

Interpretive Hypostases of Iocasta's Character in Cornel Țăranu's *Orestes & Oedipus* Opera

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Abstract: *A genuine lyrical performer of our present times has the opportunity to approach contemporary creation as a major challenge with reference to the maturation, preparation and desired approaches of new music. Within this context that is deeply rooted in the author's experience of having met maestro Cornel Țăranu, the present paper aims to reveal various semantic layers connected to tackling such a complex role. Focusing on revealing certain myths and offering a brief presentation of the libretto, the author presents her personal account of the encountered difficulties and utter satisfaction that she has experienced by portraying a unique character belonging to an exceptional masterpiece from the beginning of the 20th century.*

Key-words: *role; character; lyrical tragedy; myth; libretto; interpretive analysis*

1. General Overview of Composer Cornel Țăranu Biographical References

Cornel Țăranu (born in Cluj-Napoca, 20 June, 1934), a well-known Romanian academic, composer, conductor, musicologist, studied composition with Sigismund Toduță at the Music Academy in Cluj, between 1951-1957.

He continued his studies at the Conservatory in Paris, 1966-1967 with Nadia Boulanger and Olivier Messiaen, and then in Darmstadt, Germany, with György Ligeti, Bruno Maderna and Christoph Caskel, during 1968-1969.

Among the awards, we would like to remember a significant prizeoffer by the Romanian Academy as well as the Koussewitsky prize.

He is the Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters (2002).

In 1993 he was elected correspondent member of the Romanian Academy.

He is the the winner of the first edition (2008) of the national awards for arts, in the "Music" category, for the opera "Oreste – Oedipe", made after the libretto by Olivier Apert.

We also mention the title of Doctor Honoris Causa awarded by the Music Universities in Bucharest, Iași, Chișinău.

His creation includes symphonies, concertos, chamber operas, film and stage music, cantatas, choral music, sonatas, songs for voices and piano and others².

2. The Opera Libretto. Olivier Apert's Myth Dialogues

The libretto belongs to the French poet Olivier Apert, combining into a modern dialogue the two seemingly irreconcilable ancient myths of Oedipus and Orestes. Oedipus kills his father

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(without having been aware of his identity), and then he becomes Queen Iocasta's (his mother) husband consequently fathering two daughters. As atonement, upon finding the truth, he resorts to an extreme gesture and blinds himself.

Orestes on the other hand, kills Clitemnestra –his mother- out of revenge, having been urged to do this by his sister Electra because the latter had killed Agamemnon, her husband.

In what follows next, we would like to mention Olivier Apert's description of the libretto: "The libretto is founded on the fictitious and novel convergence of Orestes and Oedipus, two Greek myths whose similarity and inversion had not been jointly transported into fiction to date. On the path to the fulfilment of their destiny, Orestes (sensitive and sceptical) and Oedipus (proud and ambitious) meet each other sharing their vision of the world. Consequently, each of them encounters an apparition that will lead them to the place where tragedy occurs. Orestes kills his mother. Oedipus marries his mother who ultimately commits suicide. The two characters, prisoners of the very madness that revealing the crime to each other brings, eventually meet again, in what seems an impossible dialogue: Orestes, who is haunted by the Erinyes and tormented by his own conscience, falls victim to his own incessant verbosity while fighting with the visions that overwhelm him. Blind Oedipus riddles out the key-words of his inner reality and of the silent world conscience that reveals itself to him at last."³

Through the entwinement of the two tragic myths, the libretto author reveals the dramatic core of both their tragic fates. The combination of the two myths internally magnifies the catastrophes of the human soul that is doomed by an awful and implacable fate.

Oedipus and Orestes cross each other's paths on parallel-mirrored trajectories, being prey to an intense battle with their own conscience that is torn by pain and guilt.

