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A Theory of Associations: An Explanation and Applications to Wagner's Das Rheingold

Parker T. Gordon
Abilene Christian University, ptg09a@acu.edu

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ABSTRACT

This thesis posits an interdisciplinary theory of associations. Within inter- and intra-textual texts, there exists a presence that points toward an originating source, which audience members may or may not consciously recognize. This presence accumulates associations from surrounding materials through abstract and subtle references or through direct quotations. These associations, once examined in relation to one another in the context of the narrative, may help readers discover additional insights and uncover new information about a text. My theory draws upon literary scholarship primarily grounded in intertextual theory and adaptation theory. Inspired by the intertextual insertion of pre-existing music in film scores, my theory seeks to work in a variety of applications, across multiple fields of study.

To that endeavor, I have selected Richard Wagner’s music drama Das Rheingold as the text I use to demonstrate and apply my theory. Concentrating upon one leitmotif, I focus my study on the associative relations present in connection to the action of forging. I also employ the study of several of Wagner’s source texts from the medieval Norse and Germanic sagas. Through this thesis, I explore both the inter- and intra-textual aspects of my theory in application as well as the interdisciplinary application to both a musical and a literary text.
A Theory of Associations: An Explanation and Application to Wagner’s *Das Rheingold*

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate School
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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

By
Parker Thomas Gordon
May 2016
To my family, who supported me through years of piano and oboe lessons and never discouraged me from following my dreams—even when they involved such a crazy idea as graduate school.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: WAGNER’S RING AND ASSOCIATION THEORY

In my undergraduate studies in Music and Political Science, I often sought research opportunities that would incorporate multiple disciplines. This led to topic combinations such as music and politics, literature and music, and film music and adaptation studies as a way for me to explore my interdisciplinary interests through research, papers, and presentations. After deciding to pursue a career in research and teaching, I finished my undergraduate degree and transitioned to studying literature. Throughout my graduate studies in literature, my passion for music has remained, and I have focused on researching interdisciplinary topics such as the creation songs in fantasy mythopoeic literature, adaptations of Shakespearean songs in film and other mediums, and even the innuendos of explicitly bawdy lyrics in songs to convey Renaissance medical beliefs. These research experiences have shown me the need for more interdisciplinary research in the Academy as well as cultivated my interest in this field for further development during my future doctoral studies.

Historical Context

My previous research on Richard Wagner (1813-1883) and interdisciplinary studies includes my Chief Justice Jack Pope Fellows undergraduate research paper, which examined the influences of classical music in political spheres, primarily international relations in the Middle East. Through that research, I learned much about the still-current ban on Wagner’s music by the Israel Philharmonic in protest against the Nazis’
use of Wagner’s music throughout the Holocaust and World War II as well as the efforts of modern-day musicians to ease political tensions between Israeli and Palestinian government officials through collaborative efforts. My undergraduate Honors Thesis provided another opportunity for an extensive interdisciplinary project in which I constructed a theory proposing that Hitler’s all-encompassing approach to establishing the Third Reich, if not directly inspired by, was at least similar in structure to Wagner’s ideas for a Gesamtkunstwerk—complete artwork. Through these projects, I came to have a solid understanding of the intricate complexity and thorough planning evident in Wagner’s works.

With the music drama Des Ring der Nibelungen in particular, Wagner’s goal is to create a German epic, using existing Germanic and Norse mythologies to construct a unified text. Scholars have since continued to recognize Wagner’s Ring as a monumental work of German cultural identity and mythology. Shortly after its discovery in 1755, the Nibelungenlied became an unofficial national epic, reaching heights of popularity such that, as Elizabeth Magee notes, Friedrich Theodor Vischer published a call for a “German national opera based upon the Nibelungenlied and even provided a specimen scenario” (8). Wagner was not alone in considering the call for a “new German national opera”; other composers interested in the task included Robert Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn, and Franz Liszt (Edwards xxiv). Wagner’s tetralogy remains a demanding work of incredible depth, complexity, and endurance for performers, audiences, and scholars. I find the Ring to be a meaningful research topic because of its musicological significance and for its rich source material and connections to Norse mythology. The mythological source material for the Ring has also served as inspiration for generations of fantasy
writers, perhaps most notably J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Not only have the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, the Old Icelandic *Edda* collections, and the *Volsung* saga inspired new works; but, as mythologies, they have continually been retold, translated, updated, and adapted for new generations of audiences. As translator Jesse L. Byock aptly points out, “*The Saga of the Volsungs* says that its hero’s ‘name is known in all tongues north of the Greek Ocean, and so it must remain while the world endures.’ Wagner’s *Ring* cycle has helped to make this thirteenth-century statement true” (29). As a dramatic and literary work, Wagner’s *Ring* continues to inspire interest in the early medieval sagas and the mythic world of gods, dragons, and men of valor.

Wagner’s most ambitious dramatic work, the *Ring* in its entirety encompasses over fifteen hours of performance and was conceived of as a festival piece to be presented over the course of four days—a preliminary evening for *Das Rheingold*, and then *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* over the following three days. It remains one of the most difficult (and expensive) pieces for opera companies to produce, but its prominence as one of the genre’s most important works ensures the *Ring*’s continued performance by the most prestigious opera companies in the world.

Wagner wrote the libretti for all four operas in reverse order, starting from the end before working his way forward composing the music. Wagner scholar Peter Wapnewski explains that after completing the score for *Lohengrin* in April 1848, Wagner begins writing sketches and prose drafts for his envisioned Nibelung music drama (36-37). While in Dresden and with access to the Dresden Royal Library, Wagner drafts *Siegfrieds Tod* (*The Death of Siegfried*), which later becomes the final installment of the *Ring*,
"Götterdämmerung (The Twilight of the Gods).\textsuperscript{1} The dramatic difficulties of such a historically-driven work prove to be too much for one composition, and Wagner drafts *Der junge Siegfried (The Young Siegfried)* in 1851 as a prequel to *Siegfrieds Tod*. “Obliged to go further and farther backwards,” Wagner then writes the prose drafts and libretti to *Die Walküre (The Valkyries)* and *Das Rheingold* in the summer and fall of 1852, respectively (Wapnewski 38). Wagner continues working on the libretti for *Der junge Siegfried* and *Siegfrieds Tod*, finishing (with later revisions to *Der junge Siegfried* in 1856) by 15 December 1852. In February 1853, Wagner publishes fifty copies of the completed libretto for the *Ring* and recites the work to a group of friends over the course of four evenings, and afterward he begins setting the entire work to music (Wapnewski 38).

Now working from the beginning of the narrative, Wagner completes the scores for *Das Rheingold* in 1854 and *Die Walküre* in 1856 and begins composing the music for *Siegfried*, formerly *Der junge Siegfried*, the summer of 1856 (Wapnewski 40). Wagner then puts *Siegfried* aside to compose *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Writing to his friend Franz Liszt, Wagner describes the difficulties of abandoning his Nibelung music drama: “I tore Siegfried out of my heart and put him under lock and key, as though I were burying him alive. There I intend him to stay, and nobody is to get a glimpse of him, since I must banish him from my own mind. Well, maybe the sleep will do him good” (qtd in Wapnewski 40). It was not until 1871 that Wagner completes the score for *Siegfried*, and finishes *Götterdämmerung*, formerly *Siegfrieds Tod*, 1874. However, before he could finish the entire *Ring* cycle, Wagner’s patron, King Ludwig II of Bavaria requested, a performance of *Das Rheingold* in 1869.

\textsuperscript{1} A more extensive explanation of *Götterdämmerung*’s translation is provided in Chapter IV.
and of *Die Walküre* in 1870, much to Wagner’s resentment and displeasure. The premiere of the entire *Ring* was finally performed at the inaugural Bayreuth Festival in 1876 (Wapnewski 41).

There are few topics of study that so naturally draw upon so many different disciplines and link to an infinitude of interests as Richard Wagner and his works. It is unrealistic to try to master the intimate knowledge and professional experience in every form of study and discipline worthy of incorporating into a topic as expansive as Wagner studies; thus, this thesis will focus on the intersections of music and literature in a portion of Wagner’s *Ring*. Wagner writes at length about this very phenomenon of combining multiple disciplines to create what he calls *Gesamtkunstwerk*. As applied to opera, or more appropriately to Wagner studies and to musical dramas, *Gesamtkunstwerk* contextualizes the combination of various elements all serving a single purpose.

Wagner’s music dramas differ from the traditional genre of opera due to Wagner’s fascination with maintaining the highest attention possible to the dramatic action on stage. His focus, unlike many traditional opera conventions, is to promote the story rather than use the story as a showcase purely for popular singers, favorite sopranos, or innovative scenery. Wagner does not adhere to the traditional operatic formula of recitative, aria, and chorus, favoring, instead, a through-composed work that starts with the Prelude, beginning the dramatic action (as opposed to an overture that introduces the drama that begins with the first aria or chorus) and continuing seamlessly to the end. For Wagner, the presentation of the narrative and maintaining the dramatic intent of the work is the most important duty of the composer and librettist. As such, Wagner develops the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* to encompass the dramatic intentions behind every element
present in the music drama. For Wagner, this is the very concept of drama; everything in
his music dramas is conceived of as supporting the best communication of the dramatic:
sets, lights, musical setting,\(^2\) libretto, costumes, stage directions, and even the
performance venue—an enduring testament of Wagner’s commitment to the envisioned
performance of his art.\(^3\) Such a comprehensive approach for examining some of
Wagner’s works has undoubtedly been undertaken by many capable scholars; however,
this thesis will focus more on the interdisciplinary relations between literature and music.

**Theoretical Approach**

My research for this thesis explores the blended spaces that exist between music
and literary studies, sifting through the language each discipline uses. I hope this research
will contribute new ideas for other disciplines as well as increase the integration of music
and literary studies. I became aware of this integration as I read literary theory and
noticed literary scholars and critical theorists using terms such as *polyphony*, *overtone*,
and *harmony*—words that I had previously only associated with music. In my own
writing, I found myself incorporating other “musical language” words such as *leitmotif*
and *resonance* to capture better what I was trying to say about literature just as I was
more frequently noticing literary scholars doing so. These intersections between different
fields led me to pursue ideas that eventually developed into a *theory of associations*: an
examination of the connections and connotations that surround or are similar to materials

\(^2\) For future reference, the term musical setting will designate the actual music as it appears in print
and is later performed—the notes—rather than what might be interpreted as the setting (when used apart
from musical), which would be a literary term for the background (place) in narrative and the background
/design) for performances.

\(^3\) Much of Wagner’s own opinions on the subject of what should and should not be opera can be
found in his book, *Oper und Drama (Opera and Drama)*, written in 1851 just as he was beginning the
twenty-six year process of writing the *Ring* (1848-1874). I have also written about *Gesamtkunstwerk* in my
Honors Thesis, “Wähn! Wähn! Überall Wähn!: Applying Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* to Hitler’s Third
Reich.”
through reference and development. While reading Mikhail Bakhtin I discovered the theoretical language I needed to articulate my ideas. Even before I encountered Bakhtin and other theorists, I was making connections and asking questions about pre-existing music in film scores and songs in literature, particularly investigating how these inserted texts worked intertextually within the larger whole. After writing multiple papers and making several conference presentations, I am continuing to develop my *theory of associations* and am applying it to larger texts and genres such as opera. Opera itself is an interdisciplinary medium that incorporates music, acting, and text (written in the form of a libretto—literally, little book) and has the potential to be an intertextual medium that incorporates or adapts already-existing materials such as the mythological sagas for the *Ring*.

To help clarify some of the interdisciplinary language, I make the distinction between *text* and *work*. A text is a piece of material, not limited to literature or printed word but as a continuing element of discourse (reception and response) including media such as music, art, literature, and film. Distinctive from the *text*, *work* is deemed more of a concrete or completed item. For example, I will refer to Wagner’s *Ring* as a work that is a part of the composer’s body of work viewed within the whole of Wagner’s musical and literary oeuvre. When placing the *Ring* within the context of continued scholarship, inspecting various aspects and contributing new ideas, I will refer to it as a text. I will discuss the distinction between text and work as explained in Roland Barthes’ *Image—Music—Text* in the Literature Review.

My theory addresses what I am tentatively calling a *bank of associations*, pre-existing ideas or knowledge possessed by each individual who comes into contact with a
particular text. My idea originated as I studied theories of adaptation and intertextuality
and searched for a more accurate way to identify the relationship between multiple
narrative threads that may be present in a single moment. During my research of film
music and Shakespearean adaptations, I began considering the possibilities of polyphony
in literature. This musical term, appropriated by Bakhtin for narratological purposes,
describes an author’s use of multiple narrative voices or threads that appear throughout a
text. This coming and going can be understood as a multiplicity or sustaining of narrative
consciousnesses, more often referred to hereafter as voices. When studying the ways film
music—specifically the uses of pre-existing music in film—enhances or affects a
viewer’s film experience, I began wondering whether or not the concept of literary
polyphony could be expanded to include multiple narrative threads that build upon one
another in ways that are similar to the musical overtone sequence in which overtone
pitches resonate above an originating note. My theory also draws upon Louise
Rosenblatt’s Reader Response theory in that each consumer of texts implicitly has a
unique, personal bank of associations. Each reader, viewer, and hearer of a text,⁴ builds
up a memory from his or her encounter with the text. These encounters become reference
points for the audience member to then extrapolate additional meaning and insight from
the connections to other reference points of that same text or even related texts.
Essentially, the audience’s member’s bank of associations is the previous knowledge and
exposure to texts that resonate when encountering new material. This theory will be
discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

⁴ In most cases hereafter, I use the terms audience and audience member to refer to the reader,
viewer, and hearer of a text.
To demonstrate and apply my theory of the way texts interact with one another based upon the audience’s recognition of associations, this thesis will examine some of Wagner’s source material for the *Ring* along with specific instances where similar associations are built up through intertextual or intratextual references such as leitmotifs. Wagner’s extensive use of leitmotifs—repeated thematic elements representing a character, emotion, setting, or object—across the four parts of the *Ring* provides ample material to examine associations with these intratextual references (the musical leitmotifs) or the intertextual references (the originating medieval sagas). The *Ring* serves as a good example for the application of my theory because such an immense work provides a great deal of material to examine as well as an abundance of existing scholarship for reference. The application of my theory to a text with such diverse elements (text, drama, music, and originating material) will demonstrate the theory’s applicability to a variety of media.

In this project I intend to examine Wagner’s *Ring* and the early Germanic and Norse sagas that inspired his music drama. Using my own theoretical approach to adaptation and intertextuality, I examine the associations that arise in relation to one leitmotif that crosses between the music and libretti. Future application of this theory to Wagner could potentially result in a structure for Wagner’s leitmotifs, not only for how they function in the music drama but a structure in relation to their respective appearances in the early sagas as well.
Literature Review

Russian Formalist Theory

My theory—*bank of associations*—began to take shape as I read several crucial theoretical texts. In a way, like Wagner, I had to work backward to formulate my ideas fully. Originally inspired by the use of pre-existing music in film scores, my reading of Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation*, Roland Barthes’ *Image—Music—Text*, and Graham Allen’s *Intertextuality* was foundational in my efforts to articulate my ideas. Also, as I became more familiar with Mikhail Bakhtin’s writings on polyphony and his understanding of the epic and novel, I read a number of other Russian Formalist critics and their understanding of literary theory structures in order to have a better context for understanding early adaptation studies and the focus on fidelity criticism.

Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis’ edited collection, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, expanded my knowledge of Russian formalism and provided me with an understanding of how formalists understood the placement and use of literary devices and images. Viktor Shklovsky’s language of defamiliarization and habitualization in his “Art as Technique” (1917) helped me see the way authors use words and images to create and perpetuate meaning. Later in 1921, Shklovsky writes that a motif is “never fully developed, never actually realized, but is only recalled from time to time; its fulfillment is continually put off to a more and more remote time. Yet its very presence in all the dimensions of the novel ties the episodes together” (40). This definition of motif works well for describing how the connectivity of a leitmotivic structure unites a text. The word “presence” continues to describe the occurrence or incident in which a motif is passed
along or recalled; however, I will later expand upon this term to describe the tangible results of these accumulated resonances of previous and foreshadowed meanings.

Boris Tomashevsky’s “Thematics” (1925) challenged me to consider the nature of theme beyond my musical understanding of the term. On a larger scale, he writes that the “selection of an interesting theme is not enough. Interest must also be maintained, attention stimulated. The theme does both” (65). I found this statement applicable to Wagner’s selection of the \textit{Nibelungenlied} and other early Germanic and Norse sources because he culturally cultivated and maintained the sagas in his creation of a national German epic. Looking at the smaller elements of theme, Tomashevsky remarks that “[b]y simply retelling the story we immediately discover what may be omitted without destroying the coherence of the narrative and what may not be omitted without disturbing the connections among events” (68). This idea aptly describes Wagner’s efforts to weave together his \textit{Ring} from a multitude of sources. The idea of a text as a tapestry, possessing a woven texture, is an ideal illustration of the interconnectedness of texts and their layers. The act of omitting necessitates the creation of a unifying material to bring the edges and loose threads of the tapestry together. I began thinking of about the ways leitmotif could be used as a unifying figure to evoke previous images and events to fill in the gaps just as operatic music contains inherent devices for binging the elements of narrative together. On the nature of form, Tomashevsky even makes the connection between literary form and musical forms with terms such as exposition, sonata-allegro, minuet-trio, and rondo, thus, further supporting an interdisciplinary approach.

The Russian Formalist approach to literature supports my ideas for examining leitmotifs and the way themes and motifs are incorporated to unite (or divide) a narrative.
Tomashevsky writes that a “repeated motif usually shows the connection which exists in the story between parts of the plot structure. Thus, if . . . the means of recognizing the lost child is an amulet, then this amulet motif accompanies both the narrative about the disappearance of the child and the biography of the new character” (74). He clarifies in a footnote that if the motif is repeated and is not involved in the story—as a symbol, it would then be considered a bound motif—“then it is called a leitmotif. Thus, certain characters appearing in the narrative under various disguises are often accompanied by some kind of fixed motif so that the reader may recognize them” (74). Tomashevsky then explains how these motifs can be combined and traced: “The character [with its attached motif] is a guiding thread which makes it possible to untangle a conglomeration of motifs and permits them to be classified and arranged” (88). When this approach to motif is applied to music, and specifically to Wagner’s *Ring*, we find that scholars have long studied and considered the combination and separating out of leitmotifs to demonstrate the connectivity of these musical themes but usually in an effort to trace their musical and narrative development—not to map similarities to the originating mythologies.

Lastly, Boris Eichenbaum’s “The Theory of the ‘Formal Method’” includes a sentence on the construction of meaning from the smaller elements of the literary theme, more so than the image that is painted for the reader’s mind. On the topic of words and even nonsense sounds, he finds that “poetic language is not only a language of images, that sounds in verse are not at all merely elements of a superficial euphony, and that they do not play a mere ‘accompaniment’ to meaning, but rather that they have an independent significance” (110 emphasis added). This observation about meanings, even in utterances, is a topic Barthes would later examine in the meanings of even the elements
of parole and langue. I found this to be a striking realization as I listened to the Rheinmaidens’ exclamations of “Heiajaheia!” in Das Rheingold (Spencer and Millington 66). Wagner provides even this utterance with a leitmotivic significance that is developed and incorporated into the whole of Rheingold and, ultimately, the whole of the Ring. The cries of the Rheinmaidens at the loss of the Rheingold are supported by—essentially, attached to—a two-note musical motif that recurs and develops over the entire Ring because it is ultimately the loss of the Rheingold that sets the narrative action in motion.

The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin, edited by Michael Holquist, includes the study of the “Epic and Novel” in which Bakhtin describes his understanding of these genres. Bakhtin’s assessment of the novel as a relatively new genre helpfully separates and distinguishes between epic and novel as terms for communicating a narrative. Bakhtin asserts that the novel, as perfected, in his opinion, by Fyodor Dostoevsky, allows for multiple voices to flourish—the ideas and emotions of the author can be distinguished from those of the characters, resulting in multiple consciousnesses—multiple voices. He believes that the novel “reflects more deeply, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of it unfolding,” and, as a part of that development, communicates on a multitude of levels, forming a dialogism, polyphony, or heteroglossia (Bakhtin changed this term as his ideas developed over time) (7). However, Bakhtin saw the epic as a flat, single-voiced genre that presented an inaccessible world. He does not provide a specific example or even generic strata for the epic(s) he refers to but is unrestrained in his assessments of his envisioned abstract epic:

By its very nature the epic world of the absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of
view or evaluation. . . . It is given solely as tradition, sacred and
sacrosanct, evaluated in the same way by all and demanding a pious
attitude toward itself. (16)

The epic as a mythological narrative is often associated with religious subject matters,
and, as such, does contribute to some of the distance that Bakhtin refers to as “sacred”
and “pious”; however, this does not solely account for what he interprets as lacking a
plurality of voices. What is more, any sort of traditionalism that preserved the “absolute
past” as unapproachable for evaluation has been completely broken down under the
assault of Post-modern criticisms.

