



**ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND DRAMA**

# **Violin solos in Wagner's Operas**

## **A thematic and symbolic analysis**

Guillem Gadea Salom

**Degree project, Master of Fine Arts in Music with specialization in  
Orchestra Performance  
Spring Semester 2019**

Degree Project, 30 higher education credits

Master of Fine Arts in Symphonic Orchestra Performance, Academy of Music and  
Drama, University of Gothenburg

Spring Semester 2019

Author: Guillem Gadea Salom

Title: Violin solos in Wagner Operas

Subtitle: - A thematic and symbolic analysis

Supervisor: Tilman Skowroneck

Examiner: Joel Speerstra

## ABSTRACT

An analysis of the violin solos in Richard Wagner's operas, from a symbolic,  
narrative and musical point of view, and how it translates into a better performance.

Key words: Wagner, Leitmotif, Theme, Violin, Symbolism, Opera, Solos.

# Index

Introduction.....	3
Objectives.....	4
Biographical notes.....	6
List of characters.....	7
Analysis of the solos.....	12
Performance considerations.....	28
Conclusion.....	29
Bibliography.....	30

## **Introduction**

Since the birth of modern orchestra at the beginning of the sixteenth century the violin has been one of its leading instruments within it. This leading role has contributed to the establishment of the concertmaster as one of the higher hierarchical figures within the orchestra, being after the conductor, the person that has more capacity of making musical decisions, especially in the strings section.

This relevance is reflected in the emergence of the solo passages for the concertmaster, in which he plays by himself one motif, melodic line, etc. with different approaches, structures and characteristics being used depending on the style, composer, orchestration, etc.

Additionally, in the nineteenth century and later, with the appearance of Wagner's stage works, the tone poems of the likes of Franz Liszt and Richard Strauss, the representation of non-musical ideas, moods, images, landscapes, etc. became more common, which raises the question of which are the tools, orchestrations, instruments, etc. used by the composers in these representations.

For this assignment I have decided to focus on the violin solos in Richard Wagner's operas, as his use of symbolism and musical illustration of non-musical realities in his dramas makes these operas specially interesting for their analysis of the thematic, narrative and emotional aspects, as well as how this shall be translated into a better performance of his works.

## Objectives

The present assignment has the purpose of analysing the violin solos in Wagner's Operas, both musically and symbolically. Wagner's dramas are works that are very complex, with many veiled meanings and symbols which require a careful study in order to properly express them in a satisfactory performance.

Examining this solos will also gives us a better understanding of Wagner compositional style, his orchestration, which musical means he uses in order to articulate his ideas in his dramas, as well as a greater comprehension of his works.

Additionally, discovering the concepts or ideas he associates to the solo violin will help us in achieving a more profound interpretation of his work, as we will have a better understanding of the philosophical framework and narrative implications of his Music-Dramas.

In order to give some context to better grasp the objectives above stated, I will give a brief biographical entry about Wagner, as well as a concise summary of the characters of his Dramas which are of greater importance for the present work.

Then I'll proceed on presenting the solos giving the needed context, analysing their more distinctive musical characteristics, their motivic connections as well as their presumable meaning; relating them in the base of their common features.

Finally I'll reflect on the previous analysis and address the implications they have for me as a violinist regarding the performance of the solos.

In concrete points, I will direct my investigation towards the following goals:

1. Analyse the musical aspect of the solos, the importance they possess in the musical texture which they appear, the expression marks used, etc. and recognize their distinctive features.

2. Reach a better understanding of these solos by taking into account how they are fused in the narrative structure of the work, the characters they are associated with, which are the concepts conveyed in the solos, as well as find if there is consistency throughout Wagner's dramatic work regarding the themes or motifs which are used. .

3. Use the gathered information to improve the performance of the cited solos, with a more reflective and reasoned approach that will make easier to manifest their essential meaning and purpose.

## Biographical Notes

Wilhelm Richard Wagner (1813-1883) was a German composer, writer, and conductor, mainly known for his operas, is a central figure of the nineteenth century; his musical production, is one of the most influential in western music, having deeply affected later figures such as Anton Bruckner, Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler among many others.

His most important contribution to music comes from the progressive harmonies, innovative orchestration, rich textures and his approach to Operas as *Gesamtkunstwerke* or “total works of art” where he tried to combine drama, music and visual arts in what he called “the Drama of the Future”<sup>1</sup>, where himself, breaking with the general tradition, wrote his own librettos.

One of the most innovative aspects of his stage works is the extensive use of *leitmotifs* (“leading motif”), recurring musical themes that represent a character, an idea or a place, being “the smallest structural unit possessing thematic identity”<sup>2</sup>

A very large figure during his lifetime, Wagner was able to establish close relationships with other remarkable characters of his time, such as Franz Liszt, Friedrich Nietzsche and Ludwig II of Bavaria, among others. Although remaining a highly controversial figure, his influence has transcended the realm of music, projecting his ideas until today in many spheres, philosophy, politics, conducting, as well as still being a central figure in research and academic works.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Wagner *Prose works* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892), 155.

