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**THE MYTH OF "ORPHEUS" IN THE FRENCH BAROQUE
CANTATA, FROM CHARPENTIER TO RAMEAU.
HYPOSTASES OF THE DRAMATIC**

Part II
Analytical Perspectives

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The analytical approach taken by this second part of the study on the Orpheus myth based French Baroque cantata⁸¹ is focused on illustrating the dramatic element present exclusively in the literary-musical discourse imposed by the specificity of the cantata genre in the stylistic context of the time.

As stated in the first part of the study, the French Baroque cantata is the main vocal-instrumental genre having animated the French musical life in the period between Lully and Rameau, i.e. during the first three decades of the 18th century. The socio-cultural context of the time, which also included a certain exclusivist cultural policy of the royalty regarding opera productions, required the finding of efficient solutions, while the cantata, imported from the Italians, provided the ideal framework for that: the need to invest certain reasonable financial resources, a reduced vocal and instrumental ensemble (a solo voice, *continuo* and possibly one or

⁸¹ Tatiana Oltean, *Mitul "Orfeu" în cantata barocă franceză, de la Charpentier la Rameau* (The Myth of "Orpheus" in the French Baroque Cantata, from Charpentier to Rameau). *Hypostases of the Dramatic. Part II – Theoretical Perspectives*, published in the journal: "Musicology Papers" Vol. XXV, No. 1/2010, Editura MediaMusica, Cluj, p. 57-74.

two *obbligato* instruments⁸², and a more extended instrumental ensemble towards the end of the period) and a host of young French composers eager to assert themselves, and who now had the opportunity to become known and appreciated during the cantata seasons. But the new genre, initially adopted somewhat reluctantly by the French, had to satisfy the needs of a public familiar with sophisticated, opulent and obviously costly stage productions, a true spectacle to the ears, and mostly to the eyes.

After the height of the comedy-ballets created by the famous couple Molière-Lully, the exigency of the public regarding the amount of dramatic tension that the artistic act was supposed to produce imposed the rapprochement of the cantata (a genre designed by Italian composers as one eminently lyrical-epic) to the pole of the dramatic spectrum. The solutions in this respect, in the absence of visual stimuli, could only lie in the development of the dramatic parameter, in the vocal-instrumental expression itself. Once accomplished, this fact shed its beneficial consequences on the French spectacular genres of the 18th and 19th centuries. Let us recall here the case of Jean-Philippe Rameau who, in the eight cantatas preserved until today and composed in the preamble to his stage works, used the cantata genre to "practice" on his force of purely musical dramatic expression that he would later employ and improve in his lyric tragedies.

Below is a summary of the techniques used to potentiate musical drama that we considered in the analysis of the four French Baroque cantatas built on the theme of *Orpheus*, which we grouped into three key aspects of analysis:

a. Micro- and macrostructure peculiarities as potentiators of the dramatic effect

We have included in this first aspect of our analysis elements such as the transition from one type of discourse to another (free or imitative polyphonic, harmonic, sequential) as an element with dramatic valences in structuring the musical discourse, tonal plans, the overall rhythm of the literary-musical discourse as a key factor in the balance between the lyrical, the epic and the dramatic, illustrated in the peculiarities of the recitative discourse, in conjunction with the aria discourse.

A decisive role in this context is played by the (literary and musical) reprise, as a structuring and dramatic potentiator of the musical discourse; a very special technique that could be assimilated to the idea of reprise is the thematic recall⁸³, i.e. the return to a previous key or musical idea, in order to strengthen the coherence of the discourse and the drama of expression. A

⁸² In the practice of the time, in the French cultural context, the existence or not of the *obbligato* instrument was already indicated in the title of the piece (cantata), through the words "avec symphonie", or "sans symphonie".

