

Spoken voice and sung voice in Paul Claudel's musical drama

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Abstract: *Albert Roussel remarks in "Sur l'orientation de la musique moderne", the conference of February 18, 1936, that in the context of a crisis of the opera generated by the socio-cultural and political changes of the time, young composers seek a new theatrical formula that corresponds to the new spirit. This formula is materialized by choreographic performances joined by choirs and soloists (Noces of Igor Stravinsky), performances close to the fair theater (History of the Soldier by Igor Stravinsky on a text by Ramuz) that combines music with dramatic text, oratorios (King David de Arthur Honegger), melodrama (Persephone by Andre Gide and Igor Stravinsky).*

The combination of different arts for spectacular purposes encourages the diversification of the relationship between drama and music. In this context, the playwright Paul Claudel proposes a new form of musical drama based on a perspective on his dramaturgical conceptions of the text and the performance of musicians such as Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger, who took a stand against the model of Wagnerian opera advocating for primacy of the music. The voice, which invests the individual as a sound body and has its own language superimposed on the language of words, is the instrument through which new text-music relationships have been created that have resulted in the birth of the new drama.

Keywords: *drama; word; voice; sprechgesang;*

Introduction

In the seventeenth century, the emergence of *dramma per musica* takes place as a result as a result of the theatricalization of musical discourse through what we call *seconda pratica* (second practice – the accompanied monody). Initially, the relationship of the text with the music involved tilting the balance towards the text. The latter, consisting of meaning (concept) and signifier (acoustic image) becomes the catalyst of the new genre and music has the role of accompanying the dramatic action, to translate and amplify the meanings of the text. In other words, the new genre involves assigning literary features to the score that must use prosody, rhythm, dynamic for dramatic purposes. The dramaturgical solution proposed for combining the external, visible perspective of the dramatic action with the internal / conceptual one of the characters (impressions, feelings, thoughts) was represented by the recitative-aria alternation.

Over time, the connection of the text with the music has undergone changes generated by the stylistic and aesthetic aspects of the various periods. Christoph Willibald Gluck's reform, which proposes, among other things, a preeminence of the text, will have direct effects on the combination of the recitative with the aria, and Richard Wagner will abolish it and replace it with the continuous melody.

The originality of the interwar period lies in the fact that it will favor a greater variety of forms of alliance of text with music enriching the form of melodrama initiated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the late eighteenth century through rhythmic speech and sprechgesang.

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The approach to the text differs from previous periods. In the 17th century, composers took over a text that underwent some syntactic, enunciative, rhythmic, rhetorical, etc. metamorphoses, or through literary strategies in order to be able to establish a dramatic correspondence with the score.² In the example below, we are presented in two variants (Torquato Tasso's version and Claudio Monteverdi's version) the action that will take place in *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*:

”Vuol nel arme provarla un huom la stima, ”Tancredi che Clorinda un homo stima vol nel Degno a cui sua virtu si paragone.” (T. Tasso)³ armi provarla al paragone.”
(C. Monteverdi)⁴

The mediator between text and music is the voice that makes them merge adding a particular emotion. The renewal of musical drama in the twentieth century involves an evolution of the voice that is able to make the transition from rhythmic voice to sung voice and from declamation to melodic singing. In other words, renewed musical drama involves a contemporary reconsideration of the vocal means of exploring and expressing the text-music alliance.

Paul Claudel's collaboration with Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger

One of the initiators of the musical drama reformation is Paul Claudel (1868-1955). In his dramaturgical adventure, Claudel is bravely accompanied by composers Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger, both members of the Group of Six formed by Jean Cocteau. Unlike his younger contemporary, Jean Cocteau, who writes for music, Paul Claudel wants to set the setting and character of musical interventions. For each of his dramas, he accurately indicated the music he wanted. Although he favored the dramatic point of view, Claudel did not want the music to be enslaved to the text. The originality of his dramaturgy consists in a dialectical relationship between the two languages (musical language and dramaturgical language) through which the poet-playwright managed to define a new stage aesthetic. It is interesting to note that a man of letters like Claudel was able to influence a composer like Darius Milhaud in terms of rethinking the relationship between text and music. Milhaud in turn distinguishes the prosody sung from the spoken one:

