

BRÜNNHILDE'S TRANSFORMATION: LEITMOTIFS AND LOVE IN WAGNER'S *DIE WALKÜRE*

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Many philosophers have devoted a lot of attention to the work of Richard Wagner. This article provides philosophical accounts of two important aspects of Wagner's most ambitious work, the tetralogy *Ring of the Nibelung*. First, I examine how the musical device developed by Wagner known as the leitmotif functions in Act 1 of the second opera of Wagner's *Ring*, *Die Walküre*, through the analysis of leitmotifs presented by Roger Scruton. I shall focus particularly on the perspective that the use of this musical device provides on the love between the siblings Siegmund and Sieglinde depicted in the act. My belief is that Scruton's account of leitmotifs helps to explain the unique character that has been attributed to this act. The second part of the article presents a more detailed examination of the significance of the love between Siegmund and Sieglinde for *The Ring*. Besides Scruton's views, the interpretation of *The Ring* by Philip Kitcher and Richard Schacht will have an important role in this examination.

I

It is a stormy night. Sieglinde is waiting for her brutish husband Hunding to return from hunting in the surrounding woods. All of a sudden a strange man stumbles into the hut and falls unconscious on the floor. It is Siegmund, who has managed to chase away his enemies, and now, exhausted by this endeavour, does not even recognize the presence of the other person in the room. Sieglinde approaches the stranger, giving him some water, which revives him, and while they are standing there, gazing into each other's eyes, an immediate affection begins to grow between the two, which is beautifully reflected in the musical lines accompanying their encounter.

These are the first minutes of Act 1 of Richard Wagner's music drama *Die Walküre*, the second opera of Wagner's *magnum opus* *The Ring of the Nibelung*, and it marks the first stages of the story of Siegmund and Sieglinde, the mortal children of the god Wotan, who were separated at birth. Sieglinde was abducted and forced to marry Hunding, while her twin brother Siegmund was raised by Wotan in the woods. Wotan's hope was that Siegmund would one day be able to bring him the magic Ring, thus enabling Wotan to restore the world order that was disrupted by Alberich's theft of the Rhine gold in the first opera of the tetralogy, *Das Rheingold*.

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There probably is no other composer whose relationship to philosophy is as complex as Richard Wagner's. He was not only well-read in philosophy, particularly in the philosophy of Schopenhauer, but many philosophers have been inspired by his work and have provided extensive readings of the significance of Wagner's music dramas. One such philosopher is Roger Scruton. In fact, Scruton's admiration for Wagner is so great that he finds the whole of modern high culture merely 'a set of footnotes to Wagner'.¹ Scruton's evaluation is based on the significant insights he believes Wagner's works provide into our modern predicament, that is, into the question of how to find meaning in a world from which God has fled. Scruton locates the significance of Wagner's work for this problem in the viewpoint on human love, which *The Ring* provides.²

Another important part of Scruton's work on Wagner is an attempt to explicate the workings of the musical device developed by Wagner, which is known as the leitmotif. Act 1 of *Die Walküre* is actually one of the richest examples of Wagner's employment of it. There is, however, very little effort in Scruton's aesthetics to combine these two sides of his analysis of Wagner's work. This is what I intend to do in this article. Moreover, when analysing the position he believes love occupies in *The Ring*, Scruton almost exclusively discusses the love between Siegfried and Brünnhilde, which sees its first moments at the end of the third opera of the tetralogy, *Siegfried*. Though Siegfried and Brünnhilde's love is most central to *The Ring*, the love of Siegmund and Sieglinde is highly important as well, and thus deserves closer consideration. In fact, my belief is that Scruton's analysis of leitmotifs forms an illuminating basis for exploring both the character that love acquires in the course of Act 1 of *Die Walküre* and how the viewer's experience of the act is constructed, as well as allowing for a more thorough investigation of the position the love of the siblings occupies in *The Ring*.

