

# Zombie *Parsifal*: Undead Walkers and Post-apocalyptic Stagings

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This essay locates zombies in Wagner's *Parsifal*, interpreting them within the work's original nineteenth-century context and reading recent productions in light of contemporary zombie studies. Immediately, a question arises: why zombies? Perhaps Kundry, the wandering Jewess, could be seen as an undead wanderer. Parsifal, too, is cursed to wander past endurance, and Amfortas clearly suffers from an inconvenient and painful immortality. But even so, how can the case be made for zombies in particular? Over the last two hundred years, myriad undead monsters have evolved and receded in cultural consciousness. Vampires were the undead monster of choice in Wagner's time, popularized by John Polidori's short story "The Vampyre" in 1816 and adapted by Heinrich Marschner and Peter Joseph von Lindpaintner in two separate 1828 operas, both called *Der Vampyr*. Wagner even conducted a production of Marschner's opera.<sup>1</sup> Vampires, ghosts, and Frankenstein's monster may all have better claims than zombies to the title of *the* nineteenth-century undead monster, yet uniquely zombie characteristics—the slow inexorability, the tendency to travel in herds and yet remain utterly isolated, the bare exposure of animalistic drives, the horrific lack of boundary between outside and inside, the total absence of human self-consciousness—resonate powerfully with the themes of passivity, acceptance, stasis, and Schopenhauerian hopelessness that pervade *Parsifal*.

The zombie characteristics of Wagner's original work have been emphasized by several recent stage productions, a choice some critics have found inappropriate. In a review of the Wiener Staatsoper's 2010 production of *Parsifal* titled "Oster-'Parsifal': Das ist Wagners Zombie-Zauber" (Easter-Parsifal: That Is Wagner's Zombie-Magic), Peter H. Smith complained that, by zombifying the grail knights, director Christine Mieltitz destroyed the complexity and paradox of Wagner's message.<sup>2</sup> When the Grail Knights enter after the Good Friday sequence, Smith explains:

The incredibly lazy magic of this staging breaks through: the ruined Grail Knights storm the stage as zombies, the grail shatters in a thousand pieces. Guilt, sin, endless atonement, life as a prison sentence, all these Christian questions of faith raise

Wagner to the level of monstrous mystery. Mielitz solves the contradictions inherent in religion simply by keeping religion outside of her interpretation. In the end, the knights stand before the curtain, passing the questions off on the audience.<sup>3</sup>

But emphasizing the zombie aspects of *Parsifal* does not contradict the spiritual content of the piece, or constitute a lazy staging. In *Parsifal*, after all, walking is the way to spiritual transfiguration: characters are tormented by how the physicality of the body conflicts with the yearning of the soul, and this tension is resolved through pilgrimage. Through zombified walking, in other words, *Parsifal* aims to transcend binary divisions between body and soul, inside and outside, dead and alive. Allowing for the possibility of a spiritual zombie, recent stagings thus reinterpret the opera in a contemporary idiom.

What is more, *Parsifal*'s desperate, seeking spirituality can be productively understood as a series of interactions between unhappily undead characters. My essay aims to reinterpret the opera from the perspective of this insight, and suggests that recent productions have reinvigorated the work by highlighting its post-apocalyptic connotations. I place several recent productions of *Parsifal* in the context of recent zombie films and literature—looking in particular at Nikolaus Lehnhoff's 2004 production in Baden-Baden and François Girard's 2013 production at the Metropolitan Opera, as well as scenes from contemporary zombie narratives including *I Am Legend* and *The Walking Dead*. Lehnhoff's production is characterized by symbols of a previous civilization: cement backdrops, rudimentary tools, and broken railroad tracks reference advanced technologies that seem no longer accessible to the society of Grail Knights. Girard's staging features gorgeous projections of a night sky and a dusty absence of natural bounty. It, similarly, seems void of advanced technology but is set in a world that remembers once having such capabilities. Staging *Parsifal* in a zombie postapocalypse doesn't make fun of the work; it simply takes very seriously the horrors of environmental devastation and immortality that informed Wagner's original opera.

## UNDEAD OPERA AND CONTAGIOUS EMPATHY

Operas featuring the undead are hardly uncommon. Indeed, they have been a fixture of the genre since Monteverdi's Orfeo first tried and failed to lead Euridice from the underworld in 1607. In playing with the liminal border between life and death, opera confronts the undead as a possible, audible subject and as a location from which to sing.<sup>4</sup> Undead operatic figures vary widely in their purpose. Some are simple ghosts returning to seek retribution or vengeance, like the Commendatore in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787) or Peter Quint and Miss Jessel in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* (1954). Others struggle with immortality, either because they love a mortal and must become mortal themselves—as in Hoffmann's *Undine* (1816), Wagner's *Die Feen* (1833) and *Der Ring der Nibelungen* (1870s), and Dvořák's *Rusalka* (1901)—

or because they have been cursed to live forever, as in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843) and *Parsifal* (1882), Halévy's *Le Juif errant* (1852), Ullmann's *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* (1943), and Janáček's *Věk Makropulos* (1926). Still others feature undead monsters—Marschner's *Der Vampyr* (1829), d'Albert's *Der Golem* (1926), Rocca's *Il Dibuk* (1934)—or, in the case of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (1831) and Puccini's *Le Villi* (1884), whole crowds of reanimated corpses. The list of opera characters that simply die onstage is, of course, much longer, and complicates Catherine Clément's claim that women alone are destined to die on the operatic stage.<sup>5</sup>

Recent critical conversations about opera and the undead have tended to be framed by Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar's *Opera's Second Death*, which focuses more on the death (or undeath) of the genre itself: "from its very beginning, opera was dead . . . it was perceived as something outdated, as a retroactive solution to an inherent crisis in music."<sup>6</sup> Joseph Cermatori agrees, asserting in 2013 that "opera actually begins its life already dead, or as it were, already undead. Opera begins its life as a zombie."<sup>7</sup> These claims have been buttressed by the increasing numbers of contemporary operas that are staged using zombies (Cermatori mentions in particular Christopher Alden's *Così fan tutte* at New York City Opera in 2012), and, of course, by the inveterate doomsayers who gloomily doubt the ancient art form's viability in today's theatrical world.

