is written in the form of a *Heldenepos* and at the same time it has many elements of the *Höfisches Epos*. The first part of the *Nibelungenlied* deals with Kriemhilt, Prünhilt and Sivrit ending with his death. The second part of the *Nibelungenlied* describes the attempts of his widow to obtain revenge. There are different sources for the *Nibelungenlied*, one of them being part of the *Poetic Edda*. The mainstay of Wagner's literary composition was based on the *Poetic Edda* and the *Volsungensaga*. Wagner was impressed by certain aspects of the *Nibelungenlied* such as courage, honesty, fidelity, pride and power. It is obvious however that Wagner did not use actions as described in the *Nibelungenlied* especially the circumstances surrounding the birth of Sîfrît. In the *Nibelungenlied*, Sîfrît is the son of royalty, that is of Sigmunt and Sigelinde. Wagner relied especially on the work of *Der hürnen Seyfrid* meaning the Horned-Skin Sigfrid.¹⁰⁹ This is thought to have been written about 1492. In this story Sigfrid is a young boy very difficult to control who is sent away to learn the trade of smith, but he fights with everybody, including a dragon which he kills, covering himself with the skin of the beast which turns his own skin horny except for a small area between his shoulder blades.¹¹⁰ Sigfrid is also known as Sigurd. There is considerable overlap between the *Volsungensaga*, the *Thidrek Saga* and the *Nibelungenlied*. In one part of the *Edda*, Sigurd rides up the mountain

¹⁰⁹ Cord, 1991, p. 450.

¹¹⁰ Cord, p. 460.

and wakens the Valkyrie Sigrdrifa which means victory giver.¹¹¹ The Valkyrie was plunged into a deep sleep by being pricked with a sleep inducing thorn by Odin, this being the punishment meted out to her for awarding victory to the wrong man.¹¹²

Act 2. Fafner in *Das Rheingold* was one of the two giants brothers. After slaying his brother, Fafner changed into a dragon to guard the treasure and the ring. He resides in a cave and is being watched by Alberich who is eager to regain the treasures. Wotan appears again as the wanderer. Siegfried and Mime arrive. The latter hopes to teach fear to Siegfried by exposing him to the dragon. and while waiting for the dragon to emerge from his cave Siegfried is taught by a woodbird to understand the bird's language. Siegfried kills the dragon with his sword and a few drops of the dragon's blood splash upon him which renders him invincible. He now understands that Mime is using him in order to get the treasure and the ring so he kills him. The bird reappears and tells him about Brünnhilde and that it will lead him where Brünnhilde lies.

Mythological recall

The *Wanderer* is none other than Wotan in the *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*. He has more than seventy other names.¹¹³ The important point is that Wotan is a traveler always in search of new knowledge. The Teutonic people were knowledgeable in as far as the constellation known as the Great Bear, the Big Dipper, or in Latin, Ursa Major was concerned. This led them to call it *Wuotanes Wagan*. Since Wotan liked to wander about the heavens, the Milky Way was also known in Teutonic mythology as *Wuotanes Wec* or *Wuotanes Straza*.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ O.E.G.Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North. (Holt, Rinehart and Winston), 1964. p.198.

¹¹² Turville-Petre, p.198.

¹¹³ Cord, Volume II. The Family of Gods p.189-194.

¹¹⁴ Cord, Volume III part 2, p. 520.

The *Wanderer* is found in Anglo-Saxon literature at about the same time as *Beowulf*, the time frame being between the 8th and the 10th century A.D. A poem was published by Conybeare which describes the travels of the *Wanderer*.¹¹⁵

Act 2 (cont'd)

The *Wanderer* and Mime now have a long discussion. The *Wanderer* suggests that Mime should ask him three questions which must be answered correctly upon the penalty of losing one's head. The *Wanderer* successfully passes the test and now Mime must subject himself to the same ordeal, but he fails to answer the third question which is who will successfully reforge the sword Nothung, the correct answer being 'the one without fear'. The *Wanderer* is magnanimous and allows Mime to keep his head, which he later loses to Siegfried. Incidentally, during this long exchange between the *Wanderer* and Mime the former comments on the origins of the Nibelung:

In the bowels of the earth dwell the Nibelungs:
 Nibelheim is their land.
 They are elves of darkness
 Black Alberich once guarded them as lord and master.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Grimm, Wilhelm. *Die Deutsche Heldensage*. (Dritte Auflage von Reinhold Steig. Gütersloh. Druck und Verlag von E. Bertelsmann). 1889. p.19. "hām gefōhte eafan of Ongle, Eormanriçes wrāpes wærlogan". 'Heimath ich besuchte östlich von England, Ermanriche des zornigen, treulosen'. This would read in modern English as 'I visited the homeland of Ermanriche the hot tempered, treacherous one'.

