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Richard Wagner*

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# The History of a Talisman

The Quest for the Holy Lance from Chrétien de Troyes  
to Richard Wagner

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Not all who will have encountered the honorand will know of the breadth of his cultural interests. These include, as one would expect, the linguistic and literary – especially concerning the literature of Arthur and the Grail. However, they are equally historiographical, his special expertise being the Crusades, including the famous legend of how the finding of the holy lance inspired the Crusaders at the siege of Antioch in 1098; and also, notably, operatic. I wish to do justice to both professional and extra-curricular areas of his concerns by taking a diachronic approach to the motif of the lance quest, which first occurred in a work by the medieval French author on whom he wrote a notable monograph, Chrétien de Troyes. This study will focus in particular on the *Conte du Graal* (c.1180) and compare the motif of the lance quest with its rather idiosyncratic avatar, the opera of *Parsifal* by Richard Wagner (1882).

Chrétien's famously uncompleted romance was adapted into German and completed (according to its author's own conceptions) by Wolfram von Eschenbach in his *Parzival* (c.1200), the version which Richard Wagner used as inspiration for his last opera. *Parsifal* takes only certain features from the 25,000-line romance by Wolfram von Eschenbach,<sup>1</sup> the composer himself showing an abundant awareness of operatic constraints when he wrote:

I cannot choose to work on such a broad scale as Wolfram von Eschenbach was able to do: I have to compress everything into three climactic situations of violent intensity, so that the work's profound and ramified content emerges clearly and distinctly. My art consists in working and representing things in this sort of way.<sup>2</sup>

These words make it clear that his conception of poetic adaptation was unlike that of a medieval adapter. He did not feel himself beholden to the constraints of source (to what the Germans term *Stoffzwang*), since he did not honour the medieval notion of received imaginative truth. Instead, he took the medieval romance as a storehouse of motifs for a free composition of his own. In his own estimation Wagner was the grand exegete of the western, medieval canon, alone able to reveal the true, 'mythic' (by which he meant approximately proto-Jungian) import which he typically felt to be veiled by the medieval romances he took as his source texts.<sup>3</sup>

One early tradition about Christ's death on the cross concerns the piercing of Christ's side with a spear by a blind Roman centurion, Longinus, the blood flowing down the shaft of the lance into his eyes and restoring his sight.<sup>4</sup> The Holy Lance and the Grail (*gradalis*), the drinking vessel used by Christ at the last supper, both entered into the orbit of Arthurian legend with Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Conte du Graal* and were taken over by Wolfram von Eschenbach in his account. In three acts, Wagner develops the story of how the ailing Grail king, Amfortas, his sickness imposed upon him for his sinful carnality, comes to forfeit the holy lance to his heathen arch-enemy, Klingsor, becoming wounded for his vulnerability in the process. A voice informs the Grail company that the lance may be won back only by the spiritual ministrations of a naïve youth (Parsifal). These ministrations are in course of time duly performed by the youth, and in so doing he is able to retrieve the holy lance illicitly appropriated by Klingsor, establish a more appropriate Grail kingship in Amfortas's stead, and cause Klingsor's evil fastness to dissolve into dust both literally and metaphorically. In brief, Parsifal restores a Grail line whose spiritual mission had been fatally subverted by an enemy who in the opera is more reminiscent of Milton's Satan than he is of Wolfram's Clinschor or of the 'clers sages d'astronomie' of Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*.

In Wolfram's version Clinschor is an embittered knight who has been castrated for his adultery with a king's wife. His subsequent turning to the black arts allows him to inflict a somewhat less drastic form of talion punishment on a host of youths and maidens by immuring them in segregated quarters in his sinister *schastel marveile*. In Wolfram's version he has no connection with the Parzival/Grail strand of the action but clearly Wagner saw the opportunity of raising him to the status of chief opponent of the Grail

world, essentially granting him mythical stature as the Adversary *tout court*.<sup>5</sup> The Wagnerian Klingsor aspires in his hubris to oppose the guardians of spiritual authority seated in their pantheon at the Grail castle. Frustrated over his exclusion from their circle, Klingsor, in a significant alteration of the medieval prototype, goes as far as castrating *himself*.<sup>6</sup> In this way he aspires to gain unearned spiritual preferment by freeing himself from the desires that he believes impede his spiritual elevation (apparently sharing with the Alberich of the *Ring* cycle the ambition to renounce love in favour of power). Seated in his own castle in an adjacent valley in what Wagner terms the rank realm of heathendom (*üppiges Heidenland*), he seeks to bolster his adversarial position vis-à-vis his enemies at the Grail castle of Monsalvat (*mons salvaticus*) by acting as the *souteneur* of Kundry and of other beguiling 'flower maidens' in order to seduce Grail knights from their avocation.

