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Mother Mime: *Siegfried*, the Fairy Tale, and the Metaphysics of Sexual Difference

ADRIAN DAUB

In a letter to Theodor Uhlig, Richard Wagner writes in 1851 that his *Young Siegfried* “has the enormous advantage, that it presents the important mythos to the audience in a playful manner, the way one presents a fairy tale to a child.”¹ Even when *Young Siegfried*, the prelude to a projected *Siegfried’s Death*, transformed into the “second day” of the Ring cycle,² the opera retained this doubleness: *Siegfried* is mythos condensed into a fairy-tale setting, or conversely a fairy tale that hides a mythos. The doubleness that Wagner seems to find so advantageous, however, also constitutes *Sieg-*

fried’s central contradiction. In particular, act I of *Siegfried* sees the story of the Nibelungs and the gods of Valhalla grind to a virtual halt, as the cast pauses to stage a production of the Grimms’ story of the “youth who went forth to learn what fear was.”³

¹Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Briefe—Band IV: Mai 1851 bis September 1852*, ed. Gertrud Strobel and Werner Wolf (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 2000), p. 44: “Der ‘junge Siegfried’ hat den ungeheuren Vortheil, daß er den wichtigen Mythos dem publikum im spiel, wie einem kinde ein märchen, beibringt.”

²On the transformation Wagner’s original text underwent to become “*Siegfried*,” see Daniel Coren, “The Texts of Wagner’s *Der junge Siegfried* and *Siegfried*,” this journal 6 (1982), 17–30.

³In fact, it is clear from Wagner’s correspondence that *Der Junge Siegfried* was initially conceived as a fairy-tale opera. Siegfried started out simply as the nameless “Bursche . . . der auszog das Fürchten zu lernen,” and Wagner only subsequently hit on the idea that this “Bursche” could be identical with the hero of *Siegfrieds Tod*. In May 1851, Wagner wrote to Theodor Uhlig: “Didn’t I tell you earlier about this light subject matter? It was the youth who went forth ‘to find out what fear was’ and who is so dumb that he never wants to learn it. Imagine my start when I suddenly realized that this boy is none other than—the young Siegfried who wins the treasure and wins Brünnhilde” (Habe ich Dir nicht früher schon einmal von einem heitren stoffe geschrieben? Es war dieß der bursche der auszieht ‘um das fürchten zu lernen’ und so dumm ist, es nie lernen zu wollen. Denke Dir meinen schreck, als ich plötzlich erkenne, daß dieser bursche niemand anders ist, als—der junge Siegfried, der den hort gewinnt und Brünnhilde erweckt!) (Wagner, *Sämtliche Briefe, Band IV*, 44).

As Carl Dahlhaus suggested with respect to *Siegfried*, a classic fairy tale is characterized by both timelessness and immanence.⁴ In setting up its protagonist, in outlining that protagonist's travails and their eventual resolution, a fairy tale draws on no external resources, whether social, historical, or even logical. It answers exactly the questions it poses, without remainder. When Wagner distinguished between *Mythos* and *Märchen*, he was clearly drawing on the distinction between the historical axis and dynastic concerns of the epic/mythos, and the compressed and self-contained temporality of the fairy tale.

Of course, recent scholarship has argued against a stark dichotomization of mythos and fairy tale. It is, these scholars argue, just as misguided to regard the fairy tale as entirely ahistoric as it is to set up the mythos as its exact opposite, fully divorced from immanentist concerns.⁵ For a fairy tale almost always has to do with, if not overtly sexual, at least familial relationships, such as siblinghood, parenthood, and descent. It was this conjunction of attributes that made the fairy tale one of the prime sites and resources for psychoanalytic interpretation around the turn of the twentieth century. It offers, on the one hand, a static, atemporal structure that, on the other hand, exists only in iteration and so furnishes a ground for historical sequence. Especially for a period so preoccupied with questions of descent, (de)generation, and breeding as the nineteenth century, the sexual was the historical *par excellence*. The familial resources that give rise to the immanence of the fairy tale thus threaten to explode the genre whose very lack of presuppositions they are supposed to vouch for.

In Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen*, this contradiction between genetic temporality and pure, ostensibly static form becomes a contradiction of genres. The cycle's "second day," *Siegfried*, as Dahlhaus argued, constitutes not

only a fairy tale, but one upon which something foreign, namely the mythos, is always already encroaching: "This particular fairy tale does have a sequel, but it takes place outside of the world of the fairy tale and destroys it. The fairy tale of young Siegfried is like one of the Fortunate Islands, which is swallowed up by the myth[os]."⁶

The stark dualism that seems to characterize Wagner's understanding of mythos and fairy tale therefore asserts itself in the plot of the opera. *Siegfried* stages an opposition between an epic plot, namely the story of the Nibelungs and the end of the gods of Valhalla, and a fairy-tale plot, the story of Siegfried leaving his forest and reaching (sexual) maturity. And since the intersection between the epic plot that needs to be advanced and the fairy-tale anti-plot that attempts to suspend its development occurs precisely in the realm of sexuality, sexuality emerges as a central thematic node of *Siegfried*. What is more, the dualism of self-enclosure and epic development plays itself out in *Siegfried's* music as well.

The hero of both mythos and fairy tale persists in, or rather exists as, the intersection of fairy-tale timelessness and mythic provenance. He emerges from somewhere outside concrete historical sequence yet comes to influence and even inaugurate historical sequence. The magic spot of intersection is inherently contradictory, and the hero's position at that point in the story overdetermined. In *Siegfried*, more importantly, the hero is not alone at the intersection of myth and fairy tale: his foster parent and cunning exploiter, Mime, occupies that very

⁴Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Musical Dramas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 126–28; idem, *Richard Wagners Musikdramen* (Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1996), p. 183.

⁵See, e.g., Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 208–30.

⁶"Timeless though a fairy tale may be, it has its frontiers. The waking of Brünnhilde, just like that of Sleeping Beauty, marks an ending that admits no future development because it represents perfection and fulfillment. This particular fairy tale does have a sequel, but it takes place outside of the world of the fairy tale and destroys it. The fairy tale of young Siegfried is like one of the Fortunate Islands, which is swallowed up by the myth" (So zeitlos eine Märchenhandlung ist, so geschlossen ist sie andererseits. Die Erweckung Brünnhildes stellt, nicht anders als die Dornröschen, ein Ende dar, das keine Fortsetzung zulässt, weil es Vollendung bedeutet. Was dennoch folgt, liegt jenseits der Märchenwelt, die es zerstört. Das Märchen vom jungen Siegfried gleicht einer glücklichen Insel, die vom Mythos verschlungen wird) (Dahlhaus, *Wagner's Musical Dramas*, pp. 127–28; idem, *Wagners Musikdramen*, p. 183).

same vexed spot. In Mime's case, the opera obsessively asserts the impossibility of his position, turning him into the tortured citizen of two worlds. In the case of Siegfried, however, it just as strenuously denies the impossibility of the youth's position within the narrative. Mime thus becomes in many respects the sacrificial lamb of *Siegfried's* hybrid plot (and Siegfried's hybrid position within it), or perhaps what Julia Kristeva has termed "the abject"—a loathed quasi-object, whose obsessive and repeated exclusion allows the opera to repress its own generic contradictions.⁷ Mime's object is to preserve the immanence of the self-enclosed, imaginary space of the enchanted forest; what undoes him are the rumbles of the *mythos* that, to return to Dahlhaus's image, threatens to engulf Mime's little island.

Wagner forces Mime to act out these contradictions through a sexual charade, by associating the epic with familial, dynastic sexuality and the fairy tale with a kind of asexual reproduction. In the course of act I, Siegfried is launched on a quest to discover his provenance. And an increasingly panicked Mime, desperate to maintain the illusion that he is the boy's (sole) point of origin, begins to take on all roles, culminating in his desperate claim that "I am your father / and mother as well." Siegfried wants to know where he comes from and suspects that it might not be Mime: "Now Mime, where have you got / your loving wife, / so that I may call her Mother?"⁸ While Siegfried associates the woman he wants "to call mother" with sexual love ("Minne"), Mime refuses to acknowledge that link between sexuality and motherhood. Instead, he lays claim to being a nonsexual mother, a gambit that, as we will see, is both a lie and perfectly true: of course, Mime did not produce Siegfried; but the asexuality of Mime's origin-claim highlights that for him sexuality is essentially a form of *Witz*, an example of "cunning" manipulation based on

the causal chains of instrumental reason. And it is *sexual* causation, of which Mime appears incapable, that proves to be his downfall.

Mime's dizzying carousel of sexual personae is at once strangely desexualized (in many ways it is the simple fact of sexual difference that proves Mime's undoing) and a kind of drag, and it is clearly played for a laugh in the opera. Mime's voice and use of figurative language always already subvert the claims his charade forces him into, in the eyes of both Siegfried and the audience, for whose benefit Wagner supposedly turned *mythos* into fairy tale in the first place. As Mime's claims become increasingly outlandish, his voice, his mien, and the music that he is given to sing disclose with spectacular eloquence that for Mime sexuality is but a cunning machination. He tells Siegfried that he is his "father and mother," but his musical means betray that he is incapable of sexual reproduction and parental love.

