ISSN 1097–2358

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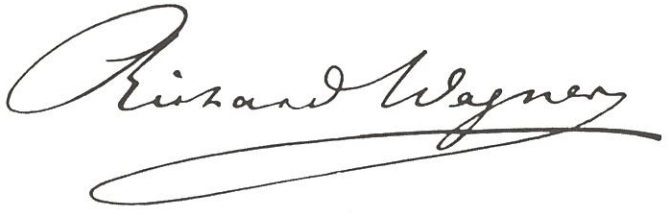
Leitmotive

The Wagner Quarterly



Volume 26, Number 2

Summer 2012 ISSUE 98

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ISSUE 98

The Editor's Thoughts

Andrew Porter's translation of Wagner's *Ring*[1] was greeted when published in 1977 as being a major step forward for English speaking audiences. Porter stated in his Introduction that his "...translation was made for singing, acting and hearing, not for reading." Nonetheless it has been widely used to read because Porter's work is so clear and easy to read.

Toward the end of his introduction, Porter writes the following: "The *Ring* on the first level is a rousing and splendid old tale of gods and dwarfs and men, of giants and dragons, loves and hates, murder, magic, and mysteries, unfolded amid vast and picturesque scenery. Beyond that, it is about (among other things) man's conquest of the natural world for his own uses (the first action recorded is Wotan's tearing a branch from the World Ash-tree); about man's dominion over men (well-intentioned oligarchy and capitalist tyranny are both condemned); and about man's understanding of himself (the forces influencing his actions, at the start located within gods, and finally discovered to lie within himself). By intention, Wagner patterned his drama on Attic tragedy but chose as his symbolic matter the ancestral myths of the North. To mankind's collective unconsciousness he gave form; that is easily said, but for that matter, it can easily—if not briefly—be demonstrated. Instinct, inspiration, the composer's comprehensive grasp of what men before him had thought, dreamed and done, and his powerful, controlling mind directed the creation of the *Ring* over more than a quarter century. In words, music, and vivid theatrical imagery combined, it took shape.

Each of the clauses above has been the subject of many books; I mention here these large matters in summary

(Continued on page 23)

1. Porter, Andrew, *Richard Wagner, The Ring of the Nibelung*, German Text with English Translation (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977).

LEITMOTIVE – *THE WAGNER QUARTERLY*

Robert S. Fisher, Editor
Typography: Francisco Moreno

ISSN 1097-2358

LEITMOTIVE – *THE WAGNER QUARTERLY* is a journal intended for all persons interested in the works, life, and influence of Richard Wagner (1813–1883). Although many of our authors and readers are scholars affiliated with academic institutions, many are informed lay persons with a keen interest in Wagner studies.

LEITMOTIVE – *THE WAGNER QUARTERLY* is published four times a year as Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter issues. Actual publication dates can vary, but all annual subscriptions to this journal are for four issues. There are no "double" issues. Views expressed are those of the authors of the specific articles in this journal, and are not necessarily the views of the Editor or the Publisher.

We invite all interested persons to submit articles for publication: please see the back cover.

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The Publisher of LEITMOTIVE – *THE WAGNER QUARTERLY* is the Wagner Society of Northern California, PO Box 590990, San Francisco, California 94159.

David Dalto, Founding Editor (1985–1989) Paul Schofield, Editor (1990)

About the Authors

Mary A. Cicora (A Dialogue on Romanticism: Heiner Müller, Richard Wagner, and *Tristan und Isolde* (Bayreuth, 1993)) holds a B.A. in Literature from Yale University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in German Literature with a minor in Musicology from Cornell University. Her research interest is literature and music, and in particular, Richard Wagner. She has published extensively in the scholarly journals on the interrelationship of Wagner's works with the German literary tradition, treating the topic of Wagner and literature with reference to such diverse writers as Thomas Mann, Günter Grass, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Friedrich Nietzsche. She has published five books on Wagner and his works: "*Parsifal* Reception in the *Bayreuther Blätter*" (Lang, 1987); "From History to Myth: Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and its Literary Sources" (Lang, 1992); "Mythology as Metaphor" (Greenwood, 1998); "Wagner's *Ring* and German Drama" (Greenwood, 1999), and "Modern Myths and Wagnerian Deconstructions" (Greenwood, 2000). Most recently she has contributed an article on the literary sources of *Parsifal* to the "Companion to Wagners *Parsifal*" edited by William Kinderman and Katherine Syer (Camden House, 2005).

Terri Stuart ("The Wagner Society of Israel") is currently the President of the Wagner Society of Northern California. She has served on the Board for 12 years, 11 years as Treasurer, and 10 years as both Treasurer and Vice President-Director of Programs. She is also on the Board of Directors of the San Francisco Opera Guild-East Bay Chapter and has served on the Board of Directors of Festival Opera (Walnut Creek, CA). Ms. Stuart has been an avid attendee of opera and music events in the greater San Francisco Bay Area for over 20 years and has enjoyed the privilege of attending the Bayreuth Festival on three occasions, most recently in 2011.

