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The legacy of Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen as reflected in select late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century film media

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Thesis

THE LEGACY OF WAGNER'S DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN
AS REFLECTED IN SELECT LATE-TWENTIETH-
AND EARLY-TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY FILM MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Richard Wagner is one of the most important and influential composers for scholars of film music. His concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk or "total art work," which combined music, visuals and storytelling, played an indelible role in the creation of film aesthetics, especially with regard to music and sound design. Yet, Wagner's actual music has its own curious legacy in film history, in terms of how it is used to interact with a story that often bears no relation to those of Wagner’s operas. This is particularly interesting with regard to the Der Ring des Nibelungen (aka "the Ring Cycle"). The Ring is his most ambitious and influential, and densest work, and perhaps the one with the greatest lingering legacy in popular culture. For example, "Ride of the Valkyries," an excerpt from Die Walküre made famous by Looney Tunes shorts and Francis Ford Coppola’s Apocalypse Now, is still a frequent presence in film, television and advertising that want to evoke sounds of war and conquest—associations created more from its use in those contexts than the original opera.

This thesis will examine films and television series of the last half-century that have used musical examples from the Ring in their soundtracks. Works given particular focus will include Apocalypse Now (1979), the Japanese anime series
Princess Tutu (2002-2003) and Terrence Malick’s historical romance The New World (2005). The examination will discern both how film media has influenced modern cultural perceptions of the original operas—and of Wagner's legacy in general—and also how said film media is itself a reflection of modern attitudes about Wagner and his masterwork.
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Chapter One: Introduction and First Case Study: Terrence Malick's *The New World* (2005)

One of the most fascinating topics for students of film music is Richard Wagner's influence on the movies. The composer had an enormous impact on a medium that did not even exist when he was alive and one that has become the past century's predominant form of popular storytelling. The history of art in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is dominated by film, and any understanding of Wagner's philosophy and style makes it easy to read the art of film as a culmination of his ideas.

A common method of writing film and television music—or any sort of music that interacts with a story—is to employ the technique of *leitmotif*, a technique most associated with and perfected in Wagner's operas.¹ Plenty of notable film composers have rejected or modified the practice. Bernard Herrmann, for example, scored most of Alfred Hitchcock's films and many other notable films such as *Citizen Kane* (1941); David Cooper writes in his guide to Herrmann's *Vertigo* score that Herrmann at the time of the latter film was "'not a great believer' in the 'leitmotiv' as a device for motion picture music."² However, the use of leitmotifs is still found throughout modern film scores, even Herrmann's own when he wanted to evoke

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Wagnerian principles in works like *Vertigo*, so it was clear that even Herrmann softened on this issue. In Jack Sullivan's *Hitchcock's Music*, he writes that before *Vertigo*, Herrmann was known for a more minimalist approach that "assiduously avoided melody," rather than the more "unabashedly Romantic...Wagnerian" approach he took in that film.³ Later in his life, Herrmann modified his statement to say that Wagnerian leitmotifs were not the *only way* and "you can do it using the operatic principles of Verdi where each number is separate and not derived from the others" but did not seem to suggest it was inherently inferior; still, the fact that Herrmann took that stance at all said something about how widespread the *leitmotif* technique had become.⁴ Wagner’s influence can be felt in modern film music every time a musical theme is associated with a particular emotion, character or plot element. It is heard everywhere from the holiday romantic comedy *Love Actually* (2003), where Craig Armstrong’s score unites all the love stories with the same clarinet theme, to the classic *Star Wars* film trilogy (1977–1983), where the blazing brass of John Williams’s "Imperial March" signals the imposing Empire forces. Perhaps this technique is simply easier than the "Verdian" one that Herrmann suggested, but it could also be that it ties in well with the organizing principles of filmmaking.

The *leitmotif* in film is as old as film itself. In his essay "Wagnerian Motives: Narrative Film and the Development of Silent Film Accompaniment, 1908–1913,"

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⁴ Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo*, 22.
James Buhler notes that the idea of using specifically Wagnerian techniques in accompanying films was discussed in trade journals as early as 1910. He quotes a columnist, Clarence Sinn, in *The Motion Picture World* as explaining Wagner's ideas to his readers as follows:

> To each important character, to each important action, motive and idea, and to each important object (Siegmund's sword, for example), was attached a suggestive musical theme. Whenever the action brought into prominence any of the characters, motives or objects, its theme or motif was sung or played.

Sinn then discusses the proper way for accompanists to learn how to best utilize these Wagnerian techniques in their playing: "[O]ne must know his pictures beforehand: Given an analytical mind, five years of experience, and opportunity to study the pictures beforehand, any informed pianist ought to be able to get good results." If Wagnerian ideals were already so embedded in the notion of "film music" even before films had their own scores, it is not surprising that they would stick once filmmakers started to conceive of giving their works their own original

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7. Ibid
and specific soundtracks. This began with the advent of longer-form, more adventurous films such as those of D.W. Griffith.

Wagner’s influence can be felt not only in the way the music of films is written, but in the structure of film itself. Film, as an art that combines story, visuals and sound, can be viewed—and often is—as the summation of Wagner’s idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk, or "total art work." Wagner describes this in his 1849 essay "The Art-Work of the Future," where he characterizes it as the fusion of dance (or stage movements), tone (music) and poetry, and notes that all three of these arts are better when fused together than on their own. He compares this fusion to the way in which people are improved by the institution of marriage, by joining themselves with other people:

As Man by love sinks his whole nature into that of the Woman, in order to pass over through her into a third being, the Child, - and yet but finds himself again in all the loving trinity, though in this self a widened, filled and finished whole: so may each of these individual arts find its own self again in the perfect, thoroughly liberated Art-work—nay, look upon itself as broadened to this Art-work.... Only that art-variety... which wills the common art-work, reaches therewith the highest of its own particular nature; whereas that art which
merely wills *itself*, its own exclusive fill of self, stays empty and unfree.\(^8\)

If we view dance instead as "stage movements," narrative film combines each of these elements. The "stage movements" would be the visual components, the actors moving and acting out the plot on-screen; the poetry would be the script; and the music would be the score and arguably the non-musical sound effects. If anything, film takes the ideal further than even Wagner would imagine because of the additional creative control granted by a camera, which allows the medium to go beyond what is possible on stage.

The association of Wagnerian musical techniques with silent film came directly with the application of Wagnerian ideas about art to the film medium. As filmmaking came to be seen as a way of creating art in and of itself, and not merely a way of *documenting* and *recording*—and as the camera began to play its own role in telling the story along with the "stage movements"—the role of music became more prominent.\(^9\) Buhler writes: "Music...allowed narrative sense to appear internal to the film since (instrumental) music lacked words even when a musician was also present in a theater making the notes. In other words, music accomplished its work in such a way that the narrative simply seemed to make sense; the pictures spoke

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for themselves." It is clear here that the idea of visuals and music—different components of the Gesamtkunstwerk in the Wagnerian conception—support each other but without usurping the other's role. It is the perfect marriage.

In her introduction to the aforementioned Wagner and Cinema, Jeongwon Joe writes about how specific techniques in Wagner's operas were eerily prescient of film. For example, the film (and especially animation) technique of "Mickey-Mousing"—named for its frequent use in early Walt Disney films—involves coordinating screen action with musical phrasing. Joe argues that a prototype of this is seen in Wagner's stage directions for The Flying Dutchman, which read: "[T]he first notes of the ritornello in the aria accompany the Dutchman's first step on shore...with the first crotchet of the third bar he takes his second step—still with folded arms and bowed head; the third and fourth steps coincide with the notes of the eighth and tenth bars."  

Joe also argues that other of Wagner's directions—particularly for his later operas, such as the Ring—are so focused on the visual aspect that they come across as more filmic than for the stage, where control over the visual element is more limited. Her example is from the finale of Götterdämmerung, known to have some of the hardest stage directions in the history of opera, with their requirement that the

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Rhine overflow and the gods watch the audience as flames consume Valhalla. Joe writes:

Some of Wagner’s scenic descriptions can also be regarded as cinematic, as they focus on visual effects, which are harder to realize on stage but are much easier with cinematic techniques. [The description of the *Götterdämmerung* finale]...motivated Martin van Amerongen’s claim that ‘[i]f Wagner lived a century later, his home would not have been Bayreuth but Beverly Hills.' Wagner, continues Amerongen, would be composing not music-drama but the soundtracks for disaster movies such as *The Towering Inferno.*

She goes on to argue that the fact that Wagner’s operas were among the first to be translated into film further proves their innately cinematic quality and evidences "early filmmakers’ fascination with the composer." Wagner and his ideas were especially fascinating to silent-era directors such as D.W. Griffith, and German expressionists like Fritz Lang and F.W. Murnau, and the latter group especially often


adapted Wagner's works or their source material into film (see: Lang's *Die Nibelungen* films (1924)). Joe then notes that Wagner's ubiquity in film, in genres ranging from comedy to animation, only increased during the sound era. Overall, Joe makes a compelling argument for why understanding Wagner is key to understanding the film art, and vice versa. The very fact that filmmakers so often chose to adapt Wagner's own works shows his influence over the medium.

Some of Wagner's ideas had an enormous influence on later filmmaking technique. Moving back to Bernard Herrmann, the influence of Wagner can be felt all over Alfred Hitchcock's films, from his earliest films to those works of his "Golden Age", the 1950s–60s. In *Hitchcock's Ear: Music and the Director's Art*, David Schroeder argues that Hitchcock's filmmaking style was distinctly "Wagnerian" and more concerned with music than were the styles of other filmmakers. Hitchcock had a long film career, spanning from the silent era to the 1970s. He was trained and got his start in Europe, but made many of his most notable films only after moving to Hollywood from the UK in the 1940s. One of his major legacies was combining the techniques and aesthetics of European art film with American popular film genres such as the thriller. As Hitchcock spent considerable time in Germany in the 1920s, his education included a grounding in the diehard-Wagnerian German expressionists. Schroeder writes:

"No one had a stronger influence on all the arts in early twentieth-century Germany than Richard Wagner, and
Murnau, along with Lang and other filmmakers, saw much in Wagner that they could apply to film. Lang for one used subject material closely related to Wagner in his *Nibelungen* films, noted by Hitchcock...although he adapted it in a way that achieves different ends than Wagner does in the Ring Cycle...In her book *From Wagner to Murnau*, Jo Leslie Collier argues that Wagner permeates Murnau's vision of film at just about every possible level...Perhaps most interesting is her demonstration of the role of music in Murnau's treatment of *mise en scène*, suggesting that 'he strived as his theatrical predecessors had before him to create a visual equivalent of music,' often using 'the movement of actors and objects within the frame to establish rhythm and tempo.' Going beyond the description of a film as a symphony, he used more specific musical terminology, describing the function of blocking as an attempt 'to convey the film's "tonal chords" or "dramatic chords in space."'\(^{14}\)

Hitchcock himself would have been exposed to a great deal of Wagner's music while he was in Germany, and in fact he declared Wagner his favorite composer. Yet the real influence of Wagner's techniques over Hitchcock can be seen in how his films echo the "musical" approach that Schroeder and Collier attribute to Murnau. Hitchcock had an unusually strong desire to involve himself in the music of his films, showing his belief in its importance to filmmaking. And, as Schroeder demonstrates, this extends to the mimicking of musical structures in his films, including Vertigo.

In a chapter titled "Vertigo as opera," Schroeder details Vertigo's thematic connections to various important opera—including Wagner's own Tristan und Isolde—and considers how opera (specifically a performance of Die Walküre) played an important role in the original script. Schroeder suggests that the use of music plays an operatic (and especially Wagnerian) role in conveying the film's story. Some of Herrmann's leitmotifs in the Vertigo score bear a strong resemblance to Wagner's own, such as the leitmotif for Madeleine (Vertigo's mysterious, intoxicating and ultimately, illusory female lead) which bears harmonic similarity to the opening motif of Tristan, even using the actual "Tristan" chord. These moments of harmonic instability are associated with moments of mystery, suspicion and discord.

As in Wagner's conception of the Gesamtkunstwerk, these moods are

15. Schroeder, Hitchcock's Ear, 5.
16. Schroeder focuses on how Hitchcock uses Wagnerian musical gestures to indicate ambiguity and chaos, contrasting Wagner with other composers (such as Mozart) who Hitchcock intended to indicate order and stability.
conveyed through the interaction of the music with the visual or narrative aspects of the scene. The clearest example of this in *Vertigo* is in the "Scène d'amour" in Herrmann's original score. This is the emotional climax of the film; after protagonist Scottie learns that a new woman he met, Judy, was actually "playing a character" as his former lover, Madeleine, and faked her character's death, Scottie convinces her to turn herself back into Madeleine—by dyeing her hair, dressing and doing her make-up as she did in that role. The pivotal scene involves her preparing herself in the bathroom as Scottie waits, and she emerges from the room lit by a bright white haze. It is also one of the most memorable musical moments in the film. Schroeder notes that the original script—in fact, the scripts up until the actual shooting—indicated that "hairpins can be heard falling as she fusses with her hair", but this ultimately turned out to be unnecessary.\textsuperscript{17} As Schroeder writes, "Herrmann's score carries the full emotional burden and the ecstatic climax, music that utterly precludes the tinkling of hairpins."\textsuperscript{18} The music conveys all the information the viewer needs as it builds to its climax, which hits when Madeleine emerges from the bathroom. However, its ambiguous, uncertain harmonies also make it clear that the motives behind this transformation are unsettling and disturbing. This is further conveyed by the visuals of the *mise en scène*: the camera moves to the bathroom door, where Madeleine emerges surrounded by bright light—but it is a smoky haze. The different elements of the film converge in one scene that manages to be its

\textsuperscript{17} Schroeder, *Hitchcock's Ear*, 201.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
narrative, visual and musical climax. While these kinds of fusions are typical of various types of opera, Herrmann’s score becomes Wagnerian in its use of the \textit{Tristan} chord and four-note figures resembling the build-up to that chord in the \textit{Tristan} prelude. (These chords and figures are repeated throughout the scene, but the harmonies are at their most ambiguous in the beginning of the musical excerpt, and in the climactic moment where Madeline emerges.) It also resembles Wagner in the way all the elements of the work come to a head at the same time and work together to create such a powerful scene. The "Scène d’amour" would be less powerful if one took away the music or visuals, or if the previous story had not built to that point.

