

## The Chamber-Opera *Orestes-Oedipus* by Cornel Țăranu

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### Abstract

The study explores on a musicological and esthetic level Cornel Țăranu's chamber opera *Oedipus & Orestes*, composed after the libretto of Olivier Apert – the theater-opera *Orestes & Oedipus*, finished in 2000. Acknowledging the current function and significance of the genre of chamber opera, the paradigmatic value of Țăranu's creation becomes prevalent within both, universal and Romanian contemporaneous music. Regarding the historical-structural mutations in the revitalization process of myths starting from George Enescu, Aurel Stroe and ending with Cornel Țăranu, the author asserts that we are confronted with the face to face setting of two fundamental myths in order to explain each other as well as themselves in the signification of the senses of other times, representing new visions of modern musical interpretation. The analytical sections of the study illustrate the cathartic differentiation of the tragic faults of the main characters of the *drama per musica*. The way in which the main characters Orestes and Oedipus atone their faults at the end of the opera is the paradigm of loneliness. In the solitude of collective alienation. The musical rhetoric of the leit motifs illustrate how they pass by each other, speaking deaf monologues to which nobody answers. They both suffer equally deeply, but they cannot utter their sufferance in order to be comforted. They live a lost present, always calling for the past, either in mad nightmares – Orestes – or, in longing for return – Oedipus ...

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### The musical vectoriality of the myth

The essential myths, passing through the trajectory of human generalizations, from zero degree to rhetorical deviation, and all the way to the comprehensive interpretation of this deviation, behave like prospective openings of certain archetypes to great comparisons. “Such is our life, like that of the prisoners from the cave”, concludes Socrates in

his dialogue with Glaucon in the famous *myth of the cavern*<sup>1</sup>. And indeed, the perspective of this myth, indicating the vectors of entering and exiting the cave, turns into ideas, arouses feelings, and leads us to the discerning of new meanings of human condition. There is something almost ineffable in these macrocosmic legends, namely their musicality, their secret intention to guide us to make connections, to create harmony. Myths never stop, even today, being planted into our consciousness, by their transcendent message, the validity of eternal truths about human condition. These myths are eternal due to their profound symbolic nature, with evident metaphoric passages from one symbol to the other. T. Vianu, speaking about the creative power of rhetoric, mentions symbolic metaphors.<sup>2</sup> One might add: it is exactly symbolic metaphors which stand at the basis of the transcendental language of myths. These statements are also pertinent to antique Greek myths, as was understood by opera writers also throughout the history of music; let us only think of the impressive number of musical dramas based on the ideas of Hellenic mythology.

The symbolic functions of the reviving thoughts and feelings engraved and transmitted by myths grow, once more, with the modification of views on ancient meanings according to the resemblance of the “new presents”, re-arranging the same images, as Shklovski said, in new structures of interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Because, eventually, metaphoric

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Opere* (Works), vol. V., Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986, p. 312 ff.

<sup>2</sup> “Compared to metonymy, synecdoche, or antonomasia, to allegories, fables, parables and riddles, the symbolic metaphor is the one which possesses the **highest artistic value**. [...] The symbolic metaphor, together with all other types of metaphors presented here, implies a comparison, which is made, however, between a given impression, and one which remains vague, and thus, unable to be formulated by a univocal and precise term. For this reason, the perspective of the symbolic metaphor is not closed, but undefined or infinite. We have seen that the metaphor «the music of the moon’s smiles» evidently presupposes a comparison, but one which includes a certain sensitive aspect of the moon as a term unexpressed and impossible to formulate, which can be guessed in the unlimited perspective of these metaphors, without ever formulating it. The symbolic or infinite metaphor is, therefore, the one that mediates the most productive work of the imagination, and which produces, by its suggestive indetermination, the *par excellence* poetic condition.” (Vianu, *Problemele metaforei* (The problems of the metaphor), in Vianu, *Opere* (Works), vol. 4, Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1975, p. 282-283.

<sup>3</sup> Quotes B. Eichenbaum, in *Teoria formalnogo metoda* (The theory of the formal method), see the volume B. Eichenbaum, *Literatura – Teoria, kritika, polemica*, Leningrad: Priboi, 1927, p. 16.

symbols are nothing else than fruitful abbreviations of regular human things or acts which, even if they had never happened, could have happened any time.<sup>1</sup> Let us remember the first words of the *Cântecule nomade* (Nomadic songs) of Maestro C. Țăranu, on the verses of Cezar Baltag: “Ce va fi, a mai fost, / Ce a fost, va mai fi” (What will be, has been before, what has been, will be again). Hence derives the large field of their fruitfulness for rich meditations, emotions, and perspectives, so much in the creative process, as also in the hermeneutic understanding of these creations.

The history of modern Romanian music fully confirms the magic force of transcending and rethinking ancient legends, by the repeated reworking of the myths of Oedipus and Orestes. George Enescu, based on the scenario of Ed. Fleg, “re-arranges” the whole tragic collision of the drama with an inversed connection to the structure of the Sphinx’s enigma. The initial response – The Man! – receives a very different tragic force by the change of the initial question<sup>2</sup> into “Who is stronger than the punishment?”... To which the reply, as a triumphant exclamation – The Man! – raises Oedipus as an archetypal symbol of all uplifting confrontations with Destiny, *per aspera ad astra*, as Beethoven would say.

Paraphrasing Haeckel’s biogenetic law, one might say that the phylogenesis of the antique myth of *Orestes*, handed down to us by the three tragedies of Aeschylus – *Agamemnon*, *Choephton*, *Eumenides* – revived in the ontogenesis of the triptych *Orestia* by A. Stroe. It is not the reconsidered enigma of human condition which brings the breath of novelty of the work’s message, as happens in Enescu’s *Oedipus*, but the re-establishment of the elements of separation, as M. Proust would say, which was produced by the impact of the Trojan war. The four paradigms of the impact – *the rupture*, *the catastrophe*, *the irreparable* and *the irreversible* –, similar to certain slowed-down metamorphoses, stand at the basis of revitalizing the tragic collision culminating in the matricide committed by Orestes. The author writes: “The endless human sufferings, slavery, cruelty, chains of murders and other crimes – among which

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Poetica* (Poetics), Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1965, part IX, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> The initial enigma was: “Who is it, that walks on four legs in the morning, on two at noon, and on three at evening?” It is significant that already Sophocles ignored the question, only alluding to it in his tragedy *King Oedipus*. See Oedipus’ role, lines 390-391, chorus 1199-1200, and also Oedipus, in the end, lines 1524-1525.

parricide is only one – have accompanied the deep mutations which were to happen by the demolition to the ashes of an archaic civilization. On the winners' side, the tyrants, both ambitious and bloody, are removed by other tyrants, even more wicked: guileful, oppressing with no scruples, distrustful and cynical at the same time. The ghost of destruction seems to hover over the whole world: fast at the beginning, in time it becomes slow, but certain. The irreversible, the irreparable come to the fore more than ever before, as the basic condition of existence". Further on, he says: "This is the aspect which has probably tied me the most to the three pieces which make up Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, contemporary to those "tragic philosophers" (Nietzsche) of the pre-Socratics – in his life as well as his thinking – who had much anticipated our way to see things."<sup>1</sup> In the musical repetition of the genesis of this myth, the composition passes through the way of deconstruction from *mythos* to *logos*. It reflects the structural-historical mutations of the antique *Ethos*, by the continuous transformation of the expressive variations of the musical language pre-established by the author for the conception of the evocative-reconciliatory musical discourse. "It is easy to note that there are gaps difficult to pass between Aeschylus' works and music. And still, at a deeper level, the dramatic significance and the musical structure are congruent." [...] "We may say that it is not a musical piece in itself that we are dealing with, but *the history of the gradual rupture of an initially unitary music* under the pressure of the tragic text. It is not the rendering of the artistic image of a catastrophe via the opera, but the subjection of the very opera to a catastrophic, morphogenetic process which occurs due to the pressure of the dramatic medium on the musical score."<sup>2</sup> Then, the author concludes, similarly to the rhetoric of the Dürrenmatt-type chiasmus<sup>3</sup>, the *Oresteia* represents the "the catastrophation of the opera itself, and not the rendering of the artistic image of a catastrophe via the opera".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aurel Stroe, "Orestia – o raportare esențială" (*Oresteia* – an essential connection), in *Secolul 20*, 270-271/6-7 (1983): 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, p. 25, 26.

