The Process of Fools and the Practice of Prophets:

Enlightenment in Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* and Philip Glass's *Satyagraha*

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While Richard Wagner and Philip Glass are typically considered from different eras, worldviews and musical styles, their operas *Parsifal* and *Satyagraha* show remarkable similarities in their grappling with truth and enlightenment. *Parsifal*, based on a medieval grail legend,[1] premiered at Bayreuth in 1882, while *Satyagraha*, based on Gandhi's activism in South Africa, premiered almost one hundred years later (1980) in Rotterdam.[2] Though their stylistic differences are significant, both works are the fruits of their composers' interactions with Eastern religion. Both *Parsifal* and *Satyagraha* tell the story of a protagonist who grapples with compassion, attains enlightenment, and acts for healing in his community. Many scholars have linked these narrative themes to Wagner's understanding of Buddhism and Glass's experience of Hinduism.[3] An area that lacks scholarship, however, is the connection of these religious themes with the musical construction of the two works. Wagner's style emerges from late Romanticism and relies on leitmotifs as building blocks, while Glass writes in a Minimalist style that cycles and recycles through material. These styles clearly emerged from different historical eras and

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[1] Lucy Beckett, *Richard Wagner: Parsifal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1.

[2] Philip Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, ed. Robert Jones (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987), 107.

[3] Scholarly works that discuss the influence of Buddhism in *Parsifal* include:

Alan David Aberbach, *Richard Wagner: a mystic in the making* (Wakefield, N.H.: Longwood Academic, 1991).

Robert Cowan, "The Fatality of Romanticism vs. the Metaphysics of Sexual Love: Wagner's Love Letter to Schopenhauer and the Break-Up with Nietzsche," *Monatshefte* 106, no. 1 (2014): 1-16.

William Kinderman, *Wagner's Parsifal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Scholarly works that discuss the influence of Hinduism in *Satyagraha* include:

Allan Kozinn, "Glass's *Satyagraha* (1986)," in *Writings on Glass*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz and Robert Flemming (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 176-188.

Linda and Michael Hutcheon, "Philip Glass's *Satyagraha*: Para-Colonial Para-Opera." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (2011): 718-730.

musical soundscapes, but express similar intentions and effects when viewed through the spiritual influences that inspired Wagner and Glass.

Glass and Wagner's experiences of Buddhism and Hinduism stand in dynamic relationship with their roots in Western music and culture. Wagner's interaction with Buddhism is shaped by, and in turn affects, his late Romantic ideals of love and his fear of societal decline. Glass's encounter with Hinduism relates to a postmodern world absent of absolute truth and teleological understanding of time. For both composers, the religions they explored stressed the impermanence of the physical, temporal world and the need to transcend attachment to it. Therefore, knowledge gained through sensory or societal experience is illusory, while true knowledge comes through a different path: admitting all of the unknowns in life and relinquishing the illusion of control over them.

Wagner and Glass wrestle musically with these ideas of illusion and enlightened consciousness through *Parsifal* and *Satyagraha*. In the general musical framework for these operas, both composers remove predictable structures, disorienting listeners away from attachment to certainties that are in truth illusory. Yet through the main characters of Parsifal and Gandhi, they demonstrate another kind of enlightened knowledge that stems from this unknowing. Approaching this process from their different stages in history, Wagner's music expresses effort to detach from traditional certainties and reveal a new path, while Glass's music approaches enlightenment more from the "within" space. Wagner's music unfolds in the process of enlightenment, and Glass's shows the practice of enlightenment.

Wagner's appreciation of Buddhism deeply impacted his vision for *Parsifal*. He primarily encountered Buddhism through the writings of German philosopher Arthur

Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who viewed it as the "best of all possible religions."[4] What began for Schopenhauer when he encountered an article on Buddhism in *Das Asiatische Magazin* became a lengthy exploration of both Buddhism and Hinduism that would shape his philosophy on the renunciation of the will.[5] Schopenhauer's source materials on these religions were translations colored by the biases of outside traditions such as Sufim,[6] so the understanding he passed on to Wagner was not without flaw. Yet Schopenhauer's basic understanding of Buddhism was rightly focused on the Four Noble Truths:

1. *suffering (samsara*, illusion, dissatisfaction)
2. its *origin* (craving, desire)
3. its *extinction* (eradication of desire, *nirvana*, peace of mind), and
4. the *way* that leads there, which includes various guidelines. [7]

Schopenhauer interpreted these principles to mean that the world as constructed by the ego is illusion, and that desire for such illusory gain keeps one trapped in the cycle of want and suffering. His book *The World as Will and Representation*, first published in 1819 and expanded in 1844, describes the process through which one transcends this cycle by renouncing individual will.

Wagner was deeply influenced by reading *The World as Will* in 1854, and expressed his gratitude for its impact on his philosophy in many subsequent letters to friends. Urs App, scholar of Eastern and Western philosophical interactions and author of *Richard Wagner and Buddhism*, describes Wagner's autobiographical understanding of his transition from a "cheerful Greek view of the world" to a view toward "the voidness

[4] Urs App, *Richard Wagner and Buddhism* (Rorschach: University Media, 2011), 17.
[5] Ibid., 17-19.
[6] Ibid., 19.
[7] Ibid., 22.