”Dès l’instant où l’on met un texte en musique pourquoi vouloir qu’il ait le même débit, la même pulsation que le langage parlé.”⁵

In collaboration with Paul Claudel, Milhaud considers that his freedom as a musician is no longer the same, being of the opinion that the metrics of Claudel's language force the musician to a relentless form. The composer considers that the establishment of a continuity between the prosody of rhythmic speech and the prosody of singing should not be sought, marking the problem between the playwright and the musician. If Milhaud pleads for the expressive resources of music in relation to the text, Arthur Honegger takes a very clear position against the established prosody used by musicians. He finds it very important that the

² Christoph Georis .2013. *Claudio Monteverdi letterario ou Les Metamorphoses du texte*, Paris: Honoré Champion Publisher, pp. 58-59.

³ She wants to show her skill in handling the weapons of a worthy man with whose virtue to compare.

⁴ Tancredi, a worthy man whose skill in the fight Clorinda wants to compare.

⁵ Darius Milhaud .1992. *Entretiens avec Claude Rostand*, Paris: Belfond, pp.104-139.

„From the moment you put a text to music, why do you want it to have the same speed, the same pulse as spoken language?”

sung text is comprehensible. To this end, Honegger proposes a new conception that involves the spoken text in the key moments of the action that manifests itself in Judith and especially in Antigone (Creon interrupts the choir to shout "Assez des sottises, vieillesse!")⁶

2. From speech to singing

2.1 Musical prosody

According to Pierre Joseph-Thoulier d'Olivet, by the word prosody, we mean the way each syllable is pronounced regularly by the various inflections of the voice, some specific to raising the tone, others specific to their lowering. It's about what grammarians call "accent."⁷ The composers' attempt to find a correspondence between musical and poetic prosody oscillated between a rhythmic description of poetic language, sometimes towards a metrical description of poetry. Textual and musical language have prosody that follows its own rules but can be related. On the one hand, the text, although it cannot impose a rhythm, can provide the accentuated resources of the verse (tonic accent, prosodic accents largely based on alliteration).

On the other hand, music can exploit verbal resources as sound material, regardless of the rules of spoken prosody. In other words, the sung text takes from the spoken text the articulation of meaning just as the text retains its musicality demonstrated in the phonological aspect.

The composers have adopted conventions that allow the regulation of musical prosody, given that it is impossible to find a relationship between the melodic measure sung and the use of the heights of the voice in speech. The measure proposed since Lully's time, concerns the treatment of the tonic accent to which the rhythm (located on a long note) assigns semantic values. The word-music relationship also requires a compromise formula. A text designed to be sung will be of greater syntactic simplicity being composed of short sentences. However, compromise is in fact an indissoluble alliance in which music becomes an acoustic image and the text illustrates the meaning. Over time, the connection between the text and the music has undergone changes generated by the stylistic and aesthetic aspects of the various periods.

Arthur Honegger's prosodic system is based on the correspondence of sung prosody with the characteristics of speech. The principles of spoken prosody try to find an equivalence of the elongation of syllables under a tonic accent without slowing down the flow, while the accents of the spoken language are systematized by exploiting the pulsation. In other words, Honegger seeks to translate the prosodic rules of the French language into musical rhythm. The text thus becomes a musical partner through its rhythmic and expressive potential.

2.2 Rhythmic speech

Rhythmic speech is considered the ideal means of transition from speech to singing. Addressing Jacques Madaule, Paul Claudel states that the transition from word to music is done through rhythm. This conception has its origin in Darius Milhaud's *Orestia* and corresponds to the wishes of Paul Claudel who, referring to his drama, stated the following:

"Il faudrait quelque chose comme un ton, celui dont on récite l'épître ou l'évangile, qui pourrait devenir sans brisure quelque chose de vraiment chantée."⁸

⁶ Enough nonsense, old age!

