

## CORNEL ȚĂRANU – "ORESTES & OEDIPUS"

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### ABSTRACT

An overlapping vision of two ancient masterpieces – Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Oedipus*, created jointly by a French playwright, Olivier Apert and a reputed Romanian musician, Cornel Țăranu, the opera *Orestes & Oedipus* is an innovating response given in the early 3rd millennium to topics that have been discussed for nearly a century – *Electra* by Richard Strauss and *Oedipus* by George Enescu. While Aeschylus' hero is, unlike Homer's, a victim of dishonour and of his own crime, which eventually triggered his decline, Sophocles' hero is in search of the truth, locked up in an implacable destiny. Olivier Apert's text attempts to capture the two mythological figures, Orestes and Oedipus, in an imaginary meeting. Their destinies are similar, though seen in the mirror: Orestes avenges his father's murder by committing matricide, while Oedipus marries his mother and finds himself guilty of patricide. In his opera, composer Cornel Țăranu employs a modal-chromatic language "of a certain sensitivity, with a certain expressiveness", spiced with a few ancient Greek melodies, of which one was found inscribed on a vase in the Bihor County.

**Keywords:** Greek antiquity, overlapping myths, chamber opera, chromatic modalis

*"I am interested in making Orestes and Oedipus meet ... and by their mirror-inverted characters to oppose two political views of the world: one is the conqueror's view, that of Oedipus, and the other, more meditative and more sceptical, of Orestes."*

Olivier Apert

The Greek theatre grew out of the choral hymns sung in praise of Dionysus, considered the patron of fertility and wine. The group of singers led by a "coryphaeus", wearing goat masks (*tragos*)<sup>1</sup>, symbolized fantastic creatures such as sileni and satyrs and formed Dionysus' escort.

The episodes depicting the god's life were interrupted by choral parts, hymns of praise dedicated to the patron deity. Splitting the chorus in two and assigning the role of the god to one of the two coryphaei marked the invention of the first actor. The premises of the theatre being thus created<sup>2</sup>, subjects grew more and more diverse, to include human, historical or legendary stories which were recited or sung on a stage. The masks illustrated human typologies and the role of the chorus was to comment upon the actions narrated.

Aeschylus, the "father of tragedy" (526-456 BC) and an active combatant against the Persians at Marathon and Salamis, is the author of the only trilogy that survived from antiquity, *Oresteia*. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle credits Aeschylus with the dramatization of the story by introducing a second actor and thus diminishing the role of the chorus.<sup>3</sup> In the Homeric poems, in which the evil gods challenge the human actions, the poet reveals man's courage in fighting the gods and overcoming the obstacles raised by them. In contrast, Aeschylus demonstrates that the reason for man's decline is not the vengeance of the gods, but man's dishonour and crimes.<sup>4</sup> The trilogy tells the story of King Agamemnon's victorious return from the Trojan War and of his murder by his wife, Clytemnestra, in revenge for sacrificing their favourite daughter, Iphigenia. His death will be avenged by their children, Orestes and Electra, and Clytemnestra will die by the hand of her son. Orestes' absolution in the third part of the trilogy (*Eumenides*), symbolizes the

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<sup>1</sup> The word "tragedy" comes from *tragos* and means "goat song". Cf. Ovidiu Drimba, *Istoria literaturii universale*, vol. I., Editura Saeculum I.O.-Vestala, Bucharest, 1998, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> The phenomenon took place in Athens, during the reign of the tyrant Peisistratos, and was first introduced by the poet Thespis (534 BC).

<sup>3</sup> "Aeschylus was the first to increase the number of actors from one to two, to diminish the importance of the chorus and to assign the leading role to the dialogue". Ileana Berlogea, *Istoria teatrului universal*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, Bucharest, 1981, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Ovidiu Drimba, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

transition from a tribal order dominated by blood ties to a democratic order, where decisions are made rationally by the representatives of a community. Thus, Orestes' guilt for the matricide is less than Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus'<sup>5</sup>, who murdered a king, the ruler of the city.