Cornel Țăranu's music amplifies the pain and the tension of the entire situation leading to paroxysm. We illustrate this matter through Electra's leitmotif, "come on, kill her, kill her":



E.g. Musical no. 1

³Apert, Olivier, *Oreste & Oedip*, opera-theater, libretto, bilingual edition, Éditions Mihály, Gennevilliers, France, Biblioteca Apostrof Publishing House, Cluj, 2000, p. 107

3. The Opera Characters

"Contemplating the emotional characterization of the characters as a whole, it turns out that they are musically metaphorized between two polarizing instances, namely as dialogue couple and in monologues respectively (of several "mute" couples). [...] The musical process fulfils its rhetorical role by implicitly configuring affective dialogues. The symbolic-metaphorical sensitization of conversations is tailored to each duo of heroes according to their scenic-dramatic specificity."⁴

Following on the renowned aesthetician Ștefan Angi whom we have cited above, we will pay attention to the characters in the form of dialogue characters just as Mr. Angi depicts them. First and foremost we mention the Orestes – Electra duo; then, Clitemnestra – Orestes, Iocasta – Oedipus and Oedipus – Spfinx.

Jocasta, as a character in the tragedy of Sophocles, queen of Thebes and wife of King Laios - at first, and then, without her knowledge, the wife of her own son, Oedipus, is the female prototype of self-giving through love. In the evolution of the character in the context of the stage action, Iocasta, although she realizes at a given moment the reality of his identity, uses all sorts of tricks to avoid finding out the truth by Oedipus, in an attempt to protect him from pain. She loves Oedipus sincerely, unconditionally, even after she finds out that he is her son. Her feelings, of great depth, cover a wide range, from joy to fear, from euphoria to despair, from acceptance to ruin. The moment the truth of their identity becomes public, the only solution she sees, is suicide.

In this context, the character I have played, Iocasta, is the hero that performs an eloquent synthesis of both song and dramatic performance. As one of the most mistreated characters of ancient tragedies, she seems to embody the entire range of human pain. She uses her voice in order to render the most truthful and expressive representation of the emotions and feelings she is confronted with-correspondingly outlined by the composer.

"I am interested in making Orestes and Oedipus to cross paths... and thus, through their reverse-mirrored characters, to contrast two political visions of the world: the former being the conqueror mentality (Oedipus') whereas the latter falls under a more meditative and sceptical categorisation (Orestes)."⁵ [5]

4. The Stylistic and Interpretive Role Approaches. Technical and Expressive Methods in the Execution of Modern Music.

To a vocal performer the execution of a musical piece from the 21st century is a great challenge, as the adopted approach requires an artistic maturity, both in terms of overall conception of the work and involvement in the technical and musical interpretive training.

At a first glance, the musical score reveals itself to us as a virtual visual entity with a specific graphic, whose content is clarified at the moment of its decoding, requiring mental processing: structural semantics and architecture elements, framing the work in the respective historical era strictly complying with the libretto that underlies the work. In this case, it was necessary to analyse each myth in part in order to understand how Olivier Apert has set them in motion.

⁴Angi, Ștefan, „Chamber opera Oreste - Oedip, by Cornel Țăranu”, in *Muzica* nr. 2/2002, U.C.M.R. Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 37-38

⁵Banciu, Ecaterina, „Cornel Țăranu - Oreste&Oedip”, in *Musicology Papers*, Vol. XXX, Cluj-Napoca, Editura MediaMusica, 2015, p. 8

A mechanical control of the vocal apparatus, through the most detailed knowledge of the physiology of singing (high performance breathing, voice imposture, clear emission, diction and articulation, homogeneity of vocal registers, sound quality, vibrato, sostenuto and legato in singing, musical phrasing, physical and vocal resistance) becomes utterly essential in this endeavour.

Considering the nature of the role, the character of Iocasta has an imposing, penetrating and noble voice, her vocality merging perfectly with the vocal timbre quality and orchestral prerogative. Jocasta's appearance in act III, scene 2, in the fortress of Thebes shapes up a monumental, lavish, triumphant and dramatic scene as she openly declares to the people who are present "toi et toi, mon peuple aime. Par cette écharpe, que je porte au cou. Je te presente mon fils et t'on Roi. Tu devras desarmé, le venerer comme tu m'as obei." By the power of this scarf, which I wear around my neck I present to you my son and your king. From now on, you will have to worship him as you have obeyed me."