⁸³ *thematic recall* (English), used and perfected by André Campra, particularly in his opera-ballet works. Cf. Greer Garden, *A link between opera and cantata in France: tonal design in the music of André Campra*, in the journal: "Early Music", xxi (1993), pp. 397–412.

particular example is the echo technique, in which a thought, a memory, an image or a vow, a previous promise made by the character returns in the present moment of the action, but this time with one or two instrumental voices less, as if stated only inside the hero's memory.

b. Highlighting the text-music symbiosis

This aspect of the analysis will be defined through a series of parameters that circumscribe the issue under consideration, such as: associating keywords of the libretto with specific contexts related to rhythm and melody, range and timbrality, and chromatic colour, the harmonic wrapping of certain words or lyrics, rhythm and meter changes with rhetorical role in the musical-dramatic discourse, the rhetorical and expressive role of the pause, etc. Finally, the dramatic potentialities of the myth are discussed in the four composition versions, along with the specific moments of the myth demarcated by the four authors and their overall vision thereon, as well as the uniqueness of the message conveyed by each of the four works.

c. Exploiting instrumental timbrality and instrumentality in general

We have paid special attention to this aspect in the analysis because we believe that it plays a prevailing role in achieving the dramatic effect in the French cantata, being acknowledged not only by composers but also by the theorists of the time, as shown below.

In some recent research on instrumental expressiveness in the French Baroque cantata⁸⁴, musicologist Michele Cabrini draws attention to the growing interest of this phenomenon in the first half of the 18th century, reported at the time by Sébastien de Brossard⁸⁵, the first French theorist who described the genre of the French cantata and author, in his turn, of works belonging to the genre, but also by Jean-Baptiste Dubos, who emphasized the dramatic virtues of instruments by stating that an opera overture could move the listener as much as Corneille's or Racine's poems could⁸⁶.

As shown in the description that Brossard made to the cantata at the beginning of the 18th century, both voice and instruments were responsible to illustrate "the variety of expression and movement [...], [...] which guide imagination [...] through a succession of [episodes of the] actions

⁸⁴Michele Cabrini, *Upstaging the voice: diegetic sound and instrumental interventions in the French Baroque cantata*, in the journal: "Early Music" (2010) 38 (1): 73-90 (19 November 2010).

⁸⁵ Brossard documents, in 1724, the migration of certain types of orchestral instrumental effects⁸⁵ – the storm (*tempête*), the fight (*bruit de guerre*) etc. – from the stylistic area of the opera genre to the genres of the cantata and motet, as certified by Dubos too, who highlighted the easy adaptability of this type of expressiveness specific to the opera overture, to the non-spectacular genres. Thus, the musical instruments complement the dramatic effect achieved by the solo voice, in an attempt to compensate, musically speaking, the lack of the visual expression parameter, which the cantata does not benefit from. Cf. *Ibidem*.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

and in various ways"⁸⁷ [our transl.], recreating the coordinates of the action strictly by means of sound, which must compensate for the lack of visual stimuli. Thus, in this genre, instruments exceed their accompanying role, becoming an integral part of the dramatic deployment and contributing equally, along with the singer's voice, to the maintenance of the dramatic flow throughout the entire work.

In his study on the dramatic effect of instruments in the French Baroque cantata mentioned above, Michele Cabrini offers a number of convincing examples illustrating a few specific techniques taken either from the musical dramaturgy of the operistic genre and adapted to the cantata, or specially invented to serve the dramatic expressiveness of the latter. From the former category we note the *annonce* technique (Fr.), known since the time of Lully, which implied the announcement of the entry of new characters into action by stating the incipit of the musical ideas that they were about to sing, and then the *accompanied recitative* in its entirety, used to illustrate the link with the past (the story of a past event, where instruments play the role of a stylistic "frame" in which it falls), or the instrumental prefacing of the musical idea enunciated vocally, as if it pre-existed in the soul of the narrator before being verbalized. The second category includes methods such as the use of contrasting tempi, rhythms and meters to illustrate different spaces and times of the action, the fast alternation between the solo voice and short instrumental interjections, or between the tonic and the dominant, meant to capture the inner turmoil of the character, the abrupt and repeated interruption of the discourse, used for the same purpose.

