

***THE INFLUENCE OF LUDWIG FEUERBACH'S  
PHILOSOPHY UPON THE LIBRETTO OF RICHARD  
WAGNER'S MUSIC-DRAMA 'PARSIFAL'***

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**ELABORATION OF A TALK PRESENTED TO THE BOSTON WAGNER  
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While it is well known that the atheist German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach's influence upon Richard Wagner's libretto for his music-drama *The Ring of The Nibelung* is great, it is usually assumed that Feuerbach's influence upon Wagner's writings and operas dropped off radically after his 1854 conversion to the pessimist philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. For this reason the librettos of Wagner's other mature music-dramas completed after 1854, namely, *Tristan and Isolde*, *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*, and *Parsifal*, are widely regarded as expressions of Wagner's post-1854 Schopenhauerian phase. It is therefore quite surprising to find in key passages from the libretto of Wagner's last work for the theater, *Parsifal*, a remarkable dependence on Feuerbachian concepts. This paper will examine that influence closely. A familiarity with the libretto of *Parsifal* is assumed. This paper has retained all the extracts from Feuerbach's and Wagner's writings (and recorded remarks) discussed in my original talk of 5/30/07. However, a number of key extracts which had to be dropped from the talk due to time constraints have been restored, and other extracts added, both to fill in logical gaps in the talk, and also to address certain questions posed by audience members after the talk.

This paper is a summary of several of my key arguments from what is a far more extensive interpretation of *Parsifal*, which I anticipate will be a chapter in my soon to be completed book on Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*, entitled *The Wound that Will Never Heal*. There are many issues raised by a fuller consideration of the libretto which are either not addressed here at all, or only casually discussed in brief. These include the influence of Schopenhauer's understanding of Buddhism (especially his views on compassion for all life), the possibility that Wagner imported his anti-Semitism into both the symbolism of blood and Amfortas's alleged miscegenation with Kundry (assumed, for purposes of that argument, to be a Jewess), the music (specifically the range of meaning and employment of motifs), etc. The following argument is therefore best understood as covering what I regard as the essential Feuerbachian frame of reference upon which Wagner seems to have constructed his libretto, a process which actually consumed more than half his lifetime, from perhaps 1848 onward (i.e., well before his conversion to Schopenhauer's teachings).

There are at least six questions which the libretto raises - for which Feuerbach's philosophical writings, and Wagner's response to these writings, provide persuasive answers - which this paper will address. I have listed them below:

**WHY IS PARSIFAL IGNORANT OF HIS IDENTITY, AND WHY DOES KUNDRY KNOW HIS IDENTITY WHEN HE DOES NOT?**

**WHY DID PARSIFAL NEGLECT HIS MOTHER (Herzeleide) SO THAT SHE DIED OF A BROKEN HEART?**

**WHY DOES KUNDRY ATTEMPT TO SEDUCE PARSIFAL BY PRESENTING HERSELF AS HIS SURROGATE MOTHER?**

**WHY DID AMFORTAS'S SEDUCTION BY KUNDRY DELIVER A WOUND THAT WILL NEVER HEAL?**

**WHY DID PARSIFAL INITIALLY SEEK KLINGSOR'S MAGIC GARDEN INSTEAD OF GRASPING THE MEANING OF – AND HEALING – AMFORTAS'S WOUND, AND WHY DID PARSIFAL FEEL SUCH GREAT GUILT FOR ENGAGING IN THIS ADVENTURE, WHEN IT SEEMS SELF-EVIDENT THAT PARSIFAL HAD TO RETRIEVE THE STOLEN SPEAR FROM KLINGSOR IN ORDER TO HEAL AMFORTAS WITH IT?**

**WHY MUST KLINGSOR'S MAGIC GARDEN WITHER, AND PARSIFAL BREAK KUNDRY'S CURSE BY RESISTING HER SEDUCTION, IN ORDER THAT PARSIFAL CAN HEAL AMFORTAS'S WOUND?**

### **(1) INTRODUCTION: WAGNER'S DEBT TO FEUERBACH**

The following passage from Wagner's autobiography is his testimonial to the debt he owed to Feuerbach, and also expresses his ultimate disenchantment with Feuerbach:

**(1A) [WAGNER]** “[P. 430] [re Ludwig Feuerbach's book *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*, Wagner states that:] The absorbing questions treated here ... as if it were the first time they had ever been raised, had occupied me ever since my initial association with Lehrs in Paris ... . (...) I found it elevating and consoling to be assured that the sole authentic immortality adheres only to sublime deeds and inspired works of art. (...) [P. 431] The fact that he proclaimed what we call “spirit” to lie in our aesthetic perceptions of the tangible world ... was what afforded me such useful support in my conception of a work of art which would be all-embracing while remaining comprehensible to the simplest, purely human power of discernment, that is, of the drama made perfect ... in ‘the art-work of the future’ ... . Admittedly, after only a short time it became impossible for me to return to his works, and I recall that one of his books appearing shortly thereafter entitled *On the Essence of Religion* scared me off by the monotony of its title alone to such an extent that, when Herwegh opened its pages in front of me, I closed the book with a bang before his very eyes.” [#387W-{/49} ML: p. 430-431]

Wagner's last observation above is amusing in view of the fact that we will be reviewing momentarily a number of extracts from Wagner's writings and recorded remarks, stemming from the post-1854 period when Wagner was an avowed Schopenhauerian who claimed he had outgrown Feuerbach, in which Wagner paraphrases Feuerbach repeatedly. According to Wagner's own testimony above the essential Feuerbachian concept which influenced Wagner in developing his revolutionary art-form, the music-drama, was that what religious folk describe as divine, transcendent, and supernatural, is in actuality nothing more nor less than the product of man's aesthetic feeling, the basis for art, which

draws its inspiration and material from the real, physical world, and whose source is man's physical, natural mind. This theme will be highlighted throughout this paper.

## **(2) RELIGION LIVES ON AS ART**

When Wagner describes in the extract above how Feuerbach's concept provided useful support in Wagner's development of the music-drama, in which an all-embracing artwork could be made "... comprehensible to the simplest, purely human power of discernment ...," Wagner is referencing his concept of the "Wonder," through which easily discerned and remembered musical motifs could distill, abbreviate, and therefore represent a vast array of characters, events, symbols, and concepts, through Wagner's method of developing specific musical motifs (most often heard in the orchestra, but sometimes sung) and motif families in direct association with the evolution of particular characters, events, symbols, and concepts in the drama.. Wagner felt that in this way his musical motifs provide a substitute for religious faith which has been lost in our modern, scientific, secular world, since a sounding motif calls up to memory all the characters, events, symbols, and concepts with which it has been (or will be) associated in the course of the music-drama, thus effectively making all time, i.e., all the past and future, present time. And this, according to Feuerbach, describes what supernatural miracles do:

"[P. 236-237] If we now turn to miracles, we shall find that they objectify, embody, realize nothing other than the essence of a wish. Wishes are not subject to the barriers of space and time; they are unrestricted, unfettered, as free as a god." [#291F-LER: p. 236-237]

Feuerbach provides a model for the Wagnerian concept of the Wonder in his suggestion that though the religious promise of immortality to individuals is spurious, the collective body of all historical men (the human species as such, in time and space), particularly those who have enriched our legacy of art and science, unify past, present, and future in a figurative immortality, representing mankind's eternal youth:

"[P. 137] What is true in the universal belief in immortality is that it is a sensible representation of the true nature of consciousness, the unity of past, present, and future as one essential reality is raised to the level of an object. It's true only when it's the belief in the infinity of spirit and the everlasting youth of humanity." [#21F-TDI: p. 137]

This is reflected in the childlike innocence and spontaneity of both Siegfried and Parsifal, and especially in Wotan's proclamation to Erda that he, the God, no longer fears the tragic end Erda foresaw, since he says: "... to one who's eternally young [i.e., Siegfried] the god now yields in gladness." Wagner attributes a similarly figurative immortality to music per se:

"[P. 396] R.: 'The word 'eternal' is a very fine one, for it really means

'holy': a great feeling [Wagner here is of course alluding to the redemptive music he was composing for his music-dramas] is eternal, for it is free from the laws of change to which everything is subject: it has nothing to do with yesterday, today, or tomorrow. Hell begins with arithmetic.'

"[#804W-{7/25/71} CD Vol. I, p. 396]

But for Wagner music's true "Wonder" or miracle was embodied in his musical motifs. Wagner felt that his musical motifs accomplish what the religious imagination achieved: according to both Feuerbach and Wagner religious believers involuntarily and unconsciously condensed their experience of man's nature, and of Nature itself, into their concept of a single personality called God. Wagner tells us that:

"[P. 154] Just as the human form is to him the most comprehensible, so also will the essence of natural phenomena – which he does not yet know in their reality – become comprehensible only through condensation to a human form. Thus in Mythos all the shaping impulse of the Folk makes toward realizing to its senses a broadest grouping of the most manifold phenomena, and in the most succinct of shapes. [This] ... appears superhuman and supernatural by the very fact that it is ascribed to one imagined individual, represented in the shape of Man. By its faculty of thus using its force of [P. 155] imagination to bring before itself every thinkable reality and actuality, in widest reach but plain, succinct and plastic shaping, the Folk therefore becomes in Mythos the creator of Art ... . [#489W-{50-1/51} Opera and Drama: PW Vol. II, p. 154-155]

Wagner could condense a vast array of related experiences into succinct and memorable combinations of melody, rhythm, harmony, and orchestration, by associating such motifs and their subtle variations with particular characters, decisive events, symbols, and concepts within the drama, so that in the course of the drama particular motifs, and entire families of related motifs, carry a treasury of meaning acquired by association with various aspects of the drama. Needless to say a motif has a range of meaning generally subsumed under a guiding theme, rather than a simple meaning. For this reason motifs tend to be too ambiguous to be reducible to simple formulae. Wagner says he achieves this "Wonder" through

"[P. 371] The condensation of the most varied and extended phenomena, where many members harmonize to produce one, single, definite effect; the perspicuous presentation of such a harmony, which to us remains unseizable without the deepest research and widest experience, and fills us with amazement when beheld, -- in art, ... this is to be obtained through nothing save the miraculous [i.e. the "Wonder"]. Here in poetic fiction the tremendous chain of connection embracing the most heterogeneous phenomena is condensed to an easily-surveyed bond of fewer links [i.e., symbolized by a small number of easily identifiable

musical motifs], yet the force and might of the whole great chain is put into these few: and in art this might is miracle." [#478W-{49-51 (?)} Notes for 'Artishood of the Future' (unfinished); Sketches and Fragments: PW Vol. VIII, p. 371]

And in the following passages Wagner describes how in this way his musical motifs not only solve the problem of dramatic unity of time and space - since the sounding of a musical motif calls to mind, at least subliminally, all those characters, events, symbols, and ideas with which it has been or will be associated in the course of the music-drama - but in so doing effectively offer secular man a substitute for what otherwise religious faith promises. What Christian faith promises is the miraculous, in which man's wishes, which could not normally be fulfilled in the real world bound by time, space, and the laws of nature, can be satisfied by transcending the limits of time, space, and natural causality. Hence Wagner tells us that through his musical motifs

"[P. 350] In the singlest Space and the most compact Time one may spread out an Action as completely discordant and disconnected as you please ... . On the contrary, the Unity of an Action consists in its intelligible connexion; and only through one thing can this reveal itself intelligibly, -- which thing is neither Time nor Space, but the Expression [i.e., his musical motifs]. (...) The limitations of Space and Time, which arose from lack of this Expression, are upheaved at once by its acquirement; both Time and Space are annihilated, through the actuality of the Drama. [#550W-{50-1/51} Opera and Drama: PW Vol. II, p. 350]

And in our next extract Wagner makes the crucial link between his musical motifs' capacity to make all the past and future, present, and all that is distant in space, present here before us, and the religious concept of the miracle which transcends the limits of time, space, and natural law:

"[P. 213] The Wonder in the Poet's [i.e., Wagner the music-dramatist's] work is distinguished from the Wonder in religious Dogma by this: that it does not, like the latter, upheave the nature of things [i.e., does not appeal to the supernatural, or the religious notion of the miraculous], but the rather makes it comprehensible to the Feeling [through musical motifs].

The Judaeo-Christian Wonder tore the connexion of natural phenomena asunder, to allow the Divine Will to appear as standing over Nature. In it a broad connexus of things was by no means condensed in favour of their understanding by the instinctive Feeling [i.e., through Wagner's musical motifs], but this Wonder was employed entirely for its own sake alone; people demanded it, as the proof of a suprahuman power, from him who gave himself for divine, and in whom they refused to believe till before the bodily eyes of men he had shown himself the lord of Nature, i.e. the arbitrary subverter of the natural order of things [as in

Christ's public performance of miracles, or in God's creation of the cosmos]. (...) A fundamental denial of the Understanding [i.e. censorship of intellectual inquiry, or science] was therefore the thing hypothecated in advance ... : whereas an absolute Faith was the thing demanded by the wonder-doer, and granted by the wonder-getter. Now, for the operation of its message, the poetizing intellect has absolutely no concern with Faith, but only with an understanding through the Feeling. It wants to display a great connexus of natural phenomena in an image swiftly understandable ... ." [#522W-{50-1/51} Opera and Drama: PW Vol. II, p. 213-214]

It is clear from these extensive extracts from Wagner's theoretical writings which I have assembled that for him, his musical motifs are a secular substitute for faith in the supernatural. The motifs' musico-dramatic power, its ability to carry a potent meaning of great scope and depth, and therefore to make the audience feel as if it transcends time and space and is therefore experiencing the miraculous, only becomes fully evident with multiple experiences of the complete Wagnerian music-drama in performance. This may well be the basis for Gurnemanz's peculiar response when Parsifal observes, as they are walking toward the Grail Temple in Act One, that: "I hardly move, yet far I seem to have come." Gurnemanz explains: "You see, my son, time changes here to space," perhaps a poetic foreshadowing of Einstein's theory of relativity.

This is of course also a poetic paraphrase of Schopenhauer's concept of the ideality of time, space, and causality, the Kantian notion that time, space, and causality are not inherent to the real, objective world (Kant's "Thing-in-itself"), but are subjective concepts imported into our experience of the world through man's apriori knowledge, without which man cannot grasp his experience of the world to navigate his way around in it. The divine, in effect, is the "thing-in-itself" (which Schopenhauer called the will), i.e., what the world is in itself freed from man's apriori knowledge, freed from conscious reason. Schopenhauer identified this "Will" with music, and therefore with feeling and instinct (as opposed to thinking), and noted that it links us with all of nature, disclosing to us the unity hidden behind the apparent diversity and multiplicity of our experience of the world in time and space. Even prior to his first known acquaintance with Schopenhauer Wagner expressed his belief that music restores our feeling of oneness with the external world. Music gives us this feeling of wholeness, unity, harmony, and infinity, without the burden of religious dogma and belief which stakes a claim to truth.

The following four passages, pairing extracts from Feuerbach with Wagner's paraphrases of them, describe how man's religious longing for transcendence lives on, in a certain sense, in secular art, which unlike religious belief stakes no claim to represent the truth. And of all the arts this seems most true of music, which is feeling freed from the constraint of conceptual thought. The essential import of these four extracts is that art, and especially music, has the advantage over religion that, because it doesn't stake a claim to represent the truth, yet shares with religion the expression of the deepest and most all-embracing emotions, religion in a sense can live on in art, and especially music, freed from the fear that scientific, secular, objective thought might contradict its claim on the truth:

**(2A) [FEUERBACH]** [P. 180-181] " ... a God is an imaginary being, a product of fantasy; and because fantasy is the essential form or organ of poetry, it may also be said that religion is poetry, that a God is a poetic being. (...) And this brings us to an essential limitation of the statement that religion is poetry. In a sense it is poetry, but with one important difference: poetry and art in general do not represent their creations as anything but what they are, namely products of art, whereas religion represents its imaginary beings as real beings." [#261F-LER: p. 180-181]

**(2B) [WAGNER]** [P. 213] "One might say that where Religion becomes artificial, it is reserved for Art to save the spirit of religion by recognizing the figurative value of the mythic symbols which the former would have us believe in their literal sense, and revealing their deep and hidden truth through an ideal presentation. Whilst the priest stakes everything on the religious allegories being accepted as matters of fact, the artist has no concern at all with such a thing, since he freely and openly gives out his work as his own invention." [#1019W-{6-8/80}Religion and Art: PW Vol. VI, p. 213]

Feuerbach is quite explicit that art is free from fear, or egoism, in a sense that religious faith is not, since, unlike religion, which offers man an allegedly objectively real paradise in which his desire for eternal bliss can be realized, and his fear of death and pain can be infinitely assuaged forever, the artist makes no such conceptual promise for the future, but simply delivers a feeling of transcendence now:

"[P. 196] ... the religious imagination is not the free imagination of the artist, but has a practical egoistic purpose, or in other words, ... the religious imagination is rooted in the feeling of dependency and attaches chiefly to objects that arouse it. (...) This feeling of anxiety, of uncertainty, this fear of harm that always accompanies man, is the root of the religious imagination ... ." [#269F-LER: p. 196]

As noted in my prior talk ‘How Elsa Showed Wagner the Way to Siegfried’ (and the paper based upon that talk, which I hope to publish on the Boston Wagner Society’s website along with our present paper), Siegfried as the artist-hero is fearless, while Wotan (the God – representing religious belief) is paralyzed by fear, because Siegfried has no concern with Erda’s (i.e., Mother Nature’s) prophecy of the inevitable twilight of the gods (i.e., the end of religious belief), since, unlike the Gods (i.e. believers in gods), the artist-hero Siegfried stakes no claim to the power of truth (i.e., the power of the Ring).

And of course, in Wagner’s thinking, of all the arts music is the most able to provide us with the religious feeling of transcendence when religion as a set of beliefs, dogmas, and articles of faith cannot be sustained in the face of contradiction by the understanding in our modern, secular, scientific era:

“[P. 316] ... now, we have plainly to denote this Speaking-faculty of the Orchestra as the faculty of uttering the unspeakable.

(...)