¹¹⁶ Wagner, *Der Ring, Siegfried, Act 2*. In der Erde Tiefe tagen die Nibelungen: Nibelheim ist ihr Land. Schwarzalben sind sie; Schwarz-Alberich hütet' als Herrscher sie einst:

As to the Wälsungen:

The Volsungs are the ardently desired race
that Wotan begot and tenderly loved.¹¹⁷

Wotan also mentions the Gods living in Valhalla:

Bright elves of light are they.
Light-Alberich. Wotan, rules the host.¹¹⁸

Mythological sources:

Nibelung, Niflung in German mythology, is a dwarf who fought with his brother Schilbung about a golden treasure left to them by their father. They ask Sigfrid to divide it equitably between the two of them, but they are not satisfied with Sigfrid's arbitration and proceed to insult him, who settles the matter by killing both of them. The treasure is taken over by Sigfrid who appoints Alberich to be the guardian.¹¹⁹ **Sigurd** is the dragon slayer.^{120, 121} *Walhalla* means the Hall of the Fallen or the Chosen. It is the residence of the warriors killed in battle, where Odin receives them and the Valkyries nurture them. The hall has forty-five gates that are so huge that eight hundred warriors in armour could pass through each of them marching side by side.

¹¹⁷ Wagner, Der Ring, Siegfried, Act 2 Die Wälsungen sind das Wunschgeschlecht, das Wotan zeugte und zärtlich liebte.

¹¹⁸ Wagner, Der Ring, Siegfried, Act 2 Lichtalben sind sie; Licht-Alberich, Wotan, waltet der Schar.

¹¹⁹ Herder Lexikon. 1982, p. 126.

¹²⁰ Herder Lexikon. p.179

¹²¹ Snorri Sturluson, p.112 'Sigurd, son of Sigmund, son of Völsung and Hjördis, Eylimi's daughter. On account of his family, strength and courage, Sigurd was the most famous of all warrior kings'. And later on the same page 'When Fafnir, crawling on his way down to the water, came over the pit, Sigurd ran him through with his sword, and that was his death'.

The concept of *Walhalla* dates from the period of the eighth to the tenth century.¹²²

The world ash tree: The Germanic people bestowed magical properties on their woodland trees. They were given gender so that the first man came from the ash tree and the first woman from the elm tree. This is according to the *Prose Edda*. The trees were used for animal sacrifices but also for execution. The most important tree, and the holiest, was *Yggdrasil*. This ash tree, which always renewed its leaves, spread over earth and sky and on top of it sat an eagle. The Norns lived around the tree and protected it. If *Yggdrasil* withered permanently, this would signify the twilight of the Gods, the *Die Götterdämmerung*.¹²³ Runes were carved on the branches of the tree. *Runen* is a Germanic term for secret. The Germanic Runic alphabet consisted of twenty-four characters. The more recent Nordic *Runen* alphabet has only sixteen signs.¹²⁴

The Woodbird

This is an animal known since time immemorial as being a bird that could divine and divulge secrets, or enable other beings to hear hidden facts. In northern mythology, specifically in the *Poetic Edda* a warrior is thus instructed by a crow. In another part of the *Edda* it is mentioned that Attila can hear the voices of the birds. Wagner introduces the concept of the bird acting as a counselor to

¹²² Herder Lexikon, p.181

¹²³ Herder Lexikon, p.187.

¹²⁴ Groses Duden-Lexikon, vol. 6, (Bibliographisches Institut, Mannheim) 1967, p.820.

Siegfried who, at the woodbird's behest, gathers up the golden treasure and the cap of invisibility, i.e, the Tarnkappe, and now understands the bird's warning about Mime, who plans to poison him. Siegfried kills Mime. The bird then tells Siegfried about Brünnhilde who sleeps on the rock surrounded by a wall of fire and only the one who knows no fear may wake her. In the *Volsungasaga* it is not only one bird which is involved, but six nuthatches.¹²⁵

Act 3 Wotan, the wanderer, raises Erda, the earth goddess, from her sleep for he needs her wise counsel. She also happens to be the mother of Brünnhilde. Since she has no advice to offer he peremptorily orders her back to the bowels of the earth. Siegfried arrives, making his way towards the rock on which Brünnhilde lies. Wotan tries to dissuade him from reaching the rock first by argument and then by interposing his spear, which is however shattered by Siegfried's sword. Siegfried fearlessly crosses through the wall of fire, removes the helmet and cuts off the armored breastplate of Brünnhilde with his sword after which he awakens her with a kiss.

