Studies in East European Thought
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-023-09610-5

TRANSLATION

Translation of Evald Ilyenkov, "Notes on Wagner"

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Accepted: 24 November 2023

Wagner is usually seen as the author of vivid, brilliantly arranged symphonic scenes—the Ride of the Valkyries, the Fire Magic, Forest Murmurs, and similar strikingly colourful pictures.[1] This image comes quite naturally to anyone who gets acquainted with Wagner's work through concerts, radio programmes, especially our own,[2] and is further reinforced by commentary from our musicologists, who rely on such authorities as Tchaikovsky.[3] The latter, as is well known, saw in Wagner an unrivalled master of orchestration, and considered everything else in his work to be boring, uninteresting and unpromising—a product of scholastic speculation [mudrstvovaniia]. That Wagner was allegedly barbaric in his use of the human voice and vocal parts, and as a result he destroyed authentic operatic forms in favour of his ridiculous theories about the "synthesis of art" in musical drama—theories which, in the opinion of art historians, turned out to be unviable and unjustified when it came

[1] The pieces Ilyenkov mentions are the famous "Ride of the Valkyries" [*Walkürenritt*], the beginning of the third act in Wagner's *The Valkyrie* [*Die Walküre*]; "Fire Magic" [*Feuerzauber*], the closing piece of *The Valkyrie*; and "Forest Murmurs" [*Waldweben*], a symphonic interlude in the second act of *Siegfried* [IJ].

[2] Ilyenkov refers here to Soviet radio shows. For a brief contextualisation of Wagner's Soviet reception and Ilyenkov's exposure to his music, see the Introduction to Evald Ilyenkov's "Notes on Wagner" [IJ].

[3] In 1876, Russia's most famous composer, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky travelled to Bayreuth for the premiere of *The Ring of the Nibelung* [*Der Ring des Nibelungen*], as a correspondent for the newspaper *Russkie Vedomosti*. Tchaikovsky's impressions, laid out in several essays, significantly shaped Wagner's reception in Russia [IJ].

"Notes on Wagner" [Zametki o Vagnere] first appeared in Russian as an appendix in Evald Ilyenkov. 1984. *Art and the communist ideal: Selected essays on philosophy and aesthetics*. Compiled by A. G. Novokhatko. Moscow: Iskusstvo, pp. 333–343 [*Iskusstvo i kommunisticheskii ideal: Izbrannye stat'i po filosofii i estetike*]. The Russian edition includes three fragments on Wagner that have been found in Ilyenkov's archives. These notes, translated to English for the first time, were written at different points in Ilyenkov's life, arguably in the mid- to late 1950s. Find a complete Russian version here: http://caute.ru/ilyenkov/texts/iki/vagner.html#t1 (Accessed 3 October 2023). Thanks to Elena Illesh for authorising my translation and the reproduction of the archival material. Special thanks to Andrey Maidansky for providing Ilyenkov's manuscript with his drawings. Finally, thanks to Trevor Wilson for his invaluable advice on and help with translating Ilyenkov's Russian to English [Translator's Note].

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Published online: 03 January 2024

to further developing the art, and only prevented Wagner himself from fully realising his talent as an opera composer.

This view and the musicological arguments connected to it have very little in common with the real Wagner, with the essence of his art and with all that which he actually achieved in practice and theory. It explains nothing and is as one-sided and silly as, for example, the idea of Leo Tolstoy as a writer who very skilfully depicted hunting scenes, Russian landscapes and battle scenes… and nothing more.

Although such a view is not wrong (he was indeed an unrivalled master of orchestration and counterpoint, and his achievements to that end influenced all the world's music to such an extent that one can always say at once what had been written before Wagner and what after him; in this sense, Wagner is as much a landmark in the development of world music as Bach), it does not reflect the most important thing about him. And in order to be able to properly assess his music, one must abandon such a view once and for all. Otherwise ninety percent of his music will generally pass by the ears and, listening to his drama, one will be bored, languid and waiting for the recitatives to end and the symphonic episode to begin. He did not write many purely symphonic pieces—they are almost all played in concerts and are boring.

In fact, the "theories" realised in his work were not at all the result of scholastic wisdom in themselves, but were instead a very natural and vivid reflection of the epoch, and moreover a serious and substantial era of writing. In addition to that, it was not as if Wagner first thought up a theory and then realised it in the music and texts of his tragedies. His theories were simply very clear and sharp expressions of what he was doing as a poet and composer. But one should not explain his work by his theories alone. Both are elucidated by a completely different system of facts—the very reality to which Tchaikovsky and many professional musicologists were naturally blind.

The most intelligent of those who wrote about him (Romain Rolland, Thomas Mann, Bernard Shaw)[4] saw in him something else entirely. They display a completely opposite bias in how they understand him, compared to the narrow-musicological view, which considers him primarily a philosopher. "Lebensphilosophie" [*filosofiia zhizni*] saw him as its forerunner; Existentialists quote his poetry at every turn; Freudians saw in him a brilliant, artistically expressed psychoanalyst; supporters of Schopenhauer an artistic interpreter of [Schopenhauer's] philosophy, and so on. And all of that is in him. It is not by chance that in the West more has been written about Wagner-the-philosopher than about Wagner-the-musician, and about the philosopher no less than about Hegel.