Sophocles (497-405 BC) followed in Aeschylus' footsteps in a period of prosperity in Athens, during the construction of the Parthenon, in the time of Pericles and Phidias. From his vast body of plays (more than 120 tragedies) only seven have been preserved, of which the most famous are *Oedipus the King*, *Electra* and *Antigone*. By adding a third actor, Sophocles increased the possibilities for dramatic dialogue. Aeschylus' massive force and grandeur were replaced by introspection and the awakening of moral consciousness.

According to Aristotle and his contemporaries, *Oedipus the King* was the best accomplished tragedy of antiquity. Man's search for the truth is the main drive of the action; the hero investigates, discovers and punishes himself: man, not gods, "is the measure of all things"<sup>6</sup>. In Sophocles' view, the tragedy becomes the expression of Oedipus' inner turmoil, questions and uncertainties, hope and despair.

Euripides (480-406 BC), whom Aristotle called "the most tragic of the poets", wrote tragedies in which he interwove two or more legends. As a keen observer of female psychology, he centred his plays around the tragic destinies of a number of heroines such as Iphigenia, Alcestis, Hecuba or Medea, driven by passion, rather than will. The legend of *Orestes* was dramatized by each of the three great tragic poets, each viewing the story through the eyes of a different character: Aeschylus chose *Orestes*, Sophocles – *Electra* and Euripides – *Iphigenia*.<sup>7</sup>

Sophocles wrote *Oedipus the King* in 420, at the age of 75; 15 years later (in 405, aged 90) he resumed the tale in a new form, under the title of *Oedipus at Colonus*. Intrigued by the grim fate put upon the hero by the gods, the author highlights the cruelty of the gods who punished an innocent man.

In the myth, Oedipus is portrayed as guilty without guilt, unaware of the crimes he has committed. The ethical problem encapsulates unusual moral perspectives, where good and evil are identified with the effects rather than the intentions behind them: the hero violates the family ties by killing his father,

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<sup>5</sup> Aegisthus too had had his reasons to take revenge on Atreus, who had invited his father, Thyestes, to a banquet where he served up Thyestes' sons as the main dish. Vito Pandolfi, *Istoria teatrului universal*, Editura Meridiane, Bucharest 1971, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> Euripides wrote *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Electra*, *Orestes* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, all based on a theme dedicated to the tragic fate of the Atrides and of which *Iphigenia in Aulis* is considered the most important one. Cf. *Mic dicționar de scriitori greci și latini*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1978, p. 79.

marrying his mother and having children with her. The city of Thebes is ravaged by a plague unleashed by his crimes. When Oedipus discovers the truth, he gouges out his eyes.

The libretto of the opera *Orestes & Oedipus* was inspired by Sophocles' *Electra*: it was at Electra's request that Orestes killed his mother and Aegisthus, and not at Apollo's behest. Aeschylus' *Electra* recognizes her brother by a lock of hair which he left on Agamemnon's grave. Sophocles considered this recognition token to be rather implausible and therefore replaced it with a ring that had belonged to the king. In Euripides' version, Orestes sends an old man to tell Electra of his arrival. The libretto of Cornel Țăranu's opera was based on the second variant: the recognition tokens, i.e. the scarf and the dress pin, have a double use: the scarf becomes the murder weapon used by Orestes and Electra and also Jocasta's suicide weapon, while the dress pin is used by Oedipus to carry out his self-punishment.

The Sphinx's perennial riddle<sup>8</sup>, alluding ironically to man's fleeting time on earth as compared to the all-powerful and immortal gods, was changed in the script of George Enescu's opera *Oedipus*; the answer to the question "Who or what is greater than destiny?" is the same as in the ancient version: "Man!", but in Edmond Fleg's libretto, the mortal being is imbued with the powers of a titan. Cornel Țăranu, in consonance with Olivier Apert's libretto, took a Freudian approach to the *Sphinx*<sup>9</sup>. The Greek sphinx<sup>10</sup> was a woman, just as in the French libretto by Olivier Apert<sup>11</sup>, and this creature, seduced by Oedipus' strong personality, unravelled the secret of the riddle at the cost of her own life.

