

Der Zauberer's Magic:
Wagner and the Occult

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“[O]ccult phenomena--clairvoyance, prophetic dreams, encounters with ghosts[...T]he dreaming or mesmerized mind can find a shortcut to the sphere of the will, where artificial constructs of space and time melt away and glimpses of the future intrude...”

-Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music*

In the above quote, Ross could be summarizing the teachings of a master of Western esotericism--say, Aleister Crowley, for example--, of an occult magician muttering incantations over a constellation of black candles, as he enumerates the promised results of the esoteric practices into which an apprentice is soon to be initiated.

In fact, Ross is talking of no such thing. He is instead summarizing, in Schopenhauerian terms, the intended effects of Richard Wagner’s theater at Bayreuth upon its prospective audience.¹ Wagner’s vision would, indeed, seem to give even the most wild-eyed occultist power-dreams a run for their money:

“The abstracted image [of the stage as viewed from the house] assumes the unapproachability of a dream-vision, while the music, sounding spectrally from the ‘mystic abyss,’ like vapors arising from the sacred *Ur*-womb of Gaia beneath the seat of Pythia, carries him into that inspired state of clairvoyance in which the scenic picture becomes for him the truest reflection of life itself.”²

Wagner’s overall vision and personal mode of expression are full of mystical claims and magical analogies. His largest work, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, is full of acts of magic, and many of his most ardent followers have been associated with occultism, spiritualism, and psychonautics (a broad range of ideas and practices that this paper will group together under the admittedly imperfect catchall term of “esotericism”). Despite this, commentators from G.B. Shaw forwards have interpreted the *Ring* according to various psychological and social frameworks, and take its various acts of magic as either incidental or, at best, allegorical. This

¹ Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music*, (London: 4th Estate, 2020), 44.

² From an 1873 essay by Wagner. The version here is from Ross, *Wagnerism*: 44. Presumably the translation from the German is by Ross. The original essay can be found in Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 9, (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1912-14), 337-38.

paper will be, ultimately, a reception history: the story of how Wagner was adopted by different practitioners of esotericism. It will take as its point of departure a *magical*, rather than symbolic-interpretive, reading of *Der Ring*. After a section devoted to defining esotericism, and exploring some frameworks of magical thought, I will give an incomplete catalogue of the acts of magic seen in *Der Ring*, grouped according to the type of magic at work in each. Finally, I will tell the stories of a few of Wagner's most noteworthy esotericist followers.

Esotericism Defined and Considered

Sorbonne professor and historian of esotericism Antoine Faivre observes: “never a precise term, [esotericism] has begun to overflow its boundaries on all sides”.³ This points to the breadth and ambiguity of the term. It is a subject which, perhaps by its nature, is hard to pin down: like the alchemical transmutations it sometimes purports to effect, or like Alberich wielding the power of the Tarnhelm, it morphs, slips, and eludes our grasp.⁴ A few possible definitions, though, bear relevance to the material we shall examine in this paper.

--Esotericism as Gnostic Revelation: Esotericism scholar Arthur Versluis, a professor at Michigan State University, claims that a shared core characteristic of various esoteric strands is “a claim to gnosis, or direct spiritual insight into cosmology.”⁵ Such may be an apt description for the “clairvoyance” Wagner talks about in his essay above. It is also an apt description for the

³ Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1994).

⁴ Here, as at other points in this paper, I indulge in what musicologist Phil Ford (Indiana University) has called “magical hermeneutics,” a mode of analysis that makes its hay with homologies (like that between the effects of the Tarnhelm and the definitions of esotericism), and that attempts (as an adjunct or counterbalance to what Ford characterizes as the normal post-Enlightenment modes of rational discourse) to put some premises of “magical thought” to work in the analyst’s task, including the premise that “nothing is unrelated.” Phil Ford & S. Alexander Reed, “Introduction: The Musicological Occult, or Show Us the Dragons,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 37, no. 1 (2018): 1-4. This entire issue of the *Journal* is devoted to articles exploring the relationships between music and the occult, and is highly recommended reading for anyone interested in the subjects dealt with in this paper. For a more complete definition of magical hermeneutics and a full-scale application of this mode to a musical corpus, see Phil Ford, *Dig: Sound and Music in Hip Culture*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵ Arthur Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

epiphanic/visionary/hallucinatory experiences that author Philip K. Dick underwent in 1974, an experience Dick called “2-3-74.” Dick’s account of these experiences will have a place in this reception history, inasmuch as Dick mentions Wagner several times, and links him to other ideas in his web of ruminations about 2-3-74.