However, as a theorist he wrote almost as much as Hegel and certainly more than Feuerbach and Schopenhauer. And this in itself is of great interest.

[4] See Romain Rolland. 2005. *Musicians of To-Day*, New York: NY Perlego. Ilyenkov most likely refers to Thomas Mann's essay on Wagner, presented in a series of talks in 1933, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Wagner's death. See Thomas Mann. 1974. *Leiden und Größe Richard Wagners*. In: *Gesammelte Werke in 13 Bänden*, Band 9. Frankfurt: S. Fischer, pp. 363-427. Mann describes Wagner as the paradoxical expression of a monumental, bourgeois century. Mann's talks on Wagner caused protests among Nazi critics—a crucial factor for the author's emigration shortly after. Bernard Shaw's *The perfect Wagnerite*, published in 1898, was a major influence on Ilyenkov's Marxist reading of Wagner. Drawing on Shaw, Ilyenkov interprets the *Ring* as an allegory of capitalism. See Bernard Shaw. 1966. *The perfect Wagnerite: a commentary on the Niblung's Ring*. New York: Dover [IJ].

But it is clear that his musical tragedies are more interesting and richer than what he wrote as a theorist and philosopher.

Such an ironic mind as Bernard Shaw, without the slightest irony, in full earnest, places him next to Marx in the world-historical meaning and significance of his work. He stated that Wagner as an artist proved to mankind the same thing that Marx did as a theorist, namely, nothing more or less than the regularity of the collapse of a civilisation based on the power of gold, on the basis of commodity-money relations. He showed the absolute inevitability of its internal decomposition [*razlozheniia*] and the logic of this decomposition, not, however, through rigorous concepts, but through sensory, emotional images, just as rigorous in their necessity, movement, evolution, and development, and enacted through psychological conflicts [*stolknoveniia*]—both external and internal.

To place or not to place Wagner beside Marx in terms of his actual historical contribution—we leave the answer to this question to the English playwright's conscience, but in my opinion, no one has pointed out more correctly than Shaw the real key to understanding his entire oeuvre. And not only *The Ring*, where it is expressed directly and even explained in words, in the text, but also such things as *Tristan and Isolde*.

(A fun fact, by the way. One of his biographers met Shaw in the library of the British Museum, so he paid attention to the strange man who day after day studied two folios in parallel: *Capital* and the score of *Tristan*...).

In his artistic creation, Wagner truly solved by his own means the same problems and antinomies which tore apart nineteenth-century Europe and which were variously expressed in different spheres of consciousness and theoretical and artistic culture. That is, the soil from which Wagner grew were events of truly world-historical significance: the bourgeois transformation of the economic, political, etc. conditions of life of the human individual, taking into account the prospects that this transformation brings for this individual.

Throughout his life, Wagner partook in all the major illusions of this process, lending them extremely sharp artistic expression, living through successive collapses [*krakh*] of these illusions, and seeking new focal points and arriving at new illusions.

That is why his work turned out to be a kind of *Phenomenology of Spirit* for the entire nineteenth century—a process of successive shifts of one state of this spirit into another, and each of these states is nothing but an extremely, acutely generalised and typical way of seeing the world as a human individual, pulled into the meat grinder of the bourgeois-capitalist transformation of all interpersonal relations.

At the same time, Wagner experienced all these stages personally, attempting each time to provide himself with a strictly rational account of what was happening. In doing so, he always turned to the most significant philosophical systems of his time. The only one he passed over was Marxism. Left-Hegelianism (David Strauß[5]), Feuerbach,

[5]Ilyenkov refers to David Friedrich Strauß (1808-1874), a German philosopher and theologian, who gained notoriety for his controversial *The Life of Jesus*, published in 1835. In the controversy over Strauß's book, Hegelians would split up into two camps, the right-wing "Old Hegelians," who argued against Strauß, and the left-wing "Young Hegelians," who supported him. One of the most important commentaries on Strauß appeared in Nietzsche's *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* in 1873. At the time of writing "Notes on Wagner," Ilyenkov seemed familiar with those specific post-Hegelian disputes from the mid-nineteenth century [IJ].

Stirner in Bakunin's version, in combination with "true socialism," with [Arnold] Ruge and [Moses] Hess, then—Schopenhauer fused with some Nietzschean ideas, and finally—as the finale and deadlock of this line of development—the combination of Buddhism with Christianity. He was a very impulsive and enthusiastic man and shared entirely all these ways of seeing and understanding the world.

From this soil grew Wagner's grandiosely complex vocal and orchestral language with its absolutely stunning inner tension—the very apparatus of expressive means which Rolland described as "charged with billions of volts." This is his entire tragic-historical pathos, which at times erupts in thunder and lightning with incredible force, only to immediately subside at other times, after a discharge of energy into a state of complete lack of will and hopeless gloom, yet always eventually resolving into death as a singularly blissful state, an ideal state of the soul where absolute silence, absolute peace and darkness reign—the World Night in *Tristan*.

