

***Wagner's Parsifal. Studies in Musical Genesis, Structure, and Interpretation.* By William Kinderman. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.**

Review by William M. Marvin

In 1985, Oxford University Press launched *Studies in Musical Genesis, Structure, and Interpretation* with Philip Gossett's *Anna Bolena and the Artistic Maturity of Gaetano Donizetti*. Authors in this distinguished series explore the origins and backgrounds of major compositions, and thus inform our understanding of compositional process in combination with analysis, reception, and interpretation of the score. Operatic masterworks have figured prominently within the series, which also includes studies of Weber's *Euryanthe* (Tusa 1991), Wagner's *Das Rheingold* (Darcy 1993) and *Parsifal* (the volume under review), Strauss's *Elektra* (Gilliam 1991), and Berg's *Wozzeck* (Hall 2011).

Parsifal is an appropriate choice for Oxford's series. Primary and secondary period sources are numerous and informative for this work, and they span virtually the entirety of Wagner's professional career. *Parsifal* also offers opportunities to explore questions of ideology, both of the composer and of interpreters in the production and reception history of the work. William Kinderman takes great advantage of these possibilities to make sense of an exceptionally complex reception history and a forbiddingly large bibliography. Kinderman has lectured and published numerous articles devoted to Wagner's music dramas, and *Parsifal* in particular, over a period of 25 years, but the book under review is an original contribution, with minimal recycling from earlier publications.

The book is organized in three parts. The opening Prelude, entitled "*Parsifal* as Art and Ideology," focuses on the reception and production history of the opera from its first production in 1882 through World War 2. Part 1, "The Process of Composition," presents research on primary sources related to the origins of the dramatic scenario, poetic setting, and musical material. Much of the information in this section, including numerous transcriptions of musical sketches, is unavailable elsewhere. Part 2, "Musical Form

and Dramatic Meaning,” examines the score and notable stagings and performances since the work’s premiere.

Kinderman assumes a sophisticated and narrowly defined readership here: readers are expected to be deeply acquainted with the opera and with the vast biographical, musicological, and theoretical literature devoted to Wagner and his works. Some of his assumptions may slow the comprehension even of seasoned scholars: for example, there is no table of *Leitmotive* provided, and readers are often referred to a specific motive by its “traditional” name. Since Wagner did not name the *Leitmotive* himself, and since secondary sources don’t always agree about the labels, it might have been helpful to refer readers to a specific source. More troubling is the inconsistent reference to score measure numbers in many sections of the book: readers who wish to verify analytic statements often have little to go on in order to find what Kinderman is referring to in his close readings.

The sketch transcriptions in Part 1 of the book are revelatory, and they represent a major contribution to our understanding of Wagner’s working method. Building on the work of Otto Strobel, Robert Bailey, John Deathridge, and others, Kinderman argues forcefully and persuasively that the earlier, shorter sketches of individual themes and passages are far more informative about Wagner’s working methods than are the through-composed composition draft or orchestral draft. Kinderman’s transcriptions reveal that Wagner initially conceived of his themes in traditional sentence and period forms, often with regular 4-bar hypermeter and conventional cadences. These prototypical versions of the thematic material have obvious implications for listeners and scholars interested in the mechanics of Wagner’s “endless melody,” and the technical bases for his evasion of closure. The prototypes allow us to see exactly where and how individual phrases in the completed work have been expanded, truncated, or otherwise altered. The material presented here will be of great use to future scholars of *Parsifal* and the earlier music dramas.

Readers of this journal will most likely be interested in the analytic approach and conclusions drawn about *Parsifal* as found in Part 2 of the book. The remainder of this review will focus on these issues, which have some bearing on Kinderman’s

musicological and interpretive work. My discussion will focus first on approaches to musical form, and then on questions of harmony and key association. By interrogating Kinderman's chosen tools for analysis, I hope to suggest options for continued exploration of *Parsifal* and other music dramas.

