

Pataphysical Discourse in Kyot's *Parzival*

The attraction between Wolfram's *Parzival* and the Bildungsroman has been deflected by the historical improbability of integrating an early 13th Century epic poem into a modern genre. The birth of the Bildung with which the Bildungsroman is concerned occurs in a historical context that defines itself in opposition to its own understanding of medieval metaphysics; the *Imago Dei* falls, burning, from the sky of ideas, and Bildung promises a re-feathering of the Phoenix. The Bildungsroman consistently doubts the possibility of fulfilling this pledge, but at its highest moments – when young Wilhelm Meister's heart and mind are transfixed by Mignon's egg dance and the sublime tunes of a haunted harpist; when love and wisdom wed forever at the close of Klingsohr's *Märchen*; when the former *Magister Ludi* dives into the death of a freezing alpine lake for the sake of his final pupil – at its highest moments, the genre points toward the new and elevated image of humanity, the Bild that it seeks but cannot find. The Bildungsroman has been aptly described as *eine unerfüllte Gattung*. The study of its history shows a cluster of expectant births just before and around the time of Goethe, a brilliant rise through the works of Novalis and Nietzsche¹, and a long decline into a state of alienation from Bildung that links *Der grüne Heinrich* to *Die Blechtrommel*; the label 'Bildungsroman' seems to describe these decaying works more accurately than 'Bildungsroman.' Heidegger claimed, "*Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten*;" the tragic incompleteness of Bildung's project intensifies the desire of the genre 'Bildungsroman' to expand its orbit to encompass *Parzival*: this knight who scorns the God by

¹ While *Also sprach Zarathustra* is not a novel, I argue elsewhere that it represents a high-point in the history of Bildungsdiskurs.

Whose grace he wins the grail feels the gravitational pull of the Bildungsroman reach for him as a symbol of the attainment it painfully lacks. Parzival is called forth to revitalize Bildung.

The essential emptiness of the Bild in Bildung is the key to understanding the phenomenon of the Bildungsroman, which is defined simply as a novel about Bildung. Bildung describes the search for a Bild, an image of humanity intended to fill the gap left by the *Imago Dei*, which is rejected for reasons contained in competing accounts of the shift from a medieval to a modern worldview among the lower nobility and upper middle class at the historical moment in which social power concentrates primarily into capital rather than land. The essence of Bildung entails an image of humanity that is higher than the theological "fallen man"; Bildung demands a dialectical *Aufhebung*, rather than a parallel synthesis, or reshuffling of existing elements of the current metaphysical picture into a new configuration. After the *Aufhebung*, some metaphysical elements are maintained, others are eliminated, and something radically new enters into Being, transforming the resulting totality into a higher unity, such that looking back upon the present dialectical moment would constitute an unmistakable act of looking down. This elevating element that transforms the very nature of the synthesis is unimaginable before the *Aufhebung*, and is therefore pataphysical. Pataphysics mirrors the motion of metaphysics away from science. That which can be proven is called fact; that about which can be speculated is called metaphysics; and that which cannot be coherently thought is called 'nonsense', unless it becomes a symbol in a cognitive algorithm, in which case it is called 'pataphysics'. A Frenchman named Alfred Jarry coined this term in the late 1890s. His views on pataphysics are subsumed under my own ideas, which move away from Jarry's anarchic absurdity toward a theory of the functional role of symbols of cognitive impossibility in cultural phenomena. The Bild that Bildung seeks is pataphysical, insofar as it is *aufgehoben*. Pataphysics is essential for Bildung,

as the possibility of Bildung is itself founded on the availability of pataphysics. The Bildungsroman chronicles the pataphysical journeys of its heroes through the real and possible worlds they hope to transcend; Bildung is not a process of equalizing inner and outer "realities," but of searching for a path that leads beyond the possibilities subsisting in the combined set of all thinkable-possible realities. As the ambiguous and often morbid endings of the Bildungsroman illustrate, Bildung terminates as a phase of life before it achieves its goal. Thus some are tempted to mistake the process of Bildung for a product, such that Bildung would be the "accumulated wisdom" of those years spent searching for a Bild. This definition is a forgery of Bildung – perhaps it describes something like *allgemeine Ausbildung* or "well-roundedness," but this wisdom is not Bildung. Bildung is the search for a pataphysical Bild. Over time, both in literature and in life, pataphysical pursuits give way to realities, forgeries replace the not-yet-existent Bild, and periods of pataphysical alienation ensue.