--Esotericism as an enchanted worldview: This is, perhaps, the characteristic that most strongly defines esotericism for the “man on the street”: a belief in what University of Amsterdam professor Wouter Hanegraaff has called “enchantment.”⁶ Enchantment here refers to possibilities of causation outside of the modes of Cartesian, Newtonian, or positivist science in general; in other words: a belief in magic. Such acts--causes and effects with mystical means outside of physics--make up the magic acts in *Der Ring*, notwithstanding their frequent interpretation as allegorical or psychological.

Belief in magic--and its ritual enactment--was central to the writings of Aleister Crowley, an occultist and ceremonial magician active in the early decades of the 20th century. Perhaps for this reason, Crowley, too, was influenced by and made reference to Wagner, and will be featured in our reception history.

--Esotericism as religious syncretism and initiatory transmission: Faivre names, as two common characteristics of esoteric traditions, that they make a claim to uncover the teachings uniting various world religions, and that they include a mechanism of master-disciple transmission.⁷ These aspects were key to the teachings of Theosophists, including founder-leader Mme. Blavatsky, and Rudolf Steiner. Blavatsky and Steiner, too, had words to say about Wagner and they, too, will feature in our reception history.⁸

⁶ Wouter Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

⁷ Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*.

⁸ Whether Wagner’s search for *ur-religion*, his Buddhist-Christian mashup in *Parsifal*, and his own practice of collecting disciples (e.g. the young Nietzsche and, later, Houston Stewart Chamberlain) qualify him for these two criteria, I will leave it to the reader to decide.

Magic Acts in *Der Ring*

It is my contention that Wagner's warm reception and frequent citation by inhabitants of the world of esotericism is at least partially attributable to the ethos of magic that he himself put to work in his own writings and especially in his music dramas. To illustrate this, it may be useful to enumerate the acts of magic that take place in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, probably the most magical-operation-heavy of all his works (although supernatural occurrences are to be found in all his middle- and mature-period works with the exception of *Meistersinger*). In order to draw attention to their magical character (as distinct from any allegorical-symbolic traits), I have tried to group and assign them to the types of magical operations they represent.

--**Transactional magic:** According to archaeologist and Oxford professor Chris Gosden, transactional magic is a form of magic that requires the magic-worker to give up something in order to get the desired result.⁹ It is based on "an understanding of reality that stresses reciprocity and mutual need."¹⁰

Of course, the most glaring magical act of this type in *Der Ring* is Alberich's forging of the ring. In order to forge the ring of power from the Rheingold, Alberich must give up love.

Woglinde: *He who the sway of love forswears/ he who delight of love forbears/ alone the magic can master/ that forces the gold to a ring.*¹¹

Wagner seems to evince an understanding that transactional magic requires sacrifice and reward to be matched in magnitude; the reward for the master of the Ring is "measureless might," but what is sacrificed is profound: Love itself.¹²

⁹ Chris Gosden, *Magic: A History: From Alchemy to Witchcraft, from the Ice Age to the Present*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2020).

¹⁰ Mathew Lyons, "The History of Magic by Chris Gosden," *Literary Review* 490 (October 2020).

¹¹ Frederick Jameson, "Das Rheingold libretto (English)," DM's opera site, http://www.murashev.com/opera/Das_Rheingold_libretto_English_German .

¹² "Measureless might" is Jameson's translation of "maßlose Macht." Jameson, "Das Rheingold libretto."

But Alberich is not the only character who gives up something dear in order to gain something else for himself.

