

A ■ A MASTER PIECE

Just a single of the feelings expressed in *The Valkyrie* could be a single aim to compose a masterpiece. In *The Valkyrie*, however, these feelings chain up and cannot be forgotten nor dissociated from the work in which we have experienced them. They are both exceptional and contradictory. I will mention just a few of them: Siegmund's total defencelessness, exhausted both mentally and physically, with no roots nor shelter, falling dejected in a stormy night, helpless from any horizon or company. The experience of a love whose search for seduction seems to vanish in the face of the strong fusion among equals which are so identified with one another, which are one same thing –one same body, one same lineage and an only soul-, that nothing can be imagined without Siegmund and Sieglinde sharing it. Hunding's great animosity towards the stranger; his instinctive unfriendliness, his mistrust, his hostility disguised as a glacial and ritual hospitality get to such a tense point that the fight hand to hand seems even liberating. Also, Sieglinde's compassion and tenderness towards a stranger that can offer nothing else but a dejected body and the thirst that she soothes with the drink of mead. Or the physical enthusiasm that comes after the pulling up of the sword Nothung from the ash tree with such a scream that not a single spectator forgets. And, at the same time, I insist, Siegmund's treacherously defeat, which leaves him defenceless and with no opportunity to fight for his life. Apart from this, we also find Fricka's moral intransigence, which rummages with an implacable logic into Wotan's conjugal weakness. And Brünnhilde's piety when she decides to protect Sieglinde, knowing that she is violating, with a rebellious resolution, the explicit laws coming from the god of gods. We must not forget the love between father and daughter, made up from what must intransigently be done and from the compromises derived from law and rank; but also so tender and close that it will be hard to find it in any other time and aesthetics. Many, very intense and, as I said, contradictory.

When Hegel wrote "the work of art (...) is a way of placing in the face of man what man is", he wasn't talking about moral options that would permit us to make affectionate identifications or disapproving rejections. In art, we have to recognise that what is expressed by Hunding –and also by Sieglinde-, is part of ourselves: what we feel and what we are. It is not, however, the reflection of our personal experience: it is the expression. Because, unlike what is real, in art we contemplate the experience with the shape through which it is expressed. Not as a fact that involves ourselves, but as the contemplation of pure expression.

Due to the singular way in which it is delivered, this feeling acquires a new and remarkable complexity. This is why we can partly identify it and recognise it, somehow entailing a new experience.

In Wagner, it is not only the text –of a high quality-, what gives complexity to the emotion –each of the feelings I mentioned before-, but overall the music, truly exceptional, that has two characteristics that make it revolutionary. On the one hand, it is not only composed by guiding motives –also called leitmotiv-, but also, and overall, it is based on the architecture of these motives. This fact makes us perceive each situation, each feeling and each object, not as the vehicle of a univocal sensation –no matter how intense it may be-, but of a very complex emotion. Just as our own ones: not only the sublime ones, if we ever have the chance to feel them, but also the most common and daily ones. During Siegmund and Sieglinde's first love dialogue various motives converge –and I quote, in honour of Joaquim Pena, his text: "reached ideal", "love", "pain", "faintness" and "anxiety". Here, it is not essential the precision of the analysis, because what really is important is to point out how that complexity –what Hegel used to define as "the highest degree of dialectic" and used to identify with the fullness of romantic art-, is expressed through the convergence of contradictory musical motives in the same situation. And, thanks to the music, what is just an incident of the mythological intrigue turns into a universal experience. Because music, just as Schopenhauer wrote, "does not express this or that particular and definite joy, this or that sorrow, or pain (...) but joy, sorrow and pain themselves". What we share with people from any time and place. What makes art universal.

And, on the other hand, according to Wagnerian conception, the aim of art is not the external action, but the inner world, and this is why music narrates from inside the emotion. Wagner does not try, therefore, to musically illustrate actions nor describe emotions, but to express that particular action through the emotion of the person who experiments it. This fact causes, for instance, Wotan's farewell at the end of the play to be not only the information of a fact, but above all, the authentic dramatic

action: the complex emotions which converge inside the character's heart. This is why the artist is not the individual who, impressed by reality, decides to reproduce it with emotive or ethical traces; neither must the spectator be the one who feels curiosity towards the plot. Now, art's most important purpose is not external action, but the inner world, and the watcher must substitute curiosity by contemplation.

This multiplicity of information provided by The Valkyrie –which Wagner's genius make exceptional-, is just a component of what he builds with his art in The Valkyrie. The other aspect, which is essential, is the integration of all these feelings in two higher levels of his dramatic architecture: that of Die Walküre's plot and the whole of Der Ring des Nibelungen. Because, just as I see it, the core of The Ring –Germanic mythology material that was articulated by some of the big ideas over which the intellectual world of his time debated-, is centred in Siegfried, the pure hero that lives with no fear and who is, in fact, the ideal of the new man that is beyond gregarious conventionalities and the tyranny of power and gold. Free, superior and happy, he will only be defeated by deceit and betrayal. Thus, The Valkyrie, framed by the Tetralogy, is destined to show this hero's origin. Referring to Siegfried, Nietzsche said that "his birth is already an announcement". And so it is, indeed.

This approach is, in fact, Romantic. Because, for Romanticism, the aesthetic norm –and also the ethical one-, is not understood as a guarantee for art anymore, as all the classicisms said, but as its gag. When an emotion is extraordinary, they assure, there is no way to express it and it has to transgress art's traditional moulds in order to be and communicate itself. As far as aesthetics is concerned, Wagner, as it is obvious, considers soon that the opera principles of his time are neither adequate nor sufficient in order to express what he wants to communicate. This is the reason why he conceives a new art.

I believe this is the same criteria by which, in The Valkyrie, Siegfried's love is so far away from the bourgeois conjugal models and from Christian morality. He is, most of the time, their counterpart. Because this new man, of unequivocal redeeming vocation, seems to be prepared to be the other side of the Christian Messiah: if one is a model of tamedness –the Lamb of God-, Siegfried –"as a smiling lion", in words of Nietzsche-, is free, powerful, vital and transgressor. And, if one is the son of a virgin, Siegfried will be the song of love–that of Siegmund and Sieglinde-, an incestuous and adulterous love which affirms itself through the transgression of the explicit laws given by the god of gods, just as Brünnhilde must do in order to save Sieglinde. The uppermost transgression, then, is a signal of the most authentic, fervent and, over all, freest passion.

Ramon Pla i Arxé
University of Barcelona