

The *Beethoven Frieze*—Klimt's Knight and the Disease of the Modern Man^{*}

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The motif of the knight is frequently used in medieval art; it has made a surprising comeback in the 19th century through artists, such as the Pre-Raphaelites or the Viennese artists at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Gustav Klimt interprets this motif in a very personal manner, which throws a totally different light on the status of the knight than traditional interpretations. The aim of this paper is to indicate and analyze the very features that make Klimt's knight different from that established through the historic, literary, and artistic canons and reveal it as closer to Nietzsche's modern man—afflicted by the malady that the philosopher diagnoses and whose symptoms he describes as follows: A weakened personality, and the absence of a strong will, associated with the specific age and culture.

Keywords: knight, chivalric ideal, the malady of the modern man, allegorical scheme

The *Beethoven Frieze*—Levels of Interpretation

The *Beethoven Frieze* is a fairly complex work inspired from several sources, which can lead to several layers of interpretation (whose origins can be traced in the works of Schiller, Wagner, and Nietzsche). It is equally a mixture of manners of representation (we have in mind the influences of artists such as Mackintosh, J. Toorop, Hodler, F. Knopff, and Rodin), as well as various techniques and materials used by Klimt (plaster stucco, casein paint, tacks, coloured glass, fragments of mirrors, and gilding), to which his personal vision and the unique style are added.

Even if the frieze has several layers of meaning, the most obvious one is related to Beethoven, the subject of Max Klinger's sculpture. As a matter of fact, the entire exhibition of the 1902 Viennese Secession was organized around this monumental piece.

The fact that Klimt used quotes from Schiller's (and Beethoven's) "Ode to Joy" on the cover of the exhibition catalogue made many interpreters suggest that the frieze could be read as a visual representation of the "Ninth Symphony". Especially so since both the frieze and the symphony imply a three-stage journey: On the one hand, in the musical composition, the advance of the spirit goes through despair, illusion, and finally religious hope (Rolland, 1962, p. 148); on the other hand, in the composition of the frieze, the artist—Hero's path first has to cross a territory of human despair and of illusion in the hero's power to save the world; the second stage is his impotence when confronted by the hostile forces; and the third stage is the hope that the arts can provide.

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A second source of inspiration in the creation of the frieze could be Wagner's essays of 1846 and 1870, in which he comments on the "Ninth Symphony". The musician described (1846) the first movement of the symphony as built on a Titanesque struggle of the soul, on a thirst for joy against all the forces that oppose us and strive to raise a barrier "between us and earthly happiness". At a philosophical level, Klimt's frieze is closer to Wagner's essay of 1870, in which the latter also introduces Schopenhauer's ideas regarding the revelation of will (Bouillon, 1986, p. 26).

The last source of inspiration to mention, equally important, is Nietzsche's ideas of the role of art and of the artists as they are presented in BT (*The Birth of Tragedy*) (1999). In the *Preface*, he praises Wagner's essay on Beethoven, emphasizing that his own text was written in about the same period. He then takes the opportunity to refer to this topic in the very first paragraph:

If someone were to transform Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" into a painting and not restrain his imagination when millions of people sink dramatically into the dust, then we could come close to the Dionysian. Now is the slave a free man, now all the stiff, hostile barriers break apart, those things which necessity and arbitrary power or "saucy fashion" have established between men. [...] Singing and dancing, man expresses himself as a member of a higher unity. He has forgotten how to walk and talk and is on the verge of flying up into the air as he dances. (Nietzsche, 1999, chapter 1)

However, it must be said that in the iconography of the frieze there are details that transcend the sources mentioned. Even if, for example, mankind takes the posture mentioned by Schiller in his "Ode to Joy" in the following terms ("Do you fall on your knees, multitudes...?"), in the knight's countenance one can still recognize the portrait of the composer Gustav Mahler. As Bouillon (1986, p. 47) stated, the likeness was confirmed in 1910 by Klimt himself, on the occasion of the public launching of a collection meant as a tribute to Mahler, published by writer Paul Stefan.