In *Opera: The Art of Dying*, Linda and Michael Hutcheon suggest that "nineteenth-century opera moved away from staging Orphic stories about mourning the death of another to presenting tales of the violent and dramatic death of the self."<sup>8</sup> For Wagnerian characters, though, the death of the self is perhaps less at stake than a condition that Žižek describes as "*the very opposite of dying*—a name for the undead state of eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless, repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain."<sup>9</sup> As Joy Calico points out, however, although "the undead may be tragic, they are not horror material if they were not once human, or could not visit the same fate upon one of us. Wotan, Tristan, and Amfortas leave much suffering in their wake, but theirs is a solitary fate; their sin does not cause others to become undead."<sup>10</sup> Calico is entirely right that undead characters transition from tragic to terrifying once the threat of contagion is added (as an example of the latter condition, she points to the Dutchman, who "has an entire crew of the undead, and stands to bring his curse upon women across the centuries"). But Amfortas's fate is not solitary, and neither is Kundry's. The fear of contagion pervades *Parsifal* and, as we will see later, opens up the possibility of a "horror-*Parsifal*."

But even without the horror element, contagion suffuses the spiritual core of the opera, through Wagner's Schopenhauerian focus on compassion as a source of knowledge ("Durch Mitleid wissend"): to know is to feel *with* another, to catch something from them. As Ulrike Kienzle explains, "For Schopenhauer, compassion is a spontaneous, physical feeling of empathy with the suffering of another being.

The suffering of the other becomes as though it were my own, and one being merges with the other.”<sup>11</sup> *Parsifal* features a seminal moment of physically shared pain in act 2, during the confrontation between Parsifal and Kundry. After they kiss, Parsifal, in a flash of revelation, understands Amfortas and bodily feels the agony of his wound: “The wound I saw bleed, now it bleeds in me! Here, here! No! No!”<sup>12</sup> Parsifal suffers as Amfortas suffers—in physical pain, in the torments of love, and in the passion of Christ on the cross. As Kienzle explains, “through the mystery of compassion, Christ, Amfortas, and Parsifal merge together to form one single identity.”<sup>13</sup> In so blending, we see not only the dissolution of identity but an actual dissolution of space, as one physical body in pain occupies the space of another. If we twist this radical, physical empathy only slightly, it starts to resemble something contagious. One body “catches” the pain (or disease) of the other.

In distinction, Kundry and Parsifal also seem to share identities, but their pain is un-sharable. Kundry bemoans his lack of compassion, when, after embodying Amfortas’s pain, Parsifal seems to feel no sympathy for her (“Cruel man! If you can feel others’ pain in your heart, feel mine as well! If you can redeem, what stops you, monster, from uniting with me to save me?”).<sup>14</sup> But his lack of compassion, and his inability to embody her pain the way he does Amfortas’s, may stem from his unconscious discomfort at how close they actually are. Both begin as innocents who thoughtlessly laugh at the agony of the divine (Parsifal when he kills the holy swan, Kundry when she laughs at Christ on the cross) and move toward redemption over the course of the opera. Both seem to be forgiven: he finds his way back to the Grail realm, and she (traditionally) dies, which is coded as forgiveness in the Wagnerian topos. Each also is called cursed (“verflucht”) in the other’s realm: Parsifal is accused by the Flower Maidens as Kundry is by Gurnemanz.

Their relation, then, is not an opposition between good and evil, but rather a poisonous sameness. Donald L. Hoffman explains their congruity as a method of othering that only reinforces the similarity between the Other and the Self: “For Wagner, the hated other becomes the seductive object of desire. . . . Kundry holds not only her own darkness, but Parsifal’s as well, the first sign that the alien is not entirely other, that what is abjected is at the same time the core of being.”<sup>15</sup> This alien sameness aligns with Wagner’s anti-Semitism, which can be traced to his own uncertain paternity: his stepfather, Ludwig Geyer, could *possibly* have been Wagner’s biological father and could *possibly* have been Jewish.<sup>16</sup> Terror of that potential Jewish ancestry spurred Wagner’s artistry.

This quality of eternal liminality, the identification with a creature that is both radically other and radically identical to you, is at the center of both *Parsifal* and narratives of zombie apocalypse. In the mixed-up world of a postapocalypse, outside and inside, self and other, are no longer stable categories. Zombies represent this literally; a horrible mixture of dead and alive, they wander around with gaping wounds, their insides actually on the outside. Amfortas’s obsession is not exactly to

be healed (*heilen*), but rather to “close” the wound (*schliessen*), defining his curse as a kind of permanent liminality, a hovering between binary states.<sup>17</sup>

Wagner’s choice of verb also illustrates how the central problem of the piece is a hybrid of organic and spatial, human and environmental. How, in a broad sense, can the society be reunified, the cleft absolved? The walking body manifests this hybridity by existing both as a spatial agent and as an organic one. In *Parsifal*, walking is the way to achieve salvation, reknit space, mend brokenness, and embody nomadic hopelessness. In Lehnhoff’s production, the characters never *stop* walking. What does this mean?

### WANDERING IN WAGNER

The Wanderer in the nineteenth-century German context appears in guises ranging from a young, wealthy man traveling for education; to the Caspar David Friedrich-inflected Romantic soul yearning toward something ineffable in nature; to more practical vagabonds and journeymen, left behind by industrialization and looking for work.<sup>18</sup> The Wandering Jew, increasingly prevalent at this cultural moment as well, presents a perversion of the Romantic Wanderer: endless yearning toward infinity becomes a forced march that won’t end until judgment day, and walking now represents punishment rather than the expression of freedom and individuality.<sup>19</sup> According to Andrew Cusack, “the wanderer motif derives its potency from . . . the idea of a dynamic, striving individuality.” But in other contexts, it also communicates “ideas of collective striving and progress, of solidarity in the face of adversity,” and thereby functions as “the linchpin of both individual and group identity.”<sup>20</sup> Musically, the nineteenth-century obsession with the Wanderer culminates in Wagner’s operas, which are pervaded with versions of the figure: the journeyman (*Der Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), the pilgrim (*Parsifal*), the cursed Wandering Jew (*Der fliegende Holländer, Parsifal*), the young hero encountering the world (*Siegfried, Lohengrin, Tannhäuser*), the exile (*Der fliegende Holländer, Parsifal*), and the old man on a quest for redemption (*Siegfried*).<sup>21</sup>

Beyond his wandering characters, which are readily identifiable as nineteenth-century wandering tropes, Wagner’s music for *Parsifal* in particular lends itself to the metaphor of wandering. On a basic level, the analogy of wandering maps coherently onto the way Wagnerian leitmotifs progress: from a simple starting point, a theme evolves in response to narrative and symbolic pressures, weaving in and out of a broader texture but remaining recognizably itself, much like the youth of Romantic literature who journeys out into the world and comes back chastened and wiser: leitmotivic development as Bildungsroman. But fundamental to the construct of *endless* wandering is the idea that all the motion leads nowhere. Endless wanderers don’t have a fixed goal or a point of rest; they just go. Whether or not they learn something is entirely incidental to their movement and, as modernity’s existential

void increasingly looms over the close of the nineteenth century, the pleasant fairy tale of forward motion-as-progress begins to melt away.

