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WAGNERIAN MOTIFS IN FREDERICK MARRYAT'S NOVEL *THE PHANTOM SHIP*¹

Summary

The aim of this paper is to perform a comparative analysis of F. Marryat's novel *The Phantom Ship* (1839) and R. Wagner's opera *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843). The number of similarities between Marryat's novel and Wagner's opera is really intriguing. The central theme of both, namely a mysterious contact of the human and the spiritual world, and a constant interpenetration of the two inexplicable and ungraspable realities, contributes to the fact that the discussed works perfectly enrich the original version of the legend of the Flying Dutchman with typically romantic elements. Not only *The Phantom Ship*, but also *Der fliegende Holländer*, both taking place in the sphere of supernatural order and exuding a strong emanation of evil, constitute very interesting variations on the well-known legend. The romantic rendition of the motif of the Flying Dutchman intensifies the tragedy of the doomed captain, allowing him to influence the audience's imagination with an unprecedented force.

Keywords: *Frederick Marryat, Richard Wagner, the Flying Dutchman, opera*

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MOTYWY WAGNEROWSKIE W POWIEŚCI FREDERICKA MARRYATA PT. OKRĘT WIDMO

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest dokonanie analizy komparatystycznej powieści Fredericka Marryata pt. *Okręt widmo* oraz opery Richarda Wagnera pt. *Latający Holender*. Centralny motyw obu, czyli tajemnicze zetknięcie się świata ludzkiego i duchowego oraz nieustanne przenikanie się tych dwóch niewytłumaczalnych i niemożliwych do uchwycenia rzeczywistości, przyczynia się do tego, że omawiane dzieła doskonale wzbogacają oryginalną wersję legendy o Latającym Holendrze o elementy typowo romantyczne. Nie tylko *Okręt widmo*, ale także *Latający Holender*, oba rozgrywające się w sferze nadprzyrodzonego porządku, stanowią bardzo ciekawe wariacje na temat znanej legendy. Romantyczne ujęcie motywu Latającego Holendra potęguje tragizm skazanego na zagładę kapitana, pozwalając mu oddziaływać na wyobraźnię czytelników i widzów z niespotykaną dotąd siłą.

Słowa kluczowe: *Frederick Marryat, Richard Wagner, Latający Holender, opera*

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In her introductory essay prefacing the Polish edition of *The Phantom Ship*, Maria Janion defines Marryat's Gothic sea novel as a romantic tragedy of fate having its roots in ancient tragedies. Characterized by pessimism and fatalism, Janion argues, the British novelist's work focuses on *ananke* inherent in the protagonists' acts. She claims that in *The Phantom Ship* Marryat concentrates on the problems typical of Greek tragedies: firstly, whether or not man is to be blamed for circumstances that are not under his control, and, secondly, whether or not it will ever be possible for man to conquer and master the overwhelmingly powerful force which orchestrates his life, be it fate, fortune, destiny, *ananke*, or *fatum*. Janion maintains that in ancient tragedies all efforts to master one's fate, to reject the role of a puppet, and to act in accordance with one's own scenario are futile. The researcher claims further that all protagonists are devoid of free will, and hence presented in *The Phantom Ship* as toys in the hands of omnipotent fate².

Although Janion's claim that Marryat illustrates human condition applying the topos of *theatrum mundi* is justified, I would like to argue that while presenting his protagonists as actors on the stage of the theatre of the world, Marryat does not emphasize the lack of free will and illusion of moral independence. On the contrary, he seems to suggest that human beings are not puppets unable to show

² M. Janion, *Introduction to the second Polish edition of Frederick Marryat's The Phantom Ship*, in: F. Marryat, *Okręt Widmo*, Gdańsk 1987, pp. 5-22.

