

Myth in 300 Strokes

Gregor Pobežin, Igor Grdina

This paper aims to explore the phenomenon of the *opera minute* which emerged from the avant-garde experimentalism after WWI; its beginner and one of the foremost masters, the French composer Darius Milhaud put three short, eight-minute operas on stage in 1927. Others soon followed, among them the Slovenian composer Slavko Osterc who composed the *opera-minute* “Medea” in 1932. This paper is the first to transcribe in length the manuscript of Osterc’s “Medea”, comparing it to Euripides’ original. Furthermore, the article aims to establish the fine similarities and distinctions between the approach regular opera took towards myth and that of the avant-garde *opera-minute*.

KEYWORDS: Miniature opera, Darius Milhaud, Slavko Osterc, Medea, myth, avant-garde

INTRODUCTION

While opera took shape in the late 16th century in a coincidental manner – so to speak – as a historical adaptation of the ancient tragedy, its one-minute version, the miniature opera,¹ emerged after WWI from the spirit of the avant-garde experimentalism; the first impulse of its birth came from the desire to shock. Darius Milhaud who first mastered the one-minute opera wrote in his memoirs entitled *Ma vie heureuse*:

“Between 1922 and 1932, Paul Hindemith was organizing concerts of contemporary music, first at Donaueschingen under the patronage of the Prince of Fürstenberg, and then in Baden-Baden under the auspices of the municipal authorities, and finally in 1930 in Berlin. Hindemith was absolutely his own master, and tried out all kinds of musical experiments. In 1927 he asked me to compose an opera, which had to be as short as possible.” (Milhaud 1995: 153)

Milhaud’s solution to Hindemith’s friendly task was an extremely compressed opera; its libretto was provided by the man from the diplomatic “literary island”, Henri Hoppenot (Milhaud 1995: 153) – the contemporary of Alexis Leger, Jean Giraudoux, Paul Morand and

¹ We will favour the French term *l’opera minute* in the following pages.

Paul Claudel. This bears some significance for the outline of the text which aims to tickle the senses of artistically ambitious connoisseurs. The musical experimentalism which projected the moment when it would be accessible to everyone² shook hands with literary elitism.

AN OPERA THAT LASTS ONLY NINE MINUTES...

However, the definitive birth of this new form was another step away: the French master tackled the matter as a unique problem. Milhaud's short opera *L'enlèvement d'Europe* posed a significant problem for the publishing industry which was itself dependent of its stage cousin. Neither had the capacity for this formally non-standard oeuvre. The solution was provided by the director of the Viennese musical publishing company Universal Edition, Emil Hertzka whom Milhaud paid a visit in the spring of 1927 (Milhaud 1995: 153). This esteemed music merchant had immense experience with artistic innovators – and a fine ear for their market value;³ he then told the composer of *L'enlèvement d'Europe*: “What an idea, an opera that only lasts nine minutes! [...] Now, [...] if you would only write me a trilogy ...” (Milhaud, *My Happy Life* 153) With the help of Hoppenot Milhaud responded to the later reiterated enticement (formulated, as it were, in the head of another man) by composing the – *opera minute*! The first three oeuvres of this new genre – *L'enlèvement d'Europe* (op. 94), *L'abandon d'Ariane* (op. 98) and *La délivrance de Thésée* (op. 99) – were first put on stage before a public audience in Baden-Baden Festival immediately after their composing in July 1927 or April 1928, respectively (Milhaud 1995: 263–264; cf. Rostand, Stevens 1951: 26).

The very phenomenon of the *opera minute* reveals that this was an innovation closely related to a tradition whose vestiges are traceable not only in the adherence to the original frame of the opera and the relevant dramaturgical forms (the *L'enlèvement d'Europe* comprises eight scenes (Milhaud 1963b), the *L'abandon d'Ariane* five scenes (Milhaud 1963a) and the *La délivrance de Thésée* six scenes (Milhaud 1994) – all three oeuvres were written for a classical ensemble i.e. soloists, chorus and orchestra) but also in the-matised myths, to which we will pay more attention below.

