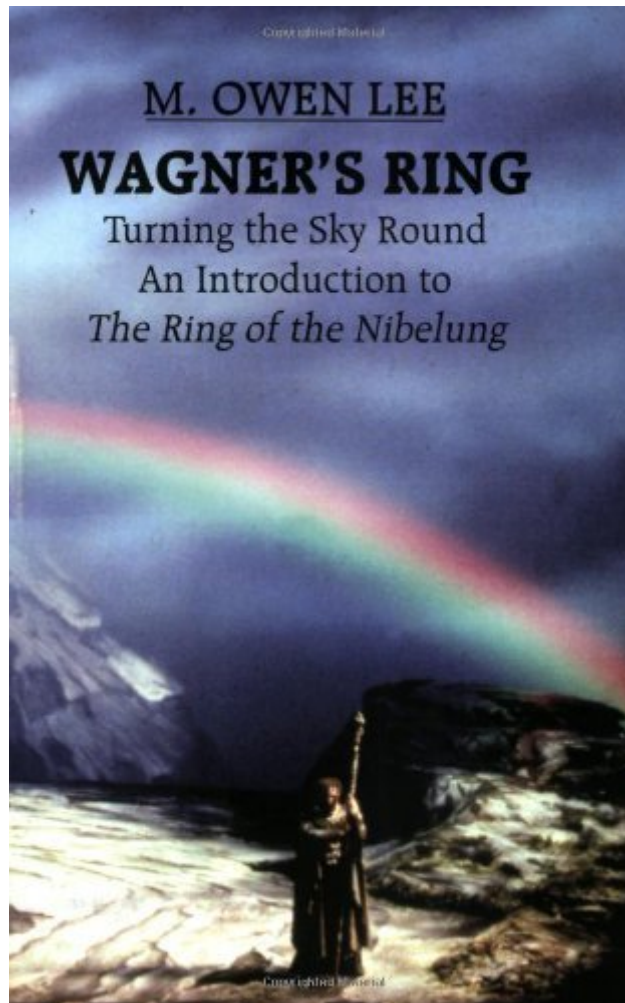




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# Wagner's Ring: Turning The Sky Round



## Synopsis

(Limelight). Commentary on and a concise, lucid interpretation of the opera world's most complex masterwork, expanded from the author's popular intermission talks during Met Opera broadcasts. "Anyone, whether knowledgeable or not, will profit by reading it..." Opera Quarterly

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Is there a better writer on opera today than Father Owen Lee? This book provides five essays on The Ring (an introduction plus an essay on each individual Ring opera) which are brief (about 15-20 pages each) but always interesting and insightful. For those new to the Ring, who want to get an idea of "what all the fuss is about" without wading through hundreds of pages of analysis, this book is indispensable. And even for those who come to it with a wealth of knowledge, this book will probably provide a few new insights.

Here we have, certainly, the "shortest" explanation of Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen" ever put in print. This is somewhat interesting from the standpoint that something so lengthy and complex as this 16+ hour traversal of good vs. evil, following the exploits of the Rhine Gold from Alberich's first finding out about it and it's prospective powers, through to the end of the world as it had been

known and the re-birth of what was to come, could be condensed down, concisely, into under 100 pages (of even extra-leaded, large face type) and contain basically all that one need know to make this work make sense. Father Owen Lee earns my commendation for this. I have "lived" with the Ring forever, it seems, first discovering it through Siegfried (as my 2nd opera recording purchased) and shortly thereafter I bought the big box from London (Decca) with Culshaw's "Ring Resounding" housed alongside the operas, around 1970. Many recordings followed, as they were released, and I steeped myself in each, and read everything I could get my hands on. So, after seeing this very small paperback by Father Lee in several bookstores, and of course running into it here numerous times, I finally said "what to heck" and figured it would be "good for a couple laughs" and ordered it. When it arrived in the same order as Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung I laughed at myself and promptly put it aside. I picked it up recently and sat down with it and read it through in about an hour or just over, and was very surprised with the "new insight" I came away from it with. Lee presents the Ring with new thoughts or ideas from the usual and it is fresh and you find yourself looking at the cycle as if perhaps through a new pair of glasses, figuratively. I found myself wishing that he had perhaps gone a little deeper and presented even more. This book can be had for under \$7.50 new or less than \$3.50 used, so you have no real good excuse to continue to pass it up. I did so for a long time and I must say that I wish I had read it years ago. It is always refreshing to me to find a new take on something that you thought you pretty much knew everything about and then "bang" someone like Father Lee comes along with this tiny little book and shows you something new and special, illuminating further a long-time favorite work. My thoughts are that everyone who either loves the Ring, wishes to know more about the Ring, or might even be "just a little curious" about what this "thing" is all about NEEDS to read this book himself. There is much to recommend here. I shall be reading the Spencer/Millington Full German Text & new English Translation soon, and will undoubtedly be reviewing it on it's own listing...you may wish to check that out. For now, I hope that you enjoy this little book as much as I did! What a surprise it was!~operabruin