any initiative whatsoever, but they are able to act freely and independently in the performance of life. In my opinion, Marek Błaszak is right in stressing an “overt religious message” of the book³ and reading the novel as a manifestation of “fundamental truths of the Christian faith”⁴. Indeed, I would argue that Marryat’s protagonists are not victims of coincidence, whose apparently meaningful actions turn out to be deranged in a universe governed by an ungraspable force. I would venture a statement that Marryat places his characters in the contexts which transgress the generic boundaries of both a Gothic novel and a tragedy. Presenting God as the director of a Gothic *theatrum mundi*, the novelist not only obeys popular conventions of fiction, but also pursues more ambitious goals. According to Błaszak, “in *The Phantom Ship* nautical adventure assumes the form of a parable of a seafaring mortal who dares to challenge God”⁵. Extending beyond the domain of Greek *fatum* and the topos of *theatrum mundi*, the novel seems to require more sophisticated instruments of analysis. Hence, the aim of this paper is to read the legend of the Flying Dutchman, in which Marryat supplements the figure of the Captain with a religious dimension, through the prism of Richard Wagner’s opera entitled *Der fliegende Holländer*.

As *The Phantom Ship* suits the Biblical paradigm of crime, punishment and atonement, Marryat’s work appears to fit into the Old-Testament representation of reality, as defined by Erich Auerbach in his remarkable book entitled *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. It seems to me that the reality presented by Marryat resembles the Biblical world described by Auerbach. The author of *Mimesis* argues that unlike legends, which portray “only clearly outlined men who act from few and simple motives and the continuity of whose feelings and actions remains uninterrupted”⁶, the figures of the Old Testament are “so much more fully developed, so much more fraught with their own biographical past, so much more distinct as individuals”⁷. In my opinion, Auerbach’s statement may be applied in the interpretation of the Flying Dutchman of *The Phantom Ship* who, being considerably different from other legendary heroes, resembles several Old Testament figures. “Fraught with [his] development” and marked by “a distinct stamp of individuality”⁸, the doomed captain expresses himself through silence: the externalization of his thoughts and feelings is in Marryat’s novel almost non-existent. Characterized by indeterminacy, the Captain constantly calls for

³ M. Błaszak, *Sailors, Ships and the Sea in the Novels of Captain Frederick Marryat*, Opole 2006, p. 160.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 202.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 258.

⁶ E. Auerbach, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Princeton 1974, p. 19.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 17.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 18.

concretization and interpretation. Claiming that God “continues to work upon them, bends them and kneads them”⁹, Auerbach defines major Old Testament figures as those who finally achieve greatness through humiliation.

Likewise, the Flying Dutchman, who is no longer alive but not yet dead, and, therefore, he is ever becoming and never being, perfectly suits Auerbach’s definition. Additionally, in the story of the doomed captain, similarly to Biblical narratives, there is no legendary simplification of events. On the contrary, in his Gothic novel, dark and full of spots of indeterminacy as it is, Marryat conveys what Auerbach calls “a second, concealed meaning”¹⁰. Stressing the relation between the material and the spiritual, the novelist, like Biblical authors, progresses *per visibilia ad invisibilia*.

According to folklore, the Flying Dutchman is a ghost ship doomed to sail the seas forever and to fight with the ferocious sea. It is also the name of the Dutch Captain, a daring and courageous traveller who is condemned to be eternally tossed about by the waves around the Cape of Good Hope, willing death to bring an end to his suffering. He cannot reach salvation and escape his fate, as other seamen seeing the ghostly ship on the horizon are petrified and quickly change their course in order to avoid its fatal influence. The legend of the doomed Dutch Captain was already a well known tale with numerous versions in nautical folklore before Frederick Marryat incorporated it into his text.