From a musical point of view, the vocal writing is based on the combination of the declamatory technique of the sprechgesang with the intonational rigor, by mastering a precise vocal technique, based on high performance breathing, a clear emission of the voice, expressively rendering the whole range of the character's inner feelings and emotions

The intonational execution -combined with the lack of tonality- has proven to pose great difficulty as the melodic sections are based on difficult intervals such as the enlarged fourth or the seventh major, which follow one after the other thus causing difficulty in their precise execution within the context of tragic, gruelling conditions.

E.g. mus. no. 2.

The next scene- scene number 3- musically brings a greater depth and interiorization, through a descending melopee that seems to flow towards death itself as death is Iocasta's destiny that she will embrace, even though she loves her son dearly, the same son who has now become-unbeknownst to her- her husband.

Handwritten musical score for Act III, Scene 3, No. 2, titled "MONOLOGUE IOCASTE". The score is written on multiple staves. The top staff is for the vocal line, labeled "Iocaste" and "Moderato". The middle staves are for the orchestra, labeled "ORCH". The bottom staff is for the lyrics, with the text "PAS LE DROIT D'AIMER MON FILS?" and "N'AI JE PAS LE DROIT D'AIMER MON FILS?". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics like "mf" and "poco rubato". There are several circled numbers (3) and other markings throughout the score.

E.g. mus. no. 3.

As she is facing the old blind prophet Tiresias, she summons, through a melopee reminiscent of Byzantine music, an acceptance of the legalization of incest, because she justifies this connection, by the fact that it is in her very nature to love her son: "O Tiresias, par mon sang, par ma vie, je te le demande. N'ai je pas le droit d'aimer mon fils?" ("O Tiresias, by my blood, by my life, I ask you. Am I not by nature entitled to love my son?")

Handwritten musical score for a piece titled "JUGASTRE". The score is written on multiple staves. The top staff contains the title "JUGASTRE" and the lyrics "Toi Et Toi MON PEUPLE Ai-". Below this, there are several staves of musical notation with various annotations. A circled "4" is at the top left. A circled "1" is on the left side. A circled "3" is on the right side. The lyrics "me", "Pati", "mon peuple ai-me", and "Toi Et Toi MON PEUPLE Ai-" are written across the staves. At the bottom, there are notes for "cables", "gong", and a circled "2".

E.g. mus. no. 4.

The lament evolves as an internal dialogue that is full of tension and shudder, while the destiny noose catches her pulling her towards her demise, as death seems to represent the only solution she has to escape from this hopeless situation. From a musical standpoint, death appears as an ascension-culmination, the tension increasing in ascent, both as an inner dosage and as a register, the voice reaching a climax on the la2 sound.

E.g. mus. no. 5.

5. Conclusions

”The 20th century opera unfolds itself as a seismographic record that is meant to provide listeners with the illusion that they move along with it. The opera is not only a musical acknowledgement of the «game within the game», but also a development of the ludic into its almost tragic essence.”⁶

The collaboration with the composer has presented itself to me as a unique golden opportunity that has enabled me to approach the 21st century music.

The approach of a work of such complexity, offers the performer a special opportunity to transcend to new sound worlds, which give the opportunity to experience new, contorted states of mind, through which one's own spiritual heritage is enriched.

This work, of a special complexity and value, stimulated my technical and interpretive vocal skills, so necessary in the most truthful rendering of the contemporary musical universe, opening the necessary new ways to approach other roles in modern music.

⁶Pinghireac, Georgeta, *Estetical symbols of soprano voice*, National Music University Bucharest, 2003, p. 11

The interpretation of this role was for me at that time, as a test of fire, being forced to learn a new language, unique moods, which brought me great professional satisfaction. Consequently, we state that-in art- both form and content can merge into an indestructible bond. Drawing on my artistic endeavour, I can therefore conclude this scientific research by: "The impactful, hidden outcome of any work of art does not abruptly reveal itself to interpretation but rather, the enigmatic weight eludes explanation rendering interpretation."⁷

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⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Estetical Theory*, Paralela 45 Publishing House, București, 2006