of the world of phenoma."[8] Over time, Wagner transitioned from understanding romantic love as a saving force to viewing it as a force from which to be saved. App illustrates this evolution by drawing on Wagner's contrasting endings of the *Ring*. The first was composed in 1852, before his encounter with Schopenhauer. In this earlier version, the character Brünnhilde ends with the proclamation: "Only love can let one be / Blissful in joy and pain."[9] Yet in 1856, Wagner's revised ending has Brünnhilde sing a lengthy passage about departing from the world of illusion and desire, guided forward by "grieving love's profoundest compassion."[10] While his formation by Schopenhauer's discussion of Buddhism is palpable, his integration of these themes into his work took many turns. In 1858, for example, during his work on *Tristan und Isolde*, Wagner wrote that his work was to extend Schopenhauer's principle of the negation of will to show that it could be achieved through the ego-dissolving power of sexual love.[11] Around the same time, he was working on a sketch of the unfinished *The Victors*, an opera about the Buddha that called for abandonment of desire toward complete renunciation.[12] Wagner's baptism by Schopenhauer was not a one-and-done conversion, but an ongoing dialogue in his art of which *Parsifal* shows a late evolution. His deep struggle with these themes holds bearing on their musical expression in *Parsifal*.

Parsifal is regarded by App as the clearest expression of Wagner's eventual conformity with Schopenhauer's vision of renunciation, at least out of his completed works. Parsifal, the hero, denies of the will to live and procreate as embodied in

[8] App, *Richard Wagner*, 22.
[9] Ibid., 24.
[10] Ibid., 26.
[11] Ibid., 29.
[12] Ibid., 34.

sexuality. Although the wild woman Kundry seeks deliverance through sexual union with Parsifal, this goal is "precisely the most fundamental source of [her] anguish."[13] Parsifal shows her enlightenment through compassion rather than desire. In the moment he feels kinship and compassion with Amfortas, the king who suffers a wound inflicted by sexual love, he foregoes the drive of his individual will and steps into a consciousness guided by "unlimited compassion."[14] As is also true of Gandhi's role in *Satyagraha,* Parsifal's insight leads him into action; he returns to the community to approach its suffering from his new vantage point. Thus, while Parsifal's path is a clear renunciation of sensory and sexual knowledge, the path that led Wagner to this understanding of Schopenhauer was long and clouded with complexity. Wagner's grappling with the meaning of renunciation situates the plot of *Parsifal* within the larger trajectory of his own struggle for truth.

Glass's knowledge of Hinduism, and specifically Gandhi's connection to it, was shaped by his extensive visits to India and his deep interaction with the source materials of *Satyagraha*, Gandhi's prison memoirs and the *Bhagavad Gita*.[15] He was inspired by Hindu friends who admired Gandhi and days spent reading *Satyagraha* (also the name of Gandhi's memoir from his time in South Africa). Glass was rooted in the complexity of Hinduism not simply as a religious philosophy, but as Gandhi's way of life. Gandhi knew the ancient *Gita* in and out and lived by its teachings, and Glass's marriage of *Satyagraha* ("truth-force" in Sanskrit), Gandhi's name for his movement in South Africa,[16] with the text that shaped his innermost drive, expresses this deep knowledge.

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[13] App, *Richard Wagner*, 35-36.
[14] Ibid., 43
[15] Glass, *Music*, 90-91.
[16] Ibid., 92.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, translated as "The Song of God,"[17] is an ancient, holy Hindu text that could merit a lifetime of interpretation not possible within the scope of this paper. Yet its main theme can be understood in light of the discussion on *Parsifal*. It tells the story of Arjuna, a warrior who wants to shy away from the battlefield because of the pain he will inflict, as the god Krishna exhorts him to accept this duty as the path he must walk, regardless of the outcome. It expounds on the same idea central to Schopenhauer: humanity's basic problem is its slavery to individual will, which keeps it bound to its own delusional appetites.[18] By surrendering this lustful will to "the inner ground of reality and freedom in himself,"[19] humans can act in the world from a place of truth. It is important to note that in both Hinduism and Buddhism, the cycle of ego's want binds a soul to Samsara, continual rebirth. The release from such attachment is the salvation of which Schopenhauer writes and the path of truth upheld by the *Gita*.

Both Wagner's understanding of Buddhism and Glass's understanding of the *Gita* stem from a view that the temporal, material world is illusory. Enlightenment is not a teleological end that is the fruit of striving, but a release from all such striving. Instead of positive, known truths, truth is the absence of this certainty, the recognition that typical patterns of meaning are meaningless. The question at hand is the possibility for these composers to convey this experience in their music, which does occur in time and space, and does create patterns (often teleological) to which listeners will assign meaning. To grapple with the possibility that the music, not just the content of these works, could

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[17] *Bhagavad-Gita,* trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (New York: Signet Classics, 2002), title page.
[18] Thomas Merton, "The Significance of the Bhagavad-Gita," preface to *The Bhagavad-Gita: As It Is*, by Srila Prabhupada (Collier, 1968), 1.
[19] Ibid., 2.

express transcendent truth beyond knowability—the void—we turn to composer Jonathan Harvey's essay "Buddhism and the Undecidability of Music." Harvey philosophizes on the ways that music can open listeners toward awareness of the limitations of human knowledge, encouraging a higher sense of knowing by renouncing the typical will toward certainty.

Harvey's connection of music with the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness provides a framework for listening as a practice of knowing and unknowing. Emptiness as Harvey understands it centers on an idea already encountered in the philosophies of Wagner and Glass; it teaches that conventional reality is illusion, while ultimate reality is empty of misleading desire.[20] Music is a path to understanding the truth that earthly existence is transient because it does not hide its fleeting nature. It enters into time as a pattern of constantly shifting sounds, onto which listeners project their interpretations of meaning.[21] Listeners face the union of knowing and unknowing as music "presents us with a *representation* of illusions seen through – we comprehend musical entities as the projections they really are. We project onto sounds and also *realize* that we are projecting onto them."[22] Music provides a representation of conventional reality that questions its permanence; it also makes listeners aware of their interpretation of this representation. To know more as a listener is to unlearn mindless certainty and grow in mindful uncertainty.