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<sup>8</sup> What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening?

<sup>9</sup> Ștefan Anghi, *Opera de cameră "Oreste-Oedip" de Cornel Țăranu*. "Muzica" Journal No. 2/2002, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> A female monster, the Sphinx lived on a high rock called Sphincius, outside the city of Thebes, and terrorized travellers by killing everyone who failed to solve the riddle, until Oedipus finally answered it. The sphinx was originally from Egypt, where it was the symbolic image of the Pharaoh, and its myth spread to Phoenicia, Syria and throughout the Mycenaean world. While the Egyptian Sphinx was portrayed as a wingless lion with the upper body of a human, the Greek Sphinx had the winged body of a lion and the breast and upper part of a woman. Bearded male sphinxes are sometimes found in archaic Greek art. After making its way through classical art, the sphinx became "wise virgin" for the tragic poets and turned into the messenger of divine justice. Anna Ferrari, *Dicționar de mitologie greacă și romană*, Editura Polirom, Iassy, 2003, p. 762.

<sup>11</sup> *La Sphinx*. Anca Mănuțiu, the translator of the libretto, noted: "Given the author's choice and the implications of the libretto, we have preferred to refer to the Sphinx as a female, which is less common in the Romanian language. In fact, the female equivalent also appears in the Romanian version of Euripides' *Electra* signed by Alexandru Miran, accompanied by the following translator's note: «The mythical monster with the face, voice and breasts of a woman can only be female, as in Greek tradition, despite having the body of a dog, the tail of a serpent, the wings of a bird and the paws of a lion.» Olivier Apert, *Oreste & CEdipe*, opera-theatre, libretto, Éditions Mihály - Editura Biblioteca Apostrof, Cluj, 2000, p. 7 (translator's note).

“The love of the Sphinx for Oedipus reveals the personality and character of the hero, who not only deserves, but also must be loved and, moreover, is meant to be loved even at the cost of the ultimate sacrifice of those who love him – the Sphinx, then Jocasta. Thus, Jocasta's tragedy is preceded – tragedy within tragedy – by that of the Sphinx...”<sup>12</sup>

This monster had been sent by Hera against the city of Thebes, as a punishment for the murder committed by Laius, who had harboured an improper love for Chrysippus, the young son of Pelops.<sup>13</sup>

In the interpretation of the Oedipus myth, Claude Lévi-Strauss regards it as the most famous of all; however, the anthropologist places the origin of the myth at a time preceding the birth of the hero, when Cadmus was searching for Europe, thus pointing to the brother-sister relationship. The author identifies the following mythemes: Cadmus' slaying of the dragon, the Spartans' self-destruction, Oedipus' genealogy that accounts for his inherited malformation, i.e. Labdakos, the lame, the grandson of Cadmus, Laius, Oedipus' left-sided father, Laius' murder, the killing of the Sphinx<sup>14</sup>, the swollen-footed Oedipus, his marriage to Jocasta, his mother, the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices, Oedipus' sons, who fought to their death, and the confrontation between Creon and Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, who disobeyed Creon's order by burying her brother according to the proper rites and customs.

George Enescu has the merit of writing the most complex Oedipal opera, following the thread of the story from the hero's birth until the end of his wanderings, along the long road of immortality.

