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Two Rings to Rule Them All: A Comparative Study of Tolkien and Wagner

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Abstract

A close comparison of Wagner's Ring Cycle and the history of the One Ring in Tolkien's legendarium which goes far beyond the usual shallow or dismissive comparison between the two. Here we see Tolkien, as he frequently did, absorbing the influence of an earlier author and responding in the form of a correction based on his sense that Wagner had, as Shippey put it, "got something very important not quite right" (*Road* 344).

Additional Keywords

Norse mythology; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Objects—The Ring—Sources; Wagner, Richard. The Ring Cycle—Influence on Tolkien

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TWO RINGS TO RULE THEM ALL: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TOLKIEN AND WAGNER

JAMIE MCCREGOR

THE PARALLEL BETWEEN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* and *Der Ring des Nibelungen* has been drawn many times and studied a few; in 1992 it was already described as having been “a matter of debate for many years” (Morgan 16), and the debate has shown no signs of abating since. Initially, the suggestion of “influence” was dealt a (seemingly decisive) blow by Tolkien himself when his (evidently incompetent) Swedish translator asserted that the One Ring was in effect identical with “der Nibelungen Ring”; with a brusque finality characteristic of him when nettled, he retorted “Both rings were round, and there the resemblance ceases” (*Letters* 306). His biographer Humphrey Carpenter uses this example to support his claim that “comparison of his Ring with the *Nibelungenlied* and Wagner always annoyed Tolkien” (202); Carpenter also alludes to Tolkien, while still a schoolboy, making “a passing jibe at Wagner whose interpretation of the myths he held in contempt” (46). Some subsequent commentaries have taken this at face value; Giddings, for example, sees any Wagnerian associations with Tolkien as a “taint” derived from his mixing “with the rabid Wagnerite C.S. Lewis” (14).

The shift towards a more objective and informed appraisal really begins with Tom Shippey, who points out that Tolkien had an intense dislike for people noticing superficial resemblances between his works and others, especially when this tended to obscure what really mattered about them. Shippey is the first to directly challenge Tolkien’s dismissal of any Wagnerian connection:

The motifs of the riddle-contest, the cleansing fire, the broken weapon preserved for an heir, all occur in both works, as of course does the theme of ‘the lord of the Ring as the slave of the Ring’, *des Ringes Herr als des Ringes Knecht*. (*The Road to Middle-earth* 343-4)

Moreover, Shippey implies a reason why Tolkien might have responded to Wagner, albeit negatively: he was “one of several authors [including Shakespeare] with whom Tolkien had a relationship of intimate dislike” and who he believed “had got something very important not quite right” (344).

A short article by K.C. Fraser, published in the Tolkien Society journal *Mallorn* in 1988, goes a step further. Here, despite several red herrings, one crucial idea emerges: that “the Ring, both in Tolkien and in Wagner, is not merely an essential part of the plot: it is, in fact, the pivot of the whole work” (13). What is more, this parallel, unlike almost all the others readers have noticed, is not found in any of the medieval sources common to both novel and music-drama; there, there are magical and cursed rings aplenty, but none of them are as yet *the* Ring. The same point is made more substantially in Arthur Morgan’s “Medieval, Victorian and Modern: Tolkien, Wagner and The Ring” (1992), to the best of my knowledge the first sustained academic treatment of the question to date. Morgan emphasizes the difference in temper: that Tolkien does not, like Wagner, oppose power with Romantic love but with “the cold heroism of the old heroic North” (17). More importantly, he shows how Tolkien’s conception of the Ring, while deriving much from the earlier sources that would have been opaque to an amateur like Wagner, is nonetheless almost certainly influenced by the composer’s very modern “association of the Ring with machinery” (25)—as exemplified by the parallel images of Nibelheim and Isengard. Most importantly of all, Morgan pinpoints Alberich’s curse in *Das Rheingold* as encapsulating, for the first time, “all the major features of Tolkien’s Ring” and proceeds to summarize them as follows:

There is one Ring only.
The Ring came by a curse, which is now transferred.
It confers unlimited power on its possessor.
Its ownership will now bring no joy, only misery.
It will gradually consume its possessor with anxiety.
It will be sought by all who do not possess it, yet will bring its possessor no contentment.
Its possessor is given the title of Lord of it [...]
Possession will be living death and it will bind its possessor even in death: the Lord of the Ring will become its slave. (22–3)

Finally, Morgan makes the telling suggestion that in 1939, when Tolkien was drafting his *Hobbit* sequel, “the influence of Wagner became stronger as Hitler’s intentions became more obvious” (24).

Much the same point is made in the less scholarly but handsomely packaged *Tolkien’s Ring* by David Day. Despite somewhat misrepresenting Wagner’s intentions, Day is undoubtedly right in pointing out that Hitler’s perversion of “Germanic” mythology outraged Tolkien and may have even inspired him to write *The Lord of the Rings* as a deliberate challenge to Wagner (179). The advantage of this view is that it offers a thoroughly plausible

explanation as to why Tolkien might have been influenced by Wagner and yet object to having it pointed out.

Indeed, the gulf between composer and novelist is far greater than even this would suggest. Bradley Birzer is exactly right in saying that “It would be difficult to find some one who held views more different from Wagner than Tolkien” (3) and he characterises each as follows:

Wagner was a nineteenth-century German socialist, a believer in the apotheosis of man. Tolkien was a twentieth-century English unconstitutional monarchist, a devout Roman Catholic, and a strong believer in the limitations placed upon humans by Adam’s original sin. (1)

Tolkien’s world-view was in fact profoundly reactionary, especially for an English intellectual of his generation, whereas Wagner’s had been ultra-revolutionary; his megalomaniac urge to replace religion with his own art would have struck a man of Tolkien’s orthodoxy (had he suspected it) as blasphemous in the extreme.¹

Other recent commentaries, such as those of online columnists Spengler and Ross, tend to support the same basic view: that there are similarities between Tolkien and Wagner that are not found in any of their mutual sources, that Tolkien’s denial of this is therefore disingenuous and is almost certainly bound up with the “Nazification” to which Wagner’s work all too easily lent itself, which was contemporary with the composition of *The Lord of the Rings*, and which its author would have felt strongly motivated to “correct.” This essential position is one that I share, albeit subject to certain modifications.

