LEITMOTIVE

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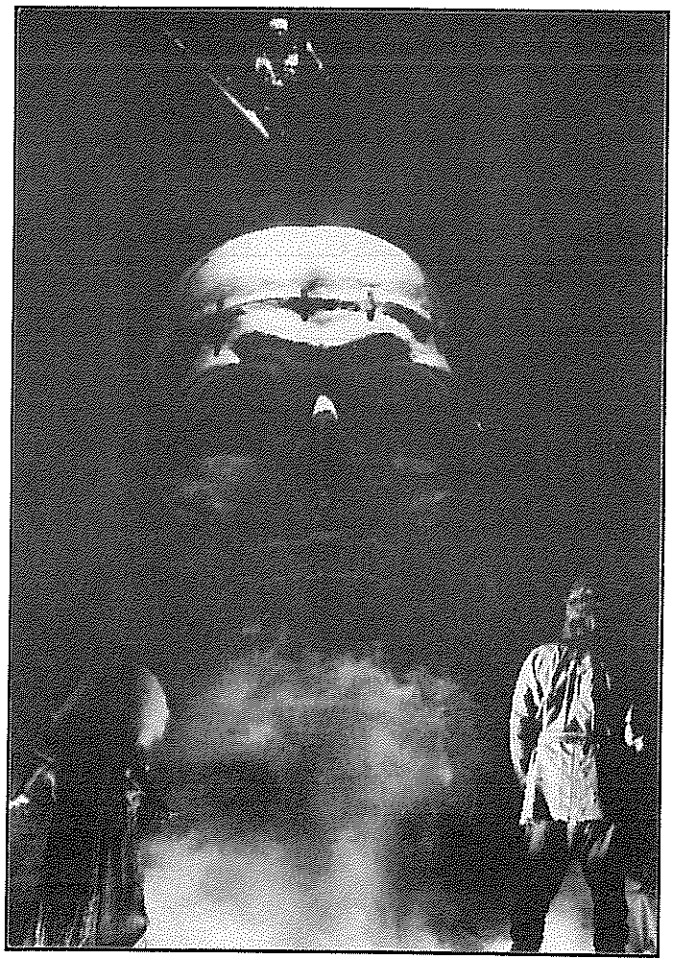
SPECIAL ALL-*PARSIFAL* ISSUE



René Kollo as Parsifal, Waltraud Meier as Kundry, and Walter Berry as Klingsor in the San Francisco Opera Parsifal. *Desgns by Pet Halmen.*
(Photos: Larry Merkle, courtesy San Francisco Opera.)

We have, many of us, recently emerged from the extraordinary, exhilarating, and exhausting experience of attending *Parsifal* twice a week for three weeks. The San Francisco Opera production may have been "controversial," but certainly the power of *Parsifal*, as music and drama, was impossible to resist. We are reminded that this last and perhaps greatest of Wagner's music dramas is also the most elusive and tantalizing. The questions it raises are not the pointed intellectual ones of *The Ring*, but rather larger and more open, often harder even to frame: What is *Parsifal* about? What does it tell us about how we may live our lives? What is the nature of redemption, and from what are we to be redeemed? Who *is* this redeemer Parsifal, and who the seductress Kundry? How are we to understand the "Redemption of the Redeemer?"

We are devoting this issue of *Leitmotive* to explorations by two of our regular contributors, Steve Sokolow and Paul Schofield, of some of the spiritual and mythical issues of the work — questions of where *Parsifal* comes from, and where it would lead us. While our space is too limited for anything like complete answers, we hope we may be of help to our readers in the life-long process of coming to terms with *Parsifal*.

WAGNER: MYTH AND PARSIFAL

TWO ESSAYS ON THE DRAMA

By Paul Schofield

WAGNER AND ARTHUR

As everyone familiar with his operas knows, Wagner wrote three dramas based on the King Arthur legends: *Lohengrin*, *Tristan und Isolde*, and *Parsifal*. However, Wagner did not use the Sir Thomas Malory versions which we as Americans are most used to. Nor did he use the Chrétien de Troyes versions familiar to the French, nor the early Celtic versions to be found in the Welsh *Mabinogion* or the old Irish legends. Wagner's sources were the German versions which he learned from Wolfram von Eschenbach (1170?-1220), and an anonymous follower of von Eschenbach who wrote a long epic on the story of Lohengrin between 1283 and 1290. Von Eschenbach certainly developed his versions from the French, English, and Celtic, but there are marked differences between all of these.

The stories are originally of Celtic origin, being found in the old Irish and Welsh myths. However, while the prototypes for King Arthur and his knights are to be found in these old legends, the Welsh and Irish versions are not the ones we are today most familiar with. Interestingly enough, many of the stories we know best, particularly those of Sir Lancelot, come from the French.

The legends were taken to France by the Celtic refugees during the Saxon and Viking invasions and conquests. In France they underwent transformation, and returned to England with the Normans in the eleventh century. Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote of Arthur in his *History of the Kings of Britain* in 1136. This work (in which, incidentally, King Lear makes an appearance), is certainly not much of a real history, but it did introduce the Arthur who is familiar to us now. De Troyes wrote his versions of the stories during the second half of the twelfth century, including his most famous piece, *Lancelot*. It was Sir Lancelot who, though a French creation, was to become Malory's main character.

Von Eschenbach, therefore, had both Celtic and French sources for his stories, though he transformed them with his own German aesthetic. His great poem, *Parzival*, was not only Wagner's inspiration for *Parsifal*, but also contained the first references to the Lohengrin story, which does not occur in the Celtic versions.

Thomas Malory wrote his *Le Morte d'Arthur* from a prison cell between 1468 and 1471, the year in which he died. The work was first published by Caxton in 1485, the year of Richard III's defeat at Bosworth field marking the end of the War of the Roses and the start of the Tudor dynasty.

Malory was the first author to codify the many disparate Arthur stories into a cohesive whole, from Arthur's birth to his death. But Malory by no means incorporated all the stories, nor all the variations that had proliferated by his time. Those of us with an English heritage may think of Malory as definitive, but he is only one of a great number of writers, most now anonymous, who produced literature on Arthur.

However, because Malory is the most familiar to us, it is interesting to note the differences between his Percival and Wagner's Parsifal, inherited from von Eschenbach.

In Malory, three knights attain the quest of the Holy Grail: Galahad, Percival, and Bors. Gawain fails because of his pride and arrogance. Lancelot fails because of his adultery with Guinevere. And of course the other knights fail for a whole host of reasons.

Of the three knights who succeed, Galahad is the greatest, and it is Galahad, not Percival, who is the counterpart of Parsifal.

Galahad is a reflection of Arthur. There are various "reflections" in these stories, a well-known one being the triad of Tristram, Iseult, and King Mark correlating with the triad of Lancelot, Guinevere, and Arthur. In both cases the favorite knight of the king is in love with his queen, and she with him. In both cases this love brings disaster to the kingdom; Cornwall and Camelot respectively.