<sup>2</sup> John D. White, *The analysis of music* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

## List of characters<sup>3</sup>

I will cite here a brief summary<sup>4</sup> of the characters of greater significance for the present work, to have a better context for the understanding of the violin solos that I'll expose later.

### Tannhäuser

**Tannhäuser:** A Minnesinger<sup>5</sup> that has surrendered himself to sensual and erotic desires at the hand of the Pagan goddess Venus, naiads, sirens among other fantastic creatures in the Venusberg<sup>6</sup>, will try to achieve redemption joining a band of pilgrims that are going to Rome. After being denied absolution by the Pope, the contemplation of the dead body of her loved one Elisabeth ultimately redeems him grace of a ultimate plea of forgiveness.

### Der Ring des Nibelungen

**The Ring:** Forged with the gold of the Rhine it grants magical invincibility to its wielder. The greed of everyone who yields to possess it will cause a series of events that will end in the destruction and rebirth of the world in the ending of the last of the four dramas of the "Ring" cycle, "Götterdämmerung".

**Alberich:** The king of the race of dwarves known as the Nibelungs and father of Hagen, he is the Nibelung referred in the title of the cycle. He forfeits love after the Rhinemaidens' rejections to his approaches and then steals the Rhinegold. After Wotan and Loge strip him off the ring he places a curse on it, granting death and despair to its bearer.

<sup>3</sup> We'll be following Charles Osborne, *The complete operas of Wagner : a critical guide* (London: Grange Books, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> The Operas will be presented in chronological order and the Characters in alphabetical order.

<sup>5</sup> German lyric poets of the Middle High German period.

<sup>6</sup> A legendary location in German folklore where a knight adores a fairy queen or a pagan goddess (Venus in this case).

**Flosshilde:** She is one of the Rhinemaidens, guardians of the gold of the Rhine, from whom the Nibelung Alberich, after renouncing Love, takes the gold in order to turn it into the magic Ring.

**Freia:** Goddess of love and youth, her loss at the hands of the giants Fafner and Fasolt as payment for the construction of Valhalla, the gods' castle, will result in the momentary loss of youth of the other gods, as her golden apples had kept them eternally young. This will cause Wotan to seize Alberich's ring in order to exchange it with the giants to regain her.

**Fricka:** The Goddess of marriage, she is Wotan's wife and sister of Freia, Donner and Froh. In "Das Rheingold" she argues with Wotan about the pact he made with the giants in regard of Freia and Valhalla. She is very possessive of her husband as it is implied that he has been unfaithful to her.

**Hagen:** The bastard son of Alberich, in the last of the Cycle dramas, "Götterdämmerung" he will trick his half-brothers Gutrune and Gunther into a plot to win the Ring for himself that ultimately will cause Siegfried murder at his hands and the demise of the gods.

**Loge:** The god of fire and trickery, will help the other gods in freeing Freia when she is being held captive by the Giants and will help Wotan in taking the Rhinegold and the Ring from Alberich.

**Siegfried:** The son of Sigmund and Sieglinde the twin mortals who are the offspring of Wotan. Siegfried is the main character of the third music drama of the Ring, bearing his name.

Siegfried symbolises the free man, the strength and the primitive and irrational violence of youth, he is noble, vigorous and doesn't know fear. He takes the Ring from Fafner (now in the form of a dragon) after killing him, and will rescue the Valkyrie Brünnhilde, whom after Siegfried's death will cause by the force of her love, the cleansing of the ring's curse and the renewal of the world.

**Wotan:** The King of the Gods, he is the god of power, knowledge and contracts. He is forced by to the other Gods to keep Freia free from the Giants hand, though he promised her to them in exchange for the completion of the Valhalla castle, as without her the Gods will lose their youth and their power. Gives in the Magic ring to the Giants after having stolen it from Alberich with Loge's help to free Freia. His incapacity to act in the mortal world for having to keep his oaths, will make him more apathetic to the destiny of the world, and after Siegfried's death and Brünnhilde's immolation he will enable the destruction of Valhalla, the gods' residence, along with them.

### **Tristan und Isolde:**

**Braggaene:** Isolde's maid, she is the catalyst of the events of the Drama, when the death potion she prepared for Tristan becomes a Love potion instead when Isolde drinks half of it, thus sparking the irresistible passion that will consume the two. During Tristan and Isolde's love duet in the second act she unsuccessfully tries to warn the couple that the night is coming to an end and to remain alert, but they ignore her, thus getting caught by King Marke's men and eventually resulting in the death of Tristan.