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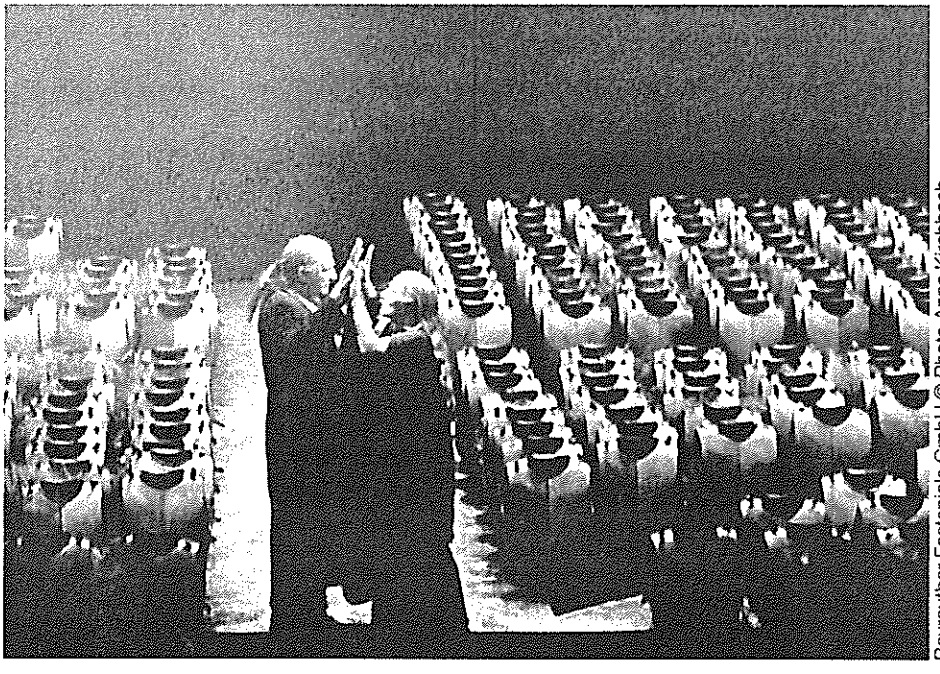
Aboard the ship to Cornwall, a bitter Isolde confronts Tristan about the wrongs she has suffered in the past, to which he calmly responds.



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In the second act, Tristan and Isolde meet in an armory and sing of their love amid rows of breastplates.

A Dialogue on Romanticism: Heiner Müller, Richard Wagner, and *Tristan und Isolde* (Bayreuth, 1993) [1]

Inviting Heiner Müller to stage *Tristan und Isolde* in Bayreuth certainly promised a unique theatrical experience. Indeed, there could be no more unlikely candidate for staging the Romantic music-drama par excellence than Heiner Müller, a prominent modern dramatist known for his political involvement, his grim view of reality and brutal deconstruction of tradition, and his almost nihilistic view of the present state of civilization. Wagner was writing in the German Romantic tradition; Müller was influenced by the avant-garde, the theater of the absurd, and postmodern trends. The DVD of this fascinating Bayreuth production was released in 2008; the principal roles are taken by Siegfried Jerusalem and Waltraud Meier.

This article presents an analysis of Heiner Müller's Bayreuth production of *Tristan und Isolde* via the *Hamletmaschine* of the same modern playwright. It will proceed in four basic steps. After outlining some affinities between Heiner Müller and Richard Wagner, I will describe this production, and then sketch some background on Heiner Müller. Next I will discuss one of his most important works, his *Hamletmaschine,* to the end of appreciating this production. Finally, some comments on *Tristan* audience reception made by Wagner, Nietzsche, and Müller, and a discussion of a conversation with Müller about this staging, will prove helpful in my analysis.

Heiner Müller and Richard Wagner?

As incongruous as it may seem, there are some strong affinities between Müller and Wagner. They both lived in times of transition, they were both po-

1. Hans Mayer, "Tristans Schweigen," in *Anmerkungen zu Richard Wagner* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966, 1977), pp. 61–75.

litically involved, and they assumed major roles in combatting what they saw as the problems in the society of the time. Both Wagner and Müller, moreover, expressed their political concern not only by participating in events; they both strove to somehow help solve social problems by revolutionizing the form of drama and creating new forms of theater, the one with music added, the other as influenced by modern currents of drama.

Heiner Müller was one of the most important dramatists of the former East Germany. He was born in 1929, and died in 1995. In his early years he experienced firsthand the brutality of Fascism, and later in his life decided to live in East Germany. Müller spoke out against the repression of free expression by the East German authorities, and in witnessing the failure of Socialism, the demise of utopian thinking. His later works document the despair that was prevalent at that time, and his style shifted from a Brechtian realism to the postmodern kind of drama represented by Jean-Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett, and Antonin Artaud as he absorbed the influences of existentialism and the theater of the absurd.

Wagner and Müller wrote stylistically dissimilar works. But scholars who intellectually engage with them discuss similar themes: tradition and innovation, history and the fragmentation of the self, and a preoccupation with Germany. Their viewpoints were iconoclastic, antidogmatic, and antiestablishment. The works of both dramatists display a splintering of dramatic continuity; in this manner, they depict problems of the subject in and the fragmentation of the world, in one case nineteenth century, in the other modern and then postmodern. Parallels between the two dramatists do abound. Might the modern playwright Heiner Müller, then, be able to provide us with some new insight into Wagner's *Tristan* drama, and the possible meaning it does and doesn't have for our present-day age?

The Staging: Collars, Armor, and Desolation; or, Something is Rotten in Bayreuth

The production, upon first viewing, seems a shockingly avant-garde staging of Wagner's drama. The staging makes use of vibrant colors for the first two acts: reddish hues for the first, and blue for the second. The third act is distinguished by dingy gray. The hair of the protagonists matches the color scheme of each act: golden yellow and red, blue, or ashy gray. The first-act set is laid out geometrically, as though in a box, with the inner stage area a smaller box within the larger, creating a claustrophobic impression. The singers wear simple robes, and neck harnesses, supposedly to show they are yoked

to the societal world in which they belong. They look like dog collars, or, because they are plastic and tubular, IV apparatuses or breathing tubes. After they drink the potion, the lovers yank theirs off.

The second act takes place in an armory containing rows upon rows of metal breastplates. Isolde, now in a blue gown, struts around eagerly awaiting Tristan's arrival, waving her shoes around. Tristan arrives walking backward. They rush toward each other, then recoil as though magnetically repelled. They then dash to opposite ends of the armory, the one walking backward while the other walks forward. They sing the love duet standing next to each other in the center. When the king enters, his harness it lit up. Moreover, at the end of the act, after Tristan has been wounded, the stage is bathed in red light emanating from Melot's harness.

