

Chapter 5

Dramatic Recapitulation and the Immolation of Valhalla

The previous two chapters have explored and clarified the overall ring structure by analyzing both simple and complex recapitulations across its central divide. Yet the most thorough and final recapitulation of the tetralogy remains to be addressed. As a closing gesture, the Immolation scene is given the enormous task of bringing the many hours of the cycle to a satisfying end. Framing the entire cycle as a ring structure furthermore suggests that the Immolation scene ought to correspond with the very beginning of *Das Rheingold*, which it does, as it brings to a close the themes which began the cycle: whereas Alberich successfully stole the gold from the Rhine, Hagen drowns in an attempt to recover it; whereas Scene 2 began with the completion of Valhalla, so *Götterdämmerung* ends with its destruction.

The Immolation scene brings closure not just to the beginning of *Das Rheingold*, however, but also revisits the material which closed each of the three preceding operas and repeats them in such a way as to complete and perfect what previously offered only tentative closure. This chapter thus explores the Immolation Scene as a dramatic recapitulation from two perspectives: as a “latch” for the cycle as a whole and as a completion-through-repetition of the ends of the preceding three operas.¹⁷⁴ Although the

¹⁷⁴ Earlier versions of this chapter have been presented at the 2007 Bayreuth seminar led by William Kinderman, the 2008 Conversations conference at the University of Michigan, and the 2008 meeting of the Society for Music Theory.

Immolation Scene serves to bring closure to a number of themes beyond functioning as a latch to the ring structure and recapitulation of the closing gestures of the preceding three operas, analysis is limited here to the passage beginning with Brünnhilde's address to Grane as she prepares to throw herself on the funeral pyre through the end of the opera. Thematically and musically, the passage can be divided into three sections. My use of Parts 1, 2, and 3 mostly correspond to what Warren Darcy has delineated as Parts 6, 7, and 8 in his own analysis of the Immolation Scene.¹⁷⁵

First, we consider Brünnhilde's final address and farewell to the world: in throwing herself on Siegfried's funeral pyre, she consecrates for eternity their marriage, which their first night on the rock, as the opera *Siegfried* came to a close, could not successfully do. Then, we analyze the recall of Brünnhilde's magic sleep and fall from godhood surrounded by Loge's flames from the end of *Die Walküre*: her symbolic death on the rock here becomes literal. Finally, we will study how, as the *Ring* draws to a close, the Rhinemaidens, whose complaints interrupted and weakened the ostensible triumph of the final strains of *Das Rheingold*, are finally given what they had been asking for; Loge, who had expressed his desire to burn the gods up, does so, and Valhalla, built on a foundation of corruption, crumbles. An annotated score for the entire passage is presented as Example 5.1.

¹⁷⁵ The Immolation Scene as a whole, of course, begins well before the portion addressed in this chapter, and I set those sections aside in favor of addressing as closely as possible the very close as it functions not just as a recapitulation in general but performs double-duty within the ring structure which is the central occupation of this dissertation. For detailed analyses of the scene as a whole, I recommend Warren Darcy's "The Metaphysics of Annihilation: Wagner, Schopenhauer, and the ending of the 'Ring,'" *Music Theory Spectrum* 16/1 (Spring 1994): 1-40; and John Daverio, "Brünnhilde's Immolation Scene and Wagner's 'Conquest of the Reprise'" *Journal of Musicological Research* 11/1-2 (1991): 33-66.

Part 1: Recapitulation of end of *Siegfried*

332 BRÜNNH.

Gra - ne, mein Ross!
Gra - ne, my steed,

(Sie ist ihm entgegen gesprungen, fasst
(She has sprung towards him, seizes

Sei mir ge - grüsst!
I greet thee, friend!

es und entzäumt es schnell: dann neigt sie sich traulich zu ihm.)
and unbridles him: then she bends affectionately towards him.)

Echo of B minor episode, *Siegfried*, Act III, Scene 2 357/1/1ff.

Weisst du auch, mein Freund, wo - hin ich dich
Know'st thou now to whom and whith-er I

p marcato *cresc.*

Example 5.1 *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, Sc. 3 (332/1/1ff.)

füh - re? Im Feu - er
 lead thee? In fire

leuch - tend, ra - diant, liegt dort dein
 lies there thy

Siegfried motives

Herr, Sieg - fried,
 lord, Sieg - fried,

mein se - li - ger Held. Dem
 my he - ro - blest. To

Example 5.1, cont.

BRÜNNH.

Freun - de zu fol - - gen wie - - herst du freu - dig?
 fol - - low thy mas - - ter, joy - - ful-ly neigh't thou?

The first system of the musical score for 'BRÜNNH.' features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/8 time signature. The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff with a key signature of three sharps and a 3/8 time signature. The piano part begins with a forte piano (fp) dynamic and includes a crescendo (cresc.) marking. The piece is marked 'P.' (Piano).

Lockt dich zu ihm die la - - chende
 Lures thee to him the light with its

The second system continues the musical score. The vocal line has a fermata over the first measure. The piano accompaniment features a forte (f) dynamic and a forte piano (fp) dynamic, with a crescendo (cresc.) marking. The piece is marked 'P.' (Piano).

Ascending sequence of Glorification motives

Lo - he? Fühl' mei - ne Brust auch, wie sie ent-
 laugh - ter? Feel, too, my bo - som, how it doth

The third system is marked 'espressivo' and includes dynamics such as forte (f), piano (p), mezzo-forte (mf), and piano (p). It features a crescendo (cresc.) marking. The piece is marked 'P.' (Piano).

brennt, hel - les Feu - er das Herz mir er - fasst,
 burn; glow - ing flames now lay hold on my heart.

The fourth system continues the musical score with dynamics including piano (p), mezzo-forte (mf), and forte (f). It features a crescendo (cresc.) marking. The piece is marked 'P.' (Piano).

Example 5.1, cont.

BRÜNNH.

ihn *fast* zu um - schlin - gen, um - schlos - sen von
to en - fold him, em - braced by his

ihm, in mäch - tigster Min - ne, ver - mählt ihm zu
arms, in might of our lov - ing with him aye made

sein! Hei - a - ja - ho! Grane! Grüss' deinen Herren!
one! Hei - a - ja - ho! Grane! Give him thy greeting!

Sieg - fried! Siegfried! Siegfried! Siegfried!
Sieg - fried! Siegfried! Siegfried! Siegfried!

Sieh! Seel Se - lig
Brünn - hild

*(Sie hat sich auf das Ross geschwungen und hebt es jetzt zum Sprunge.)
 (She has swung herself on the horse and urges it to spring forwards.)*

Siegfried motive appears; two PL transformations lead from E Major to D-flat Major

Example 5.1, cont.

Averted cadence in D-flat Major

Part 2: Recapitulation of Die Walküre

336 BRÜNNH.

(Sie sprengt das Ross mit einem Satze in den brennenden Scheithaufen.)
(She makes her horse leap into the burning pile of logs.)

grüsst dich dein Weib.
greet thee in bliss.

Die Viertel bedeutend schneller wie vorher.

(Sogleich prasselt der Brand hoch auf, so dass das Feuer den ganzen Raum vor der Halle
(The flames immediately blaze up so that they fill the whole space in front of the hall,
Wieder das vorangehende Zeitmass.

erfüllt und diese selbst schon zu ergreifen scheint.)
and appear to seize on the building itself.)

(Entsetzt drängen sich
(The men and women

die Männer und Frauen nach dem äussersten Vordergrunde.)
press to the front in terror.)

(Als der ganze Bühnenraum nur noch von Feuer erfüllt erscheint, verlischt plötzlich das
(As the whole space of the stage seems filled with fire, the glow suddenly subsides

Magic Sleep

Example 5.1, cont.

Gluttschein, so dass bald bloss ein Dampfgewölke zurück bleibt, welches sich dem Hintergrunde zu verzieht, und dort am Horizonte sich als
that only a cloud of smoke remains which is drawn to the background and there lies on the horizon as a dark bank of cloud.

dim. -
p. *p* dann nach und nach immer stärker

finstere Wolkenschicht lagert. Zugleich ist vom Ufer her der Rhein mächtig angeschwollen, und hat seine Fluth über die Brandstätte ge-
At the same time the Rhine overflows its banks in a mighty flood which rolls over the fire. On the waves the three

p. *p*
P. *sempre più f* *P.*

wälzt. Auf den Wogen sind die drei Rheintöchter herbei geschwommen und erscheinen jetzt über der Brandstätte. Hagen, der seit dem Vor-
Rhine-daughters swim forwards and now appear on the place of the fire. Hagen, who since the incident of the ring,

molto cresc. *ffz*
P.

gange mit dem Ringe Brünnhilde's Benehmen mit wachsender Angst beobachtet hat, geräth bei dem Anblicke der Rheintöchter in
has observed Brünnhilde's behaviour with growing anxiety, is seized with great alarm at the appearance of the Rhine-daughters,

più f

(Er wirft hastig Speer, Schild und Helm von sich, und stürzt, wie wahnsinnig, sich in die Fluth. Woglinde & Wellgunde umschlingen
(He hastily throws spear, shield and helmet from him and rushes, as if mad, into the flood. Woglinde & Wellgunde embrace

HAG.

ff *P.* *marcatissimo*

Zurück vom Ring! Give back the ring!