A new dramatis persona is introduced by Wagner in the character of Erda.

Mythological sources:

The northern Germans knew her as Jörd and venerated her as the mother of Thor.¹²⁶ This can be interpreted as mother earth. Snorri mentions in *Gylfaginning* X that Jörd is the daughter of Night and Annarr.¹²⁷ In this context

¹²⁵ Byock. p.66. "There sits, Sigurd, roasting Fafnir's heart. Better he should eat it himself," said a bird. "Then he would be wiser than any man." Another said: "There lies Regin, who wants to betray the one who trusts him." Then a third spoke: "He should strike Regin's head off; then he alone would control the huge store of gold." Then a fourth spoke: "Sigurd would be wise to follow their advice. Afterward he should ride to Fafnir's den and take the magnificent hoard of gold which is there, and then ride up to Hindarfell, where Brynhild sleeps. There he will find great wisdom. He would be wise to take your advice and consider his own needs. I suspect a wolf where I see a wolf's ears." Then a fifth said: "He is not as wise as I thought if he spares Regin after having killed his brother." Then a sixth spoke: "It would be a wise course if Sigurd killed Regin and took the treasure himself."

¹²⁶ Herder Lexikon, 1982. p.101

¹²⁷ Branston, 1980, p. 65.

one should mention that one of Odin's nicknames is Annarr which makes him not only Jörd's husband but also her father.¹²⁸ Another interpretation is that Jörd is Frigg, the goddess of fertility.¹²⁹ In summary the goddess Erda, although not mentioned in Germanic mythology was well known as the goddess Jörd in Old Norse mythology. This goddess was known as being all-knowing and all-wise which is why Wotan calls upon her for advice in Act 3. Like all the other females in the Ring, she too has a complaint about Wotan.

Wise though I am
a ruler once tamed me.
A Wish-Maid
I bore to Wotan:¹³⁰

Erda continues to chastise Wotan.

Does he who taught defiance
scourge defiance?
Does he who urged the deed
grow wroth when it is done?¹³¹

Wotan who initially came to Erda for advice, disdains it, and says:

Your are not
what you think you are!
The wisdom of primeval mothers
draws towards its end:¹³²

¹²⁸ Branston, p. 66.

¹²⁹ Branston, p. 118.

¹³⁰ Spencer, p. 256 'mich Wissende selbst bezwang ein Waltender einst. Ein Wunschmädchen gebar ich Wotan.'

¹³¹ Spencer, pp. 256-257. 'Der den Trotz lehrte straft den Trotz? Der die That entzündet zürnt um die That?'

¹³² Spencer, p. 257. 'Du bist nicht was du dich wähnst! Urmütter-Weisheit geht zu Ende.'

After leaving Erda he meets Siegfried who is on his way to find Brünnhilde. An altercation ensues between Wotan and Siegfried based on the generation gap.

Are you laughing at me?
No more of your questions,
old man;
don't me keep me here talking any longer!
If you can show me
the way, then tell me:
if you're unable,
then hold your tongue!¹³³

To which the Wanderer replies:

Patience, my lad!
If you think that I'm old,
you should show me respect.¹³⁴

But then Siegfried tells him that all his life he has been obstructed by an old man whom he had killed and that he was prepared to kill again if he did not move on. It comes to a fight in which Siegfried breaks the spear, Wotan's source of power. Siegfried makes his way to the rock where Brünnhilde is lying and discovers her to be a woman which frightens him. He calls to his mother for help.

Mother! Mother!
Remember me!¹³⁵

Now follows a scene which is reminiscent of the one where his father Siegmund seduces his mother Sieglinde. Having in turn seduced Brünnhilde the latter bewails her fate.

¹³³ Spencer, pp.260-261. 'Was lach'st du mich aus? Alter Frager, hör' einmal auf; lass mich nicht länger hier schwatzen! Kannst du den Weg mir weisen, so rede: vernagst du's nicht, so halte dein Maul!'

¹³⁴ Spencer, p. 261. 'Geduld, du Knabe! Dünk' ich dich alt, so sollst du Achtung mir bieten.'

¹³⁵ Spencer, p. 266. 'Mutter! Mutter! Gedenke mein!'

Alas! Alas!
 Alas for the shame,
 for my ignominious plight!
 He who woke me
 has wounded me, too!¹³⁶

Mythological recall.

While Wagner's Brünnhilde shows quiet acquiescence when wooed by Siegfried this is not how Prünhilde in the *Nibelungenlied* reacts. She objects to having her white gown torn off.