The third act is one of the most unsettling and hideous sights that I have ever seen in an opera staging. The stage and everything on it is covered in gray shattered cement. On the left is an easy chair, with a sheet draped over it. Tristan is slumped in the chair, so deeply that he cannot be detected until he moves. He seems petrified, and the impression is ghastly. Everyone is wearing rags. Tristan looks truly moribund, Kurwenal's hair is frizzed to make an eerie impression, and the Shepherd sits at the back of the stage, for the most part motionless, wearing sunglasses. Isolde enters in a shabby fur coat, and sings the "Liebestod" motionless, with the curtain falling as Tristan lies in the dust. Nobody is wearing a collar anymore. The end of Romantic illusions? The end of civilization?

Though visually intriguing and musically superb, the video is nonetheless very unsettling. The viewer has an uneasy sense that something is not right, and that huge discrepancies abound here. According to the traditional interpretation of the drama, the protagonists are supposed to be in love. Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* is considered the height of Romanticism in music. Then why stage it in this manner? And what are the possible advantages and disadvantages of this staging? By taking a detour through one of Müller's most important dramas, I hope to provide some information and ideas that might prove useful for discussing these questions.

Postmodern Postwar Drama: Heiner Müller, Die Hamletmaschine

To sort out Müller's *Tristan und Isolde* staging, I would like to focus attention on the *Hamletmaschine* of Heiner Müller, and the possible relations it has to Wagner's quintessential Romantic musicdrama. Both works under discussion in this section present modern reworkings of older material, and in doing

so they reinvent the genre of drama. In *Tristan und Isolde* the action is internal. In his article "Tristans Schweigen," Hans Mayer writes that the basis of traditional drama is dialogue, but that in Wagner's *Tristan*, though the title pair discourse at length, the speech of one character never reaches the other. In the first act, Isolde's monologue rehashes the backstory of the drama, though she never comes to terms with what has happened; in her scene with Tristan, the two are at odds with each other. In the second act, the union of the lovers is expressed by an echoing and repetition of each other's singing. The third act consists of another monologue, that of Tristan in his delirium. Like Isolde in the first act, he recounts at length what has happened before the drama began.[1] Taking another slant on the nontraditional nature of the work, Peter Wapnewski explains that even though the trappings of *Tristan* are medieval, the content of the work is really very nineteenth-century, anticipating some modern currents of ideas such as Freudian psychology.[2]

Heiner Müller is also concerned with creating a new kind of drama, but he accomplishes his purposes in a much more radical way. Just as Wagner reworked Gottfried's romance to form his nineteenth-century music drama, Müller bases his *Hamletmaschine* on Shakespeare's famous play. Scholars consider Müller's *Hamletmaschine* an important document of German postwar despair.[3]The text has a fragmentary form. It lacks dramatic action; rather, it consists of bits and pieces of character constellations, details, and aspects of the Shakespeare drama upon which it is based. At times the lines of the text run into each other with no clear indication of who the speaker is. It deals, Norbert Eke writes, with the question of the author and his social and artistic responsibility.

The play opens with a scene entitled "Family Album," underscoring that the drama consists of remembrance and self-explication of a first-person protagonist. Just as the prehistory of *Tristan* weighs upon the characters, the family album of Müller's play, which thematizes the past. The Hamlet figure states "Ich war Hamlet. Ich stand an der Küste und redete mit der Brandung. BLABLA."[I was Hamlet. I stood on the shore and talked with the breakers.][4] Norbert Eke describes this as "artificial retrodiscourse," the artificiality of which is underscored by the play being based upon a literary model, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The land is ruined, and Hamlet's speech is a meaningless

2. See: Peter Wapnewski, *Tristan der Held Richard Wagners* (Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1981), pp. 49–59.

3. I have based this discussion of the play on the excellent analysis by Norbert Otto Eke, *Heiner Müller: Apokalypse und Utopie* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1989), pp. 71–107.

4. All quotations from the play have been taken from the edition by Theo Girshausen, *Die Hamletmaschine: Heiner Müllers Endspiel* (Cologne: Prometh, 1979). Citations will be given within my text by page numbers, preceded by the abbreviation HM. All translations are my own; I have preserved the typographical anomalies of the text, such as capitals and italics for stage directions. Here cited from p. 11.

babble. Claudius's funeral procession passes by. In a grim variation of a quotation from the prototype, the Second Clown pronounces, "SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THIS AGE OF HOPE" (HM 11).

The lines of the characters frequently express a conscious reflection of actors on their roles. The Hamlet figure gives a grotesque slant on the incidents in the prototype as he says, when the ghost approaches, "Hier kommt das Gespenst das mich gemacht hat, das Beil noch im Schädel" (HM 11) [Here comes the ghost that made me, the axe still in his skull]. When Horatio enters, the Hamlet figure tells him, "DU KOMMST ZU SPÄT MEIN FREUND FÜR DEINE GAGE/KEIN PLATZ FÜR DICH IN MEINEM TRAUERSPIEL" (HM 13) [You have arrived too late for your payment / There is no place for you in my tragedy] The Hamlet figures says, "Ich wusste, dass du ein Schauspieler bist. Ich bin es auch, ich spiele Hamlet" (HM 13) [I knew that you were an actor. So am I, I play Hamlet.] The day/night imagery that one finds in Wagner's text is oddly distorted in this play. Whereas Isolde asks, "Doch der Tag / muss Tristan wecken?" [Nevertheless the day/ must Tristan awaken?], Müller's version of Hamlet states, "Der Morgen findet nicht mehr statt." (HM 13) [Tomorrow will not take place].