The only true hero of the opera is the messianic youth, Parsifal; the sole 'quest' with which Wagner's Gawan is entrusted being merely a profane search for herbal remedies which in the event prove ineffective. Wagner appears to have taken his cue for this conception from some episodic sections of Wolfram's romance (sections 505–7), where Gawan appears as a physician expert in herbal cures who saves a mortally wounded knight by dint of his medical knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Once again linking an unrelated incident from his source to the Grail action proper, Wagner has his ailing Grail king, Amfortas, cry out in pain for one of Gawan's medicinal remedies, only to be reminded by a retainer that Gawan has had to set out afresh to find a remedy that will actually work:

Herr! Gawan weilte nicht.  
 Da seines Heilkrauts Kraft,  
 Wie schwer er's auch errungen,  
 Doch deine Hoffnung trog,  
 Hat er auf neue Sucht (*sic*; = Suche) sich fortgeschwungen<sup>8</sup>

*Ha! Gawan did not stay long since his herbs – although he searched for them long and hard – proved disappointing to your hopes and he has gone off on a fresh quest.*

Having resigned himself to the news, the stricken Grail king transfers the need he feels to his promised saviour, Parsifal, and away

from any items of Gawan's pharmacopeia; Amfortas's dismissive words about Gawan, coupled with his *cri de coeur* for the supremely empathetic saviour 'made wise by pity',<sup>9</sup> appear to imply as sharp a subordination of Gawan to Parsifal as that which had been implicit in Wolfram's version where, as will presently be noted, Gawan's quest for the holy lance descends to the status of a blind motif. Even more so than the Gauvain figures of the *Conte du Graal* and of *Parzival*, who at least play a more extensive (albeit ambiguous) narrative role, the slight operatic cameo of a herbal quester must necessarily appear somewhat negligible. Moreover, it is clear that Gawan's herbal quest is entirely misdirected for, to borrow a piece of Shakespearean parlance, Amfortas has more need of the divine than the physician. I am therefore aware that my subtitle about Gawan's quest in *Wagner* might appear more than a little wrong-headed, since the operatic Gawan does not have a quest worthy of the name. My contention, however, is that any supposed subordination of Gawan to Parsifal in *Wagner* is more apparent than real since in the figure of *Wagner's* Parsifal, I shall argue, there is a little more of Wolfram's Gawan than initially meets the eye.

The point of departure for this contention springs from general observations of *Wagner's* eclectic working methods which typically motivated him to conflate a number of characters found in his sources. For instance the two figures of Wolfram's chivalric advisor, Gurnemanz, and spiritual counsellor, Trevrizent, are transformed into the one figure of Gurnemanz. *Wagner's* strange Kundry figure, it has often been noted, combines within herself a number of mythic archetypes so that her soul often seems in a perpetual process of transmigration, in line with the composer's interest in Buddhism and the processes of metempsychosis.<sup>10</sup> This particular *modus operandi* of the composer will, I suggest, have prompted him to conflate elements of both Wolfram's protagonist and deuteragonist into the one figure of Parsifal himself. I shall go on to suggest that *Wagner* attempted what generations of critics have regretted that neither Chrétien de Troyes nor Wolfram von Eschenbach were inclined to do, namely, unify the characters of *Parzival* and Gawan at some level, thus bringing some semblance of Aristotelian unity to what German critics rightly call Wolfram's double romance (*Doppelroman*), in which the Gawan sequence essentially gains a poetic life of its own.

