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Reviews of Boorman's *Excalibur* are too numerous to recount.[1] Boorman himself emphasized his desire to convey a story of mythical rather than historical truth in his film, looking for more in the legend than "meets the eye." In an interview for the *New York Times*, he says:

> … the problems in making this sort of film are great. What do you have? Arthur, a Celtic chieftain in the sixth century of England after the withdrawal of the Romans. Do you try to explore it in a historical way? I don't think so. I'm concerned with the mythological truth, not the historical truth.[2]

Certainly, Boorman's story and his medium reflect that agenda. Both the story (the story of King Arthur) and the medium (film) are well suited to the quest for mythical truth. In his 1991 essay "Mythopoeia in *Excalibur*," Norris Lacy commented on the power of the combination of story and medium in *Excalibur*: "For those who have seen it [the film], and especially for those who know the tradition reasonably well, it is material for a case study in cinematic response, and in any event it provides a singular illustration of the power cinema has to remake even our most profoundly held myths." (131) And this power still holds, as *Excalibur* seemed to reach and maintain cult status fairly quickly, despite unfavorable contemporary critique.[3] In terms of *Excalibur* as an example of myth-(re)making, cinematic innovation and cultural history, scholars seem generally to agree with Lacy's view of Boorman as "less successful in his execution" but "highly original in his conception." (Lacy 131) For purposes of this essay, I would like to suggest that Boorman's highly original concept is most evident in an area that is often mentioned but seldom explored in depth: the film's score. In fact, the score creates a set of intriguing musical and narrative allusions that enable Boorman's myth-making to succeed in a very Wagnerian way, centered around a unique equation of the key figures Arthur and Siegfried.

The music has been discussed by many, as the score offers a musical collage of well-known and well-used (particularly in film) musical references. There are the familiar quotes from Orff's *Carmina Burana*, as Arthur leads his knights to the aid of King Leodegranz at the beginning of Arthur's reign or through a shower of May blossoms to their last battle. In addition, most critics realize that the "music incorporates Wagner" (Williams 20); indeed, the score draws overwhelmingly from the operas of Richard Wagner, including *Tristan und Isolde*, *Parsifal* and the *Ring* cycle (specifically from *Götterdämmerung*). The Wagner collage is rather awkwardly constructed and its seams show, as it were. Muriel Whitaker's withering assessment of this incorporation still represents the prevailing opinion, since the music generally warrants only passing mention. For Whitaker, the music ultimately contributes to the film's "lack of consistency" offering a poorly designed musical pastiche to support "irreconcilable patterns of allusion" and a "false analogy" between Arthurian romance and Teutonic mythology. (Whitaker 141-142) In contrast to Whitaker's assessment, I wish to assert that the allusions created between music and narrative in *Excalibur* are not irreconcilable; furthermore, the "Teutonic" analogy is not false, nor does it appear accidental. On the contrary, I suggest that Boorman purposefully creates the analogy with his score. In fact, Boorman's score for *Excalibur* proposes a relationship between film and music that uniquely mediates the Wagnerian source literature the film-maker uses as a kind of "aural" frame for his own Arthurian narrative.

This frame is perhaps most apparent in the music of the film's Grail scenes. When Boorman's Percival gets his second chance to find the Grail and answer the questions properly, having already failed once, his quest is accompanied by the Grail motif from Wagner's *Parsifal*. Wagner's hymn-like Grail motif from *Parsifal* (itself a quotation of the well-known Dresden "Amen"[4]) accompanies Percival's immersion (near-drowning) in the stream that carries him back to the Grail castle. This music begins when Percival falls into the river after the death of Uryens and after Percival encounters the mad Lancelot—who chastises him for pursuing the futile and selfish goals of knighthood, which have cost Lancelot his honor and his sanity.

