THE ARTS AND THE PROFESSIONAL MAN

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Addressing a group of new graduates at the University of Melbourne almost exactly three years ago, Professor Richard Downing said "I believe the world is a good place to live in, and that it can be made a lot better. Improvements will be made, however, only as we come to a fuller understanding of ourselves and our problems. We will get there through the discoveries of the creative few." The creative few. Tonight I should like to share with you a journey of investigation into the intentions and achievements of some of these creative few working in the fine arts in the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and perhaps to come to some conclusion about how they have enriched us with insights both into the variegated workings of the human condition and into the world in which we are placed.

On the threshold of the romantic period, in the second half of the eighteenth century where we shall begin our investigations, Goethe has Faust declare in conscious defiance of St. John "In the beginning was the deed" and, from about this time, artists became ever more aware of the power of their art to translate the thoughts of small bands of philosophers into a medium that would give these thoughts a much wider dissemination and deliver them into the hands of those who would be able to take social and political action. At much the same time as Part 2 of *Faust* was taking shape, the French playwright Beaumarchais was implanting philosophical ideals that could be traced back to Voltaire, Rousseau and the *philosophes* and even beyond to the Englishman John Locke into his play *Le Mariage de Figaro*. This was a savage attack on the injustices and inequalities of the social organization of the French *ancien régime* and, after three years of official prohibition, it was finally staged in Paris in 1784, five years before the revolution. In this dramatic form the ideals of the French Enlightenment gained a wider and more popular currency, and so the inevitable downfall of the corrupt *ancien régime* was hastened. *Le Mariage de Figaro* was translated into German and, with some of the satirical sting removed, formed the basis of Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro* which opened two years later in May 1786. This was a

period of tremendous ferment. By ten years later France had been upturned by the revolution, Napoleon was beginning to take conquering French armies into Europe, and by twenty years later most of Europe had been overturned by Napoleon. What I have described here is an historical process spanning the period from, let us say, about 1750 to Waterloo in which art and artists played a significant part in realising the deed (to return to Goethe) and it is an historical process, I believe, that can be recognised in a number of other instances in the course of modern history. As the somewhat academic dictates of the Enlightenment filtered down through society they were bound to become modified distorted and misunderstood, but this is an inevitable consequence of such a process.

Romantic artists sought, rather more than their immediate predecessors, to communicate an indefinable, yet undeniable transforming experience to the individual and then, by extension, to create forces that would play their part in shaping the broader arena of society; it is this latter function we have just been considering. In his *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) Shelley went rather further in considering the second function boldly asserting that "Poets are . . . the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present . . . Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." This lofty view of the role and responsibility of the artist has remained implicit and sometimes explicit among many of the greatest of these creative few since that time. Although in a capricious vein W.H. Auden could jibe " 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world' describes the secret police, not the poets", he could endorse the spirit behind Shelley in including among the three absolute presuppositions serving as the dogmatic basis of his art that "the historical world is a redeemable world. The unfreedom and disorder of the past can be reconciled in the future."

This social consciousness, or world consciousness, or *Weltanschauung,* an ideal much upheld by German writers of the early part of the present century, was given its most universal artistic expression at the beginning of the romantic movement by a musician, Beethoven. As a musician Beethoven was heir of the classical world of Haydn and Mozart but, as a young man, he grew up in the world of the French Revolution and Napoleon. He was fired by the ideals of the brotherhood of man and freedom from tyranny and set his art to the task, no less, of proclaiming these ideals to mankind. This unprecedented orientation of the artist was matched by bold innovations and expansions in the techniques of musical language and both facets of his genius were to set their stamp on the course of artistic history for a good century. The year 1803-1804 saw the composition of