<sup>3</sup> The basis of the tragic impact formulated by the Swiss author in his grotesque drama *Romulus the Great* is the alternative paradox of the chiasmus: "Either a capital catastrophe, or a catastrophic capitalism..."; in Fr. Dürrenmatt, *Romulus cel Mare, Vizita bătrânei doamne, Fizicienii* (*Romulus the Great, The Visit, The Physicians*), Bucharest, 1965, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, p. 54.

While the procedures of *substitution* and *separation* have characterized the rhetoric of revitalization of the Oedipus and Orestes myths in Romanian music, the artistic generalization of the *Orestes & Oedipus* represents a third aesthetic variation of the re-discovery and re-liberation of the mythical energy which lives its latent existence in its tense syncretic unity. Actually, these myths existed at one time through their integrating connection, and their separation happened in parallel with the segmentation of the logos into concrete historical truths. The rhetoric, which appears here, excels by *de-fragmentation into a single, wide-range antithesis of the continuum of disintegrated events*.

### **The reviving of mythic syncretism**

The idea of the complementary union of the two myths in a single artistic structure – the theater-opera *Orestes & Oedipus* – represents a novel approach in the myths' history of interpretations. One assists here at the counter-position of two fundamental myths in order to mutually explain each other and themselves against the significance of previous meanings for new interpretive approaches to modern music.

Their *tête à tête* contiguity gives a *par excellence* metonymic opportunity for parallel syntagms to expose in an unmediated way, by an evolving-contrasting continuity, the inevitable tragic impacts: on the one hand, the punishment of the murderous mother, Clytaemnestra, being murdered by her children, which in its turn leads to the punishment of matricide by Orestes' madness; on the other hand, the (self)punishment of incest and patricide by suicide (Iocaste) and self-blinding (Oedipus).

The author's creativity re-arranges, link by link, the original *metonymical combinations* into new *metaphoric selections* by passing them again on the syntagmatic axis of the plot, as R. Jakobson would say.<sup>1</sup> Even the consequences of tragic sins receive new symbolic forms: the loneliness of the two characters' wanderings who pass by each other remembering the consequences, either prospectively (Oedipus – "I will return") or retrospectively (Orestes – "I have sought you night after night").<sup>2</sup>

Reminding oneself of the history of character-description, from the heroes of antique tragedies or the indications of the Horatian *ars poetica* to Renaissance and French Classicism, one might notice that the

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<sup>1</sup> R. Jakobson, "Lingvistică și poetică" (Linguistics and poetics), in *Probleme de stilistică: Culegere de articole* (Problems of stylistics: A collection of articles), (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică, 1964), p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> The last lines of the finale (end of Act IV.)

modern opera takes over and efficiently develops the appearance of heroes, repeating somehow their history in the history of musical drama. For example, contemporary characters appear so much in their classic catalyzing versions, as in their direct carriers of events. In both versions, one finds the unchanged intermittence, that is, the evolving fluency of the characters. All these combinations constructively pass through the way of contemporary opera between a neo-classical lyrical theater and the avant-garde musical-instrumental one. The forming of characters in the chamber-opera *Orestes–Oedipus* represents a dynamic synthesis of these two nuances. The vibrating synthesis of the two versions bears the subjective marks of the authors. Starting from the indications of the *libretto* and arriving at the heroes' parts in the *score*, it seems that O. Apert marks the classical French instances of the characters' formation, while in the case of C. Țăranu the Shakespearian vein seems to be dominant in the conception of the same roles. The harmony of dichotomic relations offers, eventually, a very rich scope of premises as well as their accomplishment on the level of character construction.

### **Dialoguing couples**

A panoramic view of the emotional characterization of the personae reveals that they are musically metaphorized in two polarized versions, that is, in dialoguing couples or in monologues (of “mute” couples). The first version is based on those instances of the myth which either have not been emphasized before, or have been upset in their archetypal forms. The musical process fulfils its rhetorical role by the implied configuring of the affective dialogues. The symbolic-metaphoric sensibility of the conversations is peculiar to each heroic couple according to their scenic-dramatic specificity. These have profoundly allegorical syncretic substrata, and lead our archetypal memories back to antiquity, evoking the distant horizon of ancient beings by the knowledge of wild feelings and thoughts, as Michel Foucault would say.<sup>1</sup>

The utmost pattern of the musical conception of each character's emotional-passionate profile is the well-balanced positioning of each role on the affective scope of the melodic line within the phases mentioned

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<sup>1</sup> “This *a priori* is what, in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man's everyday perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true.” Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, (London: Routledge, 1997 [c1970]), 158.

above. Oedipus and Iocaste are placed closer to the imaginary melodies of the antiquity by their interiorized moments of “spoken song”, while the expressive outbursts of Orestes and Electra are closer to the “spoken voice” phases of the melodic discourse. These configurations, by the complementarity of likenesses and differences, offer a fruitful parallel for the emotional drama, naturally emphasized by counterpoint structure. The jumps to altering antipodes – from the Orestes–Electra line to the Oedipus–Iocaste one – highlight the unity of the subject in its entirety.

### ***Orestes–Electra***

The musical discourse of the opera displays a “fluid” transfiguration of the libretto’s structure. At a first glance one might even notice a certain domination of the text over the music in Monteverdi’s terms, “l’orazione sia padrona dell’armonia e non serva”. This procedure is widely applied in fact in the composition of modern contemporary operas.<sup>1</sup> At a closer look however, one realizes that Țăranu applies here all three variations of the *text-melody relationship*, beginning with the prevalence of the text, often switching to the primacy of music, but most times with the tendency of equating the text with the music. This is even more apparent as the initial character of the roles is modified along with their musical thinking and feeling, during the gradual and parallel development of the libretto and the score, as shown in the additional notes of the manuscripts (libretto and score).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, lacking and adequate libretto, the music is written, syllable by syllable, for the text of the drama; for instance, in the opera of R. Bacalu, *Jacques or The Submission* on the text of E. Ionesco’s drama with the same title.

<sup>2</sup> The libretto: Olivier Apert, *Orestes & Oedipus, theatre-opera*, Biblioteca Apostrof (Cluj – Gennevilliers: Édition Mihály, 2000). The manuscript written in Cluj and Paris, November 1998 – September 1999. [Henceforth: Libretto]. The score: Cornel Țăranu, *Oreste și Oedip* (Orestes and Oedipus), libretto: Olivier Apert, manuscript Act I. mise en page 7 June 1999 [ca. 13’30”-14’], p. 1-22; Act II. 9 August 1999 [31’15”], p. 1-54; Act III. October 2000 [30’19”], p. 1-49; Act IV. 20 February 2000 [26’], p. 1-40. [Henceforth: Score, Act ..., p. All Acts are paginated from 1 to ... ].

Premiers and casting annotated in the score:

PA Automne de Cluj 11. Oct. 2000.

*Ars Nova Ensemble*

Duration: 35’50”

Abridged version: 31’10” [annotations on p.2 Act II.]

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PA Automne de Cluj 11. nov. 2000

Thus, the initially interiorized and undetermined conception of Orestes' temperament goes through very acute, passionate, dramatic, and powerful phases; similarly, the musical expressions of Electra's emotional profile often become blunter, alleviated in the planning of the revenge. These modifications shed a new, more cathartic light on their helpless beings, fused with the *Ethos* of revenge ordered by gods. These emotional musical portraits constructed with such empathy lead, eventually, to the purifying understanding of Electra's turn to matricide, and Orestes' acceptance of his sister's urge – “come, kill her, kill her” – and of the instrument of revenge – the fibula – from her hands.