Notoriously, Wagner saw his own genius as being vastly superior to that of the redactors of his medieval sources, and he was more than a little dismissive in his correspondence about such canonical writers as Gottfried von Strassburg and Wolfram von Eschenbach. The composer was to develop an aversion to Wolfram's main hero, a dislike which appears to have ripened over some three decades. His first acquaintance with Wolfram's romance came from his reading of it during one of those most quintessentially German of customs, a health cure at Marienbad in the Bohemian forest in 1845. He used this sabbatical to read the romance in the modern German translation by the pseudonymous San Marte (real name Albert Schultz). However, his opera was not written in this first flush of late-Romantic enthusiasm but three decades later in 1877, and the first performance at Bayreuth did not occur until 1882. By this time the composer's initial enthusiasm for Parzival had begun to yield to more sceptical views about the Wolframian protagonist. In a letter dated 29–30 July 1859 to his *confidante*, Mathtilde von Wesendonck, he declared:

I shall have to make a completely fresh start with Parzival (sc. the character). For Wolfram hadn't the first idea of what he was doing: Parzival's despair of God is stupid and unmotivated, and his conversion is even more unsatisfactory.<sup>11</sup>

What Wagner presumably meant here is that the denunciation of Wolfram's Parzival by Cundrie for his failure to ask the requisite question at the Grail castle was inadequate to account for the four and a half years of his theomachy, or opposition to God, which ensue and that the precise modalities of his spiritual recovery in the celebrated Book 9 are not made entirely clear. At any rate, dissatisfied with what he saw as Wolfram's unconvincing plotting and characterization, Wagner appears to have decided to rewrite his music drama with material creatively blended from both the Parzival and the Gawan sections of Wolfram's narrative, in particular exploiting a theme which his medieval predecessor had left largely undeveloped, that of a sexual temptation triumphantly withstood. The imaginative beginnings of this theme appear to have proceeded from the mention of the sexual injury suffered by the Grail king of Wolfram's romance as punishment for his sexual pursuit of Orgeluse (the Orguelleuse of the *Conte du Graal*) – an act in contravention of the self-denying

ordinance attaching to the office of Grail kingship. In the romance this theme is never satisfactorily linked with Parzival's quest (and indeed provides a particularly tenuous link between the Gawan and Parzival actions in the romance version). To be sure, there is a scene in the romance where Parzival rejects Orgeluse's sexual overtures but this is not described as a grand scene of temptation virtuously overcome and therefore remains a rather inconsequential motif (see Wolfram's *Parzival*, 616, 11ff.).<sup>12</sup> Parzival, deeply in love with his wife, does not even have to think twice about resisting Orgeluse's attempts at seduction and the Orgeluse of the romance remains more of a burlesque irritant to Parzival than a credible threat to his spiritual progress.

Wagner, on the other hand, was clearly more exercised by the spiritually disabling nature of lust in human nature than had been Wolfram,<sup>13</sup> and aggravates the theme of an assault on his protagonist's chastity. He converts Wolfram's distinctly non-alluring figure of Cundrie (she being the loathly lady who plays the functional role of guiding Parzival to the Grail in *Parzival*) into a *femme fatale*; this Kundry being another composite figure who takes on important aspects of Wolfram's figure of Orgeluse, as has long been acknowledged – Lucy Beckett for instance wrote of Orgeluse taunting Gawan in Wolfram's version 'with Kundry-like devilment'.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the sexual problematics of the operatic text are such that almost everything in the second Act of the opera is made to depend on the celebrated Kundry kiss. Kundry, who had once reduced the old Grail king's spiritual authority to its present nadir,<sup>15</sup> now attempts the same sexual/spiritual assault on Parsifal. When Kundry kisses Parsifal lingeringly on the lips, the young knight's first sexual awakening gives him a powerful intimation of how Kundry had been able to ruin the salvation of Amfortas's soul. This in turn makes Parzival aware that the welfare of his own soul depends on resisting Kundry's embraces:

Mit aller Schmerzen Qual im Bunde,  
 Das Heil der Seele  
 Entküsste ihm der Mund! –  
 Ha-Dieser Kuß! –  
 Verderberin! Weiche von mir!  
 Ewig – ewig – von mir!<sup>16</sup>