The opera's "Glaubensthema" in particular exemplifies the uncanny sense of forward motion that is not actual progress, but rather an evocative illusion of progress. As introduced in the prelude to act 1, the Glaubensthema sketches out (and plagally cadences in) B-flat major, then repeats the motif in D-flat major. Were the pattern to repeat again, continuing to migrate up a minor third each time, it would trace a fully diminished-seventh chord, taking us around the circle of fifths and depositing us back in B-flat where it began. The Glaubensthema sounds very much like it's headed somewhere, but it actually goes nowhere. Or, rather, it is designed to keep going forever. This contributes to what John Deathridge calls the "motion through motionlessness" that "pervades the entire score" of *Parsifal*. There is, he writes, a "melancholy sense of stasis and decay among the knights of the Grail—a dynamic nihilism, as it were, which gradually takes hold of a community increasingly in danger of collapsing under the weight of its own history—[which] is clearly reflected in the formal and harmonic processes of the music."<sup>22</sup>

If faith and movement cannot lead to salvation, then the characters in *Parsifal* have a problem. The kind of wandering suffered most clearly by the main characters is pilgrimage: they seek redemption, which can only be found in a particular place and in a particular state of mind, won through the feet.<sup>23</sup> Walking figures as transformation in the first act, prefiguring the role it will play in the third. Wagner's stage direction during the transformation music calls for Parsifal and Gurnemanz to "seem to be walking [as] the stage transforms" directly after Gurnemanz's famous, "You see, my son, here time becomes space."<sup>24</sup> Through walking, time does become space: time spent moving is sublimated into landscape and surroundings, in a kind of everyday physics made mystical by the transformation of the stage.

Parsifal, the only character called a pilgrim (by Gurnemanz in act 3), is also the character whose travels, spiritual and physical, we follow throughout.<sup>25</sup> Kundry's path to repentance is the longest, but Parsifal's pilgrimage grows out of Kundry's despair. At the conclusion of act 2, when Kundry has failed to seduce him, she curses him to wander, lost, as long as she has ("And though you flee from here and find all the roads in the world, the road you seek, that path you will not find: for any path and way that leads away from me I curse for you: Stray and be lost!").<sup>26</sup> When Parsifal finally returns in act 3, he describes the many years spent wandering, trying to return to the Grail Kingdom ("A wild curse drove me, in wayward wandering, never to find the healing path: countless needs, battles and struggles pulled me from the path, even when I knew where it was.")<sup>27</sup> Parsifal's return brings salvation to the entire community and seemingly an end to endless wandering. But Parsifal is only one of the characters cursed to wander; for the others, redemption may be incomplete or simply too late.

## THE WALKING UNDEAD

The undying characters in *Parsifal* began in Wagner's work as cursed, tragic figures, miserable with their fate but unable to die or be redeemed. Kundry, Amfortas, and Titurel all exhibit this spiritual exhaustion, and their undying characteristics resonate with various aspects of zombie mythology.

The most straightforward case is Kundry's. Her character, in this instance doubly cursed with Jewishness and femininity, develops from the Wandering Jew.<sup>28</sup> Kundry, exhausted from her eternal travels, is awakened multiple times from a slumber Gurnemanz describes several times as "lifeless, as if dead."<sup>29</sup> Her miserable fatigue wins her little pity, and while she falls to the ground at the conclusion of the opera, this is no guarantee that she has found the rest she seeks. Gurnemanz and Klingsor have already woken her multiple times from a seemingly lifeless state.<sup>30</sup>

The desire for an unattainable death, coupled with a torturous need to keep moving forward, identifies Kundry as a Wandering Jewess, but also matches the characteristics of the zombie.<sup>31</sup> Both the Wandering Jew and the zombie serve as mythological figures of the periphery, demonized Others. Within their respective cultures, they seem uncannily similar to the rest of society but lack the proper ethics and capabilities to be considered fully human (sentience for the zombie, Christianity for the Jew). Both move slowly, unceasingly, are everywhere unwelcome, can rest only with death, and have been cursed not to die by natural means. Just as we sympathize with the Jew (and just as Wagner feared his real father may have been Jewish), Max Brooks's documentary-style novel *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006) hints toward the similarity between humans and zombies. This sympathy harkens back to Richard Matheson's classic 1954 novel *I Am Legend* (one of the foundational texts of modern zombie literature), in which the heroic lone human is revealed at the conclusion to be the nightmarish scourge of a race of intelligent zombies who represent the next stage of human evolution. Both the Wandering Jew and the zombie serve a similar mythic function, manifesting societal fears through monstrous Otherness and combining pathetic impotence with world-destroying power.

For Amfortas as for Kundry, death would be salvation, but the Grail King is kept alive by the need to perform the Grail ceremony. Amfortas's wound that will not heal can easily be aligned with zombie characteristics. For one, both characters suffer difficulties with liminality and maintaining their physical boundaries, as Amfortas's gaping wound exposes his innards unnaturally to the outside world like one of the undead. One of the most obvious features of a zombie is the fact that they can neither heal nor die, the exact situation in which Amfortas finds himself. Gurnemanz foreshadows the existential hopelessness of many a character in



zombie fiction when he eagerly hopes for a cure to this undying sickness, only to be disappointed (“We are fools to hope for a respite when only a cure will heal him!”).<sup>32</sup>

Death means salvation for zombies as well as for Amfortas, and is coded as rest in a similar way to death in *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Parsifal*. In *The Walking Dead* (2010–17), the television series developed by Frank Darabont, a grieving father cares for his Zombified son, to whom he feeds murdered humans, before being discovered by the protagonist Rick Grimes. Rick tells the father gently that his son is dead, and it would be for the best to put him to rest, which he then does.<sup>33</sup> This is a regularly recurring conundrum in the genre; in a world where loved ones are Zombified, when does protection end and mercy begin?

Titirel, Amfortas’s father, can be identified with that final, bleakest Zombified form: the infected loved one who now seeks to infect others. When Amfortas cannot bear another Grail ceremony, it is Titirel who commands him to perform it, despite the pain it clearly causes his son. He claims to live in the grave (“I live in the grave through the power of the savior, but am too weak to serve Him”), a description that Lehnhoff’s production emphasizes by placing the singer literally in a hole in the stage.<sup>34</sup> Lehnhoff also portrays Titirel’s undead existence through explicit costuming and makeup choices, depicting the character as a blood-covered skeleton in armor—the very picture of a rotting corpse.