Gun to my head, this would be the book I would recommend to anyone wishing to become acquainted with Wagner's "Ring." That is a difficult call because it has been noted by several, including the great Wagner (and Schopenhauer) scholar, Bryan Magee, that more books have been written on Wagner than anyone else in the West, besides Jesus. Hard to prove? Perhaps, but it makes a point. Father Owen Lee chose to skim the bare surface of the very dense story line for the sake of brevity, but I'm not sure that someone could re-tell the story from his bare-bones account. And I do mean bare-bones. Nevertheless, what the author sacrifices in story line, he compensates

for by presenting a few of the ideas that have fascinated everyone about this work since it was first performed in Bayreuth in 1876. That's a very good thing because to really get anything out of Wagner, especially "The Ring," one has to do some homework, unless you are prepared to experience it on plot level alone, as you would "Lord of the Rings" in a movie theater, and this decidedly is NOT what Wagner wanted. There are ring stories and there are ring stories. No matter where he ended up in his theorizing, Wagner set out to recreate the Aeschylean experience of ancient Athenian theater for modern theatergoers, something beyond mere entertainment. That's why he built his own theater, darkened the auditorium for the first time, covered the orchestra with a shell, and so on. But if you like this introductory work, I would definitely recommend Fr. Lee's other books on Wagner, available here on . I think his "In Search of the Olive Tree Bed" is a deeply felt and movingly written masterpiece, which deals with four quests in four of his favorite works, "The Odyssey," "The Aeneid," "Faust," and "Parsifal." As professor of classics, a Catholic priest, and a Wagner devotee, he brings a unique perspective of intellectual acumen, and more importantly, soul to his writings on the subject, as he does in "Turning the Sky Around." But in the same breath, I would encourage anyone seriously interested in "The Ring" to read Sir Roger Scruton's works on Wagner and perhaps listen to a couple of his lectures on Youtube. He is arguably an even more avid admirer of Wagner than is Fr. Lee. His admiration stems from the fact that he thinks Wagner was our last dramatist to give us something truly heroic, something involving sacrifice and a sense of the sacred, which Scruton says was lost in the Enlightenment. To give you an idea of his depth, I quote below from his summation of the very first chapter of his "The Ring of Truth: The Wisdom of Wagner's 'Ring of the Nibelung'," in which he discusses just the influences on "The Ring" : "All the influences that I have surveyed in this chapter--nationalist politics, the dawn of a new Germany, the post-Kantian theory of the self and its search for personality and freedom, the revolutionary philosophy of the Young Hegelians, the new vision of Greek tragedy and the classical ideal, the idea of myth as a form of implicit knowledge, the return to the ancient stories of the Teutonic people...." and so on. This gives you a taste of his research on the subject and this is BEFORE he begins to analyze the characters and themes. This is only his warm-up act. Do not look here if you are looking for racist or proto-Nazi theories. As in the excellent works on Wagner by Michael Tanner and Bryan Magee, there is no time for such tired arguments here. Scruton credits two American philosophers, Kitcher and Schacht, for some insight from their very fine "Finding an Ending" into the "meaning" to be found in what appears to be the ashes of defeat in the final scene of "Götterdämmerung." Kitcher and Schacht gave me the insight I had not found elsewhere in all my years of reading works on Wagner, and it appears they contributed some to Scruton's views, as well. Certainly, the satisfactory

ending" Wotan (and Wagner) sought is one that restores the sacred to a post-modern world in which the gods have absconded, as Scruton argues. But for all that, Father Owen Lee's small hundred-page work is as good a place to begin as probably any other. But if you like that--keep going until you are absorbed into the subject.

My youngest son and I recently completed our first viewing of the entire Ring Cycle at the Met in NYC. My wife bought us a copy of this short and well-written volume to help us understand what we were seeing and hearing. The book was indispensable. Lee succeeds in whetting an appetite to know more, and the suggested readings at the end of the volume cover a broad range of interests ranging from George Bernard Shaw's view of the opera as a political allegory to sophisticated Jungian interpretations. I watched the curtain fall in the final act with regret that the cycle was complete. This handy little volume will help me prepare for another viewing. This is the place to start your research on the Ring Cycle.

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