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Ancient Greek Rhythms in *Tristan* and Nietzsche¹

ABSTRACT

It was Friedrich Nietzsche, appointed professor of classical philology in 1869 at the age of twenty-four and before he had completed his doctoral dissertation, who first postulated on the basis of rigorous textual studies that eminent classical philologists active in Central Europe in the nineteenth century had gone seriously off-track. Nietzsche's teaching and research notes on ancient Greek rhythm, the four notebooks he composed during his short-lived professorship at Basel University, were not published until 1993. In them Nietzsche alluded to Wagner's use of Greek rhythm in *Tristan*, though he did not give a straightforward account of how he understood it. This paper takes a cue from Nietzsche's most extended analysis of a *Tristan* excerpt (act III scene 2) buried therein, which proves catalytic in leading to an analysis through which I argue how Wagner made covert use of ancient Greek rhythm in *Tristan* under the constraint of the modern notation and the metrical system.

KEYWORDS

Greek rhythm

Wagner

Tristan

Nietzsche

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Introduction

Within pedigreed historical narratives of European cultural history, ancient Greece has been widely regarded as privileged, seminal to European self-awareness, and ancestral to as well as formative of core European values. Yet the idealised uniqueness of ancient Greece, allowing it to be claimed and appropriated by ‘the West,’ has been shaped by a paradigm of literacy, and this has influenced perceptions of music in the Greek world. On the one hand, ancient Greek music could be elevated precisely because its concrete reality remained elusive. On the other hand, clues to the true nature of that reality were dependent on what could be deduced from ancient Greek writing on music theory, as well as on what we would today call music aesthetics. Hence the seminal importance of Greek music theory, whose reception in the West has been widely discussed, but whose material trace in European art music has been under-investigated and under-valued in the past. The present study addresses this material trace both directly and indirectly via existing scholarship. In particular, it investigates the resurgence of ancient Greek rhythms in European art music during the era of cultural modernism.

There are several reasons that we have so little to tell about the compositional use of Greek rhythms. One is quite simply a lack of familiarity with them, apparent even among those music theorists who have specialized in rhythm. Another is that our use of modern notation often complicates Greek rhythms not just graphically but also conceptually. And a third is that classical philologists have usually lacked the musical knowledge to research compositional appropriations of Greek rhythm. The problematic transcriptions made by a whole generation of philologists—Gottfried Hermann, August Boeckh, Rudolph Westphal, to name but a few—add to the difficulties.²

It was Friedrich Nietzsche, appointed professor of classical philology in 1869 at the age of twenty-four and before he had completed his doctoral dissertation, who first postulated on the basis of rigorous textual studies that eminent classical philologists active in Central Europe in the nineteenth century had gone seriously off-track. A

² A hint at this may be gleaned from the ‘Westphal’ entry in *Grove Music Online*, written by R. P. Winnington-Ingram and Thomas J. Mathiesen: ‘Metrical studies have changed direction in the 20th century and most of his [Westphal’s] theories in this area have fallen out of fashion’ (Winnington-Ingram; Mathiesen, 2001).

study of Nietzsche's teaching and research notes (henceforth, the 'four notebooks'), composed during his short-lived professorship at Basel University, is pivotal to any enquiry into his Greek rhythm research. The publication of Nietzsche's complete set of 'four notebooks' was, however, seriously delayed until 1993 (Table 1).³

- *Griechische Rhythmik*
- *Aufzeichnungen zur Metrik und Rhythmik*
- *Zur Theorie der quantifizierenden Rhythmik*
- *Rhythmische Untersuchungen*

Table 1. Nietzsche's 'four notebooks' (Nietzsche, 1993: 99-338)

In *Griechische Rhythmik* Nietzsche alluded to Wagner's use of Greek rhythm in *Tristan*, but he did not give a straightforward account of how he understood it. Nietzsche drew our attention to such details as '5/4 Takt ebenso – ∪ I –' (Nietzsche, 1993: 109n) and '7 Dipodien' (Nietzsche, 1993: 115n), yet without providing us with any explanation.⁴ Nevertheless, he ended *Griechische Rhythmik* with a section titled '*Tactwechsel und Tactgleichheit*,' in which his most extended analysis of a *Tristan* excerpt (act III scene 2) appears (Nietzsche, 1993: 201).⁵ That analysis is surprisingly detailed, and it stands as an effective exposition of the two concepts in question. Put simply, *Tactgleichheit* and *Tactwechsel* refer to metric uniformity (equal measure length) and metric irregularity (varied measure length), and can be mapped to the concepts of eurhythmic (no meter change) and *alogia* (frequent meter change).

In order to tackle the key issue of how Wagner might have made compositional use of Greek rhythm in *Tristan*, I begin by reviewing Nietzsche's analysis of *Tristan*, act

³ In recent decades Fritz Bornmann 1989 and James Porter 2000 had made pioneering moves to give the 'four notebooks' long overdue scholarly attention. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Nietzsche's peer and a fierce critic of *The Birth of Tragedy* who came to be established as a towering figure in classical philology, was understandably reluctant to give recognition to Nietzsche's discovery. According to Porter, the highly influential monograph *Griechische Rhythmik* published by Paul Mass, Wilamowitz's pupil, even 'buries Nietzsche's contribution in three brief mentions and in a series of unacknowledged, often nearly verbatim, borrowings' (Porter 2000: 136).

⁴ See also Nietzsche, 1993: 188 for his analysis of a short excerpt from *Tristan*.

⁵ Nietzsche did not analyze the whole of scene 2. He stopped just before Isolde appears (m. 77).

III scene 2, in which he shows how individual measures are grouped into phrases, and then sections, all the way up to the two asymmetrical halves (strophe and antistrophe) that span the passage as a whole.⁶ I then question what special attributes of the excerpt might have led Nietzsche to single it out for detailed analysis. This review of Nietzsche's analysis leads to a more extensive study of *Tristan*, in which I argue that Wagner had made covert use of Greek rhythms in all three acts, albeit within the constraints of modern notation and the metrical system.

Nietzsche's analysis of *Tristan*, act III scene 2

To my knowledge, it was Christophe Corbier who first drew scholarly attention to Nietzsche's analysis of *Tristan*, act III scene 2.⁷ In 'Alogia et eurhythmie chez Nietzsche,' Corbier referenced Nietzsche's claim that he had uncovered a revival of 'ancient dionysisme' in Wagner's 'lyric drama.'

Having noticed the frequency of the changes of meter in the verses of the ancient [Greeks], Nietzsche relates it to the 'music of the future,' which disregards the eurhythmic element, the regularity, and the periodic return of the downbeat. In this way, the lyric drama of Wagner marks well the resurgence of ancient dionysisme, since some of its parts are regulated by *alogia* [frequent meter changes], by irrationality, expressive means unknown to the moderns and rediscovered by the master of Bayreuth.⁸

In Corbier's view, Nietzsche situated his analysis of *Tristan*, act III scene 2 at the end of his discussion of *alogia* in *Griechische Rhythmik* because *alogia* is, first and foremost, a hallmark of this scene. Kathryn Fry also commented on Nietzsche's

⁶ Despite the importance of this analysis, it has rarely been referenced, let alone critiqued.

⁷ Nietzsche's analysis of *Tristan* is not mentioned in Bornmann's 'Nietzsches metrische Studien' or Porter's *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*, detailed studies of Nietzsche's 'four notebooks' with emphasis on classical philology.

⁸ Après avoir remarqué la fréquence des changements de mesure dans les vers des Anciens, Nietzsche fait le lien avec la «musique de l'avenir», qui fait abstraction de l'eurhythmie, de la régularité, du retour périodique de temps forts. De cette manière, le drame lyrique de Wagner marque bien une résurgence du dionysisme antique, puis que certaines de ses parties sont régies par l'*alogia*, par l'irrationalité, moyen expressif inconnu des modernes et retrouvé par le maître de Bayreuth' (Corbier, 2009: 33-34).

analysis in Nietzsche, *Tristan und Isolde*, and the Analysis of Wagnerian Rhythm,' though she was less concerned about *alogia* than about broader structural issues.

[Wagner] seems to be trying to establish a sense of overall formal symmetry, as reflected in the section's division into two groups of the same phrase rhythm, designated 'strophe' and 'antistrophe.' This would imply that he envisaged an interaction between irregularity on the level of the phrases and periods, and a sense of order and symmetry on the larger level of the scene (Fry, 2014: 263).

