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## A SONG THAT WILL NOT DIE – SHIFTING SYMBOLISM IN THE INTERPRETATION OF TWO SANGUINEOUS OPERAS

**Abstract:** Bartók's well-known opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* has an internationally hardly known parallel in Willem Pijper's opera *Halewijn*. The Hungarian and the Dutch opera share the same motives; they make use of a historical, a literary and a musical heritage, both from eastern and western Europe, in different ways yet with remarkable similarities. This article is an investigation into the backgrounds of the two operas and into the contexts in which their motives developed – and continue to develop.

**Key words:** Bluebeard, Halewijn/*Mädchenmörderballade*, symbolism and Symbolism, curiosity as a vice/as a virtue, individuation, Enlightenment

### *1 – Bluebeard: history and/or legend?*

The gruesome fairy tale on which Béla Balázs based his libretto for Bartók's only opera *A Kékszakállú Herceg Vára* ('Duke Bluebeard's Castle', 1911) turns out to have a long history, both in eastern and in western Europe. Many centuries before Charles Perrault immortalized the lady-killer to whom one virgin after the other fell prey, and increased his deterrence by including him as *La Barbe Bleue* in his *Contes de ma Mère l'Oie* (1697), several variants or fragments of this story were going around – in the mountainous areas of Eastern Europe, as well as in the lands of the Celts. In the Celtic tradition, history and legend are inextricably intertwined in the vicissitudes of St. Tryphine and Conomor (or Comorre). Conomor, a nobleman from Carhaix (Brittany) who lived in the 6th century, was said to have already killed his four former wives when he married Tryphine, the daughter of the count of Vannes, whose area he sought to obtain. Legend has it that the dead wives came to life in the chapel where Tryphine went to pray; they warned her that Conomor would try to kill her now that she was pregnant, because of the prediction that his own son would eventually kill him. Tryphine fled the castle and gave birth to a baby boy; she was decapitated by Conomor when he found her, but she was miraculously restored to life by her father's spiritual counsellor, the Scottish hermit St. Gildas. True to the prophecy, the little boy later succeeded in destroying his father's castle and bringing his life to an end.

This openly oedipal notion of patricide has vanished from the story as we know it from Perrault, but many of the attempts that have been made to trace the Bluebeard story to its original native soil keep pointing at the

Celtic areas, with their very rich culture of narration and balladry. Did reality precede fantasy, or was it the other way round? In the oral tradition in which the inveterate rogue lives on, the motive continues oscillating between legend and the occasional incarnations of such archetypal figures, in this case by serial killers such as Henri-Désiré Landru and Jack the Ripper. The horrendous atrocities committed by the Belgian criminal Marc Dutroux are living memory in our own days. It is very unlikely that Perrault was aware of the fact that the forensic archives of the St. Pieters Monastery in Ghent (Flemish Belgium) do indeed make mention of an inhabitant of that city in the 13th century who was found guilty of abusing women, and whose name was *Everardus Blaubart* .... Or could it be that *Blaubart* was his nickname, later added to the baptismal name *Everardus*, on the basis of his behaviour?<sup>1</sup> This would imply that the label *Bluebeard* was already used in the 13<sup>th</sup> century to indicate such behaviour. This case is probably different from that of *Johannes Faustus*: an alchemist of that name, who lived around 1500, is mentioned as one of the historical models for the plays by Marlowe and Goethe. But as in the case of Dr. Faust, Perrault's fairy tale was preceded by a variety of historical figures whose lives were posthumously subjected to embellishments and modifications. Gustave Doré's well-known picture emphasizes the motive of obedience/disobedience:



The Bluebeard story has its homosexual variant in the historical figure of Gilles de Rais, a powerful nobleman from the days of Joan of Arc (whose servant he was during the Hundred Year War). When the rumours about his

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<sup>1</sup> See M. Ramondt, 'Heer Halewijn en Blauwbaard', in *Miscellanea Gessleriana*, The Hague/Antwerp 1948, p. 1041.

behaviour were finally investigated by the Duke of Brittany, the corpses of 50 boys were found in his castle. One and a half century later, a female incarnation of the serial killer was found in Bartók's own Hungary: the Transylvanian countess Erzsébet Báthory (1560–1614) was reported to have killed over 600 young girls. She used their blood to fill up her bath tub, as she had come to the conviction that bathing in virgin blood would guarantee the preservation of a smooth and wrinkle-free skin.

Fascination about such aberrations has contributed to the corpus of European literature for many centuries. In section 3, I will follow the main road that led from Perrault's fairy tale to Bartók's opera, but that main road has many side roads. We find allusions to Bluebeard in some classics of novel literature, like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and even in the 20th century, a host of international authors have added their own versions of Bluebeard to the literary files: Angela Carter<sup>2</sup>, Anatole France<sup>3</sup>, Max Frisch<sup>4</sup> and Kurt Vonnegut<sup>5</sup>, to name but a few.