**Isolde:** She is an Irish princess promised in marriage to King Marke, King of Cornwall, she tries to kill Tristan with a Death potion for having killed his previous fiancé, but the potion causes instead an overwhelming love for each other. She meets with Tristan in the King's castle, betraying the King and risking herself and Tristan. The couple will get caught by Merlot, a courier of the King, who deeply wounds Tristan. She, who is the only one that can cure Tristan's fatal wound, can't reunite with him in time to save him as he has been taken to his castle in Kareol to escape from the King, and after seeing Tristan dying in front of her, she dies at the end of the so called "Liebestod" or "love death" aria.

**Tristan:** A Breton knight and adopted heir of King Marke, after drinking a magic potion falls deeply in Love with Isolde. They meet at nighttime in a rapturous embrace but they eventually get caught in their infidelity by King Marke and his men.

He fights with Melot, one of King Marke's knights, and gets fatally wounded. He is taken by his retainer and close friend Kurwenal to Tristan's estate Kareol in order to protect him from King Marke's men and to give him time to heal. There he will wait for Isolde to come, but his health will quickly deteriorate causing him visions caused by delirium. Ultimately Isolde reaches him but he is in such a bad condition that he dies in her arms.

### **Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg:**

**Hans Sachs:** Arguably the central figure in the Opera, he is a shoemaker, poet and Meistersinger (master singer), he is believed to be the finest of the Meistersinger and is beloved among the townsmen. He refuses to participate in the singing contest held for the hand of the beautiful Eva, instead he teaches the young knight Walther von Stolzing the rules of the Meistersinger, so Walther can win the contest and marry Eva, fulfilling the couple's wishes.

### **Parsifal:**

**Amfortas:** The King of the Grail Knights, has a wound caused by his own Holy Spear, one of the relics he has vowed to protect, after it was taken away from him by a seductive woman (Kurwenal), both causing him physical pain as well as dishonour. He is absolved in the end by Parsifal, "the pure fool".

**Kundry:** A woman accursed with eternal rebirths (the Indian doctrine of Metempsychosis)<sup>7</sup> for having laughed at Christ on the cross, until, as Wagner writes: "the purest, most youthful man were to resist her more powerful seduction"<sup>8</sup>. She will try to tempt Parsifal as she did before with Amfortas but she will fail this time and years later will achieve redemption during Parsifal's Eucharist.

<sup>7</sup> Ulrike Kienzle, "Parsifal and religion: a Christian Music drama?" In *A Companion to Wagner's Parsifal* ed. by William Kinderman and Katherine R. Sayer (Camden House, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Richard Wagner and Joachim Bergfeld Wagner, *Das braune Buch: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1865-1882* (Zürich: Atlantis Verl, 1975).

**Parsifal:** A young man who can't seem to remember his past, he will fulfil the prophecy of the innocent man filled with compassion that will heal Amforta's wound. After being able to resist sensual advances from the flower-maidens and Kundry, he regains possession of the Holy Spear; and after years of wandering will return to the Castle of the Grail, as the rightful redeemer, thus becoming the King of The Grail Knights.

## Analysis of the solos

Here we will go through the violin solos of Wagner's operas organised by their similarities and distinctive characteristics. I'll give the narrative context as well as the text of the singers' which they are connected to.

The first solo we are going to examine appears in the first scene of "Das Rheingold" where Flosshilde seductively calls the Nibelung Alberich before mocking him along with his sisters. Although having been rejected and ridiculed by the other two rhinemaidens moments ago, he falls under the spell of Flosshilde as the alluring quality of his song, reinforced by the solo violin proves too tempting for the love-hungry dwarf.

Figure 1 "Das Rheingold" Scene One<sup>9</sup>

The musical score for Figure 1 consists of three staves. The top staff is the Violin Solo, starting with a 7-measure rest followed by a melodic line. The middle staff is the vocal line for Flosshilde, with lyrics "Was zankst du, Alp Schon so verzagt? Du" and a dynamic marking of *p*. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, marked *pp dolce* and *Tutti*, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a 4-measure rest. The score ends with the lyrics "Soll ich dir".

"See Music Example 1"

Flosshilde: "Why chid'st thou elf? So soon cast down? But twain hast thou wooed, try but the third one, sweetest balm surely her love would bring!"

Alberich: "Soothing song comes to my ears!  
How good that ye are not but one..."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold*. *Violine I* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1891), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold*. *Scene I. II* trans. Frederick Jameson (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d.), 69-71.

Here the solo violin appears related to two different motifs:

**Figure 2 Rhinemaidens or innocence motif:<sup>11</sup>**



**Figure 3 Pain or grief motif:**



The falling second major interval of the beginning of the Rhinemaidens theme turns into the half-step of the pain motif at the exact same moment that the solo violin stops doubling the mezzo-soprano melody of Flosshilde and starts doubling Alberich's line, thus anticipating his incoming pain.

The solo violin is marked with the indication of *zart* (tender, delicate, fragile) and *dolce*, revealing the intention of being played emphasizing the seductive nature of Flosshilde's invitation. This alluring and deceitful aspect of the violin solo it appears too in the following violin solo in "Das Rheingold".

