



WAGNER'S VISIONS

Poetry, Politics, and the Psyche in
the Operas through *Die Walküre*

KATHERINE R. SYER

Wagner's Visions



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for Bill

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Acknowledgments

In writing this book, I became increasingly interested in the history of Saxony and her artists in the first half of the nineteenth century. The formative years of Wagner's life and career in that region well antedate the troubling lens of German history through which the composer is so often viewed. My exploration was facilitated by the changes Saxony herself has experienced since 1989. I remember clearly my first visits to the former DDR, when the imprint of World War II damage and Communist aesthetics was pronounced. Leipzig and Dresden, centers of great importance for Wagner, have since reclaimed some of their heritage. Thus, for example, in 2013, a work like Wagner's *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* could once more be performed in Dresden's reconstructed Frauenkirche, where it originally premiered in 1843. I imagine Wagner would have been keenly interested in the construction of the Monument to the Battle of the Nations on the outskirts of Leipzig, a century after his birth. He might also have admired the palm-topped Freedom column erected near to the *Nikolaikirche*, across from his childhood school, in honor of the *Friedliche* or Peaceful Revolution carried out in the years leading up to 1989.

My ability to appreciate the history of these and other cities in which Wagner worked and lived has benefited from the support of granting bodies such as the DAAD, as well as the Research Board, Scholars' Travel Fund, and Humanities Released Time Program at the University of Illinois. The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation deserves special mention, as does the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts, whose past president Dieter Borchmeyer I value for the depth and breadth of his cultural awareness, and his generous spirit. Warm thanks also go to Gilbert Lupfer and the generous staff of the Galerie Neue Meister at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

The roots of this book lie in my intensive study of opera staging practices, which began in the early 1990s. Countless stereotypes about opera in general and Wagner in particular disappeared as I engaged with the stimulating work of directors such as Robert Lepage, Harry Kupfer, Götz Friedrich, Robert Carsen, Ruth Berghaus, Luc Bondy, Dieter Dorn and, of course, Patrice Chéreau. Wagner's legacy has benefited tremendously from the creative visions of these and other directors. For the early encouragement to perceive layers of meaning in opera—an especially rich theatrical form—I remain grateful to Roland de Beer and Hella Bartnig.

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Chapter One

To Be Born in Leipzig in 1813

It was an awful year. Prussia reentered the war against Napoleon in March. Swiftly rebuilding his forces, which had been decimated during the 1812 Russian campaign, the self-proclaimed French Emperor led major offensives at Lützen (southwest of Leipzig) and then in the Eastern region of Saxony at Bautzen, before a cease-fire was established in early June. Saxony was no stranger to strife. In October 1806, Napoleon had decisively crushed the Prussian and Saxon army at Jena-Auerstädt, before marching on to Berlin. Saxony then joined the Rhineland Confederation (*Rheinbund*) forged by Napoleon following the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire. Together with Bavaria, Saxony became one of the largest members of the Confederation, and was similarly elevated to the status of a Kingdom (*Königreich*) while lacking much genuine political authority. King Friedrich August I endeavored to remain uncommitted as the Wars of Liberation (*Befreiungskriege*) were launched, but Saxony's neighboring position to Prussia made active participation inevitable. At the end of August, the scale of war escalated substantially. Non-Prussian Germans fought under Napoleon to defeat the Prussians, Austrians, and Russians at Dresden. Napoleon's allies and fortunes changed at Leipzig, however, when the so-called Battle of the Nations (*Völkerschlacht*) ended on October 19 with his army driven westward back to France. More than five hundred thousand soldiers were involved at Leipzig; the losses on both sides were enormous.¹ Following Napoleon's ultimate defeat in 1815, Saxony was substantially reduced in geographical scope before it joined the German Confederation (*Deutscher Bund*). Prussia annexed Wittenberg, the symbolically significant seat of the Protestant Reformation, but Leipzig and Dresden remained within its boundaries.

Wagner was only an infant when the Battle of the Nations raged near his home. Even as a young boy, however, he would come to feel its scars and grasp its implications. The aspirations of many Germans were not to be realized immediately, despite Napoleon's defeat. Wagner strongly identified with the liberal movement that continued to cling to the idea of a unified, democratic Germany—a goal considered subversive by the figures of power who preferred the fragmented political organization of German-speaking regions. The vision

of a different political reality, no matter how passionately embraced, would remain the stuff of dreams for decades. Memory studies have tended to focus on the fallout of traumatic historical events since the early twentieth century. Yet Ann Rigney, in her study of the writings of Walter Scott, has persuasively pointed to the political upheaval of early nineteenth-century Europe as having produced conditions that stimulated a synergistic constellation of memory, aspirations and artistic fiction.² This book considers a constellation of this kind at work in Wagner's dramatic enterprise.

Wagner's revolutionary orientation has long been recognized, on account of his awareness of political developments around 1830, his self-identification with the Young German movement (*Junges Deutschland*), and his involvement in the insurrection at Dresden in May 1849. It was only through luck and the help of his friend Franz Liszt that he escaped arrest and imprisonment in Dresden. Living for more than a dozen years in exile, based mostly in Zurich, Wagner's increasing outspokenness about his political views aligns with the changing times. Prior to his exile, the direct expression of nationalistic sentiment had been powerfully suppressed. While the organized efforts that eventually led to the revolutions of 1848–49 were ultimately unsuccessful, nation-conscious individuals found new and influential outlets of communication. The family-oriented circular *Die Gartenlaube*, founded in 1853 in Leipzig, proved to be an important medium in this regard.³ The year was an important one, as it marked the fortieth anniversary of Battle of the Nations, an event commemorated in the journal's early issues. A decade later, significantly more attention was devoted to memorializing the events of 1813, in *Die Gartenlaube* and in public life in general. This is not to say that trumpeting the dream of a unified nation was then widely encouraged. The atmosphere, however, was becoming relatively more relaxed; it was in this context that Wagner began to draw more attention to his identification with the national movement reaching back to his youth. This orientation, as we shall see, had long influenced his dramatic art, leaving palpable traces as soon as he began to focus his artistic efforts on works for the lyric stage.