## 2 – Sources from folk ballads

Another source of the two operas dealt with in this article is to be found in the group of folk ballads sometimes referred to as 'the ballad of the enticed wife',<sup>6</sup> or as the *Mädchenmörderballade*. Friedrich Holz presented no less than 120 versions of this ballad in his 1929 dissertation, both from eastern and western Europe.<sup>7</sup> Ten years later, John Meier reported a multiplicity of *Mädchenmörderballade* variants<sup>8</sup>, and many more have been discovered since. Of course it is to a certain extent arbitrary whether a source should still be considered a version of the same ballad; just as with myth and fairy tales, there are fragments which are similar in a number of variants, but which are then, in yet another version, also linked with fragments known from completely different contexts. It is, therefore, important to understand the primordial force of such archetypal elements, as outlined in the first section: although these songs receive their shapes within a specific tradition and under external influences which the (ethno-) musicologist has to uncover and unravel, their nucleus does not come from outside but from within. These songs will not die, even if singing them in the country fields has become out of fashion these days.

<sup>2</sup> *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, London 1979.

<sup>3</sup> *Les sept femmes de Barbe-Bleue*, Paris 1907.

<sup>4</sup> *Blaubart*, Frankfurt 1982.

<sup>5</sup> *Bluebeard*, New York 1987.

<sup>6</sup> See L. Vargyas, *Hungarian Ballads and the European Ballad Tradition*, Budapest 1983, pp. 71–76.

<sup>7</sup> F. Holz, *Die Mädchenräuberballade*, dissertation University of Heidelberg, 1929.

<sup>8</sup> J. Meier, *Deutsche Volkslieder – Balladen*, Vol. 2, Berlin 1939, pp. 67–115.

The core of the *Mädchenmörderballade*<sup>9</sup> is this: a gentleman, who has built up a reputation of having ruined the lives of several other women, entices a young lady away from her family and makes her follow him, in spite of warnings from her family and her friends (or even, in quite a few German versions, from one or more white pigeons). During the period in which they are together – in many versions they are riding a horse through the woods – it dawns upon her what fate is awaiting her, and by some cunning trick she succeeds in killing him before he can lay his hand upon her. Many versions have her decapitate him with his own sword. In a number of versions, this fatal act is preceded by a scene in which the enticer puts his head in the woman's lap; this is either explained as a moment of surrender to the woman's cuddling and cherishing, or, more down to earth, as meant for her to delouse him. Holz suggests that she uses this moment to make him fall asleep and catch him off guard.

Hungarian scholar Lajos Vargyas makes much of this 'scene under the tree', which is present in all the Hungarian variants of the ballad. He believes it provides a link between eastern and western elements in the ballad's history. In his opinion, the origin of the 'scene under the tree' is Siberian (Vargyas even relates it to archaeological findings from the 5th century BC!), and it has travelled from east to west, whereas the Bluebeard story has moved from west to east. Hungary, then, was in his view one of the 'points of juncture' where the travelling motives have met, and from where they travelled on together: 'It is more than evident (...) that the scene under the tree had spread from the Hungarians to the Germans, and further to the Danes and the Dutch population, and that it [was] contaminated with elements of the French formulation in the west'.<sup>10</sup>

In the Hungarian version of the ballad, the lady is called Anna Molnár. She is already a mother, and leaves her husband and her son behind in order to join the gentleman. Zoltán Kodály collected several versions of the ballad during his fieldwork in Transylvania, and composed a four part choir work based on both the text and the original melody of the version which he had recorded among the Székely Hungarians of Bukovina in 1914.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I prefer the term *Mädchenmörderballade* to Holz's term *Mädchenräuberballade*, since the girls are not abducted but join the male character voluntarily; and also to Vargyas's *ballad of the enticed wife*, since the female character is generally not represented as a married woman (as it is in the Hungarian example). In Bartók's opera, she has a fiancé. Another current German designation for this group of ballads is *Ulingerballade*, after a frequently used name of the male character. The *Ulinger*-type is closer to Perrault's fairy tale in that it is the brother who saves the young lady.

<sup>10</sup> *Hungarian Ballads ...*, p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> The ballad can be found in Z. Kodály, *A magyar népzene*, 6th ed. Budapest 1973, p. 245. The choir work is in Z. Kodály, *Vegyeskarok*, 5th ed. Budapest 1970, pp. 131–138.

The only Hungarian version of the *Mädchenmörderballade* that Holz (unaware of Kodály's field work) makes mention of is written in German<sup>12</sup>, but in the names of the two protagonists (Aennchen and Martin) we may recognize Anna Molnár and Márton Zajgó, who is mentioned by name in the version which Kodály had collected in Csík in 1910. Holz also uses two German sources for a Serbian version, one of which<sup>13</sup> gives a happy twist to the story by turning the withered maple tree in which the girl is to be hung into the shining walls of the court where she will live with her prince.