Pam Morris’ collection of essays in *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov* includes several helpful excerpts from Bakhtin’s essays.

Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, founded upon his reading of Dostoevsky, maintains that
“[e]verything that seemed simple became . . . complex and multi-structured. In every
voice [Dostoevsky] could hear two contending voices . . . ; he perceived the profound
ambiguity, even multiple ambiguity of every phenomenon” (91-92). Bakhtin argued that
this development through the novel was not an evolution but a “co-existence and
interaction” (90). His ideas on the novel and the emphasis on voices (authorial and
character) led to the development of what Bakhtin describes as “an eternal harmony of
unmerged voices”—his definition of polyphony (92). Bakhtin contrasts the polyphony in
Dostoevsky with Leo Tolstoy’s story “Three Deaths” in which a noblewoman, a
coachman, and a horse die. Bakhtin writes that, “[t]he lives and deaths of all three
characters, together with their worlds, lie side by side in a unified objective world and are
even externally contiguous, but they know nothing of one another and are not reflected in
one another. . . . They neither argue nor agree” (95). Bakhtin classifies this as a “connection between consciousnesses” (95). Each of the characters is actually a connected reflection of Tolstoy’s consciousness and is united even though manifested in different characters.

However, if this story were to be told from a narrative polyphonic perspective, Bakhtin argues, “not only the pure intonations of the author would be heard, but also the intonations of the noble-woman and the coachman; that is, words would be double-voiced, in each word an argument (a microdialogue) would ring out, and there could be heard echoes of the great dialogue” (96). Bakhtin continues his appropriation of musical language to describe the polyphonic setting “Three Deaths” would have had if written from a dialogic perspective. If the story were to be told in music, these three deaths would be correlated on a musical thematic level, developed and presented together in a composition. Yet, in music, the multiplicity of themes has the potential to result in a harmony of merged voices rather than Bakhtin’s unmerged polyphony.

**Semiotics Theory**

Roland Barthes’ writings, particularly *Image—Music—Text*, have been formative in my understanding of the nature of a text, the ways the different elements of a text operate in relation to one another, and how their meanings may be intended by the creator or received by the audience in a specific way. Barthes theorizes about three of the most common means of communications (after speaking) and their meanings in communication. Barthes perhaps gives a more thorough analysis of image and text than he does for music, but, nonetheless, his structures of communication and classifications for meaning can be appropriately applied to music with only slight modification. The
language he uses is already quasi-musical in nature, appropriating phrases such as the elements of counterpoint: “subject,” “sequence,” and “fugue” (118). Even more useful to this thesis is Barthes’ writing on narrative structures and the formation of narrative out of language. This framework is helpful for locating, identifying, piecing together, and peering into the narrative structures in the *Ring* as well as the sagas. In reference to the narrative structures in the *Ring*, I am referring both to the storyline that is within Wagner’s libretto and also the musical narrative structure that is created by the combination of leitmotifs throughout the score: each leitmotif representing a character, physical setting, emotion, or object.

Barthes begins with a thorough explanation of the ways meaning is extrapolated from images. He establishes the idea of a “historical grammar” created by “the existence of a store of stereotyped attitudes which form ready-made elements of signification (eyes raised heavenwards, hands clasped)” (22). Therefore, he says, a “historical grammar” of iconographic connotation ought thus to look for its material in painting, theatre, associations of ideas, stock metaphors, etc., that is to say, precisely in ‘culture’” (22). Barthes claims that an individual’s grammar will obviously depend upon his or her culture and “knowledge of the world” (29), and he poses some questions: “[h]ow does meaning get into an image? where does it end? and if it ends, what is there beyond?” (32). I respond to his questions by asking: how far can meaning be ascribed to a displaced image? In fact, Barthes, in extending Ferdinand de Saussure’s sign, signifier, and signified, writes of “a ‘floating chain’ of signified” in reference to the continued nature of a sign across media (39). Barthes sets up a chain of thinking that examines the way meanings already inherently exist inside an image because of outside cultural perceptions
and the intentions of the image’s creator. Postmodern thought already prepares us to challenge these assumptions with exceptions for marginalized demographics, but there should also be the recognition that every culture will have its own historical grammar and knowledge of the world from which common meanings are implied and derived.

After analyzing the meanings that an image can impart on its own because it is always already associated with certain meanings, Barthes examines the addition of texts such as the caption for a news photograph. He finds that the text “directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle dispatching, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance” (40). This idea of how texts may direct an audience is an appropriate description of the way a leitmotif directs the hearer’s attention to a certain musical theme. In fact, the literal translation for the German *Leitmotif* is *leading motif*. I suggest that this has a two-fold meaning, indicating primary importance along with providing guidance and direction for the audience.

So far, Barthes’ theories about images may be applied to the way listeners hear music, especially when they approach music from a narratological perspective. Music has a historical grammar and is linked to cultural knowledge that essentially functions as a bank of associations just as there is a similar bank of associations for the connotations in images. The ecclesiastical modes, the imagery of three (symbolizing the Trinity), ascending and descending patterns (direction toward Heaven and Hell), and the Picardy third (ending compositions in a major key) all had connoted meanings for early audiences of sacred music. Madrigals from the Early Modern period incorporated word painting to

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5 Although the correct usage of the German word in music studies would be capitalized and italicized, leitmotif has become commonly accepted as a term in literary studies and will here be used as such without capitalization and italics.
set standards of meanings to certain musical tropes (accelerating and slowing tempi, ascending and descending figures, repetition, and groupings of singers). And the historical grammar of music continues to evolve. Wagner’s music has become part of the existing dictionary through the way he creates sounds for specific meanings (i.e., a storm, the action of running, a rushing river, a lightning strike) but also through the appropriation of his music by other media. Early film music was often chosen at the discretion of whoever was performing the music for the then silent film. Often, the music selections, if not improvised, would come from well-known operas, classical compositions, folk songs, and popular songs of the day. The film studios then began publishing books of excerpts and cross-referencing selected compositions with certain emotions, actions, and settings (Brown 13-14). The associations between certain types of music and emotions became stronger as pre-existing music was and continues to be employed to manipulate the common connotations associated with a composition. Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” has become one of those compositions passed around among commercials and films; each time becoming associated with another occurrence that increases its cultural presence and adds new definitions to its place in the historical grammar.

As I mentioned earlier, Barthes makes some important distinctions between a work and a text. He defines the work as a physical object that can be seen and held; whereas, the text is “a process of demonstration” that is “held in language” (157). The text is not limited to written words and can be any media—literature, music, drama, performance, film, photograph—in a continued state of being consumed. The work stands as a completed object. Often, I will refer to a musical composition as a work. However,
when I am referring to that same composition within the discourse of evaluation and study, I will make the distinction and refer to it as a text.

Along with the “floating ‘chain of signified’” (39), Barthes refers to the “infinity of the signifier” (158) as part of the continuing discourse within the study of a text. He writes that

the infinity of the signifier refers not to some idea of the ineffable (the un-nameable signified) but to that of a playing; the generation of the perpetual signifier . . . in the field of the text . . . is realized not according to an organic process of maturation or a hermeneutic course of deepening investigation, but, rather, according to a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variations. (158)

The continued associations that accumulate and lessen are the “overlappings” and “crossings over” of a text’s presence (158).

Barthes refers to the text as plural; however, this pluralism is “not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing” (159). He continues, “The plural of the [t]ext depends . . . not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers” (159). Both Barthes and Bakhtin use terms, often their own creations, that incorporate mono and stereo, and they use these terms in relation to concepts associated with polyphony and a multiplicity of layering. I have noticed that theorists from this span of history (1930s to 1970s) often use the language of mono and stereo to describe any sort of single or multiple of whatever they are evaluating. Future research into the advent of mono and stereo sound systems and
recording and the effect of that technological advance upon literary theory and cultural criticism could prove quite valuable.

To clarify his use of the term, Bakhtin explains that his polyphony is a “co-existence and interaction” (Morris 90). The difference between Barthes’ plural and Bakhtin’s co-existence is, I think, in relation to the text. The text itself can be plural and cross over into other media and manifestations as it is adapted and consumed; however, the polyphonic nature of the text is found in relation to another text where the two become co-existent, forming an unmerged harmony. Bakhtin suggests that Doestoevsky’s consciousness is a separate entity from those of his characters; thus, the multiple voices co-exist. However, Barthes explains that a text, as it is examined, may cross over to other realms of consumption but maintains a presence that remains with the text; thus the text becomes plural as it is encountered by audiences and studied by scholars. I use the word study as part of the reading of a text; however, as Barthes thoughtfully reminds us, “structurally, there is no difference between ‘cultured’ reading and casual reading in trains” (162)—a helpful reminder as we continue to delve into theory and the world of Wagner’s art.

Adaptation Theory

Modern adaptation studies became more holistic in scope after Linda Hutcheon’s 2005 A Theory of Adaptation. This book calls for adaptations to be studied as their own texts rather than as early adaptation studies focusing on the adaptation’s fidelity to its source text. This area of criticism began with a focus upon the ways literature is adapted into film and television. One of the first studies in this field is the authoritative Novels into Film by George Bluestone. Although outdated in some ways since its original 1957
publication, Bluestone’s text is still beneficial for scholarship in adaptation studies. Contrary to Bakhtin’s position, Bluestone rejects the idea of a single novel, saying that there is no definitive example for “the novel” (8). As adaptation theory continues to develop after Bluestone’s book, sole focus on fidelity criticism slowly begins to shift. Adaptation becomes a form of reference, as noted by Timothy Corrigan: “Adaptations claiming fidelity bear the original as a signified, whereas those inspired by or derived from an earlier text stand in a relation of referring to the original” (262). In the way that Wagner used his sources as a model, film adaptations are beginning to be examined as just a bit more disconnected from their sources with the potential to eventually be consumed as whole texts.

Linda Hutcheon’s modernization of adaptation studies, a field that has historically been concerned with film adaptations of literature, has resulted in a new definition of adaptation that includes different media and a broader acceptance of the way texts are remade. Her guide to modern adaptations, *A Theory of Adaptation*, opened up the field of adaptation studies for new media (beyond film) and introduced the concept of studying adaptation “as adaptation” (6). Studying adaptation *as adaptation* recognizes that there is new, created meaning within each adaptation and that meaning is not limited to the originating source text. The connotations of meaning continue resonating through associative relationships with texts further up the infinity chain of signifiers. Hutcheon’s theory recognizes the ever-changing way culture remakes and retells narratives through adaptation. Hutcheon’s theory shows how the historical approach to adaptation as a form of comparison studies is outdated and no longer viable for scholars wishing to examine texts as *texts*. As she demonstrates consistently throughout her book, adaptation is much
more than filmic retellings of literature. Adaptations such as artwork, musical compositions, video games, theme parks, and extended, interactive online material such as the website Pottermore for the Harry Potter novels should all be approached as adaptations worthy of study independent from source comparison.

**Intertextuality Theory**

Graham Allen’s reference text *Intertextuality* presents the history of intertextuality from its roots in Julia Kristeva’s creation of the term during her study of Bakhtin to Postmodern appropriations of intertextuality to other criticisms such as Feminism and Postcolonialism (15). Allen shows how ideas of intertextuality progress through different movements of literary criticism and are applied to different media. He demonstrates how Bakhtin’s ideas about polyphony are congruous with the way an element of intertextuality represents an outside voice. Allen writes that “[e]very character in the dialogic novel has a specific, in some sense unique, personality. This ‘personality’ involves that character’s world-view, typical mode of speech, ideological and social positioning, all of which are expressed through the character’s words” (22). He notes that Bakhtin saw a character’s ability to express an “idea or ‘worldview’” and the “image of voice associated with that character’s consciousness” as evidence of a polyphonic text (22). My extension of Bakhtin’s definition of polyphony to include elements of intertextuality adds associations from outside texts that can be viewed as equal to the dialogic voices within a text.

Intertextuality provides a framework for evaluating the ways elements of texts can be manipulated and developed as part of the polyphonic layering. The way that Wagner uses leitmotif as a representation of an object, character, emotion, or setting is an
example of intertextuality within a text called intratextuality. Moreover, in a larger context, the *Ring* is a work of intertextuality: Wagner incorporates outside texts such as the originating source sagas and weaves quotations throughout his composition in a way that is both adaptive and intertextual. The intricacies of intertextual quotations will be addressed in Chapter III with Gérard Genette’s classifications of intertextuality. Allen’s text provides a solid foundational understanding of the various disciplines and applications of intertextuality. His chapters on Barthes and Bakhtin, particularly, support my theory that meaning is carried across through the continued references that are identifiable in intertextual and intratextual references such as leitmotifs.

Allen writes about the text as “a *practice* and a *productivity*” that, when intertextual, “represents its structuration of words and utterances that existed before” and “will go on after the moment of utterance” (35). He makes the comparison to Bakhtin’s dialogism, saying that intertextuality is, by its nature of combining texts, “‘double-voiced’” (35). Allen continues, “[i]f texts are made up of bits and pieces of the social text, then the on-going ideological struggles and tensions which characterize language and discourse in society will continue to reverberate in the text itself” (35). I argue that these reverberations may continue outside the text as well, which is the very point of intertextuality—to direct the audience member to an outside text.

Allen’s reference work on intertextuality helps establish a clear understanding of what intertextuality is as well as its development through different eras of literary criticism. Just as reference texts on adaptation often include a section on intertextuality, the distinction between intertextuality and adaptation becomes clearer throughout Allen’s text. As the inclusion or referencing of another text, intertextuality is a form of
adaptation, and adaptation is a type of intertextuality. However, the differences between the two lie in the way material is used and further developed. Yet the danger of approaching intertextuality in the same manner as early adaptation studies remains a concern. Laurent Jenny writes that “‘[t]he problem of intertextuality is to bind together several texts in one without their destroying each other and without the [text] . . . being torn apart as a structural whole’” (qtd. in Allen 111). Jenny offers a cautious reminder that, just as with adaptation studies, the study of intertextuality does not devolve into a search only for the source text but a study of the new combined meanings.

**Primary Source Texts**

Elizabeth Magee’s informative study on the source texts Wagner collected and consulted for his *Ring* provides scholars with an indispensable guide to the texts Wagner had access to, the depth of his study, and the subtleties between differing translations and editions that Wagner used. Magee’s study includes a comprehensive list of the texts Wagner says he read, included in his library, and borrowed from other libraries such as the Royal Library in Dresden before fleeing as a result of the May Uprising of 1849. For this study, I will limit my survey of primary texts to *The Saga of the Volungs, The Prose Edda, The Poetic Edda, The Nibelungenlied* as well as Wagner’s libretti and scores for the *Ring*. Unless I am referring to a character’s name in a specific reference to its respective saga, I will defer to the Wagner character name. For example, when a specific character reference is needed, I will use the name Sivrit when in the context of *The Nibelungenlied*, but will refer to the general Sigurd/Sivrit/Siegfried character as Siegfried within the *Ring*. I examine these sagas in modern translations, although a future study of these texts and application of my theory would incorporate additional sources as
identified in Magee’s study and examine the texts in their original languages, or, at least, in the editions and translations that Wagner would have read in nineteenth-century German in order to more completely identify the connected associations between sources and the *Ring*.

**The Saga of the Volsungs.** Jesse Byock’s 1990 translation of *The Saga of the Volsungs* is a good resource for this study of the sagas. Despite the Nibelungenlied’s use as the *Ring*’s namesake, of the many epics and sagas that Wagner consulted, *The Saga of the Volsungs* best resembles the *Ring*. Transcribed between 1200 and 1270, this saga, which would have been popularized through the medieval oral tradition, recounts the heroic deeds of the Volsung family. The saga speaks of Sigmund and the sword that he pulled from a tree, the incestuous relationship he had with his sister Signy, the birth of their son Sigurd, Sigurd’s maturing into manhood, and his eventual slaying of the serpent, Fafnir—the brother of Otr and Regin. Other similarities to Wagner’s *Ring* continue throughout the narrative involving the gods Odin, Frigg, Loki, the dwarf Andvari, Brynhild, Gunnar, and Gudrun. *The Saga of the Volsungs* is different from some of the other medieval sagas in that there is a noticeable shift near the end of the narrative from the mythic realm of gods toward legend. Byock’s translation also includes an astute introduction and notes.

**The Prose Edda.** I have also consulted Jesse Byock’s translation of the *Prose Edda*, also known as Snorri’s *Edda* or the *Younger Edda*. Anthony Faulkes’ 1987 translation is the only complete English translation, including the frequently omitted or condensed “Hattatal” in its entirety, and I have consulted Faulkes’ edition for that purpose, but for readability and a more recent translation, I have chosen to use Byock’s
2005 translation for the “Prologue,” “Gylfaginning,” and “Skaldskaparmal” sections of the Edda. Compiled in the thirteenth century, although originating in the oral tradition of the Viking Age (800-1100 CE), the Prose Edda is a treatise on the art of Norse poetry; the individual sections of the Prose Edda form a unique insight into the ways the poetry for the sagas was composed (Byock x). “Gylfaginning” is actually an intertextual combination of poetry and prose. These excerpts are of eddic poetry, often anonymous poems. Opposed to eddic poetry, skaldic poetry “employs more intricate word choices and metres” and is often attributed to individual skalds (Byock x). Snorri Sturluson, the accepted author of the work, quotes extant poetry (a complete list of the source poetry is included in the appendices) along with a prose setting of the narrative’s events.

Knowledge of Snorri is passed down through various thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts that identify him as the author of the last section of the Edda, the “Hattatal” or “The List of Metres.” Translated in Faulkes’ edition of the Prose Edda, “The List of Metres” is an extended poem in which Snorri explicated the workings of Icelandic poetry, weaving between stanzas of verse and prose explanations. The middle section, the “Skaldskaparmal,” is a poetic listing of metaphors to be used for naming characters, objects, and actions.

**The Poetic Edda.** For the Poetic Edda, I have relied upon the translations of this collection of mythological and heroic poems by Henry Adams Bellows completed in 1923 and 1926, respectively. While dated, these translations are still regarded as excellent translations for their fidelity to the original meaning while maintaining much of the poetic form. Both the mythological and the heroic poems include sections that connect with Wagner’s Ring as well as other variations upon familiar narratives also examined in
the *Prose Edda* and *Volsung Saga*. I have supplemented my reading with Carolyne Larrington’s recent translation with up-to-date notes and introductory material.

*The Nibelungenlied.* Unlike the Norse sagas and poetry found in the other primary sources examined in this thesis, *The Nibelungenlied* reads more like a medieval romance in the tradition of the King Arthur narratives. The text was composed around 1200 by an anonymous poet in Middle High German and emphasizes an impressive attention to such details as clothing and courtly behavior. Translated in a recent 2010 Oxford edition by Cyril Edwards, *The Nibelungenlied* contains many of the character names that Wagner borrowed or adapted for his music drama: Alberich the dwarf (although not the same character as the one who steals the gold for the gods as in *The Saga of the Volsungs*), Prünhild, Sigmunt, Siglind, Sivrit, King Gunther, and references to Germanic places such as the Rhein. However, the courtly romance does not mention the Norse gods despite including supernatural references to dwarfs, giants, and magic cloaks of invisibility. Containing numerous references to history and the political implications of medieval romances, *The Nibelungenlied* differs from Wagner’s mythic creation, but the saga is still a valuable resource for this study.

**Libretto, Score, Recording, and Commentary**

Wagner wrote both the music and the lyrics for his *Ring*, maintaining absolute control over the content, story, and drama. For this thesis, I have consulted the Dover scores, reprinted from the B. Schott’s Söhne editions for *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* and the C. F. Peters edition for *Die Walküre*. For the libretto, I have relied upon Stewart Spencer’s authoritative English translation to fill in the gaps in my knowledge of German. Spencer’s translation, edited with Barry Millington and
containing a number of helpful essays, also includes a short list of leitmotifs and musical examples. These are numbered and provided throughout the translation as a general, although not exhaustive, guide. Both the scores and libretto have been instrumental in personal study of the primary source, Wagner’s *Ring*. Although I have opted to refrain from including performances and the performance aspect in this study of the *Ring*, I have used Georg Solti’s 1959-1966 recording with the Vienna Philharmonic for Decca as a reference for listening and following along with the score. This was the first complete studio recording of the *Ring* and includes Deryck Cooke’s indispensable *An Introduction to Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Cooke’s introduction, recorded on audio and included in a transcription on CD-ROM with musical examples and an index of the leitmotifs, has provided invaluable assistance in identifying, recognizing, and better understanding Wagner’s structure and development of leitmotivic material throughout the *Ring*. Cooke’s scholarship on Wagner, and particularly the *Ring*, remains a landmark contribution to Wagner studies. Likewise, Cooke’s essays on musical language and the ways ideas and emotions are communicated in a non-verbal form are integral to this thesis. His authoritative analysis of the *Ring* in *I Saw the World End* and his lectures recorded for the Solti *Ring* cycle recordings provide a solid foundation of leitmotivic relationships.