Although Fry did not critique Nietzsche's analysis or reference Corbier's '*Alogia et eurhythmie chez Nietzsche*,' there are some interesting details in her article, such as Nietzsche's possible use of 'Hans von Bülow's [then] newly published vocal score [of *Tristan*]' (Fry, 2014: 255). In what follows, I scrutinize Nietzsche's analysis of act III scene 2 and contend that his reading of two strains (strophe and antistrophe) in the passage as exhibiting 'the same phrase rhythm' is fraught with problems.

Stage 1

$\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$
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 $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$
 $\frac{2}{2}$ $\frac{2}{2}$ $\frac{2}{2}$ $\frac{2}{2}$ $\frac{2}{2}$ $\frac{2}{2}$ $\frac{2}{2}$ usw.

Stage 2a (the last '2' on the first line is typo for '1')

$\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$
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Stage 2b (the last '2' on the first line is typo for '1')

$\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$
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Stage 3

a b c d Strophe

a b c d Antistrophe

Example. 1. Nietzsche's analysis of *Tristan*, act III scene 2, excerpted from *Griechische Rhythmik* (Nietzsche, 1993: 201).

Nietzsche presented this analysis only graphically, but it is not hard to discern that it comprises three stages. In stage 1 (Ex. 1) he lists all the seventy-six time signatures (mm. 1-76) and adds slurs to group them into segments.⁹ He arrives at forty segments in total and underlines the respective endings of the two strains, which he subsequently labels as strophe (mm. 1-40) and antistrophe (mm. 41-76). The first strain comprises eighteen segments, while the second strain is expanded to twenty-two-segments (Appendix 1).

⁹ I decided against using the term 'phrase' since it seems a misnomer for slurred units that are only one measure long.

Starting from stage 2a of the analysis the time signatures are no longer displayed. Instead, Nietzsche takes into account the number of measures occupied by the segments (as defined in stage 1) and presents the two strains as number series. For instance, the opening four segments (mm. 1-10) are shown as 3 2 2 3, meaning that there are respectively 3, 2, 2 and 3 measures to these four segments (Ex. 2). Nietzsche adds slurs again, this time to indicate how Wagner might have grouped the segments into sections. There are four sections in the first strain. As for the second strain, it is hard to tell from the way Nietzsche slurs the numbers whether he reads it as in six sections or perhaps more.

Example 2. Opening four segments (mm. 1-10) of act III scene 2 (Wagner, 1906: 273)¹⁰

A comparison of Nietzsche's stage-2a and stage-2b readings shows that his analysis of the first strain remains essentially the same. But this is not so in the case of the second strain. Nietzsche effectively modifies the ways he partitions the music to assert the uniform presence of twenty segments in each strain.¹¹ Uniformity is

¹⁰ Excerpted from Richard Kleinmichel's vocal score of *Tristan* published by G. Schirmer in 1906. Excerpts of *Tristan* cited as music examples in this paper are all from the same vocal score.

¹¹ This contrasts with the stage 2a-reading of twenty and twenty-three segments respectively in the two strains.

further enhanced as Nietzsche groups the segments in the respective strain into four sections (a to d) that exhibit the same schema of 4+2+7+7 segments. For instance, Nietzsche opted for the stage-2b grouping of 3+3+2+2 in order that both the first and the second strains begin with a section that comprises four segments, involving 3+2+2+3 and 3+3+2+2 measures respectively (Plate 1). Having tidied up the analysis, Nietzsche designates the two strains as strophe and antistrophe in stage 3.

Bei Wagner Tristan III Sc. 2 Periode von 7 Dipodien antistrophisch dann

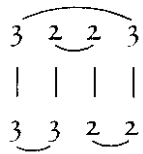


Plate 1. 'Periode von 7 Dipodien' in act III scene 2 (Nietzsche, 1993: 115, footnote 7)

m. 41
(He raises himself quite up)

T. Tod em - por - ge - rafft. Mit blu - tender Wun - de be -
self from death once more! Once blood - y and wounded Sir

kämpft' ich einst Mo - - rol - den: mit
Mo - rold I en - 3 - coun - terd: Now

blu - - - - ten - der Wun - de er - jag' ich mir -
blood - - - - y - and wound - ed I - sol - da shall -

m. 47

m. 54

Example 3. Antistrophe (Wagner, 1906: 274): the seven-note ascent is stated only twice before the threefold statement of the F-E-D descent

Nevertheless, Nietzsche's stage-2b reading of the antistrophe (mm. 41-76) as restating the four sections of the strophe, replete with the same schema of 4+2+7+7 segments, is problematic (Ex. 3).¹² While the seven-note ascent deployed at the outset of act III scene 2 is stated four times to constitute section a in the strophe, the same ascent is stated only twice in the antistrophe. This is followed by the threefold statement of an F-E-D descent, which constitutes another well-defined section (mm.

¹² The vocal and instrumental parts do not always 'breathe' at the same points. Nietzsche's reading references the instrumental part.

47-54).¹³ And yet Nietzsche reads the first and second statements of the F-E-D descent (mm. 47-50) as parts of section a, and the third statement of the same descent (m. 51ff) as the beginning of section b (Table 2). Nietzsche's view that section d does not commence until m. 70 is equally problematic. He does not seem to have considered such an obvious cue as the return of 5/4 at m. 62. The fact that what formerly constitutes section d in the strophe (mm. 31-40) parallels mm. 62-71 also seems to have escaped him.

Section a	Section b	Section c	Section d
mm. 41-50	mm. 51-57	mm. 58-69	mm.70-76
mm. 41-46	mm. 47-54	mm. 55-61	mm. 62-76

Table 2. Nietzsche's stage-2b analysis of the antistrophe (shaded); my reading (not shaded) is closer to his stage-2a analysis

Having problematized Nietzsche's analysis of *Tristan*, act III scene 2, I question what it is in the music that might have impelled him to analyze this scene at such length toward the end of *Griechische Rhythmik*. The frequent changes of meter (*alolia*) and the use of five- and seven-beat phrases in act III scene 2 are, in my view, critical factors. Throughout *Tristan*, the highest rate of meter change occurs in both scenes 1 and 2 of Act III (Table 3).¹⁴ The use of five- and seven-beat phrases is, however, exclusive to Act III scene 2.¹⁵

¹³ In the strophe the seven-note ascent is stated four times consecutively. The first and fourth statements of this ascent are three rather than two measures long, due to a one-measure extension. They are separated in time and yet connected through the shared use of a higher register and similar instrumentation. The high B (m. 10) initiates a prolonged descent, which ends with a signature figure: F4-E4-E^b4 (mm. 14-16), the first chromatic descent in Wagner's *Tristan* Prelude. A variant of this descent (F-E-D instead of F-E-E^b) is stated three times consecutively in the antistrophe. In either case the *Tristan* chord appears with the note F.

¹⁴ The frequency drops dramatically from thirty down to nine, which is the next highest, in act II scene 2.

¹⁵ Both Corbier and Fry commented on the frequent meter change and the use of 5/4 in act III scene 2, though without mentioning Wagner's use of seven-beat phrases, which is not plainly notated in 7/4. Corbier quoted *Griechische Rhythmik* (Nietzsche, 1993: 115, footnote 7), without noting that 'Periode von 7 Dipodien' is likely Nietzsche's reference to use of septuple time in the seven-note ascent first heard at the outset of act III scene 2.

Act III, scene 1

(prolonged alternation between 3/2 and 2/2 is shaded)

4/4 - 3/2 - 4/4 - 3/2 - 4/4 - 3/2 - 4/4 - 2/2 - 4/4 - 2/2 - 4/4 - 3/2 - 2/2 - 3/2 - 2/2
 - 3/2 - 2/2 - 3/2 - 2/2 - 3/2 - 2/2 - 3/2 - 2/2 - 3/4 - 4/4 - 3/2 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 2/4 -
 3/4 - 2/2

Act III, scene 2

(prolonged alternation between 3/4 and 4/4 is shaded)

3/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 5/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 4/4
 - 3/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 5/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 - 2/4 - 2/2 -
 6/8 - 4/4

Table 3. An overview of the meter changes in act III scenes 1 and 2

Still, Nietzsche’s analysis of *Tristan* (act III scene 2) did not specify Wagner’s use of any Greek rhythm, how then should we make sense of his inclusion of this analysis in *Griechische Rhythmik*? Nietzsche’s letter to Carl Fuchs, a musicologist and a close friend, dated 1877 is revealing in this regard:

Your counting of rhythmical beats is an important find, real gold, out of which you will be able to mint some good coin. It reminded me that while studying ancient metrics in 1870 I had been hunting for five- and seven-beat phrases and had counted through *Die Meistersinger* and *Tristan*—which told me a few things about Wagner’s rhythms. [...] he prefers to prolong four-beat phrases into five-beat ones, [and] six-beat ones into seven-beat ones[.] (Nietzsche, 1969: 162).