According to the model detailed above, some of these methods of enhancement of the dramatic effect will be illustrated in the analyses below.

In the first part of this study, we were mentioning about *Orphée descendant aux Enfers* by Marc-Antoine Charpentier that despite the fact that the author of the underlying literary text is unknown and, moreover, that no other musical works composed on these lines are known (which was quite usual at the time), they are elegantly constructed using embracing rhyme, pair rhyme, but also some symmetries and internal rhymes (*criminels – rochers*) of the verses. It is significant to note that the stanzas dedicated to the character Orpheus have symmetrical four-line structures with embracing rhyme, while the parts featuring the secondary characters of Tantalus and Ixion have a special structure: either two-line stanzas with free rhyme (recitatives), or five-line stanzas (2 +2 +1, duet), while the final trio is a three-line stanza, with a rhyme between the first and the last line. The rhymes are carefully and suggestively constructed: *mes pas – trépas*, *supplice – Euridice*, *peine – inhumaine*, *vautours – amours*, *aman(t)s – tourmen(t)s*.

⁸⁷ Sébastien de Brossard, *Dissertation sur cette espèce de concert qu'on nomme cantate*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. fr. 5269, f.75, translation adapted from Sébastien de Brossard, *Cantates françaises et italiennes*, ed. J. Dorival, transl. M. Criswick, Versailles, 1997, p. XLIII. Quoted in Michele Cabrini, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

In terms of the general structure of the work, symmetry is felt by the alternation between Orpheus's two arias and the interventions of the other two characters, Tantalus and Ixion, while the extremes are occupied by the instrumental prelude and recitative of Orpheus⁸⁸ (violin and *continuo*), and the final trio. Unlike the model of the genre that imposed itself a few decades later, the work here in question begins not with a recitative, as one would have expected, but with a prelude, followed – without pause, as indicated by the author in the score ("passez sans interruption au récit d'Orphée sur le violon (sic!)"), by the aforementioned recitative. In fact, similar indications by the composer can be seen throughout the entire score, such as "icy faites (sic) un petit silence", which delimitate the "numbers" of the cantata and show the importance that the composer attached to the pause, as an element used to potentiate the musical-dramatic discourse.

The tonal track of the work swings between two distinct centres – *E* and *A* (with the relative *C*) – drawing an axis of symmetry between the beginning and the end, around the *E minor* key (the end comes with the Picardian cadence). The modal spectrum – major or minor – adapts itself to the rhetoric of the literary text.

It is significant to note also that the author takes his time to outline the intimate but intensely depressive framework in which the "action"⁸⁹ is about to unfold: for this purpose, he opts for an instrumental prelude instead of the usual introductory recitative, while the first recitative, i.e. that of Orpheus, is in its turn written for violin and instrumental accompaniment. The lack of vocal parts in the first two numbers suggests from the start the overwhelming suffering of the main character, who is unable to verbalize his turmoil. Below is presented the composer's way of exposing, already in the first bars of the work, the basic cells of the further development of the piece:

⁸⁸ It seems that this unusual recitative – *Récit d'Orphée sur le violon (sic!)* – which precedes Orpheus's first aria may have been played on the violin by the tenor who interpreted this role. In fact, it has been documented that Charpentier himself used to play roles of *haute-contre* (in modern practice, this corresponds to the male alto voice) in some of the artistic productions sponsored by Marie of Lorraine, Duchess of Guise, in whose service the composer was. Cf. John S. Powell, preface to the score *Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Vocal Chamber Works*, col. "Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era", vol. XLVIII, A-R Editions Inc., Madison, n.y., p. VII. Quittard suggests that this solo part was performed by the composer himself. Quoted in *Idem*, p. VIII.