Example 5.1, cont.

mit ihren Armen seinen Nacken, und ziehen ihn, so zurückschwimmend, mit sich in die Tiefe.)
(his neck with their arms and draw him with them into the depths as they swim away.)

ff
sempre ff
poco dim.

dim.

Part 3: Recapitulation
of Das Rheingold

(Flosshilde, den anderen voran dem Hintergrunde zu schwimmend, hält jubelnd den gewonnenen Ring in die Höhe.)
(Flosshilde, swimming in front of the others towards the back, holds up the regained ring joyously.)

p
cresc.

Rhinemaidens' Song in
A-flat Major

Durch die Wolkenschicht, welche sich am Horizonte gelagert, bricht ein rüthlicher Glanz.
(Through the bank of clouds which lie on the horizon a red glow breaks forth with its melody.)

f
dim.

P. Valhalla in D-flat Major

schein mit wachsender Helligkeit aus. Von dieser Helligkeit beleuchtet, sieht man die drei Rheintöcher auf ruhigeren Wellen des all.
creasing brightness. Illumined by this light, the three Rhine-daughters are seen, swimming in circles, merrily playing with

p
cresc.

Rhinemaidens, D-flat Major

mählich wieder in sein Bett zurückgetretenen Rheines, lustig mit dem Ringe spielend, im Reigen schwimmen.)
(the ring on the calmer waters of the Rhine which has gradually returned to its natural bed.)

p

Valhalla, E-flat Minor

Example 5.1, cont.

Final Valhalla Statement, G-flat Major

ff *più ff*

P. P. P. P. P. P.

Final Siegfried, D Major

poco dim. *poco f cresc.*

P. P.

Helle Flammen scheinen in dem Saale der Götter aufzuschlagen
 (Bright flames appear to seize on the hall of the gods.)

ff

P. P.

Glorification, D-flat Major

(Als die Götter von den Flammen gänzlich verhüllt sind, fällt der Vorhang.)
 (As the gods become entirely hidden by the flames, the curtain falls.)

Etwas zurückhaltend.

p *poco f* *dim.* *poco f*

dim. *p* *dim.* *poco f*

P. P. P. P. P. P. P. P.

a tempo.

p *cresc.* *ff dim.*

P.

Example 5.1, cont.

1. The fiery consecration of Brünnhilde and Siegfried's marriage

Part 1 of my analysis begins with Brünnhilde's address to Grane at 332/1/1.

There are surface resemblances between the first part and Act III of *Die Walküre*, such as appearances of the Ride of the Valkyries motive, the Siegfried motive, and the Glorification of Brünnhilde motive, all of which found their first appearances there. This reading was advanced by John Daverio who, like myself, interprets the Immolation scene as carrying the recapitulatory weight of the entire *Ring* cycle.¹⁷⁶ I will accept Daverio's argument that "the essential fact of the formal structure here is the multiplicity of interpretations, each of them simultaneously present, that the scene demands,"¹⁷⁷ and contend that this passage further constitutes a recapitulation of the paean to romantic marriage sung by Siegfried and Brünnhilde as the third opera comes to a close.

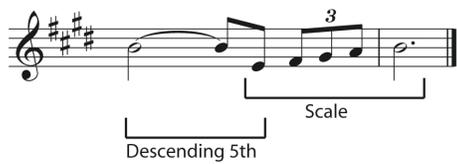
In Act III of *Siegfried*, their love is musically represented by a number of motives which involve a leap followed by stepwise motion; a table of these motives is found in Figure 5.1 and adopt Robert Donington's labels. Although Donington's ideas have been met with some skepticism, the appendix of his work is nonetheless valuable for clarifying musical as well as dramatic relationships between many of the *Leitmotive*.¹⁷⁸ The music from the *Siegfried Idyll*, or "Brünnhilde's holy love" involves a leap down by fifth followed by an ascending scale. Shortly after the *Idyll*, Siegfried sings the "tender love" music, which involves a leap down by a 6th and then a 3rd followed by an ascending scale, and the "innocent delight" music, which involves a leap down by octave, followed by a descending chromatic scale. In response, Brünnhilde sings a version of the "love as

¹⁷⁶ See especially his diagram of the Immolation scene as a whole: Daverio, "Brünnhilde's Immolation Scene," 44.

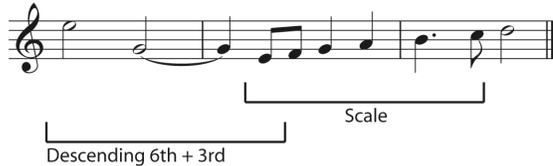
¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁷⁸ Robert Donington, *Wagner's Ring and its Symbols*, 3rd edition (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 275ff.

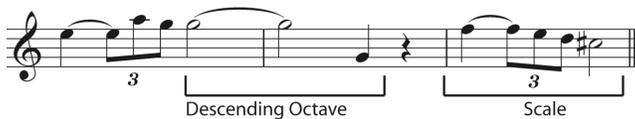
“Brünnhilde’s holy love” (Siegfried Idyll), 345/1/1ff.



“Tender love,” 354/3/2 and 362/3/4



“Innocent delight,” 354/4/2 and 364/3/3



“Love as fulfillment,” 361/1/2 (see also 355/5/1)

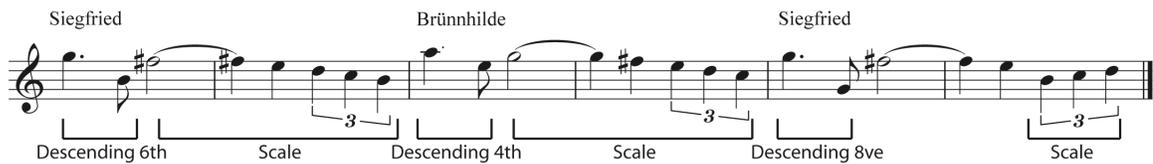


Figure 5.1 Love motives used at the end of *Siegfried*

fulfillment” motive with a descending 4th followed by a descending scale, and in the duet which ends the opera, Siegfried and Brünnhilde both sing versions of that motive with a descending 6th followed by scales which sometimes ascend and sometimes descend.

While most of the musical and textual material at the end of *Siegfried* is related to their love and is governed by a tonal pairing between E and C (as William Kinderman has outlined and we have explored in Chapter 4), a contrasting episode in B minor occurs just before the opera moves to C major for the last time, which I have reproduced as Example

5.2. During this passage, Brünnhilde asks Siegfried whether he fears her. He responds that he did, but that he has forgotten that fear entirely. Musically, this passage departs from the love motives that saturate the surrounding music and instead features the Valkyrie and Siegfried motives. It is with a recall of this B minor episode (332/4/2) that Brünnhilde greets Grane and asks if he knows where she leads him—in essence asking him, and ultimately herself—whether she fears what she is about to do. The episode leads to an ascending series of statements of the Glorification of Brünnhilde motive (334/3/2).

From a tonal perspective, as outlined in the linear reduction in Figure 5.2, this passage prolongs E major—thus recapitulating the end of *Siegfried* in the other key of the tonal pairing—up to the point when the Siegfried motives signal a transition to an aborted cadence in Db major. The passage is structured somewhat like a sentence, with a four-bar motive transposed up by step and repeated for another four bars before an abbreviated four-bar liquidation. The end of each iteration is approached by a V_3^4 chord; first to IV^6 , then to V^6 , and finally to I, and this large-scale harmonic trajectory is repeated on a smaller scale as the passage leads to the final I chord: $IV^6 - V_3^4 - I$.

While a linear analysis is very useful for showing the basic tonal structure of the passage as well as its ornamented prolongation through local key areas, it suffers because the utter frenzy and intensity of this passage is absent on the middleground level. Figure 5.3 is a branching roman-numeral/functional analysis of the passage that models the points at which the passage heightens in energy. The actual musical texture appears on the main staff, and the branching staves demonstrate alternative progressions which represent the expected harmonic continuations. Each time the passage averts a potential cadence, it raises the listener's desire for resolution.

B. Fürchtest du, Siegfried, fürchtest du nicht das
 Fearest thou Siegfried, fearest thou not the

Valkyrie motive (B+) (Sie umfaßt ihn heftig.) (She embraces him pas- sionately.) Siegf. (in freudigem Schreck.) (in joyous terror).

wild wü - ten.de Weib? Ha!
 mad pass - ionate maid? Ha!

stacc. p Vlc. Hr. (19) marc. cresc. Trp. *pp* f

S. Wie des Blu - tes Strö - me sich
 As my blood like fire is

ff p (Vlc. mit Singst.) Bl. Siegfried motive

S. zün - den, wie der Blick - ke Strah - len sich
 cours - ing, as thy glow - ing glanc - es con -

S. zeh - ren; wie die Ar - me brün - stig sich
 -sume me, as I feel the beat of thy

immer Vl. p Bl. Vlc. 7 7

R.W. 9.

Example 5.2 Siegfried, Act III, Sc. 3 (357/1/1ff.)

S. pres - - - sen, - kehrt mir zu -
bos - - - om, - comes back to

S. ①9 rück mein küh - - - her Mut, und das
me my cour - - - age of old, and the

S. Fürchten, ach! das ich nie ge - lernt, - das Fürchten, das du mich kaum ge -
fear that, ah! ne'er my heart could learn, - the fear that thy-self couldst hard - ly

Bl. 3

S. *Etwas mäßiger. Meno mosso.*
-lehrt: - das Fürch - ten, - mich dünkt, - ich
teach: - this fear - - - methinks, from

Cl. dazu Fl.