Nietzsche wrote about his ‘hunting for five- and seven-beat phrases’ in Wagner’s music ‘while studying ancient metrics in 1870,’ though without explaining how they are related. Perhaps he thought of five- and seven-beat phrases as suggestive or as appropriations of Greek rhythms? And perhaps Nietzsche’s ‘hunting’ led him to act III scene 2 of *Tristan*, whose opening bass ascent is *de facto* a seven-beat phrase, and whose melodic motifs are frenetically repeated to carve out five-beat phrases at the onset of 5/4? In order to address these questions, I delve further into Act III Scene 2,

since Nietzsche's remark that '[Wagner] prefers to prolong four-beat phrases into 5-beat ones, [and] six-beat ones into seven-beat ones' applies well here.

The seven-note ascent heard at the outset of act III scene 2 comprises a three-note head motif and a four-note ascent, both of which are seven eighth notes long.¹⁶ Although the seven-note ascent fits neatly into one measure of 7/4 (7/8 + 7/8), Wagner notates it in two measures of unequal lengths (3/4 + 4/4) instead (Ex. 4; see also Ex. 2).¹⁷ Seven time is, in this sense, engaged at two levels: 7 quarter notes at the tactus level, and 7+7 eighth notes at the sub-tactus level.



Example 4. Section a: seven-note ascent (3/4 + 4/4) re-notated in 7/4 (7/8 + 7/8)

The alternating use of 3/4 and 4/4 in section a (mm. 1-10) continues in section b (mm. 11-16) before section c (mm. 17-30) settles down to the exclusive use of 3/4. Notwithstanding the notated meter of 3/4 in section c, the constituent treble descent and bass ascent may suggest 6/4 and 3/2 instead (Ex. 5).



Example 5. Section c: treble descent and bass ascent (3/4 re-notated as 6/4 and 3/2 respectively)

Nietzsche's stage-2b reading of section c (strophe) is 2 2 2 2 2 2 2, meaning that the two-measure-long treble motif is stated seven times consecutively (Table 4). The prime number 7, formerly associated with the seven-beat ascent in section a, can be understood to manifest in section c at level of the motif rather than the beat. The sevenfold statement of the treble motif (section c) also mirrors the 3+4 grouping of

¹⁶ I shall explain the rationale that underlies my reading of two rather than just one rhythmic pattern at a later point in this paper.

¹⁷ Had Wagner adopted 7/4, the time signature would have changed less frequently.

notes in the seven-note ascent (section a) at level of the motif. This argument is based on the observation that the bass ascent (four statements) is introduced to counterpoint the treble motif (seven statements) only after the latter has been stated three times.

Treble motif	2 2 2 2 2 2 2	(three plus four statements; 2 measures each)
Bass ascent	2 2 2 2	(four statements; 2 measures each)

Table 4. The treble motif (seven statements) and the bass motif (four statements)

Thus far, seven groupings loom large in act III scene 2, manifesting in sections a and c at different hierarchical levels, which may help explain why Nietzsche hunted for ‘seven-beat phrases’ in *Tristan*. If we close in on the opening seven-note ascent, we notice that the prolongation of ‘six-beat ones [phrases] into seven-beat ones’ is arguably at work here. Notwithstanding the arcane rhythmic makeup of the seven-note ascent, we can easily convert a rhythmically conventional six-note ascent into such a rhythmically unconventional seven-note ascent. Conversely, as shown in Ex. 6, it takes only the elimination of a short value from the seven-note ascent (the last notes of the two halves) to convert it into a six-note ascent. This technique is only hypothetically established here, but we are not short of real cases in act III scene 2.

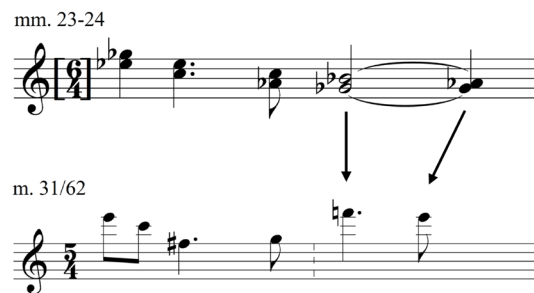


Example 6. Hypothetical conversion of the seven-note ascent (re-notated in 7/4) into a six-note ascent through the elimination of an eighth note

Section c reprises all four statements of the bass ascent heard back in section a, but the ascent is shortened to be six- rather than seven-beat long (cf. Ex. 4 and Ex. 5).¹⁸ A change from the six-beat motifs of section c to the five-beat motifs of section d then

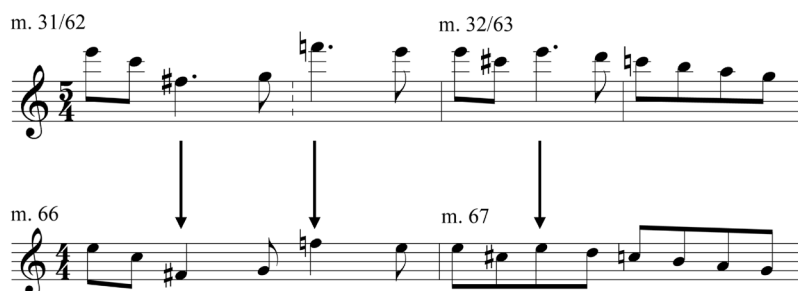
¹⁸ That this six-note ascent is heard as a curtailment of the preceding seven-note ascent is prompted by their use of exactly the same head motif and a continuing stepwise ascent.

brings about a concomitant change from 6/4 to 5/4 (Ex. 7).¹⁹ A schematic change of meter is evidently in play.



Example 7. Conversion of the six-beat motif (section c) into the five-beat motif (section d) through the elimination of an eighth note

The 5/4 measure is divided by a dotted bar line into 3/4 and 2/4. The 3/4 portion of the five-beat motif maps well onto the first half of the preceding six-beat motif. The 2/4 portion of the five-beat motif, on the other hand, may be derived from the second half of the six-beat motif. As shown in Ex. 7, it only takes the elimination of an eighth note from the half note and the quarter note to convert the six-beat motif into the five-beat motif. The aforementioned technique (see Ex. 6) is again at work here. A similar use of this technique can effectuate the subsequent change from 5/4 to 4/4 approaching the end of section d (mm. 62-76) in the antistrophe. The five-beat motifs, having emerged at the onset of 5/4, ‘modulate’ to their four-beat counterparts through the elimination of a short note value at three different points (Ex. 8).



Example 8. Conversion of the five-beat motifs into their four-beat counterparts

¹⁹ See Nietzsche, 1993: 109, footnote 5 for Nietzsche’s very brief mention of this special use of 5/4.

The 'modulation' from 6/4 through 5/4 to 4/4 is far from an isolated case in act III scene 2. An orderly change of time signatures in fact underlies the strophe and the antistrophe. Table 5 shows an overview of the extended changes of meters in *Tristan*, act III scene 2. In the strophe the meter changes from 7/4 (notated as 3/4 + 4/4) through 6/4 (notated as 3/4 + 3/4) and 5/4 down to 4/4. In each case, the meter is established through the insistent repetition of at least one distinct melodic motif.²⁰

	m. 1	m. 17	m. 31	m. 38		
Strophe	7/4	6/4	5/4	4/4		
	m. 41	m. 58	m. 62	m. 66	m. 70	m. 73
Antistrophe	7/4	6/4	5/4	4/4	3/4	2/4

Table 5. *Tactwechsel* in *Tristan*, act III scene 2

Changes of meter as such are also characteristic of the antistrophe. It begins with 7/4 again (notated as 3/4 + 4/4), but this time the meter goes through 6/4, 5/4, 4/4, 3/4 all the way down to 2/4. The list of meters becomes extended and the pace of changes accelerated, especially since the antistrophe is shorter than the strophe.²¹ In Ex. 9 the two series of meter changes are conflated into one by drawing a parallel between the first pair of 5/4 measures in the strophe and its counterpart in the antistrophe.

²⁰ In the strophe, the dynamic level in sections a and b is on the average *p*. This is raised to *f* in section c and *ff* at the outset of section d.

²¹ The strophe and antistrophe are forty and thirty-six measures long respectively.

mm. 1-2

mm. 23-24

m. 31/62

m. 32/63

m. 66

m. 67

m. 70

m. 73

Example 9. Act III scene 2: meter changes from 7/4 through 6/4, 5/4, 4/4, 3/4 down to 2/4

To recapitulate, I have argued how Wagner might have systematically applied different meters (not always plainly notated) to forge two extensive accelerations in the strophe and the antistrophe, and how he might have prolonged ‘four-beat phrases into five-beat ones, [and] six-beat ones into seven-beat ones’ in act III scene 2 of *Tristan*. The key question of Wagner’s hypothetical strategy for composing with Greek rhythms in *Tristan*, however, remains to be addressed.