Harvey does not distinguish between music as Buddhist or not, but he highlights musical characteristics that encourage listeners toward the Buddhist understanding that

[20] Jonathan Harvey and Jean-Claude Carriére, *Circles of Silence* (Paris: Sylph Editions, 2007), 31.
[21] Ibid., 31.
[22] Ibid., 31.

"form is empty: emptiness is form."[23] Applied to music, *form is empty* signifies that a listener's understanding of form is based on subjective pattern assimilation, not absolute truth. On hearing a chord or passage that falls ambiguously between different harmonic homes, the listener's confidence in an absolute, known form vanishes. The sudden unknowing produced by these chords can spiral out into a larger experience of truth for the listener, as she realizes that any musical event occurs in multiple layers at once, and her understanding of its identity depends on which layer she is perceiving.[24] The second half of the teaching, *emptiness is form,* reveals that the listener's cognizance of a musical characteristic depends on the absence of its opposite. A piece only sounds slow to a listener who hears it in relation to fast. Appoggiaturas and other unexpected pitches are a prime example in that their identity is an absence of the expected pitch.[25] Even the most basic terminology – up and down contour, loud and soft dynamics, slow and fast tempi – are no longer straightforward. A passage we perceive as loud, fast and ascending is not an absolute expression of those qualities. Rather, we are interpreting the gestures on a particular scale, and we are hearing some of these qualities by the absence of their opposite, which could be simultaneously present on another level of interpretation.[26] As we listen, we hear in different layers of time; the "two levels of cognition," hearing the present moment as "now," and hearing it in light of the past events, are inseparable and give "a double meaning for a single object."[27] To synthesize, a piece that encourages consciousness of its different layers of time, harmonic structure, and its shaping by

[23] Ibid., 38. This quote is from the *Heart Sutra*, a sacred Buddhist text.
[24] Ibid., 33.
[25] Harvey and Carriére, *Circles*, 33.
[26] Ibid., 34.
[27] Ibid., 34.

elements that are absent can be a window into the consciousness of knowing ambiguity that Harvey respects.

In *Parsifal*, listeners are thrown into an overall landscape of unknowability through the lack of structural certainty on many levels. Catherine Pickstock addresses this in her article "*Quasi Una Sonata*: Modernism, Postmodernism, Religion, and Music," wherein she argues that Wagner's use of leitmotifs undermines conventional reality. In this context, conventional reality refers to fixed keys and predictable phrase structures that reinforce desire and fulfillment as sanctioned by society. Leitmotifs, musical motives that each signify a particular theme or plot-point, become Wagner's new organizational structure as he distances himself from the type of goal-oriented tonality that subscribes to societal norms.[28] Their interweaving expresses a "pure unteleological fated process undergirding reality…a liberation of modulation from the constraints of proportionate concordance and repeatable tune."[29] Pickstock contrasts the constant becoming of leitmotifs as they ebb in and out like a stream of consciousness with the teleological goals of tonal music that seems confident about its destination.

Through layering and interweaving leitmotifs in *Parsifal*, Wagner accomplishes the complexity suggested by Pickstock. He draws listeners into unknown territory where different themes and levels of consciousness collide at once. A potent example of disorienting intermingling between leitmotifs occurs toward the end of Act I, wherein Amfortas, the wounded king, struggles to lead the ritual of the Grail. This passage, in

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[28] Catherine Pickstock, "*Quasi Una Sonata*: Modernism, Postmodernism, Religion, and Music," in *Resonant Witness: conversations between music and theology*, ed. Jeremy Begbie and Steven Guthrie (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 191.
[29] Ibid.

which he bemoans his duty to administer a sacrament that has no healing for him, fluidly moves through leitmotif after leitmotif. His father, Titurel, has just finished imploring him to continue the Grail ritual for his sustenance, and the motive known as the "Faith Motive" (or Dresden Amen) seems to propel him up to the Grail only to instantaneously fold anxiously into the motive of Kundry (p. 173)[30]. There is no separation or preparation between the sturdy ascent of the Faith motive and the ravaging fall of Kundry's chromatic descent, which prompts him into responding "No!" to his father's command. With Harvey's framework in mind, the listener loses any semblance of grip on who might be good ("faith") versus evil ("Kundry"), and on whether the leitmotif marriage is a psycho-projection of Amfortas or an external force that propels him forward.[31] Listeners have no space to control their intake of this juxtaposition, and thus no bearing on how to distinguish illusion from truth.