These staging choices amplify a resonance present in Wagner’s score. Musically, the *Glaubensthema* relates strongly to Titirel’s theme, offering a “simple variant of the Faith motif.”<sup>35</sup> Wagner understandably connects the former Grail ruler with the strength of his belief. However, if we understand the *Glaubensthema* as a musical manifestation of unending wandering, then its relation to Titirel’s theme reminds the listener of that character’s unending life. The leitmotif, in conjunction with Lehnhoff’s staging choices, underscores in Lehnhoff’s production how Titirel’s undead life is morbidly preserved under cover of sanctity.

Kundry, Amfortas, and Titirel thus display undead characteristics easily identifiable today as zombie-esque. The clearest resonance between *Parsifal* and the zombie genre, however, arises from an examination of the two main groups of characters populating the stage: Grail Knights and Flower Maidens.

## THE GRAIL KNIGHT ZOMBIE HORDE

One of the most unsettling features of *Parsifal* is the society of Grail Knights, living in monkish militarism and subsisting on the nourishment of the Eucharist. The blood and body of Christ, as they sing in the final moments of the first act, is the food that sustains them. Ryan Minor sees the members of this chorus as performative spectators, fulfilling a passive role befitting Wagner’s expressed distaste for the chorus. The chorus of Knights provides “a fully sanctioned model of the kind of spectatorship the space of the Bayreuth theatre was claimed to engender,” offering



the observant audience member a model for behavior.<sup>36</sup> Girard's production emphasizes Minor's point, with one reviewer remarking "Director François Girard's central conceit is clear: the Grail community is us."<sup>37</sup> If so, "we" are terrifying, and the Grail Knights horrify Amfortas. In the first and third acts, he hears them coming and tries to flee, but in vain. Both Girard and Lehnhoff present the Knights as a desperate, gruesome community in shambles. Lehnhoff costumes them in grayish-white army uniforms, wearing white face paint, with dark circles around the eyes and dark bruises on their cheekbones. In Girard, they look more like exhausted, post-apocalyptic humans, trying to scratch an existence from dust.

In both productions, they move extremely slowly, inexorably approaching their goal. This speed marks them as uncomfortable: seemingly human, but with a super-human slowness. The slow imperturbability that makes the zombies in George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* so fearsome is also a fundamental feature of *Parsifal*. As names like "the walking dead" attest, zombies are undying figures who always keep walking at a slow, steady clip.<sup>38</sup> This is what makes them terrifying: you can fight off one, you can even outrun them, but eventually you have to sleep and they keep coming, however slowly. Part of the Grail Knights' delayed movement is endemic to opera (and Wagner specifically), a genre in which people often move slowly onstage by default. This contributes to the uncanny quality so much a part of opera; the characters are people moving and acting in naturalistic ways, but just differently enough to make a viewer uncomfortable. *Parsifal* in particular is notorious for its slowness. Glenn Stanley describes the sense of "otherworldliness and timelessness" conveyed by the "predominantly slow tempos, slow harmonic and melodic rhythms, [and] long arching phrases."<sup>39</sup> When Lehnhoff has the Grail Knights enter in a deathly slow procession, he both references the spiritual nature of Wagner's original work (in which slowness reflects the sacred events occurring) and the uncanny, horror-inflected valances that slow but continuous movement has since acquired.

The service the Grail Knights demand in act 1 is a Eucharist, performed onstage. In Lehnhoff's production, they drag Amfortas backwards and engulf him under their reaching hands. He falls, out of view, and the light of the Grail shines forth. The Knights kneel or raise their hands in wonder, then march out the way they came. Amfortas slowly rises, the red blood of his wound visible on his torso for the first time. In other words, Lehnhoff's Eucharist is presented more as a ritual feeding than a Christian rite.<sup>40</sup> The blood of Christ, source of spiritual nourishment, might be embodied in the dripping wound of Amfortas, but the determined horde of soldiers is portrayed as a pack of ritualistic zombies, not a brotherhood of monks. K. Silem Mohammad points out how zombie mindlessness is an effect of them being "radically task-oriented beings. They have a job to do, and nothing else."<sup>41</sup> For the Grail Knights, the hunger for salvation has become their unending task.

## FLOWER MAIDENS AND ZOMBIE EVOLUTION

The chorus of Flower Maidens represents another, older kind of zombie mythology, one particularly clear in François Girard's setting of act 2. His staging involves 1,200 gallons of fake blood, which covers the floor of Klingsor's castle, bringing to mind the wound that will not heal. The Flower Maidens stand in flowing white dresses, unmoving, their faces partly covered by their long hair, while Klingsor speaks with Kundry. On his command, the maidens begin to twitch with an uncanny alertness that is neither human nor robotic. The effect grows as they work to seduce Parsifal with a kind of creepy, automatic sexuality. This depiction harkens back to Syberberg's 1982 *Parsifal*, in which topless Flower Maidens stare emptily into space, motionless, as Parsifal walks among them. Grail Knights and Flower Maidens in Lehnhoff's version are similarly depicted as automatons. In a review of Lehnhoff's production, Yuval Sharon wrote, "the identical architecture of the spaces [Montsalvat and Klingsor's castle] works quite well to emphasize how much the numb, mindless subordinates of both castles have in common."<sup>42</sup>

In other words, the Flower Maidens in all three productions (Girard, Lehnhoff, and Syberberg) are presented as zombies in the original, Haitian sense: a group of bodies animated by the will of one master and forced to do his bidding. In William Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929), the sensationalist travelogue which brought the term zombie to American awareness, a zombie is "a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life."<sup>43</sup> Their faces are "expressionless . . . vacant . . . [with eyes] like the eyes of a dead man, not blind, but staring, unfocused, unseeing."<sup>44</sup> Seabrook's zombies are much closer to the hypnotized European neurasthenic than the monsters in twenty-first-century horror films. Our current zombies are characterized by contagion, apocalypse, and cannibalism. Zombies in *The Magic Island*, conversely, are unfortunate dead bodies, raised from the grave by voodoo priests and forced to perform slave labor. They are entirely under the power of the sorcerer and cannot infect others; nor do they transform their landscape into an apocalyptic wasteland (in fact, they monstrously reinforce the colonial status quo of black slave labor controlled by oppressors). Far from cannibalistic, these zombies must be fed a tasteless porridge without meat or salt, lest they remember they are dead and return to the grave.<sup>45</sup> In the explanation given to Seabrook's narrator: "People who have the power to do this go to a fresh grave, dig up the body before it has had time to rot, galvanize it into movement, and then make of it a servant or slave, occasionally for the commission of some crime, more often simply as a drudge around the habitation or the farm, setting it dull heavy tasks, and beating it like a dumb beast if it slackens."<sup>46</sup> Parsifal, in Girard's production, seems to slay these Flower Maidens, zombified by Klingsor's enchantment, almost literally. The final tableau of act 2, in which Parsifal hoists his weapon against a backdrop of bloodied bodies, resembles a

hero shot that would fit comfortably into any number of zombie films, an analogy that is particularly clear in the shot's framing on the DVD.<sup>47</sup>