Hb. 21

Str. p stacc. Hr. poco cresc. tr

(Er hat bei den letzten Worten Brünnhilde un -
willkürlich losgelassen.)
(At the last words he has involuntarily released
Brünnhilde.)

S. Dum - mer Fl. vergaß es nun ganz!
Sieg - fried Hb. Cl. for ev - er has fled.

Hb. Cl. 21

Str. Bl. molto cresc. -

Example 5.2 cont.

The figure displays two systems of musical notation with figured bass and Roman numeral analysis below. The first system covers measures 1-10, and the second system covers measures 11-16. The key signature is E major (three sharps).

System 1 (Measures 1-10):

Figured bass: #6 4 3, 6 4, 6 5, #6 5, 4 ♯, 6, #6 4 3, 6 4 2, 6 5 4, 7 4, #6 3, 6 ♭7 ♯3, #6 4 7, 6 6, 4 3.

Roman numeral analysis: [E:] VI II V IV V V VI IV V I

System 2 (Measures 11-16):

Figured bass: 4 ♯, 6 4 3, #6 4 3, 6 6, 6 4 3.

Roman numeral analysis: [E:] (I) IV V VI IV V I

Figure 5.2 Linear analysis of *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, Sc. 3 (332/1/1 – 336/1/2)

The branches on the upper system all hinge on enharmonic readings of a second inversion E major chord. The first uses a $vii^{\circ 7}$ chord to prepare V_3^4/IV . The branch shows that the $^{\circ 7}$ chord is initially heard as $vii^{\circ 7}/V$, and could be resolved with an intermediary V_4^6 . Wagner then immediately recontextualizes the V_4^6 not as a dominant preparation but as a I chord, which is then immediately reinterpreted as V/IV by adding a lowered seventh. Leave it to Wagner to prepare a V/IV chord with a V/V chord! The second branch, which begins in the second phrase, demonstrates that the first chord can be heard as dominant preparation which could immediately move to a cadence in E, but instead, he introduces another passing $^{\circ 7}$ to prepare the chord in the sixth bar. This is the only harmony that appears with five voices in the texture, because it is tonally ambiguous. It can be heard as a cadential 6_4 , which immediately leads to a cadence in E,

as in the lower branch. Since we just left a local cadence in that key, it could also be interpreted as a passing V_3^4 moving to I in A major, as in the upper branch. Its actual resolution is more in line with cadential $\frac{6}{4}$, except that it moves to applied harmonies to V before reaching a cadence there. It is a moment which therefore might best be explained through the linear diagram, since these four bars constitute a harmonization of a symmetrical out-and-back chromatic scale. Yet its ambiguity in function, by creating the possibility for three different resolutions, is the driving factor for the intensity that builds throughout the entire passage. Finally, the two branches in the lower system show that the local harmonies anticipate dominant-tonic resolutions that are thwarted in order to continue propelling the line further and further forward.

Although the passage eventually cadences in E major, a full sense of tonal closure is weakened, as the Siegfried motives bring a sudden and surprising modulation to Db major, where the series of averted cadences in the passage reaches its apex as what might be a structural cadence on Db is destroyed by its substitution of an augmented triad for I. Nonetheless, the passage does recapitulate *Siegfried* in the other key of the tonal pairing and in fact also brings motivic closure. Throughout the various love motives at the end of *Siegfried*, all sizes of descending leap are accounted for except for the descending 7th. By introducing the Glorification motive during the recapitulation in *Götterdämmerung*, Wagner adds the one remaining intervallic leap as shown in Figure 5.4, a remarkable musical symbol for the completeness of love that had not quite been attained at the end of *Siegfried*.



Figure 5.4 Glorification of Brünnhilde, *Götterdämmerung* (334/3/2)

As Brünnhilde finally repeats and brings closure in E to the material which ended *Siegfried*, we may finally return to a thread alluded to at the end of Chapter 3 and developed further at the end of Chapter 4. Kevin Korsyn suggested to me the possibility that a recapitulation of a tonal pairing could modify the normative tonic-dominant polarity of sonata form by allowing a later instantiation of the pairing to balance an earlier one by reversing either the emphasis on one member, or else the order of their appearances.¹⁷⁹ It is in this way that Brünnhilde’s closure in E brings to final resolution the pairing between C and E begun in Act I of *Die Walküre*.

To summarize the tonal background of the entire story, the unresolved “half cadence” of *Die Walküre*, Act I could have been resolved by the tonal pairing in Act III, except that C is consistently undermined. Act I ends with a “half cadence” because Siegfried is yet to be born, yet to resolve and complete the Wälzung race and the love between his parents. Act III is missing the C because the dramatic situation is creating a space for Siegfried to fill, and the E/C pairing will only be confirmed when Siegfried arrives in Act III of *Siegfried* to fill that space. The pairing is depressed by a half-step, representing the corruption of their love due to Siegfried’s dabblings in the Gibichung’s world of social order; a corruption which will be reversed when Siegfried finally

¹⁷⁹ Kevin Korsyn, personal communication, October 31, 2008.

remembers Brünnhilde and dies heroically in C. Finally, Brünnhilde's frenzy in E major and subsequent death consecrates their marriage while bring final resolution to their tonal pairing.

The musical background of the love stories is presented in Figure 5.5. Although it resembles a Schenker graph, it is not intended to carry the strict implications of the technique. Rather than suggesting, for example, that the key areas are being prolonged over the intervening acts, the diagram simply provides a visual representation of the tonal relationships among the scenes in which the love story plays out.

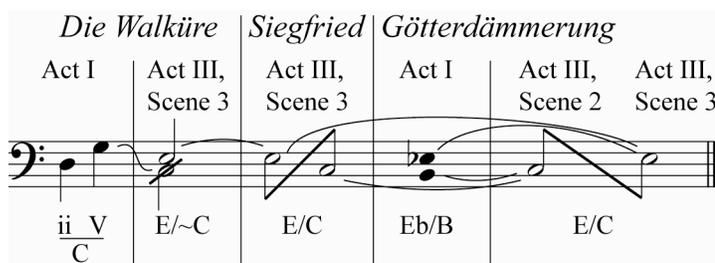


Figure 5.5 Tonal structure of the love stories.

2. Brünnhilde's final sleep

Immediately after Brünnhilde jumps into the fire, we hear a series of motives associated with the end of *Die Walküre*: the Valkyrie motive itself, the Magic Fire, and the Magic Sleep (336/1/2). It is to the last which I turn my attention here, because Wagner's transformation of this motive is remarkably symbolic, allowing it to achieve a state of closure which it had not previously had. Figure 5.6 represents harmonic

Die Walküre, 284:4:4 (First Form)

Die Walküre, 297:4:5; 302/1/1; and *Siegfried*, 283/4/2 (Second Form, reduction by Salzer and Schachter)

d)

e)

Götterdämmerung, 336/5/3 (Third Form)

Figure 5.6 Analytic reductions of 3 forms of the Magic Sleep¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ See Felix Salzer and Carl Schachter, *Counterpoint in Composition: The Study of Voice Leading*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969): 215-20.

reductions of three different forms that the motive has taken, excluding its appearances in Act III of *Siegfried* and the Prelude and Act I of *Götterdämmerung* that interrupt the motive with a transition into the Annunciation of Death. The second reduction is a reproduction of Salzer and Schachter's analysis of one form the motive takes, and the first and third adopt their notation to analyze the other two forms. Its first statement occurs toward the end of *Die Walküre* (284/4/5) and contains a chromatic sleight-of-hand which on the surface takes the appearance of two parallel passages which cycle away from and back to C major.

My ears are initially led to believe that I am listening to a cycle based on equal divisions of the octave that harmonizes a descending chromatic scale. However, there are not enough chords here to fully do that. The first passage, built on a bassline ascending by major-third, minor third, and two half-steps is matched by a bassline ascending by two minor thirds and two half steps. In addition, we might have drawn a parallel between the downward chromatic slips that appear in both progressions: B major to Bb major in the first half and E major to Eb major in the second passage. Yet the downward slips occur in two different points in the progression: between the second and third chords of the first, and the first and second chords of the second; and represent different functions with respect to their local tonal goals: the B to Bb slip is part of an ornamentation of the dominant of the eventual E major whereas the E to Eb represents the approach to the parallel mediant of C major.

By voicing the initial chord in the passage as a second inversion C major triad, Wagner fools us into believing that the similar patterns in the two iterations in the bassline account for a complete out-and-back harmonic excursion necessitating some sort of equal division of the octave: to F# and back to C, perhaps. Instead, the passage simply

moves to E major and back. There is no equal division of the octave at all! A hypothetical revoicing of the initial C major triad in root position would undermine the implied parallelism between the basslines and thereby highlight the enormous difference in function between the two passages. Here, Wagner lulls us into our own magic sleep, leading us to believe that C is prolonged through a cycle of equal rotations through the octave. Although the passage does prolong C, it does so in a manner which subordinates the assisting E major harmony rather than treating it as equal. This is corroborated by the bassline, which spells out the C major triad.