A discernable problem with most if not quite all enquiries in this area is that they tend to be conducted by Tolkien scholars (or at least enthusiasts), whose attention to Wagner is relatively limited (and sometimes flawed). Writers on Wagner, on the other hand, show a marked failure to appreciate Tolkien (on the few occasions they deign to mention him at all). Kitcher and Schacht, for example, while acknowledging his writings to be “immensely absorbing and entertaining,” conclude that “they do not deserve the serious attention and reflection lavished on [Wagner’s] *Ring*” (6). Hodgart, writing on Wagner and Joyce, is far more dismissive: “Wagner is Tolkien for grown-ups” (131). Part of the problem here is that, in most cases, Wagner and Tolkien appeal to different audiences—Tolkien’s being appreciably larger, Wagner’s (rightly or wrongly) more “elitist.”

What I now propose to do, in the hopes of redressing this balance, is to lay the two texts beside one another, according both the serious attention they

¹ In this regard, the humility and self-doubt expressed in Tolkien’s sense of his work as “subcreation” offers a striking contrast.

deserve, in order to assess their relationship. Where many critics have pointed out parallels between the events of Tolkien's and Wagner's respective epics and some have even tabulated them, I offer instead the following plot outline (in italics), designed in such a way as to be more or less equally applicable to *both* works. Despite excluding relatively minor events (such as reforged swords and riddle contests) and concentrating solely on the history of the Ring itself, I hope to show that the parallel is a more intricate one than has hitherto been noticed. In order to clarify the complex narrative detail involved, I subdivide the outline into nine numbered stages (the first being the forging of the Ring and the remaining eight the occasions on which it subsequently changes hands). Using this generic plot outline as a framework, I comment at each stage on the similarities and differences between the two versions with a view to suggesting that an important part of what Tolkien was trying to do in *The Lord of the Rings* was indeed to offer a correction of (and possibly a corrective to) Wagner's tetralogy.²

Stage 1. *An evil supernatural being forges the Ring as a magical weapon designed with the express purpose of bringing the world under its maker's sole dominion, something that naturally involves the conquest of its rightful custodians.*

In Wagner's *Rheingold* the Ring-maker is the Nibelung dwarf Alberich, a grotesquely comic villain who is at times even sympathetic to the audience. A small and unlovely creature who is initially no serious threat to anybody, Alberich stumbles across the means of attaining power virtually by accident. The Ring can potentially be made from the Rhinegold by anyone prepared to renounce love, and Alberich chooses to do so because he is denied love anyway; his frustrated lust for the gold's guardian Rhinedaughters fuels his envious desire to supplant those more privileged than himself (the gods) by acquiring the vast riches the Ring can command. The Rhinedaughters' mockery of his ugliness coupled with the patronising scorn he later meets from the god Wotan (Odin) make it all too easy for the audience to understand his bitterness. Wagner's psychological insight here is striking: one who is denied the fulfilment of sexual love seeks instead the consolation of power—which will eventually enable him to purchase the pleasure he could not win freely, and in so doing revenge himself both on those who denied it to him in the first place and those who enjoyed it in his despite. At the same time, the Ring itself is portrayed as a corruption of the gold, originally an innocent object associated with erotic appeal, pure waters and warm sunlight. It is the life-force itself, raped from the heart of nature to be

² It is equally important to acknowledge that this is no more than a *part* of Tolkien's enterprise, and one that by no means cancels out its other and better known aims, such as providing a mythology for England, or a vehicle for the invention of his own languages and etymologies. Nor am I suggesting that Tolkien was deliberately following Wagner point for point, the similarities being much closer at some points than at others.

converted into the means of producing wealth on a grand scale. The Edenic overtones of this opening scene also make it clear that it is Wagner's version of the Fall, his account of the origins of evil and suffering.

In Tolkien, on the other hand, the Ring-maker is the Dark Lord Sauron, a remote and chilling presence, altogether precluding the least shred of sympathy. Essentially a fallen angel, Sauron is a being of vastly superhuman power already committed to evil from the beginning of the world (as he is one of the earliest followers of the primal fallen being, Morgoth). His motivation is an overweening pride that demands the domination of all other wills. In stark contrast to Alberich, he consciously devises and creates the Ring as part of a deliberate strategy: the prior creation of other magic rings in pretended collaboration with and distributed in advance among those he most wishes to control (the elves), followed by the forging of the One Ring as "a thing of surpassing potency" (*Silmarillion* 346), designed to exercise this control over the very thoughts of those wearing the other rings.

Where Wagner, then, conceives of the Ring as a perversion of the pure Rhinegold, Tolkien makes it entirely Sauron's creation—hence evil in its very origin. Where Alberich first discovers, then fulfils, the pre-existing conditions for making the Ring, and acquires from it a power formerly beyond his dreams, Sauron makes the Ring without any external aid and pours his own native power into it, in order to exercise control over the wills of others. Furthermore, in what appears to be a direct inversion of Wagner, Tolkien has the Ring made in the infernal fires of Mount Doom, rather than taken from the Edenic waters of the Rhine. There is also no counterpart in Tolkien for the Rhinedaughters; indeed where Wagner is almost obsessively preoccupied with the erotic, Tolkien eschews it to the point that his work appears virtually asexual. He presents the nature of evil, far from being inherently human (and so partly sympathetic), as Satanic. The Ring has nothing to do with nature, far less sexuality, but embodies the working of a malevolent spirit. The power it generates is not financial, but Faustian; it works not through amassing worldly wealth, but through imparting its sinister influence on the very souls of those under its sway.

Stage 2. *On becoming aware of the threat the Ring-maker poses against them, the world's rightful custodians take immediate steps to counteract him, and eventually succeed in physically removing the Ring from his hand. Being immensely weakened by this loss, he suffers a great, though ultimately temporary, defeat and thereafter begins his slow but unstoppable recovery, his aim now being the restoration of the Ring to himself and the completion of his original purpose, secure in the knowledge that those who defeated him once will be unable to do so a second time. Meanwhile, the Ring itself, being magically charged with the baleful will of its master, exercises a sinister influence over all who subsequently attempt to keep it—possessing them with a jealous desire to hold on to*

it, while filling others with an envious greed to seize it for themselves. The vanquisher of the Ring-maker thus becomes the first victim of the Ring itself, even strenuously resisting the warnings and appeals of his advisors to return it to its place of origin—the only possible means of freeing the world from its accursed power.