Bryan Magee, another well-known British Wagner enthusiast, thinks that in Act 1 of *Die Walküre* the audience witnesses the unfolding of 'the most basic and primal feeling of human love within a total order of things' and that the love between Siegmund and Sieglinde depicted in the act 'is emotionally moving beyond anything imagined [...]'. Magee continues his praise, 'this act is successful artistically in every way imaginable [...]'. The characters, the action, the situation – all are triumphantly achieved, both dramatically and musically', and then concludes, 'there remains, permanently, something mesmeric about it'.³ My belief is that Scruton's analysis of leitmotifs unravels some of the mysteries of Act 1 of

¹ Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture* (London: Duckworth, 1998), 63.

² *Ibid.*, 63–68.

³ Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 2001), 132.

Die Walküre. This will be the subject of the first part of the essay. An important aim of it is to show, with the help of Scruton's analysis, some shortcomings, particularly in the explanation Thomas Grey has presented of how the leitmotifs function in Act 1 of *Die Walküre*.

My belief is that the reading of Act 1 of *Die Walküre* drawing on Scruton's analysis of leitmotifs presented in the essay will provide some new perspectives on the wider theme of the position of love in *The Ring*. The second part of the essay is devoted to explicating those viewpoints. There, together with Scruton's views, I shall take up another philosophical reading of *The Ring*, that offered by Kitcher and Schacht, as a starting point for my examination.

II

One of the primary aims of Scruton's investigation of Wagnerian leitmotifs is to call into question a common misconception concerning this musical device. The misconception equates a leitmotif with some sort of semantic sign. Like other signs populating our environment, the primary purpose of a leitmotif is, on this view, to stand for something external to the sign. Concerning the leitmotif, the sign is assumed to refer to some event or object in the drama. For example, Claude Debussy, by ironically calling leitmotifs 'visiting cards', arguably held this kind of view. Scruton, however, argues that this understanding gives a highly impoverished account of leitmotifs. Leitmotifs do indeed refer to something external to the music, but their nature is not exhausted by this relationship of reference. They are much more complex devices than mere visiting cards.

Scruton has used different kinds of metaphors to capture the essential features of leitmotifs. They are all intended to shed light on how leitmotifs gather individual things into a new complex unity. For Scruton, a leitmotif is 'a musical magnet'⁴ and 'a fragment of music with a memory'.⁵ Leitmotifs, in other words, create 'an expressive link between dramatic contexts, which compels the listener to bring one situation to bear on another, so that their atmospheres fuse'.⁶ Act 1 of *Die Walküre* serves as an especially good place to pick out the distinctive features Scruton believes leitmotifs possess. Two leitmotifs in particular have an important position in Act 1 of *Die Walküre* – namely, the Valhalla motif and the Nothing motif. Both function as musical magnets in that they bring events of *The Ring* preceding *Die Walküre* to Act 1, as well as connecting this act to some general themes and elements of the tetralogy. They precisely situate the love of Siegmund

⁴ Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 137.

⁵ Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 99.

⁶ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, 137.

and Sieglinde in the 'total order of things,' as Magee puts it. The contextualization of this love, as supplied by the leitmotifs, reveals the unique character of that love.

The Valhalla motif is heard for the first time at the beginning of scene 2 of *Das Rheingold*, when Wotan greets Valhalla, the newly finished fortress the giants have built him. Hence, the motif's connection to Wotan and his plans is evident. The Nothung motif, in turn, ties Act 1 of *Die Walküre* to the whole of *The Ring* even more strongly. It makes its first appearance right at the end of *Das Rheingold*. This motif is connected to a theme of *The Ring* that Kitcher and Schacht have helpfully named 'Project Siegmund'.⁷ This is related to the difficult situation Wotan faces at the end of *Das Rheingold*. After having agreed to give the ring to the giants Fafner and Fasolt, Wotan is left in a problematic situation regarding his attempt to establish order and meaningfulness in the world. Alberich loses the ring to Wotan at the beginning of scene 4 of *Das Rheingold*. Later, Wotan himself, however, has to hand it over to the giants as payment for building Valhalla and as a substitute for the goddess Freia, who was originally promised to them as payment for their efforts. Though Alberich is no longer in possession of the ring, neither is Wotan. Since the ring enables its owner to rule the world, this poses a fundamental threat to his authority. However, since Wotan's rule and his attempt to establish meaningfulness in the world rest on a commitment to laws and contracts, he cannot simply steal the ring back from the giant Fafner without undermining the foundations of his own authority.