⁷ Pierre Joseph-Thoulier d'Olivet quoted by Michael Verschaeve .1997. in *Le traité de chant et mise en scène baroques*, Paris: Zurfluh Publisher, p. 26.

⁸ Pascal Lécroart. 2004. *Paul Claudel et la rénovation du drame musical*, Hayen- Sprimont: Pierre Mardaga Publisher p. 191.

One such example is *Les Euménides*, which involves more means of expression. The opera begins with *Pythie's monologue in rhythmic speech supported by percussion instruments*. Darius Milhaud introduced vocal overlays that give a unity of style to the three parts of Orestia. Thus, in the writing of Agamemnon's men's choir, the composer entrusts the vocals to one voice and the vocals to others (sometimes a melodic line, sometimes chords or percussion motifs sung in choral form). In the passages to the rhythmic speech in *Le Choéphore*, Milhaud exploits all kinds of screams, murmurs, exclamations to accompany the voice of the reciting soloist. In other words, Milhaud favors verbal / sound materiality over meaning. In this creation, rhythmic speech is the ideal means of creating the prosodic design of these words and giving them an expressive power to replace rational understanding. Also here, we are talking about an exploration of the *sprechgesang* style.

On December 17, 1927, following the acquisition of the score for the drama *Les Euménides*, Paul Claudel's idea of musical drama emerged. Claudel suggests the idea of a continuity between spoken and musical expression achieved especially through all vocal means of expression.

2.3 Singing in renewed musical drama

The voice is the vector of the word (it conveys meaning and ensures communication) and at the same time the first source of music. The sung text shows the voice's ability to say something other than words. The voice imprints the breath of the living being on the meaning of the words, investing the individual in the world as a sound body. Singing is the most common form of association with text and music. In general, some key features should be mentioned. First of all, singing has the power to expressively amplify any text, even if the notation of pitch and duration causes a loss of rhythm of speech. Singing can take many forms (the recitative and the psalm seem to be closest to the spoken language). In addition, due to the singing, several people can express themselves at the same time overlapping in a harmonious way.

Sprechgesang is a vocal style that combines the characteristics of speech and singing. It revolutionized the word-sound relationship, opening up countless possibilities for singing, and was then used in various ways by avant-garde musical currents. First used by A. Schönberg in *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), the term was taken over by members of the Viennese school and other composers related to it. With *Pierrot Lunaire*, Schönberg unified the inflections of the sung voice with those of the spoken voice. The fabrics of the two issues remain distinct, which raises the issue of homogeneity. The human voice becomes an instrument whose timbre unity is not clearly delimited. It is a new harmonic basis, a new expression related to the concert. Schönberg revives the "consonant", while the vocal music of the previous century (essentially Italian) favored the "vocal". The composer opposes this abrupt and direct sensuality to this aestheticism of singing.

The irregularity of the vocal phenomenon intervenes in the articulation of the speech with the song. Initially, the rhythm had to be strictly observed as if it were sung, but while the sung voice maintains the pitch, the spoken melody (*Sprechgesang*) only indicates it so that later it leaves it on the ascending or descending line. Later, in order to curb any temptation to sing, Schönberg notes *Sprechstimme* (voice spoken on a line). He adopts an intermediate mode: the "spoken melody" which proceeds through the articulated tremolo (apart from a few isolated sounds above which the composer wrote "to speak" or "to sing"). Understanding the text is the function of declamation but the real content is in the music.

It would take something like a tone, that of which we recite the epistle or the gospel, which could become something truly sung without interruption

Conclusions

In the twentieth century, in response to Wagnerian drama, the need for intelligibility of the word arose. Heroines cannot articulate consonants with the same accuracy on high notes, which distorts the sound form of the word. Thus, the reformation of the musical drama is related to the exploration of the three means of vocal expression for dramaturgical purposes: the spoken voice, the declamation / *sprechgesang* and the sung voice. Each of the three represents the continuation of a musical thinking that accompanies not only the word but also the psychological resources of the character, the way in which the dramatic action advances, transposed vocally by the composer. Through music and especially through voice, the renewed drama actually seeks to overcome the level of perception in order to penetrate into the deepest and purest layers of emotion.

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