First Norn: *In [the world-ash's] cooling shadow rose a spring:/ whisp'ring wisdom rippled its waves;/ of holy things I sang./ A dauntless god came to drink at the well;/ as eternal tribute paid was the light of an eye.*¹³

Wotan, too, who in many ways is signified to be Alberich's mirror-image, partakes in transactional magic, when he gives up his own eyeball to gain wisdom.

--Curses, hexes and spells: A number of instances occur in the *Ring* of magic exercised by one character over another. Alberich's curse is operative upon whoever possesses the ring of power:

Alberich: *As by curse came it to me,/ accurst be aye this ring!/ As its gold gave measureless might,/ let now its magic deal death to its lord!/ Its wealth shall yield pleasure to none,/ to gladden none shall its luster laugh!*¹⁴

Alberich's curse claims Fasolt and later Fafner, and it finally claims Siegfried. To this, we may add that Wotan exercises magic agency over Brünnhilde when he puts her to sleep in Act III of *Die Walküre*. Then again, the forgetfulness potion served to Siegfried acts as a sort of hex on him--magical agency exercised over him by the Gibichungs:

Hagen: *Dost mind the drink in the chest;/ put trust in me who brought it home;/ Twill bind him whom thou dost choose/ fast in love's fetters to thee./ Let now but Siegfried come/ and taste of the magical draught,/ that he e'er a woman has seen,/ that one anear him e'er came,/ then straightway must he forget.*¹⁵

As a final instance of this kind of spellcasting, we may add the magic protection that Brünnhilde casts over Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung*.

--Transformation magic: In the *Ring*, characters are actually able to change bodily form by using the Tarnhelm. Three characters use this power: Alberich in *Das Rheingold*, who makes

¹³ Frederick Jameson, "Götterdämmerung libretto (English)," DM's opera site, http://www.murashev.com/opera/G%C3%B6tterd%C3%A4mmerung_libretto_English_German .

¹⁴ Jameson, "Rheingold Libretto."

¹⁵ Jameson, "Götterdämmerung libretto."

himself invisible and subsequently turns into a serpent and a frog in Scene 3; Fafner in *Siegfried*, who has transformed himself into a dragon in order to protect his horde; and Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung*, who transforms himself to look like Gunther. From what we see of it in the *Ring*, the Tarnhelm seems to be a magical object in and of itself, requiring no transaction or other ceremony to make it function.

Clearly, the world of *Der Ring* is one in which magic is commonplace. Within the world of the story, magic--that is, causes and effects outside the remit of mechanistic physics--is not only real, it is operative in the lives and affairs of the characters on a regular basis. The same could be said for the characters in the reception history that is to follow. For them, at least if their writings and public statements are to be believed, various kinds of supernatural events form part of the essential fabric of their worldview.

Wagner and Theosophy

Theosophy was a religious movement founded by Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891), a Russian emigrant to America.¹⁶ The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 in New York. According to a resolution from one of its earliest meetings, the initial goals of the society were the “study and elucidation of Occultism, the Cabala etc.”¹⁷ Mme. Blavatsky propagated teachings she claimed to have received from “the Masters,” long-lived, spiritually-perfected beings living in Tibet, whom she contacted beyond the physical planes. Blavatsky remained active in leading and promoting Theosophy until her death in 1891.

¹⁶ Basic biographical and historical information in this section is from Mark Bevir, “The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 62, no. 3 (1994): 747-67. For the interested reader, this article is not only a basic biography of Blavatsky, but also serves to situate Theosophy in the milieu of the other spiritualist and esoteric traditions of its time.

¹⁷ A photograph of this document can be viewed at *Notes of the meeting proposing the formation of the Theosophical Society, New York City, 8 September 1875*, January 13 2006, wikimedia commons, accessed 14 Dec 2021, <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a8/St-1ata.jpg> .