The choice of the subject of his only opera was motivated by the composer himself: “You do not choose a subject like this, but rather it chooses you; it takes hold of you and never lets you go”.<sup>15</sup> The decision of writing the opera was taken after the composer watched a show in Paris:

“As I came out of the French Comedy, I was haunted, possessed. A fixed idea took possession of my mind: to compose an Oedipus”. “The moment Oedipus was stabbing out his eyes, Mounet Sully created a miracle. His naturally beautiful face was gradually becoming hideous, almost inhuman. I am not talking about the blood running down his cheeks, but about his traits, transformed by the pain: one had the impression of a lion's head provoked by a tamer's pitchfork. As to the scream that this pain stricken mask was letting out, I notated it in my score with deliberately false notes. Pernet, who created

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<sup>12</sup> Ștefan Anghi, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Grimal, *Dicționar de mitologie greacă și romană*, Editura Saeculum, Bucharest, 2003, p. 450.

<sup>14</sup> In general, we will use the traditional masculine form.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Gavoty, *Les souvenirs de George Enesco*, Paris, Editions Flammarion, 1955. Cf. Mihai Cosma, *Opera în România privată în context european*, Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 2001, p. 247.

Oedipus' role, had the courage to learn and the talent to howl these unsingable notes".<sup>16</sup>

George Enescu conducted the dances in the Prologue on March 24, 1924, in Paris, and the orchestral parts on November 23, 1925, in Bucharest. The world première took place in Paris, at the *Académie Nationale de Musique et de la Danse*, on March 13, 1936. In 1956 followed the première in Brussels, at the *Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie*. The Romanian première of the opera *Oedipus*, translated by Emanoil Ciomac, took place in Bucharest, on September 22, 1958, under conductor Constantin Silvestri.<sup>17</sup> On the occasion of a previous complete performance (Sinaia, 1942), Enescu confessed that his intention with this work,

“which had nothing to do with the «opera» in the current and scenic sense of the word, was to revive the ancient tragedy, as well as that image of the hero, of victim and eventually conqueror of destiny, with which he had identified himself during the 25 years of gestation.”<sup>18</sup>

The first complete performance of Cornel Țăranu's opera *Orestes & Oedipus* took place in Bucharest, in 2001, within the framework of the *Romanian Music Week*, after two fragmentary performances in ClujNapoca, Romania. In 2002 followed a concert in France, at Vitry (*Jean Vilar Theatre*) and another one in Brussels, Belgium (the *Grande Place City Hall*, in the presence of the Europe Council officials and of the Romanian delegation). The following year, in October 2003, the opera was given another concert performance in Bucharest, at the *George Enescu International Festival*.

In April 2007, the work was staged in world première at the Romanian Opera, under the direction of Rareș Trifan and performed under the baton of Cornel Țăranu.<sup>19</sup>

We note certain similarities between the musical direction of the two operas, led by their authors (Enescu – in the first two concerts, Țăranu – in all of them) and the countries that hosted them. The fact that the librettos of both operas are in the French language is, besides their artistic value, an argument in support of these coincidences.

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<sup>16</sup> \*\*\*, *George Enescu, Monografie*, Bucharest, 1971, vol. I., p. 549. Quote from Romeo Ghircoiașiu, *Studii enesciene*, Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 1981, p. 93.

<sup>17</sup> Mihai Cosma, *Opera în România privită în context european*, Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 2001, p. 261.

<sup>18</sup> Emanoil Ciomac, *Enescu*, Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor, Bucharest, 1968.

<sup>19</sup> The stage design was by Carmencita Brojboiu and the choreography by Jakab Melinda. The cast included Marius Vlad Budoiu, Gheorghe Roșu and Iulia Merca, theatre actors including Cornel Răileanu, students of the Faculty of Theatre and Television of the “Babes-Bolyai” University and the “Ars Nova” Ensemble of the “Gheorghe Dima” Academy of Music.

According to the composer's own confessions<sup>20</sup>, he did not intend to write “an opera with the latest tendencies of the avant-garde”, but to create “a synthetic language of a certain sensitivity and with a certain expressiveness. The links with tradition are preserved through a modal-chromatic and sometimes rather tense language, such as was demanded by the subject.”