At this moment, however, Wotan is simply presenting a first draft, so to speak, of his plans for Brünnhilde's punishment. When they are more fully developed, the magic sleep music finds a stronger expression, which appears twice in *Die Walküre* and once in *Siegfried*. In this form, the motive realizes the potential suggested by the first appearance: the basslines and harmonic progressions are exactly transposed and the passages do cycle through a symmetrical division of the octave via major thirds. Notably, however, each passage includes an additional iteration, so that the harmony does not end where it begins. Instead, they begin in Ab major, move through E major, C major, then G# major (and it is notable here that Wagner opted not to spell the arrival point in Ab major, as this provides emphasis to the idea that the passage is not actually prolonging Ab major as much as it is passing through key areas) and the passages finally end in E major with statements of the Magic Fire music.

Salzer and Schachter's analysis emphasizes the tonal motion from Ab to E major. Although their graph incorporates all four descending-third cycles, they analyze each as only half of a structural rotation, so the first E major chord is not given as much structural weight as the C major chord, and the G# major chord is not given as much weight as the

final E major chord. What results from their graph is a progression from Ab major to C major to E major (which reverses the directionality of the thirds on the foreground level).

It is dramatically very important that Wagner adds an extra rotation so that the passages function as a transition from Ab major to E major. At this stage of the drama, Brünnhilde's magic sleep serves as a symbol of her transition from god to mortal. This is in distinct contrast to Wotan's initial conception of the magic sleep punishment, which, in prolonging C major, had a quality of permanence. Thus, there are two musical threads at play. First is the idea of a single harmony being prolonged through a progression of descending thirds. The second is an equal division of the octave that could accomplish such a prolongation, but in the end overreaches and becomes transitional.

It seems that what these statements point toward is a resolution where the prolongation of a key area is finally attained, and this happens during the Immolation scene. Rather than including the fourth iteration which brings the passage to E major, here it stops after the third and confirms the static potential of the passage and prolongs Ab major, one of the last appearances of the dominant of the key which will end the work. The third reduction in Figure 5.6 provides an analysis of this last appearance. Notice that in removing the final iteration, each cycle is given equal structural weight, and so the reversal of the direction of the thirds in the earlier iterations no longer applies. What does this mean? Considering that the end of *Die Walküre* and the end of *Götterdämmerung* hinge upon two deaths of Brünnhilde, we might think of the incomplete rotation in the first passage and the transitional nature of the following three passages, when Brünnhilde loses her godhood, as being completed by the fixed rotations in the final passage, when she accepts her destruction and its role in the end of the gods' reign. To use Žižek's phrase, it is her second death that is complete; that functions as

closure to the incomplete death signaled by the related passages in *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*.¹⁸¹

3. The Rhinemaidens rejoice as Valhalla burns

At last we turn to the final moments of *Götterdämmerung*, which serves both as the latch for the tetralogy and the recapitulation of the end of *Das Rheingold*. At the most general level, Robert Bailey has pointed out that *Das Rheingold* corresponds in structure to *Götterdämmerung*, as they both contain three scenes plus a prelude; and furthermore that this structure is mirrored at large over the course of the entire cycle: three operas with an introductory evening.¹⁸² Even were this not true, it would probably not surprise anyone to learn that the ultimate resolution of the problems set forth in *Das Rheingold* will not arrive until the end of *Götterdämmerung*. The resolution occurs during the curious extended span of instrumental music and pantomime, which closes the opera. Hagen's interruption, "Zurück vom Ring!" ostensibly out of place here, which provides contrast for and thereby highlights the purely musical and visual close which otherwise occurs.

As *Götterdämmerung* draws to a close, we return to where we began: the Rhinemaidens' song and the Valhalla motive. In Figure 5.7 and Figure 5.8 I have sketched voice-leading analyses of the first appearances of these motives with the primary goal of determining possible *Kopftöne* for them: the Rhinemaidens prolong $\hat{5}$ and Valhalla begins on $\hat{3}$.

¹⁸¹ See Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera's Second Death* (Routledge, 2002), 110.

¹⁸² Robert Bailey, "The Structure of the *Ring* and its Evolution," *19th Century Music* I/1 (July 1977), 50.

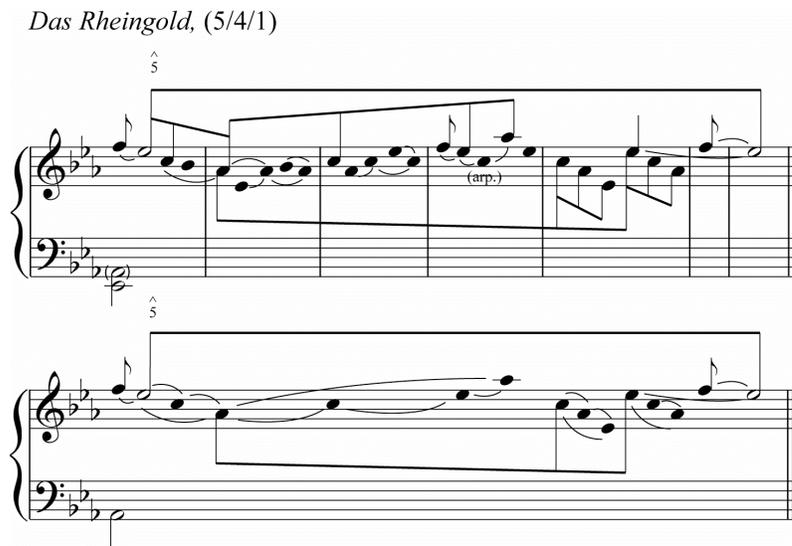


Figure 5.7 Voice-leading analysis of the first statement of the Rhinemaidens' song.

Because my voice-leading diagrams are designed to highlight musical features unique to the operas that they analyze, my usages of the concepts of interruption and unfolding in Figure 5.8 are somewhat unorthodox and therefore demand clarification. Rather than an expected pause on $\hat{2}$, this interruption features a perfect authentic cadence on V, allowing the Kopfton $\hat{3}$ to be unfolded to the Ab. In addition, the graph omits some dialogue between Wotan and Fricka and skips directly to the recuperation of the Valhalla motive. While the unfolding from F to Ab in the first half of the diagram might be interpreted as the linearization of a simultaneity of those pitches, I am using the unfolding symbol primarily to highlight a progression from F to Ab which will have important implications at the end of *Götterdämmerung*. Other important details on the graph that will have relevance in later appearances of the Valhalla motive are the middleground subdominant motion to VI in contrast to the foreground appearances of IV for that purpose and linearization of the F major triad. In Db major, F has the distinct privilege of functioning as V of VI when major and VI of V when minor!

The end of the Immolation scene provides a very functional latch for the ring as a whole, as it draws its motivic material from the music that began the first two scenes of the entire tetralogy. Furthermore, the scene displays on-stage the final states of the realms of Valhalla and the Rhine to bookend their situations at the beginning of *Das Rheingold*. However, as a finale, the scene would provide relatively weak closure to the entire *Ring* if its only function was to recall its opening material. The emotional power of the Immolation scene as a closing gesture comes primarily from its ability to bring to a close many of the dramatic and musical themes explored throughout the cycle.

While creating a latch for the overall ring structure, Part 3 brings closure to the dishonest, feigned resolution which ended *Das Rheingold*. As *Das Rheingold* closed with the triumphant strains of the Valhalla music undermined first by Loge, the god of fire, and then by the Rhinemaidens, it is notable that both fire and water take part in the destruction of Gibichung Hall, Valhalla, and the world. It is Siegfried's funeral pyre, ignited by Brünnhilde's torch which cause the logs of the World-Ash tree to catch flame and incinerate Valhalla. It is the waters of the Rhine which swell to extinguish the flames once the gold is finally returned to the Rhinemaidens. And it is the Valhalla music, now able to resolve triumphantly (although ironically so, since the triumph is manifest in its destruction), which resounds to bring the cycle (and the world) to an end.

Although *Das Rheingold* ends with the rhetoric of triumph, a rousing fanfare as the gods enter Valhalla, many writers have noted the sheer irony of the gesture.¹⁸³ The dramatic problem preventing thorough closure is represented in the structure of the

¹⁸³ See, for example, Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall, (Cambridge, 1979), 110-1; and Carolyn Abbate's observation that "In Wagnerian opera, Music can lie." *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1991), 19.

Das Rheingold, (55/1/1)

Das Rheingold, (57/1/1)

Figure 5.8 Voice-leading reduction of the first appearances of the Valhalla motive.

overall drama, which may be elucidated in part through Warren Darcy's diagrams of the opera's background which appear in his book, *Wagner's Das Rheingold*, and are reproduced as Figure 5.9. Darcy's analysis is an imaginative combination of a methodology of Schenkerian-style reduction with the system of tonal functions developed by Bailey, particularly expressive and associative tonality.¹⁸⁴



Figure 5.9 Warren Darcy's graphs of the background and deep middleground of *Das Rheingold*¹⁸⁵

Scene 1 is graphed as an unfolding of C minor (though this might be better described as a double-tonic complex between the Eb major and C minor), which functions as a neighboring harmony to Db major, the fundamental tonic of the music-

¹⁸⁴ Bailey's description of these functions are found in "The Structure of the *Ring*," 51.

