

Parsifal as Proto-SF

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Most operas are about human relationships & emotions
Parsifal is about ideas (philosophy / metaphysics / theology)

Why is *Parsifal* relevant to SF?

In *Parsifal*, Wagner was speculating on the same areas of religion and metaphysics that feature prominently in the novels of Philip K Dick and in *The Matrix* trilogy

Philip K Dick on *Parsifal*

The leader of the grail knights, Amfortas, has a wound which will not heal. Klingsor has wounded him with the spear which pierced Christ's side. Later, when Klingsor hurls the spear at Parsifal, the pure fool catches the spear – which has stopped in midair – and holds it up, making the sign of the Cross with it, at which Klingsor and his entire castle vanish. They were never there in the first place; they were a delusion, what the Greeks call *dokos*; what the Indians call the *veil of maya*.

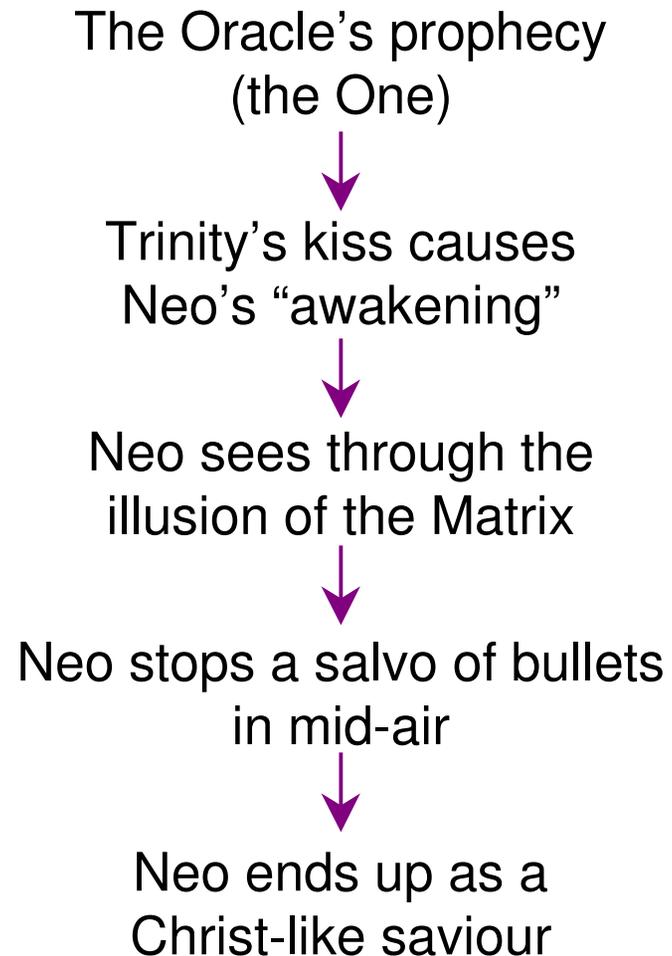
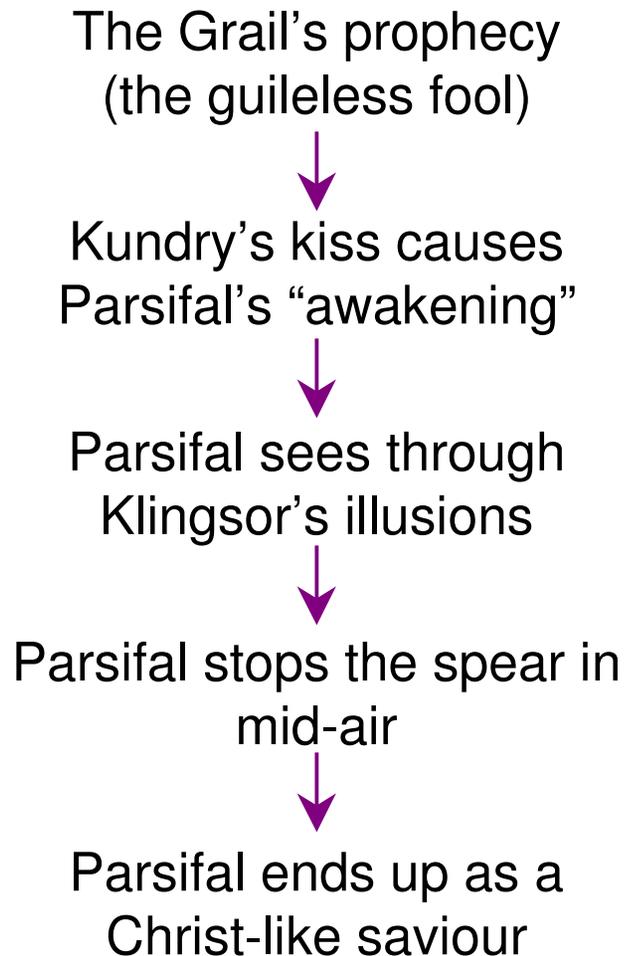
There is nothing that Parsifal cannot do. At the end of the opera, Parsifal touches the spear to Amfortas's wound and the wound heals.

- Philip K Dick: *Valis*, Chapter 8

What happens in *Parsifal*?