Seven time and related Greek rhythms in act III scene 2

As a first step, I set up the seven-note ascent of act III scene 2 as a reference point (henceforth, the referential seven-note ascent) because Nietzsche’s most substantial analysis of *Tristan* begins with it, and also because it marks the most overt use of seven time and related Greek rhythms in *Tristan*. As a second step, I identify melodic structures that share the attributes of ostinato-like repetition (being stated several

times consecutively or in close proximity)²² and unconventional rhythmic grouping with the referential seven-note ascent. The two selection criteria (shared attributes) are introduced to avoid permissively choosing tempting extracts to support my reading of Greek rhythms in *Tristan*. These melodic structures are like the referential seven-note ascent in that they assume special motivic importance in the music. I thus designate them as melodic motifs (narrowly defined), and group them into categories IA, IB, and II melodic motifs according to their degree of resemblance to the seven-note referential ascent. The categorization, accordingly, has no bearing on the chronological sequence of the melodic motifs in *Tristan*. Following this, I undertake an analysis of the appropriation of Greek rhythms in the referential seven-note ascent to precede that of the other categories of melodic motifs, since it helps clarify the axioms upon which the analyses are based.

Table 6 summarizes how the categories IA, IB, and II melodic motifs relate to the referential seven-note ascent. Category IA melodic motifs, replete with a head motif (L-S-L) and an uninterrupted stepwise ascent/descent, most closely resemble the referential seven-note ascent. There is only one category IB melodic motif, which is differentiated from category IA motifs by having a rather different head motif (see Ex. 13). An S-L-S rather than an L-S-L rhythmic pattern is adopted. Category II melodic motifs are stepwise ascents/descents of four or more notes but devoid of the head motif.

²² Due to the ostinato-like repetition of a melodic motif (often a stepwise ascent or descent), there are times when it seems as if the music has reached a deadlock and cannot move forward. This typically happens in the orchestral rather than the voice parts. The deadlock effect is intensified when the repetition persists at a fixed pitch level. The most insistently repeated melodic motif in *Tristan* is stated twenty-seven times without a break in act II scene 1 (Wagner, 1906: 118-120).

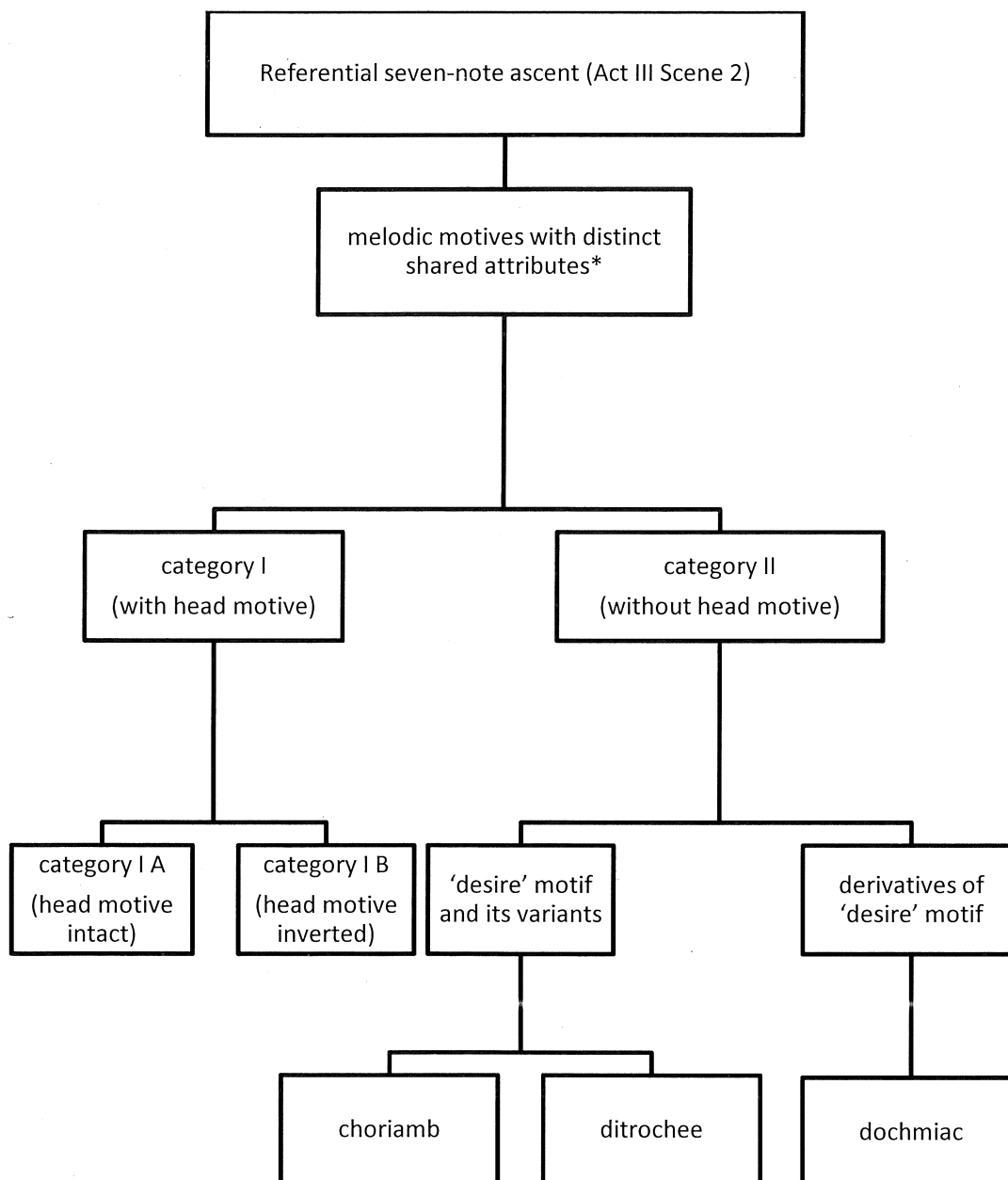


Table 6. Melodic motifs that share the attributes* of ostinato-like repetition and unconventional rhythmic grouping with the referential seven-note ascent

Referential seven-note ascent: cretic + epitrite IV

The referential seven-note ascent heard at the outset of act III scene 2 marks a critical point in the drama (Ex. 10). Tristan is dying physically and also dying to meet with Isolde again. As mentioned in the foregoing, the referential seven-note ascent marks the most pronounced use of seven time throughout *Tristan*. The two halves of the ascent have seven eighth notes each, and yet they accommodate three and four notes respectively. This brings about an acceleration that is made more intense by

the syncopation featured in the second half.²³ The quarter notes therein are syncopated against an underlying metrical grid (essentially a quarter-note pulse stream), as suggested by the notated meter of 4/4.

Sehr lebhaft.
Molto vivace.
(Kurvenal hastens away. — Tristan tosses on his couch in extreme excitement)

Tristan.
O die-se Sonne!
O sun that pourest!

3-1-3 2-2-2-1 (7+7 eighth notes)
L-S-L L-L-L-S (L and S in 3:1 and 2:1 ratios)
cretic epitrite IV

Example 10. Referential seven-note ascent, act III scene 2 (Wagner, 1906: 273): cretic + epitrite IV

Without presuming a metrical grid, the referential seven-note ascent could be played as a duration series, i.e. 3-1-3-2-2-2-1 eighth notes. If we treat 3 as long (L) and 1 as short (S), and interpret 2 and 1 along the same lines by assuming that the ratio between L and S is relative and hence variable,²⁴ the head motif and the continuing four-note ascent can be mapped onto the Greek metrical feet of cretic (L-

²³ The miniature accelerando mirrors the large-scale accelerando of the strophe and especially that of the antistrophe.

²⁴ This assumption gains weight from the fact that, throughout *Tristan*, the 'desire' motif and its variants often articulate a choriamb (L-S-S-L) by engaging longs and shorts in different ratio (see Ex. 15 and Ex. 16).

S-L) and epitrite IV (L-L-L-S) respectively.²⁵ The axioms upon which this and other analyses of the appropriation of Greek rhythms in *Tristan* are summarized below:

- The ratio between the longs and the shorts is not restrictively 2:1. Different long-short ratios (for instance, 3:1 or 5:1) may be used in different Greek rhythms, and even in different parts of an appropriated Greek rhythm.
- The same ratio may vary quantitatively; for instance, 2:1 may involve a quarter note and an eighth note, or a half note and a quarter note, and so on in different Greek rhythms.