The first version of the *Mädchenmörderballade* which Holz presents in his dissertation is the Dutch *Lied van Heer Halewijn* ('Song of Lord Halewijn'), which he believes to come closest to being the *Urfassung* of all the other variants. It was presented by the Fleming Jan Frans Willems in Mone's *Anzeiger für Kunde der deutschen Vorzeit* V/448-450 (1836) and has very often been reprinted, up to the present day, as a beautiful example of medieval Dutch balladry. The language of the ballad will indeed be recognised as Middle-Dutch by anyone who paid attention during the medieval Dutch literature classes, mainly because this very ballad is presented as a prime example of Middle-Dutch in many text books. But there is nothing medieval about it: the antique spelling was invented by Willems himself. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was in need of a history – and that is what it provided to the literary readership.

In Willems's own *Oude Vlaemsche Liederen* (Ghent, 1848), the 38 stanzas of the ballad are given with the following Dorian *Credo* melody<sup>14</sup>:

#### H A L E W I J N.

Largno.

Heer Haelwijn sanc een lie - de - kij, Al die dat hoorde wou

bi hem sijn, Al die dat hoorde wou bi hem sijn.

Lord Halewijn sang an enticing song that made him irresistible to all who heard it – in particular to the daughter of the king, who asks permission from her father, her mother and her sister to go out into the woods and find him. They all warn her that no one ever returned after following Halewijn: 'who thither go, do not return!'. Then she asks her brother, who consents on condition that she guards her honour. In the wood she finds Halewijn, and

<sup>12</sup> L. Aigner, *Ungarische Volksdichtungen*, Budapest 1873.

<sup>13</sup> S. Kapper, *Die Gesänge der Serben*, Leipzig 1852, Vol. II, p. 318.

<sup>14</sup> Johan Vanhecke (*Het hoofd werd op de tafel gezet*, Tiel 2000, p. 128) specifies that this must be the *Credo* from the *Missa in duplicibus*.

they ride on together until they arrive at a gallows-field where fourteen maidens are hung. Halewijn allows her to choose in which way she prefers to be killed. She chooses the sword, but advises him to take off his gown so it will not become contaminated with her virginal blood. When he takes it off, she grasps the sword and chops off his head. The head, lying on the ground, then begs her to blow Halewijn's horn to alarm his friends, which she smartly refuses. On the way home she meets Halewijn's mother, who she informs about her son's death. Her return home is celebrated with a banquet, with Halewijn's head put on the table as a trophy.

Willems assures us that the song must be 'old and from barbarian times', given the uncivil behaviour of the protagonists. This is the same type of remark that Holz makes when comparing the versions of the ballad in which the girl herself kills her seducer to those versions, found both in Germany and in Poland, where the male protagonist is killed by those who come to rescue the girl (as do the brothers in Perrault's fairy tale). Holz believes that such versions must be younger than the former, since the latter 'date from a period which does not know the use of arms by girls anymore'.<sup>15</sup> Such remarks betray the implicit expectation that the ballad must somehow be a realistic report of events in the eyes of those who keep it alive.

Willems claims that many variants of the ballad were in circulation in the oral tradition and even in printed versions on song sheets, but he adds that he never found an old source. Hardly could he have guessed that his own reconstruction, including his self-invented Middle-Dutch spelling, would soon serve as the original source of the ballad.

### HALEWYN.

Andantino.

Heer Ha - le - wyn zonc een lie - de - kyn ; al wie het  
 hoor - de wou by hem zyn. al wie het hoor - de  
 wou by hem zyn.

<sup>15</sup> *Die Mädchenräuberballade*, p. 80.

In 1856 E. de Coussemaker included the above notation of the ballad in his *Chants populaires des Flamands de France*,<sup>16</sup> and in the following century the alleged originality of this ballad became one of the weapons in the cultural struggle in which the Flemish strived to sustain their authenticity against both the Dutch and the French. Northern Dutch ethnomusicologist Ate Doornbosch reports that when he was a schoolboy in Frisia, he had come to learn Willems's artificial reconstruction as a sound example of authentic Middle-Dutch balladry, only to find a more complete version of the ballad during the fieldwork which he carried out twenty years later – at less than a mile's distance from his former school!<sup>17</sup> Yet, a rather complete Frisian variant including the magical requisites of the irresistible chant, the talking head and the magic horn, had already been notated as early as 1856.<sup>18</sup> Doornbosch found many more such variants in the northern provinces of the Netherlands.<sup>19</sup> These do not make mention of taking the talking head home, but are more complete in some elements that seem to be truncated in the Willems version. The modes of execution are spelled out : the girl is given the choice between being beheaded, being drown, or being hung (like the other maidens she sees on the gallows-field), and the conversation with Halewijn's mother is more extensive. In some variants it is the mother who blows a magic horn, so that the girl has to take flight, in order to escape Halewijn's alarmed friends.