As we will see, from now on, all solos that appear in the "Ring" cycle are based upon the Love motif, which is at first identified with the Goddess of beauty and youth Freia but later will be more commonly attached to the concept Love.

<sup>11</sup> For all the motifs of the "Ring" cycle I will use the designation given in Robert Donington, *Wagner's "Ring" and its symbols : the music and the myth* (London: Faber, 1989).

Figure 4 Love motif:



Figure 5 “Das Rheingold” Scene Two<sup>12</sup>

“See Music Example 2”

Fricka to Wotan: “*Oh, might but my husband win him the gold?*”<sup>13</sup>

We can find this solo during the gods discussion on about the Ring’s power. Loge, the god of fire and trickery, assures Fricka she could secure her husband’s faith if she possessed it, so she tries to convince Wotan to win the ring for her.

This time the solo violin plays the Freia/Love theme along with a series of ascending trills used in Loge’s motif. The violin’s melody appears here within a thinly orchestrated frame, with just the melody of Fricka , without other strings instruments and accompanying winds within *p* and *pp*. The expression mark that appears here is *dolcissimo*, making us interpret the solo as a musical depiction of the plea that Fricka directs to his husband, as she is trying to use her love as a mean to convince him. In the other hand, we can interpret this passage too as an indication of the reason that moves Fricka into wanting the Ring, in contrast to Wotan, as she is moved by her love for him contrasting with Wotan’s lust for power.

<sup>12</sup> Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Wagner, *Das Rheingold Scene I. II*, 297.

This relationship between the solo violin and seduction or supplication, it is in the next example, that appears in “Parsifal”, shown in a worst light as it is associated with the accursed Kundry.

Figure 6 “Parsifal” Act Two Scene Two<sup>14</sup>

(senza Sord.)  
Violin-Solo, ohne Dämpfer,  
nur Einer spielen.

(molto espressivo.)  
sehr ausdrucksvoll.

*f* *p dolce.* *più p*

*sfp* *p* *sfp*

con Sord:

*pp* *sfp*

*più p* *sehr gefühlvoll.*  
(con molto sentimento.)

*sfp* *pp* *sfp*

*cresc.* *tr.* *leidenschaftlich.*  
(appassionato.)

*pizz.* *senza Sord:*

“See Music Example 3”

Parsifal to Kundry: “Aye! With this accent, so called she him, and this her look, truly I know it well, this also, to him unpeaceful smiling; so tempted, aye was he by her lips, so too her neck was bending, so boldly rose her head; so lightly her locks fluttered o’er him...”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Richard Wagner, *Parsifal. Violine I* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1886), 34-35.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, trans. Margaret H. Glyn (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d.), 579-580.

We find this solo after Parsifal's fall to Kundry's temptation, he realizes that she was the one that successfully corrupted Amfortas with her deceptive charms and that she has done the same thing to him (although he is able to ultimately resist and rejects her), and is now recalling that moment, with the solo violin quoting variations of her theme to this purpose.

**Figure 7 Kundry's motif:**<sup>16</sup>



This solo consists of modifications of this motif in a highly chromatic fashion, that in addition to the high range of dynamics and abrupt contrasting rhythms successfully represents Kundry's cunning, seductive and sinful nature.

The orchestra is mostly static and only the exchange between the solo violin and the first clarinet grabs our attention, as they describe the nature of Kundry's allure which Parsifal is recalling, reinforced by the expression marks in the solo violin of *molto espressivo*, *con molto sentimento*, and *appassionato*.

The next example contributes to the relationship between the solo violin and temptation as it follows the Sirens' call in "Tannhäuser".

<sup>16</sup> Richard Bell, *Wagner's Parsifal* (La Vergne: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013).

### Example 8 “Tannhäuser” Act One Scene One<sup>17</sup>

*Eine Viol. Solo*

230 Fl. fag. *dolciss.* *dolce* *dim.*

239 *p dolciss.* *perdendosi* *pp* *p espr.*

Choir of sirens: “Near ye the strand! Near ye the land, where white arms pressing, love glowing, thronging, softly caressing still all longing”<sup>18</sup>

In this case the solo violin doesn’t hold a theme with a particular meaning, but uses a theme that appears throughout the sirens’ song section, enhancing the sensual and erotic atmosphere of the Venusberg, where Tannhäuser is being retained hostage of his carnal desires, by the pagan goddess of love Venus alongside the sirens, naiads, satyrs and other luxurious creatures that dwell there.

Here appears yet again the *dolcissimo* indication, that with the the repetition of the theme in other instruments during the solo, in unison (solo cello, clarinet, first horn) or in dialogue with the oboe and flute, helps achieving the dreamy and voluptuous climate that surrounds this section.