The legend of the Flying Dutchman is one of the most widely known sea stories in the world. Zofia Drapella stresses that its main theme, an eternal problem of crime and punishment, is extremely attractive to artists. It fascinates not only novelists and poets, but also musicians and painters, who in their works develop the story, giving a new meaning to the original version of the legend. A prototype of the Flying Dutchman is a sixteenth-century story of a pirate ghost ship commanded by captain Noir, which was seen by travellers at warm and misty seas¹¹. Interestingly, Elizabeth Frenzel in *Stoffe der Weltliteratur* refers to the figure of a seventeenth-century captain Fokke, who agrees to sell his soul to the devil in order to reach the West Indies as quickly as possible. Because of the pact, Fokke is eternally condemned and doomed to ceaseless wandering round the Cape of Good Hope. However, according to Drapella, it is Augustine Jal’s story presented in his *Scènes de la vie maritime* in 1832 that constitutes the basic romantic version of the Flying Dutchman. The protagonist of Jal’s story is a Dutch Captain, an atheist, who during a raging storm decides to round the Cape of Good Hope, ignoring desperate pleas of his fellow seamen and risking the lives of the crew. In Jal’s version it is God himself who in the form of a white-bearded old man

⁹ Ibidem, p. 18.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 15.

¹¹ Z. Drapella, *Mity i legendy morskie*, Gdańsk 1972, p. 235.

appears aboard the Captain's ship in order to prevent the bold Dutchman from realizing his plan. Outraged, the Captain tries to kill the visitor by firing a gun. When it proves impossible, since the Dutchman's hand becomes paralyzed and the fired bullet bounces off the old man, wounding the Captain, he curses the stranger and, thus, blasphemes against God. The old man punishes the Dutchman, condemning him to eternal wandering and constant seeking of the peace of death. What is more, calling the Captain the Devil of the Sea, he announces that at the end of time the daring commander will be doomed forever.

In England, the legend of the doomed sea captain first appeared in printed form in 1821 as an anonymous short story in the then extremely popular *Blackwood's Magazine*. The narrator of the story entitled "Vanderdecken's Message Home: or the Tenacity of Natural Affection," with which Marryat was probably familiar, navigates his ship in the vicinity of the Cape of Good Hope. Aboard the ship the seamen are narrating the legend of the Flying Dutchman. One of the narrators recalls that seventy years earlier, the captain of a Dutch ship tried to round the "Stormy Cape" at any cost, despite adverse winds and a raging storm. In his enormous pride and stubbornness, Vanderdecken swore against God and expressed his readiness to fight with the sea until the Day of Judgement in order to perform his task. Taken at his word, he was doomed to sail the seas forever, always bringing unfavourable weather and bad luck to any ship that encounters him. All seamen are frightened of him, as the Captain always hails other ships and asks the sailors to take bundles of letters for his family and friends in Holland. Hardly anyone is ever courageous enough to communicate with him, as he is generally regarded as a harbinger of misfortune and death. Soon after the conversation between the seamen, the Flying Dutchman's ship indeed appears with a pile of letters from the Captain. Having glanced at the letters, the English sailors refuse to take them to Holland. Petrified, they explain that the Captain's family died many years ago. Despite the crew's reluctance, the letters are left aboard their ship, but they are blown into the sea. After a while the ghost ship vanishes and the weather immediately improves, to the great relief of the English sailors¹².

In this version of the legend it is neither the supernatural nor the Captain's pact with the devil that is emphasized. Unlike in other variations on the legend, in the story printed in the *Blackwood's Magazine* it is the Captain's affection for his family that is stressed. The subtitle, "the Tenacity of Natural Affection," may suggest that the author of the story is deeply impressed by Vanderdecken's attachment to his beloved ones, which is illustrated by the Captain's writing to his family for seventy years.