These findings belie the conclusion, drawn by Holger Olof Nygard in his 1958 monograph on Halewijn (preceding Doornbosch's fieldwork), that 'the *Heer Halewijn* ballad is more clearly Flemish than Dutch, if one is to judge by the places of origin of the texts which have come to light'.<sup>20</sup>

However, the northern variants lack an important property: the very name *Halewijn* by which the *Mädchenmörderballade* is identified in the Dutch speaking areas. None of their male characters bear that name; instead, they have to settle for the name Jan Alberts or Heer Albert, names sounding much more prosaic to the Dutch ear than the name Halewijn does, but corresponding very well to the name Gert Olbert found in the variants from the adjacent German areas.

<sup>16</sup> See E. de Coussemaker, *Chants populaires des Flamands de France*, nouv. éd. 1930, p. 138. De Coussemaker criticizes Willems's determination of the melody as being a *Credo* (p. 144).

<sup>17</sup> A. Doornbosch, 'Halewijnliederen in het Nederlandse taalgebied', in *Die derwaart gaan en keren niet*, ed. A. van der Schoot, Hilversum 1986.

<sup>18</sup> W. Dijkstra, *In doaze fol alde snypsnaren*, Franeker 1856.

<sup>19</sup> Published in *Onder de groene linde*, ed. A.J. Dekker a.o., Vol. 1, Amsterdam 1987, pp. 76–96.

<sup>20</sup> H.O. Nygard, *The Ballad of Heer Halewijn*, FF Communications Vol. LXVII/2, No. 169, Helsinki 1958, p. 35.

Moreover, the melodies have no connection to the *Credo* of the Willems version. They give the impression of being not so much autonomous melodies but rather *ad hoc* melodic drones to recite the ballad by, often in 6/8 and in major tonality. The following is an example<sup>21</sup>; the metre is adapted by the singer when the recitation does not fit the 6/8. The melody, ending on the third of the major tonality, betrays an elementary harmonic consciousness:

1. Jan Al - berts stond op en hij zong er een lied En  
dit ver-hoor- de een ko - nings-kind. En dit ver -  
hoor - de een ko - nings - kind.

The northern provinces of the Netherlands have a Protestant tradition, so the influence of Gregorian chant and its ecclesiastical modes on folk song is minimal. A southern Dutch variant published by Doornbosch<sup>22</sup>, from a region closer to Flanders, has a Dorian melody with a leading note which shows a striking similarity to Willems's *Credo*. But although such connections make perfect sense in the light of what is known about the contacts between these areas<sup>23</sup>, none of the evidence teaches us enough to decide about origin and authenticity, let alone about an *Urfassung* of the ballad.

### 3 – From Perrault to Maeterlinck

However far the sanguineous legend may go back in oral history, the first published literary version in prose precedes the oldest inclusion of the *Halewijn* ballad in a book by more than a century. Charles Perrault (1628–1703) published the *Bluebeard* story in his collection of fairy tales under the title of *Contes de ma Mère l'Oie*, making use not of his own name but borrowing his son's as a pseudonym: P. Darmancour.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Onder de groene linde*, p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> *Onder de groene linde*, p. 89.

<sup>23</sup> Doornbosch emphasizes the role of the wandering shepherds in the 18th and 19th centuries: 'Halewijnliederen ...', pp. 51/2.

<sup>24</sup> Why? Perrault was involved in discussions on a very different platform: in the circle of the *Académie Française*, Perrault's poem *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand* had unleashed the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. In the poem, he celebrated the age of Louis XIV – his own age – as being equal or even superior to the traditionally venerated examples from antiquity. That position may have been hard to reconcile with the promotion of the fairy tales as *Histoires du temps passé*, as the *Contes* did.



The idea of the fairy tale is similar to that of the ballad, but it is set in the castle of the wealthy lord. In spite of his reputation – rumour has it that he had killed his former wives – yet another young lady is lured into marrying him. When he goes on a journey he hands her all the keys, and allows her to set foot in every room of the castle except one. When she can't control her curiosity and trespasses against this commandment, she finds the murdered wives in that room. There is no way back: blood has contaminated the key that she should not have touched, and she can't wash it off. When Bluebeard returns he threatens to kill her, and only with the help of her alarmed brothers does she survive his attack. The brothers kill Bluebeard instead.

Fairy tales like these, whatever their first origin might have been, were often told to children in the 18th and 19th centuries with an educative intention. Perrault makes this explicit, by adding a *moralité* to his stories. The lesson to be learnt from Bluebeard is not that a husband shouldn't kill his wives, but that a nosey wife will live (or die) to regret her curiosity. *Un plaisir bien léger – dès qu'on le prend, il cesse d'être, et toujours il coûte trop cher*: the pleasure of satisfying one's curiosity is short-lived, and the price is always too high.

Perrault shows himself to be also a predecessor of Willems and Holz in determining that the Bluebeard tale must be *un conte du temps passé*. For this is what he adds in an *autre moralité*: such terrible husbands, who demand the impossible from their wives, no longer exist. And in his final remark, he diagnoses that with married couples, these days (1697!), you can't even tell which of the two is the master.