Category IA melodic motifs: cretic + amphibrach/peon II

Category IA melodic motifs—a seven-note ascent and a seven-note descent in act III scene 1, and a six-note ascent in act III scene 2—are deployed around the referential seven-note ascent. These melodic motifs are like the referential seven-note ascent except that they are six (rather than seven) quarter notes long and are notated in two measures of 3/4. Due to the prominence of the head motif, the six-note motif of act III scene 2 (Ex. 11) may be heard as comprising a cretic L-S-L (3-1-3eighth notes) and an ensuing amphibrach S-L-S (1-3-1eighth notes). They are inversions of one another, in that L become S and S becomes L. Their 7+5 asymmetrical grouping of the twelve eighth notes contradicts the symmetrical grouping of 4+4+4, to which we are certainly more accustomed. The 3-1-3 head motif also assumes a strong presence in the seven-note ascent and the seven-note descent of act III scene 1 (Ex. 12) and indicates an asymmetrical 7+5 grouping of the twelve eighth notes, though the grouping of 1-2-1-1 eighth notes suggests a peon II (S-L-S-S) instead of an amphibrach.

²⁵ Greek rhythms discussed in this paper are listed with related ones in Appendix 2. *Greek Metre* (1982) and *Ancient Greek Music* (1992) by Martin West, one of the most eminent classical philologists of our times, are adopted as major secondary sources.

3-1-3	1-3-1	(7+5 instead of 4+4+4 eighth notes)
L-S-L	S-L-S	(L and S in 3:1 ratio)
cretic	amphibrach	

Conventional reading:

	(4+4+4 eighth notes)
--	----------------------

Example 11. Six-note ascent, act III scene 2 (Wagner, 1906: 273-274): cretic + amphibrach

3-1-3	1-2-1-1	(7+5 instead of 4+4+4 eighth notes)
L-S-L	S-L-S-S	(L and S in 3:1 and 2:1 ratios)
cretic	peon II	

Example 12. Seven-note descent, act III scene 1 (Wagner, 1906: 269): cretic + peon II

We first hear a category IA melodic motif as the opening half of an arc-like melody toward the end of act III scene 1. It is then fragmented, as it were, and converted into a seven-note descent before it reverses to become a seven-note ascent. All these changes register the dramatic sequence in the scene. The seven-note ascent makes its debut (Wagner, 1906: 263) just as Tristan's obsession turns from the Isolde who abides in his thoughts to the one who is physically on board the ship. Tristan urges

Kurwenal to hurry to the watch-tower and find out if he can catch sight of the ship. It is not long before Kurwenal reports joyously that the ship is in sight. Tristan then asks if Kurwenal can see Isolde on board the vessel (*'See'st du sie selbst?'*). Right after this, Kurwenal cries out to Tristan that the ship might be in danger (*'Jetzt schwand das Schiff hinter dem Fels. Hinter dem Riff. Bringt es Gefahr?'*) and initiates the seven-note descent (Wagner, 1906: 269). This change from an ascent to a descent is evocative, in musical terms, of a dramatic change from hope to despair. Instead of catching sight of the ship and then Isolde, what is likely to happen next is shipwreck and Isolde's demise. The seven-note ascent then reappears just before Kurwenal exclaims that he at last sees Isolde in the distance (Wagner, 1906: 271).

Category IB melodic motif: amphibrach + choriamb

In act III scene 1 the seven-note ascent and also the descent are directed toward the referential seven-note ascent stationed at the outset of act III scene 2. The importance of all these seven-note melodic motifs and the fact that they appear exclusively in act III beg the question of whether they are in any way prepared in acts I and II. We might, for example, rethink the all too familiar seven-note melodic motif heard in the opening measures of *Tristan* and classify it as a category IB melodic motif (Ex. 13). As signified by the slur and the change of instrumentation, the opening melodic motif (Wagner, 1906: 1) begins with a three-note head motif followed by a four-note chromatic ascent (commonly referred to as the 'desire' motif).²⁶ Thus, the 3+4 grouping of notes characteristic of the prototypical seven-note ascent/descent (act III scene 1) and the referential seven-note ascent (act III scene 2) is already in evidence.

²⁶ The four-note chromatic ascent (upper voice) overlaps with the preceding four-note chromatic descent (inner voice).

Langsam und schmachtend.
Lento e languido.












head motif	four-note ascent ('desire' motif)
1-5-1	5-1-1-5
S-L-S	L-S-S-L (L and S in 5:1 ratio)
amphibrach	choriamb

Example 13. Seven-note melodic motif (*Tristan Prelude*): amphibrach + choriamb²⁷

But there are also important differences. In the opening seven-note melodic motif, the rhythm of the head motif is S-L-S (instead of L-S-L), and that of the stepwise ascent, which appears only in the second half, is L-S-S-L (instead of L-L-L-S). The relationship between the opening melodic motif and the referential seven-note ascent may also escape us because they are widely separated in time (Ex. 14). Nevertheless, these differences do not refute a reading of the head motif (1-5-1) and the four-note ascent (5-1-1-5) in the opening melodic motif as appropriations of the Greek rhythms of amphibrach (S-L-S) and choriamb (L-S-S-L), with the longs and shorts in 5:1 rather than 2:1 ratio. What is more, the first and second halves of the four-note ascent (5-1-1-5) are marked off by two different block chords, and this leaves us in little doubt about the pairing of trochee (L-S) with iamb (S-L) in the making of a choriamb (L-S-S-L).²⁸

²⁷ The last note of the four-note ascent is followed by a very long rest and hence not clearly defined in length, but the rhythmic pattern remains unambiguously L-S-S-L. I interpret the duration of the last note as five eighth notes by including the ensuing pair of eighth-note rests.

²⁸ If the longs and shorts are 2:1 in ratio, the choriamb can easily be mistaken as the grouping of L + S-S + L in a measure of triple time.

<p>3 - 1 - 3 </p> <p>3 - 1 - 3 </p>	<p> 2 - 2 - 2 - 1 p. 273</p> <p> 1 - 2 - 1 - 1 p. 263</p>
<p>1 - 5 - 1 </p>	<p> 5 - 1 - 1 - 5 p. 1</p> <p> 3 - 1 - 1 - 3 p. 8</p> <p> 3 - 1 - 2 - 4 p. 15</p> <p> 7 - 1 - 2 - 8 p. 228</p> <p> 5 - 1 - 6 - 2 p. 216</p> <p> 2.5 - 0.5 - 3 - 1 p. 232</p>

Example 14. Referential seven-note ascent and related melodic motifs—the head motifs are shown in the left box; the ‘desire’ motif and its variants are shown in the right box

Category II melodic motifs: ‘desire’ motif, its variants and derivatives²⁹

Category II melodic motifs are stepwise ascents or descents of four or more notes. Although these melodic motifs are least like the referential seven-note ascent because the head motif is absent, they far exceed category I melodic motifs in number. Because there is a multitude of category II melodic motifs, to which a unifying principle applies, they in fact provide exceptionally strong evidence of the purported use of Greek rhythms in *Tristan*. I shall return to this.

As shown in Ex. 14 (right box), category II melodic motifs include, first and foremost, the chromatic ascent heard in mm. 2-3 of the *Tristan* Prelude. This chromatic ascent and its literal repetition at different pitch levels, all of which appropriate the L-S-S-L rhythm of choriamb, will be referred to collectively as the ‘desire’ motif. Although it is initially embedded in the seven-note melodic motif (Wagner, 1906: 1), throughout

²⁹ Most of the category II melodic motifs are notated to fit neatly one or two measures. When this is not the case, the presence of a slur helps define a distinct melodic motif. These two features are, however, not set up as selection criteria.

Tristan, the 'desire' motif more often than not appears alone, which explains why I classify it as a category II melodic motif.³⁰ As the 'desire' motif journeys through *Tristan*, its pitch and rhythmic profiles mutate along the way. One notable change is from choriamb (L-S-S-L) to ditrochee (L-S-L-S), which repeats rather than reverses the L-S in the first half to be the L-S in the second half.³¹ In the following discussion, four-note ascents/descents that are treated with ostinato-like repetition and unconventional rhythmic grouping and yet do not literally transpose the opening chromatic ascent are named 'variants' of the 'desire' motif. Their counterparts, similar ascents/descents that comprise five or more notes, are named 'derivatives' instead (see Table 6).