In *Rheingold*, the god Wotan's motives in taking the Ring from Alberich are far from simple. While the Nibelung's monstrously self-serving greed clearly needs to be counteracted for the general good, Wotan is also tempted by the desire to possess the Ring for himself. As chief of the gods, moreover, he has little difficulty in seizing it from the dwarf; with the able assistance of the trickster Loge (Loki), he simply takes him captive, violently tears the Ring from his finger and places it on his own. With furious malice, Alberich then pronounces his terrible curse: all shall desire the Ring, yet none will benefit from having it, since they will be possessed with the fear of losing it, while others will long to seize it from them; the lord of the Ring is the slave of the Ring.³ Wotan initially dismisses Alberich's words as a mere empty venting of spleen, though he has plainly fallen victim to the curse already, as he is bent on keeping the Ring for himself. Loge has all along insisted that the right thing to do is return it to its original guardians, the Rhinedaughters, but Wotan simply ignores him, being already in thrall to the power he thinks it will bring him.

In Tolkien, Sauron's chief adversaries are the elves and their allies, the men of Númenor. Unlike Wagner's gods, their motive in opposing the Ring-maker is the straightforwardly justifiable one of defending themselves and the world from his domination; none of them initially have any desire to take the Ring for themselves, only to depose its maker. Doing so moreover requires an almost infinitely greater effort for them than for Wotan, the balance of power being decidedly on the Enemy's side; only seven years of war suffice to defeat him, and his final overthrow is not achieved until Isildur cuts the Ring from his hand. Unlike Alberich, Sauron is in no position to curse the Ring, being effectively disembodied by its loss, but there is actually no need for him to do so as it is an accursed thing by its very nature (the inscription upon it corresponding closely to Alberich's curse as a description of its sinister purpose). This further underlines the central difference in the conception of the Ring itself: where Wagner portrays it as an independent power merely unleashed by Alberich (with his curse functioning both as an expression of his frustrated malice and an explication of the inevitable competition to possess its unique power), Tolkien makes it clear that the Ring is a repository of Sauron's own native power and evil will. In both cases, the Ring is shown to make people desire it, but Tolkien places a much stronger emphasis on the sinister supernatural process behind this: it is not simply the desire (conscious or unconscious) to wield power, it is the will of

³ Cf. Morgan's paraphrase, quoted p.134 above.

Sauron himself—embodied in the Ring—that possesses all who keep it. It is not merely (as in Wagner) a supremely powerful magical device, it is actually *sentient*, and in many instances shown to exercise a tangible influence on those within reach. Thus, while Sauron remains incapacitated for several centuries, the Ring itself continues to act on his behalf. It immediately gets to work on Isildur, so that when the elves urge him to cast it back into the fire it came from he refuses and claims it for his own, thereby sealing his own fate.

Stage 3. *The Ring's new keeper holds it for only a brief while, yet still succumbs to the effects of its evil. It is then picked up by a character who is entirely innocent of its true nature but who is attracted by its golden gleam and prepared to make a sacrifice in order to win it.*

Wotan, as noted, is initially bent on keeping the Ring for himself, but he is eventually dissuaded by Erda's portentous revelation that the gods are already doomed to inevitable destruction. There has been much debate as to what difference it makes at this point whether Wotan keeps the Ring or not; it seems to be a choice between letting the whole world go down to destruction with him, or allowing it to be saved by atoning for his crime.⁴ Even so, Wotan's eventual decision is still a shabby moral compromise: instead of returning the Ring to the Rhine, he gives it to the giants in payment for building his castle, Valhalla, thereby ensuring that his own power is founded on corruption (a truth he himself confesses shortly thereafter with the words: "With unclean wages I paid for that building" [*Rheingold* 144]). The Ring is meanwhile taken up by the unsuspecting giant Fasolt, who claims he deserves it as recompense for having been made to forego the love-goddess Freia (his preferred choice of payment).

Like Wotan, Isildur is intent on keeping the Ring but, unlike Wotan, he refuses *all* appeals to get rid of it. He is not even consciously seeking the Ring's power but is simply its unwitting dupe, persuading himself that he keeps it simply as "weregild" for his father and brother (*The Lord of the Rings* [LotR] II.ii.243) (and here again Tolkien differs from Wagner in stressing how the Ring makes people want it whether they are aware of it or not). A short time later, the Ring itself brings about Isildur's death—by revealing him to the Enemy's soldiers—and is thereafter lost in the river (Tolkien this time emphasising how the Ring actually *controls* events). After a considerable lapse of time, the hobbit-like creature⁵ Déagol finds the Ring while fishing, and lets go of his catch in order to grab it (like Fasolt foregoing an object of natural desire in exchange for

⁴ Investigating this problem is the principal aim of Kitcher and Schacht's *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner's Ring*. For them, Wotan's task "in view of the inescapability of his approaching ending, is to find the *right kind* of ending—and retaining the Ring would preclude that" (46, italics in original).

⁵ Morgan suggests the useful term "proto-hobbit" (21).

it). Far from there being any agreement to exchange it, though, the Ring is simply lost and found—on widely separated occasions and as if by chance. More significant still is Tolkien's use of the river as a setting—which clearly recalls Wagner's Rhine. But whereas Wagner's epic begins in the river, which is the original source of the gold, Tolkien only has it arrive there at a much later stage of its history. The parallel is underlined by the way Déagol's finding of the Ring is described, a scene memorably recreated by Gandalf: "And behold! when he washed the mud away, there in his hand lay a beautiful golden ring; and it shone and glittered in the sun, so that his heart was glad" (I.ii.53). This evident echo of the Rhinedaughters' innocent rejoicing in their gold highlights a resonant irony, as the reader is fully aware that the Ring's beautiful appearance belies its evil—and the fact that it was *originally* made in fire. It is as if at this point Tolkien were deliberately altering Wagner's version—so that the finding of the gold underwater is *not* the beginning of the story, nor has it *ever* been innocent.

Stage 4. *The Ring's finder is immediately accosted by an evil twin who demands it be given to him and, when refused on the age-old grounds that finders are keepers, resorts to fighting and killing him for it. The murderer then wanders off with his spoils and comes in time to a dark cave miles from anywhere, where he guards it for several years in a monstrously or grotesquely dehumanised form. The Ring itself meanwhile remains dormant and a kind of stalemate ensues, during which neither its maker nor his chief opponent are able to secure it, though each is gnawed by a fear of the other doing so first.*

When his brother Fafner tries to snatch the Ring from him, Fasolt angrily shouts "I hold it: it belongs to me"—to which Fafner sarcastically replies "Hold it fast in case it falls" (*Rheingold* 142) and brutally bludgeons him to death. Fafner thereafter takes on the form of a dragon and guards his golden hoard in his forest cave, Neidhöhle (the pit of envy). Both Wotan and Alberich hope to regain the Ring but are prevented from doing so directly. Alberich is simply too small and powerless to challenge the monster, but relies on his curse to bring about its inevitable death; Wotan is prevented by his own laws, specifically his contract with the giants, but works to create a free hero who will be able to act on his behalf.