'Stop rumpling my beautiful white shift!' said the handsome girl. 'you are a very vulgar fellow and you shall pay for it dearly – I'll show you!' ¹³⁷ ¹³⁸

Wagner, in *Der Ring*, paints a much softer image of the first encounter than that portrayed in the *Nibelungenlied* and which conforms to his philosophy already propounded in *Das Rheingold* that real love cannot be bought, as well as the one expounded in *Die Walküre* that love conquers all

¹³⁶ Spencer, p. 271. 'Wehe! Wehe! Wehe der Schmach der schmähhlichen Noth! Verwundet hat mich, der mich erweckt!'

¹³⁷ Hatto, p. 92.

¹³⁸ Brackert. Strophe 670. 'Do er niht wolde erwinden, diu maget uf spranc: "ir ensult mir niht zerfüeren min hemde so blanc, ir sit vil ungefüege: daz sol iu werden leit! Des bringe ich juch wol innen", sprach diu waetliche meit.'

GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG

Introduction

In this last of the four operas constituting the Ring the three acts are preceded by a prelude during which the three Norns make their appearance. As in the previous pages an attempt will be made to correlate the players and situations introduced by Wagner with Germanic and Norse mythology.

Synopsis – Götterdämmerung

Prelude. In the prelude, the three Norns recount and comment on the events preceding *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*. The three Norns preceded the creation of the earth and are the daughters of the *Earth Goddess Erda*. They recall that Wotan came to drink from the spring flowing around the ash tree and that he cut off a branch from this tree, using it to fashion a spear. He inscribed on this shaft with runes all the treaties he made and had been obliged to respect. Then follows a retrospective of the events already discussed in the first three operas of the Ring.

Prelude

The *Norns* are the three goddesses of fate in Germanic mythology and they are named *Urd*, *Verdandi* and *Skuld*. They signify the past, present and the future. They are considered to be sisters who know the complete fate and not only portions as the Gods do. They live near the spring *Urdarborn* next to the world ash, and they bring people happiness or misfortune. *Skuld* also determines the end of life, that is the arrival of death. In this respect there is some similarity

with the Greek Moiren and the Roman Parzen.¹³⁹ The Norns protect the tree Yggdrasil against attack by the serpent and other malevolent creatures and constantly repair damage to the tree with clay and water from a well called Urdr.¹⁴⁰ The *Norns* are also known as goddesses who are not under the control of Odin. He, although being the allfather has to approach them as a petitioner.¹⁴¹ They are also mentioned by Snorri in *Gylfaginning XIV*.¹⁴² In *Gylfaginning XVI* they are reported to have splashed water from Urdr onto the tree Yggdrasil. According to Snorri these were women who came from the land of giants and had immense power. It appears in Anglo-Saxon literature Urd was venerated long after the general acceptance of Christianity. They are quoted nine times in the epic *Beowulf*. The Norns were even more ancient than Odin. The fact that the Norns exemplified the past, the present and the future inferred that they were in control of time.¹⁴³ They are known by different names in other texts such as Fate, Being and Necessity.¹⁴⁴ The *Norns* were already known in literature at the end of the first millenium. The eleventh century Bishop Burchard of Worms chastised women for venerating the *Parcae*, three women who had the power to determine the destiny of a newborn.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Herder Lexikon, p. 113.

¹⁴⁰ Branston, 1980 p.77.

¹⁴¹ Branston. p.151.

¹⁴² Branston. p. 206.

¹⁴³ Branston. p.208,209.

¹⁴⁴ Davidson, 1976.p.46.

¹⁴⁵ Davidson, p.112.

Prelude cont'd.

Wagner uses the three *Norns* to recapitulate the events so far, while continuing to weave the cord which breaks, the *Norns* disappear into the nether regions of the earth. Now Brünnhilde and Siegfried emerge from the cave where they had spent the night together. Brünnhilde sings:

but the maidenly source
of all my strength
was taken away by the hero
to whom I now bow my head¹⁴⁶

Siegfried leaves to perform more heroic deeds and leaves her the ring of Alberich. She in turn gives him her horse Grane.

Act 1, Scene 1. The site of the action now moves to the castle of the Gibichungs. There resides Gunther and his sister Gutrune. Hagen, who is Gunther's half brother and the son of Alberich, suggests that Gunther should marry Brünnhilde and Gutrune marry Siegfried. This could be accomplished by giving Siegfried a magic potion which would erase from his memory his encounter with Brünnhilde. By wearing the Tarnhelm i.e. the invisibility helmet he can travel from one place to another very fast. Using it he can disguise himself as Gunther, and win Brünnhilde for him. Siegfried will then marry Gutrune. The scene now shifts to the cave where Brünnhilde sits waiting for Siegfried's return. Her sister Waltraute appears urging her to return the ring to the Rhine daughters, which she refuses to do. Siegfried now enters disguised as Gunther and leaves with Brünnhilde intending to deliver her to the real Gunther.

