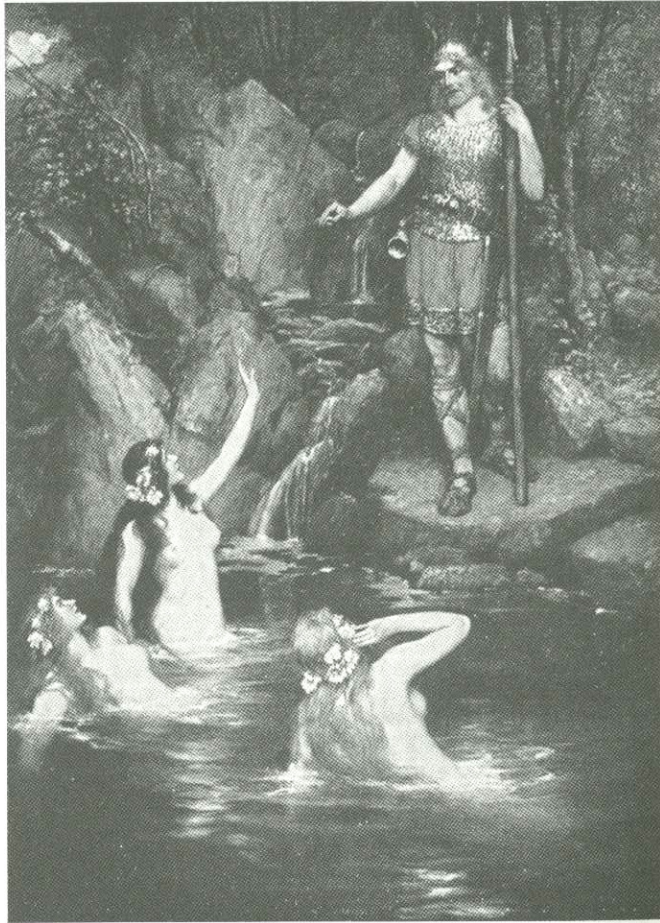


Act III: Story

Wooded Valley on the Rhine



The Rhinemaidens ask Siegfried to return the ring to them: 'A golden ring gleams on your finger. We want it!'

Scene 1

The Rhinemaidens still hope to regain their stolen gold. They hear Siegfried's hunting horn. The hero has become separated from the hunting party, and the Rhinemaidens promise him

rich booty in return for the ring on his finger. Siegfried refuses to part with Brünnhilde's love token, whereupon the Rhinemaidens tell him that he will soon meet his death unless he gives them the doom-laden ring. Siegfried contemplates parting with the ring, but will not surrender it under duress.

Scene 2

Siegfried hears the Gibichung hunting call. Meeting up with the party, he is invited by Hagen to tell them about his ability to understand the language of the birds. This prompts Siegfried to entertain Gunther, Hagen and the assembled huntsmen with the story of his slaying of the dragon and of Mime's death. Skillfully guided by Hagen, Siegfried continues the tale. Aided by Hagen's potion (the antidote to Gutrune's potion of forgetfulness), he now remembers and relates his first sight of Brünnhilde and their rapturous union. Hagen murders him by thrusting his spear into Siegfried's unprotected back. Siegfried invokes his beloved Brünnhilde, then falls back and dies. His body is borne to the Gibichung hall.

Scene 3

Gutrune, seeing Siegfried dead, collapses by his bier. Hagen kills Gunther in the struggle over the dead man's ring. Brünnhilde, now grown wise through her suffering, and understanding Siegfried's unwitting treachery, takes the ring from Siegfried's hand. She has the hero's body placed on a funeral pyre and throws a fiery brand at the logs. She mounts her horse and rides into the flames. The Rhinemaidens retrieve the ring, and as Hagen makes a desperate attempt to gain it for himself they draw him into the depths of the river. Walhall is destroyed by the flames. The end of the gods has come, and the waters of the Rhine engulf the world, which is purified and redeemed from the curse on love. The Assurance motif suggests the possibility of a new beginning.