The miniature opera never sought to forge new relationships between the human voice and the instrumental sound, which was so energetically strived for in the expressionist monodrama, e.g. Schönberg's *Erwartung* (op. 17),⁴ nor it created its own tradition in the

² Experimentalism which flourished after WWI tried to avoid the fate of utopianism, which is why the advocates of this *musique nouvelle* established their own international society and systematically endeavoured to promote their works which would eventually influence the widest taste. However, the time of non-specialized concerts and opera stages which favoured up-to-date productions came to its end – much to the surprise of adherents to the new music who could thereafter stage their oeuvres mainly in the specialized concerts performed by their own societies.

³ Ernst Krenek doubted whether Hertzka really knew music technically; however, he acknowledged his proficiency as a publisher (Krenek 1999: 220–1).

⁴ Anton von Webern particularly pointed out the outstanding feature of this oeuvre composed by Schönberg in 1909 to the text of Elsa Pappenheim, i.e. its brevity. He wrote: “The work lasts approximately one-half hour. What brevity here, even in a theatre work!” (Frisch 1999: 227)

sense of Borges' maxim that artisans create their own predecessors (Žmegač 2003: 220). This is how Milhaud and his librettist Hoppenot saw the whole history of the modern musical theatre and the literary canon of the West in which the classical Greek culture holds a pivotal role; they refused to create their own predecessors. In essence, the *opera minute* was a turn within a well-established paradigm. While the opera sought to affirmatively invoke the (temporally) distant traditions, its one-minute cousin parodied the relationship between the original and the adapted form by causing "short circuits" in the authorship and reception, however, it never lost sight of the live tradition with which it tried to stay in close touch. The way it caused these "short circuits" never left the form epitomised in the motto *Épater la bourgeoisie!* which was so well established by the time the miniature opera saw the light of day; it certainly served well the motley crew of decadents, new romantics, naturalists and the advocates of the revolutionary art in the social Darwinist struggle for the spotlight "in the fair" (if we may invoke the term from Romain Rolland's once popular novel *Jean-Christophe*, denoting the meeting point of music traders and consumers).

In relation to the *opera minute* the avant-garde turn (regarding both the ancient classical traditions as well the early modern theatre at the end of the 16th century) affected primarily the relationship with the mythical matter and its reception. It radically shifted the idea as to what can and cannot be done with classical traditions: the criterion of decency ceased to exist. Still, the avant-garde turn wasn't total in this respect: it didn't erase the very edges of permissible. No stranger to parody, irony does indeed demolish myth by degrading it, while holding on to it as a background referential point – it does not proceed in the direction of its annihilation, quite the opposite, it requires recipient's good knowledge.

Deeply influenced by Milhaud, Slavko Osterc wrote three miniature operas himself;⁵ in the first presentation of this new artistic form in Ljubljana in 1932 he emphasised:

"The essence of the *opera minute* is the scantiness of text. [...] The principle of the orchestra is mainly transparent instrumentation, there are no longer passages for singers nor the chorus. In Milhaud's "Europe Taken" a singer interrupts his partner in the middle of a story by uttering the words: 'Don't! I know this already.' The words entail the audience's knowledge about the Greek mythology and history." (Osterc 1932: 4)

It is also worth pointing out that avant-garde *opera minute* wasn't the first to treat myth in such a fashion; the 19th century operetta which saw its peak in the Second Empire approached classical themes in an equally ironizing manner. Jacques Offenbach made little effort to recreate mythical stories but rather mobilised their heroes and *sujets* to allude to the present, often making travesties of them by placing them in contemporary contexts, thus testing the reach of their instructiveness within *le genre primitif et gai* (Kracauer 1994: 159). He quite similarly approached fairy tales, sagas and legends (Klotz 1997: 152–154), as well as the modern sanctuaries of the belief in the progress and technology – such as

⁵ Slavko Osterc's miniature operas have sparked interest before: cf. P. Andrascke 1992 and Kuret 2015.

train stations (Benjamin 2004: 153, 886). Myth (decidedly religious and educational in the Greco-Roman antiquity – which is not to say that it wasn't open for irony) descended to the non-holy ground of ubiquitous fun for everyone. The novelty of the *opera minute* was that it transported this innovation from the well-established (and rather industrialized) art form into the elite circles which expressed interest in this “new music”.