Variants of 'desire' motif: choriamb/ditrochee (symmetrical/asymmetrical)

Regardless of whether the variants of the 'desire' motif appropriate choriamb (L-S-S-L) or ditrochee (L-S-L-S), the 2:1 ratio typical of Greek rhythms is seldom observed and the long-short ratio is usually relative rather than absolute. There are also cases where the two halves of a variant adopt different long-short ratios, thereby rendering it asymmetrical rather than symmetrical in layout. More specifically, the addition of the same short duration to the component notes in the first half brings about a written-out ritardando in the second half of the choriamb or ditrochee.³² A number of examples are cited below to illustrate how a unifying principle may be understood to be at work in all these different variants.

Choriamb (symmetrical)

A variant of the 'desire' motif is repeated in ostinato-like fashion for the first time at the point the magic potion is first sung of in act I (Wagner, 1906: 8).³³ As shown in Ex. 15a, this variant (3-1-1-3) shares with the 'desire' motif (5-1-1-5) the rhythmic profile of choriamb (L-S-S-L), but the long-short ratio is modified to be 3:1 rather

³⁰ The 'desire' motif appears as an integral part of the category IB melodic motif on only a few occasions and in act I exclusively (See Wagner, 1906: 5, 51-53, and 91).

³¹ Ditrochees that are symmetrical in layout are rhythmically conventional, banal even. They are not considered variants of the 'desire' motif since unconventional rhythmic grouping is an indispensable attribute of all melodic motifs.

³² This resonates with the technique Messiaen calls 'inexact augmentation.' (See Messiaen, 1956: 18-19).

³³ The magic potion is supernatural power made manifest as a material trace. Even the all-controlling Isolde falls prey to its destructive power.

than 5:1.³⁴ Other variants include 4-2-2-4 and 6-2-2-6 (Wagner, 1906: 13), which differ in the long-short ratios. Unlike 3-1-1-3, which is fitted into one measure of 2/2, the two halves of 4-2-2-4 and 6-2-2-6 are separated by a bar line, and the rhythmic makeup of L-S + S-L is thereby highlighted graphically (Ex. 15b).

a. Act I scene 1 (Wagner, 1906: 8)³⁵

3-1-1-3 (L-S-S-L) choriamb (symmetrical)

b. Act I scene 1 (Wagner, 1906: 13)

4-2-2-4 (L-S-S-L) choriamb (symmetrical)

Example 15. Variants of the ‘desire’ motif: choriamb (symmetrical)

³⁴ This variant appears less often in act II and only once in act III. In act II we hear it in the ‘Introduction’ (Wagner 1906: 106-107) and shortly after scene 1 begins (Wagner, 1906: 109). In each case it contributes to the shaping of an extended crescendo. The last time this variant reappears is in act III scene 1 (Wagner, 1906.: 234). The variant is stated five times consecutively before it once again develops into an extended ascent. In sum, the choriamb 3-1-1-3 is used motivically in *Tristan* at the following points: Wagner, 1906: 8-10 (act I); 106-107, 109 (act II); act III, 234 (act III).

³⁵ The chromatic ascent (F-F#-G-A^b) is literally stated three times. The whole series of ascents is then transposed up a tone.

Choriamb (asymmetrical)

A different variant of the 'desire' motif is sung by Isolde shortly after act I scene 2 begins, just as the young sailor finishes singing 'Weh, ach wehe, mein Kind!' (Ex. 16a). At no other point in act I is a variant repeated so insistently to bring about an octave-long ascent (D4 to D5). Choriamb (L-S-S-L) is again suggested, though with the long and short in the first half 3-1 (L-S) lengthened by an eighth note and inverted into 2-4 (S-L) in the second half. In act III scene 1, we encounter a similar variant, in which 7-1 (L-S) in the first half is lengthened by an eighth note and inverted into 2-8 (S-L) in the second half (Ex. 16b). The choriamb is, in both cases, asymmetrical in layout.

a. Act I scene 2 (Wagner, 1906: 15-16)³⁶

3-1-2-4 (L-S-S-L) choriamb (asymmetrical)

Isolda (whose eyes have at once sought Tristan and fixed stonily on him - aside, gloomily)

Mir er-ko-ren, - mir ver-lo-ren, -
I mis-tak-en! I for-sak-en!

Weh, ach we - he, mein Kind!
Woe, ah woe is my child!

hehr und heil, - kühn und feig! - Tod - geweihtes
Bright and brave! - Knight and knave! - Death - de-vot-ed

pp *p* *poco cresc.* *cresc.* *ff*

³⁶ In the first and second statements of this variant, the last note is notated as a quarter note. The next main attack, however, comes only after a half note.

b. Act III scene 1 (Wagner, 1906: 228)

7-1-2-8 (L-S-S-L) choriamb (symmetrical)

Sehr allmählich belebend.
Poco a poco più mosso.

Ah-nung? find-ing? Sehn - sücht' - ge Hate - ful - re - Sehn - sücht' - ge Hate - ful - re - minding, Mähnung, call I all, die neu dem nenn' ich dich, that back to

pp

Example 16. Variants of the 'desire' motif: choriamb (asymmetrical)

Ditrochees (asymmetrical)

Variants of the 'desire' motif that appropriate ditrochees (L-S-L-S) appear in act III exclusively. In scene 1 of the act, before the curtain is raised, such a four-note ascent is stated repeatedly (Ex. 17a). The long and short in the first half 5-1 (L-S) of this four-note ascent can be lengthened by an eighth note into 6-2 (L-S) in the second half. Similar four-note ascents appear later (Ex. 17b and Ex. 17c). They are just as dark and foreboding, creeping in at the points Tristan finishes singing 'doch kann ich dir nicht sagen' (Wagner, 1906.: 227) and 'zu entschwinden Tristan ist vergönnt' (Wagner, 1906: 232). In Ex. 17b, the long and short 4-2 (L-S) in the first half are lengthened by a quarter note into 6-4 (L-S) in the second half. In Ex. 17c, the long and short 2.5-0.5 (L-S) in the first half are lengthened by a sixteenth note into 3-1 (L-S) in the second half. In both cases, the second half (L-S) of the ditrochee (L-S-L-S) can be derived from the first half (L-S) by adding to the two component notes the same short duration. As in the afore-mentioned asymmetrical choriamb, the two longs of each asymmetrical ditrochee are of different lengths, as are the two shorts. The augmentation is unconventional in that the long-short ratio in the first half is altered in the second half.

a. Act III (Wagner, 1906: 216)

5-1-6-2 (L-S-L-S) ditrochee (asymmetrical)

cresc. - - - *più cresc.* - - *più f* - *ff* - *f dim.* - - -

b. Act III scene 1 (Wagner, 1906: 227)³⁷

4-2-6-4 (L-S-L-S) ditrochee (asymmetrical)

Wo ich er - wacht - weit' ich nicht; doch wo ich
Where I a - woke - stayed I not; but where I

c. Act III scene 1 (Wagner, 1906: 232)³⁸

2.5-0.5-3-1 (L-S-L-S) ditrochee (asymmetrical)

Etwas gedehnt. Poco steso.

- - stan ist ver - gönnt. Weh, nun
- - tan, I am doomed. Ah! it

Example 17. Variants of the 'desire' motif: ditrochees (asymmetrical)

³⁷ The last note of the ditrochee is interpreted as four eighth notes long by including the ensuing quarter-note rest.

³⁸ This variant of the 'desire' motif is played three times in a row (Wagner, 1906: 254) before it dissolves into an extended chromatic ascent, and leads all the way up to a high C.

Derivatives of ‘desire’ motif: dochmiac

Derivatives are like variants of the ‘desire’ motif in articulating stepwise ascents/descents except that they comprise more than four notes. There are fewer derivatives than variants,³⁹ but they are just as important and are unique in their appropriation of dochmiac. Plate 2 reproduces West’s comprehensive list of ‘normal dochmiacs,’ which shows all ‘possible combinations’ of longs and shorts (2:1 in ratio) in the making of dochmaics (West, 1982: 109).

