



Tolkien and Wagner: The Ring and Der Ring

Christopher MacLachlan

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Tolkien famously rejected comparison of his Ring with Wagner's, though there is good evidence that Tolkien knew much more about Der Ring des Nibelungen than he let on after the publication of The Lord of the Rings. Analysis of that work from a Wagnerian point of view enables consideration of it in a new way. By exploring the parallels between Wagner's Ring and Tolkien's, a fresh interpretation of Tolkien's work emerges, one that hinges on associating Gandalf with Wotan. Like Wagner's god, Gandalf has to find a way of solving the problems posed by the Ring and like Wotan he cannot succeed without other people. When the plots of The Lord of the Rings (and The Hobbit) are examined in this way it becomes apparent how much they owe to Wagner's music-drama, and the role of Gandalf is opened to new explanation.

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