[P. 317] (...) ... this Unspeakable is not a thing unutterable per se, but merely unutterable through the organ of our Understanding; thus, not a mere fancy, but a reality ... . [\* Wagner’s Footnote:] This easy explanation of the ‘Unspeakable,’ one might extend, perhaps not altogether wrongly, to the whole matter of Religious Philosophy; for although that matter is given out as absolutely unutterable, from the standpoint of the speaker, yet mayhap it is utterable enough if only the fitting organ be employed.” [#539W-{50-1/51} Opera and Drama: PW Vol. II, p. 316-317]

Note that Wagner wrote this in 1851, three years before he became acquainted with Schopenhauer. Its source if anywhere is in Feuerbach, per our extracts below:

**(2C) [FEUERBACH]** [P. 283] “The last refuge of theology ... is feeling. God is renounced by the understanding [i.e., modern science]; he has no longer the dignity of a real object, of a reality which imposes itself on the understanding; hence he is transferred to feeling; in feeling his existence is thought to be secure. And doubtless this is the safest refuge ... . as certainly as I exist, so certainly does my feeling exist; and as certainly as my feeling exists, so certainly does my god exist.” [#145F-EOC: p. 283]

That Feuerbach construed “Feeling,” God’s last refuge, specifically as music, we find in the following extracts:

“[P. 63] What would man be without feeling? It is the musical power in man. (...) Just as man has a musical faculty and feels an inward necessity to breathe out his feelings in song; so, by a like necessity he in religion sighs and tears stream forth the nature of feeling as an objective, divine

nature.” [#65F-EOC: p. 63]

“[P. 291] Fortunately, despite his servitude to theology, Luther found, outside of religion or theology, antidotes to the power of sin, hell, the devil or, what amounts to the same thing, the divine wrath. In a Latin letter to L. Senfel he writes that music, too, gives man what otherwise only theology can bestow, namely, a tranquil and serene mind, that the Devil, the author of all cares and emotional disturbances, takes flight at the sound of music as he does at the word of theology.” [#321F-LER: p. 291]

Note that Feuerbach suggests in passage (2C) above that, though science may contradict religious belief when it stakes a false claim to the truth in some particular instance (such as Christian theologians’ claim that the earth is the center of the universe, or that the human species was created by a direct act of divine will, rather than through evolution of species), science can never take away from us our claim that we feel what we feel. Art, and music in particular, can make us feel as if we transcend the real world, without actually claiming that we have done so in actuality. Wagner echoes this in the extract below:

**(2D) [WAGNER]** “[P. 34] Men of science persuade us that Copernicus reduced the ancient Church-belief to ruins with his planetary system, since it robbed God Almighty of his heavenly seat. (...) The god within the human breast, of whose transcendent being our great Mystics were so certain sure, that god who needs no heavenly-home demonstrable by science, has given the parsons more ado. ... but our Professors [i.e., scientists] have done him many a harm ... . Yet this approachless god of ours had begotten much within us, and when at last he had to vanish, he left us – in eternal memory of him – Music.” [#999W-{12/25/79} Introduction to the Year 1880: PW Vol. VI, p. 34]

Those who were present at – or have read my elaboration of – my previous lecture to the Society entitled ‘How Elsa Showed Wagner The Way To Siegfried,’ will recall the key thesis that Bruennhilde is Wagner’s metaphor for music and Siegfried in turn Wagner’s metaphor for the dramatic poet who embraces music to produce the Wagnerian music-drama. I first began to develop the thesis that Siegfried is Wagner’s metaphor for himself, the music-dramatist, and Bruennhilde Siegfried’s unconscious mind, his muse of inspiration, and that their union produces the music-drama, in college papers from the mid-and-late 70’s, and first copyrighted this concept (Library of Congress) in a paper from 1981 entitled ‘In Dedication to Claude Levi-Strauss.’ In a much larger, similarly copyrighted paper from 11/83 entitled ‘The Doctrine of the Ring’ I elaborated this concept and attempted to demonstrate how it runs through all of Wagner’s mature music-dramas. I subsequently learned that Dr. Jean-Jacques Nattiez has independently expounded a similar concept, that Siegfried is Wagner’s metaphor for the poet-dramatist, and Bruennhilde his metaphor for music (their union producing the music-drama). Dr. Nattiez produced an important book entitled *Wagner Androgyne* (1990 original French

edition, 1993 English translation by Princeton Univ. Press) which traced this metaphor's various incarnations in both Wagner's mature music-dramas, and in his theoretical prose works.

Though Wagner repeatedly appeals to the sexual gender metaphor that the poet-dramatist is the man, and music the woman, in 'Opera and Drama' and elsewhere in his writings, the most unambiguous evidence that he identified this metaphor with the loving relationship of Siegfried with Bruennhilde comes from the following comment in Cosima's Diaries:

"[P. 128] We speak also about my last conversation with Herr Levi. He does not seem to fully understand 'Parsifal,' and I tell him that R.'s article theoretically bears almost the same relationship to the poem as his words on music (the loving woman) and on drama (the man) in 'Opera and Drama' bear to Bruennhilde and Siegfried." [#933W-{8/2/78}CD Vol. II, p. 128]

One important implication of this elaborate poetic metaphor is that when Wotan leaves Bruennhilde asleep on her mountaintop, to await Siegfried's waking kiss, and then becomes a Wanderer who no longer interferes in the world, but only observes it, this is an allegorical representation of Wagner's comment above that, when our God (i.e., belief in God) had to leave us due to the victory of modern, scientific, secular thought, he left us the divine art of music as a substitute for lost faith. It is in this sense that the artist-hero Siegfried falls heir to Wotan's (religion's) legacy by waking and winning the love of Bruennhilde. What Siegfried wins is unconscious artistic inspiration by his muse, music.

In the following extracts Wagner further develops his Feuerbach-inspired argument that religious man's longing for transcendence of the real world lives on in music. Here Wagner not only identifies modern music with a purer Christianity purged of dogma and specific beliefs, but adds that music can only serve this purpose if it severs itself from the established church, i.e., conventional belief in God:

"[P. 223] ... the music of the Church was sung to the words of the abstract dogma; in its effect however, it dissolved those words and the ideas they fixed, to the point of their vanishing out of sight; and hence it rendered nothing to the enraptured Feeling save their pure emotional content. Speaking strictly, the only art that fully corresponds with the Christian belief is Music ... .

(...) ... we must recognize that Music reveals the inmost essence of the Christian religion with definition unapproached ... . (...) ... she stops all strife between reason and feeling ... .

(...) Only her final severance from the decaying Church could enable the art of Tone to save the noblest heritage of the Christian idea in its purity of over-worldly reformation ... ." [#1026W-{6-8/80}Religion and Art: PW Vol. VI, p. 223-224]

We are reminded of Wotan's need for a hero (and heroine, Bruennhilde) who will free himself from Wotan's influence, yet serve Wotan's longing for redemption from Alberich's curse on the Ring unconsciously.

And in the following passage Wagner describes music as providing what faith in Christ promises, a restoration of lost paradise, i.e., lost innocence:

"[P. 148] From the earth gushes sweet juice; with this, longing refreshes itself until it has imbibed fresh love of life: then the juice runs dry; rice sprouts forth unsown, satiety to abundance; then it comes to an end. Now one has to do one's own planting, ploughing and sowing. Life's torment begins: Paradise is lost. The music of the brahman world recalls it to the memory ... ." [#738W-{5/68}BB, p. 148]

Again, this serves to remind us that Siegfried remains, effectively, an innocent child, freed from Wotan's fall from grace, free from (consciousness of) Wotan's guilt, and seemingly freed also from Alberich's curse on the Ring.

In our final version of Wagner's thesis that art, and his art in particular, is heir to man's religious longing for transcendence, Wagner proposes that his music-dramas offer a substitute for Jesus' promise of redemption in a supernatural paradise. Wagner suggests that though his art remains firmly within the real world, it lifts us above this world through play:

**(2E) [WAGNER]** "[P. 33] ... I ... point my highly-loved young friend [King Ludwig II] to Art, as the kindly Life-saviour who does not really and wholly lead us out beyond this life, but, within it, lifts us up above it and shows it as itself a game of play ... ." [#708W-{64-2/65} On State and Religion: PW Vol. IV, p. 33-34]

Cosima records a similar remark by Wagner:

"[P. 470] He [i.e. Richard] says there are certain things human beings have been able to express only in symbols, and the church has committed the crime of consolidating these and forcing them on us as realities through persecution; it is permissible for art to use these symbols, but in a free spirit and not in the rigid forms imposed by the church; since art is a profound form of play, it frees these symbols of all the accretions the human craving for power has attached to them." [#1012W-{4/27/80} CD Vol. II, p. 470]

We will find this concept, that art as a substitute for lost religious faith is a "profound form of play," invaluable in our quest to answer our six key questions about the meaning of *Parsifal*.

### (3) PARSIFAL'S INNOCENCE AND IGNORANCE BASED ON SIEGFRIED

Among many other similarities, there is one characteristic which Siegfried and Parsifal share which stands out with peculiar force: they are both ignorant of their true identity. When Gurnemanz asks Parsifal his name, Parsifal answers: "I had many, but I no longer know them," echoing Siegfried's remark to Fafner that "... I still don't know who I am ... ." While Parsifal's response is obviously inspired by the Buddhist notion that he has been reincarnated multiple times but has forgotten all his former identities, it is not as widely known that Wagner himself described Siegfried to King Ludwig II as Wotan reborn:

"[P. 626] ... Wotan ... calls out to the earth's primeval wisdom, to Erda, the mother of nature, who had once taught him to fear for his end, telling her that dismay can no longer hold him in thrall since he now wills his own end with that selfsame will with which he had once desired to live. His end? He knows what Erda's primeval wisdom [P. 627] does not know: that he lives on in Siegfried. Wotan lives on in Siegfried as the artist lives on in his work of art: the freer and the more autonomous the latter's spontaneous existence and the less trace it bears of the creative artist – so that through it (the work of art), the artist himself is forgotten, -- the more perfectly satisfied does the artist himself feel ... ." [#693W-{11/6/64}] Letter to King Ludwig II of Bavaria: SLRW, p. 626-627]

What makes this even more interesting is that, while these two heroes are not conscious of their true identity, the heroines Bruennhilde and Kundry are aware of the true identities of Siegfried and Parsifal, respectively. In *Parsifal* Act One and Act Two Kundry not only recounts Parsifal's personal history, much of which Parsifal seems either not to know, or to have forgotten, but she names him "Parsifal" in Act Two. In response, Parsifal tells her: "Parsifal? Once my mother called me that in a dream? (...) Have I dreamt all this? Did you call me who have no name?" Similarly, Bruennhilde tells Siegfried in *Siegfried* Act Three: "Your own self am I, if you but love me in my bliss. What you don't know I know for you... ." In a certain sense, then, the heroine-muse – i.e., the hero's unconscious mind - keeps the secret of the hero's true identity, keeping even the hero himself unconscious of it, so that the hero does not know who he is but the heroine does.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, it can be said that she possesses knowledge – which the hero has forgotten – of his prior incarnations. Curiously, when planning a specifically Buddhist opera entitled *The Victors*, which Wagner never completed, but much of whose ideas were incorporated into *Parsifal*, Wagner proposed that the Buddha is conscious of all the protagonists' prior incarnations, which they have forgotten. Wagner also proposed that his musical motifs would be especially effective in this music-drama concerning Buddhist reincarnation, since musical motifs of foreboding or

reminiscence could call to mind protagonists' prior incarnations, making them ever present to the audience, though not to the protagonists:

“[P. 528] I was influenced to choose it ... by its peculiar aptness for the musical procedures that I have since developed. To the mind of the Buddha, the previous lives in former incarnations of every being appearing before him stand revealed as clearly as the present. The simple story owed its significance to the way that the past life of the suffering principal characters was entwined in the new phase of their lives [P. 529] as being still present time. I perceived at once how the musical remembrance of this dual life, keeping the past constantly present in the hearing, might be represented perfectly to the emotional receptivities, and this decided me to keep the prospect of working out this task before me as a labor of especial love.” [#640W-{5/16/56?} ML, p. 528-529]

Of course, Wagner finally achieved this in *Parsifal*.

Wagner linked reincarnation - and therefore his concept of the “Wonder,” i.e., his musical motifs' capacity to transport all the past and future to the present, and relocate all which can be found in the furthest reaches of space to this place to the spot where we now stand - with his Feuerbachian assumption that God and Nature, spirit and matter, are ultimately one. And these three ideas in turn Wagner conceived in light of his idiosyncratic version of Lobachevsky's theory of parallels, according to Cosima's testimony:

“[P. 426] Regarding poets, he says a poet is a visionary, and he tells me how Herwegh always needed a framework for his thoughts: ‘He grew lazy and, like all idle people, sought refuge in science, dissecting frogs. I wanted to get him producing again and suggested the subject of reincarnation, 9 cantos, three figures with 3 cantos for each, the same type recurring at different times - what I mean by God, who runs parallel with Nature up to the point where the parallels meet.” [#1005W-{1/15/80}CD Vol. II, p. 426]

It is intriguing that Wagner, in conceiving of his musical motifs as a “Wonder” which produces in us a feeling of the miraculous, a feeling that we have transcended the limits of a Newtonian universe of laws framed by time, space, and causality, employs images like Gurnemanz's “Time here changes into space”, and the related concept of parallel lines merging outside of time and space, which seem a poetic foreshadowing of Einstein's theory of relativity and the non-Euclidean geometry so central to it. Wagner developed a theory of “Feeling” according to which “expression” in music distorts our normal perspective on time, space, and causality. He even suggested – presciently, if rather simplistically – that science ultimately can't get at the essence of nature with its straight lines, but art – or feeling – takes its wavy lines from nature:

[P. 747] “Then he comes to the subject of the firmament, how curious our understanding of its nature. (...) ‘... What a stiff beggar a human being is, when he can think of nothing better than straight lines to get at the secrets of Nature, whereas Nature itself has none, until the artist comes along and takes his wavy lines from nature.’ “ [#1104W-{11/14/81} CD Vol. II, p. 747]

Wagner explained in a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck – in which he imagined the reincarnation of Lohengrin and Elsa as Ananda and Savitri (respectively) from *The Victors*, his never completed Buddhist opera - that all of our separate existences as individual humans come together as one outside of space and time through reincarnation, until all attain redemption:

“[P. 499] Lohengrin affected me very deeply yesterday, and I cannot help thinking it the most tragic of all poems, since reconciliation is really to be found only if one casts a terribly wide-ranging glance at the world.

Only a profound acceptance of the doctrine of metempsychosis [reincarnation] has been able to console me by revealing the point at which all things finally converge at the same level of redemption, after the various individual existences – which run alongside each other in time – have come together in a meaningful way outside time. According to the beautiful Buddhist doctrine, the spotless purity of Lohengrin is easily explicable in terms of his being the continuation of Parzival – who was the first to strive towards purity. Elsa, similarly, would reach the level of Lohengrin through being reborn. Thus my plan for the ‘Victors’ struck me as being the concluding section of Lohengrin. Here ‘Savitri’ (Elsa) entirely reaches the level of ‘Ananda’. In this way, all the terrible Tragedy of life would be attributable to our dislocation in time and space: but since time and space are merely our way of perceiving things [referencing here Schopenhauer’s Kantian concept of the ideality of space and time], but otherwise have no reality, even the greatest tragic pain must be explicable to those who are truly clear-sighted as no more than an individual error

... .

(...) Time and space – which, after all, bring nothing but torment and distress – then disappear for me!” [#676W-{8/60} Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck: SLRW, p. 499]

In my prior talk ‘How Elsa Showed Wagner the Way to Siegfried’ I explained how, by confessing to his unconscious mind Bruennhilde the whole history of causal relations which have trapped Wotan, and confessing to her also all that Wotan loathes about his own true self, Wotan was able to repress this hoard of conscious knowledge, his whole tortuous history and guilty sense of his abhorrent identity, and sublimate it, thereby transforming himself into his heir and reincarnate spirit, the free hero he longed for, Siegfried. Wotan is quite literally reborn in Siegfried, as man’s religious longing for

transcendence is reborn, according to Wagner, in inspired secular art. Siegfried is a hero, and freed from Wotan's foresight and fear of the end ("das Ende") which Erda foretold, precisely because, unlike Wotan, he does not know who he is. Siegfried is protected from dangerous self-knowledge, and from Wotan's fear, by Bruennhilde, who holds this knowledge for Siegfried and protects him from it. Bruennhilde – as the muse, i.e., as music, the language of the unconscious mind - is in this sense what Feuerbach called God's [Wotan's] safest refuge.

Since Siegfried is Wagner's metaphor for the artist-hero, the music-dramatist, and Wotan a metaphor for mankind's religious heritage to which Siegfried (Wagner) has fallen heir, one can see that in inheriting Bruennhilde from Wotan Siegfried not only inherits the distillate of religious faith, divine music (Feuerbach's "Feeling"), but also inherits an unconscious hoard of knowledge of all that Wotan confessed to Bruennhilde and repressed into his unconscious mind. It is for this reason that Siegfried feels fear only when preparing to wake Bruennhilde, since this threatens to restore to him the memory of his true identity as Wotan, and therefore to restore Wotan's fear. Similarly, Parsifal is temporarily overcome with fear after hearing his name spoken by Kundry: "Never have I seen or dreamed what I now behold – And it fills me with dread." This background knowledge is crucial to grasping the following matching pairs of extracts from Feuerbach and Wagner.

Brahma is the creator god in Hindu mythology. Feuerbach is therefore suggesting in the extract below that it was only through Maya, i.e. self-deception (or Wahn, illusion, as Sachs described the essence of inspired art and also human folly in *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*), that Brahma, who could foresee all things he would create, gained the courage to artistically create the world, since the veil of Maya effectively took away his foreknowledge of the world's evil, so that he could freely, fearlessly create it:

**(3A) [FEUERBACH]** "[P. 250] ... Maya [illusion, or Wahn] once drove away the melancholy of the ancient Brahma so that a depressed person was changed into a creator of the world." [#38F-TDI: p. 250]

In the following extract Wagner links the myth of Prometheus (whose name, translated from the Greek, means foresight or foreknowledge), which Wagner called "the most pregnant of tragedies" [#402W-{6-8/49} Art and Revolution: PW Vol. I, p. 34], with Feuerbach's thesis that Brahma, the Hindu creator-God, cannot create freely and fearlessly unless the veil of Maya deludes him:

**(3B) [WAGNER]** "[P. 435] ... R. says to me, 'Prometheus's words 'I took [P. 436] knowledge away from Man' came to my mind and gave me a profound insight; knowledge, seeing ahead is in fact a divine attribute, and Man with this divine attribute is a piteous object, he is like Brahma before the Maya spread before him the veil of ignorance, of deception; the divine privilege is the saddest thing of all." [#809W-{11/29/71} CD Vol. I, p. 435-436]

If we reference the original text of the Greek tragedy attributed to Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, we find that the knowledge Prometheus took away from man, i.e., protected man from, was foresight of man's inevitable death:

"Prometheus: Through me mankind ceased to foresee death.  
 Leader: What remedy could heal that sad disease?  
 Prometheus: Blind hopes I made to dwell in them.  
 Leader: O merciful boon to mortals!"

It is of uncommon interest that according to Wagner's own formulation above, Prometheus (i.e., foresight) not only granted man divine foreknowledge, but also took it away from man. Metaphorically speaking, Prometheus (the human mind itself) grants man the unique privilege and curse of being able to foresee, and meditate on, man's inevitable death (which provides man the huge advantage of foresight, but also the curse of existential fear and angst), but also evidently inspires man to create defense mechanisms against the ever-present thought of his mortality. Such would be religious faith in the hereafter, and perhaps art, which allows us to forget our mortality by bathing in the feeling of the moment, a seemingly all-embracing feeling which grants us the closest equivalent we can have to immortality within the real world. Similarly, we will find that Kundry both delivers, and offers to heal, Amfortas's unhealing wound.