The intimacy of Orestes' and Electra's brother-sister relationship reveals a sort of archaic wildness which, beyond their harsh will of revenge by murder, can vaguely suggest a possible incestuous relationship between them,<sup>1</sup> emphasizing the motivation of savage blood in the committing of matricide.<sup>1</sup>

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*Ars Nova Ensemble*

Singers: Lavinia Cherecheș  
Angela Țibrea  
Vasile Dinea  
Gh. Roșu

Choir of the *Filarmonica Transilvania*

Conducted by: The author

Acts I-II-III on December 7, 2000.

Roșu – Budoï Károlyi  
Cherecheș – Țibrea  
Trif – Popescu

And the same [annotations on p.49 Act III.]

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PA ‘Cluj-Modern’ Festival, April 2, 2001 [annotations on p. 40 Act IV.]

Gh. Roșu

Marius Budoiu

Choir Group *Ars Nova Ensemble*

Flavius Trif

Lucian Popescu

Conducted by: Cornel Țăranu.

<sup>1</sup> Orestes: “Here I am. My wolf, my Electra, you recognize me. Let me nest in your soft fur. Here I am. Do whatever you want with me.” *Electra stabs Orestes' hand with the fibula, then licks his blood*. See: Libretto, Act II., scene 2. no.1; Score, Act II. p. 19. And later on: Electra: “Behold this scarf, in this have I carried you, loved you, saved you / Nights on end without you in the cellar / Now she must be murdered / You must kill her with this scarf”. *She shows him how to*

Orestes rests in Electra's arms, saying to her: "Speak, speak to me, *my* wolf. Here I am. I was wandering so far from you, so far from us, and I only had this scarf and fibula to keep me company..."<sup>2</sup>

### ***Oedipus – Sphinx***

The myths are organized on multidimensional levels, which act in many directions. Thus, the evaluative interpretations presented so far can also be judged inversely. As the *directing indications of the libretto*<sup>3</sup> show, Oedipus, very self-assured, is a seductive man. By his temperament and ambition he imposes himself in all his manifestations. He triumphs in all his relationships with those who love him and sacrifice themselves for him. But it is exactly because of these victories that he commits all his unpardonable sins.

However, his *must be loved* quality is quite lyrically outlined in the *musical conception* of his emotional profile. Just like the Sphinx, who is turned from a monster into a woman who can love with abnegation, even at the expense of her life, the proud Oedipus as well, self-assured, transforms into a lover who justifies the love he requests from others. Invoked from the mists of times by the signal intoned on the trombone, sending our memory also to Enescu's perception of his character, Oedipus repeats the invocation on a smaller scale, and starts out

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*do it, strangling his neck.* See: Libretto, Act II. scene 4, no. 2, p. 53; Score Act II., p. 52. [the latter indication does not appear in the Score].

<sup>1</sup> The end of scene 2, no. 1: *Electra and Orestes enter. He seems to hide behind his sister. As Clytaemnestra notices Electra, she starts to growl and spit like a cat, while Electra starts to moan her leitmotif: "Come on, kill her, kill her".* Libretto, Act III. scene 2. no. 2, p. 67; Score, Act III. p. 17. Finally, here is the indication of the outcome: *While Orestes is speaking, Electra repeats, systematically and with various intonations from begging to command: "Come on, kill her, kill her!"* Libretto Act III. scene 3. no.1 p. 69; Score Act III. p. 24. [The indication does not appear in the score].

Orestes' last words before the matricide:

"Oh, your death speeds mine, it was ordained this way

We shall both die

but not together

You have lived and I live upon this treason you can be sure of that"

*(He chokes her with the scarf and stabs his hand with the fibula),* Libretto, Act III scene 3. no.1 p. 73; Score, Act III. p. 32-33. [The second part of the indication is missing from the score].

<sup>2</sup> Libretto, Act II. scene 4. no. 1. p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> See chapters: *The libretto; The libretto: structure; The libretto: history; Stage designing intentions; The abstract of the myths,* in Apert, op. cit., 107-147.

undeterred on the way to the fulfillment of his destiny. The discourse of his musical profile is more and more loaded with warmth, wisdom, and love, convincingly urging the spectator to a growing cathartic sympathy. His leitmotif-beginning evidently establishes the evolution of his tragic hero character in this direction: "I am here on the threshold of a new day".<sup>1</sup>

The mysterious monster, a bearer of the enigmas of life and death, is treated *as such* in the tragedy *Orestes-Oedipus*, being rendered by a woman's role, or more precisely by the role of the woman who comes to life in the moment of Oedipus' arrival to Thebes. Descending from the stone pedestal, the Sphinx<sup>2</sup> comes to life and becomes the body-and-soul feminine partner in the destiny of the tragic hero. The archaic lyricism of their dialogues is gradated by directing instructions<sup>3</sup> to the level of the drama of Orestes and Electra's *pendant* scene. Following the chain of events, in Electra's case one senses the musical amplification of her wild rage to chase her brother in revenge; in the Sphinx' case, just the opposite, one realizes her growing love for Oedipus, to the level of self-sacrifice. The melodic discourse of the Sphinx' revelation of the enigma of life and death is transfigured in revealing metaphors of passion and emotion, by the rhetorical figures of *emphatic repetition*, *ellipses* and *abruptio*.

One notices here, just as in the case of the Orestes-Electra couple, the Freudian and Jungian treatment of the myth. Analyzing the esthetic orientation of the authors, one may notice that the creation of the relationships is directed towards a collective-archaic subconscious

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<sup>1</sup> Libretto, Act II. scene 1. no. 2. p. 27; Score Act II. p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> The *archaic monster* who in the mythical world lives in fact in the form of a lioness with a woman's head and wings, face and breasts of a young virgin, bearer of the enigmas of life and death, has most often had a female role in its mythical and later artistic treatment. Here, in order to once again underline the femininity of this mythical being, the name is also given a female gender: instead of *Sfinx* (masculine form), she is called *Sfinxă* (feminine form) in Romanian, and *La Sfinx* in French. [It is true that in the score it is the name *Sphynx* which appears (Act II. p. 20.), as well as in certain programme booklets, such as the one for January 20, Concert Studio, "Gh. Dima" Musical Academy, and this questions the *de facto* and *de iure* acceptance of the feminine name by the composer and the Romanian medium.]

<sup>3</sup> The intimacy of the relationship between the Sphinx and Oedipus is rendered dramatically both in scenes and gestures by the directing instructions: *The Sphinx comes to life* (Libretto, p. 31) and *The Sphinx descended from her "pedestal" and rests in the arms of Oedipus* (Idem, p. 39.).

sphere. It is the remains of the domination of instincts in the cohabitation of ancient communities that are emphasized here. Although preceding the Antiquity, these obviously kept their marks in the transcendent-mythical memory of Greek legends. The imaginary recalling of the bodily relationships of gods and humans, monsters and humans, of brothers and sisters, sons and mothers are retrospectively marked by the *archaic-savage structures of human condition* on the level of instincts.<sup>1</sup>

The Sphinx' love for Oedipus also emphasizes the personality and character of the hero who not only deserves love, but must be loved, or even more: is destined for love, even at the expense of the lives of those who love him – the Sphinx and later Iocaste. Thus Iocaste's tragedy is preceded by that of the Sphinx – tragedy in tragedy – motivating once again the inevitability and irreversibility of the outcome of Iocaste's tragic perdition. Even more so, as her love is directed towards Oedipus, the one destined for love, and for whom she blames herself.