¹⁸⁵ Darcy, *Das Rheingold*, 217.

drama. The 5-6 prolongational motion governing the harmonic background of Scenes 2 through 4 is reproduced on a smaller scale graph *b* in Scenes 2 and 4. Finally, the lowest graph here analyzes the structural harmonies of each of the twenty Episodes, which Darcy argues are the fundamental divisions of the whole span of the drama. In the end, Darcy discovers a large-scale prolongation of Db throughout the opera, with an incomplete neighbor at the beginning and 5-6 neighboring motion to Bb minor in the third scene.¹⁸⁶

It is the first scene, bracketed in the harmonic structure as mere neighboring motion and bracketed in the dramatic structure as mere prologue, that unbalances *Das Rheingold* and provides the complication needed to produce the following three operas. We could imagine a version of *Das Rheingold* that does not include Alberich's theft of the gold. Such an opera might begin with Scene 2 and would omit the music from 214/3/3 through 220/3/1. This hypothetical opera would not only exhibit large-scale tonal closure, but would probably exhibit dramatic closure as well: the giants, paid for their work with ordinary, uncursed gold, would leave and the gods would enter Valhalla to the triumphant strain, in this version uncomplicated, that ends the opera.

But *Das Rheingold* does not do this. As we explored in Chapter 3, after the C major statement of Wotan's Grand Idea, which itself opens an issue which requires further development, the Db Valhalla music attempts to cadence and is interrupted three times: once by Loge's monologue (214:3:3ff.) wherein he describes the gods hastening toward their end, and twice by the Rhinemaidens pleading for the return of the gold.

¹⁸⁶ Warren Darcy, *Wagner's Das Rheingold*, (Clarendon, 1993), 216.

Thus, when the work finally cadences, the Db major Valhalla music is not fully recuperated. Closer study of the left half of bands 3 and 4 explored in Chapter 3 reveals further musical expression of the failure of *Das Rheingold* to find satisfying closure, thereby emphasizing the intricate complexity of the recapitulatory relationships that the ring structure highlights. While the musical texture is setting the dramatic exposition for resolutions that will occur in *Götterdämmerung*, these expositions themselves serve as plagally-infused repetitions of the Vision of Valhalla analyzed in Figure 5.8.

The music which leads into Wotan's Grand Idea (analyzed in Figure 3.4 and reproduced here as Figure 5.10) not only assists in establishing the key area which ends *Das Rheingold*, but it also serves as a varied repetition of the first half of the Valhalla period as it brings the motive from I to V with one important distinction: a move to the subdominant, which will be further exploited and developed as the passage recurs later in the drama. The subdominant will take an increasingly more important role in the fundamental progression as the Valhalla motive is developed, first overtaking and then completely replacing the function of the dominant as the cycle comes to an end.

Das Rheingold, (209/4/3)

Figure 5.10 First half of Valhalla period toward the end of *Das Rheingold*, reproduction of Figure 3.4

As it leads to a half cadence, Figure 3.4 represents only the first half of what could have been a completely recapitulated period. The remaining music which ends *Das Rheingold* does bring the music back to a full cadence in Db major, but with a recall of motivic material from Scene 1 that destroys both dramatically and musically the ability of the end of *Das Rheingold* to find resolution. Figure 5.11 is a voice leading sketch of the *Schmeichelsgesang* and *Schreckensgesang* studied in Chapter 3, leading to the end of the opera.

The figure displays a musical score with four sections: *Schmeichelsgesang* (215/4/4), *Loge's dismissal* (218/1/2), *Schreckensgesang* (219/1/4), and *Sword/Entry into Valhalla* (220/3/2). Below the score is a detailed voice leading analysis showing chord progressions and fingerings.

Chord progressions and fingerings:

- Schmeichelsgesang*: (=1) V I IV I V I) I V II (VI IV D IV V I
- Loge's dismissal*: I V II (VI IV D IV V I
- Schreckensgesang*: (=1) III VII V D
- Sword/Entry into Valhalla*: I V I

Fingerings: 8-7, 6-5, 4-3, 6, 4 2, 8-7, 6-5, 4-3, 4-3, 8-7, 6-5, 4-3, 8-7, 6-5, 4-3.

Figure 5.11 Voice leading analysis of the closing passage of *Das Rheingold*

This passage represents the final cadence of *Das Rheingold*, and it departs dramatically from the cadence which closed the Valhalla music in Scene 2. While earlier, a reasonably clear period could be inferred from the structure, and while the approach to the Sword motive offered the possibility of a varied repetition of the first half of the period, the remaining half is quite far removed, and in fact, the only material closely related to the Valhalla motive appears in Loge's dismissal (notice that the F to Ab unfolding connecting the Rhinemaidens to Valhalla is reversed here). The subdominant, which was added earlier in the scene, is given particular prominence here, especially

when compared against the brevity of the appearance of the structural dominant during the closing cadence of the opera. Notice too that the overall harmonic structure of the passage is reflected in the small-scale progression governing the *Schmeichelsgesang*, which further associates the background harmonic progression specifically with the Rhinemaidens.

The disingenuous splendor of the Entry of the Gods has been discussed by many, but what has not been noted is the manner in which the lie is composed out in the voice leading. The *Schmeichelsgesang* provided a descent of a $\hat{3}$ - line, expected for the Rhinemaidens, since, as pointed out above in Figure 5.7, their music has been associated with $\hat{3}$ since they entered at the beginning of Scene 1.

When Wotan asks Loge to quiet them, he does so to statements of the Valhalla motive which provide a descent of a $\hat{3}$ - line, also as expected for that motive. However, the Rhinemaidens intrude once more over the minor subdominant and prolong $\hat{4}$. When the music returns to Db major for the final strains of the opera, it does so with a prolongation of $\hat{3}$ which is emphasized during the final structural cadence over the Sword motive. The Rhinemaidens have knocked the trajectory of the descent of the $\hat{3}$ - line off-course, causing it to rise to $\hat{4}$ instead. And since $\hat{4}$ (and the Ab on which it occurs in particular) is associated with the Rhinemaidens, this means that the failure of the Entry into Valhalla to offer a structural *Urlinie* descent is actually governed by the musical association of the very cause of the inability of the passage to attain dramatic closure.

The ending of *Das Rheingold* does reiterate important musical themes and closes off some parts of the drama (Valhalla, the cost of construction now fully paid to the giants, is complete and the gods may enter it in Db major). In presenting key areas and motives that have been imbued with meaning throughout the opera, this scene looks

backwards, reminding us of events which have occurred throughout the drama. However, by arranging these repetitions to undermine the ability of the opera to provide full closure, they are also forward-looking; they represent unresolved problems which will require the remaining three operas to solve. As a result, recapitulatory structures can be embedded within themselves just as ring structures can. This interlocking of forward and backward looking material is characteristic of Wagner's work and has been noted by many scholars. One vivid explication of this phenomenon can be found in Patrick McCreless's "Schenker and the Norns," in which he uses an extended metaphor of the loom to describe the weaving of stories of the past, present, and future as sung by the first, second, and third Norns, respectively.¹⁸⁷

In this case, while the end of *Das Rheingold* engages in a failed recapitulation of the Valhalla motive from Scene 2, the last passage of *Götterdämmerung* recalls the closing of *Das Rheingold*, but actively replaces the pomp and celebration over the entry to Valhalla with a musical symbology of the fortress as it burns. In addition, the passage replaces the proud dominant-tonic inflection of the end of *Das Rheingold* with one that is governed by plagal motion.

Figure 5.12 represents an analysis of the passage from the Rhinemaidens' song forward. For reference, I have also reproduced Darcy's analysis of the same passage as Figure 5.13, from which I diverge on several points, one of which is including the first statement of the Rhinemaidens' melody, as it is motivically related to the passage which follows and not to the one which precedes it. Additionally, it plays an important introductory role for the final passage of the opera. In addition, I disagree that the entire

¹⁸⁷ Patrick McCreless, "Schenker and the Norns," in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, ed. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (University of California, 1989), 276-97.

passage consists of an unbroken series of rising 5-6 harmonies, as it is significant that the pattern breaks after the arrival on C major.

The first statement of the Rhinemaidens' song appears at the exact pitch level and with the same harmonic accompaniment as its very first statement in *Das Rheingold* (338/3/1). While pentatonic, the theme is supported by an Ab major triad in second inversion. The bass note steps down from this Eb as the Ab major resolves as a dominant to Db major, representing the final appearance of a structural dominant, which leads to the final statement of the Valhalla motive in its home key. Kevin Korsyn also pointed out to me that the same harmonic motion from Eb down to Db appears in both Brünnhilde's "Ruhe, ruhe, du Gott," Waltraute's story to which it refers, as well as recreating the harmonic motion from Scene 1 to Scene 2 of *Das Rheingold*.¹⁸⁹ While the closing passage will feature foreground dominant-tonic relationships, they are in service of a larger-scale progression governed by plagal motion. Furthermore, the Rhinemaidens' melody emphasizes F as an incomplete neighbor to the prolonged Eb, and this is reversed on a deeper level, where the prolonged Eb serves as a neighbor to the structurally significant F of the first Valhalla motive (these two tones play similar neighboring functions with each other in Figure 5.11).