It is quite meaningful that no turn occurred in the attitude towards operetta whose use of myth the miniature opera obviously tried to evade, but could not deny it completely. Operetta was very much alive after WWI, not only reception wise but also in the creational respect, particularly in *Mittleuropa*. Its shift from comedy satire towards sentimentalism did not occur entirely due to the “ageing” of the “young Vienna” but primarily due to its completely altered referential frame after the cruelties that came to pass between 1914 and 1918; operetta came to be much more like a canonized romantic opera in a process marked by democratization and other expressions of the revitalized bourgeois epoch. This shift was epitomized by the premiere of Lehár's *Giuditte* in the Vienna State Opera on January 20th 1934 (Endler 1998: 236–239; Traubner 1989: 262). Modernist avant-gardists obviously did not want to acknowledge operetta since they showed no interest in it – not even by opposing it,⁶ deeming it a genre that lost its flare – and, consequently, its independence; it died away when the environment “stopped being operetta-like”.⁷ *Opera minute* established a parodying attitude towards operetta in a completely indirect manner; it evoked operetta and its traditions only from the moment when it transcended its original forms with dramatic sentiments, thus obliterating its genre specifics. Operetta was actually quite close to the “Boulevard Mozart” Offenbach – however, it never strived for such referential value.

MILHAUD AND OSTERC

The fate of Milhaud's invention of the miniature opera was that of a typical avant-garde innovation: creators' focus on the never-before-seen or heard prevented this new form to become a mainstream tradition. The advocates of the “new music” busied themselves with the endeavour to forge their own solutions for the separation from the old traditions, while the more conservative composers expressed their scepticism over its emphasised modernism. Much later – when the waves of modernism had already subsided – *opera minute* became one of those art forms worth looking into from a perspective other than Milhaud's; the 2014 Zagreb Music Biennale Zagreb tender in the section of five-minute opera attracted a plethora of very diverse composers ten of whom made it to the finals.⁸

⁶ Ernst Krenek was one of those avant-gardists who exhibited interest in operetta – however, his creative attempt at operetta ended less than well. He tried to maintain his innovative trait in this stage genre the same way he did in his greatest opera hit *Jonny spielt auf* – by introducing elements of jazz into the musical body (Krenek 1999: 585–598).

⁷ Siegfried Kracauer wrote: “Die Operette konnte entstehen, weil die Gesellschaft, in der sie entstand, operettenhaft war.” (Willms 1988: 388) This is also quite true of the decline of operetta.

⁸ Information available at the webpage of the Music Biennale Zagreb: <http://www.mbz.hr/index.php?op=t=news&act=listcat&categoryID=1&lang=en> (last consulted: January 8th 2016).

Immediately after Milhaud had produced the three mythically inspired one-act pieces, the *opera minute* inspired similar works. The Slovenian composer Slavko Osterc (1895–1941) created his own miniature trilogy as early as 1930. Having completed his studies in the Prague conservatory (1925–1927) he became one of the most fervent advocates of the “new music” in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (or Yugoslavia); he was a member of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) whose festivals in Florence (1934), Prague (1936), London (1938) and Warsaw (1939) featured his works too (Rijavec 1979: 198–199).

Having returned from Prague, Osterc became acquainted with the avant-garde explorations – one of his teachers was, importantly, Alois Hába – and continued to spread the “new music” which he felt to be an apostle’s task. He distanced himself even from his own early endeavours (which were close to the romantic tradition) despite the fact that he had written after WWI a series of solos, a piece for a string quartet, a symphony, a ballet, and three operas (Rijavec 1979: 207). His next five works – three of which were miniature operas – were an expression of his advocacy for the asceticism of the “new reality” and “objective melodic”; in the situation of his time this was seen as a sign of “extreme leftism”. His music was supposed to tie the ear to the mind instead of the heart, relinquishing all effects stirring the emotions of the crowd (Anonymous 1932: 1–2).