Of course, being incapable of sexual love is not an incidental affliction in Wagner's system of thought, in which sexual love (*Geschlechtsliebe*) occupies a central position. In an unfinished letter to Arthur Schopenhauer, Wagner writes in 1858 about the "metaphysics of sexual love," suggesting that "in the predisposition toward sexual love . . . a path to salvation, to self-knowledge and self-negation of the will presents itself."⁹ Wagner, as Martin Gregor-Dellin has noted, transposed Schopenhauer's concept of the will into the concept of sexual love, "drawing out the erotic component of [Schopenhauer's] philosophy of will and making it absolute."¹⁰ For Wagner, love, as the negation of the will, became the only path of salvation. It is love, he writes, "that drives the subject beyond itself and forces that subject to

⁷Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 1–31.

⁸Richard Wagner, "Siegfried," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1911), VI, 94: "ich bin dir Vater / und Mutter zugleich"; "Wo hast du nun, Mime / Dein minniges Weibchen / Daß ich es Mutter nenne?"

⁹Wagner, "Metaphysik der Geschlechtsliebe," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, XII, 289: "in der Anlage der Geschlechtsliebe ein Heilsweg zur Selbsterkenntnis und Selbstverneinung des Willens [sich] darstellt." See also Wagner's letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, 1 December 1858, in *Richard Wagner an Mathilde Wesendonck, Tagebuchblätter und Briefe 1853–1871* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1908), p. 80.

¹⁰Martin Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner: Sein Leben, Sein Werk, Sein Jahrhundert* (Munich: Piper, 1980), p. 392. Wagner believed that chap. 44 of vol. 2 of *The World as Will and Representation* licensed his interpretation.

connect with another."¹¹ Again, Wagner is not thinking of divine love, platonic love, or even familial love: love "from above," as he puts it. Only sexual love is *wirklich*, real in a concrete and effective way, as opposed to abstract kinds of love that are "taught and ordered" (*gelehrt und anbefohlen*). Thus when Mime tells Siegfried that he has taught him to love "his Mime," when he tells him that "you have to love him" (*so mußt du ihn lieben*), he is clearly imposing this false kind of love rather than the love on which the metaphysician Wagner pinned his hopes.¹²

The figure of Mime is a flash point for any consideration of Wagnerian metaphysics and Wagnerian aesthetics, but above all for any discussion of Wagnerian anti-Semitism. Mime's *Witz* corresponds to a common topos of nineteenth-century anti-Semitism, and Wagner's score and stage instructions strengthen this parallel. Nevertheless, I do not contend that Wagner thinks of Mime as Jewish and of Jews therefore as somehow external to the metaphysics of sexual difference. Not because that argument cannot be made, but rather because, as Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, one cannot

"characterize" a Jewish stereotype.¹³ Indeed, although Mime appears undersexed and emasculated, the *Ring* tends to characterize Alberich in precisely opposing terms.¹⁴ Wagner's image of "the Jew" is not self-consistent, since a racist phantasm derives its force not from an inner stringency but rather from its functionality. In *Siegfried* a particular set of organizing oppositions stages the coherence of Wagner's spectacle, as well as that of his intended audience;¹⁵ in doing so, these oppositions overlap, but are by no means coterminous, with Wagner's anti-Semitism.

TWO HOUSEHOLDS UNALIKE IN DIGNITY

In German the word *Geschlecht* may refer both to gender and a dynasty or family. *Siegfried* could be described as a tale of two *Geschlechter* in that double sense. It concerns the existence of two sexes and the fact that they reproduce, and thus the question of motherhood. But behind this question looms the standoff between not just two families, but rather two kinds of families, which differ precisely with respect to reproduction.

In his 1908 article "Family Romances," Sigmund Freud points to a common fantasy that replaces the subject's own family with another.¹⁶ This "family romance" (*Familienroman*) unfolds in two stages. Children as yet unaware of sexual procreation believe themselves to be switched or adopted, or their older siblings to be bastards; once children become

¹¹Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, IV, 152.

¹²"The mediator between force and freedom, the salvation without which force is brutality, and freedom is pure randomness, is thus—love. Not that 'revealed' love, imparted, taught and forced upon us from above—which for that reason has also never become real—like the Christian [love], but that love which springs from unalienated, real human nature; which is in its origin nothing other than the most active living assertion of this nature, which expresses itself in pure joy over sensuous existence, and which, starting with sexual love, progresses via the love of children, brothers, and friends to love of all mankind." (Die Mittlerin zwischen Kraft und Freiheit, die Erlöserin, ohne welche Kraft Rohheit, die Freiheit aber Willkür bleibt, ist somit—die Liebe, nicht jedoch jene geoffenbarte, von oben herein uns verkündete, gelehrte und anbefohlene—deßhalb auch nie wirklich gewordene—wie die christliche, sondern die Liebe, die aus der Kraft der unentstellten, wirklichen menschlichen Natur hervorgeht; die in ihrem Ursprunge nichts anderes als die thätigste Lebensäußerung dieser Natur ist, die sich in reiner Freude am sinnlichen Dasein ausspricht, und, von der Geschlechtsliebe ausgehend, durch die Kindes-, Bruder- und Freundesliebe bis zur allgemeinen Menschenliebe fortschreitet.) Wagner, "Kunst und Klima," *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, III, 218.

¹³Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 125: "The figure of the Jew condenses opposing features, features associated with lower and upper classes: Jews are supposed to be dirty *and* intellectual, voluptuous *and* impotent, and so on." See also idem, "'There is No Sexual Relationship': Wagner as Lacanian," *New German Critique* 69 (1996), 14.

¹⁴Stefan Bodo Würffel, "Alberich und Mime—Zwerge, Gecken, Außenseiter," in "Alles ist nach seiner Art": *Figuren in Richard Wagners "Der Ring des Nibelungen"*, ed. Udo Bernbach (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2001), pp. 120–43.

¹⁵Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 35–55.

¹⁶Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), pp. 297–300.

aware of sexual procreation, they understand that *pater semper incertus est*, the mother *certissima*. Children then turn to the fantasy that a mysterious, unknown father from a higher station has sired them.

In many respects, the first act of *Siegfried* presents us with this kind of constellation: Siegfried, orphaned spawn of the illicit love between siblings Siegmund and Sieglinde, is raised in complete isolation by the Nibelung blacksmith Mime. Mime is perfectly aware of his charge's illustrious provenance but tries to keep the youth in the dark about it, hoping to use him to reclaim the treasure of the Nibelungs. Scene 1 of act I traces Siegfried's discovery of his true origins; in scene 2, those origins themselves arrive in the guise of his grandfather Wotan.

And yet, the scene of fantasy diverges in significant ways from the scenario Freud describes. For one thing, throughout Siegfried's attempt to decipher his true parentage, it is Mime who is *certissimus*; the mysterious object of the young man's fantasies is his mother. For another, Siegfried's interpretations are not firmly rooted in either awareness or unawareness of sexual difference, for he knows sexual difference but only by having observed it in the animal kingdom. What is thus at issue in Siegfried's interrogation of Mime are not the mechanics of sexual difference but rather the very fact of sexual difference itself. Mime's sole concern in laying claim to androgynous parenthood is to keep Siegfried from realizing that there is such a thing as love between mothers and fathers.

In trying to convince Siegfried that they are a family, Mime re-creates something along the lines of what psychoanalysts have described as the imaginary configuration between infant and mother, a dyadic construction in which the self is caught in a complex web of identifications and misidentifications with the mother. Mime himself suggests as much when he pleads with Siegfried to appreciate the fact that he "cared for you / as if you were my own skin."¹⁷ This puzzling line sets up a strange parallelism in

¹⁷Wagner, "Siegfried," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 97: "hütete dich / wie die eigene Haut."

which narcissism is adduced as the metaphoric support for love: I love you as exclusively as I love myself. The way in which Mime sets up this imaginary circuit that knows no outside eventually undermines his attempts, hinting that the fairy tale is a defective form of myth, just as Mime's and Siegfried's dyad is a defective or pseudo-family. There is, in other words, something necessary in the unraveling of their dyadic pseudo-family and the fairy-tale world Mime sets up around it.

Wotan's appearance on the scene might seem to complete this defective family. But this itinerant father figure does not stabilize Mime's mother-role. To the contrary, Mime notes with chagrin that "weak before [him] grows / my mother wit."¹⁸ When Mime speaks of his "Mutterwitz," his choice of words betrays the complex interplay between his subterfuge and questions of family and heredity. *Prima facie* Mime is simply complaining that Wotan is outsmarting him in their guessing game. Mime, as Theodor W. Adorno noted, represents for Wagner the failings and moral shortcomings of instrumental reason, the ability to manipulate the causes of the outside world without any insight into their quiddity or their *raison d'être*, a preoccupation with mechanical laws rather than their ground.¹⁹ *Witz* is central to his attempts to manipulate the forces of nature (above all Siegfried) before which he is by himself powerless.²⁰ The word *Mutterwitz* links the idea of instrumental reason with maternity and thus heredity. In nineteenth-century German, the word designated nothing more than what modern German knows as *Gewitztheit*, cunning. It refers to a quick ability to grasp and manipulate givens—a purely reactive, unoriginal facility, with a clear pejorative edge.