⁸⁹ In fact, the action is reduced to the minimum: a discussion between Orpheus and the two shades of the Underworld, who are charmed by his song and to whom he confesses that the ordeals they are subjected to are mild compared to his suffering. The happy ending of the cantata is only slightly suggested by the last lines of the final trio, glorifying the happiness of the two lovers.

Ex. No. 1. M.-A. Charpentier, *Orphée descendant aux Enfers*, 1st movement, *Prélude*, bars 1-6

The example above illustrates the melodic essence of the whole work, in the centre of which is the gradually descending line, the descending (perfect or diminished) fourth leap, and the ascending octave leap, as well as the inversion of these intervals, various instances of the sigh that will be used in Orpheus's two arias and in the final trio. Also, the pedal on the *E* note of the figured bass emphasizes the permanence of his lover's death.

Another defining melodic element is the ascending chromatic line, foreshadowed already in the prelude to the cantata (ex. 2) and then resumed in Orpheus's first aria (ex. 3) by the solo voice – "aucun de *vos* tourmens n'egalle mon supplice (sic) ":

Ex. No. 2. M.-A. Charpentier, *Orphée descendant aux Enfers*, 1st movement, *Prélude*, bars 52-57

Ex. No. 3. M.-A. Charpentier, *Orphée descendant aux Enfers*, Orpheus's aria, bars 111-117

Also in the rhetoric area of the sigh are the imitations of melodic incisions, anticipated in their turn in the prelude (ex. 4) and then resumed in Orpheus's first aria (ex. 5):

Ex. No. 4. M.-A. Charpentier, *Orphée descendant aux Enfers*, 1st movement, *Prélude*, bars 30-35

Ex. No. 5, M.-A. Charpentier, *Orphée descendant aux Enfers*, Orpheus's aria No.2, bars 130-137

This discourse, frequently interrupted by pauses, is more and more precipitated, gradually amplifying the drama, as Orpheus reveals his determination to die in order to be with the one he loves ("Ou rendez-moy mon aymable Euridice / Ou laissez-moy descendre aux ombres du trépas"). Pauses are essential for potentiating the dramatic effect, in unison with the text, especially when they precede repetitive melodic incisions that come either in sequences (ex. 4 and 5), or in *ostinato* passages. Another element with intense dramatic potential is the generally descending melodic line, sequentially harmonized with 7-6 suspensions.

The dramatic peak of the aria is reached during the instrumental finale, when these sighs are resumed without the solo voice, extending the weeping beyond the legendary time of the action and leaving the impression that in fact it has never ceased. These musical sighs are resumed

in Orpheus's second aria, in which he tells Tantalus and Ixion that their sufferings and ordeals are much lighter than the wrongful death of a young man who is separated from his love. Here, the sighs are evoked again, without vocal intervention, like an echo, or like a painful reminder of the lost love.

In contrast to these two moments, the imitation between voices and instruments is resumed in the Orpheus-Tantalus-Ixion trio of the last number of the cantata, this time in a major key, as the culmination of the love and courage of Orpheus, who has regained Eurydice ("Hélas! Rien n'est égal aux bonheur des amans" (sic!)).

Orpheus's imploring discourse of this first aria gains more dramatic weight through the consistent use of the ascending leap of a fourth, fifth, or even octave, either on the second (unstressed) beat, or on the third one (secondary stress, ex. 6), in the compound binary meter, with extension of the note value beyond the bar line, on key words of the verse:

Ex. No. 6, M.-A. Charpentier, *Orphée descendant aux Enfers*, Orpheus's aria, bars 138-144

Regarding the instrumental timbrality in this work, we notice the composer's option for the combination of strings (violin – the symbol and embodiment of Orpheus's lyre and *continuo*, on the viola – perhaps *viola da gamba* – and harpsichord) and woodwind instruments (*flute à bec*, *flute allemande*). The instrumental part, however, neglects, in a late Renaissance spirit, the timbral characteristics of these instruments, because the balanced and consistent polyphony with imitative inserts and the quite narrow and similar ambitus of the four solo instruments, creates the illusion of a single instrument.