That is why his entire system of images moves between extremely contrasting poles, and the most typical form of development of the musical fabric is a gradual increase in the sonic tension of rhythms, intonations, the complexity of the orchestral fabric, the instability of harmonic relationships, counterpoint contrasts, etc.—constant escalation [*nagnetanie*] to the limit and beyond any limit. Everything seems to have been brought to the limit of tension of the nerves, of the listener's perception, even just of their eardrums, but no: Wagner finds ways to increase the tension even more, to stir the nerves even more painfully—if not by the volume and power of the brass instruments, then by the tragedy of the text, if not by the sharpness of the orchestration, then by the rhythms, etc., etc. This is his very "lack of moderation" [*neumerennost'*] by means of expression and expressiveness, which was often called "tastelessness," disregard for all rules of "normal" human perception, etc., etc., gigantomania. . . .

And it all builds up, builds up and builds up, so that at the end of the day it all plummets with a crash into the abyss, into silence, into nothingness.[6] On the way, however, he makes stops, allowing rest on islands of serene happiness, but at the same time he constantly reminds us that this is only a momentary halt on the way to even more grandiose hurricanes, which make themselves known somewhere in the background with ominous timbres, then with deaf bass rhythms, which diverge from the smoothly flowing tops, etc.—in general, he always finds a thousand ways, so to speak, to "reflect" a sense of peace and equilibrium.

Musically, for example, the whole of *Tristan* is constructed quite deliberately (this is shown by a formal analysis of its musical fabric concerning the elementary, foundational principles of harmony) as a continuous accumulation of a harmonic "instability" of sound. There are strict formal laws of sound combination, in their rigidity resembling the doctrine of the modes of syllogisms, on which the entire system of

[6]It is interesting to read the "Notes on Wagner" in light of another text, presumably written at the same time, Ilyenkov's "Cosmology of the Spirit." For an English translation, see https://stasisjournal.net/index.php/journal/article/view/19 (Accessed 3 October 2023). Both texts, as different as their subject matter might seem at first glance, were written under the influence of Friedrich Engels' *Dialectics of Nature*. Just as Wagner's music builds up sonic tension, the cosmic excess of energy in "Cosmology" leads to a similar moment of emptying self-destruction (a "thermal death"). Wagner's "world night" and the death of the "solar hero" might correspond to the extinction of the sun and the cooling of the universe in Ilyenkov's "Cosmology" [IJ].

so-called "tonal sound" is based—C-major, B-minor, A-flat major and so on. Any melody can be attributed through purely formal analysis to one of the tonalities, and the transition from one tonality to another occurs, once again, according to strict rules. They are abstract enough to allow for a variety of combinations, but at the same time specific enough to categorically forbid, as something absolutely anti-aesthetic, certain ways of combining melody with chordal accompaniment, or two sequential sounding chords, or two melodies in counterpoint. These rules indicate that sounds constructed according to a certain principle are "naturally" attracted to certain other sounds and, on the contrary, actively "repel" unrelated consonances. According to these rules, known sound complexes are "resolved" into other ones. In *Tristan*, Wagner intentionally prevents the musical fabric from "resolving" into such a chord that would create the impression of "finality" or "completion" of the musical phrase. The melodic-harmonic structure, it seems, is on the verge of resolving itself according to a formal rule into a serene, concluding chord that would sound like a point at the end of the phrase. But suddenly the music takes what appears to be a completely unexpected and capricious turn, totally inexplicable from the perspective of strictly formal rules for transitioning from one tonality to another—and the sound becomes unstable once again, requiring a different sort of resolution. As a result, the entire music of *Tristan* turns out to be, from the perspective of school rules for combining tonalities, some grandiose paradox. It clearly does not lend itself to dissection into chordal elements. Tchaikovsky called the music of *Tristan* for that reason "malicious chromatisms." *Tristan* indeed shatters the entire harmonic, tonal system for creating a musical fabric. This is the first composition of so-called "atonal" music, but here it is not a whim, but the expression of a consciously realised idea. And only in the finale, in the famous "Liebestod," does Wagner allow the music to resolve itself into the long-awaited "serene" chord. The very chord, the arrival of which was "prevented" by all sorts of obstacles that lay outside the formal structure of the musical fabric—either an external turn of events, or a "capricious" yet emotionally justified twist in the moods of the characters, or a contrasting collision of such moods. Ultimately, from a formal perspective it is a fatal paradox, but from a broader point of view it is just the opposite. Rolland, for example, categorically views *Tristan* as the highest and truest expression that world art has managed to find for a theme like love.

Now, after these preliminary considerations, a brief word about *The Ring of the Nibelung*. In Wagner's oeuvre, it is the centre of all his artistic and theoretical principles, his life work. He wrote it for twenty-six years, and nurtured it even longer.

In terms of external, plot and image—it is an attempt to bring together the entirety of North German mythology (not only "German"), to reveal its artistic-symbolic meaning. But why "myth"? Wagner had very elaborate considerations on this matter. The point is that the entire pathos of his work was fuelled by an ancient illusion that many great artists, including Leo Tolstoy, shared. This illusion revolves around the idea that the world can be transformed by means of art. Not the world in the sense of "the universe," but the world of human relationships: it is only necessary to transform the psychology of contemporaries, to restructure the system of their moral and aesthetic principles—and their external relations to each other, too, will change.

