Tolkien's World and Wagner's: the music of language and the language of music

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Writers and commentators on the life and work of J.R.R. Tolkien almost always discount any comparison of Tolkien's world with Wagner's, as represented by the "Ring", cycle of operas.[1] The topic is discussed, for instance, by Tom Shippey (Shippey, 1982, p. 220 and 1992, p. 296) in, *The Road to Middle-earth*, but there, as apparently everywhere else, the comparison seems to be thought of solely in terms of the respective relationships of Tolkien and Wagner to the original sources, the Old Norse and Germanic mythologies. Certainly there do not seem to be any fruitful grounds for comparison in purely literary terms; likewise there is no evidence whatever for thinking of Wagner's work as an "influence", of any kind as far as Tolkien was concerned. The extent to which Wagner adapted and transformed the material for his own purposes departed a long way from the spirit and atmosphere of the sagas and the Nibelungenlied themselves.[2].

Quite a different picture emerges if Wagner and Tolkien are thought of as artists whose importance in part lay in that they reflected the events, background and spirit of their own times, the romantic nineteenth century and its twentieth century aftermath. In this light it can be seen that both of them deal fundamentally with themes which relate to those times, and also very much to the subsequent periods up to our own time. In their handling of such common themes – power and the corruption inherent in the exercise of power – the despoilment of the natural world by mankind – the inevitability of change and death – they can be seen often enough to cross each other's paths, and sometimes to coincide. I dealt with this topic in a paper given at Cambridge in 1988 at the Tolkien Society's annual Seminar (or "Workshop", as it was then called). I also suggested that a large part of a comparison between them, perhaps the greater part, lay in looking at the respective ways in which they deal with the object of creating a, "Secondary World", of the readers', or listeners', imagination. Wagner's world being created mainly by way of the resources of his huge orchestra, the comparison involved considering the scores of the operas, rather than the texts, the libretti. Such an inquiry could not be followed up within the limits of the 1998 paper, and is attempted in the present article, which constitutes a pendant or sequel to the earlier one.

At this point I intrude a personal note. Many lovers of Tolkien works look back to their first reading of *The Lord of the Rings*, as a special, life-determining experience. The same applies to many Wagnerians in regard to the first time of seeing the "Ring", cycle performed as a whole in the theatre. In my own case the two experiences came close together, and may have overlapped. I saw my first "Ring", at Covent Garden in the spring and early summer of 1955. Two volumes of, *The Lord of the Rings*, had appeared by then, the last volume following in October of that year. I cannot be too precise about the date, but clearly recall the impression that passages from *The Fellowship of the Ring*, and *The Two Towers*, made on me (and the rest of my family), in the summer of that year.

I was fortunate in the performances, which in those years were of a quality that has rarely been equalled since, and perhaps the parallelism would not have struck me so forcibly if I had had to face the kind of musical failings and eccentricities of staging and production that, in more recent years, have bedevilled a good many performances of the operas. Well may many people nowadays retreat from the perils of live theatre, in favour of recordings, where the listener, like the reader of Tolkien, can build up the imaginary world in his or her own mind. I am of course assuming that the reader, if interested enough

[1] The four operas, in order. are *Das Rheingold*, (The Rhinegold) (composed 1853-4); *Die Walküre*, (The Valkyrie) (composed 1854-6); *Siegfried*, (composition between 1856-7 and completed 1869-71); and *Götterdämmerung*, (The Twilight of the Gods) (composed 1869-74).

[2] For Wagner's own handling and adaptation of the original material see Deryck Cooke's unfinished study of the "Ring" cycle. *I saw the world end. – a study of Wagner's Ring.*

to have read this far, will be acquainted with at least some of the music of Wagner's "Ring" (beyond the so-called "Ride of the Valkyries"!), and will have or be able to obtain, access to one or other of the (nowadays) quite numerous recordings, one of which is sung in English.[3] This may assist those for whom the original German text (Wagner's style is highly idiosyncratic) represents a stumbling block.