Beethoven's Third Symphony. It was designed as a musical tribute to Napoleon who was at that time the First Consul of France. As a symphony it is a work of enormous musical innovation; playing for some fifty minutes it is almost twice the length of any earlier symphony and its concentration of technical complexities was quite new. Beethoven originally inscribed on the title-page only the names "Buonaparte" and his own. When, however, news was brought to him that Napoleon had proclaimed himself emperor, Beethoven exploded with rage "Is he then, too, nothing more than an ordinary human being? Now he, too, will trample on all the rights of man and indulge only his ambition. He will exalt himself above all others, become a tyrant." He then tore the title-page in two and threw it on the floor. Only then did he give the symphony the less specific title *The Eroica.* Beethoven's only opera *Fidelio* tells the story in a compelling and winning musical language of the power of a wife's love that enables her to rescue her husband from prison where he is under threat of death for fabricated political crimes. This type of opera, where inhumane political injustice is defeated by the most human of love and devotion, was common in revolutionary France and the species became known as French rescue opera. Through the expressive depths of his music Beethoven has given a human vividness to his principal characters, to the prisoners and to the situations that involves one involuntarily in the drama and gives it a universality that utterly transcends the stereotyped patterns of conventional French rescue opera.

In the last decade of his life, Beethoven's art entered a new phase characterised by a greater technical refinement matched by a new rarefied simplicity; it was an art that concealed its immense artifice. Probably the most significant work of this period in this context is the Ninth Symphony. This is a work whose length and complexities exceed those of the *Eroica,* and its most far-reaching innovation is the use of chorus and soloists in the last movement to set Schiller's *Ode to Joy.* After the first three towering symphonic movements, the bass soloist enters towards the beginning of the fourth declaiming "O friends not these sounds, rather let us raise more pleasing and joyful ones". With these introductory words by Beethoven himself, one feels that the artist is almost dismissing the traditional role of the symphony and hurling it into a more universal arena. Later Beethoven's intentions become more explicit in the setting of the texts "Seid unschlungen Millionen" (O you millions, let me embrace you) and "alle Menschen werden Brüder" (all men shall be brothers). Whether Beethoven's works of this period be monumental like the *Missa Solemnis* and the Ninth Symphony or more intimate like the last six string quartets, they all seek a new rarefied simplicity that gives them a greater universality.

I make no apology for having recourse to the works of a musician. About the beginning of the nineteenth century and against a background of momentous social change, groups of romantic artists and writers on aesthetics began to question the ordered rationalism of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason and sought in art that which transcended the rational, which aspired to the infinite and inexpressible. It was a reaction to such a view as that taken by Kant who in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790) had recognised that music could move the mind, but denied that it could appeal to the reason. "*In the judgement of Reason*" he wrote, music "has less worth than any of the other fine arts". From the beginning of the nineteenth century artists came to recognise in music a medium that was not structured by words, shapes or visual impressions that were in everyday communicative currency and, because of this music's power to make a direct appeal to the inner world of the subjective, the world of the infinite and inexpressible was all the greater. A German writer of this period, E. T. A. Hoffmann, who was also a minor operatic composer declared that "the intuitive revelation without fixed limits of form is music", and again, music "is the most romantic of all the arts—one might almost say, the only genuinely romantic one—for its sole subject is the infinite".

Throughout the nineteenth century there was a progressive convergence of the arts, a move that reached its zenith in the opera house, to which we shall return. As other artists came to recognize the emotional power of music, so they sought to appropriate something of this power into their own arts. Writing on the Renaissance in his *Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873) the English critic Walter Pater declared simply and comprehensively "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music". This simple statement serves almost as a guiding principle of much artistic creativity of the second half of the nineteenth century and, by this time, the music that was becoming most pervasively influential was that of the operas of Wagner.

In examining the intentions of the creative few at the beginning of the nineteenth century we have seen how in attempting to embrace all humanity they were in their own mediums giving expression to the underlying forces that were so radically changing the face of contemporary Europe. Yet there were contradictions. While Beethoven was in his art proclaiming the brotherhood of all mankind in the loftiest tones, he was engaged in wretched legal battles over the custody of his nephew Karl and bitterly resenting that the case was transferred from an aristocrats' court (a privilege Beethoven claimed by virtue of the prefix *van* to his name) to a commoners' court. It seems that despite his disillusionment with Napoleon, Beethoven too could act as

"nothing more than an ordinary human being". That, of course, does nothing to invalidate the supremacy of his art.