In \textit{Hitchcock’s Music}, Jack Sullivan goes even further than Schroeder: he outright states that \textit{Vertigo} is "the most Wagnerian score in the movies."\textsuperscript{19} Along with discussion of the \textit{Vertigo} score’s harmonic language, Sullivan details how Herrmann’s musical motifs—unlike in some of his other scores—actually function as leitmotifs in the film. He writes "when...Madeleine says her morbid memories are located in Spain, we hear Carlotta’s habanera; when she worries about a fantasy of an open grave, we get a chasmic discord that appears again during Scottie’s nightmare of plunging into it."\textsuperscript{20} He also spends a great deal analyzing how the story of \textit{Vertigo} reflects one of the roots of the leitmotif concept, Hector Berlioz’s \textit{idée fixe}

\textsuperscript{19} Sullivan, \textit{Hitchcock’s Music}, 223.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 223.
in his *Symphonie fantastique*, with its tale of mad infatuation and sexual obsession, and its fuzzy line between reality and delusion.\(^{21}\)

It is probably difficult to find a great director from film's first half-century who wasn't influenced, at least second- or third-hand if not directly, by Wagnerian ideals, but Hitchcock and others took these somewhat closer to heart. Even going beyond the music itself, Sullivan notes that "Wagner's imprint" is found "not only in the *Tristan*-infused suspensions but in the basic structure of music and story," calling Scottie's attempts to resurrect the illusion of Madeleine "a Liebestod in every sense."\(^{22}\) Directors like him reflected those ideals in their directorial style, combining the different elements of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* into a seamless whole.

In addition to his influence on certain notable film directors, Wagner's music also loomed large in the political mindset during the mid-century because of its use by the Nazi regime as propaganda and as a key part of its cultural ideology due to Wagner's own anti-Semitism and German nationalism. This included its use in Nazi films, such as the propaganda films of Leni Riefenstahl. She notably uses music from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in her most famous work, *Triumph of the Will* (1935). In her film *Olympia* (1938), documenting the 1936 Berlin Olympics, her technique has also been compared to that of Wagner. In its inclusion on the list of "All-TIME 100 Movies" compiled by *TIME* magazine in October 2011, film critic


\(^{22}\) Ibid.
Richard Corliss notes that in *Triumph of the Will*, Riefenstahl "painted Adolf Hitler as a Wagnerian deity", and then says of *Olympia*, "[she] gave the same heroic treatment to [African-American track-and-field gold medalist] Jesse Owens..."\(^{23}\) The use of Wagner’s music by Riefenstahl in films meant to glorify the Third Reich (even if, as Corliss indicated, *Olympia* may have had some other unintended effects by glorifying those who would not have been accepted in the Reich) changed the reception of his work, and its legacy in film, forever. Future uses of Wagner in film would often engage with the popularity of his music in the Nazi era, as with the 2008 historical thriller *Valkyrie*. (Of course, in the case of that film, it helped that the real operation to assassinate Hitler that the film depicted, took its name from the opera *Die Walküre.*) This is particularly true with the use of the excerpt "Ride of the Valkyries", as will be discussed further in the following chapter.

In spite of those Nazi associations, however, film after World War II continued to engage with Wagner’s music in a variety of ways—including works specifically about the music itself, such as the 1957 *Merrie Melodies* short "What’s Opera, Doc?,” which parodies Wagnerian opera. Though one could ascribe a political meaning to parodying Wagner in immediate postwar America, there were *Merrie Melodies* parodying various other notable classical music works during this time; see also "The Rabbit of Seville" and many others. Those associations, however, render postwar reception of Wagner’s music and ideas in and of themselves a fascinating

topic. It is one largely neglected by much of the film scholarship on Wagner, which focuses mostly on early cinema—including silent cinema—and most specifically, on Wagner’s influence on other German filmmakers. The later a film was made, and the further it was made from German-speaking countries, the less likely it is to be covered by the literature.

My intention in this thesis is to deal specifically with the topic of current Wagner reception as reflected in a select number of film works from the late 20th- and early 21st-centuries. I focus on the use of the music from Der Ring des Nibelungen, Wagner’s most famous, influential and expansive work, and the one that has had the greatest impact on the art of filmmaking. In studying these works, I set out to answer: how does each one use the music of Wagner’s Ring? Why do the filmmakers choose the experts they do? How does the film engage—or not—with the literary and visual material of Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk—or is it engaging more with the century-plus of Wagner reception than with the work itself? What does it say about modern Wagner reception, including the political implications of his work, and what does the choice to engage with those issues say about the film itself?

The two works that I will examine in the greatest detail in this paper are Francis Ford Coppola’s Vietnam War epic Apocalypse Now (1979) and the Japanese animated television series Princess Tutu (2002–2003). I wanted to choose two works that I thought contrasted each other in style, topic and mood. These examples represent wildly different avenues to examine the use of Wagner’s music in film,
showing the range of the Ring’s interpretations. Although there were already scholarly treatments of *Apocalypse Now*, a well-known film by a famous and celebrated director, I expected more than what I found on the use of Wagner’s music in the film, and the film’s place in current pop-cultural Wagner reception. *Princess Tutu* is a far more obscure work: an anime series about fairy-tale characters fighting against their sadistic storyteller to create happier fates for themselves. I could not find much in the way of scholarship about *Tutu* or its music. However, it is celebrated among anime fans and critics for, among other things, its innovative use of music, as it incorporates various classical music excerpts into its story to a degree that reaches far beyond Mickey-Mousing. The series’ musical selections include several excerpts from Wagner’s operas, which are chosen for the ways in which their thematic and character elements coincide with those of the *Princess Tutu* story.

Although these two works are the crux of my analysis, with a chapter devoted to each, I will also touch on several other works that use Wagner's music. For example, the *Apocalypse Now* chapter discusses how the film’s use of "Ride of the Valkyries" is influenced by the use of that same selection in D. W. Griffith’s influential silent film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). I will also take a moment now to discuss the use of the *Ring’s* music in Terrence Malick’s *The New World* (2005). This is the most recent work I will discuss and is perhaps the most telling about the various ways in which Wagner’s music has been reinterpreted in modern popular film; as a historical film and a romance, it also adds more genre variety to the films considered here. (*Apocalypse Now* can be seen as a historical film now, but since the
Vietnam War had only ended a few years before it was released—and was still ongoing during the film's pre-production—it is hard to classify it as "history" in terms of the creators' intentions. *The New World* also situates itself in-between the other two works in terms of how much it engages with Wagner's music's political implications. *Apocalypse Now* and *Princess Tutu* use the music more directly, as an integral part of telling their stories. Therefore, there is much more to analyze about the role that Wagner's music plays in those works—and what they say about modern Wagner reception and Wagner's place in popular culture. However, *The New World* has its own lessons to impart about where Wagner is in the modern world.

**The New World (2005)**

*The New World* is Malick's telling of the story of Pocahontas and John Smith, starring Q'Orianka Kilcher and Colin Farrell in the title roles, and Christian Bale as John Rolfe. It follows Pocahontas's story starting from when Smith's fleet first arrives at Jamestown, and progressing through the romance of Pocahontas and Smith, his departure, and her marriage to Rolfe and arrival in England. The film, like much of Malick's catalogue, is stronger in the visual component than it is in terms of the text, and especially lacking in dialogue other than internal monologues. The resulting in
formal film structure caused some film critics to refer to it as a "tone poem." 24

If The New World relates to Wagner’s ideas about the Gesamtkunstwerk, then the lack of dialogue and muting of action make it almost as though one of the three legs of the "total art work" has been removed—or at least reduced. The New World certainly has a narrative, yet it takes a backseat to the visuals and the characters’ internal thoughts (especially those of Smith and Rolfe: Pocahontas, unfortunately, does not get to say much and certainly is denied the opportunity to soliloquize). Much of the acting is in the form of gestures rather than conversations between characters, and it is through those gestures that the romance between Pocahontas and John Smith develops. The New World certainly makes full use of the visual component of Wagner’s three prongs.

It is more difficult to discuss the use of music here, because The New World does not engage in as much of the "Mickey-Mousing" that Joe attributes to Wagner’s influence and that is found in the other two films studied in this thesis. Princess Tutu and Apocalypse Now at least tie the cinematography of these scenes, if not also the actions of the characters, to their references to Wagner’s music. This makes it easier to discuss how each film engages with the music it uses. However, The New World’s collage of images does not seem particularly tied into the musical phrasing of the excerpt it uses, with the exception of its opening.

References to Das Rheingold appear in various scenes throughout The New

World, most notably in the film’s opening and ending portions. It is interesting to analyze, first of all, how this particular excerpt connects to the ideas expressed in Malick’s film. Robert Donnington writes in Wagner’s ‘Ring’ and its Symbols about how the Prelude to Das Rheingold creates its world out of water, and how this connects to creation myths:

’Mark my new poem well’ Wagner wrote to Liszt (11 Feb. 1853), ‘it holds the world’s beginning, and its destruction’ The primordial chaos at the world’s beginning is regularly depicted in creation myths as a waste of waters from which the first self-generated gods emerged as they established some foothold of solid matter, some bubble of air to keep the waters at bay. We read in Wagner’s stage directions of water thinning to a fine mist below, so as to leave mist the height of a man. He must have forgotten this later when he makes his Rhinemaidens swim low and his Alberich climb high; and indeed in the original Sagas Alberich himself is a water-creature. In any case, no mythical creature, terrestrial or otherwise, has any difficulty in breathing underwater if the symbolism requires it.25

The idea of "life coming out of the water" is reflected in Wagner's *Ring*, for the story begins, in *Das Rheingold*, in the waters of the Rhine when Alberich tricks the Rhinemaidens into giving him the gold, and it also ends there in *Götterdämmerung* when, after Valhalla burns, the Rhine overflows and the Rhinemaidens are seen getting back the ring. The river is the well-spring of life in the world of Wagner's opera cycle; it begins there, and it goes back there. The world of his story originates there, as does the presumed new world that will follow the destruction of *Götterdämmerung*. The Rhinemaidens are among the only creatures who survive, protected by the water from the events unfolding on land.

So, too, does the story's life both begin and end in the waters of Malick's *The New World*, the waters where we first see the characters emerging and later returning to, which here are the Atlantic Ocean and the James River. The film begins with shots of bodies of water, and moves back there after the viewer is told of Pocahontas's death. And it is these scenes that are most connected to the use of *Das Rheingold*. The excerpt is first heard right at the end of the opening credits, as the camera settles on the bottom of a river. The camera slowly pans up to show people swimming in the river—the Powhatan people, Pocahontas's tribe—and focuses on their hands, arms and legs as it moves slowly out of the river. Like Wagner's music, which starts with the lowest instruments in the depths of the orchestra, with basic I-V harmony and slowly adds to its chord, the scene begins in the depths of the river and slowly moves out. It is notable, in that vein, that when people are first shown swimming in the James River, the camera begins by looking up at them, as though
from the point of view of a creature swimming in the water's depths (see Figure 1). As the music intensifies, the camera moves above water, and shows the ships approaching. Again, it continues the theme of "emerging from the water's depths."

When the strings enter in the music, the camera switches to on board the ship, where it shows the settlers approaching, then switches back to a pan of all the ships in the fleet, and then a shot of the other ships from the vantage point of a sailor in one of them. The music has built enough that we are no longer in the depths, but still connected to the water through the film's continual visual focus on it. As the strings intensify and move to faster patterns, the camera finally moves to viewers outside of the water, as the viewers see the Powhatan watching the ships approach (see Figure 2). In spite of this sudden introduction to land, the camera continues switching back and forth between the Powhatans' perspective and that of the sailors on board the
ships, as the music plays. It is at this point that the viewers are introduced to John Smith, watching the shore, and to the other ships from a dark chamber in the bottom of his own.

Figure 2: The New World, 3:38—The ships approaching the shore; first moment at which camera is at eye-level, not looking up from below the depths.

The music begins to draw to a close only when the action is tied more firmly to land, and it does so by cycling back to earlier material, rather than reaching its full climax (which would lead into the entrance of the Rhinemaidens in the opera). The ships are anchored, and the settlers walk onto land. It is when the water completely disappears—when the settlers are shown moving through a field of reeds—that the musical excerpt ends.

Of the scenes where the film uses Das Rheingold, this opening scene is the one in which the action and camerawork are most explicitly tied to the musical phrasing. With most of the others, the camerawork seems to exist separately from
the musical phrasing, with the music working more to set an atmosphere or mood than to dictate the action. This is a less Wagnerian way of engaging with music in a narrative—and yet, Wagner's ideas are still important to understanding these scenes.

Figure 3: The New World, 2:09:41—Pocahontas bathes in the water during ending sequence

Take, for example, the ending scene, where the Das Rheingold excerpt emerges again before the credits roll. It begins with John Rolfe's narration about the end of Pocahontas's life, after the final "plot" scene showed her final conversation with John Smith. As Rolfe tells of her later death in a voiceover, and the camera flashes briefly to her empty bed, it then returns to flashbacks of her playing in an English garden with her son. She eventually finds herself at a pond; she walks into it and splashes water on her face (see Figure 3). This scene thus begins on land, and then slowly moves back to the water. As the music continues, the camera shifts to
showing Rolfe and his son boarding a ship, presumably leaving for the New World.

After one quick shot of Pocahontas’s grave in England, the camera then focuses on the ship leaving, and then cut backs to various images of water and of nature (see Figure 4), ending in the trees above a river, and with nature sounds. Like the Ring itself, the story has ended in the water. It has returned to the ocean, and then to the river—presumably, back in the New World.

Figure 4: The New World, 2:11:01—"Returning to the river", rapids during the ending sequence

In the other scenes, while there is less of a direct connection between the filmic content and the music. There is always some sort of water-imagery, even where it would otherwise be superfluous. For example, the second iteration of Wagner’s music in the film comes when the Powhatans are preparing for war against the English settlers, and Pocahontas asks her deity for advice about her feelings for John Smith. The war preparations include a shot of the water; they
prepare on the shore and the ocean or river is clearly seen beyond it. There are other sudden, unrelated shots of bodies of water, such as rippling water, birds flying over water, and a moment when Pocahontas watches a thunderstorm on the water. The scene ends with a firm return to land—John Smith coming back to the Jamestown fort—after frequent panning between the sky, earth and sea/river, showing their interconnectedness.