When one speaks of Wagner's music in, "The Ring", as establishing a "secondary world", in Tolkien's sense one is implying that music is capable of creating, or illustrating, ideas and images outside itself.[4] The development of its expressive powers in this sphere had been taking place for a century and more before Wagner began to compose the music for "The Ring", and has sometimes occupied a chapter in this or that history of music under some such title as "the rise of programme music." A key text, perhaps *the* key text, is Beethoven's "Pastoral", symphony, first performed in 1806, especially with reference to Beethoven's own description of it as, "more an expression of feeling than painting." That is to say, the musical fabric of the work as a whole illustrates nothing but itself, but the emotions it arouses equate with pleasurable thoughts and feelings about the countryside. Set amongst the musical fabric are a number of illustrative touches or passages which represent sonic imitation or parallelism – two solo 'cellos in the slow movement suggesting the rippling of a stream; the bird-song imitations at the end of this movement; the comic village-band imitations in the scherzo, and finally the storm itself, and the shepherds piping after it has died down. These passages and illustrative touches act so as to focus and interrelate the musical material and structure of the symphony as a whole, so that its portrayal of the countryside in its various aspects appears quite complete and wholly satisfying descriptively and emotionally. SO one might compare Turner's capacity for transforming, with a few flourishes, a seemingly abstract "watercolour beginning," into a vision of a ship afloat on a stormy sea.

The same capacity is displayed by Tolkien again and again in, *The Lord of the Rings*. A particularly good instance of it is the reference to the rustling of leaves in the surrounding trees that follows answering distant cries of the Black Riders as the three hobbits journey towards the crossing of the Brandywine. It seems an insignificant detail, and yet its effect is out of all proportion to its prominence; it concentrates and focuses the reader's picture of the scene, and completes the sense of heightened tension which the whole passage evokes. Interestingly, there is a close parallel in Wagner, not in "The Ring", but in *Tristan und Isolde*, (opening of the second act). The sound or rustling leaves suggested in the orchestra by the violins playing tremolando, "on the bridge" (thereby hardening the tone) acts in the context like a slight increase in the tension inherent in the situation already apparent on the stage.

In the case of Beethoven's "Pastoral" symphony the description or illustrative appeal depends on the manifestations of nature, or man amid nature, frequently being sounds themselves, a storm being the most obvious instance. The storm in the "Pastoral" symphony is only one, although the most famous, of a long succession of storms, both in opera and in concert music, extending from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth, and of which Wagner, in the Ring, provides two instances. From about this time onwards another important resource begins to be exploited by composers, namely the manipulation of orchestral tone-colour to produce specific illustrative or dramatic effects. Although available for orchestral music in ant=y form, it proved to be especially applicable and important in regard to opera an theatre music in general, and its most extensive and far-reaching applications were those of Wagner himself.

An outstanding example of the dramatic use of tone-colour, prior to Wagner's composition of any of the Ring operas, is of great interest in the present context, because Tolkien seems to have been aware of it, perhaps even to have picked it up directly. This is the music associated with Samuel, the Demon Huntsman, in Weber's *Der Freischütz*, (1821). Samuel's characteristic motive, three low A's on timpani and double-basses pizzicato, looms through a haze of string tremolo and low sustained notes for clarinets in their lowest register; evoking the dense forest which is the opera's physical background, and the superstitious awe and terror it evokes. The numerous appearances of the motive create the sense of a mysterious and ever-present hostile power. Tolkien once in an interview referred to Weber's music as a counterpart of his own imaginative world, and remarkably, he likens Treebeard's voice to the sound of, "a very deep woodwind instrument",

[3] The recording, taken from live performances, by the English National Opera, conducted by Reginald Goodall.