The Sphinx' deed – the revelation of the enigma of life and death at the expense of her life – emphasizes once again the substance of the sin and passion which defines the relationships of the main couples Orestes-Electra and Iocastes-Oedipus. It is enough just to mention the symbolic content of the answer to the enigma, which can be seen in the meta-text of the discourse, namely, the means by which all the murders will be committed in the drama: the fibula and the scarf, anticipating the tragic collisions of future events.

Oedipus himself becomes less proud and violent in the pentagrams of the opera. His musical discourse changes his temperament and character as compared to his initial dramatic traits into a profound interiorized lyricism and wise judgment of all things, even if they are hidden from his eyes and reason. This characterization bears a deep hermeneutic-musical instance: it suggests the gesture of self-punishment by blinding, i.e. if his eyes were unable to foresee things, they will be even more useless for a retrospective view. As if the Little Prince's replica would direct this idea: it is only with the heart that one can truly see...

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<sup>1</sup> The invocation of primitive and ancient epochs of the anthropological structure of the human condition penetrates the content of directing instructions, and brings to our attention the self-sufficient character of these structures all throughout history. Such an anthropological-philosophical orientation can be found in the work of Cl. Lévi-Strauss who distinguishes *ab ovo* between *savage* as an adjective and *the savage* as a notion, entitling his work *The savage thought* (La pensée sauvage), and not *The thinking of the savage*.

## Mute couples

### *Clytaemnestra (mute) – Orestes*

Unlike Iocaste's emotional profile of a regretful victim, Clytaemnestra's role is rather potential, motivating, and does not have a direct participation in the course of events. Her drama has long before been inwardly lived. The remains of her consciousness are only exteriorized by the anxious desire to eliminate the causes of fear – the imminence of the righteous revenge against her – ordering her guards more and more vehemently to “watch, watch, watch over!”<sup>1</sup>

### *Iocaste – Oedipus (mute)*

Iocaste, the regretful victim of the drama, has two appearances, just like all the other heroic couples.<sup>2</sup> Her tragic end is foretold by the insertion of Clytaemnestra's murdering by Orestes in the chains of events, as the punishment of her tragic sin committed against the *Nomos*. In the musical rendering of Iocaste's two appearances, especially in the case of her tormenting thoughts and feelings all along her great monologue – “Don't I have the right to love my son?”<sup>3</sup> – the composer conceives the warmest, most humane and moving instances of the entire opera. These instances are most inwardly justified. At the end of the revelation of secrets one assists thus, implicitly, at the apperception of the tragedy's emotional motivations. One can cathartically observe Iocaste's recognition of her own sin, and the outburst of her entire arsenal of feelings – from happiness to resignation, from hope to despair, from premonition to certainty – in the alive, comprehensive experience of tragedy destined for her by the Olympus. Iocaste's melodic discourse, similarly to the metaphors of Racine, carries through the depths of sufferings caused by deeds and sins the victim of which the spectator becomes along with Iocaste, as long as he also opposes the cruelty of Destiny... The elevating conception of the music goes beyond the vocal empire of the *Sprachgesang* applied before in the score, reaching the level of a passionate *arioso*.

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<sup>1</sup> Libretto, Act III. scene 1. no. 1. p. 55-59, and Act III. scene 2. no. 1. p. 64-65; Score Act III p. 1-8 and 14-17.

<sup>2</sup> Her text and appearance is combined from the lines of Tiresias: Act III. scene II. no. 2. p. 63. and scene III. no.2. p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> Libretto, p. 73-77.

## The cathartic differentiation of tragic sins

The esthetic contemplation of the permanently changing events – from an *Orestes* episode to an *Oedipus* one – qualitatively modulates the content of the spectator's cathartic participation in the unfolding of the tragedies, enchained during the opera. Starting from Aristotle's *Poetics*<sup>1</sup> in analyzing the accompanying feelings, one may say that the musical interpretation of Oedipus' tragedy, along with that of Iocaste, will attract one's whole compassion, with instances of fear, but also *pity* dominating it.

Just like the other way round, the scenes which prepare and complete Orestes' tragedy polarize the accompanying emotions in the direction of *fear*. There is truly something even more savage and shocking in their taking the decision of revenge, with gods guarding its accomplishment.

The two parallel dramas eventually synthesize the cathartic traditions of the tragedies of Corneille and Racine. Stendhal's words about the two French masters, *mutatis mutandis*, are very fitting – Racine is a poet of anxiety, Corneille is a poet of the sublime – as to the confrontation of the tragic collisions of Orestes and Oedipus.

This nuance is emphatic in the musical rendering of maternal feelings, compromised in exactly opposite ways, in the case of the two female characters, Clytaemnestra and Iocaste.

Iocaste becomes, as it has been shown, the main subject of compassion, while Clytaemnestra utterly lacks any such spiritual motivation. The former finds her son as her lover at the expense of suicide; the latter ignores her own children after having murdered their father as his wife.

The tragic sins, inevitable through Destiny and unforgivable through *Ethos*, are differently grouped in the *continuum* of mythical time, so that Clytaemnestra's revenge against Agamemnon *in the past* becomes revenged by her own children *in the present*. In the other case, however, maternal love is deceived, lifting, in the *discontinuum* of time, into an anachronistic, forbidden erotic relationship. Clytaemnestra takes a

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<sup>1</sup> "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; *through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.*" (emphasis mine, I. A.) In Romanian, see Aristotle, *Poetica*, part VI, p. 59-60. (English translation by S. H. Butcher online: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html>).

passive part, being only the *object* of the murder, while Iocaste is the *subject* of her tragedy, judging her actions and acting by suicide. Their resemblance, which grounds the synthesis of the two outcomes, is thus a contradictory resemblance. In common, they have their loneliness, characteristic to all tragic heroes. One may say with the bitterness of a tragedy's viewer: it is only their Destiny that does not leave them. They act on their own, and they pay for their sins in solitude. Thus, they are only common in their loneliness.

This collective solitude also characterizes the way in which the main heroes – Orestes and Oedipus – pay for their own sins in the Finale of the opera. They pass by each other, saying their deaf monologues to which nobody answers. They both suffer equally deeply, but they cannot communicate their sufferings to ease them. They live a lost present, always calling for the past, either in mad nightmares – Orestes – or, in longing for return – Oedipus ...

The collective solitude, very instructively painted in the reconciliation of the two myths into one single musical drama gives obviously expressionist tints to melodic and dynamic structures. This expressionism however transcends the field of symbolic hyperboles, reaching in intensity the antique tragedy's ways of expression. This tendency is eloquently achieved in the emotional – extrinsic evolution of Orestes' character. Hence the polarized marking of *fear*, a feeling present in all desperate expressions of a man left alone with his own Destiny. The means of expression used for revealing Oedipus' conflict emphasize the *symbol* which surpasses the modern field of factual present, returning to the world of allegoric archetypes, and making a musical use of them.

## **Catalyzing heroes**

### ***Electra***

Electra is the promoter of the execution of revenge. Opposed to Tiresias, who would stop the galloping of tragic events, Electra rushes the course of actions. She does not contemplate in desperation the Inevitable, the Unrepeatable, and the Unpardonable which ground the respect for the *Ethos* of revenge, but execute them, or rather prepares their way by urging, intimately or wildly, her brother Orestes to fulfill the deed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the myths which vehemently oppose the observance of the most elementary and fundamental *nomoi* of cohabitation in the antique polis, the foul deeds committed by their heroes and the complete resignation because of these deeds demonstrate just as many signs of alarm. These, in their mythical comprehension, necessarily mean an opportunity of purification for the spectators of all times, "by

The opera's utmost value is, above all, the integration and revitalization, of a perennial efficiency, of the antique-mythical ways of thinking about the tragic in surpassing the transcendental limits of human condition, now and always.<sup>1</sup>

The trajectory of Electra's and Orestes' anxiety is preceded by a series of tragic collisions represented by the confrontation of opposing *ethos*-es.<sup>2</sup> And Electra's leitmotif words, "Come, kill her, kill her!"<sup>3</sup> pass through all the action, from Clytaemnestra's appearance before the brother and sister and until Orestes' matricide. Her repeated appearances, whether murmured or shouted, lead through a dynamic and tense emotional evolution, equally convincing in whispers or in exclamation, which prepare the final moment of the plot, when Orestes strangles Clytaemnestra with the scarf and then stabs his hand with the fibula.<sup>4</sup> By the repeated intonations of the preparation and progress of the tragic events, the musical transfiguration becomes ever more exteriorizing and

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fear and pity for these passions", as Aristotle has shown in his *Poetics*. Naturally, these opportunities presuppose a hermeneutic comprehension, a dialogue with the reproduced event, the understanding or rather feeling, even if subconscious, of the spiritual and sentimental threats transmitted by the transcendental languages of antique myths.