Although in its nineteenth-century usage the "motherhood" of this *Witz* seems extraneous,

¹⁸Wagner, "Siegfried," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 106: "vor ihm [Wotan] magert mein Mutterwitz."

¹⁹Theodor W. Adorno, *Die musikalischen Monographien: Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 13, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 103.

²⁰Dieter Borchmeyer, "Siegfried—Der Held als Opfer," in *Alles ist nach seiner Art: Figuren in Richard Wagners "Der Ring des Nibelungen,"* ed. Udo Bernbach (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2001), pp. 68–80.

the word's etymology points to the hereditary character of this kind of cunning, a matter of instinct rather than of acquired skill.²¹ This etymology appears to have formed the basis for the Wagner family's use of the word. In "Deutsche Kunst und deutsche Politik," Richard equates *Mutterwitz* with "the natural understanding of a people";²² Cosima's diary calls it "the wit that one has from inside."²³ Wagner's personal understanding of "Mutterwitz" thus tends to valorize the word, as referring to wit that springs naturally from the autonomous individual or from the wisdom of a people. As such, it appears to be distinct from the rootless, roving wit that characterizes Mime. Indeed, Mime's (hereditary) instincts do "grow weak" before Wotan's deeper familial wisdom: the opera forces Mime into a revealing turn of phrase when he refers to his lack of "Mutterwitz" rather than of "Witz." Mime's language has a strange way of slipping out of his control. His *Witz*, insofar as it is "Mutterwitz," bespeaks that which it lacks, a natural, instinctual, inherited basis.

The question of motherhood is a central preoccupation of *Siegfried*. In act I the recognition that Mime cannot be his mother launches Siegfried out of his fairy-tale enclosure. In act II, the *Waldvogel*, who allows Siegfried to see through (and slay) his false mother Mime, seems to act as a medium of sorts, speaking for the dead mother: "It would surely tell me something, perhaps about my dear mother?"²⁴ It is

the bird, speaking for the "dear mother," who first redirects Siegfried's "yearning" (*Sehnen*): "Ho! Siegfried has killed / the evil dwarf! Now I know for him / the most marvelous woman."²⁵ The moment he has slain his false father, Siegfried can accede to his true mother/lover. And in act III Wotan the wanderer, who has lost his place in the world, descends to Erda, the mother of Brünnhilde, who alone has remained stationary since we last saw her in *Das Rheingold*. The final scene of the opera then transposes mother into lover, as Siegfried finally learns to be afraid when he lays eyes on the female form: "O mother! Mother! / Your brave child! / A woman's lying asleep: / and she's taught him to be afraid."²⁶ The mother's image dominates the entirety of the opera's climactic scene. As Lawrence Kramer has observed: "The hero, who has had his mother much on his mind while musing over the sleeping bride, and who will soon misrecognize Brünnhilde herself as his mother, responds to the miraculous awakening with a maternal invocation that Brünnhilde at once echoes, the musical phrases of the couple overlapping and intertwining: 'O Heil der Mutter, die mich gebar,' 'O Heil der Mutter, die dich gebar' (Hail to the mother that bore me/you)."²⁷ Finally, when Brünnhilde informs Siegfried that his mother will not return, he is able to substitute her for his mother, the original object of desire.

In the opera, the image of the maternal object is always bound up with questions of epistemology: Mime's defective motherhood is tied to what Adorno calls his "Dummschläue,"²⁸ the cunning that turns him into a fool. Siegfried in turn is propelled by both his ignorance of his own origins (evident in particular when he fails to recognize the wanderer) and by the instinc-

²¹Kant's *Anthropology*, for example, distinguishes between "Mutterwitz" and "Schulwitz," BA 24/25, in Immanuel Kant, *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1964), p. 425.

²²Wagner, "Deutsche Kunst und Deutsche Politik," *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VIII, 46: "der natürliche Verstand des Volkes."

²³Cosima uses the word when discussing Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack (Munich: Piper, 1976), I, 179: "dem Witz, den einer von sich selbst hat."

²⁴Wagner, "Siegfried," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 134: "Gewiß sagt es mir was,—/ vielleicht—von der lieben Mutter." Wagner's earlier drafts further emphasized the maternal connection of the *Waldvogel*. One draft has Siegfried saying "Mich dünkt, meine Mutter / singt zu mir!" *Skizzen und Entwürfe zur Ring-Dichtung*, ed. Otto Strobel (Munich: Bruckmann, 1930), p. 156.

²⁵Wagner, "Siegfried," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 150: "Hei! Siegfried erschlug nun den schlimmen Zwerg! / Jetzt wußt ich ihm noch das herlichste Weib."

²⁶Wagner, "Siegfried," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 166: "O Mutter! Mutter! Dein muthiges Kind! / Im Schläfe liegt eine Frau: / die hat ihn das Fürchten gelehrt!"

²⁷Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 84. Kramer especially emphasizes the link between maternity and the ideology of lineage (in particular anti-Semitism).

²⁸Adorno, *Die musikalischen Monographien*, p. 120.

tive knowledge that Mime cannot possibly be that origin. As Adorno pointed out, Siegfried's ignorance is of an entirely different register from that of Mime. In his cunning, Mime represents what the German Idealists called *Verstand*.²⁹ His actions are instrumental and always directed at the same goal: "How can I help myself now? / How can I hold him here?"³⁰ Wotan, who goads him into posing questions to which he not only knows the answer, but rather to which he *is* the answer, represents the deeper, less mechanistic *Vernunft* characterized by insight into the conditions of possibility of the chain reactions that *Verstand* is content to manipulate.³¹ Here, then, an anti-Semitic epistemology (the canard of the "cunning Jew") and an anti-bourgeois critique of specialized, instrumental reason are explicitly linked in and through the medium of sexuality.

Since the knowledge that Siegfried seeks is always that of origins, the opera associates *Verstand* and *Vernunft* with variant approaches to sexual provenance. That is, *Vernunft* characterizes knowledge through genealogical descent, whereas *Verstand* corresponds to asexual transformation. Of course, the obtuse and shallow youngster Siegfried is neither *vernünftig* nor *verständlich*, but the questions he poses (always in contradistinction to Mime) represent the first stirrings of *Vernunft* and a rejection of *Witz* or *Verstand*. In turn those two means of understanding origin vie to explain Siegfried's provenance in the first act of the opera. Mime claims to Siegfried that he "made him without a mother," and he plots against Fafner who has transformed himself from a giant into a dragon: dwarf and giant alike multiply laterally rather than procreating dynastically.³² The distinction between the gods' procreative powers and the

"horizontal dynasties" of iteration of the giants and dwarves (somewhat along the lines of what Carolyn Abbate has called the "cabinet of Wagnerian shape-shifters"³³) dovetails with the dichotomy natural/unnatural. Even when Alberich begets Hagen, he does so as an unnatural "affront" (*Hohn*) against the gods since he has forsworn love.³⁴

Wagner describes something similar to this biological narcissism in an 1849 fragment on "Jesus von Nazareth."³⁵ Here Wagner characterizes *Geschlechtsliebe* as the first self-alienation or self-externalization (*Wiederentäußerung seiner selbst*). In love, human beings give away their life force (*Lebenskraft*) and multiply themselves into families. This voluntary surrender of life force necessitates the subject's eventual death. Wagner now sketches the opposite possibility, "that man would not die, were he not to multiply by begetting offspring but rather using his generative power to continually reproduce his own body."³⁶ In this fragment Wagner explicitly declares self-reproduction a form of egoism and associates it with "the acquisition of power and wealth." It is

²⁹Ibid., p. 103.

³⁰Wagner, "Siegfried," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 99: "Wie helf' ich mir jetzt? / Wie halt' ich ihn fest?"

³¹Rolf-Peter Horstmann, "Den Verstand zur Vernunft bringen? Hegels Auseinander-setzung mit Kant in der Differenz-Schrift," in *Das Interesse des Denkens: Hegel aus heutiger Sicht*, ed. Wolfgang Welsch, Klaus Vieweg (Munich: Fink, 2003), pp. 89–108.

³²On Wagner's assimilation of the Nibelung's biology in the old Nordic and German sagas, see Würffel, "Alberich und Mime," p. 125.

³³Abbate's argument focuses on the late Wagner tendency to compress a variety of types or mythic archetypes into one individual role, presumably in the interest of a Gnostic transcendence of the *principium individuationis*—there is of course no such transcendence in the Nibelungs' iterative shape-shifting. Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 108.

³⁴See, for example, *Götterdämmerung*, act II, sc. 1: "You are fearless and I begot you that way / so that, fighting heroes, you'd stand firm for me. / Granted—not strong enough to stand up to the dragon— / that was only granted to the Volsung,—but to fierce hatred / I brought up Hagen, and now he'll avenge me / get the ring, to the Volsung's and Wotan's contempt!" ("Dich Zaglosen zeugt' ich mir ja, / daß wider Helden hart du mir hieltest. / Zwar stark nicht genug, den Wurm zu bestehn, / was allein dem Wälsung bestimmt, / zu zähem Haß doch erzog ich Hagen, / der soll mich nun rächen, / den Ring gewinnen / dem Wälsung und Wotan zum Hohn!") Wagner, "Götterdämmerung," *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 211.