But there is a difference in the Galahad-Arthur reflection: Galahad succeeds where Arthur fails. And it is this success of Galahad which is translated to Parsifal.

Both Arthur and Galahad are conceived through treachery; both have royal blood; and both draw swords from a stone to identify themselves to the world. And in each case, the sword is placed in the stone by Merlin.

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The story of Arthur begins when King Uther Pendragon first sees Igraine, the wife of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall. He falls in love with her, and after many events declares war on Gorlois. Uther cannot take the castle of Tintagel, where Igraine is guarded, and so he persuades Merlin to change him into the likeness of Gorlois. While Gorlois is in battle, the disguised Uther enters Tintagel and sleeps with Igraine. Arthur is conceived this night, and when Gorlois is killed in battle, Uther marries Igraine. In return for his magic, Merlin had demanded the child that would result from the union, and when Arthur is born, Merlin takes him away and gives him to Sir Ector to raise.

Galahad is also conceived through disguise and treachery. Elaine, granddaughter of the Grail Guardian King Pellam of Carbonek, is in love with Lancelot. Because of Guinevere he rejects her, but she asks Morgana le Fay to change her into the likeness of Guinevere. In this guise Elaine sleeps with Lancelot, and the child is Galahad.

Everyone knows the story of Arthur pulling the sword from the stone. But less well-known is Galahad pulling the sword of Balin from a block of marble. We will hear more of Balin in a little while, but for now it is the story of his death that is important.

Balin, who was once one of Arthur's knights, comes to a castle where he is forced to fight its guardian, who turns out to be his brother, Balan. Neither recognizes the other until it is too late, and they have given each other mortal wounds. Merlin arrives at their death and creates a tomb for them. Then he takes Balin's sword and plunges it into a block of marble, prophesying that only two knights are to draw it, Lancelot and his son, Galahad.

When, many years later, Galahad draws the sword from the marble, he is lead into the hall of the Round Table where he sits in the Siege Perilous, designated his by Merlin many years before. By these two feats he reveals himself as Galahad, son of Lancelot, and the one destined to achieve the Holy Grail.

The Holy Grail, sometimes called the Sangreal, has its origins in pagan religion, though it was taken over by the Christian writers of the period we have been discussing. I will discuss the pagan sources as well as the Christian transformation, for the pagan sources bear significantly on *Parsifal*. (For clarity, I will capitalize the word "Grail" when it appears in a Christian context, but not when it appears in a pagan one.) In *The Golden Bough*, James Frazer talks at length (emphasis on *length*) about the pagan tradition of sacred kings. The essence of this tradition is that many pagan societies world-wide sought their connection with the divine through their kings. One of the aspects of this belief was that the well-being and health of the society was directly linked to the health and well-being of its king. If the king was young and virile, the society would be strong and the land fertile. If the king were to become ill or impotent, the society would decline and the land would cease to yield crops. Of course I am simplifying for the sake of brevity, but ancient societies took this view very seriously. As we shall see shortly, the idea of a "waste land" comes from this pagan belief.

It was thus, of course, very important to guard the king from any mishap, harm, or illness. Those of you who saw the movie *The Last Emperor* saw one of the last vestiges of sacred kingship in this century. The young emperor Pu Yi cannot go outside the Forbidden City, for he must be protected from the dangers of the world. The Japanese Mikado was not allowed to touch the ground or be exposed to the sun. Our word "taboo" comes from the African word "tapu" which meant forbidden. It was "tapu" for the Chitomba, or sacred king, to do many things, as it was believed those things could bring him harm.

The king's fertility was very much tied to the fertility of the fields, and we will see later how the symbolism of impotence and desolation appears in both the quest of the Holy Grail and in *Parsifal*.

Different societies had different ways to protect the king, and different ways to retire him when he became too old. Some societies placed a specific time limit on his tenure. Twelve years, nine years, seven years, and especially one year occur most often. In the Arthur stories one knight may say to another, "Return here one year from today and we will fight," or whatever else they had arranged to do. This interval of a year has its origin in the custom of sacred kingship.

Other societies allowed the king to reign as long as he could hold off all challengers, but when he was beaten, the victor took his place, and reigned until someone defeated him in turn. Thus the society was assured of always having the strongest man as king. Throughout the Arthur stories, knights are guarding castles, fords, springs, and crossroads, challenging all passersby to combat. Often the victors stay and become the guardians themselves, and here again we see a vestige of the custom of sacred kings guarding holy places against those who have come to displace them. (See Balin and Balan above.)

There were also different practices dealing with a "retired" king. If a society had a specific term for their king, and not a system of replacement by combat, then three main futures were possible for the replaced king. He could be allowed to literally retire, and lead his own life, but this was rare. More often he was either killed, making way for the new king without fear of competition, or he was castrated and reviled. It is easy to see why an old king would be killed, but why castrated? As I mentioned before, the sacred kings were very closely allied to fertility. Part of the pagan belief-system was an understanding of seasonal cycles, and the symbolism therein, a symbolism carried out in the pagan rites. Winter brings death, after which follows the birth of spring. Spiritually, death must come before rebirth, and thus many old fertility rites involve symbols of death, such as the Totentanz, or Dance of Death. Thus the reviling and castration of the old king symbolized the discarding of the old, making way for the new, and the transference of fertility power from the old king to the new one.

In Britain during pre-Christian times, there was the old tradition of "Fisher Kings" or "Rich Fishers": sacred kings who got their name from a particular rite involving the serving of fish at a feast. These Fisher Kings were also grail guardians. As we shall see, Amfortas is a Fisher King. And the Sangreal was originally a vessel (or

sometimes a sacred stone) used in the rites of the Fisher Kings, rites which were believed to provide food and prosperity through the magical and divine properties of the grail.

With all of this in mind, we can embark on the story of the quest of the Holy Grail.

As the old Celtic, and even pre-Celtic, stories were taken over by Christian Europe, they underwent transformation from pagan symbolism to Christian symbolism. The Holy Grail thus went from a vessel or stone used in pagan rites to the cup that Jesus drank from at the Last Supper. With this cup, Joseph of Arimathea (not the husband of Mary) caught the blood of Christ as he hung on the cross. After Christ's death, Joseph brought the Grail, along with the spear which had pierced Jesus' side, to Glastonbury, where he founded the Church of Britain. When Joseph died, he was embalmed and placed, along with the Grail and spear, in the castle of Carbonek. In Arthur's time, the contemporary descendent of Joseph, King Pellam, guarded the Grail. As Elaine was his granddaughter, and Galahad's mother, Galahad was descended from Joseph. And since Galahad was chaste and had no heirs (more on this later), he was the last of Joseph's line.