The present study examines some of the operas Wagner wrote during the early period of his career—a period of roughly twenty years that includes his first completed opera, *Die Feen* (The fairies, 1834), and carries through to the early 1850s, when he was toiling away on his ambitious project *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. In focusing attention on the dreams and nightmares experienced by characters within those dramas, my investigation orients itself toward a particular dimension of Wagner's dramatic art that rewards close readings of the evolving dramatic texts as well as their musical and theatrical realization. Starting with *Die Feen*, Wagner set out to shape psychologically complex characters predisposed to conceiving and inhabiting realms other than those which surround them. Such characters stand out. They invite us to try to understand their exceptional makeup and their dramaturgically influential altered states of consciousness. Chapter 2 examines the madness of Prince Arindal in Wagner's little-known opera *Die Feen* alongside Arindal's ability to ultimately

achieve his utopian vision of a life united with his supernatural wife. In this and the remaining chapters, Wagner's visions are explored for their potential to embody in art the hopes and anxieties of liberal thinkers during the politically unpromising times of the composer's own lifetime. In this context, Senta's somnambulistic tendencies in *Der fliegende Holländer*, and her unwavering commitment to her dream of becoming the Dutchman's redeemer, reflect far more than a passing interest in then fashionable Mesmerism.

Wagner's move to Dresden, following challenging times in Paris, afforded the composer the opportunity to develop his appreciation of the legacy of the 1813 Wars of Liberation. In artistic terms this would take the form of an expanding network of politically-tinged poetic images and metaphors that had special meaning for Dresden's artists and audiences, as well as currency beyond Saxony's borders. This material enabled Wagner to shape stories from medieval literature and Greek drama so that they could resonate with the recent historical past. This includes *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, a work that was but a single opera libretto when Wagner went into exile. In the concluding chapter of this book, attention is paid to the details of the genesis of *Die Walküre*, which absorbed the full impact of a radical change in Wagner's conception of his stormy god Wotan in the early 1850s. Sieglinde's horrific vision of Siegmund's death and her nightmarish recollection of the destruction of her childhood home came to assume considerable significance as a result. Such changes point to the penetrating impact of the failed revolutions of 1848–49. Although Wagner was never to make his home in Saxony after 1849, he remained profoundly affected by his deep roots there.

The philosophical writings of Arthur Schopenhauer, which Wagner first encountered in the fall of 1854, have generally been regarded as a crucial stimulus to the composer's emphasis on psychological realms in his musical dramas. Especially in the *Ring* and later operas, Wagner's achievements in this regard have been considered so striking that he is often described as a musical-dramatic Freud ahead of his time. Yet, as is made clear in the chapters that follow, Wagner's *Ring* and later dramas involve a range of creative strategies already deployed and developed in his earlier dramas. Furthermore, these strategies absorbed influential ideas about the unconscious mind already in play in the first part of the century. By exploring the psychological dimension of Wagner's earlier works within their historical contexts, we gain access to important layers of meaning—many of them politically charged—that are inaccessible if the primary point of orientation is Schopenhauer or Freud.

Art and Politics around 1813 and Beyond

Let us return to the situation in battle-torn Saxony during 1813, as related by E. T. A. Hoffmann, an author who deeply impressed Wagner in his youth. Hoffmann travelled from Bamberg to Dresden in April 1813, arriving just days

before Prussian and Russian troops converged in the city. Napoleon arrived soon after. From May 23 until June 24 Hoffmann relocated to Leipzig, during which time armistice was established. When conflict resumed after his return to Dresden, he recorded his impressions of daily life in brief accounts that nevertheless convey the perspective-altering nature of his experiences. He wrote, for example, that the sounds of battle could be heard from within the theatre during a performance of Gluck's *Iphigenia auf Tauris*, for which he was then responsible.⁴ The opera, which features many stormy passages and a story that turns on murderous inclinations, thus gained live sound effects. Following Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig, Hoffmann retrospectively crafted the more graphic account "Die Vision auf dem Schlachtfelde bei Dresden" (Vision of the battlefield near Dresden), in which he painted a horrific picture of the slaughter that had taken place and of the tyrant that Napoleon had become.⁵ Hoffmann's long-standing disenchantment with the French enterprise was now complete.

First published as a pamphlet in 1814, Hoffmann's "Vision" was attributed on its cover to "the author of the Fantasy Pieces in the Style of Callot" (Vom Verfasser der Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier), referring to his volume of short stories published the year before. Hoffmann was by no means keeping his identity as author of the "Vision" a secret, but he laid stress on the fact that he was already known for fantastical writings. Perhaps the reference to fiction served as something of a safety hatch, given his elaborately critical depiction of Napoleon, with whom the Saxon King had long been allied. In any case, he thereby purposefully linked the realms of politics and creative writing. Within his dramatic rendering of the bloodied battleground, Hoffmann invoked a metaphorical deadly dragon and saturated his text with red and black imagery. As for the place of publication, the name of an imaginary land was printed on the pamphlet's cover: "Deutschland."

In his initial, more fragmentary notes concerning the events of August 1813, Hoffmann's reference to his production of *Iphigenia auf Tauris* can be considered significant in multiple ways. He had begun to express his enthusiasm for Gluck, especially *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774), in his early novella "Ritter Gluck" (1809), before offering a more detailed account of the work in his 1810 review of a performance in Berlin. Hoffmann's literary creation Kapellmeister Kreisler (*Kreisleriana*, 1813) claims to have heard that work no less than fifty times. During these years of shifting allegiances, Gluck's close association with the Paris Opéra enabled his *Iphigenia* operas to be performed widely across French dominated regions. Gluck was one of many artists and thinkers drawn to Euripides's pair of *Iphigenia* dramas (and subsequent versions thereof) as the eighteenth century drew to a close.⁶ Amongst German responses, Goethe's drama *Iphigenie auf Tauris* is noteworthy; it was first performed in 1779, the same year as *Iphigénie en Tauride*. Schiller's 1788 translation *Iphigenie in Aulis* also helped steer the self-sacrificing daughter of Agamemnon into the central

arena of the German Hellenistic movement, which gained momentum during the years around 1800. In the afterword to his translation, Schiller praised the young Iphigenia for her sublime nature, for she willingly cedes her life so that the goddess Diana will favor the Greek army. Hoffmann echoed this sentiment in his review of Gluck's earlier opera. The older Iphigenia, as depicted by Euripides and Gluck, faces a rather different situation amidst the Taurians—a barbaric race devoted to human sacrifice. Her plight, under the rule of a tyrannical king, and her eventual liberation, which is coupled with the end of a generations-long curse on her family, struck a chord for those who, like Hoffmann, became disillusioned as the Napoleonic Wars dragged on.