[4] For a general discussion of this topic, see Cook, 1959, pp. 2-6.

implying the same kind of tone-colour as evocative of Fangorn, and forest depths in general. The simile is a remarkable one because no one without some knowledge of nineteenth century orchestral music is likely to have thought of it; an author less aware musically would probably think of such a sound as that of an organ. Weber was writing in terms of the very limited theatre orchestra of his day. Wagner enlarged the orchestra, for the purposes and requirements of "The Ring", to a hitherto unprecedented size, and developed its resources of tone-colour and texture to match the scale and complexity of his own imagined world. The portrayal of forest depths likewise pervades the first two acts of *Siegfried*, the third opera of the "Ring". Much of its effectiveness lies in the extent to which Wagner emphasises the middle and lower registers of the orchestra, and avoids high-lying writing for strings and woodwind, but from time to time lightening the texture and providing flicks of woodwind colouring to indicate sunlight filtering through from above. Consequently, when, in the third act, Siegfried passes through the fire surrounding the sleeping Brunnhilde, and steps onto the mountain top where she lies, the violins alone, soaring up to the heights, create a powerfully vivid impression of wide open space and brilliant sunlight. At the heart of the forest is the cave where the former giant Fafner, now in dragon shape, lies on the Nibelungs' hoard; a looming presence made evident from time to time in the writing for the lowest brass instruments, contrabass tuba and contrabass trombone.

George Bernard Shaw, who could coin a phrase like no one else, referred to the sound and colour of the Ring scores as "that vast orchestral atmosphere of earth, air, fire and water." The primary image of all, as it is with Tolkien, is that of "earth." The first sound one hears is a low E flat sounded by 'cellos and double-basses as the cycle begins. From its origin here in the depths of the orchestra[5] the primary image is reinforced time and time again throughout the four operas by, "the rugged and massive ground bass," so often pervading the score, with, "the drums muttering the subterranean thunder of Nibelheim", by the cavernous depths of the lower brass, or the dark colours of low woodwind, the latter typically evoking, soon after the curtain has risen for the first time, the bed of the Rhine out of which the dwarf Alberich[6] emerges to set the drama in motion.

Tolkien creates his own world very largely out of sounds, both the sounds of his invented languages, and sounds portrayed or imitated in themselves. Nothing is more characteristic of him than the way in which he builds up the portrait of the cavernous depths of Moria out of sounds, beginning with the contrasting footfalls of the members of the Company after they have first entered the Mines. There follows the soft distant rhythmic figure that answers the "plunk" of the stone dropped by Pippin down the well ("tom-tap, tap-tom") a perfect counterpart for the quiet rhythmic figures for the timpani that Wagner so often uses to define moments of tension, great or small. The rhythmic under-pinning of course grows in weight and power, "drums, drums in the deep", "doom, doom", as the action is propelled forward to its (decidedly Wagnerian) climax at the bridge of Khazad-dûm and the long sad diminuendo that follows.[7]

The phenomena of fire and water, (the former an especially potent image of evil in Tolkien, as with the Balrog or the slumbering red glow of Orodruin), are more directly handled in music by parallelism; fire by the flickering restless music associated with Loge (Lokki) and culminating in the "Magic Fire", episode which ends, *Die Walküre*, water by the ease with which arpeggio figures can suggest the image of rippling water, emerging from the prelude to *Das Rheingold*, weaving their way through the opening scene in the depths of the Rhine, and finally joining with the imagery of fire as the cleansing forces of fire and water overwhelm the scene at the end of *Götterdämmerung*. "Air", on the other hand, can hardly be said to have any musical parallel in itself, unless it is set in motion as wind or breeze. The gentle movement of wind among the trees is suggested by the undulating figure that pervades the "Forest Murmurs", episode in the second act of *Siegfried*.[8] Violent movement, as in a storm is likewise suggested by the furioso rushing, up-and-down scale figure that starts off *Die Walküre*, (itself a descendent of the scale passages in the storm in Beethoven's "Pastoral" symphony).

[5] For acoustic reasons, although not indicated in the score, it is customary to double the opening pedal note on an organ.

[6] Actually, "Schwarzalberich" (Dark Elf). Wotan, Alberich's counterpart and principal opponent is, "Lichtalberich," (Light Elf).

[7] At the end of the chapter, as the drumbeats fade, the impression is decidedly Beethovenish; in this, as in so much else, Wagner's practice develops out of Beethoven's.

[8] This is the title of the once-popular concert arrangement of this episode for orchestra only.

