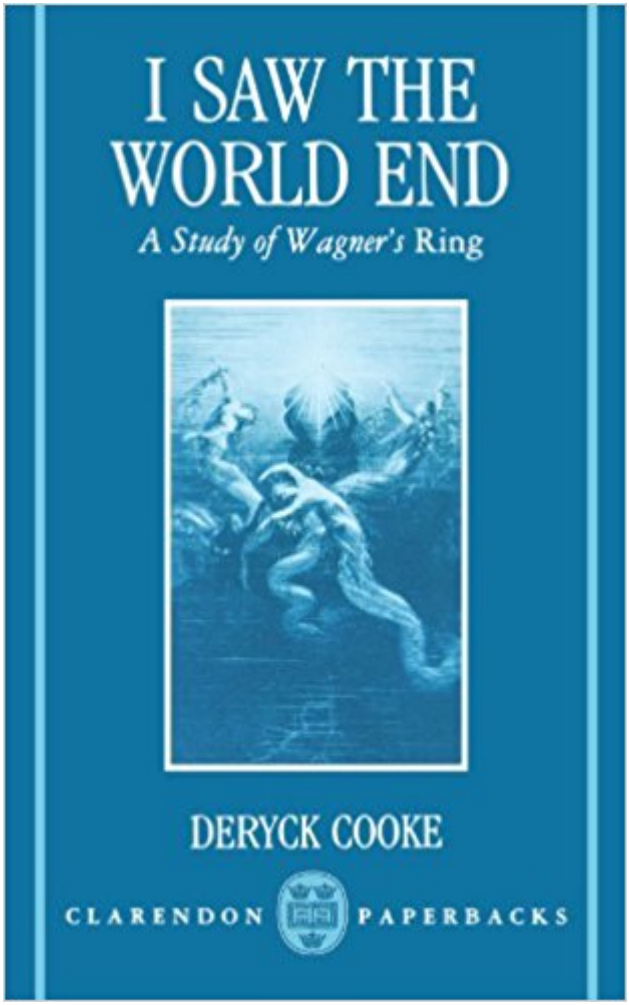
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I Saw The World End: A Study Of Wagner's Ring (Clarendon Paperbacks)



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Synopsis

Long considered a masterpiece, Wagner’s Ring has baffled and confused critics because of the highly complex meaning of its text and music. The diverse range of commentaries written on the subject since the first performance over one hundred years ago reveals just how little critics have understood The Ring. Deryck Cooke displays his masterly common sense in this study of how and why The Ring took the shape it did. This volume represents only a portion of the enormous book he had planned--his untimely death prevented him from writing a full analysis of the music. Even as it stands, I Saw The World End will give fresh understanding and appreciation to every lover of Wagner’s music.

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Customer Reviews

"An important contribution to Wagner studies."--John Warrack, Times Literary Supplement"Extremely valuable for tracing the relationships between Wagner’s sources and his libretto."--Choice

The late Deryck Cooke, author of The Language of Music, completed Mahler’s Tenth Symphony.

This book is a model of thoughtful interpretation. Cooke begins by setting out why interpretation of the Ring cycle has been so difficult. This is seen as due partly to the enormous complexity of the

work, partly due to the fact that prior major interpretations have been based on somewhat unrealistic preconceptions, for example, Bernard Shaw's social-political interpretation, and partly due to prior major interpretations bypassing close analysis of the music itself. Cooke develops a set of explicit criteria for an accurate interpretation of the Ring and applies them to prior major interpretative efforts. His critique of Robert Dornington's Jungian analysis, for example is moderate in tone but devastating in effect. Cooke defends Wagner against the charge that the plot and characters of the Ring are a shoddily assembled hodge-podge of myth. Cooke performs a careful analysis of Wagner's sources, using the same editions that Wagner drew from. Cooke demonstrates Wagner's careful and artful selection and modification of elements from German and Nordic mythology into a sophisticated and well integrated drama. Cooke's recurring term for Wagner's craft is masterly and he is correct. With this background, Cooke moves to a careful analysis of the plot and characters of the first 2 operas, Rheingold and Valkyrie. An essentially step by step analysis shows how Wagner used plot and character to advance his theme of the conflict of power versus love.The only defect of this book is that it ends with the conclusion of Valkyrie. Though this book is over 350 pages long (in a small but not miniscule font), this would have been only the beginning of Cooke's projected opus on the Ring. Presumably, there would have been an equivalent amount of enlightening text on Siegfried and Gotterdamerung. Cooke then apparently planned a major work analyzing the development of musical aspects of the drama. Listeners who have heard Cooke's excellent introduction to the leitmotivs of the Ring will have had a taste of what Cooke planned. Its truly unfortunate that Cooke didn't live to complete this project.