Haitian zombies, as depicted in early U.S. film, enabled white audiences to comfortably imagine black Haitians as natural slaves, while playing on fears of miscegenation and a reversal of power when white protagonists were zombified and then controlled by the zombie master. As the genre evolved over the twentieth century, the space between self and other continued to erode, leading up to George Romero's breakthrough film, *Night of the Living Dead*, in 1968. Rather than the us-versus-them mentality that characterized zombie films before 1968, Romero's film took place in (hometown American) rural Pennsylvania, and the zombies were, horrifyingly, no different from the heroic group of humans attempting to fend them off.<sup>48</sup> Rather than illustrating white America's fears of the Other, zombies after Romero grew into an expression of white America's fear of itself: the fear that the contamination came from within.

Contamination then became a central theme in modern zombie literature, although it harkens back to the Middle Ages. Steven Zani and Kevin Meaux argue that zombie narratives are quite similar to medieval plague narratives like Boccaccio's *Decameron* or Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*. As they explain: "In plague and zombie narratives, we fear . . . that the institutions holding our culture together, often specifically law, family, and belief in the sacred, will break down or reveal themselves to be false in the face of catastrophe. But it isn't the specifics of an individual breakdown that are essential, but rather the very idea of breakdown, the dissolution of certainty and meaning that zombies represent."<sup>49</sup> This is also the fear at the center of *Parsifal*. Amfortas, felled by his own inner demons, cannot forgive himself for falling prey to Kundry's wiles. Kundry, having once sinned against Christ, cannot forgive herself until Parsifal offers her absolution. Žižek writes that *Parsifal* is less about a pure-blooded Knighthood threatened with the contamination of Kundry, and more about a group terrified of an evil that emanates from within. Klingsor is an ex-Grail Knight who has left the fold, and Titurel himself embodies decadence and excessive desire. As Žižek notes, "the primordial imbalance which destroyed the Grail community . . . resides at its very center—it is Titurel's excessive and fixated enjoyment of the Grail which is at the origins of the misfortune."<sup>50</sup>

Although *Parsifal* in its original form lends itself to a post-apocalyptic interpretation, it does narrowly avoid the existential chasm by ending with a scene of pure grace. No matter how sinful the characters may feel themselves to be, they can all be saved through Wagner's mystical combination of belief systems. But in Lehnhoff's production, the final scene of redemption is undercut. Not only is there no white dove, but Kundry herself does not die. Instead, she slowly leads the Grail knights along the broken train tracks, into a black void, after the score has already announced her collapse. This move is not unprecedented; Harry Kupfer's 1992 production at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden ended with "Parsifal, Kundry, and

Gurnemanz leaving behind a hopeless Grail order.”<sup>51</sup> In both Kupfer and Lehnhoff, though, their continued movement doesn’t look hopeful, but rather nightmarish. Where are they hoping to go? After all of Amfortas’s pleas to be left to die and Kundry’s exhaustion, continued movement powered by an inhuman force is hardly comforting. Rather than a renewal of hope, this staging makes the plodding procession of Knights look like an undead horde setting off on a long journey of eternal wandering, with undead Kundry leading the pack. Death is coded as rest in Wagner’s oeuvre and these characters find none.

#### POST-APOCALYPTIC PASTORALS

As we’ve seen, the undead characters in *Parsifal* resonate with various aspects of zombie mythology. However, we can recognize the zombies in Lehnhoff’s and Girard’s stagings partly because those productions set them in a post-apocalyptic landscape. Man’s relationship to nature, a theme present in Wagner’s original staging, today has become a central hermeneutic through which to read the piece and one which lends itself readily to a post-apocalyptic zombie staging.

In Wagner’s original Bayreuth *Parsifal* in 1882, for which he famously envisioned huge canvas landscape backdrops and a rolling mechanism to simulate movement, the Grail forest is lush and paradisiacal.<sup>52</sup> The stage directions in act 1 call for a “forest, shady and solemn but not bleak”<sup>53</sup> and, in act 3, “a pleasant, open spring landscape with a background of softly rising flowery meadows.”<sup>54</sup> Klingsor’s garden in act 2 was a veritable hothouse of beautiful flowers, the inspiration for which Wagner claimed to have found in the gardens at Ravello.<sup>55</sup>

Modern reinterpretations of *Parsifal* have preferred a more evocative, symbolic setting to the naturalism of the original. Seen in the context of Wagner’s oeuvre, the work comes after the construction and destruction of the entire world of the Ring Cycle. From this perspective, *Parsifal* is literally post-apocalyptic, a fact that many contemporary productions have reflected. Peter Konwitschny’s 1995 production at the Bayerische Staatsoper used an underground bunker for the Grail temple and a single tree to symbolize natural destruction.<sup>56</sup> Götz Friedrich’s 1982 Bayreuth staging included a fallen-down tower, with its pinnacle facing the audience, and “these scenes of disorder suggested the corruption that had set in among the knights.”<sup>57</sup> Ruth Berghaus’s Frankfurt *Parsifal* in 1982 “evinced a Grail community in terminal decline . . . knights resembled the half-dead of an apocalyptic horror movie,” with Amfortas as a mummy who had to be propped up to perform his Grail responsibilities.<sup>58</sup> With this heritage, it’s hardly surprising that Lehnhoff sees *Parsifal* as “an endgame in the wasteland. After the mass destruction the last survivors, and thus the last humans, slowly begin to communicate across the ruins.”<sup>59</sup>

In all of these productions, then, we can see elements of apocalyptic collapse mixed with Wagner’s initial conceit of natural bounty. In a choice between the

paradigms of nostalgia and apocalypse, argues Alexander Rehding, music tends more toward pastoralism and nostalgia, as it's more capable of evoking reminiscence than expressing immanent crisis.<sup>60</sup> But his dichotomy makes a mistake in presenting nostalgia and apocalypse as two opposing modes. They come from a fundamentally similar urge, which manifests itself in various post-apocalyptic genres. Depictions of the post-apocalyptic merge the nostalgic longing for a lost pastoral with a heart-pounding sense of immanent crisis. After the apocalypse, humans abandon their technological urban strongholds and flee to the countryside, in a desperate attempt to live off the land once modern society has broken down.<sup>61</sup> In *The Walking Dead*, characters fish, hunt, search for nuts and berries, and camp out in rural Georgia, driven away from Atlanta by a zombie outbreak. Looking for survivors, Rick Grimes rides into Atlanta on a horse, looking every inch a cowboy amid the wreckage of modern civilization. Out in the countryside, it's a lushly filmed, pastoral Eden, full of idyllic mountain streams and a return to a simpler mode of living, marred only by intermittent zombie attacks. The cities themselves break down; Central Manhattan in the film version of *I Am Legend* is slowly returning to a state of nature, with grass growing up beneath the cracking asphalt and New York City nearly deserted of human life. Nostalgia for a simpler time merges with apocalyptic anxiety in fantasy worlds where the worst has already happened.