**Research Questions**

This thesis will address questions related to the *theory of associations* I have developed and its application to *Das Rheingold* from Wagner’s *Ring*. Although a wealth of Wagner scholarship from both a musical perspective and a literary perspective is readily available, this thesis will approach Wagner’s operas from an interdisciplinary
perspective, combining literary and music studies to examine the structural, intertextual, intratexual, and adaptive correlations between Wagner’s music-dramas and their source materials.

These questions will be primarily concerned with the implications of the ways a theory of associations enables audiences of texts to recognize additional meanings within a text and in relation to surrounding texts. In what ways are meanings communicated and received across texts through inter- and intra-textual references? In what ways may audiences construe additional meaning and insight from these references in relation to the text? In relating association theory to Wagner’s Ring, does Wagner’s use of leitmotivic development throughout the entire Ring follow a structure of similar narrative development to the medieval sagas he studied? Does Wagner’s use of alliteration, word play, and other early medieval narrative devices assist in this establishment of a structure, and does his libretto follow this pattern? What are the additional meanings revealed by the application of this theory and what are the implications of these meanings for new interpretations of the Ring?

**Thesis Chapter Outline**

**Chapter I: Introduction: Wagner’s Ring and Association Theory**

This introductory chapter includes a description of my interest and experience with developing a theory of associations, a brief discussion of how my theory will be applied to Wagner’s Der Ring des Nibelungen, and a review of relevant literature. I explain my initial exposure to Wagner’s works through interdisciplinary research projects and my aim to continue studying the blended spaces between disciplines. I provide some historical context for when and why Wagner wrote the Ring amidst the popularity of the
then-recently-discovered *Nibelungenlied* and the movement toward a unified Germany. I also outline some of what I am calling my *theory of associations*, which is explained in more detail in Chapter III, with the purpose of establishing my theory as the primary framework for this study of Wagner’s music drama. The Literature Review examines a selection of the theory and source texts that I referenced, consulted, and found to be foundational for this study.

**Chapter II: Finding the Right Words: An Interdisciplinary Glossary**

In this chapter, I emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of my research. I provide an extended glossary of terms that I have identified as frequently used in both literary and music criticisms. Sometimes, the two fields have similar definitions for a term and, at other times, very different meanings. This glossary is meant to provide readers with the terms I use in Chapter IV when I apply my theory of associations to Wagner’s *Ring*. The glossary is also designed to help bridge the gaps between literary and music studies in an effort to foster additional interdisciplinary study.

**Chapter III: The Continuing Presence: Associative Theory**

In this chapter I explain how I understand my *association* theory in relation to other theorists’ work in adaptation and intertextuality studies. Using a term for the memory each individual audience member possesses of consumed and encountered texts, the *bank of associations* refers to the *presence* of a text that is connected to other texts. Narrative devices such as symbols or leitmotifs help guide the audience to identify these connections. This chapter contains a brief example and application of my theory to different genres and media in order to better illustrate the ways it can be applied to both intratextual and intertextual texts.
Chapter IV: A Trial by Fire: Associative Theory and the Forge Leitmotif

Here, I apply my theory of associations to Wagner’s music drama Der Ring des Nibelungen. I demonstrate the ways my theory works with an intratextual text such as the Ring with its numerous leitmotivic references and overall cohesive structure. I limit my application to one leitmotif, and, even then, must limit the extent to which I identify and connect the associations that Wagner develops among his leitmotifs in Das Rheingold. This study examines the hammering leitmotif that supports the forging of the ring and the re-forging of the sword Nothung. This leitmotif works well for this study as well as for extended future studies because the musical theme is present in each of the four parts of the Ring and is divided into traceable smaller musical motifs that are developed, sequenced, augmented, and varied in other ways that are associated with other elements in the music drama. The hammering upon the anvil is also a literary motif or action that is found in the sagas. Thus, there are surrounding associations that can be identified in both the sagas and the Ring that Wagner utilizes and that audiences notice. I include examples of the ways these associations are built up and of the additional meanings that are revealed that can enrich the audience’s experience of the text.

Chapter V: “All That Is, Ends”: Conclusion

I conclude with a brief summary of my theory of associations and propose a few more examples and scenarios for application. I continue to show the ways that my research intersects with the larger fields of interdisciplinary and Wagner studies. Here, I will also extend some of my observations on interdisciplinary studies and suggest areas where additional scholarship is needed. Just as I have extended the research begun by

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6 Erda warns Wotan with “All that is, ends” in Scene Four of Das Rheingold. The narrative implications of this line are examined in detail in Warren Darcy’s “‘Everything That Is, Ends!’: The Genesis and Meaning of the Erda Episode in ‘Das Rheingold.’”
Deryck Cooke and supported theoretically by Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, and recent theorists such as Linda Hutcheon, I hope to provide direction and a working theoretical model for future research with the associations of texts and with interdisciplinary studies.
Our language is so rich in synonyms [sic] that, having lost our intuitive understanding of their meaning, we fancy we may use them at our pleasure and draw private lines of demarcation between them.

Richard Wagner, *The Artwork of the Future* (270)

Within the fields of literature and music, a handful of terms are used in critical discourse that, in some cases, possess the same or similar meanings in both disciplines. Likewise, certain terms shared between the disciplines may also possess differing meanings or may be applied in different ways. Literary theorists have appropriated some musical terms as a means to express concepts in literature. Musical expressions such as resonance, timbre, harmony, and dissonance have been incorporated into literary scholarship in order to provide new language and perspectives of study for literary criticism and theory. This admirable interdisciplinary appropriation of terms should be lauded as one step that affords scholars a more comprehensive way to gain a greater understanding, a better means of evaluating, and a more thorough form of expressing ideas within the humanities. Even within literary scholarship and theory, the appropriation of terms from different fields of study has gained recent recognition, particularly in the areas of postmodern theories such as gender studies, postcolonial studies, ecocriticism, and psychological studies, among others. This present study provides clarification and amplification of the intersections that have developed between
the disciplines of music and literary scholarship. In that spirit, I will show how scholarship between these disciplines can be mutually beneficial and may lead to even more intersections with other disciplines. If scholarship and theory have anything to say about art, it is that art takes on another life beyond the spheres in which it is conceived, created, and intended, becoming a work of art through reception, perception, and consumption. Works of art are consistently examined for outside influences and interior motives. But along with that examination is the truth that art transcends boundaries and, as such, should be examined with an approach that extends beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Each discipline has its own idiomatic language and terms specific to its study, yet we find that disparate disciplines sometimes share a common vocabulary. While these intersections may be mutually created and beneficial among disciplines, it is critical that scholars remain aware of the differences that exist between their respective disciplinary languages and, therefore, take care to explain the distinct nuances of shared vocabulary. For example, the English disciplines of literature, linguistics, and rhetoric share identical terms but that differ in meaning as well as differing terms that represent the same meaning. Even more so, these differences and similarities should be observed between fields that are less related (i.e., music and literature). This thesis will look at terms such as polyphony and note Bakhtin’s appropriation of the term from music to describe the dialogic voices that appear in the novel. However, I argue that Bakhtin may not have fully appreciated the concept of polyphony within music; therefore, I aim to extend his definition and application of polyphony in the novel to other genres and to propose further connections and opportunities for polyphony within narrative studies. To illustrate
this application of polyphony from both a musical and literary perspective, and, ultimately, the ways it can also be combined, this thesis will examine a selection from Wagner’s music drama, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

As an interdisciplinary theory that examines the intersections of different texts, media, and genres, my *bank of associations* theory draws upon music theory and several branches of literary theory—Formalism, Post-Structuralism, Semiotics, Intertextuality, and Adaptation theory, which are addressed in Chapter III. However, I will give a brief explanation of the aspect of music theory as it will be applied in this thesis here and again in Chapter IV. Just as literary theories such as Formalism approach a text in the interest of seeing how it is constructed, music theory is the discipline of examining music with an emphasis upon formal and harmonic analysis. Music theory examines the mechanics of a composition. With its idiomatic language consisting of terms, abbreviations, and symbols borrowed from a host of languages other than English, music theory is the study and of what a composer accomplishes through sound. Other areas of music studies analyze the physical properties of sound and acoustics, the history of music, its performance and practice, as well as the cultural and societal influences upon a composer. In Chapter IV, I engage with each of these areas of music studies as I analyze a portion of Wagner’s *Ring* using my *bank of associations* theory.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of music studies in the evaluation of a composition is to attempt to answer the question, “what does it mean?”—a question that is also difficult to answer in literary studies. The evaluation of music, as art, as an aesthetic, is a subjective endeavor that may be informed by outside research and study or may be less informed but perhaps no less or even more intuitive and enlightening. The
strengths and limitations of music studies are bound to the subjective nature of hearing, which is also bound to the subjective nature of an interpreted performance. Music does not possess an established dictionary with proper pronunciation and a definition for each “term” or type of sound. Every combination of pitch and timbre affects a hearer individually, and each experiences a slightly or even radically different composition. Even so, scholars have established certain tones or constructions of phrase into a type of “grammar” for music such as Deryck Cooke’s *The Language of Music*. One of the strengths of music, however, is its ability to express emotions or ideas not communicable through words. The study of music, then, is not limited to a study of meaning, a musicological review, or a formal and harmonic analysis but is also a personal interpretation both in performance and in reception.

Literary studies also take personal interpretation and reception into account as seen in Reader Response theory¹ and other postmodern theoretical frameworks. The aspect of the writer as a “performer” with an authorial intention waiting to be discovered and established may also be analyzed, but this has somewhat fallen out of popular favor with most postmodern scholarship. Literary studies now focus more upon the reception and meaning of texts when viewed through different theoretical lenses. Like music, literary scholarship has developed a unique vocabulary for use in textual analysis in order to aid scholars in articulating textual meaning.

Across the disciplines of music and literary studies, there are colloquial terms that intersect, overlap, and, at times, even conflict. Several music terms have specific connotations to the aural capabilities of music (resonance, timbre, harmony, dissonance).

¹ For more on “interpretive communities” and the creation of meaning, consult Stanley Fish’s *Is There a Text in This Class?*
It will be beneficial to expand upon these and other musical terms that appear in literary criticism and the ways these aural connotations function for literary texts. For this study, the terms I examine are divided into three categories: terms and the nuances common too (shared by) music and literary scholars and in music and literary contexts, literary terms applied in musical contexts, and musical terms applied in literary contexts. These terms are collected from my exposure to music and literary scholarship and do not in any way represent the entire spectrum of terms shared between these two disciplines. While that would be a separate and intriguing subject to explore for future interdisciplinary studies, the inevitable scope of such a project is beyond this thesis. Therefore, in this limited list of terms, I will refrain from reiterating terms outside of their root forms (i.e., theme, instead of theme, themed, thematic, and so on).  

**Common Terms Used and Understood in Both Literary and Music Criticisms**

To clarify some of the similarities and differences between terms used in both literary and musical fields of study, I have opted to provide the reader with a glossary of terms that I use throughout this thesis. These selected terms are *exposition, setting, theme, motif,* and *adaptation*; I have already noted some distinctions between the literary and musical uses of *text* and *work* as noted by Barthes. *Exposition* is often used to designate a smaller part of a larger form, to describe a display or showcase, or to denote a stand-alone statement. Likewise, each of these meanings can be appropriately applied in both musical and literary situations. The term *exposition* enjoys some ambiguity when not clearly designated. However, the more frequent use for *exposition* within formal music analysis

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2 For a much more thorough analysis of the elements of musical forms and structures, Deryck Cooke’s *The Language of Music* (Oxford, 1959) is an authoritative text on the “grammar” of music. Hoping to avoid restating what Cooke has already masterfully written, in my analysis of these terms I attempt to place them alongside the context of literary criticism.
is in reference to a compositional form such as Sonata-Allegro form or Double-Exposition form although it may also be used in reference to a thematic statement. Within literary applications, exposition is often a narrative’s opening and build-up to the rising action of the plot. For clarity, I specify which meaning and field of study I refer to with each use of this term.

Another ambiguous term necessitating distinction is setting. Often used in literary studies to describe the backdrop to a narrative, story, or poem, setting refers to the narrative’s temporal or spatial location. A musical setting refers to the arrangement of words to music or melody to harmony such as the musical setting of a chorale text. Even though I do not examine performances of the Ring in this thesis, it is important to note for future interdisciplinary studies that, in drama, the term operatic setting also carries nuanced connotations that merit clarification.

The literary definition of theme most often refers to the identified subject matter or commonality within a text. For example, literary themes in Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird include childhood innocence, courage, and the impacts of racism on a community. The theme may vary according to the reader’s response and interpretation and may or may not also include the author’s intentional or unintentional creation of specific themes within the text. The musical definition of theme is related to a structural function and is constructed of smaller elements called motifs that are combined into a musical phrase that is later developed, expanded, varied, or abandoned in a composition. A well-known example of a musical theme is readily identified in the melody of Johann Strauss II’s Blue Danube Waltz. I specify whether a theme is literary or musical; however, most of my references to musical themes are leitmotifs.
A literary **motif** is similar to theme in that it is an element that pervades the text but may not be quite as over-arching as theme. A literary motif may include objects or actions that are repeated throughout the text, but is different from a symbol, metaphor, or allusion in that a motif does not represent something outside itself. Within musical formal analysis, a musical motif is the smallest unit of significant meaning and is recognized as the melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic building block for a phrase, a theme, and, eventually, an entire work. The opening four notes of Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony* provide an example of a motif that is the basis for the entire symphony as the motif is developed, inverted, augmented, and extended throughout.³ As with theme, I specify whether the motif is used in a literary or musical context.

The differences between music and literary *adaptations* are many and may be applied in many ways. In musical analysis, adaptation is more accurately described by the actions of development and variation in a musical composition. Within the technique of development, the thematic material is furthered (including motifs) into new material. Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony* is a useful example of musical development. The iconic opening four notes develop into new motifs and themes throughout all four movements. In this way, it could be said that Beethoven adapts his own music into new manifestations. Likewise, using variation, a composer adapts a motif or theme and manipulates it, but, unlike development, the thematic material remains recognizable. Such is the case with Mozart’s variations upon the theme “Ah, vous dirai-je maman,” or, as it is more commonly recognized, “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” Throughout the

³ An excellent analysis of the symphony may be heard through *The Great Courses* series featuring Dr. Robert Greenberg on the “Symphonies of Beethoven” set of lectures.
twelve variations involving key changes, inversions, ornamentations, and tempi alterations, the theme remains present and recognizable.

Outside of formal analysis, adaptations are ubiquitous in music and were certainly popular during Wagner’s lifetime and in the genre of program music. In program music, the subject matter is based upon a text, usually a written work such as a poem or story. The objective or challenge of program music is to communicate a narrative without scripted text or words. A short description of the narrative action might be included in the musical score, but the words are not part of the performed music. Perhaps the most iconic example of program music is the *Symphonie Fantastique* by Hector Berlioz, a well-respected acquaintance of Wagner’s[^1] in which the music depicts an artist’s dream of wooing a woman, dancing at a ball, being led to a scaffold and beheaded, and concludes at a witches’ Sabbath. All of these scenes are depicted through music without the aid of a spoken or sung text. Other examples of program music include musical adaptations of literary texts, particularly those of Shakespeare such as Mendelssohn’s incidental music for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Tchaikovsky’s concert overtures on *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, and Verdi’s operas on *Macbeth* and the creation of *Falstaff*.

Apart from literary scholarship, adaptation has recently become a recognized field of study all to itself. Although adaptations have existed for as long as story, recently adaptation has become a popular vessel through which stories are disseminated to new audiences. Historically, adaptations have enjoyed several eras of great—one notable example includes the prominence of Shakespearean adaptations during the Victorian era; however, adaptations have historically been regarded as debased forms of originals. This

[^1]: To describe the relationship between Wagner and Berlioz as a close friendship may be too optimistic. Consult “Flying Leaves” by Katherine Kolb and Jacques Barzun’s biography of Berlioz, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, for more information on the relationship between Wagner and Berlioz.
belief led scholars of adaptation to focus upon a text’s fidelity to its source in search of an elusive “true” adaptation. Likewise, early adaptation theorists were concerned with the notation and appreciation of differences between the elusive original and the qualities of the new medium with its own strengths and weaknesses (Bluestone 5). As the author of one of the first definitive texts of adaptation theory, George Bluestone deserves some credit for appreciating the choices filmmakers make in order to accommodate the source text to the medium of film. Although Bluestone’s adaptation theory makes allowances for the inherent differences between literature and film, fidelity criticism is still the primary purpose of early adaptation scholarship. With Bluestone’s pioneering study, adaptation theory finds a place in literary scholarship (64).

However, recent scholars have begun to examine adaptation as an act of creation in itself rather than a visual copy or corruption of the written source text. Linda Hutcheon describes this approach as studying “adaptation as adaptation” (A Theory 6). Her position does account for the idea of repeating material, making it available and accessible for newer audiences, but she calls it a “repetition without replication” (7). What is more, Hutcheon opens up the realm of adaptation from the rather limited scope of literature into film to an examination of all manner of media and other art forms. Her theory of adaptation recognizes that adaptations are not vertical creations, rooted in a source text, but are lateral, pulling from, reacting against, and adapting a number of existing texts. Tolkien’s cauldron of story analogy demonstrates the non-vertical nature of story and the folly of tracing a story back to its roots (“On Fairy Stories”). With Tolkien’s cauldron of story and Hutcheon’s insight into the ways adapters use story, the field of adaptation

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5 Tolkien’s influential essay “On Fairy Stories” establishes a “story soup” metaphor that describes how all narratives throughout human history are metaphorically collected into a great cauldron of story from and to which “authors” may both borrow and add.
studies is wide open for more research into the interdisciplinary and multi-media approach adapters utilize when creating a new text. Examined as an art form in itself, adaptation merits closer inspection and study especially once we begin approaching adaptation as a means to accessing previous associations and connotations.

The distinctions between exposition, setting, theme, motif, and adaptation as used in literary, musical, and adaptation contexts warrant this brief explanation to avoid any misuse of these terms. As illustrated in the next sections of this thesis, the appropriation of terms between disciplines can be misused and the associations connected to terms may be contrary to the intended use. While this incorporation of terms across disciplines adds specificity of language where a specific discipline’s vocabulary may fall short, interdisciplinary scholars should be mindful of the ambiguity and discipline-specific nuances of terms.

**Interdisciplinary Approaches to Intertextuality**

In examining and connecting meaning to associations and connotations, the discipline of intertextuality provides some of the framework, terminology, and theory for analyzing the connections between texts. When approached as a tapestry, the dangling ends of threads represent the intertextual references. These loose strands point the audience toward an association through a reference, a quotation, or any signal to a text outside the current text under observation. Broadly interpreted, intertextuality is the inclusion of a signifier within a text to an outside text. These beacons of meaning attract the audience’s attention to a world outside the text, but in doing so, also bring the outside world into contact with the text’s story world. This technique may be used to establish or break down a text’s credibility. In fantasy literature, the inclusion of a reference to earth
such as the sport of golf attracts the audience’s attention to a game that occurs outside the created fantasy world. In one of his authorial asides in *The Hobbit*, Tolkien does just this:

> If you have ever seen a dragon in a pinch, you will realize that this
> [fierceness] was only poetical exaggeration applied to any hobbit, even to Old Took’s great-grand-uncle Bullroarer, who was so huge (for a hobbit) that he could ride a horse. He charged the ranks of the goblins of Mount Gram in the Battle of the Green Fields, and knocked their king Golfimbul’s head clean off with a wooden club. It sailed a hundred yards through the air and went down a rabbit-hole, and in this way the battle was won and the game of Golf invented at the same moment. (17)

The intertextual reference to golf signals the audience away from Middle-Earth and back toward the audience’s own world; however, the action works both ways. By including a realistic sport such as golf in a fantasy realm, Tolkien also brings the fantastic to the audience’s realm, through the rabbit-hole, no less, in an intertextual nod to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. Readers of *The Hobbit* and viewers of the film adaptation will, from that moment on, have the combined association of golf clubs and goblin wars imprinted in their memories. Instead of signals, these intertextual references may be understood as having a gravitational pull. The use of outside references may pull the fantasy realm to the realm of reality and disrupt the creation of the fantasy world. Or perhaps, by inserting real (reality) elements into their fantasy world, the author may increase the credibility of the fantasy realm. Perhaps a more tangible example might be the Christmas music played at shopping malls that tickles the listener’s ear back to memories of previous Christmases, to associations that connect to other times the shopper
heard a particular Christmas song and perhaps puts the shopper into a more amiable and shopping-inclined mood. Likewise, the smell of certain foods triggers memories and associations connected to previous “smellings.” These types of memories are discussed in Chapter III as part of the resonating presence that within a text and the personal bank of associations for each audience member.