In a direct parallel—and miniaturised parody—of this scene, Déagol refuses his friend Sméagol's claim that the Ring should be his birthday present and insists, "I'm going to keep it," whereupon Sméagol, echoing Fafner's sarcasm, sneers "Oh, are you indeed, my love" and throttles him (*LotR* I.ii.53). Sméagol then proceeds to become Gollum—not a dragon indeed but certainly a depraved creature and on occasion a cannibal. Meanwhile, both Sauron and his chief adversary, Gandalf (himself a decidedly Odinic figure), are not merely *unable* to regain the Ring but *unaware* what has happened to it. Both sides, however, begin to suspect the truth and to search for answers. Sauron, returned

to the world as the Necromancer, sends his servants to search the river where it was last seen. Gandalf in turn grows perturbed by this and becomes increasingly watchful.

Stage 5. *Years later, a passing adventurer, who is in some sense the unwitting protégé of the Ring-maker's chief opponent, but who appears to be guided by a providence altogether beyond any conscious strategy, encounters the murderous troglodyte, who threatens to eat him. Defending himself with his sword, the hero overcomes his enemy and wins possession of the Ring—but without the slightest inkling of its true nature and origin. He then proceeds to bring his adventure to a successful outcome, with the Ring still safely in his keeping.*

More by luck than judgement, Wotan's strategy ultimately succeeds (in the third part of the cycle) when his blissfully ignorant grandson Siegfried is led to the dragon's lair by Alberich's brother Mime (himself lusting for the Ring).⁶ Siegfried fights and kills Fafner simply to prevent himself from being eaten and only takes the Ring because he magically hears the voice of a bird suggesting he do so. He disregards the information that "it would make him ruler of the world" (*Siegfried* 130), as he has no interest whatsoever in such an occupation, and keeps it simply as a trophy of his victory. Appearing to then forget about it completely, he continues his adventures, which culminate in his awakening the sleeping Brünnhilde with a kiss.

In Tolkien's version, Gandalf sends the blissfully ignorant hobbit Bilbo to help the dwarves win back their gold from the dragon Smaug (one of seemingly innumerable—but mostly incidental—parallels with *Siegfried*),⁷ partly as an experiment in distracting Sauron from his search for the lost Ring. This gamble proves infinitely more advantageous than Gandalf could have hoped, Bilbo himself finding and winning the Ring *en route* by what appears to be the most unfeasible coincidence (but which Gandalf implies is providential: "Bilbo

⁶ The servile and treacherous dwarf Mime is the closest character in Wagner to Gollum and is often thought to be an anti-Semitic caricature. Siegfried reacts with disgust (and an obvious sense of superiority) when Mime claims to be his father, as Frodo does at the thought that "Gollum was connected with hobbits, however distantly" (*LotR* I.ii.54). The difference is that Tolkien presents the claim as true; Frodo's denial of Gollum's essential humanity is reproved by Gandalf and later overcome by his own experience. Tolkien also invests Gollum with a strangely grotesque charm—something utterly lacking in Wagner's Mime.

⁷ In a purely historical sense, Tolkien's version of events begins at this point, since he wrote *The Hobbit* first and was at that stage no more aware than Bilbo that Gollum's ring would turn out to be *the* Ring. Apparent parallels with Wagner in the earlier book (at least in its original version) are therefore more likely to be the result of the shared mediaeval sources for both; *The Lord of the Rings* (together with the consequent revisions to *The Hobbit*) is another story.

was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker" [*LotR* I.ii.56]). Unlike Siegfried, he finds it before meeting its guardian, who is as yet unaware that he has lost it, and wards off his attack with his sword without needing to kill him, indeed at a crucial moment actually spares his life—an act of mercy that proves to have the most momentous consequences. Instead of a battle, they engage in a riddle contest.⁸ Bilbo finally escapes his would-be assailant, who—like Alberich—curses the “thief” who has taken his Ring. He too then proceeds to complete his adventure successfully. The significant differences vis-à-vis Wagner are Tolkien’s radical redefinition, not to say inversion, of heroism (substituting the humble and merciful hobbit for the invincible *Übermensch*) and the far lesser degree of involvement and even knowledge exhibited by all the characters, specifically as compared to the Ring itself and inscrutable “chance.”

Stage 6. *After resting a while from his labours, the Ring-finder sets out on a new journey, having first bequeathed the Ring as a parting gift and keepsake to a loved one—who later receives an unexpected visit from a trusted former comrade who has found out the truth of the matter and is consequently filled with anxiety. The greatest danger now lies in the fact that its maker is sparing no effort to regain it, an event which would guarantee the success of his original plan and plunge the world into irredeemable darkness till the end of time. This looming threat of a permanent and irreparable cosmic disaster lends this episode in particular an atmosphere of suffocating dread and terrible urgency. The messenger is fully aware of what needs to be done and loses little time in relaying it. There is only one possible solution: the Ring must finally be returned to its source of origin. But this, the one thing needed to save the world, is rendered seemingly impossible—both by the implacable will and power of the enemy to retrieve it, and the relative weakness and ignorance of the bearer. The tension is thus further increased by the apparent inevitability of disaster, the consequences of which are about as dire as could conceivably be: the total domination of the world by a hostile power, utterly ruthless, bent on the enslavement and torment of its inhabitants, for the whole of the foreseeable future, and with no further possibility of its ever being checked or resisted in any way whatsoever.*

Siegfried, in *Götterdämmerung*, gives the Ring—with tragic irony—as a love-token to Brünnhilde, before riding forth sounding his horn. Oblivious of her danger, Brünnhilde dotes on the Ring as the symbol of Siegfried’s love and remains deaf to the entreaties of her sister valkyrie, Waltraute, who comes riding on the wings of storm to reveal that “The world’s woes certainly stem from it” (102) and to urge her to return it to the Rhinedaughters. The irony is here intensified, as Brünnhilde’s grandiloquent gesture in the name of love belies the fact that she is nonetheless failing to do the one thing needful, and indeed

