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Dramatic Recapitulation in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*

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In his essay, "A Note on Opera," Donald Francis Tovey wrote that "a far more important aspect of Wagner's musical organization than any details of leitmotiv is the matter of recapitulation."[1] Nowhere in Tovey's writings did he explore in detail the implications of this striking observation, which so flatly contradicts much of traditional Wagner scholarship. In fact, recapitulation is a conspicuous feature in many of Wagner's works: the Chorus of Pilgrims in *Tannhäuser,* the Prize Song in *Die Meistersinger,* and the bells of the Temple of the Holy Grail in *Parsifal* are some of the most familiar examples. And, as Tovey did point out on several occasions, there are two instances in Wagner where recapitulation assumes extraordinary importance. In *Tristan,* and in the *Ring,* Wagner achieved a musical articulation of the crux of the drama not by means of the leitmotiv or thematic recall, but by massive musical recapitulation.

The best-known example of large-scale recapitulation in Wagner's works is Isolde's concluding "Liebestod" in *Tristan,* and its dramatic point has been discussed by Joseph Kerman in his book *Opera as Drama.*[2] But an even larger musical recapitulation takes place in the last act of *Götterdämmerung,* in the passages that prepare and depict Siegfried's moments of revelation before his death. This recapitulation has received very little critical attention. Lorenz overlooked it completely, and, in his zeal to classify its form according to recurring motives, obscured its correspondence with the last act of *Siegfried.* Consequently, Lorenz regarded precisely this section as "unusually

[1] "A Note on Opera," in *The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays* (New York, 1949), p. 359. Tovey also made this point in several other essays, but never more clearly than here.

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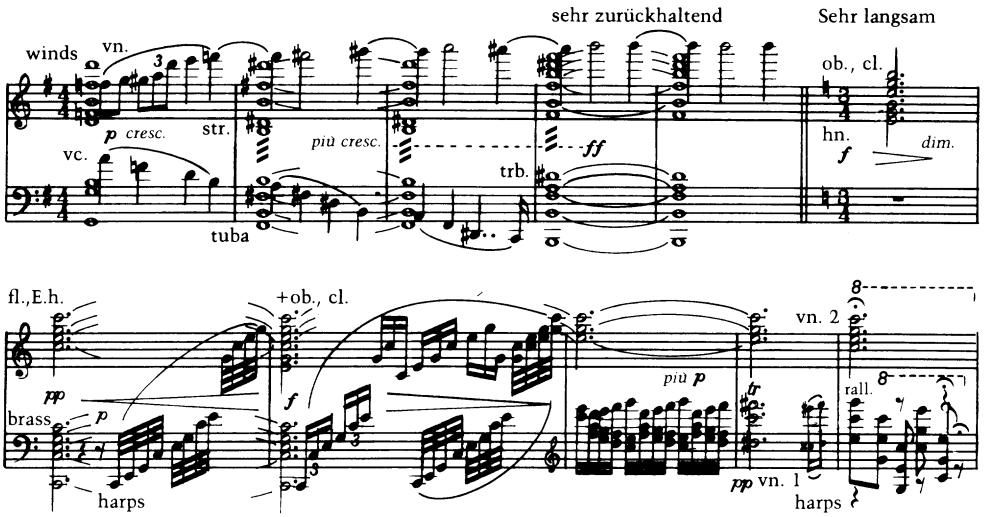
[2] *Opera as Drama* (New York, 1956), p. 212.



Example 1

free" in its formal aspect.[3] Actually, this section represents a powerful formal gesture on the level of the entire cycle, perfectly calculated to express the pathos of Siegfried's tragic death.

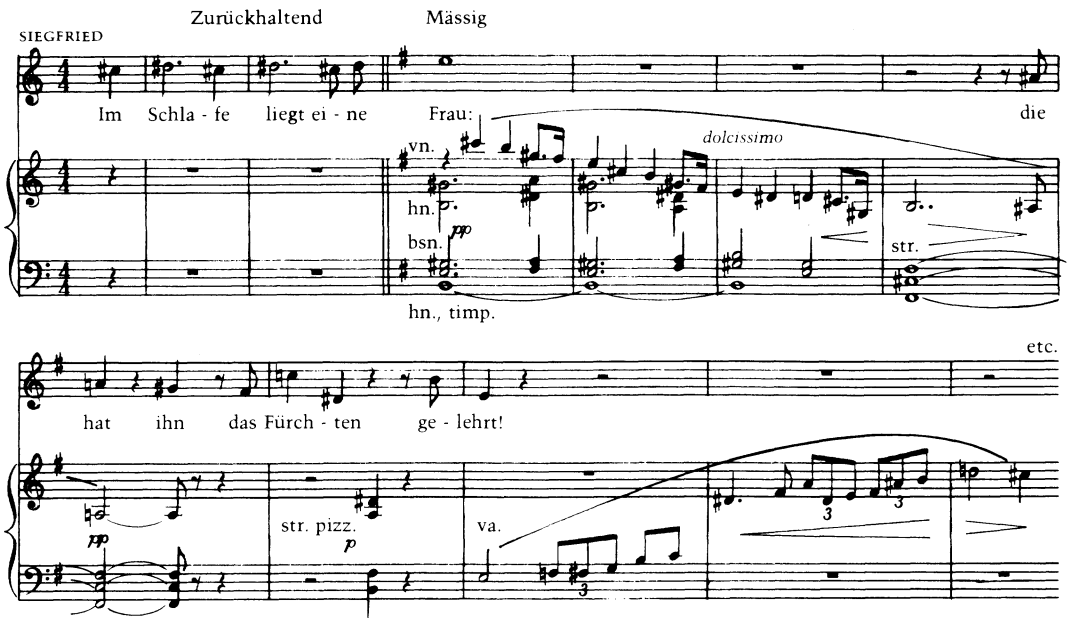
When Wagner returned to work on *Siegfried* in 1869, after a twelve-year interruption during which he had completed *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger,* he brought with him a more complex musical language and a greater control over large-scale tonal relationships. In particular, he had developed the technique of pairing two tonalities and using the tension thus created for dramatic effect.[4] This practice, which is a pervasive feature of Wagner's musical organization in the works beginning with *Tristan,* can best be illustrated by precisely that music in the *Ring* that forms the core of the great recapitulation in *Götterdämmerung.* The music for Siegfried's awakening of Brünnhilde in Act III, scene 3 of *Siegfried* is based on such a pairing of tonalities, in this case E and C. The moment of maximum musical tension in the scene is the moment at which C major is affirmed, having developed out of a tonal context in E. And, as we might expect, this moment of maximum musical tension coincides exactly with the moment of maximum dramatic tension: Brünnhilde's awakening by Siegfried. Brünnhilde is at first speechless with wonder, and the chords in the orchestra, due to their modulation and the remarkable preparation for it throughout the third act, articulate the feeling of a new, heightened range of consciousness.