Sir Balin, at Arthur's court, killed Vivian, Lady of the Lake, believing her to be a sorceress. As it was Vivian who had given Arthur Excalibur (the sword Arthur had drawn from the stone was lost in a fight with King Pellinore), Arthur considered her his benefactress, and he banished Balin. On his adventures, Balin swore to avenge two treacherous deaths caused by Sir Garlon, who rode invisible. Inquiring of people how he could find Garlon, he was informed of a feast to be held at the castle of Carbonek. As Garlon was the brother of King Pellam, he would be there. But unmounted, in the hall, he would be visible. Balin joined the feast, and asked where he might find Sir Garlon. When Garlon came over to him, Balin drew his sword and killed him. At that point King Pellam was obligated to avenge his brother's death, and attacked Balin. Balin's sword broke in the encounter, and he fled through the castle looking for a weapon, pursued by Pellam. Balin entered the room where the embalmed body of Joseph lay, and saw the spear on the wall. This, as you remember, was the spear that pierced Jesus' side. Balin took the spear down from the wall, and when King Pellam entered the room, Balin smote him with the spear. This was the Dolorous Stroke, prophesied by Merlin, which plunged three kingdoms into ruin, creating the "waste land." It is this waste land which is the subject of T. S. Eliot's poem, and the waste land Parsifal finds in the Friedrich production in Bayreuth, for King Pellam is wounded by the spear of Jesus, just as Amfortas is in *Parsifal*. And just as Amfortas must await the coming of Parsifal for the healing of his wound, so must Pellam wait for his redeemer. That redeemer is Galahad.

At this point, Pellam becomes confused in Malory with his son, Pelles, the "maimed king" (and father of Elaine). Pelles has his own episode in which he tries to draw an enchanted sword from its scabbard. The sword is not meant for him, and immediately a spear comes out of nowhere, "wounding him through the thighs." When Galahad arrives at Carbonek to fulfill the quest of the Grail, he finds Pelles there, not Pellam. Galahad touches his fingers to the blood of the Spear, and with this blood heals Pelles of his wound, which has been unhealed since it was inflicted, waiting for the coming of Galahad. Of course Pelles and Pellam are in fact the same character, the counterpart of Amfortas, and the fact that Malory confuses them (as he does others throughout the book) is of no consequence. What *is* of consequence is the "wounding through the thighs." This phrase is a euphemism for castration. The "maimed king" is castrated, impotent, and his kingdom a waste land. He is healed, and his kingdom restored, by the redeemer Galahad and the attainment of the Holy Grail. The symbolism, of course, is multiple.

Throughout Malory we find references to pagan religion mixed freely with the tradition of the French romances and Christian symbolism. Being an inheritor of the French tradition (his title, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, is of course French), Malory did not understand the pagan references. They were carry-overs from the previous centuries, and Malory was not a religious scholar. Therefore, we must sort things out for him, and then see how they relate to Wagner.

As we have seen, castration was one result of being a replaced sacred king. But especially important here, an impotent king was believed to bring a "waste land" to his kingdom. And, in pagan tradition, one of the ways in which this waste land could be replenished was through blood sacrifice, whether the barrenness of crops was believed to be caused by the king's impotence or by some other phenomenon. The sacrificial blood was collected in a vessel known as the grail, and the blood from the grail was distributed eucharistically for the redemption of the waste land. Thus Galahad heals Pelles with the blood from the spear, just as, in Christian symbolism, the world is redeemed through the sacrificial blood of Christ.

So finally we have the elements of castration, waste land, a wounded Fisher King, a grail ceremony, sacrifice, the need for redemption, and blood. We shall see how Wagner takes these many disparate elements and symbols, and fuses them into a cohesive whole.

Amfortas is certainly a "maimed king," waiting, like Pelles, for a redeemer to heal his ghastly wound. Amfortas, also like Pelles, is a Grail guardian. Monsalvat, like Carbonek, houses the Grail and the Grail ceremonies, which, as the pagan ceremonies were designed to do, give the land its spiritual and agricultural health. It must always be remembered that the physical waste land barren of crops is also a symbol for the spiritual barrenness of a people divorced from their religious practice and guidance, whether it be Christian or pagan. Amfortas has received his wound and plunged Monsalvat into decline by his failure at his office, being lured into temptation by Kundry and Klingsor.

Even though Wagner does not specifically state that Amfortas' wound is castration (in Eschenbach's *Parzival* the wound is to the genitals), symbolically Amfortas has been castrated, for he is impotent to perform the office of the Grail with spiritual conviction. And after Parsifal witnesses the one performance, Amfortas cannot do it at all.

Klingsor is specifically castrated, voluntarily. Wit-

ness the following lines:

Klingsor — (to Kundry) But I can hold you.
Kundry — You?
Klingsor — Your Master.
Kundry — By what power?
Klingsor — Ha! Since only with me
does your power avail you nothing.
Kundry — Ha ha! Are you chaste?
Klingsor — Why do you ask this, accursed witch?
Dire distress!
So now the fiend mocks me
that once I strove after holiness?
Dire distress!
The pain of untamed desire,
most horrible, hell-inspired impulse
which I had throttled to deathly silence...

As Gurnemanz relates to the squires in Act I, Klingsor had aspired to be a knight of the Grail, but Amfortas refused him. So Klingsor turned to revenge, gaining his power through self-castration, and thus overcoming a desire he could not defeat earlier. Certainly we see the theme of renouncing love in return for power. Klingsor has done exactly what Alberich had done, though by different means. It is interesting to note that in Malory, Sir Percival at one point narrowly avoids and defeats sexual temptation. As penance, he takes his sword and stabs himself "in the thigh." Here Percival has castrated himself in service to the quest of the Grail so that he will not again be tempted. Malory makes no more of Percival's action, for he probably did not understand its significance. But there again is the castration reference.

And this brings us to the question of chastity in spiritual quest.

In Malory, Galahad and Percival are chaste. Bors has intercourse only once, when he is drugged and bedded with a particular queen who is childless. The purpose of the whole affair is to produce a child, but afterwards Bors lives a chaste life. In Malory's version, chastity is a prerequisite for attaining the Grail.

In *Parsifal*, chastity is also a requirement, except for the king in marriage. (Amfortas is the son of Titurel, and Lohengrin the son of Parsifal.) Sexual temptation is the implement of Klingsor, and it is the entrapment in this temptation which ruins Amfortas. And it is the ability and willingness to resist this temptation which allows Parsifal to defeat and destroy Klingsor.

Before we close this discussion, we should see what happens to Galahad, Percival, and Bors.

After healing Pelles, Galahad performs a Grail Mass in Carbonek, then, by the order of the spirit of Joseph of Arimathea, takes the Grail and the Spear away from Britain to the holy city of Sarras. As Joseph tells him, the people of Britain have turned too far away from the way of God, and no longer deserve to have the Grail in their land. Galahad takes Percival and Bors with him, and the light goes out in the realm of Logres (the spiritual name for Britain).