But to do this, it is necessary to influence the deepest roots of an intricately branched psychology. Mythology, according to Wagner, is precisely such a form of

consciousness in which, over centuries, and even millennia, the most general principles of worldview, characteristic of "the people as a whole," have crystallised. In the form of myth, the nation distils the very essence of its self-consciousness, purifying it from everything irrelevant, accidental, transitory, and temporary. Therefore, myth is a concentrate, the quintessence of a people's self-consciousness, and thus, a consciousness of the world [*soznaniia mira*], a world-understanding [*miroponimaniia*]. In myth, in the system of mythological imagery, therefore, the "essence of the world" is expressed as it is understood by a people, those ideals or images that a people spontaneously strive to bring to life.

The entire *The Ring of the Nibelung* thus develops around the image of Siegfried. Siegfried is the man we all long for, Wagner said in the 1840s and 1850s, that is, in the years when his idea had already matured and the composer set out to realise it. The entirety of the highest Ideal[7] of modernity is concentrated in him. Siegfried is a being devoid of fear, suffering, alien to pedantic reflection that exhausts the will, he is a being in whom a word seamlessly merges with a deed, with action, etc.—in short, he is the very type of individuality destined to free the modern world from suffering, evil, poverty and other ills. This is the very individuality which freely embodies the nature of humanity in general—the very nature of humanity of which Feuerbach spoke so much. It was not only Wagner who saw this meaning in the image of Siegfried. The entire German revolutionary democracy of the 1840s found in him a ready-made image of its ideals and aspirations. It was a ready-made "aesthetic illusion" in which the bourgeois radicalism of that epoch magnified in its imagination completely real tasks, the very same tasks that the 1848 revolution sought to resolve.

In the early 1840s, the idea of composing an allegorical tragicomedy with Siegfried as the main character was also pursued by Friedrich Engels. Here is what he wrote in 1840, recounting his visit to the town of Xanten on the Rhine, according to legend the birthplace of Siegfried:

> What is it about the legend of Siegfried that affects us so powerfully? Not the plot of the story itself, not the foul treason which brings about the death of the youthful hero; it is the deep significance which is expressed through his person. Siegfried is the representative of German youth. All of us, who still carry in our breast a heart unfettered by the restraints of life, know what that means. We all feel in ourselves the same zest for action, the same defiance of convention [...]; we loathe with all our soul the continual reflection and the philistine fear of vigorous action; we want to get out into the free world; we want to overrun the barriers of prudence and fight for the crown of life, action. The philistines have supplied giants and dragons too, particularly in the sphere of church and state.[8]

[7] Interestingly, Ilyenkov capitalised the notion of the "Ideal" here, just as he would do in his later work from the 1960–1970s, such as in *On Idols and Ideals* (1968). Though the "Notes on Wagner" were most likely written in the 1950s, they foreshadowed a main concern of Ilyenkov's mature philosophy, the concept of the Ideal [IJ].

[8] Ilyenkov quotes an excerpt from the Russian translation of Engels's "Siegfrieds Heimat," originally published under the pseudonym Friedrich Ostwald in *Telegraph für Deutschland* No. 197, December 1840 (*K. Marks i F. Engel's ob iskusstve*, t. 2., Moscow 1976, p. 533). The Russian version is replaced here by an English translation from the original German, published as "Siegfried's Native Town." https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1840/12/siegfried.htm (Accessed 1 October 2023) [IJ].