Mythological background.

Gunther is a German heroic figure based on Gundahar also known as *Gundikar*, King of the Burgundians of the middle Rhine. He is first mentioned in 411 and is killed in 436 when his kingdom is destroyed by Huns. He is mentioned in the *Waltharilied* and in the *Nibelungenlied* as being the brother of Kriemhild, Gernot

¹⁴⁶ Spencer, p. 285. 'doch meiner Stärke magdlichen Stamm nahm mir der Held dem ich nun mich neige'.

and Giselher. Gunther, the husband of Prünhilde, is the king of the Burgundians and in the first part of the *Nibelungenlied* he is portrayed as a rather labile character and weakling, sharing responsibility for the death of his brother in law Sifrit. In the second part of the *Nibelungenlied* he is shown as the victim of his sister's vengeance. In the *Waltharilied* he is described as being avaricious and in the *Edda*, where his name is Gunnar, he is thrown into a snakepit at the court of Atli, while his brother Högni has his heart cut out and this is also reported in the *Atlakvida*.¹⁴⁷ Gunther is also known as Gynther and *Guthere*.¹⁴⁸ In the *Nibelungenlied* he is named in *aventure* 1, strophe 4, then in *aventure* 6 strophe 332 Gunther expresses the wish to take Prünhilde as a wife and Sifrit promises to help him in this endeavour. The relationship between Gunther, Sifrit and Prünhilde is quite different from that described, or rather invented, by Wagner in *Der Ring*. While in *Die Götterdämmerung* Wagner chooses to make Brünnhilde jealous of Gutrune, in the *Nibelungenlied*, Prünhilde is very upset that Gunther's sister has married beneath her station since Sifrit calls himself a vassal. Hagen finds out from Brünnhilde that Siegfried has a vulnerable spot between his shoulder blades and kills him during a hunt. Gunther in turn is killed by his half brother Hagen in *Die Götterdämmerung* but his fate is different in the *Nibelungenlied* where Kriemhild cuts off his head.

¹⁴⁷ Herder Lexikon, p. 77-78.

¹⁴⁸ Grimm, 1889, p. 20.

Gutrune, who in Germanic mythology is known as Gudrune, in Norse literature is Kriemhild. In the *Atlakvida* she avenges the death of her brothers. In other literature she is also known as Kudrun.¹⁴⁹

Wagner greatly modifies the story in *Die Götterdämmerung* by having Gutrune offering Siegfried a draught which clouds his mind and makes him forget *Brünnhilde* falling in love instead with Gutrune. All this has been contrived by Hagen who is the son of Alberich and half brother of Gunther and Gutrune.

Hagen – mythological recall.

In Old Norse known as Högni, in the *Atlakvida* of the *Edda*, he is the brother of Gunnar, the king of the Burgundians, and is invited by Atli the king of the Huns, who tried to find out where the treasure of the *Nibelungen* is hidden. Since the two brothers refuse to reveal this information, Högni has his heart cut out and Gunnar is thrown into the snake pit. In the *Atlarnalsaga* Högni's fate is the same but he is avenged by Atli's wife. In the old *Sigurdlied* Högni advises against killing Sigurd because he realizes that Brynhild is out for vengeance. In the *Nibelungenlied* Hagen kills *Sîfrît*, the husband of Kriemhild to avenge the insult which *Prünhilde* has suffered.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Herder Lexikon, p. 75.

¹⁵⁰ Herder Lexikon, p. 79-80.

In *Die Götterdämmerung*, Hagen finds a watery grave when he jumps into the Rhine to retrieve the ring and is drowned by the Rhine maidens.

As to the betrayal of *Brünnhilde* by *Siegfried*, who suffers from memory loss due to the potion given to him by Gutrune at the behest of Hagen, Wagner amplifies this story in a remarkable way. *Siegfried* tries to calm the fears of Gutrune about his faithfulness to her by saying:

Brünnhild' obeyed her husband
for the whole of the bridal night.¹⁵¹

When Brünnhilde appears on the scene and discovers that it was Siegfried who stole the ring from her she is, of course, very upset.

Ha! He it was
who wrested the ring away from me
Siegfried, the treacherous thief!¹⁵²

Her ire is boundless:

Bid Brünnhilde
break her heart in twain
to destroy the man
who betrayed her!¹⁵³

And further on she cries:

He forced delight
from me, and love.¹⁵⁴

Siegfried tries to defend himself by saying:

Nothung, my worthy sword,
defended the oath of loyalty;
its sharp edge sundered me
from this unhappy woman.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Spencer, p.314. 'Ihrem Mann gehorchte Brünnhild' eine volle bräutliche Nacht'.