Within this same scene, unknowing is also established through the subversion of clear temporality. The syncopation in the anguished, offbeat orchestra part (beginning p. 174) contributes to unknowing on multiple levels. On an immediate level, the syncopation takes power away from the certainty of stable beats. The orchestra's desperate repetition sounds like struggle for certainty where there is none to be found; it grasps at knowing something that is out of its reach and seethes in its incompletion. On a larger scale, this syncopated pattern is heard as a return from Amfortas' first appearance (p. 44). Though not a leitmotif, this pattern is distinctive in its atmosphere of unrest. By the time it returns, the audience has grown in knowledge of the Grail kingdom, yet

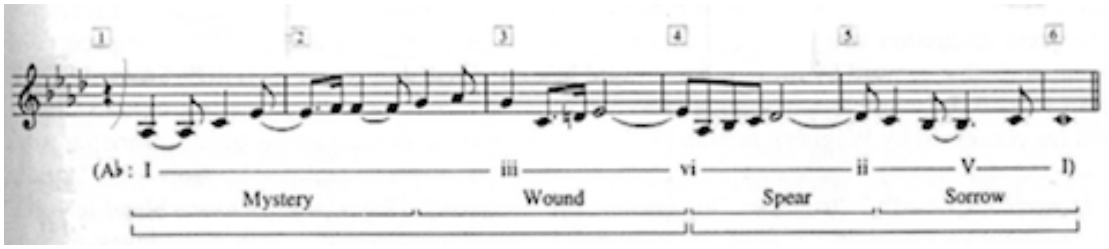
[30] Richard Wagner, *Parsifal* (New York: Dover Publications, 1986). All future score references to *Parsifal* refer to this edition.
[31] Earlier in this act, Parsifal earnestly asks Gurnemanz, "Who is good?" (130).

Amfortas is stuck in the same pain vortex from which he sang before. He is caught in a frantic rhythm that tries to push forward but gets nowhere, singing an arpeggiated melody that soars and falls but finds no healing (pp. 174-179). Trapped in cycles of suffering on an immediate and an infinite level, he sings of his "woeful inheritance" and the "punishment" it is to be the wounded guardian of the Grail. This is a pain that does not heal or teach over time, but continues to throb in continuous discontinuity. This striving pattern that binds Amfortas in its offbeat pain viscerally initiates the listener into the emptiness of grasping for certainty among the unknown.

If leitmotifs are Wagner's expression of consciousness, their distortion in Amfortas' wounded song undermines trust in the abilities of consciousness itself. Leitmotifs are fragmented, turned minor, sucked into this vortex of pain and changed. In William Kinderman's analysis of *Parsifal*, he writes, "for Amfortas, it is as if these smaller intervallic spaces opened into a warped realm of experience, racked by pain and poison."[32] Listeners have a doubly uncertain experience of questioning the level on which they are listening to the leitmotifs while they question any ontological certainty in the leitmotifs' meaning. Perhaps, as Kinderman suggests, they are corrupted at this point by Amfortas' enslavement to pain. Many scholars establish the main harmonic framework for *Parsifal* as a struggle between truth (embodied in major mode leitmotifs) and cyclical suffering (represented by the minor mode meanderings of Kundry, Klingsor and Amfortas).[33] In Amfortas' struggle in this scene – reaching for transcendence from the pain to which he is bound – the Communion leitmotif that began the entire opera in the

[32] William Kinderman, *Wagner's Parsifal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 221.
[33] Fred Lehrdahl, "Tonal and Narrative Paths in *Parsifal*," in *Musical transformation and musical intuition: eleven essays in honor of David Lewin*, ed. Raphael Atlas and Michael Cherlin (Roxbury: Ovenbird Press, 1994), 121.

prelude to Act I is transformed into the minor mode (p. 180) at the moment when Amfortas sings of the divine contents of the chalice once its covering falls. Harvey might question on what level it is minor. It could be minor because it is corrupted in Amfortas' imagination, or it could be minor because Amfortas intuits a pain in the ritual that no one else does. Ontological certainty is removed, and listeners are left with their doubts. Similarly, the unity of parts within the Communion motive surfaces as a question. In Fred Lehrdahl's analysis, even from its statement in the prelude's opening, the Communion motive contains suffering and ambiguity. It sounds like a unified whole at the start, but throughout the opera it is fragmented into its different parts, including the Wound motive (measure 3) and the Spear motive (measure 4).[34] Lerdahl labels them as shown.



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As Amfortas sings painfully of the Grail's beauty, the Spear and Wound leitmotifs pulse in and out, shifting instruments and key areas (pp. 180-181). They are both heard in the context of the Communion theme that precedes them by seconds, and as distinctive stumbling blocks for Amfortas. Because the mode and unity of the Communion motive are disrupted in this passage, listeners face suffering from a place of disruptive impermanence.

On a macro scale, Wagner uses the techniques described above throughout *Parsifal* in conjunction with other jarring musical characteristics. Listeners get lost in

[34] Lehrdahl, "Tonal and Narrative Paths," 125.
[35] Ibid.

tempi that move incredibly slowly and without the assurance of audible beats. Even the opening of the prelude exemplifies this: the Communion theme starts on beat two and stays completely off of the beats until it lands on beat one of measure three, all in an already slow tempo (p. 5).[36] Listing all of the passages where the beat shifts with ever-changing leitmotifs would be impossible, because it is the default musical style. Finally, there are rarely strong cadences, just one leitmotif melting into the next, with a few notable exceptions.[37] These details make palpable the struggle for certainty in a musical plane where even consciousness cannot be trusted.