Perrault's fairy tale did not fail to make waves.<sup>25</sup> The Grimm brothers included it in their collection of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812), changing no more than a few details, and Bluebeard became a *topos* in European literature. The fact that the last wife survives makes for a sort of happy ending, but most of the authors emphasize the gist of Perrault's first *moralité*: female curiosity will have a fall, and will bring the trespasser down. Many fairy tale versions specify, as did Perrault himself, that Bluebeard's belongings were inherited by his wife. But some believe they have to strengthen the warning function of the parable, and make it clear that she cannot enjoy her possessions. Friedrich W. Gotter disinherits her in his ballad version of Bluebeard (*Göttinger Musenalmanach*, 1772) and emphasizes that her lucky escape, this time, should serve as a last warning ....

Exactly one hundred years after Perrault, Ludwig Tieck published his version of *Ritter Blaubart* (1797), which he later turned into a theatre play. He has Bluebeard himself phrase the moral of the story: 'Miss Curiosity can never be faithful to her husband. A man who marries her can never be sure of his life. Curiosity is the sin that brings in all other sins.' Ludwig

<sup>25</sup> See H. Suhrbier, *Blaubarts Geheimnis*, Cologne 1984.

Bechstein ends his *Märchen vom Ritter Blaubart* (1845) by telling us that the wretched woman was not able to cope with the consequences of her shameless behaviour for a long time. Peter Lyser declares that she deplored her curiosity and went into a monastery – where she died soon after (*Abendländische 1001 Nacht*, 1838).

The title *Abendländische 1001 Nacht* betrays the transcultural change of identity that Bluebeard, in the meantime, had undergone. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Bluebeard turned into a Turkish *Pasha*, comparable to Pasha Selim in Mozart's *Entführung*. Surprisingly, this transformation took place in a country far removed from direct confrontation with the Ottoman Empire: England. Here, George Colman's *grand dramatic romance* entitled *Blue-Beard, or female curiosity* (1798, with music by Michael Kelly) was so successful that it appeared on stage in London for 26 years. The new bride is now called Fatima, and she is given a fiancé with the equally unsurprising name of Selim. The emphasis on the curiosity is preserved, but it is set in an oriental context – an Orient of western cut, however. Bluebeard was subjected to what Edward Said has termed *Orientalism*.

In France, this led to the production of a comic play under the title *Mahomet-Barbe-Bleue ou la Terreur des Ottomanes* (1811). And up to the present day, this Orientalism has coloured the image of the motive. The Dutch *Winkler Prins Encyclopaedia* claims that the motive of the forbidden room stems from *1001 Night*, and the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* (revised edition, 1998) takes 'Bluebeard' to be 'a popular tale in an oriental setting, from the French of Perrault'; the summary follows the original fairy tale, but calls the woman Fatima – as if Perrault himself had been responsible for the orientalisation!



A staggering rarity in the history of Bluebeard, entitled *Commentaires apostoliques et théologiques sur les Saintes Prophéties de l'Auteur Sacré de Barbe-Bleue*, was published in Cologne in 1779, under the name of Dom Calmet. This treatise wants us to believe that the Bluebeard story is of Hebrew origin, and that it dates back from the time of the prophet Samuel. Perrault's fairy tale is quoted word for word, without his name being mentioned, and followed by an extensive essay in which details of the story are accounted for in biblical terms. Bluebeard, of course, is the devil, the young lady symbolizes the Jewish people, and the expectation of the brothers who come to save her is nothing but the expectation of the Messiah. Equally staggering as this imaginative fabrication itself is its real authorship: the *Commentaires* were written by no other than Frederick II the Great, the Prussian king better known in music history for his authorship of the theme of Bach's *Musikalisches Opfer*.<sup>26</sup> The king was satirizing a kind of allegorical explanation of sacred texts, as this had indeed been practised by Dom Calmet and others.

In the course of the 19th century, further elaborations of the Bluebeard story developed into two directions: on the one hand, the story triggered more frivolous fantasies, on the other hand, we find the more openly psychological interpretations that would eventually pave the way towards Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*.

An example of a frivolous fantasy is the comic opera *Barbe-Bleue* by Jacques Offenbach (1866, libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy). The women's lives are saved here because Bluebeard does not kill them himself, but orders the alchemist in his service to do so; the latter, however, chooses to enchant the women and have them serve his personal needs. In spite of all the comical trivialities, this production was charged with a degree of political tension absent in the German versions: the Paris audience in 1866 knew all too well that the king portrayed here (as an antagonist to Bluebeard) referred to the Emperor Napoleon III, and to the manners and customs of the French court. For France, the phenomenon of a political Bluebeard was not new: in the months immediately preceding the outbreak of the French revolution in 1789, the Paris *Opéra* had staged Grétry's *Raoul Barbe-Bleue*, based on the theatre play of the same name by Michel-Jean Sédaine. As in many theatre plays of this period (Beaumarchais!), criticism of abuse of power by the ruling class was obvious here.