The extraordinary character of this climax is achieved by something like a miracle in harmonic progression: the strongly-prepared dominant-tonic cadence in E is subsumed within an even stronger chromatic resolution to C. Despite the four measures of dominant preparation for the E-minor triad that opens the

[3]*Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner,* vol. I (Berlin, 1924), p. 202.

[4]For the concept of "tonal pairing" in Wagner's music I am indebted to Professor Robert Bailey. A tonal pairing entails the juxtaposition of two key areas which together comprise the tonal center for an extensive musical unit. Such dual tonal relationships are common in Wagner's late works: thus, the first act of *Tristan* contains a tonal pairing of A and C, the second act of *Götterdämmerung* of B♭ and C, and the first act of *Parsifal* of A♭ and C. For a discussion of this tonal relationship in the first act of *Tristan* see Bailey's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, *The Genesis of* Tristan und Isolde *and the Study of Wagner's Sketches and Drafts for the First Act* (Princeton, 1969).

Of course, if any analysis of tonal relations in Wagner is to prove aesthetically sound, it is important not to regard tonalities as abstract entities apart from the music, a danger to which Graham George succumbed in his treatment of "interlocking tonality" in "The Structure of Dramatic Music 1607–1909," *Musical Quarterly* 52 (1966), 465–82. The value of the idea of tonal pairing consists in its utility as a means of describing events in a musical language in which the process of modulation itself—in Wagner's own words, "*die Kunst des* Überganges"—occupies a central position.



Example 2

$\frac{3}{4}$ *Sehr langsam* section, its highest tone, B, is heard as leading tone to C, and the triad must resolve to the following C-major chord. Wagner reinforces this effect by his orchestration, giving the E-minor triad to the horns, oboes, and clarinets in a confined register, and the following C-major triad to the brass instruments, flutes, and English horn in a setting that encompasses a tonal space of five octaves (ex. 1).

This climax is not an isolated and unprepared event. Seeds for it have been sown throughout the last scene. The crucial harmonic progression, E to C, along with the ascending violin line from Brünnhilde's awakening, are first heard in the orchestral introduction when Siegfried appears on the mountain height. The first vertical sonority to be sounded against this rising, unaccompanied melody in E major is a C-minor triad.[5] Moments later, as Siegfried discovers Brünnhilde's steed, and as he loosens her breastplate, this material, and its accompanying harmonic shift toward C, are repeated.[6] Finally, as Siegfried calls upon Brünnhilde to awaken, thirty-five measures before the climax, the full chromatic ascent is accomplished in the orchestra in smaller note values. The high B, harmonized here as the dominant-seventh chord of E, is nevertheless followed by a C-major sonority. At Brünnhilde's actual awakening, the E-minor triad is simply *interpolated* between the E dominant-seventh and C-major chords. The effect is thereby created of the falling away of one perspective, and the simultaneous opening out of a new one. With this cadence, E, the central tonality of the scene up to this point, is superseded by C.

It will be seen that the pairing of the tonalities E and C in this scene is most clearly reflected in the music at its moments of greatest dramatic intensity. When Siegfried appears on the mountain height at the beginning of the scene, the tonality of E is affirmed, and the rising melody to high B and C occurs for the first time in the unaccompanied violins. And when Siegfried overcomes his fear of Brünnhilde, 130-odd measures later, he sings a complete cadence in E accompanied by a recall of this violin line from the orchestral introduction[7] (ex. 2). Until this point, E has been the

[5]Schirmer Vocal Score, p. 285, system 4.

[6]At S. V. S., p. 286, it reaches high E, descends three octaves of unison Es, and then shifts toward C major, as an E-minor triad is connected directly with a C-major chord; at S. V. S., p. 288, high A is reached as a harmonized dominant-seventh sonority of E, but the bass pedal on B resolves upward to C as the dominant-seventh of E resolves to an A-minor sonority.

[7]This vocal cadence occurs on the words "Im Schlafe liegt eine Frau: die hat ihn das Fürchten gelehrt!" (S.V.S., p. 293).

clear tonal center, with only passing tonal digressions in other keys. After this cadence, however, the primacy of E is clouded, and the dramatic juxtaposition of E and C at Brünnhilde's awakening brings the music to its most intense climax. Still, the expected cadence in C major is twice avoided before its emphatic arrival when Brünnhilde and Siegfried first sing together: their vocal cadence in C finally resolves the tension of the tonal pairing, and affirms C as the clear tonic. This too is dramatically apt: the remainder of the scene is crowned by the two passages in which Brünnhilde and Siegfried sing together. Both provide definitive cadences in the purest C major, and express musically the exaltation of their union.