Gluck's status as a reform-oriented composer who had modified stylistic elements characteristic of French opera only enhanced his standing for Germans not willing to be subject to Napoleon. As early as his "Ritter Gluck" novella, Hoffmann's experimental narrative style cast the knighted older composer in the role of an aesthetic redeemer, one glimpsed in a dreamlike state that allowed for otherworldly and ecstatic experiences. That vision, however, is clearly a response to the oppressive atmosphere of French-occupied Berlin. Wagner would have been keenly attuned to these sociopolitical dimensions of Hoffmann's writings, even or perhaps especially in those writings that seem to be mostly about music.⁷

Gluck's *Iphigenia auf Tauris* made a strong impression on other artists in German-speaking regions during the politically turbulent second decade of the nineteenth century. Franz Schubert, for example, experienced a compelling performance of the opera in the winter of 1812–13, at a time when he was weighing the possibility of pursuing a career as a composer. That same night, Schubert had the opportunity to meet Theodor Körner, a young Dresden-born poet and playwright influenced above all by Schiller, whose own interest in the Iphigenia figure had intensified around the time of the French Revolution.⁸ Körner, in part emulating Schiller, developed nationalistically-charged dramas during his time in Vienna, and he also turned his creative energies to opera and Singspiel libretti. Supported by influential figures such as Wilhelm von Humboldt and Prince Lobkowitz, one of Beethoven's patrons, Körner secured the title of resident poet at the Burgtheater. On April 23, 1812, Körner met with Beethoven to discuss possible subjects for an opera. Several months later, in a letter written to his parents on February 10, 1813, Körner confirmed that the subject was to be the return of Ulysses and added that if Gluck were alive, it would be the right material for his Muse.⁹ Beethoven, too, was deeply interested in Gluck's *Iphigenia auf Tauris*, and had even played excerpts of the score for French soldiers who visited him when they occupied Vienna in 1805. Given that Beethoven had already rejected the Napoleonic project, the soldiers must surely have failed to grasp the full meaning behind his musical offering.

Körner left many artistic projects unfinished when he departed Vienna in March of 1813 to become actively involved in supporting Prussia's fight against

the French. With his father's support—Körner's family home in Dresden had long served as a meeting place for liberal thinkers—he joined the military unit headed by Ludwig Adolf Wilhelm von Lützow and helped orchestrate its first collective swearing-in ceremony. A voluntary civilian group that augmented the efforts of the Royal Prussian militia, the *Lützowsche Freischaar* or *Freikorps* maintained its own distinctive identity and welcomed men, like Körner, who hailed from German regions nominally allied with Napoleon. Körner was not to return home, or to Vienna. He died from battle wounds in August 1813, at not yet twenty-two years of age. While the possibility of long-lasting friendships and collaborations between Körner and composers he had met in Vienna can be no more than speculation, he was certainly not forgotten by them after his death. Beethoven referred repeatedly to Körner's sad fate in conversation and personal writings in the early 1820s, around the time that he was wrapping up work on the *Missa solemnis*. That work, we might note, conspicuously features an intrusion of military music in its *Agnus Dei*, as a threat to peace, or *pace*. Distant drumbeats of war cast a shadow even in the final moments.

Schubert, like many other composers, engaged directly with Körner's texts around the time of Napoleon's defeat.¹⁰ In 1815, Schubert set out to command the genre of art song. In that process he turned to a range of Körner's early poems thematically oriented toward nature and love, as well as a more ambitious dramatic scene titled "Amphiaraos" (D. 166).¹¹ He would also set Körner's Singspiel libretto *Der vierjährige Posten* (which was first performed only in 1869, in Dresden). Strikingly, Schubert did not shy away from some of Körner's most explicitly patriotic verses, as can be seen from his settings of "Schwertlied" (D. 170), "Gebet Während der Schlacht" (D. 171), and "Lützows wilde Jagd" (D. 205). Schubert's turn to several texts by Körner suggests that his encounter with the poet-dramatist after the performance of *Iphigenia auf Tauris* had made a penetrating impact on the young man uncertain about his path in life. The figure of Iphigenia, who had taken on fresh, urgent meaning in the contest of the German struggle for liberation, would also surface in Schubert's compositional output. In 1817 he composed the extraordinarily dramatic vocal work simply titled *Iphigenia*, featuring a text by his close friend Johann Mayrhofer (D. 573).

When repressive measures were instituted following the 1815 Congress of Vienna, patriotic lyrics by Körner and others that patently expressed support for the nationalistic movement invited political censure. Schubert's Körner settings were, of course, not destined for immediate publication but were written to be performed in intimate settings, by and among like-minded friends. In his selection of texts, we might nevertheless perceive a study in metaphorical modes of politically expressive art, from the subtle to the most blatant. Issues of transparency were of great concern for artists, a topic that surfaces repeatedly in this book, concerned as it is with a time in which the idea of freedom was fragile and often under threat.