It is clear, therefore, that *The New World* connects the ocean with the importance of water in the *Das Rheingold* prelude, in which the gradual build-up of the E-flat major chord represents a world emerging from the water’s depths. The story of *The New World* also begins in water, and ends in it, suggesting its world comes from there and is destined to return. This clearly connects it with Donnington’s conception of the music of *Das Rheingold* as part of a watery "creation myth."\(^{26}\)

What is the world, then, that *The New World* is creating? Though the film focuses primarily on Pocahontas’s relationships with John Smith and John Rolfe, its story is really one of the early chapters of the European conquest of the Americas. It was the establishment of an entirely new civilization. Yet, the ending imagery also recalls the end of Wagner’s *Ring*, returning similarly to the water. The ending of *Götterdämmerung* is the destruction of the world, with the promise of a new one. As such, the story of Jamestown and the other European colonies’ establishments is also the story of another civilization’s destruction: that of the Native Americans who

already lived in those continents. It is notable that the film ends with Pocahontas’s death, which was most likely of smallpox or another disease. The Native American civilizations were largely destroyed by diseases that the Europeans brought with them to the "New World."

This could suggest that *The New World* is engaging with Wagner’s music in a similar manner to *Apocalypse Now* and to other films that associate his music with stories of imperialism and conquest, due to their propagandistic use by the Nazi regime and the pop-cultural connection between his music and invasion. This is a conception of Wagner’s music, and particularly the *Ring*, that I will discuss further in the next chapter, which deals specifically with *Apocalypse Now*. However, it is difficult to suggest that *The New World* is primarily influenced by that conception of Wagner’s music since, unlike *Apocalypse Now*, the scenes where *The New World* uses its *Ring* excerpts are usually idealistic, romantic and dreamlike, rather than scenes of war and conquest. (The film does have some of the latter, but they do not use Wagner’s music.) More likely, it is simply engaging with the "creation from water" idea, which suggests that, even today, over a century removed from Wagner’s opera cycle’s premiere, there is some sense of the original ideas of the work, at least among those who create film.

Still, it is impossible to ignore how *The New World* and other films like it idealize these stories of conquest, even if largely by ignoring that aspect of the story. The "Pocahontas" story of her saving John Smith is, after all, likely a myth, debunked
on the official website of Pocahontas's tribe, the Powhatan Renape Nation. The true story begins only with Pocahontas's marriage to John Rolfe, which resulted more from Rolfe's having demanded her hand than from a consensual love story. John Smith’s part of the tale is believed to have been invented by him after Pocahontas's death due to her popularity in London society, and since she was then prepubescent, there is no romantic angle to it. Even more scholarly sources on Pocahontas and her depiction in film, such as Monika Siebert’s "Historical Realism and Imperialist Nostalgia in Terrence Malick's The New World" in The Mississippi Quarterly, describe the romance as "largely fictionalized." Siebert goes on to discuss how Pocahontas and the larger atmosphere of the film offer "an updated version of the oldest myths of American nation-building: the virgin land pandering to the European settlers." In reality, many Native American civilizations were just as (if not more) technologically advanced as European civilizations of the same period, and pre-Columbian America was full of densely-populated cities and complex empires and trade networks—hardly "virgin" land. The Europeans did not "build" new civilizations, or "tame" uncharted land—but destroyed and replaced existing civilizations and cultures.

It speaks to the power of film as storytelling in how this story has been
mythologized and romanticized beyond the depressing historical facts, largely due to the 1990s Disney film but also due to other works such as *The New World*. Not only is the world of the Powhatan people wiped away by the European colonizers, but Pocahontas’s true story is wiped away by myth-making, initially in terms of John Smith’s invented tale and later in how it was adapted to film. And while the Disney film *Pocahontas* includes some musical choices designed to evoke associations with Native American culture (contrasting them with more European-inflected music), *The New World*’s musical selections in romanticizing this tale are mostly European classical music. Wagner’s music is not the only choice in this regard (the film also makes frequent use of Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 23, especially in scenes of Pocahontas and Smith getting to know each other), but it is one of the most-quoted. It accompanies both the beginning and ending of the film—the rise out of and back into the water—and many of the scenes of Pocahontas and John Smith falling in love. It plays a key role in sweetening this story for the audience. (This is necessary, since the age gap between John Smith and Pocahontas is clearer than in the Disney film. In its effort to be more "historically-accurate," *The New World* cast a 15-year-old actress, Q’Orianka Kilcher, as Pocahontas, while keeping John Smith as an adult man in his late twenties, played by Colin Farrell.)

In that sense, this may be an even clearer case of the use of Wagner’s music changing the film’s context than in its use in *Apocalypse Now*. While it is hotly debated where the latter film falls in its assessment of the Vietnam War, the dark side of the war is communicated clearly, including its effects on the Vietnamese
natives. (This is especially clear in the scenes that use "Ride of the Valkyries," as will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.) But in The New World's story of conquest, the music serves not only to represent the actual invasion in the story of the film, but also to represent how the myth-making involved in its version of Pocahontas's story "overwrites"—or "conquers"—the truth of what happened in the British settling of Virginia. This version of this story, like many other myths associated with the European colonization of the Americas, is one that allows modern-day Americans to feel better about how their country came into being. The true story, of a scared teenage girl forced to marry an older tobacco farmer and then dying of disease after surviving a long voyage to a foreign land, makes viewers far too uncomfortable. These national myths also make up as central a part of the American identity as the German national myths that Wagner drew on in his operas did for 19th-century Germans. Yet, at least a story about Norse gods, valkyries and Nibelungs is clearly fictional, and does not involve warping any real-life history to make viewers feel better about how their ancestors came to their nation.

It is important to look at how Wagner’s ideas resonate within modern film, not just in the older works that make up the bulk of Wagner scholarship on film. After all, as Jeongwon Joe writes, the ideas represented in Wagner’s writings still resonate within film, whether individual examples actually deal with his music and stories or not:

Even when Wagner’s music is not heard, his inaudible
presence looms large in such celebrated box-office hit film epics as George Lucas's *Star Wars* series (1980-2005), which the director called 'space operas', and more recently, in Peter Jackson's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003). In spite of Tolkien's adamant refusal of Wagner's influence on his work in declaring, 'Both rings were round, and there the resemblance ceased,' Jackson's trilogy made a significant contribution to the popularization of Wagnerian ambience in cinema for the general audience.31

Indeed, if anything, the analysis of Wagner's place in film is *more* important now, when new technologies, such as CGI (which allows live-action films to make fantastical elements more realistic-looking), allow filmmakers easier fusion between story, visuals and sound, to the point where they become inseparable. As computer advances make special-effects in film less noticeable, the experience for audience members is more immersive, and they can truly lose themselves in the fusion of those elements of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—that perfect marriage of the different arts.

Regardless, Wagner's influence will resonate in popular and high culture alike for generations to come. For now, at least, film—the closest art gets to the ideal

fusion he envisioned—is the ideal lens through which to understand modern cultural perception of Wagner and his *Ring* cycle.
Chapter Two: "Music To Invade Vietnam To": The Ring in Apocalypse Now (1979)

D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of A Nation* (1915) is easily one of the most influential films of all time. It was one of the first "feature-length" films, and it solidified the idea that film could be an art form, could tell full, rich stories beyond mere documentaries of everyday activities. Yet, the story it chose to tell—a re-write of American history starring the Ku Klux Klan as "saviors" of white people from invading black hordes—has made it as infamous as it is essential. Its malicious twisting of American history was too often taken as "fact" in the white-supremacist atmosphere of 1910s America, leading to the Ku Klux Klan’s refounding and spread throughout the United States, to culminate in a peak membership of three million in 1924. As further proof of the film’s effect on this, the KKK even used *Birth of a Nation* as a recruiting tool until the 1970s. So, like the Nazi propaganda films of Leni Riefenstahl, *Birth of a Nation* is a regular on film-school syllabi that must be endured rather than enjoyed by modern viewers, because of its blatant, toxic racism. And like Riefenstahl’s films, it makes liberal use of the music of Wagner, including the *Ring*.

In the current popular imagination, "Ride of the Valkyries," the opening to the third act of *Die Walküre*, is usually associated with either the 1957 *Merrie

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*Melodies* short "What's Opera, Doc?" or with the subject of this chapter: *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Yet, its cinematic legacy began with *Birth of a Nation*, where it was used by Griffith to illustrate the scenes where Klansmen rode on horses to save the endangered white people, frantically rushing to their aid and always arriving just in the nick of time. Griffith likely associated it with the heroic rescue from Wagner's original opera, as the music there accompanies the valkyries escorting heroes to Valhalla. Naturally, those scenes in *Birth of a Nation*, like the film as a whole, look very different through modern eyes.

Griffith is, of course, not solely to blame for how Wagner's music, and "Ride of the Valkyries" in particular, has shifted in association from heroism, to racism and imperialism; a larger part of that is also due to its appropriation by Nazi Germany for propagandistic purposes, including in Riefenstahl's films. However, it is the legacy of Griffith that Francis Ford Coppola engaged with in creating what is easily the most influential modern use of Wagner in film: his Vietnam War epic *Apocalypse Now*.

*Apocalypse Now and "Ride of the Valkyries" as "Music for Invasion"

Coppola, like other filmmakers of the "New Hollywood" era, drew on the history of both American and international film to show his sophistication as a director. The references to *Birth of a Nation* in the use of "Ride of the Valkyries" in *Apocalypse Now*’s helicopter scene is intentional—at least, on the part of one of the men involved with the film. In his book *Hollywood Auteur: Francis Coppola*, Jeffrey
Chown credits it to original screenwriter John Milius: "Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries'...was Milius's idea, perhaps inspired by the Ku Klux Klan's attack on the blacks set to the same music in D.W. Griffith's Birth of a Nation." He considers it one of many examples of "double structuring of meaning in the text," of Milius and Coppola's competing visions for the film and what it was meant to "say"—if anything—about the Vietnam War conflict. Chown writes: "In conception, one wonders whether Milius saw the use of Wagner as ironic. However Coppola, in the staging of the scene, left no question about the irony of glorious, Teutonic opera music playing while whites kill non-whites."

Apocalypse Now is often considered one of the great anti-war—or at least, anti-Vietnam-War—films, but viewing the film does not leave the viewer with such an easy answer. Based on Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, it tells the story of Captain Willard, played by Martin Sheen, a Vietnam veteran who finds himself unable to adjust to civilian life and who returns to the front on a special assignment. He is told to hunt down a rogue officer, Colonel Kurtz, who is now ordering unauthorized attacks on Cambodia. On the way through the jungle, moving further and further from civilization, Willard and his crew encounter various strange people and situations. One of them is the trigger-happy Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore, played by Robert Duvall. He seems to get a perverse joy out of war; in one of the film's most famous lines, he mutters, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning." When his

35. Ibid.
group captures a beach, he orders the men to surf it amidst the enemy fire, as
though to gloat in their carefree American pastime as they murder the Vietnamese.

It is in this scene, during a helicopter assault by Kilgore's men, that "Ride of
the Valkyries" comes in—another form of gloating. The use of the music here, like
much of the film's soundtrack, is diegetic; it is literally blasting from the
loudspeakers as the squadron attacks the beach. Kilgore says of this: "Yeah, I use
Wagner. Scares the hell out of the slopes. My boys love it!"

The direction of the helicopter scene is timed very closely with the use of
music Though the excerpt begins with a close-up on the record player as a soldier
turns it on, the brass enter with the main theme of "Ride of the Valkyries" with a cut
to a wider view of the helicopters spreading out across the sky (see Figure 5). With
each musical phrase of the theme, the camera cuts—between each soldier in the
helicopters as he prepares, in his own way, for the bombing, even showing one
petting the missile they plan to drop on the Vietnamese. As the theme appears to
repeat itself for the first time, louder, the camera pans back out to the spread of
helicopters looming over the clouds. Yet, before it can finish, the music suddenly
fades away as the film then cuts to the Vietnamese villagers who are peacefully
going about their day, unaware that they are about to be attacked (see Figure 6).
Figure 5: *Apocalypse Now* 31:30—The brass enters in "Ride of the Valkyries"

Yet, the music slowly returns, signaling the approaching helicopters, and here it is juxtaposed with Vietnamese schoolchildren singing as they come out of their school. Slowly, the villagers begin to look up and rush out of the square and back inside their homes for protection. It is around this point when the vocalists—beginning with Gerhilde's "Hojotho!"—enter the music, and as that occurs, the camera cuts back to the helicopters, showing them looming in the distance as they approach the beach (see Figure 7).
The film continues tying the musical gestures closely with the visuals and the non-musical sounds of the scene, with the footsteps of the Vietnamese villagers running for cover and the whirring of the helicopter’s propellers both matching the pulsing of the strings in Wagner’s music. Then, as Helmwige hits her high note at the end of the first vocal section, and the brass re-enter, the helicopters fire the first of their missiles.
In the following scene, the camera repeatedly cuts between shots of the Vietnamese villagers fleeing, framed at their level, and Dutch-angle shots looking down at them, as though coming from the helicopters themselves (see Figure 8). It also shows the soldiers' views from the interior of the helicopters, looking out at the opening to the skies from within its walls. As such, there is an attempt to show the viewer the scene from both the soldiers' and the villagers' positions, but the soldiers' positions are privileged. And yet again, actions are timed to the music's rhythms—specifically, the release of bombs on the beach.
It is examining the impact of the scene that gives rise to the "double structuring" at work. In context, it is an expression of Kilgore's war-mongering cruelty. Chown writes: "The key cut in facilitating the ironic point of view is to the shot of Vietnamese school children dressed in white just before the violence begins. Thus later, when a Vietnamese woman, apparently one of the teachers, tosses a grenade in a helicopter picking up American wounded, we can feel the irony when Kilgore calls her a 'savage,' orders his pilot to 'put a skid up her ass,' and guns her down. Of course, if one does not care about the schoolchildren, the irony is lost."36 The fact that it cuts to the schoolchildren first at play, and then fleeing—and frames them as innocent, in their white clothes—makes the viewer concerned for them,

even if they are still a faceless Other compared to the fully-realized American-soldier characters. The camera could have easily stayed on the helicopters as they blasted the music. During the first cut to the schoolchildren, "Ride of the Valkyries" disappears, only fading back in as the helicopters approach and the children flee in terror.