³⁵For references to this draft, which Wagner worked on during and immediately after his "revolutionary" phase, see Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben* (Munich: List, 1963), pp. 401, 403; idem, *Sämtliche Briefe, Band III: Briefe der Jahre 1849 bis 1851* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1983), pp. 110, 150, 179; Cosima Wagner, *Tagebücher*, I, 43; Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, *Das Leben Richard Wagners in sechs Büchern dargestellt* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1905), II, 319; and Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner*, p. 254.

³⁶Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, XI, 301.

hard not to think of one particular “Wagnerian shape-shifter” in this regard—the giant/dragon Fafner: “Here I lie and I am master / let me sleep!”³⁷—as Brechtian a line as Wagner ever wrote!

The juxtaposition of generative vs. “lateral” sexuality (or sexuality and anti-sexuality) has obvious racial implications. Indeed, neither Mime’s attempt at keeping Siegfried in the dark about sexuality nor Siegfried’s rage at the possibility of Mime’s paternity makes sense apart from a racial matrix of biological signification. One somewhat anachronistic testament to that fact comes from a rabid anti-Wagnerian, Max Nordau. “The disease of degeneracy,” he would write in 1892, “consists precisely in the fact that the degenerate organism has not the power to mount to the height of evolution already attained by the species, but stops on the way at an earlier point.” The degenerate may sink “so-matically to the level of fishes, nay to that of arthropoda, or, even further, to that of rhizopods not yet sexually differentiated.”³⁸

The image of an organism too degenerate to be sexually differentiated resonates with Wagner’s characterizations of the Nibelungs from his first prose sketches of the *Ring*. In his 1848 *Entwurf zu einem Drama*, Wagner describes the Nibelungs as follows: “With restless agility they burrow through the innards of the earth, like worms in a dead body.”³⁹ The common denominator between Nordau’s “degeneration” and the asexual nature of the Nibelungs and their ilk is the inability, or the immoral unwillingness, to self-alienate: Alberich’s renunciation of love, of any “re-externalization of the self.” The “retentiveness” of the *Ring*’s sub-humans, their tendency to cling possessively to their essence and inability to beget

newness finds its opposite in Wotan’s (at least nominal) willingness to relinquish control to/ via his offspring out of love. “Those I love, I let do as they please; / let him stand or fall, he is his own master.”⁴⁰ It is of course significant that the egotism inherent in “lateral” reproductions of the self is also a common trope of Wagnerian anti-Semitism. For Wagner (who was influenced by Feuerbach in this regard), the Jews cling stubbornly to a particular identity, rejecting the universalization that can only come with the negation of the self.⁴¹

LOVE UNION AND ANDROGYNY

As Michael P. Steinberg has recently pointed out, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* tells an exceedingly bourgeois story, the “decline of a family” exemplified in the German canon by Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks*.⁴² The *Ring* is at its core a story of the degeneration and decadence of a household. Paradoxically, of course, in keeping with Wagner’s revolutionary program, the opera is dominated by an anti-bourgeois affect regarding both its operatic genre (the holistic aspirations of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*) and its organizing dichotomy (instrumental reason vs. love). At the same time, this dichotomy relies on a parallel *Geschlecht* that persists side-by-side with the Valsungs and at times interlocks with Wotan’s household: the titular Nibelungs, who shadow the Valsungs as their other, relying in each iteration not on filiation but rather on changes in form. Alberich uses the ring to transform into a number of monsters, and the giant Fafner turns himself into “a giant worm.” Mime undergoes a similar transformation, appearing “in drag” by claiming to be Siegfried’s mother.

The precise nature of this “drag” is bound up with *Siegfried*’s organizing generic aporia. Within the logic of the fairy tale, Mime is not in drag; rather he attempts “to pass himself as

³⁷Wagner, “Siegfried,” in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 128: “Ich lieg’ und besitz’, laßt mich schlafen!”

³⁸Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: D. Appleton, 1895), p. 556; idem, *Entartung* (Berlin: C. Duncker, 1893), II, 555: “körperlich bis zur Stufe der Fische, ja der Gliedertiere und selbst der geschlechtlich noch nicht differenzierten Wurzelfüßler hinab.”

³⁹Wagner, “Der Nibelungen-Mythus,” *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 139: “In unsteter, rastloser Regsamkeit durchwühlen sie (gleich Würmern im toten Körper) die Eingeweide der Erde.”

⁴⁰Wagner, “Siegfried,” in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 140: “Wen ich liebe, lass’ ich für sich gewähren; / er steh’ oder fall’, sein Herr ist er.”

⁴¹Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture*, p. 88.

⁴²Michael P. Steinberg, “Die Walküre and Modern Memory,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 74/2 (2005), 705.

an androgyne."⁴³ He stands outside sexual difference in that he banishes maleness and femaleness from the sphere of the human, consigning them to the realm of "rabbit and fox." Siegfried, on the other hand, instinctively yokes the question of origins to that of sexual difference and gender roles: which is it, Mime, father or mother?⁴⁴ To instill this instinctual rage in Siegfried, the opera has to combine two tropes: the biological contiguity of "rabbit and fox" with Mime and Siegfried—a variation on the naturalization of heterosexuality in Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe*—and the logic of the fairy tale's generic other, the mythos. Daphnis and Chloe learn from the sheep they are herding, but they already have each other, whereas Siegfried's naturalization of sexual difference can proceed only by positing the phantasm of a never-glimpsed feminine outside Mime's magic circle.

Only vis-à-vis the epic context, then, can the opera abject Mime's androgyny as a stridently theatrical performance, obviously and spectacularly unnatural. Only once we know of the epic-dynastic context beyond Mime's fairy-tale enclosure does his claim to fatherhood and motherhood become integrated into a sexed context and consequently legible as cunning and instrumental deception. Mime's "drag" is thus the narrative obverse of the telos of *Siegfried* (the character as well as the opera), the "quest for sexual difference."⁴⁵ But that difference, in keeping with Wagner's metaphysical program, is necessary only so that it can be superseded in love. Siegfried has to leave behind the strange androgyne Mime, become aware of sexual difference, and then aspire to the (impossible) sexual union in love as an

other kind of androgyny.⁴⁶ The union Siegfried and Brünnhilde almost achieve at the climax of the opera is the opposite of the bizarre union of mother and father in the cunning blacksmith. For Mime's androgyny has not passed through the alembic of sexual difference, a stopping-short before sexual determinacy that indicates his defectiveness. The *biologically* degenerate/egoistic relapses into a state prior to sexual difference (ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny); analogously, the morally egoistic is incapable of the self-alienation of love and so remains outside the sexual relationship. Nevertheless, as the abject image of the "worms" in the earth's carcass makes clear, there is still an unsettling *productivity* to these loveless egoists: in spite of their barrenness, they counternaturally reproduce.

It is central to Mime's subterfuge that his performance of androgyny is, in a perverse way, reproductive (both in the sense of being mimetic and in the sense of reproducing the self). Mime's attempt to transform himself into a mother is therefore not just one more instance of the Nibelungs' lineage of shapes and disguises. When Siegfried bluntly asks Mime whether he is his "father / and mother as well," he has hit upon Mime's secret motive: the Nibelung's ambitions to build a "lateral dynasty." Returning to the strange locution that Mime "cared for you / as if you were my own skin," we now see that "skin" not only points to an insufficient cleavage of self and other but also contrasts with "my own blood." Mime's relationship with Siegfried is skin-deep, just as Alberich's, Fafner's, and Mime's own transformations are mere changes of external form, since they seem to be barred from passing on their blood through procreation. It is indeed an index of Siegfried's lapse in *Götterdämmerung* that he himself begins to think/procreate laterally: his use of the *Tarnhelm* to abduct Brünnhilde disguised as Gunther, which sets off the

⁴³Jean-Jacques Nattiez, "The Tetralogy of Richard Wagner: A Mirror of Androgyny and the Total Work of Art," *Diogenes* 52/73 (2005), 78. See also Slavoj Žižek, "Why Is Wagner Worth Saving?" *Journal of Philosophy & Scripture* 2/1 (2004), 28.

⁴⁴The fact that *Siegfried* presents the youngster's animus against Mime as something instinctual may well be linked to Gobineau's claim that there is a "mutual repulsion" of different races, which is instinctive both (historically) in the polity and (aesthetically) in the individual. Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: Putnam, 1915), pp. 179–80.

⁴⁵Nattiez, "The Tetralogy of Richard Wagner," p. 78.

⁴⁶As Jean-Jacques Nattiez has argued, "Mime has to die: imbued with Jewishness, he has wanted to pass for both mother and father of Siegfried. But Siegfried and Brünnhilde also will die, because it is impossible for man and woman to become united totally, to rediscover Plato's primordial oneness of the androgyne" ("The Tetralogy of Richard Wagner," p. 80).

opera's calamitous chain of events, is a lateral transformation in the mold of Mime and Alberich.