Glass also writes within a framework of musical unknowability, denying predictability of rhythm, accent and repetition. Yet unlike *Parsifal*, *Satyagraha* accepts these perhaps unstable building blocks without a visceral struggle against their instability. This is a subject taken up in the book *Repeating Ourselves*, in which Robert Fink discusses the convergence of trance consumerism and postmodern uncertainty in the music of American minimalism, providing a cultural starting point for Glass. The consciousness that Glass builds in *Satyagraha* is shaped by the paradox of a society in which mindless pattern and extreme distrust of any truth therein is the norm. Accordingly, Glass did not just seek to establish another kind of trance so as to distract listeners from the trance of cyclical consumerism, but distanced his music from the concept of mindless trance.[38] Fink compares Glass's disassociation with trance to

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[36] Lerdahl, "Tonal and Narrative Paths," 125.
[37] The word "death" (Tot), for example, is often set with a definite cadence. This connects to Kundry and Amfortas' longing for death as an end to their suffering. For example, see page 131, when Kundry reveals that Parsifal's mother is dead, and page 107, when Gurnemanz pronounces the swan dead.
[38] Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American minimal music as cultural practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 76.

contemporary minimalist Steve Reich's sentiment that he wants the listener to be "wide awake and hear details [she's] never heard before."[39] The ideal listening experience for Reich and Glass is full of intention. While the music of *Satyagraha* does not actively fight pattern formation, the patterns on which it settles are built of ever-changing microcosms. To exist within their ebb and flow requires awareness.

Underneath these microcosms is an overarching cyclical stability in *Satyagraha* that comes from the use of chaconne, a macrocosmic knowing that undergirds the experience of passing uncertainty. Glass described the piece as a chaconne in a 1980 interview, which he defined as "a harmonic sequence that is repeated completely throughout, reiterated throughout."[40] Allison Welch addresses this in her article "Meetings along the Edge: Svara and Tala in American Minimal Music" which explores convergences between Indian and American composition techniques. She writes that Glass's use of chaconne in *Satyagraha* has roots in both Indian and American music. Its unifying, grounding nature is enhanced by its dominant to tonic motion throughout.[41] Glass designed each scene to sound as a chaconne, "a whole continuous, sustained piece," he remarked.[42]

Satyagraha's continuous, cyclical nature is further developed in its use of mode. It begins and ends in the same mode (Phrygian), with the same ascending scalar pattern in

[39] Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 76.
[40]Michael Cooper, "An exclusive interview with Philip Glass and Constance de Jong concerning their new opera: *Satyagraha*," *Feedback papers* 19 (1980): 4.
[41] Allison Welch, "Meetings along the Edge: *Svara* and *Tala* in American Minimal Music," *American Music* 17, no. 2 (1999): 194.
[42] Cooper, "Exclusive interview," 4.

the first and last scenes. In the opening, the flute plays it; at the end, Gandhi sings it.[43] Throughout the opera, simple ascending and descending scalar patterns are a common aesthetic link between scenes. Glass's expedition into the unknown exists within a framework of stability, just as Gandhi found grounding in the path of the *Gita* even though the outcome of his *Gita*-inspired actions would be uncertain.

The opening of the opera finds calm amidst inner unpredictability. On listening to the opening of *Satyagraha* for a first time, it could be easy to hear the lull of cello ostinato and Gandhi's repeated descending pattern. But beneath the repetitive surface, a careful listen reveals that the rhythmic structure of the cello ostinato is in constant flux. The eighth notes alternate between groupings of five, six, seven, eight and nine (for example, pp. 1-4).[44] Glass learned this additive process of rhythm from Hindustani music, the classical style of North India. Instead of dividing larger expanses of time into equally balanced divisions, as Western composers might, Glass begins from the smaller rhythmic building blocks and strings them together in cycles.[45] Within these strands of repetitive yet potentially arbitrary-sounding rhythmic cycles, Glass manipulates the accent patterns for an uncertainty that is audible upon close listening that goes beyond disengaged trance.

Glass' starting point is not a struggle against freedom from certainty but a submission to uncertainty. This is exemplified in another changing eighth note pattern, again from Act I Scene I. When the whole chorus of warriors on the Kuru Field of Justice joins Gandhi, Arjuna and Krishna in song, the orchestra takes on a driving rhythm that

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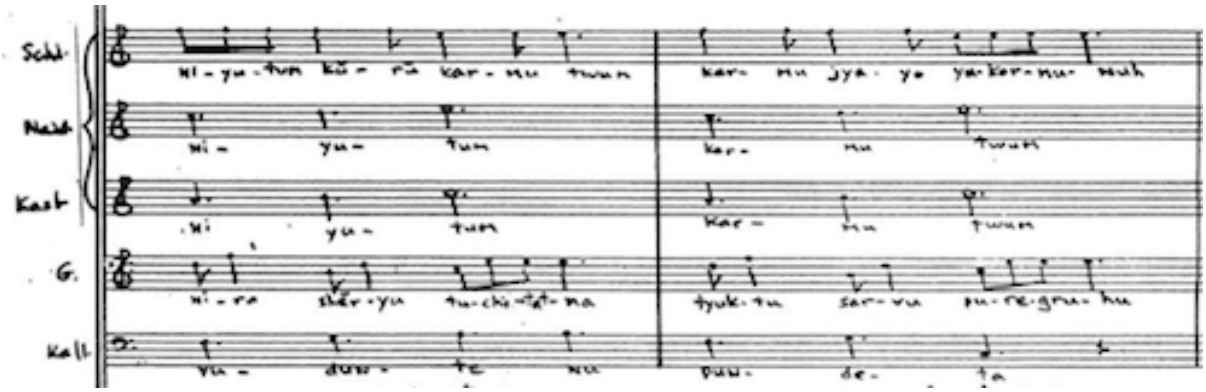
[43] Veena Varghese, "Becoming the Charioteer: Gandhi in Philip Glass's *Satyagraha*," *Nota Bene: Canadian Undergraduate Journal of Musicology* 1, no. 1 (2008): 107.
[44] Philip Glass, *Satyagraha* (London: Chester Music, 1979). All further references to the score refer to this edition.
[45] Welch, "Meetings along the Edge," 191.

maintains unity. This rhythm feels consistent at a macro level, but on a micro level its groupings are constantly fluctuating between fours, threes and twos (pp. 42-49). The chorus moves slowly and sturdily, but maintains complete awareness of every minute change in the eighth note groupings that support it. The entire ensemble is initiated into knowledge of the fickle character of the eighth notes, always arriving on the big beats no matter where they fall in the succession of eighth notes. The chorus gives dedicated purpose to these eighth notes, just as they give motion to what would otherwise be a glacial vocal line. Returning to Harvey, it is the integration of these two patterns that gives purpose to their varying characteristics. The entire forces of the ensemble, full orchestra and choir at forte, yield to the chance rhythm at a volume that perhaps only yields in abandon. Known and unknown are two levels of the same experience.