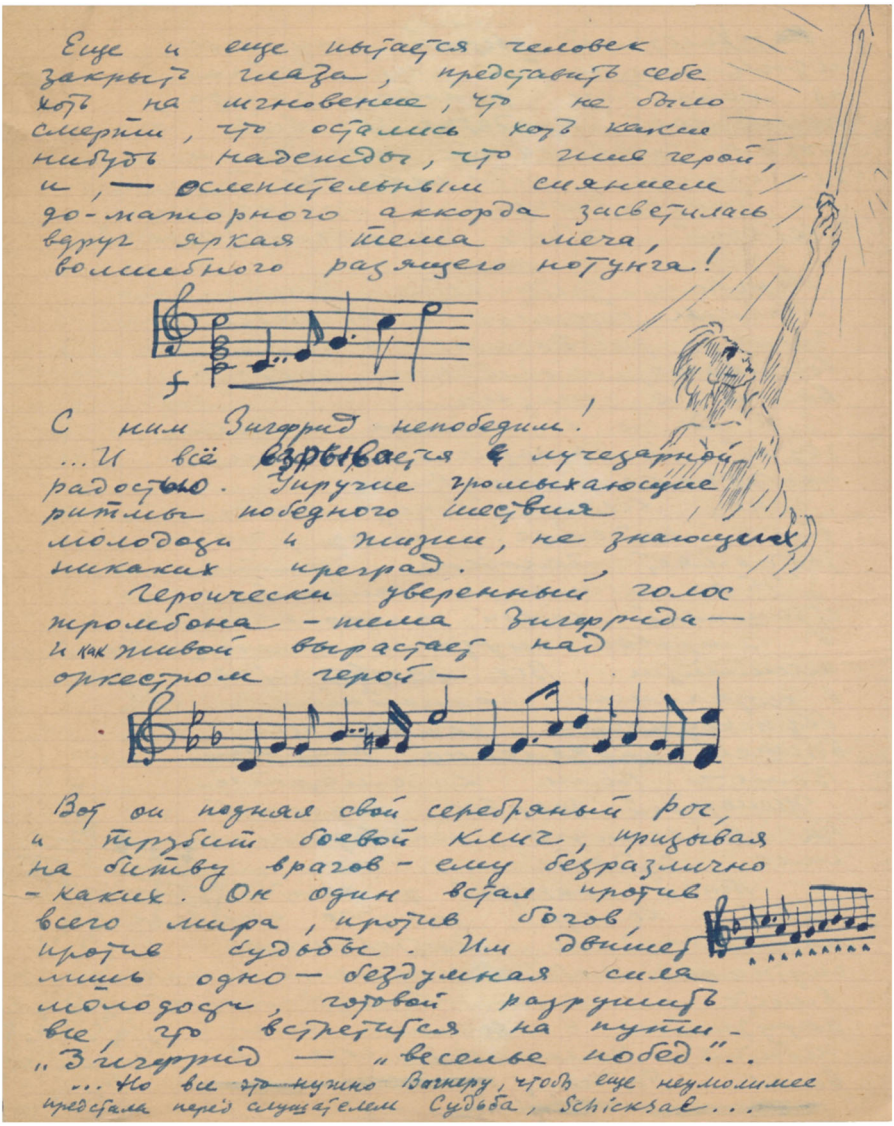

Fig. 1 A page of Ilyenkov's original manuscript, with a drawing of Siegfried and some musical notations. Credits: Elena Illesh.

It was this very "profound significance" of Siegfried's image that was inspiring. And its meaning was very clear. It was connected to all the Hellenic-optimistic hopes of revolutionary democracy. Engels understood this perfectly. But while he conceived of his Siegfried as an allegorical-Aesopian portrayal of modernity, and therefore thought of his work as a "tragicomedy," Wagner had not the slightest bit of romantic irony about Siegfried. He took the image seriously and therefore saw Siegfried's story as an optimistic tragedy from the very beginning. The image of Siegfried was

for him the highest aesthetic ideal long before he began composing *The Ring*. He also perceived the revolution of 1848 through the prism of this ideal. That is why an extremely funny thing happened to him in 1848: he met a "living" Siegfried, a real embodiment of the ideal. This living Siegfried turned out to be none other than Mikhail Bakunin, the anarchist-Hegelian who led an uprising in Dresden. Wagner instantly imbued him with the same selfless faith that Christians would imbue in Christ if he were to descend to the second coming .... They immediately became best friends, and as Bakunin's adjutant, Wagner also took part in the uprising. After the defeat of the uprising, Bakunin was imprisoned, and Wagner managed to escape to Switzerland. There he immediately discarded all other plans and began writing his *Siegfried*. He more than once stated, moreover, that he was writing Siegfried directly as Bakunin.

At first, he conceived of one opera—*Siegfried's Death*, which then turned into the fourth day of the tetralogy—the *Twilight of the Gods*. But very quickly he realised that he would not be able to fit the whole meaning of this image into one opera. He began to conceive two operas, linked by plot and images—the duology *Young Siegfried* and *Siegfried's Death*. Then he felt the need to start at an even earlier stage, with the story of Siegfried's parents, which later developed into *The Valkyrie*. But even this was not enough, and then arose the idea of *The Rhinegold*—a prehistory of the world which would show the absolute necessity of Siegfried's appearance in the world. In *The Rhinegold*, through a system of images, Wagner intended to prove that the world is entangled in contradictions that can only be resolved by a being like Siegfried, a fearless hero with a sword.

The composition of the text of *The Ring* was dragging on. And here, while composing the text, Wagner began to be tormented by a new problem. He consciously formulated it to himself as follows. Why is modern humanity not in a hurry to transform the world in harmony with the ideal, if this ideal is so clear, so beautiful and enticing that anyone would have to accept it? What is the reason for the fact that Bakunin's frenzied, Siegfriedian energy crashed against obstacles, drowned in the swamp of philistinism, indecisiveness, inconsistency and other anti-Siegfriedian qualities of popular self-consciousness, real, living, non-ideal [*neideal'nykh*] people?

And soon this problem, rather than the image of Siegfried itself, began to become the central problem of *The Ring*. In the course of developing the plot of the myth, Wagner tried to find an answer to this question, to solve it for himself.

As the plot unfolded under his pen, Wagner began to increasingly realise the meaning of the tragedy, laid down in the ancient, primordial and eternal layers of folk psychology, namely: that not only Siegfried's birth but also his death, the collapse of his attempt to liberate the world, was necessary. That is why Siegfried's murder began to appear not as the result of a vile betrayal, not as a murder from behind a corner, but as an absolutely inevitable resolution, as a finale, the necessity of which is already inherent in the very beginning of things, in the very "essence of the world," as he puts it.

This gloomy ending thus became a secret, expedient reason for the actions, thoughts, feelings and deeds of all the characters in *The Ring*—a secret reason of which none of them is aware and yet for which they all act, including Siegfried himself. The music therefore takes on a gloomy-tragic tone from the very beginning, which is reflected in the most joyful pages of the score.