This really is an extraordinary book - it is the most comprehensive, insightful, and consistent study of Wagner's Ring des Niblungen. It offers some musical analysis of the leitmotivs, and is one of the first books to begin a revision of von Wolzogen's grossly erroneous analysis of the leitmotivs; it provides a plethora of highly organized information about the stages of Wagner's sketches and librettos and the original myths/legends/sagas from which he drew; and a scene by scene analysis of Rheingold and Walkure.This book actually makes sense of Der Ring des Niblungen - no easy task, as anyone familiar with the opera tetralogy is well aware. If you are interested in the tetralogy and want to know more about it, this is THE book. There are, however, two tragedies associated with this book: the first is that the author's untimely death prevented him from finishing the book (though the material printed is itself finished). The whole book should have been about three times the length of the printed material. The second tragedy is that it is OUT OF PRINT - this is absolutely disgraceful...hopefully this title will come in to print again.Get a hold of a copy of this book if you can.

One of the finest books on the Ring, if not the finest.

Excellent book.

Exactly what I wanted; a bit strange that is seemed a copy of the original book, but since it was the same as the edition that I had seen, I am satisfied.

Deryck CookeI Saw the World End: A Study of Wagner's RingOxford University Press, Paperback, 2002.First published in 1979.CONTENTSThe Unsolved Problem1. The puzzle of The Ring2. Objectivity in interpretation3. Comprehensiveness in musico-dramatic analysisThe Text and the Sources1. The nature of the text2. The nature of the sourcesThe RhinegoldScene 1Scene 2 The godsScene 2 The actionScene 3Scene 4First Summing-upThe ValkyrieAct 1Act 2Act 3BibliographyIndex==========Now I understand that Deryck Cooke's untimely death (he was only 57) in 1976 must indeed have been a tragedy - as is often pointed out by many Wagnerians - for it prevented him from completing what most probably would have been the definitive analysis of Wagner's ''Der Ring des Nibelungen''. This remarkable book is all that's left, actually less than half of the whole: only the analysis of the first two parts of the gigantic tetralogy were completed, and without the music at that; the analyses are almost entirely concerned with the characters, the plot and the numerous, confused and confusing, Scandivian and German legends and myths Wagner used as sources. The part about The Valkyrie is indeed still incomplete; those with sharper eyes would notice that the contents of the book lack 'Second Summing-up'; by the way, in a short Preface the editor of the volume (Collin Matthews) explains the omission with the too fragmentary character of the manuscript. In fact, it can be said safely that, alas, no more than one fourth of Deryck Cooke's original plan has been completed. Fortunately for us, the first part of the book goes into considerable detail about the music and the drama of all parts of The Ring. So we may, to some extent at least, have a tantalising idea of the masterpiece that the complete study would have been. Alas, it was not to be. In the same Preface, Mr Matthews perceptively remarks that this musical digression, if I may put it that way, makes the loss of Deryck Cooke to be felt even more acutely. But we really should be grateful for what's left - for it is surely among the most sensible, the most illuminating, the most penetrating and the most rewarding writings in the dangerous field of Wagnerology where more than anywhere else trashy nonsense has been, is being and will surely continue to be written.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 out of all recognition. Perhaps it is time to leave it alone, and let it speak for itself.These are the first lines of Deryck Cooke's ''I Saw the World End''. Quite sensible but perhaps somewhat inauspicious beginning. But then the author continues with the intriguing statement that since its world premiere (Bayreuth, 1876) ''Der Ring des Nibelungen'' has been subject to variety of contradictory interpretations which is indeed puzzling. For those who are completely unfamiliar with the elaborate intricacies of the plot and its implications, or with the astounding system of ever changing short musical phrases that illustrate characters, objects, events, and moods (the so called 'leitmotifs'), such statement may well seem a trifle bombastic. But Deryck Cooke makes his point in a thoroughly convincing and indeed brilliant manner: he chooses one of the many contradictory moments and then shows how three of the most famous commentators of The Ring (George Bernard Shaw, Ernest Newman and Robert Donington) attempted to deal with it. The episode in question is Siegmund's pulling his sword from the tree in the end of Act 1 of The Valkyrie while singing the theme rightly associated from The Rhinegold with renunciation of love. Why on earth should he do that when he has just fallen passionately in love with Sieglinde and 'renunciation of love' is obviously the last thing in his mind right now? Eine gute Frage. Then Mr Cooke goes on to point out without mincing words the deficiencies in any of the three aforementioned commentators: Shaw's warped socialistic view that completely ignores the episode, Newman's skillful evasion giving no explanation at all and Donington's Jungian nonsense are mercilessly exposed by pertinent quotations and completely demolished by the penetrating musico-dramatic analysis of the author. Mr Cooke finds a good many other defects in all these interpretations and he elegantly exposes them too, the most remarkable thing being the fact that he actually never lapses into rambling; every criticism of his is supported with a sensible argument and alternative interpretation obviously based on intimate knowledge about the drama and the score.(In passing it may be noted that the very first commentary on The Ring and its intricate net of leitmotifs, published only two years after the world premiere of the tetralogy and written by Baron Hans Paul von Wolzogen, does not escape Mr Cooke's sharp and perceptive pen either. The Baron's labeling and mislabeling of motifs, as well as those who blindly and unthinkingly followed him, is discussed in detail and without mercy.)In the same compellingly written introductory part, The Unsolved Problem, Deryck Cooke states clearly what is the goal of his interpretation: to operate on all levels simultaneously and to present the subject matter as objectively as possible and without any distortions. Above all, Mr Cooke is concerned with paying special attention to one factor that, he says bluntly, has been neglected by