The Körner cult that began to emerge even before the poet-soldier's death derived much of its energy from sympathetic response to the particulars of his protracted decline and demise, and to the ideals of the military unit to which he belonged.¹² Körner was seriously injured during the summer of 1813, following Napoleon's command to kill Lützow's black riders (as they were widely known), despite the negotiated armistice. Körner never fully recovered, so was already in a weakened state when he was again wounded in battle in August and died shortly thereafter. Körner had been part of a sizeable group of Saxons that fought "freely" under Lützow, which meant that members had partially to support themselves as nonprofessional soldiers. Famed for their collective self-identification as a brotherhood ("Brüderschaft") that crossed the political boundaries of several German-speaking regions, theirs was a renegade spirit.¹³ On account of the skill of their cavalymen, Lützow's band was glorified in terms and imagery that evoked the Wild Hunt of folkloric fame, as in Körner's most popular lyric, "Lützows wilde Jagd" (Lützow's Wild Hunt).

In addition to their obvious nationalistic import, often vividly expressed, Körner's war poems aimed to comfort and buoy the spirits of his fellow soldiers. Napoleon's campaigns, dependent on a strategy of pitting non-Prussian Germans against the Prussians, posed a huge threat to the vision of a German nation shaped by language, as a *Kultur* nation. Non-Prussians who joined the *Lützower* thus fought as traitors against men from their native regions who supported Napoleon's forces, willingly or otherwise. Körner's poems repeatedly reassured those who joined the resistance to French oppression and tyranny that their efforts and lives were valued, as the death toll of the Liberation Wars grew ominously large.

With the posthumous publication of *Leyer und Schwert* (*Lyre and Sword*, 1814), a collection prepared by the poet's father, a generous number of Körner's poems became the *lingua franca* of the liberation movement.¹⁴ In addition to musical settings of his texts, Körner was memorialized through written tributes, odes, and dramas honoring his life, as well as paintings, engravings, and monuments. The poet-dramatist's fate thus came to represent the sacrifice made by so many in 1813. The Körner settings of Weber, which became particularly widely known, contributed to a form of participatory memorialization when sung.

Weber's interest in Körner was bound to fascinate the young Wagner, who quickly became enthralled with works such as *Der Freischütz*. Furthermore, Wagner's family was personally connected to the conductor-composer as he came to play an important role in artistic life in Dresden. Late in life, in 1878, Wagner recalled the first time that he asked his mother for money to buy music paper; his purpose, he claimed, was to transcribe Weber's setting of "Lützows wilde Jagd." Johanna Wagner was reportedly hesitant at first, but then agreed.¹⁵ She would have been fully aware that Weber's Körner songs tapped into a vein of popular support. Several of them are for all-male unaccompanied

chorus, anticipating their rapid adoption by the civilian army (*Landwehr*). Those very soldiers, however, had a tense relationship with the Prussian King's militia.¹⁶ The songs thus signaled a revolutionary, antimonarchical orientation within Prussia, although the civilian army had supported Friedrich Wilhelm III in 1813. Weber consequently found himself disadvantaged professionally in Berlin. In Dresden, Wilhelm August's former alliance with France prevented the "Prussian" songs from working wholly to Weber's advantage.¹⁷

Weber had gone so far as to absorb parts of his setting of "Lützows wilde Jagd" into a larger dramatic structure, his *Kampf und Sieg* cantata celebrating the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. The cantata's dramatic action is the battle itself, with a chorus singing Körner's text as it claims victory. The work as a whole celebrates ideas that are characteristic of much of Körner's war poetry. Weber's cantata, and his other Körner settings, are now scarcely known: in John Warrack's appraisal, "There is much that is obviously now difficult to accept in this cantata. The sentiments are belligerent, for all the final courtesy gesture towards peace, in a manner that is explicable in the excitement of a great victory won in aggressive times, but, with its exaltation of a God of Battles and a Holy Fatherland, is distasteful outside the immediate time and place which gave rise to it."¹⁸ Although Weber subsequently avoided quoting his own Körner settings, the songs were absorbed into other artistic forms that attempted to recreate events from 1813. A rare, early example of a play of this kind that was also publicly performed was Johann Nepomuk Adolph von Schaden's *Theodor Körners Tod, oder das Gefecht bei Gadebusch, dramatisches Gedicht in einem Akt* (Theodor Körner's death, or the encounter at Gadebusch, a dramatic poem in one act, 1817/rev. 1821). In the play, the character Theodor Körner and other soldiers sing Weber's settings of the protagonist's texts.

Wagner seems not to have been interested in this direct manner of depicting the Wars of Liberation, involving quotation of popular patriotic songs. Far more interesting to him were the ways he detected traces of Weber's Körner settings, artfully transformed, in his lyric dramas. Wagner first mentioned Körner's verses in print in his 1867–68 essay "Deutsche Kunst und Deutsche Politik" (German art and politics), where he identified them as the basis of Weber's *Der Freischütz*.¹⁹ Several years later, on a spring evening in 1880, Cosima's diaries record him reiterating this view. She noted that, according to Wagner, Körner's lyrics were fundamental to Weber's dramatic art ("seine Basis waren die Körner'schen Lied[er]"), but that one could detect Weber shifting toward more subtle forms of dramatic treatment in *Euryanthe*. That evening, after playing the hunters' numbers from both works, Wagner noted that the chorus from *Euryanthe* (no. 18), unlike the male chorus near the end of *Der Freischütz*, is less a quasi-realistic, conventional hunting-song type than a passage that conveys the experience of the realm of the forest.²⁰ In other words, the link to Körner's songs had assumed, in Wagner's view, a more nuanced aesthetic form. All artists whose life spanned the *Vormärz* era, those years from

the fall of Napoleon through to the Revolutionary outbursts that began in the German Confederation in March of 1848, had no choice but to recognize that explicit expressions of patriotic and nationalistic sentiment were risky. When it came to matters of blending politics and art, the metaphorically and symbolically charged responses to the Wars of Liberation of creative figures like Weber and Hoffmann proved instructive as Wagner began creating his own works for the lyric stage.