*In league with every infernal torment in creation, Kundry's mouth kissed away the salvation of Amfortas's soul. Oh that kiss! Arch-corrupter, you, keep away from me and never come near me again!*

Realising in this moment of vicarious insight the causes of Amfortas having incurred his symbolic wound (giving way to such sexual susceptibilities being unworthy of the office of Grail kingship) he becomes aware of what he had not comprehended on witnessing Amfortas's wound bleeding for the first time (and in that sense shows himself morally ripe for the supreme office which awaits him):<sup>17</sup>

Amfortas!  
 Die Wunde! – Die Wunde!-  
 Sie brennt in meinem Herzen. –  
 ( . . . )  
 Die Wunde sah ich bluten: –  
 Und blutet sie in mir! –  
 Hier – hier!  
 Nein! Nein! Nicht die Wunde ist es.  
 Fließe ihr Blut in Strömen dahin!  
 Hier! Hier im Herzen der Brand!

Das Sehnen, das furchtbare Sehnen,  
 Das alle Sinne mir faßt und zwingt!  
 Oh! Qual der Liebe! –  
 Wie alles schauert, bebt und zuckt  
 In sündigem Verlangen.<sup>18</sup>

*Amfortas! The wound, the wound! It burns (sic) in my own heart. I witnessed the wound bleeding and now it bleeds in me: here, here. No! No! It's not so much the wound (would that all its blood would run off). It's here in my heart that there is a fire. The longing, the terrible longing that grips and subdues all my senses! Oh, torment of love! How everything around me shakes and quakes in my sinful lust!*

In this strange, powerfully mixed metaphor of blood and fire we find matters reconceptualized to focus on Parsifal's sudden understanding of the morally problematical nature of sexual passion. This insight alone allows him to save himself from self-compromising spiritual failure and to save Kundry (who according

to Wagnerian conceptions, can be saved only when a knight should resist her embraces). It also enables him to use the grail lance as a kind of talismanic crucifix to brandish in the direction of Klingsor, the evil genius from whom Kundry's orders proceed.

There is clearly much that is quintessentially Wagnerian in these conceptions but scholars have speculated about the composer's remoter inspiration for some of his ideas. In his recent book on the Grail, Richard Barber has contended that the notion of Parzival's resistance to sexual temptation derives from French prose sources and that 'Parsifal has taken on the qualities of Galahad and has become the chaste champion rather than the warm and human figure evoked by Wolfram von Eschenbach'.<sup>19</sup> There may be some truth in Barber's contention but I would enter a caveat since, although Parsifal remains chaste, he is clearly not invulnerable to female sexual charms, as we have observed, and does not stand head and shoulders above the sexual fray like the virginal *chevalier Jhesucrist* of the French Lancelot-Grail cycle. Crudely put, were Parsifal unable to register the physiological symptoms of erotic arousal he would have been unable to understand the plight which led to the sexual and moral downfall of the old Grail king, Amfortas, and so could not have mustered the spiritual empathy to bring about an effective restoration of Grail kingship in his own person. It therefore seems more likely to me that Wagner will have drawn an important part of his inspiration not from Galahad but from that knight who fully registers the temptations of Kundry's medieval forbear, Orgeluse, but who resists her blandishments up until the point of their betrothal. I refer, of course, to Wolfram's Gawan.

Whilst we know that Wagner was deeply versed in many aspects of medieval tradition (a fact to which all his operas amply attest), I am inclined to think that the balance of evidence suggests that the composer will here have derived his main inspiration from that text which he had been actively engaged in adapting ever since the time of his Marienbad retreat, namely *Parzival* itself. Other sources may of course be plausibly conjectured,<sup>20</sup> but we cannot be certain of them and for me the image of a sexually vulnerable Parsifal is more reminiscent of Wolfram's Gawan than of the sexually immune Galahad. Hence I would put my weight behind the contention of one of the contributors to the English National Opera guide to *Parsifal*, Mike Ashman, who commented that, 'in order to motivate *Parsifal's* quest more clearly, [Wagner] took over the idea of the