Marryat's variation on the Flying Dutchman is thoroughly original. According to Marek Błaszak, *The Phantom Ship* is remarkable for "the highly dramatic

¹² F. Barker, *The Flying Dutchman. A Guide to the Opera*, London 1979, pp. 36-39.

treatment of the sea legend¹³. Only in Marryat's version there appears Vanderdecken's son, named Philip, whose mission is to avert his father's destiny. In the final chapter of the book, Philip accomplishes his task, atoning for the Captain's blasphemy with self-sacrificial death. The problem of sacrifice central to the legend is also accentuated by Richard Wagner. Frederick Marryat's full-length novel is one of the most interesting and extensive realizations of the legend of the Flying Dutchman, whereas Richard Wagner's opera entitled *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843) constitutes a brilliant musical illustration of the well known motif. Although Wagner made no use of Marryat's version, the number of similarities between *Der fliegende Holländer*, an opera which is performed even nowadays especially during the Richard Wagner Festival in Bayreuth, and *The Phantom Ship*, a Gothic novel which is now completely forgotten, is striking.

In both works the legend, much older than the European nineteenth-century Romanticism, acquires a deeper meaning when confronted with the romantic perception of life. Surprising as it may seem, there are numerous correspondences between Marryat's novel and Wagner's opera, existing on the level of both the genesis of the works and the autobiographical aspects presented in them. However, what makes the two works so remarkably similar is, above all, the fashioning of the Flying Dutchman as a Faustian figure.

Marryat's Gothic sea story, *The Phantom Ship*, began to appear in *The New Monthly* in 1838 and a three-volume book edition was published by Henry Colburn in 1839¹⁴. The novel plays an important part in the Captain's career as a writer. Using an extremely popular genre in all English-speaking countries, which the Gothic novel was at that time, Marryat tried to spread major Christian ideas, that is fall, contrition, penance and absolution. In Marryat's novel Captain William Vanderdecken becomes a *pars pro toto* figure. Marryat identified himself with the weak and sinful protagonist who in falling and overcoming his weaknesses becomes a representative of the whole humanity. According to Marek Błaszak, Marryat's novel is his artistic reaction to Samuel T. Coleridge's lyrical ballad, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which the author of *The Phantom Ship* found deeply inspiring¹⁵. Coleridge's poem, published in a volume from 1798 entitled *Lyrical Ballads*, constitutes a romantic realization of the legend of a doomed sea captain. The poem explores the voyage of the Ancient Mariner, which abounds with unusual phenomena. The Mariner's fate becomes determined by the act of killing an albatross, which may symbolize man's violation of the natural law, and by the supernatural consequences of this crime. All phenomena occurring

¹³ M. Błaszak, *Sailors*, p. 76.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 76.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 41.

during the voyage have a symbolic sense and contribute to the formation of the Ancient Mariner's morality.

Janina Kamionka-Straszakowa claims that in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" the plot follows a scheme of crime, punishment, penance and expiation. After almost unbearable suffering the sin is forgiven, but the wrong-doer has to roam around the world for the rest of his days, narrating his story in order to warn others¹⁶. Highlighting ethical aspects of Coleridge's poem, Kamionka-Straszakowa focuses on the problem of man's transgression of the moral law and on the necessity to perform penance, only after which will the ethical order be restored and the union with nature will be recreated. She observes that the figure of the Ancient Mariner has some features of the Wandering Jew and that his voyage, which is an attempt to cross the frontiers of what is permissible and attainable, may be regarded as a quest for limitless experience. The Ancient Mariner, wandering ceaselessly from one country to another and preaching love of all creation, resembles the Wandering Jew in his being an eternal wanderer who will never reach his destination¹⁷. Central to the medieval legend of the Wandering Jew, like to that of the Flying Dutchman or to the Adamic myth, are the motifs of sin and eternal wandering, regarded as a punishment for being disobedient to God. The Jew taunts Jesus on the way to Calvary, the Dutchman blasphemes against the divine Creator, and Biblical Adam wants to usurp God's omniscience. Having committed a sin, all are sentenced to roaming the world: the Jew and Adam on land, whereas the doomed captain at sea. William Vaughan underlines in his article that the Ancient Mariner, travelling ashore and afloat, incarnates both the legend of the Wandering Jew and that of the Flying Dutchman¹⁸. Accentuating the moral aspect of the crime, Coleridge's Gothic lyrical ballad, presented in the form of a dream vision, conveys an ethical message. It stresses the necessity to distinguish between what is permissible and what is not, and warns against crossing the boundary between the two too recklessly.

