



Parzival

A Journey of Initiation

by **Séamus Maynard**
adapted from Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*
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Introduction

The inspiration for writing this piece arose out of a necessity, the necessity to uncover some aspect of the heart of the Parzival legend in order to give dramatic renderings of certain episodes that are depicted on his quest. These events as they are described through the imaginative pictures in the story provide an opportunity, not only for enjoying a good story, but also to come to a deeper understanding of the experiences that arise when an individual chooses to take up their own spiritual path of initiation.

As I worked to uncover these main events in the story, in order to portray them in simple dramatic renderings for groups of young people and adults, it became apparent that the translations of Eschenbach's Parzival that I was working with were cloaked in the literary and social conventions of the time in which the story was first written and later translated. The dense, academic, and literary cloak, which the story was wrapped in, obscured the imaginative and experiential impact of the events in the journey when it came to making a script for a dramatic telling of the story.

As an actor and storyteller, I had worked for many years with the texts of Shakespeare and other poets whose mastery encompassed the art of drama, and I missed the immediacy, imaginative power, and directness of such texts. In frustration, I was eventually led to creating my own script which would strive to emulate, in a modest way, the forms that those great masters of the word had employed to fashion their dramatic works.

The legend of Parzival is a living being which exists independent of its authors. It has been told many times by many different writers, and each time it is retold, new aspects of its nature are revealed while the heart of the legend remains authentic to itself.

The depth of experience which occurs when engaging with this tale on a deeper level than just the intellect is what has driven me to complete this project despite the obvious social challenges of offering a book which is currently being cut from the curriculum of many schools.

One of the glaring difficulties that I first encountered with writing the piece was the inherent patriarchal backdrop of the original tale. With a small team of committed editors, I have worked to recast all of the female roles in the story whose strong, clear voices, silent in Eschenbach's telling, rang clearly once they were somewhat unshackled from their prison of historical gender oppression.

It is of the utmost importance to grapple with these questions in our times. Having said that, it is also of the utmost importance not to do away with the deep wisdom and experience which lies within legends such as Parzival. It is crucial to approach a legend such as this one with the understanding that it is not at all meant to be understood as a literal representation of characters and events but as a dream-like depiction of inner soul experiences, all of which can be found in one human soul - regardless of their sex, gender, or nationality. The character of Parzival is a representative of an individual human being, the characters that he encounters depict the many varied, complex expressions of the human soul life and the events that occur are metaphors for the inner challenges and discoveries of a human soul on a spiritual journey. Though one can observe aspects of our individual nature which resemble one character or another character in the story, it is most important to understand that we each have the potential for all of the characters to live within our inner life of experience.

In order to truly understand the legend of Parzival, one must come to understand the language of soul pictures in which it speaks. Male and female characters do not need to be thought of as male and female in the way that we think of them but as representations of the eternal masculine and eternal feminine powers that make up the balance in every human being regardless of their sex and gender. Soul capacities have nothing to do with being male or female. One can understand this by the examples one finds not only in legends but also in everyday life. It is not only useful but also enjoyable and deeply fulfilling to approach the Parzival legend with this in mind.

Some helpful questions to ask when setting out on the Parzival journey could be: what qualities, capacities, or virtues do the characters express through actions and words? What virtues arise through the relationships between characters and from the unfolding events in the story?

In the realm of imagination, which is where the legend exists, we are not bound to our everyday materialistic sense of things but can be liberated to experience the beautiful language of soul in which such stories speak. When we set our literal mind aside, it becomes apparent that our own soul can recognize these deeper imaginative pictures that live in the story without the need to analyze or dissect the story with our intellects. The soul knows that the image of a sword is not a literal sword, but a picture of the mastered and clarified thought life. It can understand that a battle is not a literal battle where one would try to kill someone with the sword but a living image of the mastery we need to cultivate in order to navigate the treacherous inner realms of the soul. We must be able to have a sharpened and honed capacity for thinking and speaking our thoughts in order to navigate both the inner and the outer world of experience. That is what the mastery of knighthood symbolizes. The soul can understand that, but our dead, materialist, literal, and intellectual ways of thinking and understanding the world will never be able to comprehend the realms of soul that the legend of

Parzival traverses.

If one can truly enter the experience of the story, listening for the capacities of soul which speak through the characters, the door of experience will open and the deep wisdom and fructifying life within the imaginative pictures in the story will begin to nourish us, no matter what age, nationality, sex or gender we may be. The story then becomes a continuum of interacting virtues: strength consoles the loyal wounded heart, compassion listens to grief's deep understanding of life, steadfastness answers trepidation, faith holds out until the end of time, joy blesses faith, and love conquers all.

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