The identification of the dramatic structure of the scene with the tonal structure based upon these paired tonalities is shown in figure 1.

When Wagner composed the music for *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, scene 2, Siegfried's death scene, he restated the entire tonal framework that we have discussed above. This is noteworthy, because the scene in *Götterdämmerung* represents not simply a recapitulation of several passages from *Siegfried*; it is rather a *transformation* of the musical essence of the whole last scene of *Siegfried* in a way that depicts the tragedy of the death of Siegfried. Not only the passages of exact recapitulation, but others as well, such as Siegfried's "Funeral Music," are adapted to this restatement of the E–C tonal pairing.

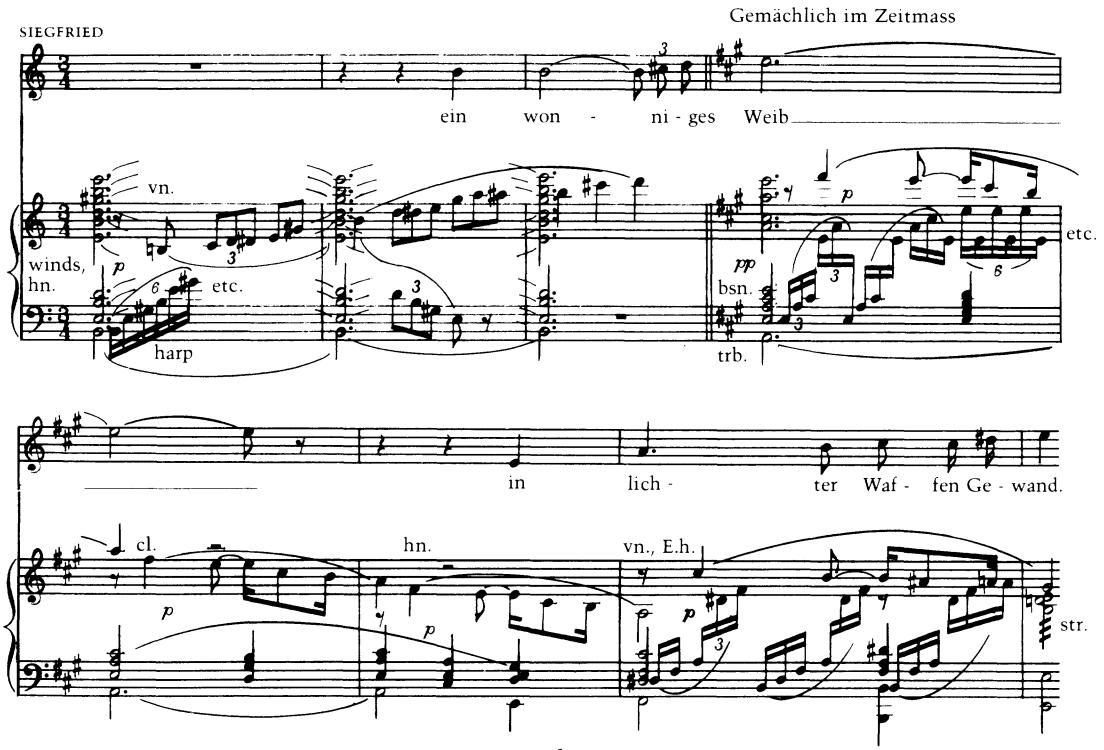
In fact, the pathos of Siegfried's "Funeral Music" owes much to the repetition of this large-scale tonal framework. If the music of the last act of *Siegfried* has made its mark, the return of this tonal progression up to its point of extreme tension (the juxtaposition of E and C in the chords cited above) arouses expectation of its fulfillment in C major. The simple change of mode to C minor in the "Funeral Music" derives not a little of its power from its formal correspondence with the C-major love-duet of Siegfried and Brünnhilde in *Siegfried*.

The most striking change in the recapitulation of this tonal framework is its new emphasis on A, the subdominant of E. Siegfried's cadence on *"ein wonniges Weib"* in *Götterdämmerung* is harmonized in A major, whereas its counterpart in *Siegfried*, *"Im Schlafe liegt eine Frau,"* was in E. This cadence weakens the E side of the tonal pairing by turning E into the dominant of A. Yet of course emphasis on the subdominant in a recapitulation is a familiar feature of the symphonic "drama" of the Classical style. Its effect here is analogous to that in a Classical symphony: the resulting softening of contrast presents the restatement in a new and superior light. The serene, other-worldly character of Siegfried's final measures is reinforced by its tonality of A, a key of resolution for the E side of the tonal pairing which is the dramatic center of the scene.

Another change in the recapitulation is that some of the material from *Siegfried* is omitted.

Tonality	Action	Schirmer Vocal Score Page Numbers
E	Orchestral Introduction, appearance of Siegfried	285–86
E	Siegfried overcomes his fear (cadence in E confirms E)	293
E/C	Siegfried turns to Brünnhilde, awakens her	293–96
E/*C*	Brünnhilde wakes, rises	296–300
C	Siegfried and Brünnhilde sing together (cadence in C confirms C)	300–02
C	Siegfried and Brünnhilde sing together (Coda, end of scene)	333–37

Figure 1: *Siegfried*, Act III, scene 3, Tonal and Dramatic Framework



Example 3

Obviously, there would be no dramatic point to a repetition of the "chords of awakening" before Siegfried's death; the faster pace of the action requires abbreviation of the material. Despite its compression, however, this is one of the largest recapitulations in all of Wagner's works. About 130 measures are directly recalled from Acts II and III of *Siegfried,* and the whole section that encompasses the tonal pairing, including the "Funeral Music," numbers more than 250 measures.