This same atmosphere is being used in the next solo of “Tannhäuser” where Venus tries to keep Tannhäuser captive in the Venusberg.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Wagner, *Tannhäuser. Violine I* (Berlin: Adolph Fürstner, 1890), 12.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Wagner, *Tannhäuser*, trans. John P. Jordan (Berlin: Adolph Fürstner, n.d), 100-102

Figure 9 “Tannhäuser” Act One Scene Two<sup>19</sup>

Andante  
Viol. Solo

320 *p dolce*

329 *p dolce*

339 *pp* *dolce* *p* *espress.*

348 *p* *dim.* *più p*

354 *p* *pp*

357 *pp*

360 *pp* *p dolce*

364

366 *poco rall.*

368

370 *a tempo* *pp* *p dolce* 1

<sup>19</sup> Wagner, *Tannhäuser*, 16-21.



“See Music Example 4”

Venus: *O loved one, come! See yonder Grotto, with rosy fragrance softly filled! Enchantment of fers w'wn a fod and sweetest joys of ecstasy. And resting there on softest pillow, thou shalt be free from ev'ry smart! Thy burning brow soft breezes cooling, and rapture's glow shall fill thy heart!*<sup>20</sup>

During Venus appeal to the sensual desires of Tannhäuser we encounter the Remorse motif, heavily linked throughout the Opera to Tannhäuser's struggle between his yearning for redemption and his longing for carnal love.

**Figure 10 Remorse motif:**<sup>21</sup>



Here the solo violin finds himself inside a luminous and rich orchestration, with a four-part divisi in the first and second violins and a bright woodwind section, emphasizing light and delicate textures, with trills, *leggerissimo* arpeggios that move from one instrument to another, everything within a high register, producing an otherworldly and airy mood. As with earlier examples, the solo violin part is required to be played with a tender and *espressivo* character as the *dolce* and *dolcissimo* marks appear periodically.

<sup>20</sup> Wagner, Tannhäuser, 146-148.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Klindorth, ed. *Tannhäuser* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1895).

In the next example we'll see the violin solo in a more positive light, as we can't find any trace of deception, mockery or lustful feelings associated with it.

Figure 11 “Siegfried” Act Two Scene Two<sup>22</sup>

“See Music Example 5”

Siegfried: “*On my mother who lived on earth!*”<sup>23</sup>

At the end of Siegfried’s reflection on who his parents are, he wishes that he could see his mother, then the solo violin emerges with the Love motif, representing the feelings that would awake their encounter, or maybe the Love that Sieglinde would have professed to Siegfried, manifested in musical terms.

Here the atmosphere is very peaceful and calm with a very clear harmony, without any movement in the horns and basses, and gentle arpeggios in the strings, which are divided in a broad but transparent divisi. We found again the *zart* mark, indicating that the solo violin should be played in a *dolce* and tender manner.

In the next example, appearing in the next opera of the “Ring” cycle, this good-natured approach to the violin solo remains.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Wagner, *Siegfried. Violine I* (Mainz: Schott, 1891), 35.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Wagner, *Siegfried*, trans. Frederick Jameson (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d), 568-569.

Figure 12 “Götterdämmerung” Act One Scene One<sup>24</sup>



Gutrune to Hagen: “If he of heroes be first on earth, the fairest women in the world long since would have won his love.”<sup>25</sup>

This solo appears during Hagen’s conversation with Gutrune and his brother Gunther, where he tries to persuade them to act according to a plan he has designed to take the Ring from Siegfried’s hand. Hagen wants Gutrune to marry Siegfried but she is reluctant, as she doubts that she is capable of gaining Siegfried’s love, as being the mightiest of heroes probably will be loved by someone more worthy than her. This suspicion is true, as the Valkyrie Brünnhilde has already won Siegfried’s love, presented here in the solo violin as we can infer from the use of the love motif.

Once again the *ausdrucksf. voll* indication, remarking the espressivo character of the brief solo and the warm-hearted and truthful character of Brünnhilde’s love for Siegfried. Although the score is marked with *piano* the relative stationary nature of the orchestration makes the solo violin emerge as the most important remark to Gutrune’s melody.

The last example of the violin solos of the “Ring” cycle develops too the love motif, this time with an interesting divergence.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Wagner, *Götterdämmerung. Violine I* (Mainz: Schott, 1893), 14.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*, trans. Frederick Jameson (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d), 231-232.

Figure 13 “Das Rheingold” Scene Three<sup>26</sup>



Alberich: “Lapped in gently wafting breezes ye who now live, laugh and love with golden energy grasp, ye godly ones all shall be captured.”



“See Music Example 6”

Alberich: “All that have life shall eke for swear it!  
Enchanted by gold, the greed for gold shall enslave you!”<sup>27</sup>

This solo appears when Alberich threatens Wotan and Loge, who had come to the Nibelheim (Home of the Nibelungs) in order to take the ring from him. The love motif is presented with a high degree of chromaticism compared to earlier examples, and the prevalence of the diminished fifth successfully shows the failed notion of Love that Alberich possesses, enhanced by the harmonic structure of the segment, rich in dissonances and agitation depicted with the tremolo in the strings.