Scene 3, with the heading "Scherzo," takes place at the University of the Dead. The setting is a cemetery, and according to the stage directions, from their gravestones the dead philosophers are throwing their books on Hamlet. Thus the scene represents a rejection of philosophy and expresses the insufficiency of intellectual pursuits. Whereas Wagner's drama documents his revision of Schopenhauer's theory, Müller doesn't revise, he simply annihilates. Scene 4, set among the uprising in Hungary thematizes the confrontation between art and reality, drama and political action. Hamlet removes his mask and costume. He rejects his role, and speaks of his drama in the conditional: what his drama would be like if it were to take place. He states, "Ich bin nicht Hamlet. Ich spiele keine Rolle mehr. Meine Worte haben mir nichts mehr zu sagen. Meine Gedanken saugen den Bildern das Blut aus. Mein Drama findet nicht mehr statt. Hinter mir wird die Dekoration aufgebaut. Von Leuten, die mein Drama nicht interessiert, für Leute, die es nichts angeht. Mich interessiert es auch nicht mehr. Ich spiele nicht mehr mit." (HM 17) [I am not Hamlet. I won't play a role anymore. My words have nothing more to say to me. My thoughts suck the blood out of the images. My drama won't take place any longer. Behind me the sets are being taken down. By people who aren't interested in my drama, for people who have nothing to do with it. It doesn't interest me anymore either. I won't play along anymore.]

Hamlet wants to go home. He even denies that his drama has taken place;

"Mein Drama hat nicht stattgefunden. Das Textbuch ist verlorengegangen. Die Schauspieler haben ihre Gesichter an den Nagel in der Garderobe gehängt" (HM 19). [My drama did not take place. The script has been lost. The actors have hung their masks on the nails in the dressing room.] Later in the scene a photograph of the author is ripped apart. Roles are then changed; the protagonist says, "ICH WAR MACBETH" [I was Macbeth] (HM 21). The setting is then the Ice Age; the stage features a refrigerator, and the splitting of the heads of Marx and Lenin takes place. In a line that seems almost emblematic of the play as a whole, the heads of Marx, Lenin, and Mao state, in unison, "ES GILT ALLE VERHÄLTNISSE UMZUWERFEN, IN DENEN DER MENSCH... *Hamletdarsteller legt Kostüm und Maske an.*" (HM 21; ellipsis in original) [It is a matter of overthrowing all relationships in which human beings... The actor who plays Hamlet puts on his costume and mask].

Scholars often discuss Wagner's dramas in terms of gender dichotomy; the female protagonists in Wagner's operas are often the subject of discussion; many interpreters have written about the gender dichotomy in these operas and the image of the woman as emancipated and strong-willed or victim, Madonna or whore; the examples of Kundry and Brünnhilde come most readily to mind. Similarly, the *Hamletmaschine* presents a new version of the Ophelia figure that is appropriate to this work. In the second scene, she introduces herself with, "Ich bin Ophelia. Die der Fluss nicht behalten hat." (HM 15) [I am Ophelia, who was not contained by the river]. Tristan and Isolde swap identities in their second-act duet; Hamlet and Ophelia trade roles in another way. In the third scene, Ophelia removes her clothes, and Hamlet expresses his desire to be a woman. In this scene[5], which centers on Ophelia, the drama transforms the female victim-become-speaker to first a crazed fury thirsting for revenge, and then a bitter, mute, and helpless cripple. Her identity has changed; "Hier spricht Elektra." (HM 23) [Here speaks Elektra.]

In a bizarre reversal of the natural order, she proclaims, as some postmodern kind of sinister earth-goddess, "Ich nehme die Welt zurück, die ich geboren habe" (HM 23) [I take back the world that I have given birth to.] Her definitive pronouncement offers a depressive view of human existence: "Es lebe der Hass, die Verachtung, der Aufstand, der Tod." (HM 23) [Long live hatred, scorn, rebellion and death]. Rather than representing transcendence, she expresses all that is negative. Ophelia has doctors at her side.

The men leave and at the end of the play, Ophelia remains alone on stage, in a wheelchair, wrapped in bandages. Thus the play concludes with a grim

5. Cited from: Heiner Müller, *Werk 8*, edited by Frank Hörnigk (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), pp. 443–50. Page numbers will be given within my text, preceded by the abbreviation AG.

commentary on the failure of hope in the postwar age and the loss of all illusions of future Socialist utopias.

The *Tristan Machine;* or, What does *Hamlet* have to do with *Tristan*?

Müller's *Hamletmaschine* can somehow hold the key to understanding his *Tristan* staging. More important than the parallels between these two works is to understand how Müller's own dramaturgy as a playwright influences his Bayreuth staging of Wagner's drama. Müller understood his own work in a dialectical relationship to tradition. As far as Müller was concerned, writing for the future involved dealing with works of the past. In writing his plays, he engaged in what he termed a "dialogue with the dead." I suggest a parallel between what Müller has done to *Hamlet* in writing his *Hamletmaschine* and what he has done with *Tristan und Isolde* in staging the work in Bayreuth. Müller flies in the face of the traditional understanding and staging of Wagner's music-drama for important reasons of his own. With this staging, Heiner Müller does the same thing to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* that he does to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in writing his *Hamletmaschine.* A play based on a prototype presents a new understanding of the traditional drama; similarly, such a revision forces the audience to experience the familiar work of art in a new way. A staging is an interpretation, and it creates what one could call a new work of art, like a drama based on a traditional source material. I would suggest that in this Bayreuth production, *Tristan und Isolde* is staged as what I would call the *Tristan Machine.*

Some of Müller's own thoughts prove enlightening in this discussion. In a conversation about his *Tristan* production titled "Angst und Geometrie," Müller outlines some of his ideas about Wagner and his theater, and hints at what he wanted to accomplish with his Bayreuth staging.[5] He speaks of the overwhelming weight of Bayreuth tradition, and his ideas seem to recall comments that Wagner made, late in his life and disappointed with the stagings of his works, that he wished he could invent the invisible theater. Counter to what Wagner theorized, Müller recommends the separation of the elements, not the reunion of the arts. In this manner, he dismantles Wagner's total work of art. Müller writes: "Wünschenswert wäre, dass man in Bayreuth bestimmte Festlegungen, Konventionen und Traditionen überwindet. Oft resultiert ja eine unfreiwillige Komik aus dem Zwang der Sänger, Schauspieler zu sein. Man könnte sich bei Wagners Opern sehr gut denken, dass die Sänger sich überhaupt nicht bewegen und Schauspieler spielen und die Sänger nur singen, also eine Trennung der Elemente im 'Gesamtkunstwerk' vollzogen wird.