A review of the dramatic progress in Siegfried's death scene will reveal further how the tonal pairing of E and C has been recalled and transformed. While on a hunting party with Gunther and Hagen, Siegfried relates stories from his youth. When he recalls his conversation with the forest bird, the "Waldweben" music from the second act of *Siegfried* is restated in its original tonality, E. After Siegfried sings the first two strophes of the forest bird's song, Hagen gives him a potion to restore his memory. Siegfried then finishes the final strophe of the forest bird's song, and continues directly with the story of his passage to Brünnhilde's rocky height. By this point Siegfried is transfixed, oblivious to everything but his memory of Brünnhilde, and on his words *"ein wonniges Weib"* Wagner recalls the vocal cadence and orchestral accompaniment from the corresponding passage in *Siegfried*[8] (ex. 3). Here, as we have seen, the cadence is harmonized in A, but as in *Siegfried* it marks the end of a section of music with a central tonality of E; the tonal balance is soon to shift in the direction of C. Thus in *Götterdämmerung,* the "Waldweben" music assumes the tonal role of the first part of the last scene of *Siegfried* in the E–C pairing. The temporal weight of E in proportion to C is approximately the same in both. Wagner can thus recapitulate material from both Acts II and III of *Siegfried* and incorporate it into one large musical unit.

[8]This passage was not contained in Wagner's first sketches, which show that he revised and expanded his first conception, thereby amplifying the recapitulation of material from *Siegfried.* See Curt von Westernhagen, *The Forging of the 'Ring': Richard Wagner's Composition Sketches for* Der Ring des Nibelungen, trans. Arnold and Mary Whittall (Cambridge, 1976), p. 225.

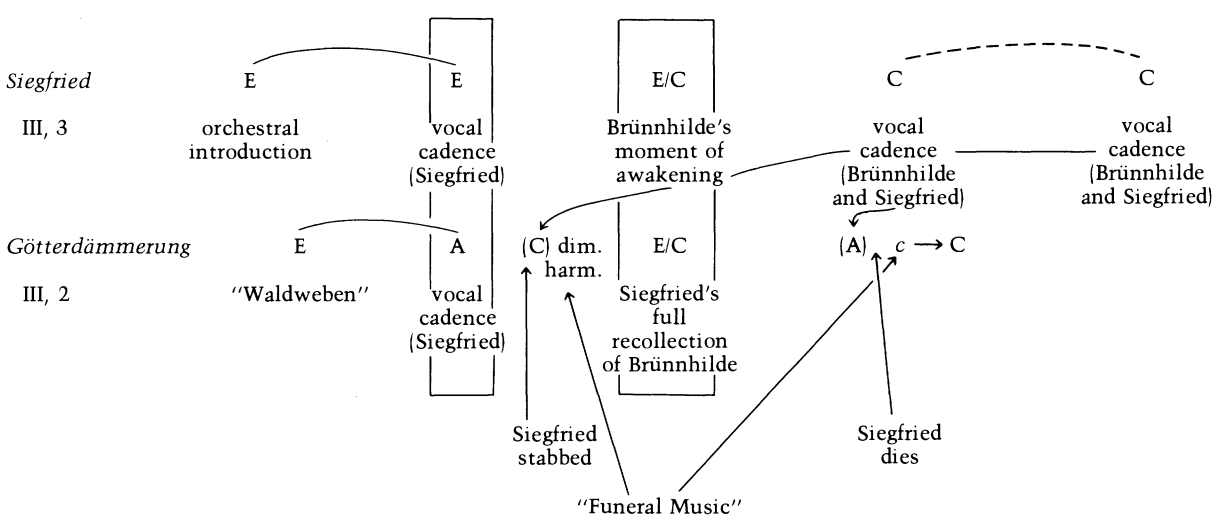
Even the double cadence structure in C from *Siegfried* is preserved in the recapitulation, though it is transformed in accordance with the different dramatic situation. As we have seen, the recapitulated material is condensed in *Götterdämmerung*; also condensed is the reference to C major before the chords of Brünnhilde's awakening. This reference is confined to one momentous passage, the last eight measures of Siegfried's narrative before he is stabbed by Hagen. Wagner recalls here material from both of the climactic C-major cadences in *Siegfried,* combining their motives to frame the first words in which Siegfried fully recollects his union with Brünnhilde. Siegfried's last words as he dies, moreover, are accompanied by the cadential flourishes from the first of the *Siegfried* cadences, transposed into A major. Musical sentiments of splendor and peace recapitulated from the love-duet in *Siegfried* convey the dramatic point of the scene—that Siegfried dies oblivious to his own tragedy at the hands of Hagen.

We may now schematize the tonal basis for the great recapitulation in *Götterdämmerung* (figure 2):

II

Wagner used tonal pairing as a structural musical element to solve a problem posed by his enormous expansion of the time-scale in music. Through his abandonment of set-numbers and creation of continuous opera, Wagner equated the development of music with the development of the entire drama. How was he then to set musically the central climactic events of the drama, without the aid of symmetrical forms? His solution was to base large sections of his music not on one stable sonority, but on the tension between two tonal centers, which could then reflect the underlying tension of the drama.

In the *Ring,* Wagner also resorts to a juxtaposition of paired harmonic centers to underline psychological conflict between characters. For example, in the Wotan-Erda dialogue in Act III, scene 1 of *Siegfried,* the central tonality of Erda's last three passages is E♭ and the central key for Wotan throughout is G. The tension in their dialogue, which increases until their mutual renunciation, is reinforced by these contrasting tonalities. In the first act of *Götterdämmerung,* the crucial confrontation be-



Note: Direct recall of material is shown by boxes.