<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Liiceanu: "Any attempt to annul the tragic represents a form of detachment of the finite conscious being of his own ontological status, as well as a refusal of man to live his life, and of mankind, its history." In: *Tragicul. O fenomenologie a limitei și depășirii* (The tragic. A phenomenology of limit and transcending), Bucharest: Univers, 1975, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Here is the chain of events which carry conflicting ethical imperatives:

- the opposition of Apollo's *Ethos* with Aphrodite's; Agamemnon's torments as the chief of the army and as a father to his daughter Iphigenia. As leader of the army he fulfils the conditions imposed by the Olympus, in order to be able to lead the Greeks to victory against the Trojans; as a father, sacrificing his daughter on Apollo's altar. He commits the tragic sin which attracts Aphrodite's fury, the goddess protective of virgin girls.

- Aphrodite's fury against Agamemnon leads Clytaemnestra, his wife, to revenge, killing him together with his mistress, Cassandra, the famous prophetess of the Antiquity.

- Apollo helps then the brother and sister Orestes and Electra in revenging Agamemnon's, their father's, murder by killing their murderous mother, Clytaemnestra.

<sup>3</sup> Act III. scene 2. no. 1. p. 67., Score Act III. p. 17; then: Act III. scene 3. no.1. p. 69., Score Act III. p. 26, 27, 32.

<sup>4</sup> Libretto: Act III. scene 3. no. 1. p. 73, Score: Act III. p. 32-33. The second part of the indication is missing from the score: "and stabs his hand with the fibula".

expressive, lending the final moment an extremely convincing emotional setting. It is as though the echoes of Electra's cries resound with the fulfillment of the fate, that it could not have happened otherwise, or rather that this is the only way it could have happened!

The repeated sharpening of Electra's catalyzing presence authenticates, in an edifying way, the oratorical version of the opera in the lack of gestures and scenic movements.<sup>1</sup>

### *Tiresias*

Tiresias the oracle is also a catalyzing character of the drama. He equally represents the *Ethos* of the Olympus and of the world. By his ideogram-like imperatives<sup>2</sup> which he only pronounces on the request of the crowd, he plays a role – against his own desire to stop the avalanche – in speeding up the progress of the events. His formulations about the *Nomos* become fundamental ideas. They rush the conclusion of the epilogue incorporated in the *passacaglia*<sup>3</sup> of the opera at the end of Act III. The *passacaglia* revives with an archaic resonance the emotional power of the repetitive sequence which characterizes its form, the theme being conceived in a fearful *maestoso* on Tiresias' lines: "The law of Thebes and the world".<sup>4</sup> The whirling meanings of the imperatives uttered during the events still remain repressed in Tiresias' repeated intonations "Disappear, make it disappear!"<sup>5</sup> These also last during Iocaste's great monologue.

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<sup>1</sup> Libretto, Act III. scene 3. no. 1. p. 72; Score, Act III. p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Tiresias: Law is transcendence

Choir: Transcendence

Tiresias: Transcendence is light, dark transgression

Choir: Dark light; I understand not what you say; Tiresias spoke, long live Tiresias

Tiresias: I say the law

Choir: The law, but which law, Tiresias will speak, long live Tiresias

Tiresias: The law of Thebes and of the world

Choir: Thebes the world

Tiresias: What is good for one is also good for you

Choir: One us

Tiresias: That is the law

Choir: The law

(Act III. scene 2. p. 63, 65)

<sup>3</sup> Act III. scene 4., Choir, Oedipus, Electra (passacaglia)

<sup>4</sup> Score, Act III. scene 4. p. 45-49.

<sup>5</sup> Libretto, Act III. scene 3. no. 2. p. 72; Score Act III. p. 34.

## The rhetoric of leitmotifs

In the conception of the melodic discourse the author draws up each role in a nuanced way, including that of the choir. The nuances are contained between the direct phase of poetic declamation and that of musical intonation – rhetorically speaking, between the metonymies of poetically combined contiguities and the metaphors of musically selected combinations. For their analytical delimitation, instead of the traditional *recitativo*, *arioso*, *aria*, I will employ terms I consider closer to their contemporary hermeneutic understanding, namely: *Sprechstimme* (=spoken voice) and *Sprechgesang* (=spoken song). The totality of these rhetorical-musical figures can be defined, paraphrasing N. Harnoncourt, as *Klangrede* (sonorous/musical speech), that is, musically ornated speech. Deep down in these expressions there is a more profound sense than the mere domination of the text over the melody. For example, the distinctions developed above activate the entire semantic field of historical and structural correspondences which define, in fact, both the evocative origin and the contemporary experience of the mythical-dramatic message. Thus the “musical speeches” of the melodic discourse, unlike the musical composition of the *Nomad songs*, do not stop at the eloquent phases of a chromatic mode which is formed closer to us, reviving our own space and time from a simple musical past. The complex rhetorical figures of the opera *Orestes–Oedipus* cross, by a rarely seen dynamism, the profound route, as Lucian Blaga would say,<sup>1</sup> of the revealing expressiveness from origin to culmination which contemporary music can offer today to esthetic experience. The comparisons, epithets, oxymorons used in the libretto<sup>2</sup> become, by their musical configuration, inherent means of expression in the understanding and contemporary–esthetic reevaluation of the past mythical meanings of tragic conflicts, and implicitly of their inevitable consequence in the (self)judgment of tragic sins. The lyric experiences and epic and dramatic arguments of the actions and situations grasped in a musical way are extremely vividly felt and rendered. They contribute to the full to the adequate motivation of the outcome of lyric and/or scenic conflicts. I say outcome in the singular and not in the plural, because the culmination of

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<sup>1</sup> Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia culturii* (The trilogy of culture), 3<sup>rd</sup> part, *Geneza metaforei* (The genesis of the metaphor), Bucharest: ELU, 1967. p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> See the text of the libretto. For example, for the rhetorical representation of the intimacy of relationships: Electra – Orestes and the Sphinx – Oedipus. Thus, Electra for Orestes is *my wolf* (pp. 25, 29, 31); the Sphinx for Oedipus appears first as an *archaic monster* (p. 33), and later it becomes *my beautiful beast* (p. 39.)

the two myths are so well re-synchronized musically that they form – from the exposition all the way to the epilogue – a single tragic action and a single dramatic musical process, that of tragic existence, as the Transylvanian philosopher D. D. Roșca said, which does not cease its persistence over the past and present human condition. “*Tragic existence* is: fight heroically to become a true man, a man who could be crushed by the blind forces of existence, but cannot be defeated; only he who climbed the high terrace of such liberation and freedom can rightfully claim that he has achieved the highest degree of human dignity”.<sup>1</sup>

In the musical development of the heroes’ character the point-like moment which always appears unchanged, perpetuating the image about their fatal destiny, is rhetorically constructed on leitmotifs. The repeated preconditioning of the heroes’ reactions in front of destiny emphasizes their different attitudes on the basis of which they will act all along the course of events. Naturally, these *repeated instances* are inserted into the void of events which are musically grasped by the *spoken voice* or *song* of the roles which cross, scene by scene, the entire action of the drama. This *non-transformation into transformation*, this continuity in the flux of varieties appears either as a starting point of the hero, launching him in his role, or as an obsessively repeated moment meant to point out, willingly or not, the discontinuity of the course of events.