This is the dilemma Wotan finds himself in at the end of *Das Rheingold*, and it is what Project Siegmund is intended to solve. That is, Wotan believes that if he were able to create a hero who is independent of his will and orders, but who would still eventually restore the ring to his possession, this would in no way compromise the foundations of his authority. Wotan puts this plan into effect with the actions he undertakes in between *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, which are not shown on stage. Wotan descends from heavenly heights to earth and assumes the name 'Wälse'. He has two children with an earthly woman: Siegmund and Sieglinde. Wotan brings up Siegmund alone in the woods, but after a while abandons him, so that Siegmund can develop into a hero who is independent of him. That is, to quote Wotan's lines from Act 2 of *Die Walküre*: 'The crisis calls for a hero who, free from divine protection, will be released from divine law. So alone he will be fit to do the deed which, much as the gods need it, a god is nevertheless prevented from doing.' This is the core of Project Siegmund and it is the 'great idea' that, the stage directions tell us, Wotan is 'seized' by at the end of *Das Rheingold* – at precisely the moment when the Nothung motif is heard in the orchestra for the first time.

⁷ Philip Kitcher and Richard Schacht, *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner's Ring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 28.

III

I shall concentrate on six occurrences of the Valhalla and Nothung leitmotifs in Act 1 of *Die Walküre*. In each case, they bring past and general elements of *The Ring* to the act. It is important to note, however, that some occurrences are more important than others, in the sense that certain leitmotif appearances fuse past elements with present stage actions more strongly than other instances do. Roughly, leitmotifs function in the act in two ways: some leitmotifs, by making reference to Wotan, simply provide an indication of Siegmund and Sieglinde's being siblings. This is especially the case with the first two leitmotif appearances in the act. Other occurrences, in turn, create a more multifaceted link between the whole *Ring* and Act 1 of *Die Walküre*. Also, the Nothung motif in particular develops during the act, and its later appearances become more significant than earlier ones. As Scruton explains, one of the central features of leitmotifs is the way 'meaning slowly accumulates' around them.⁸ In Act 1 of *Die Walküre*, this is especially true of the Nothung motif. That is, more and more associations related to Project Siegmund begin to grow around it, and through its recurrent appearances the leitmotif begins to colour the stage actions that it accompanies. As a result, the magnetism of this motif becomes stronger and the leitmotif becomes less and less like a visiting card.

The third appearance of the Nothung motif serves as a good example of this development. It occurs in the scene where Siegmund has been left alone after having been challenged by Hunding to a duel in the morning. At this point in Siegmund's lines a reference is made to his father. Siegmund recalls how his father had promised him a sword which he can use when most in distress. Siegmund now finds himself in such circumstances, but no sword, it seems, is in sight. At this point, Siegmund calls out for his father by his earthly name 'Wälse'. These outbursts and Siegmund's angrily posed question, 'wo ist dein Schwert' (where is your sword), are followed by an orchestral climax at the height of which the Nothung motif is played by the trumpet, as if responding to Siegmund's cry 'Here's your sword'. Siegmund sees a glimmering light coming from the tree trunk, but does not realize that the light comes from the sword placed there by his father.

In this context, the magnetic character of the Nothung motif begins to evolve. It does not serve as a mere signifier or a visiting card for the sword on stage, but rather, by its appearance, the memory of Project Siegmund begins to colour the actions of Act 1 of *Die Walküre* more strongly. The leitmotif reveals factors which are not immediately apparent in the stage actions and it thus opens another level for the drama relating to Wotan's plan to regain the ring. That is, the motif fuses Project Siegmund with Siegmund's cry for the sword, and by doing so forms a new

⁸ Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, 137.

dramatic unit. Through the associations linking the Nothung motif with Project Siegmund, the appearance of the leitmotif in this context suggests that Wälse/Wotan did not sink the sword into the tree merely for the sake of Siegmund's rescue. This rescue has another purpose of which Siegmund is wholly ignorant – namely, to aid Siegmund in retrieving the ring from Fafner. The level of drama opened by the leitmotif is thus only available for the audience; it remains closed to Siegmund.