Percival is helpless, carried by the current; he gradually loses his armor, his weapons, and emerges breathless in a cave clad only in his undergarments. As he loses the outer trappings of knighthood (armor, clothing, weapons) in the water, these physical changes are scored to Wagner's

motif of spiritual purity, audibly reinforcing the spiritual transformation that will lead Percival finally to become an agent of rebirth and renewal. It is then that he can approach the Grail again, he understands the question and he knows the correct answer. This is a cleansing in the water, a new baptism, an appropriately religious experience underscored by Wagner's Grail theme and informed by the associations of that theme. Then, Percival does indeed have the opportunity to restore health to the king and to the land (both hitherto depicted as spiritual and physical "Wasteland").

Critics have observed that Boorman eschews overtly Christian associations with his Grail quest; indeed, Maureen Fries describes his vision as a "unique and desacralizing version of the Grail Quest." (Fries 77) Boorman's score would seem to suggest this connection to Wagner, who similarly wished to have wished de-sacralize his Grail Quest, or to create a new religious order at the very least. Wagner's choice of motifs, however, reveals explicit Christian associations that subvert his own apparent intentions. Boorman's score definitely functions likewise in this scene. Thus, the overtones of Wagner's Grail motif connect Boorman's Grail sequence to Wagner's interpretation of the Grail story and his Parsifal's quest for salvation, both embedded in and seeking to transcend the traditional Christian narrative. (Lacy 128) The themes of forgiveness and redemption are also folded into this musical theme in *Excalibur* as the Grail melody returns when Arthur forgives Lancelot on the battlefield after the final battle (just before Mordred appears). This is, of course (in *Excalibur*'s story), Lancelot's old self-inflicted wound that has never healed—it is a lust-wound, like that of Wagner's Amfortas (and Wolfram's Anfortas, for that matter). Breathing his last on the field of the final battle, accompanied by the echo of the Grail theme, Lancelot says: "It is my salvation to die a knight of the Round Table." This statement also applies to Arthur's salvation, which is accomplished in the fulfillment of his destiny: he is to die (shortly thereafter) as king and as knight of the Round Table and as the one who saves the land from Mordred by killing him while sacrificing himself.[5]

Parsifal's score as background to Percival's quest in *Excalibur* makes the associations between those narratives (*Parsifal* and *Excalibur*) clearly unavoidable; Boorman constructs similar musical associations between Guinevere and Lancelot and Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, though the music and thus the referential frame are perhaps not as immediately recognizable. The tryst scene, in which Lancelot and Guinevere finally consummate

their relationship in the forest, is set to the prelude from Wagner's opera. In this context, some viewers may simply appreciate the "lush romantic music" without recognizing the source. For those who do recognize the musical reference, on the other hand, it may be designed to imply "some kind of parallel or conjunction of the two pairs of ill-fated lovers, or rather of two corresponding and equally destructive love triangles."[6] Using the music in this way, to connect several related narratives,[7] Boorman audibly highlights the association of Guinevere/Lancelot with Tristan/Isolde through the score. The association itself comes as no surprise, although the mechanism of the association is again revealing of Boorman's attitude toward the material and his sources: we are to see, and to hear, Lancelot and Guinevere as Tristan and Isolde. The tryst scene in *Excalibur* also offers a clear visual parallel to the scene in which Gottfried's Marke (for example) finds the lovers in the grotto and sees Tristan's naked sword between them: the place where Lancelot and Guinevere meet in the forest is grotto-like; when Arthur finds them, he unsheathes his sword to plunge it into the earth between them.[8] In *Excalibur*, Arthur's action injures the "spine of the dragon" (which holds the world together) and causes Merlin to reveal the magic charm of making to Morgana; this revelation leads to his undoing and the undoing of the kingdom, because Morgana is then able to imprison Merlin and seduce Arthur. The rest of the story/film takes its expected course. The tragic relationship of Boorman's ill-fated lovers sets the events in motion that cause a world to collapse; Arthur's discovery of Lancelot and Guinevere leads to a destructive "fissure" in the foundations of Camelot. Fries offers a compelling analysis of what she terms a "brilliant montage" in the ensuing sequence of scenes from Merlin's entrapment to Mordred's birth, emphasizing Boorman's unique conflation of figures and symbols to create a new story through seemingly "irreconcilable" allusions. (Fries, 76-77)

Lacy's assessment of the music does necessarily attach much brilliance or intentionality to Boorman's choice of score: "...whether the use of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* simply sets a romantic mood or instead establishes a complex overlay of themes pre-figuring both passion and death depends quite simply on the viewer's recognition of the music." (Lacy 131) The viewer may or may not recognize the music; recognition may add depth to the interpretation but it is not essential. Whitaker's assessment, on the other hand, ascribes an intentionality but one that is misplaced.