Figure 2: *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*—The Tonal Basis for the Recapitulation

tween Brünnhilde and Siegfried, when he appears in the likeness of Gunther after having been transformed by the magic of the Tarnhelm, is portrayed by a tonal shift from B to E♭, the polar tonalities of the act as a whole. A poignancy of effect is created by the abruptness of the modulation at Brünnhilde's shocked response (*"Wer ist der Mann, der das vermochte, was dem Stärksten nur bestimmt?"*) and by the fact that she does not sing in the tonality of the Tarnhelm, an instrument of deception and guile. Here again, in a very different context, a relationship between tonalities a major third apart surfaces at an important dramatic moment.

The device of tonal pairing enabled Wagner to establish a covert link between disparate musical events by basing them on the same underlying harmonic relationships. This practice accounts in large measure for the paradox that Wagner's later music, while avoiding formal schemes, nevertheless imposes its own scaffolding on the dramatic progression. The characteristic sound of this music is conditioned by a subtle web of systematically controlled tonal relationships.

Wagner's mastery over the expressive possibilities of large-scale tonal relationships could also yield effects of extreme subtlety. At the very beginning of *Götterdämmerung,* for example, the chords of Brünnhilde's awakening are combined with the motives of the Rhine in another recapitulatory gesture, one that harks back to the music of primal innocence from the beginning of *Das Rheingold.* This is the only other moment in the *Ring,* apart from the great recapitulation in the third act of *Götterdämmerung,* when this chord progression is restated, and tonally it retains all its potency. It is now transposed down a semitone, and its first two harmonies, E♭ and C♭ (B), foreshadow the two pivotal tonalities of the first act.[9] And not only does this chord progression anticipate the tonal structure of the first act, it also presages the tragedy to follow. For if it were merely an echo from Brünnhilde's awakening it should resolve to C♭, as her chords had resolved to C. Instead, this resolution is withheld, and the first part of the Norns' Scene remains in E♭ minor. By this means Wagner converts the climax of his tonal pairing into a strangely suggestive gesture of premonition.

Far more important than these subtleties, however, is the recapitulatory synthesis at Siegfried's death. As the culmination of the story of Siegfried, the central figure of the *Ring,* this large formal gesture assumes special dramatic and even philosophical interest. In particular, it serves to define a perspective from which human subjectivity is paramount. We have already seen how Wagner's ingenious transformation of the E–C tonal pairing insures that Siegfried's final passage remains anchored to the center of a large modulatory structure, which brings it strongly into relief. From a dramatic point of view, Siegfried's death scene is no less central. It is a nodal point in the dramatic argument of the *Ring,* for in it the character of Siegfried seems to assume a symbolic dimension, as a representation of certain edifying ideas.

The special dramatic force of this recapitulation derives from the relation between Siegfried's role in the drama and those of Hagen and Brünnhilde. Siegfried's fullest identification with Brünnhilde occurs at his "awakening," as he recalls her after having been stabbed by Hagen. His recollection is so intense that he calls on her once more to awaken, and believes that he is actually with her on the mountain height. And he recalls Brünnhilde to the *same* sentiments she felt when she was awakened by him, having lost her godhead and become human. The physical disembodiment of these sentiments in Siegfried's death scene raises them to the level of mystic insight.

But in another sense Siegfried's dramatic role parallels that of Hagen. Each of them was raised as the son of a Nibelung, but Siegfried, unlike Hagen, is able to overcome his past.[10]

[9]Robert Bailey has discussed this tonal polarity, and its origins in Wagner's early sketches for *Siegfrieds Tod,* in "The Structure of the Ring and its Evolution," this journal I (1977), 53, 59–61.

[10]This dramatic relationship was pointed out to me by Professor Bailey.

Hagen, goaded on by his father Alberich, perpetuates greed and deceit. Siegfried is purified of these flaws and dies to sentiments of love. The basic philosophy of the *Ring* is expressed by the curse on the will to power and the promise of salvation through love. The means by which Wagner articulates this philosophy is Siegfried's transcendence of his worldly downfall in *Götterdämmerung*. Wagner's *Ring* is perhaps his most significant monument to the Romantic tenet that the current of subjectivity, of spiritual activity, of the individual's apprehension of *value*, is more real than external reality.

It is important in this connection to reassess Wagner's commitment to a complex of philosophical ideas espoused by Arthur Schopenhauer and, before him, by Immanuel Kant. In fact, the source of these ideas can be discerned in Plato's famous doctrine of Ideas. According to Plato, the soul is akin to the Ideas, and both are immaterial and everlasting substances. In Kant's revision of Plato's idealism, both concepts are explicitly excluded from the realm of phenomena, but are preserved through Kant's argument that things-in-themselves, as the ontological grounds of appearances, cannot be identified with the phenomena conditioned by them. Thus the bipolar metaphysical alliance between the Platonic soul and the Ideas is transformed by Kant into a complex of hidden universal laws of the higher unity of nature. Furthermore, there are two realms of human activity, moral action and the creation of beauty in art, where these hidden universal laws find embodiment in the sensible world of phenomena. This view of Kant's, which establishes a conceptual basis for the contention that art comprises the revelation of a higher order in nature, inspired the more radical thesis proposed by Schopenhauer in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*.