With this turn of thought Wagner resolved for himself the question of why the 1848 revolution was defeated. He decided that it was neither accidental nor the result of a despicable betrayal, but an inevitability. This inevitability was expressed in the fact that the ideal, in the name of which it was carried out, was false, illusory, and that a secret goal, unknown to any of its participants, diverged from the ideals of its best participants. This was also expressed in the fact that Siegfried-Bakunin, despite all his subjective honesty and selfless courage, and even thanks to these qualities, was in fact a great deceiver, who genuinely deceived himself and others. And that the people who wholeheartedly believed in him were actually led to their doom from the very beginning.

Death is the only and natural result of the collision of the beautiful free individuality [*individual'nosti*] with the world. This is why the very image of Siegfried, from the very beginning, contains death, ruin, and his image develops towards it.

But because this is so, Wagner's focus as an artist began to shift from Siegfried to the "world" within which he is born, forced to act, and ultimately perish.

The Rhinegold does just that.

What kind of world is it? It is a world inhabited by modern people. Wagner states this quite consciously. The main feature of this world is the state of Necessity [*Nuzhdy*], Not[9] (this word is a leitmotif). The world has fallen into such a deplorable state as a result of the fact that it has fallen under the power of gold. Then begins a completely transparent symbolism. Gold is a magical power that opposes all individuality whatsoever. The being who wishes to acquire gold, and with it power over the world, is forced to renounce their own individuality. The power of gold is impersonal [bezlichna]. This most ugly creature, in all its glow, can become anything at all, and subjugates everything in the world—the hardworking Nibelungs, the beautiful gods, the mighty giants, the proud beauties of goddesses—Freya, the goddess of youth and freedom, and Fricka, the goddess of the home. Everyone turns out to be a slave of the ring—and most of all just the one who imagines himself to be its master. . . .

The central figure of the *Ring*, as it progresses, increasingly becomes Wotan, a generalised-symbolic figure of the modern human. "Look at Wotan—he is man as he is, he resembles you to the point of indistinguishability," Wagner wrote in a letter.

And another amusing instruction: "Imagine in Alberich's hands instead of a gold ring a stock market portfolio of shares—and you get an image of the modern world. . . ."

In this situation no being can assert its I without opposing the power of gold. But no being has the power to do so: every character is bound hand and foot to this world. Love, which Wagner interprets in the spirit of Feuerbach—as the principle of an individual relation to things and people, as the principle from whose point of view everything is valued according to its individual merits—turns out not only to be absolutely powerless to resist the impersonal power of gold, but also becomes, unknown to itself, the maid of this gold. . . . All this symbolism is absolutely transparent, and there is no need to explain it.

[9] Ilyenkov uses the German term "Not," translating it as *Nuzhda*, which has strong connotations of poverty, distress and lack. While "Need" might be an accurate equivalent, "Necessity" unveils a dialogue with Marx's idea of a realm of necessity (credits to Trevor Wilson for finding this important nuance) [IJ].

* * *

This understanding of the meaning of modern tragedy led Wagner to social pessimism. At this time, Schopenhauer started to seem the wisest philosopher to him. Schopenhauer's influence on the entire structure of images and symbolism of *The Ring* was very strong. Sometimes the monologues (especially Wotan's) sound like a popular exposition of ideas from *The World as Will and Representation*. Here are the inescapable antinomies between knowledge and will, between absolute will and "finite" will, there is the thesis of the self-denial of the will as the highest way of its self-affirmation, etc., etc. In other words, Wagner constantly brings into conflict, in figurative-symbolic form, such things as *cognition*, *beauty*, *will*, *individuality*, *freedom*, *error*, *necessity*, *contract* (as a principle of law), etc., etc., in short, the entire traditional conceptual arsenal of German philosophy, in order to see what arises out of this mutual collision.

The proletariat is also present in *The Ring*, in the form of the Nibelung people. Aesthetically, he portrays them as very unattractive, dirty, dull: in the music one hears the metallic rumbling of hammers, squealing, groaning sounds, etc. The Nibelungs are also very unattractive in their moral nature; they are not going to eliminate the power of gold, they only want to seize it each for themselves to use it against others. Moreover, they themselves are forging their own gold chains, making them thicker and stronger, and no hope can be placed on them. They themselves need a liberator, and when he comes, they insidiously try to use him for their own purposes and then kill him.... The stupid giants also resemble them—the builders of Valhalla...

Everything begins with the fact that Gold sleeps at the bottom of the Rhine, in the bosom of nature, and there it is only of aesthetic value, pleasing the cheerful and carefree beauties—the Daughters of the Rhine. But it already conceals in itself all the evil that will be committed in the future. So, the beginning is Nature as such....

* * *

The characters and situations of *The Rhinegold* often make one want to ironise them for many reasons. In the first place, it is precisely because they are too overtly allegorical and perhaps even overtly rationally constructed.

When it comes to *The Valkyrie*, irony does not quite fit. Here, the whole system of images unfolds in terms of playing with Old Germanic myths, particularly the part that tells the story of Siegfried's parents—about the fate of Siegmund and Sieglinde, about their first attempt at a heroic uprising against the power of Gold, which very quickly ends tragically. However, there is much more profound historical and psychological truth here—that very realistic truth of characters, the logic of their own development which apparently constitutes the main mystery of Wagnerian art, its bewitching power.