Dieser Einfall kommt vielleicht aus einem Überdruss an traditionellen Inszenierungen. Das Gesamtkunstwerk selbst setzt die Trennung der Elemente voraus." (AG 44) [It would be good if they could overcome rigid conventions and traditions in Bayreuth. An unintentional comedy often results from the singers trying to be actors. One could imagine the singers in Wagner's operas not moving at all, and actors acting, with the singers merely singing, that is, a separation of the elements of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This idea probably comes from a weariness of traditional stagings. The total work of art in itself presupposes a separation of the arts.] Like Wagner and Nietzsche, Müller places his dramaturgy of music-drama within the tradition of Greek tragedy, but Müller has new ideas about this as well. "Die Musik übernimmt bei Wagner die Funktion der Maske in der griechischen Tragödie. Die Masken waren notwendig, weil in der antiken Tragödie nur Tote agierten." (AG 445) [Wagner's music assumes the function of the mask in Greek tragedy. The masks were necessary because in ancient tragedy it was only dead people who acted.] Wagner wrote about reuniting the arts that with the demise of Greek tragedy and the rise of the modern world became separated; according to Nietzsche, in the Wagnerian rebirth of tragedy, the Dionysiac chorus represents itself visibly onstage by Apollonian images; Müller writes about the dichotomy of anxiety and geometry.

According to Müller, it is impossible to depict scenically what is happening in *Tristan und Isolde* due to the lack of stage action. Rather, it is about the relationship of anxiety and geometry, and this constitutes the essential tension of the theater. "Eine Illustrierung des *Tristan und Isolde* ist nicht möglich. Es geht eher um das Verhältnis von Angst und Geometrie, um Geometrisierung, sogar Kanalisierung." (AG 448) [It is not possible to visually depict *Tristan und Isolde*. Rather it is a matter of the relationship between anxiety and geometry; the drama must be made geometrical; that is, it needs to be contained, controlled.] Müller uses a kind of Brechtian alienation concept. He feels that the audience is accustomed to responding to Wagner's works in a certain way; the director should change this, and make them experience these works anew. The director must not allow the audience to identify with Tristan and Isolde. The audience reception has become preprogrammed; Müller wants to shake people up.

Furthermore, he expresses ideas about the possible death of the audience that can be effectively juxtaposed with comparable statements by both Wagner and Nietzsche. Each has theories about how and why an audience can be killed off by *Tristan und Isolde*. Wagner expresses in a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck (Lucerne, April 1859) that he fears that a good performance of the

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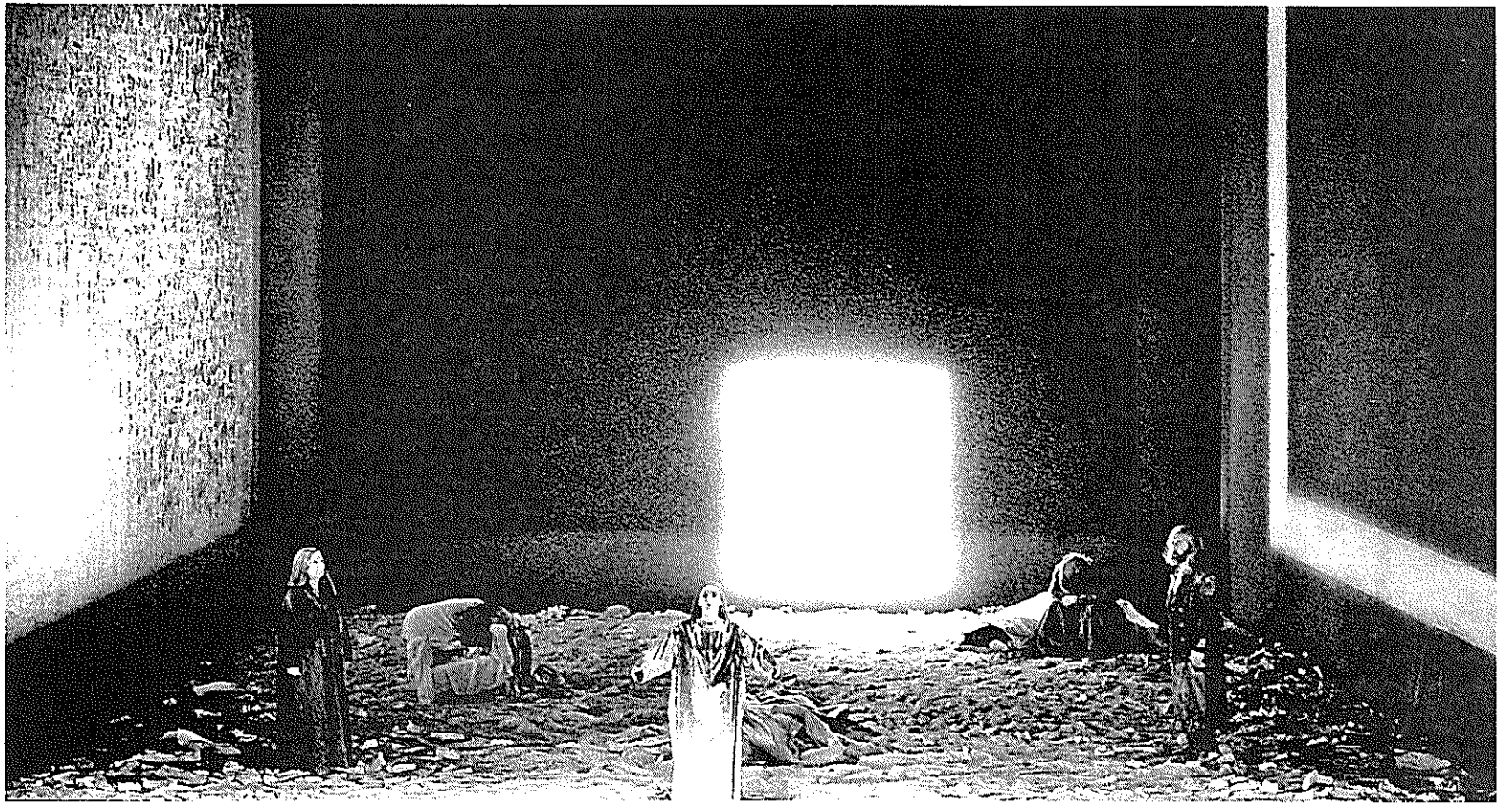