According to Ross, Blavatsky originally took a dim view of Wagner's output.¹⁸ Blavatsky wrote in 1883 that Wagner's "handling of the 'most sacred truths'--for those for whom those things and names are *truth*--is a sheer debasement, a sacrilege, and a blasphemy."¹⁹ Yet in 1888, Blavatsky's magazine was praising Wagner, calling him "a mystic as well as a musician," and saying that he had "penetrated deeply into the inner realms of life."²⁰ Ross suggests that the reason for this about-face may be that Blavatsky began being treated for certain medical conditions by William Ashton Ellis (1852-1919), a medical doctor and a Theosophist, in addition to being a leading Wagner translator and the editor of a Wagnerian journal, *The Meister*. Ross implies that the shift on the matter of Wagner was an expression of gratitude for, or an attempt to make nice with, Ellis.

A one-time Theosophist, and the founder of the offshoot movement of Anthroposophy (and the Waldorf School system), Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), was especially enthusiastic about Wagner's work.²¹ In a 1907 lecture in his *Supersensible Knowledge* series, he said:

Wagner had a basic feeling, an inner awareness, that guided him to the same Truth about mankind's origin and evolution as that indicated by spiritual science. This inner awareness linked him to spiritual science and to all genuine mysticism.²²

Steiner was sufficiently taken by the parallels between *Der Ring* and his "spiritual science," that, of the four lectures in his 1905 series *Richard Wagner in Light of Spiritual*

¹⁸ Ross, *Wagnerism*, 180.

¹⁹ Helena Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966): 333.

²⁰ Blavatsky's magazine, *Lucifer*, evidently did not credit the authors of editorials like this one, so there is no way to know who authored this article. Quite possibly it was Blavatsky herself. Anon. "The Meister," *Lucifer* 2 no. 7 (1888).

²¹ Steiner, evidently, was never formally inducted into the Theosophical Society as a member, but nevertheless was tapped to be the leader of the German wing of the Society from 1902. The tensions between Steiner's viewpoint and the official line of the Theosophical Society grew throughout the decade, and Steiner eventually left the movement in 1912. The story of Steiner and Theosophy can be found in Geoffrey Ahern, *Sun at Midnight: The Rudolf Steiner Movement and Gnosis in the West*, (Somerset: James Clark & Co, 2009). Interested readers can also see Steiner's autobiography, Rudolf Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, originally published 1928, available at: https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_index.html .

²² Rudolf Steiner, "Supersensible Knowledge, Lecture XII: Richard Wagner and Mysticism," Rudolf Steiner Archive, 28th March, 1907, <https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA055/English/AP1987/19070328p01.html> .

Science, three are devoted to dealing with *Der Ring* (the fourth handles *Parsifal*). To get the flavor of Steiner's spiritual reading of *Der Ring*, one may consider this passage from the first lecture:

Richard Wagner makes Wotan, the ancient Atlantean initiate, oppose Alberich, [...]an initiate of the Aryan period.[...]The bearer of intellectual wisdom is gold. Gold is deeply significant in mysticism, for gold is light, and out-streaming light becomes wisdom. Alberich brings the gold, the wisdom which has become hardened, out of the waters of the Rhine. Water always symbolizes the soul-element, the astral element. The Ego, gold, wisdom, come forth out of the soul.²³

In addition to Ellis, Blavatsky, and Steiner, Ross identifies several other Theosophists, among them Basil Crump, Alice Leighton Cleather, and Katherin Tingley (leader of the estranged American branch of Theosophy), who evinced an interest in Wagner.²⁴

Wagner and Thelema

Aleister Crowley was born in 1875, the year of the Theosophical Society's founding. Crowley is a towering figure in the memory and imagination of esotericists (and counterculturalists) that came after him, having deemed himself "The Beast 666," and was famously dubbed "the most evil man in the world."²⁵ Crowley, who died in 1947, was an occultist and ceremonial magician, in addition to being a prolific writer of plays, poems, novels, and the liturgical texts of Thelema, a religion he founded after an epiphanic experience in 1904.

Crowley was to evince an interest in Wagner throughout his career. In 1901, he addressed a poetic ode to Wagner, writing:

O master of the ring of love, O lord

²³ Rudolf Steiner, "Richard Wagner in the Light of Anthroposophy, Lecture I: Lohengrin and the Ring of the Nibelungs," Rudolf Steiner Archive, 28th March, 1905, <https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA092/English/GAS1937/19050328p01.html> .