virtually all previous commentators of The Ring, and this is the music, i. e. detailed, in-depth, thorough analysis of the score, all leitmotifs in it and how they are interrelated, developed and transformed. Here Shaw, Newman and Donington get it in their necks again - and rightly so; the first almost completely ignores the music dedicating to it only one short and rather superficial chapter, whereas the second and the third are bubbling with musical examples but rarely if ever bother to examine them with more care than naive evasions or repetition of Wolzogen's misconceptions. Together with the special accent on the music, another fascinating thing about Mr Cooke's interpretation is his determination to take a full account of the man whom is usually neglected by those self-absorbed commentators who attempt to interpret The Ring - Wagner himself. Among the criteria which Mr Cooke sets for his objective interpretation, prominent place is taken by the composer's intentions and the degree of emphasis he himself laid on any of them. The author is far from merely accepting the words of the composer in good faith, but he is determined not to miss a single thing that Wagner had to say about his creation, for ''the interpretation must either absorb it, or else give very good reasons for rejecting it.''After all, the question is not 'What meaning can we find in The Ring?', but 'What did Wagner really mean by The Ring?'Now, somehow I cannot agree with Deryck Cooke's professional credo. To my mind the greatest advantage of any art is its subjectivity. If one finds certain things in a work of art that are certainly not there according to the greatest critics (or according to anybody else including the artist, for that matter) but nonetheless affect one's character profoundly, why the heck should one care about 'objectivity of interpretation'? I certainly wouldn't go as far as to claim that appreciation of art is a matter purely of subjective feelings; I don't for a moment believe it is, or at least it should not be, for its significance would in this case be greatly diminished. But I do think the intellect, and hence the intellectual concepts that are part and parcel from art and its perception by human beings, are to a large extent if not entirely subjective, too. The more creative the intellect, the more mysterious ways it has, not to mention that it is never so very far removed from our feelings as we might wish. But all this is neither here nor there, and I am rambling. The point I wanted to make is that whatever degree of objectivity Mr Cooke's interpretation of The Ring may or may not have, whether one agrees with his observations or not, at all events ''I Saw the World End'' is a brilliantly written and marvellously enlightening way to plunge into serious exploration of Wagner's most ambitious achievement in the field of music drama.Beside the frustrating incompleteness, just two other caveats need be mentioned, even though none of them is of crucial importance.Deryck Cooke obviously took the trouble to make his book accessible to as wide a public as possible. His prose, especially considering the complexity of the matter, is exemplary and thoroughly enjoyable: succinct, lucid, amusing, always to the point and