¹⁵² Spencer, p.321. 'Ha! - Dieser war es, der mit den Ring entriss: Siegfried, der trugvolle Dieb!'

¹⁵³ Spencer, p.322. 'Heisset Brünnhild', ihr Herz zu zerbrechen, den zu zertrümmern, der sie betrog!

¹⁵⁴ Spencer, p.322. 'Er zwang mir Lust und Liebe ab.

¹⁵⁵ Spencer, pp.322-323. 'Nothung, das werthe Schwert wahrte der Treue Eid; mich trennte seine Schärfe von diesem traur'gen Weib.

Act 3. In Scene 1 the three Rhine maidens try to get the ring from *Siegfried* but he refuses to give it to them. *Siegfried* goes out on a hunting party with Hagen and Gunther. Hagen had previously obtained from *Brünnhilde* a description of the spot on *Siegfried's* back which is vulnerable to a spear. Just at the time that *Siegfried* remembers how he was duped into renouncing *Brünnhilde*, Hagen kills him by plunging a spear into his back. *Brünnhilde* then realizes the treachery of Hagen and that *Siegfried* was innocent and had lost his memory. she orders a funeral pyre to be built for *Siegfried* then rides Grane herself into the flames, but not before throwing the ring into the waters of the Rhine. Hagen jumps into the water to retrieve the ring but the Rhine maidens drag him to a watery grave. Valhalla and the Gods erupt in a fiery explosion.

Act 3.

Here Wagner introduces a scene with no mythological correlation. *Siegfried* meets the Rhine maidens who entice him to return the ring to them. He is willing to comply but expects certain favours from them. Then follows the scene of the hunt where Hagen kills *Siegfried*. As he lies dying his memory returns and he realizes the horrendous betrayal he has committed.

Mythological recall.

In Wagner's *Der Ring*, *Brünnhilde* seeks and finds a fiery death at the same time setting fire to Valhalla. In the *Nibelungenlied* the Burgundians are killed off or kill each other in Attila's kingdom. The end result is the same, total annihilation caused by greed and deceit, infidelity and disloyalty, thirst for revenge and utter disregard for agreements and contracts.

Having discussed the different personalities appearing in Wagner's *Der Ring* and their relationships to Germanic and Norse mythology, an attempt will be made to correlate certain concepts in Wagner's Ring with their mythological sources.

Götterdämmerung

Also known in Old Norse as *Ragnarök*, meaning the ultimate fate of the Gods, the demise of the world, the final battle of the Gods and their enemies. The main source is the *Völuspá* which is part of the *Edda*. There are premonitory signs indicating that the end of the world is approaching. The magic tree Yggdrasil is starting to wither and shake, the sunlight fades and the *Fimbulwinter*, which is the winter of fright, begins ushering in the end of the world.¹⁵⁶ For three years the cold was intense and the whole world became waste. The moral decline starts with the murder of Balder, then the ultimate battle between the Gods and Giants start, the earth sinks into the ocean, the world goes up in flames and all life ceases. However the *Ragnarök* did not signify the eternal end of the world because, according to Germanic mythology, new creation would start in association with the return of Balder. The inhabitants of heaven and earth would begin once again to live in harmony and peace and a golden era would ensue.¹⁵⁷ The god responsible for the decline is Odin (Wotan). This decline was associated with a general lapse in morals which included adultery, incest, breach of contracts, murder of relatives and so on.

¹⁵⁶ Herder Lexikon, p. 55.

¹⁵⁷ Herder Lexikon, p. 70-71.

Walhalla. The name is derived from the Old Norse Valhöll. Höll means the great, or royal, hall and the prefix Val indicates the chosen. Also, the hall of the chosen, slain in battle.¹⁵⁸ In the *Poetic Edda* an account of the rise of Walhalla can be found. A place where the heroes slain in battle can be brought to be nurtured back to health and martial vigour by the Valkyries. Interestingly enough the concept of Valhalla was enthusiastically embraced by the Vikings of Scandinavia during the ninth to twelfth century A.D. As far as the final resting place of the dead is concerned, two places are quoted in old Germanic lore. One place is named Hel and this is the destination of old people, children and anyone without the honour of having performed heroic deeds. Then there is Valhalla which was situated in the centre of *Asgard*, particularly in Gladsheim, meaning the place of joy and accessible only to the Gods and the chosen heroes.¹⁵⁹ In Wagner's *Der Ring* we find a different conception of Walhalla which he describes as being both the home the gods and the chosen slain warriors while in early Teutonic folklore Walhalla is reserved strictly for the warriors.