Just as Marryat was inspired by Coleridge's poem, Wagner drew his inspiration from Heinrich Heine. Having read some of Heine's works, the composer decided to write an opera based on themes taken from the German poet. Wagner worked on the music to *Der fliegende Holländer* for three months. In the summer of 1841 he finished the sketch of the libretto and in November he completed the score. The opera premiered on the 2nd January 1843 in Dresden, conducted by the composer. Even today the composition of the then thirty-year-old Wagner is regarded by

¹⁶ J. Kamionka-Straszakowa, *Zbłąkany wędrowiec: Z dziejów romantycznej topiki*, Wrocław 1992, p. 32.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

¹⁸ W. Vaughan, "Loneliness, Love and Death." *The Flying Dutchman*, New York 1982, p. 29.

critics as a manifestation of a wonderfully spontaneous young talent¹⁹. According to Bohdan Pocij, the opera was inspired by two sources. The first is a first-hand experience of the power of the sea during a nightmarish sea voyage from Riga to London made by the composer and his wife, Minna, in July 1839. The second source is Wagner's reading of Heine's humorous and autobiographical *Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelewopski* (1833). In his work, Heine describes a performance of the play *Der fliegende Holländer* which he watched in a theatre in Amsterdam. The main character, a Dutch Captain, is destined to eternal seafaring, as he promised the devil that he would round a certain reef, even if the navigation should last till the end of time. Interestingly enough, the devil, before condemning the Captain, offers him a possibility of redemption: he can be released from his fate by a faithful wife. The Dutchman, known under the name of "the Wandering Jew of the Ocean," comes ashore every seven years in quest for a woman who would be able to lift the curse from him. When the daughter of a Scots sea captain falls in love with the Dutchman and vows to remain faithful to him until death, the doomed sailor is so touched by her feeling that he chooses a lonely life at sea to save her the fate of a "Flying Dutchwoman."

In his narrative, Heine treats the motif of the Flying Dutchman not seriously, but ironically. By contrast, in Wagner's adaptation of Heine's satire, the composer removes the romantic irony and views the story with pathos. Joachim Köhler observes that Wagner's opera of a wandering seaman has its sources in the composer's soul, as he gave Heine's ironic story "a highly personal spiritual form"²⁰. Zdzisław Jachimecki also claims that the Dutchman can be regarded almost as Wagner's double, a character with whom the artist strongly identified. Unlike Marryat, who in *The Phantom Ship* individualizes what is general, in *Der fliegende Holländer* Wagner generalizes what is individual.

Another similarity between the two is that both the British novelist and the German composer present in their works a romanticized legend of the Flying Dutchman, adding new elements to the original version. Captain Vanderdecken, the protagonist of Marryat's novel, is portrayed as a daring and self-confident sailor, for whom taking part in dangerous expeditions in order to explore the extremes is the essence of his existence. In *The Phantom Ship*, Marryat supplements the figure of the Captain with a religious dimension. Vanderdecken is presented as a believer who in a moment of weakness blasphemes against God. Swearing on the relic of the Holy Cross, which he has worshipped for years, the Captain challenges God and expresses a willingness to satisfy his desire even against the Creator's will. As it happened in Jal's version as well, in Marryat's novel it is not Satan but God that condemns the Captain to ceaseless wandering. Strikingly

¹⁹ B. Pocij, *Wagner*, Kraków 2004, p. 77.

²⁰ J. Köhler, *Richard Wagner – ostatni Tytan*, Warszawa 2004, p. 177.

enough, in *The Phantom Ship* everlasting seafaring is not equated with eternal condemnation.