Here, as in *Siegfried*, you feel the least influence of rational schemes that so greatly spoiled the entirety of *The Twilight of the Gods*—those rational schemes from Schopenhauer which infused Wagner already at that time.

The Valkyrie was composed precisely at the turning point in all his political and philosophical sentiments, and this influence already began to impact the text. Especially in the second act, where Wotan delivers a forty-minute monologue and extensively recounts what everyone already knows from *The Rhinegold*, while also commenting on this story in the spirit of Schopenhauer's philosophy, that is he speaks

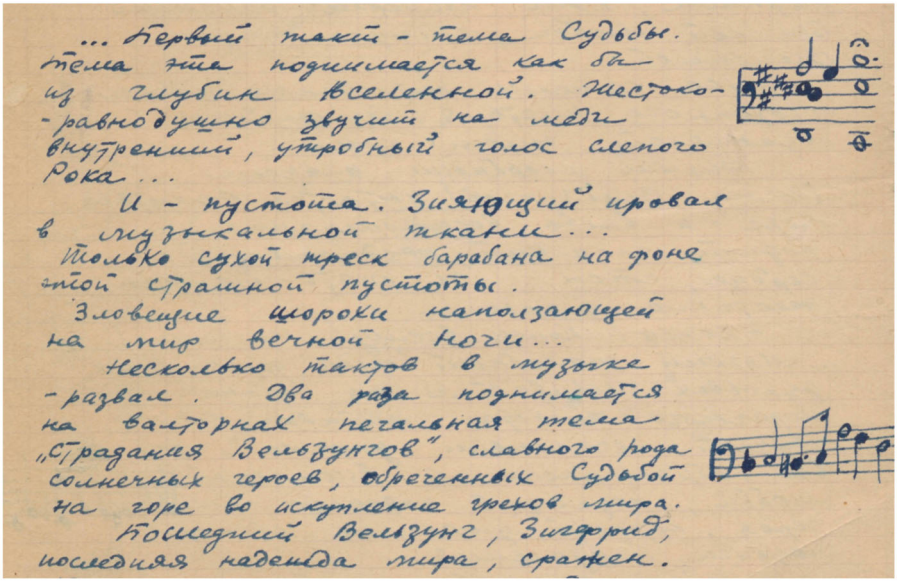

Fig. 2 An excerpt from Ilyenkov's original manuscript, Credits: Elena Illesh.

about the helplessness of the human being to fight against the world's sufferings, about the fact that the only way out of them is death, and so on.

However, the music of *The Valkyrie* is still almost not tainted with Schopenhauerian pessimism. Moreover, the further Wagner moves away from the revolution, from its ideals, from its hopes, the more painful it becomes for him to part with them. And the more intensively he tries to recreate in music the entire romantic atmosphere of revolutionary effort, rebellion against stagnation, against traditions, against philistinism.

Therefore, the music of *The Valkyrie* is utterly optimistic, just like its successor *Siegfried*. However, unlike *Siegfried* it is also utterly dramatic. In its character, it often strongly resembles—this has often been noted by musicologists and you will clearly see it yourself—the pathos of Beethoven's sonatas, such as the "Appassionata." It is an optimistic tragedy in the highest sense of the word. And while the world of Schopenhauerian moods does occasionally make its presence felt here, it only does so temporarily: they come and go like shadows cast by clouds onto a painting that is, on the whole, bathed in sunlight, pierced by gusts of fresh wind reaching hurricane strength—bursts of flame, and so forth.

* * *

Richard Wagner. "Trauermarsch"[10] from *The Ring of the Nibelung*.

The Funeral March is, in essence, the culmination of *The Ring*, where the entire philosophy of the tetralogy finds its resolution. "With Siegfried's death, the drama comes to an end…"—as Rolland states.

[10]Ilyenkov retains the term "Trauermarsch" [Funeral March] in the original German [IJ].

The "March" in the opera follows immediately after the death of the hero. The last words of the dying Siegfried end on the backdrop of the first beat of the "March," sounding like his final sigh.

... The first beat—the theme of Fate. This theme emerges as if from the depths of the Universe. The inner, visceral voice of blind Fate sounds cruelly indifferent in the brass...

And—emptiness. A vast chasm in the musical fabric... Only the dry crack of the drum resonates against this dreadful void. The ominous rustlings of the Eternal Night engulfing the world...

A few beats in the music—collapse. Twice the mournful theme of the "suffering of the Volsungs" rises on French horns, the glorious lineage of solar heroes, doomed by Fate to bear the burden of the world's sins in redemption.

The last Volsung, Siegfried, the last hope of the world, is slain. Now, the only outcome for the world is one—in death, in plunging into eternal oblivion, "where there is no suffering, where there are no desires—the end of universal wanderings".

Once again, silence. Emptiness. A few more abrupt and dry drum beats... The world is orphaned. There is no longer any force within it capable of saving it... It is all over...

Another dry strike of the strings. Once more. Again (cresc.)—and suddenly, with a cry of despair, sorrow, and anger, the orchestra erupts...