According to Schopenhauer, music is preeminent among the arts, because whereas the other arts present copies of the Platonic Ideas in perceptible form, music alone represents the will itself, that cosmic force which unifies the spiritual and material poles of existence. "Music ... never expresses the phenomenon, but only the inner nature, the in-itself of all phenomena, the will itself."[11]

This unique and exalted status accorded to music in the thought of Schopenhauer had a profound impact on Wagner, and his contact with Schopenhauer's ideas in the mid 1850s contributed to the decisive turn in his own creative development, the first monument of which is *Tristan und Isolde*. As Jack Stein has shown in his book *Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts*,[12] Wagner's "Schopenhauerian turn" counteracted his tendency, in the works from *Der fliegende Holländer* to the first operas of the *Ring* cycle, consciously to subordinate music to an all-encompassing dramatic synthesis. Far from regarding his music as the handmaid of the drama, as in his famous treatise *Oper und Drama*, Wagner, in his later writings, argues that the inner nature of music is in some sense more fundamental than drama. His clearest statement to this effect is contained in the essay *Beethoven*, which was written at the same time as the later parts of the *Ring* were composed:

> Music, which does not depict Ideas inherent in the phenomena of the world, but is itself a comprehensive Idea of the world, *includes* the drama within itself, since the drama, in its turn, expresses the only Idea of the world adequate to music.... We would then not be mistaken if we saw in music the *a priori* qualification for shaping a drama.[13]

At the time that he finished the *Ring* cycle, Wagner regarded his music not merely as a means of expression, but as the end of expression, as the basis for a metaphysical drama which captures the hidden essence of the noumenal world.

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[11]Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Leipzig, 1879; first published 1819), book III, p. 308.
[12]*Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts* (Detroit, 1960). See Stein's discussion of Schopenhauer's influence on Wagner, pp. 113–17, 157–65.
[13]"Die Musik, welche nicht die in den Erscheinungen der Welt enthaltenen Ideen darstellt, dagegen selbst eine, und zwar eine umfassende Idee der Welt ist, schließt das Drama ganz von selbst in sich, da das Drama wiederum selbst die einzige der Musik adäquate Idee der Welt ausdrückt.... Wir dürften somit nicht irren, wenn wir in der Musik die aprioristische Befähigung des Menschen zur Gestaltung des Dramas überhaupt erkennen wollten." *Gesammelte Schriften* IX, 105–06. This essay dates from 1870.

We must inquire, then, whether Wagner vindicates this lofty claim by his musical setting of Siegfried's death in *Götterdämmerung*. Does Wagner's "musical drama" reveal more than is depicted by the stage drama of a dying hero immersed in recollection? How does the great gesture of recapitulation in Siegfried's death scene represent Siegfried's *transcendence* of his worldly downfall?

Perhaps the most striking musical effect of this passage is that of suspended time. A recapitulation, because it represents the turning-back of a form onto itself, tends to collapse one time into the recollection of another. But the music of Siegfried's "awakening" also evokes a sense of arrested action because the inward ferment of love which it depicts obstructs all outward sensibility. This moment of complete internalization of the drama transfigures the character of Siegfried into an archetypal symbol of love which, in its purity, exists no longer on the plane of real, but of ideal, action. The real "action," portrayed by the "Funeral Music" which frames Siegfried's "awakening," is characterized by tropes of a traditional type—by fierce down-beats, diminished and minor harmonies, and the avoidance of high registers of pitch. It is the total absence of these accents of tragedy in Siegfried's own music that gives rise to a mood permeated with the mystery of revelation. Siegfried's "awakening" is an astonishing hiatus in the melodramatic action of murder and death.

This effect of a suspension of time coincides with a suspension of a sense of place. Siegfried is utterly unaware of Hagen's treachery because he believes that he is once again united with Brünnhilde on her rocky height. Thus, in the moment after he is stabbed by Hagen, Siegfried's narrative suddenly shifts from the past into the present tense:

Brünnhilde! Heilige Braut!
Wach'auf! Oeffne dein Auge!
Wer verschloss dich wieder in Schlaf?
Wer band dich in Schlummer so bang?

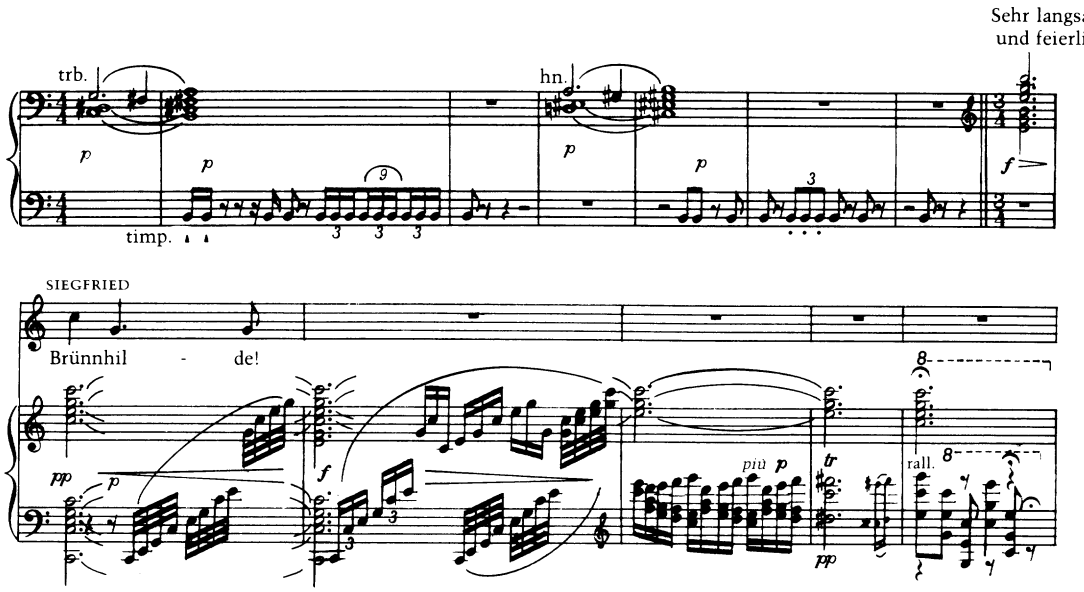
Brünnhilde! Holiest bride!
Awake! Open thine eyes!
Who hath locked thee again in sleep?
Who hath bound thee in slumber so fast?