The reference in *The Hobbit* to golf is intertextual because of the inclusion of an outside reference within the text. This is an example of a very broad definition for intertextuality—the inclusion of direct reference to an outside text within a text. For those who may claim that the Tolkien illustration is actually an example of appropriation, I argue that a fictional sport such as Quidditch in J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series is an appropriation or adaptation of soccer, but is not an intertext because it is not a quotation of or a direct reference to soccer, whereas in *The Hobbit* golf is an intertext by quotation and by direct reference. In literature, when a character reads a book, listens to music, or watches a film, the inclusion of the title or a popular reference to the text being read, listened to, or watched is an act of intertextuality.

First used by Julia Kristeva, a prominent feminist scholar, noted also for her groundbreaking work in introducing Bakhtin’s theories to the French critics, the term “intertextuality” has grown to include many different aspects (degrees of referencing) and levels (depth of “weaving” into the tapestry) for inserting and referencing outside texts within a work of art. The use of a pre-existing popular song or classical piece of music in a film score or commercial such as the “Habanera” from *Carmen* is an act of intertextuality. The use of a direct quotation of part of a poem (“Two roads diverged in a yellow wood”) or a line from a popular novel (“Call me Ishmael”) is an act of
intertextuality. Direct quotations of intertextuality are often easier to recognize, especially if they are cited or referenced by name, but other types of intertextuality do not use direct quotations as will be discussed in Chapter III. Certain types of paraphrasing may also be interpreted as intertextuality. Similarly, the boundaries between adaptation, paraphrase, and intertextuality can easily become blurred, especially when examining texts such as medieval sagas that originated from the oral tradition and now exist as analogues to later texts. Adaptation, by the process of re-making an existing text is necessarily an example of intertextuality. Inevitably, adaptations contain direct quotations, paraphrases, common motifs and symbols, or references that connect the adapted text to the originating text. Adapted texts may also feature veiled references, subtle quotations, and even misquoted references from the source text that may be intended and interpreted as intertextuality.

Just as adaptation blurs the boundaries between disciplines, new knowledge and ideas also develop in these blended spaces. Linda Hutcheon and her husband Michael Hutcheon, a pulmonologist and professor of medicine, explore the interdisciplinary possibilities among literary criticism, medical studies, and music through their collaborative efforts, which include *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* (1996), *Bodily Charm: Living Opera* (2000), and *Opera: The Art of Dying* (2004), and *Four Last Songs: Aging and Creativity in Verdi, Strauss, Messiaen, and Britten* (2015). Although their books are involved with musical subjects, Hutcheon and Hutcheon do not include many musical examples or focus much on the significance of the music within the material they examine. Instead, they focus their analysis upon the narrative events and aspects of the body (voice, physical presence, disease, and physical condition for both the character and the performer) inherent in the operas they study. However, these interdisciplinary
explorations of corporeality, cultural criticism, and operatic drama provide ample examples of the ways different disciplines contribute to one another’s interpretation. Combining the insights of a literary, cultural, and adaptation scholar with the expertise of a medical professional and bringing both to the discourse of musical topics certainly demonstrates the fruitfulness of interdisciplinary studies.

Hutcheon and Hutcheon describe opera itself as a “promiscuously interdisciplinary and resolutely performative art form” that is a “hybrid, complex, staged musical-theatrical experience, totally embedded in its culture” (Opera: Desire xvi). They argue that the interdisciplinary nature of opera “is such a complex art form that it cries out for more than one approach: after all, it brings together dramatic narrative, staged performance, a literary text, a certain subject matter, and complex music in a particularly forceful way” (5). Hutcheon and Hutcheon acknowledge that “[t]here is no such thing as the single ‘text’ of opera. Indeed, it is even reductive to talk, as many do, of its two texts, the libretto and the score” (5). Moreover, they trace the connection from words in the libretto to the creation of meaning through all the other aspects of opera as an “experience” (7). Of course, opera as a performed art would also include the additional texts of costumes, gestures, lighting, staging, setting, and props; however, as I have noted, I will not be examining specific productions of the Ring because each production is unique.

Of Hutcheon and Hutcheon’s books, one that most directly applies to the topic of Wagner’s Ring is Opera: The Art of Dying. In it, they discuss the ways that Wagner and his characters, even the gods, reflect upon the inevitability of death, and they quote Wagner’s own writing on the subject:
The last, completest renunciation of his personal egoism, the demonstration of his full ascension into universalism, a man can only show by his *Death*; and that not by his accidental, but by his *necessary* death, the logical sequel to his actions, the last fulfilment of his being. *The celebration of such a Death is the noblest thing that man can count on.*

(qtd. in Hutcheon and Hutcheon 94)

Hutcheon and Hutcheon conclude that Wotan’s acceptance of death is a reflection of Wagner’s own understanding of death. By emphasizing the medieval Viking trope of finding a good death worthy of being accepted into Valhalla, Wagner’s philosophy parallels the ideology found in his Old Norse sagas and other medieval sources that a good death is “the noblest thing a man can count on” (94). It is through this type of interdisciplinary study that new insights are revealed that lead to a richer encounter with texts.

**Literary Terms Used and Understood in Musical Contexts**

Elvis Costello once remarked in an interview, “Talking about music is like dancing about architecture.”⁶ This insight is quite appropriate when one begins the attempt to explain certain musical concepts. Yet, despite what might be interpreted as the awkwardness of dancing about architecture, it is not wholly unfeasible and reflects an understanding of the challenge to express and communicate across different media and disciplines. However, with another discipline acting as a bridge across the gaps, the difficulty of finding language can be alleviated. As a non-texted language, music can be difficult to describe, especially outside the realm of music theory, forms and analysis, and

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⁶ Many thanks to Dr. Steven Ward for bringing this quotation about the supreme difficulties of expressing musical ideas in words to my attention.
musicology. Deryck Cooke writes, “What Goethe, Baudelaire, and Kafka said may be valuable data for the final understanding of humanity; what Beethoven, Berlioz, and Mahler said is certainly not—simply because there is no way of agreeing as to exactly what they did say” (Language xi). Words begin to fail when describing an entity that elicits such a diverse range of emotional responses from its hearers. Even so, music criticism endeavors to provide language for the narrative aspect of music. Just as some terms are commonly shared by literary and music studies, music criticism often appropriates terms that either originated within or have become best associated with literary criticism in order to better describe the narrative action in music. Just as we have examined several terms that music and literary criticisms commonly use (exposition, setting, theme, motif, and adaptation), we have noted several necessary distinctions and differences. In this same manner, befitting an interdisciplinary approach, we will examine several terms associated with literary scholarship as they have been appropriated into musical terminology and criticism and, perhaps, venture into other disciplines to help find the bridge across the fields of literary and music studies.

The literary crossings over into musical criticism do have an effect upon musical analysis and provide the necessary language for some elements of music that are difficult to capture in words or that lack a definitive term. While discussing film, Bluestone quotes A. A. Mendilow who explains, “Language cannot convey non-verbal experience; being successive and linear, it cannot express simultaneous experiences; being composed of separate and divisible units, it cannot reveal the unbroken flow of the process of living” (12). Music exists as sound in time and exhibits a linear progression similar to narrative: a beginning, middle, and end. Literary studies have several terms that describe moments
within this progression more successfully than music studies or that are appropriated in lieu of a musical term altogether. Literary terms such as *foreshadowing, symbolism, metaphor, allegory,* and *allusion* provide some of the necessary language for music criticism that seeks to examine the story-telling nature of music. Even literary terms such as *satire* and *parody* are useful terms for describing music that ridicules, mocks, or imitates material. These terms often become subject to personal biases and opinions but still help describe the hearer’s interpretation.

When describing the linear progression of music, the literary terms *foreshadow* and *suspense* indicate anticipation for material to follow. Foreshadowing in literary texts often works in such a way that the reader looks back and recognizes certain in-text clues that, in hindsight, reference and preface events that occur later in the narrative and provide a type of unity for the text. Literary foreshadowing is most often recognized after the fact or as the reader re-reads the text. For example, it is only after the audience has reached the conclusion of the *Ring*, or at least knows the title and premise of the story, that they recognize Wagner’s foreshadowing of the events of *Götterdämmerung* in the libretto for *Das Rheingold* by inserting several textual references. Even within Scene 1 of *Das Rheingold*, Flosshilde says, “Es dämmert und ruft”\(^7\) when her sister Woglinde hears the approaching Alberich and asks who it is (Spencer 58). Loge, in response to the lack of Freia’s golden apples to keep the gods young, remarks, “erstirbt der Götter Stamm”\(^8\) (Spencer 86). Lastly, the goddess Erda makes a prediction of the world’s end: “Alles was

\(^7\) “Darkness descends and a voice cries out” (Spencer 58).

\(^8\) “[T]he race of gods will perish” (Spencer 86).
ist, endet. / Ein dust’rer Tag / dämmert den Göttern” (Spencer 112). Through word association, Wagner foreshadows in the beginning of the Ring the events that will occur at the conclusion of the Ring. In music, harmonic progressions, following the tension-and-release conventions and “rules” of Western music, are audible and may be recognized as a type of foreshadowing by indicating an anticipated resolution such as a V7 chord resolving to I or the leading tone of a scale resolving to the tonic. Moreover, this type of musical foreshadowing is often recognized and anticipated, even if subconsciously. Similarly, the overtures for operas and musicals may be composed in such a way that they provide contextual clues and an aural presentation of themes that serve to foreshadow events. Although some opera overtures can be dismissed as thrown-together presentations of the most popular tunes, arranged at the last moment, preludes such as Wagner’s operate as introductions to the drama through a foreshadowing of musical and narrative themes. Bizet’s prelude for his opera Carmen depicts a rousing presentation of one of the most popular musical themes, the “March of the Toreadors,” which is then succeeded by the musical motif symbolizing the workings of fate and foreshadowing all of the fateful moments, which are indicated throughout the entire opera by the musical presence of this motif.

A piece of music may also be approached with the intention of finding symbols and metaphors for objects or ideas outside the composition. In literature, the symbol is often a constructed meaning from the reader’s perspective rather than an intentionally

9 “All things that are—end. / A day of darkness / dawns for the gods” (Spencer 112).

10 In music harmonic analysis, the dominant—the major chord built upon the fifth note in a scale—labeled as V. The addition of the seventh scale degree increases the harmonic tension and desire to resolve to the tonic labeled as I or i, in major or minor, respectively. Likewise, the intervallic relationship between the leading tone and tonic produces a similar tension and desire for resolution. For an example, sing Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Ti, Do as in The Sound of Music, but stop after singing Ti—this is the harmonic tension that seeks to resolve to Do.
inserted device used by the author: however, the author’s deliberate insertion of a symbol is also certainly possible. On the subject of symbolism in creative writing, Ray Bradbury writes that

I never consciously place symbolism in my writing. That would be a self-conscious exercise and self-consciousness is defeating to any creative act. Better to let the subconscious do the work for you, and get out of the way. The best symbolism is always unsuspected and natural. During a lifetime, one saves up information which collects itself around centers in the mind; these automatically become symbols on a subliminal level, and need only to be summoned forth in the heat of writing. Thus locomotives can be dragons, or dragons locomotives. (qtd. in Butler)

For example, the symbolism present in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* may or may not have been an intentional literary device, nor may the symbols have meant to Hawthorne what they mean to a modern reader. Musical examples of symbolism may be approached in a similar way. The casual listener and music critic alike may seek to use the language of symbolism to better approach and understand a composition, but the symbolic meaning behind a Picardy third, which ends a minor keyed composition with a major chord, the symbolism of canons in Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture*, or the symbolic sexual “climaxes” in Wagner’s “Liebestod” from *Tristan und Isolde* all are subject to the audience member’s interpretation of these symbols. But of course, symbolism, as employed by the composer and writer—whether it is perceived by the audience or not—may be, for example, an intentional portrayal of a dragon symbolized by a locomotive, or, in Wagner’s case, by the low and deep sounds of the tubas in *Das Rheingold*. Musical
symbolism, like literary symbolism, is subject to the responses and constructed meanings that are attached to it. Similar literary terms such as metaphor, allegory, and allusion are equally difficult to pin down when applied to music criticism. The Soviet political pressures behind the compositions of Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev, and Igor Stravinsky are an ample subject for this field of study (Was a melody included by the composer intended to be a tribute to the Soviet Union or a veiled commentary on Soviet oppression?). Yet, composers and writers alike often prefer to resist the constraints that allegorical and metaphorical meanings put upon their compositions. Tolkien was fiercely against the idea that his Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit were allegorical vehicles for events of two world wars—despite having conceived of and written parts of his mythological world while in the trenches of World War I.

These vague terms, often found in literary studies or applied as narrative devices, find their way into appropriated applications in music studies. Literary terms incorporated into music criticism exemplify another way that interdisciplinary relationships contribute to a better understanding and blended language useful for commentary. The interdisciplinary ties between music and literary studies continue to grow more obvious as we progress toward the application of musical terms in literary scenarios. The two disciplines contribute to and borrow from one another in order to find language capable of expressing what cannot adequately be expressed with only one discipline’s critical vocabulary. However, in the shifting application of terms, the definitions and origins of these terms need to be properly taken into account so that a term is not misapplied or misconstrued.
Musical Terms Used and Understood in a Literary Context

Just as literary terms are helpful when examining a text that has the ability to move forward and backward, to suspend the act of reading and concentrate on a certain moment indefinitely, musical terms are helpful when examining the aural elements in a text. With a written text, literary terms work alongside the reader’s ability to move back and forth, to turn the page and turn it back again, to re-examine a word or phrase of interest. With music texts, the score can similarly be read and the pages turned back and forth, but the music itself exists in the performed, sound presentation, requiring a hearer just as the text of a book necessitates a reader. The language used to describe this aspect of music as sound in time appropriately describes the heard nature of a musical text and can be applied to the act of reading a text. Terms such as discord, dissonance, harmony, timbre, intonation, resonance, and overtone are among those used to describe aural characteristics of literary texts. The use of these musical terms in literary contexts further strengthens the interdisciplinary ties between music and literary studies and benefits both disciplines.

Discord, dissonance, and harmony, while used to describe many different scenarios in literary criticism, all have a common trait: they are associated with the relationship between tones. In music, discord and dissonance both imply an incongruity between tones that is often unpleasant or unsettling to the ear. Borrowing also from psychology, literary criticism has appropriated the term cognitive dissonance to refer to instances when a character is at odds with herself or acts irrationally (such as Brünnhilde’s choice to ride her horse onto Siegfried’s funeral pyre). Harmony in music is a rather broad concept that fundamentally refers to the presence of more than one tone at
a time. This harmony can be either musical consonance or dissonance and is not specifically associated with an over-arching pleasantness or an absence of tonal conflict. The harmonies in modern composers’ compositions such as Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, Schoenberg’s twelve-tone music, Charles Ives’ symphonies, or Bartok’s piano concertos are just a few examples of the dissonant possibilities of harmony. More often, though, literary studies refer to a scenario or narrative setting of harmony that is assumed to be pleasant and lacking conflict: a harmonic texture, a perfectly harmonious scene, or a collective harmony of ideas. It should be noted that the main difference between the uses of harmony is the possibility for both pleasant and unsettling harmonies in music and the implied positive connotation in literary studies. For this thesis, I will mention harmony mostly in the music sense, referring to a multiplicity of tones. A judgment of the degree to which a harmony is pleasing or harsh is subjective and generally will be avoided. When I need to refer to a harmony in a literary sense, I will specify whether the harmony in the context of the narrative is positive or negative.

*Timbre* and *intonation* are also frequently appropriated from music to refer to literary textures or voices such as a character’s or the author’s. Timbre in music is often described as an idiomatic tone color such as the reedy sound of the oboe or bagpipes and the brassy sound quality of a trumpet or trombone. When used to refer to a character’s voice quality such as high, or low, squeaky or booming, the term is applied in a manner consistent with the musical definition. However, in literary studies, timbre is sometimes used almost as a synonym for sound or theme. While not incorrect, these uses are less accurate and similar to the broad application of harmony. Intonation in music is consistently used in reference to the pitch of a note and indicates the accuracy of that
tone—being in tune, flat or sharp. In literary studies, intonation can be applied more widely as a type of tone of voice or manner of speaking as we have already seen with Bakhtin’s assessment of Tolstoy’s “Three Deaths.” He describes how the intonations of the author and the intonations of his characters are no different; the consciousnesses of the voices are united and not dialogic (Bakhtin, Problems 95).

With resonance, the musical and literary definitions are perhaps the most closely aligned of the terms already discussed—the distinctions, of course, resting with the difference between aural and read texts. A resonance in music is the after-effects or the reverberations of a tone after it has sounded as the sound waves continue vibrating, generating less sound as it dissipates and dies away. With a literary text, a resonating phrase or word will have a lasting impact upon the reader and with similar reverberations but, obviously, without the audible sound. Hutcheon uses resonance when she refers to the way that a text registers with the memory of an audience member through “repetition and variation” (8). The resonance may continue to fade as the text progresses and the reader’s memory fades, but unlike with sound in time, a reader can always look back to the resonating word or phrase, whereas, with music, the sound has faded away.

Similar in a way to resonance, a phenomenon exists in music that is called the overtone sequence, sometimes also referred to as the harmonic sequence or as overtones. These overtones are produced by the corresponding frequencies within a fundamental pitch vibrating in such a way that the brain and ear can discern multiple pitches. This sequence results in multiple pitches being “fused into a single sound with a definite musical pitch,” the fundamental (Oldham). The overtone sequence may even be manipulated to move while sustaining the fundamental pitch such as with throat-singing
techniques. Wind instruments also accomplish a similar harmonic effect through irregular fingerings for each instrument, which result in a chordal sound—multiple pitches produced at the same time.

The concept of overtones in music is often understood as a part of acoustics and the physics that govern sound similar to the effects resulting in the tension and release discussed in the foreshadowing and suspense sections. Overtones are used in practice as a way to check intonation for pitch or for musical effects such as the harmonics in wind instruments. Mongolian throat-singing and the manipulation of overtones using the voice are also examples of ways overtones are practiced in musical performance. The aspect of overtones that corresponds to literary studies is the way in which a fundamental element within a text resonates throughout the duration of a text or even outside a particular text just as the overtones in music resonate over the fundamental pitch. These overtones (literary and musical) create multiple points of reference that associate with the fundamental element. For our purposes, let us say that the overtones are linked to their fundamental. When found in literary studies such as the introduction to Jesse L. Byock’s translation of the Prose Edda, overtones have the ability to evoke a type of corresponding entity or emotion by association via this link. Byock uses overtones in this way: “Skadi chooses to return to her father’s home in the mountains, and this story of material incompatibility has overtones of an ancient tale illuminating the difference between life on land and in the sea” (xxii). In the story of Skadi’s choice to return home (the Edda as a fundamental), Byock recognizes an element that is evocative of the overtones from another ancient tale (which is a different fundamental). The thematic element of “material incompatibility” contains a recognized association to the overtones from another “ancient

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11 See Hefele for a demonstration of overtone singing.
tale,” thus drawing the two together for Byock. However, for a different reader, unfamiliar with the outside text, the connection between the fundamental Edda and the fundamental ancient tale cannot be made because the reader does not recognize the connections between the corresponding overtones.12

Another musical term now accepted in literary studies is leitmotif. The term, which literally translates to leading-motif, originated with Hans von Wolzogen’s 1878 thematic study of Wagner’s Ring and has since become used in music studies to describe a rhythmic, harmonic, or melodic device that is repeated or developed throughout a composition to symbolize elements such as a character, emotion, physical setting, or object. Wagner’s prolific use of leitmotifs in his Ring and other music dramas has remained a popular research subject since the late nineteenth century, leading to exhaustive studies that have attempted to identify and trace every leitmotif. Leitmotifs take on the associations of the texts that they support. Leitmotifs therefore become multifaceted as they pick up these new associations, resulting in an increasing presence. As a musical or a literary (or other media) leitmotif, the meanings associated with the leitmotif can cross over into different media and continue resonating back to the originating presence. Defined in literary studies as symbolism, leitmotifs have the ability to occur in literature without the need for an under- or over-lying supporting medium as would be the case in opera or film. The literary leitmotif is usually represented by a theme repeated throughout the course of a text. However, in opera and film, musical leitmotifs operate in conjunction with another text such as the libretto and communicate the added presence of

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12 As we have seen repeatedly in this interdisciplinary glossary, there are terms that have different meanings in different disciplines. Here, fundamental is used as the sounding pitch over which overtones resonate. However, the term fundamental also has other connotations such as being foundational or essential.
a supporting image, action, or sound. These resonances are the overtones traceable back to the fundamental that an audience receives, recognizes, and registers as connected to the originating text. Leitmotif has since become an accepted term used in film and film music studies and has also become popular in literary studies when referring to a repeated image or word in a text. Again, this appropriation or application of the term is not wholly incorrect, but it is underdeveloped because of the way that leitmotifs in literature have been studied. The thematic relationships between leitmotifs as they are varied and developed may become a fruitful area of study for the literary scholar.