With the psychological interpretation presented by Maurice Maeterlinck, the story of Bluebeard enters a different era. In *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue, ou La délivrance inutile*, female curiosity turns into a virtue. The text from 1899 was produced as an opera, with music by Paul Dukas, in Paris in 1907. The event drew a lot of attention in the musical world; a remarkable number

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<sup>26</sup> The text can be found in *Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, tome XV, Berlin 1850, pp. 45–57; for a modern German edition, supplemented with an essay by Hartwig Suhrbier, see Friedrich der Grosse, *Das Buch Blaubart*, Frankfurt 1987.

of important composers was either personally present, or sent a congratulatory telegram.

When Ariane, the sixth wife of Bluebeard, enters his castle, she is already determined: 'First of all, we have to be disobedient. That is the first duty when an order is a threat without an explanation. The other wives were wrong; they are lost because they were hesitating.' Ariane does not show interest in any of the rooms that Bluebeard allows her to enter, nor in the treasures they contain. She only insists on opening the one forbidden room: 'everything that is allowed will not help us any further'. Eventually, she succeeds in liberating the five earlier wives and tells them to escape. But in vain: the women gape in admiration at the pearls, the emeralds, the rubies and the diamonds stored in Bluebeard's castle, and no wild horses could drag them out of their former prison. The one who harnesses his horses in order to flee the castle is Bluebeard himself, afraid of their revenge. But when his coach is raided by the peasants who deliver him to the women in the castle, it is Ariadne who undoes his ropes, and together with the other women she takes care of his wounds. Then she abandons their company, never to return. The other women cannot bring themselves to leave Bluebeard alone, and remain in the castle. Thus, they offer a perfect operatic exemplification of what has now come to be known as *the Stockholm syndrome* – the condition of hostages who have come to sympathize with their captor.

#### **4 – East / West: Bartók's *Bluebeard* and Pijper's *Halewijn***

The opera by Maeterlinck and Dukas was the direct source of inspiration for text writer Béla Balázs, who had turned to Bartók after his former roommate at the Budapest Eötvös Kollégium, Zoltán Kodály<sup>27</sup>, did not see fit to set this text to music. Bartók finished the score in a remarkably short time in 1911, but had to wait until May 24, 1918 to see his opera performed. In 1911 it had been rejected because it was considered *unperformable*<sup>28</sup>. In 1913, Balázs's text was brought on stage as a theatre play, without drawing much attention. It was only due to the success which Italian conductor Egisto Tango had achieved with Bartók's *Wooden Prince* in 1917, that the same conductor got the opportunity to perform *Bluebeard's Castle* the year after, in a double bill with the *Wooden Prince*. After that, it took more than fifteen years for both works to be staged in Hungary again. As opposed to *Ariane*, which was soon performed on both sides of the Atlantic (with Toscanini conducting it in the Metropolitan Opera), Bartók's opera took a

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<sup>27</sup> It is possible that Balázs attended a performance of *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* in Paris together with Kodály, when both of them spent time there in 1907.

<sup>28</sup> By the committee judging the scores for the opera competition that Bartók participated in.

long time to conquer the international podia. In 1926, a performance in the city of Cologne was forbidden by the Lord Mayor, Konrad Adenauer.

In Balázs's script, the story is deprived of every possible fringe. It is a drama, but there is no action, except for the opening of the seven doors which Judit – the new wife – finds inside Bluebeard's castle. She opens them one by one, resisting Bluebeard's attempts to keep her from doing so, and behind each door, initial splendour and majesty turn into their reverse. She finds his torture room, his armoury, his treasury, his gardens, the vast estates, the sea of tears and, finally, the dungeon. We hear Judit's change of moods as her discoveries proceed, first in the music, then in her comments and further questions to Bluebeard. Behind the last door, she finds his three former wives, alive but not lively, and takes her place among them. The doors close, and the opera ends as it began: the drama has come full circle.

The *Halewijn* ballad discussed in section 2, and its reputation as being a remnant of original, old Dutch folk culture, led to the creation of the opera (or 'symphonic drama') *Halewijn*, written in 1933 at the request of the *Wagnervereeniging* for the 11th ISCM festival by the most important Dutch composer of the period, Willem Pijper (1894–1947).<sup>29</sup> In 1920, Pijper had already composed an *a cappella* choir work *Heer Halewijn*, as Zoltán Kodály had done with the *Anna Molnár* ballad. The libretto was based on the theatre adaptation of the *Halewijn* ballad by the Dutch poet Martinus Nijhoff, and, after the collaboration between Nijhoff and Pijper went awry, rewritten by novelist Emmy van Lohorst (at that time also known as *Mrs. Pijper*<sup>30</sup>). Like Bartók, Pijper completed only one opera.<sup>31</sup> *Halewijn* was premiered in Amsterdam on June 13, 1933, under the baton of Pierre Monteux<sup>32</sup>; it was broadcast a few times, but not very often repeated on stage. The text underwent a remarkable transformation for the Rotterdam production in 1935: it was 'translated' into Middle-Dutch<sup>33</sup>, just as Willems had done a century earlier with the ballad itself. Pijper commented that in this way, a greater unity was achieved between the text and the scenery on stage.