The Wild Hunt in Wagner's Operas through to *Die Walküre*

The first instance of Wagner's integration of the Wild Hunt into his own dramas occurs as a psychological manifestation within Arindal's "mad scene" in *Die Feen*, a scenario that looks forward to Sieglinde's frenzied vision of Hunding in the first act of *Die Walküre*. In the interim, Wagner returned to the Wild Hunt for his characterization of the Dutchman and his ghostly crew, but then chose to explore a qualitatively different representation of the roving pagan band in *Tannhäuser*. The folkloric Wild Hunt, as I demonstrate in this book, is a core element of a coherent body of imagery that was well poised to open up a web of associations in the minds of liberal readers and listeners during Wagner's lifetime. Its frequent connection with depictions of various altered states of consciousness in Wagner's dramas brings it into sharp focus in this study.

For his first completed opera Wagner selected Carlo Gozzi's *La donna serpente* (The lady as snake, 1762)—a tale in which hunting figures prominently. A pivotal event in that drama's prehistory concerns the moment when Arindal, out on a hunt, plunged into a river in pursuit of a beautiful doe. He thereupon discovered the woman who would become his bride. Hoffmann's dialogue on aesthetics "Der Dichter und der Komponist" (The poet and the composer) probably encouraged Wagner to consider Gozzi's plays as well suited to operatic treatment. In the main text of the essay, which contains framing references to the wars that raged in 1813, Hoffmann proposed the theatrical fables of the eighteenth-century Venetian dramatist as the ideal basis for a Romantic opera libretto. Wagner would have been further encouraged in this direction by the fact that the play Hoffmann singled out for special praise, Gozzi's *Il corvo* (The raven), had been translated by his own uncle, Adolf Wagner, in 1804.

Wagner's operatic adaptation of Gozzi's *La donna serpente*, with its act 3 allusion to Weber's Wild Hunt scenario in *Der Freischütz*, was largely completed two decades after the decisive battle at Leipzig. Negotiations to have it first performed in Wagner's native city, where his family had long-standing connections to the theatre, proved unfruitful. The composer subsequently withheld details of the work from public knowledge. The timing and efforts regarding performance possibilities of *Die Feen* suggest that the twenty-year anniversaries

of the battle at Leipzig, and Körner's death, may have influenced Wagner in the ways he molded his *Feen* drama, especially its third act. In the very same period, the composer Friedrich von Flotow attempted to break into the opera business with two dramatic texts by Körner. Flotow hailed from Mecklenburg, where the famed poet-soldier was buried. He worked on both *Die Bergknappen* and *Alfred der Große* in 1833 but, like Wagner with his *Die Feen*, did not find an immediate audience for his efforts. Open identification with the ideals of the Wars of Liberation was still discouraged during the 1830s. Wagner's and Flotow's operatic projects might have been perceived as crossing that line, thus determining, in part, their fates at the time.

Die Feen remains a seminal work in Wagner's creative development. In its dualistic structure of human and supernatural spheres, and its focus on the psyche of its heroic protagonist, *Die Feen* displays a closer affinity with Wagner's mature dramas than do his next two operas, *Das Liebesverbot* and *Rienzi*.²¹ In 1924, Paul Bekker regarded Wagner's portrayal of Arindal's madness as disclosing Wagner's lifelong special gift for depicting extreme psychological states.²² Wagner's prince is an altogether more Romantic figure than Gozzi's, as one would expect given the seven decades that separate these works. Gozzi's *La donna serpente* involves a satirical combination of *commedia dell'arte* and Venetian operatic traditions geared toward spectacle. Wagner nevertheless derived a great deal from Gozzi—more than has generally been acknowledged.²³ Wagner's spotlight on Arindal's guilt and fears, and the prominent role he ascribed to psychological experience, reflects ideas absorbed from Gozzi compounded with those from other sources. The composer modified Gozzi's plot so that the final act, beginning with Arindal's mad scene, takes place in the underworld where he is empowered with magical symbols of a shield, sword, and lyre. With much support, he overcomes threatening forces and rescues his wife from the state of petrification through song (rather than kissing a deadly snake, who is actually his beloved transformed). Through the hero's dual status as hunter/soldier and artist, overtly Orphic twists to Gozzi's plot resonate with contemporary heroic models such as Körner, who had already attained mythic status around the time of his death in 1813. Signature elements of Wagner's subsequent essays in altered states of consciousness find their roots in this rich complex of artistic influences.

Wagner's Saxon orientation and willingness to weave political subtext into an artistic form can also be glimpsed in his little-known 1841 essay "The Story of the Two Black Knights" (*Die Geschichte von den zwei Schwarzen Rittern*). Written in Paris for the *Dresdner Abendzeitung*, Wagner employed the image of two black knights as a refrain or *idée fixe* that lent coherence to a string of apparently disconnected impressions.²⁴ Wagner's essay displays a reflexive Hoffmannesque style, and alludes to that author in the very first sentence with the reference to "our Don Juan"—Mozart's opera, which had inspired E. T. A. Hoffmann's own 1813 novella titled "Don Juan."²⁵ Wagner's ostensible

purpose in his article was to inform readers in Dresden about musical life in the French capital, but he often assumes a playfully ironic, sometimes sarcastic tone. Professing that the Paris performance of “Don Juan” lulled him to sleep, Wagner relayed his dream about two black knights (schwarze Ritter), linked in turn to his memory of a theatrical performance in a small town in his native Saxony. As originally experienced and recalled, the dueling knights sprang into action to cover delinquent missing players, such as an actor representing a hermit who lingered at a local inn. Wagner’s conceit here involves an oblique reference to mutilated Parisian performances of Weber’s operas; the cast of *Der Freischütz* includes a hermit and that of *Euryanthe* a black knight. Berlioz’s adaptation of *Der Freischütz* was soon to be unveiled at the Paris Opéra—an event that Wagner wrote about in a more serious manner in different essays for French and Saxon audiences respectively. For readers in Dresden in the 1840s, the black knights in Wagner’s fanciful essay would have also called to mind the “black riders” or “black hunters” of the aforementioned Lützow voluntary regiment. The more chivalric form of a knight emphasized the ongoing need for a redeemer figure of the ilk that fought so valiantly against Napoleon in 1813.