Galahad serves as king of Sarras for one year (here again we see sacred kingship), and then is taken up into Heaven. The kingship of the city is offered to Percival, but he declines, and lives for two years as a hermit before dying. Bors, upon the death of Galahad, returns to Arthur's court with the news of the attainment of the Grail and the death of Galahad. And then the final events begin at Camelot which lead to the death of Arthur.

One final note. It is Percival's chastity which precludes the appearance of the character of Lohengrin from Malory. But in the French versions, Percival does not retire to a hermitage. He marries the Grail maiden Blanchfleur, and they live together as a last beacon in a dark world. In the German stories, they have a son, Lohengrin, who carries on the tradition of the Grail knights.

WAGNER AND REDEMPTION

In *Parsifal*, Wagner is not simply essaying myth for its own sake. At all times he is molding the myths he uses to his own purpose. He is not just telling an old story because he likes it, but because he sees the chance to communicate deep levels of meaning through the telling of that story. One of the aspects of his art that makes him so powerful is his ability to work on a multiplicity of levels simultaneously. In *The Ring*, for example, we have the psychological, emotional, political, social, economic, spiritual, artistic, and more happening all at once, and Wagner is able to do this through the use of myth. Myth allows not only a prolific use of symbols, but also a freedom from specific time and place which permits both author and audience to reach into the universal, gazing with heightened insight into the source of life and creation. The Greek tragedians knew this very well, and so did Wagner.

It is this quality which distinguishes the works of Wagner from most other operas. Whether or not they can articulate it, people feel that there is something different about Wagner, something which can excite, offend, inspire, scare, overwhelm, or confuse, depending on the individual person. Often people will say, "I love Wagner," or "I hate Wagner," without being able to explain why. All they know is that his music affects them differently than most other music does.

To trace the creative source of Wagner's art (and I say "art" because music alone is not all of it), we can begin with a seemingly simple question: what are Wagner's operas *about*?

Anyone even slightly familiar with them can trace the stories of the operas, but this is not all they are about. *Carmen* is about Carmen, *Aida* is about Aida, but *Parsifal*, for example, is not just about Parsifal.

To answer this question, we can borrow an idea from Schopenhauer. Until his philosophical work *The World as Will and Representation* was published, drama, and specifically tragedy, was considered the greatest art form. But Schopenhauer introduced a new idea. In his work, "will" is not the individual, human will, but rather the "life force" or "creative force" of the universe. And Schopenhauer argues that music is the greatest of all art forms because whereas other arts are representations of objects of the will, music is a representation of the will itself.

If we borrow and slightly transform this idea, we can

say that most other operas are about certain aspects of life, but Wagner's operas are about life itself. And to borrow a phrase from Thomas Mann, we can say that Wagner's works are about "the difficulty and nobility of being human."

This is what sets Wagner apart. At all times he is concerned with life in all its aspects, seeking a universal vision of what it means to be human. And central to his question of humanity is the quest for redemption.

From *Der Fliegende Holländer* to *Parsifal*, Wagner is concerned with redemption. And he is concerned not only with the spiritual question of attaining redemption, but also the artistic problem of communicating through art the way to redemption.

Much has been made of Schopenhauer's influence on Wagner. But it must be remembered that Wagner did not read Schopenhauer until 1854. Before that year, *Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and the libretto to *The Ring* had all been completed. Wagner made some alterations in the poem of *The Ring* later on, but they were dramaturgical changes, not philosophical ones. Wagner, after reading Schopenhauer, proclaimed himself a disciple, but in real fact he never was. Not, at least, in his music. Schopenhauer, with his very incomplete understanding of Hinduism and Buddhism, came to the conclusion that the highest attainment could only be a denial of the will to live and a complete renunciation of the world and its desires. Schopenhauer was close, but ultimately he missed, for he saw redemption as cessation when in fact true redemption is regeneration. And it was this last insight that Wagner was able to grasp.

But he did not get it right away. Indeed, we might say that it took him forty years — the time difference between *Holländer* and *Parsifal*.

There are four main avenues to redemption in the operas leading up to *Parsifal*. The one everybody knows is the theme of redemption through love. This theme, in one form or another, is present in all his operas. The second way to redemption is through the sacrifice of one for the salvation of another. This theme is present in *Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Götterdämmerung* and *Meistersinger*. The third, present in *Lohengrin*, is divine intervention. And the fourth way, present in *Tristan*, is the abandonment of the self through love. Let's see how each of these paths works in the various operas.

In *Der Fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*, Wagner's first two operas (I am here not counting his first three "youth" operas), redemption is accomplished not through love itself, but through the actual sacrifice of one person for another. Senta dies to release the Dutchman from his curse, and Elizabeth dies for the love of Tannhäuser, who realizes the purity of spiritual love upon seeing her funeral procession. In *Götterdämmerung*, Brünnhilde sacrifices herself for the redemption of the ring and the final purging of the world. In all three cases, redemption has been gained by someone's death, and this, over the years, was not satisfactory for Wagner.

There is also sacrifice in *Lohengrin* and *Die Meistersinger*. In the latter, Sachs sacrifices his own love for Eva so that she and Walther can marry. And in *Lohengrin*, Brabant is redeemed only through the sacrifice of Elsa and the love she shares with Lohengrin. In this opera Wagner also introduces the theme of divine intervention. Lohengrin is from another world, a superior world to this one, and it is his intervention which helps to save Brabant from evil. But as time went on, Wagner was no more satisfied with the theme of intervention than he was with sacrifice. For Wagner, redemption had to be an act of free will, not an imposition of the will of one over the wills of others. We will see more on this shortly.

In his youth, Wagner believed in the redemptive power of romantic love. We just saw how this belief was manifested in his first three operas, but it came to final flower in *Tristan und Isolde*. To quote from a letter Wagner wrote in 1854:

> The highest satisfaction of individual egoism is to be found in its total abandonment, and this is something which human beings can achieve only through love; but the true human being is both man and woman, and only in the union of man and woman does the true human being exist.

Here we see the seeds of *Tristan*. Wagner saw the union of man and woman, both sexually and spiritually, as the creative act of the universe, the act which gives completeness to the human being and which makes possible the regeneration necessary for redemption. In this act is the extinction of the separate self and the rebirth of the spiritual self.

But, as Wagner eventually recognized, there is an inherent flaw in this path to redemption.

Tristan and Isolde want only to lose themselves in each other. They want to blot out the world and live in their own world of love. They want to merge their identities into each other, dwelling forever in an eternal night of love. But this of course is impossible. Throughout the opera, they are tormented by the disparity between the blissful state they seek with each other and the realities of the outside world. They try to escape from the outside world into a world of their own, but they cannot; the outside world closes in on them and destroys them. And when they finally do merge permanently, it is again in death, not life. They cannot redeem themselves, much less the world.