Lastly, the term polyphony was originally appropriated by Bakhtin in his study of the novel as a way to describe the dialogism of voices in a text and has more or less continued to be used in literary criticism; however, the uses often seem to refer to an abstract duality or alternating of narrative voices. The literary uses of polyphony will be noted in more detail in Chapter III. This is not an incorrect application of the term since polyphony as a music term has a broad range of uses. Musical polyphony developed during the medieval period around the same time that the Norse sagas were circulating through oral tradition and just beginning to be recorded. Manuscripts of music from this time period around 800-1000 CE were mostly limited to sacred music composed for the church. These compositions were often musical settings of the text for the mass and were written in the Gregorian chant style, which was primarily a form of monophony—a single, unison line. Early polyphonic settings developed as organum, a system of parallel

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13 Wagner’s influence upon film and film music is considerable. His popular melodies such as the “Ride of the Valkyries,” the “Wedding March” from Lohengrin, and “Liebestod” from Tristan und Isolde were commonly used as accompaniment for early films as were other popular songs and opera melodies. Then, after the era of the pop music film, common in the 1960s and 1970s, leitmotivic film scores saw a resurgence with John Williams’ scores for the Star Wars saga, which have often been referred to as a space opera with the frequent use of leitmotifs on a Wagnerian scale.
movement of usually two (and later three) voices similar to the way homophony is classified (similar to modern hymns). Developments in music notation, the growing practice of organum and glossing of musical settings of the mass, and the increasingly ambitious efforts of composers eventually led to a complete polyphonic setting of the mass by Guillaume de Machaut in 1377. Musical polyphony continued to evolve through the innovations of counterpoint in the Baroque era and on into the modern era, producing musical compositions of incredible polyphonic density and complexity well beyond the early medieval polyphonic developments. This explanation of development helps us identify the differences and similarities between the literary and musical definitions and applications of the term.

As we move forward, extending Bakhtin’s understanding of polyphony and introducing it to adaptation and intertextuality theory, I arrive at a new theory based upon the associations carried across texts through polyphonic “voices.” As these associations also carry connotations and meaning, their conflation with other associations creates new meanings and discoveries for critical study. When I apply these associations to Wagner’s Ring in Chapter IV, the continuing presence generated by leitmotifs extends through associations (any sort of reference) but also accumulates into a multiplicity of voices and meanings, all simultaneously present. Each contributes and creates new meanings as the respective overtones collect and interact—resonate—with one another: a theory of associations.
CHAPTER III

THE CONTINUING PRESENCE: ASSOCIATIVE THEORY

In my theory of associations, I extend Bakhtin’s literary use of polyphony to better reflect the musical possibilities of polyphony. It is worth mentioning that, despite Bakhtin’s assessment that the genre of epic is non-polyphonic and demonstrates a singleness of consciousness and voice, the epic was and continues to be a source for many other media and is actually compatible with Bakhtin’s argument that the novel would enjoy a “special relationship with extraliterary genres” (Bakhtin, “Epic” 33). As an example of how Bakhtin may have misrepresented the epic as a contrast to his understanding of the new novel, I note that opera as a new art form developed around 1600 alongside the Early Modern belief in humanism and the celebration of human achievement and form. The first operas were based upon classical mythology and epics; thus, elevating and memorializing the deeds of great heroes and historical figures, while combining the stories of the epics with additional genres. Bakhtin does not mention any specific type or example of epic. He appears to propose a generalization that is not congruent with current scholarship and critical approaches to epics and sagas.

In describing his ideas for narrative polyphony in the novel, Bakhtin identifies “two contending voices” in Dostoevsky’s writing—the author’s and the character’s self-consciousness. Bakhtin maintains that these two voices, given the term dialogism, exist on one plane “alongside or opposite one another,” and their differences, at times irreconcilable, result in “an eternal harmony of unmerged voices” (Problems 92).
Bakhtin’s polyphony is left tethered to the novel form and evokes the imagery of alternating voices of consciousness rather than multiple sustained voices.

While this contrapuntal form of polyphony worked well for the nineteenth-century novel, poststructuralist theory, Barthes’ “Death of the Author,” Reader Response theory, cultural criticism, and other theoretical approaches opened the world of theory up to more possibilities than only a dialogic interpretation of the novel or of any text. New media such as film and television along with developments in existing media (avant-garde, minimalism, and stream-of-consciousness, to name only a few) challenged the dominating views and theories. The advent of adaptation theory and increased prevalence of adaptation studies among genres and media necessitated broader definitions of intertextuality (or, as later shown in Gerârd Genette’s case, more definitions of intertextuality). These broader definitions have led to a form of literary polyphony that is detached from its original meaning and inadequate of the meaning of the term in its musical context. To accommodate this gap in theory, I propose that the polyphony of texts may be studied by acknowledging and identifying the presences of texts that accumulate in each audience member’s personal bank of associations.

There are moments in literary studies when the reader draws upon a personal bank of associations in order to recognize the difference between an originating source text and its adaptation and to recognize the inclusion of an intertextual reference. I use the term originating in preference to the original because of the connotations original has with some early adaptation studies. The term original implies that there was a first; however, as Tolkien writes in his influential essay “On Fairy Stories,” there is a “Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story,” which “has always been boiling, and to it have continually
been added new bits, dainty and undainty” (340). Although not mentioned in Tolkien’s essay, the “Mead of Poetry,” a story from Norse mythology, bears an entertaining likeness to the Cauldron of Story.¹ Tolkien’s illustration displays all of mankind’s narratives simmering as bones and broth, from which an author removes a ladleful of soup, adds new ingredients, and with his or her own flourished stir, produces stories such as the flood narrative from “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” the biblical account of the Flood and Noah, and the references to a great flood in both the *Prose Edda* (Byock 15) and *Poetic Edda* (Larrington 288 fn 35) when the blood of the defeated frost giant Ymir drowns all other frost giants except for “one who escaped with his household” in a wooden coffin or box (Faulkes 11). Therefore, when discussing analogues such as the Norse sagas and Old German epics, I refrain from describing these as *original* texts or *original* sources, especially given that before these narratives were transcribed into manuscripts they were part of a much older oral tradition. I find that the term *originating* is sufficient for distinguishing this thesis’ purpose from the type of fidelity and source criticism that was popular for early adaptation studies.

In his trilogy on palimpsests,² Gérard Genette proposes a study and classification of intertextuality, which he prefers to label as Transtextuality and defines as “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (Genette qtd. in Allen 98). Genette divides Transtextuality into five classifications for identifying different

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¹ The medieval *Prose Edda* tells the stories of “Kvasir and the Mead of Poetry” and “Odin Seeks the Mead,” which recount how the mead of poetry was created and, after trickery, is now a gift of Odin that he gives to those who are to become poets, which is a means of imparting divine inspiration. The mead is also briefly mentioned in “Brynhild’s Wise Council” in *The Saga of the Volsungs* (70).

² The term *palimpsest* refers to the technique of scraping off layers of vellum which were used for medieval manuscripts. Residue of earlier writings could still be visible, resulting in a physical form of intertextuality.
types of intertextuality: Intertextuality, Paratextuality, Metatextuality, Hypertextuality, and Architextuality.

Genette’s classifications provide the scholar with a helpful method for distinguishing and identifying texts within the broad definitions of intertextuality and the related field of adaptation. However, as Thomas Leitch notes, “Genette’s painstaking taxonomy, like that of other distinctions among modes or types of adaptation . . . does not adequately demarcate the frontiers of adaptation, the places where it shades off into allusion” (94). The dangers of crossing into allusion from adaptation again reflect the caution of losing the connection between a text and its originating material, at which time the text ceases to be an adaptation. For our purposes, I consider Wagner’s Ring as a work of adaptation based upon early Germanic and Norse source texts; however, as Elizabeth Magee diligently shows, Wagner uses these texts more for inspiration than for source material (13). Wagner’s Ring also incorporates his own creative contributions to the sagas that differ from any of his source texts. An understanding of Wagner’s intertextual material becomes important when we begin to examine the ways in which intertextuality reflects a plurality of textual voices. This understanding of intertextual form is helpful nonetheless as it provides the audience member with a more nuanced appreciation for the richness within a text.

I have noticed a recurring question about Wagner’s Ring cycle: is it or is it not an adaptation of the originating sagas? I believe the answer to this question would also be the answer we would give about Tolkien’s well known The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. The best responses I have seen describe Wagner’s relationship with the originating sagas as one in which he uses them as a model for his Ring. Wagner does not use only
one text or even one story with multiple versions as his source material. Instead, he borrows events, characters, objects, and settings from a multitude of texts, often in multiple translations, and to varying degrees of interest and use. To assist in identifying the connections Wagner created between all of these mythologies, Magee’s thorough analysis of Wagner and his sources is fully recounted in Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs. I have found Magee’s book useful to this thesis because Magee not only identifies Wagner’s source texts but also provides evidence and hypotheses for the ways in which he is dependent upon and faithful to any specific text. Frequently cited by some of the most prominent Wagner scholars, Magee’s text is an indispensable resource when examining Wagner’s source texts. Perhaps what sets her study apart from other “trace the origins” accounts and research is that her book is not a fidelity criticism or evaluation of the changes in Wagner’s music dramas from the originating saga.

Linda Hutcheon makes an important observation that “[a]s audience members, we need memory in order to experience difference as well as similarity” (22). Just as the early adaptation scholars attempted to trace the adapted text back to its original source by looking for familiar narrative details and elements, audiences are able to recognize that which is familiar from an originating text and acknowledge what is new. Similarly, in literary theory, the postmodern movement away from Russian Formalism and toward a Poststructuralist approaches demonstrate how theorists should be aware of the ways texts are structured before approaching the texts from other traditional theoretical perspectives. A familiarity with Saussure’s sign, signified, and signifier and the relationships between elements of linguistics, form, and literary devices in a text is a crucial first step to understanding a text. Rather than ending an analysis by noting how well a text is
constructed (the Russian Formalist approach), Poststructuralist approaches such as Barthes’ identify the differences between a text’s construction and the large contexts and circumstances influencing its creation. This type of understanding and “memory” invites audiences of adaptations to reflect upon associations they recognize from the great cauldron of story and from earlier texts and adaptations they have encountered and to then begin imagining that all of these associations are building up, attaching themselves to occurrences, are evoked again by resonances, and can be traced along to what I have called the presence.

Just as Hutcheon writes about the need for memory to experience differences (22), she also writes that “adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (8). Graham Allen uses the phrase the “already read” to describe the relationship between memory and outside texts in intertextuality (79). The memory or familiarity with a text obviously varies from audience to audience, but with pre-existing knowledge, adaptations and instances of intertextuality take on a layered and nuanced meaning. Each reader, viewer, and listener has his or her own bank of associations from which he or she recognizes, compares, and evaluates the connections or connotations that a text has with another text.

While Genette’s classifications of intertextuality provide a language and distinction for different levels and elements of intertext, I argue that through this study, Wagner’s Ring can be approached as a composition of intertextuality with its originating texts. On a foundational level, the medium of music drama, or Wagnerian opera, also functions as an example of intertextuality by combining different texts such as the
libretto, musical score, stage directions, operatic setting, lights, costumes, props, and even the rhetoric of performance. Each of these texts can be examined as a field of study on its own and analyzed as working within an intertextuality of disciplines and media combined into Wagner’s larger, unifying text. With the Ring as a work of intertextuality, the aspects of polyphony, while obvious in some regards (a polyphonic musical setting, music combined with text as polyphony, and opera as a polyphonic display), reveal the nature of intertextuality as also polyphonic by previous associations and connections to a current or new text. The opera as a dramatic display literally gives characters a voice and is a type of dialogism—polyphony. The libretto accomplishes the same effect from a literary perspective just as Bakhtin developed his views on literary polyphony by focusing on Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment.

The difference between recognizing the libretto as a literary—read—text and as a performed—sung—text is noticed and addressed by Hutcheon in her study of adaptation. She approaches the music in opera as non-diegetic, a term often found in film score analysis that refers to the music that is only heard by the audience rather than heard by the characters: “the convention of opera is that characters on stage do not hear the music they sing, except when they self-consciously perform what are called ‘phenomenal songs’ (lullabies, toasts, etc.). Only the audience hears the rest of the music; only the audience has access to its level of meaning” (60). Hutcheon’s conclusion is based upon the principle that “[t]he words they sing may address the outer world, but their music represents their inner lives” (60). However, I disagree for this very reason. The music representing the inner emotions of the characters does originate with the character and, I believe, is heard by them. Opera as a medium is an art form that necessitates the
suspension of disbelief in order to effectively convey a narrative through music and move an audience. Hutcheon even provides an example from Wagner:

In ‘through-composed’ operas . . . such as the music dramas of Richard Wagner, musical repetitions and variations . . . can bring to the audience’s ears what the characters cannot consciously face. Isolde may sing of her hatred for Tristan . . . but she does so to music we already associate with her love for him. (60-61)

Yes, the music is an indicator of what is already inside the character and is an outward expression of those emotions, but the music is also a character that acts and sings and participates in the drama. It is not merely an accompanying figure, especially in through-composed compositions such as Wagner’s music dramas. The music is connected into the fiber of the characters and the action and cannot exist elsewhere, as it does in film, as a thematic and emotional guide for the audience. Even for musical scenes that are not connected to lyrics such as the storm at the opening of Walküre and the forest murmurs from Siegfried, these are musical actions that the characters must react against. I disagree with Hutcheon’s non-diegetic assessment on the principle that a character must hear the music as a convention of the opera form. The music in opera does not exist solely for the audience’s benefit; it exists for the characters and the drama as well. Because the words are inseparable from the music as musical support and additional commentary in performance, the two should be approached as a unified entity. The music and words are of equal importance as texts in opera, expressing and conveying the elements of narrative, passing them back and forth, developing and maturing over the course of events.
The nuances within intertextuality that we have explored will be helpful as we approach more terms that are shared between music and literary criticism in order to better understand the associations that exist among music, words, and their combined meanings that accumulate throughout texts. The function of intertextuality becomes crucial to understanding the implications of a large polyphony when applied to such an ambitious and multi-faceted text as Wagner’s *Ring*. Understanding the *Ring’s* relationship to its originating texts as a type of adaptation will also prove helpful as we proceed to examine the associative relationships between the sagas and the music drama, in addition to the narrative influences, references, and themes.

*My theory of associations* applies the concepts of polyphony to adaptation and intertextual studies to illustrate and trace the *presence* of texts, which, in combination with other texts, results in additional meanings and revealed insights among all the texts. Laraunt Jenny writes about the interconnectedness of intertextuality: there is “a language whose vocabulary is the sum of all existing texts” (qtd. in Allen 108). These *banks of associations* essentially are the sum of what Hutcheon calls the “memory” (22) of the audience and the recognition of the “already read” text (Allen 79). Tolkien’s cauldron of story provides an appropriate analogy when considering the “sum of all existing texts” as an accessible collection and the way new texts are created. Allen writes that

[a] text is constructed out of already existent discourse. Authors do not create their texts from their own original minds, but rather compile them from pre-existent texts, so that, as Kristeva writes, a text is ‘a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text,’ in which ‘several
utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another.

(qtd. in Allen 35)

Intertextuality is a way of thinking about the already written just as the banks of associations are connected to the “already read.” The intertextuality within a text that points outward and has the potential for intertextual references later used in outside texts creates an environment rich with references that are inherently part of the adaptation process. Adaptation as a form of intertextuality already provides a framework of theory that is helpful for identifying and tracing the resonances between texts. Hutcheon writes that “[i]f we know that prior text”—an expression of the memory that makes up an audience member’s personal bank of associations—“we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly” (6). I expand Hutcheon’s use of the word “presence” to suggest that the presence of an originating work is not limited to a specific initial occurrence, but rather continues throughout the text as well as subsequent adaptations and intertextual references of a specific text. This presence differs from a physical presence that occupies space and is, instead, a textual presence that continues resonating with associations across multiple texts (intertextually) and throughout a single text (intratextually).

Just as intertextuality functions as a reference or quotation within a text pointing to an outside text, I use what Allen calls intratextuality for references or quotations of material that originate within the same text. Intratextuality is easier to identify and analyze when it appears in shorter texts such as poetry although it is also present in

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3 Very short sections of this chapter originated in several of my previous conference papers and presentations as I began experimenting with the idea of presence as applied to adaptations of Shakespeare.

4 See George Steiner’s Real Presences for the spiritual use of the term presence.
longer works such as plays and novels. In poetry, the repetition of a certain phrase, word, or descriptor—while often indicating symbolic significance—becomes a signal to those previous occurrences. The emphasis placed upon “Will” and “will” in Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 135” acts as an intratextual presence that accumulates meaning through connotations and associations with each repetition and variation upon the word.\(^5\) The “will” at the ending of the sonnet has a multifaceted meaning and set of resonances, mimicking the overtone sequence that is different from the “will” at the beginning of the sonnet. One “will” refers to a future action, the other refers to the “will” that is an intention, while yet another is the “will” that is the personal spirit and drive. Also, “will” can be the shortened term to express willingness to commit an action, and then “will” becomes a name, “Will,” which can be short for William Shakespeare, but also a personification of the personal willful spirit. These wills/Wills make up the overtone sequence above the fundamental “will.” Over the course of the sonnet, the presence of the word will/Will grows and accumulates multiple resonances: meanings, connotations, and associations. The connecting associations to the other wills/Wills in the sonnet are intratextual; the connecting associations to wills/Wills outside the sonnet—a reader’s friend named Will, the film Good Will Hunting, a note to consult an estate lawyer to write a last will and testament, or any other association that exists in the reader’s personal bank of associations—are now all linked to the will/Will in the sonnet through the intertextuality that is “the sum of all existing texts” (Jenny qtd. in Allen 110). What I propose is that the meanings associated with these occurrences are likewise transferable within the bank of associations.

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\(^5\) Many thanks to Dr. Joe Stephenson for introducing me to the sonnets of Shakespeare.
Adaptation provides many examples for analyzing the ways associations and the meanings behind them are transferred from one text to another, even the transference from different media such as a book to a live performance. Linda Hutcheon notes that those media which have a performance aspect highlight the significance of a continually remade text. Each performance is slightly different from the previous one just as each production of a Shakespeare play or Wagner opera will be different dependent upon the director’s artistic vision. Hutcheon writes:

The performance mode teaches us that language is not the only way to express meaning or to relate stories. Visual and gestural representations are rich in complex associations; music offers aural ‘equivalents’ for characters’ emotions and, in turn, provokes affective responses in the audience; sound, in general can enhance, reinforce, or even contradict the visual and verbal aspects. (23)

Hutcheon continues the conversation of Bakhtin and Barthes when posing the questions: Where does meaning go? and can meaning and associations be continued throughout the text? Hutcheon confirms that, even through adaptation and transference across differing media, the associations and meanings continue through the text and into newer texts. In extending this line of thinking, I ask if meaning and associations are extended beyond the text, not only across it, and I find that they are. Through adaptation and intertextuality, not only is material quoted in some form, but the meaning inherent in the originating context continues to resonate through associations with the originating context. This continuing presence is then carried across media and contexts, and, with each repetition, the presence accumulates additional meanings. For example, a particular thematic
element, sound, word, color, or musical phrase that is a direct quotation or reference to an originating work may be used intertextually or in an adaptation. In this case, the connecting resonances of the earlier text are strengthened enough to permeate the entire text. In addition, the connections between original and adaptation may also be broken and separated by distancing the presence through distortion\(^6\) and manipulation. I argue that on some level, all adaptations contain a presence that harkens back to an originating text and builds up or breaks down over time depending upon the adapter’s use of the earlier material; otherwise, if the material is so far removed from the originating text that no audience member can make the connection through association, the text has lost its connection to the presence.

The continuing presence is subjective to the audience member, of course. Each repetition is subject to an audience member’s personal bank of associations. For example, an initial exposure to reading Hamlet during a class assignment would trigger a presence that resonates with any personal association: seeing performances of Hamlet at a local theater or at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in London, attending Ambroise Thomas’ opera adaptation, listening to Sergei Prokofiev’s songs for Ophelia, viewing artistic representations of skulls in hands, and watching the film and Broadway versions of The Lion King. These are all examples of ways in which an audience member begins, either consciously or subconsciously, connecting the associations between and across these media to Hamlet. This accumulated presence continues to build and resonate as the audience member later encounters a cartoon comic that features two doors labeled “2B” and “Not 2B.” Similarly, in what has now become a trope that is often parodied, Yorick’s

\(^6\) Not to be confused with the negative connotations often associated with the term, distortion is used here to refer to the reverberating echoes of a text’s presence, which alter the relationship to the fundamental.
skull carries the associations of *Hamlet* through its stage presence, even when separated from the context of the graveyard scene or the line, “Alas, poor Yorick.” The associations with *Hamlet* resonate in a reference that is completely removed from the context of a play, live theatre, film adaptations, musical representations, and even character references such as the way a reader’s *bank of associations* resonates with the cartoon and makes the connections. As overtones over a fundamental, these associations are co-existent. They are a polyphony that takes form, sounding in the mind of the audience member all at once.