Wagner also transforms the legend of the Flying Dutchman. However, unlike Marryat, he does not supplement the original version with a religious dimension, but enriches it with a psychological aspect. The Wagnerian Dutchman constitutes a figure fully developed psychologically, sensitive and ennobled, in which the composer found his own features. For Wagner the Flying Dutchman became an incarnation of a romantic artist, due to his being a doomed wanderer condemned to everlasting homelessness, craving for a permanent settlement ashore but at the same time aware of his non-belonging to any place whatsoever. The composer, perceiving himself as an outstanding individual, tired with freedom and with his life of an exile, treated "the Wandering Jew of the Ocean" as his *alter ego*. It is also worth noting that the figure of the hunter Erik, Senta's fiancé, comes from Wagner, not from Heine. In the concluding moment of Act III, Erik and Senta have a bitter argument about the cursed sea captain. The Dutchman, listening to their conversation, is convinced that he has been betrayed once again. In a gesture of despair, he rushes to his ship and immediately goes to the open sea. Wagner, like the Dutchman, felt betrayed: his wife, Minna, was unfaithful to him and finally decided to leave the composer for her lover. Tormented by life and completely alone, the Dutchman mirrors Wagner's suffering and his sense of loneliness. Comparing Wagner's opera with his life, Piotr Kamiński is convinced that *Der fliegende Hollendär* should be regarded as a form of autobiography. He holds that in this composition Wagner expresses his innermost emotions, which makes the work so egocentric or, as Kamiński puts it, "so Wagnerian"²¹.

Another aspect connecting Marryat's Gothic novel with Wagner's opera is the figure of the Flying Dutchman portrayed as a Faustian character. Extremely talented and proud, the legendary scholar represents both individual and universal features. Although his limitations are typical of all human beings, Faust's cognitive insatiability and his desire for knowledge raise him above mediocrity. Filled with all-consuming passion, the scholar wants to know the unknowable and to rebel against his weaknesses resulting from the imperfections of human nature. Faust is also characterized by inexhaustible energy and by his willingness to sell his soul to the devil in order to satisfy his greatest desire: to find the ideal.

Similarly to Faust, Vanderdecken in Marryat's novel is also extremely gifted. The Captain, aware of his exceptional nautical abilities, perceives himself as an outstanding individual, ready to challenge the raging sea and able to emerge victorious over nature. The Faustian cognitive insatiability and desire for knowledge are manifested in Vanderdecken in the form of a passion for discoveries, which the Captain views as the essence of his existence. Defying any limitations when

²¹ P. Kamiński, *Tysiąc i jedna opera*, Kraków 2008, p. 646.

it comes to fighting with adverse winds and unfavourable tides, in his attempt to round the Cape of Good Hope Vanderdecken does not hesitate to sacrifice the lives of the crew or to give his soul to the devil in order to master the sea. What is more, the Captain craves for the ideal which is for him a participation in God's omnipotence and omniscience. In Marryat's novel, rounding the Cape of Good Hope at any cost has a symbolic meaning and can be interpreted as a desire for reigning over the ocean and taking control of the forces of nature.

The main character in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* has Faustian features as well. A rebel and an adventurer who wants to explore the extremes, the Dutchman does not hesitate to collaborate with evil forces in order to satisfy his desires. Interestingly, Köhler stresses the fact that before Wagner composed the opera, he desired to write a Great Symphony entitled *Faust*. In his composition the German artist wanted to present a drama of an outstanding individual whose desire is to extend the boundaries of human knowledge and to find satisfaction in the company of an ideal woman. Unfortunately, the writing of *Faust*, planned as a four-part composition, resulted in failure: only the last part was performed. Not only did Wagner neglect to introduce the figure of Gretchen into the plot, but also his Faust turned out to be a flat character devoid of any power of expression.