- Mysterious writing appears on the Grail prophesying the coming of a redeemer – “the guileless fool”
- Parsifal turns up and acts like a guileless fool until Klingsor sends the witch Kundry to seduce him
- As soon as Kundry kisses Parsifal, he becomes enlightened and understands everything
- Parsifal sees through Klingsor’s illusions and recovers the holy spear
- Parsifal redeems everybody, including himself

Parsifal and The Matrix



Wagner's influence on *The Matrix*

When we were spotting [*Matrix*] *Revolutions* the word "Wagnerian" came up very often. And the reason was because, you know Wagner was very much a fan of Schopenhauer. He was actually obsessed with the Schopenhauer ideas of will and representation... And it was significant enough to both Larry and Andy [Wachowski] and myself that we felt working on the third part of this trilogy, which is significantly about philosophy -- no less Schopenhauer than Hegel and Kant and Heidegger and Kierkegaard, but still definitely Schopenhauerian and also Nietzsche, who was a close friend of Wagner's up until *Parsifal*, when they had a falling out. One of the things I did in acknowledging this Wagnerian tradition of philosophy in multi-media drama was that I quoted the *Tristan* chord over the Deus Ex Machina.

- Don Davis (composer, *The Matrix* trilogy) quoted at music.ign.com

Mix & match metaphysics: Wagner's sources for *Parsifal*

Perceval - Chrétien de Troyes (12th century)

Parzival - Wolfram von Eschenbach (13th century)

Meister Eckhart - sermons (13th century)

Hafez - poems (14th century)

The Upanishads (translated by Duperron, 1804)

Schopenhauer - *The World as Will and Representation* (1844)

Burnouf - *History of Indian Buddhism* (1844)

Ramayana (translated by Holtzmann, 1847)

Spence Hardy - *Manual of Buddhism* (1853)

Renan - *Life of Jesus* (1863)

Sutta Nipata (translated by Coomaraswamy, 1874)

The religion of *Parsifal*: Christianity meets Schopenhauer

This act of denying the will 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...

This most profound of all instincts finds purer and more meaningful expression in the oldest and most sacred religion known to man, in Brahmin teaching, and especially in its final transfiguration in Buddhism.

- Wagner: letter to Franz Liszt, June 1855

The Grail as Symbol

An old legend existed in southern France telling how Joseph of Arimathea had once fled there with the sacred chalice that had been used at the Last Supper... I feel a very real admiration and sense of rapture at this splendid feature of Christian mythogenesis, which invented the most profound symbol that could ever have been invented as the content of the physical-spiritual kernel of any religion.

- Wagner: letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, May 1859

Whereas the priest is concerned only that the religious allegories should be regarded as factual truths, this is of no concern to the artist, since he presents his work frankly and openly as his invention.

- Wagner: *Religion and Art* (1880)

Parsifal and *The Da Vinci Code*

...Wagner's opera *Parsifal* was a tribute to Mary Magdalene and the bloodline of Jesus Christ, told through the story of a young knight on a quest for truth.

- Dan Brown: *The Da Vinci Code*, Chapter 95

The Saviour's blood (*Sang réelle*, whence *San Gréal* - The Holy Grail)

- Wagner: Prose draft of *Parsifal*

Sangreal... *Sang Real*... *San Greal*... *Royal Blood*... *Holy Grail*

- Dan Brown: *The Da Vinci Code*, Chapter 60

Parsifal and Gnosticism

Erlösung dem Erlöser! (The Redeemer redeemed!)

- Wagner: *Parsifal*, Act Three

The savior saved idea is Gnostic in origin. How did it get into *Parsifal*?

- Philip K Dick: *Valis*, Chapter 8

Gnosticism is a form of Christianity that views the physical world as an illusion that conceals true reality.

It has parallels in Hinduism, Buddhism and the philosophy of Schopenhauer, and is a theme of *Parsifal*, *The Matrix* and the novels of Philip K Dick.

Parsifal and space-time

You see, my son, here time turns into space

- Wagner: *Parsifal*, Act One

Wagner... died in 1883, long before Hermann Minkowski postulated four-dimensional space-time. The source-basis for *Parsifal* consisted of Celtic legends, and Wagner's research into Buddhism for his never-written opera about the Buddha to be called *The Victors*. Where did Richard Wagner get the notion that time could turn into space?

- Philip K Dick: *Valis*, Chapter 3

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, but otherwise have no reality, even the greatest tragic pain must be explicable to those who are truly clear-sighted as no more than the error of the individual.

- Wagner: letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, August 1860

Parsifal - “Pure fool” or *Pierce-the-Veil*?

"Parsi fal" means: *parsi* - think of the fire-loving Parsees - "pure"; *fal* means "mad" in a higher sense, in other words a man without erudition, but one of genius ...

- Wagner: letter to Judith Gautier, Nov 1877

Percival (Perceval, Percheval, Parsifal...) from Old French “pierce the veil” [*perce le voile*]

- www.babynamesdirectory.com

The theme which runs most consistently through Phil's work is that of Parsifal, the "wise fool"... He appears in *Divine Invasion* as Manny (Emmanuel), in *Valis* as Horselover Fat searching for the saviour.

- Tessa Dick (quoted at www.pkdfans.com)

But even PKD was confused by *Parsifal* !

I can see Richard Wagner standing at the gates of heaven:
"You have to let me in," he says. "I wrote *Parsifal*. It has to
do with the Grail, Christ, suffering, pity and healing.
Right?"

And they answer, "Well, we read it and it makes no sense."
SLAM.

- Philip K Dick: *Valis*, Chapter 8

The End

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