For a better overall image of the topicality of the iconography used, we quote the clearest presentation of Klimt's work, to be found in the very catalogue of the exhibition:

First long wall, opposite the entrance: the yearning for happiness. The sufferings of feeble humanity: who beseech the well-armed strong one as external, compassion and ambition as the internal, motivational forces, who move the former to take up the struggle for happiness. Narrow wall: the hostile powers. The giant Typhon, against whom even the gods battle in vain; his daughters, the three Gorgons, Sickness, Madness, Death, Lust and Lewdness, Excess. Nagging sorrow. The yearnings and desires of mankind fly over and above, away from these. Second long wall: the yearning for happiness finds gratification in poetry. The arts lead us into the ideal kingdom, where alone we can find pure joy, pure happiness, pure love. Choir of the angels of paradise, "Joy, beautiful divine spark." "This kiss for the whole world!" (Bisanz Prakken, 1984)

Dürer, Nietzsche, Klimt, and the Chivalric Ideal

Two persons had a crucial influence in young Nietzsche's development. Firstly, his thinking was deeply influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy; this influence can be traced in *The Birth of Tragedy*, as well as in other fragments he wrote during that period. Secondly, Nietzsche expressed his enthusiasm for Wagner's music, of which he believed it could prove to be an expression of the rebirth of Ancient Greek tragedy (it is well known that he placed tragedy in a privileged position in relation with the other arts).

Schopenhauer's considerations reveal Wagner's interest for Dürer's engravings *The Knight, Death and the Devil* and *Melancholy*. Young Nietzsche was in turn fascinated by the former, which he used as an image capable of capturing his professor's moral portrait:

Here a desperate, isolated man could not choose a better symbol than the knight with Death and the Devil, as Dürer has drawn him for us, the knight in armour with the hard iron gaze, who knows how to make his way along his terrible

path, without being dismayed at his horrific companions, and yet without any hope, alone with his horse and hound. Such a Dürer knight was our Schopenhauer: he lacked all hope, but he wanted the truth. There is no one like him. (BT, chapter 20)

In his notes for *The Birth of Tragedy* of 1871 he mentions this image which he again associates with Schopenhauer, emphasizing that modern times are in need of a special type of art. Moreover, Dürer's engraving *The Knight, Death and the Devil* can indeed be considered "a symbol of our existence". It is true that in his mature years, Nietzsche will no longer support this viewpoint regarding his professor, of which he will eventually hold the exact opposite.

In one of his letters written in Basel to Malwida von Meysenburg (1875), he even explains how he came to be in the possession of one of the artist's engravings:

A local patrician gave me a significant present in the form of genuine Dürer print. I rarely derive pleasure from a pictorial representation, *but I identify with this image*, "Knight, Death, and Devil" in a way I can hardly explain. In *The Birth of Tragedy* I compared Schopenhauer to this image, and because of that comparison I received this picture. (as cited in Bertram, 2009, p. 38)

In his turn, Nietzsche himself will be associated with the person in the engraving by Franz Overbeck in a letter of 1871 which the latter sent him: "In your expressive portrait you remind me of the bold Dürer knight you once showed me". Bertram lists all the instances when Nietzsche mentions his passionate interest for Dürer or in which he makes direct or indirect references to the knight's motif. The scholar analyzes them in detail, in association with relevant particulars of the philosopher's life (Bertram, 2009, pp. 37-55).

Dürer had dealt with this topic in other works such as *The Knight Attacked by Death* (1497) or *The Armoured Knight* (1498); between these two and the previously mentioned one (*The Knight, Death and the Devil*, 1593), the difference lies at the level of expression. The interpretation given to Dürer's engraving relies on the idea that the fearless knight embodies the champion for Christ who, in spite of the oncoming dangers awaiting for him, relentlessly pursues perfection, "careless of the threatening fleeting emptiness of the Evil and of the world" (Durand, 1998, p. 132). Together with the motif of the knight, the leit-motif of death is repeatedly interpreted by the artist as a remainder of mediaeval spirituality.