It is worth noting, however, that the projects that were not brought to completion in the symphony of Faust, were fully realized in *Der fliegende Holländer*, perfectly illustrating Wagner's unquestionable talent. Connecting the main principles of the symphony, an elaborate musical composition for full orchestra, with some elements of the stage drama, Wagner managed to create a new conception of music drama based on operatic music, giving a strong emanation of intensity and unprecedented power of expression. According to Köhler, a dumb Faust was transformed into a poetically talented Dutchman, flowing on the melancholy melodic line²². Vaughan also underlines in his article that Wagner drew his inspiration for creating the figure of the Flying Dutchman from Goethe's *Faust*, seeing a parallel between the ending of *Faust* and the culmination of Wagner's opera. In Goethe's masterpiece, the suffering and death of Gretchen contribute to the redemption of Faust's soul. Similarly, in Wagner's opera *ewig Weiblichkeit*, represented by Senta, is presented as a redemptive force, powerful enough to release the Flying Dutchman from his curse²³. The word *senta*, which is an imperative form of the Italian verb *sentire* denoting both "to listen to" and "to feel," may illustrate the woman's attitude towards the condemned captain: she listens to his story and feels sorry for him. Therefore, in Wagner's romantic treatment of the theme, the Dutchman is viewed with sympathy, not with irony, as was the case in Heine's interpretation.

²² J. Köhler, *Richard*, p. 179.

²³ W. Vaughan, *Loneliness*, p. 28.

Despite numerous similarities, *The Phantom Ship* and *Der fliegende Holländer* differ considerably in certain respects. One of the essential divergences between the two is the portrayal of the figure of the Flying Dutchman. Although in both works the life of the doomed captain and sea space are inseparable, Marryat's Flying Dutchman seems to be presented as *il penseroso*, while Wagnerian *Holländer* is constructed as *l'allegro*.

Created by the power of the word, Vanderdecken is portrayed as capable of performing analyses, as his long-lasting wandering on the seas stimulates reflection and self-examination. The immensity and vastness of the sea are awe-inspiring for the Captain and make him feel insignificant in confrontation with the power of the element. Reflecting on his adventurous past, the Captain discovers that God's presence is indispensable in his life. He shows signs of genuine repentance for the committed blasphemy and wants to kiss the relic of the Holy Cross, which is now in his son's possession. In Marryat's novel, the ceaseless wandering illustrates man's fight with his own weaknesses on the way to *sacrum*. Marryat adds a religious aspect to the *peregrinatio vitae* metaphor, showing God both as the beginning and the end of wandering characterized by contemplation. It is the divine Creator who reigns over oceanic waters; in his hands the sea no longer constitutes a *locus horridus*, but belongs to the sphere of *sacrum* and acquires purgatorial features. An apparently senseless seventeen-year-long voyage has in fact a deeper meaning. The monotony of continuous wandering gradually purifies the proud Captain of egoism and opens his eyes to his fragility and insignificance in confrontation with the all-powerful sea. Oceanic waters, being a manifestation of God's omnipotence, are similar to baptismal water in their bringing purification and absolution of sins. After a long-lasting wandering, the Captain falls on his knees aboard his ghost ship, and in a gesture of humility kisses the relic of the Holy Cross, against which he swore seventeen years before. Finally, he finds the peace of death and reaches the land of never-ending happiness.

In the Wagnerian opera there is a parallel drawn between the Dutchman and the sea as well. Not only the figure of the Flying Dutchman, ever becoming and never being, but also the ocean, characterized by continuity in time and shapelessness in space, are created in *Der fliegende Holländer* by the power of music. Therefore, portrayed by the means of sounds, rather than words, the Wagnerian Dutchman does not constitute a reflective character. Apart from the protagonist, the grimly roaring sea is also continuously "illustrated" by the orchestra in the analyzed opera. According to Jachimecki, Wagner's exceptional attempt to paint with sounds gives rise to a number of musical pictures of nature and various elements, whose colouring, delineation and the power of expression are absolutely outstanding²⁴. It is musicality that makes the Dutchman unaware of possible

²⁴ Z. Jachimecki, *Wagner*, Kraków 1973, p. 57.

consequences of his actions and unable to reflect on his adventurous life. As an ideal character devoid of the power of words, he lacks self-awareness and self-examination. Therefore, the Wagnerian *Holländer* cannot be judged in terms of good and evil. Indeed, the amoral Flying Dutchman in Wagner's opera is not an individual, but a universal character, remaining in the realm of aesthetics. By contrast, it is self-reflection that implies in Marryat's novel the idea of sin, leading to a transition from the aesthetical phase, through ethical, to religious.