For more dramatic purposes, Wagner would have known from Jacob Grimm’s *Deutsche Mythologie* (1832) that the legendary loyal band led by Wuotan/Wodan/Odin also included female members. Grimm noted in this regard the variously spelled Bertha/Berahta/Berchta as a key figure that was in turn related to Holda/Holla, Diana, and Herodias. Holla and Venus, he adds, are intimately related to each other, in a passage in which the Horselberg near Eisenach comes into play. Also discussed are figures such as the faithful Eckert and Dietrich of Bern, literary treatments of which informed Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*, the first of his dramas to be developed and completed in Dresden.²⁶ Bertha, we should note, is a character featured in the seventh scene in the last act of Weber’s *Euryanthe*, a work that Wagner engaged with deeply once he assumed the Dresden post that had been held by the older composer. Her seemingly innocuous May song praising love and fidelity precedes the arrival of Adolar dressed in black armor. Adolar’s bleak report about the absence of love and fidelity in the world attempts to negate all that is celebrated in Bertha’s song, but his pessimism is soon overturned—a scenario that prefigures Parsifal’s return to the Grail realm in *Parsifal*. Yet Wagner also displayed his appreciation of Weber’s scenario involving Bertha in *Tannhäuser*, in the form of the shepherd’s song to Frau Holda in act 1. Of the other huntresses identified by Grimm, Herodias surfaces in Wagner’s oeuvre as one of Kundry’s many personae. The goddess Diana, for her part, is praised in the popular hunters’ chorus at the end of *Der Freischütz*. As Artemis, she also received special attention from Wagner in his adaptation of Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Aulide*, a remarkably important but little known project undertaken during his years in Dresden.

Wagner responded early to Hoffmann’s endorsement of Ritter Gluck. As early as 1832 he attended a performance of *Iphigenia auf Tauris* in Vienna,

with expectations largely informed by Hoffmann's writings. His opportunities to hear Gluck's music increased substantially during his stay in Paris several years later, when he began to showcase the older composer in print. Wagner's essay "Über die Ouvertüre" (On the overture, 1840–41) would be the first of many times that he would champion Gluck's overture to *Iphigénie en Aulide*. After his arrival in Dresden in the spring of 1842, his attention to Gluck broadened and deepened.

Wagner's relocation from Paris to Dresden reveals him searching for fresh ways to make his dramas politically relevant to his new setting. His second work to premiere there, *Der fliegende Holländer*, was at first not sufficiently well received to warrant more than two performances. The work had been completed while Wagner was still based in the French capital, as the so-called Rhine Crisis of 1840 fuelled concern over the region that had been annexed by Napoleon but reclaimed after his defeat. It was at this juncture that lyrics such as Max Schneckenburger's "Die Wacht am Rhein" (The watch on the Rhine, 1840) became immensely popular.²⁷ Hundreds of *Rheinlieder* flooded the air. In this same period Hoffmann von Fallersleben's "Das Lied der Deutschen" (The song of the Germans, 1841) conveyed the geographical breadth of German-speaking regions that might ideally comprise Deutschland. Körner's "Lützow's wilde Jagd" from 1813 lent energy to the general cause. As Körner's lyrics proclaim, Lützow's men were not just black riders and hunters who went from the hilltops to the valleys, they were also "black swimmers" (*schwarze Schwimmer*) who stormed into the Rhine and beyond, to the banks of the river occupied by the enemy.²⁸ Although Wagner considered much patriotic song literature crude and unaesthetic, its imagery was popular and dramatically potent, and he found it useful in shaping his early nautical drama.

Of the many poets motivated to defend their land through verse, why was Körner Wagner's war poet of choice? He is the only such poet to emerge in a favorable light in Wagner's writings and in Cosima's diaries, and he does so right until the composer's very last days. The answer is undoubtedly bound up with Körner's fuller artistic persona. He did not just pen his patriotic verses, he sang them to his fellow Lützower. And he was a man of the theater, which he regarded as a suitable venue for political activism. The image of Theodor Körner thus assumed importance for Wagner through its union of poetry and politics, reflection and action, lyre and sword.

Much of Körner's nation-conscious poetry blended the past, present, and future, in ways that resonated with Wagner's experiments in depicting altered states of consciousness. Körner drew heavily on ancient worlds—he was referred to as the German Tyrtæus—and shaped his glimpses of the future as victorious, glowing with the aura of redemption as they moved past the blood-soaked fight for liberation from the French. If one focuses primarily on the sentiments Körner expressed in his last poems—those written as he was actively fighting and those that gained the widest currency—one encounters a stagey

kind of theatricality of an ideologically unsettling kind. In the last months of his life Körner tended to glorify his devotion and death in advance of that eventuality. Liszt was attracted to that side of Körner in 1848 as revolutionary feelings swelled high, as is evident in his elaborate composite transcription of Weber's Körner settings, *Heroide für das Piano forte*, published with a dedication to Princess Augusta of Prussia. For Wagner and many others, Körner could represent much more than this, and his image carried meaning through less volatile periods as well.

With *Tannhäuser* in particular, Wagner revealed a growing awareness of nature imagery and idealistic metaphors that are central to the corpus of Körner's poems written before he joined the war effort. In his poem "Die Eichen" (The oak trees, 1810), for example, Körner refers to the oak as an age-old symbol of German strength that protects pilgrims.²⁹ In act 2 of Wagner's pilgrim-populated opera, following Landgrave Hermann's mention of recent war with the Guelphs, Wolfram refers to the men gathered in the Hall of Song as a brave forest of oak trees. In Wagner's next opera, *Lohengrin*, King Heinrich addresses the gathered soldiers from his customary position in front of a majestic oak. In his 1810 collection of poetry titled *Knospen* (Buds), Körner foregrounds natural elements and cycles that embody promise. The budding staff that is understood as granting Tannhäuser redemption is likewise a sign of hope for those remaining in the Wartburg Valley. While *Knospen* accords much prominence to the transition from spring to summer, it is somewhat cryptic with regard to the significance of the concept of fruition. This less direct yet still potent poetic style appealed to cautious Saxon artists and informed Körner's public image as well. Wagner's experiments in the mid-1840s with nature-inspired symbols and metaphors would leave its mark on his later dramas. Changes in the political climate in Dresden would meanwhile encourage him to draw upon other artistic influences as he explored ways of revolutionizing opera.