The same thing happens in *The Ring*. Romantic love makes a great, heroic attempt at redeeming the dark world in which it finds itself, but it is again overcome by forces it does not know how to counter.

One person in Bayreuth this past summer said to me, "*The Ring* is about redemption through love." However, this is emphatically *not* really what *The Ring* is about at all. Love does not redeem anything in *The Ring*. Love is conquered and destroyed by the machinations of power. Siegmund is killed by his father; Siegfried is stabbed in the back by Hagen. Love offers an alternate way to the quest for power. It reveals the evil of that quest, and provides moments of light in the dark world of power, but it does not redeem. We might say that nature is redeemed, that the ring goes back to the Rhine. But this is accomplished through the sacrifice of Brünnhilde, not through love. And if Brünnhilde and Siegfried do find final union, it is once again in death, not in life.

If we examine the love between Brünnhilde and Siegfried, we find that it is a very selfish love. Very passionate, very strong, very radiant, yes; but also very selfish. Neither character ever tries to really feel what the other is feeling. They are concerned with their own feelings. This is true not only on the rock, but especially in the Gibichung hall. Brünnhilde never once tries to understand what might have happened to Siegfried. She is so possessed by her own hurt that she can think only of revenge and Siegfried's death. In the great scene of the spear point, each is concerned only with his or her honor. No one is redeemed.

How else is redemption at work in *The Ring*? We have seen that love and sacrifice are not true redeemers. In some cases they may redeem individuals, but certainly not the world.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, what is called *Transcendentalism* was a major philosophical and artistic force. There were many aspects to Transcendentalism, but one of the main ones was that value came into the world through the creative process of art, and that it was up to the artist, who had the true vision of the world, to redeem man and society. It must be remembered that the failure of the French Revolution and the collapse of the Enlightenment produced profound changes in the thinking of European artists and intellectuals. No longer was the artist a servant of a society he believed in and had hope for. Rather, he was alienated from his society, perceiving it to be unenlightened and headed for destruction unless a fresh view could be found. No longer did people believe that redemption could come through society, but rather that society was in need of redemption itself.

Artists looked at their own contemporary society and saw only unenlightenment. With the defeat of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the Bourbon monarchy was restored and European politics set back to pre-French Revolutionary conditions. The political, economic, and social tensions this produced erupted in the revolutions of 1848-9 (in which Wagner took part in Dresden), and when these failed, Europe began its march toward the era of Bismarck and the ensuing rise of militaristic nationalism which was to produce World War I. Artists saw a society doomed by its desire for nothing but power and wealth.

So the idea of the artist as redeemer was very attractive to the artistic world of this time. Inherent in this notion of the redeemer was that society could still be redeemed. Wagner saw otherwise.

One tenet of Transcendentalism was that the imposition of the will of one over the will of another brings only evil and disorder, and it was this imposition that artists saw as being at the foundation of society's ills. The Church imposed its will over the people of Europe; governments imposed their wills over their subjects; the rich imposed their will over the poor. A redeemer was needed who could bring a vision to society where each person was an agent of his or her own free will, where value was brought into the world not by the quest for wealth and authority, but by acts of pure creation.

If this sounds familiar, it is because this is the world of *The Ring*.

But Wagner went a step beyond the Transcendentalism of his time, with a number of devastating insights. He saw that society could not be redeemed, because it did not *want* to be redeemed. Society did not want the artists' view of the world. And here he found the fatal flaw in the Transcendentalist viewpoint: *for the artists to impose their will over the will of society was to commit the same violation they saw society being guilty of itself.* And his final insight is chilling when we see the course of later European history: power cannot be completely effective unless it is absolute, and absolute power can never be morally responsible.

In the world of *The Ring*, Wotan and Alberich both aim for power over the world. Each wants to subject the world to his will. Alberich wants absolute power, which he will use only for his own gain. Wotan's power is not absolute. It is restricted by the laws written on his spear. With the best of intentions, he wants to bring order and law to the world, but on *his* terms. Throughout the story the other characters work to thwart his will. And because his power is not absolute he cannot overrule them by power alone, as that would violate the laws by which he rules in the first place. So his power, in the end, is ineffective. And to take absolute power, as Alberich tries to do, would entail the morally irresponsible acts of theft and subjection.

Wotan cannot redeem the world, and Alberich would never even think of trying. That leaves only Siegfried, who truly is an agent of his own will, and who does not aspire to subject the world to his will. Why then does he fail to redeem?

For two reasons. First, he does not understand the world. He is intrinsically good, yes. He is brave, yes. He is honest, yes. But he is so without guile that he cannot see guile when it surrounds him. The first thing that happens to Siegfried when he enters the world of men is that he gets duped. He becomes such an easy tool of Hagen that Hagen can have nothing but contempt for him.

Second, and most important, Siegfried thinks only of himself. He is incapable of feeling empathy for anyone else. He is not evil, he simply is unaware of the suffering of others. He bounds through the world following his own interests, unaware of how he is affecting others. He sees everything in the world as there for the taking, whether it be gold, adventure, or women. And he will fight anything, or anyone, who gets in his way.

Parsifal, like Siegfried, is young and foolish. Like Siegfried he is good, honest, brave, and naïve. And like Siegfried he first journeys into the world thinking that what he encounters is there for his taking.

But with Parsifal there is an all-important difference.

Parsifal enters the forest of Monsalvat and kills the first game he sees, a swan. When Gurnemanz asks him if it was he who did the shooting, Parsifal boasts of it. But when Gurnemanz points out to him the crime of taking another life, and the suffering it has caused, Parsifal is truly contrite, breaking his bow and throwing the arrows away. When, in the Grail Hall, he hears Amfortas cry aloud, Parsifal clutches his own heart, feeling the pain himself. And when, in Klingsor's castle, he is kissed by Kundry, he at that moment feels the wound of Amfortas, and identifies Kundry as the cause of

Amfortas' ruin.

What Parsifal has that Siegfried does not is the ability to feel compassion for the suffering of others. It is this quality which allows Parsifal to be the redeemer. "Enlightened through compassion," Parsifal brings redemption to himself and the world.

It now remains to see how compassion redeems, whereas sacrifice, intervention, and abandonment through romantic love cannot. One of the most often asked questions is, "What is the relationship of *Parsifal* to Christianity?" In answering this question we will come to Wagner's final view of redemption.

Christianity is a religion of love, sacrifice, *and* divine intervention. Here we have two of the very three elements which Wagner had rejected as paths to redemption. And in addition to this, we must consider Wagner in the context of his own time.

Wagner was very much a man of his own time. And one widely-held view among artists and intellectuals of Wagner's day was that the established Christan Church, whether Protestant or Catholic, had failed in its role as society's redeemer. The Church, in Wagner's eyes, had become an institution of outward repression rather than a guide to inner enlightenment. And here was Wagner's split with the established Church: redemption does not come from outside, but from within.