The preference this paper demonstrates for Kyot's rather than Wolfram's *Parzival* is pataphysically motivated, but is not pataphysical itself. Wolfram's *Parzival* is simply not a Bildungsroman, but with respect to Kyot's *Parzival*, we are free to imagine the opposite. Wolfram himself opens the door to a pataphysical interpretation of *Parzival* with the creation of Kyot. If one accepts, as many scholars do, that Wolfram's Kyot is imaginary, then anything one were to write about Kyot's literary output would be on some level nonsensical; this type of pataphysics would resemble the Jarryite absurdist branch more than my own brand of pataphysics, but would also serve as an announcement of my own cognitive-impossible pataphysical intentions. Kyot's *Parzival* demonstrates a state of excited magnetism toward the Bildungsroman that guides us to the creative (re)construction of Kyot's lost work; we search for traces of the imaginary content of Kyot's *Parzival* in the tension between Bildung and the

pataphysical symbols encountered on the pages of Wolfram's epic. Kyot's *Parzival* opens a new line of discourse about Bildung, and points in a surprising direction when asked: who is Kyot?

Multiple incarnations of Wilhelm Meister call out in distress to their knightly brother Parzival. The quest motif that defines each of their stories binds them strongly, as does the nature of the objects of their searches. Parzival flows through the postures of the typical Bildungsheld: he leaves his home and family, killing his mother as surely as Heinrich Lee, in search of an ideal as rare as Heinrich von Ofterdingen's *blaue Blume*. Parzival encounters in the outer world and within his own character difficulties with which he must come to terms in order to continue with the pursuit of his transcendental goal, for the sake of which he rejects society as it is in favor of something undefined but higher. He experiences a period of mind-spirit adolescence, *eine geistige Reifezeit*, a period called, centuries later and within a different context, 'Bildung'. Despite the gulf of the centuries, Parzival rejects existing models of adulthood as possible equilibriums into which this spiritual adolescence might resolve itself, maintaining a state of sustained disequilibrium through his *Gotteshass* that allows him to pursue the impossible for four and half years. So much is true of both Wolfram's and Kyot's Parzivals. Further elaboration of these claims would establish *Parzival* as a precursor to the Bildungsroman; Melita Gerhard's classic study of the *Entwicklungsroman* bridges solidly the narratives that separate Goethe from Wolfram. Kyot's *Parzival*, however, must be more than a precursor to the Bildungsroman, once removed; in some sense it must also come *after* the Bildungsroman, from a moment in its future. Our aim is to build a bridge to Kyot, over which Parzival can cross in a display of *triuwe* to his kinsmen in the form of service to Bildung. The tension between

chronology and history ignites a charge in the void that separates these lost siblings and illuminates our search for Kyot's tale of the grail.

The grail-passages in Wolfram's work expose the outlines of an image of the grail in Kyot's epic. The words *lapsit exillis* are used in one of the two passages in which Wolfram describes the grail. I interpret this garble of Latin as a pataphysical marker in the same sense in which Jarry intends the word *merdre* in the play *Ubu Roi*. Strictly speaking, despite the metaphysical contortions of a Bodo Mergell,² *lapsit exillis* is nonsense; it signifies a content of which we cannot form any type of mental representation, which is to say, it signifies a cognitive impossibility – an entity about which at most, one might make the metaphysical claim that it subsists in a pataphysical realm. Wolfram describes the grail as a stone on which messages sometimes appear, but one doubts this is also the case in Kyot's work. Would a Wolframian audience have accepted the idea of a pataphysical Bild? Given the amount of resistance the modern or even (post)modern mind offers to the idea of pataphysics, one doubts it. Indeed, the pataphysicality of Kyot's grail lends support to the idea that Kyot writes from a future time. Wolfram's grail is problematic, in the sense that it comes from the heavens, but exists on the earth; if the grail were actually a stone, then the grail would exist in this world. The Bild sought by Bildung, however, although symbolized in this world, is expected to come from outside the given metaphysical matrix into a world that will only come into Being *after* the coming into Being of the Bild. Thus we cannot know if Kyot's grail is symbolized by a stone, or if Wolfram reinterprets Kyot's pataphysical *lapsit exillis* into a stone in order to present a more concrete symbol to his audience, but we can be certain that Kyot's grail is not intended to *be* a stone. The uncontested symbol of Kyot's grail is '*lapsit exillis*,' which might as well be Latin for

² Hermann Weigand reformulates Mergell's interpretation as *lapis(stone) lapsus in terram (fallen to earth) ex illis (from them) stellis (stars) et ex illis lapidibus (all magical stones)*.