Referring to the meeting with the Cluj composer, which had taken place the previous year, Olivier Apert, the librettist of the opera, said:

“Cornel Țăranu's music was like a love at first sight” “... and this made the myths of Orestes and Oedipus meet. I was interested in the meeting of these two fictional mythological figures because Orestes and Oedipus had never met. In a way, they are mirror-inverted characters; their destinies are the same, but seen in reverse: Orestes avenges his father by killing his mother, while Oedipus marries his mother and kills his father”.

Here is what composer Cornel Țăranu said about the relationship between Olivier Apert's libretto and the music of the opera:

“the text is very important for the suggestion of the ambiance of the work. I started thinking about a special language that would also include some slightly archaizing allusions to the musical setting in which the action unfolds, and so I resorted to a few multi-millenarian Greek tunes that we know from the musicological collections; I have used two or three fragments from Greek songs of which one was found on a vase in the Bihor county and deciphered by our musicologists, and which constitutes the end of the 3rd act. As to language, I chose one that highlights the innate musicality of the French language. The intelligibility of the text and the quality of the declamation are very important; I also had some hesitations concerning the formula of opera-opera, opera-theatre or theatre-opera. I started with the form of theatre-opera, in which certain parts were spoken. The cantabile element prevails... There is also a free translation of the text in Romanian, by Anca Mănuțiu (Apostrof Publishing House)”. ... “There is also some *Sprechgesang*<sup>21</sup>, but it is never chanted. The choir has a few rhythmic interventions, but many French participants wanted them to be sung rather than spoken. The opera was presented in a quasi-oratorical form, with lights in which the performers remain somewhat still and sing from the score. It's very hard for them to memorize this music,”

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<sup>20</sup> In the interview with composer Cornel Țăranu, taken by Virgil Mihaiu at the Radio-TV Station in ClujNapoca, Romania.

<sup>21</sup>Enescu used the declamatory *Sprechgesang* technique in *Oedipus*, just as he did in the sketches of the opera *Strigoii* [The Ghosts]. Cornel Țăranu has the merit of reconstructing this score of unique documentary value from *disjecta membra*, showing Enescu's use of the *Sprechgesang* ever since 1916". Cf. Sigismund Toduță, *Un aspect înnoitor al structurii vocale în tragedia lirică "Oedip" (Sprechgesang)*, in the volume: "Simpozion George Enescu - 1981", Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 1984, p. 103.

says the author full of regret.<sup>22</sup>

While at the Cluj première of the chamber opera, conductor Fabrice Parmetier remarked: "There is a lot of colour in this music and a lot of change of atmosphere; this gives it dramatic tension. Composer Cornel Țăranu does indeed hear the music of the French language"<sup>23</sup>, he concludes.

With regard to the theme chosen, Fabrice Parmetier considers that "from a philosophical point of view, antiquity has always addressed itself to the present. From the point of view of the public, mythology has always had a lot of teachings to offer. Since the eighteenth century there has been a preoccupation with the texts of the ancient writers, and their modernity has not ceased for one moment."<sup>24</sup>

Through the simultaneous presentation of the two great myths of Orestes and Oedipus, the opera enables a comparison between the two: Oedipus, the powerful king at the peak of his glory, Jocasta's beloved husband and the father of her four children, is filled with care and concern for his subjects: he wants to find out the cause of the terrible plague that haunts the city of Thebes. He is completely unaware of the fact that he is at the origin of these phenomena, that his own deeds have caused the gods' revenge.

Orestes, on the other hand, is terrified at the thought of the crime he is inevitably about to commit: the killing of Clytemnestra, his mother, and of Aegisthus, her husband. His only joy upon returning to the city is his reunion with his sister, Electra, who, according to some sources, saved his life from the vengeful anger of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus who, after killing Agamemnon, wanted to kill his son, Orestes, too.

Another specific aspect of this scenario is the instinctual, primary eroticism, or, as Freud called it, the "nuclear complex"<sup>25</sup>. If the mother/son

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<sup>22</sup> In the interview with composer Cornel Țăranu, taken by Virgil Mihaiu at the Radio-TV Station in ClujNapoca, Romania.