In contrast to both Lacy and Whitaker, and in contrast to the general lack of interpretation with respect to Boorman's choice of score, I wish to re-examine Boorman's Wagnerian allusions as an expression of Boorman's understanding and interpretation of the Arthurian legend. The analogy between Arthurian romance and "Teutonic hero tales" is not as false as Whitaker insists. On the contrary, the analogy is essential to the message of Boorman's film, a message that relies heavily on nineteenth-century interpretations of German medieval literature (mediated through Wagner) as well as nineteenth-century Arthurian literature (mediated through Tennyson). Indeed, Boorman uses the analogy to re-create in his film what Oerter would term a uniquely nineteenth-century combination of the "national and the mythic" in literature and culture.[9] This combination of the national and the mythic, weaving Wagner's Siegfried into the Arthurian narrative, is the essential message in the film that the music literally and figuratively underscores.

To hear the message, and understand the "Teutonic-Arthurian" analogy, the audience must hear (and understand) *Excalibur*'s score in a characteristically "leitmotivic" fashion; for purposes of our discussion here, I wish to draw on an understanding of leitmotif as "an orientational thread compounded of thematic substance and mental representations." (Grey 210) Wagner himself apparently preferred to talk about associative motivic networks, which would seem to apply better to Boorman's program than a more limiting term such as leitmotif.[10] The concept of "associative motivic networks" actually offers a more nuanced understanding of Boorman's program. The evocation and the application of associations are evident in the Grail sequences. By means of the melodic theme, and its cultural and musical overtones, the audience can orient itself mentally and visually toward the Grail. Thus, like Wagner, Boorman seems to demand that his audience practice a form of associative listening in order to understand the intricate network of narratives at work in his film.

It will come then as no surprise that the most revealing association in *Excalibur* involves the figure of Arthur himself and Boorman's musical (and thematic) association of Arthur with Wagner's Siegfried. In contrast to the Grail and Lancelot/Guinevere theme, the musical association between Arthur and Siegfried extends throughout the entire film, not just in key scene sequences. The "orientational thread" that leads through the entire film comes actually from the music of Siegfried's funeral march that

concludes Act III scene 2 of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung,* the final opera of the *Ring* cycle. In the remaining portion of the essay, I will argue that Boorman employs the funeral march to create a guiding concept for his film. The film can be read musically as a funeral march for Arthur, suggesting further (though this may require more analysis) that Boorman wishes to show us Arthur as Wagner's Siegfried. I will first discuss the key phrases at beginning of the *Trauermarsch.* Then, I will compare both the beginning and the ending of the film, both of which are orchestrated (pun intended) to and with the music. Finally, I will suggest that Arthur and Siegfried become merged in Boorman's construction of *Excalibur*'s hero.
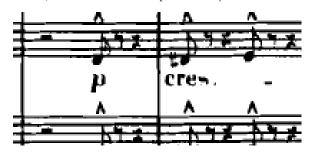
Musically, the funeral march in Wagner's opera is the incidental music to the transition from scene 2 to scene 3 in Act III; the march weaves together the themes that have signified Siegfried and his family and his story (past, present and future) throughout the previous operas, notably *Siegfried* and *Die Walküre.* Narratively, as it tells the story of Siegfried's life, the music accompanies (while describing) the journey of Siegfried's body from the location of the hunt, where Hagen has murdered him, back to Gunther's hall. The opening credits and the first scene of *Excalibur* are intentionally orchestrated to the opening measures of the funeral march; in fact, the opening lines are timed to those first measures. Thus, as *Excalibur* opens and the movie begins, we see the symbol of Orion pictures, and we hear the timpani softly begin the march:

[11]

Then, we see the following text appear (white letters on black background):

<div align="center">

The Dark Ages
The Land was divided and without a king
Out of those lost centuries rose a legend...