Wagner calculates his setting of Siegfried's death so as to effect the suspension of time and space—the two forms of sensibility which, according to Kant, are necessary preconditions for experience of the phenomenal world. Wagner indeed gives us grounds for accepting his recapitulation as a representation of Siegfried's transcendence of his worldly downfall! From the standpoint of subjective idealism the problem of eternal existence is not to be sought as infinite temporal duration but rather as timelessness, as escape from the phenomenological "prison" of temporal succession and material causality. Thus there is, in fact, a legitimate sense in which Wagner's musical setting of Siegfried's death represents the promise of salvation through love.

This moral, metaphysical dimension is essential for a full understanding of Wagner's music. For the musical structure is organized so as to articulate certain central climaxes of dramatic import. And of these, the pathos of Siegfried's death is the most weighty.[14] As we have seen, it is articulated by a recapitulation of unprecedented proportions, which identifies and transforms sentiments from the climax of *Siegfried*. Nothing can show more clearly the limitations of analyses of Wagner's works confined to leitmotivs; analysis of this kind cannot touch the central tensions in this music, which are embodied in the form of the work as a dramatic whole.

Nevertheless, motives have their important subsidiary role in Wagner's works, and there are several powerful examples of reminiscence by motif in the *Götterdämmerung* recapitulation. Thus when Hagen thrusts his spear into Siegfried's back, Wagner recalls the C–F♯ tritone motif first sounded in Act II, scene 3 of *Götterdämmerung*, where Hagen called his men to arms. The most significant motivic recall, however, is of material from the so-called *Todesverkündigung* (Annunciation of Death) scene in Act II of *Die Walküre*.

[14]This was already noticed by Gustav Kobbé in 1889, who described it as the "supreme musical-dramatic effect in all that Wagner wrought" (*Wagner's Music Dramas* [New York, 1904], p. 103). But Kobbé ascribed its power to no more than the combined effect of several leitmotivs.



Example 4

As we have seen, in *Siegfried* the chords of Brünnhilde's awakening are introduced by an ascending violin line which supplies a sonorous transition to the climax. However, in the *Götterdämmerung* recapitulation, these chords are prefaced instead by the principal motif introduced in the crucial *Todesverkündigung* scene, in which Siegmund learns of his coming death. This motif, confined to a low register and clothed by the same distinctive orchestration that marked its first appearance in *Die Walküre,* serves no such transitional function (ex. 4). The point of this recall is not only the allusion to Siegmund's death; still more important is the sharpness of contrast thus drawn between two psychological levels of the drama. Siegfried's "awakening" represents an internal, or spiritual, plane of action. The music that frames it, Siegfried's "Funeral Music" as well as the reminiscence of the *Todesverkündigung,* is a commentary on the external, visible level of the action. Its dissociation from context makes the culminating recapitulation all the more astonishing, and its message more convincing. These two dramatic levels, with a summary of the musical material recalled in the *Götterdämmerung* recapitulation, are shown in figure 3 (see p. 111).

III

There is only one other recapitulation in Wagner's works analogous to the one in *Götterdämmerung:* Isolde's "Liebestod" at the end of *Tristan.* The Chorus of Pilgrims in *Tannhäuser* and Procession of Mastersingers in the third act of *Die Meistersinger* both recapitulate music heard at the beginning of the overture, and in the latter work a more subtle recapitulatory effect is created by Walther's "Prize Song," which is the apotheosis of his "Dream Song" heard earlier in the act. Yet in these cases the recapitulation itself is not the agent for a central dramatic point.[15] In *Tristan* it is. Isolde's "Liebestod," a recapitulation of material from the climax of her love-duet with Tristan in the second act, drives home the

[15]Walther's "Prize Song," coming at the very climax of *Die Meistersinger,* is certainly the agent for a central dramatic point. But the "Prize Song," is not, strictly speaking, a recapitulation, though it begins as one, while the transcendental theme important in *Tristan* and *Götterdämmerung* is absent in *Die Meistersinger.* For a thorough discussion of the relation between the "Dream Song" and "Prize Song" see William E. McDonald, "Words, Music, and Dramatic Development in *Die Meistersinger,*" this journal I (1978), 146–60.

	Material	Tonality	Action	Schirmer Vocal Score Page Numbers
Internal Action	"Waldweben" (*Siegfried*, II)	E	Siegfried recalls the forest bird's song	286–93
	Siegfried's cadence (*Siegfried*, III)	E → A	Siegfried recalls coming through the fire to a sleeping woman	293–95/2
	Cadential motives (*Siegfried*, III)	C	Siegfried recalls embracing Brünnhilde	295/3–95/4
External Action	Motif from *Götterdämmerung*, II	diminished harmonies, C–F♯ tritone complex	Hagen stabs Siegfried	295/4–96/2
	"Funeral Music" (new) and motif from *Walküre*, II	diminished harmonies, modulates to V of E	Horror of onlookers	296/3–97/3
Internal Action	Music from Brünnhilde's awakening, *Siegfried*, III	E (A)/C	Siegfried addresses Brünnhilde	297/3–301/1
External Action	"Funeral Music" (new) with other motives	C minor–C major (then modulates to E♭)	Funeral procession	301/1–03/5

Figure 3: *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, scene 2, Recapitulation.

point of their mystic union in love. In the second act love-duet, their union is not yet affirmed as a mystic, or suprasensible reality. For that to be possible, a sensible reality must become disembodied in order that its ideal substratum be revealed. In Isolde's final passage, their real love is transfigured to an ideal love, and the mystic ascent is symbolized by the death of Isolde.