It may well be that Wagner described the Prometheus tale (known to him through a German translation of *Prometheus Bound*, the first part of a Greek dramatic trilogy generally attributed to Aeschylus) as the most pregnant of tragedies because Prometheus, after granting mortal man the divine gift of foreknowledge (and thus sentencing man to what Feuerbach describes as a sort of existential fear known only to man), suffered Zeus's divine wrath (as Bruennhilde suffers Wotan's divine wrath for a similar crime). The punishment Prometheus suffers at Zeus's hands is, tellingly, being bound to a mountaintop to face the elements without protection, where Prometheus suffers an unhealing wound picked at continuously by vultures. Prometheus's unhealing wound is a metaphor, of course, for the gift of divine foresight, i.e., the human gift of reflective thought which allows man, alone among animals, to contemplate his inevitable end. The existential fear and anxiety this engenders is, of course, also the muse which has inspired all human societies to invent religions of consolation, as man's veil of Maya which grants man temporary healing of this wound of consciousness. As Wagner himself noted on several occasions, not only Amfortas, but Tristan also, suffer unhealing wounds. And of course Wotan's suffering under the threat of Alberich's curse on the ring, especially as expounded by Erda in her prophecy of the Gods' inevitable doom, is in effect an unhealing wound, which Bruennhilde is able to assuage temporarily by becoming a repository for Wotan's confession. By serving as Wotan's unconscious mind Bruennhilde is able to keep Wotan's unspoken secret a secret even from him, so that, in his reincarnate form Siegfried, he ceases to foresee the doom Erda had predicted, loses consciousness of his true identity (dangerous self-knowledge), and can fearlessly enter into that loving union with his muse which produces the Wagnerian artwork of the future.

It is noteworthy that Wotan, who suffers paralysis stemming from his fearful foreknowledge of the abysmal, and inevitable, twilight of the gods which Erda predicted, describes his condition to Bruennhilde in the following way: "The saddest am I of all living things," obviously echoing Wagner's comment above about the price man pays for divine foreknowledge. And Wotan makes this declaration of his desperation just prior to making his confession to Bruennhilde, that confession through which he can be reborn as Siegfried. Bruennhilde, in other words, by holding for him his fatal hoard of knowledge of the bitter truth, frees Wotan from the despair embodied in his confession that: "To my loathing I find only ever my self in all that I encompass. That other self for which I yearn, that other self I never see ... ." Through his confession to Bruennhilde Wotan becomes his other self Siegfried, protected now by the veil of Maya, or Wahn, the magical protection from abhorrent self-knowledge which Bruennhilde's love provides Siegfried.

I believe that Parsifal's ignorance of his true identity has an identical explanation. After all, Wagner stated in his essay 'Epilogue to "The Nibelung's Ring"' that Siegfried and Bruennhilde are virtually the same characters as Tristan and Isolde:

"[P. 268] With the sketch of 'Tristan und Isolde' I felt that I was really not quitting the mythic circle opened-out to me by my Nibelungen labours ... . For the grand concordance of all sterling Myths, as thrust upon me by my studies, had sharpened my eyesight for the wondrous variations standing out amid this harmony. Such a one confronted me with fascinating clearness in the relation of Tristan to Isolde, as compared with that of Siegfried to Bruennhilde. ... here, ... two seemingly unlike relations had sprung from the one original mythic factor. Their intrinsic parity consists in this: both Tristan and Siegfried, in bondage to an illusion which makes this deed of theirs unfree, woo for another their own eternally-predestined bride, and in the false relation hence arising find their doom. (...) What in the one work [the *Ring*] could only come to rapid utterance at the climax, in the other [*Tristan and Isolde*] becomes an entire Content, of infinite variety; and this it was, that attracted me to treat the stuff at just that time, namely as a supplementary Act of the great Nibelungen-myth, a mythos compassing the whole relations of a world." [#811W-{12/71} Epilogue to THE NIBELUNG'S RING (PW Vol. III, p. 268-269)]

And Cosima reports that Wagner described Kundry as having experienced, in her prior incarnations, Isolde's final transfiguration hundreds of times:

"[P. 910] When there is mention on the train of the Wagnerites' preference for 'T. und I.' even over 'Parsifal,' R. says: "Oh, what do they know? One might say that Kundry already experienced Isolde's Liebestod a hundred times in her various reincarnations.'" [#1135W-{9/14/82} CD Vol. II, p.

910]

In a sense all of the leading characters in Wagner's prior operas and music dramas are reborn in the protagonists of *Parsifal*, where all their parallel existences seem to come together and merge outside of time and space.

In the following extract in which Feuerbach describes all that a human soul would have to renounce within the physical world, in order to attain supernatural immortality in heaven, we find further ground for our thesis that through Wotan's confession to Bruennhilde he is reborn as Siegfried (who in turn is reborn as Parsifal), who lacks conscious knowledge of both his prior history, and his true identity:

**(3C) [FEUERBACH]** “[P. 133] Only when history is nothing, when the naked individual who is stripped of all historical elements, all destiny, determination, purpose, and measure, and goal, only when the vain, abstract, meaningless, empty individual is something, and history is nothing, is the nothing after death something. ... as they [Christians] posit a future life, they negate actual life.” [#20F-TDI: p. 133]

It is important to recall here, apropos of Feuerbach's critique of Christianity's promise of immortality, Wagner's remark in the tribute to Feuerbach he wrote for his autobiography (the opening quotation of the present paper) that what pleased Wagner about Feuerbach was his notion that the sole authentic immortality adheres only to noble deeds and inspired works of art. In other words, according to Wagner, what religious folk took to be a literal immortality of the spirit in heaven, lives on figuratively in the historical celebration of the great deeds of our past heroes (our immortals, so to speak), and in great and inspired works of art which become part of civilization's legacy, as immortal, iconic works.

Wagner is clearly referencing Feuerbach's remark above (compare Feuerbach's “naked individual” above with Wagner's “naked Man” below) when he describes below how he peeled away the layers of historical man to rediscover the mythic man, Siegfried:

**(3D) [WAGNER]** “[P. 357] ... I drove step by step into the deeper regions of antiquity, where at last to my delight, and truly in the utmost reaches of old time, I was to light upon the fair young form of [P. 358] Man, in all the freshness of his force. ... . What here I saw, was no longer the Figure of conventional history, whose garment claims our interest more than does the actual shape inside; but the real naked Man ... .” [#574W-{6-8/51} A Communication To My Friends: PW Vol. I, p. 357-358]

**(3E) [WAGNER]** “[P. 375] With the conception of ‘Siegfried,’ I had pressed forward to where I saw before me the Human Being in the most natural and blithest fulness of his physical life. No historic garment more,

confined his limbs; no outwardly-imposed relation hemmed in his movements ... . (...) It was 'Elsa' [from *Lohengrin*] who had taught me to unearth this man: to me, he was the male-embodied spirit of perennial and sole creative instinct (Unwillkuer) ... ." [#579W-{6-8/51} A Communication To My Friends: PW Vol. I, p. 375]

Though readers will find a full explanation of Wagner's tribute to Elsa above, as his source of inspiration for his invention of the history-less and identity-less Siegfried, in the essay-length elaboration of my talk 'How Elsa Showed Wagner the Way to Siegfried,' a quick review of this thesis will be helpful here. Though Lohengrin ostensibly came to earth to redeem Elsa from an allegedly false charge of fratricide, the libretto of *Lohengrin* strongly suggests, and Wagner's commentary on *Lohengrin* in 'A Communication to My Friends' makes clear, that Lohengrin was in fact seeking redemption from the bleak, abstract solitude of the Grail Realm (in which the Grail knights enjoy immortality but must swear an oath of celibacy), by seeking earthly love with a mortal. The reason for this, following our Feuerbachian-Wagnerian logic, is that since the immortality of our soul in heaven is merely imaginary, to make even our imaginary heaven livable we need to smuggle into it what religious conviction told us we'd have to renounce in order to be worthy of admission, namely, all those things which give life its luster. In other words, when we imagine heaven we don't merely imagine a disembodied spiritual existence without any ego or consciousness (in fact, it is impossible to imagine a disembodied world without in some sense embodying it in an image), but instead picture ourselves enjoying a condition of bliss in heaven unmixed with the pain and dread which is inextricably bound up with the bliss obtainable only within the real world. As Feuerbach put it:

"[P. 137] Even if that which pleases him cannot exist without being associated with that which displeases him, the subjective man is not guided by the wearisome laws of logic and physics, but by the self-will of the imagination. Hence he drops what is disagreeable in a fact, and holds fast alone what is agreeable." [#100F-EOC: p. 137]

Wagner elaborated on Feuerbach's concept of smuggling in our extract below:

"[P. 345] This act of denying the will [i.e., self-renunciation for the sake of an ideal, such as conquering one's own egoism and self-preservation instinct for the sake of others] is the true action of the saint: that it is ultimately accomplished only in a total end to individual consciousness – for there is no other consciousness except that which is personal and individual – was lost sight of by the naïve saints of Christianity, confused, as they were, by Jewish dogma, and they were able to deceive their confused imagination by seeing that longed-for state as a perpetual continuation of a new state of life freed from nature ... ." [#636W-{6/7/55} Letter to Franz Liszt: SLRW, p. 345-346]

In other words, a religion-based morality which offers eternal bliss in paradise in compensation for renunciation of earthly satisfaction in this life is hypocritically smuggling an egoistic motive into the very spiritual realm, i.e., into our longing for redemption there, which presumably requires renunciation of egoism as the price of admission.

The relevance of our argument above concerning the art of smuggling the earthly into heaven is the following: In my essay ‘How Elsa Showed Wagner the Way to Siegfried’ I also pointed out that the true identity and origin which Lohengrin keeps secret (in a sense even from himself) is that God and the spiritual actually originate in man’s imagination, under the sway of the egoistic desire for infinite pleasure and freedom from pain and fear, which in turn originates in nature, since man himself is the product of natural evolution. The fact that Lohengrin and other Grail knights, who have presumably cast aside the burden of earthly, carnal, mortal existence in favor of a spiritual existence, need to return to earth to seek redemption from the meaninglessness of an imaginary existence, is proof of their natural origin, and also of the natural origin of their ideal, their longing to transcend the physical world and their body. So, when Elsa offers to share with Lohengrin the burden of keeping this secret, but Lohengrin refuses her request, it is left for Wotan in Wagner’s first, revolutionary music-drama, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, to share with Bruennhilde his confession of that secret which according to Wotan will remain forever unspoken. It will remain forever unspoken not only because he does not speak it in words, but also because Bruennhilde will keep it secret even from him. It is in this sense that Elsa - i.e., her offer to share with Lohengrin the task of preserving him from the danger of exposing his secret - showed Wagner the way to Siegfried, and therefore also the way to his revolutionary transition from romantic German opera to music-drama. Thus Wagner said that:

“[P. 345] This [his creation of *Lohengrin*] led me, in the conduct of the scenes ... and dialogue ... , to a path which brought me later to the discovery of possibilities whose logical sequence was certainly to point me out an utter revolution in the adjustment of those factors which have hitherto made up our [P. 346] operatic mode of speech.” [#572W-{6-8/51} A Communication To My Friends: PW Vol. I, p. 345-346]

[P. 347] Elsa, the Woman, ... made me a Revolutionary at one blow.” [#573W-{6-8/51} A Communication To My Friends: PW Vol. I, p. 347]

Thanks to our theses that it is through Wotan’s confession to Bruennhilde (recalling that Bruennhilde calls herself Wotan’s “Will”) that the fear-struck Wotan, trapped in a web of historical entanglements, is reborn as the fearless and history-less Siegfried, and that through Wagner’s musical motifs (for which Bruennhilde is metaphor) past and future (reminiscence and foreboding) become present, we can now understand Wagner’s following startling remark to Cosima:

**(3F) [WAGNER]** “[P. 466] Siegfried lives entirely in the present, he is the hero, the finest gift of the will [i.e., the finest gift of Bruennhilde, who

heard Wotan's confession and will now keep his unspoken secret for Siegfried]." [#820W-{3/12/72}CD Vol. I, p. 466]

Now, in final confirmation that Wotan can live in the present in his new incarnation as Siegfried (or as Parsifal, if you will), through the agency of the unconscious mind and its language, music (i.e. through Bruennhilde's protective love), note Wotan's and Bruennhilde's intimate exchange just prior to his confession:

"Wotan: If I let it be spoken aloud, shall I not loosen my will's restraining hold? Bruennhilde: To Wotan's will you speak when you tell me what you will: who am I if not your will? Wotan: what in words I reveal to no one, let it stay unspoken for ever: with myself I commune when I speak with you."

Now compare this with what Wagner described as the "Wonder" of his musical motifs, which submerges the poet-dramatist's aim (say, Wotan's quest to obtain redemption from Alberich's curse) within the dream realm of unconsciousness and the involuntary. Through the Wonder the secret can remain unconscious even for its author, the poet-dramatist himself.

"[P. 233] The poet can only hope to realize his Aim, from the instant when he hushes it and keeps it secret to himself: that is to say, when, in the language [P. 234] wherein alone it could be imparted as a naked intellectual-aim, he no longer speaks it out at all. (...)

A Tone-speech [song] ... is therefore the organ of expression proper for the poet who would make himself intelligible by turning from the Understanding to the Feeling ... ." [#529W-{50-1/51} Opera and Drama: PW Vol. II, p. 233-234]

In the context, of course, Wagner is alluding to music when he says the poet can keep his aim secret by expressing it without words.

In the following extract, for instance, Wagner could well be speaking of the content of Wotan's confession of his historical entanglements to Bruennhilde when he describes how melody frees the poet's subject matter from the burden of history and its entanglements:

"[P. 256] ... he [the Poet] has ... freed his subject-matter, as much as he could, from a burdensome surrounding of historico-social and state-religious relations and conditionings. But the poet has never heretofore been able to bring this to such a point, that he could impart his subject unconditionally to the Feeling and nothing else, -- any more than he has brought his vehicle of expression to a like enhancement; for this enhancement to the highest pitch of emotional utterance could only have been reached precisely in an ascension of the verse into the melody ... .

[P. 263] ... the Poetic Aim can only be realized through its complete transmission from the Understanding to the Feeling ... ." [#532W-{50-1/51} Opera and Drama: PW Vol. II, p. 256; p. 263]

And finally, Wagner's highly suggestive remarks below inform us that his musical motifs (i.e., Bruennhilde, or Kundry) keep the profoundest secret of the poet's (i.e. Wotan's) aim, which Wagner himself shares with his audience:

"[P. 346] These Melodic Moments ... will be made by the orchestra into a kind of guides-to-Feeling (Gefuehlsweigweisern) through the whole labyrinthine (vielgewundenen) building of the drama. At their hand we become the constant fellow-knowers of the profoundest secret of the poet's Aim, the immediate partners in its realisation." [#547W-{50-1/51} Opera and Drama: PW Vol. II, p. 346]

Ultimately Wagner himself comes to our support and says below, quite openly, that one can draw a parallel between Siegfried's relationship with Wotan, and Parsifal's relationship with Amfortas, again illustrating our thesis that the protagonists of Wagner's prior operas and music-dramas are reborn in *Parsifal*:

(3G) [WAGNER] "[P. 299] Over coffee he says to me that in fact Siegfried ought to have turned into Parsifal and redeemed Wotan, he should have come upon Wotan (instead of Amfortas) in the course of his wanderings ... ." [#964W-{4/29/79}CD Vol. II, p. 299]

#### **(4) KUNDRY, THE ARTIST'S MUSE, AND HER ETERNAL REBIRTHS AS SEDUCTRESS AND SERVANT OF THE GRAIL: BY INSPIRING ART SHE COMPENSATED FOR THE WOUND SHE DELIVERED**

I mentioned earlier Wagner's borrowing of the Buddhist concept of reincarnation for his music-drama *Parsifal*, and noted that it is implicit that Parsifal has been reborn many times. Gurnemanz quite explicitly describes Kundry as a reincarnate spirit who is effectively working through her karma, her guilt for some past sin, in her present life: "... under a curse she may be. Today she lives here, perhaps anew, to atone for guilt in her earlier life, still unforgiven." Following is Wagner's remarkable description of Kundry's idiosyncratic brand of reincarnation, alternating rebirths of two personas:

(4A) [WAGNER] "[P. 54] Kundry is living a never-ending life of constantly alternating re-births as the result of an ancient curse which ... condemns her, in new shapes, to bring to men the suffering of seduction; redemption, death, complete extinction is vouchsafed her only if her most powerful blandishments are withstood by the most chaste and virile of

men." (...) [P. 55] From one state to the next, she carries no real consciousness of what has passed: to her it is like a dream experienced in very deep sleep which, on waking, one has no recollection of ... ."  
 [#715W-{8/30/65}BB, p. 54-55]

The constantly alternating personas are (1) her role as seductress of Grail Knights while in Klingsor's service, and (2) her role as penitent pariah providing unquestioning service to the Grail knights as the messenger of the Grail and inspirer of the knights in battle (shades of the Valkyrie Bruennhilde! In fact, one can hear echoes of Bruennhilde's Valkyrie music in the orchestra when Gurnemanz describes how Kundry rides her horse).

This passage contains two rather striking points: (1) if Kundry is, in effect, Bruennhilde and Isolde reborn, and we can accept my thesis that both Bruennhilde and Isolde (and self-evidently Eva from *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*, who is Walther's muse of inspiration for his Mastersong) are the artist-heroes' muses, then Wagner is saying here that Kundry's curse, the suffering of seduction, is identical with her role as muse of inspiration for the artist-hero's art, which is produced through their figurative act of sexual union. In other words, Kundry can only escape from the curse of eternal rebirth, i.e., eternal inspiration of the artist's art through figurative sexual union, if the artist-hero rejects her love. What this means is that the artist-hero must waken from what has now become the nightmare of his formerly unconscious artistic inspiration by his muse, prior to embracing her in complete union, so he can gain enlightenment and renounce her love (and the illusory redemption it offers). On this view Wagner is, effectively, suggesting that his inspired artistic creativity is a burden, a curse, a private hell, which Wagner himself wishes to escape.

(2) This passage suggests that this act of unconscious artistic inspiration of the artist, experienced as a dream in deep sleep, which is not remembered upon waking, is Kundry's alternate life, or incarnation, the sin for which Kundry seeks atonement in her present life, as a penitent and servant of the holy Grail. Klingsor himself reminds Kundry of this: "Kundry: Yearning ... yearning ...! Klingsor: Haha! For those saintly knights? Kundry: There ... there ... I served. Klingsor: Yes - to repair the harm you maliciously brought on them?" Wagner's following remarks strongly suggest that he did indeed link Kundry with his theory of unconscious artistic inspiration:

**(4B) [WAGNER]** "[P. 111] ... the prodigious force here [in artistic inspiration] framing appearances from within outwards, against the ordinary laws of Nature [i.e. subjectively, rather than objectively], must be engendered by the deepest Want (Noth). And that Want presumably would be the same as finds vent ... in the scream of the suddenly awakened from an obsessing vision of profoundest sleep [\* Translator's Footnote: "Cf. Kundry's awakening in *Parsifal*, acts ii. and iii.] ... . (...)  
 [P. 112] " ... the important issue for the Art-genius of mankind, is that this special stress called forth an artistic deed whereby that genius gained a novel power, the qualification for begetting the highest Artwork."

[#786W-{9-12/70} Beethoven: PW Vol. V, p. 111-112]

It is a bizarre characteristic of Kundry that upon waking from her unconscious service to Klingsor as muse-seductress, and returning to the Grail realm to offer her service in atonement, she unleashes a primal scream. And most importantly, she forgets the time spent in Klingsor's service. Interestingly, Tannhaeuser likewise forgets his loving embrace of Venus in the Venusberg each time he wakes within the environs of the Wartburg, armed now with new inspiration to compose songs for the court. Though his true source of inspiration is what the Minnesingers, Courtiers, and Ladies of the Wartburg would describe as hellish, they, and he, are glad to attribute his inspiration to a divine, heavenly source. This remains true until the song contest in the Act Two, when Tannhaeuser, as if under a spell, unwittingly reveals the true source of his artistic inspiration for the first time, his loving sojourn with Venus in the Venusberg, both to himself and to his audience. It is therefore noteworthy that Wagner himself acknowledged the kinship of Klingsor's Magic Garden with the Venusburg on more than one occasion.