Unlike Charpentier's work, composed thirty years earlier, **Louis-Nicolas Clérambault's cantata *Orphée*** enjoyed, stylistically speaking, the accumulations of three decades of writing evolution and of assimilation of the elements of Italian style that would later impose themselves in the early 18th century French stage works.

The dramatic parameter is highlighted here by the cumulative role of the vocal soloist (high soprano voice and *haut-contre*): he begins in the narrator's role, with a short recitative introducing Orpheus, continues by deploring his fate (Orpheus's first aria), and then, encouraged by the voice of the ancient Greek choir (which he also interprets), seeks entry to the Underworld

and asks Pluto to return his sweetheart to him, reminding him of how he himself had fallen in love with the daughter of Ceres (meaning that he too knows what love is). Touched, Pluto (interpreted by the same singer) gives his girlfriend back to him, while the choir glorifies again, through the solo voice, the triumph of love even over the Underworld.

What is interesting and unusual here is the structure of the verses, in quatrains, with embracing, pair and even cross rhyme, authored by M. de Rochebrune, a close friend of Antoine Houdar de la Motte – one of the most famous authors of libretti and verses for vocal works of the time. Even recitatives are built on rhymed verses, also structured in quatrains. When comparing the two texts underlying the two works analyzed so far, the similarity of the two phrases meant to persuade Pluto appears quite striking: "Ou rendez moy mon aymable Euridice / Ou laissez-moy descendre aux ombres du trépas" in Charpentier's cantata, and "Ramenons Euridice, ou restons chez les morts!" in Clérambault's. Other similarities can be detected in the happy ending of the two texts, evoking the joy of the two lovers and the triumph of love over death.

The dramatic parameter can also be identified in the succession of tonal centres, which follow a quite unusual path for the time when the work was written: after a debut in *B minor* (the first two numbers – recitative and aria), the centre shifts to *G* (the second recitative and the second aria), the third recitative returns to *B minor* to prepare the third aria through a semi-cadence (Orpheus's imploration), in the unusual *B major* key, then the next aria returns to *B minor*, while the next one, in *D major*, completes a bold tonal track, to restore in the end, in the last two numbers, the original tonal centre *B* (the last recitative in *F # minor*, preparing the last aria, in *B major* again).

Compared to Charpentier's cantata, Clérambault's *Orphée* is much more dramatized also through the recitatives expressing the inner anxiety and turmoil of the mythological character, while the sudden and abrupt changes of his feelings are captured in music by dynamic alternations of rhythmic-melodic motifs, or by dynamization of the *basso continuo* line. Below is the second recitative of the cantata, with the dynamization of the bass and the rapid change of expression, depending on the character's feelings.

Ex. No. 7, L.-N. Clérambault, *Orphée*, recitativo 2, bars 1-16

In his first aria, for example, Orpheus implores the forest's echo to stop responding to his voice, for nothing can ease the pain that tortures his soul. The text is musically illustrated – how else? – than through the echo technique, on the *obbligato* instrument. The moment is achieved through short, alternative solo interventions, between the *obbligato* instrument (violin or *flute allemande*) and the *continuo* section, with the solo voice standing out like an equal partner of the vocal-instrumental polyphonic discourse:

Ex. No. 8, L.-N. Clérambault, *Orphée*, Aire tendre et piqué, bars 1-10

Also, a much closer connection of music with the text and with the complexity of the hero's moods can be detected in this music, which combines the freedom and flexibility of the melodic line with harmonic refinement and with Italian elements like sequences, forms with reprise, melismatic vocal passages of high virtuosity etc.