After the first Rhinemaiden melody, the section begins with two statements of an ascending sequence that alternate the Valhalla music with a modified Rhinemaiden melody that incorporates the Glorification motive in cover tones and includes 5-6 motion which the original motive did not. A third sequential statement begins, but before it can shift to the Rheinmaiden's song, the passage begins to assert fragmented Valhalla

¹⁸⁹ Kevin Korsyn, personal communication, October 31, 2008.

motives that move up by step: F, G and finally A. The pattern changes somewhat here. Whereas the first three Valhalla statements harmonize the initial arpeggio with the local tonic in the bass, all of the remaining statements harmonize the initial tone of the motive with the local dominant. The A minor of the last statement is then treated as vi of C, and this arrival on C is emphasized with an enormously orchestrated dominant-tonic resolution.

These Valhalla fragments actually perform double-duty, as they provide resolution to a detail from the of *Die Walküre*. As he bid Brünnhilde farewell, Wotan sang “Leb’ wohl” three times. The first two statements involved descending major thirds, harmonized like those in the Immolation scene: V^7/E to E, $V^7/F\#$ to F#. Rather than continuing the sequence, to G#, perhaps, the final “Leb’ wohl” only drops by half step, and is harmonized by a V^7/V to V in F#.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Wotan's "Leb' wohl" in *Die Walküre*. Each system consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics "Leb' wohl! Fare well!" and "leb' wohl! fare well!". The piano accompaniment features a descending major third arpeggio in the bass, with dynamic markings such as *mf*, *cresc.*, *sf*, *dim.*, and *f*. The piano part also includes performance instructions like "piu p" and various articulation marks.

Example 5.3 *Die Walküre*, Act III, Scene 3 (290/4/1)

At the end of *Götterdämmerung*, however, the pattern is completed and consists of this ascending sequence of falling thirds. Instead of leading to a half cadence, the last falling third is harmonized by $V^7/vi - vi$ leading normatively to $V^7 - I$ in C major, which is also the moment of a heavily emphasized statement of the Valhalla motive. It is as though Wotan's farewell in *Die Walküre* was only tentative, and here it is affirmed and completed: Wotan is bidding farewell not just to Brünnhilde, but to the world.

After two fragments, the pattern changes again. Instead of continuing the ascending sequence, the passage skips a step and asserts the Valhalla motive in C major. As a result, the music averts an opportunity to connect the initial F in the upper voice by an ascending scale to a Db. Instead, the upper voice skips over the potential Db, which might have suggested structural closure, and moves directly from C to E natural, where it continues its ascent. (Given the local chromaticism, of course, the skipped note would more likely be a D natural).

The middleground diagram highlights some remarkable structural similarities to the Valhalla motive itself: the unfoldings perform double-duty; they not only connect the Kopfton of the Valhalla motive with that of the Rhinemaidens' song, but they also recall the unfolding from F to Ab that occurred when the first Valhalla theme moved to its half-cadence. The bass scale from Db to F recalls the same scale which is used to prolong the Kopfton in the upper voice, and the scale from F to A prolongs the same F major key area that supplied the transition from Bb to Ab in *Das Rheingold*.

Figure 5.14 is a more detailed analysis of the harmonic progression beginning from the double bar:

The figure shows a musical score with two staves (treble and bass clef). The bass line is annotated with chord symbols and arrows indicating resolutions. The first section, labeled 'Model', shows G⁷ resolving to C, and A⁷ resolving to d. The second section, labeled 'Shaded', shows G⁺ resolving to c, and a^{o7} resolving to db. The third section, labeled 'Extended', shows B^{bb}/A resolving to D^b, which then resolves to G^b. The final section, labeled 'Liquidated', encompasses the B^{bb}/A, D^b, and G^b chords.

Figure 5.14 Corruptions of the Valhalla motive (339:5:3ff)

After parallel statements in C major and D minor, the bass now stops ascending, although the upper voice continues. From a harmonic standpoint, the ascending 5-6 sequence is replaced with what Matthew Bribitzer-Stull might call a developing motivic corruption.¹⁹⁰ My reading of the passage draws from Ernst Kurth’s theory of Wagnerian harmonic shading, which describes the brightening or darkening of otherwise conventional harmonies by raising or lowering one tone by a half step.¹⁹¹ I argue that this passage constitutes a parallel sequence of “dominants.” The first iteration is presented as normative and functions as a model: GMm7 resolves to C major and AMm7 resolves to D minor. The second iteration repeats the progression but shades the harmonies while simultaneously fragmenting the Valhalla motive. GMm7 becomes a G augmented triad; C major becomes C minor; AMm7 becomes A half-diminished seventh; and D minor becomes Db minor. The Db minor chord undergoes an L transformation to become a

¹⁹⁰ Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, *Thematic Development and Dramatic Association in Wagner’s Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Ph.D. dissertation (Eastman School of Music, 2001), 106-13.

¹⁹¹ Ernst Kurth, *Selected Writings*, trans. Lee A. Rothfarb (Cambridge, 1991), 105.

Bbb major/A major chord that both extends and unravels the repetition, as it finally leads to Db major for the last statement of the Valhalla motive. It is particularly significant that this Db is not a point of arrival; rather, it is merely a dominant to Gb, where the motive finally cadences. This is why it is so important that the harmonic pattern accompanying the Valhalla motive changed and began to assert dominant-tonic motion. Db's presence in this passage is not only the final reminiscence of the grandeur of Valhalla, but by appearing as a dominant it suggests not only its complicity in its own destruction, but its fundamental role.

The tonality of this passage was driven by a tritone relation – C and Gb. Both the expressive rise in tonality and the harmonic shading which appear in the passage serve to heighten the intensity as Valhalla burns, and the tritone further represents the wrenching of the once-great fortress as it burns to the ground. In addition, the strong emphasis on C major echoes for one last time Wotan's Grand Idea, in tonality if not in motive, while simultaneously expressing its outcome.

According to Figure 5.12, the structural harmonic progression of the passage is I – III – VII – IV – I, which is an unusual progression to say the least. However, the bassline reflects the fact that the passage is driven by a structural plagal progression. The bass motion of the overall progression becomes very familiar when inverted—and so *Götterdämmerung* ends with the subdominant projection of a very characteristic tonal progression: I – VI – II – V – I, as outlined in Figure 5.15.

3rd 4th 4th 5th

Db: I VI II V I

3rd 4th 4th 5th

Db: I III VII IV I

Figure 5.15 Closing progression as subdominant projection of normative functional progression

Finally, the Gb major of the last Valhalla motive becomes Gb minor during the last statement of the Siegfried motive, whose Eb (reflecting the subdominant) is enharmonically spelled as D major (the Neapolitan), which resolves down by half-step to bring the piece back to Db major and with it the arrival of the *Urlinie* on scale degree 1. This last passage in Db major states the Glorification of Brünnhilde motive, no longer in cover tones, but finally as part of the structural upper voice.

Furthermore, the structural upper voice, which had skipped Db during its ascent through the closing passage, also skips C. This is because C is the leading tone; it is missing because the passage is missing a structural dominant. In a plagal closing passage, there is no room for a dominant or its leading tone.

The unusual musical details of this passage serve a symbolic end. The passage starts with an ascending sequence of the Valhalla motive which missed an opportunity to find closure by bringing the upper voice to rest on scale degree 1. Subsequently, the Valhalla motive is corrupted as the fortress burns and when the upper voice finally reaches Db, it is only as the local dominant of Gb. The Valhalla motive burns gloriously in Gb major, and is never heard from again. When we do get Db major back, it is now wholly centered on the Glorification of Brünnhilde motive. The Glorification motive

thus *supplants* the Valhalla motive, which burned up with the castle in Gb, and supplies a remarkable musical symbol of the end of the old order and the beginning of the new.

Finally, the plagal infusion in the closing passage recalls the same plagal ending of *Das Rheingold*, whose closing cadence was approached by the same Gb major/minor which occurs here. Plagal motion has overtaken authentic motion; *Götterdämmerung* ends with no triumphant statement of the Valhalla motive, rather, it ends with a musical and dramatic realization of the Rhinemaidens' plagal prophecy.¹⁹²

Tracing recapitulations of the previous three operas in the Immolation scene uncovers another analytic morsel: these passages appear in reverse order, and this brings our discussion back to the overall ring structure, which here finds itself embedded through a small-scale detail. At the same time as it provides a latch for the overall ring structure of the cycle, the Immolation scene brings closure to each of the preceding three operas in the form of another small-scale ring

The end of the *Ring* constitutes one of Wagner's finest resolutions precisely because it serves to bring closure to a wide range of musical and dramatic situations which the tetralogy has spent many hours developing and complicating—many more than were discussed in this chapter. Yet the particular recapitulations studied here demonstrate a high degree of compositional sophistication on Wagner's part—some passages may recapitulate earlier recapitulations; while others bring closure to multiple issues simultaneously—as well as the surprising and unusual relationships that can be uncovered through the hermeneutic application of ring structure.

¹⁹² During the oral defense of this dissertation on December 16, 2008, Andrew Mead added a compelling interpretive twist to the V⁹ chords discussed in Figure 3.6. Because a V⁹ chord joins the pitch content of the dominant triad to that of a subdominant triad (II), the music of the Rhinemaidens' *Schreckensgesang* to Siegfried can be read as suggesting that they will get the ring back whether he takes the authentic route or the plagal route.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This dissertation has studied the issue of recapitulation through the lens of ring structure, by noting moments which feature a repetition of established dramatic or musical material in a new context that brings them closure. In delineating a governing ring structure, it was initially important to find both musical and dramatic evidence to ground the concept, as a ward against the dangers of traveling too far into the speculative. Yet, one of the most important features of the structure is its ability to suggest relationships which are not immediately obvious. Once a sufficient critical mass is met, we may accept the overall structure and then use it to guide our thinking to considering moments that appear to have formal significance, and yet do not initially appear to be closely related.