'pataphysical Bild'. The fact that messages appear on this grail in Wolfram's work reinforces the functional role of symbols of impossibility in cognition; the message of the grail is a calling that cannot be coherently expressed, only followed.

The grail provides those accepted into its service with an array of worldly goods that prompts Wolfram to compare its abundance to that of heaven.

wan der grâl was der saelden vruht,/ der werlde sÛeze ein sÛlh genuht,
er wac vil nâch gelfÛche/ als man saget von himelrÛche. (238, 21-24)

That which can be said of heaven can only be said in the language of the metaphysics of earth; the grail's bounty provides a symbol of a set of metaphysical elements which will be preserved in the dialectically elevated world symbolized by the grail itself. (Although one can never know which specific elements will be preserved and which will be eliminated, one cannot help imagining that the goods are maintained at the expense of the non-goods.) This insight affords us a fuller concept of Parzival's *Gotteshass*. Knowing in advance that the grail will supply all earthly goods, whatever they might be when he reaches the end of his quest, Parzival is free to reject the totality of the world as it is. The search for the grail demands that he reject the totality, which is accomplished by renouncing God. The grail promises an elevated synthesis, such that whatever of the old world remains after the *Aufhebung*, one's antithetical relationship to it (one's negative dialectical approach to it, or one's anarchic-revolutionary stance regarding it) will scarcely matter. The *Gotteshass* is a road toward the grail that erases itself once its end is reached. (Wittgenstein's comparison of his *Tractatus* to a ladder that one throws away after climbing provides an illustrative parallel.) Parzival's *Gotteshass* is a necessary condition for searching for the grail, as indeed some sort of radical deconstructive posture is necessary for any type of pataphysical venture. Wolfram scholars seem divided on the exact values of Wolfram's coordinates on the scatter-plot of heresy versus orthodoxy, but none seem likely to ascribe to him

this view of the *Gotteshass* as cognitive imperative, so we ascribe it to Kyot, in whose *Parzival* the *Aufhebung*-intentionality of the *Gotteshass* must be imagined as being more pronounced.

The pataphysical highlight of *Parzival* is neither the grail nor the *Gotteshass*, but the four and a half years Parzival spends wandering and fighting. In this period of visions battling explanations, against the totality of which Parzival rebels in favor of the pure pataphysics of a postpantamimetic episode – a mode of being in which the fight or flight reaction is provoked by all but the incomprehensible – Parzival wanders in alternate wastelands blossomed and strewn through their emptiness with performances of the cosmic noise—the unintelligible randomness that lies beyond the mind, but within the universe. Thus Parzival comes upon three drops of blood in the snow and is reminded of the *Aufhebung*, the one meaning he cannot obliterate, as it is foundational to his very quest. His highest *minne* is reserved for the pataphysical Bild, the attainment of which would mean salvation from the hells of this world. More than the name of this *minne* cannot be spoken, but the maximization of the possibility of its coming into Being calls for the widest possible margin of cognitive error; God's hand is forced by opening the *Lichtung* that defines us to lights we cannot see, but to which we might pray. The drops of blood in the snow recall to Parzival the reality of reality, disclosing the essential unreality of its antithesis, and leading him into complete paralysis. A negative dialectic is always an enigma, a composition of previously employed constructions, uncanny, like a house of empty bottles or a pile of broken bones. The thesis is alive at present; we dwell in its environment, it constitutes our World. The essence of the antithesis is the pataphysical, the postpantamimetic: that which exists beyond the totality of possible mimesis and which would be called psychosis if it were to emerge unintentionally or for unwanted intervals. Postpantamimetic episodes are measured in hours, or perhaps days or weeks, but after several months or years who could survive such a

state, except for Parzival, the foolish knight called by the grail. With respect to his foolishness, we can be certain that in Kyot's *Parzival*, the hero is insane, not merely inexperienced. Cunneware's laughter and the butt of Ither's lance conspire to send Parzival into a state of madness that intensifies with Cundrie's proclamation of his irredeemable failure at Munsalvaesche. Parzival rejects everything, repudiating his vassalage to God himself through a madness that exhausts itself in the processing of mental representations that negate all that he sees. When he finally throws down the reigns, one wonders if he returns to life or hastens toward death. Is he aware any longer of the possibility of encountering his destiny?

