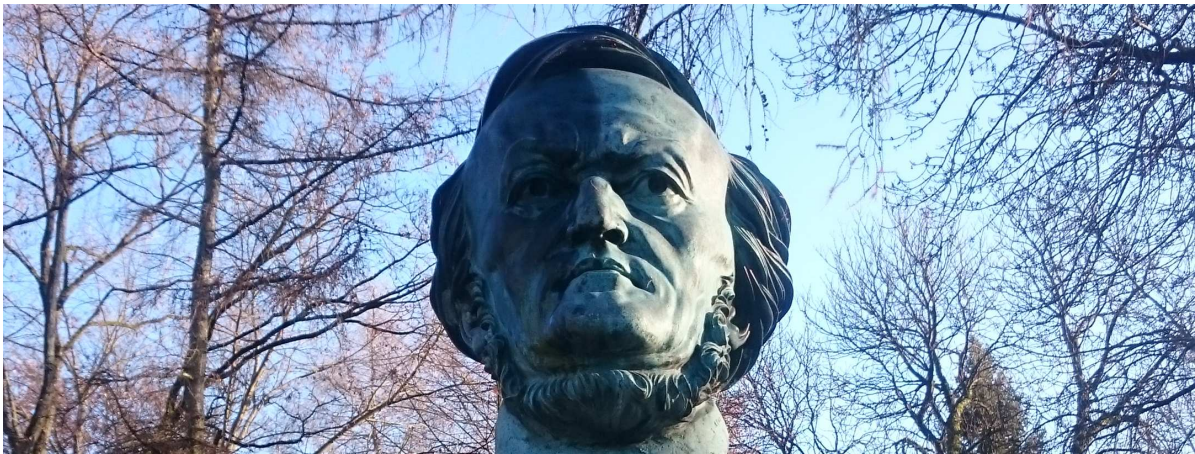


Wagner or how to suffer (like a German)

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I was born and raised in Germany. Maybe I will go so far to actually call myself German. I think it is not the worst nationality one can have (maybe to have a nationality in general is a bad thing, but that should be discussed somewhere else). Germany has many things to offer: There are some of the nicest (and at the same time most boring) cars, it has a really good, pork-based diet and the beer there is just not from this world (OK, it is, but it is also really good). Germans like to do stuff the right way, and they go most of the time all the way. Even their fuck-ups are always major, in fact so major that we have managed to do the worst fuck-up in history. But there is something Germans like even more than all of this: suffering! I consider the fact that Schopenhauer, who came up with the idea »All living is suffering«, was German not by chance.

Imagine the typical day of a German: He wakes up next to his beautiful wife on a sunny day with the bluest possible sky. The birds are singing in the garden, which is full

of colorful flowers (and not so many "Gartenzwergen"). He is sitting at breakfast and thinks about what to do on this nice day... "Why not do some nice suffering?" Not that he did not have the same idea the day before and the day before the day before and the day before the day before the day before... (I think you got the picture by now).

As a first idea, he thinks about just putting the fork into his leg, but this would be too easy. He is German, he comes from a civilised country, and the civilised way to suffer is through culture! So what does this German do to get a good deal of suffering? He goes to the opera and listens to some of Richard Wagner's works. Richard Wagner, this great composer from the 19th century. Even if one does not admit that he has written some of the greatest operas (or in his words: "Musikdramen"), one can easily admit that he wrote some of the longest. The "Ring of the Nibelungen" alone contains about 16 hours of music and spans over four days! He has built a whole theater (the "Festspielhaus") originally only for this opus magnum. Until this day, only his works have been presented there (OK, this is not totally true, for two times they played Beethoven's ninth symphony. But what are two times in over 100 years?). Nothing else than the deliberate will to suffer can explain what every year again in the hottest period of the summer there at the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth (in southern Germany) is happening. People spend hundreds of Euros to sit together with more than a thousand other people for 16 hours in summer in a theater without air condition on the simplest and most uncomfortable seats to listen to this music. Every year the directors of this festival of sorrow choose a certain number of Wagner's plays for staging (they are usually on the schedule for a few years). But it will always be a selection out of this ten plays Wagner had chosen worthy enough to be played at this venue. There will be nothing new in the nearest future (also not in the distant future. Wagner will not write any new play anymore). But every year again, there are ten thousands of people waiting for a ticket to just one of these stagings, and some are waiting for about ten years. Like I said before: The deliberate will to suffer. But is it only this suffering which motivates people that strong that they will go through all of this?

Let us take a look at maybe his most adventurous work: "Tristan und Isolde", this probably most emotional and most sexually charged Musikdrama of all times. You should know that singers have literally died playing the role of Tristan and conductors have literally died conducting the "Tristan"! And there are still singers dying to play the role of Tristan, and there are still conductors dying to conduct this fine piece of art.

After Tristan and Isolde accidentally took a love potion instead of poison (which would have taken them out of their misery but was changed by Isolde's friend Brangäne),

they decide to make their lives even more complicated by beginning to love each other desperately. She is engaged to this old but friendly king Marke, who is by the way at the same time Tristan's boss. And you can imagine that this is not the best constellation to provide a good base for a happy work relationship. When Tristan and Isolde meet again in the second act, they cannot hold on to their love anymore and hump each other's bones (but not before they finished some serious talking). Of course they get caught. Tristan's jealous little coworker following the name of Melot (no, not Merlot!) gave it away. Until this moment, Wagner actually composed pure sex in terms of music. Even more (or should I probably say less?), he composed a "coitus interruptus" (to rephrase the thought of Stephen Fry). Hearing this will really make you shiver and dissolve in desire. Wagner must have had a real hard-on while writing this music. Unfortunately for Tristan, the only bodily fluid flowing at this moment was his own blood. He was injured by Melot (not the same kind of being injured you feel after a good share of Merlot). That takes us to the third act. Tristan is hiding back at his house in the countryside. With him is his friend Kurwenal (these names alone hold the potential to make you suffer!). You can now get out a pack of napkins. What now follows for about an hour are waves over waves of winy, slimy self-pity. Starting to tell the whole rotten story from the beginning while he is slowly dying (you will find yourself in the place of wishing him a faster death), Tristan is dragging himself over the stage from the left to the right, from the right to the left, from the left to the right, from the... (again, you get the picture). He is waiting for Isolde to give him a last vow of love, so he can die happily (what the hell!). And in the end there she is, singing her last aria, the "Liebestod" (love death) and finally dies together with Tristan..... And this music and these final words make up for everything that was before, for every time you thought during the first act: "Come on guys, do not talk that much, get it on.", for every time you thought during the second act: "Seriously guys, it's simple, get it on, you do not have to talk that much." (OK, there they finally were getting some action), for every time you thought during the third act: "Die man, die! Please, finally die right now!". It makes up for everything beyond that, it is pure beauty. It is dissolution of yourself in music, the forgetting of all suffering, it is freedom. It is pure solitude, transcendence, fear, love, it is nothing and everything.

You will find yourself exhausted in the best possible way and you wish to suffer again. You want to go through all these stages again to finally be free again. And you will. I find these moments in all the other works of Richard Wagner: "Der fliegende Holländer", "Tannhäuser", "Lohengrin", "Die Meistersinger", "Parsifal" and of course the "Ring". But

you should try it yourself, there is always a theater around which will play some Wagner. Feel free to become free!

So in the end, I like to suffer this way. Does it make me more German? No, by no means. Beauty has nothing to do with nationality, it is universal and at the same time just personal. I am human, I am just looking for something nice in life and if it takes a couple of hours of suffering, I am fine with that. Is this real suffering? No, of course it is not, it is opera and real life is not an opera.