The structure of the cantata is complex, built on the traditional principle of alternation between arias and recitatives, with three arias symmetrically placed in the centre, of which the middle one a true *lamento* in which Orpheus begs Pluto to give his sweetheart back to him. The composer chooses a *da capo* aria, after the Italian model, with *obbligato* instruments (here Orpheus's "lyre" is symbolized by the *flute allemande* and the violin), whose touching message – "Laissez vous toucher par mes pleurs / D'un sort affreux réparez le caprice / Rendez moi ma chère Euridice / Ne séparez pas nos deux coeurs" – is expressed by simple harmonies, *passus duriusculus*, and interruptions of the solo line and even of the *continuo*, which allow brief, imploring, solo interventions of the flute to be heard. As with Charpentier, the interruption of the vocal line is associated with inexpressible pain and with the inability to verbalize extreme suffering.

Ex. No. 9, L.-N. Clérambault, *Orphée*, Aire fort lentement, bars 55-67

55 Fort lentement

Lais-sés vous tou- cher... par... mes pleurs Lais-sés vous tou- cher... par...mepleurs,

Violle et clavecin

3♭ 7 ♯ 7 9 7 5♯

62

D'un sort af- freux re-pa- rés le ca- pri- ce, Ren- dés-moy ma chere Eu-ri-

♭7 6 7 6 ♯ 6 5 ♯

Special attention should be paid to the so-called "choral" interventions in the cantata. They occur in two of the arias (the second and final ones, and are both entitled *Air gai*). In the first one, Orpheus is encouraged to descend to the Underworld in search of Eurydice ("Allez Orphée, allez, que votre amour extrême / Serve d'exemple au l'Univers. /Il est beau qu'un mortel passe

jusqu'aux Enfers / pour se rejoindre à ce qu'il aime"). "Breaking" the action and inserting this commentary moment typical for the ancient Greek tragedy is signalled in music by the sudden shift to *G major*, as well as by changing the tempo and character of the music. The sound of the "crowd" is suggested by repeating the exclamation *Allez!* at an alert pace, in dotted rhythm:

Ex. No. 10. L.-N. Clérambault. *Ornhée*. Air gai. bars 9-15

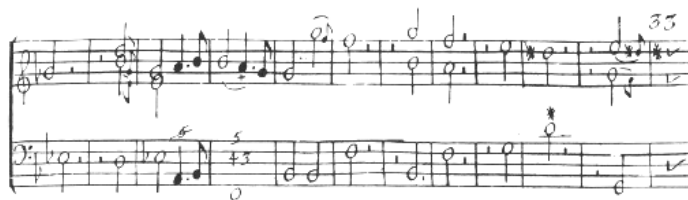
A revealing example of assimilation of the Italian art of writing can be seen below. Here, the technicality of the vocal writing, the long phrases, requiring proper breathing, the sequencing technique, the ornamentation of a discourse in extremely short rhythmic values (in the score, marked with +) and the rhythmically complementary flute line, create a stark contrast to the next fragment (the sudden shift to a slow tempo and the brief accompaniment of the solo voice), which suggests the resumption of Orpheus's fervent plea to persuade Pluto, reminding him that he too once knew what love was ("Vous avez ressenti la flamme / Du Dieu dont j'éprouve les traits. / L'aimable fille du Cérés / Par ses divins appâts sut embrasser votre âme. "):

Ex. No. 11, L.-N. Clérambault, *Orphée*, Air tendre, bars 102-114

No less important in terms of musical dramaturgy is the change of meter from binary to ternary, when Orpheus speaks to Pluto.

Philippe Courbois's cantata *Orphée* was written in the same year as Clérambault's homonymous one, although, structurally speaking, its construction is much simpler and more standardized than that of the latter. For Courbois, the formal and architectural skeleton of the music does not seem to have offered much in terms of musical dramaturgy. Instead, the composer paid special attention to the instrumental interludes, especially to the pause, as an element of expression and of dramatic tension:

Ex. No. 12, Philippe Courbois, *Orphée*, instrumental interlude – the rhetorical use of the pause), part I, bars 22-33



Here again, as in Clérambault's cantata, the solo voice cumulates the roles of Orpheus, Pluto and of the narrator. The novelty is that the narrative takes place both in the third and in the first person, without this being musically particularized.