It is possible to read the first act as a struggle to integrate Siegfried into each of these lines. Wotan wants to restore the power of his dynastic line (and his own dynastic prowess), whereas Mime hopes to secure the transformative power of the ring, thus the power of lateral reproduction. At the beginning of *Götterdämmerung*, Siegfried entrusts the ring to Brünnhilde as a token of his love. It is, as Linda and Michael Hutcheon have noted, the first time in the cycle that the ring serves a ring's "proper" dynastic function, as a token of a love union. Before that, as well as later on in *Götterdämmerung*, it is only a means of perverted dynastic ambition.⁴⁷ While he does not confront Siegfried directly in the first act, Wotan does remind Mime of the filial aspects of the struggle, turning him into the unwitting tool of his own dynastic ambitions.

Of course, Wotan's efforts in *Siegfried* have the strange tendency to assimilate him to the deceptive dynasties that the epic context pits him against. Wotan appears three times in *Siegfried*, each time in a different relation to the dynastic principle. In act I, he simply serves as a reminder, and as a foil for Mime's cunning. The question with which Mime's life is ultimately forfeit is the question his *Witz* is unable to solve, that of how to mend the sword Nothung. In act II, Wotan is himself engaged in a battle of *Witz* with Mime, aiding a scheme (bringing Siegfried to outgrow Mime) that in act I was made to seem natural and inevitable. In act III, finally, Wotan's designs paradoxically both are foiled and come to fruition, in a replay of the tetralogy's first Oedipal scene: not recognizing "the Wanderer," Siegfried shatters the spear that represents Wotan's law; the spawn bests his elder.

The outline of this progression is illustrated by the role played by the sword Nothung. In Mime's forest, the shattered sword that his mother/father cannot mend comes to represent

Siegfried's suspicions against him. In the second act, slaying both the dragon and the heinous dwarf, a repaired Nothung becomes the emblem of Siegfried's emancipation from the fairy-tale world, his foray into the mythic struggle of the *Ring*, and his integration into the dynastic designs of Wotan. In the third act, Nothung begins to display its own efficacy, since Siegfried does not recognize his role in the epic design and uses the sword to smash Wotan's spear. Whereas in Mime's forest the shards of the sword functioned as a vexing reminder of the dynastic horizon looming beyond the fairy-tale enclosure, Siegfried's disinterest in where those same shards came from signal the unraveling of Wotan's dynastic plan: "What do I know of that? / I only know / that the fragments would have been useless / had I not forged the sword afresh."⁴⁸

There is of course a dangerous suggestion in the eventual undoing of Wotan's plan: The possibility that the grandfather's designs are in fact not that different from fake-father Mime's. Wotan spends as much of *Siegfried* skulking around caves and forests as Mime does. And his emphasis on love ("Those I love, I let do as they please; / let him stand or fall, he is his own master") is no less a ruse than Mime's "so too you must love [me]." In fact, when he finally confronts Siegfried in act III, Wotan seems to Siegfried nothing but a successor to Mime: "All my life an old man / has always stood in my way: now I've swept him aside."⁴⁹ Nevertheless, what still centrally distinguishes the two, at least for the audience, is the fact that the smashing of the spear constitutes a further step in the *Ring's* tragedy, whereas Mime's comeuppance is at best comic.

Although *Götterdämmerung* will see both the lateral and dynastic projects come to naught, *Siegfried* at least concludes with the decisive victory of the dynastic principle. Leaving

⁴⁸Wagner, "Siegfried," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 153: "Was weiß ich davon? / Ich weiß allein, / daß die Stücke mir nichts nützten, / schuf ich das Schwert mir nicht neu."

⁴⁹"Wen ich liebe, lass' ich für sich gewähren; / er steh' oder fall', sein Herr ist er." "Solang ich lebe, stand ein Alter stets im Wege; / den hab' ich nun fortgefegt" (ibid., VI, 140, 153).

⁴⁷Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: The Art of Dying* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 80.

Mime's fairy-tale forest for a moment, it is clear that the biological and erotic solipsism of the opera's first act finds its glorious renunciation in the love union of the third act. It is here that Siegfried's budding awareness of sexual difference is finally realized, that his inchoate erotic longing attains to the status of true Schopenhauerian love, and that the union that Mime can only feign of "father and mother in one" is finally (albeit only momentarily) realized. And lest we forget: it is here that the youth who went forth to learn what fear was learns just that. When Siegfried first ascends to Brünnhilde's fiery resting-place, he is looking for his mother but still sees a man: "Look! A man in armor: / how strangely enticed I am by his image!" The homoerotic tinge of the scene should not eclipse the fact that Siegfried is at this point unaware that his mother might well look different from a man. Nevertheless, his instincts once again stand him in good stead. Just as he rejected the false father Mime for not being masculine enough, for not being able to mend Nothung for him, so he feminizes the unknown "man" through his phallus-sword: "Come, my sword, / cut the iron! / That's not a man!"⁵⁰ The recognition that "that is not a man" brings to a conclusion the fairy tale of the "youth who went forth to learn what fear was" (even though in the fairy tale the youth never does learn to be afraid).

Žižek characteristically reads the fact that Siegfried's "quest for sexual difference" is "at the same time the quest of fear"⁵¹ as a cipher for castration anxiety. This is certainly plausible, given Nothung's role in the discovery and "feminization" of Brünnhilde. Still, it fails to take into account the specific link Wagner himself proposes between sexual difference and fear. Woman strikes fear into Siegfried's heart by confronting him with difference, with something that exceeds the narcissistic configuration in which he has persisted with Mime. The "man" Siegfried describes before he opens Brünnhilde's harness may, at least in Wagner's

vision, be simply Siegfried: "Oh, how beautiful! / Shining clouds hover on the waves / of the bright sea in the sky; / the gleaming sun's laughing gaze / beams through waves of cloud / his breast heaves / as he breathes." What shock, then, when his mirror image sports a pair of breasts! Sexual difference and sexual relationship finally become a sensuous reality for Siegfried when he disarms Brünnhilde. For not only does he invoke the matrilineal dynasty of which he is a part ("Mother! Mother! Think of me!"), but he also understands that overcoming this fear requires a dialogue with the sexual other: "If I myself am to wake up, / I must awake the maiden!"⁵²

In every respect, then, the love relationship to which the opera's final scene offers its encomia constitutes the opposite of the relationship Mime has tried to foist upon Siegfried. Whereas Mime mainly postulated love ("so you *must* love him") and claimed it as something unknowable ("What mother? What father? / Idle question!"), in this final scene knowledge and love are nearly identical: "You yourself I am, / If you in my bliss love me. / What you don't know, / I know for you; / Yet I have knowledge / Only because I love you!" Mime's claim to Siegfried's love was a matter of "caring for you as for my own skin." But Siegfried was entrusted to Brünnhilde's care "before you were even conceived," and her love for him is a matter of blood: "As streams of my blood rush towards you"; "as our blood streams set one another alight." Her care, love, and knowledge of Siegfried are not "taught and ordered" but rather are matters of instinct and dynastic heredity: "My inheritance, my own, one and all,"⁵³

⁵²Wagner, "Siegfried," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 164-65: "Ach! Wie schön! / Schimmernde Wolken säumen in Wellen / den hellen Himmelssee; / leuchtender Sonne lachendes Bild / strahlt durch das Wogengewölk! / Von schwellendem Atem / schwingt sich die Brust!" "Mutter! Mutter! Gedenke mein!" "Daß ich selbst erwache, / muß die Maid mich erwecken!"

⁵³"Was Vater! Was Mutter! / Müßige Frage!" "Du selbst bin ich, / wenn du mich Selige liebst. / Was du nicht weißt, weiß ich für dich; / doch wissend bin ich nur, / weil ich dich liebe!" "Noch eh du gezeugt"; "Wie in Strömen mein Blut entgegen dir stürmt"; "Ha! Wie der Blutes Ströme sich zünden." "Erb' und Eigen, ein und all" (ibid., VI, 94, 169, 174-75, 176).

⁵⁰"Ha, in Waffen ein Mann! / Wie mahnt mich wonnig sein Bild!" "Komm, mein Schwert, schneide das Eisen! / Das ist kein Mann!" (ibid., VI, 164, 165).

⁵¹Žižek, "Why Is Wagner Worth Saving?" p. 28.

as Siegfried and Brünnhilde proclaim in their climactic dialogue.

THE INTERRUPTED DYAD
AND THE FAIRY TALE

Dahlhaus observed that “what separates *Siegfried* irredeemably from *Götterdämmerung* is the timelessness of the fairy tale, as opposed to the temporality of the mythos.”⁵⁴ This timelessness of *Siegfried* is intimately bound up with the question of filiality. The fairy tale’s protagonist never belongs to a family tree (a *Geschlecht*, to speak with Wagner)—all he or she has are “father” and “mother” (or, more often, stepmother), who constitute family-prototypes rather than a dynastic line. The arrangement of these prototypes can be broken, skewed, incomplete, or even phony, but that status itself has neither etiology nor consequences beyond the causality of the fairy tale. No fairy-tale orphan has ever lost his or her parents to a historic event, to a family history of disease, or to a boating accident. No fairy-tale protagonist has ever avenged his or her family, or set off a feud with, for example, the evil stepmother’s own offspring.