A similar mechanism is at play in Lehnhoff's production. Characters bear hunting weapons, use simple stone and wood tools, and wear thickly woven, un-dyed cloth, but are identified as post-apocalyptic (rather than prehistoric) by the remnants of decaying technology which surround them: railroad tracks which break off, gas masks, piles of concrete rubble, and the finely worked metal spear, all of which remind viewers of a lost, earlier age.

In Girard's production, meanwhile, the Grail itself is made holy by its beautiful gold metalwork. A literal representation of the Grail cup grows in meaning when it is the only object onstage reflecting a society that could support intricate craftsmanship. It becomes a sacred object simply because it was created by a much more advanced (but now defunct) culture. Compare the symbolism of this object with the scene in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* in which the son, who has never experienced a pre-apocalypse world, is awed by the carbonated sweetness of an errant can of Coca Cola.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, in the post-apocalyptic section of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, the central storyline involves a primitive tribe member guiding one of the very few remaining scientists to a place he finds incomprehensible and holy but she knows is a defunct observatory.<sup>63</sup> In *Cloud Atlas* or *The Road*, the age of technology becomes a retroactive golden age, nostalgically referenced by the bits and pieces of it that remain after most of the human-made world has been reclaimed by nature. This is what the Grail cup represents to the Grail community in Girard's production; the Knights may have forgotten what this marvel represents, but they worship it nonetheless.

In the libretto, Gurnemanz presents a rather bleak picture of Montsalvat's environment in act 3. Without the nourishing sustenance of the Grail, the knights have been reduced to simple food.<sup>64</sup> More ominously, Gurnemanz explains the change in circumstances to Kundry when she awakes and asks to serve: "That won't give you much work; we don't send messages anymore; everyone finds herbs and roots for himself, we learned it from the beasts of the forest."<sup>65</sup> Returning to an animalistic life, the Knights have given up the remnants of civilization and are focused on simple survival, enough of a challenge in their inhospitable world. Seen in this light, the Good Friday Music can be taken as a kind of failed pastoral, a call back to an earlier time of pure natural beauty, which the Knights' subsequent, funeral entrance proves to be a fleeting mirage. Deathridge comments that: "the best music in *Parsifal* is more in sympathy with the intransigent pessimism of [Gobineau and Schopenhauer] than it is with any inscrutable idea of redemption. Humanity is rapidly losing its strength; its best days are gone and a sense of pervading entropy and the inevitable advent of nothingness prevails."<sup>66</sup> Girard and Lehnhoff underscore this musical pessimism with settings that emphasize a world gone back to nature.

An utterly desolate landscape faces the audience in Girard's production. The holy forest Gurnemanz sings of has been transformed into an arid wasteland of cracked mud, in which nothing seems to grow. Indeed, although we see a naturalistic dead swan Parsifal has slain, it is impossible to imagine that this world could support animal life as complicated as swans. The spring has become a trickling stream that turns red with blood as Amfortas bathes—hardly a "holy source." In the background, a sky full of turbulent clouds becomes an awe-inducing view of planets, and then fills with tortured red smoke in Klingsor's realm. When we return to the wasted Montsalvat in act 3, gravediggers seem to be burying bodies, in allusion to the absence of the life-sustaining grail ceremony. As it becomes clear that Parsifal's return will save the community, the background sky is shot through with a gorgeous, otherworldly aurora borealis. Despite the wisdom Parsifal has gained through his suffering, the final scene gives little hope for the future of this community or this world. The environmental wasteland is still antithetical to life; the knighthood is shown to be a simple cult, scrounging for something to believe in a fundamentally inhospitable world. As the *New York Times* review by Anthony Tommasini despondently concludes, "what future is possible given the environmental desolation?"<sup>67</sup> Another reviewer wonders "if the Grail knights have been dead all along but move between other worldly realms of mostly barren landscapes."<sup>68</sup> The natural devastation becomes, as it is meant to, a metaphor for spiritual dissolution and hopelessness. But whereas hope and spirituality are, in some way, renewable resources, not everything in this environment is. Even if Parsifal can bring the light of God to the community, it may not be enough for survival.

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Between its cursed, undying wanderers, choruses of the cannibalistic and automatic undead, and gestures toward a hopeless, post-apocalyptic world, *Parsifal* in these recent stagings fits naturally into the post-apocalyptic zombie genre. Part of what continues to make it relevant is its focus on fears about dying and undying, and how the desire for immortality gets problematized in a rapidly destabilizing environment. Sarah Juliet Lauro describes the recent rise of the eco-zombie, a figure revenging itself on humanity for natural despoliation and illustrating our fear that the earth will somehow reclaim the space taken up by humans. In the post-apocalyptic pastorals depicted in *28 Days Later*, *I Am Legend*, or *The Walking Dead*, flight from the infected cities drives characters to the relative safety of the country and its natural bounty, which inevitably fails to save them. As Lauro explains, “we might say that the zombie is inherently an ecological avenger . . . whether the sin is man’s enslavement of his brother as in the original myths of Haitian folklore or humanity’s development of technology, weapons, and chemicals that pollute and poison the planet . . . the living dead may be little more than the planet’s messengers, raised to exact revenge.”<sup>69</sup> In razing civilization as we knew it, zombies bring about a post-apocalyptic wasteland in which the environment itself takes revenge.

This renders meaningless the distinction between apocalyptic degradation and religious emptiness. Huntley Dent’s review of Girard’s *Parsifal* complains that the landscape is “mistakenly described by several critics as post-apocalyptic, which is explicitly not what Girard meant—this isn’t nuclear winter. It’s spiritual bereavement.”<sup>70</sup> Dent does not recognize that, in a contemporary setting, the two have merged. Performing *Parsifal* in a zombie postapocalypse is not, then, the activist kind of *Regietheater* in which a strange interpretation is asserted for shock value. Instead, it is a way to translate a classic work into contemporary idiom, illustrative of our current cultural preoccupations. As these *Parsifals* argue, the path to redemption will require coming to terms with our environmental sins on a global level; even if God were to accept Kundry’s desire to serve and Parsifal’s desire to return to the Grail realm, the earth might be less forgiving.

