

Seminar for M.A. in the Humanities Program
Mount St. Mary's College, Los Angeles

Two Rings:

Lord of the Rings & Ring of the Nibelung

HUM289CS, Spring 2010, Saturdays
Dr. Michael Heim



Brief Description: This seminar connects Mount St. Mary's College to more than 100 cultural and educational institutions in Los Angeles that are staging the 2010 Ring Festival LA, a citywide celebration of arts and culture based on LA Opera's first-time presentation of Richard Wagner's epic Ring cycle. The seminar focuses on the myth and imagery of the Ring in the epics of Tolkien and Wagner, in Norse sagas and 20th-century fantasy. On June 11 & 12, 2010, the Mount will also host a 2-day workshop based on this seminar.

Related Links:

<http://www.laoperaring.com>

<http://www.ringfestivalla.com>

<http://www.msmc.la.edu/ringseminars>

<http://ringfestival.wordpress.com>

Full Description: This seminar is **an immersive experience in the Ring myth**. It is a study of a myth that has echoed from ancient times and resonates today in the 21st-century Ring Festival in Los Angeles where 100 cultural partners are creating a wide variety of exhibits, symposia, museum shows, conferences, special events and projects during the Spring of 2010. Both Ring trilogies, by Richard Wagner and by J.R.R. Tolkien, are masterworks that have engaged the arts of music, poetry, painting, theater, dance, and cinema. The "unending melody" of Richard Wagner transformed Western music and created a new "total work of art" that literally set the stage for the modern movie industry. *The Lord of the Rings* is the epic fantasy that inspired a movie masterpiece by Peter Jackson and a magical soundtrack by Howard Shore. The relationship between these two gigantic works – the Wagner and Tolkien intersecting Ring myths – is the subject of this seminar. The seminar has three objectives.

The first objective is to experience and re-think these giant artworks as Ring myths. Wagner's *Ring* consists of four operas (the trilogy plus prologue), altogether 15 hours of ecstatic music sung by a large cast supported by an entire orchestra. There are several ways to experience Wagner outside the opera house. The instructor will provide a study

CD with opera music and score. We will share video clips of the operas at each seminar meeting. We will study the ways in which the Los Angeles 2010 Festival is renewing the Ring myth. Participants will read and re-think Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as well as the latest research by Verlyn Flieger and M. Drout in the flourishing area of Tolkien studies. We will analyze clips from the movie *LOTR*. Our discussions will require you to acquaint yourself or renew your acquaintance with these seminal works as we discuss them. Participants may rent or purchase the DVDs and view them together outside seminar meetings. The LA Ring Festival 2010 is producing the entire opera cycle during the 2010 season, and students get discounts on tickets.

The second objective is to actively discuss these masterworks. Our discussions will take place in the classroom on campus but will also reach out to other Festival partners in the Los Angeles area. We will reflect on the three different formats in which we experience the two Rings: the pleasures of reading a linear book, the excitement of watching an action movie, and the delights of listening to ecstatic music live or on CD. Our discussions will highlight similarities and differences in these modes of perceiving the Ring myth.

The third objective is to respond creatively to these masterworks. For many students, the proper response may be a 15-20 page paper that takes two scenes in each work, analyzes them in detail, and then mines the mythic content found in the two art experiences. For other students, the proper response may be to create an artwork that juxtaposes scenes from the two Rings in a short film, a series of photographs or watercolors, a poem or lyrics to a melody, or a piece of choreography. Each student will also connect to one of the LA cultural partners.

As part of the MSMC Humanities Program, the Two Rings seminar will develop critical and analytical skills in the following ways: You will analyze two major milestones in literature, music, and film; you will learn a variety of research methods to compare critical writings about these art works, and you will develop your communication skills by giving presentations in class based on group discussions and by peer-reviewing online blogs and final projects.



Required Books and Videos:

- *Lord of the Rings* by JRR Tolkien ISBN: 0-618-26025-0 (Houghton Mifflin, one-volume paperback edition)
- "Lord of the Rings: The Motion Picture Trilogy" 12-disc DVD set, directed by Peter Jackson and published by New Line Cinema (may be rented and viewed in small groups during the semester)
- *The Ring of the Nibelung* by Richard Wagner, (translated by Andrew Porter), ISBN: 0-393-00867-3 (Norton paperback)
- "Der Ring des Niebelungen" operas either live at the 2010 LA Opera or on DVD: 1980 Boulez / Bayreuth production; 1989 Levine / NY MET production; 1992 Barenboim / Bayreuth production. (Clips from these are available on YouTube)
- A student "Ring Disc" for study of the opera will be distributed in class
- Selections from current scholarship will be distributed and assigned in class.