⁸ Another probably coincidental *Siegfried* parallel.

playing directly into the enemy's hands. (By this stage, the audience is aware that Alberich's fearsomely capable human son Hagen is masterminding the Ring's retrieval.)⁹

Bilbo, in the first chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*,¹⁰ leaves the Ring to Frodo as part of his inheritance, before wandering off, ultimately to settle in Rivendell and write his memoirs. In stark contrast to Siegfried, Bilbo is shown to be in the early stages of the same addiction more markedly present in Gollum, and has to be actively coerced by Gandalf into letting go of the Ring for his own good. Here Tolkien is again insisting that no one, no matter how well-meaning or innocent, is immune to the evil will of the Ring, which in Gandalf's memorable phrase "set to work on its keeper at once" (I.ii.48). The only exception to this rule is Tom Bombadil, whose example offers an implied criticism of Siegfried: since Gandalf says of him, in response to the suggestion that he might keep it safe, that "if he were given the Ring, he would soon forget it, or most likely throw it away. Such things have no hold on his mind. He would be a most unsafe guardian; and that alone is answer enough" (II.ii.265). Where Wagner idealises Siegfried's immunity to greed and ambition, Tolkien is at pains to emphasise that—at least where the Ring is concerned—innocence of any kind will prove catastrophic. Both Gandalf and Aragorn periodically chide the hobbits for being irresponsibly light-hearted about so grave a matter.

⁹ The replacement of Alberich by Hagen as chief villain means that both of them are counterparts to Sauron, but at different stages of the plot, a fact that underscores further shades of difference between the two works. The late introduction of Hagen in the story serves a vital dramatic purpose, the prophesied downfall of the gods being contingent on the emergence of the "Nibelung-son"—who thus plays a kind of Antichrist to Siegfried's Messiah (since Alberich's calculating and loveless begetting of a son to do his dirty work forms a parodic counterpart to Wotan's parallel strategy in procreating a "free hero" to save the world). In fact there is considerable ambiguity as to whether Hagen will reclaim the Ring for his father or for himself, whereas Tolkien makes it far more explicit that the Ring erodes all filial loyalty (evident for example when Gandalf tells Denethor that Boromir "would have kept it for his own, and when he returned you would not have known your son" (*LoTR* V.iv.813). Wagner's supplanting of his original villain with a successor thus pre-empts Tolkien in one way, while at the same time underlining the contrast with the immortal and bodiless Sauron, whose vital power passes not into a physical heir but—more chillingly—into the Ring itself, and whose agents' loyalty is assured by his complete domination of their wills.

¹⁰ Everything up to this point is recollected in flashback (or recounted in the earlier book *The Hobbit*); *The Lord of the Rings*, a true epic in this respect, begins *in medias res*. The corresponding point in Wagner is the beginning of the fourth and final part of the cycle, though it was the first to be written (Wagner, as is often claimed, having written the text backwards and the music forwards). In a sense, then, he too was beginning the story at this point—and then adding the earlier parts as "prequels."

Frodo, more positively, shows no signs of Brünnhilde's sentimental attachment to the Ring and is entirely receptive to Gandalf's insistence that it must be returned to where it came from. The problem is that this act is not a simple matter (as it would be for Brünnhilde to simply hand the Ring over to the Rhinedaughters); indeed it involves an epic quest, all but impossible of fulfilment (a point the text makes numerous times). Unlike Hagen, Sauron does not know exactly where the Ring is, but once he finds out it will be a relatively simple matter for him to retrieve it, since he commands seemingly limitless resources. The chief danger is not that the Ringbearer refuses the necessary task, but that the odds are so overwhelming stacked against the possibility of his succeeding. Essentially, Wagner presents the solution as almost effortlessly easy but thwarted by a tragic twist of fate, whereas Tolkien makes it a seemingly insuperable difficulty that is nonetheless also a "dreadful chance" (I.ii.51).

Stage 7. *As events build to a climax of tremendous tension, the Ring is taken from its new keeper by a trusted friend. This episode involves a great deal of dramatic confusion and bewilderment, in which both characters are essentially victims of a treacherous plot to seize the Ring from them, one of them being murderously attacked from behind as a consequence.*

Siegfried, under the influence of Hagen's evil magic, seizes the Ring back from Brünnhilde, unaware that it was he who gave it to her, or even that he has met her before. This gives Hagen the pretext he needs to justify murdering Siegfried, which he does by stabbing him in the back during a boar-hunt.

Frodo, gradually nearing the end of his quest, is betrayed by Gollum to the monstrous spider, Shelob, who stings him in the neck. His faithful servant Sam, having fought off Gollum and Shelob but thinking Frodo dead, takes the Ring from him in order to complete the quest on his behalf.

The exact circumstances of each case are at their most different at this stage, with the sequence of events and the roles of the characters being reversed (or substantially altered); what is most striking is the way Tolkien replaces a scene of bitterly tragic (if unwitting) betrayal with one in which treachery is thwarted through an act of devoted loyalty.

Stage 8. *When the confusion is eventually resolved, the Ring is restored to its keeper, who proceeds to complete the task of returning it to its place of origin. At the critical moment, s/he claims the Ring by right, and in token of this places it on his/her finger.*

Brünnhilde, having belatedly learned the full truth and now understanding the whole situation, intervenes just in time to prevent Hagen from seizing the Ring from the fallen hero (undoubtedly helped by the portent of his dead hand rising in protest); she then claims it back in order to return it to the Rhine.

Sam, having learned that Frodo is still alive, is reunited with him and restores the Ring to him, whereupon they continue the final stage of their journey to Mount Doom. Once there, Frodo ultimately fails to relinquish the Ring, claiming it for his own instead.

This is of course the critical stage, the climactic moment when the bearer must finally determine what the fate of the Ring and the world will be. Brünnhilde does so impressively, checking the seemingly unstoppable Hagen at the last moment. Her claim to the Ring at this point is both authoritative, as her rightful inheritance from Siegfried, and selfless, as she is ultimately giving both it and herself up in an act of ritual atonement, and bequeathing it to its original guardians, the Rhinedaughters, whose prior claim she fully acknowledges. The fire that consumes her, as well as the sacrificial nature of the act, purifies the Ring of its curse, so that it is restored to its primal innocence.