DOCHMIAC 109

(i) Normal dochmiacs. Any of the three longs of the basic form may be resolved, and either of the two shorts may be replaced by a long (drag). The scheme thus becomes $\cup \cup \cup \cup \cup \cup$. But of the thirty-two theoretically possible combinations, eleven do not occur, and others are very rare:

resolutions:	no drag	drag-in	drag-out	double drag
none	- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -
one	- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -
two	- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -
three	- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -

NOT FOUND

Plate 2. West’s comprehensive list of ‘normal dochmiacs’

West defines dochmiac as a pattern that “contains the equivalent of eight short notes, divided unequally in groups of three and five” (West, 1992: 142). Like the Greek rhythm choriamb featured in the ‘desire’ motif and its variants, dochmiac connotes tragedy.⁴⁰ Regarding the three derivatives featured in *Tristan*, a reading of the unconventional 5+3 grouping of eighth notes characteristic of dochmiac makes much better sense than that of different patternings of longs and shorts. The 5+3 grouping is well defined, though the diminutions in each group are achieved in notably different ways. The appropriation of dochmiac in the derivatives brings

³⁹ The number of derivatives would escalate considerably if I included structures that are not stepwise ascents/descents. But then it would be less convincing to argue that they are derivatives of the ‘desire’ motif. Just a couple of them will be examined following a discussion of the derivatives.

⁴⁰ Gevaert refers to dochmiac and choriamb as rhythms associated with Greek tragedy (Gevaert, 1881: 65, 79). West is also of the view that dochmiacs are ‘characteristic of tragedy’ (West, 1982: 108).

about a written-out *accelerando*, just as a *ritardando* is composed out by an asymmetrical choriamb in selected variants. It is as if the appropriation of dochmiac in the derivatives and that of choriamb in the variants were conceived as a pair.

A derivative of the 'desire' motif first appears in act I scene 3 (Wagner, 1906: 27-28) at the point Isolde and Brangäne decided to use the magic potion (Ex. 18a).⁴¹ The unconventional 5+3 grouping of eighth notes in this six-note ascent is suggested by the beaming of the last three notes. If only the last two eighth notes had been beamed, this six-note ascent would have assumed the conventional rhythmic grouping of 2+4+2 instead.

a. Six-note ascent, act I scene 3 (Wagner, 1906: 27)

b. Five-note descent, act II scene 2 love duet (Wagner, 1906: 183)

⁴¹ This six-note ascent is pitted against a four-note descent to form a wedge-shaped pair. Stated three times consecutively, the wedge-shaped pair generates mounting tension in response to Brangäne's words ('Weh! ach wehe! dies zu dulden!'). The same rhythm, albeit realized through a six-note ascent that is only partially stepwise, is heard three times in a row shortly after Brangäne exclaims 'O weh! Ach! Ach des Übels, das ich geahnt!' (Wagner, 1906: 11).

c. Six-note ascent, act III scene 1 (Wagner, 1906: 235)

Mässig beginnend und schnell bewegter.
Moderato cominciando e poi stringendo subito.
Kurvenal (after great distress, quickly rousing himself from his dejection)

Der einst ich
For her who

trotzt, aus Treu' zu dir, mit dir nach ihr nun muss ich mich seh - - -
once, for faith to thee, was feared by me, with thee am I long - - -

Example 18. Derivatives of the 'desire' motif: dochmiacs (5+3 eighth notes)

The second derivative of the 'desire' motif appears in the love duet of act II scene 2 when Tristan and Isolde embrace for the third and last time (Ex. 18b).⁴² The attack points of the two tied notes in this derivative mark off a 5+3 grouping of eighth notes.⁴³ Stated six times without a break, this derivative articulates an accelerando-cum-crescendo, which is further intensified by the use of syncopation.

The third derivative (S-L-L-S-S-S) appears in act III scene 1 (Ex. 18c).⁴⁴ The unconventional beaming of the last three eighth notes in this six-note ascent (as in

⁴² The five-note descent is evidently an extension of the preceding four-note descent . A passing note is added, but the introduction of a triplet to accommodate the passing note ensures that the four- and five-note descents are of the same length, taking up one measure of 2/2 each.

⁴³ The same reading is inferred in the case of the four-note descent, from which the five-note descent originates. The four-note descent can also be read as a ditrochee (asymmetrical), i.e. L-S (3-2) followed by L-S (2-1). This reading is nonetheless problematized by the fact that no other ditrochees (asymmetrical) in *Tristan* repeat a note of the same length.

⁴⁴ This six-note ascent first appears in act I scene 5 near the markings of 'Tristan (confused)' (Wagner, 1906: 94) and 'Isolde (in confusion)' (Wagner, 1906: 102), when Tristan and Isolde, having taken the love potion, embrace one another passionately for the first time. But it is not until act III scene 1 (Wagner, 1906: 235) that this six-note ascent is played insistently, being stated six times in a row to shape an extended crescendo. A sense of

the six-note ascent of act I scene 3) suggests the appropriation of a 5+3 dochmiac. The Greek rhythm dochmiac is most unequivocally projected in this derivative, given the schematic use of longs and shorts in strictly 2:1 ratio. S-L-L-S-S-S is also special because the motivic use of an ascent in *Tristan* usually begins with two shorts or one long.⁴⁵

a. Act II scene 1 (Wagner, 1906: 119)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Act II scene 1. Each system consists of a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The first system features the lyrics: "Schein! flame! Dass That ganz sie sich nei - ge, now she come nigh us,". The piano part begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking. The second system features the lyrics: "win - ke der Nacht! bid we the night! Schon E'en". The piano part begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. In both systems, specific rhythmic motifs in the piano accompaniment are highlighted with red boxes, showing a consistent six-note ascending pattern.

urgency is created as Kurwenal tries to pull himself together in the face of Tristan's failing physical condition.

⁴⁵ This rhythm appears in West's comprehensive list of 'normal dochmiacs' and is cited by Messiaen from Pindar's *Olympic II* to illustrate how iamb (S-L) and cretic (L-S-L) are juxtaposed to form dochmiac (see Messiaen, 1994: 78).

b. Act II scene 2 (Wagner, 1906: 147)⁴⁶

c. Act I scene 5 (Wagner, 1906: 94)⁴⁷

Example 19. Melodic motifs affiliated with the derivatives: dochmiac (5+3 eighth notes)


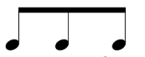







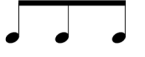


Dochmiac is also prominently featured through the melodic motifs that are not shaped as stepwise ascents/descents and therefore not classified as derivatives of the ‘desire’ motif. A comparison of three such melodic motifs (Ex. 19) and the aforementioned derivatives shows that there is a one-to-one mapping between them (Ex. 20). Wagner might have played with different ways to ‘reduce’ the asymmetrical 5+3 grouping of eighth notes to come up with multiple pairs of dochmiacs. The melodic motif affiliated with the first derivative is prevalently used throughout *Tristan*, and is stated twenty-seven times consecutively in act II scene 1 (Ex. 19a).⁴⁸ An even more impressive record of thirty-two consecutive statements of this melodic motif

⁴⁶ A six-note melodic pattern that shares with the second derivative the same rhythm, except that the ties are not yet in place, appears in act II scene 2 (Wagner, 1906: 147) and is stated five times in a row.

⁴⁷ In act I scene 5 a six-note melodic pattern that shares with the third derivative a similar rhythmic profile is stated three times in a row near ‘Tristan (confused)’ (Wagner, 1906: 94) and again near ‘Isolde (in confusion)’ (Wagner, 1906: 102).

⁴⁸ Wagner, 1906: 106-108, 110, 112-113, 115-116, 118-120, 126, 128-129, 139-140, 161, and 276.

results if the single measure of interruption (located right after the twenty-seventh statement) is discounted. This is remarkable, given that such obsessive repetition of a rhythm is not heard elsewhere in *Tristan*. Only the ending of the love duet in act II scene 2 and the ending of act III and hence *Tristan*—in both cases saturated with different manifestations of the ‘desire’ motif—may be considered comparable.

		first derivative
		affiliated melodic motif
		second derivative
		affiliated melodic motif
		third derivative
		affiliated melodic motif

Example 20. Derivatives and their affiliated melodic motifs

Epilogue

In the 1870s, while still a keen advocate of Wagner’s music, Nietzsche had espoused Wagner as a modern-day Aeschylus and alluded to the revival of Greek rhythms in *Tristan*.⁴⁹ In *Griechische Rhythmik*, however, Nietzsche had made only tangential remarks on the use of five and seven time, and the frequent changes of time signature and measure length in *Tristan*. Taking Nietzsche’s analysis of *Tristan* act III scene 2 as a cue, I conducted a comparative analysis of melodic motifs deployed in all three acts of *Tristan* that resemble the referential seven-note ascent. The appropriation of distinct Greek rhythms in *Tristan* thus becomes evident: choriamb and dochmiac, which connote tragedy, outnumber cretic, amphibrach, epitrite IV, and peon II, which are heard mainly in act III and in association with category IA melodic motifs. A notable number of melodic patterns adopt the unconventional 5+3 grouping of eighth notes characteristic of dochmiac. They are nonetheless

⁴⁹ As the relationship between Nietzsche and Wagner turned sour, however, the unconventional rhythmic approaches he praised in Wagner’s music became the targets of his attacks.

deceptively conventional in that each of them neatly fills out one measure of 2/2 or 4/4.⁵⁰ The same applies to choriamb (L-S-S-L), which underpins the ‘desire’ motif and the many occurrences of its variants. A wealth of evidence supports the argument that the long-short ratio is made variable not just across different choriamb, but also across the two halves of individual choriamb. The reading of a variety of long-short ratios—ranging from 2:1 to 3:1, 3:2, 4:1, 5:1, and even 7:1—is thus treated as axiomatic.