Yet, the fact that they are still a faceless Other, along with Kilgore's glee at the assault (which becomes infectious for other men in the helicopters), makes it easy for viewers to take away a different message from this scene. Chown notes that many did have this interpretation: "Perhaps part of the reason the film succeeded commercially was that it depicted the sensations of war in a way that the curious liberal could accept, whereas those inclined to enjoy the violence for its own sake were able to ignore the sentiments not appealing to their political viewpoint.... A student has told me he almost enlisted in the Marines after seeing the film." 37 As the helicopters swoop over the beach, to the rhythm of music associated with triumphant heroes, it is difficult not to feel some excitement for the soldiers in them when the camera focuses there. The viewers are concerned for the Vietnamese schoolchildren while the camera lingers on them, but it does not stay there for long... and as it moves, so do the viewers' focus and sympathies. It is not difficult to see how the uncritical viewer can be swept up in the pomp and bombast of the scene.

This is consistent not only with how the music is used in the original opera—

with the valkyries rescuing fallen heroes and taking them to Valhalla—but also with how it is used in Birth of a Nation. I first saw Griffith’s film this past fall, when I took a class in the history of American film; it was also the first exposure to it for most of my classmates. Even with the revulsion that modern viewers feel at the film’s vivid racism, and at being asked to root for the Ku Klux Klan, it is difficult not to get swept up in Griffith’s visual and auditory storytelling. He consistently uses "Ride of the Valkyries" for scenes of the Klansmen riding in on their horses as avenging heroes, after depicting the other white characters in peril—cutting back and forth between the KKK riders and the white characters’ strained faces as they waited for their rescuers to arrive. It is more than effective in framing the white characters as either heroes or victims, and engaging the audience’s sympathies, even to a certain extent today. After the film was over, one student expressed her disgust that "it made me almost want to root for the KKK in the movie!"

Like Apocalypse Now, the use of "Ride of the Valkyries" in Birth of a Nation involves cutting back and forth between the different parties involved in the struggle, including the black characters fighting against the KKK. Yet, the framing is extremely important; while the white characters, both the Klansmen and the people they rescue, get direct shots, the black characters are always shown as off to the side in the frame, the focus instead on their long guns. In this framing, it is clear that the white people are the point-of-view characters and the black people are the mindless others. As such, the heroic strains of the music (which are also, here, timed to the action, if not to quite the level of detail that Apocalypse Now uses) encourage the
audience to sympathize with the white characters and further reduce the black characters to mindless, villainous hordes.

By the time *Apocalypse Now* was made, after the civil rights movement of the 1950s–60s, *Birth of a Nation* would likely have been recognized for the bigoted screed it was. It is worth considering if that context was on the table when Milius and Coppola decided to reference Griffith’s film in their use of "Ride of the Valkyries." The music blasting from the helicopters comes off not only as an attempt to terrorize the Vietnamese villagers, but as an attempt at a sort of "cultural imperialism": imposing their bombastic Teutonic music—part of a racist nineteenth-century European’s "total art work"—on the non-white "savages," as Kilgore characterizes them. It is an invasion not only with missiles and bombs, but also with sound waves, and with culture. Kilgore and his men are imposing their culture (Western culture) on another in the most literal sense.

Wagner’s music, and particularly "Ride of the Valkyries," has taken on a life of its own in popular culture as "music for invasion." Larry Lipton, Woody Allen’s character in his film *Manhattan Murder Mystery* (1993), famously quipped: "I can’t listen to that much Wagner, ya know? I start to get the urge to conquer Poland." The specific wording is, of course, more of a reference to the use of Wagner by Nazi Germany than anything—and Allen had taken pot-shots at Wagner and Nazi/anti-Semitic associations in his 1970s films, even before Coppola’s use of "Ride" in *Apocalypse Now.* (In *Annie Hall* (1977), Allen’s character Alvy Singer accuses a record store owner of anti-Semitism for strongly suggesting to him that they had "a
sale on Wagner"). Yet, it is interesting that of all of Wagner's music, that specific excerpt from that specific opera has become pop culture's preferred choice for "Music To Invade Poland To"—as it is called on TVTropes.org, the popular community-created wiki of common fiction patterns and clichés. If an advertisement wants to suggest conquerors, invaders or the power-mad, the go-to example is "Ride of the Valkyries."

In the book Whom God Wishes to Destroy...: Francis Coppola and the New Hollywood, Jon Lewis shows how critics agreed with this "political ambivalence," and were frustrated at what they saw as a "style over substance" approach to a Vietnam War film that sacrificed the attempt to make an anti-war political statement. Lewis writes: "If Apocalypse Now was the ultimate Vietnam picture, the critics seemed to say, it had to make the ultimate political statement as well... Because [Coppola] seemed unable or uninterested in making a liberal Hollywood statement—many of the critics argued that the film was deeply conservative... [even] John Milius called his onetime mentor 'a raving fascist, the Bay Area Mussolini.'" And yet again, Griffith's film rears its head, even in the critics' comments; Lewis continues: "One critic went so far as to call the film 'monstrously illiberal'; a second argued that it was 'as conservative as Birth of a Nation.'"

In that sense, it is unsurprising that even this film that depicts the Vietnam

40. Ibid, 52.
War in such gruesome, horrifying terms, still manages to come off to others as a glorification of war. The context of its time gives ever more reason for this effect; as one of the first major films about such an unpopular war, it was expected to make a strong statement against it. While the film as a whole can hardly be called "pro-war"—the second half involves Willard’s crew journeying through the jungle, where nearly all end up brutally killed in its dark, bewildering haze—the fact that it was not a plea for peace caused its critics to interpret it as its opposite. And when examining scenes in isolation that did seem to glorify conflict, as with the helicopter scenes that use "Ride of the Valkyries," it is no wonder that anti-Vietnam critics came down so harshly on the film’s politics (or lack thereof).

In fact, while Apocalypse Now is not pro-war, it is also clearly not pro-peace. This is clear in the last quarter of the film, when Willard and his two surviving crewmates travel into the compound of the rogue Colonel Kurtz, played by Marlon Brando, and Willard becomes acquainted with Kurtz’s "gospel" of sorts. Kurtz tells Willard that he has "gone rogue" out of distaste for the US military’s methods to win the war in Vietnam. Specifically, he thinks that they are too lenient, too concerned about their public image abroad—and not enough about what will actually win the war. Kurtz is more sadistic and attacks seemingly "unnecessary" places like Cambodia, because he thinks that the war requires an "all or nothing" approach. If the United States wants to win, they have to pull out all the stops and do whatever is needed regardless of how many human rights abuses it takes, or how many civilians are killed. Kurtz thinks they need to dispense with morality and think of only
results—and that winning is a worthy goal unto its own.

Kurtz is, in many respects, every bit the horrifying psychopath that the story's other "colonel," Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore, is. And yet, Kurtz's particular brand of psychopathy is one that is shown to persuade and even change other people. Willard's position partly includes discovering the fate of Colby, the previous man sent to reprimand Kurtz by the army. Willard finds that Colby has joined Kurtz's bizarre cult deep in the jungle and is defending Kurtz with a thousand-year stare and near-catatonic devotion. A hippie photographer espouses what a genius Kurtz is to Willard and his men, when they first enter the compound. In fact, even Willard himself is taken in by Kurtz's words. Of the many endings that Coppola considered for the film, one included Willard actually taking Kurtz's place once he killed the cult leader on the government's orders. Most involved having Willard display some sort of ambivalence. Even after Kurtz's tribe killed Chef—one of Willard's subordinates and crew members—and drop his severed head into Willard's head as intimidation, Kurtz's twisted "gospel" is persuasive enough or "logical" enough that he cannot help but give it serious consideration. He cannot help but contemplate taking over the rogue band of soldiers and Vietnamese villagers himself—or at least, leaving them be rather than letting them be assaulted in an air raid on the compound.

All of this raises the question, "what is the 'apocalypse' of *Apocalypse Now*'s title?" The idea of an "end of the world" is another connection between the film and Wagner's *Ring*, given how the *Ring* cycle ends with the gods and Valhalla destroyed,
almost every character dead, and the suggestion of a new, fairer cosmic order replacing it as Alberich’s curse on the ring runs its course. Yet, with its smaller, country-level disaster, *Apocalypse Now* does not seem to be concerned with a "real" apocalypse. So what does the title mean?

In relating it specifically to the *Ring*, Lewis repeatedly compares one of the possible endings for the film with *Götterdämmerung*:

> By the end of 1979, four endings had been screened. The first, shown on early rough cuts for the industry and the press, presented a ground and air assault on the Kurtz compound stylized to look like the apocalypse in the film’s title...Coppola rightly feared that this Milius-inspired *Gotterdammerung*-style finale with special effects worthy of a $30 million state-of-the-art Hollywood production seemed to highlight just how much the film depended on style at the expense of substance.41

Indeed, it would have likely fallen into the same pitfall as the helicopter "Ride of the Valkyries" scenes; coming across to some viewers as glorifying war and violence, rather than taking the more morally-ambiguous—or perhaps non-committal—

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41. Lewis, *Whom God Wishes to Destroy*..., 52.
approach that Coppola preferred. Yet, it would have tied more easily into the title of the film, showing a world gone up in flames, one that can only be destroyed through a scorched-earth policy—nothing can remain, just like the world of Wagner's Götterdämmerung. The entire order must be destroyed to create a fairer world, including destroying the more sympathetic characters of the opera.

That clearly, however, was not the message that Coppola wanted to send about Vietnam... at least, with regard to Kurtz. He did not want to reject the man's ideas outright, or suggest that they were so dangerous they needed to be completely destroyed like the US military wanted, but rather, to have the viewers seriously consider them—just as the characters do. In the various other endings, while Kurtz is always killed by Willard, the younger man's reactions after that range from merely walking away from the compound—but leaving everything else intact—or taking Kurtz's place. Or his reaction is never completely revealed, as in the ending the film eventually settled on and is depicted in the current home release of the original film. Willard's murder of Kurtz is juxtaposed with the villagers killing a water buffalo, in a move reminiscent of earlier Coppola film endings like that of The Godfather: Part II, where three characters’ deaths are pressed against each other. Apocalypse Now ends with Kurtz's body falling to the ground as Kurtz utters his last words: "The horror, the horror..."

Adding to the apocalyptic feeling of these scenes is the use of The Doors' "The End," which joins "Ride of the Valkyries" as the film's most significant musical reference. Though "The End" was written over a decade before Apocalypse Now was
released, its lyrics about a man seemingly walking to his death "in a desperate land" make it sound as though it were written for the film. Curiously, it is also used at the beginning of the film, as Willard dances around in his room and smashes into a mirror, showing the desperate state he was left in by his previous Vietnam campaign. Though the ending of the film may be an "apocalypse" of sorts, the musical choices also indicate it is a return to the beginning... or perhaps, its own new beginning, in the same sense that the ending of Götterdämmerung is also a beginning.

The overall point is that Kurtz is never so easily replaced as to simply bomb his compound to smithereens. His ideas linger—in his followers, and in those in the military who tried to dispose of him, including Willard. They linger in the consciences of those even higher up who decided what the war's policies should and should not have been. The "all-or-nothing" was his approach to the war, and the "apocalypse" was the destruction he suggested... or the inevitable American loss if they did not take his suggestions. They did not, and as such, the Vietnam War was one of the first great setbacks for American military power in the 20th century. Perhaps America's hegemonic control over the world was the Valhalla pantheon who were sent up in the flames by the Ring's curse—and by Kurtz's own, warning of it, like the Erda of Apocalypse Now?
In any case, in spite of setting up a more ambiguous fate for Willard, and for Kurtz's ideas, Coppola still keeps some of the Götterdämmerung-esque imagery. The images of the original ending still roll over the ending credits of the film, and the bombs falling over the compound and then going up in a sudden burst of flame (see Figure 9) certainly recall the ending of Wagner's *Ring*.

Of course, the question of whether the Wagnerian aspects of the film were the brainchild of Milius or Coppola (Lewis, after all, does describe the original ending as "Milius-inspired") hits against the question of whose *film* it was in the first place. That gets into fundamental struggles in film theory: between *auteur* theory, where the film is the director's vision, and *Schrieber* theory, where it is that of the
screenwriter. (Of course, Milius was not the only screenwriter; while it was his original script, Coppola made extensive revisions, and the two men were dually nominated for the award for Best Screenplay Based On Material From Another Medium at the 52nd Academy Awards.) Yet, it is clear how Coppola saw his own project: as his magnum opus and his staggering, singular artistic vision. It is also clear that United Artists saw it that way, willing to throw money at Coppola alone to get the picture made.

Lewis details the financial battles that established *Apocalypse Now*’s status as an *auteur* film—and the beginning of the end for the New Hollywood era, in spite of *Apocalypse Now*’s financial successes. In their worries over the film’s financial successes, United Artists loaned Coppola a great deal of money in both a way to distance themselves from the project and pin any possible issues with it on Coppola, and also to ensure that it would be made. The particular way they handled it, however, gave Coppola a great deal of creative control and put everything in his hands:

Though [UA’s deal with him over *Apocalypse Now*] left [Coppola] deep in debt and obliged to United Artists, the bottom line revealed that Coppola ostensibly owned the project...and thus, within very few limits, he could do with the film what he pleased. As a result of his revised deal with United Artists, Coppola ended up shouldering much of the
risk for the film's future performance at the box office. But he also secured a degree of creative control over his own destiny that neither he nor any other director of his generation had ever enjoyed...Coppola could continue to increase the budget with no regard for his own ability to pay UA back because the studio, as a condition of the renegotiation, had surrendered control over the amount of money Coppola could spend on the film.42

In that sense, Coppola was the culmination of the auteur era of Hollywood, where directors were given the freedom by studios to run rampant with their personal visions; Lewis draws a direct line from it to Heaven's Gate, the hugely-expensive Michael Cimino pet project that nearly bankrupted United Artists with its financial failure and ended the auteur era singlehandedly. And yet, the extreme auteurism of Coppola's approach to Apocalypse Now and its various production details—not only the expense and the battles with the studio, but the particular conditions of shooting he demanded and his constant revising of the ending—recalls an older sort of artistic megalomania.