Chapter 4 began to press against this very problem; from a poetic perspective it was relatively easy to interpret Siegfried's second wooing of Brünnhilde as a structural repetition of his first arrival, and both of Siegfried's wooings as structural repetitions of his mother's two marriages. In addition, the dramatic events in all four marriages fit nicely into ring forms embedded into two structural levels. But while the events as described by the poetic texts and stage action fit into ring forms quite nicely, the musical content of both subrings was much more difficult to interpret in that way, and the musical

structure along the four points of the overall ring, while providing a provocative reading of the C/E tonal pairing, stayed mostly at the background level.

There are two ways to fill in the triad of music, text, and structure. The first is deductive, where we acknowledge a relationship between the known aspects of the drama—music and text—and discern that those relationships fall into a consistent pattern. An inductive method presumes the existence of an organizational structure that is confirmed by a patterning in either the music or the text but not necessarily both simultaneously. The inductive method then allows the analyst to ask whether there is an obscured relationship in the remaining aspect, and, at the furthest point, whether there might even be a *repressed* relationship in the remaining aspect.

Because the inductive methodology runs the risk of being purely speculative and ungrounded, recapitulations discussed throughout most of this dissertation have tended toward what might be referred to as *positive recapitulations*, as they involve the *presence* of a particular theme or character. While undoubtedly a safer route, insisting wholesale on a deductive methodology of positive recapitulation ignores the fact that absence is constantly developed as a theme throughout the cycle.

As an example, consider the steady dwindling of the supernatural throughout the four operas. In *Das Rheingold*, we are presented with the drama's pantheon: Wotan, Fricka, Freia, Donner, and Froh. Loge and Erda may also be included, but they are distinguished somewhat from the others as they seem ontologically different: Loge is only a half-god, so he does not require Freia's apples, and Erda seems to be prior to the other gods—Wotan, ruler of the gods, does not initially know who she is. Nonetheless, Loge and Erda are not excepted from the slow decrescendo of the gods' active roles in the drama. Loge is not seen again after *Das Rheingold*, although he is in a sense

spiritually present in the Magic Fire scene of *Die Walküre*, the forge in Act I of *Siegfried*, surrounding Brünnhilde's Rock in Act III of *Siegfried* and Act I of *Götterdämmerung*, and finally as the vehicle which destroys both the world in the Immolation scene. Erda is present only once after *Das Rheingold* and "appears negatively" in the prelude of *Götterdämmerung*, with the Norns functioning as her surrogate. In *Die Walküre*, the only gods who are present are Fricka and Wotan. In *Siegfried*, the presence of the gods is thinned once again so that Wotan is the only one to appear—and he no longer appears in his godly splendor, but only as a Wanderer. Finally, no gods appear in *Götterdämmerung*, a point to which Wagner draws our attention in Act II, when Guttrune gives thanks for her fortune to Freia and Hagen calls for sacrifices to be made to Wotan, Fricka, Donner, and Froh. The pantheon of *Das Rheingold* appears in *Götterdämmerung* only as a signifier for their absence.

Slowly, the interests of the gods—and the gods themselves—fade from the foreground of the drama. By Act I of *Götterdämmerung*, the role that the gods play is so far removed from that story that it can only be told in the third person, during Waltraute's narration. By Act III (assuming a production completely faithful to the stage directions), their role is reduced to mere tableau.¹⁹³ Brünnhilde returns the ring to the Rhinemaidens specifically because she knows it will bring peace to Wotan, through an end for which he has craved since Act II of *Die Walküre*, yet Wotan is curiously absent. It is remarkable that an opera whose title tells us it is concerned with the Twilight of the Gods does not present in any way the actions of the gods in question.

¹⁹³ During the instrumental portion of the close of the Immolation scene, the stage directions indicate that the interior of Valhalla becomes visible, with the gods and heroes arranged as Waltraute had described in Act I.

Looking again at William Kinderman's discussion of dramatic recapitulation in Wagner, in which he points to Siegfried's funeral music and Isolde's *Liebestod* as key moments which revisit and reinterpret earlier music in ways which seem to summarize the drama, we may notice that these two moments have one critical detail in common: not only are they notable for the themes which are present, but they are both notable for what is missing. Siegfried's funeral music recapitulates the great deeds of Siegfried, who is of course now dead, and the *Liebestod* recapitulates the love duet between Tristan and Isolde from the second act, but the work is now transformed into a solo number. Where Tristan was a crucial figure in the duet in act II, he is now missing from the music and is only present in the drama as a corpse.

Absence also played a fundamental role in the background analysis of the love stories explored in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, as the importance of the E/C tonal pairing in *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* was foreshadowed by the absence of C at the background level in Acts I and III of *Die Walküre*. Both the "genetic code" of C major hidden within the union of Siegmund's and Sieglinde's tale and the reading of Act I as composing out a background half-cadence suggested a future importance for C not yet attained. Act III, which frequently orbited around C while never quite resting there, allowed the absent tonality to serve as a symbol for Siegfried, whose arrival in Act III of *Siegfried* will fulfill the prophecies of the end of *Die Walküre* by joining with Brünnhilde's E to provide the musical symbolism for their love.

The analysis in Chapter 5 of the Magic Sleep music provided another example of an absence which suggests its own future completion. The first instance of the Magic Sleep was voiced in a way that allowed its actual syntax to be misheard: we may have initially interpreted it as a prolongation through a cycle of descending thirds before

realizing that the descending thirds in the bass simply resulted from a particular chord voicing. Its second appearance reflected the harmonic progression implied by the bass motion of the first, but used the descending thirds to effect a modulation rather than prolong a harmony. The criteria for what would constitute the definitive version of the progression could be extrapolated from the features which were absent in its first two forms, and its final appearance in the Immolation scene provides closure specifically because it presented that definitive version.

The *Ring* itself invites us to puzzle over absences, and thus also to posit the concept of *negative recapitulation*, a structural gesture which would serve to repeat and bring closure to dramatic or musical themes through their *significant absence* in the later iteration. Such a possibility provides the ground for a construction of a dialectic of absence and presence, ultimately suggesting one point of entry into interpreting repetitions which do not present material as expected.

An absence is not significant merely because something does not appear; significance must be manifest in signals which appear in the drama, music, or any of the incorporated media. For example, after Brünnhilde throws herself on Siegfried's funeral pyre, there ceases to be any text in the drama except for Hagen's final attempt to retrieve the ring. It has been pointed out before that this interruption seems inappropriate. However, it is only because this outburst is inappropriate that our attention is drawn to the fact that the remainder of the drama is being told entirely through pantomime and the progression of leitmotives. The presence of Hagen's intrusive text provides a contrast to, and thereby signals the importance of, the opera's otherwise wordless close.

One model for a principal of negative recapitulation can be found in the work of Fredric Jameson. In the course of a reading of Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Jameson points out

that one notable plot event is never actually present in the course of the narration, but happens outside of it:

A classic textualizing displacement first offers the donkey flight of the hapless Blanco dictator as a mere secondary detail, “told” rather than “shown,” and evoked in conversation as a passing example of some quite unrelated topic—only some hundreds of pages later to reactualize this same “event” as an absent sense-datum, the implied cause of a crowd of spectators blocking off from view some object of curiosity in the distance.¹⁹⁴

Jameson is then able to connect this present-only-through-its-absence event to the impossible non-event of bringing society to Sulaco in *Nostramo*, which occurs, “not as an event which can be narrated, but rather as an aporia around which the narrative must turn, never fully incorporating it into its own structure.”¹⁹⁵

In Chapter 3, we suggested the possibility that the end of *Das Rheingold* could recapitulate the vision of Valhalla that opened Scene 2. Although the closing passages began with a varied repetition of first half of Valhalla period, the Rhinemaidens intrude and disrupt what might otherwise have been the second half of the period. A positive recapitulation would have included a complete restatement of the Valhalla period, but this is dramatically impossible: the splendor of Valhalla is corrupt. Because payment for the fortress’s construction was made with stolen gold, the story cannot find final resolution. The Rhinemaidens’ plaint interrupts a hypothetically complete recapitulation of the Valhalla motive, replacing it instead with a signifier for its absence.

Negative recapitulation might also help explain the difficulty in finding a compelling musical relationship between Siegfried’s two arrivals on Brünnhilde’s rock. As Act I of *Götterdämmerung* drew to a close, Siegfried uses the Tarnhelm to disguise

¹⁹⁴ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 271-2.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 278.

himself as Gunther. The identity of the character on stage is in a sense indeterminate. From Brünnhilde's perspective, it is Gunther. From Siegfried's perspective, it is himself wearing a disguise. To someone reading the score, it is Siegfried, since that is made explicit in the stage directions. A hypothetical audience member seeing the ring for the first time might be aware that the character on stage is Siegfried disguised as Gunther, but might not know for certain which actor is on the stage.