</div>

Then the lower strings enter alone, playing single eighth notes; each phrase of the following text appears in sequence on the screen, in time accompanied by each successive note:

> Of the sorcerer, Merlin,
>   Of the coming of a king

Then we see the title "Excalibur" appear on the screen with the the rolling triplet figure in the lower strings

and the return of the horns in the background to accompany the appropriately shimmering title of *Excalibur.* [12]

The word itself gleams like the sword the name represents and perhaps like the ring of power that costs Siegfried his life as well. In this way, the arrangement literally sets the tone even before the film begins; the musical text scores the credits and, in a very real aural sense, offers a kind of prologue. The broader allusion of the prologue is to the passing of Wagner's Siegfried, who has died with a vision of Brünnhilde before him, awating him in an eternal embrace (his last words are: "Süßes Vergehen, seliges Grauen! Brünnhild bietet mir Gruß"). The hero has been betrayed, the audience has heard and witnessed his passing, and now he is no more.

Yet the hero Siegfried lives in his (in Wagner's) music, or at least the hero lives to die in another incarnation, namely Boorman's Arthur. The triplet theme that invariably accompanies Excalibur and fate-related scenes, is the theme throughout the *Ring* that foreshadows Siegfried's doom. It is also the theme of Hagen's betrayal, as illustrated in this passage, in which four ("4 Mannen") of Gunther's retainers ask Hagen what he is doing: "Hagen, was thu'st du?" [13]

For Whitaker, the sword image combines "history and myth, reality and fantasy, water and rock" and thus it thematically (not just musically) suggests the comparison between Boorman's sword Excalibur and Wagner's ring. Because the sword represents sovereignty, "it must be returned to the otherworld when the King's reign ends."[14] (Whitaker 140) This would also seem to conform to the state of the world at the conclusion of the *Ring*-cycle in *Götterdämmerung*, in which "the element of water, the source of all life...receives the gold within its depths, making it the plaything of the Rhine Maidens and once again devoid of commercial value." [15] (Wapnewski 65) The power of the "thing" has been neutralized and the object has been returned to the environment from which it came into corrupting and unready human hands. The music from *Götterdämmerung* reinforces this thematic connection between sword and ring, between the wielders of both.

Siegfried's funeral music at the beginning of the film thus anticipates Arthur's similar fate; as the motif recurs throughout the film, the end is always in the audience's ears, as it were. The slow dirge-like beginning of the film's score, the beginning of the funeral march, accompanies the film's initial battle. Uther appears, searching. In the darkness and amid the fire of battle, Uther is looking for Merlin, who eventually emerges from the smoke and mist; the opening scenes of the film and the film score are the opening bars of the march, punctuated by the clash of metal, by the deadly noise of sword on sword. We witness the agony of the dying, the brutality of the war, the reality of the chaos. Uther's knights win the day but the scene (and the battle) actually culminate in the presentation of Excalibur, as the music makes a crescendo to the brass fanfare that heralds the appearance of the sword, the gift of Excalibur from Merlin (through the Lady of the

Lake) to Uther so that he can heal the land. Of course, that healing is a task that this king ultimately cannot fulfill. (Aronstein 155)

The last scenes of the film repeat the same musical quotation heard in the first scene, the triplet motif associated with Siegfried's betrayal and death. Whereas the betrayal motive remains fairly static by comparison (located in the lower registers of the strings, e.g. cello), it is now played by the violins, and here it is in the context of an ascending pattern; the pattern is visually evident in this excerpt. (*Götterdämmerung* 525)