A recurring trope in Kinderman's book (and in Wagnerian analytic research more generally) is his attempt to discredit the work of Alfred Lorenz, whose four-volume study of Wagner's seven mature music dramas still represents the most substantial, yet insufficiently digested, body of analytic data on Wagner's output.¹ Kinderman references Lorenz frequently in this volume, and almost invariably with an intent to disparage both his analytic method and his conclusions. Readers are given early warning of Lorenz's inadequacy on pp. 4–5, but the heart of Kinderman's critique is to be found in a close reading of Lorenz's analysis of the Prelude and opening measures of the music drama (Act I, mm. 1–146; Schirmer 1/1/1–9/4/6).² Kinderman's objections to Lorenz are numerous and substantial. First, Lorenz ignores sketches and the genesis of the work, opting for an interpretation of the published score. Second, his formal method of parsing the score into micro- and macro- *Bar* and *Bogen* forms is inflexible and based on ad-hoc criteria. Third, his political affiliations render both the method and the analyses suspect. Finally, Kinderman asserts that individual readings of specific scenes and moments in the opera are objectively incorrect. It is difficult to argue with Kinderman's global assessments, yet one may also sense that Lorenz's study has not been sufficiently examined, and that there may be important insights within his work that remain insufficiently acknowledged in North American scholarship. Indeed, the close reading of the Prelude and opening scene of *Parsifal* is the only portion of

¹ See Lorenz 1924–1933 (1966). The most significant study of Lorenz in English is McClatchie 1998.

² It is conventional to refer to measures numbered consecutively within each act of Wagner's operas, and also to refer readers to the widely available Schirmer piano-vocal scores, using the format x/y/z to reference page/system/measure within the appropriate volume. Kinderman does not use the Schirmer score references, and is inconsistent in his use of measure numbers throughout the volume.

Lorenz's work that merits a sustained discussion in Kinderman's book.

As mentioned above, dismissal of Lorenz is a regular feature of Wagnerian analysis. However, readers should expect a better methodology to be offered in place of what has been rejected. Kinderman's formal readings are based on an interpretation of some of Robert Bailey's ideas, most notably associative tonality and tonal pairing.³ This is not surprising, as Kinderman's earlier analytic work is deeply invested in this approach, most notably in the collection Kinderman and Krebs 1996. Again, Kinderman assumes the reader will be broadly familiar with Bailey's work and with more recent applications of it. The approach is not without controversy; Robert Morgan's 1999 review-essay of Kinderman and Krebs' collection expresses grave reservations about the explanatory power of tonal pairing as an analytic concept. Unfortunately, Kinderman's applications do not address or acknowledge Morgan's concerns, and Morgan's work does not appear in the present volume's bibliography. The debate is far from settled; Peter Smith has recently demonstrated that the concept can uncover meaningful relationships even in monotonal contexts.⁴

It appears that Kinderman prefers a relatively flexible and non-rigorous approach to harmonic analysis. There are no Roman numerals to be found in this book, nor are there any applications of neo-Riemannian operations to explain harmonic motions (with the exception of citations or brief references to work by David Lewin, Richard Cohn, and Warren Darcy). Scale degrees are rarely invoked, with a preference for intervallic descriptions. One unfortunate exception is a description of Kundry's call to "Parsifal" in Act II as a $\hat{5}-\hat{1}-\hat{3}$ triadic statement, which is associated by Kinderman with the earlier music on "reine Thor"; a quick reference to the score will indicate that neither of these passages is

³ See McCreless 1982, pp. 88–95, for a clear definition of Bailey's terms, and the entire volume for a rigorous application (and extension) of Bailey's ideas to a single music drama. Kinderman does not offer a formal reading of *Parsifal* based on poetic musical periods or symphonic movements, both of which can be understood as resuscitations of Lorenz's formal method. See also Darcy 1993 for a neo-Lorenzian formal approach based on "episodes."