The final scene of the drama takes place in a barren and dreary landscape of dust and ruin. Dressed in a gold gown, Isolde sings the Liebestod while standing very still, and a square-shaped opening in the back of the stage glows.

work would be devastating to the audience. In reference to the third act, he writes: "Ich fürchte, die Oper wird verboten—falls durch schlechte Aufführung nicht das Ganze parodiert wird—: nur mittelmässige Aufführungen können mich retten! Vollständig *gute* müssen die Leute verrückt machen—ich kann mir's nicht anders denken." [6] [I fear the opera will be forbidden—as long as it is not made into a parody by bad performances; only mediocre ones can save me! Really good ones will drive the audience mad; I can't envision any other possibility.]

Friedrich Nietzsche works the audience reception of this music drama into his theory of the rebirth of tragedy, and the necessity of using words to veil the Dionysian frenzy of the music; he expounds on what would happen to an audience experiencing the third act of *Tristan und Isolde* without words and images in his *Geburt der Tragödie*. The danger of a good performance can be mitigated by verbal language, and the audience can be saved. In his usual bombastic style, Nietzsche rhetorically asks those hypothetical few who truly understand music:

> An diese ächten Musiker richt ich die Frage, ob sie sich einen Menschen denken können, der den dritten Act von "Tristan und Isolde" ohne alle Beihülfe von Wort und Bild rein als ungeheuren symphonischen Satz zu percipiren im Stande wäre, ohne unter einem krampfartigen Ausspannen aller Seelenflügel zu verathmen? Ein Mensch, der wie hier das Ohr gleichsam an die Herzkammer des Weltwillens gelegt hat, der das rasende Begehren zum Dasein als donnernden Strom oder als zartesten zerstäubten Bach von hier aus in alle Adern der Welt sich ergiessen fühlt, er sollte nicht jählings zerbrechen? [7]

[To these genuine musicians I will pose the question, whether they can imagine a person hearing the third act of *Tristan und Isolde* symphonically, without the help of the words and the stage action, without dying from a spasm of the soul? A person who could press his ear directly on the World Will, who feels that raving desire as a thundering stream or gentle brook pour itself into all veins; wouldn't he just collapse?]

Such a person hears the World-Will directly, and it would not be tolerable. Whereas Nietzsche and Wagner felt that *Tristan* was a dangerous work because it communicated metaphysical insights that the audience would not be able to tolerate, Müller views a detrimental effect to be a good thing, and

6. Cited from: Richard Wagner, *Briefe*, edited by Hanjo Kesting (Munich: Piper, 1983), p. 379.

7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, in *Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, part 3, vol. 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), p. 131.

prefers that the audience not be rescued. Rather, he wants to figuratively bury them. This, according to Müller, is what an appropriate production of *Tristan und Isolde* would accomplish.

> Die meisten Besucher glauben, dass das, was in Musik und Oper verhandelt wird, frühestens nach ihrem Tode gilt. Die Musik teilt das mit, auch das ist ein Geheimnis der Wirkung von 'Tristan'. Die Mitteilung der Musik ist: Mein Reich ist nicht von dieser Welt, nicht von eurer Welt—deshalb die Gier danach gerade bei denjenigen, die nie Zugang haben werden zu dieser Welt, von der gesungen und gesprochen wird. Eine gelungene Aufführung von *Tristan und Isolde* wäre eine gelungene Beerdigung des Publikums, eine Verabschiedung von diesem Publikum. (AG 448)

[Most audience members believe that what they have experienced on stage will take place at the earliest after they are dead. This is communicated by the music; that too is one of the mysteries of *Tristan*. The music says: My kingdom is not of this world, not of your world—therefore the curiosity of those that will never be admitted to the world that is being sung and spoken about. A successful performance of *Tristan und Isolde* would be a burial of the audience, thus a farewell to this audience.]

Changing the audience presupposes a new way of performing *Tristan*. In his Bayreuth production, Müller very effectively accomplishes his intention of restaging *Tristan* in a way that alienates and thus reprograms the audience.

Müller has separated the elements that Wagner reunited in his total work of art. Moreover, instead of drawing the audience into the emotional experience of the work, he deliberately appeals to the intellect and alienates them from the work. The drama is not dramatic. Moreover, it is directly opposed to what the audience expects from a performance of this work. The entire production undermines the notion of authorship and canonical works. Jonathan Kalb writes, "Like Brecht and other GDR writers who took their cues from him, Müller refused to revere any classical text on principle and sought to establish benevolently destructive relationships with canonical works that he thought euphemized or disguised barbaric historical realities." [8] Müller's production of *Tristan* clearly expresses the same sentiment as Hamlet removing his mask and the photograph of the author being ripped apart. In a discussion of this staging Theresia Birkenhauer comments on how the production features singers who do not act, a set in which nothing happens, and a visual presentation that fails to scenically represent the emotions expressed in the

8. Jonathan Kalb, *The Theater of Heiner Müller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 88.

music.[9] In this manner, Müller takes a broad swipe at Wagner's emphasis on drama and the scenic element as an essential part of the total work of art.