<sup>29</sup> See *Muzikologija* No. 2, 2002, p. 160.

<sup>30</sup> In relation to the theme it may be interesting to know that Emmy van Lohorst married four times, the first two times with the same husband. The third marriage was with Willem Pijper. All four marriages ended in divorce (a relatively rare phenomenon in those days). She had quite a few extramarital relationships, both with men (Nijhoff for one) and with women, as well as with a married couple (needless to say: even less common in those days).

<sup>31</sup> During the Second World War he worked on a second opera, with similarly magic motives (on the sorcerer *Merlijn*), which he did not succeed in finishing.

<sup>32</sup> From 1925 to 1935, Monteux was conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, next to Willem Mengelberg. He had more affinity with Pijper's style than Mengelberg had.

<sup>33</sup> By Erna Buning-Jurgens, at the request of director Eduard Verkade. The occasion for the Rotterdam production was the opening of the new Boymans Museum.

Pijper's opera remains much closer to the ballad than does Bartók's to Perrault, but with a striking innovation at the end. We follow the king's daughter as she disregards the advice of her family, puts on her crown and her most sumptuous gown, and rides her horse into the woods to meet Halewijn. Halewijn sings his song, expressing satisfaction about his loneliness: 'I sing a song that will not die; roaming forever, and roving am I ...'. He welcomes the king's daughter in her precious clothes and explains that what *he* has to offer is the most precious treasure of all: *oblivion*. He is not eager to answer her questions about his dwelling-place, about the meaning of his magic song or about the cave where he cherishes his memories (this is not in the ballad, and obviously influenced by the Bluebeard tale). He shows her the gallows-field and allows her to choose her death. As he takes off his gown, the king's daughter grasps the sword, beheads him, and takes his head home. The head makes the same requests as in the ballad, which she ignores, replying that the head will now forever be silent. But Halewijn's mother warns her that she cannot put an end to what she does not understand. When the head is put on the table in her father's palace, Halewijn's song is heard again: Halewijn is dead, but he lives on in his song.<sup>34</sup>

Pijper's idiom is a mildly modern extended tonality, strongly influenced by the French composers of the early 20th century (first Debussy, then the *Groupe des six*). This is one thing he had in common with Bartók (and Kodály), but also with many contemporary composers from other countries: France was leading their way out of the Wagnerian swamp. This orientation was a lot easier for Pijper in 1933 than it had been for Bartók in 1911: one aspect which the committee judging *Bluebeard's Castle* had specifically turned down was its 'musical language'. The committee rightly concluded that up to 1911, no composition had ever been written in the idiom that Bartók presented here. He had not only created a totally new type of musical drama, but also a new musical vernacular for this drama to come to life. All earlier 'Hungarian' operas had only been Hungarian as far as their text was concerned; their music was German throughout. I will specify some of the building-blocks of Bartók's new language in order to compare them to Pijper's idiom in *Halewijn*.

What made this language so unchewable for the critics in 1911? In *Bluebeard* we can clearly hear how Bartók overcame tonality without giving it up. That is, how traditional harmony-based tonality, with its unshakeable logic of major and minor triads, is replaced by a much more intricate type of melody-based tonality, which owes a lot to Hungarian folk song. What sounded first like no more than a social-romantic fantasy ('basing high class concert music on countryside peasant song') was implemented by Bartók by

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<sup>34</sup> In the programme booklet of the Rotterdam production, Pijper writes: 'After his death, Halewijn resurrects and resumes his magic chant: *I am the song*, that will not die' (italics mine).

broadening the current diatonic syntax in two opposite directions at the same time: by contracting it towards the pentatony which he had come to recognise as the basis of Hungarian folk song, and by expanding it towards 20th century chromaticism – without destroying the diatonic logic (as Schoenberg would do).

The opening of *Bluebeard's Castle* immediately puts us on this track. The lower strings play an abridged version of a four-line folk song in an f sharp minor pentatonic scale – not an existent melody, but rather a compressed evocation of the world of Hungarian folk music (the world that Judit had left behind for Bluebeard?).

As if the London Big Ben chimes were striking the hour:



The greatest dynamic contrast to this opening lies behind the fifth door, where we find Bluebeard's immensely vast estates. This is a gigantic climax in C major, played by the whole orchestra strengthened by the organ, yet equally pentatonic and without any voice-leading:



These majestic chords, celebrating the marriage between pentatony and good old major triads in a modern setting, also symbolize Bartók's triumph in the accomplishment of his mission: making compositorial progress by means of the unification between rural and urban tradition.