Satyagraha integrates subjective variety within objective unity when different rhythmic interpretations of the big beat peacefully coincide. The entirety of Act I Scene II, a depiction of Gandhi's Tolstoy Farm wherein he and his colleagues worked for social justice, is based on a rhythmically predictable ostinato in 12/8 time. Throughout, the flute comes in and out with an ostinato that ascends for six notes and then descends for six. Gandhi and his colleagues both fit within this and completely change the rhythmic paradigm by their rhythmic motion. Simultaneously (page 98), Gandhi sings an eighth note followed by a quarter, repeated; his friends Kasturbai, Mr. Kallenbach and Mrs. Naidoo sing dotted quarters; and Miss Schlesen, his secretary, sings a quarter followed by an eighth. Here is the example from page 98 of the score:



Listeners shift between the rhythmic reference points of Gandhi and Miss Schlesen, experiencing the rhythmic drive from these different perspectives. Adherence to the big beat provides an underlying certainty in the midst of these diverse vantage points, a sense of transcendent truth.

When musical transitions in *Satyagraha* are jarringly unprepared, the listener is encouraged to treat the unpredictability with equanimity rather than unrest. Texture and material transform in a moment, and the music conveys acceptance, not anxiety, at these shifts. The third scene of Act II depicts the protest in which Gandhi and other Indian residents of South Africa burned the registration certificates that the Black Act required them to hold. The music shifts between a quiet string ostinato, Gandhi's contemplative solo, and the defiant near-shouting of the protesting crowds. The textural changes are abrupt and without warning. For example, thirty seconds after the chorus begins its rhythmic, impassioned protest (p. 286), Glass instantly cuts to bare orchestra (p. 288), which ushers in Gandhi's solo. He is quickly joined by the strength of everyone else, who again stop singing by page 292. As Glass cycles through these stunning shifts, listeners acquiesce to their abruptness. Through repetition, the extremes of uncertainty in instrumentation, volume and pattern are normalized.

To return now to a comparison between Wagner and Glass, *Parsifal* and *Satyagraha* complicate their listeners' experiences of patterned time and trust in patterns.

Parsifal, written in an age familiar with the fulfillment of continuous desire in music, acts to musically challenge of these ideals by subverting listeners' expectations for concrete knowledge. *Satyagraha*, conceived in a time that distrusted absolute truth, uses the grounding bass of a chaconne to bring the listener into the transcendent truth by which Gandhi lived. On one level, the general atmosphere of *Parsifal* is unknowing, while for *Satyagraha* it is knowing. On a deeper level, Wagner's strategy is effective because he prizes knowing as a powerful force for the listener, and Glass's soundscape impactful because of the arguably unknowing, postmodern nature of his listener. In light of Harvey, knowing and unknowing need one another to be recognized in the musical language of both operas. This relationship is complicated further by examining the heroes and their enlightenment; one comes to knowing through unknowing, and the other practices knowing amidst unknowing.

Parsifal is a dynamic character whose beginnings as a foolish outsider allow him to eventually see through and renounce the constructed patterns that would bind him to illusory attachment. He arrives in Montsalvat having left behind his mother, who raised him in the forest without knowledge of the outside world. After responding in confusion to the ritual of the Grail, he leaves Montsalvat and finds himself in the realm of Klingsor, the evil magician who has power over Kundry. By order of Klingsor, Kundry tries to seduce Parsifal, who refuses when he realizes that Amfortas' wound is sexual in origin. He recovers the spear that Amfortas lost when he fell to Kundry's spell, and returns to Montsalvat after years of wandering to heal Amfortas and preside over a restored Grail ritual. His initial knowledge is selfish and limited, but his character and music change throughout the opera as he is enlightened by compassion. His entrance almost an hour

into the opera illustrates the kind of unknowing from which he begins. Listeners have already spent almost an hour taking in the leitmotifs, encountering the wounded Amfortas, being initiated into the legends of the Grail kingdom of Montsalvat by the knight Gurnemanz, and puzzling over Kundry. Parsifal runs onstage without knowledge of any of these situations. In fact, his bombastic horn theme (p. 101) has just interrupted the tenderness of the "pure fool" prophecy (p. 100), and he has just proudly killed a swan sacred to Montsalvat (106). Foolishly aggressive, he has not yet come into understanding of his own unknowing. When Gurnemanz questions Parsifal's identity, a curious thing happens at the moment he admits he does not know who his father is (119). He innocently completes the phrase established by Gurnemanz, leaping down by a fifth, but in doing so joins the orchestra in an iteration of the Wound leitmotif. This now-wounded response is immediately preceded by a horn call recollection of his proud entrance theme (118). This marriage of leitmotifs foreshadows the convergence of his ignorant youth with the compassion for Amfortas' wound that will ultimately transform him. While he is unequipped to intuit the legends and rules of Montsalvat, he innately utters the Wound motif, a nod toward the knowledge of suffering that he doesn't yet have, but that will ultimately liberate him from the ego expressed in the horn calls.