By the most extreme contrast, Frodo's performing an almost identical act is presented in terms of his *failing* the quest. Having come, against all hope, to the very Crack of Doom itself and having only to perform the seemingly simple task of casting the Ring into it, he instead succumbs to its overwhelming temptation and claims it for his own. That this is an irrational and catastrophic act is clear, as through it Frodo is effectively giving both the Ring and himself up to the Enemy—even though that is the very thing the quest is meant to prevent; it is in the act of putting it on his finger that Frodo becomes visible to Sauron, whose victory thereby seems assured.

The differences here are so significant as to suggest that Tolkien's original inspiration for the plot of his "*Hobbit* sequel" may have been bound up with a need to "correct" Wagner on this crucial point. Brünnhilde's claiming the Ring is wholly admirable, the act that finally saves the world, whereas Frodo's doing so is tragic and appears to seal the world's doom. In each case, of course, claiming the Ring means something different. For Brünnhilde it is a grandiloquent gesture, part of her redemptive final ritual; for Frodo it is the defeat of his own wisdom and good nature by either reckless egoism or the will of the Ring itself.¹¹ More practically, Brünnhilde's wearing the Ring is the means through which it actually passes through the purifying flame and returns to the Rhine, whereas Frodo claims it *instead* of throwing it in the fire. Here more than ever, then, Tolkien's departure from Wagner lies in his insistence that the Ring cannot simply be overcome by nobility of purpose, since there *is* nobody who is capable of resisting its allure.¹²

¹¹ The difficulty of deciding which has been memorably articulated by Shippey: either "the Ring is a sort of psychic amplifier, magnifying the unconscious fears or selfishnesses of its owners" or "it is a sentient creature with urges and powers of its own" (J.R.R. Tolkien: *Author of the Century* 136).

¹² Except—as noted—the irresponsible Tom Bombadil.

Stage 9. *Finally, the Ring is taken from its keeper for a second time, this time for good. In the process, the treacherous would-be robber dies in a last desperate attempt to seize it, being driven by an overmastering greed that makes him heedless of his own safety; he would in any case have no desire to live without it, as it is the only thing to which he attaches value. His death results immediately from his immersion in the hostile element from which the Ring comes, and to which it is now returned. The salvation of the world is thereby achieved—in each case through a climax of awe-inspiring power, in which the tension is worked up to the last degree of tolerability and then released in a great wave of relief and astonished joy: deliverance beyond hope. The accursed thing that brought oppression and bondage into the world is dissolved, and humanity is delivered from an order based on possession and ownership, to enter a new era of freedom and peace—whose future nonetheless remains uncertain. At the same time, a race of higher beings, the former chief custodians of the world, now renounce it altogether in an act of solemn atonement for their unwitting involvement in the whole business from the beginning. With their passing, the world comes under the rule of men, who will hopefully learn from their example—though there is no guarantee of this. The whole work closes with an epic sense of the end of an age, and in a mood of noble resignation.*

In Wagner's majestic finale, the Rhine floods its banks, allowing the Rhinedaughters to claim the Ring from Brünnhilde's ashes, Hagen being drowned in a desperate final bid to snatch it from them. His defeat, the Rhinedaughters' unchallenged repossession of their treasure and its cleansing by fire, water and sacrificial love reverse the original effects of Alberich's curse. Valhalla is seen burning in the heavens, not as was once feared because of an assault by the forces of darkness, but because Wotan himself is essentially echoing Brünnhilde's self-immolation on an altogether grander scale, putting an end to the whole world order that was founded on the Ring's corruption, making spectacular amends for his own original sin and embracing a Schopenhauerian dissolution of the will to live—"smil[ing] into eternity" (*Götterdämmerung* 100). The human survivors, now an extension of Wagner's audience, witness the spectacle as a veritable bonfire of the illusions our civilisation is built on. The evident recommendation is that they—and we—should begin a new world, without government, law or property of any kind. But whether anyone will really do so, or whether the whole cycle is not more likely to begin all over again, remain unanswered (and probably unanswerable) questions.

In a further inversion of Wagner, Tolkien has the world saved by "chance" (which appears indistinguishable from divine intervention): Gollum's desperation to regain his precious drives him to bite off Frodo's finger, and his reckless jubilation at repossessing it leads him to tumble into the crevice; the Ring is unmade (rather than merely purified) in the fire from which it first arose, and the foundation of Sauron's power is destroyed forever, in token of which the Dark Tower crumbles in apocalyptic ruin (an obvious echo of the fall of Valhalla),

while Sauron himself, though immortal, is reduced to an impotent spirit, blown away on the wind; with his passing, the vast armies under his sway are left directionless and their threat is removed at a stroke. The victorious allies are now free to begin the work of restoring their kingdoms and healing the devastation wrought by war. At the same time, however, the power of the elven-rings fades, and the elves themselves pass over the sea into the West—at least partly in a spirit of penance for the role their thirst for knowledge and understanding played in the creation of the rings of power. With their passing, and the dwindling of the other free peoples, the way is paved for the dominion of men—in effect the beginning of history as we know it. *The Lord of the Rings* also stresses repeatedly that, the defeat of Sauron notwithstanding, evil will never be finally vanquished within this fallen world, and that each new age brings with it an inevitable sense of diminishment. The whole work, and its closing chapters in particular, are deeply elegiac, filled with a haunting consciousness of mortality and irretrievable loss.

The conclusions of both works are clearly similar, though again there are significant differences. Both feature the salvation of the world from the threat of the Ring's evil dominion, but in each case this is substantially qualified. The ending of Wagner's cycle is famously ambiguous, combining tragedy and triumph in equal measure, partly through the pessimistic Schopenhauerian doctrine that existence itself is inescapably tragic and oblivion a state greatly to be desired. *The Lord of the Rings* falls short of tragedy as such, but not by far (a fact that is lost on hostile critics who accuse it of having a superficially happy ending). Where both works suggest that the world will continue going from bad to worse, and both locate final redemption beyond "the circles of the world" (*LotR* App.A.1035), Tolkien eschews Wagner's implied death-wish for an aching nostalgia for life reminiscent of late Mahler.¹³

When considering the overall pattern of similarities and differences discussed here, it seems increasingly difficult to ignore the likelihood of Tolkien setting out to "rewrite" Wagner with a view to correcting that "something very important [but] not quite right" that he (according to Shippey) had detected in his work (*The Road to Middle-earth* 344). Furthermore, the governing overall difference in spirit between the works, above and beyond the perceived relationship between Hitler and Wagner that first alerts one to it, is that noted by Birzer (as discussed above): the extreme ideological gulf between Tolkien's conservatism and Christian orthodoxy and Wagner's revolutionary (and arguably proto-fascist) iconoclasm. When one pays attention to *what* Tolkien