overthrow of a magic castle from another limb of the Grail stories (the hero of this section is actually Gawan [Ashman's parenthesis]) and joined the two elements together by the device of recovering the lost Spear.<sup>21</sup> It is precisely the spear motif blinded by Wagner's medieval forbear which the composer reinstates, for in the opera Amfortas is cured by the touch of the sacred lance and not by the compassionate question ('Mitleidsfrage') associated with Parzival in the romance. As Ulrich Müller has pointed out, the time-honoured constraints of Stoffzwang left Wagner little choice but to accept that 'Parsifal was necessary as the redeemer figure whom Amfortas longs for,'<sup>22</sup> but knowing Wagner's hostility towards Wolfram's character of Parzival, it would have been natural for him to have switched some part of his imaginative allegiance to Wolfram's second hero, Gawan, and, *pari passu*, to the quest for the lance which his medieval counterpart had renounced seven centuries earlier.

Wagner, then, disinterred a lance effectively lost to Arthurian tradition for over 700 years and, in order to explore further the composer's possible motives for retrieving it and melding it with the Parsifal-quest theme, it may be worth noting how the lance became lost in the first place. In the *Conte du Graal* and *Parzival* we read of how Gauvain/ Gawan is accused of slaying a knight unchivalrously, that is, without having issued a due knightly challenge; and his blustering response to the accusation may be thought to give at least *prima facie* support to the case of his accuser.<sup>23</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach takes up the motif of the murder charge and even has Gawan set off on a quest for the bleeding lance as a penance, but then peremptorily leaves this motif undeveloped through the invention of an evil *deus ex machina* figure in the shape of one Ekhunat, a knight we never meet but who is nevertheless said to have committed the murder of which Gawan had been accused. Thereafter Gawan is no longer associated with the quest for lance or Grail. The revelation of the identity of the real villain saves Gawan's face by exonerating him of the charge of murder but has the consequential effect of making his subsequent knightly itinerary, including the quest for the bleeding lance, nugatory. It is a telling feature of the last Book of the romance that Parzival takes only his half-brother Feirefiz, with him on his final, redemptive visit to the Grail king—all the more remarkable a choice since the half-brother had previously played what might be termed a mere cameo role as the issue of Gahmuret's liaison with the heathen princess, Belakane. That Parzival should have chosen his

him rather than his chivalric *confrère*, Gawan, to be his companion at the Grail is not an intuitively obvious choice (the less so given the farcical circumstances of Feirefiz's baptism where his lust for the Grail bearer far outweighs any notions of religious conviction).

Wagner's imaginative achievement was to have acted on the insight that the Gawan section of his source provided rich material for a delineation of a sacred quest, a theme which his medieval predecessor had let wither on the vine. Whilst nominally retaining the quest motif, Wolfram in effect shifts his focus for the Gawan action to the new and (as he perceived it) discrete theme of the problematics of sexual passion. His motivation for this move will doubtless have been inspired by contemporary tradition. Gawan's problematic sexuality derived from an extensive epic background which supplies a subtextual dynamic in a wide variety of medieval texts such as *L'Âtre Périlleux*, *Meraugis de Portlesguez*, *Gliglois* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.<sup>24</sup> Often the ironies and ambiguities of Gawan's sexual entanglements attract considerable narratorial raillery. Keye, on seeing Gawan in the company of the young women liberated from Clinschor's castle in Wolfram's *Parzival*, remarks snidely that Gawan had come upon the equivalent of a private harem.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the jocose ferryman before *schastel marveile*, Plippalinet, assumes without warrant his young daughter and Gawan had been engaging in some sexual foreplay.<sup>26</sup> Indulging in quips about his deuteragonist's sexual vulnerabilities, Wolfram's narrator at one point observes facetiously that he (the narrator) could never have summoned up the reserves of well-nigh infinite continence displayed by Gawan in resisting Orgeluse's charms.<sup>27</sup> The point and purpose of Gawan's new challenge, for Wolfram, seems to have been that the King's second-in-command, traditionally flawed in the matter of sexual morals, should nevertheless be able to overcome his carnal frailties and confute the charges of unwarranted licentiousness directed at him by his would-be calumniators.