The Ring in Mythology.

This is discussed in the *Eddic* literature in relation with the dwarf Andvari who was a fish-like dwarf swimming in a waterfall. He is captured by Loki but regains his freedom by giving Loki the golden ring. This ring becomes the root of all evil

¹⁵⁸ Cord, p.599.

¹⁵⁹ Cord, p.74.

as described in the *Volsungasaga*.¹⁶⁰ The treasure of the Nibelung is described as gigantic in the *Nibelungenlied*:

And now listen to some marvels concerning this treasure! It was as much as a dozen wagons fully loaded could carry away from the mountain in four days and nights coming and going thrice a day!^{161 162}

Much more precious than the treasure is the golden wishing rod which in Wagner's libretto becomes the *Ring*. This ring would enable the owner to become the ruler of the world.

In among the rest lay the rarest gem of all, a tiny wand of gold, and if any had found its secret he could have been lord of all mankind.^{163 164}

The ring plays a pivotal role in Wagner's opera. The failure to return it to the Rhine maidens engenders a chain reaction of horrific events. For example, in Act 1, Scene 2 of the *Götterdämmerung*, Waltraute, one of Brunnhilde's sisters comes to plead with her to return the ring to its rightful owners because failure to do so is already causing the weakening of the power of the Gods and Valhalla.

¹⁶⁰ Herder Lexicon, p.14.

¹⁶¹ Hatto, p. 147.

¹⁶² Brackert. Strophe 1122. 'Nu muget ir von dem horde wunder hoeren sagen: swaz zwelf kanzwägene meiste mohten tragen in vier tagen und nahten von dem berge dan. ouch muose ir ietslicher des tages dristunde gân.

¹⁶³ Hatto, p. 147.

¹⁶⁴ Brackert, Strophe 1124, 'Der Wunsch lag darunter, von golde ein rüetelin der daz het erkunnet, der möhte meister sin wol in aller werlde über ietslichen man'.

She quotes Wotan:

‘If she gave back the ring :
to the deep Rhine’s daughters
from the weight of the curse
both god and world would be freed’¹⁶⁵

Brunnhilde refuses because the ring is the only token of love she has from Siegfried. As to the latter, who has removed the ring from Brunnhilde’s finger due to his state of confusion and loss of memory caused by Hagen’s draught, he too refuses to return the ring to the Rhine maidens unless offered some favours in return. Yet at the fiery end of this tale the Rhine maidens do recover the ring.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Spencer, p.304. ‘Des tiefen Rheines Töchtern gäbe den Ring sie wieder zurück von Fluches Last erlöst wär Gott und Welt

¹⁶⁶ Spencer, p.351. ‘Flosshilde leads the way as they swim towards the back of the stage, holding the regained ring aloft in a gesture of jubilation.’

Conclusion

In this treatise an attempt has been made to correlate Wagner's '*Der Ring*' with the mythological sources he used. While in some sections of the four part *Der Ring*, Wagner adheres fairly closely to his mythological sources, other sections are changed drastically to enable him to achieve cohesion and harmony in his work. The points of difference and affinity will be discussed in chronological order beginning with *Rheingold*.

In the *Volsungensaga*, Sigurd, the Volsung, obtains the gold of the Nibelung by trickery but in Wagner's version the giant Fafnir murders his brother, not his father. Another point of difference is that the dwarf in the *Volsungensaga* is not a Nibelung and is called Andvari. Furthermore the giants will build Asgard, which is the home of the Gods, while Valhalla is the place heroic slain warriors are brought to be resuscitated, according to Snorri Sturluson in the *Prose Edda*. The goddess who distributes the golden apples which ensure eternal youth is Freyja in Wagner's version but Idun in the *Prose Edda*. Also in the *Prose Edda* no mention is made of the relationship between the curse placed on the ring and building the castle for the Gods, this being Wagner's personal contribution to the story. Another innovation by Wagner is connecting love and the gold, or rather the foreswearing of love to obtain the gold. A different situation prevails in the *Nibelungenlied* where Hagen has hidden the gold in the Rhine, whilst in the *Rheingold* the gold has been there since time immemorial and is guarded by the three Rhine maidens. Wagner tells of three Rhine Maidens while the other

Sagas speak only of two. Alberich's role has been changed by Wagner. There is some confusion between Fricka and Freia, their roles being different in some of the Sagas. The various discrepancies between mythological sources and Wagner's interpretation have been quoted in the main portion of this thesis. Similar discrepancies exist in all the other operas of *Der Ring* i.e. the *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*.