Another aspect of Wagner's own time was a new exposure of artists and philosophers to the religions of the East. This is not to say that Europeans of Wagner's day understood Oriental religions perfectly, but these religions were certainly influential, especially with those disenchanted with the Christian Church.

It has often been said that Buddhism and Christianity are two different paths up the same mountain, two different starting points with the same destination. I personally believe this to be true, but it is also true that the starting points are not only different, but diametrically opposed.

Christianity begins with faith in other. One is asked to believe in the death and resurrection of Christ; that his death and sacrifice accomplished the work of salvation; and that by accepting Christ as the Savior, one is saved as well.

Buddhism begins with faith in self. Not in the separate, ego-oriented self, but in the self which is an expression of the eternal. Buddhism teaches that you have everything you need to become enlightened, that you do not need anything outside yourself for salvation. Just as Buddha was born a man and attained enlightenment here on earth, so can we all, born human, attain enlightenment here in our own lives. And at the point in spiritual understanding where self and other merge, so do Buddhism and Christianity merge.

And it is this merging of self and other that is the core of *Parsifal.*

Tristan and Isolde attempt to merge self and other through romantic love, but are able to do so only in death. In life they remain separate, both from themselves and the world around them. Their acts of union unite them temporarily, but not permanently. And they can not exchange identities, as they wish, because they still remain two separate people. Romantic love relies on something outside the self, namely the beloved, for its redemption, and therefore, in Wagner's final view, cannot succeed.

James Joyce once said, "There cannot be perfect love between man and man because there must not be intercourse, and there cannot be perfect love between man and woman because there must be intercourse." Therefore a love must be found which transcends the separation between man and woman, and which is not subject to the physical desire of romantic love.

This is the love of *Parsifal.* In this supremely great work, Wagner accomplished the union of man and woman he had always wanted. But it was a spiritual union, not a sexual one. Parsifal rejects the lust of Kundry, but accepts the devotion of Kundry. In Jungian terms, he rejects the destructive feminine but embraces the creative feminine. And in this act the illusion of the separate self, Klingsor's castle, is obliterated and collapses into dust.

The Grail is, of course, the female symbol, and the Spear the male symbol. At the start of the opera these two symbols are separated. Amfortas has lost the Spear through his succumbing to the temptation of illusion and the separate self. In Klingsor's castle, the world of Maya, Kundry begs Parsifal to redeem her by one hour of romance. In the young Wagner, that very act is seen as the act of redemption. In the mature Wagner, that is the very act of damnation. By resisting that temptation, Parsifal recaptures the Spear and returns it to the Grail, reuniting the male and female into their original whole.

Thus, even though the outward symbols of *Parsifal* are Christian — the Grail, the Spear which pierced the side of Christ, etc. — the inward symbolism is Buddhist. Salvation is not accomplished by a transcendental act of sacrifice or intervention, but by the opening up of compassion and the embracing of the suffering of others. Redemption is not accomplished by the death of one for others, but by the living of one who embodies the masculine and feminine within himself, wisdom and compassion. It is this awakening of wisdom and compassion within ourselves that leads to redemption, not any act which happens outside ourselves. In *Parsifal,* Wagner has not rejected Christianity, merely detranscendentalized it. Redemption is here on earth, in our own lives, not someplace we go after we die. The redemption of Monsalvat is the redemption of the self, the gateway to enlightenment.

WE SPEAK OF KUNDRY MATTERS...

CHRISTIANITY, SEXUALITY, AND PARSIFAL

By Steve Sokolow

Because of the mythic nature of Wagner's operas and the archetypal nature of his characters, we tend to react to them in a special way. We do not necessarily look for universal morals or guides to behavior in the actions of Mimi and Rodolfo, but we do expect some kind of philosophical "correctness" in the actions of Brünnhilde or Pogner or Parsifal. We argue over whether Brünnhilde should give the ring to Waltraute, or what Amfortas' sin really is. We feel that Amfortas' anguish is not something simply imposed on him, like Mimi's illness. It must be the result of his own actions, and the drama must be telling us what is right and what is wrong. Of course, Wagner gives no explicit message — such and such is right, and such and such is wrong — in any of his works, but clearly these works want to preach to us. For many, the morality expressed in *Parsifal* is unpleasant or unacceptable or simply old-fashioned. I believe that the message we are "supposed to" take away from *Parsifal* is easily misunderstood.

In actuarial terms, the ends of Wagner's operas are fairly dismal:

Holländer — Dutchman and Senta dead.
Tannhäuser — Tannhäuser and Elizabeth dead.
Lohengrin — Elsa dead (?), Lohengrin defeated.
The Ring — Siegfried, Brünnhilde, et. al. dead.
Tristan — Tristan, Isolde, Kurwenal dead.
Meistersinger — Nobody dead (!)
Parsifal — Kundry dead (?), Parsifal triumphant (!)

Many commentators (and all program notes) argue that these tragic endings are mitigated by some form of redemption. Senta has saved the Dutchman from his curse (if we use Wagner's second ending). Elizabeth has saved Tannhäuser from the clutches of Venus (if we use Wagner's second ending). The Grail has returned Gottfried to the Brabantians (if that is any consolation). Brünnhilde has (perhaps) cleansed the world. Isolde is transfigured (in some way). But even if one accepts these symbolic redemptions, the heroes and heroines have all paid the highest price for them. Leaving *Meistersinger* aside for the moment, only Parsifal has managed to remain alive and accomplish what he set out to do. What makes him so different? What is there about his nature or his experience that makes him successful where all others have failed?

(A note about the happy ending of *Meistersinger*. It has been argued by Michael Barclay and others that Hans Sachs is unsuccessful in his mission to synthesize Walther's spontaneity with the decadent but essential traditional methods of the Meistersingers. Even after composing the Prize Song, Walther does not understand the synthesis. He has failed to learn his lesson, and Sachs has to forge a happy ending out of sheer charisma. Where is the redemption?)

The Wagnerian canon can be seen as one continuous artwork, from *Dutchman* to *Parsifal*. The earlier operas can also seen to be part of this progression, but they are so derivative of other people's styles that the analysis becomes Procrustean. The same pregnant themes run through all the works — the redemption of some outcast or misfit man by the self-sacrifice of a woman (Dutchman, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, Wotan); the danger of drowning in Eros (Tannhäuser, Siegfried/Brünnhilde, Tristan/Isolde, Walther/Eva, Amfortas/Kundry); the pull of Thanatos (the Dutchman, Wotan, Tristan, Amfortas, Kundry); the numbing intolerance and/or greed which we call ordinary society (Daland, Mary, the Minnesingers, Telramund, the Walhalla gods, Hunding, the Gibichungs, Beckmesser and the other Meistersingers, the Grail knights) contrasted with the power of ignorance (Siegfried, Walther, Parsifal).