One can see (and hear) that the shape of the phrase is qualitatively and chromatically different than the excerpts cited above (see p. 10). The pattern also repeats one measure after another, giving an impression of forward movement and greater energy; the crescendo also enhances the feeling of movement. It culminates once more in the green gleam of Excalibur before the sword now disappears to await the king who will come one day in fulfillment of Arthur's promise. The music continues to move forward, also shifting to a major (and more optimistic) key. The phrase reaches a majestic fortissimo with a triumphant brass fanfare (the excerpt below illustrates the scoring for horn and trumpet), as Percival watches the sword disappear, goes to find Arthur and realizes he is gone, on the barge sailing out to sea. (*Götterdämmerung* 526)

Percival sees the barge with the king on a bier, surrounded by the three queens, drifting away into the rising sun.[16] Wagner's directions for this scene suggest a similar setting, though in the moonlight rather than in the light of the rising sun: "Der Mond bricht durch die Wolken, und beleuchtet immer heller den die Berghöhe erreichenden Trauerzug"... "[A]us dem Rheine sind Nebel aufgestiegen, und erfüllen allmählich die ganze Bühne, auf welcher der Trauerzug bereits unsichtbar geworden ist, bis nach vornen, so dass diese, während des Zwischenspieles, gänzlich verhüllt bleibt." (The moon breaks through the clouds and illuminates ever more brightly the funeral procession as it reaches the hilltop...fog has arisen from the Rhine and it gradually fills the entire stage, on which the funeral procession is no longer visible, up to the front, so that the stage remains shrouded in its entirety during the intermezzo; *Götterdämmerung* 524-525). This scene sets up Siegfried's "last" journey down the Rhine back to Worms.

Given these visual and aural overtones, might it then be possible to conceive of the movie as a treatment of Arthur as Wagner's Siegfried, in which case we could hear and see the film as Arthur's funeral march? Or would one thereby invest the film (and its score) with more significance than it is due? The music, to return to Norris Lacy's comment on the *Tristan* accompaniment to the Lancelot/Guinevere tryst, may simply be appropriately somber and weighty to provide background to the scenes in which it figures. On the other hand, if we can believe Boorman's own commentary on the film, Boorman understood Arthur's story very much in the vein of Wagner's *Ring*: "The Arthurian legend is about the passing of the old gods and coming of the Age of Man, of rationality, of laws—of man controlling his own affairs." (Yakir 50)   If we allow the message of Boorman's music to direct our interpretation, the film offers an Arthurian version of the *Götterdämmerung*; the entire film is a funeral march, from Uther's king-making to Arthur's death. Furthermore, the Siegfried-murder/funeral motif echoes wherever the sword Excalibur is used in plot-essential scenes.[17] By this sword Arthur also destroys his only heir (who could theoretically, though never realistically, succeed him). The sword is also then returned to the lake to be held as Arthur's legacy for the future. This is perhaps the triumphant mood at the end. It is interesting that only at the end of the film does the score continue with the music from the funeral march (beyond the two minutes used to score the opening and concluding scenes of the film). The music moves from the ominous

triplets in the lower strings to the triumphant chords in the brass, echoing Siegfried's horn call from previous sections of the opera *Götterdämmerung* and *Siegfried* and other motifs associated with Siegfried.[18]

Nevertheless, it is always clear in Boorman's film that the sword carries the mechanism and the potential for Arthur's destruction. Arthur's fate parallels Siegfried's; the music draws attention to what one could perhaps call the funerary echo. And the funerary echo sets the dominant tone, as the themes of Siegfried's heroism certainly resonate with Boorman's in the depiction of Arthur. In a March 1981 review of the film, Harlan Kennedy comments that Boorman understood the story of the German "Ring" legend as a "kissing cousin to the Arthurian story. Both are parables of the birth of consciousness from dormant nature and of the quest for destiny."[19] Both stories, of Siegfried and Arthur, share similar themes: fate, tragic betrayal, tragic misunderstanding, innate stupidity or blindness of the hero[20] — and both offer a story of lost (or squandered) greatness personified in tragic heroic figures for whom evil lies in the place where they least expect it. Finally, in order for each hero to become what he is destined to become, each hero must perish: "Siegfried's death, ironically, is to be his salvation....he dies as his true self." And he is "aware once again of what was, and what he was, and what Brünnhilde was to him." (Wapnewski 62) Boorman's Arthur, like Wagner's Siegfried, must learn at last who he truly is; indeed, Arthur reaches a similar realization of his purpose and his relationship to Guinevere, after the Grail restores him to health. Arthur understands that he "was not born to live a man's life, but to be the stuff of future memories, " and he rides to the final battle so that future generations may have hope. (Aronstein 59-60)