¹³ Arthur Morgan once suggested to me that a spiritual affinity can be sensed between *Das Lied von der Erde*, for example, and Bilbo's farewell song in Rivendell.

appears to correct, as well as *how* he does so, this difference becomes more sharply underlined.¹⁴

The cosmos of Wagner's *Ring* is pagan, fatalistic, inescapably tragic, the only hope it offers the bleakly Schopenhauerian one of denying the Will and embracing oblivion. The world comes into being spontaneously, and even in its Edenic age there is inequality, suffering and cruelty. The original natural order of things, in other words, is imperfect, clearly not the product of intelligent design. The gods themselves are deeply flawed and fallible, and there is (initially) no higher order of existence than them; they are destined to be superseded by an ideally free and (by conventional standards) amoral humanity; the *Ring* can be (and often has been) interpreted as glorifying adultery, incest, ingratitude and (ultimately) the abolition of civilisation. The line between good and evil is blurred, Alberich sometimes appearing more sympathetic than Wotan. The *Ring* itself, as we have seen, is presented as something that can arise naturally, through a quite understandable process of corruption (and one that is ultimately reversible through purification).

By complete contrast, Tolkien's universe, while pessimistic in its way, is at the deepest level a Christian one and allows for the possibility of "eucatastrophe," of positive salvation. Tolkien's "good" characters, while obviously not literally Christian, adhere to highly moral codes of conduct that

¹⁴ An alternative view is that offered by Christine Chism, who sees Wagner as simply a part of a larger movement in post-German Romantic mythmaking, one that threatens to eliminate history for its own self-serving and potentially destructive ends. Tolkien, Chism argues, problematises the allure of mythic creation that Wagner (and others) mystifies and sublimates, and instead affirms a return to history, even at the cost of renouncing the numinous. This is a complex and impressive argument and has much to recommend it, notably its attention to Tolkien's capacity for self-interrogation. At the same time, it reinforces a common tendency to lump Wagner together with Hitler as one "whole vicious Siegfriedian, Rosenbergian Nazi mindset"—so that Tolkien can be presented as negotiating an "ethical dilemma that Wagner's devotees must still negotiate: how can one [*sic*] separate enjoyment of the complex artistic diagetic world from the political and cultural uses to which its power may be put" (78). This view is nothing if not widespread (and is certainly not limited to Tolkien studies); it is an inevitable consequence of acknowledging both Wagner's virulent anti-Semitism and Hitler's appropriation of Wagner's mythology, as well as the moral revulsion aroused by both. It can nonetheless lead to some degree of oversimplification (in the current context the emphasis on Tolkien's differences from Wagner at the expense of their similarities). It can lead Chism, for example, to assert that Siegfried "doesn't hesitate [...] to kill for the Ring" (76), which—if intended as a literal comment on the onstage action—is simply untrue (see my discussion of this episode above, in Stage 5 above, p.141). Much recent Wagnerian criticism, on the other hand, has attempted—without downplaying the often repugnant nature of the composer's beliefs—to remove the attendant confusion that bedevils appreciation of his work (see for example the excellent chapter on "Wagner's Misleading Reputation" in Magee).

are. The elves and Númenóreans in particular reverence, but do not worship, the Valar (who, as *The Silmarillion* clarifies, are faithful viceregents of Ilúvatar, evidently identical with the Christian God). Gandalf, after his return from death, refers to “roads that I will not tell” (*LotR* III.v.502), implying that he is forbidden to speak of whatever lies beyond this world or the power responsible for sending him back. The perceptive reader nonetheless realises that this is (intentionally) consistent with the Christian view of things, especially at a period supposed to predate the Incarnation. Symbolically, Gandalf’s resurrection, as well as Aragorn’s restoration and, especially, Frodo’s sacrifice are meant to (and do) resonate with Christian significance. The moral world of the novel contains all the mechanisms of fallibility, temptation, resistance, submission, repentance, atonement and forgiveness; while few characters are simplistically all one or the other, the line between good and evil remains absolute. And the Ring itself is absolutely evil, beyond the possibility of purification.

Nor is it simply a matter of the Ring. There are other apparent “inversions” of Wagner that fit the same pattern. A clue to these is offered by Day’s suggestion that Tolkien’s “challenge” to Wagner mirrors that which he makes to “Shakespeare’s use of myth and history in *Macbeth*” (179). The latter, as many have noted, is not limited to the march of the Ents (an improvement on Birnam Wood merely appearing to come to Dunsinane); the deceptive prophecy that none of woman born shall harm Macbeth has its equivalent too (that the Witch-king shall not fall by the hand of man). But the encounter of Éowyn and the Nazgûl has Wagnerian as well as Shakespearean overtones.

As a spirited warrior maiden, Éowyn recalls Wagner’s heroine Brünnhilde. Like the valkyrie, Éowyn rides into battle in defiance of a father-figure’s orders, and does so—paradoxically—because moved to do so by a deeper loyalty towards him. At the same time, however, the enemy she encounters resembles a sinister parody of Brünnhilde: each is the chief among nine riders, “choosers of the slain” whose airborne steeds fly over battlefields, seeking their prey. But whereas the valkyries take the slain to their reward in Valhalla, the chilling threat of the Nazgûl is to “bear thee away to the houses of lamentation, beyond all darkness, where thy flesh shall be devoured, and thy shrivelled mind be left naked to the Lidless Eye” (*LotR* V.vi.841). This in turn suggests the Dark Tower is likewise an evil version of Valhalla (a point already suggested above in the way that both are destroyed in spectacular fashion immediately after the restoration of the Ring). Each is a vast mountaintop fortress that commands a worldwide view, each is home to a supremely powerful lord who is served by the nine riders, and each lord is distinguished by his single, all-seeing eye.