The primary way that this staging presents us with what I am calling the *Tristan Machine* is in the emphasis on role-playing. The plastic collars are costume devices that make the notion of role-playing visual; in the first act these indicate that the protagonists reluctantly and self-consciously act these roles according to Wagner's day-night schema, blatantly thematizing the contrast between societal reality and the inner world. They are subjects of the "day" world; Marke is king, therefore his collar is lit up. Melot's beams red, to indicate his dramatic role of betraying Tristan to Marke; the visual effect is schematic, almost allegorical. Furthermore, just as the Hamlet figure in Müller's *Hamletmaschine* is no longer playing Hamlet, at least not in the sense in which the character in the Shakespeare play is traditionally understood, the characters in Müller's staging of *Tristan und Isolde* are no longer the same ones we are accustomed to. Without having changed the music or the words, Müller has made Wagner's drama into a radically different work. In Müller's staging the settings of the acts of *Tristan* differ from what Wagner intended—just as the *Hamletmaschine* does not take place in Elizabethan court society. As depicted in Müller's Bayreuth staging, the locales in which *Tristan* takes place are abstract; the first act features boxes in boxes, with little indication of being on a ship. The concepts of day and night, which the lovers discourse at length upon, have little meaning when the act takes place in an armory instead of a garden. In Müller's production, the third act has apocalyptic implications; when the action is frozen at key climaxes, Tristan's delirium becomes nothing but a psychodrama.

Furthermore, in many individual details Müller subtly undermines the traditional interpretation of *Tristan und Isolde*. The collars that the singers wear in the first act depict their enslavement to a societal norm, thus obviating any legendary setting or mythical otherworldly aura. It seems highly incongruous for an armory, which connotes war, to serve as the setting for the love duet in the second act. The message in this seems to be that in a world that is going to ruin, it's nonsense to discourse on Schopenhauer or other dead philosophers. Birkenhauer likens the appearance of this armory, with the rows of breastplates, to a cemetery. Moreover, the protagonists' zigzagging or crisscrossing through the armory depicts the impossibility of any true togetherness of the lovers (see Birkenhauer, p. 334). The alienating contrast between the visual and the musical makes a powerful statement on the irrelevance of Romanti-

9. Theresia Birkenhauer, in *Heiner Müller Handbuch: Leben, Werk, Wirkung*, ed. Hans-Thies Lehmann and Patrick Primavesi (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), p. 333.

cism to the modern world when, during Brangäne's warning, the camera pans through a blurred-out armory.

Müller's staging of the third act clearly conveys that Tristan's imaginings are delusions; death is not beautiful, it's hideous. Here the influence of modern theater is most apparent. Jonathan Kalb explains the setting with reference to Samuel Beckett's play *Endgame*, in which nonsensical dialogue of characters is carried on in ashbins. According to Kalb, Müller alludes to this Beckett play, "strongly reinforcing the seriocomic impression left by the other two acts that this romantic hero's death-wish amounted to a histrionic conceit" (Kalb 168). In this manner Müller's staging movingly depicts the isolation of Tristan in his sick delirium, making the ordeal into a psychodrama that is pathologically at odds with any outer reality. As he sifts his hand through shattered cement dust, Tristan asks Kurwenal, "Bin ich in Kornwall?" [Am I in Cornwall?] Kurwenal replies that he is in Kareol, but in Müller's staging, it seems he is in neither Cornwall nor Kareol, but in some postmodern theater landscape. Thus Müller has emptied the drama of all former meaning. Isolde's "Liebestod" traditionally signifies transfiguration, release, and redemption; at the end of Müller's play, Ophelia is shackled by bandages. The play concludes with unabated pessimism. The end of the Bayreuth production features Waltraud Meier standing motionless, surrounded by forsaken survivors of a disaster. Is Isolde distressingly similar to Ophelia here?

Reviews of this production have quoted Müller's statement, "Nobody really yearns for death." [10] In de-romanticizing the setting for Tristan's sick delirium, for example, Müller has very movingly depicted the interior emotional and psychic struggles of a human being of any time or setting; in fact, the eerie outward setting somehow sets the inside turmoil in greater relief. Has Heiner Müller done Richard Wagner a disservice? Has Müller's "dialogue with the dead" been a very productive one, or is it an irresolvable argument? Is there value, in our day and age, in having a Tristan character who does not play Tristan? The discrepancies between the two dramatists remain, and in some way they have enriched each other.

— Mary A. Cicora

10. See, for example: "Unitel Highlights: Controlled Ecstasy," to be found at: www.unitel.de/unitel_homepage/unitel/utilities/1997/041597.htm," and John Rockwell, "A New 'Tristan' Gives 'Ring'-Less Bayreuth Plenty to Talk About," at: query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpagehtml?res=980CE6DE1538F93BA15754C0A965958260.

A Wagner Boot Camp

Jane Eaglen Tells of Training the Next Generation

In 2011, Baldwin-Wallace University announced that it was launching a summer training program dubbed "Wagner Intensive." Baldwin-Wallace University is a small liberal arts school in Berea, Ohio—close to Cleveland. It boasts a Music Conservatory and one of the best musical theater programs in the Midwest.

"Wagner Intensive" was the brain child of soprano turned Baldwin-Wallace professor, Jane Eaglen, together with her colleague at Baldwin-Wallace, helden tenor Professor Timothy Mussard (Seattle Opera and Australian Opera).

During the inaugural year (2010), Ms. Eaglen and Professor Mussard were joined by conductor William Vendice (Los Angeles Opera, Metropolitan Opera), Eric Weimer (Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, plus experience coaching thirteen complete *Ring* cycles) and for 2011 mezzo-soprano Nancy Maultsby (Seattle Opera). In 2012 bass-baritone Gordon Hawkins (San Francisco Opera, Metropolitan Opera) was a guest instructor.