For Klimt, too, Dürer's art held a special significance, since we trace the motif of the knight in two of his works, *Life is a Struggle. The Golden Knight* (*Das Leben ein Kampf. Der goldene Ritter*), 1903, and in the *Beethoven Frieze, Yearning for Happiness* (*Die Sehnsucht nach Glück*), 1902. Klimt's first encounter with Dürer occurred in the early 1880s, when three of Ferdinand Laufberger's pupils copied some of the 16th century engravings in honour of King Franz-Josef. In this way, "Klimt's first contact with the world of Dürer provided him with rich iconographic resources which he was to draw on and develop further at a later date" (Néret, 2003, pp. 9-10).

In his work, *The Golden Knight*, the character is represented as the knight riding his dark horse, with his helmet and armour covering his entire body so as not to allow any hint at a physical or moral feature. In Dürer's work, the knight's visor was lifted and his face showed his determination to go on. Klimt's knight is represented mainly bi-dimensionally and leaves the impression that the armour is empty, that there is actually no one inside, that a hollow armour is fastened to the horse's saddle. This decorative representation is in stark contrast with the realistic depiction of the horse. Also, his passage does not seem to be strewn with any dangers. On the contrary, the background is dotted with brightly coloured flowers and a white rose bush stands out. It is true, however, that behind this bush a silhouette looms, almost blending with the background. However, no real

threat seems to come from that area. So the question arising naturally is: What does the struggle in life consist of in the case of the this knight? Paradoxically, the horse is standing on something resembling a pedestal, in the manner of an equestrian statue or in the manner in which Saint George is represented. The sense of motion is rendered realistically through the horse's posture, one leg lifted in the air; however, the animal is at the same time apparently attached to a pedestal whose height we cannot estimate, since it is in the fore-ground. This manner is reminiscent of other works by Klimt, such as the allegory of *Sculpture*, where the main character, although meant to be a sculpture, seems real due to the way hair is represented.

Similarly, the knight in the *Beethoven Frieze* only appears to have set out on his journey to fight evil. Even if the motif of death is found in several of Klimt's works, such as *Medicine, Death and Life*, and *Hope I*, however, in the *Beethoven Frieze*, the knight is not out to fight death, but the hostile forces. In trying to account for the position of Klimt's knight, we shall consider Huizinga's remark on the model of the knight, in its medieval meaning, that of a redeemer, saviour, defender of the faith, protector of the weak, and the defenseless. A correct understanding of the chivalric ideal implies a merge of elements and features that can be analyzed from various perspectives: religious, ethical, social, esthetic, and affective (Huizinga, 1987, pp. 104-134).

As a religious ideal, the knight draws the source of his deed from Archangel Michael's feat, and from the idea of fight for universal peace, associated with the effort to liberate Jerusalem. In the first panel of the *Beethoven Frieze*, the knight seems to really set out to fight evil and the hostile forces.

As an ethic and moral ideal, chivalry ought to imply piety and virtue. However, it commonly falls short of expectations in this respect, ending up by being the exact opposite: (1) The essence of the ideal is haughtiness, elevated to beauty (Huizinga, 1987, p. 67); and (2) Ambition, the sense of honour and the desire for personal glory are conducive rather to the notion of sin (from a Christian perspective). An aspiration for glory and chivalric honour is closely connected to the cult of the hero (an imitation of the model of the ancient heroes or those in the Arthurian cycle). Equally, the emphasis is placed on asceticism: The knight errant is poor and disconnected from his earthly bonds. This is how Nietzsche describes him in *The Dawn*, chapter 191, also mentioning some of his possible attributes: "Pictures of chivalric virtues, strict duty, generous devotion, and heroic self-denial!"