#### NOTES

Melissa Kagen received her PhD in German Studies from Stanford University in 2016 and is currently completing a book project on the concept of wandering in German/Jewish opera between Wagner and the Shoah. She is now a Lecturer in Game Studies at Bangor University in Wales. Heartfelt thanks to Tom Grey, Ewa Domanska, Adrian Daub, Caroline Egan, Kurt James Werner, Arman Schwartz, and the anonymous peer reviewer, all of whom greatly improved this essay with their very thoughtful comments and suggestions.

1. Joy Calico, “Wagner in East Germany: Joachim Herz’s *Der fliegende Holländer* (1964),” in *Wagner and Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 303.

2. Peter H. Smith, “Oster-Parsifal: Das ist Wagners Zombie-Zauber,” *Die Presse*, April 2, 2010, [http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/klassik/556048/OsterParsifal\\_Das-ist-Wagners-ZombieZauber](http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/klassik/556048/OsterParsifal_Das-ist-Wagners-ZombieZauber). Smith’s title references Gurnemanz’s line, “Das ist Karlfreitagssauber,”



in which he attests to the transformative power of Good Friday.

3. “Dann aber bricht der herrlich faule Zauber der Inszenierung durch: Die verlotterten Gralsritter stürmen als Zombies die Bühne, der Minigral zerspringt in tausend Stücke. Schuld, Sünde, endlose Sühne, das Leben als Beugehaftfall diese christlichen Fragwürdigkeiten erhob Wagner ins monströse Mysterium. Mielitz hat die Widersprüche gelöst, indem sie die Religion draußen hält. Am Ende stehen die Ritter vor dem Vorhang, geben ihre Fragen ans Publikum weiter.” Smith, “Oster-Parsifal.”

4. Michal Grover-Friedlander argues that the Orfeo myth represents opera’s obsession with the power of the voice, and the subconscious message that the voice can reawaken the dead or exist beyond death. See Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Operatic Afterlives* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2011). See also Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: The Art of Dying* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 146–83 for an analysis of *Věc Makropulos*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, and *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*.

5. See Hutcheon and Hutcheon, *The Art of Dying*, 9. For Clément’s original claim, see Catherine Clément, *Opera, or, the Undoing of Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

6. Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera’s Second Death* (London: Routledge, 2002), viii–ix. Quoted in Joseph Cermatori, “Notes on Opera’s Exquisite Corpse,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 35, no. 1 (2013): 6.

7. Cermatori, “Opera’s Exquisite Corpse,” 6.

8. Hutcheon and Hutcheon, *The Art of Dying*, 112.

9. Quoted in Calico, “Wagner in East Germany,” 303.

10. *Ibid.*, 304.

11. Ulrike Kienzle, “Parsifal and Religion: A Christian Music Drama?,” trans. Mary A. Cicora, in *A Companion to Wagner’s Parsifal*, ed. William Kinderman and Katherine R. Syer (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 87.

12. “Die Wunde sah ich bluten, nun blutet sie in mir! Hier hier! Nein! Nein!” Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, Klavierauszug (Mainz: Schott Music GmbH & Co., 2011), 278–79.

13. Kienzle, “Parsifal and Religion,” 103.

14. “Grausamer!— Fühlst du im Herzen nur anderer Schmerzen, so fühle jetzt auch die meinen! Bist du Erlöser, was bannt dich, Böser, nicht mir auch zum Heil dich zu einen?” Wagner, *Parsifal*, 288–89.

15. Donald L. Hoffman, “Bearing the Grail,” *Arthuriana* 18.1 (2008): 88–96, 91.

16. See Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

17. See Michael P. Steinberg, “Music Drama and the End of History,” *New German Critique*, no. 69 (Autumn 1996): 163, which begins: “This essay is about *Parsifal*. It is about Amfortas’s wound, the efforts to close it, and the meaning of the claim that it has finally been closed.” See also Ryan Minor, “Wagner’s Last Chorus: Consecrating Space and Spectatorship in *Parsifal*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17, no. 1 (2005): 7.

18. These figures are represented, respectively, by Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister (educational), Tieck’s Franz Sternbald and Novalis’s Heinrich von Ofterdingen (Romantic), and Gottlieb’s Jakob and Karl von Holtai’s Anton Hahn (journeyman searching for work). See Andrew Cusack, *The Wanderer in Nineteenth-Century German Literature* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008).

19. Cusack also argues that the wandering Jew problematizes progress. The unending journey is a “modern derivative of the Christian *navigatio vitae*.” Cusack, *Wanderer*, 92.

20. Cusack, *Wanderer*, 223.

21. For more on Wagner and the Wandering Jew, see Dieter Borchmeyer, *Richard Wagner: Ahasvers Wandlungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2002). See also Frank Halbach, *Ahasvers Erlösung: der Mythos vom Ewigen Juden im Opernlibretto des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2009).

22. John Deathridge, *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 270.

23. For explications of the many aspects of historical wandering, see Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin, 2001). In the German context, see Anke Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

24. Gurnemann: “Du siehst, mein Sohn, zum Raum wird hier die Zeit.” Stage directions: “Allmählich, während Gurnemann und Parsifal zu schreiten scheinen, hat sich die Szene bereits immer merklicher verwandelt.” Wagner, *Parsifal*, 95.

25. In recent scholarship about pilgrimage in *Parsifal*, the focus tends to be on pilgrimages to Bayreuth rather than the pilgrimage aspects of the work itself. See, for example, Anthony J. Steinhoff, “Embracing the Grail: Parsifal, Richard

Wagner and the German Nation,” *German History* 30, no. 3 (2012): 372–94. For an account of Parsifal itself as a pilgrimage, see Gregory Straughn, “Wagner’s Musical Quest: The ‘Grail’ in Parsifal,” *Arthuriana* (2001): 54–66.

26. “Und flöhest du von hier und fändest alle Wege der Welt, den Weg, den du suchst, des’ Pfade sollst du nicht finden: denn Pfad und Wege, die dich mir entführen, so— verwünsch’ ich sie dir: Irre! Irre!” Wagner, *Parsifal*, 313–14.

27. “Den Weg des Heiles nie zu finden, in pfadlosen Irren trieb ein wilder Fluch mich umher: zahllose Nöte Kämpfe und Streite zwangen mich ab vom Pfade, wähhnt’ ich ihn recht schon erkannt.” *Ibid.*, 341–42.

28. In *A Communication to My Friends*, Wagner makes it clear that both the Dutchman of *Der fliegende Holländer* and Kundry were inspired by the legend of the Wandering Jew. Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 11 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1911–14), 404–05.