<sup>23</sup> Olivier Apert, *Oreste&Œdipe*, opera-theatre, libretto, Éditions Mihály – Editura Biblioteca Apostrof, Cluj-Napoca, 2000, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> "The child reacts to this situation, since, as son, he wishes himself in the place of his father, as daughter, in the place of the mother. The feelings awakened in these relations between parents and children, and, as a resultant of them, those among the children in relation to each other, are not only positively of a tender, but negatively of an inimical sort. The complex built up in this way is destined to quick repression, but it still exerts a great and lasting effect from the unconscious. We must express the opinion that this with its ramifications presents the *nuclear complex* of every neurosis, and so we are prepared to meet with it in a not less effectual way in the other fields of mental life. The *myth of King Oedipus* who kills his father and wins his mother as a wife is only the slightly altered presentation of the infantile wish, rejected later by the opposing barriers of incest. Shakespeare's tale of Hamlet rests on the same basis of an incest complex, though better concealed." Sigmund Freud, *Prelegeri de psihanaliză*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, Bucharest, 1980, p. 402.

incestuous relationship between Orestes and Jocasta is unconscious, neither of them being aware of their blood relation, the relationship between Orestes and Electra, brother and sister, as viewed by librettist Olivier Apert, is very suggestively described and reasoned upon by musicologist Stefan Angi: “The intimacy of the brother-sister relationship between Orestes and Electra points to the presence of an archaizing savagery which, beyond their vengeful, murderous yearning, suggests some subtle overtones of incest between them.”<sup>26</sup> The forbidden love between the two brothers is not an isolated case in Greek mythology. In a dialogue with composer Cornel Țăranu, he recalled a similar case found in the legends of the North, which were the source of inspiration for Wagner's tetralogy “The Ring of the Nibelung”. The two brothers of *Valkyrie*, Siegmund and Sieglinde, Siegfried's parents of the *Wolfe* family, call themselves *Wölfiner*, i.e. “wolf cubs”<sup>27</sup>. Orestes, in Apert's version, calls himself a “wounded wolf”,

The image shows two systems of handwritten musical notation. The first system consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics "dant en vain autour du car- nage" and "Me voi". The piano accompaniment has a circled note and the number "13". The second system also has a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics "ci - long blessé" and "qui peut à tre se sou- vient dure-". The piano accompaniment has a circled note and the number "2". There are various other annotations, including numbers "10", "2", "13", "3", "2", and a circled "P".

<sup>26</sup> Ștefan Angi, *Opera de cameră "Oreste-Oedip" by Cornel Țăranu*, in the "Muzica" journal, edited by the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania, No. 2/2002, p. 39.

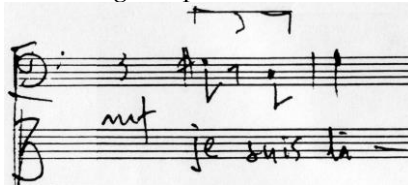
<sup>27</sup> Balassa Imre, Gál György Sándor, *Operakalauz*, Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, Budapest, 1956, p. 181.

and frequently calls his sister “my she-wolf”:<sup>28</sup>



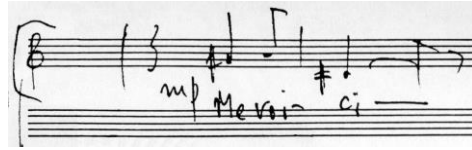
The emotional ties between the brothers of the two couples develop in times of crisis, after the physical or moral loss of their parents.