With Klimt, the problem of the moral model and of asceticism are not even touched upon: The hero's crown and armour are made of gold, he is offered the laurel wreath before he takes part in the decisive battle, his back is turned upon the people asking for his help, and in the end he is presented embracing his woman. This seems to complement Nietzsche's statement: "So what do ascetic ideals mean? In the case of an artist, we know the answer immediately:—*absolutely nothing!*" (*On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, chapter 5). To Nietzsche, however, this ideal is still achievable:

What does it mean when a real *philosopher* pays homage to the ascetic ideal, a truly independent spirit like Schopenhauer, a man and a knight with an bronze gaze, who is courageous to himself, who knows how to stand alone and does not first wait for a front man and hints from higher up? (Nietzsche, 2009, III, chapter 5)

As a social ideal, chivalry contains a set of critical elements for social life: "Chivalry would never have been the ideal of life during several centuries if it had not contained high social values" (Huizinga, 1987, p. 106). As an esthetic ideal, chivalry is a model of beautiful life, everything being reduced to the beautiful image of honour and virtue, with noble rules creating the illusion of order. Huizinga (1987, p. 57) identified three ways to accede to a beautiful life: (1) forswearing this world, while life will be eventually found in a

different world; (2) righting this world; and (3) the escape from this reality by dreaming. The first and the last ways out of the three are suggested by Klimt through the presence of the dreamlike characters floating about and through the refuge in the garden of pleasures; the second way seems impossible to achieve. In Huizinga's (1987) words, the force of this ideal consists of the beautiful exaggeration: the grander the ideal, the bigger the contrast between it and reality. Ultimately, chivalry proves to be a mere "vain illusion", "a beautiful and spurious game" based on fashion and ceremony.

Finally, one other element that must be taken into account is the old ideal of chivalric belief in love. In the frieze, there are details conducive to *The Romance of the Rose*, as the allegory of the rose was a theme frequently used during the mediaeval period and which made a surprising comeback during the art of the 19th century (for example, in painting in the works of the Pre-Raphaelites, especially in those of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in music by Richard Strauss in his opera *Der Rosenkavalier*, whose libretto was written by the Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal).

Along the time, the chivalric ideal undergoes various changes, the results of which are the fact that the above-mentioned features lose their force, grow increasingly weaker and each time "another layer comes off, which had turned into a lie". With Klimt, all these alterations take the shape of the nude knight who retains none of the features of the medieval model. The hero of the modern age appears stripped of all the old ideals and revealed in his nudity. It seems a circumstance similar to the one mentioned previously, that of the empty suit of armour, with no knight inside to play the part of the hero (a kind of "Cheshire grin without a Cheshire cat" in Lewis Carroll's story), only in this case the story is reversed: The knight has no suit of armour and he appears naked.

Klimt's Knight and the Disease of the Modern Man

An important part in disseminating Nietzsche's ideas in the Viennese cultural world was played by a group of students from the university, known as the Pernerstorfer Circle. Some of the members of the circle were also members of the Leseverein der Deutschen Studenten Wiens (Reading Society of the Viennese German Students) group. Among them, Viktor Adler and Joseph Paneth were the initiators of debates on Nietzsche's philosophical work at the university, especially on his 1874 work *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, Untimely Meditation II* (Lehrer, Golomb, & Santaniello, 1999, pp. 182-183). Deeply impressed by the third one, *Untimely Meditation III, Schopenhauer as Educator*, the members of the circle sent Nietzsche a letter in which they collectively expressed their adhesion to the cultural ideal which his work promoted.

What is of interest here is *Untimely Meditation II* (UM, 2), where Nietzsche speaks about the disease of the modern man consisting of his "weakened personality" (UM, 2, chapter 5). This weakening of the personality is the direct consequence of the gap between man's "innwardness and outwardness", between essence and appearance, between form and content.