The different endings of the two phrases of the violin eloquently depicts the future fall of the gods; whereas the first time it maintains its strength as shown in the crescendo,

<sup>26</sup> Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, 33.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold. Scene III. IV*, trans. Frederick Jameson (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d.), 78-82.

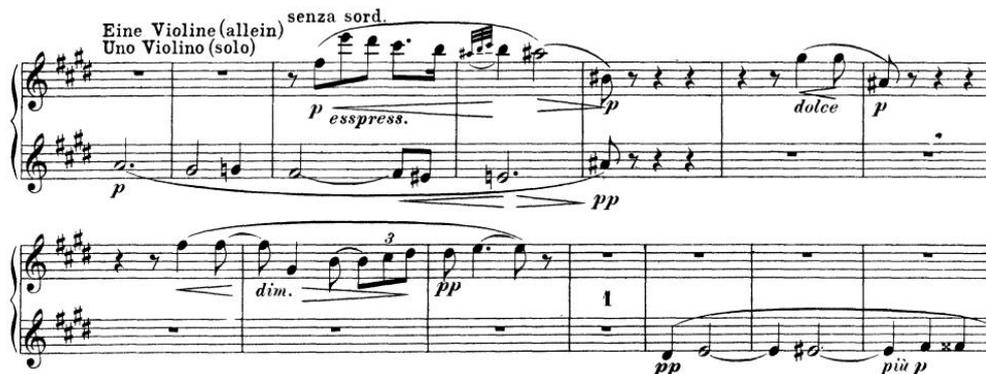
the second time, the love motif, here identified with the gods, loses its energy and decays inevitably, incapable of reaching the force of the *fp* in the strings.

The association with love is continued in other dramas such as “Tristan und Isolde”, where the “love potion” motif appears in the solo violin.

**Figure 14 Love potion motif:**<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 15 “Tristan und Isolde” Act Three Scene One**<sup>29</sup>



“See Music Example 7”

Tristan to Kurwenal: “On board Isolda, see, she smiles, with the cup that reconciles. Dost thou see? Dost thou see now?”<sup>30</sup>

Tristan is waiting for Isolde’s arrival to heal his wound, and while he asks his friend Kurwenal if he too can see her, but everything is in his imagination, as his health is rapidly declining, and this delusion only reveal us his deeply-ill state.

<sup>28</sup> Roger Scruton, *Death-devoted heart : sex and the sacred in Wagner’s “Tristan and Isolde.”* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde. Violino I* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1892), 52.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* trans. H. and F. Corder (Mainz: Ernst Eulenberg, n.d).

As in the Figure 4 the motif of the solo violin also appears in other instruments, this time in the oboe and clarinet, helping achieve the illusory character of the fragment. The *espressivo* mark as well as the *cresc.* and *dim.* Reinforces the longing aspect of Tristan’s visions.

In the next example this device of the repetition of a motif in different instruments to produce this dreamy and distant atmosphere it is used again.

Figure 16 “Tristan und Isolde” Act Two Scene Two<sup>31</sup>

The musical score for Figure 16 consists of four staves. The top staff is for a solo violin, labeled 'Eine Violine (allein) Uno Violino (solo)'. It begins with a motif of eighth notes, some grouped in triplets, marked 'p dolce'. This motif is repeated with 'espress.' and 'dim. pp' markings. The second and third staves are for two violins, labeled '2 Violini'. They play a similar motif, marked 'pp' and 'espress.', with 'dim. pp' markings. The bottom staff is for a cello or double bass, marked 'pp' and 'morendo'. The score is in 3/4 time and D major.

“See Music Example 8”

Brangaene to Tristan and Isolde: “*I foresee warn you woe is near, waken to my words of fear!*”<sup>32</sup>

During Tristan and Isolde encounter during the night, Isolde’s maid Brangaene tries in vain to alert of the couple as she is keeping watch so the lovers do not get caught by the King Marke’s men.

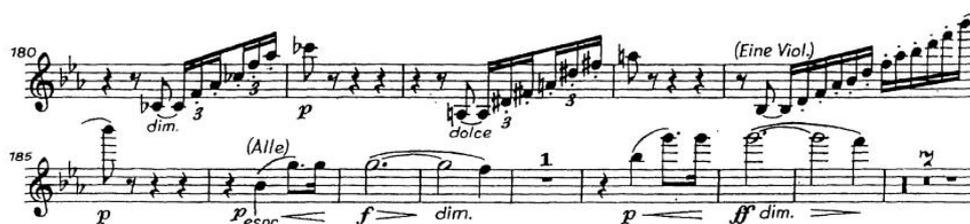
The solo is composed of two different motifs of no particular meaning, each of them comprised of two bars, that appear throughout the Brangaene’s call, in different instruments, like the solo cello, solo viola and divisi violin, avoiding a dense sound to successfully present Brangaene’s plea from a distance, as she is singing without being on stage. Once again the *dolce* and *espressivo* indications, emphasize the tender and loving character of the solo violin.