Air in stillness becomes indirectly evident through Wagner's manipulation of space and distance. This is especially a theatrical device made possible by the positioning of on- and offstage sounds which can be made to appear to come from alternate or different directions. It is of course widely employed by composers of opera, especially Romantic opera, but Wagner's use of it is particularly individual and extensive. The indication of space and distance, and its exploitation by description, is likewise Tolkien's principle method of conveying the scale and geography of Middle-earth to the reader, and the scenes and distant prospects that surround the journeyings which make up do much of, *The Lord of the Rings*. It operates more straightforwardly in literary terms, because Tolkien can describe scenes and indicate distances directly, as eh does with the evocative power we all know.

In the theatre the simple device of placing voices or instruments off stage may achieve highly dramatic or evocative results. At the end of *Das Rheingold* the voice of the distant Rhinemaidens lamenting the loss of their stolen Rhinegold, by seeming to come from the depths below stage level, ironically underlines the hollowness of the triumph of the Gods as they enter into their newly-built Walhall (Valhalla), at curtain-fall. Several passages in, *The Lord of the Rings*, imply the same sort of distancing, as for instance the answering cries of the Black Riders, from nearer and farther-off locations, in the passage with, "the wind in the leaves", already mentioned; and of course the outstanding one is the cock-crow at dawn outside Minas Tirith, and the horns of Rohan echoing in the sides of Mindolluin coming as if in answer to it. This might be compared to a more complex usage, in which the "location", of the opening scene of the last act of *Götterdämmerung*, set in late afternoon sunlight by the bank of the Rhine, is established musically. The main element in it of course is the music of the Rhine itself, raised from its original E flat to F major (significantly Beethoven's principal key in the "Pastoral" symphony), coupled with a new, flowing theme in 9/8 time as the Rhinemaidens rise to the surface of the river and their voices enter. The setting already has its own atmosphere of the relaxed warmth of late afternoon, but it is counterpointed by the spacing of various horn calls, Siegfried's own, and those of Hagen and the chorus of the Gibichung vassals, heard in the prelude both from the pit of the orchestra and behind the curtain, and later on spaced out and answering each other and Siegfried onstage from different directions, echoing each other, followed by the distant voices of Hagen and the vassals themselves. The whole scene is thus placed precisely in its setting by the image of towering cliffs and wooded heights rising up on each side, which the whole group of echo-effects produces.

The relaxed mood in which this act opens is heightened by the extreme tension of the drama as it has developed in the act preceding it, and contrast is also a highly effective method of calling up impressions of space and distance. At the end of the opening scene of *Das Rheingold*, set in the depths of the Rhine, its saturated textures melt away into the base sound of two horns sounding the motive of the Ring, as the scene clears to reveal a wide open space on a mountain height, confronting the prospect of the newly built Walhall in the distance. Conversely, the storm that constitutes the first act prelude of *Die Walküre* gives way to the sheltering interior of Hunding's dwelling as the curtain rises; the contrasting atmosphere of warm firelit darkness is established by the orchestral colouring that pervades the music in the early part of the act, with its emphasis on the rich sound of strings in the middle registers supported by horns, and chamber music like scoring with solo 'cello prominent. Another kind of contrast is represented by the orchestral transition which introduces Nibelheim, and typifies its cavernous depths and stifling oppressiveness reaching a tremendous climax as the sound of eighteen anvils behind the scenes breaks in with the hammering rhythm of Alberich's slaves at their labour. The impression of cavernous underground space becomes almost palpable when the clamour is cut off, and replaced by the soft and mysterious sound of muted horns on their own with the motive of the Tarnhelm. The orchestral possibilities of Shelob's lair are fascinating, and Tolkien indeed uses a similar kind of clamour to "bring down the curtain", as Samwise is left apparently powerless outside the rear entrance of Cirith Ungol. The contrast of wide open space with confined closed-in space so characteristic of "The Ring", is of course present throughout, *The Lord of the Rings*. The narrative of the various journeyings, and the wide open lands traversed, is interspersed with "closed-in", scenes such as the firelit warmth of Elrond's house, the cave of Henneth Annûn, or the dim interior of Théoden's hall.

Perhaps Tolkien and Wagner are most closely comparable in regard to their mutual concern with, and attention to, the phenomena of time and weather.