Wolfram apparently did not consider Gawan's battles with the inner demons of his own sexuality weighty enough to carry the quest theme.<sup>28</sup> Yet that it would have been perfectly feasible for Wolfram to have made Chrétien's incomplete Gauvain section carry the theme of the Grail quest can be seen by the ease with which the author of the First Continuation<sup>29</sup> and Heinrich von dem Türlin in *Die Krone* were able to do so. It has likewise been suggested with regard to Wolfram's Gawan that, once he had dispelled Clinschor's

influence, there was no logical barrier to his Grail adventure on moral grounds:

the audience naturally expects that the romance will turn to an account of Gawan's adventures in this search. They might also expect the flower of Arthurian knighthood to succeed where Parzival had failed.<sup>30</sup>

This thought, however, clearly did not lie within Wolfram's imaginative sympathies. Wagner, by contrast, even though he permits the *person* of Wolfram's Gawan only a small role, nevertheless saw the possibilities for creative development of the Gawan theme which he attaches very firmly to the Grail/Lance motif. Fiercely independent in his reception of his sources, Wagner was unaffected by the subordination of the Gawan to the Parzival action which Wolfram von Eschenbach had encouraged and which dominated critical discourse about the romance for far more than a century after the composer's death in 1883. Wagner clearly absorbed the whole of the romance imaginatively, rather than bits of it in anthologised form as was to be the *de facto* procedure even for many professional Germanists in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in this way he produced a music drama which, though notionally calqued on its medieval original, remains strikingly different from it.

## Notes

- 1 References are to *Parzival*, ed. Karl Lachmann, Berlin/Leipzig, de Gruyter, 1926 (sixth edition), and to *Parsifal*, ed. Wilhelm Zentner, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1986.
- 2 Ulrich Müller, 'Wolfram, Wagner and the Germans', in *A Companion to Wolfram's Parzival*, ed. Will Hasty, New York, Camden House, 1999, pp. 245–58; p. 254.
- 3 See Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, London, Allen Lane, 2000.
- 4 See entry 'Longinussegn' in J. Bächtold and J. Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, New York, de Gruyter, 2000 (repr.; 10 vols), vol 5, columns 1327–47.
- 5 Whilst Wagner was fond of denying a direct, Christian influence on his operatic output, there can be little doubt that the symbolism of *Parsifal* is 'cast in a mould consecrated by Christian tradition' (Jessie L. Weston, *The Legends of the Wagner Drama*, London, David Nutt, 1896, p. 155).

- 6 'Ohnmächtig, in sich selbst die Sünde zu ertönen,/an sich legt' er die Frevlerhand' are the euphemistic words which the composer puts into the mouth of Gurnemanz (ed. Zentner, Act I, scene 1, p. 17).
- 7 The role of Gawan (Walewein) as physician occurs elsewhere only in Germanic tradition, as for instance in the Middle Dutch *Walewein* and in *Moriaen*. See Penninc and Peter Vostaert, *Roman van Walewein*, ed. and trans. by David F. Johnson, New York, Garland, 1992 (Garland Library of Medieval literature vol. 81, series A), p. 541, note to line 647.
- 8 *Parsifal*, ed. Zentner, as in note 2, Act I, scene one, p. 13.
- 9 Ohn Urlaub? –Möge das er sühnen,/Dass schlecht er Gralsgebote hält! / O wehe ihm, dem trotzig Kühnen, / Wenn er in Klingsors Schlingen fällt! / So breche keiner mir den Frieden:/Ich harre des, der mir beschieden. / 'Durch Mitleid wissend' – / War's nicht so? (ed. Zentner, Act I, scene 1, p. 13). Kundry concedes that neither Gawan's herbs nor her own have any power to heal Amfortas: 'Hilft der Balsam nicht / Arabia birgt / dann nichts mehr zu seinem Heil' (Act I, scene 1, page 13).
- 10 Apart from Orgeluse, Eve, Herodias (wife of Herod who, according to one legend, rejected the love of John the Baptist) and Gundryggia (a wandering spirit of Norse mythology) were all models considered by the composer himself.
- 11 Ulrich Müller, 'Wolfram, Wagner and the Germans', pp. 253–4. Müller also gives a translation of the whole letter, pp. 252–4.
- 12 Cf. her pointed reference to Parzival having rejected her love (619ff.); yet little is made of this rebuff in the romance version.
- 13 See Marianne Wynn, 'Medieval Literature in Reception: Richard Wagner and Wolfram's Parzival', *London German Studies* 2 (1983): 94–114.
- 14 Lucy Beckett, *Richard Wagner, Parsifal*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 10.
- 15 As a punishment for his carnal weakness Amfortas had received the debilitating wound which presently makes his Grail kingdom more waste land than flourishing centre of the spiritual life. Klingsor also won from Amfortas the Grail lance which he uses as a talismanic weapon with which to issue threats to the Grail company. The Grail company, having been saved by Parsifal, describes itself as having been heretofore 'eine führerlose Ritterschaft' led by 'des Grales sündiger Hüter' (ed. Zentner, Act III pp. 121, 124).
- 16 Ed. Zentner, Act II, p. 45.
- 17 Cf. ed. Zentner, Act I, pp. 28–30, where Parsifal had remained 'starr