When he makes these remarks, he relates modern man to the ancient man, as this contrast between the inner and the outer was not known by the old peoples. On the contrary, Nietzsche speaks about the harmony between the inner and the outer, between the body and the spirit which the Ancient Greeks, for example, presented in the form of the world of the Olympian gods and through the medium of tragedy.

The disease of modern man is associated to the malady of modern culture, in that the weakened personality of modern man is linked to a weakness in culture. This refers to those cultures based mainly on history or which, in most cases, misuse it. This weakness is caused, among other things, by the lack of

consequences, of effects of those cultural traditions which waste themselves in a contemplation of the past, "divorced from action and relegated to inwardness" (UM, 2, Preface).

Modern man lacks precisely that balance between the form and the content, and Nietzsche even speaks about a "troubling chasm" between the two, "the critical gulf" (UM, 2, chapters 4, 25). Form has become a mere convention, in other words, it is dissimulation and disguise, while the fractured depth, feeling, and inwardness have been forced to learn "to leap, to dance, to use make-up, to express themselves with abstraction and calculation and gradually to lose themselves!" (UM, 2, chapters 4, 25). Modern man is divided between "the inner man" and "the outer man", while the two dimensions can no longer overlap in order to restore the balance. For the same reason, "biologically, modern man represents a *contradiction of values*, he sits between two stools, he says yea and nay in one breath" (*Epilogue*, CW, p. 51).

Which, then, could be the meaning of the disguise, of the fact that it is hiding? The disguise, the act of putting on the mask, presupposes a form which is inadequate to the content. He who adopts it makes an attempt at hiding fear, lack of self-control and of will force, which is the most visible forms of weakness in the modern personality.

The historic disease has been conducive to man's impossibility to create history. This *impotentia*, in Nietzsche's terms, is in fact "the fear of entering historic responsibilities in the first person, the uncertainty of his own decisions" (Vattimo, 2001, p. 21).

As long as man no longer dare trust himself, but, seeking counsel from history about his feelings, asks "how am I to feel here", will, from timidity, gradually become an actor and play a role, mostly even many roles and therefore each so badly and superficially. (UM, 2, chapter 5)

This uncertainty of modern man springs from an excess of historic culture in the sense that "the expulsion of the instincts by history has almost transformed men into downright *abstracts* and shadows" (UM, 2, chapter 5). Hence, a deeply-felt need for disguise, for putting on conventional masks, some of them frozen in a single expression (BT, chapter 17).

In the *Beethoven Frieze*, helpless mankind places its hopes in the hero's ability to deliver, since "the world must go forward, that ideal condition cannot be achieved by dreaming, we must fight and struggle to achieve it" (UM, 2, chapter 9). The great battle that Klimt's hero is left to fight is that against opposing forces.

Considering how the "storyline" unfolds in the three panels of the frieze (as Hofmann remarks, everything is static, narrative in the frieze, 1983, p. 88), we can draw the conclusion that Klimt's knight is a representation of modern man, since he seems to suffer from the same malady as Nietzsche's modern man, namely a "weakened personality" (UM, 2, chapter 5). The argument at the basis of this conclusion is that, in his struggle to achieve collective happiness, he no longer places his entire being at stake, "no one dares to show his person", instead he disguises himself as a knight, in a way similar to that in which Nietzsche's modern man hides behind masks and plays various parts: that of the cultivated person, of the poet, of the scholar, and of the politician.

In the frieze, the balance is only apparent: The knight is well-armed and acts as an external force, while Compassion and Ambition (represented allegorically as two female figures) act as two forces from the inside. All this should be an incentive for the felicitous conclusion of the struggle for happiness. The so-called saviour is, however, a diseased man who avoids the great confrontation: "The individual has withdrawn into his inner being: externally one discerns nothing of him anymore", as he turns into a "walking lie" (UM, 2, chapter 5). For this reason, the artist represents the suit of armour in a bi-dimensional, decorative manner,

while in his work *The Golden Knight* it can be surmised that the suit of armour is empty inside. The armour in the frieze also looks as if it were empty, even if there is a head for the character, that of the composer Gustav Mahler. The body protected by the armour seems something abstract, a phantom, has no reality of its own. It has only a form, no substance. Since it is entirely decorative, it is more suitable to be placed in an art gallery than in a real life situation. Hence, his role which is rather esthetic than moral or social. Although one of his legs is extended forward as if he were marching, the knight is motionless, leaning against his sword, which seems too large for his powers.