Robert Raphael, in his excellent volume *Richard Wagner* in the Twayne's World Author series, sees Wagner's works as a continuing search for an answer to the question, "What in the universe has real value?" In turn, Wagner posits and rejects the Church (*Tannhäuser*), unquestioning faith (*Lohengrin*), natural heroism (*The Ring*), sexual passion (*Tristan* and *The Ring*), and Art (*Meistersinger*). Finally, by this lifelong process of elimination, he finds that only empathy (*Mitleid*) truly has redemptive power.

There are, of course, Wagnerian women who are capable of *Mitleid*, notably Senta, Elizabeth, and Brünnhilde. In Senta, it is an obsession, and not a particularly attractive one at that. Brünnhilde has tremendous compassion for her father (as she says, she was trained to guard his back in battle, so she can see what he does not) but this empathy seems to be overpowered by her passion for Siegfried when she is confronted by Waltraute and asked to return the ring to the Rhinemaidens. Brünnhilde's actions in this scene are a controversial topic; nevertheless, one feels her *Mitleid* is complete at the end of *The Ring*. The fact that it is *Mitleid* that leads her to destroy the world is disturbing, but that is another essay.

To find a Wagnerian male with *Mitleid* is not so easy, though there are tantalizing hints right from the beginning that the development of this trait is crucial. The Dutchman tells Senta that he intends to spare her from his curse. Is it this act which finally redeems him from that curse? Wolfram claims to have *Mitleid* for Tannhäuser (though Tannhäuser must remain pious to deserve it). Kurwenal's devotion to Tristan is extremely moving, but more like puppy love than fellow-feeling, and certainly he has no understanding of Tristan's internal torture. Hans Sachs has an abundance of *Mitleid*,

but Walther never seems to develop a capacity for it. And Wotan's lack of this quality is a major issue in *The Ring*.

If Parsifal is successful because he acquires real *Mitleid*, we still must ask: "Why him?" What is so special about this hero? The first thing we learn about him is his abysmal ignorance. He knows nothing, and why should he? He was brought up in the forest, deliberately kept ignorant by his concerned mother. He does not even know the difference between good and bad — he asks "*Wer ist gut?*" In his ignorance he is the brother of all the Wälsungs and of Walther von Stolzing, who is a noble savage in the Nuremberg Art Scene. But ignorance does not work particularly well for these stalwarts. Siegfried's stupid bravery works well enough in the forest against dragons, but is useless when pitted against the sophistication of his city cousins. It can not be ignorance alone that explains Parsifal's success.

Parsifal's *Mitleid* is aroused by the kiss, his introduction to sex, which thus becomes the crux of the matter. When we experience Parsifal and Kundry we can not help but think of Siegfried and Brünnhilde and their first encounter with sex. A first familiarity with Wagner produces the distinct impression that Siegfried succumbs to sexual desire and thus fails, whereas Parsifal rejects or does not respond to sexual desire and thus succeeds.

The differences between the characters and situations in the two awakening scenes is enormous. In Siegfried's case, this coincides with his first encounter with a woman, since he never knew even his own mother. Consider the contrast with Parsifal — when we first meet Siegfried, he does not even know whether he has a mother, and it is precisely the lack of this knowledge that propels him into the world. When we first meet Parsifal, we quickly discover that the only thing he does know is "*Ich hab eine Mutter!*" These references to their mothers are the first significant utterances of the two heroes. Parsifal's only preceding statement about himself is that, like Siegfried, he makes his own weapons. The second difference between the two situations is that Parsifal is seduced by Kundry, whereas Siegfried is (initially) rebuffed by Brünnhilde. In fact, among the four characters, Kundry is the only one with any sexual experience.

Parsifal's reaction to the kiss is certainly his most significant action, but it is not his only significant action. Before the seduction scene we see him kill a swan and experience remorse. We see him moved by the Grail ceremony but fail to understand it. We see him amused but not aroused by the Flower Maidens. (Contrast Siegfried and the Rhine Maidens. His remarks about them are worthy of Lt. Pinkerton, U.S.N.) After his enlightenment, he wanders through paths of error for years, experiencing great hardship as he refuses to use the holy spear as a weapon. Eventually, of course, he heals Amfortas and releases Kundry from her curse. But these post-enlightenment actions involve neither conflict nor striving. Once understanding has been awakened in him, no matter how painful his wanderings might be, his success seems assured. The crucial battle was the internal one that took place in response to the kiss.

Is the rejection of sexuality then the explanation of Parsifal's success, as set against the failures of all other Wagnerian heroes? This is a moral which does not sit well in the twentieth century. It seems hideously Victorian and anti-life. It is not the conclusion of his life's work that we would have expected from Wagner, who himself was an extremely sexual person, and who moreover expressed eroticism in music better than anyone else in history. Should *Parsifal* be viewed as an antidote to *Tristan und Isolde*? I think not, and I will argue that this is a misinterpretation of *Parsifal* which is based on too literal — i.e. non-mythic — a reading of the action. I was aided in understanding this by the books and lectures of Joseph Campbell, who shows us how to read myths.

Before discussing *Parsifal* and sexuality, it is worth discussing *Parsifal* and Christianity, since here too, first impressions of the work are very misleading. What a trickster Wagner was, and how Nietzsche was fooled by *Parsifal*, which he saw as Wagner's "submission to the Cross." What percentage of people who view *Parsifal* for the first time see it as an intensely Christian work? Certainly the great majority. I saw one performance with a friend who has been a devout, churchgoing Christian all his life. I know how much he loves the work, and yet he told me that he was just as happy that his pastor did not know he was attending the opera, since he himself understands what a thoroughly heretical work it is. Yes, it is saturated with Christian symbolism — not only the holy relics at the center of the work, but the many crosses, baptisms, prayer, recreations of Biblical scenes, etc. Perhaps this aspect of the work was too overwhelming to Nietzsche. Still, the final words of the work — "*Erlösung dem Erlöser*," "redemption to the redeemer" — could not be more heretical. The divine principle represented by the Grail is itself moribund and in need of salvation. It is the act of a human being which rescues the divine from impotence. In orthodox Christianity, one puts oneself in the hands of Christ and relies on faith. The idea that Godhood itself could be sick and in need of help from a human is foreign to western religion.