The 1970s auteur mindset almost draws on the Romantic-period ideal of the artist and the artist's vision; in Hitchcock's Ear, Schroeder even links the two ideas directly, stating that "the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk, the all-embracing artwork,

42. Lewis, Whom God Wishes to Destroy..., 42-43.
[was] a notion that would later appeal of some film critics as the auteur."\(^{43}\) As such, Coppola's approach to *Apocalypse Now* can be seen as yet another parallel between his film and Wagner's *Ring*. Richard Wagner could be almost a 19th-century operatic version of the film auteur, who saw his operas as his own unique and important artistic statements rather than the more collaborative efforts of earlier generations. Wagner wrote the libretto for his works as well as the music, made extensive demands for staging—especially with the *Ring*—and saw his works as having great cultural, political and social importance.

*Coppola is not quite the same—since, in spite of making a "definitive" film about Vietnam, he did not seem to want to make a definitive statement about Vietnam. And he succeeded, if the confusion among the aforementioned critics (and those that will be discussed in greater depth later in the fourth chapter) is any indication. He wanted to engage with an important issue in the public consciousness without necessarily telling people what to think about it. For this, he paid the critical price, admonished for documenting more than pontificating, for making a story about Vietnam larger than the individual conflict and tying it into his own life, instead of merely a work of propaganda.

This would be at-odds with how Wagner saw his own work—as deeply political, even if Wagner's contemporaries and modern-day musicologists alike debate just how much the messages against greed in *The Ring* align with anti-capitalist ideology, for example. He saw this engagement as critical to the opera's

development as an art; for example, in Opera and Drama, he criticizes how opera had "fallen, at the hands of its masters, to a mere commercial article." Yet, Wagner's obsession with the folk traditions of Germany caused him to set most of his operatic treatises in the time and place of legends and fairy tales, removing them from the modern sociopolitical context that would make their meanings clearer—the trap of all socially conscious writers of fantasy and science fiction. In addition, many who took issue with Wagner's political ideas were drawn toward his musical and literary works, and his ideas about art, and used what ambiguity there was to interpret them to their own ends. All this is demonstrated by the wide variety of interpretations and ideological frameworks that critics since Wagner's own time have attributed to his work, or read into it. The ability of modern-day scholars to interpret the Ring as everything from communist, to fascist, to feminist is a testament to this, to the universality of its themes, and to its timelessness.

Apocalypse Now is, likewise, a work that is very situated in the debate of its time and yet, has its own universality. When that is combined with its apocalyptic themes and its status as the manifestation of one director's megalomaniacal vision, it can be said that, far from just engaging with the legacy of Wagner's Ring, Coppola's Vietnam War epic could be considered a Ring for our own times.

44. Richard Wagner, Opera and Drama, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 90.

One of the more curious, and poignant, uses of the music of Wagner's *Ring* in film and television comes from an unlikely source: anime. Like Western animation, anime contains some of the most seamless fusions of music and narrative in film media. Examples include the anime scored by composer Yoko Kanno, particularly *Cowboy Bebop*, a story of bounty hunters in space that manages to create unique sound worlds on the episodic level. Another is *Princess Tutu*, a "magical girl" story that uses a fusion of classical symphonic, operatic and ballet excerpts to tell a story of a sadistic fairy-tale writer and his characters who battle against their tragic fates.

*Princess Tutu* ran on Japanese television in 2002 and 2003 and was directed by Junichi Sato and Shogo Koumoto. Sato had previously made his name on influential fellow "magical girl" series *Sailor Moon*. "Magical girl" anime feature teenage girls who transform into frilly superheroines powered by love and other magical abilities, and *Princess Tutu* is no exception to the genre. Its heroine, Duck, starts out as an ordinary duck granted the power by dead fairy-tale author Drosselmeyer, to become a human girl who attends a ballet school. She then has the power to turn into the magical ballerina warrior Princess Tutu when her friends are in peril. Drosselmeyer (whose name comes from the toymaker in *The Nutcracker*) has the ability to control the inhabitants of Gold Crown Town, Duck's home, from beyond the grave in order to use them as characters in his final fairy tale, "The Prince and the Raven," which was left unfinished at his death.
The "Prince" of Drosselmeyer's fairy tale saved his town from an evil raven by letting his heart be shattered. Said prince, now named Mytho, attends Duck's school and it is up to her to find the shards of his heart while they are possessing other Gold Crown Town inhabitants, and dance with them to extract the shards and give them to Mytho. However, another girl, Rue, is dating Mytho and doesn't want him to regain his heart—and thus, his memories—out of fear that he will transfer his affections to Princess Tutu, his "rightful" princess. Rue also has the ability to transform into a dancing magical girl, Princess Kraehe, an identity she uses to fight Princess Tutu. Rounding out the main cast is the character Fakir, who is the "knight" designated to protect the prince and princess from Kraehe, the villain. He also is fearful of Mytho regaining too much of his heart, because according to Drosselmeyer's story, he is destined to die fighting Kraehe, and Tutu is destined to disappear when she reveals her love for Mytho after returning his heart to him.

All this comes to a head as the characters spiral helplessly toward their fates, resulting in the inevitable confrontation predicted in Drosselmeyer's story. However, they all miraculously survive it, suggesting a happy ending... yet, this is

45. Characters' names are usually symbolic in Princess Tutu. Mytho's name is pronounced like the Greek word "mytho", the root of "mythology", and likely refers to the fact that he is the character who is the most "at the mercy of the story" throughout the run of the anime. He only has the name because of amnesia about his true identity, and it is only when he regains that identity as the Prince that he is able to influence the outcome himself (instead of Duck, Fakir and Rue doing it for him) and save the day. Other characters with symbolic names include Fakir, whose name comes from an Arabic word for a wandering Sufi Muslim teacher, which may relate to his role as a storyteller. It is difficult to determine where Rue's name comes from—it may be related to the English word, relating to her regrets and sorrow about her past—but the name of her villain identity, Princess Kraehe, is clearly due to "Kraehe" being the German word for "crow" (since she transforms into a crow-feathered ballerina and her "father" is the evil Raven).
merely the end of the first season, and the story goes on. Mytho’s heart is mostly returned to him, but it was corrupted by Rue dipping the shards in Raven’s blood, as the audience finds out that she is the daughter of the evil Raven in the fairy tale. It is now Duck and Fakir’s jobs to stop Mytho from hypnotizing the girls of their school into sacrificing their pure hearts to him, and by extension, the Raven. As they do so, Fakir begins to discover that he has a mysterious power of his own: to rewrite the story from within it, and therefore fight against the dark ending that Drosselmeyer wants for his tale. All the characters—including the villainous Princess Kraehe—begin to fight against the sad endings designed for them, working toward the happiest possible end for everyone. In this second season, Princess Tutu becomes more than a fractured fairy-tale, and turns into a work of metafiction.

There are frequent references to not only other fairy tales, but ballets and other works of classical music, in each episode of Princess Tutu. For example, in the "episodic" arcs of each season—Tutu drawing out heart shards to give to Mytho, or protecting students from having their hearts stolen by him—one-off characters’ stories are often based on those of famous ballets, such as Giselle and Coppélia. Even if not directly based on the plot of a ballet or other musical work, the episodic characters usually have a famous classical work used as their leitmotif in the story. For example, the flamboyant and flirtatious male student Femio, whose "pure heart" Kraehe attempts to steal herself in his episode, is always accompanied by excerpts from Carmen. The wide array of classical excerpts used in Princess Tutu therefore play a key role in telling its story.
Yet, there are certain excerpts that are used more than others. The series includes nearly every movement from Ravel's orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, repeating them throughout the story as leitmotifs (such as using "Ballet of the Chicks in their Shells" as one for Uzura, a childlike puppet character who appears in the second season) and pulling others out to highlight crucial moments. It also frequently uses the music of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, for similar purposes, tying in with *Princess Tutu's* status as a story-within-a-story and its theme of the transformative power of narrative. As per the ballet theme, Tchaikovsky's ballets—especially *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*—are repeated throughout the story, in a similar manner; the series' few moments of original score even make references to parts of *The Nutcracker*. Lastly, the "Aquarium" movement from Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals* is used in the first season in foreshadowing and expository-dialogue scenes, to give the impression of the viewers "looking in" on a story the way one would look in on an aquarium.

However, in the second season, there is no longer mere viewing going on; the characters are actively trying to influence and reverse the writing of the story themselves. Thus, the story needs a more "active" musical representation in those scenes, and so, "Aquarium" is largely replaced—with "Siegfried's Death and Funeral March" from *Götterdämmerung*. Though the excerpt is used in a variety of ways throughout the season, all of which will be analyzed here, it is mostly clearly connected with those scenes of foreshadowing, particularly of the tragic variety. This connects *Princess Tutu* very clearly with the themes of Wagner's *Ring*, another
story of characters hurtling toward a tragic fate. Yet, the way that it is used in *Princess Tutu* highlights how the two stories take very opposite approaches to the theme of fate vs. free will.

The story of the *Ring* and in a smaller sense, the story specifically at work in *Götterdämmerung*, is one about the need to accept a tragic fate. The characters must accept their own demises, and even the demise of the world as they have come to know it, in order to allow for a better world for the future. They must allow the world to be reborn, and their place in it eliminated, so it can be a good one—because that is the only way to truly destroy the power of the Ring. Unfortunately, fate has dictated that all who came in contact with the Ring of the Nibelungs will eventually die, and that includes the Gods of Valhalla, per the curse that Alberich placed on it. But this fate is accepted, with the Ring easily read as a symbol for power and how it corrupts. It is better to just eliminate these corrupt powers, and have the world start over.

Yet, in *Princess Tutu*, the characters are only able to achieve greatness and save their world by specifically rejecting the tragic fate that the dead fairy-tale author Drosselmeyer has planned for them. They achieve this largely through the actions of Fakir, who discovers near the end of the story that he is a direct descendent of Drosselmeyer’s, and thus, has inherited his powers—his writing talent, and his ability to make the stories that he writes come true. Yet, Fakir needs great training in order to have the ability to overcome Drosselmeyer’s influence, as it is easier for him to merely copy on to the page what Drosselmeyer and others
"influence" him to write. Fakir needs practice to be able to write in his own voice, and it is an ability he largely gains through cooperation with Duck, whose determination as Princess Tutu to return Mytho's heart shards at all costs, inspires him. Rue and Mytho, on the other hand, are more passive characters, and their respective drives toward self-sacrifice and saving others cause them to play right into the clutches of the evil Raven, newly re-awoken, and thus Drosselmeyer's tragic endings... but they are still able to contribute by inspiring Fakir and Duck. And ultimately, Fakir and Duck give the two of them the power to defeat the Raven directly, earning them their heroic ending.

**Prince Siegfried and the Wagnerian Siegfried: Comparing Characters in the Ring and Princess Tutu**

Mytho and Rue's decision to accept their tragic fates, because they believe it is the best possible way to protect each other, recalls to a certain extent the main couple of the second half of the Ring: Siegfried and Brünnhilde. Mytho, in the end, turns out to really be named Prince Siegfried, after he regains his memories upon having all his heart shards returned to him. To a certain degree, he is constructed more like the character of the same name from Swan Lake—especially in how Rue/Princess Kraehe, as the "dark" (both in personality and goals, at first, and in appearance) counterpart to Princess Tutu, is obviously intended as the Odile to Tutu's Odette. Princess Tutu also appears to onlookers (those who aren't among the main four characters of the story, or her rescue of the day) as a giant white swan
when she saves people, and her background as a bird who was turned into a human princess is a reversal of the curse that is put on Odette in Swan Lake. Yet, in personality, Mytho’s Siegfried is much closer to his Wagnerian counterpart than his Tchaikovskian one. Far from the selfish, hedonistic prince of Swan Lake, Mytho—before his heart was scattered—shows the selfless heroism and naiveté of Wagner’s Siegfried.

Like Wagner’s Siegfried, one of Mytho’s key weaknesses is his innocence, and he spends most of the Princess Tutu narrative—before his heart is returned to him—shuffled between the wishes of the other heroes. This is similar to how Siegfried is so easily manipulated by other characters in Siegfried and Götterdämmerung. In the former, he nearly falls into Mime’s trap until he is warned by a bird singing to him. In Götterdämmerung, Siegfried is tricked into drinking Gutrune’s potion and forgetting his memories of Brünnhilde. Likewise, Mytho’s lack of memory due to losing his heart is part of what makes him so easily led by the other characters, for good and for ill.

The status of Mytho’s heart is the key to either achieving or avoiding the ending that Drosselmeyer hopes for in his story, so while Tutu, in her compassion for the prince, attempts to return Mytho’s remaining shards, Fakir and Rue manipulate him in order to avoid this. The theme of the second season is that, like the characters in the Ring, the other characters cannot fight this fate: his heart must be returned, the story must end—and as they grow, they realize they do not want the story to go back to the beginning. However, unlike Wagner’s characters, they are
able to make the fate less tragic.

In her initial role as the villain Princess Kraehe, Rue attempts to manipulate this inevitable ending for her own purposes, by corrupting Mytho's heart. If she cannot avoid Princess Tutu returning the pieces to him, then she will turn it around in a way so that it benefits her, rather than Tutu. She dips a shard of his heart that she has pulled out of him in the blood of the evil Raven, which turns Mytho evil. He hypnotizes other characters in the story into giving their "pure hearts" to the Raven, who needs one to satisfy his ultimate plan; in each case, Mytho is thwarted by Princess Tutu. By having a pure heart for the Raven to devour, Rue would be able to marry Mytho and become his princess. She does not believe that she can be loved on her own, and so she must deceive him and warp his love. In that sense, Rue is similar to Gutrune, who can only gain Siegfried's love through trickery.

However, like Gutrune, Rue is not actively malicious. Both do care for the men they trick into loving them. In Rue's case, she has been led to believe that as the human daughter of a raven, she is a freak who cannot be loved. She later learns this is not true, and Mytho comes to love her genuinely. In her book *Vocal Victories: Wagner's Female Characters from Senta to Kundry*, Nila Parly writes that Gutrune is "a singularly weak character, whose main purpose would seem to be as contrast to the heroic dynamic Brünnhilde. Gutrune is a docile conventionally-minded Romantic victim." Rue is not over-simplified that easily, but she plays a similar

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role in being framed at first as a malicious antagonist, but ultimately fills a role
closer to that of a victim. She appears to be the engine behind the conflict in the first
season, but Rue is truly controlled by the Raven’s machinations, and is one of the
characters with the least agency in the story (only Mytho has less, at least until all
his heart shards are returned in the penultimate episode). After she sacrifices
herself to save Mytho near the end, she is the character who must be saved by him,
propelled forward by the other two main characters. And in this role, Rue is also
contrasted with a more "heroic" female character: Duck, the protagonist, whose
actions are the engine that keep the story going (again, until the penultimate
episode, where she shares this role with Fakir).