IV

Now, the difference or even discrepancy between the characters' beliefs and the insights into their condition, which the leitmotifs reveal, I believe, largely explains the unique effect the act produces. The gulf between the characters' conception of themselves and the view that the leitmotifs provide starts to highlight and intensify the forlorn nature of the main characters, that is, how these lost figures, Siegmund and Sieglinde, are not autonomous beings at all, but are parts of a scheme of which they are ignorant.

Further illustration of this unique effect is provided by the fourth and fifth appearances of the leitmotifs. In this case, the divergence in the level of knowledge between the audience and the characters concerns the specific quality that the developing incestuous love relationship acquires in the act. Again, in revealing the full significance of the viewpoint that the Nothung motif provides on their love, it is important to note that it brings in elements of which the main characters, Siegmund and Sieglinde, are both unaware. The motif's appearances reveal the background of the sword in the tree-trunk and of Siegmund himself. The sword and Siegmund have specific roles in Wotan's master plan, that is, Project Siegmund. The siblings are, in other words, totally ignorant that they are mere puppets, as it were, in Wotan's attempt to reclaim the ring he had to give up in *Das Rheingold*.

This is the import of the later appearances of the Nothung motif in the act, and my belief is that the way these instances colour the developing love relationship discloses the unique character Magee attributes to the act, that is, only when one grasps the full complexity of the Nothung and Valhalla motifs' appearances does one begin to feel how 'utterly abandoned' and emotionally naked the love of Siegmund and Sieglinde truly is.⁹

The fourth set of leitmotif appearances occurs in Sieglinde's recital following Siegmund's cry for the sword. First, the Valhalla motif is heard at a point where Sieglinde mentions a strange man who interrupted her wedding and plunged a sword into the tree, declaring that it belongs to whoever is able to pull it out.

⁹ Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 132.

So far, no one has succeeded. The appearance of the leitmotif in this context strengthens Sieglinde's connection to Wotan. The Nothung motif starts to dominate the music when Sieglinde begins to discuss her longing for a man who could pull the sword from the tree and rescue her from Hunding's hands. Sieglinde's beautifully expressed yearning for freedom is coupled with Wotan's Project Siegmund. Though the sword will eventually make Sieglinde's rescue possible, it was not primarily intended for that purpose. Again, there is a discrepancy between the character's state of mind and what the appearance of the leitmotif implies and, moreover, it is precisely this difference between what the characters know and what the music reveals that intensifies the vulnerability and distress apparent in Sieglinde's recital.

A similar kind of interplay between the Valhalla and Nothung motifs occurs in the fifth set of leitmotif appearances. In this case, the leitmotifs accompany the siblings' gazing at each other's features. Sieglinde is stunned by the likeness in appearance between her and Siegmund – 'though I first saw you today, I've set eyes on you before' – and by the familiarity of Siegmund's tone of voice. Gradually, their love grows deeper. But the developing erotic affection between the two arouses complex reactions in the spectator, and this is precisely because she knows more than the characters do. The leitmotifs convey that the two people falling in love are siblings and that one of them, Siegmund, has a special role in a master plan that has no place for his falling in love. This is to say that the leitmotifs reveal the accidental nature of the love of Siegmund and Sieglinde. The associations the leitmotifs bring to this part of the act suggest that this love is ultimately something which should not be happening, not because it is a form of incest, but because it is not a part of Wotan's scheme to regain possession of the ring. The sad helplessness of their love emerges once the developing relationship is placed within what Magee calls 'the total order of things,' and this is precisely the context the leitmotifs place it in. In other words, the siblings' relationship exhibits a special fragility that is not only due to the miserable situations we find them in, but is also due to the ignorance these characters have of the true state of affairs. The leitmotifs provide precisely this outlook on their love, and remind us of the divergence between the two levels of drama – that is, Project Siegmund and the developing love relationship. This again intensifies the vulnerability that the siblings' relationship embodies.