I have explained in my paper "The 'Ring' as a Whole" (a brief version of which can be found under 'articles' on the Boston Wagner Society website) that, since both Siegfried and Tristan are metaphors for Wagner the music-dramatist, and Bruennhilde and Isolde metaphors for the artist-hero's muse of unconscious artistic inspiration, when Siegfried and Tristan, under a spell, give their true muse of inspiration away to another man (Gunther and King Marke, respectively), this is Wagner's allegorical representation of his own suspicion that in his mature music-dramas he was unwittingly revealing the secret of his own unconscious artistic inspiration, i.e., the profoundest secret of his poetic intent, to both himself and his audience. Clearly this is also what happens when Tannhaeuser reveals the heretofore unconscious source of his inspiration to the Wartburg Court. This is also effectively what Klingsor does in luring the Grail Knights, and ultimately their King Amfortas, into the arms of his Flowermaidens and Kundry, muses all, except that, unlike Siegfried and Tristan, and even Tannhaeuser, Klingsor is fully conscious of the tragic implications of his actions. The hidden agenda behind this plot archetype is, ultimately, that the Grail, i.e., man's longing to transcend the real world in a supernatural realm, in actuality has an earthly, physical, and mortal origin. This is what is at stake, and it is the cause of that horror which ensues when this secret is exposed to the light of day.

It seems then that Kundry, like Bruennhilde (and presumably Isolde, and most certainly Eva), is Wagner's metaphor for the muse, or potential muse, for Parsifal's unconscious artistic inspiration. Kundry not only selflessly serves the Grail knights as the Grail's messenger and inspirer of Grail knights in battle, but she is also the most dependable in procuring balsam to salve Amfortas's unhealing wound (a wound she caused in the first place). This is also, by the way, what lies behind Sachs's cobbling song in *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* Act Two: in essence he is confessing secretly to Eva (since Walther doesn't grasp the meaning of his song) that, since she, as Eve in Paradise, is guilty of the original sin of eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and sharing it with Adam, that sin which expelled mankind from paradise, Eva must compensate for

this sin by inspiring the music-dramatist Walther to produce his redemptive Mastersong, in which paradise (Eve proffering the fruit of the Tree of Life) seems to be regained. This Mastersong is the shoe with a perfect fit, through which man, now expelled from paradise, can walk upon the gravel of mortal life, yet not feel it. But the balsam Kundry provides is, however, now always ineffective.

In effect, then, Kundry's alternating identities are (1) the seductress-muse who unconsciously inspires the artist's art, now considered sinful, and which no longer provides a healing salve, and (2) the penitent who atones for this sin, by serving the Grail knights as their messenger, source of inspiration, and provider of ever less effective salves. Evidently her two formerly distinct identities, sleeping and waking, respectively, are becoming ever more indistinguishable. It appears she is no longer able to keep the poet-dramatist's unspoken secret. The veil of Maya no longer serves to preserve the artist from paralyzing self-knowledge. The unconscious is becoming conscious. Or, as Alberich put it, his Hoard (of forbidden knowledge) is rising from silent depths to the daylight.

In light of Kundry's status as the messenger who delivers the Grail's inspiration to the Grail Knights, it is extraordinarily interesting to recall here that Wagner described his musical motifs of reminiscence and foreboding as the "messengers" of the poet's hidden aim or intent:

"[P. 324] This faculty ["of uttering the unspeakable"] the ear acquires through the language of the Orchestra, which is able to attach itself just as intimately to the verse-melody as earlier to the gesture, and thus to develop into a messenger of the very Thought itself, transmitting it to Feeling ... ." [#540W-{50-1/51} Opera and Drama: PW Vol. II, p. 324]

It would appear that his motifs do indeed hold the key to unlock the secret of Wagner's unconscious poetic intent, the programme behind his veil of Maya, the completed work of art.

Feuerbach again provides an extraordinarily helpful clue: it would appear that Wagner assimilated Feuerbach's praise of Eve – who provided mankind with the fatal knowledge (i.e., consciousness) which drove man out of paradise – to his characterization of his heroines. This is not the place to introduce evidence which will carry us too far afield from our primary argument, but it is worth mentioning that I have considerable reason to believe that all of Wagner's heroines from at least Venus (in *Tannhaeuser*) onward through Elsa (in *Lohengrin*) and the four heroines of the mature music-dramas (namely Bruennhilde, Isolde, Eva, and Kundry) are modeled on the Biblical Eve who brought about the Fall through knowledge. Of course, Eva in *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* is obviously modeled on Eve. I also propose that Wagner construed Eve somewhat according to Feuerbach's reading, as described below:

**(4C) [FEUERBACH]** "[P. 246-247] "In the beginning faith was alone and in a condition of innocence ... . Adam developed a strong yearning for a

female companion. God pitied his plight, took a rib out of the body of faith, and created for him Eve, that is, reason. (...) But alas, Eve! She seduced upright faith into plucking the fruit from the tree of knowledge, and an angry god drove the pathetic pair out of paradise, the land of simple innocence." [#35F-TDI: p. 246-247]

**(4D) [FEUERBACH]** "[P. 250] We should celebrate gratefully the day when Eve misled Adam, for she did it out of her love for us." [#37F-TDI: p. 250]

Feuerbach construes Eve as a symbol for freedom of intellectual inquiry, and specifically for natural science, through which man can replace the illusion that man can participate in a transcendent, supernatural realm of being in which he can find redemption from the anguish of life, with acknowledgment of his true identity as an animal, and restore nature's status as his true mother. The Biblical Eve stands for what we might call the first, or traditional, Fall, or exile from paradise. The Feuerbachian Eve in contrast represents a sort of second Fall, in which man himself renounces the innocence of a consoling religious faith in the hereafter, with an acceptance of mortal life here on earth. Metaphorically speaking, historical man gradually accumulates a hoard of knowledge of nature and of his true place in nature, which inevitably leads to the death of belief in supernatural gods, a sort of twilight of the gods.

In the following passage Wagner himself describes Kundry as a figure for Eve:

**(4E) [WAGNER]** "[P. 664] 'What is the significance of Kundry's kiss?' - That ... is a terrible secret! (...) Adam and Eve became 'knowing'. They became 'conscious of sin'. The human race had to atone for that consciousness by suffering shame and misery until redeemed by Christ who took upon himself the sin of mankind. (...) Adam - Eve: Christ. - How would it be if we were now to add to them: -- 'Anfortas - Kundry: Parzival?' But with considerable caution!" [#718W-{9/7/65}Letter to King Ludwig II of Bavaria: SLRW, p. 664]

To grasp Wagner's allegorical logic in modeling his heroines on Eve, consider the following: we noted previously Wagner's assertion that Feuerbach showed him how the only true immortality is found in heroic deeds and inspired works of art. In other words, secular art falls heir to religious faith's feeling, when faith as a set of conceptual beliefs, or assertions of fact, can no longer be sustained in the face of modern, secular, scientific thought. Note also that Feuerbach in the passage above describes the Eve who gave Adam the fatal knowledge which drove man out of paradise (i.e., out of the ignorance and innocence of unquestioning religious faith in the supernatural) as reason, i.e., as the basis for scientific, secular thought, which brings religious faith to an end. It is this passing away of religious faith which, according to my reading of Wagner's allegorical logic, is the muse of inspiration for the development of secular art, and particularly Wagner's music-drama, as a substitute for lost religious faith. It is in this indirect sense that the

Biblical Eve, via Feuerbach's reinterpretation, can be understood as a metaphor for the loss of faith in transcendent being, and therefore as the muse for man's longing to restore the innocence that has been lost, which produces inspired art. This is virtually Wagner's definition of music.

### **(5) KLINGSOR'S MAGIC GARDEN: ART PERPETUATES RELIGION'S (I.E., PARSIFAL'S, SIEGFRIED'S, AND TRISTAN'S) SIN AGAINST OUR MOTHER, NATURE**

There are a number of instances where Wagner, though indirectly influenced by Feuerbach, added something unique and original to his music-dramas which Feuerbach never explored. We noted earlier Feuerbach's observation that religious feeling can live on when religion as a set of beliefs, articles of faith, and assertions of fact, must fail in the face of contradictory facts or logic brought to light by scientific inquiry, and that he identified this feeling in which God finds refuge, with music. But, in contradistinction to this viewpoint, Feuerbach celebrated modern secular art, divorced from religion, as the complement to natural science, because such art disclaims any appeal to the supernatural, and embraces the real world. Of course Wagner, echoing Feuerbach, suggested that art could live on in the face of science because, unlike religious faith, secular art stakes no claim to represent truth, and therefore makes no claims to factuality which could be contradicted by science.

What Wagner brought to Feuerbach's musings on art in the modern world was a compromise with Feuerbach's two distinct conceptions, which evidently contradict one another. That is to say, on the one hand Feuerbach suggests that modern secular art is a natural complement to science because it doesn't posit the supernatural, while on the other hand man's religious longings for mystery and for the transcendent can live on in the art of music, pure feeling. Siegfried, as the friendly foe for whose redemption Wotan longs, exemplifies this contradiction. Wagner likewise felt that religious man's longing for transcendence is satisfied by secular art, particularly the art of music, in which a feeling of infinitude very like religious man's longing for transcendence does indeed live on unencumbered by claims to truth which might involve the artist and his audience in contradictions. But Wagner felt that this art, at its inspired best, as in Wagner's own music-dramas, was nonetheless antithetical to the scientific world-view, and would eventually come into conflict with it because Wagner wished to reserve for inspired art, and for the geniuses who produce it, an element of mystery which he felt is irreducible to logic. In other words, like Schopenhauer, Wagner was smuggling a religious sensibility into his ostensible atheism.

In this sense, then, we can legitimately draw the conclusion that Wagner's understanding of his own art was that it perpetuates religion's sin against the truth, through feeling rather than through staking a claim to factual knowledge. On more than one occasion Wagner actually conflated deep feeling with truth, though he was careful to distinguish factuality in the scientific sense from this truthfulness of deep feeling. In the *Ring* this conflict seems to end with the victory of science and the death of both religion

(the gods of Valhalla) and art (whose metaphor is the loving union of Siegfried the artist-hero and his muse Bruennhilde), since all go down to destruction. Of course, Hagen, Alberich's instrument of annihilation, and presumably Wagner's metaphor for the secular, scientific worldview which according to Wagner is inimical to both religious faith and art, goes down to destruction also, for Wagner felt it bore the seeds of its own destruction.

On this view the music-drama was nothing more than covert religion, just as the Valhallan gods' only hope of redemption from Alberich's threat was Siegfried the artist-hero, who fails in the end just like his prior incarnation Wotan. Because, in Wagner's view, his art would inevitably succumb to the same fate religious belief does (just as Bruennhilde tells Wotan that Siegfried succumbed to the same curse to which Wotan succumbed), Wagner, I believe, in his final years sought redemption even from his own art.

There is considerable evidence that Wagner construed Klingsor's Magic Garden as a metaphor for his own art, and for its ultimate failure to redeem man from the bleak outlook of a purely objective, scientific worldview, in which there is no room for divinity or transcendent love. Our initial clue is the fact that Kundry's narrative of Parsifal's early childhood, which takes up a large portion of Act Two (entirely set in Klingsor's magic garden), describes how Parsifal neglected his mother (a metaphor for Mother Nature), and brought about her death through a broken heart. This corresponds perfectly with Feuerbach's notion that in positing the existence of a supernatural creator god, religious man had to deny his true origins in nature. Metaphorically speaking, religious man denies his true mother, Nature, and this was not only a sin against Mother Nature, but was actually symbolic matricide.

I believe this may be what is behind the otherwise inexplicable fact that not only Parsifal, but two of Wagner's other mature music-drama heroes, Siegfried and Tristan, are in a sense responsible for their mother's death. While Parsifal brought about his mother's death through neglect (and specifically through seeking the Grail Realm, the supernatural realm which is an affront to Mother Nature), both Siegfried and Tristan are described as having been born through their mother's death. Siegfried himself expresses what can best be described as remorse for this. After Mime describes how Siegfried's mother Sieglinde died giving him birth, Siegfried asks himself "So my mother died through me?" And later, musing alone, he exclaims: "when, in her dismay, she gave me birth, why did she have to die then? Do all mortal mothers perish because of their sons? Sad that would be, in truth!" When Siegfried longs to see his mother, we hear forest murmurs reminding us of his metaphysical mother, nature, as well as a motif identified earlier with both his mother Sieglinde, and the sufferings of both his parents. The fact that Sieglinde, Siegfried's literal mother, died giving Siegfried birth, is itself a metaphor for his relationship to his metaphysical mother, Nature.

A likely mythological source for Wagner's notion that the artist-hero is a matricide is Orestes' murder of his mother Clytemnestra, and Bruennhilde's intervention in Siegmund's and Siegfried's behalf is probably modeled, to some extent, on Athena's

intervention on Orestes' behalf. It is surely no accident that Athena like Bruennhilde is an armored virgin, goddess of wisdom, born of her father Zeus's head (just as Bruennhilde's ability to serve as protectress to Siegfried - i.e., to bring Siegfried to birth by letting Wotan's confession inseminate her womb, so to speak - is the product of Wotan's confession to her).

This idea that the artist-hero is a matricide is probably Wagner's metaphor for Feuerbach's notion that religious belief in a transcendent, supernatural realm of being, constitutes not only a sin against Mother Nature, but figurative matricide. Since Wagner regarded his own revolutionary music-dramas as a perpetuation of mankind's religious longing for transcendence, and conceived his mature music-drama heroes (Siegfried, Tristan, Walther, and Parsifal) as metaphors for the music-dramatist, the heroes are figuratively responsible for the death of their mother, Nature, because in their inspired art they perpetuate religious man's sin in denying Mother Nature, and the objective truth, for the sake of an illusion, the longing for transcendence of the real world. Thus Parsifal is utterly overcome with guilt as Kundry describes how his neglect led to his mother's death. Her narrative from Act Two is set in the midst of the detritus left behind in the Magic Garden by all prior heroes of religion and art (represented by the Grail knights – perhaps Parsifal's prior incarnations? - and their lovers, the Flower-maidens, whom we may take as their muses of unconscious artistic inspiration).

The following extracts from Feuerbach and Wagner bear this out. Feuerbach, for instance, states that the belief in God the creator strikes life (i.e., Mother Nature) dead, and is a sin against Nature:

**(5A) [FEUERBACH]** “[P. 86] If you imagine nature has its ground outside of itself [i.e., that God created it] you strike life dead ... .” [#11F-TDI: p. 86]

**(5B) [FEUERBACH]** “[P. 85] How untrue we Germans have become to our source, our mother, and how unlike her, thanks to Christianity which taught us that heaven is our home.” [#211F-LER: p. 85]

Wagner's following remarks are clear echoes of Feuerbach's sentiments:

**(5C) [WAGNER]** “[P. 59] If history shows an actual Utopia, a truly unattainable ideal, it is that of Christendom; for it has clearly and plainly shown ... that its dogmas are not realizable. How could those dogmas become really living, and pass over into actual life: when they were directed against life itself ... ?” [#412W-{6-8/49} Art and Revolution: PW Vol. I, p. 59-60]

**(5D) [WAGNER]** “[P. 57] Let us glance ... at this future state of Man, when he shall have freed himself from his last heresy, the denial of Nature, -- that heresy which has taught him hitherto to look upon himself as a mere instrument to an end which lay outside himself [i.e. God's end].” [#410W-

{6-8/49} Art and Revolution: PW Vol. I, p. 57]

## **(6) THE PRICE FOR RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN TRANSCENDENCE: AMFORTAS'S UNHEALING WOUND**

It is no accident that, just as Parsifal is overcome by guilt when Kundry informs him that his mother (Nature) died through his neglect (i.e., through his betrayal of her, by seeking instinctively to serve the Grail), he also suddenly becomes aware of his true identity as a sinner against Amfortas. Parsifal has sinned against Amfortas not only in having neglected to seek or grasp the cause of Amfortas's suffering when Parsifal visited the Grail Castle, but also by running off on adventures to Klingsor's Magic Garden of Art, which provided man a surrogate for his true mother, Nature, a surrogate reality. As Parsifal says, when Kundry's kiss has granted him a profound sense of identification with Amfortas's anguish (which Parsifal experienced in the Grail Temple in Act One):

"I hear the saviour's lament, the lament, oh the lament o'er the desecrated sanctuary: 'Deliver, rescue me from guilt-stained hands!' Thus cried the godly lament thundering loud to my soul, and I, the fool, the coward, I fled to wild and childish deeds!"

Like so many other passages in *Parsifal* this passage is highly ambiguous: on the one hand it could mean merely that Christ the saviour wishes for a purer soul to restore his personal relic - the spear that pierced his side after he was nailed to the cross - to the Grail sanctuary, by removing it from the impure Klingsor's hands, and replacing the corrupted, sinful Amfortas by taking on his role as Grail King and performing the Holy Grail service himself. One problem with this reading is that the "wild and childish deeds" to which Parsifal alludes are his journey to Klingsor's Magic Garden, which in the event is necessary in order to destroy it and recapture the spear. If, however, we interpret Parsifal's visit to Klingsor's Magic Garden as the artist-hero's unconscious artistic inspiration by the muse (i.e., by any of the Flower-maidens, or by Kundry), and consider that Parsifal - as the archetypal artist-hero - has been reborn in many different artists over time, Parsifal and his predecessors have visited Klingsor's Magic Garden for inspiration (as Tannhaeuser visited the Venusberg to seek inspiration from Venus) as many times as they have obtained unconscious artistic inspiration. This seems a plausible explanation of Parsifal's "wild and childish deeds," and accounts for why he is overcome by guilt for them.

Another plausible reading, consistent with the latter of the two offered above, is that Christ the saviour, who has in a sense been reborn in the artist-hero Parsifal (just as lost religious faith lives on in music as feeling), seeks to free himself and all who have inherited his legacy of belief in transcendence from the guilt which is the inevitable consequence of such a futile, illusory longing. The entire libretto is replete with such ambiguity and therefore resists reduction to simple formulae: the best one can do is offer a reading which makes the most sense of the libretto text as a whole.

At any rate, Kundry, who offers his dying mother's parting kiss of love to Parsifal as his surrogate mother, wakens in him consciousness of his responsibility for Amfortas's unhealing wound. An important point is that Parsifal feels not only that he neglected his responsibility to identify the cause of Amfortas's wound when he first encountered it, and to heal it, but more importantly, he seems to acknowledge in some sense that he is its author. Witness his following remarks to Gurnemanz in the Third Act. Gurnemanz describes for him all the terrible things which have happened since Gurnemanz ejected Parsifal from the Grail Temple in Act One:

"From the day that you were here our grief, of which you know, our fears grew into dire distress ["hoechsten Not"]. Amfortas, to resist his wounds, the torment of his soul, in wrathful defiance now lusts for death. No plea nor misery of his knights could move him to perform his holy office. In its shrine, the Grail has long remained locked: thus its sin repentant guardian, since he cannot die whilst he looks upon it, hopes to force his death and with his life the torment end. The holy manna is now denied us, and common fare must be our nourishment: and so our warriors' strength has waned. Now no message ever comes for us, no call to holy wars from far away: wan and wretched, the despondent leaderless knights limp around."

