

9 ■ NINE VISIONS

02 ■ FROM MEDIAEVAL MYTH TO RICHARD WAGNER

And when (...) he left the battle, he found in the woods a bunch of superbly looking women, though one of them stood over the rest. (Völsunga-Saga)

In Germanic mythology, the Valkyrie is “the one that chooses” (kyrja derives from the verb kjósa, “to choose”) the warriors that have fallen in the battlefield (valr) to take them to the Valhöll, the gods’ dwelling, where they will have to remain until Ragnarök’s great confrontation, the end of the world. As Odinn’s announcers, their presence in the battlefield presage the hero his death. This is why heroes are advised not to raise their eyes to the sky for fear to meet the spirit (fylgia, “who precedes”) or valkyrie. Although some of their traits connect them to the amazons, their warrior quality is not the most significant one. Above all, valkyries have to do with protecting souls, supernatural beings that accompany people during their lives.

Brynhildr says two kings were fighting. One was Hjälmgunarr. He was an old and great warrior, and Odinn had promised him to reach victory; the other one was Ganar o Audabródir. I made Hjälmgunarr fall in the battle, but Odinn stung me with the sleepiness thorn to avenge him and told me I would never marry anyone that knew what fear was. (Sigurdr’s Saga)

The valkyrie’s supernatural nature, tightly united to virginity, disappears with marriage. This is the god’s sentence. Richard Wagner keeps totally faithful to his sources, changing what drama asks him to change; this is the reason why he gets rid of characters and reduces the broad lineage of the Völsunga’s (Wälsung, in his version) to two generations; he insists on Siegmund and Sieglinde’s incestuous love, adapting, as usual, an archaic world to other senses, to other intentions which can be seen from the mythical bottom. At the end of the second day’s journey, everything is ready for the emergence of the hero of the Tetralogy, Siegfried. In this drama where the archaic inner-self remains untouched, a great fresco of gold and blood, as Renauld-Krantz would call the Icelandic saga, everything moves towards the great flame, the fire circle that surrounds the sleeping beauty, the fire circle that Odinn/Wotan accepts to light giving in Brünnhilde’s demands. This valkyrie’s greatness, turned into an ordinary woman, free from the pacts that chain up the god, and faithful to the given word –unlike her lover, far from her archetype, the sinister and vengeful Brynhildr-, makes her stand out over everyone else and places her as the very heroine of Der Ring. (Excerpts from the Barcelona Opera House programme)

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