When we view Boorman's film *Excalibur* and listen associatively, the Wagnerian allusions literally and figuratively (under)score the mythic narrative. Boorman himself admits "trying to do what Tolkien did, to invent a sort of middle earth, contiguous with our own but not the same. We are trying to avoid any specific look—architectural and historic style. We want to create our own period and time." (Owen 17) It is instructive that Boorman wants to create a unique period and time, because his musical references place that "unique" period in a very referential (non-unique) context, namely that of Wagner. Referencing that specific period and time, Boorman's myth-making succeeds in a very Wagnerian way.

The musical and narrative allusions resonate with a political and literary context that both Boorman's and Wagner's times share; at least the music would suggest that Boorman seems to think so. Like Boorman, Wagner was not particularly interested in the "real" Middle Ages. For the *Ring* narrative, Wagner did not want only the world of the thirteenth century of the *Nibelungelied*; rather, he sought (as Volker Mertens puts it) "those very conditions which, in combination with the Germanic gods and heroes, seemed to him to have archetypal significance and hence provided a key to interpret the present." (Mertens 246) Wagner's *Ring* was appropriated, like the *Nibelungenlied*, by nationalistic interpreters who wanted to use the medieval past to find the greatness that the present did not, or did not yet, offer. (Müller 74) Boorman's Arthur of the early 1980's is weak and unable to put his dreams of an ideal society into practice; because he cannot do this, neither can his knights. (Gentry 280-281)

Yet Boorman encourages us to seek solace and hope in the visions he invents of a mythical glorious past. In this, he is very much in line with historian Kathleen Biddick's assessment of why the Middle Ages functions so well (and so often) as a frame for a variety of narratives over time:

> As both nonorigin and origin, the Middle Ages can be everywhere, both medieval and postmodern, and nowhere, sublime and redemptive. What better material for a dream frame for popular culture, a truly relative past that can be read as either the present or the future? (Biddick 84)

This "relative past" locates both the Wagnerian and the Arthurian narrative as well. Thus, Siegfried's funeral march offers an appropriate gloss on Arthur's story, because the "*resonances*" of their stories are essentially the same for Boorman.[21] And these resonances are not medieval. The heroic deaths of Wagner's Siegfried and Arthur, and their triumphal funeral march, offer a stark contrast to the depiction of Siegfried's demise in the medieval German *Nibelungenlied*, where Siegfried's corpse is secretly brought back to Worms at night and unceremoniously dumped in front of his wife's chamber door so that she will stumble over it as she leaves for morning mass:

er hiez in tougenlíchen legen an die tür,
daz si in dâ solde vinden so si gíenge darfür
hin zer mettine ê daz ez wurde tac,
der diu frouwe Kriemhilt vil selten deheine verlac.(l.1004)

[Hagen ordered the corpse of Siegfried of Nibelungenland to
be carried in secret to Kriemhild's apartment and set down on
the threshold, so that she should find him there before daybreak
when she went out to matins, an office she never overslept.
Trans. Hatto]