To determine the *presence* of a text is not to trace the originating source—this would result in search for Shakespeare’s source material for *Hamlet* as well as a call for fidelity criticism to the original, which is elusive as we have seen from Tolkien’s cauldron of story metaphor. Imagine trying to trace the originating source and subsequent resonances leading to a modern superhero movie! To evaluate the *presence* of a text, the audience member should be conscious of which texts are connecting to their personal bank of associations. The smell of baking cookies and the sound of familiar music during a holiday as referenced in Chapter II, the specific colors in an old wallpaper pattern, and the sound of a school fire alarm all become part of one’s *bank of associations* and are texts upon which associations continue to build upon the *presence*. In response to Barthes’ “Death of the Author,” the act of interpretation as well as theories such as Rosenblatt’s Reader Response have resulted in a “Birth of the Reader,” as Allen calls it (148). However, I would amend this designation to better reflect the responsibility of the

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7 I continue to use the musical language common for overtones. The overtones are said to be any pitches that exist above the fundamental pitch. Another term for fundamental would be *partial*, but I felt this term would be less appropriate for the spirit of *fundamental* as something crucial and foundational rather than having to distinguish between the connotations of incompleteness associated with *partial*. 
audience to remember and recognize the connections that exist between texts. Although it is obviously impossible to recall and distinguish among all the connecting associations that an audience member encounters over a lifetime, it is important for the reader of texts to at least be aware of the continuing presence that are enacted or activated within the reader as he or she negotiates multiple texts. This continuing presence traverses within and across texts because not only do authors and creators of texts manipulate these associations but common cultural associations and the creators’ own personal associations slip inevitably into their artistic creations. The presence can be both built up and broken down by the strength of the associations.

When interacting with instances of intertextuality and adaptation, the audience member not only experiences the new material but also re-experiences the associations of the originating material now connected to the new material. At the same time, other audience members may be unaware of these associations and connections. But for those with the originating material in their personal bank of associations, these resonances can be isolated, identified, and examined to construct new material and meaning from the connections. For example, in an early scene from the Disney-Pixar film Up, the grieving, elderly Mr. Fredrickson begins his morning routine of mundane cleaning and chores which he has developed in the aftermath of his wife’s death. The film music supporting this scene incorporates a sensuous quotation from George Bizet’s opera Carmen. When the audience experiences the juxtaposition of these two pieces of text together, they may make the connections between the ways in which these two texts are in harmony and “speak” to one another. Rather than two alternating narrative, the narrative threads of Carmen and Up occur simultaneously; both are present and create a nuanced moment of
narrative. Thus, instead of a scene where the music is recognized as subordinate and non-contributing to the action on screen, the combination of the sensuous associations with *Carmen* and the stoic actions of the grumpy Mr. Fredrickson creates a significant comedic-ironic contrast. In short, this contrast reveals an unsettled aspect to Mr. Fredrickson’s routine and even foreshadows a call to adventure that will disrupt the old man’s established order. The comedic-ironic contrast in this scene builds upon the associations viewers may have with *Carmen* either through familiarity with the opera’s music and story or through other manifestations of the “Habanera’s” presence in commercials and other media.

I propose that authors have the ability to essentially create and insert their own “triggers” into a text. Incorporating common tropes of horror or manipulating the associations commonly attributed to trauma, an author may anticipate the reaction of an audience based upon an expectation of what they may or may not have in their *bank of associations*. The author may even create a *bank of associations* within their text that will build up over the duration of the work. This is the author’s creation of an intratextual overtone sequence, designed to resonate upon itself within the audience member’s *bank of associations*. This is essentially the purpose of a leitmotif. Often, leitmotif is understood to be a thematic device that is symbolic of a character, object, setting, or emotion that is repeated to emphasize its symbolic importance. However, an author may also employ leitmotif to introduce new, or text specific, associations, revealing the author’s manipulation of the connotations that become associated with the leitmotif. In the *Up-Carmen* example, the film’s creators have constructed meaning by establishing associations between the old widower doing chores and the music of *Carmen*. Of course,
I find the example humorous because of my personal *bank of associations* and knowledge of *Carmen*. For the viewer of the film whose *bank of associations* includes only the references to Bizet’s music in food commercials, the combination of *presences* will produce a different outcome.8 This is only one example of the ways authors and other creators use the wide range of materials at their disposal, not just for the fundamental *presence* but also in combinations and developments from which additional relationships and meanings are created.

Contrary to the “Birth of the Reader,” which I feel implies that the “Reader” is an infantile, inexperienced persona in comparison to the wizened, authoritative “Author,” I propose that we refer to the “Rise of the Reader” as a period in which audience members take an active role in recognizing the artistic resonances in their personal *banks of association*. Through this conscious effort, audiences are able to make the connections between resonances that contribute to the accumulated *presences* of a text. With this information and understanding at their disposal, “Readers” identify what they find as humorous, taboo, romantic, and devastating and why, by acknowledging the *presences* built up in their personal *banks of associations*. The constructed meanings and anticipated reactions that an “Author” creates for his or her audiences can be evaluated and interpreted as understood from a personal perspective that allows for the inclusion of cultural influences.9

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9 In addition to these constructed resonances and personal conscious recognitions, we might also account for what Carl Jung calls the “collective unconscious” (59). This means that certain associations are shared and universal. Whether these have changed over time and evolved or are innate and instinctive, they are part of every *bank of associations*. Whether these are moralistic, familial, or romantic in nature, these foundational “pre-existent forms” resonate with every individual. In a way, they are the instinctive *bank of*
Used by composers and authors alike, the leitmotif is an example of the constructed intratextual presence (except when it is an intertextual quotation as we have seen with Genette’s classifications of intertextuality) that is repeated and developed. Leitmotifs have the potential to be developed in polyphonic relation to other leitmotifs and thematic material. Hutcheon uses the example of the accompanying music in *Tristan und Isolde*, which includes the love leitmotif while Isolde sings “of her hatred for Tristan” (60). The music and words enter into a co-existent polyphony of conscious voices (the sung voice, the voice of the orchestra, and the narrative voices) that reveal Isolde’s perhaps unconscious concealment of her true feelings, which opens up additional realms of discourse. Much research has been conducted on the symbolic meanings behind leitmotifs and explanations of their development in relation to the developing narrative. However, few have noted the importance of and analysis of structure and the relationships between leitmotifs and the *presences* of other material, particularly the *presences* of the originating source materials. My study involves analysis of Wagner’s source texts—the sagas—and score in order to map out the leitmotifs throughout the duration of *The Ring*. For this study, I isolate one leitmotif that occurs throughout the *Ring* and draw conclusions based upon the associative *presence* Wagner creates and assembles within the *Ring*, particularly in *Das Rheingold*. Just as Wagner utilizes *Gesamtkunstwerk* to create everything for a dramatic purpose, the relationships between libretto and music and texted and musical leitmotifs work to connect meaning through associations. Thus, I show how the *Ring* reflects a structure of creating and perpetuating associations (such as those connected to the sagas) that Wagner emulates in his music.

*associations* that creators may use to intend a certain meaning and that audiences may likewise use to perceive meaning.
libretto and score. The relationship of *presences* that interact over the course of the *Ring* cycle will reveal additional meanings constructed by the different resonating texts within Wagner’s constructed *bank of associations* for his audience.
CHAPTER IV

A TRIAL BY FIRE: ASSOCIATIVE THEORY AND THE FORGE LEITMOTIF

At this late stage in the history of Wagner studies, any would-be interpreter of The Ring faces the immediate question: “Is your interpretation really necessary?” Perhaps we have interpreted and reinterpreted this masterpiece until we are in danger of interpreting it out of all recognition. Perhaps it is time to leave it alone and let it speak for itself.

Deryck Cooke, *I Saw the World End*

With these words, renowned Wagner scholar and commentator Deryck Cooke opens his commentary on Wagner’s *Ring* with the above statement. When beginning his analysis of Wagner’s *Ring*, Cooke recognized the enormous task ahead of him: to compile a commentary that not only acknowledges the sources and context for Wagner’s work but also traces the musical and narrative connections to their meaningful conclusions. When Wagner combines two, three, and, at times, even more leitmotifs together in a scene or in a sequence, what is the significance of this musical statement? When Wagner varies a musical theme from the major to the minor, slows the tempo, and alters the accompanying instrumentation, what are the narrative implications of these changes? Cooke recognized the need for such a commentary and began the task with his first volume, *I Saw the World End*; unfortunately, he died before completing the project. Insightful and quick to point out the insufficiencies of previous commentators’ work in explaining the dramatic significance of Wagner’s leitmotivic structure, Cooke’s work begins to trace the connections that make the *Ring* the associative masterpiece that it is.
Just as Cooke called for in his 1952 essay “The Musical Symbolism of Wagner’s Music Dramas,” and then personally undertook with his *Language of Music* in 1959, the ambitious task of compiling a grammar of music certainly influenced Cooke’s understanding of Wagner’s ability to compose themes in a dramatic way—musical themes that emulate and support the necessary dramatic impetus. Cooke writes: “Wagner was only able to succeed with such an oblique procedure through his own peculiar method of constantly introducing musical reminiscences\(^1\) to evoke dramatic reminiscences, and thereby preserve dramatic coherence and continuity” (*Language* 4).

However, the question still remains: why are two seemingly unrelated and even conflicting dramatic scenarios connected by the same musical theme? Cooke chooses to emphasize the conflation of the musical theme that supports both Alberich’s renunciation of love and Siegmund’s statement as he pulls the sword from the tree. On a dramatic-functional level, Cooke sees that Wagner uses the musical leitmotif to connect the events of *Das Rheingold* to *Die Walküre* because the two end and begin, respectively, with such jarring discontinuity of settings and characters. He adds, “Since we can feel no immediate emotional or psychological connection between Siegmund’s action and Alberich’s, the connection intended by Wagner must presumably be symbolic—but what is it?” (*Language* 4). This is the question Cooke set out to answer in *I Saw the World End* and the additional volumes of analysis and commentary he planned to write before his premature death in 1976.

Even in its unfinished form, *I Saw the World End* provides the reader and scholar with a remarkable insight into the larger study Cooke envisioned. Although my thesis is much more limited in scope than Cooke’s expansive project, I see many correlations

\(^1\) *Reminiscence* is just one of the terms that Cooke prefers in favor of *leitmotif*.
between his work and the ways my theory of associations can be applied to texts as comprehensive as the *Ring*. Such a study would be, just as he intended, a multi-volume task. With the benefit of recent literary theories (adaptation and intertextuality) and the modern English translations of Bakhtin, I believe I have developed a theoretical framework that supports Cooke’s planned but unfinished musico-dramatic analysis of *The Ring*.

In this chapter, I limit my focus to one musical and literary theme as I apply my theory of associations. To illustrate the ways my theory is applicable to a variety of texts, I have selected Wagner’s *Ring* because of its incorporation of several source texts, the way music drama exemplifies the interdisciplinary nature of opera as a genre—a musical, literary, and dramatic text—and its potential to be examined as both an inter- and intra-textual text. In previous chapters, I have addressed Wagner’s *Ring* as a text that incorporates characters, symbols, and events from the Old Norse source texts and is itself an interdisciplinary text, combining music, literature, and drama into one art form. Likewise, although I have discussed the differences between intertextuality and intratextuality, I provide a brief explanation of the way in which Wagner’s libretti and the source sagas, as poetry, function as both inter- and intra-textual texts.

Wagner’s *Ring* functions as an example of containing and developing intertextual associations through its incorporation of the medieval sagas we have noted: *The Saga of the Volsungs*, *The Prose Edda*, *The Poetic Edda*, and *The Nibelungenlied*. Although he draws upon a multitude of sources, these four sagas are among those most influential upon Wagner. I will discuss these intertextual references and associations from the sagas in connection to references found in the score. Similarly, as noted in the Literature
Review in Chapter I, the sagas’ incorporation of intertextual references to outside sources such as the poetic quotations in *The Prose Edda* provides another level of intertextuality in connection to the sagas.

**Application to the Ring’s Libretti as Poetry**

This demonstration of my *theory of associations* also functions on an intratextual level. Similar to the brief example from Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 135,” noted in Chapter III, which examines the accumulating presence of overtones associated with the wordplay over will/Will in *Sonnet 135*, the poetry of Wagner’s libretti also contains resonating associations that, once identified and explored, contribute to an enriched reading of the text. In order to build closer associations to his medieval source texts, Wagner employs additional literary devices such as alliteration, wordplay, and poetic metaphors. Not only does this technique strengthen the associative connection to the sagas, it also increases the credibility of the music drama as a staged medieval saga similar to the way that Tolkien used a reference to the sport of golf to add credibility to the fantasy world of Middle Earth. As poetry, both the sagas and the libretti contain literary devices that reveal additional significant associations when examined from an intratextual perspective. Throughout the libretti for the *Ring*’s music dramas, Wagner writes in a form of poetry called *Stabreim*\(^2\) that features alliteration. Just one example, taken from *Die Walküre*, reads:

Winterstürme wichen

dem Wonnemond

in milden Lichte

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\(^2\) For more on *Stabreim* in the *Ring*, see Jeoffrey L. Buller’s “The Thematic Role of *Stabreim* in Richard Wagner’s Der Ring des Nibelungen.”
Wagner is, of course, modeling the much older style of alliteration generally found in the poetry of early Germanic and Slavic sagas such as this Old Norse example (the poetic caesura is left intact) from the “Second Peom of Helgi Hundingsbani” in Larrington’s translation of *The Poetic Edda*:

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Hér má Höðbroddr Helga kenna,
flótta trauðan, í flota miðiom
hann hefir eðli ættar Þinnar
arf Fiörsunga, und sic þrungit. (xxix)
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Wagner incorporates the alliterative poetic style for his libretti in part to begin to build an association to the medieval saga sources (Buller 59-60), creating a credible intertextual

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3 “Winter’s storms have waned / at May’s awakening; / Spring is aglow / with gentle light; / on balmy breezes, / light and lovely, / working wonders / he wafts this way; / through woods and meadows / blows his breath; / wide open / his eyes are laughing” (Spencer 134-35).

4 Here Hodbrodd may recognize Helgi, / the fighter who does not flee, / in the midst of the fleet; / the homeland of your kin, / the inheritance of the Fiorsungs, / he has conquered (Larrington xxix).
connection that also builds upon the intratextual linguistic associations found in the alliterated words within the poem.

Another literary device that Wagner weaves into his *Ring* is wordplay. One intratextual example, frequently written into the libretto for *Die Walküre*, is the association between the German word *Noth* for *need* and *Nothung*, the name of Siegmund’s, and, ultimately, Siegfried’s, sword (Spencer 138-39). Wagner combines the wordplay of Siegmund’s need for a weapon to fight Hunding with the sword driven into a tree by Wotan as described earlier in the narrative. Wagner connects Siegmund’s need with Wotan’s provision by inserting Wotan’s spear leitmotif (see Ex. 1)⁵ into the music as Siegmund sings of the promise his father (Wotan, disguised as Wälse) made that a weapon would be found in the time of greatest need.

Ex.1. Wotan’s Spear.

The associations with this leitmotif serve a dual purpose. The descending musical motif has been already established by connecting Wotan’s power to the integrity of binding contracts in Scene 2 of *Das Rheingold* (Spencer 74), but now it also acts as a continued presence for Wotan, whom we learn has earlier thrust the sword into a tree and later shatters the sword with his spear in Act 4, Scene 5 of *Die Walküre* (Spencer 166). The wordplay of *Noth* and *Nothung* for the different needs of the characters reveals additional insights into the plot development of the extended drama as Wotan both provides the sword to fulfil Siegmund’s need and destroys the sword in order to serve his own needs:

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⁵ Many thanks to Geoffrey Driggers for his assistance in preparing the musical examples.
Fricka, the goddess of marriage, insists that Wotan must abandon Siegmund, who is born as the result of Wotan’s adultery and is now involved in an incestuous relationship with Sieglinde (thus, doubly turning Fricka against Siegmund), and withdraw the sword’s powers, leaving Siegmund defenseless—in need—against Hunding (Spencer 145).

Continued into Siegfried, the wordplay upon Noth/need is evident as Siegfried, Siegmund’s son, re-forges the sword as a weapon against Fafner, who has been transformed into a dragon by the Tarnhelm. It is Siegfried’s success against Fafner that brings the ring back into narrative focus: Alberich needs the ring to resume his quest for world-dominion; Mime needs the ring to overthrow Alberich; Wotan needs the ring in order to restore it to the Rheinmaidens (although this would be if he did not keep it for himself), and even Fricka needs the ring in order to keep Wotan faithful to her. The associative connections in the wordplay continue to resonate with each exclamation of Noth and Nothung and to accumulate, building upon the needs of the characters.

Lastly, Wagner ties his libretti to the device of poetic metaphor. In the “Skaldskaparmal” chapter of the Prose Edda, which is a primer on Old Icelandic poetry, Snorri Sturluson provides a list of metaphors, phrases, and expressions for all manner of objects, characters, and narrative settings. For example, the metaphors for gold in the “Skaldskaparmal” include:

- the fire of Ægir, the leaf of Glasir, the hair of Sif, the headband of Fulla, the tears of Freyja, the utterance, voice or words of the giants, the drops of Draupnir, the rain or shower from Draupnir or from Freyja’s eyes,
- recompense for the otter, repayment for the blow struck by the gods, the seed of the plains of Fyri, the covering of Holgi’s burial mound or the fire
of all expressions for water and hands, also the boulder, rocky islet or lustre of the hands. (114)

Wagner employs a similar strategy to strengthen the Ring’s associative connections to the medieval sagas (intertextual) and also to unite the music dramas that make up the Ring into a more cohesive whole (intratextual). One example comes from Scene 1 of Das Rheingold as the Rheinmaidens react to the sudden reflection of the sun off the Rheingold through the watery depths. The Rheinmaidens sing: “Die Weckerin lacht in den Grund”\(^6\) (Spencer 65), flimmert der Fluß, / flammet die Fluth\(^7\) (66), and “der Wassertiefe / wonnigem Stern”\(^8\) (67). The \textit{intratextual associations} stem from the connection between the lyrics and the musical leitmotifs for the River Rhein (Ex. 2), the Rheingold (Ex. 3), and, ultimately, the ring (Ex. 4).

\begin{multicols}{2}

\begin{center}
Ex. 2. The River Rhein.
\end{center}

\begin{center}
Ex. 3. The Rhein Gold.
\end{center}

\end{multicols}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \(^6\) “The wakening sun smiles into the deep” (Spencer 65).
\item \(^7\) “[W]hen the river glows / and the flood is aflame” (Spencer 66).
\item \(^8\) “[T]he joy-giving star / in the watery deep” (Spencer 67).
\end{itemize}
Ex. 4. The Ring.

Wagner uses individual motifs from each of these leitmotifs, which develop into other leitmotifs, in order to establish continuity and to reflect the narrative progression of the libretti throughout his drama. The metaphor for gold in the river in *The Saga of the Volsungs* is described as the “Fire of the well” (58). This association further connects the *Ring* to its saga sources at the same time it reveals additional meanings because it associates the ring with the fires, which will eventually destroy Valhalla. Called *Ragnarök* in the medieval sagas, this calamitous battle will mark the end of the world and the death of the Norse gods.