It must, however, be said that Gustav Klimt had practised the tridimensional representation of the knight in the portraits of the ancestors of the Romanian royal family, the Hohenzollern Sigmaringens. We are speaking here about the five life-size portraits painted in the academic art style between 1883 and 1885, of which we could mention those of: Eitel Friedrich VII, Phillip Friedrich Christoph sau Johann Georg at the Peleş Castle in Sinaia. They are wearing shiny suits of armour painted in the minutest details.

On the last panel of the *Beethoven Frieze*, the hero is represented in the nude, as the armour in which he had started to fight was no longer of use, especially since the battle had been no longer fought. He does not have to fight any longer, since the ancient values are now behind the time. He thus turns into one of those "disguised universal people" very careful about their disguise and who, when their mask is touched, in the notion that it is a genuine thing, a real person and not a fake, "one suddenly has hold of nothing but rags and multi-coloured patches" (UM, 2, chapter 5).

However, Nietzsche says, there will come a time we shall take heed of the people "who constitute a kind of bridge across the wild stream of becoming" (UM, 2, chapter 9); they are those with strong spirits, endowed with will force, which is mentioned in his second *Untimely Meditation*. Then the gap between inwardness and outwardness will have to be annihilated "under the hammer blows of need" (UM, 2, chapter 4).

The Knight in the Allegorical Schemes of the *Beethoven Frieze*

The *Beethoven Frieze* is one of Klimt's most complex allegories. It has to be emphasized that, after a long time when it was triumphantly used during romanticism and realism, allegory suddenly becomes outdated. Although during a large portion of the 19th century this opinion was still held by many, it makes a comeback due to the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites. As other Viennese artists, Klimt finds in allegory the vehicle to represent a set of themes and motifs of choice which he approached in various versions, adapted and interpreted repeatedly during his entire career.

Due to the narrative nature of allegory, the characters seen in their unfolding actions require a certain amount of time. This amount of time, which is natural in literature, is converted into space in the case of the visual arts. In Klimt's frieze, the time is mythical (due to the representation of certain characters from Ancient Greek mythology or of Edenic creatures such as angels) and modern at the same time (due to the picture of composer Gustav Mahler).

Even if a certain symbolic crystallization occurs around the allegorical nucleus in the *Beethoven Frieze* and in spite of the ambiguity created by its mixture with other motifs, Klimt pursues a set of clearly delineated allegorical schemes. The allegorical scheme is "an organizing model which offers a criterion for the internal structure of the work of art", and, at the same time, offers the author multifarious aesthetic possibilities to communicate his personal vision (Călin, 1969, p. 30). In the frieze, several such allegorical schemes can be identified: (1) the path; the road with no destination; (2) the fight; (3) both man's and woman's "roles"; and (4) the confined space.

In a comment on Klimt's allegorical project, Ludwig Hevesi, who had seen the exhibition, said: "Klimt has painted the yearnings of mankind for happiness. That, at any rate, is the general gist, because allegories are never meant to be understood completely" (Novotny, 1967, as cited in Sabarsky & Haenlein, 1984, p. 147). As a rule, allegories imply two levels: The moral one, based on the confrontation between positive and negative principles, between vices and virtues (the knight, compassion, ambition, the choir of angels, poetry, music, on the one hand, and all the evil forces, the monster, on the other). There is also a general allegorical interpretation leading to deeper levels which expand the meanings. Thus, any allegory is "a double action" and requires "a double reading" able to exhaust the readings in the deeper levels (Tuve, 1966, pp. 45-55).