virtually devoid of incomprehensible musical terminology. There is, however, one notable exception if you have the 'misfortune', as I do, not to be able to read music. Of course the book, or at least its first part, abounds with musical examples, and for the layman incomprehensible these certainly are. But there is something of a remedy for that. Since Mr Cooke almost always mentions exactly where the music example he is currently discussing occurs, should one be incapable of reading it on paper one can hear it through the speakers; yes, it is inconvenient but it does work. This naturally brings me to my second caveat, namely that complete recording of The Ring together with full libretto (and translation, if necessary) ought to be handy for playing in your CD player. Indeed, perhaps due to the incompleteness of Mr Cooke's study, perhaps due to the staggering complexity of Wagner's work, a certain degree of familiarity with the music and especially with the plots is highly recommended before starting the book. Believe me, it does help.Both drawbacks, so to say, of reading ''I Saw the World End'' can to some extent be alleviated by adding to your CD collection Deryck Cooke'sÃ Â spoken commentaryÃ Â on ''The Ring''. It was recorded in the late 1960s as a short introduction to the first complete studio stereo version of the tetralogy made between 1958 and 1965 by the conductor Georg Solti, the producer John Culshaw, the Wiener Philharmoniker and the best singers they could engage. Today Deryck Cooke's commentary is available on a double CD from DECCA and is no less legendary or historically important than the 14 CDs of the complete recording. For about two hours or so, with pleasant voice and excellent diction, Deryck Cooke investigates a number of fascinating relationships between some of the most important motifs of The Ring. The wonderful thing is that the spoken commentary is richly interspersed with musical examples (193 of them, all printed in the booklet) taken from the Solti's recording, or indeed recorded separately and especially for Mr Cooke's narrative; practically every word he says is illustrated musically. It is, of course, far from complete as a thematic guide, but it can serve as an excellent complement to ''I Saw the World End''. To give just one example: Mr Cooke explains both in the book and on the record the motive of Freia, the goddess of love, how it consists of two parts and how the second of this is actually something like Wagner's universal love motif that recurs numerous times throughout the tetralogy and so on and so forth. To read that is certainly intriguing, but to actually hear it musically is almost mesmerising - and tremendously helpful, to be sure. As a matter of fact, the spoken commentary is completely enthralling in itself and totally indispensable for every serious admirer of ''Der Ring des Nibelungen''. It really does help one to appreciate the amazing thematic unity of the work. Masterfully guided by Mr Cooke, the musical transformations of just one motif often span several music dramas. The whole experience gives a tantalising glimpse of the frighteningly complex and yet perfectly organised mind of the composer; namely how he

managed to unify some 15 hours of gorgeous orchestral sound, inhuman singing and highly dramatic action under the aegis of His Majesty the Leitmotiv. One is dazed and wonders what an awesome genius Richard Wagner must have been.It is also tantalising to speculate how Deryck Cooke would have finished his outstanding study of The Ring had he lived longer. How would he have managed the cornucopia of motifs in the GÃƒÂ¶tterdÃƒÂ¤mmerung for example? We don't know; but we have every reason to believe that he would have done it more brilliantly than anybody else. Unfortunately, as it is now, ''I Saw the World End'' contains very little discussion on the music of The Ring and only the intricate plots of The Rhinegold and The Valkyrie (to some extent) receive the appropriate amount of attention. The only completely finished part with regard to the whole tetralogy seems to be the analysis of the text and the sources where with his usual acumen Mr Cooke makes a very strong case that Wagner was not only a great composer but a great dramatist as well - something he is not often given credit for (indeed, he is often ridiculed about his plots - as if any opera remained in the repertoire because of its plot!). Mr Cooke investigates meticulously the disparate, often ridiculously inane and certainly very poor dramatically, myths and legends Wagner used and how he culled from them a far more dramatic and effective story than the originals; in fact, a good many episodes were skilfully invented by Wagner himself to complement the vapid mythology and render it suitable for the opera theatre. But that's another story, and one which Deryck Cooke has told in an absolutely unforgettable way.

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