They, both of them, are "Northern", artists, and so of course is J.W.M. Turner, of whom it might indeed be said that his principle subject matter is, "the weather." Wagner's first important opera *Der Fliegende Holländer*, (The Flying Dutchman), was coloured by his experience of an exceedingly rough and dangerous sea voyage from Riga to London, and a conductor of the opera once complained about, "the wind that whistles out at you wherever you open the score." Instances of the motion of wind, both as light breeze and raging storm, have been quoted above. On Tolkien's part, the meticulousness with which he indicates the state of the weather at every stage of the Ring's journey, and the dramatic and narrative importance of scenes such as the snowfall on Caradhras, or the storm in the Emyn Muil, are sufficiently clear, even more significant perhaps is the storm that passes over Edoras, followed by sunshine which underlines Théoden's waking to resolution and action. This exemplifies the especial Romantic tendency to equate the personal or psychological states of individuals with the physical nature of their surroundings, and in this sense both Tolkien's and Wagner's characters are very much at one with their environment. Wotan's rages in *Die Walküre*, are at one with the storms that rage around him, and Frodo's and Sam's progress across the desolate wastes of the Dead Marshes and Mordor is as much a spiritual journey as it is a material one.

The "plein-air," scenes of *Das Rheingold*, are full of musical evocations of weather and the passage of time, clearly perceivable as representing one single day from dawn to sunset: The string tremolos descriptive of the mist that swirls round the Gods as they age and wither after Freia's departure with the Giants; the sun breaking through the mist in the rising and arching line in the violins as the Giants return with her; the darkening of the sky at the apparition of Erda, lightening again as the apparition fades; the sultry heaviness in the air before Donner summons the mists and calls up the thunderclap that forges the rainbow leading the Gods to Walhall, and the light of evening in Walhall as the storm clears away; all those effects are realised with absolute precision in the score. The same kind of richness and detail in the observation of natural phenomena are manifest throughout *Die Walküre*, together with a time-scheme meticulously indicated, both in the original stage directions and as evident in the colour of the music. At the start of the opera it is, "getting on towards evening," and the storm in the prelude to the first act, rising inexorably to the clap of thunder at its climax, nicely counterparts Tolkien's storm in the Emyn Muil at the climax of the "prelude," to Book IV. In the second act the colour of the music makes the atmosphere sequence quite clear; full daylight as the curtain rises, becoming overcast as the act continues, until near the end the stage has darkened and the clouds have become, "so thick that the mountain pass is invisible; thunder and lightning break out with Wotan's departure in fury as the curtain falls. Foul weather continues for the earlier pad of the last act, but finally twilight falls, followed by night in the long final scene between Wotan and Brunnhilde, and Wotan's farewell as he leaves her on her fire-encircled rock.

Thee process of musical illustration, or parallelism, relates also, of course to the detail of stage action and gesture, notably in the scene of the forging of Siegfried's sword, where the various metallurgical processes involved all have their analogies in sound in the orchestra. At the simplest level, the "Sword motive", (one of the half-dozen or so most prominent and recurring "leading-motives"), is no more than a musical thumbnail impression of a man pulling a sword out of its sheath and holding it up in the air.

The interaction of musical illustration with stage direction and incident has one especially interesting application in a scene which is worth mentioning in some detail, as it conveys a very Tolkien-like impression of scene, place and time. This is the opening scene of the second act of *Götterdämmerung*, set at night on the bank of the Rhine in front of the Hall of the Gibichungs,[9] the interior of which has been the setting of much of the first act. Hagen, the "evil genius", of this, the last opera of the cycle, the son of the dwarf Alberich, sits brooding by the river-bank, and is suddenly confronted with the apparition of his father, demanding of him almost hysterically that he stays faithful to the goal of regaining the Ring for him. Alberich's total enslavement to the desire of repossessing the Ring (much as Gollum is enslaved) is vividly expressed in the music of the prelude, with its slow syncopated pulse and the harsh darkened harmonies grinding their way throughout it. As the curtain rises a solo trumpet in the orchestra provides a counterpart of the dim shape of Hagen outlined in the

[9] The Germanic tribe (known historically) conceived as having settled on the west bank of the middle Rhine in the fifth century AD.