Gurnemanz's story culminates with his proclamation, adding horror to horror, that Titurel has now - deprived of the sight of the Grail by his son Amfortas - finally passed away. Of course, as described in the libretto, Titurel had been living in his coffin for quite awhile already, kept artificially alive by the sight of the Grail. Parsifal exclaims in despair:

"And twas I, I who brought about all this misery! How with guilt of sin offensive this foolish head is ever laden, for no repentance, no atonement relieves me of my blindness. Chosen for deliverance, I am lost in the maze - every path of deliverance vanishes!"

At this point Parsifal faints! It seems a stretch to argue that Parsifal should be so overcome with guilt at merely having failed to grasp the meaning of Amfortas's anguish at first sight. Parsifal's feeling of guilt seems to be more all-embracing, as if Parsifal is himself entirely responsible for all that troubles the denizens of the Grail Realm, not merely the troubles which followed Parsifal's initial failure to grasp their cause. It is absurd for him to claim, for instance, that "... twas I, I who brought about all this misery!" merely because he did not initially grasp its cause and alleviate it. If we consider Klingsor a projection of Parsifal's own nature as an artist-hero who has perpetuated religion's denial of reality by indulging in the fantasy world of secular art, long after this salve on man's unhealing wound has lost its redemptive potency, and that in rejecting Klingsor, the Magic Garden, and Kundry's seduction, Parsifal is renouncing his former self (i.e., his former incarnation as the artist-hero Siegfried), this argument becomes more plausible.

Apropos of our argument that in a certain sense all the leading characters of Wagner's prior operas and music dramas (and therefore many of the dramatic situations in which they find themselves) are reborn in the leading characters of *Parsifal*, it is of uncommon interest that Gurnemanz's description for Parsifal of the terrible plight into which the Grail knights have been plunged since Parsifal wandered off to Klingsor's magic garden parallels in many respects Waltraute's description for Bruennhilde of the plight into which the Gods and heroes of Valhalla have been plunged since Wotan, as the Wanderer, returned to Valhalla with the spear Siegfried broke. Waltraute reports that now Wotan no longer sends the Valkyries on missions in defense of Valhalla, that Wotan has left the gods and heroes leaderless, and, most importantly, that he no longer partakes of Freia's golden apples of sorrowless youth eternal, i.e., he no longer seeks to sustain his immortality, and wishes to die, just as Amfortas – in refusing to unveil the Grail - does:

“Since he and you were parted, Wotan has sent us no more into battle; lost and helpless we anxiously rode to the field. The Lord of the Slain avoided Valhalla's valiant heroes: alone on his horse, without rest or repose, he roamed the world as the Wanderer. He came back of late; in his hand he was holding his spear's splintered shards: they'd been shattered by a hero [Siegfried the artist-hero, Wotan's – i.e., religion's – heir]. (...) So he sits, says not a word, silent and grave on his hallowed seat, with the splintered spear held tight in his hand; Holda's apples [of sorrowless youth eternal – i.e., immortality] he does not touch: wonder and fear hold the gods in thrall. (...) Clasp[ing] his knees we valkyries lie: he is blind to our pleading glances; we are all consumed by dismay and infinite dread.”

When one considers that it is Wotan's knowledge that Siegfried the artist-hero will also succumb to Alberich's curse, and therefore fail to redeem the gods from it, which is the cause of his ultimate despair in *Twilight of the Gods*, and not the mere fact that he has lost power to Siegfried and knows the gods are doomed (something Wotan told Erda he in fact joyously welcomed), the parallel becomes more clear. Wagner clarified this point in his remarkable letter to August Roeckel in which he attempted to explain the entire significance of the *Ring*:

“[P. 307] ... not until the ring proves the ruin of Siegfried, too, does he [Wotan] see that only by restoring to the Rhine what had been stolen from its depths [i.e., dissolving the Ring and its curse in the waters] can evil be destroyed, and that is why he makes his own longed-for downfall a pre-condition of the extirpation of a most ancient wrong.” [#616W-{1/25-26/54} Letter to August Roeckel: SLRW, p. 307]

The significance of Wagner's remark lies in the fact that, if we accept my hypothesis that Siegfried represents the artist-hero who has fallen heir to religious feeling when religion as a conscious belief-system can no longer be sustained, and that in this sense Wotan's hope of redemption from Alberich's curse of consciousness lives on in Siegfried, with Wotan's recognition that Siegfried too has failed, Wagner is telling us that in his view the

hope that religion could live on covertly in secular art has been dashed. Following the logic of our interpretation, if the Ring represents human consciousness itself, the unique power of the human mind, then dissolving it in the Rhine of preconscious life is tantamount to suicide. If one reads Wagner's writings from his earliest to his latest years closely, one will see that Wagner ultimately regarded human consciousness itself as the source of all sin. For him it was inherently "Fallen."

So what precisely is the significance of Amfortas's unhealing wound, and why is it unhealing? Its cause is, precisely, religious man's renunciation of his true mother, Nature (Herzeleide, who died of a broken heart due to mankind's neglect), for the sake of man's longing for transcendence in an alternative realm designed by the imagination to contradict the natural realm, namely, the supernatural, represented by the Grail. We must seek the cause of mankind's unhealing wound in the religious impulse to posit a transcendent realm of being which offers man redemption from the anguish of his real, physical life on earth (Erde). Man, alone among his fellow animals, was able to posit a supernatural realm as his alleged source of being and ultimate refuge of redemption, because the natural evolutionary process which produced the human mind evidently selected for the advantage of intellect, of symbolic consciousness, which can summarize and abbreviate real life experience through symbolic representations of experience, or generalizations, in language. It appears that this ability to abbreviate actual experience through its reduction to symbols led over time to the capacity to divorce symbols from objective experience altogether and create and rearrange them subjectively. This was what one might describe as an unforeseen byproduct of evolution, the evolution of reflective thought. This process culminated in the illusion that man, i.e., his mind or spirit, could be autonomous from real physical experience, a notion which in the world's monotheistic religions led ultimately to the belief in a creator God who actually created Mother Nature through a supernatural act, or thought.

Feuerbach's thesis explaining the origins of God in the very nature of our mind is quite profound:

"[P. 97] The very nature of thought and speech, the requirements of life itself oblige us to make use of abbreviations on every hand, to substitute concepts for intuitions, signs for objects, in a word, the abstract for the concrete, ... one cause for many different causes, one individual for different individuals as their representative. In this sense it is perfectly right to say that reason, at least as long as reason, not yet disciplined by observation of the world, regards itself uncritically as the essence of the world, ... leads necessarily to the idea of divinity." [#215F-LER: p. 97]

This notion that mind, or spirit, created matter, reversed the actual truth, which is that matter and energy, under the influence of fundamental natural laws, evolved into mind and therefore spirit. Thus, as Feuerbach puts it:

"[P. 156] ... all of us are materialists before we become idealists, we all serve the body, the lower needs and senses, before we rise to spiritual

needs and sensibilities ... ." [#245F-LER: p. 156]

Therefore:

"[P. 294-295] ... the first definition of "god" ... is simply that a god is what man requires for his existence, and specifically for his physical existence, which is the foundation of his spiritual existence, so that a god is a physical being; ...: man's first god is need, and specifically physical need ... . . . the first and oldest God, the God before and behind the ethical and spiritual God is the physical God ... . (...) This makes it clear that the abstract concept "being" has flesh and blood, truth and reality, only in nature ... ." [#322F-LER: p. 294-295]

And Wagner, as always, provides a perfect paraphrase of Feuerbach's thesis, which also has the advantage of providing us a provocative insight into the true relationship of Alberich [perhaps "the older Nature-god"] to Wotan ["the highest god"]:

"[P. 275] The quintessence of ... constant motion, thus of Life, at last in 'Wuotan' (Zeus) found expression as the chiefest God, the Father and Pervader of the All. Though his nature marked him as the highest god, ... yet was he nowise an historically older god, but sprang into existence from man's later, higher consciousness of self; consequently he is more abstract than the older Nature-god, whilst the latter is more corporeal and, so to phrase it, more personally inborn in man." [#368W-(6-8/48) The Wibelungen - Revised summer of 1849; PW Vol. VII, p. 275]

In the following passages Feuerbach describes this process whereby the very nature of man's symbolic mind, its capacity for imagination, abstraction, and generalization, which ultimately produces a quest for perfection and infinite satisfaction, led necessarily to a belief in the mind's autonomy from the natural world which produced it:

**(6A) [FEUERBACH]** "[P. 262-263] ... from man's ... infinite thirst for knowledge, which is not and cannot be satisfied here below, from man's infinite striving for happiness, which no earthly possession or good fortune can satisfy, from his yearning for perfect morality, sullied by no sensuous drives, don't Christians ... infer the necessity and reality of an infinite life and existence for man, not limited to the time of a man's life span or the space of this earth, unfettered by the body or by death? (...) But what does this infinity of the divine attributes reveal? Nothing but the infinity or unlimitedness of human desires, of the human imagination and faculty of abstraction... ." [#300F-LER: p. 262-263]

And here we have Wagner's succinct paraphrase of Feuerbach:

**(6B) [WAGNER]** "[P. 24] To the religious eye the truth grows plain that there must be another world than this, because the inextinguishable bent-to-happiness cannot be stilled within this world, and hence requires another world for its redemption." [#701W-{64-2/65} On State and Religion: PW Vol. IV, p. 23-24]

It is this capacity of the human mind to reach beyond the limits of immediate bodily experience through imagination and memory and dreaming, which leads man inevitably to overreach, to quest for things beyond his physical nature. The futility of this endeavor within the real world creates a pang of dissatisfaction with the objective, palpable world, and an impulse to cheat by inventing (unconsciously, of course) other worlds in which infinite satisfaction might be obtained, when a wiser approach would be to fault man's capacity for self-deception, which tempts man to pursue such unattainable goals. The very essence of Alberich's curse on the Ring is that those who lack its power will long for it, and, once obtained, will find it inadequate to satisfy a now insatiable desire. The curse Alberich places on his Ring, specifically to punish Wotan for stealing it from him and trying to co-opt its power, is a prime example of the unhealing wound. That Alberich's curse on the Ring also entails doom to its owner is a metaphor for the fact that the human mind grants its possessor both the useful power of foresight, and its price, man's capacity to foresee and meditate on his inevitable death, which engenders existential fear and angst. By a similar logic, the fact that in the Bible's Book of Genesis Adam and Eve forfeited paradise (and presumably their immortality) by eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, means simply that the natural human gift of foresight made them aware of the fact of death as a philosophic problem. It is thus the natural evolution of the human mind from animal forebears which exiled man, figuratively speaking, from the paradise of his animal ancestors' preconscious life of instinct.

It is worth adding here that Alberich actually tells Wotan that he will, in effect, be guilty of matricide (i.e., of murdering Mother Nature, Erda) if Wotan (as God, representing religious faith) steals Alberich's ring and co-opts its power for Wotan's (i.e., religion's) purposes. I argued in my other papers that the Ring's power is actually the power of the human mind. Alberich tells Wotan:

"Be on your guard, you haughty god! If ever I sinned, I sinned freely against myself: but you, you immortal, will sin against all that ever was, is and shall be, if you brazenly wrest the ring from me now!"

Since Erda, i.e., Mother Earth (Nature), shortly thereafter tells Wotan: "How all things were – I know; how all things are, how all things will be, I see as well ...," it is clear that if Wotan co-opts the power of the human mind, represented by the Ring, to confirm the rule of the gods in Valhalla (i.e., the role of religious belief in human life), Wotan will be sinning against Erda (Nature), and specifically against her knowledge (i.e., the knowledge man could acquire from Nature). Religious belief in gods is therefore the

ultimate example of the mind's propensity to overreach, to deny nature's truth, and is therefore the most potent expression of man's unhealing wound, since religion cannot deliver on its promises.

Wagner provides a particularly apt description of our invention of a god who is freed from natural physical limitations as a "luxury", a particularly disturbing and disruptive expression of man's unhealing wound, the futile quest to overreach the possible in striving to satisfy our impulses. This remarkable passage links our invention of godhead, i.e., Wotan ("Light-Alberich"), directly with Alberich's lust to acquire power by amassing a hoard of gold so he can dominate the world:

"[P. 76] Luxury is as heartless, inhuman, insatiable, and egoistic as the 'need' which called it forth, but which, with all its heaping-up [as expressed, say, in Alberich's acquisition of his golden hoard] and overreaching, it never more can still. For this need itself is no natural and therefore satisfiable one . . . . (...) . . . it racks, devours, torments and burns, without an instant's stilling; it leaves brain, heart and sense for ever vainly searching, and swallows up all gladness, mirth, and joy of life . . . .

And this fiend, . . . this need of Luxury . . . . (...) . . . is the soul of that Industry which deadens men, to turn them to machines; . . . the soul of our deistic Science, which hurls men down before an immaterial God, the product of the sum of intellectual luxury, for its consumption." [#421W-9-12/49] *The Artwork of the Future: PW Vol. I, p. 76-77*

In the following extracts by Feuerbach and Wagner we find that a key price man pays for the illusion that his mind, or spirit, can transcend its true source, Mother Nature, is that this illusion makes us long for an infinite bliss unencumbered by the contradictions and pains of real, physical life, a longing which can only be satisfied in imagination, not in reality. Such is the longing of Christians for immortality, and redemption from the sins of the flesh in paradise. We can't help noting, by the way, how our initial extract by Feuerbach below seems to have provided Wagner with the inspiration for Tannhaeuser's complaint to Venus in Act One of *Tannhaeuser*, that he is tired of the eternal bliss her love offers, and that he would rather return to the real world where he knew pain and death, in order to praise her from afar. And as I noted previously, Klingsor's Magic Garden and the Venusberg were closely linked in Wagner's mind:

**(6C) [FEUERBACH]** "[P. 277] What am I if I cut my bond with the earth? A phantom . . . . Man has many wishes that he does not really wish to fulfill . . . . He wants them to remain wishes, they have value only in his imagination; their fulfillment would be a bitter disappointment to him. Such a desire is the desire for eternal life. If it were fulfilled, man would become thoroughly sick of living eternally, and yearn for death." [#311F-LER: p. 277]

It seems self-evident that Amfortas's complaint against the holy Grail (which compels him to suffer his unhealing wound for eternity since the sight of the Grail makes him immortal), stems from Feuerbach's critique of the concept of immortality. We can see this in Wagner's description of Amfortas's plight below:

**(6D) [WAGNER]** “[P. 456] ... it is Amfortas who is the centre of attention and principal subject [in ‘Parsifal’]. (...) ... the wretched man knows of no other longing in his terrible pain than the longing to die [just as Wotan confesses to Bruennhilde that all he longs for now is “das Ende”]; in order to attain this supreme solace, he demands repeatedly to be allowed a glimpse of the Grail in the hope that it might at least close his wounds ... : but the Grail can give him but one thing only, ... that he cannot die; its very sight increases his torments by conferring immortality upon them. (...) ... his whole soul now yearns, again and [P. 458] again, to behold the vision that destroys him in the very act of worship, vouchsafing heavenly salvation and eternal damnation!” [#669W-{5/30/59}Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck: SLRW, p. 456-458]

Note that in Wagner's description above Amfortas can no longer distinguish heaven from hell. Similarly, one of the Esquires accompanying Gurnemanz tells Kundry: “... as yet we know not whether you are sacred.” Again we find here an expression of our theme that what formerly was unconscious, forbidden knowledge, that the spiritual realm of the Grail has an earthly origin, is now becoming conscious. Amfortas, then, Wagner's figure for historical man, i.e., his figure for Wagner's own audience, suffers from the unhealing wound, religious man's sin against Mother Nature and her objective truth, thanks to Parsifal's own art, which in his past lives (represented by the other Grail knights who have succumbed to Klingsor's Flower-maidens, or muses) perpetuated religion's sin against Mother Nature. Art, which heretofore had provided a temporary balm for man's unhealing wound, is now ineffective and has actually become a curse for the artist and his audience, another embodiment of man's unhealing wound. Like Amfortas, Wagner himself described his art as both his blessing and his curse:

[P. 359] I am only an artist: - that is my blessing and my curse: otherwise I should gladly become a saint ... [i.e., gladly become Parsifal, after his enlightenment].” [#644W-{8/23/56} Letter to August Roedel: SLRW, p. 359]

We will see below that Klingsor's self-castration is merely another representation of Amfortas's unhealing wound.

## **(7) THE PRICE FOR RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN TRANSCENDENCE: KLINGSOR'S SELF-CASTRATION AND THE PERPETUATION OF RELIGION'S SIN AGAINST MOTHER-NATURE IN ART**

The following two extracts from Wagner illustrate why I believe that we can construe Klingsor's Magic Garden, with its Flower-maiden seductresses who lure Grail Knights to their destruction, as Wagner's metaphor for his latter-day critique of his own art. In the first, Wagner describes his art as artificial, "... like a tropical plant in the winter garden ... ," a refuge from reality, which seems an apt description of Klingsor's Magic Garden of illusions, which Parsifal dispels at the end of Act Two:

**(7A) [WAGNER]** "[P. 39] How shall I feel when I again sit, whole and solitary, at this miraculous loom [i.e., his return to composing the music for the 'Ring']. It is the only thing that befits me. The world I cannot shape, I must merely forget: this is the only relationship I can stand in towards it. Wholly artificially, like a tropical plant in the winter garden, I must shut myself off against the atmosphere of reality, there is no other way."  
[#710W-{8/19/65} BB, p. 39]

Wagner's following description of Klingsor's Magic Castle (Garden) is very much in the spirit of our extract above describing Wagner's own art:

**(7B) [WAGNER]** "[P. 47] Beyond the mountain height ... there lies another castle, as secret as it is sinister. (...) The Godly take care not to approach it. But whoever does approach cannot withstand the anxious longing that lures him towards the gleaming battlements towering from the never-before-seen splendour of a most wonderful forest of flowering trees, out of which magically sweet birdsong and intoxicating perfumes pour upon all around. - This is Klingsor's magic castle. (...) The castle is his work, raised miraculously in what was previously a desolate place with only a hermit's hut upon it. Where now, in a most luxuriant and heady fashion, all blooms and stirs as on an eternal early-summer evening ... . (...) [P. 48] It is supposed that Klingsor is the same man who once so piously inhabited the place now so changed: - he is said to have mutilated himself in order to destroy that sensual longing which he never completely succeeded in overcoming through prayer and penance."  
[#712W-{8/28/65}BB, p. 47 - 48]

When Wagner describes above Klingsor's Magic Castle (i.e., Garden), where "... all blooms and stirs as on an eternal early-summer evening ...," we are reminded of the Wahn-filled atmosphere of the mid-Summer's Festival of art in *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*. But Wagner's additional remark that Klingsor's Castle was raised miraculously in a previously desolate place is Wagner's way of informing us that out of Christian belief, which renounces the real world and the body, the habitat of sin, in

favor of the purity of a supernatural realm of spirit, was produced the realm of secular art, particularly Wagner's art, which smuggles back into the Eden of our imagination the physical world which spiritual man has allegedly renounced. Klingsor's evil consists of his intent to compel the Grail Knights to acknowledge this need to smuggle into the spiritual paradise of our imagination the very earthly impulses which religious faith proclaims we must renounce to enter there. It was precisely through this smuggling that religious man's longing for transcendence could live on in Wagner's music-dramas, within the context of an increasingly secular, scientific, and cynical world ever more hostile to traditional religious faith.