The scene in which Parsifal witnesses the ritual of the Grail shows his struggle into confusion over the juxtaposition between Amfortas' pain and the Grail Knights' blind commitment to ritual. Still an outsider, he arrives at the Grail chamber before the knights march in with their metric song (p. 157). He hears the lengthy transformation of the mythical bell motif (starting p. 138) into the song they sing. While the music leading into the Grail ritual is metrically stable and melodically coherent through the bell motive,

by the time the Grail Knights leave, it is interspersed with instrumental echoes of Amfortas' cries (pp. 217-223). For the Grail knights, the bell motif seems to signal the arrival of the time to process into or out of the Grail ceremony. But because Parsifal experiences it in stasis on both ends of the Grail ceremony, he is set up for a knowing that supersedes the rigid certainty of this temporality. Gurnemanz asks Parsifal if he knows what he has seen, and Parsifal remains silent (p. 224). Parsifal is caught between the music of the knights, for whom ritual is reality, and the music of Amfortas, for whom suffering is reality. Although the mythical bell motive and Amfortas' turbulent melody are paired in this closing music, there is an ontological chasm between them in which Parsifal finds himself bewildered. Parsifal's own mythical theme, the Pure Fool leitmotif, makes a few appearances in this scene, even under a minor guise when Gurnemanz scolds him for being "just a fool" at the end (p. 225). This theme is notable because its text beckons: "the pure fool, enlightened by compassion."[46] Parsifal's way out of the chasm of utter confusion between blind ritual and suffering is not the building of another construct, but a gentle solution that already exists, his own motive of compassion. It is a motive of becoming just as much as a motive of stasis. While Amfortas' suffering music is tumultuous and syncopated and the Grail Knights' ritual music steady and certain, the Pure Fool motive is searching but tender, light but profound (pp. 226-227). The words that accompany it are not bound to time or pain but invoke the process of enlightenment.

The compassion that enters Parsifal the moment he kisses Kundry is the knowledge that the depth of suffering cannot be reached by running from its cause toward the supposed certainty of an illusory attachment. This moment, lodged in the middle of

[46] Beckett, *Parsifal*, 31.

Act II, is in many ways the core of the opera. When Kundry kisses him, the Wound leitmotif returns to announce that he suddenly inherits the pain that Amfortas feels (pages 366-367). In the ensuing whirlwind of leitmotifs, Parsifal struggles with the dissolution of the cyclical knowledge that Kundry proposed when she claimed that she could heal his loss of his mother through a sexual encounter. The music spins into battling motives of salvation and loss, from the ascending Grail motive to the downward leaping Wound motive (p. 382). Between chromatically askew iterations of the Grail theme and a recapitulation of the painful, syncopated passage that Amfortas sings toward the end of Act I, the music suggests that Parsifal is seeking the truth. He has fully entered the chasm he witnessed at the end of the Grail ritual, in which the diatonicism of the Grail motive is drenched in the painful chromaticism that Amfortas experiences. He is left in a deep place of unknowing (pages 367-390). The four-note ascent that Lerdahl identifies as the Spear motive persistently reappears, as if to sound hope.[47] While Kundry offers that he can forget the pain he feels by remembering his bond with his mother through love with her, Parsifal, who entered the opera an ignorant fool, allows unknowing instead of remembrance to guide him onward.

Parsifal's journey is facilitated by musical unknowing and unlearning, but these function toward attainment of musical enlightenment and unity that he brings back to Montsalvat in the end. After years wandering in the wilderness, Parsifal finds his way back to Montsalvat on Good Friday to bring healing to Amfortas through the spear that wounded him. In unison with the spear motive in the orchestra, he proclaims, "only the Spear that smote you can heal your wound" (p. 567). As in Wagner's understanding of

[47] Lerdahl, "Tonal and Narrative Paths," 125.

Buddhism, to eradicate suffering one must face and eradicate its cause. Since the Spear caused the wound, no other path will reach the root of this suffering. Here, Parsifal unites the music of the known and unknown in simplicity. Throughout the opera, the beginning of the expansive Communion leitmotif has disintegrated into Spear, Wound and other motives, been tainted by painful chromaticism, and has been an overall source of confusion, its ascent always leading somewhere different. When Parsifal presides over the Grail ritual, the beginning of the Communion motive leads into the gently falling Faith motive. The mystery of ascent is held in descent, but a descent that is liberated from the chromaticism that is bound to desire. Over the broad scale of a musical work that has broken the bonds of chromatic desire, there is a teleological desire toward this liberation, though. All of the uncertainty from before melts into the transcendent sanctification of the last few pages, wherein suffering can cease when the ritual is not desire but compassion. Wagner breaks out of the cyclic ignorance of the knights and suffering of Amfortas by offering a new cycle of detachment as long as the work itself. *Parsifal* is a ritual not of repetition but of process.

In *Satyagraha*, Gandhi's path of knowledge is not a narrative of struggle toward enlightenment, but the struggle of practicing enlightenment in the world. Unlike Parsifal, Gandhi does not journey musically from knowing unknowing into unknowing knowing, but practices transcendence throughout. Even throughout the first scene of Act I, wherein he makes a transformative decision to fight for justice in South Africa,[48] his musical expression of consciousness remains the same. From his place on the Kuru Field of Justice, he begins the opera by singing Arjuna's doubt, but by the end of the scene

[48] Cooper, "Exclusive Interview," 4.

embodies Krishna's wisdom, therein making his choice to fight for racial justice. The perspective from which he sings changes, but the music at the beginning and end of the scene is the same. His practice remains constant to the spirit of the *Gita*. This differs substantially from Wagner's musical expression of Parsifal's journey to enlightenment.