²⁴ Ross, *Wagnerism* 180-184.

²⁵ For the general background in this section I am indebted to Hugh B. Urban, "The Beast with Two Backs: Aleister Crowley, Sex Magic and the Exhaustion of Modernity." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 7, no. 3 (2004): 7–25. <https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2004.7.3.7> , particularly the section "Unleashing the Beast: Crowley's Life and Context," pp. 9-11.

Of all desires, and king of all the stars,
 O strong magician! [...]
 Wagner! creator of a world of light
 As beautiful as God's²⁶

The scholar MJ Allis has traced several other Wagner references in the work of Crowley, including many poems or works derivative of, or in dialogue with, various scenarios and characters from the work of Wagner.²⁷ Crowley even gestures directly toward the magic in the *Ring* when giving instructions for ceremonial magic. In his handbook on ceremonial magic, *Magick in Theory in Practice*, Crowley makes the surprising claim that Wagner “was instructed how to apply magical formulae by one of the heads of our Order.”²⁸ He adduces the instance of Nothung striking against Wotan’s spear “to suggest the importance of striking objects [together] during ceremonial magic”.²⁹

The reader will recall how Siegfried smote Nothung, the sword of Need, upon the lance of Wotan. By the action Wagner[...]intended his hearers to understand that the reign of authority and paternal power had come to an end; that the new master of the world was intellect.³⁰

Among his many liturgical writings, Crowley in 1913 produced a “gnostic mass” for adherents of Thelema to celebrate, entitled *Liber XV: Ecclesiae Gnosticae Catholicae Canon Missae*. In this ceremony, Wagner is put forward as a saint, alongside such figures as “Laotze, Siddhartha, Krishna[...]Hermes, Pan, Osiris[...]Francis Bacon[...]Goethe[...and] Nietzsche.”

²⁶ Aleister Crowley, “To Richard Wagner,” *The Works of Aleister Crowley*, vol. 1 (Inverness: Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth, 1905), 179. Inasmuch as the most famous ring associated with Wagner is the ring in the *Ring*, the opening line is evidently a reference to *Der Ring*, although to call this object “the ring of love” is a strange characterization.

²⁷ MJ Allis, “The Diva and the Beast: Susan Strong and the Wagnerism of Aleister Crowley,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 50, no. 4 (October 2014): 380-404. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqu026> . To name just a couple from Allis’ long list, there is a poetic ode, “Brünnhilde,” and a full-length stage play, “Tannhäuser.”

²⁸ Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (Paris: Lecram Press, 1929), 84.

²⁹ Allis, p. 13.

³⁰ Crowley, *Magick* 84.

These figures, Wagner included, are said to be ones “that did of old adore” the “Lord of Life and Joy,” “and manifest [His] glory unto men.”³¹

Wagner and Philip K. Dick

Wagner’s impacts on the esoterically-inclined were not limited to late 19th- and early 20th-century “spiritualist” types. He played a supporting role in a series of weird, epiphanic experiences that the science fiction writer Philip K. Dick (1928-82) had, starting in 1974.³² Dick is known to most as the author of science fiction classics like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (the basis for the film *BladeRunner*) and *The Man in the High Castle* (which inspired an Amazon Prime TV series of the same name).

Beginning in February of 1974, Dick had a series of revelations which would haunt and inspire him for the rest of his life. As Erik Davis points out, there is no definitive account of the experiences that Dick called “2-3-74,” (for February and March of 1974) which must be reconstructed from the 8,000 or so pages of Dick’s “Exegesis.”³³ The “Exegesis” is a collection of writings by Dick primarily for himself. Likely they were never intended to be published. It is an attempt at working out the implications of 2-3-74, for which task Dick finds a narrative recounting of the 2-3-74 events unnecessary, since he is the only intended reader. A few key experiences of 2-3-74 can, however, be reconstructed: a vision of suburban LA as a mirage overlaying the “true” location of early-Christian Rome, a series of dreams where Dick heard

³¹ Aleister Crowley, *Liber XV: Ecclesiae Gnosticae Catholicae Canon Missae*, Standalone ed, (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace 2014).