Klingsor's self-castration, described by Wagner above, is Wagner's metaphor for the extremes to which man's unhealing wound, his futile quest to renounce the bodily, earthly life in favor of a spiritual life, compels him. Klingsor, as an artist-hero of the religious phase of human history, was so desperate to attain the spiritual purity which the Grail seems to require that he actually castrated himself, removing his sexual organ as if, by doing so, he could wholly divorce himself from his physical origin and identity as a child of Nature. Also, the fact that Klingsor cannot have sexual union with the muse Kundry, the artist-hero's unconscious mind, suggests that he has grown too conscious to enjoy the benefits of unconscious artistic inspiration, i.e., the benefits of a consoling illusion. But Klingsor, seeking futilely to purge himself of his physical nature, makes a terrible discovery: it turns out that the Grail Knights do not truly seek spiritual purity. What they seek instead is an allegedly spiritual paradise in which they can find again what they had to renounce, the satisfaction of bodily impulse and instinctive feeling, freed in the imagination from all which constrains and limits it, like mortality and pain. Klingsor, seeking revenge, if you will, against the illusion of faith which betrayed him, now seeks to force all others, still deceived by this illusion, to acknowledge the terrible truth. So, as Feuerbach suggests below, man's futile quest to attain spiritual being, though stemming actually from his corporeal desires to attain infinite bliss and escape pain, deluded by the imagination, forces man into contradiction with his own true nature, denial of his own true identity, and self-mutilation:

**(7C) [FEUERBACH]** "[P. 257-258] "Laws that a God gives to man, that is, laws that have as their foundation and goal an abstracted being who lives only in the imagination, are ... unfit for man, they result in the greatest hypocrisy, for I cannot be a man without denying my God ... . The necessary consequence of a spiritual, that is, abstract God, whom man makes into the law of his life, is self-mutilation and mortification. (...) Man must therefore replace the religious ideal with another ideal. Let our ideal not be a castrated, disembodied, abstract being but the whole, real, many-sided, fully developed man." [#297F-LER: p. 257-258]

Wagner's conversation with Cosima - described by her below - regarding the excesses engendered by religious man's futile quest to purge his natural self, yet to live on in paradise in perpetuity, succinctly captures Feuerbach's formulation:

**(7D) [WAGNER]** "[P. 188] ... we decide that the excesses to which the

insistence on chastity led constituted a terrible feature; they were due to the impossibility of realizing something felt to lie deep within the human character, the desire to set oneself outside nature and yet to go on living.” [#948W-{11/3/78}CD Vol. II, p. 188]

From this standpoint one can see how Amfortas’s feeling of guilt at being unable to resist his physical impulses, yet striving under the Grail’s inspiration to seek an unattainable spiritual purity, is echoed in Klingsor’s desperate attempt to purge his own nature of all animality, of everything which has a physical origin (which is everything, Feuerbach says, including our mind and so-called spirit, those very aspects of our humanity which religious man supposed were divine in origin and therefore autonomous from animal impulse and free from natural law). One can even account for Titurel’s peculiar fate along similar lines. Titurel also cannot die, i.e., cannot accept the fact of his mortality, so long as the Grail, i.e., the illusion that there is a transcendent and divine realm of redemption from the physical world, inspires him. Therefore it is actually a great benefit when Amfortas, refusing any longer to conduct the holy service by unveiling the Grail, finally allows Titurel to die.

What then, we may ask, is behind Klingsor’s employment of the Flower-maidens to seduce the Grail Knights into breaking their oath of celibacy and chastity? Because Klingsor’s artificial bid to acquire purity worthy of the Grail through self-castration was rejected by Amfortas’s father Titurel (according to Gurnemanz), Klingsor obtained a deep insight into the vulnerability at the root of the Grail knight’s faith. He seems to have realized not only that the Grail Knights’ faith is itself a form of self-castration like his, but that, unlike him, the Grail knights hypocritically deny that what they are seeking in heaven is nothing more than the satisfaction of earthly desires and assuagement of earthly fears, abstracted by the imagination into a disembodied reality allegedly freed from servitude to the human ego, to the bodily impulses, and autonomous from Mother Nature’s rule. So Klingsor sets out to bring down the Grail Knights to his level, to demonstrate to them that even their highest impulses are as impure as his own. More than all, he sets out to disclose to them their hypocrisy (just as Alberich accuses Wotan of hypocrisy in claiming for himself Alberich’s ring and its power without wishing to pay its price), as described by Feuerbach below:

“ ... the ... true Christian ... is bound to deny nature, while he satisfies it ... . (...) ... he publicly disavows what he privately does.” [#165F-EOC: p. 314]

I noted earlier, and also in my prior talk (and the paper based upon it) ‘How Elsa Showed Wagner the Way to Siegfried,’ that Lohengrin seems to be guilty of this hypocrisy in secretly seeking to find his own salvation through sexual union with Elsa, without divulging that as a Grail Knight he is bound by an oath of celibacy. The key point here, I argued previously, is that he insists that Elsa not compel him to disclose his true identity, for if she did it would expose this contradiction to the light of day. Wagner seems to lend support to this argument below:

“Renunciation, repudiation of the will [Schopenhauer’s Will], the oath of chastity separate the Knights of the Grail from the world of appearances. The knight is permitted to break his oath through the condition which he imposes on the woman – for, if a woman could so overcome a natural propensity as not to ask [about his origin and true identity], she would be worthy of admission to the Grail. It is the possibility of this salvation which permits the Knight to marry.” [#756W-{3/1/70}CD Vol. I, p. 194]

In other words, curiously enough, it seems that the Grail Knights’ innocence and/or guilt depends upon whether their true identity, and therefore their hypocrisy, is disclosed. I argued in that talk and paper also that what Elsa, as Lohengrin’s potential muse, offers him, is protection from consciousness of this contradiction, just as Bruennhilde as recipient of Wotans’ confession of his own guilt and hypocrisy protects his new incarnation, Siegfried, from fatal self-knowledge. Clearly Wagner’s notion that if the woman could so overcome her natural propensity as not to ask the forbidden question concerning the knights’ true origin and identity, she’d be worthy of admission to the Grail, is an oblique reference to Eve’s temptation by the Serpent in paradise, to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge (of good and evil). And I noted previously that Eve is the figurative muse for that inspired secular art which replaces religious faith, and thus replaces faith’s dependence on fear of inquiry, i.e., its dependence on forbidding knowledge of its origin in nature, with feeling (music).

**(8) KUNDRY, PARSIFAL’S ARTISTIC MUSE IN HIS PAST LIVES, IS HIS SURROGATE FOR HIS TRUE MOTHER, NATURE. HE MUST RESTORE NATURE’S RIGHTS TO GAIN DELIVERANCE FROM THE ILLUSION OF TRANSCENDENCE, IN ORDER TO HEAL MAN’S UNHEALING WOUND**

In the opening pages of our paper I introduced Wagner’s observation that art is, for him, a game of play, but I subsequently noted that Wagner in his latter years began to critique his own artistic endeavor as somehow evading the real crux of man’s existential dilemma, as, in effect, placing a mask over it, to hide from ourselves the true suffering of the world. Wagner spoke of his art as an artificial evasion of reality, a dream:

“[P. 73] Ah, we are all holy martyrs; perhaps I shall one day be a real one, but in that case all will be over for me with art – that beautiful delusion, the last and the most sublime, to hide from us the misery of the world.”  
[#629W-{3/55}Letter to Franz Liszt: CWL, p. 73] [P. 598]

And Cosima recorded the following conversation with Wagner:

“[P. 598] Reflections on history and the development of mankind’s predatory activities lead me to ask in the morning whether these have not

brought about art. ‘Certainly,’ says R., ‘and that is why it is an evasion and a dismal substitute; it becomes something worthwhile only when it is religion ... .’ [#1054W-{1/16/81}CD Vol. II, p. 598]

In Wagner’s remarks below regarding Parsifal’s impressions of Klingsor’s Magic Garden and of his surrogate mother Kundry, Wagner echoes these sentiments, providing further evidence that Klingsor’s Magic Garden is his metaphor for his own art under the shadow of Wagner’s critique. Recording a conversation she had with Wagner, Cosima tells us that:

“[P. 130] ... he says that he sometimes has the feeling that art is downright dangerous – it is as if in this great enjoyment of observing he is perhaps failing to recognize the presence of some hidden sorrow.” [#753W-{7/27/69} CD Vol. I, p. 130]

This seems to be reflected in Wagner’s observations below:

**(8A) [WAGNER]** “[P. 56] Parzival has entered Klingsor’s wonderful magic garden: his astonishment at the unutterable charm is mingled with an uneasy feeling of alarm, hesitation and horror. (...) Parzival abandons himself to what he takes to be a childish game without any thought of there being a serious side to the situation. (...) Then he hears the loud, loving sound of a woman’s voice calling him by name. He stops, shaken, believing it to be his mother, and stands, greatly affected, rooted to the spot. (...) [P. 57] Bending her head above his, she now presses her lips to his in a long kiss. (...) ... the mysterious happening witnessed at the Castle of the Grail claims him entirely; transferred wholly into the soul of Anfortas, he feels Anfortas’ enormous suffering, his dreadful self-reproach ... . . . . to his innermost being there has been a loud appeal for deliverance, and he has remained dumb, has fled, wandered, child-like, dissipating his soul in wild, foolish adventures! Where is there a man sinful and wretched as he? How can he ever hope to find forgiveness for his monstrous neglect of duty? (...) [P. 58] (...) All the torments of the human heart lie open to him: he feels them all and knows the only way of ending them.” [#716W-{8/30/65} BB, p. 56-58]

One of the first things that strikes us reading Wagner’s description of Parsifal’s first impressions when entering Klingsor’s magic garden, is that Parsifal is charmed yet fearful, as if there is something deadly serious and foreboding behind the charm of this garden. When Wagner adds that Parsifal nonetheless participates in a childish game (with the Flowermaidens), without realizing there is something serious lurking behind this game, we can’t help recalling Wagner’s description of art as a “game of play,” and that he told Cosima that art is “profound play.” These elements relate this passage directly to Wagner’s other critiques of his art, his notion that it is an evasion of something deeply serious, a sort of mask which hides from us the earnest and tragic nature of the world.

Why does Parsifal confuse Kundry with his mother, and why does Kundry virtually present herself to him as his surrogate mother when placing what she describes as his mother's dying kiss on his lips? This may well be because, for Wagner, his art replaces reality, and therefore allegorically his art can be construed as a metaphor for the subjective surrogate the artist-hero (and his muse) offers man in place of the objective reality of Mother Nature, which religious man abhors as the source of pain and mortality. Art, like religion, replaces reality with a fiction (or in music a feeling divorced from conceptual claims to truth, and therefore equally divorced from falsehood), the only difference between them being that religious belief presents its fiction as truth.

There are other, related reasons why Kundry is the surrogate for the mother whom Parsifal killed through neglect. Kundry, as the muse for the artist-hero's unconsciously inspired art, his unconscious source of artistic inspiration, is equivalent to what Feuerbach describes below as "... man's inner nature ...," that part of Mother Nature inside man himself which acts independently of man's conscious mind, the involuntary unconscious:

**(8B) [FEUERBACH]** "[P. 310-311] The object of religion is nature, which operates independently of man and which he distinguishes from himself. But this nature is more than the phenomena of the outside world; it also includes man's inner nature, which operates independently of his knowledge and his will. (...) The ultimate secret of religion is the relationship between the conscious and unconscious, the voluntary and involuntary in one and the same individual." [#331F-LER: p. 310-311]

This dreaming, or unconscious and involuntary artistic inspiration, is presumably also the source of religious revelation, yet it stems from nature, per Feuerbach's remarks above. As Feuerbach put it:

"[P. 140] Feeling is the dream of nature ... . In dreaming ... I take the spontaneous action of my own mind for an action upon me from without ... . (...) It is the same ego, the same being in dreaming as in waking; the only distinction is that in waking, the ego acts on itself; whereas in dreaming it is acted on by itself as by another being. (...) Feeling is a dream with the eyes open; religion the dream of waking consciousness: dreaming is the key to the mysteries of religion." [#102F-EOC: p. 140]

Thus Wagner, who as one of a long line of artist-heroes who involuntarily and unconsciously invented the world's religions and myths, and, in the modern secular world, lived on as artists independent from any specific religious world-view, could well say of his own art:

"[P. 357] ... how can an artist hope to find his own intuitions perfectly reproduced in those of another person, since he himself stands before his

own work of art – if it really is a work of art – as though before some puzzle, which is just as capable of misleading him as it can mislead the other person.” [#641W-{8/23/56}Letter to August Roeckel: SLRW, p. 357]

We can easily see how, in the context of Feuerbach’s remarks above, Kundry, as the artist-hero’s unconscious mind, links him with mother nature. It is implicit that for Wagner music is directly linked to the creative unconscious in a way that the other arts are not, and Wagner clinches our argument in the following extract which clearly states this equivalence:

“[P. 63] Viewed from this side of consciousness, the great musician [Beethoven] must always remain a complete enigma to us. At all to solve this enigma, we undoubtedly must strike an altogether different path from that on which it is possible, up to a certain point at least, to follow the creative work of Goethe and Schiller: and that point itself becomes a vanishing one exactly at the spot where creation passes from a conscious to an [P. 64] unconscious act, i.e. where the poet no longer chooses the aesthetic Form, but it is imposed upon him by his inner vision (Anschauung) of the Idea itself. Precisely in this beholding of the Idea, however, resides the fundamental difference between poet and musician  
 . . . .

The said diversity comes out quite plainly in the plastic artist [painter or sculptor], when compared with the musician; betwixt them stands the poet, inclining toward the plastic artist in his conscious fashioning (Gestalten), approaching the musician on the mystic ground of his unconsciousness.” [#763W-{9-12/70} Beethoven: PW Vol. V, p. 63-64]

In other words, musical inspiration, according to Wagner, is involuntary like dreaming, and it is the source of all artistic inspiration in general.

But there are many other respects in which Kundry links Parsifal with his Mother Nature. Music for Wagner is the language of the unconscious, involuntary mind, related to the organ which produces those night-dreams which though they are ours, yet we did not consciously create them and therefore cannot call them our own. Thus when we speak of our muse we are actually speaking of our unconscious, involuntary dreaming. Keep in mind that for Wagner sexual love between hero and heroine is a metaphor for the artist-hero’s unconscious artistic inspiration by his muse. We see this in his following unusual description of his own artistic creativity as a marriage of himself to himself:

“[P. 152] I had been distressingly but more or less decidedly disengaging myself from the world; everything in me had turned to negation and rejection; even my artistic creativeness was distressing to me, for it was longing with an insatiable longing to replace that negation, that rejection, by something affirmative and positive, the marriage of myself to myself

“(sich-mir-vermaehlende).” [#657W-{9/18/58}Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck: Quoted by Robert Donington in his *Wagner's 'Ring' and its Symbols*; p. 152]

Wagner therefore felt that his unique status as both author of the drama, and composer of the music, for his music-dramas, gave him a unique insight into the operations of his own unconscious mind, and therefore the creative unconscious in general. Keep in mind when reading his following critique of Schopenhauer's notion of redemption that when speaking of sexual union as a path to salvation, Wagner is actually referencing his metaphor, the relationship of the male poet-dramatist to his muse, music. The proof of this is that he compares the redemptive effect of this sexual union with the ecstasy the genius (of art, of course) feels at the highest moments of perception (i.e., the ecstasy of his unconscious artistic inspiration):

“[P. 432] During recent weeks I have been slowly rereading Schopenhauer's principal work, and this time it has inspired me, quite extraordinarily, to expand and – in certain details – even to correct his system. ... it must, I think, have been reserved for a man of my own particular nature, at this particular period of his life, to gain insights here of a kind that could never have disclosed themselves to anyone else. It is a question ... of pointing out the path to salvation, which has not been recognized by any philosopher, and especially not by Sch., but which involves a total pacification of the will through love, and not through any abstract human love, but a love engendered on the basis of sexual love, i.e. the attraction between man and woman. (...) The presentation of this argument ... involves a more detailed explanation of the state in which we become capable of recognizing ideas, and of genius in general, which I no longer conceive of as a state in which the intellect is divorced from the will, but rather as an intensification of the individual intellect to the point where it becomes the organ of perception of the genus or species, and thus of the will itself ... ; herein lies the only possible explanation for that marvellous and enthusiastic joy and ecstasy felt by any genius at the highest moments of perception, moments which Sch. seems scarcely to recognize, since he is able to find them only in a state of calm and in the silencing of the individual affects of the will.” [#664W-{12/1/58}Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck: SLRW, p. 432]

For Wagner, his art is, unlike religious faith, not a supposed stilling or renunciation of the will, or animal impulses, as found in all religions of renunciation, but its excitation to the point of revelation. Wagner therefore felt that he had unique and privileged access to the secrets of unconscious artistic inspiration and therefore also religious revelation, the religious mysteries:

“[P. 78] In the long run I always hark back to my Schopenhauer, who has

led me to the most remarkable trains of thought, as lately indicated, in amendment of some of his imperfections. The theme becomes more interesting to me every day, for it is a question here of explications such a I alone can give, since there never was another man who was poet and musician at once in my sense, and therefore to whom an insight into inner processes has become possible such as could be expected of no other.”  
 [#665W-{12/8/58}Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck: RWLMW, p. 78]

Wagner’s ability to access this otherwise unconscious, secret, and forbidden knowledge, it would seem, grants his works a large part of their power and underlying tension and suspense. This I believe is what is behind Parsifal’s alarm as he confronts his surrogate mother in Kundry, just as Siegfried is alarmed at the prospect of waking Bruennhilde. .

Pursuing further the allegorical logic behind Kundry’s status as Parsifal’s surrogate for the mother he killed (Nature), we find that Wagner told Cosima that music is produced by Mother Nature:

“[P. 986] ... ‘It took Nature a very long time to produce passion; this is what can lead one to the heights; music is its transfiguration, is, alone among all the arts, directly connected with it.’ ” [#1143W-{1/5/83} CD Vol. II, p. 986]

And in the following extract Wagner quite explicitly links Mother Nature with the agitated mood, or excitation of Will, which is music, in which Wagner says Nature (often the source of fear, as in Erda’s prophecy of doom) becomes a sympathetic being [i.e., Erda – Mother Nature, the source of Wotan’s fear - becomes her daughter Bruennhilde, who protects Siegfried from Wotan’s fear by hearing Wotan’s confession, so he can repress this knowledge in her, his unconscious mind]:

“[P. 218] Nature in her actual reality is only seen by the Understanding, which de-composes her into her separatest of parts; if it wants to display to itself these parts in their living organic connexion, then the quiet of the Understanding’s meditation is involuntarily displaced by a more and more highly agitated mood ... of Feeling. In this mood, Man unconsciously refers Nature once more to himself ... . In Feeling’s highest agitation, Man sees in Nature a sympathizing being ... .” [#526W-{50-1/51} Opera and Drama: PW Vol. II, p. 218]

The full significance of Wagner’s remark can be gathered from Cosima’s observation following Wagner’s own thesis, that Bruennhilde is a metaphor for music, and Siegfried a metaphor for the dramatic poet. I have already presented evidence that Siegfried’s relationship with Bruennhilde is metaphorically identical with Parsifal’s relationship with Kundry.