To inaugurate his tenure as Hofkapellmeister in Dresden, in March of 1843, Wagner chose to conduct Gluck's *Armide*. His focus on Gluck continued with work on an adaptation of *Iphigénie en Aulide* that Wagner brought to the stage in 1847 (as *Iphigenia in Aulis*). In the interim, *Iphigenia auf Tauris* also became part of musical life in Dresden, under the baton of Wagner's colleague Carl Reißiger. When Wagner had first become familiar with *Iphigenia auf Tauris*, in 1832, his expectation of a predominantly transcendent experience had largely been shaped by Hoffmann's adulatory "Ritter Gluck." He was unsatisfied on that occasion, however, and it is not hard to imagine the young Wagner initially finding Gluck's opera stylistically remote. One scene nevertheless proved exceptional. According to Wagner's retrospective account in *Mein Leben*, Orestes's sleep scene, haunted by the Furies, transported him at least halfway into that ecstatic state that he deemed so important to aesthetic experience.³⁰ Wagner's response aligns with those of many earlier listeners impressed by

Gluck's handling of music to convey Orestes's psychic layer of experience. As he falls asleep, professing to feel a sense of calm, the orchestra hints at the inner turmoil that reigns within him and will soon erupt in the form of a nightmare. The scene revolutionized operatic listening in the late eighteenth century on account of its ability to draw listeners into sympathetic identification with a character onstage, despite the extraordinary dimensions of what that figure experiences.³¹ We find traces of Gluck's handling of Orestes's nightmare in the eruptive dream/mad scenes in Wagner's early operas. Artistic residue from the Iphigenia legends themselves began to have a significant impact on Wagner's creative work around 1840.

Gluck's earlier Iphigenia opera, to which Wagner devoted much attention in the 1840s, would have further drawn his attention to the dramatic potential of psychologically driven scenes. Clytemnestra, for example, is pushed to the brink of insanity in Gluck's rendering. She imagines and describes the slaughter of her offspring as if it were being enacted right before her (the sacrifice ultimately does not take place). More histrionic, and a more accurate prediction of death, is Sieglinde's vision of Siegmund being shredded to death by Hunding's dogs—a scene that nevertheless assumes a similar dramatic function in the way it heightens a sense of anxiety about the future.

For the Dresden performances of Gluck's *Iphigenia auf Tauris* led by Reißiger, Wilhemine Schröder-Devrient portrayed the titular heroine.³² Schröder-Devrient had long embodied Wagner's ideal actress (although her maturing physique was considered a hindrance to her portrayal of Venus in the 1845 premiere of *Tannhäuser*), and she was as much a political activist as the composer as tensions mounted in Dresden in the later 1840s. For the 1847 performances of Wagner's revised *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Schröder-Devrient essayed the psychologically complex role of Clytemnestra, while Johanna Wagner (the composer's niece) played her more composed daughter destined for sacrifice.

In preparing his adaption of the opera set at Aulis Wagner paid close attention to the figure of Diana/Artemis, the goddess of the hunt who determines Iphigenia's future. In the 1774 score of *Iphigénie en Aulide* that he had at hand, Wagner was dissatisfied with the falsely optimistic ending and problematic lack of dramatic tension. He thus added a tempestuous arrival for the goddess Artemis (who does not appear in the score he referenced)—a solution that also enabled him to forge a connection to the beginning of Gluck's stormy operatic sequel. Once she arrives on stage, Artemis utters a calm pronouncement that bears intertextual links to *Lohengrin*, which Wagner was working on at the same time. The stormy part of her personality meanwhile foreshadows the way Wagner would first envision Wotan when he embarked on an opera about the death of Siegfried.

Despite the tremendous modeling and learning opportunity that Gluck's works clearly offered the younger composer, Wagner's engagement with Gluck throughout the 1840s has for the most part been neglected by scholars.³³ As

chapter 5 explores in detail, key revisions that Wagner made in 1851–52 to the poem of *Die Walküre* bear remarkable traces of his sustained engagement with Gluck's pair of Iphigenia operas. Initially, Wagner absorbed ideas drawn from Gluck's dramas that resonated with the revolutionary and nationalistic outlook that was gathering steam in the later 1840s.³⁴ After 1849, those same sources suggested to him ways through which his expanding drama could reflect the failed insurrection, via a recharacterization of Wotan. As Wagner began dramatizing more than Siegfried's disgrace and demise, he placed his god on stage as a singing character. This involved, for a limited phase of the creative process, the god becoming increasingly influential. Before versifying *Die Walküre*, however, Wagner systematically stripped Wotan of his powers. As a result, the god came to resemble more closely Gluck's vulnerable Agamemnon. The structural ways that Wagner drew on Gluck's Iphigenia dramas to achieve the final design of *Die Walküre*—the opera that exposes Wotan's lack of power—include its stormy opening frame and residual psychological turmoil, which color Sieglinde's multiple visions.

Die Walküre, we should remind ourselves, is a flawed step toward the conclusion of the *Ring*, not its final stage. Yet it is connected to Siegfried's death through its allusion to the Wild Hunt. Sieglinde's hallucinatory scene involving Hunding's dogs (act 2, scene 3) contains Wagner's last pointed reference to the Wild Hunt in Weber's musical formulation. Siegfried's final moments meanwhile hearken back to Arindal's mad scene in *Die Feen*, which contains Wagner's first Weber-inspired allusion to the Wild Hunt. Siegfried does not, as Arindal does, hallucinate that he has attempted to kill his wife, but he similarly imagines being reunited with her in an eternal realm. In the case of Siegfried and Brünnhilde, Wagner came to reject his initial idea that the location of their idyllic reunion would be Valhalla. A critical view of Valhalla and of the gods in general then took shape to become the focus of *Das Rheingold*, a drama in which other idealistic symbols such as the rainbow are used in ironic fashion. The idea of a glorious Valhalla-like place for dead soldiers had achieved prominence during the Wars of Liberation. It surfaces prominently in Körner's poetry, and took on concrete form in the many monuments erected in memory of those battles and the soldiers who fought them. Körner's ideal realm did not, however, include the rulers of the day, for he loudly denounced the crowned leaders of German-speaking regions for their failure to support the idea of a democratically unified nation. In Siegmund's refusal to follow Brünnhilde to a Valhalla populated by gods we might detect Wagner's effort to suggest, or reclaim, a more revolutionary ideal realm. At the same time, the manner in which he dramatized Siegfried's death clearly distanced his hero from more combative versions of the legendary figure.