Osterc, a regular guest of the stage of the Ljubljana National Theatre, felt obliged to present an art form which would stir the audience; upon the premiere of his two *opera minutes* (accompanied by the premiere of his ballet pantomime *The Masque of the Red Death*) he wrote about his works committed to this art form:

“They came as a sort of a reaction to the immensely lengthy romantic operas, but also as a practical consequence of the modern stage outline which allows for quick scenery rearrangement, which means shorter breaks after each *opera minute*. [...] Darius Milhaud was the first to have composed these *opera-minutes*; piano excerpts of his three *opera minutes* were published in the edition Universal. [...] They were all performed in Germany. [...] Longer one-act pieces were later also treated as *opera minutes*, e.g. Hindemith’s sketch ‘There and Back Again’ and even Toch’s opera ‘The Princess and the Pea’ which lasts 45 minutes.” (Osterc 1932: 2–3)

Osterc came up with virtually the same “genealogy” of the miniature opera as Milhaud (Milhaud 1995: 153) – which means that he was completely up to date with what was happening in the community of the avant-garde composers after his schooling in Prague, which can also be recognized from his correspondence (Cvetko 1988). Meaningfully enough, his history of the *opera minute* lacks any mention of his own half-hour sketch entitled *From the Opéra comique* (Slov. *Iz komične opere*) which was premiered November 9th 1928 in Ljubljana; this piece which played upon the form of the *opéra comique* lasted some 30 minutes.

THE SHORTEST MEDEA

The audience that came to the premiere of his two *opera minutes*, i.e. the *Medea* and *Dandin in Purgatory* (Slov. *Dandin v vicah*) in 1932, was carefully prepared by Osterc for the artistic novelty – he wrote about this new form especially for this purpose. Without this sort of heads-up, the composer might have easily been completely and undeservedly misunderstood, even though he composed for an environment where opera had no profound tradition.⁹ Osterc wrote at the occasion:

“The *opera minute* is not about the characterization of the protagonists nor the characterization of the situation; it is rather about the fastest possible display of events which pass as quickly as if the protagonists spoke in prose. However, this does not exclude the possibility of a reiterated sentence or a word should this affect the display of events. Clearly, there are little protagonists in the *opera minute*. Milhaud even prescribed a reduced chorus of no more than 6 or 8 singers – and even the four-voice polyphony is reduced to two or three voices. Chorus is therefore fittingly discreet which is less than ordinary in large operas. The *opera minute* is, for its sheer brevity, such that it has to limit romantic effects and completely negate the pathetic ones. According to its discreetness and length it should be deemed suitable more for chamber theatres than large institutions.” (Osterc 1932)

Osterc indeed left out his part in the history of *opera minute*, as we have shown above (this shows that that he perceived his own sketch from 1928 in which he followed the opus of Henri Murger as an independent response to the challenge of the late-romantic musical drama¹⁰); he later recognized his debt to Milhaud, yet his chosen art form which Milhaud invented was not entirely copied. The Slovene composer indeed saw the brevity and textual scarceness as two definitive characteristics of the miniature opera, but not also its irony, even though he noticed it and commented upon it in his analysis of Milhaud’s *L’enlèvement d’Europe*, as we have shown above. For Osterc the essential thing in *opera minute* was its opposition to the lengthy late-romantic musical drama.

This is very much evident in his approach to myth in his *Medea*, a highly compressed version of Euripides’ tragedy which did not want to distance itself from the original by means of parody or travesty. It maintained the same degree of respect for the classical tradition as Josip Stritar’s long monologue poem (some 100 verses) about the princess from Colchis (Stritar 1953: 367–370). Osterc was literature-savvy, so he wrote his own libretto; no stranger to satire, Osterc purposefully abstained from irony in *Medea* – but it is quite meaningful that Milhaud, too, couldn’t manage the same kind of distance for

⁹ The first opera composed to a Slovene text took shape in the late 18th century, whereas professional ensembles have performed on stage in Slovene since 1892.

¹⁰ Osterc received good critics for his *From the Opéra comique* from the much revered critic Anton Lajovic, deemed the greatest musical authority among the Slovenes in 1930 (Lajovic 1929).

this theme (so intimate in its core) as he did in his approach to myth in his *opera-minutes*. His one-act piece *Médée* (op. 191) from 1938 (Milhaud 1995: 266), whose libretto based on Euripides, Seneca and Corneille was written by his wife (Milhaud 1995: 193; cf. Nichols 1996), is very close to the ancient mythological version in its tragic capacity. Only the composer's typical musical talk maintains contact with his approach to mythical material from when he planned his *opera minutes*; however, even though *Medea* lasts about an hour, it is very close to the discipline his of brevity in the *opera minutes* (Lang, Frankenstein 1963: 515).