The author of the text is unknown, but here again one can distinguish some elements of versification and rhyme (*passage – sauvage, loix – voix, sort – mort* etc.), not only in arias, but also in recitatives.

In terms of tonal trajectory, the work swings between two distinct centres – *C* and *G* – each appearing both in major and in minor key. The introductory recitative opens in *G minor*, while the final aria ends the work in *G major*. The middle aria, with *obbligato* trumpet, in *C major*, provides the tonal contrast that is so necessary in the architectural configuration of the whole. Here we notice the unusual subdominant relationship between the main tonal centres, which constitutes an archaizing element in the development of the musical discourse.

The cantata begins abruptly with a recitative-declamation, in which Orpheus mourns the death of Eurydice:

Ex. No. 13, Philippe Courbois, *Orphée*, introductory recitative, bars 1-14

O Ciel! disoit Or-phé-e, ô dis-grace Sa-ta-le! vous mourés Euré-
 ...di-ce hé-las!, hé-las! at-ten-dés

Orpheus's descent into the Underworld is signalled in music by gradual descending lines, first in mixtures of sixths in the two violins, then in the *continuo* bass line.

Ex. No. 14, Philippe Courbois, *Orphée*, the descent to the Underworld (instrumental interlude - *récitatif mesuré*), bars 41-51

Je voy déjà le ter-ri-
 ble riva-ge ou Mercure confond les bergers et les Rois

lentement

Unlike the first two cantatas analyzed, Courbois's cantata also includes the crucial moment of the legend when Orpheus turns his head and thus loses Eurydice for good, a moment that, however, is not presented in a dramatic form, but a rather in an epic and quite neutral one.

The work ends in the tradition of the French cantata, with a moral pointing to impatience as main culprit for the beloved's loss, as in the text of Jean-Philippe Rameau's homonymous cantata. Paradoxically, the final aria – the *moral* – is sung in a major key, while Orpheus's aria, in which he tries to persuade Pluto and which in Clérambault's work was sung in *B major*, is here in *G minor*, giving a completely different atmosphere to the theme ("Dieux redouté qui regnez sur les ombres, terminez mon funeste *sort* / Je viens chercher dans vos royaumes ou mon Euridice, ou la *mort*. "). In Courbois' version too, Orpheus's "lyre" is embodied by the sound of the violin.

Here, again, one can distinguish elements of both vocal and instrumental virtuosity (especially in the solo trumpet line). From the standpoint of the solo voice assigned to the baritone timbre, the aria with *obligato* trumpet ("Peut-on refuser la victoire aux doux efforts du tendre amour?") is the most difficult one, for the composer resorts to intensely melismatic passages placed in the medium-high register, on the key words of the text (here, *gloire*):

Ex. No. 15, Philippe Courbois, *Orphée*, aria with *obligato* trumpet, bars 29-40



In Jean-Philippe Rameau's cantata *Orphée*, the species of the French Baroque cantata has already reached its maturity stage. Here, the composer experiments with expressive virtues of the musical language rather than with new musical structures or architectures. And rightly so as in this work the *da capo* aria gains more drama and freedom, elements that Rameau would later use in his lyric tragedies.

For this cantata, Rameau used Louis Fuzelier's text, a literary gem in verse, in which rhymes, treated somewhat freely, create unusual arabesques and symmetries.