But there were more basic contradictions among the creative few. Between 1815 and 1830, that is between Waterloo and the second French revolution, there grew up a group of artists in France who very consciously sought to sever themselves from the bulk of humanity. They lived in a country where the cream of the nation's manhood had twice been thinned, within twenty-five years, by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars and where the oppressions of the Metternich system, which sought to return Europe as far as possible to the conditions of pre-1789, were strongest. They were appalled at the rising tides of bourgeois mediocrity they saw rising around them and shrank from any association with the vulgar masses into their own exclusive cafe society. They preached an artistic liberalism that defiantly opposed the rigid political oppression of contemporary France and they were fiercely anti-clerical. Principal among this creative few were Hugo, Baudelaire, Delacroix and Berlioz. A work that very clearly reflects the artistic ideals of this period is Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique.* To begin with, its very title proclaims it as an escape into a world of fantasy and its unorthodox structure, its five movements and their idiosyncratic design, stand in direct antithesis to the rigid formalism dictated by the Conservatoire. Its final movement "Dream of a Witch's Sabbath" with its bitter parody of the plainsong *Dies Irae,* is symptomatic of some of the fiercely anti-clerical statements of French artists at this time. Their exclusivism became the genesis of the movement "art for art's sake" that by the end of the century was so opposed to any moral, social or political function of a work of art. Yet this exclusivism in no way precluded the insights of the artist prompting a response in the individual that could bring that individual into a more realistic appraisal of himself and the world in which he was placed.

For much of the first half of the nineteenth century artists, who were consciously seeking to reach out beyond the comparatively small band of artistic initiates to humanity as a whole, used conventional platforms; Beethoven, for example, had still chosen the symphony. But in the 1840's another musician, one of the most influential of artists in the century, began working, and he chose a different arena. His name was Richard Wagner and he poured his most prodigious energies into a series of operas which stand as towering monuments among the creations of civilised man. In his dramas Wagner chose the myth as a means of providing, on one hand, a cohesive plot propelled by interactions of characters and incident and, on the other, a timelessness which lent these interactions a universality and enabled

them more recognizably to represent expressions of man's inner consciousness and of his subjective reality. Wagner then clothed this drama with music, whose power, beauty, subtlety and sensuality contributed an unparalleled immediacy to an experience that originated in the theatre but was intended to reach out to all mankind.

The musical dimensions of his dramas I am not able to illustrate this evening, but perhaps I can give some impression of the universality of the dramas by examining some of their plots and characters. Probably most would recognise as Wagner's major work *The Ring of the Nibelung*, the cycle of four operas *Rheingold, Walküre, Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* designed to be performed on four successive evenings. The central character of *The Ring* cycle is Wotan, the leader of the gods, and Wagner has created here an "everyman" with the aspirations, delusions and discoveries that most of us experience in some form. Towards the beginning of the cycle Wotan is introduced admiring his newly-built castle in which he expects to be able to sit back and rule the world unchallenged. He believes that his struggles are over, but we know with his crafty accomplice Loge that his troubles are just beginning; that his life's journey, which will remove his delusions and temper his aspirations with a growing knowledge of his real rather than his idealised self and of the world about him, will be difficult and painful but will make Wotan a wiser, calmer and more complete individual. All of the other characters in *The Ring* serve in some manner the inexorable growth of Wotan's self-knowledge. The repulsive dwarf Alberich, clever, complex and scheming, represents the darker side of Wotan's character, his lust for power and his deviousness. But in their final confrontation Wotan tells Alberich he will not attempt to prevent Alberich from retrieving the ring which bestows on its owner the power to rule the world. Wotan has abrogated this aspiration that formerly meant so much to him. When his favourite daughter Brünnhilde disobeys him, thus defying the rigid formalist moral code of the gods, Wotan is totally alienated from her and plans to cast her out utterly. Through her entreaties Brünnhilde persuades him partially to reverse this inhuman decision and they are reconciled with tender filial love. Thus yet another rigidity of Wotan is replaced by a more human capacity. In the creation of his son Siegmund, Wotan saw the creation of an extension of his own will. But because Siegmund violated the same moral code, by committing adultery and incest, Wotan had to yield to the demands of his shrewish wife Fricka that Siegmund should die. He was thus powerless to defend this personification of the extension of his will. In Siegmund's son, Siegfried, Wotan saw reincarnation of his will but by this stage, recognised that Siegfried must be master of his own destiny and that the immortality he had sought by perpetuating