<sup>31</sup> Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, 34.

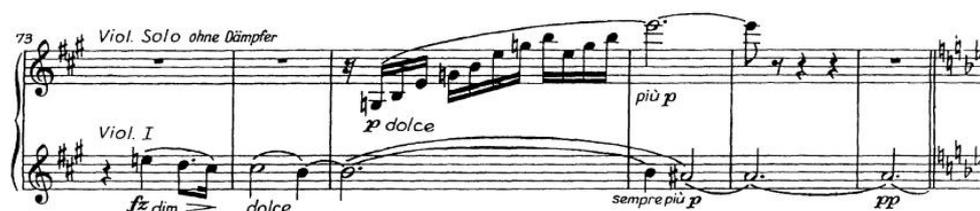
<sup>32</sup> Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, 577-583.

The next two examples share the same main characteristics as they use the solo violin as a tool to broaden the colour of the orchestra, as different motifs that have been appearing during the Venusberg section are presented here in the solo violin to enrich the orchestration with the grace of a lone string instrument.

**Figure 17 “Tannhäuser” Act One Scene One**<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 18 “Tannhäuser” Act One Scene Two**<sup>34</sup>



Venus to Tannhäuser: *“Hast thou so soon forgotten, how thou once didst suffer, and now here knowst happiness?”*<sup>35</sup>

These two examples share the similar rising arpeggio figure, and as a recurrent motive in the initial scenes of the opera, they strengthen the association of the solo violin with eroticism, as seen in earlier examples related to carnality, specially in “Tannhäuser” such as Figures 4 and 5.

In contrast with the previous violin solos in Tannhäuser, the next example conveys a very different feeling as it uses the motif that represents the pardon Tannhäuser wishes to attain on his pilgrimage to Rome, which is based upon a sequence of six notes

<sup>33</sup> Wagner, *Tannhäuser*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Wagner, *Tannhäuser*, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Wagner, *Tannhäuser (Orchester-partitur)*, 123.

frequently sung by choirs in Saxony during the nineteenth century, known as the Dresden Amen.

Figure 19 Pardon motif:<sup>36</sup>



Figure 20 “Tannhäuser” Prelude Act Three<sup>37</sup>



The four part divisi in the first violins at the end of the prelude, anticipate the final redemption of Tannhäuser at the end of the opera, the mute indication as well as the lack of accompaniment in the orchestra gives this passage an otherworldly feel.

The last example I am going to comment on appears in “Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg” where the beloved Meistersinger Hans Sachs is expressing his loneliness, as he could win Eva’s hand at the song contest, but he prefers to help the knight Walther von Stolzing in doing so, fulfilling Eva’s wish.

A variation of the renunciation motif, which depicts Sachs’s sacrifice for the loving couple happiness is shown here first very briefly in the solo violin and immediately later in the whole 1<sup>st</sup> violin section, where the *cresc.* and *dim.* as in the Figure 9 express a longing mood.

<sup>36</sup> Klindorth, *Tannhäuser*.

<sup>37</sup> Wagner, *Tannhäuser*, 64.

Figure 21 Renunciation motif:<sup>38</sup>



Figure 22 “Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg” Act Three Scene Four<sup>39</sup>



Hans Sachs : “If I could only summon my muse!”<sup>40</sup>

As we’ve seen the motivic and expressive associations Wagner makes in the solo violin remain fairly consistent through his works, as they almost always revolve around love, seduction, allure, etc. The solo violin is particularly suited for those kinds of representations, as its high register makes it suitable for depictions of female characters or commonly attributed feminine traits, which with the addition of its solo condition, makes it even more apt to convey this tempting or deceitful mood.

On the other hand, the limitations of the solo violin from a volume perspective within the context a full orchestra, means that it shall be used in moments of intimacy and not very heavily orchestrated, as Wagner intelligently does, using this limitation in his favour in situations when he wants to express distance or an otherworldly atmosphere.

<sup>38</sup> Karl Klindorth, ed., *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1903).

<sup>39</sup> Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d), 65.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, trans. Frederick Jameson (London: Ernst Eulenberg, n.d), 267.

## Performance considerations

With the object of facing Wagner's violin solos with a greater perspective, I've decided to record my own interpretation of the most significant examples, taking into account the preceding thematic and symbolic examination of these solos.

The examples I've chosen<sup>41</sup> share the connection to allure and love feelings that is prevalent in Wagner's violin solos, and a certain significance within the musical context which they appear making them more interesting for a closer look.

Even if the sentiments conveyed in the solos differ from one another, they are all required to be played with a high degree of expressiveness, as noted by the recurrence of expression marks that highlight this during the solos: *dolcissimo*, *ausdrucksvoll*, *esspressivo*, *con molto sentimento*, *sehr zart*, etc.