Wagner's message

It behooves the modern reader of '*Der Ring*' to try to come to some understanding of the meaning that Wagner wished to convey to the audience and public.

While it was primarily the mythological background which characterizes *Der Ring* there were other important considerations which emerge in this poem and composition. The socio-economic situation around 1848 undoubtedly influenced the thinking of Wagner to a great extent (see page one of the Introduction). Bernard Shaw goes so far as to write that Wagner's 'picture of Niblunghome under the reign of Alberic is a poetic vision of unregulated industrial capitalism as it was made known in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century by Engels 'The condition of the working class in England in 1844'.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Bernard Shaw. 'The Perfect Wagnerite' A Commentary on the Niblung's Ring. Time & Life 1972, p.xxi

A gloomier interpretation might focus on the downfall of the Gods and Walhalla as being caused by the lack of moral fibre. It could be seen as a tale of deceit, lies, dishonesty, rivalry, adultery and incest with every imaginable vice being represented, the worst being disloyalty and lack of honour.

However, the redeeming value in this masterpiece, which is *Der Ring* is that greed, lust for power and manipulation is the ruin of the world which has to be purified and rebuilt from within fortified by the power of love.

Everlasting love heals all, as *Brünnhilde* sings:

Siegfried, my blessed hero
seize hold of my heart
to clasp him to me
while held in my arms
and in mightiest love
to be wedded to him !¹⁶⁸

167.Spencer, p.350. 'Siegfried, mein seliger Held, ihn zu umschlingen, umschlossen von ihm, in mächtigster Minne vermählt ihm zu sein.'

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Sources

Das Nibelungenlied, 1. Teil, Mittelhochdeutscher Text und Übertragung.
Ed. and trans. Helmut Brackert. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 25. Auflage
September 1999.

Das Nibelungenlied, 2. Teil, Mittelhochdeutscher Text und Übertragung.
Ed. und trans. Helmut Brackert, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 22. Auflage
Februar 1999.

Njal's Saga, author anonymous, translated by Magnus Magnussen,
Penguin Classic, 1996.

The Poetic Edda, translated from the Icelandic by Henry Adams Bellows.
Publ. Biblio and Tannen, 1969.

Saga of Thidrek of Bern, translated by Edward R. Haymes, Garland
Publishing, Inc., 1988.

Saga of the Volsungs, translated by Jesse L. Byock. Penguin Books,
1999.

Sturluson, Snorri, The Prose Edda, Tales from Norse Mythology.
Translated from the Icelandic by Jean I. Young. Publ. Bowes and Bowes,
1954.

Wagner, Richard Die Wibelungen. Weltgeschichte aus der Saga.
(Summer 1848) in Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen, Zweiter Band,
Leipzig, Verlag von E.W.Fritsch, 1887. Faksimile druck der Ausgabe von
1887. 1976 Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim. 1976.

Wagner, Richard. Das Rheingold. Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen. Fünfter Band. Verlag von E.W.Fritsch, 1888.

Wagner, Richard. Die Walküre. Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen. Sechster Band. Verlag von D.W.Fritsch, 1888.

Wagner, Richard. Siegfried. Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen. Sechster Band. Verlag von E.W.Fritsch. 1888.

Wagner, Richard. Götterdämmerung. Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen. Sechster Band. Verlag von D.W.Fritsch, 1888.

Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung, translated by Stewart Spencer. Publ. Thames and Hudson, 1993.

2. Secondary Literature

Branston, Brian, Gods of the North, published Thames and Hudson, 1980

Cord, William O. The Teutonic Mythology of Richard Wagner's The Ring of the Nibelung, Volume III. The Natural and Supernatural Worlds. Part 1. The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991.

Davidson, H.R.Ellis, Gods and Myths of Northern Europe, Penguin Books 1964, reprinted 1976.

Dumézil, Georges. Loki. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1959.

Grimm, Wilhelm. Die Deutsche Heldensage. Dritte Auflage von Reinhold Steig. Gütersloh. Druck und Verlag von E. Bertelsmann. 1889.

Grosses Duden-Lexikon, Volume 6, Bibliographisches Institut, 1967.

Hatto, A.T. The Nibelungenlied. Penguin Books, 1969.

Herder Lexikon, Germanische und keltische Mythologie 2. Auflage 1982.

Shaw, Bernard. The Perfect Wagnerite. A Commentary on the Nibelung's Ring. Time-Life Records Special Edition. Time Incorporated. 1972.

Spencer, Stewart. Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung. Publ. Thames and Hudson, 1993.

Turville-Petre, E.O.G. Myth and Religion of the North. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.