his will in successive generations was no genuine immortality at all. The last time we see Wotan is in his only encounter with the young, brash hero Siegfried. It is an almost archetypal clash of different generations. Siegfried is irritated at the questions and assumed superiority of the old man and Wotan recognises that he is powerless to influence the course of this life that his will brought into being. Finally, Siegfried shatters Wotan's spear, the symbol of his authority, and Wotan realises that his power is broken by a force of his own creating. He limps off recognising the inevitability of the downfall of the gods. That translated into terms of our own psyche might be rendered as recognising the inevitability of unrealistic aspiration yielding to a more realistic understanding of the genuine self and its relation to the world in which it is placed. Here is a glowing example of the insight of one of the creative few elucidating concerns that are basic to the whole of humanity and, by so doing, enriching the quality of human life.

Wagner's other great music dramas deal with more specific themes, but themes with no less universal concern, *Tristan und Isolde* is a story of erotic love with a difference. Initially, the lovers are prevented from consummating their love by the dictates of their positions and the interventions of a hostile world. But as they experience these frustrations they realise that their ecstasy is heightened by the frustrations and they begin, quite subconsciously, to place obstacles between themselves and the fulfilment of their passion in order to heighten their ecstasy. Finally they resort to the final obstacle and seek eternal union in death, thus perpetuating their ecstasy into eternity. This concept of the ultimate denial of the will to live, reversing what was considered to be a basic instinct within man, was first articulated by the philosopher Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Idea*. Although it was first published in 1819, for over 30 years its contents were known only to a small band of philosophers. Then in the early 1850's it struck a sympathetic chord of recognition in Wagner who gave one of its principal ideas so much wider dissemination in *Tristan und Isolde* thus mirroring the historical process which I discussed earlier this evening. The nature of the drama and the highly sensuous music with which it was projected prompted Nietzsche, towards the end of his life when he had become antagonistic to Wagner's ethos, to describe *Tristan und Isolde* as a work of "dangerous fascination, of an equally shivery and sweet infinity" and to declare that "The world is poor for those who have never been sick enough for this 'voluptuousness of hell' ".

Tristan und Isolde concerns the dangerous and alluring workings of unleashed eros. Wagner's last opera *Parsifal* examines no less a human concern, the world of sensual renunciation, the pursuit of a salvation

of the spirit and the wonder of God's working among men. It is no exaggeration to say that Wagner's work set its seal upon the artistic climate of Europe and very largely determined its course for generations after his death in 1883. He excited fierce adulation from his followers and passionate and devoted hostility from his critics, but his was a force no artist of creative ability could ignore. The foremost German philosopher of the second half of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche, began his career as an ardent disciple of Wagner's art but, by the end of his life, he had come to mistrust and fear the magnetic power of the artist over men, and wrote a reasoned and savage attack entitled *The Case of Wagner*. Yet the reader is never but totally aware that the subject of the attack is no less than a genius. It was W. H. Auden who said that the forcefulness of Wagner that shone through this attack prompted him to listen to Wagner's music seriously for the first time.

In France a Wagnerian cult grew up that was literary and poetic rather than musical. It thus affords an excellent example of Pater's assertion that all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music as writers, poets and, to some extent, painters were trying to appropriate the multi-layered depths and heady sensuality that Wagner had shown music capable of communicating. Two early champions of Wagner in France were Baudelaire and Gautier who brought Wagner to Paris in 1861 for what became a disastrous production of *Tannhäuser* at the Opera. Baudelaire wrote an evocative essay on *Tannhäuser* which was to be particularly influential among the group of poets that became known in the next generation as symbolists. Principal among these poets was Mallarmé whose *Richard Wagner, reverie of a French poet*, described by its author as half article, half prose-poem, provided the French literary Wagnerians of the 1880's with something of a manifesto. The repercussions of the movement are keenly felt in the poetry of Verlaine, Rimbauld and Valéry at this time. The group sought, by means of sensuous symbols and imagery, to minimise the direct objective meaning of words and to evoke a response in the inner world of the subjective as they saw music doing.