Knowing the meaning of the themes that shape the solos, as well as their narrative importance has helped me in improving my interpretation, as it has given me a clearer sense of purpose and awareness of the emotions that shall be expressed in them.

I've tried to emphasize the *esspressivo* character of the solos paying special attention to the *vibrato*, shaping it differently for each individual case, where it may be needed a more subtle, gentle *vibrato* or a sharper, more open one. The knowledge of the symbolic meaning of the leitmotifs that appear in the solos has helped me in giving them a clearer and more purposeful musical outline, knowing which are the key elements of the solo, and thus require more attention. To properly represent this sensual quality expressed in the solos I tried to produce a continuous musical line, avoiding any abrupt changes, with well-timed shifts and gradual (in most cases) changes of character.

<sup>41</sup> Figures 1, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 15 and 16.

## Conclusion

This research about the themes and representations in Wagner's dramas has helped me achieving a better understanding of Wagner's works and as a violinist too has given me a new perspective on approaching his or any other music. Although of interest to me, the solo violin is a very concrete subject, and with a broader subject we should expect to reach even more helpful knowledge than in this case. As we've seen Wagner's music it is very carefully planned, with a lot of concealed meanings and interpretations that requires a careful and diverse study in order to grasp to some extent its intellectual profundity.

This thematic and symbolic analysis has many possibilities for later investigations, as we could translate it to any other instrument or family of instruments of the orchestra, finding the themes and characters more commonly associated to them. Based on the same principle, we could approach the investigation in inverse order, following an idea or group of ideas and recognize the instrument used to display them, analysing which are the factors taken into account to make the decision of choosing one instrument over another.

The nature of the Opera makes it the genre more prone to be object of this kind of study, as the musical description of non-musical realities is one of its key features, and in a more explicit way after the profound influence of Wagner's dramas and his use of the *leitmotiv*. Nevertheless Wagner is not the only composer and Opera is not the only genre that can be examined in this light, as symphonic poems, ballets and film music are equally apt for this type of research.

I think this kind of investigation is a very interesting subject, because it does not only help us gather new understanding of purely musical aspects, but can also explore the more elusive question of how an abstract medium such as music can successfully (or if it can at all) express an idea, material or not.

## Bibliography

- Bell, Richard. *Wagner's Parsifal*. La Vergne: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013.
- Carter, Brian. *Meaning in the Motives: an Analysis of the Leitmotifs of Wagner's Ring*, 2002.
- Donington, Robert. *Wagner's "Ring" and its symbols : the music and the myth*. London: Faber, 1989
- Kienzle, Ulrike. "Parsifal and religion: a Christian Music drama?" In *A Companion to Wagner's Parsifal* edited by William Kinderman and Katherine R. Sayer. Camden House, 2005.
- Klindorth, Karl, ed. *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1903.
- Klindorth, Karl, ed. *Tannhäuser*. New York: G. Schirmer, 1895.
- Osborne, Charles. *The complete operas of Wagner : a critical guide*. London: Grange Books, 1995.
- Scruton, Roger. *Death-devoted heart : sex and the sacred in Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde."* New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Wagner, Richard. *Das Rheingold. Violine I*. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1891.
- Wagner, Richard. *Das Rheingold. Orchester partitur Scene I. II*. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d.
- Wagner, Richard. *Das Rheingold. Orchester partitur Scene III. IV*. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d.
- Wagner, Richard. *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. Violino I*. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d.
- Wagner, Richard. *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Translated by Frederick Jameson. London: Ernst Eulenberg, n.d.
- Wagner, Richard. *Götterdämmerung. Violine I*. Mainz: Schott, 1893.
- Wagner, Richard. *Götterdämmerung*. Translated by Frederick Jameson. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d.
- Wagner, Richard. *Parsifal*. Translated by Margaret H. Glyn. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d.
- Wagner, Richard. *Parsifal. Violine I*. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1886.
- Wagner, Richard. *Prose works* . London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892  
Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d.

Wagner, Richard. *Siegfried*. Mainz: Schott, 1891.

Wagner, Richard. *Siegfried*. Translated by Frederick Jameson. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n.d.

Wagner, Richard. *Tannhäuser. Violine I*. Berlin: Adolph Füstner, 1890.

Wagner, Richard. *Tannhäuser*. Translated by John P. Morgan. Berlin: Adolph Füstner, n.d.

Wagner, Richard. *Tristan und Isolde*. Translated by H. and F. Corder. Mainz: Ernst Eulenberg, n.d.

Wagner, Richard. *Tristan und Isolde. Violino I*. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1892.

Wagner, Richard and Bergfeld, Joachim. *Das braune Buch : Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1865-1882*. Zürich: Atlantis Verl, 1975.

White, John D. *The analysis of music*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976.