The libretto for Osterc's *Medea* deserves to be fully expanded here;¹¹ even though textual economy is, as we have noted above, of utmost importance for the effectiveness of the *opera-minute*, there are several instances of reiterated text – which is entirely in sync with what Osterc wrote in the 1932 playbill quoted *in extenso* above: "... this does not exclude the possibility of a reiterated sentence or a word, should this affect the display of events."

Medea:¹² *O, come, blessed Death! I cannot bear my shame anymore! I cannot bear my shame anymore! My unfaithful husband was enchanted by the king's daughter. Why? Why? Why? Why?*

[Kreon comes from the palace in the company of armed guards.]

Kreon: *I decree that Medea abandons the country forthwith. She is a threat to myself and to Jason's bride, my daughter.*

Medea: *Mercy, king! What have I done so terrible that I must leave Corinth? My fate is chasing me that is all.*

[Medea falls to her knees before Kreon.]

Let me at least stay one day so that I may prepare for the journey.

[Kreon thinks.]

Why did I leave my home? Why did I follow a stranger? Why? Why? Why?

Chorus: *Why did you leave your home? Why did you follow a stranger? Thou have been cast away into misery and shame ... o Medea, thou have been cast away.*

[Jason comes from the palace.]

Jason: *You could stay in the country ... I come to offer help – help for you and the children, because the misery and want abroad –*

Medea: *– shut your mouth! But no, it is a good thing that you came, I want to tell you this: I have saved you on the ship Argo, I have slain the dragon that kept the Golden Fleece. I left my home, my father, and in Iolcus I murdered Pelias the king – he was slain by his own blood! All this for you! But you have betrayed me, you have betrayed the children when you married another. I want no charity from your hands!*

¹¹ Osterc's text is only extant in manuscript; the authors made it an effort to transcribe it (his handwriting was quite exquisite); this is, as will be shown below, quite important because it seems the composer had different versions of the ending in mind. The chart numbers 29 pages altogether, but there are two sets of pages 22–23 with alternative plots.

¹² Text translated by authors.

Jason: *Is this how ...*

[Upon the king's signal two boxers appear.]

Kreon: *Right then!*

[Kreon leaves for the palace.]

Medea: *O holy vengeance! I swear upon Hecate! O holy ... o holy ... o holy ...
... o holy ... o holy ...*

Jason: *I leave now.*

Medea: *Yes, go! For too long you have left your bride alone.*

[Enter king Aegeus and his company from the right, all dressed in travelling attire.]

Medea: *Hail Aegeus, son of wise Pandion!*

Chorus: *Hail!*

Medea: *Where from you come?*

Aegeus: *I come from Delphi. I asked the oracle how I might produce offspring
– I have no children. I am on my way to Troezen to king Pittheus. And you?*

Medea: *I am to be banished, cast away by my husband. He married Kreon's daughter.*

Aegeus: *Come live in my land, for you be wise and know your magic potions
– maybe you can teach me how to become a father!*

Medea: *And so it shall happen. I will follow you to Athens – but not before I do what must be done.*

Aegeus: *Farewell, Medea!*

[Aegeus and his entourage leave.]

May Hermes the messenger of gods be at your side and let all your wishes come true!

Medea: *Maid!*

[A servant appears.]

Medea: *Call Jason!*

[The servant nods and leaves.]

Medea: *Careful now!*

Chorus: *Careful now! Careful now! Careful now! Careful now!*

[Jason appears.]

Jason: *You summoned me – I am here.*

Medea: *Forgive, oh Jason, my wretched self! I insulted you with no proper cause. I thought it over and came to realise: you act prudently ...*

[Jason isn't convinced; he summons for children and a servant brings them. Medea lifts them up and kisses them.]

Jason: *This is how a wise woman acts! [to children] I made arrangements for you with the help of gods.*

Medea: *Jason! Not for me – I ask you for the children, don't let Kreon banish them! I ask of you to convince the king; I ask your wife ... [to the servants] Quick! Bring the jewellery which I give to Kreon's daughter; the wedding gift!*

[Servants leave and quickly reappear with the jewellery and the clothes.]