Oedipus' ascending leitmotif (Act II), a metaphor for his ambitions, interrupted by the “abyss” of the gods' punishment,



derives from Orestes' leitmotif, in which the hero's destiny is symbolized by the downward leap,

<sup>28</sup> Olivier Apert, the author of the libretto, alludes to the original totemic traditions, or ancient symbolic rituals, of self-definition or objective reference to the possibility of human metamorphosis into a wolf. There existed a ritual *lykanthropy* whereby a warrior was exempted from obeying the human laws. Orestes' way of calling his sister, Electra, “my she-wolf”, may also lead to the myth of the twin brothers Romulus and Remus, rescued and suckled by a she-wolf. According to some sources, Electra saved Orestes' life and hid him after the murder of their father, King Agamemnon. Strabon called the Dacians *daos*, the Phrygian name for wolf. As Mircea Eliade claims in his book *From Zalmoxis to Genghis Khan*, this “mutilated relic”, alongside the legend of the she-wolf who raised Romulus and Remus, are among the few *lykanthropies* preserved from the archaic initiation rituals. Cf. Victor Kernbach, *Dicționar de mitologie generală*, Editura Albatros, Bucharest, 1983, p. 368.



and makes the connection between the two main characters.

Another contrast between the two myths concerns the themes of patricide and matricide, respectively: Oedipus kills his father unknowingly, without realizing that that violent old man he encounters upon his return to Thebes is his father. His destiny becomes even more tragic upon discovery of the truth. Orestes is aware of his mother's crime and of his imminent vengeance; however, he is quite reluctant to act, despite the urging of his sister: *Tuela...* Exasperated, he asks Electra to stop pressuring him, feeling the inability to hurt the woman who gave him life.

The family (blood) relationship is obvious in Orestes' case: he knows his allies – his sister, Electra and his good friend, Pylades, as well as his enemies – his mother, Clytemnestra and her husband, Aegisthus. In the opera we find only Clytemnestra, terrified she will be punished for her deeds. Oedipus has a false image of reality: he does not know his real parents. Laius, his father, wanted to kill his son at birth, to prevent the fulfilment of the Oracle's prophecy. He was raised by individuals who were not his actual birth parents. His true mother, Jocasta, the only one who suffered when her son was taken away to be killed, became his loving wife. He appeared to be strong, a true leader, blessed with everything a mortal could want: power, family, wealth. But after finding out the truth, he lost everything. He tore out his eyes because he could not face reality, Jocasta, his wife and mother, committed suicide, their sons fought on opposite sides in a war for the throne, and the ungrateful people banished him from the city, oblivious of the fact that he had once saved them from the Sphinx. His daughter, Antigone, was the only one who accompanied him in exile.

The action in the two myths unfolds at different paces: delayed by Tiresias' refusal to reveal the truth, in the case of *Oedipus*, it is precipitated by Electra's hatred and lust for revenge, in that of *Orestes*.

An important character in Olivier Apert's scenario, compared to the earlier works, is the Sphinx. This *monstre archaïque*, as he himself describes her, will sacrifice herself for love of Oedipus. The dialogue between the two reveals Oedipus' aversion to questions (*Je n'aime pas les questions, j'aime les affirmations*)<sup>29</sup>, which will determine the Sphinx to tell Oedipus the answer to the riddle, at the cost of her life.

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<sup>29</sup> "I do not like questions, I only like affirmations".

Here is another difference in the destiny of the two mythical characters: Oedipus enjoys the support and sacrifice of the women in his life (the Sphinx and Jocasta)<sup>30</sup>, while Orestes is pushed to murder and thus destroyed by them. After committing matricide, Orestes loses his mind, being purified by Apollo only after a trial in which he is acquitted of all his crimes.

A tragic atmosphere dominates the sound-world of the opera, based upon the composer's selection of vocal and orchestral elements that create a sense of anguish throughout the entire work. Quoting Lermontov, the composer warns from the beginning: "You can find peace in the storm."<sup>31</sup> In the same context, Enescu quoted Queen Carmen Silva who, in a letter in which she suggestively called him Sphinx (due to his enigmatic silence), made reference to Nietzsche's opinion that "the ancient tragedy was born as a necessary reaction against the excessive health and balance of the Greeks".<sup>32</sup>

The extreme orchestral parts create a heavily chromatic, ancient modal atmosphere (Greek Phrygian / medieval Dorian) and remind of another outcast of the ancient world, evoked by Sigismund Toduță in his *Third Symphony, "Ovid"*.