V

The sixth appearance of the leitmotif occurs when Siegmund draws Nothung from the tree-trunk. It is a huge orchestral explosion where the intensities and expectancies that have gradually accumulated in the course of the act finally receive their climactic fulfilment. As Magee puts it, the intensity of the siblings'

experience 'borders on the intolerable' and this climax is the moment it seems finally to find release. But, again, things are more complex than they appear. Thomas Grey, in his categorization of leitmotifs, has named the Nothung motif an 'anticipation' motif by which he means that the motif is 'a musical and mental presentiment of an object not yet materially realized'. The object is in this case the sword Nothung and the moment the motif anticipates is 'Siegmond's discovery of the sword implanted by his father'. In other words, Grey claims that the 'denotational role' of the Nothung motif is not fully apparent in its first appearances, but 'is realized only in the course of Act 1 of *Die Walküre*'.¹⁰ In Grey's opinion, the event of Siegmund's pulling the sword out of the tree is 'the defining dramatic context' of the Nothung motif. This is the point at which the anticipation gradually built by the previous, less grandiose, appearances of the motif in the act receives fulfilment.

Now, building musical dramatic tension in Act 1 of *Die Walküre* is certainly one aspect of the Nothung motif. The motif develops, which builds tension, and then achieves resolution at the climax of the act. But this is only part of the story. Grey's account overlooks the way the other appearances of the Nothung motif fuse elements of Project Siegmund to the stage actions to build a new dramatic context (in Scruton's words). They have a more independent position than Grey's description implies. That is, they do not merely build tension, but the Nothung motif already has a specific role in the earlier contexts in which it appears. Grey's reading of the position of leitmotifs in Act 1 of *Die Walküre* somewhat misjudges the significance of Project Siegmund in the act; by reducing the earlier appearances of this motif to mere signs of anticipation, it does not take into account the way in which Wotan's project becomes implemented in the act, and the way it colours the drama by the appearances of this leitmotif.

As I have argued, the associations the leitmotifs carry of Project Siegmund provide perspective on the act, particularly on the character of the love between Siegmund and Sieglinde. The full unfolding of the heartbreaking helplessness of this love is dependent on the viewpoint the leitmotif's appearances afford it. This is an important aspect of how the leitmotifs function in the act, and is something Grey's account overlooks. This is to say, the recurrence of the Nothung motif in the act does not merely anticipate Siegmund's pulling the sword from the tree and build musical tension for that moment, as Grey's reading suggests. Rather, it plays a decisive role in opening the viewpoint on human love that Magee deems the central source of the exceptional quality of Act 1 of *Die Walküre*. This love, however, also has general relevance for the tetralogy as a whole.

¹⁰ Thomas S. Grey, 'Leitmotif, Temporality, and Musical Design in *The Ring*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 92–93.

VI

Many philosophical accounts of Wagner's *Ring* have drawn attention to the important position human love has in the work. Like Scruton, Kitcher and Schacht give it a central place in their investigation. In these readings, the theme of love is, however, approached with slightly different emphases. Whereas Scruton primarily focuses on the love between Siegfried and Brünnhilde, Kitcher and Schacht provide a detailed analysis of the relevance that Siegmund and Sieglinde's love has for *The Ring*. In fact, the two scholars explicitly reject the notion that the love between the siblings is 'little more than a warm-up act for Siegfried and Brünnhilde, foreshadowing in lower case what their successors display in capital letters, hero and HERO, love and LOVE.' This kind of evaluation does not, in their view, do the siblings 'justice.'¹¹ The love between them should not be underestimated, for it makes possible a process Kitcher and Schacht call 'Brünnhilde's transformation',¹² which ultimately leads to the culmination of the whole *Ring* in the immolation scene of *Götterdämmerung*. That is, the love serves as a kind of causal condition for this process in the sense that Brünnhilde would have been unable to carry out her final actions 'without the lesson in love that she learned thanks' to the siblings.¹³ Scruton, Kitcher, and Schacht emphasize the importance of the encounter between Siegmund and Brünnhilde in Act 2, scene 3, of *Die Walküre*.¹⁴ The siblings have desperately tried to flee Hunding and his men, but at the beginning of the scene they are too tired to continue. Sieglinde falls asleep and all of a sudden Brünnhilde appears to Siegmund announcing that his earthly time has come to an end, and that he must follow her to Valhalla. This is not what Siegmund's fate looked like in the beginning of Act 2. There, Wotan is almost euphoric about Siegmund's recovery of the sword and he orders his beloved daughter Brünnhilde to help Siegmund in the duel, so as to ensure the proper continuation of Project Siegmund. While Brünnhilde is getting ready for battle, Wotan's wife Fricka approaches Wotan. She is disturbed by the love that has emerged between the siblings and, as the goddess of marriage and fidelity, she demands punishment for Siegmund for his having broken up Hunding and Sieglinde's marriage. At first, Wotan does not care one whit about Fricka's rage and demands. He responds by explaining the bigger picture and the pivotal role Siegmund plays in it – that is, Project Siegmund – and thinks that the troubles Fricka raises are minor compared to them.