darkness; it echoes the musical outline of Hagen's final words at the end of his monologue, "Hagen's Watch," in the previous act. A shaft of moonlight lights up the scene to a stab of colour in high woodwinds, and at once the violins play a rapid staccato transformation of the Ring motive which creates an image of Allberich, "flitting like a wraith," (as Tolkien might put it) through the shadows and now appearing in front of Hagen. the whole sequence takes up only a few bars from the rise of the curtain, and yet the pictorial quality of the scene is perfectly captured in this small compass. As the scene ends and Hagen is left alone, still sitting like a statue beside the river-bank, the approach of day is signalled, firstly by a new theme slowly unwinding itself on the bass clarinet over the slow pulse of the 'cellos, and then by the red glow of dawn spreading over the scene as eight horns, grouped in successive waves, take the theme up in a rich B flat major. Then the rich colour fades out in the music into the harsh cold light of day as Siegfried now enters and the next stage of the action begins. In much the same mode does Tolkien describe daybreak over Parth Galen as a prelude to the dramatic sequence of events leading to the breaking of the Fellowship, "The day came like fire and smoke. Low in the East there were black bars of cloud like the fumes of a great burning. The rising sun lit them from beneath with flames of murky red; but soon it climbed above them into a clear sky. The summit of Tol Brandir was tipped with gold." (Tolkien, 1966, p. 411).

One is left with the feeling that if Tolkien had been a composer, this is the way in which his operas would have been written. Of course the parallel between the holocaust that overwhelms Barad-dûr and its counterpart overwhelming Walhall and the Gods at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, hardly needs stressing.

Tolkien's world and Wagner's are structured worlds, as they have to be if they are to function at all. Tolkien's emerges out of his primary concern with words and out of his invented languages, and Wagner's world emerges in music as represented by the structure of "leading-motives," (*leitmotiven*) that runs through the "Ring" operas. Many other composers of course have used recurring musical themes or ideas as a means of recalling past scenes or events or as a means of characterization, but there are normally specific references presented to the listener's conscious attention. Wagner's method is a special case in that, firstly the network of recurring musical ideas or phrases is all-pervasive, and embraces the entire musical structure of the operas, and secondly, in that much of it does not operate in the forefront of the listener's mind. That is to say, while some of the motives (that of the Sword previously mentioned is a good instance) stand out and draw attention to themselves every time they appear, many others, continually re-appearing in new shapes or transformations, operate like an unconscious system of reminiscence and cross-reference, so that the relevant associations are set up in the background of the listener's mind without conscious awareness of them.

Such a process has a certain similarity to the operation and effects of Tolkien's languages, as evident in *The Lord of the Rings*, their principal outlet, of course, is in the form of nomenclature. Intruding a personal note once again, especially as a non-linguist, I clearly recall that one of the strongest impressions made on me by my first reading of *The Lord of the Rings*, was fascination with the sound of Tolkien's names for places, things or persons. Such names as Cirith Ungol, Dol Guldur, Carach Angren, Osgiliath, or Boromir, Faramir, Finduilas, Ecthelion, appeared to set up a network of associated ides arising out of the resonance and recurrence of the sounds comprising them. The explanation, of course, lay in Tolkien's mastery of words and language with the result that his, "invented," languages "work", as real ones. But further than this, there are even instances which offer a parallel to the workings of Wagner's leading-motives, a prime one being Tolkien's use of the element, "Morgul", with the meaning of, "sorcery". This is not simply used as a place name element, as with "Minas Morgul," equivalent to "the tower of sorcery." It appears on a number of occasions as a specific sound in its own right, independent of the actual sense of the context involved, as with "They tried to pierce your heart with a Morgul-knife which remains in the wound," (Tolkien, 1966, p. 234). The effect is to create the associated idea of, "sorcery", as an adjunct to or a component of the total sense of the sentence, in the mind of the reader. It represents a, "sorcery-motive," in old-fashioned Wagnerian terminology; in a Wagnerian opera it would be represented not in the words of the libretto, but as a specific musical phrase or idea, in appropriately sinister orchestral tone-colour, say, that of clarinets and bassoons in the lowest register, or that of muted brass. Another instance of the same thing is the recurrence of the

element, "dwim" ("an old word", says T.A. Shippey, for "nightmare", or "illusion", (Shippey, 1982, p. 99; 1992, p. 117)), as in, "dwimer-crafty", "foul dwimmerlaik", "Dwimorberg", "webs of deceit were ever woven in Dwimordene", in the various contexts setting up the mental association with the idea of "nightmare", "illusion", or "phantom".