A good grasp of Greek rhythms is a prerequisite for any attempt to understand how Wagner might have appropriated them in *Tristan*. Still, even for someone well versed in Greek rhythms, they may not be readily recognizable. There is no way of telling from the mere presence of iamb (S-L), trochee (L-S), anapest (S-S-L), dactyl (L-S-S), and spondee (L-L), which fit perfectly well our rhythmic idioms and notation, whether individual composers considered these rhythmic patterns to be Greek rhythms or not.⁵¹ Throughout *Tristan*, most of what I argue as Greek rhythms are notated in duple or triple meters. Quintuple meter appears only rarely, while septuple meter is only implied by the change of meter from 3/4 to 4/4 in the referential seven-note ascent.⁵² While the use of five and seven time in *Tristan* suits well Nietzsche’s hunting for ‘five- and seven-beat phrases,’ the more prevalent use of choriamb and dochmiac seems to have escaped him.⁵³

Despite the importance of the melodic motifs analyzed in this study, only the seven-note melodic motif at the outset of the *Tristan* Prelude and the ‘desire’ motif embedded in it are commonly understood as Leitmotifs. That most other melodic

⁵⁰ Dochmiacs illustrate well how unconventional rhythmic patterns, depending on how they are notated, can visually appeal to us as somewhat conventional in makeup.

⁵¹ The slow movement of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony is a case in point. Deprived of any documentation that points to Beethoven’s conscious use of Greek rhythms, we can hardly verify Messiaen’s view that dactyl rather than just a commonplace L-S-S pattern is pervasively used in the movement. *Toute la pièce est en effet basée sur des dactyles, et le thème initial est lui-même une succession ininterrompue de dactyles et de spondées* (Messiaen, 1994: 117).

⁵² The use of unconventional rhythmic patterns in *Tristan* often coincides with the depiction of excited, confused, or disturbed mental states. In Nietzsche, 1993: 123-124, he draws an analogy between rhythmic irregularities that result from frequent changes of meters and unbalanced mental states, which may trigger such physiological condition as irregular heartbeat.

⁵³ The use of dochmiac in *Tristan* seems apt. According to West, dochmiacs ‘appear in every extant [Greek] tragedy. Their tone is always urgent or emotional’ (see West, 1982: 108).

motifs are stepwise ascents/descents and in this sense melodically banal may help explain why they have received little scholarly attention. There is virtually nothing about Wagner's compositional use of Greek rhythms in the existing literature, not to mention any attempt to address questions such as whether Wagner makes substantial use of Greek rhythm for the first and only time in *Tristan*, or perhaps similar approaches are adopted elsewhere in his *oeuvre*.

Fueled by important archeological findings, philological studies of Greek rhythm burgeoned during Wagner's lifetime. One major archeological discovery was the *Anonymous Treatise*, which was published by Bellermann in 1841. There were, of course, endless debates about the true nature of ancient Greek rhythms. During the long nineteenth century, the concept of *Taktgleichheit* (equal measure length), promulgated by a line of distinguished German philologists, waxed and waned. There was growing awareness that ancient Greek rhythms could never be known and experienced as they had been in the past, for the obvious reason that audiences had changed. Wagner, though, might not be concerned with what ancient Greek rhythms truly were, but how best to turn what he understood of them into a valuable compositional resource,⁵⁴ exploiting the notion of untimeliness at multiple levels and in ways that resonate well with Nietzsche's stance in the late 1870s:

It is only to the extent that I am a pupil of earlier times, especially the Hellenic, that though a child of the present time I was able to acquire such untimely experiences. That much, however, I must concede to myself on account of my profession as a classicist: for I do not know what meaning classical philology could have for our time if it was not untimely—that is to say, acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come (Nietzsche, 1997: 60).

⁵⁴A parallel can be drawn between the use of Greek rhythms and the magic potion in *Tristan*. Both are inherited from the past, hardly known, and yet stunningly powerful.

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Appendix 1. Nietzsche's analysis of *Tristan*, act III scene 2 (mm. 1-76)

Strophe

a

1

3 2

2 3

Tristan.

O die-se Sonne!
O sun that pourest!

6

p cresc. f p f

b

11

3 3

Ha! dieser Tag! Ha dieser Won - - ne son-nigster
Glo-rious ray! Joy thou re - stor - - est, sun-ni-est

f p cresc. espr.

c

16

2 2

Tag! Ja - gendes Blut, - jauch - zen-der
day! Cours - es my blood, - grows my heart

f f fp cresc. f fp

2 2

T. Muth! good! Lust oh-ne Ma - ssen, Joy without mea - sure! freu - - - Fren - - -

20 *cresc.* *f* *fp* *cresc.* *f* *fp* *cresc.*

18325

2 2 2

T. - - di-ges Ra - sen! Aufdes La - gers Bann, wie - - - sie er - - -
- - zy of plea - sure! *accel.* Can I brook to stay, this - - - sick-bed

25 *sempre più f*

d

2 2

T. tra - - gen! Wohlauf unddar-an, wo die Her - zen schla - gen!
keep - - ing! Nay! Up and a-way, to where hearts are leap - ing!

31 *ff*

2 1 1

T. Tri - stan, der Held, in ju - - beln - der Kraft, - - - hat sich vom
Tris - tan, the knight, with glo - - ri - ous pow'r - - - has snatch'd him -

35 *p* *cresc.*

Antistrophe

a

1 1 3
(He raises himself quite up)

T. Tod em - por - ge - rafft. Mit blu - tender Wun - de be -
self from death once more! Once blood - y and wounded Sir

39

3 2

T. kämpft' ich einst Mo - - rol - den: mit
Mo - rold I en - coun - terd: Now

44

b

2 4 3

T. blu - - ten - der Wun - de er - jag' ich mir -
blood - - y and wound - ed I - sol - da shall -

49

c

2 2

T. - heut' I - - sol - den! Hei - a, mein Blut!
- be con - front - ed! A - ha! my blood!

56

2 2

(He springs from his bed and staggers forward)

T. lu - stig nun flie - sse! Die mir die Wun - de
 Gai - ly it flows now! She that this wound of

61 *ff*

2 1

T. e - - wig schlie - sse, sie naht wie ein Held, sie naht mir zum Heil! Ver -
 mine can close now, she comes like a queen to heal me at need, the

65 *p* *accel.* *cresc.*

[d]

1 1 1 1

T. geh' die Welt mei - ner jauch - zenden Eil!
 world, I ween, must make way to her speed!

69

1 1 1 1

(He totters to the centre of the stage) *Isolda (without)*

Tri -
 Tris -

73 *piu f* *ff trem.* *dim.*

Appendix 2. Greek rhythms appropriated in the seven-note referential ascent and the categories I and II melodic motifs are bolded

Trochee	L-S	— U
Iamb	S-L	U —
Tribrach	S-S-S	U U U
Spondee	L-L	— —
Dactyl	L-S-S	— U U
Anapest	S-S-L	U U —
Proceleusmatic	S-S-S-S	U U U U
Amphibrach	S-L-S	U — U
Bacchius	S-L-L	U — —
Cretic	L-S-L	— U —
Antibacchius	L-L-S	— — U
Peon I	L-S-S-S	— U U U
Peon II	S-L-S-S	U — U U
Peon III	S-S-L-S	U U — U
Peon IV	S-S-S-L	U U U —
Ionic major	L-L-S-S	— — U U
Ionic minor	S-S-L-L	U U — —
Molossus	L-L-L	— — —
Epitrite I	S-L-L-L	U — — —
Epitrite II	L-S-L-L	— U — —
Epitrite III	L-L-S-L	— — U —
Epitrite IV	L-L-L-S	— — — U
Ditrochee	L-S-L-S	— U — U
Diiamb	S-L-S-L	U — U —
Choriamb	L-S-S-L	— U U —
Dochmiac	S-L-L-S-L	U — — U —
Dactylo-Epitrite	L-S-S-S-L-L-L	— U U U — — —