- und stumm, wie gänzlich entrückt' (stage direction, p. 29) in the presence of the sight of Amfortas's bleeding wound.
- 18 Ed. Zentner, Act II, p. 44.
- 19 See Barber's *The Holy Grail. The History of a Legend*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2004; also Erdmuthe Döffinger-Lange, *Der Gauvain-Teil in Chrétiens 'Conte du Graal'. Forschungsbericht und Episodenkommentar*, Heidelberg, Winter, 1998 (Studia Romanica 95), pp. 55, 59.
- 20 One of which was surely Wagner's own *Tannhäuser* (1842/5) with its similar sexual *Problematik*.
- 21 Mike Ashman, 'A very human epic' in *Parsifal*, ed. Nicholas John, London, John Calder; New York, Riverrun Press, 1986 (English National Opera Guides 34), pp. 7–14; p. 8.
- 22 Müller, p. 254.
- 23 *Le Conte du Graal*, ed. by Keith Busby, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1993, lines 4779–4787.
- 24 In *Meraugis de Portlesgues* his philandering leads to his having to promise that he will not stay two successive nights in the same castle lest he compromise the good name of its maidens and ladies. In *Gliglois* the hero's overweening sexual *amour propre* fails to impress the heroine who decides to bestow her favour upon Gauvain's page, the eponymous hero, whose respectful *amour de loin* is ultimately rewarded. Even in *Diu Crône*, which arguably presents the most positive depiction of Gawain in medieval verse, Gawain is said to have committed a sexual assault (discovered by the first test of virtue in that romance). He would have forced a lady to submit to his sexual will without ceremony.
- 25 'got mit den liuten wunder tuot./wer gap Gawan die frouwen luot?/sus sprach keye in sîme schimpf' (*Parzival*, 675, 13–15).
- 26 *Parzival*, 555, 17ff. Cf. also Gawan's denial that anything untoward had passed between himself and the minor, 556, 1 ff.
- 27 See *Parzival*, 601, 14–19; 604, 4–6 where the narrator implies he would not have gone to the lengths of jumping the River Sabîns (Sabrina/Severn) on horseback to fetch a bauble for her; he would have had his way with her there and then.
- 28 Even though it appears to have occurred to Ulrich Fûetrer at the end of the fifteenth century in his *Buch der Abenteuer*. Fûetrer describes Gawan's liberation of the Castle of Wonders with the same terminology as Wolfram had used to describe Parzival's winning of the Grail, telling of how Gaban *commandeered* ('erstrait') and *redeemed* ('erlost') Tschachtelmareyl. These verbal parallels indicate a perception in Fûetrer's mind of a linkage of Parzival's Grail

adventure and Gawan's challenge at *schastel marveil*, and hence by extension of a moral equivalence of Parzival and Gawan. The later author, however, remained true to his commission as a compiler of a variety of Arthurian legends from the High Middle Ages and did not alter the substance of the narratives he adapted for his patron.

- 29 *Première Continuation de Perceval (Continuation-Gauvain)*, ed. William Roach, trans. Anne Van Coolput-Storms, Paris, Librairie Generale Française, 1993.
- 30 Bonnie Büttner, 'Gawan in Wolfram's *Parzival*'. Unpublished dissertation. Cornell University, 1984, p. 108.