Medea: *There is a saying that even the gods can be convinced by gold – and more so than with a thousand good arguments. Let her take this gift from my own hands so that she may be nice to you.*

[Jason and the children leave for the palace.]

Medea: [to herself] *The jewellery is poisonous and so are the clothes! Even he who touches the person wearing them is doomed to die.*

Chorus: *Oh you worthless groom, the king's son in law! Your bride and your father in law are doomed to die – the children will die too. Medea, she is vengeful and jealous – she conceived a sacrilege which is already under way.*

[The nurse brings children from the palace.]

Nurse: *The king's daughter gladly took your gifts!*

Medea: [to children] *Poor me! An exile I must leave for foreign countries – I know not what becomes of you. Should I leave you exposed to my foe's vengeance? No! No! Just for a moment I must forget that I'm a mother; I will do what I decided to do.*

[A messenger arrives.]¹³

Messenger: *Medea, flee! Dead is the king's daughter; dead is Kreon from your poison!*

Medea: *Oh, sweet report!*

Messenger: *What say you?*

Medea: *I wish you described the death of them both. But don't – I know the effects of poison all too well.*

[She leaves for the palace, the messenger follows.]

Chorus: *Alas! Her thirst for vengeance is not yet satisfied. She wants to desecrate her hands with the blood of her own body's fruit – her own body's fruit. Oh the suffering that comes from the vengeful passion of love!*

Soprano:¹⁴ *... the vengeful passion of love ...*

[Jason rushes from the palace in the company of servants.]

Jason: *Where is Medea? I have no wish for vengeance – but I am worried for my children – the king's vengeance might be upon them for their mother's crime.*

Chorus: *The children – gone! The children – gone! You will see what she did to them.*

Jason: *Servants, undo the bolt!*

Chorus: *The children – gone! The children – gone!*

[The gates open. Medea with dead children on a chariot pulled by two winged dragons.]

Medea: *Helios, my father's father, sent this chariot for me – so that I be safe from your vengeance!*

¹³ At this point there seems to be an alternative version which ends with the short line sung by soprano. For the purpose of transcription, we have joined both versions because the sequence makes sense from the contents point of view.

¹⁴ This particular point marks the end of what might be considered the end of the “alternative version”.

Jason: *You wretched woman! Leave my children here so that I may bury them.*

Medea: *Never! I will bury them myself in the Hera's sacred grove ... Then I will go to Athens where I will live with Aegeus, son of Pandion. But you will die a death that you deserve ...*

[Curtain.]

There seems to be, as we have already mentioned, an alternative ending although this might not be the case; as we have already noted, the document has 29 numbered pages altogether (the composer carefully marked each page), but the text ends on page 25 and page 29 contains almost nothing but scribbles. Interestingly enough there are two sets of pages 22–23; it seems unlikely Osterc made that kind of mistake but we should allow for that possibility since, as already noted, contents-wise it makes sense to merge both sets of pages 22–23. However, another interesting point is that the “alternative ending” introduces a “soprano” at the very end reiterating the line “the vengeful passion of love”. Both “versions” are equally long.

The “alternative version”, if we may call it that, is also the one that contains the most Milhaud-like moment which Osterc wrote about: “in Milhaud’s ‘Europe Taken’ a singer interrupts his partner in the middle of the story by uttering the words: ‘Don’t! I know this already.’ The words entail the audience’s knowledge about the Greek mythology and history.” (Osterc 1932: 4) In his *Medea* there is the finest example of avant-garde respect for myth by omission, presupposing audience’s knowledge; Medea’s words that she “knows the effects of poison all too well” are a fine example of a lengthy original passage (Eur. *Medea*, messenger’s report, v. 1136–1230) substituted for a short, intellectually packed sentence, which only an educated audience could properly absorb.

MYTH DISPLACED?