Related and Recommended Readings:

Arthur Rackham's Color Illustrations for Wagner's Ring

Aspects of Wagner by Bryan Magee

Decoding Wagner: An Invitation to His World of Music Drama by Thomas May

Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Round by M. Owen Lee

The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Nibelung's Ring by George Bernard Shaw

I Saw the World End: A Study of Wagner's Ring by Deryck Cooke

The Ring of Power: The Abandoned Child, the Authoritarian Father, and the Disempowered Feminine: A Jungian Understanding of Wagner's Ring Cycle by Jean Shinoda Bolen, MD

Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World by Verlyn Flieger

Wagner: The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art by M. Owen Lee

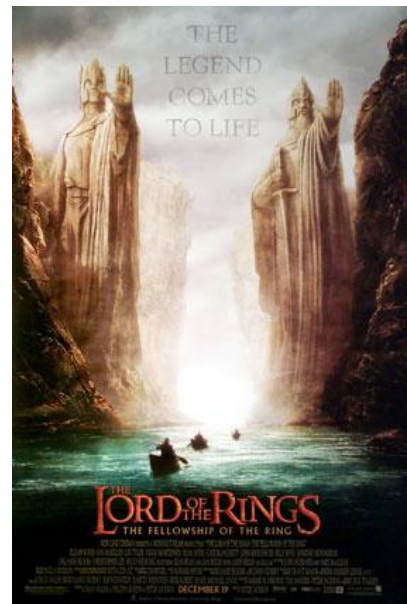
Wagner by Michael Tanner

Magical Worlds of Lord of the Rings: Amazing Myths, Legends and Facts Behind the Masterpiece by David Colbert

The Comic Book *Ring of the Nibelung* by P. Craig Russell

The Graphic Novel of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* by Roy Thomas & Gil Kane with Jim Woodring (DC Comics)

Richard Wagner: Stage Designs and Productions from the Premiere to the Present by Oswald Georg Bauer



Secondary Academic Literature:

J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century by Tom Shippey

Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism edited by Neil Isaacs and Rose Zimbardo

Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader edited by Jane Chance

The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy: One Book to Rule Them All edited by Gregory Bassham and Eric Bronson

Poetic Diction by Owen Barfield

The Rise of Tolkienian Fantasy by Jared Lobdell

A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faerie by Verlyn Flieger

Tolkien in the Land of Heroes: Discovering the Human Spirit edited by Anne Petty and J. Stein



Grades: Grades are based on attendance (required), participation in the seminar discussions and presentations, weekly postings online (both in class and biweekly off-campus), and on the final project (see third objective). **A mid-term grade will be given at Meeting 4 based on these criteria and on the current thesis prospectus.** Grids for grading papers and for peer reviewing of art works are handed out at Meeting 3. Final grades are e-mailed after the last meeting (6) and final project materials are returned, at student request, in a self-addressed stamped envelope provided by students at the last meeting.

The final grade is determined by performance in five areas:

- Attendance / Participation in live Discussions (absence = -50) 100 points
- Biweekly online work (5 x 20) (in-class and Thursdays prior to meeting) 100
- Exam on readings (10 questions plus choice of paragraph) 100 points
- Project Proposal / Thesis (due Thursday noon prior to Meeting 4) = 50
- Final Project (due meeting 6) 150 points

Grades are given at mid-term at Meeting 4 and then final grades, including the mid-term and final project grades, are sent after the sixth and last meeting.

Grade Scale

- Over 470 points = A
- 451-470 points = A-
- 436-450 points = B+
- 421-435 points = B
- 401-420 points = B-
- 386-400 points = C+
- 371-385 points = C
- 351-370 points = C-
- 300-350 points = D
- Below 300 points = F

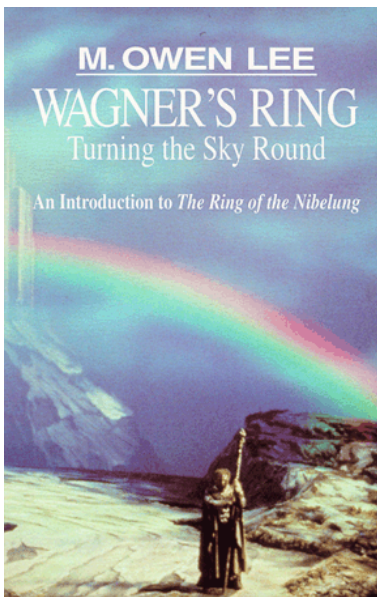
Attendance:

Attendance at all meetings is mandatory. One absence will lower your grade by 50 points (out of 500). **More than one absence will be grounds for failure in the seminar.** Excused absences will require medical documentation. Late arrivals can be counted as absences. **A sign-in sheet will be circulated during the first 5 minutes** of each meeting and **online after lunch.** Attendance also requires bringing assigned texts and notes to meetings each week. To receive credit for attendance, you will also be expected to participate with appropriate comments, questions, and attentiveness. To participate fully, you must come to class prepared, having studied the material and thought about the discussions, **with your materials and books in hand.**



Final Project: The final project consists of a prospectus, a first draft or sketch, a tentative outline or plan, and a final version. It will identify, explain, and defend a thesis about the significance of the Rings that you have developed over the weeks based on three close readings of the works we study and discuss. Alternate media projects (other than writing or in addition to writing) must be discussed with the seminar leader at meeting 3 including agreed criteria for successful completion. The final project must include at least one version that has been revised as well as a final version. You should submit a folder of draft materials, including peer reviews along with the final version. A written final project should be 15-20 pages (double spaced, standard margins, footnotes, etc). Art works require a 5-page artist's statement that includes notes and bibliography.

All final essays must be in proper format (double-spaced, with page numbers, footnotes rather than end notes). Because this is a graduate seminar, expect to use at least two



footnotes per page. Final drafts are to be submitted with previous drafts in the assigned online workspace: both should be in Word format. The workspace folder should include: pre-writing page(s), idea drafts, first submitted draft, peer/revised draft, and peer comments / reactions.

No late projects are accepted in this seminar. Biweekly assignments will not receive points if they are not submitted on time. Get used to completing the assignments a day or two prior to due date. Biweekly online submissions are each time-stamped by computer so please become an early bird or you will have regrets. Each biweekly contribution is due the Thursday noon before the next class meeting.

Academic Honesty Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism. Plagiarism is the deliberate copying of someone else's work, and taking credit for that work. It is possible to copy only one sentence or a few key phrases from another source and be guilty of plagiarism. Credit your sources when using other's ideas. Please see Mount St. Mary's College Policy in the *Graduate Student Handbook* (p. 43) on academic honesty. If plagiarism is suspected on any written work, the instructor will submit the essay in question to www.turnitin.com for checking. Turnitin checks the submitted work against a database of several billion pages of archived essays from students, paper mills, essay websites, databases of professional writing, and billions of web pages to look for matching words, phrases and language patterns. If the essay is found to be plagiarized, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. We will discuss proper citation practices in class. See especially the Academic Freedom Policy in the *MSMC Graduate Student Handbook* (p.41); Grade Appeals (p. 49); and Student Rights and Responsibilities (p. 55).

Schedule (Saturdays):

January 16: Overview of the materials and variety of ways to access Wagner and Tolkien. Final project goal: to engage with the Ring myth and connect with LA Festival events. How to contribute to online Workspace. Conference with instructor. First presentations.

January 30: Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Groups read passages aloud from part 1 of LOTR. Related clips from first two movies. Commentaries by top Tolkien scholars and the issue of "Both rings are round." Class presentations about LA Festival. The myth of Time Travel in Tolkien and Barfield's theory of language.

February 20: Readings aloud from Wagner's two dramatic poems *The Rhine Gold* and *The Valkyrie* (two operas). Overview of Ring scholarship: Norse sagas, the *Saga of the Volsungs*, Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, Tolkien's *Legend of Gudrun and Sigurd*.

March 6: Due: first draft of written project proposal (2 pages with annotated bibliography). Written exam (10 short questions plus passage analysis). Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, third movie and parts 2 & 3 of the book.

March 27: Wagner's *Ring: Siegfried* and *Twilight of the Gods* (two operas). Readings aloud and peer-reviews of final projects. Contrasting the two Rings. Concluding presentations about LA Festival.

April 17: Contrasts and Comparisons: Final presentations are shared and discussed.

Note to Early Birds: Before the first meeting, go to the LA Ring Festival website (<http://ringfestivalla.com>), look through the 100 Festival partners, and choose one from the wide variety of exhibitions, symposia, museum shows, conferences, special events and projects. Choose one partner and research it in depth. Study the partner website and do the work needed to prepare an informative 10-minute class presentation at our first meeting. Choose a project you can relate to and e-mail your choice to the instructor (mheim@msmc.la.edu) at least one week before our first meeting. We want to avoid duplicating a report on the same event or partner.