Orestes and Oedipus are characterized by leitmotifs in the exposition of the drama, at the beginning of Act II. The two starts are far from being identical, especially from a musical point of view.

### ***Orestes***

Orestes, by his passive appearance – “Here I am!” – anticipates his complete subservience, as if foreseeing that he will be nothing else than an executive instrument of destiny. His emotional revolts, the desperate motivation of his deed in front of his mother before killing her, and then his madness which saves him from the torture of his reason – all these are anticipated as a longitudinal section in the blaming expression of the leitmotif “Here I am!”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D. D. Roșca, *Existența tragică* (Tragic existence), Bucharest: Ed. Științifică, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Libretto, Act II. scene 1. no. 1. p. 24; Score, Act II. p. 1.

Musical example no. 1.

Moderato 1=92

ACTE II - scène 1

Oreste mp

Ma voi

ci sans armes sans larmes deuil au bout des doigts

**Oedipus**

Oedipus, by his explosive *in medias res* entry, justifying in a way the perspectives of his existence, suggests the desire to be involved in the course of events. He is not, and does not become, a simple instrument in the hands of destiny, but exactly the opposite, the whole tragedy happens because of his confrontation with the provisions of his destiny. It is of course a blind confrontation, which determines him in the moment of the resolution to give up the sight of his eyes, taking on indeed the fate of the blind. Oedipus, who was invoked in the first Act, recommends himself thus, intoning the beginning leitmotif and alternating the appearance of Orestes in the second Act:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Libretto, Act II. scene 1. no. 2. p. 27; Score, Act II. p. 6.

## Musical example no. 2

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a scene. At the top, it is marked 'Molto' and '2'. The first system includes a vocal line for 'De' (Clytemnestra) with the lyrics 'mp le suis là au sein d'un journa' and an orchestral accompaniment. The second system shows another vocal line for 'De' with the lyrics 'veau' and a corresponding orchestral part. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

### *Clytemnestra*

Her leitmotif is an encompassing one. Her repeated and desperate, quasi-leitmotif imperatives illustratively comprise her fears which, at a general level of the accompanying emotional context, represent the horrors to which our spiritual reaction can be no other than detached condemnation:

Musical example no. 3

*pro accelerando* 5

surveil lez veil lez veil lez surveil lez veil lez veil lez surveil

HEUR DU MAL HEUR

lez veil lez veil lez surveil lez

DU RO-DEUR DELA PEUR

*Surveillier*

*libro* *entrée d'écrite et d'oreille*  
*le est comme assis*  
*derrière sa peur.*  
*de l'angoisse épouvant*  
*écrite face et crouche*  
*comme un chat*  
*écrite (à droite)*  
*à la suite de*

140 *repet*  
 12.01/00 *ad libitum*

total (10')

## *Electra*

Electra's leitmotif, "Come, kill her, kill her", which she almost obsessively repeats, appears already at the peak of the events. She represents the emotional-musical motivation of Orestes' deed. She is the spiritual alterity of her brother. Orestes transforms into this alterity, becoming in the course of events an instrument of this continuously repeated goal:<sup>1</sup>

Musical example no. 4.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a scene. It consists of several staves of music with lyrics in French. The lyrics include "vas-y tue la", "vas-y tue la", "il l'étrangle avec", and "l'épée". The score is marked with various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "piano". There are also some handwritten annotations and markings, such as "Electre" in a box and "C#".

## *Tiresias*

Tiresias' leitmotif presence also has a profound catalyzing character. While Electra's repetitive leitmotif rushes the course of events by the power of the ever growing hyperbole, Tiresias' litotic, almost whispering urge to destiny, "make it not happen", raises once again the dramatism of the final impact, Iocaste's and Oedipus' self-punishments.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Libretto, Act III. scene 3. no. 1. p. 72; Score, Act III. p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Libretto, Act III. scene 3. no. 2. p. 72; Score, Act III. p. 34.

### Musical example no. 5



### *The choir*

The choir has complex and multiple functions in the construction of the tragic collisions in the opera. It does not represent however the collective narrator who recounts the events in a third person narrative. It is not an epic character which only leaves others speaking, as Aristotle would say,<sup>1</sup> but it takes part in the action of the drama. Its epic and scenic duty exhausts its short commentaries in which it repeats the key-moments of the tragedy. Its inner configuration determines it to make its presence on the scene dynamic. The dismantling of the lines, the individualization of questions and answers, their alternation with homophone phases as rhetorical *noemes* of the discourse are all dialoguing features by which the choir is dramatically constructed in the context of the opera. These features show their ancient syncretism by improvised combinations in which their *Sprechstimme* nature is almost exclusively based on the inner musicality of the text. The rhetorical prolonging of certain emphasized vowels of the lines dramatize the choral voices of the score, by making the expression of the feelings connected to the dramatic moment more eloquent. For example, in the revelation of the mystery by prolonged *noemes* on the words *fear* (*afraid*) (PEUR), *wanderer* (RODEUR), *cry* (PLEURE), *die* (MEURT), *pains* (DOULEURS). The words written in capital letters are uttered by all the

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Poetica* (Poetics), Bucharest: Academiei, 1965, chapter III. p. 55-56.

voices; the rest of the text is randomly individualized, according to the number of the character:

*Le Choeur*

- 1: Je ne sais pas pourquoi j'ai PEUR  
2: PEUR aurions-nous PEUR?  
3: Oui oui de l'étranger, le RODEUR  
4: PEUR PEUR, l'étranger, le RODEUR, il PLEURE PLEURE  
3: A Mycène on MEURT MEURT  
2: Toujours des drames des DOULEURS  
1: Clytaemnestra fera notre MALHEUR  
1,2,3,4: D'ELLE AURIONS-NOUS PEUR?<sup>1</sup>

This *recitative* aspect is what visibly approaches the presence of the choir to the archetype of the ancient theater, to the choral texts of the tragedies of Aeschylus or Sophocles.<sup>2</sup>

The narrative beginning of the action, the mobilization of the events, the musical load of the scene, the prospective projection of the spiritual states which follow the conflicts are all achieved by the *recitative discourse* of the choir at the beginning of each of the four acts. They follow in their construction the manner of the *secco* recitative, the chords of the old harpsichord are transposed now in the instrumental compartments of a chamber orchestra. Thus the microstructure of the accompaniment is intoned in an arpeggio, which is then constantly maintained in its vertical musical intensity all throughout the recitative, accommodating to the generally bleak and dark character of the text. The initial chord is repeated in a varied way – it is developed line by line,

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<sup>1</sup> The Choir

- 1: I don't know why I am AFRAID  
2: AFRAID are we AFRAID?  
3: Yes yes of the foreigner the WANDERER  
4: FEAR FEAR, the foreigner, the WANDERER, he CRIES, CRIES  
3: At Mycene they DIE DIE  
2: Always drama and PAIN  
1: Clytaemnestra will bring us MISFORTUNE  
1,2,3,4: OF HER ARE WE AFRAID?

Libretto, Act III. scene 1. no. 1. p. 54-55; Score Act III. p. 1 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, containing the dramas *Agamemnon*, *Choephon*, *the Eumenides*, as well as the dramas of Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, *Electra*, *Oedipus at Colonus*.

organically mixing the poetic meaning of the text with its emotional sense.<sup>1</sup>

Musical example no. 6.

ACTE I / scène 1  
CORNEL TARANU  
1999

Libero (1 voix) NR (1) (Tous) 1999

gardons-nous d'appeler jamais UN HOMME HEUREUX

(1 voix) (Tous) 1 voix

avant qu'il ait franchi le terme de SA VIE sans avoir subi un chagrin.