A primordial tattoo on the back of civilization, myth has been the artistic vantage point for many cultures since the earliest beginnings of their cultural endeavours. Greek tragedy, with all its stylistic conventions, is justifiably deemed to be a document of “contemporary attitudes toward authority in the domestic, military, or civic sphere” (Gregory 2002: 147). Just as myth was a story told from a time other than the present one, Greek tragedy, too, was a world other than the one lived – even in the 5th century BC; however, this very anachronistic distance is exactly what insures the perennial modernity of both tragedy – and myth. The very essence of myth is the distance within which it takes shape (Vernant 1984: 113), i.e. the distance from the explainable *rationale*. Myths revived thus offer a chance to address the Thucydidean ever-present situations (τὰ ἀεὶ παρόντα), so to speak; the opera, on the other hand, was occasionally seen as anachronistic and forcibly traditional due to its “iron repertoire” (Kotnik 2004: 198). It is easy to see why the avant-garde composers Milhaud and Osterc chose mythological matter for their miniature oeuvres.

The Ljubljana Opera dignified Osterc’s affirmative approach to myth by putting its best ensemble together for the 1932 premiere. The role of Jason was played by the tenor

Josip Gostič who made a name for himself in many productions under the legendary conductor Karl Böhm.

Osterc did, however, remain faithful to Milhaud's irony towards ancient traditions in his minute opera *Salome* which hasn't been performed on stage yet: the princess dances her way to getting John the Baptist's head by incessantly annoying Herod who simply wants some peace and quiet for a nap. He grants her wish out of sheer pragmatism. Osterc designed his third *opera-minute*, i.e. *Dandin in Purgatory*, as a comedy inspired by Molière's motif of the punished husband and Hans Sachs' carnival play. During the Ljubljana premiere in 1932 it was performed last, which means that the same sequence was tried as in Puccini's one-act pieces in the *Il trittico*.

It is therefore safe to say that Osterc somewhat broadened Milhaud's idea of the *opera-minute* – regardless the omitted irony; consequently, this new form became possible in the affirmative relationship with the tragic as well. On the other hand Osterc's creative process significantly extended the possibilities for the motifs of the *opera-minute*: from then on even generally known drama themes could provide substance for it – if the librettist and the composer did not use them, they were confined, so to speak, to sketches, anecdotes and general situations due to the sheer brevity of the oeuvre. This is why the *opera-minute* had the capacity for any expression of the tragic or comic genre. Due to the compressed subject matter it generally stayed attached to themes that were deeply rooted in the audience's conscience (there was otherwise no room for a deeper evolving of characters' actions), which is precisely what fortified myth's foundations in the *opera-minute*.

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MIT V 300 TAKTIH

GREGOR POBEŽIN, IGOR GRDINA



Pričujoči članek naslavlja dve temi, in sicer fenomen t.i. *miniturnih oper* Slavka Osterca s poudarkom na primerjavi njegove *Medeje*. Miniaturna opera po Osterčevih besedah ne služi karakterizaciji protagonistov ali karakterizaciji okoliščin, pač pa čim hitrejši izmenjavi prizorov, ki morajo miniti čim hitreje, kakor da bi protagonisti govorili v prozi.

Osterčeve miniaturne opere časovno niso veliko zaostajale za deli francoskega inovatorja Dariusa Milhauda, ki je prve tri miniaturne opere uprizoril leta 1927; Osterc je svojo *Medejo* zložil leta 1932, še istega leta pa jo je ljubljanska Opera uprizorila s svojim najboljšim ansamblom.

Pričujoči članek prinaša transkripcijo Osterčeve *Medeje* in primerjavo z Evripidovo tragiško predlogo. Osterc, dober poznavalec antične tragedije, se je priredbe Evripidove predloge za libreto lotil z veliko mero spoštljivosti do izvirnega besedila – brez ironije, s katero se je denimo lotil *Salome*. Libreto, ki obstaja zgolj v rokopisu, šteje 29 strani, dva kompleta strani 22–23 pa kažeta, da je imel avtor morda v mislih dva različna zaključka.

Associate Prof. Dr. Gregor Pobežin, University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities, Titov trg 5, SI-6000 Koper-Capodistria & Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts; Novi trg 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana; gregor.pobezin@fhs.upr.si.

Prof. Ddr. Igor Grdina, Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Novi trg 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana; igor.grdina@zrc-sazu.si.