In the echoes of their musically shared funeral procession, Boorman's
Arthur becomes Wagner's Siegfried as the film progresses; at the end of
both narratives, the hero/king returning from his war, as the sun rises (or
as the flames of the funeral pyre reach upward), vanishes into the light
of a new world. Wagner's scene resonates with Boorman's, as Boorman's
resonates with Tennyson's.[22]   In *Excalibur*, we see the sword disappearing
into the lake, the barge going out to sea, the queens surrounding Arthur's
bier, the large red sun of the dawn rising on the carnage of the Salisbury
plain, and Boorman's sets this scene again to the heroic strains of Siegfried's
Trauermarsch.[23] Red light breaking through the clouds dominates the final
scene of *Götterdämmerung*: "Durch die Wolkenschicht, welche sich am
Horizont gelagert, bricht ein rötlicher Glutschein mit wachsender Helligkeit
aus." [A red glow, with increasing brughtness, breaks through the layer of
clouds that has gathered on the horizon.] And the flames spread, as while
the Rhinemaidens pull Hagen with them down into the river depths;
Wagner's descriptions in the score set the scene:

 Von dieser Helligkeit beleuchtet, sieht man die drei
Rheintöchter auf den ruhigeren Wellen des allmählich wieder
in sein Bett zurückgetretenen Rheines, lustig mit dem Ringe
spielend, den Reigen schwimmen. Aus den Trümmern der
zusammengestürzten Halle sehen die Männer und Frauen
in höchster Ergriffenheit dem wachsenden Feuerschein am
Himmel zu.
(*Götterdämmerung* 603 ff.)

> [One sees the three Rhine maidens, illuminated by this
> brightness, playing happily with the ring and swimming their
> dance on the more peaceful waves of the Rhine as it retreats
> back into the riverbed.]

Wagner's men and women look to the flames, as Valhalla falls in ruin, much
like Boorman's Percival (recalling Tennyson) stares at an overwhelmingly
bright sun, as Arthur's barge sails out to sea. The imagery reinforces
Boorman's reliance on Tennyson for story and imagery highlights the
connection with Wagner as well, as both "the *Ring* and the *Idylls* are informed
by the intertwining of the universal and the national that was required to
make them meaningful carriers of philosophical and metaphysical meaning
in nineteenth-century thinking." (Oerter 294) Boorman unites Wagner's
Siegfried and Tennyson's Arthur in *Excalibur* through his use of music not
just to underscore myth, but also to make myth. Thus, *Excalibur* presents
a uniquely creative reassessment of two narratives that have had varied
interpretations throughout the twentieth century, interpretations that were
often "swinging between adulation and vilification" through political and
cultural developments in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. (Oerter
209) The score works to create a new mythological landscape by combining
the ways in which nineteenth-century Germany and twentieth-century
America inscribed their "national" heroes in their respective landscapes,
seeking to find a heroic past to give an uncertain present the hope of a
glorious future.

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1. For extensive references, see Kevin Harty's "Cinema Arthuriana: A Comprehensive
Filmography and Bibliography". In *Cinema Arthuriana. Twenty Essays. Revised Edition.* Ed.
Kevin Harty. (McFarland: Jefferson, NC, 2002) 252-301.

2. Owen, Michael. "Here Come the Swords and the Sorcerers." *New York Times* (Late
Edition (East Coast)). New York, N.Y.: Feb. 22, 1981, p. A.17.

3. *New York Times* reviewer Vincent Canby described John Boorman's *Excalibur* as "*Star
Wars* without the redeeming humor of its comic-book style and eye-popping special effects,"
noting in addition that "humorless...is not the same thing as being serious." While the
film seems to remind one of *Star Wars*, according to Canby, the main problem is that *Star
Wars* (with which it is roughly contemporary) is a better film. (Canby, *New York Times*

(Late Edition (East Coast)). New York, N.Y.: Apr. 10, 1981, p. C.11. Indeed, Williams makes a similarly unfavorable comparison to another contemporary success in the early 1980's, commenting that "the elaborate armor flashes and glitters like the robots of *Battlestar Galactica*." (20)

4. Like Felix Mendelssohn before him, Wagner made strategic use of the traditional "Dresden Amen" in order to insure his theme's religious meaning. (Kirby, 177-178)

5. Interestingly, Boorman takes Wagner's Grail ritual and places it back into the Arthurian court, though Wagner had taken great pains to remove medieval romance from his opera. (Haymes, 187)

6. Lacy notes that "This music also prepares, very subtly, the next step in the wasteland spiral, for Boorman employs a motif without parallel in Malory's account of Lancelot and Guinevere, but drawn instead from the Tristan story..." (Lacy, 124)

7. These narratives would include: the story of Lancelot and Guinevere, the story of Tristan and Isolde, and the story of Tristan and Isolde told in Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. And thus Boorman uses the score to keep the story of Tristan and Isolde in the film's narrative although the characters are not written into the script.