In a way, Rue/Princess Kraehe can be read as merging of the Wagnerian
Siegfried’s two love interests; she is also like Brünnhilde in that she is weakened and
given her place in the story by her father’s plans (although, of course, Wotan’s
motivations were less villainous than the Raven’s), and in that her salvation comes
from a sacrifice for her loved one at the end of the story. She also shares
Brünnhilde’s transfer of loyalty from her father (who ends up not being Rue’s true
father, as he kidnapped her from her human parents when she was young), to the
man she loves. Parly writes of Brünnhilde:

> Brünnhilde is not characterised [sic] by faithfulness to
> her father... Brünnhilde is entirely characterised by
> faithfulness to her beloved Siegfried. She sees the ring
as a pledge of love, and refuses to compromise her love, even if it means her father and the other gods perish in the process. Brünnhilde's obstinate re-definition of the ring's symbolic meaning and her subsequent sacrificial death purge the ring of its evil.47

Rue's sacrifice has a similar effect on the cursed heart shard that she gave Mytho—purifying it, and ridding him of the Raven's curse. Now turned good, he is imprisoned by the Raven and waits for Princess Tutu to return with his final heart shard. Rue is lastly comparable to Brünnhilde in how she is framed as Mytho's "sexual awakening" of sorts, as is Brünnhilde for Siegfried's in the opera. Princess Tutu is careful in its second season to contrast the more obsessive, sexual, romantic love that Rue and Mytho have for each other with the admiration and platonic love between Duck and Mytho, in order to play with viewer expectations (since Mytho was expected to take Duck as his princess based on the first season's events). This is why Mytho ultimately chooses Rue, rather than Duck, as his princess at the end. Parly says that when Siegfried and Brünnhilde first come together at the end of Siegfried, "[f]ate and its motif are again set in motion; Siegfried has learned the meaning of fear, he has found himself, has come to life."48 In Princess Tutu, Rue has a similar effect on Mytho.

47. Parly, Vocal Victories, 200.
48. Ibid, 203.
At least some of these thematic similarities were almost certainly noticed by the original creators, and part of the decision to use music from the Ring in Princess Tutu's soundtrack. As the creators' commentaries on the DVD make clear, every choice of outside music for the soundtrack is extremely deliberate and coincides in some way with the themes of either a particular episode or the overarching plot of Princess Tutu. As such, analyzing the relationship of Princess Tutu to the Ring—since it is one of the more frequently-heard musical works in the anime series (along with Scheherazade, Pictures at an Exhibition and Tchaikovsky's ballets)—is essential to understanding the story's themes and to speculating as to what the creators meant to convey by using it.

**Analysis of Siegfried and Götterdämmerung Excerpts in Princess Tutu**

The use of Siegfried Idyll and the "Siegfried's Death and Funeral March" excerpt from Götterdämmerung are paced throughout the series in a way that reflects the frequent changes in tone in the series. Siegfried Idyll coincides with heroic moments, and "Siegfried's Death" with dramatic, even ominous, ones. As such, Siegfried Idyll is heard first, early on in the series, when the viewers are first introduced to the idea of Mytho as a heroic prince, and are cheering on Princess Tutu to return him to that state. It is a leitmotif for his "real" identity as Prince

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49. Sarah Alys Lindholm and Mike Yantosca, "Staff Commentary: Episode 16", Princess Tutu, directed by Junichi Sato and Shogo Koumoto, 2002-2003 (Houston: AESir Holdings, 2011), DVD. (Note: Lindholm was the translator and Yantosca the script writer for the English dub of Princess Tutu's second season.)
Siegfried. However, as the first season plot moves forward and it becomes clear that returning Mytho's heart will not necessarily have the positive consequences that the viewers and Princess Tutu hope for, *Siegfried Idyll* disappears, and instead the Wagner we hear is that of "Siegfried's Death."

As mentioned before, this reference is used primarily in the second season for scenes of exposition and foreshadowing, somewhat replacing the role that Saint-Saëns's "Aquarium" had in the first season. (*Scheherazade* also takes up this role, in a more general sense than "Siegfried's Death" does—which is connected with a particular kind of foreshadowing, as to be revealed. Both show that the characters are taking a more active role in shaping the story and thus, their fates, rather than merely "looking in", as implied by the use of "Aquarium"). However, "Siegfried's Death" shows up even before the seasonal break, and is used primarily, in both cases, to indicate darkness and doom. Its use reveals that the characters are spiraling, inevitably, toward the confrontation that Drosselmeyer intends them to have as his first great climax: with Mytho and Tutu as the heroic prince and princess, Fakir as the protector knight who is destined to die, and Kraehe as the villain entrusted to kill him and prevent the happy ending. Miraculously, all the characters live, but in its continuing use in the second season, the use of "Siegfried's Death" makes it clear that the characters' fates have yet to be completely rescued from Drosselmeyer's cruel machinations.

To examine the use of Wagner's music in *Princess Tutu*, it is worth looking more carefully at a few key scenes in the second season. For most of the second
season, it is used at least once an episode, with the exception of a few more lighthearted entries; only in the ninth episode of the 13-episode season, "Crown of Stone/Das Grosse Tor von Kiew," does it start to disappear—and be replaced by Siegfried Idyll.\textsuperscript{50} This is, not incidentally, the same episode when Fakir begins to awaken his abilities to re-write his and his friends' fates. As such, *Princess Tutu* gives us many examples to look at when it comes to how it uses the music of Götterdämmerung.

While "Siegfried's Death and Funeral March" is associated with both foreshadowing and with doom and despair, it is particularly connected to scenes featuring Mytho and Rue (usually in the form of Princess Kraehe). The first time it shows up in the second season is in its season premiere, "The Raven/Blumenwalzer."\textsuperscript{51} It comes immediately after a lighthearted scene where the characters' feline ballet instructor, named Mr. Cat, tells a story of his meeting with a famous ballet dancer named "Meowzinsky," and how Mr. Cat was entrusted with Meowzinsky's practice shoes, his most prized possession.\textsuperscript{52} This scene has a soft, pastel color palette, and is accompanied by the third movement of *Scheherazade*,

\textsuperscript{50} The subtitles or secondary titles of episodes tend to be the name of the musical work that is most frequently or prominently used in it. In this episode's case, that is the final movement of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, "The Great Gate of Kiev," during a pivotal scene where Princess Tutu discovers the gates enclosing Gold Crown Town and how they trap its citizens within Drosselmeyer's story.

\textsuperscript{51} The secondary title here refers to the "Waltz of the Flowers" from *The Nutcracker*—which is, again, prominently featured here, and tends to be used throughout the series as a leitmotif for Princess Tutu rescuing people. This is the first time where Mytho is a villain and she has to rescue someone from him.

\textsuperscript{52} The name of Mr. Cat's hero "Meowzinsky" is a reference to the famous Russian ballet dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky.
"The Young Prince and the Young Princess." When the music switches to "Siegfried's Death", the camera suddenly zooms to Mytho, who is clutching his heart in pain (see Figure 10), as his eyes flash red and purple in a wicked expression (see Figure 11). When Duck looks over to him worriedly, it is in a different frame—indicating Mytho's isolation and separation from her, and from everyone; as it keeps focused on him alone in the frame as he trembles. It is also interesting how precisely the music is timed with the action, as the signature horn blasts that begin the "Siegfried's Death" theme in earnest, only come upon his eyes flashing and indicating that Mytho is not merely in pain, but also, corrupted.

Figure 10, Princess Tutu Episode 14, 13:55—Mytho clutches his heart as the musical excerpts switch over
The scene, overall, is all about suggestion and implication. It cuts suddenly from Mytho’s torment to Mr. Cat’s priceless Meowzinsky shoes, on his desk. Then back to him, and then back to the shoes again, where there is now a shadow (implied to be Mytho, as it is someone with his frizzy hair) looming over them (see Figure 12). Then it cuts back to Mytho in the ballet studio, and then back to Mr. Cat’s desk, where the shoes have now disappeared. There is no direct statement that it was Mytho who took the shoes, or what he did with them, but the music of doom and gloom and the camera work tell us what we need to know. In a later scene, it is revealed the shoes were cut into pieces and left on the floor, for seemingly no reason. It indicates how corrupt the shard is turning Mytho, since his previous acts
of senseless kindness are now replaced by those of senseless cruelty (and indeed, Mytho is never given a reason for why he destroyed Mr. Cat’s shoes). The heroism of Prince Siegfried is truly dying, as the musical selection tells us.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 12: Princess Tutu Episode 14, 14:11—Mytho’s shadow over the Meowzinsky shoes**

"Siegfried’s Death" continues to play as Fakir comes to visit Mytho in his dorm room, where Mytho is resting, seemingly ill. The color palette here has distinctly turned darker and more saturated, indicating that it is later in the day and they are in a room with less windows than the ballet studio, but also the darker mood of this scene. Fakir is worried about Mytho, but he staves Fakir off with excuses. The distance between the two boys—who, in the first season, were close enough friends to border on the homoerotic—is communicated not just through
words, but through the camera, where even when Fakir is in the same frame as Mytho, he is situated opposite him, and only one boy is looking at the camera at a time. Once again, it communicates Mytho's growing distance from those he cares about as the corrupted heart shard works its magic. And the musical selection culminates in another close-up on Mytho's eyes, where an ominous purple-red orb is taking over.

Figure 13: Princess Tutu Episode 15, 10:27—Fakir slaps Mytho

In the following episode, titled "Coppelia", the theme of "Siegfried’s Death" being used for exposition-by-implication continues. Duck is in the library talking to Fakir, about a conversation she witnessed between Mytho and her friend Pike (a
Japanese romanization of the ballet term "piqué"). It is when she reveals that Mythro left behind a crow’s feather that "Siegfried’s Death" starts up. Fakir, realizing what this suggests without needing to state it, rushes out of the library in a panic—and finds and confronts Rue, who he insists on calling "Kraehe." He is stopped from physically confronting her by Mythro, without giving a reason, though Fakir still tries to slap Mythro away (see Figure 13). It is not stated outright, but the actions imply that Rue and the Raven are playing a role in Mythro’s corruption. The camerawork, once again, supports this: Fakir and Duck, who are growing closer in their mutual investigation of what is happening to Mythro, are consistently shown in the same frame as Duck recounts what she saw to him. When Fakir confronts Rue, however, they are framed opposite one another, the camera cutting back and forth between their faces. It is only when Mythro shows up that all four main characters, caught in the confrontation, share a frame. It suggests that he can only be close to others through Rue. He is growing closer to her, but she is driving him apart from Duck, his apparent rescuer and previous love interest, and Fakir, his best friend. It continues as it zooms out to Drosselmeyer’s domain, where he is watching the

53. Piqué comes from the French term for "pricked" and describes a move where the dance steps "directly on the point or demi-pointe of the working foot in any desired direction or position with the other foot raised in the air." Source: "Piqué", Online Ballet Dictionary, American Ballet Theatre, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html

54. The use of birds in prominent characters’ names and powers in Princess Tutu is likely a reference to Swan Lake, considering how Duck and Rue are initially framed as like "Odette" and "Odile" respectively. In her "Princess Tutu" form, Duck even appears to bystanders (i.e., those other than the four main characters of her, Rue, Mythro and Fakir) as a white swan. It also simply adds to the fairy-tale-like atmosphere, as Gold Crown Town is full of talking animals (such as Mr. Cat) alongside the human characters.
actions through one of his turning gears. He comments on how "little Duck's prince is changing, and not for the better!" while the gear-as-mirror zooms in, again, on Mytho's eyes. In this episode, we can clearly see that they have now turned completely red—like Rue's, the daughter of the Raven. At least one part of him is already completely corrupted. None of this is stated outright, but while *Scheherazade* is for direct exposition scenes, "Siegfried's Death" is for those of implication, particularly of the darker variety.

*Figure 14: Princess Tutu Episode 15, 15:13—Pike gazes down at Mytho*
"Siegfried's Death" is used again later in the episode, when Pike—who Mytho is now "dating" in order to seduce her into being his victim-of-the-episode—is looking down on Mytho looking up at her. (See Figures 14 and 15.) Again, the two are presented in separate frames, to indicate Mytho's distance from her in spite of his professed "love" for her. It then cuts to Fakir brooding in the library, where he is suddenly visited by Rue in her Princess Kraehe form. In this case, "Siegfried's Death" is associated with more direct exposition, though not for the viewer. The viewers already know by this point that Mytho's heart's corruption is due to Kraehe dipping the shard in Raven's blood. Yet, this is the first that one of the other three main characters learns about it, as Kraehe divulges this information to Fakir in this scene. This is yet another scene full of dark lighting and color, even though it appears to
still be daytime outside; the shadows of the library offset the ominous music. And once again, separation is indicated by the camera, with Fakir and Kraehe only appearing in different frames, or on opposite ends of each other in the same frame. They may be sharing information, but they are on opposite ends of the conflict, fighting for opposite goals. They may be physically close, but they are not emotionally close at all.

It is interesting that the "death" of the "good" Prince Siegfried, in terms of his corruption by Rue's poisoned heart shard, is associated with his transformation into a raven. This is obviously largely due to the fact that the Raven is the evil character in the series, but it harkens back to the use of ravens in the Ring as well. They are associated with the opera cycle's own omnipresent father-figure, Wotan; as stated before, his relationship with Brünnhilde has some parallels with the Raven's with Rue, albeit in a much more benign, non-villainous form. However, ravens also appear in the scene shortly after Siegfried actually dies in Götterdämmerung. Parly notes that "'two ravens of misfortune' [hang] over the head of the dead Siegfried" and identifies them with Hagen, not with Wotan, because of how they are associated with "revenge" and "diversion."55 This is similar to the role of the Ravens in Princess Tutu.