When this program was announced, the Wagner Society of Northern California Board of Directors immediately recognized that such a specifically Wagner-oriented plan was tailor made for a scholarship grant from the Society's William O. Cord Memorial Grant Fund. Full tuition scholarships were made both years of the "Wagner Intensive." For 2012 the grant was designated as "The Wagner Society of Northern California, Steve Sokolow Memorial Scholarship."

Now that Baldwin-Wallace completed its second "Wagner Intensive" last August, the Wagner Society of Northern California contacted Jane Eaglen for more details about the program, its inception and what the future holds for

this unique Wagner "boot camp." She graciously agreed to be interviewed in a series of e-mail exchanges tucked into her busy schedule:

Terri Stuart: "Wagner Intensive" is a truly unique program; what was it that moved you and Dr. Mussard to found it and at Baldwin-Wallace?

Jane Eaglen: When I first arrived at Baldwin-Wallace, Tim [Dr. Timothy Mussard] mentioned that he would like to start something like this. I had also wanted to have some sort of Wagner summer school, but coming to Baldwin-Wallace meant that there was a place for it to happen. It really was Tim's idea and then the Outreach Department at Baldwin-Wallace made it happen. There is nothing like it anywhere in the world as far as we know, so it was something we felt was needed.

TS: What is the greatest challenge of organizing and successfully launching such an enterprise?

JE: There were many things that, at the time, you don't even realize that you have to plan for with such a program. Luckily, the Outreach coordinators were able to deal with the practical things like where the singers stay and what they eat. One of the hardest things is picking the scenes we are going to work on and deciding which singers will be in them. Tim and I directed the scenes (which is new to both of us), but we wanted to offer our stage experiences to the singers and to show them how Wagner drama is different from other opera. I didn't expect to be creating the Norns' rope out of paper and colored ribbon—or blowing up the beach balls of my Walküres!

TS: I notice that your faculty is a group of extremely busy artists; how have you attracted these esteemed colleagues to help with the Wagner Intensive Academy?

JE: Luckily, most people want to pass on their experiences so we were able to go to some very talented people who were only too happy to join us. We wanted to offer the singers the best we could in the Wagnerian field.

TS: How do you select the artists you welcome to participate?

JE: Some came to Baldwin-Wallace to audition, and some sent in video clips on line. It's difficult when you only hear someone on line and so we are hoping that in coming years we will be able to offer auditions in New York and eventually on the West Coast, too.

TS: The participants come to you with years of training, but from the feed-

back from the participants, what types of additional training or new techniques are these artists taking away with them?

JE: Most of the participants have had limited work with Wagner. They may have sung a few arias, but almost none have performed a scene. We are able to offer them a chance to do that and to sing with colleagues who also have larger voices, which again is something they rarely get to do. We offer them German coaching, voice lessons, musical coaching and acting, all with the emphasis on Wagner. The feedback we have from the singers is amazing, and we are thrilled that they are able to get so much from the program.

TS: Are there any other aspects of "Wagner Intensive" that might be of interest to our readers?

JE: We did consider calling it "Wagner Boot Camp," because the intense training and work that the singers do, does feel a little like that. But I believe without exception that the singers leave knowing more about Wagner and more about how to approach working in this *fach* [area]. We have high hopes for the future of the program, hoping eventually to be able to work with an orchestra. We hope to continue encouraging young Wagner voices—singers who have so few opportunities to learn their craft—so that the next generation of Wagnerians can continue the great tradition of the past.

TS: So what are the results of this careful selection process and rigorous training? We at the Wagner Society received reactions from two of the participants in the 2012 "Wagner Intensive." Participant Jeremy Inland wrote us, "Working with world class coaches and vocal instructors was as informative and productive as it sounds! For me, this opportunity was something that I would have not had without your funding and support. Because of this festival, I am able to more fully pursue the dream of a Wagnerian vocal career. I am eternally grateful for your donation."

Soprano Kirsten Hart wrote, "I cannot begin to express my gratitude for the incredible gift you gave me. As a young opera singer with little money, I have often found myself not auditioning simply because I could not afford to go. This incredible program has changed my life. I learned so much during this program and could hear an improvement in my voice by the final concert. I am honored and eternally grateful for this opportunity. Thank you!"

Two members of the Wagner Society of Northern California who reside in Ohio (and were in the audience for some of the concerts) reported back:

Jean Scarr wrote, "With only piano accompaniment and a minimum of props, these singers were able to create a very convincing portrayal of the

heroes and heroines in eight of Wagner's works. The afternoon/evening concerts were ended with a two piano and eight singer rendition of the 'Ride of the Valkyries.' Four U.S. Wagner Societies provided scholarship help to the singers [Wagner Society of Northern California, Wagner Society of Ohio, with additional funding from the New York Wagner Society and the Boston Wagner Society]."

Steve Charitan wrote, "It is a real thrill to sit in an audience and watch these young singers become possessed by the spirit of Wagner's music and drama. With few props, sensitive coaching by Jane and her team (and sometimes more commitment than I have seen on some of the greatest stages) Brünnhilde, Wotan, Ortrud, Elsa, Siegfried and Rienzi spring to new life in a way I would never have thought possible without the resources of a major house behind them. The grand finale, staged by Jane Eaglen, was one of the most sumptuously voiced gatherings of the 'Walküre Girls' I have ever experienced—all of them sounding like stars in the making."

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The Wagner Society congratulates Jane Eaglen, Timothey Mussard and their team. We wish them continued success and growth of this important training program.

—Terri Stuart

The Editor's Thoughts

(Continued from page 4)

form only to make the point, that believing *all* these things about the *Ring* to be true, I have not endeavored to translate it with special reference to any one of them. This is not a particular 'interpretation'. Such interpretations—usually they are the work of ambitious producers, who have determined to disassemble the components of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—can cast exciting new light on aspects of the work. They can be maddening. And, however brilliant, they are achieved only by diminishing the force and richness of the whole."

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