29. “Leblos, wie tot.” Wagner, *Parsifal*, 41, 324. Her rest is also described as “Todesschlaf,” 327. In act 2, Kundry’s conversation with Klingsor centers around her heartfelt desire to sleep or die. Stage directions: “In dem bläulichen Lichte steigt Kundrys Gestalt herauf. Sie scheint schlafend. Sie macht die Bewegung einer Erwachenden. Sie stösst einen grässlichen Schrei aus” (158–59). Kundry: “Oh, ewiger Schlaf, einziges Heil, —wie, —wie dich gewinnen?” (172–73).

30. Stage direction: “Kundry sinkt, mit dem Blicke zu ihm auf, langsam vor Parsifal entseelt zu Boden.” Wagner, *Parsifal*, 378. The word Wagner uses, “entseelt,” is different from the way he describes her asleep at other points (usually using “erstarrt” and “leblos”).

31. For a full comparison of Wandering Jew and zombie, see the chapters “The Immortal” and “The Zombie,” in *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural: An Encyclopedia of Our Worst Nightmares*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 307–40 and 723–54.

32. “Toren wir, auf Lind’rung da zu hoffen, wo einzig Heilung lindert!” Wagner, *Parsifal*, 16.

33. This encounter also occurs in the comic book series of the same name, on which the television show is based. See Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore, *The Walking Dead* (Berkeley, CA: Image Comics, 2009), issues 58–59.

34. “Im Grabe leb’ ich durch des Heilands Huld: zu schwach doch bin ich, ihm zu dienen.” Wagner, *Parsifal*, 111.

35. Derrick Everett, “Guide to the Thematic Material of Parsifal,” last modified September 11, 2015, <http://www.monsalvat.no/motiftop.htm>.

36. Minor, “Wagner’s Last Chorus,” 36.

37. David Allen, “The Music Redeems Unanswered Questions in the Met’s Beautiful New Parsifal,” *Bachtrack*, February 18, 2013, <http://bachtrack.com/review-met-opera-parsifal-girard-gatti-kaufmann>.

38. Modern cinematic zombies are sometimes faster, as in *28 Days Later* or the 2005 remake of *Dawn of the Dead*. The ramifications of their increased speed is explored in K. Silem Mohammed, “Zombies, Rest, and Motion: Spinoza and the Speed of Undeath,” in *Zombies, Vampires, and Philosophy: New Life for the Undead*, ed. Richard Greene and K. Silem Mohammad (Chicago: Open Court, 2010).

39. Glenn Stanley, “Parsifal: Redemption and Kunstreligion,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, ed. Thomas M. Grey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 159.

40. In Syberberg’s *Parsifal* as well, the procession of Grail knights in the third act looks like a march of the living dead. See Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, directed by Hans Jürgen Syberberg (West Germany: TMS Films/Gaumont, 1982), DVD.

41. Mohammed, “Zombies, Rest, and Motion,” 98.

42. Yuval Sharon, “Richard Wagner: *Parsifal*,” *review of Parsifal*, directed by Nicholas Lehnhoff, *Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2006): 377.

43. William Buehler Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (Rahway, NJ: Quinn & Boden Company, 1929), 93.

44. *Ibid.*, 101.

45. *Ibid.*, 98–99.

46. *Ibid.*, 93.

47. *Wagner: Parsifal*, DVD, directed by François Girard (New York City: Sony Classical, 2014).

48. Johnny, who gets separated from his sister Barbra early in the film, reappears near the end as part of the zombie horde that carries her to her death. Karen, the young daughter of Helen and Harry Cooper, is infected by a zombie bite and then reanimates to feed on her mortally wounded father and stab her mother to death. For a full discussion of the sameness of zombies and humans, see Kyle William Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2010), 95.

49. Steven Zani and Kevin Meaux, “Lucio Fulci and the Decaying Definition of Zombie Narratives,” in *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*, ed. Deborah Christie

and Sarah Juliet Lauro (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 101.

50. Slavoj Žižek, introduction to *In Search of Wagner*, Theodor W. Adorno, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2005), xvii.

51. Elaine Kelly, "Art as Utopia: *Parsifal* and the East German Left," *Opera Quarterly* 30, nos. 2–3 (2014): 261.

52. Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 112.

53. "Wald, schattig und ernst, aber nicht düster." Wagner, *Parsifal*, 12.

54. "Freie, anmutige Frühlingsgegend mit nach dem Hintergrunde zu sanft ansteigender Blumenau." *Ibid.*, 322.

55. Carnegy, *Art of the Theatre*, 116.

56. Kelly, "Art as Utopia," 260.

57. *Ibid.*, 254.

58. *Ibid.*, 257–58.

59. "*Parsifal* ist ein Endspiel im Waste Land, im wüsten Land. Nach dem Vernichtungsschlag beginnen die letzten Menschen, die letzten Überlebenden, über Ruinen wieder zu kommunizieren." Nikolaus Lehnhoff, *Wagner: Parsifal*, DVD pamphlet (London: Opus Arte, 2005), 6.

60. Alexander Rehding, "Ecomusicology between Apocalypse and Nostalgia," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64.2 (2011): 410.

61. See the relationship between zombie infestation and cities in Antonio Sanna, "Consumerism and the Undead City: The Silent Hill and Resident Evil Films," in *The Zombie Renaissance in Popular Culture*, ed. Laura Hubner,

Marcus Leaning, and Paul Manning (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 56.

62. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 22.

63. David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2004).

64. "Die heil'ge Speisung bleibt uns nun versagt, gemeine Atzung muss uns nähren." Wagner, *Parsifal*, 349.

65. "Das wird dich wenig mühn; auf Botschaft sendet sich's nicht mehr; Kräuter und Wurzeln findet ein jeder sich selbst, wir lernten's im Walde vom Tier." Wagner, *Parsifal*, 328–29.

66. Deathridge, *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil*, 269.

67. Anthony Tommasini, "Dark Nights of the Soul in the Kingdom of the Holy Grail," *New York Times*, February 17, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/18/arts/music/parsifal-at-the-metropolitan-opera.html>.

68. David Patrick Stearns, "Review: Metropolitan Opera's Entrancing and Enigmatic *Parsifal*," *Operavore*, February 19, 2013, <http://www.wqxr.org/story/270761-review-metropolitan-operas-entrancing-enigmatic-parsifal/>.

69. Sarah Juliet Lauro, "Afterword: Zombie (R)evolution," in *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*, ed. Deborah Christie and Sarah Juliet Lauro (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 231–35.

70. Huntley Dent, "François Girard's New Production of Wagner's *Parsifal* at the Met," *New York Arts*, March 31, 2013, <http://newyorkarts.net/2013/03/francois-girard-wagner-parsifal-met/>.