Later uses of "Siegfried's Death" in the series follow a similar pattern to episodes 14 and 15. They appear in scenes where information is communicated, whether through implication or direct dialogue. The information communicated

55. Parly, Vocal Victories, 199.
usually involves Mytho and his fate, and the shots focus on either Mytho or Rue/Kraehe, who the camera marks as separate from the other characters involved. The overall mood, palette and lighting of the scene is significantly darker than those surrounding it, often with very abrupt changes from much lighter, brighter and happier scenes. It plays a key role not only in setting up information, but particularly in foreshadowing doom and gloom, and positioning the dark end that Drosselmeyer has planned as inevitable—or at least, difficult to prevent. This, of course, ties in with the music's use in the Ring, as it is associated with Siegfried’s inevitable (due to the curse Alberich placed on the Ring) tragic fate. As such, when the series switches it out for the music of the previous opera, where Siegfried is still a happy-go-lucky hero and the darkness of the final Ring opera seems further away, it serves its own key narrative purpose: in showing that the Tutu characters will not, after all, necessarily fall to the same sad ends as the Ring characters. So therefore, it is useful to examine the very different way that Siegfried Idyll, its other Ring-associated excerpt, is used in Princess Tutu.

The most significant uses of it come in the final two episodes of the series. At this point, Rue has realized that she is a human girl, and was kidnapped by the Raven; she is not his real daughter. She has also learned, through her interactions with Fakir’s friend Autor (who has a crush on her), that she can, in fact, be loved—in spite of what the Raven taught her, that only he—and Mytho, if she forces him through corrupting him—can love her. As an extension, she has realized that she loves Mytho genuinely herself. When the Raven tries to take Mytho’s almost-
completed heart, Rue instead sacrifices herself to go in his place—and is taken to a barren wasteland where she is forced to dance until she dies (possibly a reference to the ballet *Giselle*), unless Mytho can rescue her first.56

Mytho wants to rescue her, even if it means sacrificing his heart. At the very least, he wants his heart completed with the final shard—which is Princess Tutu’s transformation pendant—so he can help Rue. It is while he tells this to Tutu that *Siegfried Idyll* begins playing. In contrast to the use of "Siegfried's Death," the use of *Siegfried Idyll* here is in a scene that is much lighter and brighter than the ones surrounding it. During this scene, Mytho recalls his memories of meeting Rue as a little girl. The memories are sepia-toned, but bright, as they take place in broad daylight outside. Even flashbacks to events of the story seem brighter than they were before, such as when Rue is dancing with the corrupted Mytho, where they are illuminated by light from a window. In the scenes surrounding these flashbacks, however, Mytho and Tutu’s figures are the only bright spots in a world of darkness, as the giant, evil Raven has taken over the sky (see Figure 16). In this case, the music of Wagner is associated with happier times in the midst of darkness, not foreboding doom. The music of *Siegfried* is that of optimism, as Mytho tells about how Rue loved him relentlessly no matter what, and how he believes that his mutual love can save

her—because he wants Rue to be his Princess. The music only stops when Tutu is unable to remove her heart pendant, and the story turns dark again.

![Figure 16: Princess Tutu Episode 26, 18:23—Mytho as Prince Siegfried prepares to defeat the Raven](image)

The music returns later, after Tutu gains the ability to remove her heart pendant, which only came when she realized that she should return to her duck form (because the pendant is the only thing that allows her to become both a normal girl and Princess Tutu). As she approaches with it and the music begins, she is illuminated by light when she rises up to give her pendant to the trapped Mytho—again, the music is an accent for a "light in the darkness." It is interesting, as a recollection of the previous uses of Wagner's music in the series, that the camera chooses to focus on Mytho's eyes as he tells Tutu that he knew that she would come
back for him. Here, we can see that they have returned to their original brown, with no sign of the red-purple light of the curse (see Figure 17). The curse is broken, and Mytho is free, once his heart is fully returned, to become the heroic Prince Siegfried again.

Figure 17: Princess Tutu Episode 25, 19:13—Camera focuses on Mytho's (normal) brown eyes

The use of Siegfried Idyll in the finale of the series is again, associated with "light in the darkness" and Mytho regaining his role as the heroic Prince Siegfried. He is literally illuminated by a beam of light as he rises up on a tower of pink flowers to fight the Raven with his sword. When the people of the town—now turned into crows—try to fight him, the pink flowers and the Prince's light drown them out, contrasted in their bright pastel with the darkness of the rest of the scene (see
Figure 16). It is only when the mood turns back toward the dark, as the Raven cackles and the crow-people are able to rise back up against him, that the music of *Siegfried's Idyll* switches out for another, darker selection (in this case, "Baba Yaga/the Hut on Fowl's Legs" from *Pictures at an Exhibition*). *Siegfried Idyll* is associated as strongly with light as "Siegfried's Death" was with darkness, with heroism as much as the latter was with corruption, and with the characters defying their fates rather than spiraling toward an inevitable darkness. The two selections are shadows of each other in how they are used in the *Princess Tutu* narrative.

In the tenth episode of the second season of *Princess Tutu*, "Marionette/Ruslan und Ludmilla," one of the major events of the story that the characters must deal with is when the story begins "turning backwards." This is due to the naïve puppet character, Uzura, innocently turning a crank when she and Princess Tutu are sucked into Drosselmeyer's domain against their wills. Her actions were innocent curiosity, yet if they had gone unchecked, they would have completely undone the character growth everyone had experienced over the course of the story, and the relationships they built. They all realize that they do not want that, and therefore, that they must continue moving forward and face Drosselmeyer's ending. It is a pivotal moment in *Princess Tutu*’s thematic relationship with fate.

Yet, the *Tutu* narrative, when it is thematically compared with Wagner's *Ring*, could be seen as *that* story spinning backward in its second season. Mytho begins the season with his heart—and thus, love—corrupted, like Siegfried is for much of
Götterdämmerung, and the moments that illustrate this are punctuated with the music of that opera. In choosing the theme from Siegfried’s death and funeral march, it is as though the narrative is saying that the heroic, good Prince Siegfried is dead. And yet, when the climax is reached, Mytho’s heart is re-purified and he becomes the good Prince Siegfried. And in that moment, it is switched out for the music of the previous Ring opera—or at least, what would become it in Siegfried Idyll (which essentially served as "sketches" for the opera Siegfried).

While the narrative of Princess Tutu must keep moving forward, it is clear that some other stories are able to move backward, if a tragic ending is the only possible one. Princess Tutu makes it clear that Wagner’s Ring is a story of the latter type. Duck, Fakir, Mytho and Rue reject that their story must have a tragic ending, that they cannot change their fates and control their own narrative—and show the way to all characters in all stories that this can be true for them, too. Erda’s vision of doom is not the only way.
Chapter Four: Conclusions: Film and Modern Wagner Reception

**Wagner and the Surreal**

David Schroeder spends the fourth chapter of *Hitchcock’s Ear* discussing the relationship between Wagner’s musical gestures and those of other composers in Hitchcock’s films. He notes that while composers such as Mozart and Bach represent order and tradition, Wagner is associated with ambiguity and chaos. This is partly due to Wagner’s harmonies, which stretch the limits of tonality; Schroeder says that “[Hitchcock] could certainly hear the basic differences between the music of Wagner and that of composers from a century earlier. Unlike the phrasing patterns and harmonic or tonal progressions of earlier music, Wagner abandoned... cadence-oriented progressions, and this results in music very much cast adrift according to the old standards.”

Yet, even composers with similarly adventurous tonal structures, such as Ravel, play more dual roles, their music representing both the social order and its breakdown in Hitchcock’s films. Wagner, however, is identified strictly with the demise of the social order, and with the ambiguous and the uncertain—and Schroeder believes this owes something at least partly to how Wagner’s music united with his libretti in creating these impressions. He writes:

> Wagner sets up the potential for this in the librettos, for example the nature of the illicit love between Tristan

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and Isolde, but the erotic ecstasy comes to life through the music, Wagner’s most powerful weapon. We get a strong sense of that in the prelude to Tristan und Isolde, and the climactic capping off of this in the 'Liebestod' at the end of the opera, with Tristan already dead and Isolde about to join him, moving distinctly from the physical to the spiritual world. Such heights can only be achieved with a musical ambiguity that has the potential of developing in any one of a myriad of possibilities, preventing any predictability or premature resolution.\textsuperscript{58}

This partly speaks to the power of the ties between music and text in Wagner's works, furthering the effect of his Gesamtkunstwerk ideal. However, this "ambiguity" in how Wagner's music develops, and what it can suggest about the text constructed around it, also reveals the variety of interpretations his operas have garnered over the decades. This includes the variety of ways his music has been used in film, in service of other narratives: only a few of which are explored here, and only among the use of one of his works (the four operas that make up Der Ring des Nibelungen).

\textsuperscript{58} Schroeder, Hitchcock's Ear, 186.
However, the association with "ambiguity" and "chaos" itself, which Schroeder identifies with Wagnerian motifs in Hitchcock's films' scores, can be reflected in Wagner's use in some of these films. One of the clearest examples is *Apocalypse Now* where, like in *Vertigo*, the lines between reality and the characters' perceptions of it are frequently blurred, and the ending of the film seems to indicate the victory of chaos.

In *The Hollywood Auteur*, Chown describes one scene later in *Apocalypse Now*:

The crew arrives at the Dong Lo Bridge. Machine gun fire, cursing, screams, eerie music, and explosions dominate the soundtrack, and blurred visuals, flashing lights and phantasmagoric colors dominate the imagery, giving a surreal quality to the scene. Lance is doing acid, and several soft focus shots suggest his perspective. In a trench Willard encounters several black machine-gunners who dispense with a Viet Cong on the perimeter by calling a zen-grenade specialist named Roach in to do his specialty. Willard discovers there is no commanding officer and departs. The scene has a nightmarish quality. As Willard asks who is in
command, his face bobs in and out of shadow, later to be repeated as a motif when we meet Kurtz.\textsuperscript{59}

*Apocalypse Now* is clearly a film with an ambiguous relationship between reality and fantasy. The film, as described above, often makes it unclear what is really happening and what is merely the perception of the drugged-up characters as they travel through the jungle and descend into madness, in a similar manner to *Vertigo*—but to very different ends. As Roger Ebert writes in his "Great Movies" review of *Apocalypse Now*, the film shows "how the soldiers try to use the music of home, booze and drugs, to ease their loneliness and apprehension" but true madness comes only from those, such as Kurtz, who are forced to face reality: "If we are lucky, we spend our lives in a fool's paradise, never knowing how close we skirt the abyss. What drives Kurtz mad is his discovery of this."\textsuperscript{60} Regardless, the experience of watching *Apocalypse Now* is quite surreal and "trippy," and in a way that is aided by all the elements of the film—the story, the visuals and the soundtrack—in a manner truly in line with Wagner’s vision of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

In many ways, this drug-addled surrealism was even reflected in the production; accounts suggest that much of the crew themselves were on LSD or other drugs, and that the film’s "drugginess" was an example of this blending into

\textsuperscript{59} Chown, *The Hollywood Auteur*, 129.

the storyline. Many also describe the way that Coppola himself got ahead of himself with money and expense, and pestered it away on this one film, as like a micro version of the war he was depicting in his film. His wife is quoted in *Hollywood Auteur* as saying "Because I loved him, I would tell him what no one else was willing to say, that he was setting up his own Vietnam with his supply lines of wine and steaks and air conditioners. Creating the very situation he went there to expose...He was turning into Kurtz—going too far." Coppola himself said, at the Cannes Film Festival press conference where the film would go on to win the Grand Prix,

> My film is not a movie; it’s not about Vietnam. It is Vietnam... We were in the jungle, there were too many of us, we had access to too much money, too much equipment; and little by little, we went insane. I think you can see it in the film...I realized I was a little frightened, because I was getting deeper in debt and no longer recognized the kind of movie I was making...The

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film was making itself; the jungle was making the film,

and all I did was do my best.63

The idea of an ambiguous line between dreams, between art, and reality, was powerful enough to cross the fourth wall in the making of Apocalypse Now. As such, it is no surprise the film reflects this ambiguity. The question is whether Wagner’s music reflects this ambiguity and chaos, like Wagnerian musical motifs do in Hitchcock’s films.

The helicopter scene comes early in the film. It is a brightly-lit scene with broad skies, rare in the film where, as Ebert describes, the characters are often "little human specks at the foot of towering trees, and this is a Joseph Conrad moment, showing how nature dwarfs us."64 Instead, the helicopters swooping over the rest of the scenes are images of man’s mastery over nature, and American mastery over the Vietnamese on the shores of the river who are bombed by them. It appears as one of the less ambiguous scenes, where both the viewers’ and the characters’ senses are clear and sharp, before the drugs and the general despair warp their senses. Thus, it would seem that Wagner’s music is associated with the opposite of ambiguity in Apocalypse Now, in contrast to its use in Hitchcock’s films. Yet, initial appearance can be deceiving.

64. Ebert, "Great Films: Apocalypse Now"
In fact, this scene has its own surreal reality. Like Kurtz, Kilgore himself is already mad in his own way. He invites parallels to the soldier Willard is searching for by his name and the two being close in rank (Kurtz is a Colonel, Kilgore is a Lieutenant Colonel), and yet his level of madness is somehow not the concern of the higher-ups in the U.S. military. But someone who describes himself as "loving the smell of napalm" and makes sport out of bombing—from blasting music from the helicopters to the surfing—is clearly someone who most would consider as having taken leave of his senses. Yet, this war is the kind where madness is tolerated, so long as it is consistent with the American military's aims. There is a much darker subtext to him and his use of Wagner than the visual excitement of the helicopter scene would initially suggest. The surfing along the beach, too, invites its own surreal reality: the idea of combining an American leisure support with war in Vietnam. It is so unexpected as to be almost comical, and yet is really a reflection of Kurtz's madness.

What is more, the use of the music helps the soldiers take leave of their own senses as they bomb the beaches. The scene depicts the initially-hesitant soldiers under Kilgore's command—and from Willard's group, as Kilgore escorts them across the river to their mission—being swept up in the music and the adrenaline rush as the bombing goes on. While they may not be on literal drugs as they are later in the movie, this scene already shows that the madness of war alters and blurs one's sense of reality. The soldiers are able to forget that they're being commanded to kill, and they have fun with it the way one might with a video game. The music, of course, aids in this, giving a rhythm and bombast to their actions. As such, the scene
is a reflection of how the reality of the war in Vietnam already alters how the soldiers’ perceive their reality even before any actual drugs or despair are involved—and also, how music itself can act like a drug and encourage those listening to take leave of their senses. Perhaps Kilgore is not only playing "Ride of the Valkyries" in order to scare the Vietnamese villagers they bomb, but also to motivate his own soldiers.