Indeed, then, in insisting on being “your father / and mother as well,” Mime is acting in the interest of generic purity as well as his own interest, attempting to banish the threatening echoes of the epic. Wagner’s “poem” for *Siegfried* makes quite explicit that what disrupts the fairy-tale act is not so much Wotan, the father figure, as sexuality itself. The cracks that start to appear in Mime’s and Siegfried’s dysfunctional dyad are occasioned by Mime’s double insufficiency. Siegfried’s father would have to be able to craft a sword that his son could not break—a rather strange supposition that the opera never seems to question. He is

not man enough for young Siegfried, unable to create a sword that the youth wouldn’t break in two like “trashy toy[s]” (*Tand*);⁵⁵ moreover, he is unable to sustain the illusion that he is man enough to have given birth to Siegfried, a bizarre position into which scene 1 of act I increasingly forces him.

The way Mime’s subterfuge unravels suggests that the impossibility of Mime’s paternity stems from questions of descent rather than of family in a narrower sense. Plenty of children are able to best their parents; in fact, Oedipal impulses require that they do so eventually. That Mime’s failure before his “son” is not Oedipal but rather means that Mime cannot be Siegfried’s father is a matter of heredity. Siegfried’s suspicions are aroused by his observations of nature: “And so I learnt what love is: / from their mother I never took her whelps away. / Now Mime, where have you got / your loving wife, / so that I may call her Mother?” More heavily than this introduction to “what love is” (namely coupledness) weighs Siegfried’s self-observation. In watching reproduction among the animals in the forest, he notices how “the young look like their elders.” Eventually he comes across his own image: “There I also saw my own shape; completely different from you I seemed to be.” The difference between Mime and Siegfried is thus framed in terms of the descent of species. Siegfried does not simply doubt that Mime is his father because he does not look like him, but rather suggests that they are of different species. He and Mime are “as like as a toad to a glistening fish; but never a fish was born to a toad!”⁵⁶ What first looks like a family romance turns out to be something different: only in realizing that he cannot be of the same species as Mime does Siegfried realize that he cannot be Mime’s offspring.

Mime in turn deflects Siegfried’s inquiries by chalking up sexual difference to a difference in species: “Are you either a bird or a fox?” he asks, suggesting that sexual difference obtains

ADRIAN
DAUB
Siegfried,
Fairy Tale,
Metaphysics

⁵⁴“Was *Siegfried* von der *Götterdämmerung* unüberbrückbar trennt, ist die Zeitlosigkeit des Märchens gegenüber der Zeitlichkeit des Mythos” (Dahlhaus, *Wagners Musikdramen*, p. 183). The translation is my own, since Mary Whittall’s more reader-friendly version somewhat obscures the point I am trying to emphasize: “The timelessness of fairy tale, as opposed to the temporal setting of myth, creates a separation between *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* that nothing can bridge” (Dahlhaus, *Wagner’s Musical Dramas*, p. 127).

⁵⁵Wagner, “*Siegfried*,” in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 88.

⁵⁶“Da lernt’ ich wohl, was Liebe sei: / Der Mutter entwandt’ ich die Welpen nie. / Wo hast du nun, Mime / Dein minniges Weibchen / Daß ich es Mutter nenne?” (ibid., VI, 93).

only in the animal kingdom.⁵⁷ The very question after his descent, which for Siegfried is coextensive with the quest for his mother, is relegated to the animal kingdom. In a puzzling fragment written in 1883 and intended as a concluding chapter to *Religion und Kunst*, on the theme “das Weibliche im Menschlichen,” Wagner introduces the opposite line of argumentation, emphatically linking the sexuality of animals and humans. Although Wagner tries in the fragment to capture the “Reinmenschliche” in the “relation [*Verhalten*] between . . . the male and the female,” he ranks animal coupledness very highly. Animal species are able to maintain themselves “in great purity” (*in großer Reinheit*) because they do not get together based on the acquisition of wealth (*auf Eigentum und Besitz*).⁵⁸ On the other hand, they also do not marry. Monogamy is the way in which human beings raise themselves, or have historically raised themselves “above the animal kingdom” (*über die Thierwelt*). According to Wagner’s classification, the basest of the different forms of *Verhalten* between male and female is the marriage that is entirely drained of its biological content. If the institution is abused for external purposes (Wagner speaks of a “Mißbrauch der Ehe”), namely gaining wealth, power, and influence, it occasions mankind’s degeneration “bis unter die Tierwelt.”⁵⁹ Mime’s claim that descent is something that characterizes only the animal kingdom thus paradoxically represents his utter debasement of the love relation between humans.

Significantly, introducing a cleavage between animal and human love represents a full reversal in Mime’s line of argumentation. Mime has previously argued that “young things long for their old ones’ nests; that longing is love: and so you pine for me also.”⁶⁰ Siegfried is to love

Mime like his offspring, but he is not the result of reproduction; other species may constitute a model for the love relationship that is to obtain between Siegfried and Mime, but they cannot provide a model for their filiation. As already noted, Mime here takes recourse to an abstract love “from above,” which lacks natural grounding and requires language to assert what *Geschlechtsliebe* simply knows. Mime offers this as the truly human form of love, as opposed to the brute *Geschlechtsliebe* characteristic of *Vogel und Fuchs*.

The disjunction Mime insists on between filiation and *Geschlechtsliebe* means that love becomes an ideological construction, a conceit of language as self-sufficient as the fairy-tale loop the dwarf is trying to maintain around Siegfried: “Won’t you ever remember / what I taught you about gratitude? / You should be glad to obey / the man who did so much for you.”⁶¹ The second part of Mime’s question is strangely circular: Siegfried is to remember what Mime taught him about being grateful for what Mime taught him. Mime is not asking Siegfried to remember any one thing he has taught him, but rather to remember the fact of his teaching—where one might expect a list of actual deeds, all one gets is another bit of language. Mime’s efforts are focused on calling on the Siegfried that he himself has constructed—with the additional proviso, however, that the opera posits a “real” Siegfried behind the “linguistic” one Mime attempts to fashion.

If language is Mime’s province, he is not therefore the lord of his domain. Just as it is not clear whether his claim “ich bin dir Vater und Mutter zugleich” is a machination of his *Witz* or follows from his desperation, the fact that he must speak literally to answer Siegfried’s question of paternity indicates that Mime is at the mercy of his language.⁶² For Mime offers

⁵⁷“Wie die Jungen den Alten gleichen”; “Da sah ich denn auch mein eigen Bild; / ganz anders als du dünkt’ ich mir da.” “So glich wohl der Kröte ein glänzender Fisch; / doch nie kroch ein Fisch aus der Kröte.” “Bist doch weder Vogel noch Fuchs.” (*ibid.*, VI, 93).

⁵⁸Wagner, “Das Weibliche im Menschlichen,” in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, XII, 342.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰Wagner, “Siegfried,” in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 92: “Jammernnd verlangen Junge / nach ihrer Alten Nest; Liebe ist das Verlangen: so lechzest du auch nach mir.”

⁶¹“Willst du denn nie gedenken, / was ich dich lehrt’ vom Danke? / Dem sollst du willig gehorchen, / der je sich wohl dir erwies” (*ibid.*, VI, 89).

⁶²We might well wonder if Mime’s claim of fatherhood and motherhood is not perhaps a metaphorical one. Is Mime really laying claim to preterhuman sexual prowess, or is he simply claiming that he is *like* mother and father to Siegfried? If Mime’s statement is metaphorical, it is obviously evasive: His claim that he is “dir Vater und Mutter zugleich” is an answer to Siegfried’s question “Du

his claim as the answer not to the question whether he cares for Siegfried (*like* a father and mother might), but rather whether he made Siegfried. At all times Mime is either being metaphorical (and dodging the question) or outright lying. Language is therefore the last resort of those that can't lay convincing claim to paternity. And indeed, Mime's strange locutions betray him again and again. Take for example a line examined twice already: Mime claims that he "cared for you / as if you were my own skin." In German, as in English, when one saves or protects "one's own skin," this is usually a selfish, cowardly act at the expense of others. To protect someone else like one protects one's own skin thus means that one will think of the other first the same way one thinks of oneself first. The metaphor contradicts its supposed "intended" meaning.

VOICE, SONG, SATIRE

Since the narrative of *Siegfried* is precariously perched between two genres, it should not come as a surprise that musically as well *Siegfried* performs a kind of travesty and that it is Mime who is forced to enact it. There is a different operatic form lurking in the background for much of *Siegfried*, and it enters the plot usually with Mime as its vessel. The opera harkens back to this form only to travesty it in a kind of derisive citation that employs its idiom, thoroughly Wagnerized but nevertheless legible as a code for not just aesthetic but also dramatic, and, I would argue, sexual *mauvaise foi*.