Translated into German, *Götterdämmerung* or “twilight of the gods” is an example of another poetic metaphor which refers to the final battle. When understood as figurative language for the destruction of the world, the idea of *Götterdämmerung* contributes additional significance to the metaphor for the Rheingold as it gleams in the

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9 The nuanced meanings, correct origins, and translations of the German word *Götterdämmerung* have been discussed at length by Wagnerian and Old Norse scholars alike. The German word itself translates as “the twilight of the gods,” which has become the popular English translation of the title for the final installment of the *Ring*. Perhaps better referred to as a poetic translation rather than a mistranslation, the term has historically been connected to the Old Norse word *Ragnarök*, which translates “End of the Gods” or “Doom of the Gods” (Byock *Prose* 128). However, *Götterdämmerung* is the German translation for the Old Norse word *Ragnarøkr*, meaning “Twilight of the Gods” or “Darkness of the Gods” (Byock *Prose* 128). *Prose Edda* translator Anthony Faulkes explains that the form *rökk*r means “twilight” and that the form *rök* means “doom” and that distinction arises between Snorri Sturlesson’s use of *Ragnarøkr* for the prose sections of the *Edda* and the presence of *Ragnarök* in the poetic sections incorporated throughout the *Edda* (250). E. V. Gordon’s definitive *An Introduction to Old Norse* includes an excerpt from the *Gylfaginning*, which contains the discourse where High explains the end of the world to King Gyfli disguised as Gangleri (17). This section is labeled as “The Doom of the Gods”; however, the word found in the excerpt is *Ragnarøkr*. Nevertheless, the meaning is clear: at the end of the world, even the gods themselves will fall. George Bernard Shaw, in his treatise on Wagner’s *Ring*, brilliantly combines the sentiment of twilight with the imagery of an end or doom by referring to *Götterdämmerung* as “Night Falls on the Gods” (2).
sunlight. The listener who is aware of the combined associations inherent in these metaphors recognizes the symbolic contrast of twilight and sunlight, the incompatibility of fire and water and the subtle irony that the ring forged from the Rhein’s gold, even when returned to the Rhein, ultimately becomes the dramatic impetus that sets the events of Ragnarök into motion. Just as the epics and sagas are early medieval poetic narratives, so too is the libretto for each of the music dramas an extended poem. Alliteration, wordplay, and figurative language are each examples of ways the inter- and intra-textual associations accumulate and reveal additional meanings.

Application to the Ring as Music Drama

This thesis aims to put a theoretical framework in place for a text such as the Ring and for other intertextual and intratextual texts rich in associations. I limit my application of association theory to specific occurrences of a single leitmotif and Das Rheingold. As other scholars of and listeners to the Ring have noticed, one could argue that the entirety of the Ring’s motifs originate, develop, and are varied from the very first motif: the opening E-flat arpeggio representative of the Rhein river—water, the source of life as well as a powerful, destructive force of nature, connecting all leitmotifs as associated with this one, primordial chord. In his audio lecture An Introduction to Wagner’s Der Ring des Nibelungen, Cooke identifies 193 leitmotifs and acknowledges the near extraordinary number of recognizable and significant motifs. Thus, the associative connections from one leitmotif to another are numerous to say the least. Wagner foreshadows many leitmotifs in a way that Cooke calls the “embryonic” form of the leitmotif, later followed by what is identified as the “definitive” form. I continue using

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10 This guide was recorded in conjunction with Georg Solti’s recording, the first complete studio recording of the Ring. A transcription of Cooke’s lecture along with the musical examples he cites is provided on CD-ROM in the 2012 Decca boxed set.
these terms and also refer to sequenced, developed, extended, inverted, retrograde, and new forms of the leitmotif. As leitmotifs are built from combinations of smaller motifs (regarded in music as the smallest units of significant meaning), I distinguish between what I identify as abbreviated forms of the leitmotif and motifs.

I encounter the same issue that Cooke experiences in his study of the themes in Wagner’s *Ring*. Labeling leitmotifs is problematic because they tend to change so much over the course of the drama that they become associated with several, even conflicting, references. In fact, preferring to ignore the term, Cooke finds that the term leitmotif minimizes and separates the themes from the larger, surrounding context and contributes to difficulties in understanding the musical reminiscences as themes and phrases that are developed, repeated, and interpolated with other thematic materials. Cooke uses the terms “musical” and “dramatic” reminiscences (4) or “musical-dramatic symbolism” (10) instead of leitmotif because of the ways leitmotif has been misused by other commentators. The term “Musico-dramatic” represents more interdisciplinary borrowing from dramatic literature as well as music studies. However, in the years since Cooke wrote *I Saw the World End*, leitmotif has become a more accepted term in both literary and music studies. We will, however, maintain the spirit of Cooke’s disquiet and recognize that thematic material evolves within Wagner’s score and, thus, is not to be separated and studied in minute, isolated instances. Unfortunately, other scholars’ study of the leitmotif has evolved into a “treasure hunt” that ignores the referential meanings and developments of the thematic material. Instead, scholars locate, isolate, and determine *definitive* themes, which they then reference infrequently afterward with little regard to the meanings behind thematic combinations and variations.
Leitmotifs work to remind the audience of recurrent literary and musical themes throughout the narrative, as they connect events, characters, settings, objects, and emotions into a connected whole. Leitmotifs and their interactions with surrounding material reflect the text’s narrative, emotive, and environmental action such as the storm at the beginning of Die Walküre. Moreover, these reflections accumulate both projected and received meanings. By recognizing the associations attached and attracted to these presences, we uncover significant observations and details that we miss when studying an element in isolation. This is Cooke’s objection to the term leitmotif and, unfortunately, the direction Wagner commentaries have taken toward offering analysis and explanation for the definitive form, while disregarding the developed associations with other leitmotifs and their attendant significant implications within the narrative.

With this understanding of leitmotif and the historical tradition of assigning labels that may or may not actually be all-inclusive of the leitmotif’s thematic connections, the leitmotif I have selected for my application of associative theory is that which Cooke has labeled the “Nibelung” leitmotif (Introduction 5), but which Spencer labels the “Nibelungs and Mining of Gold” leitmotif (19). Still others such as Wolzogen, call it the “Forging-motive of the Nibelungen” (21), and Robert Donington the “Mime as smith (and forging generally)” (294). I have traced this leitmotif (Ex. 5) throughout the Ring, and suggest that if the cumulative presence of this leitmotif must receive a label, “Forging” is perhaps more appropriate and defers to its first definitive form in Das Rheingold: eighteen anvils striking the rhythmic motif for the hammering of the Nibelung by dwarves who were subjected to Alberich’s enslavement.
Additionally “Forging” also acknowledges the second definitive form (thus, illustrating a limitation of Wolzogen’s label, which does not account for the continued use of the leitmotif outside Nibelheim11), also played on anvils in Siegfried at the re-forging of the sword Noth. In serving a multi-faceted purpose, forge’s multiple meanings include the work of a blacksmith, an act of counterfeiting and pressing forward (to forge ahead); thus, this label better describes the multitude of meanings and contexts which are associated with the forge leitmotif.12 This act of forging in Das Rheingold is manifested as an embryonic example of the leitmotif early in the narrative when Loge describes the powers of the Rheingold and explains that one’s renunciation of love is the only way to forge a ring from it. However, the ring has already been forged by the time Alberich reappears in Scene 2; the audience does not see the initial forging of the ring; they are only present during the later forging of the Tarnhelm and of Siegfried’s sword. In order to symbolize this non-staged action musically, Wagner inserts the leitmotifs associated with the ring and with the renunciation of love to connect the act of forging the ring to Loge’s description.

11 Nibelheim is the underground home of the dwarfs.

12 While I disagree with the other labels used for what I am calling the Forge leitmotif, this is not a disagreement over the general context of these labels because “hammering,” “Nibelung,” and “mining” are not so far removed from basic associations connected with the leitmotif. I offer my own label in favor of a less-limiting term in order to better express the associative connections with the leitmotif that extend beyond the definitive occurrence. However, for clarity, I do not rename all of the leitmotifs that I examine in this thesis but will frequently refer to musical themes as they have been labeled by Cooke and Spencer (both of which are influenced by Wolzogen and subsequent commentators’ labels).
Motifs of the Forge Leitmotif

I have identified two primary motifs that originate out of the Forge leitmotif (as denoted by the brackets in Ex. 5). These motifs expanded into other leitmotifs become the dotted-rhythm pattern (Ex. 6) and the three-note melodic pattern of departure and return (Ex. 7).

Ex. 6. Example of Dotted-Rhythm Pattern.

Ex. 7. Example of Three-Note Melodic Pattern.

Both of these motifs are foreshadowed separately in other forms before later combining to form the embryonic and definitive forms of the Forge leitmotif. The dotted-rhythm motif is used extensively in Das Rheingold’s score, particularly in the leitmotif for the Rheinmaidens (Ex. 8) as well as throughout the whole of the Ring such as the leitmotif for the Walküre (Ex. 9) and Siegfried’s horn call (Ex. 10). Although extensive, the incorporation of motifs into other leitmotifs establishes a semblance that reflects the interconnectedness of musical themes and of narrative events similar to the intervallic relationships that connect so many leitmotifs back to the beginning leitmotif for the Rhein.

13 Figures 8 and 9 are transcribed from Cooke’s Introduction. Figure 10 is taken from the Dover score for Siegfried.
The rhythmic pattern for the Forge leitmotif places emphasis on the oscillation between dotted rhythms and straight rhythms, indicating a propelled movement forward and then a settled static pattern. The melodic properties of this leitmotif, most often found in the violas and cellos, indicate an act of repetition. The melodic line actually brings the motif back to where it started; there is a sense of departure and arrival (also bracketed in Ex. 5). This example of associative theory will examine selected examples built from and associated with these motifs and their combined leitmotif as used in music dramas, primarily Das Rheingold.

The three-note melodic motif is often used as a part of other leitmotifs such as what Cooke labels as the Rheinmaidens’ Joy in the Gold (Ex. 8) as evidenced by their exclamations of delight and wonderment in the gold. This melodic pattern is often

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14 A future project would examine associations that could be drawn between this leitmotif with the “nonsense” words that Wagner writes for these exclamations and the later cries of the Walküre, both similar in melodic theme and in “nonsense” words.
found in sequences (Ex. 11), inversions (Ex. 12), extensions (Ex. 13), and inverted extensions (Ex. 14).15

Ex. 11. Forge Leitmotif—Sequence.

Ex. 12. Forge Leitmotif—Inversion.

Ex. 13. Forge Leitmotif—Extension.


I explain in detail the associative significance of these variations later in this section, and also explore other variations throughout Siegfried, combined with additional leitmotifs, indicating the evolution of the Forge leitmotif now associated with the sword Nothung and the narrative action surrounding the sword. Das Rheingold also features other motifs that are similar to the melodic and rhythmic motifs identified in Ex. 5 and varied through sequencing, inverting, and extending. I have identified several of these as

15 The dotted-rhythm motif is obscured by the dotted-quarter note but connects to the three-note melodic motif with the tie.
part of the Forge leitmotif and noted the ways they might be the subject of future study on either a larger, unifying family of leitmotifs or as the signification of a separate, smaller motivic relationship.

**Embryonic Form**

I have identified an embryonic form of the Forge leitmotif that occurs as Loge and Fricka discuss how the gold can be used to ensure Wotan remains faithful to her. This embryonic form\(^\text{16}\) occurs rhythmically in the oboe and horn parts, melodically in the vocal, English horn, clarinet, violin, and viola parts, and dramatically in the lyrics with Loge’s line: “Des Gatten Treu’ ertrotze die Frau, trüge sie hold den hellen Schmuck, den schimmernd Zwerge schmieden, rühige im Zwange des Reifs.”\(^\text{17}\) This example (Ex. 15) is promptly associated with the first segment of Freia’s leitmotif, here played by the solo first violin (Ex. 16), and as part of the leitmotif for love and its inverse serves as a motif for the renunciation of love, which follows this exchange. Under a descending chromatic scale, the leitmotif for gold (as labeled by Spencer) (Ex. 17) is passed from the trumpet to the horn, and from major into minor, indicating a sullying of the Rheingold’s power as it becomes manipulated by dwarfs, men, giants, and gods for personal gain.

\(^\text{16}\) All musical quotations, figures, and examples come from the Dover score for *Das Rheingold*, unless otherwise indicated such as leitmotif transcriptions from Cooke’s *Introduction* or translations from Spencer.

\(^\text{17}\) “A wife might ensure / that her husband was true / if she lovingly wore / the bright-shining jewel, / which, shimmering, dwarfs have forged, / bestirred by the spell on the ring” (Spencer 81-82).
Ex. 15. Forge Leitmotif—Embryonic Form.

Ex. 16. Freia’s Leitmotif—First Segment.

Ex. 17. The Rheingold—Major to Minor.

Associated with this musical passage is the dialogue between Fricka and Loge about the ring’s powers, the identity of the person who first forged the ring, and the way the ring was made. These lyrics, supported by musical motifs, bring the associations of the ring, the Rheingold, and love associated with Freia together as simultaneously they combine with Fricka’s desire for Wotan to remain faithful to her. Wagner’s insertion of the embryonic Forge leitmotif indicates foreshadowing of later forging scenes and also signifies additional action that appears neither on stage nor in the libretto: the embryonic
Forge leitmotif as associated with the discussions of the Rheingold’s potential in this scene reveals a moment of off-stage action—Alberich’s renunciation of love and the forging of the ring, thus thwarting Fricka’s plans and perhaps even providing the audience and reader with some explanation for Wotan’s later infidelity with a human, a union that produces Siegfried and Sieglinde, as well as his infidelity with Erda, which produces Brünnhilde.

**Definitive Form**

At the end of Scene 2, the Forge leitmotif appears in its definitive form. The leitmotif is introduced (and thereby associated) with the two-note motif of descending half-steps (Ex. 19), originating from the leitmotif for the ring’s power as labeled by Cooke (Ex. 18). This association serves to remind the audience of how the ring was forged.

Ex. 18. The Power of the Ring.


This two-note motif, which is passed between the cellos and the woodwinds, is also associated with previous uses of the motif with the Rheinmaiden’s cries of “Rheingold! Rheingold!” (Spencer 66) and transitions into the dotted-rhythm motif from the Forge
leitmotif, which gradually grows within the string section (Ex. 20), once again reminding the audience of the warnings against stealing and using the gold.

Ex. 20. Shifting Forge Leitmotif Rhythm.

The rhythm of the strings here is actually a variation upon the rhythmic motif from the Forge leitmotif and shifts the emphasis one beat over for each second and third repetition, indicating the disturbing and unfamiliar world of Nibelheim. This aggressive texture builds in volume and eventually settles into the static dotted-rhythm of the Forge leitmotif joined by a solo call of the Gold leitmotif played by the bass trumpet, thus associating the other objects forged from the gold with the same ominous connotations as the ring. The gold leitmotif is then repeated, adding the trumpet to the bass trumpet (Ex. 21), and, as they play, the woodwinds play the definitive rhythm of the Forge leitmotif while the strings play the complete leitmotif, rhythmically and melodically.

After the statement of the Gold leitmotif, the sustained top note then connects to what Cooke labels the second segment of Freia’s theme in a minor form and is then passed on, continuing downward, through to the horns and then the trombones (Ex. 23).\textsuperscript{18} Since Freia is the goddess of love, her complete leitmotif (Ex. 22) represents love, and, as such, in its inversion, becomes the theme for the renunciation of love. However, even when augmented (slowed down) and changed from major to minor, this motif which is passed down through the brass and is later picked back up by the bassoons, cellos, and basses is not the renunciation of love leitmotif; it is a variation upon Freia’s leitmotif, indicating a complication rather than an abandonment of love—an association with Freia’s leitmotif we will examine later.

Ex. 22. Freia’s Leitmotif.

\textsuperscript{18} Figures 22 and 23 come from Cooke’s \textit{Introduction} and have been listed as violin examples so that the melody is more easily distinguishable.
Ex. 23. Freia’s Leitmotif—Second Segment.

The orchestra begins thinning away as eighteen anvils begin playing the rhythm of the forge leitmotif. According to Wagner’s stage directions, dark red lights begin shining on stage as the sound of the anvils crashes from all sides, which is an association that can be manipulated in performances. Eventually, the orchestra dies away entirely, leaving only the ringing of the anvils. The hemiola created by the juxtaposition of duple and triple rhythm between the eighteen anvils signifies an unease and almost clumsiness that could even be interpreted as intentional, stubborn non-conformity. This hemiola is a rhythmic and connecting association that Wagner does not use again outside the act of forging, thus bringing the associations of willful action (intentional, stubborn non-conformity) to any other motif in proximity.

As the strings return with the full statement of the Forge leitmotif, the bassoons, cellos, and basses play the motif of the augmented second segment of Freia’s leitmotif in the minor, but this time, it is abruptly truncated by the displaced octave on the third note which then resolves down, beginning the motif pattern again until concluding with the two-note motif for the ring (Ex. 24).

Ex. 24. Freia’s Leitmotif—Truncated Sequence of Second Segment.

This frustrated, abbreviated statement of Freia’s leitmotif, now associated with the ring, illustrates the connection that Freia has with the ring in relation to Wotan’s payment to Fasolt and Fafner in exchange for building Valhalla.
Associative Significance of the Forge Scene

The orchestral interlude between Scene 2 and Scene 3 occurs as Wotan and Loge descend into Nibelheim to take (steal) enough gold to ransom Freia from Fasolt and Fafner. As we saw in Ex. 20, the strings replicate this action with the descending motion of each phrase (the downward journey into Nibelheim); every other measure, however, ascends (the dramatic anticipation of drawing closer to Nibelheim and the growing sounds of hammering in the forges) through a C-flat major arpeggio (the Neapolitan of the B-flat minor key), finally settling on the seventh (B-flat) as the bass trumpet plays the Gold leitmotif, providing an aural reminder of the gods’ quest. This entire section is grounded by an F (the dominant) pedal tone in the basses and sustained in the timpani and tubas. This harmonic tension reaches the tonic (in second inversion) with the second declaration of the Gold leitmotif and eventually settles into the dominant when the eighteen anvils begin playing, indicating an arrival point as the gods hear and observe the power of the ring at work through Alberich’s enslavement of the Nibelungs. The sustained harmonic progression then departs from the dominant, only to increase the tension back toward the dominant, finally cadencing in descending arpeggios from the supertonic seventh (C, E-flat, G-flat, B-flat) to the secondary half-diminished seventh of the dominant (E-natural, G-natural, B-flat, D-flat). This harmonic progression propels the audience into Scene 3, which, instead of offering a comforting resolution, only continues avoiding the return to tonic. The gods are, after all, no longer in their home but are instead in foreign territory, which Wagner masterfully illustrates through the musical harmonic setting.
The significance of the combined associations in the definitive form of the Forge leitmotif reveals additional insights into the relationship and motives (not motifs) of the gods in their descent into Nibelheim. The prominence of the two-note ring motif and the Gold leitmotif is a continuing presence that accumulates additional meaning with each repetition. For the audience, these musical themes represent the reason for the gods’ journey and serve as a reminder of the predicament they are in—Freia has been taken by the giants as payment for building Valhalla, and, without Freia’s golden apples, the gods have begun to wither and decay. As noted earlier, the joining of the Gold leitmotif and Freia’s leitmotif, although in the minor and augmented, creates an interesting combination of associations (Ex. 21). Freia’s leitmotif is associated with love through several connections: the musical theme (Ex. 22) is present when Loge sings what Cooke calls a “hymn to love” (Introduction 14), when Fasolt sings of his desire to have Freia as a wife, and when in direct reference to Freia, the goddess of love.

However, the musical setting of this leitmotif is varied and develops from its definitive form. The shifts (already described: into a minor key and slower tempo through augmentation) alter the musical connotations toward a more sorrowful, longing type of love. The joining of this leitmotif with the Gold leitmotif\footnote{It is important to remember that the Gold leitmotif at this point in the music drama has been strongly associated with the two-note motif for the power of the ring.} keeps the purpose of the gods’ mission—to attain enough gold to pay the giants so that they release Freia—at the forefront of the audience’s mind. Fasolt is perfectly happy to keep Freia as his payment for building Valhalla, but his brother Fafner insists on gold and also convinces Fasolt to agree to receive gold as payment. Fasolt rather reluctantly agrees, and the two giants demand enough gold so as to cover up Freia completely. Yet, shortly after receiving the
gold, Fafner kills Fasolt and takes all the gold, including the ring, for himself. Through this evolution of leitmotifs from gold to Freia, Wagner illustrates the bargain and sacrifice required to attain the ring—Fasolt must renounce his claim on Freia in order to have the ring added to the hoard of gold; yet Alberich’s curse upon the ring results in his death, a rather macabre form of foreshadowing. This information revealed through the associations of the leitmotifs adds depth and even a more compassionate understanding of Fasolt’s character.

Having now been presented in its definitive form, the Forge leitmotif—carrying its own associations of the crashing of anvils, the growing red lights of the forges, and the connected associations with the minor form of the second segment of Freia’s leitmotif, the Rheingold, and the power of the ring—presents these accumulated associations with each presentation of the Forge leitmotif, in rhythm and melody. After Alberich beats Mime at the beginning of Scene 3, the orchestra once again combines the two-note ring motif with the Forge leitmotif as an introduction to Wotan and Loge’s re-emergence into the action as they begin questioning Mime. Wagner uses the associations connected with the Forge leitmotif, the descent into Nibelheim, and the quest for the ring to remind the audience of the reason for Wotan and Loge’s arrival in the land of the dwarfs.