A further aspect of large-scale structure needs to be mentioned by way of comparison and conclusion. This is the reader's, and the listener's, sense of onward progression towards a final resolution or catharsis. This is to say that Tolkien's and Wagner's structures are articulated in terms of a sense of time and the gradual heightening of tension inherent in its passage, which nevertheless can be stressed or relaxed as the occasion requires. C.S. Lewis put it succinctly, "the steady upward slope of grandeur and terror, (not unrelieved by green dells, without which it would indeed be intolerable)."[10] Frodo's and Sam's journey with the Ring, in terms of a sense of time, seems to become ever more agonizingly slow the nearer they approach Mordor and the Fiery Mountain, and the feeling is intensified by the predominantly fast pacing and crowded events of Books II and V, in which they do not appear. Nevertheless there are "the green dells," the principal episode of relaxation being the sojourn in Lothlórien, where time is totally suspended. Its counterpart in Wagner's "Ring" is the episode in the second act of *Siegfried*, in which Siegfried is left alone in the forest clearing by the dragon's cave, to relax amid the sounds of nature. Throughout "The Ring", as a whole the listener's sense of the onward progression of time towards catharsis is regulated by the underlying pulse of the music, and the shaping of successive scenes and complete acts as wholes in terms of a continuous process of symphonic development. At least that is the ideal, but unhappily there are very few conductors (fewer than once there were) capable of realising this effectively in performance. As has been previously hinted near the beginning of this article, a profound practical difference exists as regards the relative positions of the reader of Tolkien and the listener to or spectator of Wagner's "Ring", in that the latter is dependant on quality of performance and the former is not.

All of the comparisons that have been drawn up to now do not imply, and are not meant to imply, that all lovers of Tolkien's works and readers of *The Lord of the Rings*, will automatically find themselves on familiar ground if they find themselves suddenly confronted by or plunged into the midst of Wagner's "Ring" cycle. This is, after all, the largest and most complex musical structure ever planned and composed. Anyone who comes to it without some sort of experience of classical or Romantic music in general and the Viennese masters, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, in particular is liable to experience the feelings of one who, in the process of learning to swim, is "thrown in at the deep end." Nor is anything here meant to imply that Wagner is the only composer whose music may be recalled by *The Lord of the Rings*, or by Tolkien's writings in general. Tolkien's own liking for the music of C.M. von Weber has already been mentioned, and a number of late Romantic composers might also be suggested whose music could recall Tolkien's world, notably, to this writer, Dvorak and Smetana. We especially need to remember Elgar, a West Midlander like Tolkien himself. There are many passages in the music of Elgar which could very well convey Tolkien-like overtones to many listeners, in particular a little-known and rarely performed piece, the incidental music to W.B. Yeat's play *Grania and Diarmid* which features a funeral ode that chimes perfectly with the passing of Boromir.

We do not know whether comparisons of this sort ever occurred to Tolkien himself, beyond his recorded references to Weber's music mentioned above; his love of music in general is well known and frequently evident in his writings. He seems to have attended performances of one or other of the "Ring" operas at Covent Garden occasionally, before the second World War, in the company of C.S. Lewis.[11] We would very much like to know what were his reactions to the music, but presumably we never shall. But to compare Tolkien's achievement with that of another artist working in another medium – and an artist wholly different in personality – no two people could have been more *unlike* each other than Tolkien and Wagner! – provides a valuable way of looking at his work and his genius in a new and unfamiliar light.

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[10] C.S. Lewis, letter to Tolkien quoted in Carpenter, 1997, p. 204

[11] C.S. Lewis himself was of course a very considerable enthusiast for Wagner's music – see in particular Wilson, 1990, p.30.

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