① L'homme demeure toujours un étranger  
② Ici-bas, l'homme demeure toujours étranger à lui-même

③ Personne ne passe plus ici  
④ Plus personne ne s'arrête dans notre ville -

piano - vibra

bais cordes

<sup>1</sup> Libretto, p. 8; Score, Act I. Scene 1. p. 1.

The musical resonances, closely connected to the *declamation* of the text, present first of all the spoken voices of the choir. It should be mentioned however that their contrasting presence is complementary to the *recitative* of the spoken song which is also attributed to the choir with either terrifying or alluringly flattering emotional senses.

Remaining for a while at the *Sprechstimme* phases of the choir, one may emphasize their evocative effect in the unexpectedly natural way of the atmosphere of the choirs of antique tragedies. Schiller wrote: "The Greek tragedy has its origins in the choir. And also, by the way it has detached from it in the course of history, we may say that it derives from the choir poetically and spiritually as well, and that, without this consistent witness and supporter of the events that the choir is, the tragedy would have become a completely different kind of poetry."<sup>1</sup> I remember the impact of the esthetic experience which conquered me, decades ago, on the occasion of the performance, in ancient Greek, of Sophocles' two *Oedipus* dramas by an Athenian group in Bucharest. The choir, although relatively small, managed to create the masterly and elevating, authentic atmosphere of tragic conflicts presented on the stage. It accurately intoned the quasi-musical declamation of the text either by sensitizing the narratives mediated by epic, or by direct acclamatory interventions. I remember this esthetic event now, contemplating on the recently seen *Orestes–Oedipus* chamber-opera, because I felt again the possibility of a permanent need to rethink the events passed. This rethinking deliberately tended to an archetypal rebirth, devoted to the past of tragic conflicts. This tendency also comprised the spectators' present time, with a thoughtful perspective on the future because of the language created here and now, thoroughly contemporary, and still transposed into the imminence of the revived archaic.

The other face of the choir is the *melodic* one, in which the antique recitatives are brought to life in the pentagrams of the score. While the recitative is meant to complete the *space* of the action, the choir's melodic lines fill the lyric moments of the drama's *time*. While in its first function the choir *foretells* by rhetorical devices of premonition the first phases of the action, in the second one it *accompanies* by melodic metaphors the whole range of feelings expressed, from intimidation to moving and back. Thus, in Act I, scene 2, no. 1, when Electra enters, the moving recitatives of the choir will gradually become more intense.

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<sup>1</sup> Schiller, *Über Kunst und Wirklichkeit*, Leipzig: Verlag Philipp Reclam jun., 1975, p. 552.

Similarly, in an alternative way, in Act II, scene 3, no. 1, when the plot returns to Oedipus and the Sphinx who is coming to life, the choir's frightened recitatives are heard, gradually increasing in intensity and crossing the whole stage, and then are gradually transformed during the next scene into moving recitatives, similar to the ones accompanying Electra in scene 2. It is the moment when the Sphinx has left the "pedestal", resting in Oedipus' arms. The complementary and evolving role of the choral recitatives continues. In the next scene, when Electra and Orestes return, the moving recitatives of the choir are gradually transformed into frightened recitatives, the same which accompanied the Sphinx in scene 2, from Orestes' rest in Electra's arms until her commanding lines in the end of the episode: "Now she must be killed / You must kill her with this scarf".<sup>1</sup>

Here are the examples:

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<sup>1</sup> See the indications in the libretto and their achievement in the score:

Act II scene 2: Electra enters. Meanwhile, moving recitative of the choir, which gradually increases in intensity (p. 29)... Then, at the end of the scene: Electra stabs Orestes' hand with the fibula, then licks his blood. (p. 31). In the score: Act II, scene 2. no. 1. p. 9-20.

Act II scene 3. no. 1: Return to Oedipus. The Sphinx comes to life. Meanwhile, frightened recitative of the choir, which gradually increases in intensity. Libretto, p.31; Score, Act II, p. 21-30.

Act II scene 3. no. 2. Gradually, the frightened recitatives of the choir are transformed into moving recitatives (the same which accompanied Electra in scene 2). The Sphinx has left her "pedestal" and rests in Oedipus' arms. Libretto, p. 39; Score, Act II. p. 31-43)

Act II scene 4. no. 1. Return to Electra and Orestes. The choir's moving recitatives are gradually transformed into frightened recitatives (the same which accompanied the Sphinx in scene 2 (Libretto, p. 31) (following the modification in the score: scene 3. no. 1!)). Orestes rests in Electra's arms (Libretto, p. 49). Scene 4. no. 1, which ends with the line: "Now she must be killed / You must kill her with this scarf". She shows him how to do it, strangling his neck (Libretto, p. 5; Score p. 44-52). [NB! Orestes' final words (You torture me, you wolf!) are absent from the score, as well as the indication "he faints" (Libretto, p. 53). Thus, the score ends with Electra's commanding words cited before.

Moving recitatives:<sup>1</sup>

Musical example no. 7

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a scene. The title is "SCENE 2. Entrée de Cléopâtre". The score is written on multiple staves, including vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in French: "Libera", "2. 1. s'loigne-tu de cette tombe hydre égarée viens-tu". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics. There are several annotations in French: "a mélancoliquement" (melancholically), "a" (ad libitum), "tempo", "quiescent?", "quiescent?", "cordes" (strings), and "Libera". The score is marked with "NTO" and "total 5".

<sup>1</sup> Libretto, Act II. scene 2. no. 1., p. 28; Score, Act II. p. 9.

Frightened recitatives:<sup>1</sup>

Musical example no. 8.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a scene. It consists of several staves of music, including vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The score is written in French and Russian. Key elements include:  
- A vocal line with lyrics: "Aux portales théâtrales, crois-moi" and "re-nonce avant que tu...".  
- A piano accompaniment with various markings such as "sost.", "Tempo", "s. br.", "mit cresc.", and "effrayé".  
- A date "19.07.1" written at the bottom right.  
- The score is heavily annotated with performance instructions and dynamics.

The whole second act is characterized by a latent, contrasting dynamism of the accompanying feelings meant to prepare the impact of the next act, the fulfillment of destiny. The latency of the emotional contrast is imprinted with a maximum structural economy in the two kinds of recitatives of the choir. The gradually increasing and decreasing conception of alternating fear and moving raises the choral recitatives to the rank of unmediated illustrations of the progress of each of the characters: Orestes, flattered by Electra at the beginning, is gradually but inevitably led to the acceptance of the idea to kill; Oedipus, lonely at the beginning, is finally flattered by the Sphinx, who appears first as frightening, but later changing into a creature worthy of being loved.

### Evocative *topoi*

Similarly to the leitmotifs of destiny, personified by the heroes of the chamber-opera, these *topoi* are used as ideograms, as the essential musical archetypes of certain musical *topoi* meant to emphasize the situational framework of tragic actions. It is in these that the characters in action appear, as Aristotle says.<sup>2</sup> While the leitmotifs of the heroes represent longitudinal (temporal) sections of the spiritual states

<sup>1</sup> Libretto, Act II. scene 3. no. 1. p. 30; Score, Act II.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, op. cit., p. 54, 59-60.

accompanying the events, the archetypes serve as transversal (spatial) sections in the process of the musical drama.

### ***The ideogramic representation of a Byzantine psalm***

The evocative *topos* of the myths is transfigured, in a highly inspired way, by the melody of a Byzantine psalm which, in the form of a complementary evolving dialogue in 3 sequences, paints the tableau of the recitative choir in the first act, raising the heroes' "wars" with destiny from the mist of legends by oboes and trumpets alternatively.<sup>1</sup>

Musical example no. 9.

Handwritten musical score for "Musical example no. 9". The score is written on two systems of staves. The first system is labeled "Libero" and contains the lyrics "L'argument ne manque pas d'intérêt." with musical notation for voice and piano. The second system contains the lyrics "oui, mais le paradoxe est un peu court" with musical notation for voice and piano. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "mf" and "piano".