The most significant French musician of the generation after Wagner, Debussy, was very conscious of the magnetism of the German musician. He vigorously affirmed his rejection of Wagner's influence and described how, during the composition of his only opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, he would destroy pages of manuscript when he recognised "the ghost of old Klingsor" appearing. (Klingsor was, of course, the evil magician of *Parsifal*, but here represented Wagner himself.) But Debussy could not exorcise so strong a musical and dramatic spirit quite so readily and his debt to *Parsifal*, in particular, shines forth in many pages of *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

It was in Germany and Austria that Wagner's influence was at its strongest in both music and in literature. In the field of opera his natural successor was Richard Strauss who, with a strong feeling for the theatre, was able to develop Wagner's musical language and technique yet produce a very different species of music drama from Wagner, a species that boasted works as diverse as *Elektra* and *Der Rosenkavalier*. Strauss's values are perhaps not as universal as Wagner's and some of his operas could be described better as entertainments than music dramas, but they are none the worse for that. *Der Rosenkavalier*, for all its mannerist buffoonery, has not a little to say about the weakness of human vanity and the foibles of rigidly stratified social order. It is a superb comedy of manners. Wagner's developments in the language of music, his enriched chromatic harmony, extended symphonic development of fragmentary musical ideas and his expansion of the range and expressive power of the orchestra all had profound effect on the symphonic music of Bruckner, Mahler and later Schoenberg.

Outside Germany and Austria his influence among musicians was equally strong. In England much of the genius of Edward Elgar was fired by Wagner and, in Italy, Busoni's music was equally indebted to Wagner despite its composer's protestations to the contrary.

One of the foremost novelists to be affected by Wagner is the German writer Thomas Mann. He not only wrote stories that closely follow the plots of Wagnerian operas, short stories such as *The Blood of the Wälsungs* and *Tristan*, but he introduces motives, such as the sea, that weave their way through a story with an inner, subjective importance as Wagner constantly wove a web of significant musical motives through his textures. Thomas Mann's now widely-known *Death in Venice* could, in many respects, be regarded as something of an exercise in the style and spirit of *Tristan und Isolde* that I described earlier. Mann's short story traces the growth of a love that cannot possibly be fulfilled and, as the frustration is heightened, so it consumes the lover, who, despite its dangers, pursues its course with headlong abandon. Eventually it propels its willing victim to his own destruction.

I am not able to suggest any ways in which these artistic movements affected the legal profession, but towards the end of the nineteenth century a branch of medical science developed that recognised the value of the artistic probing into the human mind, motives and inner consciousness that had reached its zenith in Wagner. It systematically set about applying the mechanics of scientific method to a study of human behaviour and, in this climate, the psychoanalytical movement of Freud was born.

The ideal of a convergence of the arts reached a particularly fruitful expression in the first three decades of this century in the Russian

ballet. The almost demonic director, Serge Diaghilev, persuaded some of the foremost artists of the time to provide music and stage designs for the ballet and these included Debussy, Stravinsky and Ravel among musicians and Picasso, Dali and Matisse among painters.

In examining the work of the creative few until the early years of this century and their concern for assisting the growth of self-awareness on the part of the individual, one is constantly aware of the important part played by music and musicians. In the later twentieth century artistic movements have greatly diversified making it more difficult, particularly at this point of time, to identify underlying driving forces in the arts that still seek to communicate with humanity. Nevertheless, music still does exert an enormous influence on the literary arts and there is scarcely a twentieth century English writer who does not reflect this to some extent. W. H. Auden, for example, explained how through listening to music he learned much about how to organise the mechanical constituents of poetry and he himself has provided opera librettos for both Stravinsky and Hans Werner Henze.

This tremendous diversification of the arts is of course a reflection of a greater diversification that has permeated society at every level. But if, in the face of pervasive materialism and a mass levelling through gargantuan centralised institutions, the values of individuality are to survive, it will be achieved through the discovery and developing of that individuality on the part of members of society. The creative process itself has become diversified and we are perhaps a little more reliant on re-creators, such as performers of music, than formerly. But the principle remains valid and the process of self discovery is today still as dependent on the discoveries of the creative few as much as, if not more than, it ever was in the past.