There seems to be a clear pattern at work here. Where Wagner’s Wotan and Brünnhilde are noble and admirable characters, Tolkien mirrors each of

them doubly—that is with diametrically opposed good and evil counterparts. Just as there is a fatal encounter between the Nazgûl and Éowyn (a false versus a true valkyrie, so to speak), so too Sauron's principal opponent is Gandalf (suggesting likewise a true and a false Odin/Wotan).¹⁵ Like Wagner's Wanderer, the Grey Pilgrim roams the earth in the guise of an old man leaning on a staff/spear, or riding a matchlessly swift steed, spurring mortals on to deeds of heroic courage and concealing his true power beneath a cloak of humility. The pattern moreover reflects the same moral "correction" as the inverted history of the Ring. Where Wagner seems to glorify what Spengler calls an "existential act of despair" (par.16), Tolkien remains true to the Old Norse spirit of indomitable courage even in the face of certain defeat.

Éowyn, like Brünnhilde, seeks her own death, partly because of her tragic love for the hero, but in her case this attitude is shown to be misguided; she is given a second chance, and returns to life and love fulfilled. Gandalf, in contrast to the resigned and world-renouncing Wotan, is Tolkien's outstanding spokesman for resistance at all costs, an attitude he expresses memorably on several occasions but none more so than at the last debate of the captains of the West:

We must walk open-eyed into that trap, with courage, but small hope for ourselves. For, my lords, it may well prove that we ourselves shall perish utterly in a black battle far from the living lands; so that even if Barad-dûr be thrown down, we shall not live to see a new age. But this, I deem, is our duty. And better so than to perish nonetheless—as we surely shall, if we sit here—and know as we die that no new age shall be. (*LotR* V.ix.880)

The character who most embodies the Wagnerian view, and is heavily censured for doing so, is Denethor. It is Denethor who, like Brünnhilde, creates his own funeral pyre and who voices an attitude reminiscent of Wagner's at the end of *Götterdämmerung*: "The West has failed. It shall all go up in a great fire, and all shall be ended. Ash! Ash and smoke blown away on the wind!" (V.vii.852). What Wagner celebrates, Tolkien decries as shamefully defeatist.

¹⁵ Frank P. Riga makes a similar case for the opposition of Gandalf and Saruman being based on "a single, complex and ambivalent figure" who is split into "two different figures, each one representing a different aspect of Merlin and Prospero" (207). The Wagnerian, no less than the Shakespearean and/or Arthurian, sage is likewise many-sided and morally dubious, his primarily noble character having a contrastingly roguish and Machiavellian streak, and Tolkien appears to divide his attributes between the diabolical Sauron and the gruff-tempered but nonetheless venerated and deeply sympathetic figure of Gandalf. This polarising tendency should not be misunderstood as a reductive or oversimplified view of "us and them," however; far from being "simply schematic antitheses," Tolkien's opposing types "reveal multiple layers of complexity and ambiguity" (212).

Several other details suggest this scene is a deliberate inversion. As Denethor leaps onto his pyre, he breaks “the staff of his stewardship” upon his knee (V.vii.854), like Wotan welcoming the breaking of his spear (his own staff of office) and later lighting his own immense pyre with the spear’s flaming fragments. The description of Denethor’s face in this scene even suggests a physical resemblance to Wagner himself, as he appears in several portraits: “it seemed cut out of hard stone, sharp with black shadows, noble, proud, and terrible” (V.vii.853). Finally Denethor’s death is deliberately contrasted, and designed to coincide, with Théoden’s—a model of heroic resistance, and appropriately attended by his own defending “valkyrie,” Éowyn.

To conclude, it seems evident that the growing critical suspicion that Tolkien was deliberately “correcting” Wagner is amply justified. His denial of any connection was most likely intended to avoid a false appearance of kinship where he intended opposition;¹⁶ it is also typical of his fondness for scholarly in-jokes. But this achievement, which adds a further dimension to *The Lord of the Rings*, is equally ill-served by critics who overpraise either author at the other’s expense. In a balanced view, Tolkien, widely underestimated though he is, cannot be seriously held to rival Wagner’s transcendent genius. Nonetheless, when it comes to spiritual authenticity to the sources, Tolkien’s professional authority outweighs Wagner’s gifted amateurism and makes his version, in that sense, the “truer” of the two. But whether Wagner’s version is really “wrong” in the ways that Tolkien’s implies it is must remain a matter for personal judgement. As many recent studies of Wagner have tried to show (Kitcher and Schacht’s being a good example), *Der Ring des Nibelungen* is not necessarily as nihilistic, proto-Nazi and downright hateful as it is often taken to be. Tolkien may even have more in common with Wagner than he would have ever

¹⁶ For all their real differences, however, it does not follow that Tolkien had no time for Wagner at all, or that he objected to Lewis dragging him to Covent Garden on occasion. Diana Glyer argues that a spirit of opposition often coexisted easily with mutual esteem among the Inklings, commenting that “even when the criticism is blunt or harsh, these disagreements occur within the context of genuine friendship, and even the most caustic comments tend to be marked with humour and conducted with charity” (93–4), so it is not impossible that Tolkien’s attitude to Wagner was similarly balanced. For one thing it is hard to imagine the author of *The Lord of the Rings* being unmoved by the unashamed Romantic fervour of Wagner’s score. It is also noticeable that the defining qualities that mark the Inklings as a group and underscore their opposition to the fashionable intelligentsia—their lack of affectation or pretension, their privileging of real human feeling over artificial sentiment, their honest, unashamed estimation of old-fashioned values, of friendship, love, nature, camaraderie, and a certain capacity for blunt directness, even tactlessness—are qualities that Wagner, by and large, tended to share. Simply put, he would not have been entirely out of place among them.

suspected. Morgan quotes one of his most revealing letters, which asserts that the desire to “rebel against the laws of the Creator—especially against mortality [...] will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective,—and so to the Machine (or Magic)” (*Letters* 145; Morgan 26). What Tolkien can hardly have known was that Wagner, also in a letter, had described the moral of the *Ring* as being that “dread of the end is the source of all lovelessness” (1.260). Bearing in mind that the *Ring* presents a diametric opposition between power and love, it is clear that “lovelessness” here is equivalent to “the desire for Power,” suggesting that Wagner and Tolkien equally see the lust to dominate as originating in the fear of death (“Dread of the end”/ “rebel[ion] [...] against mortality”), an impulse that leads to a futile substitution of material possessions for the irreplaceable value of life itself. Throughout this essay, I have made a point of referring to the Ring in the singular, even where simultaneously discussing both Tolkien’s and Wagner’s versions of events. This has served more than a purely practical purpose. At the end of the day, the Two Rings are One after all.



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Mexico/Latin America air \$12
Europe/Asia \$12