### ***The place of a "mad" round-dance***

In the last act we are reminded of the threatening *locus* and *tempus* of the first act, by the introduction, with the same rhetorical device of *hinted citation* as in the case of the Byzantine psalm, of a mad round-dance (*une ronde folle*) which anticipates the entry, wanderings, and musical litany (*At night laid down in the night I seek you*) of the mad Orestes:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Libretto, Act I. scene 3. no. 2-3.; Score Act I. p. 13, 14, 15 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Libretto, Act IV. scene 3. no. 2. p. 84; Score, Act IV, p. 14 ff.



## Formal *topoi*

There are two other stylistic *topoi* which are imposed by the equally evolving application of certain stylistic units with clear ancient rhetorical meanings.

### *The ostinato as a background*

One of them is the *ostinato* which precedes the spoken lines – *Sprechstimme* – of the choir at the beginning of Act III, denoting once again the choir’s anticipation of the terrible events which form the core of the opera.

### *The passacaglia as a musical sentence<sup>1</sup>*

The second revived formal procedure is the *passacaglia*. Its theme appears first in diminution in scenes 2 and 3 of Act III, but then it appears in its entirety at the end of Act III. As was shown before, its role is to represent the inevitable consequences of the tragedy as a musical ideogram by the apodictical scanning of the *Nomos*: “La loi de Thèbes et du Monde”.<sup>2</sup>

### Musical example no.11

<sup>1</sup> The theme of the *passacaglia* comes from a Greek inscription on a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century silver vessel found at Tăuteu-Bihor (Romania), which possibly conceals an ancient melody. The inscription was deciphered by Ervin Acél on the basis of the “Table of Greek musical notation” published by Riemann in the *Abriss der Musikgeschichte*, Leipzig: Max Hesse Verlag, 1919, p. 90. See Ervin Acél: “Notație muzicală pe un vas de argint descoperit la Tăuteu-Bihor?” (Musical notation on a silver vessel discovered at Tăuteu-Bihor?), in *Muzica* 2 (1978): 35-39. The theme was also cited by A. Vieru in his *Inscriptio, in memoriam Liviu Glodeanu*, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Libretto, Act III, scene 4, p. 76 (see also p. 62); Score, Act III, p. 3.

Finally, the beginning and the end – the *Prelude* and scene 4, Act IV, respectively – are composed as the extrinsic pillars of the opera, offering in their relationship of *question–answer, cause–effect, premise–consequence* an esthetic experience suitable for the purifying comprehension of man’s fight with the inevitable and unrepeatable, always comparing it with the price of the sacrifice.

### **The oratorical version between the dramatic and the lyric**

Although the *Orestes–Oedipus*, as the title shows, is a chamber-opera, its interpretation as a vocal-instrumental concert is just as authentic and coherent as the scenic one. This is due first of all to the fact that both the libretto and its musical structure are conceived in an extremely visual way. One could also easily imagine it screened for cinema or television. The stage representation of the expressiveness of gestures and clothing<sup>1</sup> in the case of concert performance is thus rendered, as T. Vianu would say, by the eloquence of the musical discourse of the choir and the orchestra. Following the indications of the libretto,<sup>2</sup> the instruments and choir departments support by tableaux of composition – as a *pars pro toto sonore* of a virtual audiovisual whole – the action which makes the imaginary more dynamic by the eloquence of the major actors’ last lines. For instance, see the quasi-visual connotation, by a musical *pars pro toto*, of the scene of Iocaste’s suicide and Oedipus’ (self)-blinding following Iocaste’s last lines:

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<sup>1</sup> Such as: the wearing and symbolic handling of the instruments of murder – the scarf and the fibula – in the hands of Orestes and Electra, and then the scarf around Iocaste’s neck and the fibula in Orestes’ hand. Similarly, when Clytaemnestra is killed; when Iocaste kills herself, and when Orestes grabs the fibula.

<sup>2</sup> Note the following indications:

*Electra stabs Orestes’ hand with the fibula and then licks his blood;* Text: Libretto, in O. Alpert, op. cit., p. 30, 31; Music: in the manuscript of the score, Act II. scene 3. no. 1. p. 19-20.

[Orestes – a. n.] *strangles her* [i.e. her mother, Clytaemnestra – a. n.] *and stabs his hand with the fibula;* Text: Libretto, p. 72-73. Music: Score, Act III, scene 3, no. 1. (the second part of the indication is missing from the score – *and stabs his hand with the fibula*’)

*Iocaste wears the scarf around her neck;* Text: Libretto, p. 66-67. Music: Score, Act II. scene 2. no. 2. p. 18. (Indication missing from the score).

[Iocaste – a. n.] *hangs herself with the scarf. Oedipus grabs the fibula.* Text: Libretto, p. 76-77. Music: Score, Act III. scene 3. no. 2. p. 43.

He is the king of all Thebans,  
king of mine he is he belongs to me  
and in death he will die with me  
and in death he will lie next to me<sup>1</sup>

These words are the end of the great monologue, after which the libretto reads: [Iocaste – a. n.] *hangs herself with the scarf. Oedipus grabs the fibula.*<sup>2</sup>

Musical example no. 12.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a scene from the opera Oedipus at Colonus. It features several staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics in French: "Hoi De Mai de", followed by "dis parais pas Oedipe". Below this are piano accompaniment staves with complex rhythmic patterns and dynamics. A section of the score is marked "scène" and includes the instruction "elle se pend avec l'écharpe, Oedipe s'empare de la fibule". The bottom of the page has the name "G. CASAS" and some handwritten notes.

The opera's two versions of performance – the scenic one and the oratorical one in the form of a concert – offer two ways of configuration and polarization of the *inter-categorical forms* meant to emphasize its basic esthetic values. In the case of the *scenic version*, the emphasis on gestures, mimes, and environment of the poetic and musical lines amplifies the *dramatic communication* in the tragic message of the musical score. Just as in the *concert version* the inner experience of the consequences of the events is more emphatic, offering primarily the possibility of the *esthetic experience of the lyric side*. The usual decrease in the oratorical version of the epic parts of the choir department stress even more convincingly the primacy of the lyric aspects.<sup>3</sup>

The sympathetic and satisfactory reception of the *dramma per musica Orestes-Oedipus* by specialists and knowledgeable music-lovers

<sup>1</sup> Libretto, p. 77; Score, Act III. p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Idem

<sup>3</sup> As, for example, in the *opera-oratory* concert on January 20, 2002, in the Concert Studio of the "Gh. Dima" Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca.

merit being presented in more details than this last paragraph allows. Indeed, the explanations are many-sided and refer to several musical–esthetic statements. Besides the inner values of this chamber-opera, the remarkable competence and artistic-musical authenticity of the *Ars Nova Ensemble*, conducted by its founder Cornel Țăranu, and of course the mastery of all its members and singers<sup>1</sup> have also contributed to the success of the work both at home and abroad.<sup>2</sup> We, as the recognized audience of the *Ars Nova*, are accustomed to the opportunity of a continuous artistic, stylistic, and esthetic formation on each of its performances. Maestro Cornel Țăranu confessed in an interview at the RTV his regret that we have no theoretician of our musical life, similar to T. W. Adorno for the avant-garde music of his age. However, I consider exactly the opposite, as Adorno and the musicians of his age did not seem to have such a practical and theoretical forum which would have offered for endless decades, with the same consistency, what Maestro Țăranu offers us by his masterpieces – including the opera *Orestes–Oedipus* – as the best of today’s musical creation.

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<sup>1</sup> See note 1, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> On its success in Paris, see Anca Florea’s review: “Opera Oreste și Oedip de Cornel Țăranu, aplaudată la Paris” (Cornel Țăranu’s opera *Orestes and Oedipus* applauded in Paris), in *România liberă*, February 6, 2002.