Further, in relating to the orchestra and other characters, Gandhi moves about uncertain rhythms with a knowing ease. At the end of Act I, Scene I, after Gandhi sings with Arjuna, Krishna and both armies, Gandhi once again has a solo with the orchestra. This solo is marked by what sounds to be a renunciation of control on the part of both Gandhi and orchestra. The orchestra both sets the pulse of eighth note groupings and mimics Gandhi after he sings. In one of many similar passages, the woodwinds respond to his melodic statement with a comment on it (p. 59). Likewise, Gandhi seems to float in whenever he pleases, using whatever rhythmic combination suits him – such as the triplets in the (p. 60) iteration – and yet in his silences he seems to yield his listening to the orchestra. There is the sense that both Gandhi and the orchestra know how to listen to and be in the unknown; they respond to each other as if in perfectly timed yet perfectly spontaneous conversation. There is continuity without a drive to control. Just as Gandhi does not shy away from these simultaneous leader and follower roles, he does not shy away from providing an opposite rhythm to what everyone else onstage may be singing. The earlier example provided from Act I, Scene II, in which Gandhi sings the opposite triplet rhythm of the women onstage, demonstrates this. During group scenes, Gandhi brings unknown opposites alongside the path that the community knows, unafraid to unlearn what is familiar.

In relation to the larger ensemble, Gandhi's consciousness is also proven transcendent when he takes a path of silence in contrast to the crowd's noise. In Act II, Scene I, Gandhi is returning to South Africa, and an angry mob is ready to attack him for the disparaging news he spread of apartheid in South Africa during his time away. Yet Gandhi responds with nothing but silence to all of the brutally violent "ha-ha-ha-ha-has" thrown at him throughout the act. Gandhi's stillness in the face of the mob's frenetic repetition is an unknown for the audience to face. Gandhi gives the surprising truth of stillness amidst the illusion of aggressive desire.

Finally, Gandhi's final solo at the end of Act III leaves the listener with the impression of a consciousness that is above time. Glass uses the Hindustani concept of mukhra, which Welch explains as "a melodic phrase that produces both a melodic and rhythmic cadential effect on the downbeat of the following rhythmic cycle."[49] The low-note landings of Gandhi's phrases as he sings the text of Krishna coincide with the start of the next rhythmic phrase in the orchestra. Over and over again, Gandhi gives the security of cadence. As Gandhi sings of Krishna's consciousness of his many births, he reiterates this peace of landing ad infinitum. The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches readers to follow the rightly known path even though the results are unknown. Glass portrays Gandhi as, like Krishna, repeating this right path without regard for how many times it may be necessary, or what its results may entail. The final eight-note ascending scale that Gandhi repeats over and over seems to live on beyond the opera, an endless practice of enlightened action. While less goal oriented than Wagner's leitmotifs, this too is a becoming through commitment to the source of the action. Although the temporality of

[49] Welch, "Meetings along the Edge," 192.

the orchestra constantly changes in grouping, Gandhi's entrance always marks the mukhra. Being at peace with the truth, he is at peace to act accordingly in the world.

Both *Parsifal* and *Satyagraha* create a listening experience that defies the boundaries between known and unknown to indicate an enlightenment that goes beyond constructed repetition or meaninglessness. While some of their techniques for removing the listener from conventional certainty are similar, the frameworks from which they approach ultimate knowledge differ alongside the varying portrayals of their protagonists. Parsifal is a fool whose process, developed musically by the interaction of leitmotifs that redefine meaning and time, leads him to enlightenment. Wagner considered *Parsifal* not simply an opera, but a stage dedication festival play.[50] The music itself is the ritual by which desire is purged and compassion acquired. Wagner also saw his own struggles in all of the characters in *Parsifal*. Their grappling with suffering, ritual and meaning toward a greater purpose is his own disillusionment with false certainty and ensuing search for truth. Very much aware of the pulls of certainty, teleology and desire, Wagner acknowledges and manipulates listeners' experiences of these through intense chromaticism, syncopation and instability until enlightenment is achieved through the lengthy process of coming to unknow. Regarding *Satyagraha*, though, Glass comments, "in a way, the whole opera is about his inner world. It's the outer world and the inner world. Gandhi was a great foil in that way because he lived externally these internal and spiritual processes."[51] Gandhi's inner commitment to practice permeates the entire opera.

The framework of known and unknown that has driven this paper is perhaps, as Gandhi sings at the end of *Satyagraha*, just one of many births. If consciousness is the

[50] Beckett, *Parsifal*, 87.
[51] Cooper, "Exclusive Interview," 4.

illusory and demanding world with the flaws and possibilities that *Parsifal* and *Satyagraha* make it out to be, there are infinite cycles and levels on which listeners can enlighten and be enlightened by this music. “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him,” teaches a Buddhist proverb. If there is truth in this reading of known and unknown, let it be washed away by the next listener who hears these pieces anew, lest the grasping in these words solidifies into the ignorance of knights or the blind certainty of crowds. Over this construction of words and thoughts, the fool struggles and the prophet practices on, united momentarily in this birth as opposite parts of the same unknown truth.