8. Tristan is the cleverer adversary, having placed his sword purposely between himself and Isolde so they could be seen to lie as "man unde man/ niht alse man unde wîp." (17405-17416). Boorman's Arthur relinquishes his sword in his moment of rage and thus loses his grasp of the land. Upon awaking, Lancelot cries that the king is without a sword and the land is desolate ("The king without a sword, the land without a king.").

9. Oerter presents a compelling analysis of both Wagner's *Ring* and Tennyson's *Idylls* as related examples of this combination. (3) Whitaker also stresses Boorman's debt to Tennyson , despite the fact that Malory is credited as the source for *Excalibur*. (137)

10. According to Grey, the origin of the term leitmotif and its meaning for Wagner remain disputed, since "Wagner himself neither invented or sanctioned the term 'leitmotif' for the ideas that form the substance of his associative motivic networks." (188)

11. Richard Wagner, *Götterdämmerung in Full Score* (New York: Dover Publications, 1982) 520. All musical citations come from this score, which will be referred to hereafter as *Götterdämmerung.*

12. *Götterdämmerung,* 510. This figure is the motive of betrayal, incorporated into various themes in the opera, here accompanying Hagen's mortal wounding of Siegfried.

13. *Götterdämmerung*, 510. This passage immediately follows the one quoted above, echoing the ominous triplet theme in the lower stringe (cello and contrabass) as the men and then Gunther ask Hagen what he has done (in the measures following thie excerpt, Gunther's words are: "Hagen, was thatest du?").

14. The sword represents more than sovereignty for Boorman, who expands its significance

by connecting the sword (its loss and its impotence) to the king's moral and spiritual condition.

15. In his interview with Dan Yakir, Boorman likewise emphasizes the water imagery and its psychological overtones: "In Jungian terms, the underwater reflects the forces of the unconscious and the sword contains all these forces and dangers which are focused on its point." (49)

16. This scene directly recalls the concluding lines of Tennyson's "The Passing of Arthur" (*Idylls of the King*, l. 467-468), where Percival sees the king "Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go/From less to less and vanish into light."

17. These scenes include: when Uther receives the sword from Merlin, when Arthur draws the sword from the stone, when Uryens knights Arthur in the river by Leodegrance's castle. This is how Arthur wins Uryens' loyalty, because Uryens cannot kill a defenseless "boy" with the sword that rightfully belongs to that boy as king.

18. There are pre-echoes of the funeral march when Siegfried drinks the potion that makes him forget Brünnhild, the motif of the hero and his fate.

19. Furthermore, both stories "begin with the image of a piercing, luminous object emerging from water…and go on to tell of a chosen hero (Arthur, Siegfried) waking a primitive land from its sleep of barbarism." (Kennedy, 34)

20. Wapnewski calls Siegfried "an unwitting puppet, a rash daredevil, artless and happy-go-lucky." (62) Certainly, Boorman's Arthur could also be described at least as "artless" and perhaps even "an unwitting puppet" of forces he does not initially understand.

21. These "resonances" are the essentials of myth that make myths popular and yet remain constant. In an interview with Harlan Kennedy, Boorman emphasizes this adaptability of myths as "a body of stories completely homogeneous and interrelated, yet also completely flexible…" (Kennedy, 34)

22. The "imaginative construct" of *Excalibur* reflects layers of influence, then, from Malory through Tennyson and Wagner, despite Boorman's explicit reliance on Malory (as he states in the film's credits). (Whitaker 137)

23. Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* conclude following Percival's gaze out to sea:
 Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint…
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars. ….
…[He] thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year. ("The Passing of Arthur," verses 457-469).