Fricka does not give up, and instead tries to get Wotan to see that he has a mistaken conception about the hero's relationship to him. That is, Siegmund is

¹¹ Kitcher and Schacht, *Finding an Ending*, 140.

¹² *Ibid.*, 115.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 140–41.

¹⁴ Roger Scruton, 'Love in Wagner's *Ring*', in *Art and Morality*, ed. Jose Luis Bermudez and Sebastian Gardner (London: Routledge, 2003), 162.

by no means independent of Wotan, but merely an extension of his will; hence, Siegmund cannot be a solution to the problem that Wotan encountered at the end of *Das Rheingold*. Wotan's plan demands a being that is independent of the god's will, but Siegmund does not satisfy this criterion. Fricka's remarks grow in authority and gradually Wotan begins to understand their ultimate meaning. He realizes that Project Siegmund is plagued by an insurmountable problem. Siegmund cannot be the solution to Wotan's problem of how to regain the ring. Moreover, given the role that oaths and promises have in Wotan's rule, Siegmund's stealing of Hunding's wife cannot go unpunished. Finally, Wotan swears an oath that he will remove the power from Nothung and will rescind the order he gave to Brünnhilde to help Siegmund in the duel. Fricka leaves the stage and is never to be seen again.

Brünnhilde returns. She sees her father devastated and wonders what has changed his state of mind so quickly. At the end of their exchange, Wotan tells Brünnhilde that the order he gave earlier has changed. She should in no way help Siegmund, but rather achieve victory for Hunding and then bring the Wälzung (the race Wotan sired) to Valhalla after he has fallen. Seeing Wotan's love for Siegmund, and how painful this decision is for him, Brünnhilde protests. She has, however, no other option but to follow her father's new orders, for, as Wotan reminds her in rage, Brünnhilde is nothing but his 'wish's blindly approving instrument'.

This is the background of Brünnhilde's encounter with Siegmund. After hearing about his fate, Siegmund asks questions about Valhalla, for example whether he will meet his father there. When he hears that Sieglinde cannot follow him, Siegmund asks Brünnhilde to greet Wotan and the heroes of Valhalla for his sake: he will stay with Sieglinde. Brünnhilde responds that anybody who has seen 'the Valkyrie's searing glance' must follow her. There is no other option. Hunding is pursuing Siegmund and Siegmund will be defeated in the duel since Wotan has taken the power from Nothung and it will no longer protect Siegmund in battle. This announcement makes Siegmund leap to his sleeping wife. He tells Brünnhilde not to 'terrify the sleeping woman' and then sings a heartfelt recital, crying over their unhappy condition, but finishing with a pledge to Sieglinde that even if he dies he shall not go to Valhalla.

Brünnhilde is astounded and deeply moved by Siegmund's commitment to Sieglinde. She just cannot believe that one could value 'everlasting bliss' so little. Brünnhilde continues to express her astonishment at seeing the love Siegmund feels for the sleeping Sieglinde: 'Is she everything to you, this poor woman who, tired and sorrowful, lies limp in your lap? Do you think nothing else glorious?'