To begin with, the self-enclosed loop characteristic of many of Mime's claims asserts itself in the music as well. In particular the back

story that grounds Mime's claim to motherhood ("Als zullendes Kind") returns at least thrice in the opera's first scene, resurfacing as something closer to a song-number than a leitmotif. Mime initially intones it in order to remind Siegfried of his debt of gratitude; Siegfried turns the song against Mime, demanding to know where the "zullendes Kind" came from; finally, Mime makes another attempt to get through the song in order to deflect Siegfried's questioning, but is interrupted after each line by Siegfried. In fact, when Mime repeats these song fragments, the opera's poem reproduces the text in quotation marks: the song does not recur; rather, it is quoted. The circulation of distinct song numbers is of a piece with Mime's deceptiveness and his defectiveness as a parent. As Abbate claims, "He sings it even though it has been sung countless times over the years (Siegfried's irritation makes this clear) and though his audience has had more than enough: he is harping."⁶³ But it is above all Mime's choice of genre that is meant to condemn him in the eyes of this "audience," meaning both Siegfried and us, a choice that again has implications for the opera's stance toward sexual difference.

The first act of *Siegfried* is notable, among other things, for its comedy, even its downright satiric character. The opera's original draft, *Der junge Siegfried*, was explicitly conceived as the comedic companion piece to the tragedy *Siegfrieds Tod* (later to be rechristened *Götterdämmerung*).⁶⁴ The opening conceit (explored in Mime's "Zwangvolle Plage") of a master blacksmith too specialized, too "witzig," to craft a lasting blade, already takes rather obvious satirical shots at what Hegel called the "bourgeois zoo" (*das geistige Tierreich*) of extreme specialization and the social division of labor.⁶⁵ Mime's repartee with Siegfried—the only time in the entire *Ring* that the word "repartee" might be justified—with its tempestuous mood changes, Mime's constant attempts at ingratiating himself, and Siegfried's constant reject-

machtest wohl gar ohne Mutter mich?" only if he means it literally. The assertion that he cares for Siegfried just as much as the combination of a father and a mother would be certainly interesting, but it offers nothing by way of explaining how Siegfried was "made." It answers Siegfried's question only if the claim is on some level literal. While Mime's exact meaning (and thus its relation to Siegfried's query) is thus not decidable, it is clear that in this instance only Mime has a "choice" in registers (literal or metaphoric). Siegfried can pose exclusively existential questions, whereas Mime in answering them can treat them as questions of existence or of language.

⁶³Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, p. 122.

⁶⁴See Robert Bailey, "The Evolution of the *Ring*," this journal 1 (1977), 49.

⁶⁵G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1841), pp. 286–304.

tion of these, constitutes one of the cycle's most overtly comedic scenes.⁶⁶

Not least among the libretto's comic flights ranks Mime's increasingly desperate attempt to harmonize Siegfried's growing awareness of sexuality with the elaborate web of lies with which he seeks to keep the boy in the dark about his ancestry. At least part of the comedy of their exchanges, then, issues precisely from the fact that, in trying to maintain his deceptions, Mime is pushed by Siegfried into claiming ever more outlandish sexual powers. The more fervently he asserts these powers, however, the more Siegfried realizes that Mime cannot really possess them: in its very plainness, Mime's voice bespeaks with ever-greater eloquence the extent of his impotence. This dissonance, to which Siegfried responds with instinctive rage, furnishes much of Mime's comedy.

This points to a strange ambivalence in Mime's villainy as well as his comedy: his comedy is villainy thwarted by bodily insufficiency. Of course, as Adorno knew already, Wagner's operas are able to "do" comedy only in a very strange, refracted fashion. In order to laugh at Mime, we have to be able to despise him a little, and it is difficult to despise him without a bit of a chuckle. Wagner's villains, Adorno has noted, "become humoristic figures and victims of denunciation," insofar as Wagner presents them as objects of both ridicule and pity.⁶⁷ Mime's ridiculousness and pitifulness are staged in a spectacular fashion that links him to earlier operatic and singing types.⁶⁸ If *Siegfried's* first act is structured much more like a tradi-

tional opera than the rest of the *Ring*, this rests mostly on Mime's shoulders. Recitative, aria, and dialogue, all but banished from Wagner's operas, reappear in Mime's forest, while leitmotivic development plays only a secondary role.⁶⁹

Adorno already argued for the anti-Semitic aspects of Siegfried's instinctual rejection of Mime's paternity.⁷⁰ "I can't abide you," he reminds Mime, providing a litany of Mime's bodily expressions that rouse him to violence.⁷¹ As Marc Weiner has added more recently, it is difficult to hear Mime's whining, plaintive song and not be reminded of Wagner's infamous indictment in "Das Judentum und die Musik" of 1850.⁷² In Wagner's words, "a shrill sibilant buzzing of [the] voice" characterizes Jewish speech and song, so that in listening, "we are involuntarily struck by its offensive manner [Wie] and so diverted from understanding its matter [Was]."⁷³ Others have contested the identification of Mime's voice with that which Wagner attributes to the Jew. Hermann Danuser for example has pointed to the fact that Mime too uses that (to Wagner) ur-German poetic form, the *Stabreim*.⁷⁴ However, it seems that it is not so much the intricacies of Mime's sound (which is indeed *zischend* and *schrillend*) that lend credence to the identification, but rather the preponderance of the *how* over the *what* contained in Mime's speech. Mime's use of *Stabreim* would therefore be itself a kind of

⁶⁶It is worth noting that this dialogue is an extremely late addition to the opera's text. Regarding the opera's production history: at least since Patrice Chéreau's centennial production of the *Ring* in 1976, the dark underside of this comedy has become increasingly emphasized. Chéreau stages the opening exchanges between Siegfried and Mime as a vicious brutalization of a piece with the exploitations the Mime of *Rheingold* endures at the hands of Alberich. Nevertheless, as Adorno has pointed out, the opera seems to think of Mime's victimization as at base comedic—be it the "Au! Au!" that Loge and Wotan laugh at in *Rheingold* or the "zwangvolle Plage" of *Siegfried*.

⁶⁷Adorno, *Die musikalischen Monographien*, p. 19.

⁶⁸Martin Puchner notes that "Mime is the scapegoat for everything that is suspect about theatrical mimesis." See his *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality and Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 49.

Weiner connects Wagner's Mime-caricature into outdated operatic (mostly singing) styles. See Weiner's *Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination*, pp. 176–95.

⁶⁹Hermann Danuser, "Universalität oder Partikularität? Zur Frage antisemitischer Charakterzeichnung in Wagners Werk," in *Richard Wagner und die Juden*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer, Ami Maayani, and Susanne Strasser-Vill (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), p. 88.

⁷⁰Adorno, *Die musikalischen Monographien*, p. 22.

⁷¹Wagner, "Siegfried," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, VI, 92.

⁷²Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination*, pp. 176–85.

⁷³Wagner, "Das Judentum in der Musik," in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, V, 71: "ein zischender, schrillender, summsender und murksender Lautausdruck"; "bei dessen Anhörung unsere Aufmerksamkeit unwillkürlich mehr bei diesem widerlichen Wie, als bei dem darin enthaltenen Was der jüdischen Rede verweilt"; Richard Wagner, *Stories and Essays*, ed. Charles Osborne (London: Peter Owen, 1973), p. 28.

⁷⁴Danuser, "Universalität oder Partikularität?," p. 82.

masquerade, but a masquerade that is flamboyantly obvious to both Siegfried and the audience.⁷⁵

Whether or not we read Mime as anti-Semitic, then, at least one parallel to the Judaism essay emerges as obvious: Mime's voice, like that of "the Jew," has a problem with "how" it says "what" it says. "The Jew," Wagner claims, is characterized by a range of vocal effects that draw attention to themselves to the point that they eclipse the actual "matter" conveyed in speech. These vocal effects seem to run the gamut from pronunciation ("zischend") to timbre ("summsend").⁷⁶ Similarly, Mime throws himself at Siegfried as a friend, yet his voice and his mien betray him as a repulsive "Nicker." Mime attempts to fool Siegfried, yet his voice tells the dragon-blood-addled Siegfried everything that he means to conceal (with the help of his "real" mother speaking through the *Waldvogel*).⁷⁷ Although Mime offers himself as a cunning artificer, we hear him to be a fool.⁷⁸ And, centrally for our line of inquiry, Mime offers himself as "Vater und Mutter zugleich," yet both Siegfried and the audience can hear that this is not true: his voice signals that he is lying and betrays that he could not possibly be Siegfried's father or mother. For Mime, whether he is put forward as an explicitly "Jewish" character or not, is clearly offered for "ridicule and pity" as a castrato of sorts.

The musical form that Mime turns to (the "how") heightens the obviousness of his insufficiency, for Wagner provides Mime's pleas with a generic subtext that subverts both his intentions and his literal meanings. I have already noted that the self-enclosed loop in which Wagner places Siegfried and Mime asserts itself in the circulating "song numbers," foregoing developmental or motivic considerations. And it is clear that this melodic insularity is related

to the insular form of the fairy tale. Dahlhaus points to the "song- and rondo forms" that predominate in particular in the exposition "between Mime and Siegfried, in which the fairy-tale atmosphere is most obvious."⁷⁹

Like Mime's voice, however, these forms are not just subversive but, more important, comical. We are meant to laugh at Mime's songs as much as we are to laugh at his outrageous attempts to cover up his lies. "Als zullendes Kind" is not just a song number, fully detachable, as Dahlhaus pointed out, "from the dramatic-symphonic context,"⁸⁰ it is also a song-parody. Siegfried too is given melodies that have the character of distinct song numbers in the opera's first scene—but these are not presented as parodic. Keeping in mind David Levin's point that "Jews in Wagner's works are dogged by aesthetic qualities that the composer loathed,"⁸¹ it becomes clear that Mime, whether he is an anti-Semitic caricature or not, is ridiculous because he represents a remnant of an "inferior" operatic practice (note in particular the exaggerated four-squareness of "Als zullendes Kind"). He declaims his arias, draws an unwilling Siegfried into duets, and comes close to speaking, verging on a recitative-aria schema.