Wolfram's Parzival passes through the *Gotteshass* to the grail, but perhaps Kyot's Parzival wanders forever in fallow fields, listening faithfully to the cosmic noise until the end. The neutral angels are his guardians; they champion the *Aufhebung* against God and the Devil and for this neutrality they are eternally damned within the metaphysical sphere, but promised the indefinite hope of salvation by the pataphysical realm. The neutral angels guide humanity to the grail as it calls out from its state of non-being; they protect us as we follow the vibrations of our mind-spiritual evolution. Parzival mounts a bridge of sound that connects him to the unimaginable future; he must remain a *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* until either he crosses to the other side, or leaps from the bridge back into the world, at which point his postpantamimetic episode expires and only God's grace to a worn out fool remains as an object of hope. Kyot's Parzival could be imagined exploding in his armor on the very spot in Flanders that marks Hans Castorp's end six centuries later. But if Kyot's *Parzival* mirrors the ambivalence of the Bildungsroman as it has been written thus far, then it could only symbolize the present, and not the future. So we reject the idea of Parzival's death on the bridge of sound, and follow Wolfram's account of Parzival's journey back to God.

.Perhaps Parzival crosses the bridge to the *Aufhebung* and attains the grail. This would mean nothing to us, unless we were able to follow him across a bridge of our own design. The Bildungsroman promises such a bridge, not within its pages, but through the impossible discourses in which it allows its intensive readers to participate. Thus the Bildungsroman never shows us the Bild at the end of the bridge, but when it does provide us with something like a happy ending, it shows us an image of the best Bild available and invites us to join the *Turmgesellschaft* or emigrate to Castalia. These societies are not *aufgehoben* in the radical sense that Bildung demands; they offer a Bild that is not the Bild that Bildung seeks, but rather the one that it finds. In this sense, from the perspective of Bildung these Bilder are forgeries. These forgeries, however, *represent* an intermediate step between the present dialectical moment and the angelic ending of our longed-for evolution; they might be defined as states of co-optimization of what Eckhart called the right and left eyes. The *templeise* are those who respond to the calling of the Grail, but then return to the world as the advance troops of human consciousness. Kyot's Parzival lives both on the bridge to the *Aufhebung* and in the world as it is, on the side of the manifested God in the world, and against Him in the pataphysical realm, where the incomprehensibility of the Godhead (*Allgrund*) is everything. Kyot's *Parzival* is an invitation to a state of selectively-blind nobility, an aristocracy of the spirit grounded in this world but venturing further. The essence of the legitimizing claim from which nobility derives its splendor might be called *Übermensch*. Perhaps Kyot's Parzival symbolizes the possibility of attaining a human developmental stage that certainly falls short of the partially-pataphysical, winged, musical angel Bildung destined us to become, but also goes well beyond the human-all-too-human. Perhaps Kyot's Parzival and the rest of the Grail Company reach a privileged equilibrium of the adolescent mind that maximizes meta- and pataphysical thought through

selective serial/parallel-processing, allowing for full production in both possible and impossible modes of thought. This nobility would tower above the unenlightened mass, a case of *Gottesfreunde* overpowering the merely *gottesbekannt*.

Anfortas, Klingsohr, and Trevrizent represent failures of this post-postpantamimetic endeavor; their excessive love of the present world, symbolized by women, leads to castrations of one sort or another for each of them. Artus, Gawan, and the other *Tafelrunder* represent optimal configurations for success in the present world, but they lack the experience of the world beyond God, of the realm of undifferentiated Godhead. Anfortas is only cured after Parzival falls from the bridge to the next level and retains his *triuwe* to the *Gotteshass* while simultaneously returning to God in the world; Anfortas is cured by Parzival's example, on which the question, "*aheim, waz wirret dir?*" is existentially founded. Clinschor's status as a fallen *templeise* does not carry over into Wolfram's work, but we can be certain that this evil magician is also granted another summer, not by Parzival's question, but rather by his own eventual use of magic for the sake Ofterdingen's initiation into the pataphysical cult on his wedding night. Nietzsche famously exclaims that he only desires children from eternity; certainly the Grail and Bildung are part of our eternal-maternal inheritance – from the male perspective, they are manifestations of the muse. Yet from the perspective of un-gendered probability, the question that might remove the lance from Bildung's groin seems to involve the lack of narratives of female *templeise* or Bildungsheldinnen. Incorporation of these narratives into present models of thought might open the Lichtung more than twice as wide, further optimizing our current meta-/pataphysical configurations for the parallel processing of reality *and* the cosmic noises that might present us with our grail, our pataphysical Bild, our angel's wings. Kyot's Parzival rides to Bildung's rescue, her outline barely visible beyond the second horizon of the mind.