**Continued, Varied, and Developed Forms**

A well-known adage says that to compose something brilliant and use it only once is a waste as audiences may not notice it; to repeat it three times is just showing off, and it will become trite; however, to use it twice is a subtle revelation of genius. Wagner follows this technique (although, with more dramatic flair than subtlety) by re-using the rhythmic motif of the Forge leitmotif and the eighteen anvils at the end of Scene 3,
perhaps even capitalizing upon the popularity of Giuseppe Verdi’s *Il trovatore*—which premiered in 1853 (one year before Wagner completed writing the music for *Das Rheingold*) and includes the famous “Anvil Chorus”—also performed with anvils on stage. As Scene 3 transitions into Scene 4, Wotan, Loge, and their prisoner, Alberich, proceed out of Nibelheim, back to the surface. Cooke notes in his *Introduction* that their ascent is depicted musically by a reverse presentation of the musical themes played while they descended. The ascending episode is shorter than the descending episode and is introduced by an abbreviated statement of the Renunciation of Love leitmotif in the trombones (Ex. 25). Once again, also present with the anvils is the same variation of Freia’s leitmotif, this time in the horns. This brief episode with the anvils is then followed by the leitmotif for the giants: a variation upon the dotted-rhythm motif, symbolizing the reason for descending into Nibelheim and foreshadowing the necessary payment to the giants. This giant motif (Ex. 26) in conjunction with the statement of Freia’s leitmotif in the horns further strengthens the associative conclusion of Fasolt’s love for Freia.

As mentioned earlier, significant variations and developments upon the Forge leitmotif become associated with other leitmotifs, producing additional meanings. For example, associations that connect to the sequencing of an extended musical setting of the Forge leitmotif come shortly before the goddess Erda speaks to Wotan, telling him to
give up the ring in order to ransom Freia. This warning is preceded by Loge and Froh
piling up the Nibelungs’ gold between the giants’ staves. The cellos introduce the stage
direction (Spencer 108) with the giants’ leitmotif (Ex. 26). The dotted-rhythm motif is
then adapted by the tubas into a different leitmotif with an ascending minor arpeggio that
then descends by steps, similar to Wotan’s spear leitmotif, illustrating the binding
contracts made by Wotan (Ex. 27). This development is then incorporated by the violas
as noted earlier in Ex. 13 with the minor arpeggio ascending in the triplet rhythm that
then connects to the Forge leitmotif before descending down by steps, only to repeat the
entire phrase again, sequenced up a step.

Ex. 27. Contracts.

This illustration demonstrates the ways Wagner develops phrases from different
motifs into new leitmotifs; moreover, the incorporation of a separate motif also attaches
new associations. Of course, the combination of these musical motifs symbolizes the
need for Wotan to fulfill his word to the giants by delivering their payment for building
Valhalla. The Forge leitmotif symbolizes both the gold of the Nibelungs that is already
used in payment as well as the gold that is still needed for payment—the Tarnhelm and
the ring. Wagner cleverly develops the musical symbolism for each of these aspects in
the narrative from a single motif—the giants’ leitmotif—in order to demonstrate the
continuity between the characters and their dependence upon the gold.
Only a short time later, as Fafner inspects the hoard, Loge tells him, “Der Hort ging auf”\(^{20}\) (Spencer 109). This line is supported by the Forge leitmotif in the violas, but in this case, the melodic motif is inverted, skipping up rather than down and then stepping back to the first pitch of the phrase as noted in Ex. 12. This inverted motion contradicts Loge’s statement and forces the gods to give up the Tarnhelm and, eventually, the ring just as the leitmotivic associations with Wotan’s spear and binding contract dictate that the giants must be paid in full.

Lastly, as an example of an extension upon the melodic motif from the Forge leitmotif, the Rheinmaidens sing toward the very end of the music drama, crying out for the ring to be returned to the river (noted in Ex. 14). This melodic association to the forging of the ring, in which the melodic contour ascends and then returns back down, indicating the need for a return of the Rheingold from the surface of the earth back to the watery depths where it belongs, combines with the lyrics, “O gebt uns das reine zurück!”\(^{21}\) This variation upon the Forge leitmotif only occurs here with the Rheinmaidens’ cry for the gold’s return and becomes associated with the rippling sounds of the harp, which grows and expands into six harps, establishing the emphatic need for the ring’s return, which does not occur until the very end of the Ring with Göttterdammerung.

**Application to the Ring’s Sagas as Sources**

My *theory of associations* has been applied to numerous literary texts in previous chapters, but here, I will examine several of the Norse sagas that Wagner consulted for

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\(^{20}\) “The hoard is spent” (Spencer 109).

\(^{21}\) “O give us the guileless gold back again” (Spencer 117).
his *Ring*. Now in relation to the Forge leitmotif as a literary leitmotif, I also examine the source sagas for references to forging and anvils and the associations that are present.

**The Saga of the Volsungs.** In *The Saga of the Volsungs*, like each of the other sagas I examine, the forging of the ring is not a specified action—the ring simply already exists. However, moments in the saga recount the forging of the sword used to kill Fafnir and the presence of associations connected to what we will now examine as the literary Forge leitmotif. In “The Otter’s Ransom,” Regin tells Sigurd the tale of how Odin, Loki, and Hœnir kill an otter and skin it. They later stay in a nearby house, only to discover still later that the otter was a son of Hreidmar, their host and the brother of Regin and Fafnir. Hreidmar demands restitution for his son’s death and orders that the otter skin be filled and the outside covered with gold. To obtain enough gold, the gods sent Loki, who goes to Andvari’s Fall, casts a net, and catches a pike, which is actually the dwarf Andvari. Andvari gives Loki the gold, but tries to keep back one ring and later curses it before giving it to Loki. Loki returns, and the gods fill and cover the otter skin, but Hreidmar notices one spot not covered in gold, and the gods are forced to give up the ring.

Differing from Wagner’s *Ring*, the ring in this tale is still associated with gold, but it is unclear whether this ring is forged from the same gold. Nonetheless, the ring is now associated with the blood payment for Otr’s death.

Regin recounts to Sigurd how Fafnir kills Hreidmar for the gold, threatens Regin, and then leaves to guard the hoard, now as a dragon. In the next story, “Regin Fashions Gram,” Regin tries to forge a sword for Sigurd to use to kill Fafnir. Twice, he smashes the sword upon Regin’s anvil, and the sword breaks. However, the third time he tries to

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22 A much larger study incorporating the greater number of texts at Wagner’s disposal may reveal a structure of associations in the literary texts that Wagner reflects in his scores.
forge the sword, Regin takes the pieces of Sigmund’s sword and re-forges them into the sword Gram, which Sigurd then uses to cleave the anvil in two and later to kill Fafnir and Regin. The *Saga of the Volsungs* says, “[Sigurd] praised the sword highly and went to the river with a tuft of wool, which he threw in against the current. The sword cut the wool in two when the tuft ran against the blade” (Byock 60). This statement adds to the sword’s associations, which now include both the anvil and the river, two musical leitmotifs that Wagner uses extensively throughout the *Ring*. Although the account of the forging of the sword does not occur in Wagner’s music drama until *Siegfried*, the associations with the river and anvil are foreshadowed musically in *Das Rheingold* just as the events of *Götterdämmerung* are foreshadowed in the libretto.

**The Poetic Edda.** The individual poems in *The Poetic Edda* include both the presence of the anvil and the act of forging. *The Poetic Edda* recounts some of the same events and characters as *The Saga of the Volsungs*, some in more detail and others in less, and is actually quoted at times throughout the *Saga*. “Reginsmol” recounts much of the same narrative as “The Otter’s Ransom” and “Regin Fashions Gram.” However, *The Poetic Edda* includes Hreithmar’s two daughters, Lyngheith and Lofnheith. It is Lyngheith who counsels Regin to ask for the gold from Farnir in “friendly wise” (Bellows, *Heroic* 112). The physical presence of Lyngheith and Lofnheith in this scene adds the associations of wise female counsel and familial relationships that are emulated in other ways in *Das Rheingold*. Fricka counsels Wotan against crossing the giants, but also chastises him for having agreed to give Freia as payment. The wise woman, Erda, also counsels Wotan in relation to the ring’s corrupting power and the end of the world. While not directly associated with the Forging leitmotif, Erda’s warning is associated
with what I identify as an embryonic statement of Siegfried’s Sword leitmotif similar to Lyngheith’s warning to Regin not to kill Fafnir with a sword. Erda’s warning is also associated with the Rhein and Ring leitmotifs as she warns of the ring’s curse.

In the *Edda*, the associations of the otter’s skin, the gold payment, the pike-dwarf Andvari, the river, and the ring (again, separate from the gold in that it is not narrated as being forged from the gold) are present within the narrative when Regin makes the sword Gram: “it was so sharp that when he thrust it down into the Rhine, and let a strand of wool drift against it with the stream, it cleft the strand asunder as if it were water. With this sword Sigurth cleft asunder Regin’s anvil” (Bellows, *Heroic* 113). These associations with Gram continue into “Fafnismol,” in which Sigurth slays Fafnir, saying,

> My heart did drive me, my hand fulfilled,
> And my shining sword so sharp;
> Few are keen when old age comes,
> Who timid in boyhood be. (Bellows, *Heroic* 121)

Again, in this reference more of the associations are realized in *Siegfried* than in *Das Rheingold*, but as a literary motif, the presence of the sword and its sharpness continue across the poems.

*The Mythological Poems* do not recount nearly as many references to the act of forging or to anvils. The opening poem “Voluspo,” says:

> At Ithavoll met the mighty gods,
> Shrines and temples they timbered high;
> Forges they set, and they smithed ore,
> Tongs they wrought, and tools they fashioned. (Bellows 5)
Although not connected to the sword or the ring, the associations in this poem equate the act of forging with the other acts of creation and the foundational elements of the world. Although I have not found references to the forging rhythmic or melodic motifs in the Prelude to Das Rheingold, the literary motifs of creation and the elements are emulated in Wagner’s music.

The Nibelungenlied. Of these source sagas, The Nibelungenlied perhaps has the least direct associative connections to the act of forging, and, therefore, to the Forge leitmotif. Unlike the Norse sagas, The Nibelungenlied is structured and composed more like a medieval romance, concerned with recounting battles and the details of courtly romance. Most of the associations that build up and resonate with Wagner’s Ring are limited to name association, primarily the dwarf Albrich (whose name becomes Alberich in the Ring). Although the names are similar, the two characters are quite different; Albrich is not an alternative form of Andvari, the dwarf in the other source sagas. Likewise, the similarities are more associative than direct sources for Wagner’s material. Rather than a ring of power, this romance features a cloak of invisibility and “gold from the land of the Nibelungs” (Edwards 117). References to the Norse gods are replaced by reliance upon the Christian God and attending the mass.

However, the name of the dwarf Albrich acts as an associative presence for Alberich from the Ring. In The Nibelungenlied, Albrich fights Sivrit and is forced to hand over his cloak of invisibility. Although in Das Rheingold Alberich does not fight with Siegfried, Alberich does possess the ring, which renders him invisible while he torments his brother Mime. An associative relationship exists between Albrich and lost treasure—a recurrent theme also in the Ring narrative. After Albrich loses the fight against Sivrit,
Sivrit, that fearsome fighter became lord over the hoard. . . . He quickly
gave the order that the treasure be carried and carted to the cave from
which Nibelunc’s men had previously taken it. Mighty Albrich then
became chamberlain in charge of the treasure. He had to swear oaths to
serve Sivrit as his vassal. He was ready to do his bidding in all things.

(Edwards 13-14)

While the swearing of oaths of fealty was not uncommon in the medieval romance
tradition, this reference to the oath does serve as an association to Alberich’s forswearing
of love—a dramatic invention of Wagner’s own. The necessity of renouncing love in
order to gain ultimate power has been noted by scholars as a manifestation of Wagner’s
own philosophies of power rather than as a narrative event originating within a medieval
source saga. Through this associative connection, there are links among Albrich’s oaths
to Sivrit, Alberich’s renunciation of love, and the forging of the ring. This does not
necessarily prove that Wagner used the event quoted above as a direct source to explain
why Alberich must renounce love in order to forge the ring; however, it should be noted
that in each case, after the swearing of the oath, Alberich and Albrich both experience an
increased proximity to wealth.

The Prose Edda. Contrasted with The Nibelungenlied, The Prose Edda has the
most direct associations connected to the act of forging and the Forge leitmotif. From
“Gylfaginning (The Deluding of Gylfi),” Snorri describes the origin of the dwarves and
their connection to smith-work:

Next, [the gods] set up forges and made hammers, tongs and anvils, and
with these they fashioned all other tools. Following this, they worked
metal, stone, wood and great quantities of gold, such that all their furniture and household utensils were of gold. That age is called the Golden Age before it was spoiled by the arrival of the women who came from Giant land. (Byock 22)

The dwarves arrive later as maggots crawling out of the frost giant Ymir’s flesh, whose body the gods have used as the foundations of the earth. It is later in the Edda that the dwarves become known as builders and craftsmen. In “Loki’s Monstrous Children,” they “make the fetter called Gleipnir” to bind Fenriswolf, the wolf which later brings about the destruction of Ragnarök (40).

Wagner’s Das Rheingold brings together two different narratives from the source sagas. One is often referred to as “The Otter’s Ransom,” which describes the ransoming of the gods by stealing gold from the dwarfs, including the ring, and the gathering of the hoard by a giant serpent. This story often focuses upon the events leading up to the Siegfried character’s slaying of the dragon and meeting Brünnhilde. The other narrative concerns the payment necessary for the building of Wotan’s hall. In “The Master Builder from Giant Land and the Birth of Sleipnir,” we encounter a story similar to the events in Scene 2 of Das Rheingold. It tells of a smith who arrives to build a fortress for the gods (not Valhalla, which had already been constructed) and “[a]s his payment he asked for Freyja in marriage” (Byock, Prose 50). It is later revealed that the smith is actually a giant whom the gods refuse to pay, decline their oaths, and then kill. It is this tale that becomes associated with “The Otter’s Ransom” and the Forge leitmotif in Das Rheingold.
In another section of *The Prose Edda*, “Skaldskaparmal,” Snorri prefaces his version of the “Otter’s Tale” with the forging of Odin’s spear and the forging of the ring Draupnir. Two dwarfs, Brokk and his brother Eitre, forge gifts for the gods. Eitre instructs Brokk to continue pumping the bellows no matter what until he returns to take the objects out of the forge. Each time, a fly lands upon Brokk and each time bites him harder, eventually causing him to bleed (92). This pain at the forging of the gifts, including the ring, may not have the same associative relationship as the oaths noted in *The Nibelungenlied* have with the Forge leitmotif, but there is an element of self-sacrifice and pain present in Brokk’s forging of the ring.

The *Prose Edda*’s recounting of “The Otter’s Ransom” is very similar to that found in *The Saga of the Volsungs*. In order to pay the blood debt for killing Otr, Loki catches a fish, which is actually the dwarf Andvari, who possesses a gold ring that allows him “to make more wealth for himself” (Byock, *Prose* 95-96). It is not stated whether or not this is the same ring forged by Brokk and Eitre for Odin. The narrative continues with Fafnir killing his father and threatening his brother Regin over the hoard of gold. Regin then “went to King Hjalprek in Thjod and became his smith. He took Sigurd, the son of Sigmund, who was the son of Volsung, as his foster son” (97). In order to kill Fafnir, Regin forges the sword Gram: “It was so sharp that when Sigurd lowered it into running water it sliced through a tuft of wool carried by the current against the sword’s edge. Next Sigurd used the sword to cut Regin’s anvil in two, starting from its top down to the log on which it rested” (97). The associative relationship between the sword and water is a recurrent motif that, if replicated by Wagner, would result in possible combinations in the score and libretto of the Sword leitmotif, Siegfried’s leitmotif, the Forge leitmotif,
and the leitmotifs associated with the River Rhein. However, my current analysis focuses on the associations between these sagas and the music drama Das Rheingold. Certainly a larger project would include the associations between the sagas and the entire Ring.

Each of the source sagas contributes additional insights and associations to the Forge leitmotif. Within the texts, references to the presence of characters, objects, settings, and even emotions become linked to the literary Forge leitmotif (i.e., water, the River Rhein, the ring, wool, splitting the anvil, renunciation, swearing of oaths, pain). When the Forge leitmotif is presented as a musical device in the context of Wagner’s Ring, we find similar associative connections present through other musical leitmotifs (i.e., the Rhein gold, the Rheinmaidens, the River Rhein, the power of the ring, love as associated with Freia, Wotan’s spear, and even the foreshadowed Sword leitmotif). The crossings-over of these musical and literary themes into different media, their development and variations across genres, and any similarities of structure are all revealed through the associative relationships that resonate throughout the texts.
CHAPTER V

“ALL THAT IS, ENDS”: CONCLUSION

Richard Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* has endured as one of the most studied works of literature and musical achievement. In this thesis, I demonstrate the ways that these two disciplines can be linked to uncover even more significant meanings within the text by connecting the associations between music and literature. Stemming from interdisciplinary studies, combining adaptation and intertextuality theory, my *theory of associations* seeks to illustrate the potential for recognizing an audience member’s memory of previous associations and the creative ways authors (of all texts) anticipate the expectation that audiences will respond to those associations. This recognition and study of *banks of associations* and the continuing *presence* of texts will contribute to the uncovering of additional realizations about texts that may change the way we encounter and understand texts.

I outline my theory, tracing its development from earlier projects across a variety of media and genres, and explore the possibilities within the larger area of interdisciplinary studies. My *theory of associations* is then explained in detail with examples from different media to demonstrate its effectiveness across a spectrum of texts. In my application, I analyze Wagner’s *Ring* with an emphasis upon the intratextual associations but also acknowledge some of the intertextual associations in connection to the source sagas. This brief example, limited to the first part of the *Ring, Das Rheingold*, hints at the immense scale that such a study would have if it were to
encompass the entire *Ring* along with a more comprehensive approach to the source sagas. I mention the possibilities and opportunities for additional research on this topic as well as other projects that would benefit from an associative approach.

Wagner’s *Ring* is a massive work that only looms larger the more carefully one examines it. The sheer breadth of material written about the *Ring* from musical, literary, philosophical, psychological, political, theological, historical, and mythological disciplines is a testament to the enduring quality of this masterpiece and the intrigue it holds for scholars of all disciplines. Even the popular commentaries upon the *Ring* can be classified as belonging to different schools of thought and perspectives as Cooke noted throughout *I Saw the World End* (his own summative significance perspective): political and social (George Bernard Shaw), philosophical based upon Wagner’s reading of Schopenhauer (Brian Magee’s *The Tristan Chord*), and psychological (Jungian reading by Robert Donington).

Through my associative reading, the *Ring*’s interconnectedness becomes even more apparent. My *bank of associations* theory provides audiences of texts with the framework to identify, trace, and extrapolate meaning from the conflation of multiple *presences* within a text, particularly inter- and intra-textual texts. Each reader has a personal *bank of associations* against which the continuing *presence* of other texts resonates. In the same way, the two quotations provided in Chapter II to illustrate intertextuality also illustrate this point. The inclusion of those two intertextual quotes in this thesis now connect the personal associations that the reader has with Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” and Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* to Wagner’s *Ring* and Norse
mythology. Of course other meanings can be extrapolated from this revelation according to the reader’s personal bank of associations.

Similarly, the mention of the opera Carmen in Chapters II and III began an accumulating presence within this thesis in which the multiple references were related and could be encountered as possessing some connective meaning or associational relationship to Norse sagas and Wagner music dramas. As demonstrated with Wagner’s Forge leitmotif, associative theory combines intertextual relationships with adaptation theory in response to the concept (informed by both literary and musical contexts) of polyphony and overtones.

As I have also noted throughout this thesis, the possibilities for an associative reading of a text (of any media or genre) are abundant. To me, the fields of literary scholarship, music studies, and political policy and theory provide an interdisciplinary treasure trove of associative combinations and readings of texts. However, my theory can also be employed to navigate the continuing presences found in disciplines such as the visual arts, in video games, and even in botany. As I continue testing and developing my theory, I aim to increase awareness of interdisciplinary studies and the benefits of examining a text from a perspective lens other than each individual field of study.

Lastly, Warren Darcy reminds us of Erda’s warning to Wotan, “Everything that is, ends.” And yet, there are contrasting statements of endurance from The Saga of the Volsungs that Sigurd’s name shall be known through all time in all regions of the earth; and, as Barthes asserts, the text is in a state of continued examination and interpretation. Endings and continue-ings come together, conflicting and unreconciled, and yet informative, nonetheless. Such is the power of the continuing presence that conflates
stoic grief and mundane routines with the sensuous call to adventure. Such is the power of associations and the recognition of our own consumption of texts. Such is the power of an endless ring, one moment forged upon the anvil and offered in payment to giants, the next, carried by Hobbits and thrown into a volcano rather than the Rhein, and, instead, a magical sword, pulled from a stone rather than a tree, is thrown into the water and brandished by the Lady of the Lake. Such is the power of a great cauldron of story from which only more associations are waiting to resonate and connect.
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