This is particularly poignant, of course, when applied to Wagner’s music, due to the importance of his music as propaganda in regimes such as Nazi Germany. Music is often used as a propaganda tool to help people be swept up in the emotions of a particular cause and to spend less time thinking critically, but Wagner’s music has a particular troubling history in that regard. It was used to represent the German national musical and literary tradition and to help the German people swell with national pride, in a way that would keep them from thinking about or examining just how the Nazi philosophy of "Germany over all" was being achieved. It is associated with propagandistic music that encourages people to invade and to conquer, and that is how Kilgore uses it in this scene. It is also associated, again, with its use in Griffith's Birth of a Nation—where it encourages the audience to root for the KKK to defeat the black villain characters, and to "take leave of their reasoning" in forgetting the context of why the heroes and villains are who they are.

The use of Wagner’s music as "blurring the line between art and reality" is reflected in the way it has been used for political aims throughout its history, but particularly by Nazi Germany. Art can "leap off" the page, the screen, or the stage
and influence the real world beyond that "fourth wall," when its ideas affect real people who use them to achieve real ends. Wagner was someone who very much believed in using art for this purpose, as he detailed in many of his writings about the politics of it. And his art would become the ultimate reflection of the troubles with when that line between art and reality is blurred, and when the world of fiction is allowed to influence reality.

Of course, that makes it particularly interesting that one of its greatest associations is with *Apocalypse Now*, a film that eschews making any specific propagandistic statement about the Vietnam War, and as previously mentioned, was often lambasted for that by anti-war critics. The film communicates that war is horrible and has a strong psychological effect on the people who participate in it, but that isn’t used to suggest that war should never happen; if anything, Colonel Kurtz’s philosophy that is able to entice so many people, including hippies, is that war should be all-or-nothing, and the U.S. government should go scorched-earth with its Vietnam policy. The ending, as mentioned before, is ambiguous as to Willard’s fate, and went through many revisions before that. The viewer is left to draw his or her own conclusions about Vietnam from the film. As such, the "ambiguity" of Wagnerian music is reflected on a meta-level with a film that is not only ambiguous in presentation, but also ambiguous in its themes and conclusions.

*The New World*, too, leaves it up to the viewer to discern how he or she wants to react to the colonizing of the Americas. It can be argued that it romanticizes the event, but that is largely by leaving out the larger sociopolitical context and effects,
focusing instead mostly on the romance between two people, John Smith and Pocahontas. (This is in contrast to the Disney film *Pocahontas*, which situates their romance in the context of a clash between two different cultures.) The use of music, both Wagner’s and others, seduces the viewer away from thinking critically about the film, but not toward any particular thematic end. The idea is that viewers are merely swept up in the characters’ romance.

**Fatalism and Auteurism**

One work that is far less ambiguous about its themes and that deals with the "line between art and reality" is *Princess Tutu*. The series is literally about an author, Drosselmeyer, who has the ability to make his stories "come alive" by casting real people in them. The conflict in the story is initially about the characters having to give up their free will to play their parts in the scenario he has designed, and then in regaining that control by deciding to reject what he has planned for them. Though it never "jumps off the screen" into literal reality the way that *Apocalypse Now* did in the making of the film, the meta-text in *Princess Tutu*—the "story within the story"—is able to influence the "main text." There is ambiguity in what is under the control of author Drosselmeyer and what the characters are able to achieve for themselves.

This theme is a major part of the story and that is reflected in the musical choices. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Wagner’s *Ring* is chosen because it reflects
the fatalism that the series explores, and eventually rejects, and the placement of each excerpt from Wagner reflects *Princess Tutu*’s evolution in how it deals with fatalism. Other excerpts in the story, however, are those that specifically bring to mind the metafictional "blurred line between art and reality" theme that is the other cornerstone of *Princess Tutu*. Examples include Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade* Suite, which depicts the stories that the titular queen used to save herself from her murderous king; *The Nutcracker*, which involves toys coming to life; and Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which brings visual art to life through music, and where the line is frequently blurred by the placement of "promenades" between pieces meant to depict specific works of art (especially as the promenade theme can be heard sometimes even in the movements representing art works). There is a conscious attempt to connect the music with these themes in the selection of musical excerpts for *Princess Tutu*. In the series, there is a repeated theme of bringing stories to life through dance, and of those musical works being brought into the world of *Princess Tutu* by being used to control the Raven’s intended victims. For example, in Episode 15, Duck’s friend Pike is lured into Mytho’s trap by being forced to dance the "Waltz of the Doll" from Delibes’s *Coppelia*. Perhaps the use of Wagner’s music is its own attempt to unite the themes of "fatalism" and metafiction; while the *Ring* itself is not metafictional, Wagner himself was quite outspoken in his works, as shown previously, about the importance of art in terms of real-world issues such as political issues.
This subtext is even more interesting when considered in light of the 
auteurism of *Apocalypse Now* and how that concept is rooted in the artistic ideal of
Wagner's time, and developed further by him in his writings on the
*Gesamtkunstwerk*. *Apocalypse Now* is the ultimate auteurist work: a factual story
that, over time, turned into a more personal one as the artist took greater and
greater control over the work and its production. Chown writes of Coppola:

> Authors might be divided into three categories: those
that write imaginatively from personal experience,
those that write imaginatively with material based on
research, and those that do both. Coppola as an auteur
has straddled the three categories... With *Apocalypse
Now* he set out to make a film entirely from research
materials... But the film metamorphosized into a
personal experience and vision in and of itself.65

Coppola was able to make *Apocalypse Now* more of a personal vision than intended,
making it the ultimate auteurist work. And yet, he also spoke of the film "making
itself," and that blurs the line in the way that *Princess Tutu* suggests. *Princess Tutu*
can arguably be read as a rejection of the auteurist vision and as embracing the idea
of art taking on its own life, separate from the artist's original intentions.

For example, *Princess Tutu* begins with a literal "death of the author" and yet involves that author, Drosselmeyer, desperately trying to keep control over his creation from beyond the grave. He manages to keep this up for most of the story, and it is when the characters seem bound to this fate that *Götterdämmerung*, that work of the ultimate megalomaniac artist himself, plays the most often in the TV series. However, Drosselmeyer must eventually accept his death and, therefore, release the strings pulling the story, when the characters wrest control away from him and make their own fate—through Fakir writing his own, alternate ending. The story takes on a life of its own outside of the original creator's intentions. It is also notable that a character named Autor, a friend of Fakir's who slavishly worships Drosselmeyer, is able to show Fakir his powers but cannot affect the story himself; only Fakir, who rejects Drosselmeyer's control and vision, is able to do so.66 *Princess Tutu* can easily be read, therefore, as a promotion of the idea of "Death of the Author," of stories being evaluated on "their own" terms rather than through the lens of a particular artist's—the auteur's—vision. And of course, as the control of the author slips away, *Götterdämmerung*’s place in the story slips away—to another Wagner excerpt, as previously mentioned, but also to works by other composers. This includes *The Nutcracker*, which forms the first and last music heard in the

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66. An additional note on Autor: Unlike the dance student protagonists, Autor is in the school's music division, where he studies composition. So he is another type of "author" himself. Overall, the character is able to introduce Fakir to the art of creation, and to his natural gift as Drosselmeyer's descendent, but he cannot achieve the same himself because of his obsession with the concept of the "Author"—hence his name. The characters possess the gift because of lineage but it is their choice, to either worship their Author or reject him, that gives or denies them the ability to truly craft new stories and endings.
story, and is itself about toys—a human's (Drosselmeyer's) fictional creations—coming to life and gaining their own agency.

Wagner himself, of course is an interesting composer both with regard to the idea of autuerism and the idea that the story, eventually, takes on a life of its own outside of the original creator's intentions. His music and its legacy represent these contradictions, as his life and his writings reflect the ultimate Great Artist who had a strong vision set out for his particular work and wanted as much control over it as possible—writing his own libretti (unlike most opera composers) and outlining his ideas of how all elements of the work should be streamlined in the form of the Gesamtkunstwerk. And yet, his works are also the ultimate example of artwork taking on a life of its own, for purposes the original author did not intend, and how the history of a work's reception can often tell people more than simply analyzing what its original author intended. While Wagner himself was an outspoken anti-Semite and wrote about those beliefs in his essays, it is debatable how much those ideas were present in his operas themselves, including the Ring. And it is even more debatable whether the way they were used by Nazi Germany represents a continuation or a violation of Wagner's original intentions, or something in-between. Even so, that association of his music with Nazis is overwhelming in the popular mindset. It is why performance of his operas is still largely verboten in Israel, for instance, where for many Holocaust survivors it brings up painful memories of their persecution by the Nazis.
The representation of Wagner's music in recent film suggests that, to at least some degree, this association is not as ironclad as it once was. While *Apocalypse Now* engages with the association of Wagner's music with racism and imperialism, this is likely as much due to its use in *Birth of a Nation* as it is due to the Nazis. *Princess Tutu* does not engage with these political associations, and *The New World* is somewhat ambiguous here—seemingly engaging with this legacy in its depiction of the colonization of the New World, but not framing that colonization as necessarily problematic. The choices may be due to familiarity; "Ride of the Valkyries" was already well-known to the popular consciousness by the time *Apocalypse Now* was released, due to its use in both *Birth of a Nation* and "What's Opera, Doc?" The excerpts used by *The New World* and *Princess Tutu* are somewhat more obscure, and thus, can lend themselves to different interpretations than the one that the everyday person has come to associate with Wagner. Even so, the ambiguity that many of these films associate with Wagner—including with Wagnerian motifs as in Hitchcock’s films—may reflect the ambiguity of the meanings and reception of Wagner's works themselves.

Regardless of how these films use his music, though, there is a common thread of a fuzzy line between art and reality, and of raising questions about the way that stories come together, the way that art takes on a life of its own through a history of different receptions. *The New World* involves its own myth-making about an actual historical event—or rather, building on previous myth-making in terms of John Smith's own tales and how they were reflected in previous films such as
Disney's *Pocahontas*. *Apocalypse Now* was an initially-accurate, meticulously-researched account of the Vietnam War that gradually morphed into a personal story for *auteur* Francis Ford Coppola, and managed to leap out of the Fourth Wall in the details of its production. And *Princess Tutu* engages the idea of how stories are told, how they can change our lives, and how art and reality are blurred in the first place, as one of its major themes, and this is reflected throughout by its choice of classical excerpts—including works by Wagner himself, the ultimate megalomaniac author (like Drosselmeyer) who nevertheless is also the ultimate example of his stories taking on their own lives.

Perhaps this is the real legacy of Wagner in film—the story of how his Total Artworks were changed and reinterpreted by other artists and critics throughout the history of their reception, of how a work can be both rooted strongly in the artistic ideals of its time and yet also be universal. Wagner’s music endures because it is myth-making for all times, but the lens through which each period views it is different, and does not necessarily connect to what Wagner originally intended—politically, purely aesthetically, or otherwise. This is the possible fate of all artworks, no matter how much control the creator tires to retain, and the use of the *Ring* in film reflects this story.
Bibliography


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CONFERENCE PAPERS:

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"Twilight of the Ducks: Music and Fate in Princess Tutu"
Music and the Moving Image IX, May 30-June 1 2014 at NYU Steinhart School, New York, NY
"Redefining the Sounds of Horror: The Musical Legacy of Hitchcock’s Psycho"
Boston University Graduate Music Society Conference Tracing the Gothic: Viewing Culture through Barbarism, February 8, 2014 at Boston University Photonics Center, Boston, MA

PUBLISHED WRITING:

Anime News Network – Streaming Reviewer, August 2014-present
Anime News Network is a news website for fans of Japanese anime and manga. It is the most popular English-language official anime site. I review and recap currently-streaming anime series episode-by-episode. This is my first regular, weekly writing position.

Autostraddle.com – Staff Writer, July 2011-present
Autostraddle is a news and social website aimed at an LGBTQ audience, specifically reflecting the interests of young lesbian and bisexual women. It is the second most popular lesbian-oriented website on the Internet, averaging hundreds of thousands of unique hits per month, and a twice-consecutive nominee in the GLAAD Media Awards for Outstanding Blog. When I was a regular staff writer, I wrote several feature-length articles for the site per month, usually focusing on politics or popular culture. I have since switched to a more infrequent position. My June 2013 article "How Do We Solve A Problem Like Queerbaiting?: On TV’s Not-So-Subtle Gay Subtext" was also published in The Huffington Post’s "Gay Voices" section. My articles can be found here: http://www.autostraddle.com/author/erda/

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE:

Boston University College of Arts and Sciences Center for Writing, Boston, MA – September 2013-May 2014
Graduate Writing Tutor
I tutored undergraduates in the 100-level writing courses, and helped them improve their class assignments as well as with general academic writing and editing skills. This included ESL students, and I have been trained specifically in how to teach writing to students who are ESL.
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Advanced speaking, reading and writing proficiency. I can communicate with native speakers who do not speak English, write essays in French, and translate documents between French and English.
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Beginning-level speaking, reading and writing proficiency. I can speak a small amount of conversational German, and I am capable of basic translation from German to English with the heavy aid of dictionaries.
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Extensive knowledge of Microsoft Office programs, and Wordpress software (I have used Wordpress for both Autostraddle articles and my personal blog).
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I have additional teaching experience beyond my work as a writing tutor at BU. As a graduate student, I taught music history lessons to high school history classes at the Bryn Mawr School for Girls in Baltimore, MD. These included a 9th grade class on music of the Early and High Middle Ages, and a 10th grade class covering musical modernism during World War I and the interwar period. As an undergraduate, I participated in a program called Junior Bach where composition majors taught underprivileged middle school boys how to write music, with the goal of performing their pieces at the end of the semester. One of my students was chosen for a scholarship for music lessons at the end of the program. I also taught music theory and orchestration to a high school student to help her write a piece of music as part of a "Senior Capstone" project.