Joseph Campbell and Heinrich Zimmer put it this way in *Philosophies of India*:

> From the Indian point of view, the special dignity of the human being consists solely in the fact that he is capable of becoming enlightened, free from bondage, and therewith competent, ultimately, for the role of the supreme teacher and savior of all beings, including the beasts and the gods...This amazing ideal...was taken seriously and literally as an ideal for all. It was actually regarded as open to man, and steps were taken to realize it...The image constantly held before the mind's eye was that of the human savior as the redeemer even of the gods. In the West such thinking has been suppressed systematically as heresy — a heresy of titanism. Already for the Greeks, it was the classic fault of the suffering hero, the hubris of the anti-gods or titans, while in the Christian Church such presumption has been mocked as simply incredible. Nevertheless, in our modern Western Christian poetry there can be

> pointed out at least one great instance of the idea of the coming of a human being to the rescue of God. For when Parsifal, in the third act of Wagner's opera, brings back the holy spear, cures Amfortas, the sick guardian of the holy grail, and restores the grail itself to its beneficent function, the voices of the angels sing out from on high: "Redemption to the Redeemer." The sacred blood of Christ, that is to say, has been redeemed from the curse or spell that was nullifying its operation.

Campbell and Zimmer point out (immediately following the above) that Parsifal (a human) saving the God principle is equivalent to Brünnhilde (a human) saving the God principle in her universe:

> And again, in Wagner's cycle of *The Ring of the Nibelung*, a pagan parallel to this motif is developed in almost identical terms. Brünnhilde quiets Wotan's sufferings, putting to rest the All-Father of the universe, when she returns the Ring to the primeval waters and sings to Wotan: "Ruhe, ruhe, du Gott!" — "Rest, rest, thou God!" The enlightened individual, perfected through having conquered ego, redeems the divine principle, which is incapable, alone, of disengaging itself from its own fascination with the cosmic play.

Having called *Parsifal* heretical, it must also be said that the plea for compassion at the center of the work is also central to Christianity, as it is central to many religions. *Parsifal* is certainly not anti-Christian, but it is not a work which preaches or "believes in" Christianity any more than *The Ring* is a work which "believes in" the pagan gods. The difficulty comes only when we try to interpret the Christianity of *Parsifal* literally. Those who watched Bill Moyer's interviews with Joseph Campbell on Public Television saw Campbell stress the point over and over that when religions are interpreted metaphorically, they are all seen to be amazingly similar. When their symbols are interpreted literally, dogma, intolerance, and misunderstanding begin to set in. As with any religion or myth, so with Wagner. Parsifal's empathy with Amfortas is what is important, not the fact that Amfortas is the Christian king of the Grail. Presumably, Parsifal would still have healed him had be been a Hindu or Moslem. Thus, the Grail and the spear are best understood as symbols of femininity and masculinity rather than as Christian relics. Thus Amfortas' wound gains meaning from its association with Christ's wound, but so does Christ's wound gain meaning from Amfortas'.

Returning to the issue of sexuality: the fallacy of taking symbols literally, which causes people to picket "The Last Temptation of Christ," may also account for a misunderstanding of the message of *Parsifal*. Just as the temptation of Christ is better understood metaphorically than literally, so is the temptation of Parsifal. Parsifal's reaction to the kiss shows that he knows that the desire he feels is somehow inextricably linked with the suffering of Amfortas. If we take Parsifal's reaction to sexual desire to mean "sex is evil" we are seriously over-literalizing. If we take sex as a (very apt) metaphor for desire or attachment of all kinds, and we understand Amfortas' suffering to be the suffering of all humanity, we see a different vision. This is simply what the Buddhists call the Second Noble Truth. The First Noble Truth says that life is basically suffering. The Second Noble Truth says that suffering is caused by desire, because desire eventually and inevitably eludes fulfillment. Thus pleasure and pain are inextricably linked. The metaphor of sex is so apt because the pleasurable quality of the sex act involves the prolonging of desire — a kind of pain. Wagner's art is so erotic because it continually creates an overwhelming desire for a musical and dramatic resolution, teasing us with the possibility and withholding it for hours.

Kundry starts her seduction by describing to Parsifal how his actions caused the death of his mother. She attempts to create great pain in him first, which she can then soothe with pleasure. Some might consider this rather unusual foreplay, but we know (because she proceeds to tell us) that Kundry herself uses sex as an antidote to the pain of her guilt, and she thus considers this an effective way to seduce Parsifal. We are confronted with a *misuse* of sexuality. It is a misuse which Parsifal rejects ("*Die Labung, die dein Leiden endet, beut nicht der Quell aus dem es fliesst...*"), just as he rejects the flower maidens and their use of sex for power.

What causes the spontaneous appearance of *Mitleid* in Parsifal? We know that Wagner was devoted to Schopenhauer, the most pessimistic of philosophers. Schopenhauer taught that we are all slaves to the will, the blind force of nature which causes all our selfish, grasping behavior. But he also recognized that humans sometimes spontaneously act completely selflessly, sacrificing themselves for the well-being of another. This part of our nature, which separates us from the beasts and makes us uniquely human, was a mystery to Schopenhauer. It was not an ideal of behavior that we should strive for but simply a part of the human experience. Wagner offers no explanation for Parsifal's being struck with *Mitleid*. True to Schopenhauer, he simply shows us the possibility. Parsifal sees the connection between desire and suffering and, like the Buddha, subordinates his whole life, all his desires, to an act of compassion. This does not necessarily mean that we should all follow the path of eliminating desire from our lifes. In Buddhist terms, this is the path of devoted seekers — monks. Those of us who live in the everyday world, who are not monks, can learn from Parsifal and Kundry to become better actors in the cosmic play. We need not all be Parsifals or Kundrys, but Parsifal and Kundry are parts of all of us.

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

DIRECTORS ELECTED...

Five members of the Board of Directors of the Wagner Society were elected at the annual meeting on November 22: David Dalto, Annaliese Munetic, Paul Schofield, Steve Sokolow, and Ramona Wascher. The Board is particularly happy to welcome Ms. Munetic and Mr. Schofield, who are serving as Directors for the first time.

The Board would also like to express thanks to retiring Directors Trish Benedict and John Chilcott for their many hours of labor and years of service to the Society.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS...

Readers who would like to pursue further the kind of spiritual/mythological concerns dealt with in this *Leitmotive* may be interested in the Fall 1988 issue of the magazine *Gnosis — A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions*, which includes an piece on Wagner and heroic mythology by WSNC member Christopher Farmer. In addition there are articles on the Grail and Wasteland mythology in Britain, on the cult of Wotan, and even a critical look at Adolf Hitler's alleged inspiration by *Parsifal*.

For those unable to find the magazine, subscriptions ($15 per year) and back issues ($5 per copy — the issue in question is #9) are available from P.O. Box 14217, San Francisco, CA 94114.

GRANT PROGRAM, AGAIN...

This season we saw two WSNC Grant recipients on the stage of the Opera House — Cristiane Young as Mary in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, and Monte Pederson substituting for José Van Dam as the Dutchman for one very successful performance. Early in 1989 the Society will be presenting a concert by our most recent winner, mezzo-soprano Roberta Wain-Becker. We hope that this visible activity will remind our members and readers of the need for continued contributions to our Grant Program. Our support for Wagnerian art and performance in Northern California is one of our most important functions. We depend on your generosity to make it possible.

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