In the orchestral *Prelude* to Act I, the clarinet and bassoon play a motif<sup>33</sup> in a *parlando rubato* style that carries the melodic signature<sup>34</sup> of composer George Enescu, as a subtle dedication from composer Cornel Țăranu:

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<sup>30</sup> In the other versions, Merope, his adoptive mother, Jocasta and Antigone.

<sup>31</sup> Cornel Țăranu, in the presentation of the chamber opera *Orestes-Oedipus* – Act I and II, in the Studio Hall of the "Gh. Dima" Academy of Music, filmed by the Cluj-Napoca TV Station.

<sup>32</sup> Bernard Gavoty, *Amintirile lui George Enescu*, Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 1982, p. 88.

<sup>33</sup> In a 1979 television show, composer Ștefan Niculescu noticed, "as a curiosity, the possibility of drawing a correspondence between a transposition of this 3-sound fragment and the staff transcription of the name ENESCU, based on the German musical terminology, the fragment thus acquiring the aspect of a signature or emblem". Cf. Ștefan Niculescu, *Reflecții despre muzică*, Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 1980, p. 95.

<sup>34</sup> The motif is also found in the opera *Oedipus*. Cf. Octavian Lazăr Cosma, *Oedip-ul enescian*, Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor din România, Bucharest, 1967, p. 478.

CORNELIUS  
ORPHEE - OEDIPPE  
Andante Rubato ACT I - PRÉLUDE

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the prelude of Act I of the opera *Orphée-Oedipe* by Cornelius. The score is written for a full orchestra and includes parts for woodwinds (flutes, oboes, bassoons, clarinets), strings (violins, violas, cellos, double basses), and percussion (trumpets, trombones, timpani). The tempo is marked 'Andante Rubato'. The score is handwritten and shows various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'p' and 'f'. There is a circled section in the woodwind part and a separate section of music written below the main score.

E (N) Es C U (ut=c)

A musical staff showing the notes E, (N), Es, C, and U (ut=c) on a treble clef staff. The notes are represented by whole notes on the staff lines.

The moment of the trial conducted by the chorus suggestively evokes a Greek response to the Gregorian *Dies irae*, at a climactic moment of the opera. The architecture of the opera also includes lyrical passages, particularly in the arias

sung by female characters (Jocasta). However, the pathetic and the tragic are the dominant notes, achieved by means of declamation and incisive cadences.

In symmetry with the beginning, the finale presents the two heroes in a *tutti* in expanded time, suggesting almost a sense of timelessness; Orestes appears delirious, haunted by his murderous deed<sup>35</sup>, seeking<sup>36</sup> forgiveness, peace or Electra (?), while Oedipus is featured in dialogue with the chorus, both repeating a promise that will never be kept: "I will return".<sup>37</sup>

Referring to his opera *Oedipus*, George Enescu, in the famous interview with Bernard Gavoty, confessed: "this will certainly be the opera of my life." Years later, musicologist Octavian Lazăr will confirm his words: "*Oedipus* is the gravitational centre of his entire work."<sup>38</sup>

In a similar manner, Doru Popovici regarded Cornel Țăranu's opera *Orestes&Oedipus*, as a "post-expressionist work", "...the culmination of his music."<sup>39</sup> The great reviews and appreciation from the audience and critics were confirmed by the nomination of the opera for the *National Arts Awards* in the Music category, and by the award received by the composer from the Romanian Government, on May 22, 2008.

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<sup>35</sup> *Sons devenus chair la rese de la gorge, cordes vocales comme charpes de soie.*

<sup>36</sup> *Nuit couchée dans la nuit je te cherche.*

<sup>37</sup> "Je reviendrai".

<sup>38</sup> Octavian Lazăr Cosma, *op.cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>39</sup> Doru Popovici, *Cornel Țăranu - 70!*, in the "Muzica" journal, No. 2/2004, p. 134.

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