In the *Ring* Wagner made this link between Mother Nature and the heroine-muse, the artist hero's unconscious mind, clear, by presenting Bruennhilde, Siegfried's muse of inspiration, as the daughter of Erda, Mother Nature. And Bruennhilde is, metaphorically speaking, Siegfried's mother, because Siegfried was born of Wotan's seed: Wotan's confession of his hoard of forbidden knowledge and of his longing for a free hero, to Bruennhilde, inseminated her womb so she could bring Siegfried to birth, as a sort of virgin birth. Siegfried is, as I said, actually Wotan reborn without consciousness of his true identity, because Bruennhilde holds this knowledge for Siegfried. It is no accident therefore that Bruennhilde names Siegfried, and Siegfried's literal mother Sieglinde accepts that name in her son's behalf. And in *Siegfried* Act Three Siegfried actually confuses Bruennhilde with his mother:

"Bruennhilde: "I nurtured you, you tender child, before you were begotten; even before you were born, my shield already sheltered you: so long have I loved you, Siegfried! Siegfried: So my mother did not die? Was the lovely woman merely asleep?"

A final point to consider here is that as the repository of religious man's forbidden knowledge of his natural origin and therefore of the natural origin of his religious longings to transcend Nature, the muses Bruennhilde and Kundry also represent Mother Nature.

It is worth mentioning that in *Tristan and Isolde*, Act Three, Wagner both musically and verbally links the concept that Tristan's Mother died giving him birth, with the idea that his loving union with Isolde (and the love-death potion which is its symbol) is, though the source of his greatest bliss, ultimately a curse, through the alte Weise (Old Tune). This is the shepherd's tune which Tristan tells Kurvenal he heard while emerging from his mother's womb, when she died giving him birth, and heard again as he traveled over the Irish sea in his coracle, suffering from an unhealing wound, to his fateful visit with his muse and lover Isolde. Isolde temporarily heals his wound with her magical arts which she learned from her mother, who Isolde proclaims can also control the sea: perhaps her mother is Nature. Isolde's healing arts are, however, a metaphor for the figurative sexual union, or unconscious artistic inspiration, through which she temporarily heals the artist-hero Tristan's ultimately unhealing wound. She heals him also by, significantly enough, preserving the secret of his true identity (in "silence"), which she alone has discovered!

These considerations, then, are the conceptual basis for Kundry's status as Parsifal's surrogate for his mother, nature, whom Parsifal killed through neglect.

**(9) GOOD FRIDAY: NATURE’S RIGHTS ARE RESTORED, SO AMFORTAS’S WOUND – PARALYSIS DUE TO HIS UNBEARABLE FEELING OF GUILT AT BEING UNABLE TO TRANSCEND HIS TRUE NATURE - IS HEALED**

Cosima recorded a brief, seemingly insignificant remark by Wagner about his Good Friday Spell from *Parsifal* which actually gets to the very heart of my primary thesis, that the Grail, the symbol of man’s religious longing for transcendence, is actually a product of the earth:

“[P. 265] But he works and says to me, ‘Do not expect too much from the meadow – it must of course be short, and it cannot express delight in nonexistence, as in ‘Tristan.’ “ [#959W-{2/3/79}CD Vol. II, p. 265]

The point of this remark is that, while *Tristan and Isolde* was an artwork which dramatized the anguish of man’s unhealing wound, i.e., the futility of man’s quest to transcend the real world by seeking redemption in a spiritual realm of being, or within art’s illusions, the Good Friday Spell, unlike *Tristan*, “cannot express delight in nonexistence,” and therefore must on the contrary express delight in existence, the real world of Nature, of time, space, and causality. The mere fact that *Parsifal*, i.e., Wagner’s last will and testament expressing his ultimate concept of redemption, ends on Good Friday, the day of Christ’s crucifixion, rather than on Easter Sunday, the day of Christ’s supernatural resurrection which holds the promise of immortality for the faithful, strongly suggests that Wagner’s idea of ultimate redemption requires of man that he should reconcile himself with his true identity as part of the animal kingdom, and reconcile himself with his natural limits, including the necessity of death. The meaning is clear: there is no room for the supernatural, for a resurrection of the spirit and man’s redemption from his mortal coils, in a culture which fully embraces man’s natural origins and limits.

This Feuerbach-inspired libretto text for *Parsifal* culminates in Act Three with the Good Friday Spell and Parsifal’s healing of Amfortas’s previously unhealing wound. We saw in Act Two that thanks to Kundry’s kiss Parsifal simultaneously became conscious of the link between three things which otherwise would have remained unconscious, namely, (1) Kundry’s role as the muse of unconscious artistic inspiration, the seductress; (2) Parsifal’s guilt in perpetuating religious man’s denial of Mother Nature in the art that Kundry in her past lives has inspired; and (3) Amfortas’s wound, which cannot heal so long as heroes of religion and art perpetuate man’s futile longing for transcendence of Nature.

In order to atone for that sin and erase its effects, Parsifal has to renounce his former muse of unconscious artistic inspiration, Kundry, resist her seduction, and destroy the illusory world of art represented by Klingsor’s Magic Garden and its muses, the Flower-maidens. Parsifal has to do this in order to restore Mother Nature to her former position as the Mother of all things, so man can be reconciled to his mortal nature and the

limits of time, space, and causality. And this is precisely what happens in the Good Friday Spell, whose text is manifestly a restoration of Mother Nature, whom man, freed now from the religious illusion that he needs - and can obtain - redemption from the real world, will no longer trample. I reproduce it in some detail below so we can examine it somewhat closely to see just how far Feuerbach's spirit seems to pervade it:

"Parsifal: How very beautiful the meadow seems today! I have come upon magic flowers which sickly twined about me to my head; yet ne'er have I seen such soft and tender blades, blossoms, flowers, nor has anything smelled so childlike sweet or spoken so dearly to me. Gurnemanz: That is the magic of Good Friday, lord!"

Here, it is clear, Parsifal is renouncing the artificial tropical garden of his art, the Flower-maiden-muses (his Fleurs de Mal, so to speak), for the sake of Mother Nature herself.

The following extended passage is Gurnemanz's description of Parsifal's, and mankind's, atonement to Mother Nature, for having denied her in favor of an illusory realm of spirit which holds her in contempt. Here Gurnemanz suggests that by accepting his own mortality man can acknowledge his true place in nature and his oneness with her:

"Parsifal: Alas, the greatest Day of Pain! On which everything that blooms, breathes, lives and lives anew should, it seems, but mourn - ah, and weep. Gurnemanz: You see, it is not so. They are the repentant tears of the sinner that drop today with holy dew upon both field and meadow: thus they flourish. Now all creatures rejoice at the Redeemer's gracious sign, and dedicate their prayer to him. Him upon the Cross they cannot see: and so they look up to Man redeemed, who feels free of his burden of sin and shame, made pure and whole by the loving sacrifice of God [i.e., that God revealed himself to be, merely, man, in Christ]: Now blades and flowers of the meadows perceive that this day no foot of man shall crush them, but just as God with heavenly patience took mercy on him, and suffered for him, so man today with pious grace spares them with gentle tread. For this, all creation then gives thanks - all that blooms and shortly withers - for Nature cleansed has gained this day her Day of Innocence."

And of course, this is nothing more than what Erda, Mother Nature, asked Wotan - the chief god and symbol for man's religious consciousness in the *Ring* - to do, acknowledge that all things are ephemeral and that the gods too will pass away:

"Erda: All things that are - end. A day of darkness dawns for the gods: I counsel you: shun the ring!"

But of course neither Wotan nor his ultimate heirs, the artist-hero Siegfried and his muse Bruennhilde, shun the ring, and therefore the entire plot of Wagner's *Ring* recounts how through both religious belief and artistic expression mankind got swept up in the most tragic consequences of man's unhealing wound, Alberich's curse on the Ring.

Specifically, the Good Friday Speel represents Parsifal's atonement to his mother, Nature, for having broken her heart by leaving her in order to pursue the Grail, man's longing to transcend reality in religion and art, a betrayal which caused her figurative death. The repentant sinners are all those who denied nature for the sake of an illusory spiritual existence, and later for the sake of art which strove to recreate the religious feeling of transcendence, and to deny reality. Just as in Biblical mythology God lowered his spiritual stature to enter man's physical world as the physical Christ, and to suffer there man's sufferings so God could empathize with and love man (as Feuerbach put it), so Gurnemanz suggests that nature itself now looks up to man, who will no longer spurn and deny it, but embrace it and all within it, all that withers and soon dies. From Feuerbach's perspective the Christian notion that God came to earth as man, and sacrificed himself for man's sake, represented the beginning of the end of a belief in a disembodied, mysterious, spiritual Godhead. Symbolically, God sacrifices himself so that man no longer has to put up with him, no longer has to strive futilely to be worthy to join him in spiritual redemption. The significance of Christ, for Feuerbach, is that man can recognize himself, his mortal self, in God. In Feuerbach's view God, after all, is man's invention. Feuerbach stated, for instance, that in order for man to purge himself of guilt, he need only find guilt and sin in God himself [#32F-TDI: p. 224]. Thus Mother Nature regains the innocence lost to her when religious man demonized her in order to posit a higher, purer, more substantial level of being, Godhead.

The wisdom obtained through the restoration of Mother Nature's rights, and a renunciation of man's illusion that he has, or can become, a supernatural spirit which transcends Nature, is the acknowledgment that man, a product of nature, invented God the creator, and therefore God is, himself (or herself), nothing more than Nature. As Feuerbach put it:

**(9A) [FEUERBACH]** "[P. 321-322] ... the God of Christian monotheism is a withered, dried-out God in whom all traces of His origin in nature is effaced; there He stands like a creation out of nothing; on pain of the rod He even forbids the inevitable question: "What did God do before He created the world?" or more correctly: What was He before nature? In other words, He makes a secret of His physical origin, hiding it behind a metaphysical abstraction." [#341F-LER: p. 321-322]

We should remember that not only the God of Genesis forbade man to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, but Lohengrin likewise forbade Elsa and everyone else to inquire after his true identity and origin (significantly, Elsa alone had the power to compel Lohengrin to reveal his identity, his origin in Nature). In both instances the reason can be found in Feuerbach's explanation for why God "forbids the inevitable question ... ," that the true origin of man is Nature, and therefore God, man's invention, originates in

Nature also. According to Feuerbach it is through reason, i.e., through natural science, the intellectual inquiry which men of faith wish to prohibit, that man can restore to mind his true relationship with Mother Nature, and his true place in the animal kingdom and the natural world:

**(9B) [FEUERBACH]** “[P. 287] To reason alone belongs the great work of the resurrection and restoration of all things and beings – universal redemption and reconciliation. Not even the unreasoning animal, the speechless plant, the un sentient stone, shall be excluded from the universal festival.” [#152F-EOC: p. 287]

And he adds:

**(9C) [FEUERBACH]** “[P. 211] The task of modern times was to prepare for a final reconciliation of spirit with nature.” [#30F-TDI: p. 211]

Curiously, Wagner’s explanation of the ultimate meaning of *The Ring of the Nibelung*, i.e., the primary lesson to be learned from it, for his friend August Roeckel (early in 1854, well before Wagner tells us he first read Schopenhauer, in the Fall of 1854), is a perfectly apt paraphrase of Gurnemanz’s plea that mankind no longer trample nature, all that withers and soon dies, but rather embrace it:

“[P. 302] But how is this reality [of Nature] to be grasped once more, since as an imaginary whole – it had presented itself not to our feelings but solely to our intellect? It can be grasped of course only if we recognize that the essence of reality lies in its endless multiplicity. This inexhaustible multiplicity which incessantly reproduces and renews itself can be apprehended, however, by feeling [i.e., by music], which perceives it simply as a separate, ever-changing phenomenon: this sense of change is the essence of reality, whereas only what is imagined is changelessly unending [i.e., immortal]. Only what changes is real: to be real, to live – what this means is to be created, to grow, to bloom, to wither and to die; without the necessity of death, there is no possibility of life ... . Therefore, to be consumed by truth is to abandon oneself as a sentient human being to total reality: to experience procreation, growth, bloom – withering and decay, to apprehend them unreservedly, in joy and sorrow, and to [P. 303] choose to live – and die – a life of happiness and suffering. This alone is ‘to be consumed by truth’. But in order to make such a consummation possible, we must abandon completely our search for the ‘whole’ [i.e., we must no longer seek infinite satisfaction and perfection, as in our quest for the Ring and its power, or in our even more debilitating - because it is illusory - quest for reunion with God and redemption in a supernatural paradise]: the whole reveals itself to us only in the individual manifestation, for this

alone is capable of being 'apprehended' in the true sense of the word; we can really 'grasp' a phenomenon only if we can allow ourselves to be fully absorbed by it, just as we must in turn be able to assimilate it fully within us. How is this marvellous process most fully achieved? Ask Nature! Only through love!" [#607W-{1/25-26/54}]Letter to August Roedel: SLRW, p. 302-303]

And this reconciliation of spirit with nature, this celebration of man's recognition that both are one and the same, is precisely what is expressed in the Good Friday Spell.

In Wagner's following remarks he paraphrases Feuerbach's sentiments, especially in (9E) where Wagner suggests that the religious mysteries are summed up in the statement that what we call God, the divine, the supernatural, is really just Nature:

**(9D)[WAGNER]** "[P. 505] But, alas, how is culture possible when religion has such defective roots, and even terminology is so little defined that one can talk of spirit and Nature as if they were antitheses?" [#828W-{6/29/72}]CD Vol. I, p. 505]

**(9E) [WAGNER]** "[P. 395] At lunch a recollection of Aeschylus's chorus (the female hare and the eagle) causes him to remark on the nobility of this outlook, and he feels it was things like this that might have led to accusations of blasphemy against Aeschylus, this connection between holiness and Nature was probably at the bottom of the Eleusinian mysteries." [#993W-{11/14/79}]CD Vol. II, p. 395]

Wagner also embraced Feuerbach's notion that, since Mother Nature itself is amoral, and since all that man calls good is imputed to God, and all that man considers evil is imputed to his rival Satan, and both God and Satan are nothing more than projections of the extremes of man's own nature, the true primal being, Mother Nature, is neither good nor evil:

"R. spoke recently of the heresy of the Marcionites, which consisted in recognizing a primal being who was neither completely good nor completely evil; admiration for this sensible form of cognition." [#854W-{7/1/74}]CD Vol. I, p. 770]

And in the following passage we find Wagner's elaboration of Feuerbach's concept of a universal festival of reconciliation in which man will embrace his status as a part of nature, both animate and inanimate. In this instance Wagner celebrates Darwin's idea that man evolved from animals and is therefore a product of nature, not the product of a divine personality:

"The wisdom of the Brahmins, nay, of every cultured pagan race, is lost to us: with the disowning of our true relation to the beasts, we see an

animalized – in the worst sense – and more than an animalized, a devilized world before us. (...) ... an honest inquirer, a careful breeder and comparer, a scientific friend of beasts [Darwin], laid once more open to us men the teachings of primeval wisdom, according to which the same thing breathes in animals that lends us life ourselves; ay, showed us past all doubt that we descend from them. In the spirit of our unbelieving century, this knowledge may prove our surest guide to a correct estimate of our relation to the animals; and perhaps it is on this road alone, that we might again arrive at a real religion, as taught to us by the Redeemer and testified by his example, the religion of true Human Love.” [#986W- {10/79}Letter to E. von Weber ‘Against Vivisection’: PW Vol. VI, p. 204]

And it is precisely through man’s acknowledgment of his true identity as a product of mother nature, and a member of the animal kingdom who therefore need no longer strive futilely to transcend his natural limits, that, as Feuerbach says below, he can free himself from religion’s “... excessive demands and desires, such as the desire for immortality,” and thus close man’s unhealing wound, and end Alberich’s curse on his ring:

**(9F) [FEUERBACH]** “[P. 37] ... it is only through nature that man can become free of all morbidly excessive demands and desires, such as the desire for immortality. ‘Learn to know nature, recognize it as your mother; then you will descend peacefully into the earth when the time comes.’ “ [LER: p. 37]

Through this means Parsifal ends Kundry’s and Klingsor’s curse on the Grail Knights, and heals Amfortas’s wound.

It was at this point that I concluded my lecture on 5/30/07, due to time limits. My current paper doesn’t suffer this disadvantage, so I’ll close with a few more insights into the *Parsifal* libretto provided by Feuerbach, and by Wagner’s paraphrases of Feuerbach.

## **(10) ART’S ARTIFICIAL SURROGATE FOR MOTHER NATURE, THE MUSE KUNDRY, DIES**

I noted previously that during the second half of his life Wagner increasingly came to critique his entire artistic endeavor, suggesting that in this life of consoling illusion he had built for himself and others he might be neglecting the really big philosophic questions about the meaning and purpose of it all. In the following extract it seems self-evident that in the character of Parsifal Wagner presented to us his notion of the “Schopenhauerian saint,” who has broken free from Wagner’s art. In the Schopenhauerian Saint Wagner of course posits his Buddhist-Schopenhauerian ideal man, who upon gaining enlightenment realizes that all as yet unenlightened beings are in

unthinking service to the selfish Will, and can presumably conquer this subservience to the Will by recognizing his oneness with all the diverse forms of life in the world, and by so doing eliminate his egoism. This acknowledgment of man's oneness with the cosmos, according to Schopenhauer's theory of morality, logically leads to compassion for all the living. Of course, acknowledgment of one's oneness with all life could just as easily lead to one's embrace of what seems to be a universal egoism underlying all motivation in the animate world. This is a problem Wagner dealt with occasionally but left out of *Parsifal*, in which he wished to leave us his final, definitive illustration of the possibility of a meaningful life within the bounds of a natural world.

Wagner describes his art below as, in effect, a cowardly evasion of the really important issue in life, that most (perhaps all) motivation for action in the animate world, and especially in human life, seems to be selfishness and egoism. Wagner's great philosophic problem was to show how it might be possible for selfless love to be a property or potential of human nature, when ruthless egoism (of either the individual, or any particular group to which the individual sees himself as belonging) seems to have been the primary virtue selected for in evolution, and particularly in human history. Wagner suggests here that acknowledgment of this has been more or less unbearable (Wotan found it so unbearable that he informed Bruennhilde he dare not speak it aloud even to himself), and that his artistic world of illusion, his veil of Maya, has hidden the fateful truth from him and others:

**(10A) [WAGNER]** "[P. 338] ... all I could probably ... become, were I really able to break free from my art, would be a Schopenhauerian saint!  
 (...)  
 (...) this artistic nature of mine is ... a daemon which repeatedly blinds me to the clearest insights and draws me into a maelstrom of confusion, passion and folly ... . (...) when I see an animal being tormented: I cannot begin to describe what I then feel and how, as if by magic, I am suddenly permitted an insight into the essence of life itself in all its undivided coherency ... .  
 [P. 339] It is at moments such as these that I see the 'veil of Maya' completely lifted, and what my eyes then see is terrible, so dreadful that ... I suddenly ask myself whether I can go on living; but it is at this moment that another veil descends ... which ... is ultimately always the same 'veil of Maya', in all its artistic forms, which casts me back into the world of self-deception ... ." [#630W-{5/12/55}] Letter to Jacob Sulzer: SLRW, p. 338-339]

Wagner's remarks above call to mind the fact that, when Wotan confessed to Bruennhilde that he was prepared to accept the appalling end ["das Ende"] which Erda had foreseen, in which the gods would go down to destruction at the hands of Alberich's curse on the Ring, Bruennhilde gave Wotan's hope to redeem the gods from this fate a new lease on life, by, figurately speaking, giving birth to Siegfried the artist-hero. It is in their loving union, i.e., the artist-hero Siegfried's

loving union with his unconscious muse of inspiration, Bruennhilde, that religious man's longing for transcendent meaning can live on temporarily in secular art. Similarly, just when Tristan and Isolde are prepared for death, Brangaene gives them a new lease on life in which they can, for a time, enjoy loving union (i.e., unconscious artistic inspiration), before the religious mystery contained in that union is finally exposed completely to the light of day (i.e., becomes conscious).