These words mark the beginning of Brünnhilde's transformation. Kitcher and Schacht argue that in these moments Brünnhilde is gradually overcome by a feeling of love they single out as a form of 'empathic love.' They contrast this to what they

call 'benevolent love'. Though these two forms of love are both connected to human feelings and can be strong motivators for action, they differ from each other by involving a different level of generality. The affection involved in benevolent love is based on finding certain general principles important, which causes one to strive to make those principles more widespread in the world. A central cause of misery for these sorts of people is seeing those principles being trampled upon. Empathic love, in turn, is compassionate in nature and 'springs from the heart rather than from the mind and will'.¹⁵ It has to do with the feelings raised by encounters with other individuals and by their situations in life. It is a feeling based not on reason but on compassion for other people. It is this sort of love that gradually takes hold of Brünnhilde in Act 2 of *Die Walküre*. The process begins with her seeing her father's torment, and culminates in the encounter with Siegmund. As Kitcher and Schacht explain, 'at this point of her development, [Brünnhilde] experiences and expresses a number of instances of emphatic love, responding in an impulsive and unreflective emotional way to the needs, suffering, nobility, and worth of others'.¹⁶ The significance of this, in Scruton's words, is that Brünnhilde, in her encounter with Siegmund, 'is overcome by his selfless love and grief; as a result she identifies with his fate, so jeopardizing and ultimately losing her godhead [...]'.¹⁷ The emergence of this love in Brünnhilde, according to Kitcher and Schacht, 'is the key to her discovery that there is an authority even higher than that of Wotan himself'¹⁸ and this awakening is what leads Brünnhilde to defy her father's orders.

VII

Now, my belief is that the emergence of this kind of empathic love in Brünnhilde is largely caused by her seeing the siblings' relationship from the perspective provided by the leitmotifs in Act 1 of *Die Walküre*. That is, in her encounter with Siegmund, Brünnhilde perceives that love in the total order of the tetralogy. This perspective on their relationship was, as we have seen, to serve as a precondition for the proper unfolding of the sincere but hopeless love between the siblings. It is based on knowledge of the true state of affairs of which the siblings themselves are wholly ignorant. In Act 1, the audience acquires that knowledge by understanding the content and functioning of the leitmotifs. Brünnhilde, in turn, learns the relevant background from her father right before her encounter with Siegmund. There, Wotan gives a detailed account of his hopes and his plans to fulfil them. Now those plans have come to nothing.

¹⁵ Kitcher and Schacht, *Finding an Ending*, 150.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Scruton, 'Love in Wagner's *Ring*', 162.

¹⁸ Kitcher and Schacht, *Finding an Ending*, 144.

In both cases, there is a discrepancy between the siblings' view of things and what Brünnhilde and the audience know. This discrepancy renders the love between Siegmund and Sieglinde, to quote Magee again, 'emotionally moving beyond anything imaginable'. This is what Brünnhilde begins to perceive in the relationship, and is what ultimately moves her to defy her father's orders and to help Siegmund in battle with Hunding. Moreover, this decision is the penultimate point in Brünnhilde's transformation, and is decisive to the future course of *The Ring's* events. Grasping the outlook the leitmotifs provide on the love of Siegmund and Sieglinde enables the audience to share Brünnhilde's point of view, and understand what leads her to defy her father's order.

According to Scruton, the highest forms of love, as portrayed by Wagner in *The Ring*, exemplify an outlook in which the other person is loved 'in his individuality', that is, as 'the incarnate self for which there is no substitute since he can be wanted and cherished only for the particular thing that he is'.¹⁹ This outlook on another person finds a powerful expression in the relationship of Siegmund and Sieglinde, for in the course of Act 1 of *Die Walküre* it evolves precisely into the kind of love in which the lovers cannot admit 'substitutes'.²⁰ It is also a love that changes everything in *The Ring* and by understanding the leitmotifs in Act 1 of *Die Walküre* the audience, too, comes to sense its power.

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¹⁹ Scruton, 'Love in Wagner's *Ring*', 147.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.