The action begins with an abrupt and explosive recitative (as in Philippe Courbois's cantata), after Orpheus succeeds in persuading Pluto to return Eurydice to the living, and unlike all the cantatas analyzed previously, this one captures with exactness and drama the moment when Orpheus looks back at Eurydice. Thus, the first dramatic moment of the cantata becomes that of her irrefutable loss. This time, however, the culprit is not haste, nor impatience, but love itself: "Amour, amour, c'est toi qui fais mon crime / c'est à toi de le réparer!". Love is sent back to the Underworld by Orpheus, to repair the crime. However, in the final aria, impatience is eventually accused for the final separation of the two. The aforementioned freedom is also suggested by brief meter changes:

Ex. No. 16, Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Orphée*, recitative, bars 31-37

Another specific element of this cantata in comparison with those analyzed above, is the way the literary text is structured and the manner in which it determines musical structure: unlike the cantatas composed by Charpentier, Courbois and Clérambault, where text repetitions were made according to certain keywords or phrases, here, the feeling of "reprise", as a replay at the end of a text fragment of at least two lines, becomes a formal landmark of reference. Furthermore, the reprise is dynamized in most cases, both musically and literarily. For example, in the aria quoted above, "Amour, amour, c'est toi qui fait mon crimes," the resumption of the lines in the end brings the interrogation "Ne saurais-tu le réparer?", which softens the imperative of the first enunciation of the text ("c'est à toi de le réparer!").

Like Charpentier, Rameau "connects" some parts of the cantata through the indication "enchaînez", to provide the work with the continuity and consistency of an opera scene.

The tonality range is not very wide: generally, recitatives make the transition to the new tonality, in a simple and natural succession of tonal centres, which are in relationships of tonic-dominant-tonic-subdominant-tonic: *G major (E minor) - D minor - D major - G minor - C minor - G minor - G major*.

Some of the dramatic effects in this cantata that was composed almost half a century after that of Charpentier, are also achieved through fast and wide melodic leaps, through shifts from even rhythm to dotted rhythm and vice versa, or through insertions of pauses in the instrumental part (solo violin).

The intricacy of the solo rhythmic-melodic line proves not only the concern to illustrate the musical drama, but also the technical and expressive qualities of the solo voice in the works of the period preceding the composer's great lyric works:

Ex. No. 17, Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Orphée*, recitative, bars 1-4

The musical score for Jean-Philippe Rameau's *Orphée*, recitative, bars 1-4, is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is for the Violon (violin), the middle staff for the voice with lyrics, the bottom staff for the Clavecin (harpsichord), and a separate staff for the Virole (viola). The lyrics are: "me. Amour, amour, c'est toi qui fais mon cri-mel Vo - le aux en - fers le ré - pa - rer". The score shows a complex rhythmic and melodic structure, with a key signature of one flat (G minor) and a 3/4 time signature. The recitative style is characterized by its irregular rhythm and wide melodic leaps.

If, from the point of view of the action, the first two cantatas analyzed here are related by the option for a happy ending, the last two cantatas highlight Orpheus's moment of weakness and his permanent loss of Eurydice.

Furthermore, all the four authors have considered the dramatic element, which they all exploited while maintaining a series of common characteristics: a specific treatment of leaps, the change of metrics and rhythmicity according to the dramaturgical purpose envisaged, the use of

repetitions in the literary text to generate reprise and rondo structures of the musical text, the use of tonal relationships between sections of the cantata to enhance the dramatic effect, exploitation of the continuity of the discourse through *attacca* instructions, the expressive use of the pause, the use of timbrality for rhetorical purposes.

Although they used similar techniques, each of the four composers remained faithful to their own personal style, thus creating four works that illustrate the evolution of a genre and of a language over the course of half a century. The four works stand upon the borderland between the epic and the dramatic, from the most epic one – that of Couperin, to the most intensely dramatic and most recent one – that of Rameau.

The study of the dramatic element in the pure, unadulterated music - in this case in the genre of the French Baroque cantata, is an essential stage in understanding how the myth has fulfilled its dramatic function in the spectacular genres (opera, ballet).

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