⁴ See Smith 2009, 2013, and 2015.

meaningfully described as a triadic unit once harmonic context is taken into consideration.⁵ In lieu of a more rigorous application of harmonic method, A-flat/C tonal pairing is described as the underlying organizing principle in the opera, with an analysis of the Communion theme (Act I, mm. 1–38; Schirmer 1/1/1–4/4/1) serving as a prime example for the approach. The passage consists of two 19-measure spans of music, broadly parallel in construction, in A-flat major and C minor. Additionally, the A-flat major span embeds prominent motions to C minor triads in measures 3 and 11. Kinderman further references A-flat and C triads, key areas, and set pieces from elsewhere in the work.⁶

The analysis here leaves much to be desired. In addition to the obvious question of levels and monotonal context,⁷ there is no attempt to interpret or relate the two triads or keys to each other, either through a transformational operation (L), or through a functional reading (in any specific instance, is C minor the mediant of A-flat, or is A-flat the submediant of C minor?). Within these 38 measures, it seems questionable to isolate the C minor triads in mm. 3 and 11 without also calling attention to the E minor triads in the parallel locations at mm. 22 and 30; doing so reveals a background of major thirds which has deep resonance throughout *Parsifal* and in numerous contemporary approaches to tonal theory.⁸ While

⁵ Kinderman 236–237. The score passages in question are Act II, mm. 739–741 (Schirmer 167/1/1–3) and Act I, mm. 325–326 (Schirmer 20/3/4–5).

⁶ My summary here is derived from Kinderman's discussion of the Communion motif on pp. 95–98 (sketches) and 200–202 (completed work). In keeping with Bailey's practice, A-flat and C can appear in either major or minor modes within the analyses.

⁷ While Kinderman criticizes Lorenz for allowing his opening period to spill beyond the Prelude into scene 1, there is some justification for hearing the tonal and motivic unit continuing in A-flat major, and coming to a close in m. 146 (Schirmer 9/4/6) makes sense from a monotonal perspective. (Concert performances of the Prelude frequently append a closing cadence in A-flat major.) Kinderman is not inclined to define harmonic function in any of his analyses within this book.

⁸ Kinderman mentions the E minor triad of measure 22 on p. 201, but unfortunately follows this with a blunder that should have been caught in proofreading: "The internal tensional shift now carries the music to E minor, a tritone [*sic!*] removed from the opening tonality of A-flat major."

Kinderman identifies the expansive version of the Communion motif, including both large spans in A-flat and C minor, which returns in the temple scene toward the end of Act I (mm. 1440–1470; Schirmer 87/4/4–90/3/2),⁹ he does not comment on the later passage's harmonization. The harmonic setting matters because Wagner keeps the beginning of the second span in A-flat major (see mm. 1440ff.), and arrives in C minor only at the cadence (mm. 1463–1464; Schirmer 89/5/2–3). This has important implications for how one might hear the local scale-degree assignments for mm. 20–21, but the point should now be clear: tonal pairing alone is simply an inadequate conceptual framework to explain Wagner's harmonic language and its expressive content in this music drama.

Turning now to Bailey's concept of associative tonality, *Parsifal* raises serious questions about its application and explanatory adequacy that are not asked in this study. The concept has been widely and successfully applied in analysis of the earlier music dramas and mature operas, and it seems reasonable at first to expect its continued use in Wagner's final work. Kinderman proposes an association of A-flat (and its paired tonality C major/minor) with the Grail, B-flat with Parsifal, and B minor with Klingsor.¹⁰ Additionally, the fixed pitches of the temple bells on C, G, A, and E have associative resonance, although Wagner repurposes these pitches in varied local key statements. It is striking that the list of associative tonalities ends here; Wagner seems to use the concept far less extensively in *Parsifal* than in the *Ring*, *Tristan*, or *Meistersinger*.