This passage also calls to mind Feuerbach's and Wagner's observations about the creative spirit's need for a veil of Maya, of ignorance and self-deception, to hide the world's misery, so that paralysis by fear and angst can be overcome in order to unleash blissful creativity. This is clearly the case in the contrast between Wotan's paralysis as described by him to Bruennhilde in his confession, and Siegfried's joyous, fearless gift of artistic creativity. Bruennhilde, by hearing Wotan's confession and thus allowing him to repress the conscious knowledge which has paralyzed him, employs her magic to throw a veil of Maya over him so that he can be reborn as the fearless, loving Siegfried, whose heroism stems from his ignorance of self and unconcern about the twilight of the gods (i.e., secular artists' unconcern about threats to religious faith). We noted that just as Bruennhilde holds this terrible hoard of knowledge for Siegfried and thus protects him from Wotan's paralyzing fear, so Kundry holds Parsifal's knowledge of his true identity for him. Parsifal, however, becomes fully self-aware, aware of his guilt at perpetuating religion's denial of Mother Nature, at the moment of Kundry's kiss, and casts off the consoling veil of Maya to fully, consciously embrace the terrible truth.

As further evidence that Wagner became increasingly engaged in a critique of his own artistic nature in his later years, we find in the following extract from a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck his observation that Buddha excluded art, presumably because art was a distraction from the possibility of enlightenment:

"[P. 425] "My child, the glorious Buddha was no doubt right when he strictly excluded art. Is there anyone who feels more clearly than I that it is this unhappy art that everlastingly restores me to life's torment and all the contradictions of [P. 426] existence? If I did not have this wondrous gift of an over-predominant visual imagination, I could follow my heart's instinctive urge, in accordance with my own clear-eyed insight, -- and become a saint ... !" [#663W-{10/5/58}Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck: SLRW, p. 425-426]

And Wagner could not possibly be more explicit than he is in the following observation quoted by Cosima, that the path from religion to art, which was the path illustrated in the *Ring* in Wotan's (religion's) withdrawal from life in favor of his heir Siegfried (the secular artist-hero), he now (during the period in which he completed *Parsifal*) renounces in favor of a new religion of feeling which apparently will embrace nature, and man's nature, without the consolation of illusion or self-deceit.

“[P. 424] He tells me the thought he has written down: ‘The path from religion to art bad, from art to religion good.’ ” [#1004W-{1/13/80} CD Vol. II, p. 424]

In the following illuminating illustration of Wagner’s critique of his own art, Wagner contrasts the permanent imperturbability of the saint with the inspired artist’s dual life, in which he either enjoys the ecstasy of unconscious artistic creativity, or suffers the dregs of mundane existence. This brings to mind Kundry’s dual life of alternating rebirths as both the muse for art and the penitent servant of the Grail:

“One state surpasses his [the inspired composer], and one alone, -- the Saint’s, and chiefly through its permanence and imperturbability; whereas the clairvoyant ecstasy of the musician has to alternate with a perpetually recurrent state of individual consciousness, which we must account the more distressful the higher has his inspiration carried him above all bounds of individuality.” [#771W-{9-12/70} Beethoven: PW Vol. V, p. 72-73]

And in the following passage, in which Wagner describes his life as an artist as both his blessing and his curse, we are reminded of Wagner’s description of the conflict Amfortas suffers when looking upon the Holy Grail, for Amfortas experiences “heavenly salvation and eternal damnation:”

“[P. 359] I am only an artist: -- that is my blessing and my curse; otherwise I should gladly become a saint ... .” [#644W-{8/23/56} Letter to August Roeckel: SLRW, p. 359]

I also noted previously Wagner’s equation of his art with play, or games. In the passage below Wagner identifies his own art with the Grecian spirit, which according to Wagner evaded the great philosophic issues of the meaning of life for the sake of the joy in playfully re-shaping the world artistically. Again, according to Wagner his blissful art has ignored the terrible reality of egoism at the root of human motivation

**(10B) [WAGNER]** “[P. 229] In the workings of the Grecian spirit we ... are made spectators of a kind of pastime, a play in whose vicissitudes the joy of Shaping seeks to counteract the awe of Knowing. Content with this, rejoicing in the semblance, ... it asks not after the goal of Being ... .

[P. 230] ... what but a mummery at last could such delight well be, when we find that blood and massacre ... still rage throughout the human race; that violence is master ... ? But a heartless mummery must the concernment with Art ever be, and all enjoyment of the freedom thereby sought from the Will’s distress, so long as nothing more was to be found in art ... .” [#1029W-{6-8/80} Religion and Art: PW Vol. VI, p. 229-230]

These various observations by Wagner dramatically support our thesis that *'Parsifal'* is, among other things, Wagner's critique of his own art, from which the character Parsifal's actions in Act Three presumably offer redemption. And this explains why Kundry has to die in the end. Kundry dies as Parsifal unveils the Grail, nevermore to be hidden, because as the muse of unconscious religious revelation and artistic inspiration, Kundry no longer has any function to serve in a culture which fully embraces objective truth. There is no longer any need to hide the truth behind the veil of Maya, which is just a metaphor for religious faith and art. The days of unconscious artistic inspiration are over, and Kundry's day is done.

The following section provides a closer look at what Parsifal does to bring about this redemption.

## **(11) PARSIFAL UNVEILS THE GRAIL, NEVER MORE TO BE HID: RELIGION'S MYSTERIES ARE UNMASKED**

We encountered Feuerbach's observation a few moments ago that the God in Christianity's brand of monotheism is a god who denies his true origin in nature, and forbids intellectual inquiry into his origins. This passage, and the passage below, which suggests that the barrier with which religious faith confronts intellectual inquiry into the roots of faith, the religious mysteries, ought to be lifted, call to mind Lohengrin's prohibition on knowledge, his demand that the heroine-muse Elsa never inquire about his true identity and origin, and Elsa's insistence on knowing Lohengrin's secret:

**(11A) [FEUERBACH]** "[P. 219] ... no barrier to human knowledge can excuse us. In the realm of nature, to be sure, there are still many things we do not understand; but the secrets of religion spring from man himself, and he is capable of knowing them down to their remotest depths. (...) The elimination of this lie is the condition for a new, energetic mankind."  
[#284F-LER: p. 219]

In the romantic opera *Lohengrin*, of course, Lohengrin is Parsifal's son, which, as Nietzsche pointed out, begs the question how a Knight of the Grail, who presumably has sworn an oath of celibacy and chastity, could produce a son. In my prior talk to the Boston Wagner Society entitled 'How Elsa Taught Wagner the Way to Siegfried,' I explored the notion that Elsa, as a metaphor for Feuerbach's concept of Eve as a heroic figure who brought about the end of innocence and faith, is the muse for Wagner's art as heir to lost religious faith. Wagner proclaimed in 'A Communication To My Friends' that Elsa's insistence that Lohengrin share with her, in love's night, the secret of his origin and identity, so she can help him protect the secret of his identity, was Wagner's inspiration for the revolution which terminated the phase in which he produced his romantic operas, and brought forth his music-dramas. In that paper I noted that, where Lohengrin refused to let Elsa hear his confession of his true identity and origin, Wotan on the contrary agreed to share with his daughter Bruennhilde the "unspoken" secret of his confession. I explained how this contrast between Lohengrin's refusal and Wotan's

acquiescence is the metaphorical basis for the transition from Wagner's romantic operas, where music still has only a sort of mechanical relation to the dramatic text, to the music-dramas, in which music and poetic text are fused in a union whose metaphor is the loving union of hero with heroine. Wotan's acceptance of Bruennhilde's proffer to hear his confession represents the redemptive union of the poetic drama (the man) with music (the woman), through which man's terrible history of egoism feels redeemed.

But now, Parsifal must renounce this special kind of love, renounce union with the muse of unconscious artistic inspiration, in order to reveal the religious mysteries, the heretofore unconscious source of religious revelation and artistic inspiration, by making what formerly was unconscious rise to consciousness (much as Alberich said that the gods should beware the day when his army of night brings the Nibelung Hoard from the silent depths to the light of day). He can only do this by rejecting union with his potential (and former) muse Kundry, so that he can wake what has slept until now, man's hoard of knowledge of his true origin in nature, and his identity as a natural, physical being. Therefore Parsifal tells all present after he heals Amfortas's wound with the point of that holy Spear with which Klingsor, with Kundry's aid, made the wound in the first place: "No more shall it be closed: Reveal the Grail – open the shrine!" This final act of blessing seems more than just a repeat of the ceremony Amfortas and others before him had been performing: Parsifal's proclamation seems to invoke something new and unprecedented, with a feeling of finality. It is as if the Grail is being revealed never to be concealed again.

The religious mystery which Parsifal now exposes to the light of day, i.e., to man's reason, his reflective consciousness, may well be what Wagner discloses in the following passage, that the Nibelung Hoard (identified with egoism, the lust for power and acquisitiveness) is the true identity and origin of the Holy Grail:

**(11B) [WAGNER]** "[P. 293] In truth the legend of the Holy Grail ... makes its entry on the world at the very time when the Kaiserhood [i.e., earthly power] attained its more ideal direction, and the Nibelung's Hoard accordingly was losing more and more in material worth, to yield to a higher spiritual content. This spiritual ascension of the Hoard into the Grail was accomplished in the German conscience ... .

(...)

[P. 294] The quest of the Grail henceforth replaces the struggle for the Nibelungen-Hoard ... ." [#373W-{6-8/48}The Wibelungen -Revised summer of 1849: PW Vol. VII, p. 293-294]

In other words, the Holy Grail, i.e., man's futile longing to transcend the real, physical world by positing a supernatural, divine realm of redemption from it, is identical with the Nibelung Hoard, i.e., the egoistic basis of earthly power. Both Grail and Hoard arise from man's Ring-curse, i.e., the nature of the human mind itself, whose gift of imagination and abstraction allowed man, even compelled man, to seek infinite satisfaction of natural desires, and permanent freedom from sin, death, and pain, but without result. The only difference between them is that the Grail represents satisfaction

of subjective psychological needs which can't be satisfied in actuality in this physical world, but only in the imagination, whereas the historical quest for the hoard represents this same gift of imagination and abstraction in the service of man's quest for objective knowledge of the real world, which grants him finite but potentially unlimited, and ever increasing, power. As one can see in Wagner's stunning expose of the true origin of the Grail above, the practical quest for the hoard's power leads inevitably over time to the abstract quest for unlimited, supernatural power not subject to the limits of time, space, and matter. Alberich's curse on his ring, which represents the incapacity of the human mind to find perfect satisfaction, the feeling of lack, or "Noth" (which according to Feuerbach is the root of all creativity in culture), is the origin of man's futile quest for supernatural redemption from the limits of real, physical life on earth. And one can see that this acknowledgment of the identity of the quest for the Nibelung's Hoard, and the quest for the Holy Grail, parallels Feuerbach's and Wagner's proclamation of a reconciliation of Nature and Spirit. It also parallels, amazingly enough, the transformation of the Ring Motif into the first part of the Valhalla Motif (i.e., that motif representing the heavenly realm of the gods) during the transition from Scene One to Scene Two of *The Rhinegold*, the first part of *The Ring of the Nibelung*.

Man has now become conscious of the nature, scope, and origin of his once unconscious sources of motivation. As Feuerbach said in concluding what I regard as his most important book, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*:

"It was my purpose to demonstrate that ... the being which man, in religion and theology, sets up as a distinct being over against himself, is his own essence. It was my purpose to demonstrate this so that man, who is always unconsciously governed and determined by his own essence alone, may in future consciously take his own, human essence as the law and determining ground, the aim and measure, of his ethical and political life." [#194F-LER: p. 22-23]

## **(12) A POSSIBLE FEUERBACHIAN SOLUTION TO THE CONUNDRUM: REDEMPTION TO THE REDEEMER**

There remains one key question, and it concerns the controversial final words of *Parsifal*: they are sung by what Wagner described as an asexual chorus - mixing men's and women's voices - which proclaims: "Redemption to the Redeemer." A simple answer, one which a number of scholars favor, is that the explanation for this conundrum can be found in Parsifal's repetition of what we must assume was a plea which Christ the Redeemer made to him, at least subliminally, while the still ignorant Parsifal observed Amfortas's anguish during the Holy Grail Service in the Temple of the Grail in Act One:

"Parsifal: I hear the Saviour's lament, the lament, oh the lament o'er the desecrated sanctuary: 'Deliver, rescue me from guilt-stained hands!' Thus cried the godly lament thundering loud to my soul, and I, the fool, the

coward, I fled to wild and childish deeds!"

We have already discussed the contradiction that though Parsifal's wild and childish flight from the Grail Realm to Klingsor's Magic Garden was the precondition to winning back the Spear which alone can heal Amfortas's Wound, and bringing to an end the temptation offered by Klingsor's Magic Garden and the Flowermaidens, yet Parsifal feels unbearable guilt at having made this journey to Klingsor's realm, as if by so doing he missed his chance to redeem Amfortas. We can, however (as noted previously), construe Parsifal's "wild and childish deeds!" as representing all of his prior visits, and all of his prior incarnations' prior visits, to Klingsor's Magic Garden to obtain unconscious revelation and artistic inspiration. By being deluded as to the true means of redemption, Parsifal and his progenitors delayed the day of Amfortas's redemption from illusion.

Of course, it can also be said of Titurel, the first Grail King who received the Christian relics, the Spear and Grail, that he redeemed God and Saviour by preserving the faith when it was under threat. The First and Second Procession of Knights who carry the Grail and Titurel's bier, respectively, during Titurel's funeral in Act Three, bear this out:

"Second Procession: This funeral shrine the warrior holds; there lies the heavenly power, into whose care God once gave Himself: Titurel we bear.  
First Procession: Who did slay him that, in God's care, once God himself protected?"

But a true God and Saviour can neither be under threat, nor redeemed, by man, unless they are a product of man's imagination, and therefore depend upon man's belief in them to sustain them, which is precisely, it seems to me, what the notion that God found himself in Titurel's protection means.

An alternative explanation which seems to follow logically from our present interpretation is that Amfortas's plea that the Saviour would relieve him of the burden of the heritage the Saviour left for him, the Holy Service Amfortas has to perform which overcomes him with unbearable guilt, is answered by the redemption which Parsifal offers, namely, the restoration of Nature and renunciation of that form of religion which denies nature. The following is Amfortas' complaint to the Saviour:

"Titurel: Reveal the Grail! Amfortas: No! Leave it covered! Oh, may no one know the torment which this sight in me arouses, yet you delights!  
What is the wound [i.e., acknowledgment of man's natural, carnal, mortal nature and limitations, in this context], the fury of its pain 'gainst the distress ["Not"], the hellish pangs of being condemned to this office!  
Woeful lot that I have inherited, that I, the only sinner among them all,  
Should tend the Holy of Holies, should beseech its blessing on the pure!  
O judgment! Peerless judgment of the – alas! – offended merciful One! (...)  
And now from me, in holiest office, the guardian of godliest treasures,  
custodian of redemption's balm, there wells my hot and sinful blood, ever

replenished from the spring of yearning. Alas, by repentance never staunched! Have mercy! Have mercy! (...) Take my heritage, heal the wound, that holy I may die, pure and whole in Thee!"

To grasp the irony in Amfortas's confession that while he alone of all the Knights is a sinner, he alone has been favored by the Grail to serve its office, we must consult Wagner's observation that the higher man, or inspired artist, stands out from other common men by his propensity to – or better, his inability not to – grasp the full, universal and tragic significance of things which common men understand from a merely mundane, practical, and narrow standpoint, in terms of its use or uselessness to them:

"[P. 30] "... the great, the truly noble spirit is distinguished from the common organisation of everyday by this: to it every, often the seemingly most trivial, incident of life and world-intercourse is capable of swiftly displaying its widest correlation with the essential root-phenomena of all existence, thus of showing Life and the World themselves in their true, their terribly earnest meaning. The naïve, ordinary man – accustomed merely to seize the outmost side of such events, the side of practical service for the moment's need – when once this awful earnestness suddenly reveals itself to him through an unaccustomed juncture, falls into such consternation that self-murder is very frequently the consequence. The great, exceptional man finds himself each day, in a certain measure, in the situation where the ordinary man ... despairs of life." [#707W-{64-2/65} On State and Religion; PW Vol. IV, p. 30]

Amfortas is either one of these higher men (given the fact that he alone has been granted the privilege of officiating at the Grail's holy service), or he has involuntarily obtained an insight into their horrific, forbidden knowledge through the wound which Klingsor delivered with Kundry's aid, and is therefore more conscious of the guilt in our mere existence than others, just as Wotan was. But it was thanks to his seduction by Kundry and wounding by Klingsor that Amfortas can no longer enjoy the balm of that veil of Maya which religion and art once provided. What Amfortas desires, without being fully conscious of it, is to be relieved of the burden of belief in a transcendent realm of spirit which forever leaves sensitive men feeling unworthy and irredeemably corrupt. This I believe is the gift of healing that Parsifal delivers by refusing to wield the spear in his own self-defense, and touching Amfortas's wound with the same point with which Klingsor once delivered the wound.

The implication of this for our interpretation is that Parsifal, as artist-hero and heir to the legacy left man by all those inspired culture-heroes who created religious mythology and inspired art, as heir therefore to Christ the Saviour and the Buddha, receives his decisive revelation of the sin (matricide) that all these prior redeemers perpetuated by offering man the delusion of redemption from this world, and frees man from this sin by proclaiming man part of the natural world, so to speak. In this sense the redeemer Parsifal redeems both himself, and retrospectively all his prior incarnations, as

redeemer of their sin in denying Mother Nature, by restoring Mother Nature's rightful position.

There is one passage from Feuerbach's writings which suggests that Christ himself needs a saviour. Feuerbach tells us that if Christ is not a supernatural God but is merely a symbol for human nature and human longings, Christ cannot be our saviour but needs a saviour himself:

**(12A) [FEUERBACH]** "[P. 45] ... when I believe that the human nature alone has suffered for me, Christ is a poor savior to me: in that case, he needs a savior himself. And thus, out of the need for salvation is postulated something transcending human nature, a being different from man. But no sooner is this being postulated than man yearns after himself, his own nature, and man is immediately reestablished." [#56F-EOC: p. 45]

So it seems that Parsifal, and therefore Wagner himself in his swan-song, offers us final redemption in a new religion which exalts feeling over thought, but disavows any dependence upon monotheistic religion and its renunciation of Nature. I conclude below with both Feuerbach's and Wagner's description of this "New Religion.":

"... our religious doctrines and usages ... stand in the most glaring contradiction to our present cultural and material situation ... . (...) A new era ... requires a new view of the first elements and foundations of human existence; it requires - if we wish to retain the word - a new religion!" [#283F-LER: p. 216-217]

"As for our present Civilization ... nothing but the spirit of our Music ... can dower it with a soul again. And the task of giving to the new, more soulful civilization that haply may arise herefrom, the new Religion to inform it - this task must obviously be reserved for the German Spirit alone." [#791W-{9-12/70} Beethoven: PW Vol. V, p. 121; p. 123]

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