Mime's music is not simply a throwback to outdated aesthetic practices and genres; its generic insufficiency is coterminous with his generative insufficiency. His voice and song offer eloquent testimony of his lateral lineage and its allegorical dimension. As Abbate puts it: "It is no secret that such empty formalism, though the librettos present it more harmlessly as the outmoded or antique, was what Wagner had in mind, when he decried Jewish music, its 'false mimesis' and artistic incapacity."⁸² Mime, who as "parent" cannot beget newness, is also an aesthetic reproducer. As Martin Puchner has noted: "Mime is the scapegoat for everything that is suspect about theatrical mimesis"⁸³—including, it seems, its supposed barrenness,

⁷⁵Puchner, *Modernism, Anti-Theatricality and Drama*, p. 50.

⁷⁶On the question of Mime's speech and so-called "Mauscheln" (German spoken in a Yiddish accent), see Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination*, p. 116.

⁷⁷See Borchmayer, "Siegfried," p. 78.

⁷⁸Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 165–66.

⁷⁹Dahlhaus, *Wagners Musikdramen*, p. 184.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁸¹David J. Levin, "Reading Beckmesser Reading: Antisemitism and Aesthetic Practice in the Mastersingers of Nuremberg," *New German Critique* 69 (1996), 129.

⁸²Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, p. 122.

⁸³Puchner, *Stage Fright*, p. 49.

its artificiality, and its over-dependence on language and rule. Seen in light of his own erotics of creativity, then, Wagner's notorious assertion that "the Jew" can only imitate (*nachsprechen, nachkünsteln*)⁸⁴ has the equally ominous corollary that the Jew Mime cannot but always re-create himself—that his Mime-sis is also a form of (biological, musical, generic) egoism.

Wagner himself suggests a similar link between the song-practice and the lack of sexual relationship (*Geschlechtsliebe*) in a startling discussion of what we might term "tonal exogamy." In the third part of 1851's *Oper und Drama*, "Dichtkunst und Tonkunst im Drama der Zukunft," Wagner turns to the metaphor of exogamy for a discussion of melody and modulation. Each tone, he writes, is a member of a "family clan" (*Geschlecht*), namely a scale. But each member of this scale is itself tied by a kind of yearning to the notes of another scale; harmonic modulation then resembles healthy exogamy, the unification of the members of two separate families, while the tonal endogamy practiced by, for example, folk melody that remains wedded to a single key, can know nothing of the love between two tones. Here, then, family and sexuality (because, once again, Wagner is not interested in platonic love, but rather in sexual attraction [*Geschlechterliebe*]) are thought as opposites: An involved kinship system secures transcendence of the "patriarchal limitation" (*patriarchalische Beschränkung*) of the "family melody" (*Familienmelodie*).

While Mime's song-numbers, most prominently "Als zullendes Kind," do modulate and are (to use Wagner's schema) "exogamous," it is clear that Wagner thinks of song-based operatic practice as tending toward a kind of familial solipsism that is coterminous with the absence of love. Insofar, then, Mime's reliance on song resonates with this earlier Wagnerian text as well.⁸⁵ Mime's singing, by its very closure gestures toward a form that Wagner associates

with harmonic self-referentiality. His song would thus parallel Mime's biological solipsism as well as the closed-loop structure of the fairy tale he constructs around Siegfried. All three are explicitly marked as barren and as "egotistical"—incapable of love, which is "the motif . . . that drives the subject beyond itself and forces that subject to connect with another."⁸⁶ Mime's tendency toward melodic self-enclosure is of one piece with his incapacity for, and utter disregard for, the alienation of the self in sexual love.⁸⁷

Once read in the context of Wagner's own speculations on the ground and meaning of sexual difference, the generic hybridity of *Siegfried* takes on distinctly moral undertones. Its fairy-tale self-sufficiency and its first two scenes' comedic trappings, holdovers from earlier developmental stages of the opera and the *Ring* cycle, are transformed into sexual signifiers that open up an almost Darwinian morality of origins, sexual relationship, and community. Thus the characterizations of Mime and Siegfried's dysfunctional dyad are shot through with a much more black-and-white morality that is at base biological. As Patrice Chéreau has famously noted, it is almost impossible to watch Siegfried's treatment of his foster parent and think Mime at least somewhat justified in plotting his revenge.⁸⁸ It is also impossible not to recognize in Siegfried's supposed superiority a good deal of shallowness, obtuseness, and downright idiocy (in particular when compared to

⁸⁶Wagner, *Oper und Drama, Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, IV, 152.

⁸⁷It may appear at first, then, that Mime's "endogamy" is nothing other than the Valsung's incest, which has produced Siegfried—the value judgment implied in Wagner's family-metaphor would thus be offset, or at least to some extent relativized. It is worth noting, however, that Wagner does not say that single-scale harmonics are incestuous, and only modulation produces desirable exogamy. In his image, he seems to regard family and *Geschlechtsliebe* as fundamentally opposed: it is not that harmony within the scale family is incestuous and bad, it is simply *not love*. This is why I claimed that Wagner may regard Mime's songs as insufficiently exogamous: they are not incestuous, since they are not characterized by any love relation whatsoever, and it is the latter fact rather than the former that marks their moral turpitude.

⁸⁸See Patrice Chéreau, Pierre Boulez, *Boulez in Bayreuth: The Centenary Ring* (Baarn, Netherlands: Phonogram International, 1981).

⁸⁴Wagner, "Das Judentum in der Musik," *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, V, 71.

⁸⁵On the association of endogamy and Jewishness, see Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture*, p. 89: "Jews, runs the anti-Semitic bromide, care only for other Jews; they incarnate endogamy."

the cycle's two other heroes, Siegmund and Wotan).⁸⁹ Nevertheless, on my reading, there is a level of signification that transcends or grounds Mime's and Siegfried's particular characters, and this biological-genetic as well as musical-generic level marks even the victimized Mime as somehow unnatural and contemptible, while marking Siegfried even at his most brutish as naturally superior. Wagner's biological "supremacism"⁹⁰ distinguishes between a domain of the properly human (coterminous with the domain of the sexual) and one of the not-quite-human (coterminous with parasexual reproduction). Wagner's musical drama then strains to give this defective or "lower" phylogeny a voice by which its defect can betray itself.

The question that *Siegfried* does not allow to come to the surface is the following, famously posed by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*: "Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established?"⁹¹ Mime's drag is clearly imitative. In fact, Mime is not "in drag" insofar as he is a man who presents himself as a mother; instead, he is in drag whether he presents himself as man or woman, offers himself as father or mother. In this figure whose very sexedness is a ruse, *Siegfried* represses the second possibility Butler suggests, namely that Mime's performance dramatizes

the contingency of Siegfried's own dynastic, Germanic, heroic heterosexuality. It is therefore ultimately not just the generic contradiction whose abjection rests on Mime's shoulders; it is the internal contradiction of the panacea of *Geschlechtsliebe*. Mime, a character who is in drag whichever gender (genre) he claims for himself, helps the opera repress the contingency of the very eschatology of sex on which it pins its hopes.

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Siegfried,
Fairy Tale,
Metaphysics



Abstract.

Richard Wagner's *Siegfried* constitutes something of an anomaly within the *Ring* cycle: the epic narrative of the Nibelungs and Valsungs grinds to a virtual halt, while two characters, Mime and Siegfried, reenact the fairy tale of the "youth who went forth to learn what fear is." The fairy tale's mythic framework nevertheless reasserts itself within the fairy-tale enclosure in the guise of sexuality, in particular sexual difference: As Siegfried begins asking troubling questions about his paternity, Mime is thrust into the role of unitary origin, culminating in his desperate claim that he is Siegfried's "father and mother." This article explores how exactly Wagner stages the tug of war between Siegfried and Mime over sexual difference, in particular in act I of *Siegfried*, allying different ways of conceiving descent, knowledge, and love with either the epic or the anti-epic (which Wagner associates with the fairy tale). This turns the generic struggle at the heart of *Siegfried* into a struggle between two kinds of families laying claim to Siegfried's paternity: the Gods of Valhalla who reproduce sexually, and the Nibelungs who are capable only of asexual reproduction of the self-same. This article argues that Wagner draws on his own speculations on sexuality, race, and history, in particular his idiosyncratic reading of Schopenhauer, to overlay this opposition not only with moral significations, but racial ones as well.

Key words: Richard Wagner, *Siegfried*, sexuality, sexual difference, anti-Semitism.

⁸⁹Philip Kitcher, Richard Schacht, *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner's Ring* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 186ff.

⁹⁰Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture*, pp. 191–92, 198–203.

⁹¹Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. xxviii.