In *Götterdämmerung*, the idea of a mystic ascent is worked out not as the single, all-consuming theme of the drama, as in *Tristan*, but in relation to a world ambivalent or hostile to it.[16] If *Tristan* is a religious drama,[17] the *Ring* is an ethical drama. Isolde's death is the inexplicable culmination of mystic passion; Brünnhilde's death in *Götterdämmerung* is a decision, an act from knowledge. This is made very clear in her final address to Wotan:

> . . . Mich musste der Reinste verrathen,
> dass wissend würde ein Weib!
> Weiß ich nun was dir frommt?
> Alles, Alles, Alles weiß ich
> Alles ward mir nun frei.
>
> . . . The truest of all had to betray me,
> So that I, a woman, might grow wise.
> Do I now know what hideth in thy heart?
> All things, all things, know I fully now;
> Everything has been revealed to me.

Brünnhilde's final act, her ride into the flames of Siegfried's funeral pyre, has double significance: she transcends her sensual union with Siegfried by a suprasensible, symbolic union, and deliberately relinquishes the ring, symbol of power and oppression. Love is identified with the meditated renunciation of power.

[16]One must of course make allowance for the dreaded world of "Day" in *Tristan*. But *Tristan* contains no counterpart to Hagen, and the forces he represents, unless it be Melot, who is merely a stock character without much independent dramatic significance.

[17]For an interpretation of *Tristan* as a religious drama, see Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, pp. 192–216.

In a sense, *Götterdämmerung* reaffirms the message of *Tristan* and then goes beyond it. Siegfried's death scene corresponds with Isolde's "Liebestod" as a recapitulatory transformation of the love theme inherent in both, and Brünnhilde's final oration ties the idea of a mystic ascent in love to an ethical *Weltanschauung* inimical to materialism. *Tristan* also left its mark on the musical substance of Brünnhilde's last passage, which, like the "Liebestod," consists of a long series of chromatically ascending sequences building to a great cadence in the tonic. And in *Götterdämmerung,* as in *Tristan,* the motif treated in these sequences forms the final cadence of the opera.

Siegfried's death scene, however, receives a musical interpretation unique in Wagner's works. Nowhere else did he employ recapitulation of the magnitude and complexity of the example in *Götterdämmerung.* The explanation for this is obvious: Siegfried's death music is the outstanding example in Wagner, and indeed in all of Western music, of a recapitulatory synthesis in a cycle of dramatic works. The end, or purpose, of this formal gesture is the expression of the crux of the drama of the *Ring:* the curse on the will to power, and the promise of salvation through love. The most fundamental means of its articulation is Wagner's control over large-scale tonal relationships, or more specifically, what we have described as a tonal pairing.

We may conclude by again quoting Tovey's essay:

> Perhaps the first necessity for the understanding of Wagner's music and drama is to realize that when he broke down the old classical organization of operatic "numbers," he did not pulverize music into "motives," but built it into symmetries tenfold longer in time and a thousandfold more voluminous than any that music had known before.

The largest symmetries in Wagner's music, such as that between the last act of *Götterdämmerung* and the last act of *Siegfried,* have often been overlooked by critics who have not apprehended the massive time-scale of Wagner's forms. Lorenz's failure in this regard has already been mentioned, but now we are in a position to judge the reason for his oversight. Since Lorenz based his analyses on the concept of the poetic-musical period, which is not the mode of organization of Wagner's most mature works,[18] his methods frequently fail to reveal any "secrets" about the musical form. For Lorenz, Siegfried's entire death scene forms a 145-measure period in A major; but actually no more than twenty-five measures of this section are in A, and they act as a large subdominant inflection of the E side of the tonal pairing that encompasses 250 measures of music for both Siegfried's final narrative and the drama of his death. Moreover, Lorenz's scheme introduces an artificial structural demarcation between the "period" of Siegfried's death and the "Funeral Music," which he assigns to the next "period." For one statement of the "Funeral Music" had already occurred in the "period" of Siegfried's death. This scheme not only obscures the tonal framework that embraces the entire section, it ignores the smaller symmetries which transcend the boundaries of such fictitious "periods." Lorenz's mistake was to analyze the music as if it were a static, sectional mosaic instead of a dramatic organism.

A more reasonable basis for analysis of Wagner's works would regard the *music* as the basis for the dramatic progression, which is often less perfectly conveyed by the staging and libretto. Wagner himself once wrote that he would gladly have called his dramas "deeds of music that have become visible" (*ersichtlich gewordene Taten der Musik*).[19] There can be no doubt that the music of his most successful works must be identified with their dramatic framework. In works such as the last acts of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung,* the manifold interrelationships in the tonal structure of the whole are regulated by a musical hierarchy, and this hierarchy coincides with and reinforces a hierarchy in dramatic values.

[18] See Carl Dahlhaus's critique of Lorenz's procedure in "Wagners Begriff der 'dichterisch-musikalischen Periode'," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Musikanschauung im 19. Jahrhundert,* ed. Walter Salmen (Regensburg, 1965), 179–87, and the discussion, 187–94.

[19] This quotation is from the essay "Über die Benennung 'Muskidrama'," from 1872. *Gesammelte Schriften* IX, 306.