Some listeners will be troubled by some of the proposed mappings. One might first question the meaning of an association if the key appears prominently in a dramatically incongruous manner. For example, the Flower-maidens' set-piece, "Komm! Holder Knabe!" (Act II, m. 567ff; Schirmer 147/1/1) is clearly in A-flat major, and one cannot meaningfully associate this music with the Grail! Kinderman notes this contradiction, but offers no

⁹ Attentive readers will note that this span is shorter than 38 measures; Wagner breaks the parallelism at this point, which also weakens the reading based on tonal pairing. Kinderman makes no mention of the music at mm. 1470ff.

¹⁰ Kinderman, p. 103.

explanation. Additionally, Act II ends in B minor, yet Klingsor's kingdom has been destroyed 33 measures earlier, and he is never heard of again. Further concerns are related to transpositions of associative themes: if a theme is transposed frequently within the music drama to multiple pitch levels, surely it will call the referential association into question. This is particularly relevant in *Parsifal*, where Klingsor's and Parsifal's motifs frequently appear in keys other than the proposed referential B minor and B-flat major. Robert Gauldin (2015) has recently offered strategies for understanding transposed statements of associative themes within the *Ring* dramas; his methodology might serve as a useful model here, but my intuition suggests that Wagner may not have been as concerned with associative tonal reference in this work as he was in the earlier music dramas.

Kinderman obviously knows *Parsifal* and the sources surrounding it in great detail, and his book is filled with individual insights about the history, dramatic affect, and production values in relation to this work. While this review has expressed reservations about the theoretical tools chosen for close analysis of the music and sketches, the positive insights in this book will continue to intrigue and inspire scholars who approach this work and the earlier music dramas of Wagner.

References

- Darcy, Warren. 1993. *Wagner's Das Rheingold*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gauldin, Robert. 2015. "Associative Transposition in Wagner's *Ring*." Paper presented at the annual conference of the Music Theory Society of New York State (MTSNYS), Binghamton, NY, April 11.
- Gilliam, Bryan Randolph. 1991. *Richard Strauss's Elektra*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gossett, Philip. 1985. *Anna Bolena and the Artistic Maturity of Gaetano Donizetti*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hall, Patricia. 2011. *Berg's Wozzeck*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kinderman, William, and Harald Krebs. 1996. *The Second Practice of Nineteenth-Century Tonality*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Lorenz, Alfred. 1924/1966. *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner. I. Bd. Der musikalische Aufbau des Bühnenfestspiels Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Berlin: Max Hesse. Reprint ed. Tutzing: H. Schneider.
- _____. 1926/1966. *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner. II. Bd. Der musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagners Tristan und Isolde*. Berlin: Max Hesse. Reprint ed. Tutzing: H. Schneider.
- _____. 1930/1966. *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner. Band III. Der musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagners Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Berlin: Max Hesse. Reprint ed. Tutzing: H. Schneider.
- _____. 1933/1966. *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner. Band IV. Der musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagners Parsifal*. Berlin: Max Hesse. Reprint ed. Tutzing: H. Schneider.
- McClatchie, Stephen. 1998. *Analyzing Wagner's Operas: Alfred Lorenz and German Nationalist Ideology*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.
- McCreless, Patrick. 1982. *Wagner's Siegfried: Its Drama, History, and Music*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press.
- Morgan, Robert. 1999. "Are There Two Tonal Practices in Nineteenth-Century Music?" *Journal of Music Theory* 43/1, 135–163.
- Smith, Peter H. 2009. "Harmonies Heard from Afar: Tonal Pairing, Formal Design, and Cyclical Integration in Schumann's A minor Violin Sonata, op. 105." *Theory and Practice* 34, 47–86.
- _____. 2013. "Tonal Pairing and Monotonicity in Instrumental Forms of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms." *Music Theory Spectrum* 35/1, 77–102.

- Smith, Peter H. 2015. "Hausmusik for Cognoscenti: Some Formal Characteristics of Schumann's Late-Period Character Pieces for Instrumental Ensemble." *Music Theory Spectrum* 37/1, 51–70.
- Tusa, Michael Charles. 1991. *Euryanthe and Carl Maria von Weber's Dramaturgy of German Opera*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.