It is an unbearable cry of pain and horror, erupting with an immense force that cannot be restrained or subdued—the scream of a soul that has just realised the fatal significance of loss, the cry of the fatally wounded Great Love, the stimulus of life in the Universe...

... But the heavy, rhythmic beats of the funeral march mercilessly suppress this cry—the quiet mournful lament (the theme of the Volsungs) attempts to pour out its grief—and once again, the memory gives rise to a loud, heart-wrenching moan. And again—the heavy, cruel beats... The end! The end of everything! Silence!

... The gentle mournful weeping of the wooden wind instruments amidst the sombre thundering of the anvils. It sounds like a sad reproach for everything, directed towards the All-Powerful Love that gave birth to hopes for a hero who died without accomplishing the feat of redemption...

Confusion sets in. Muffled passages of double basses and cellos, frantic and agonising efforts to defy the dreadful reality and dispel the thought of the hero's death, which looms over the majestic voice of the tuba...

Again and again, one tries to close their eyes, momentarily imagining that there was no death, that some hope remains, that the hero is alive, and—suddenly, with a bright flash of D-major chords, the theme of the sword, the magical Notung, shone forth! With it, Siegfried is invincible!

... And everything erupts with radiant joy. The resilient rhythms of a triumphant procession of youth and life that know no obstacles.

The heroically confident voice of the trombone—Siegfried's theme, and as if alive rises above the orchestra the hero...

There he raises his silver horn and sounds a battle cry, calling upon his enemies to face him—indifferent to whoever they are. He stands alone against the whole world, against the gods, against Fate. His only driving force is the mindless strength of youth, ready to destroy everything that comes in his path. "Siegfried—the joy of victory" ...

… But all of this is necessary for Wagner, so that Fate, *Schicksal*, stands even more inexorably before the listener …

The cold, damp mist rising from the Rhine, from the cradle of the fateful Gold, sneaks, creeps in from all sides, against the backdrop of ominous nocturnal rustlings, enveloping with darkening hues the bright image of the "solar hero"…

The world is veiled in darkness. The darkness of helpless despair. The last sparks of the will to life fade away, vanishing without a trace. … And somewhere in the darkness, in the Night, the receding footsteps of the funeral procession can be heard…

The end of everything. The end of love, faith, hope. The end of everything that compels a person to live.

This is pessimism—the most terrifying one can find in world music, Schopenhauerian pessimism. Everything dissolves in the realisation of utter hopelessness, giving birth to the highest manifestation of the World Will—the Will to death.

The iron curtain descends upon the universe, an invincible force of fate…

Quietly, the theme of the Ring sounds from the bassoon, the golden symbol of the world's Evil, the indomitable companion of Love and Life… Only together with them can the Ring sink into the eternal sleep of non-being, the desired sleep, into the waves of the Rhine. (Sometimes in a concert, they insert the theme of Fluch—the curse that hangs over the Ring's owner.)

… In the vague rustling and fading beats of the retreating procession, the orchestra falls silent…

This march, in its form reminiscent of the funeral march in Beethoven's "Eroica," is, in essence, its complete opposite.… There, it is the apotheosis of the hero-victor. Here, it is the darkest abyss. It is no longer mourning for the bright memory of the deceased. It is the triumph of overcoming the Will to live, a forcible victory of pessimism, to which Wagner strives to lead the listener through the power of musical impact [vozdeistviia], logically and emotionally convincing them that this philosophy is the only natural one; and what is terrifying in this march is that it is from the first to the last note logical and sincere due to its logic.

Once you enter the tone of his worldview ("understand" it), you cannot escape its conclusions…

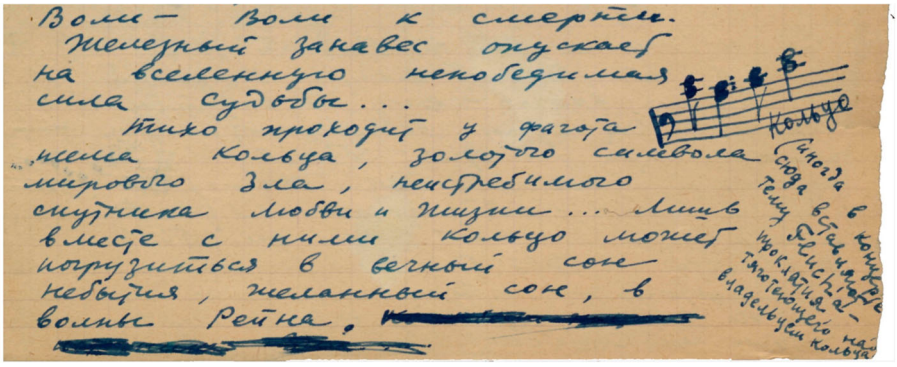

Fig. 3 An excerpt from Ilyenkov's original manuscript, Credits: Elena Illesh.

In Chopin, there is something similar in mood, but Wagner's march is stronger in its ability to plunge the listener into a state of desperate horror, resignation towards death, not from the first chord, but by leading them to such a state very deliberately, very cunningly…

In terms of philosophical content, this episode represents a crisis of Feuerbachian Love and the victory of Schopenhauerian Voluntarism…

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Declarations

Competing Interests On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.