Each panel of the frieze is associated with a main allegorical scheme, to which other, secondary, can be added. The first panel, "The Aspiration to Happiness" is related to "the path" as an allegorical scheme, while the second panel, "The Hostile Forces" is related to the scheme "the battle" (usually "the path" and "the battle" intermingle). The last panel contains the scheme of "the confined space".

Klimt's knight is the traveller who set out on a journey with a destination which is known or presupposed; the path towards it contains all sorts of temptations and obstacles which he has to overcome or reject, by enduring, suffering, and sacrificing himself. He is a human prototype in that he—the knight—appears as a human being (at least in the manner in which he is presented on the first panel), the saviour of mankind, as well as a lover in search for his love (as he is presented in the last panel) or as an individual thirsting for knowledge. It has been said about this character that he is in search for the truth, that he "must overcome the constraints of a rational society in order to reveal and transform the terrible Dionysian will" (Hilles, 1998, p. 176).

The knight is encouraged to set out on this path alone (moreover, in spite of his rich clothing, he has no horse; that is why the reference to the image in Klimt's *Golden Knight*, which he would paint a year later, makes sense here); his loneliness emphasizes the danger and anxiety. In the second panel it can be seen that, in fact, the destination is unknown, that the hero could be the subject of a spiritual adventure (allegorically presented, in its turn), which takes him to a labyrinth teeming with fearful creatures. Which he eventually chooses to avoid, as we can conclude from the third panel.

The end of this path cannot be said to be entirely a failure, as it cannot be said to be a victory either. Or as it cannot be said to be a crucial ontological experience. We can, however, see that this journey of the false hero has become representative of an unreachable ideal, as the journey failed to reach its original purpose. The modern hero cannot take upon itself to save humanity and he takes part in no battle. "This psychological attitude (of the allegories) is, as it were, a classical expression of a weak ego that finds a substitute for its lack of power over reality: desire is everything, and argument is avoided" (Schorske, 1981, p. 248).

As a rule, in most works of art, the knight is subject to all sorts of temptations and errors, he is, however, equally able of feats that can lead him to the final victory. Although he seems to have embarked on reaching a noble ideal (that of saving humanity), which implies a clearly set path, Klimt's knight was not spiritually stimulated in his deeds by what the two winged characters Ambition and Compassion have to offer, his only stimulus was his yearning for love and his own sexuality, as is revealed at the end.

In most allegories, be they in visual arts or in literature, the hero, in his attempt to fulfill the destiny of humanity, is opposed by a negative principle, which tries to prevent this fulfillment. In Klimt's frieze, too, the "battle" scheme implies a struggle, possibly successful, against evil forces, embodied as a single character or a group opposing order (the Gorgons, Sickness, Madness, Death, Lust, Lasciviousness, Excess, and Gnawing Grief), also as the monster around which this group congregates (Typhon). As can be inferred from their

names, they have individualizing physical and psychological features, related each to the vice they represent: disease, violence, and power. They are all at the basis of many myths, they bring about the evil, disasters; they are also the elements which, when fought against by the hero, will ultimately help reestablish order, freedom, and salvation.

Along this frieze, the man initially plays the role of the knight, which he eventually gives up in order to ultimately play his own role. On the first panel, behind the armoured knight, there is another man, kneeling, humiliated by his nakedness and impotence, begging for help. Together with two female characters, he represents humanity. In this frieze, on the other hand, the woman is represented in several hypostheses, as she plays various roles: that of the lover, goddess, monster, angel, and floating dream.