Yet another difference between Marryat's novel and Wagner's opera is the fact that different forces triumph at the end of the two analyzed works. In *The Phantom Ship* Captain Vanderdecken attains salvation thanks to his son's heroic self-denial. Of his own free will, Philip decides to sacrifice himself in the name of saving his father from eternal condemnation. Sailing the seas of the world in search of the ghost ship commanded by the doomed captain, Philip acquires Christ-like features, his mission on earth being to obey his father's will. Due to his obedience, Philip does not hesitate to sacrifice his life in order to perform the task. When in the final scene he brings the relic of the Holy Cross to his father, the Captain is released from the curse. He finally finds the peace of death, as his ghost ship, gradually immersing in purgatorial sea waters, eventually sinks. The father, tightly embracing the son, is filled with joy, and so is the surrounding nature. This image creates an atmosphere of reconciliation, forgiveness and renewal. In the final chapter of the novel, Marryat stresses the redemptive power of sacrifice, presenting a triumph of sacrificial love over the sin committed in the past.

In contrast to Marryat's novel, a gloomy atmosphere prevails in Wagner's opera. Since his youth, the composer associated the spiritual world with bare fifths opening Beethoven's Ninth Symphony²⁵. According to John Deathridge, it is likely that Wagner "deliberately converted the mysterious bare fifths of Beethoven's opening into the rasping sound of the open fifths at the beginning of the *Dutchman* Overture [...] – the 'salty breeze' which Franz Liszt claimed to hear in the piece"²⁶. Analyzing the demonic aura of the opera, Deathridge notices that the interval of diminished fifth was defined by medieval theorists as the "Devil in Music" [*diabolus in musica*]²⁷. Wagner probably applies such an interval in his opera to indicate the protagonists' *discesos ad inferos*. In *Der fliegende Holländer*, Senta flings herself from the rock to unfathomable sea depths, thus confirming her oath of faithfulness to her beloved until her death. At the same time, the doomed captain's ship sinks and the embraced figures of the lovers appear on the horizon. Committing suicide, Senta is finally united with the Dutchman and accompanies

²⁵ J. Köhler, *Richard*, p.183.

²⁶ J. Deathridge, "An Introduction to *The Flying Dutchman*." *The Flying Dutchman*, New York 1982, p. 15.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

him on his way to eternal condemnation. Despite the triumph of demonic forces and the perdition of the main characters, in the final scene of the opera Wagner celebrates *Liebested*, that is the culmination of love in death. According to Wagner, it is Senta's love that makes her feel fulfilled in the role of a self-sacrificing woman and contributes to the doomed captain's victory in finding the desired death. In the turning point of the opera, both protagonists may symbolize a paradoxical union between Eros and Thanatos.

The number of similarities between Marryat's novel and Wagner's opera is really intriguing. The central theme of both, namely a mysterious contact of the human and the spiritual world, and a constant interpenetration of the two inexplicable and ungraspable realities, contributes to the fact that the discussed works perfectly enrich the original version of the legend with typically romantic elements. Not only *The Phantom Ship*, but also *Der fliegende Holländer*, both taking place in the sphere of supernatural order and exuding a strong emanation of evil, constitute very interesting variations on the well-known legend. The romantic rendition of the motif of the Flying Dutchman intensifies the tragedy of the doomed captain, allowing him to influence the audience's imagination with an unprecedented force.

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