In the final act of the *Ring*, Siegfried stands out for his nonaggressive nature. In his dying moments he fully embodies the vulnerable, suffering artist surrounded by a crowd that has not grasped the devious and self-serving agenda

of its leader. The suffering hero was a persona of Körner's that took on artistic form in one of his last poems, "Abschied vom Leben" (Farewell to life), which he wrote while wounded. He had struggled for weeks with injuries and realized that his many fictional predictions of the deaths of soldiers were becoming his own reality. Although beyond the scope of the present study, Wagner's final opera, *Parsifal*, suggests strong recourse to or, perhaps, even a level of self-identification on the composer's part with this widely-known image of the dying poet-soldier. With the slightest sleight of hand, Amfortas could be heard as singing the opening line of Körner's poetic farewell: "Die Wunde brennt" (The wound burns). The knights' request for the Grail to be revealed "for the last time" (zum letzten Male) might meanwhile be heard as echoing scenarios in Körner's verses in which Lützow's brotherhood drew strength from a shared drink of wine. In coloristic terms, Körner drew attention to the purple wine as symbolizing the blood of the loyal soldiers who would die fighting. Interesting, in this vein, is the way the rejuvenated knights in act 1 of *Parsifal* sing what is arguably the most anthem-like music in the entirety of Wagner's oeuvre. Yet combat, we should note, is repeatedly critiqued in the drama. As with Siegfried, Wagner shaped his final hero so as to reach beyond historical periods of conflict.

Growing Interest in the Psyche

One of the great Wagnerian myths—that of Wagner as an operatic Freud or Jung *avant la lettre*—emerged after interest in the human psyche surged in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Freud's early publications devoted to hysteria and dreams appeared before century's end, with some of his main tenets passing swiftly into public awareness. Early twentieth-century writers such as Paul Bekker and Thomas Mann subsequently promoted the view that in matters psychological Wagner was ahead of his time. Mann was especially impressed with the way Wagner's musical-dramatic fabric revealed modern psychological insights. In his 1933 essay "Leiden und Größe Richard Wagners" (The sorrows and grandeur of Richard Wagner) Mann included examples drawn from the *Ring*, which he collectively regarded as "pure Freud, pure psychoanalysis."³⁵ In advancing this view of Wagner's psychological modernity, Mann sought to emphasize the composer's cosmopolitan and futuristic importance. He acknowledged that Freud's major ideas were not *sui generis*, noting Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as the links that bound the composer and the psychoanalyst. Yet, as already noted, the very work that Mann most prized for its psychological depth—*Der Ring des Nibelungen*—was already at an advanced stage of development when Wagner began reading Schopenhauer's writings in the fall of 1854. The entire text of the tetralogy had been written and significantly revised by that time, and the composer was well on his way to realizing

the score of *Die Walküre*. Schopenhauer thus cannot be regarded as a central motivating influence with regard to the psychological dimensions of the *Ring*.³⁶ Neither, for that matter, can Nietzsche, for he only entered the Wagner scene much later, in 1868.

With the exception of E. T. A. Hoffmann, the origins and models for Wagner's dramatic psychology have long remained obscure. Mann's sense of a path of influential ideas reaching back to Schopenhauer (but not further) might be explained by the fact that Freud himself favored such a self-image. Theatrical and operatic traditions had, however, long featured scenes privileging psychic experience. Wagner was more connected to those traditions as they developed in the eighteenth-century than has been generally recognized. As previously noted, almost no attention has been paid to his close study of Gluck within a compact timeframe in the 1840s, although the two composers have often been considered close relatives in the arena of operatic reform. Gluck's *Armide* and his two Iphigenia operas all contain scenes in which characters temporarily leave the dramatic present to enter psychological realms. Gozzi's *La donna serpente* also encouraged Wagner in this vein.

The writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann, it must be noted, stand apart from other literary and dramatic explorations of madness and the unconscious that Wagner encountered. Hoffmann's semifictional aesthetic debates, à la Jean Paul Richter, intertwine with more fantastical material. In this manner, his *Serapionsbrüder* collection (1819–21) serves up a virtual compendium of contemporary psychological theories alongside fictional tales that reflect their tenets. Within this prelude to our detailed examination of some of Wagner's works, let us briefly consider more closely these connecting strands of psychology and imagination—life and art—that so fascinated Hoffmann and others of his generation.

Hoffmann's interest in the mind from a medical perspective spiked in 1808 when he assumed responsibilities at the theater in Bamberg. There he befriended Adalbert Friedrich Marcus, the art-loving director of the local hospital, who introduced Hoffmann to the practice known as animal magnetism or mesmerism. Marcus was also responsible for directing Hoffmann's attention to the writings of Johann Christian Reil, whose *Rhapsodien* (1803) is considered a significant contribution to the beginnings of German psychiatry.³⁷ Not immediately convinced of the potential of mesmerism to illuminate the unconscious, Hoffmann pursued these matters more seriously by consulting the mesmerism specialist and physician David Ferdinand Koreff. He followed closely investigations of the unconscious such as those by C. A. F. Kluge and especially the Dresden-based Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert, whose *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft* (Views from the night side of the science of nature, 1808) he read during the fateful summer of 1813. Von Schubert's Christian-based view of the universe and consciousness aligned with the school of *Naturphilosophie*, with God occupying the fundamental level of a