The allegorical scheme of the confined space is represented on the last panel of the frieze, through the paradise-like garden and the bell covering the characters. The confinement is, then, double: the bell also separates the two lovers from the rest of the "confined garden". A closer inspection of this final section of the frieze reveals that Klimt knew the significance of the "garden" as described in the allegorical poem *The Romance of the Rose*. In medieval art and literature, the garden had a double meaning: The first one, valid for Christians, was the walled garden, the enclosed garden, "hortus conclusus", and it was a symbol of Mary's virginity. The secular meaning was that of garden of pleasures, "hortus deliciarum", where women could delight themselves in intellectual or cultural activities. Both types of gardens contain roses, as a symbol of the divine love on the one hand, and of the profane love on the other. In Klimt's garden, the two lovers are surrounded by two bushes of Tudor roses, painted as having three petals, in Mackintosh's style, while the angels stand with their eyes closed, in an immobile posture. This choir of angels is a bidimensional repetitive motif, with almost identical chromatism for clothes, hands, and feet. A curious detail is that they have no wings, although the wings are an element recurrent in his work: the winged Niké (*The Theater of Taormina*, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, and *Sculpture*), the bird associated with Isis (*The Art of Ancient Egypt*), Cronos (*Januar*), even Ambition and Compassion in this frieze. This absence of the wings may indicate that this is in fact an earthly paradise, hosting a profane love and not a celestial one. As they are in a garden of pleasures, the angels have no aura either. The garden has turned into a place of sensual pleasures, as revealed by the sensual embrace of the two lovers and by the symbols that are doubtlessly indicative of sexuality. The hero and his partner are surrounded, in Schorske's terms, by a column shaped as a penis. Another detail to be mentioned here: The two bushes of roses, on either side of the column, symbolically represent female sexuality. Klimt has left no detail out.

Conclusions

The *Beethoven Frieze* was created for an ephemeral existence, as it was to be relocated at the end of the exhibition (this was in fact the reason why Klimt used cheap materials). Since its restauration, it has represented a continuous challenge for interpreters in their attempt at clarifying its meanings. Due to its manifold levels of interpretation, the frieze has become a point of debate for a large number of scholars, Hofmann, Schorske, Bouillon, and Hilles among them. It has been analyzed from the point of view of the artist's role in the social life, that of the artist-hero who has to fight against the forces opposing the creative act. It has also been seen as Klimt's pictorial manner to present the Nietzschean view of the world (a view related to music and tragedy selected from among the arts). It has been interpreted as an instance of an essentially female dominated world, where the hero is subject to the female principle and which is replete with symbols of

sexuality. It has been regarded as the artist's response to those who opposed his vision and to criticisms directed to his proposals for the panels at the University of Vienna representing *Philosophy*, *Medicine*, and *Jurisprudence*.

The utopian vision of universal brotherhood which Beethoven had proclaimed [in his *Ninth Symphony*—a vision where the whole of mankind would be set free from its pains—was contrasted with the chaos and corruption of modern civilization and the constraints imposed from above, by the state and the church. [...] The “hostile forces” in the painting apparently also included those forces which obstructed his own development as an artist. (Bisanz Prakken, 1984, p. 537)

All these well-known perspectives are also well supported by arguments—for this reason they have not been reproduced in the present paper.

The issue at stake is the knight's status and role in an age when his very presence seems anachronistic. It is true, however, that Hofmann remarked that the knight model, this character, is a very frequent symbol at the end of the 19th century; it bears the significance of the herald of a more beautiful world, an esthetic world (Hofmann, 1970, p. 27). Therefore, of the old chivalric ideal and its representations only the artistic, esthetic dimensions remain. If we consider the set of virtues and qualities that tradition has preserved as the attributes of the knight, Klimt's character is not a genuine one (as he lacks most of the essential characteristics). The initial hypothesis we supported and argued using a text by Nietzsche is that in Klimt's representation, in spite of possible ideals which the knight may attempt to achieve, he proves a weak personality, as he fails to participate in the “great battle”. The solution Klimt finally suggests (the realm of music, poetry, and love) overlaps the solution offered by Nietzsche for this malady: A new age to herald a new form of collective culture under the auspices of art (UM, 2, chapter 10).

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