By the end of the act, the neophyte will learn that it was the actor portraying Siegfried on the stage; by the end of the opera, Brünnhilde, too, will have deduced that it was Siegfried who came to the rock. Gunther, present in appearance, serves as a significant absence in the closing scene of Act I, with Siegfried serving as his replacement.

Gunther's absence is highlighted in several ways, both deductively and inductively. First, because we had at the end of the previous scene heard of the plan for Siegfried to disguise himself as Gunther, the audience is aware of his deception when he identifies himself as a Gibichung and knows that Gunther is actually not there. Second, from an inductive standpoint, the subring suggests a formal expectation that Siegfried will return to the rock to provide a structural repetition of his earlier arrival, causing the possibility that Gunther might be wooing in person and not through an agent some aesthetic dissonance.

Most importantly, while Gunther is ultimately absent on the stage, he is present in the musical accompaniment; in fact, the music associated with Siegfried's earlier visit has been replaced by the music introduced and developed in Scene 1 at Gibichung Hall. The last scene of Act I includes prominent statements of the Gibichung and Tarnhelm motives, the first of which introduced Scene 1 of the act, while the latter appeared when

Hagen suggested the possibility that Siegfried might be able to win Brünnhilde for Gunther.

Conversely, Siegfried's presence on the stage contrasts with the fact that his music is absent; the few motives we do hear during the struggle, mentioned in Chapter 4, are fleeting, like fragments of memories whose origins are puzzling and unclear to the pair as they struggle. As Siegfried begins to overpower Brünnhilde, the motive of Siegfried's heroic deeds serves as a fleeting reminder of their last embrace before he left to find further adventure; as Brünnhilde, overcome, looks into Siegfried's eyes, two love motives from the end of *Siegfried* sound as a memory of the first time she was overcome. It is precisely the ephemeral nature of these motivic memories that draws attention to the fact that the music is otherwise lacking material related to the last time Siegfried was on the rock.

Furthermore, the identity of the man on the rock is split. It is Siegfried in body, competence, and formal placement, yet it is Gunther in agency, appearance, and musical accompaniment. The split nature of the character on stage is reflected in the difficulty of analyzing of the wooing as part of a subring, which provided a compelling rationale for the sequence of dramatic events which occurred during Siegfried's second visit, but was unable to account for the musical narration of the scene. In other words, the split identity is reflected in the divide between the approaches utilized to analyze the music and the text.

We end our study with a discussion of perhaps the most significant absence of the entire *Ring* by returning to the analysis of the Immolation scene from Chapter 5. The analysis considered the scene primarily from the perspective of positive recapitulation, highlighting the appearance of many of the same thematic elements of the Magic Fire

scene from *Die Walküre*—the Magic Sleep, Magic Fire, and Siegfried motives; two different “deaths” of Brünnhilde and the corresponding role of fire in each. However, the Immolation scene is particularly notable for what it lacks: the figure of Wotan, who, even if not physically present, is nonetheless *symbolically* present. Wotan’s absence is curious, as he is one of only two characters who *could* have appeared in all of the operas (the other being Alberich, although his absence in *Die Walküre* seems less significant than Wotan’s absence here). If the tragedy which plays out throughout the *Ring* as a whole is essentially the fall of Wotan, we might expect him to appear in the culmination of his own downfall. Dramatically, his absence in *Götterdämmerung* is of critical importance.

The referential nature of language makes it relatively easy to relate characters and actions without requiring their actual presence. The abstract quality of music makes a similar process more challenging. Is there a way for music to relate its story without requiring the presence of its objects?¹⁹⁶ Specifically, is there a way in which Wotan’s complicated absence finds expression in the music? Though absent on stage, Wotan’s continued role in the drama is developed through the presence of the Spear motive, sounded as Brünnhilde sends Wotan’s ravens to tell him the news, and in the final statements of the Valhalla motive, which we hear as it (and he) burn to the ground.

The final section of the Immolation scene began by repeating, at the correct pitch level, the openings of the first two scenes of *Das Rheingold*: the Rhinemaidens’ song and the Valhalla motive. These statements performed several rhetorical tasks, including symbolizing the interests of the Rhinemaidens and Wotan and, in particular,

¹⁹⁶ Of related interest is Abbate’s observation that “Music seems not to ‘have a past tense.’ Can it express the pastness that all literary narrative accomplishes by use of past or preterite verb tenses?” Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 52.

demonstrating that the wishes of both are finally being met. Wotan comes to “the end” for which he has longed since *Die Walküre*, while the gold is returned to the Rhinemaidens, thus fulfilling their wish since the end of Scene 1 of *Das Rheingold*. The end of *Götterdämmerung* contrasts with the end of the first opera, which presented the fulfillment of Wotan’s wish which, as a consequence, foiled that of the Rhinemaidens. These two motives may be considered to stand in synecdochically for the Rhinemaidens on the one hand and Wotan on the other.

Because the final passage of *Götterdämmerung* is saturated by statements of the Valhalla motive, its musical treatment can serve as a narration for Wotan’s downfall. Recall that the first statement of the Valhalla motive in the closing passage is the last in which it appeared in its home key of Db major. The passage offered the motive in ascending sequence as part of a structural upper voice that led to its last appearance in Gb major. Because the underlying harmonic pattern changed throughout the sequences by beginning to incorporate dominant-tonic motion, the initial pitch of each Valhalla motive was given more emphasis. Looking once more at the foreground diagram of Figure 5.12 we may note that the initial tones of each Valhalla motive also ascend by step, but this line is uninterrupted: a passing note F filled the gap between the statements in A minor and C major (this upper line appears prominently in Darcy’s analysis). Because this upper line is unbroken, it pushes the music forward to its climax on the Db that serves as the dominant to the final statement of the Valhalla music. Figure 6.1 is another interpretation of the analysis of Figure 5.12.

338:3:1	338:4:2	338:5:3	338:6:4	339:2:1	339:3:2	339:5:3		
Motives:	Rhinemaidens	Valhalla	Rhinemaidens+ Glorification	Valhalla	Rhinemaidens+ Glorification	Valhalla Fragments	Corruption of Valhalla Fragments	Siegfried, Glorification

Figure 6.1 Linear analysis of the shadow upper voice at the end of *Götterdämmerung*

The entire passage at the end of *Götterdämmerung* includes a series of unfoldings as the *Urlinie* ascended. The other voice of the unfoldings can be understood as a shadow of the *Urlinie*. The diagram presents a background until the first unfolding, and then pinpoints the complete scale of pitches as it ascends toward the climax of Db. Because this is not the *Urlinie*, the beamed members of the scale do not always have consonant bass support, and I have indicated with slurs those pitches which can be heard as constituting passing motion.

The shadow *Urlinie* can be compared to the shadow of Wotan, who has arranged for the conditions of his downfall while deciding to passively await its occurrence; Db is both absent and present, as is Wotan. For it is his own downfall playing out as the fires consume his creations, and it is he, once the most powerful god in the drama, whose presence is limited to the impotence of a tableau.

Similarly, although *Götterdämmerung* ends with plagal motion, notice that in Figure 5.13, Darcy interprets the tritone between C and Gb as a large-scale unfolding that resolves inward to the root and third of Db major. Because C and Gb constitute the defining tritone of V⁷ of Db, their appearance in the background of a passage otherwise saturated with plagal motion can also be interpreted as the shadow of the authentic motion that ended *Das Rheingold*. If we fail to hear Valhalla burn conclusively in its

home tonality, Db nonetheless floats just beneath the surface of the music, subtly directing the excursions above; and if we fail to hear an authentic cadence that would balance the end of *Das Rheingold*, it too has left its residue on the Rheinmaidens' plagal close.

As a final note, recall in Chapter 5 that the fragments of the Valhalla music which approached C major served to resolve the half cadence from Wotan's farewell in *Die Walküre*. We suggested that the closing passage of the Immolation scene functioned as Wotan's definitive farewell, but we may further nuance its significance by pointing out that it is a farewell offered by Wotan's shadow.

The present conclusion offers only a sketch of some possibilities for future points of inquiry into recapitulation in Wagner's *Ring*. It is hopefully clear, however, that contrary to the term's usage up to this point, the project of discussing Wagnerian recapitulation is more complicated than a simple metaphorical adaptation from sonata form might imply. Recapitulations may be embedded into different structural levels, as Siegfried's abduction of Brünnhilde both repeated his first wooing and the abduction of his mother by Hunding. Recapitulations may balance events within a ring structure. There may be moments serving as recapitulations of recapitulations, where an action both completes a previous action while opening a space for itself to be completed later; when Siegfried awakens Brünnhilde on the rock, it serves as a structural closing moment to the sleep brought on by Wotan's kiss at the end of *Die Walküre*, and yet it also serves as a moment which will be reversed later when the disguised Siegfried sends Brünnhilde to sleep at the end of *Götterdämmerung*. Recapitulations may be overdetermined: the power of the Immolation scene stems in part from the fact that it efficiently brings simultaneous closure to multiple threads. Recapitulations may bring idiosyncratic

closure to double-tonic complexes, by allowing a later emphasis on one of its members to balance an earlier emphasis on the other, as was the case in the background tonal structure to the two pairs of love stories. Lastly, recapitulations may function through an active negation or avoidance of an expected appearance. It is my hope that the groundwork explored in this dissertation may offer a tool for exploring recapitulations both within the study of Wagnerian music drama but also to genres and media far beyond.

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