³² The account of “2-3-74” here is primarily from Erik Davis, *High Weirdness: Drugs, Esoterica, and Visionary Experience in the Seventies*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019. It may be slightly inaccurate to call Dick an “esotericist” in any sense in which that term is narrowly understood—he did not belong to any “sacred orders” or “initiatory brotherhoods,” nor practice “magick” of the Crowley variety. However, as the experiences related here make clear, the definition of esotericism as “gnostic vision” discussed earlier in the paper certainly places Dick alongside these other esotericist figures.

³³ Despite its full-book, indeed, multi-volume length, I refer to the Exegesis proper in quotation marks inasmuch as it remains unpublished. There is a publication of significant excerpts of the “Exegesis,” namely Philip K. Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*, Ed. Pamela Jackson & Jonathan Lethem (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011). The Wagner episodes quoted here are from this edition.

from an entity he called the “AI Voice,” and a pink laser beam that downloaded volumes of information into his mind. Among the flotsam and jetsam of this apparently overwhelming series of experiences, we find Dick ruminating on, among other topics, Wagner. Wagner is mixed in with many other intellectual preoccupations:

“We get citations or hasty summaries of, among other sources, the *I Ching*, Handel, Dogon cosmology, Mircea Eliade, Plato, Henry Vaughan, C.S. Lewis, Edward Hussey’s *The Presocratics*, Heraclitus, Ikhnaton’s hymns, various Nag Hammadi codexes, *Workingman’s Dead*, Goethe’s *Faust*, Wagner, the *Tao te Ching*, Xenophanes, the Jewish Bible, the New Testament, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Calvin, Pascal, Rosicrucian mottos...”³⁴

Interestingly, Wagner here shares billing with Lao Tzu and Goethe, just as he did on Crowley’s litany of Thelemic saints, and with Tibet, just as he did in the preoccupations of the Theosophists. In the published excerpts from the “Exegesis” brought out under the title *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*, there are no fewer than five different passages dealing with Wagner. Dick’s prime preoccupation is with *Parsifal*. Dick’s approach to Wagner, as well as the general flavor of his writing, can be grasped from this passage:

“In Act III of *Parsifal* Wagner was already moving toward a perception of the homology between Christ and the Buddha, and *that* is what I am responding to, and I did from the start (in particular the Good Friday spell which I think reaches a synthesis above any single religious system). When I realize that I was only in high school when I first began to listen to *Parsifal*, Act III, I see how early and deep this has held me...the atonality of the prelude to Act III. It begins there. The anima enters the modern Western world there, precisely.”³⁵

In the published version of the “Exegesis,” *Der Ring* gets only one short mention, but though it is fleeting it is thematically powerful. In a section ruminating on the artist’s relationship to Fate, Dick writes:

“‘[S]eizing Fate by the throat’ [is what] Beethoven spoke of; it is the epitome of the heroic—not the *tragic!*—it is in fact the heroic *replacing* the tragic; destiny is your victim, not your master: you are the craftsman, it the artifact.

³⁴ Davis, *High Weirdness* 345-46.

³⁵ Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*, 376.

“This is the topic of Wagner’s ‘Ring,’ the gods against Fate. In it the gods lose. Thus tragedy wins. It need not be so, not for the creative artist.[...]

“[T]he victory of man over Fate[...]is achieved by collapsing space and time[...]He who can do this has won where in the ‘Ring’ the gods lost”³⁶

Conclusion

As Ross makes clear in his *Wagnerism*, the tendrils, or rays, of Wagner shoot out in innumerable directions in the culture that followed him. In any number of sociological or allegorical readings, he is understood as socialist, anarchist, proto-Fascist, Jungian, Freudian and many other things. This paper has been an attempt to reckon with another thing Wagner is: magical. Magical Wagner is there to be seen in the many acts of magic in the *Ring*, and one of his “rays” shot into the magical thinking of his many esotericist heirs.

³⁶ Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*, 800.

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