In this respect Bartók is second to none, but as far as his Dutch contemporaries are concerned, Pijper is the one who comes closest to him, as we can hear in *Halewijn*. In a more detached academic way, Pijper also tries to make the next move in contemporary music by bringing an old tradition of ballad and folk song to life in the theatre. Not by transforming grassroots level fieldwork to contemporary music as Bartók had done<sup>35</sup>, but

<sup>35</sup> The article which Pijper wrote about Bartók in 1925 ('Béla Bartók en het neo-Beethovenisme', in W. Pijper, *De Quintencirkel*, 4th ed. Amsterdam 1964, pp. 116–124) makes clear that not only the fieldwork practice, but also the music and the mental world of Bartók were completely alien to Pijper, who belittles the influence of peasant singing on Bartók's work. Neither in the essay, nor in the programme notes does he refer to *Bluebeard's Castle*.

by bringing the remnants of this tradition on stage<sup>36</sup>, without bothering too much about their authenticity.

The most direct example, of course, is the Halewijn song itself. Compare the song with which Halewijn introduces and identifies himself in the opera to the melody as transmitted by De Coussemaker (see section 2):



But there are also more indirect references to the tradition of Dutch music. In the third *tableau*, the king's daughter is dressing up to get ready for her ride in the woods. Her sister dissuades her three times from going to Halewijn, using arguments that are reminiscent of Judit's experiences behind three of Bartók's seven doors: Halewijn does not want jewelry (third door), nor tears (sixth door), nor a kingdom (fifth door) – he wants *blood*. To contrast this threat with the world which the king's daughter is going to leave behind for Halewijn, we hear the on-stage chamber orchestra playing sketchy references to (allegedly) old Dutch melodies. An echo of this fragment returns in the sixth *tableau*, when, in her conversation with Halewijn, she is reminded of her father's castle.

As the above fragment shows both in the flute solo and in the accompaniment, the fourth, divided into major second and minor third, is an important structural motive; it is what Pijper calls the *germ cell* of the whole work. Although Pijper does not base his own themes on folk song, we also find pentatonic melodies in *Halewijn*, which can result from stacking fourths divided in this way. Such melodic turns often give a Bartókian colour to Pijper's idiom. Here is the fragment in which the king's daughter asks her father's permission to go to Halewijn:

<sup>36</sup> Literally: a chamber orchestra is to take place on the stage to play these fragments, similar to what Mozart had done in *Don Giovanni*.



Mijn jongste dochter komt voor mij staan Vader  
mag ik naar Halewijn gaan?

The image shows two staves of musical notation in a 4/4 time signature. The first staff contains the lyrics 'Mijn jongste dochter komt voor mij staan Vader' with a small '(h)' above the first measure. The second staff contains the lyrics 'mag ik naar Halewijn gaan?'.

The full chain of such divided fourths leads to Pijper's often employed *octotonic scale*, with a regular alternation between major and minor seconds. An example would be his second piano sonatina, a seminal work in his development:

Veloce  $\text{♩} = 160$   
*mf* *poco f* *piu f*

The image shows a piano sonatina in 3/8 time. It features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The tempo is marked 'Veloce' with a quarter note equal to 160 beats per minute. Dynamics include *mf*, *poco f*, and *piu f*. The piece is divided into four measures.

This is the scale which Lendvai, in his analyses of Bartók's music, has termed the 1:2 model; an example would be Bartók's choir work *Kánon*<sup>37</sup>. The octotonic scale is an important element in the unification between pentatony and chromaticism, as the above examples show. It is basically the stacking of fourths divided into minor third and major second which makes this unification possible. In *Halewijn*, this element turns up immediately at the beginning, when the choir calls out his name, and in the order of the divided fourths we may recognize what Lendvai has termed the *axis system* of Bartók's music<sup>38</sup>:

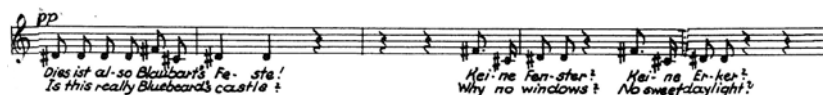
*poco f* Halewijn  
*poco f* Halewijn  
*p* Halewijn  
*sf* Halewijn  
*sf* Halewijn  
bassi *f* Ha - - le - - wijn  
*f* Ha - - le - - wijn

The image shows the beginning of Bartók's 'Halewijn'. It features a vocal line for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B), and a bass line for Basses (bassi). The lyrics are 'Halewijn' and 'Heer Hale - - wijn'. Dynamics include *poco f*, *p*, and *sf*.

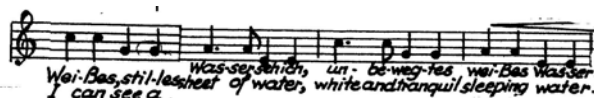
<sup>37</sup> E. Lendvai, *Symmetries of Music*, Kecskemét 1993, pp. 26/7.

<sup>38</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 7–16.

Bluebeard's castle is introduced with the same divided fourth, when Judit enters:



and behind the sixth door, the Sea of tears is symbolized by the same chain of fourths with which Pijper began his second piano sonatina, but in a very different mood:



Finally, a remark about the overall structure of both operas.

In Balázs's script, the seven doors inside Bluebeard's castle are the dramatic focus, and they make up the structure of Bartók's through-composed one act opera. Every door has its own tonality. The work opens and ends in f sharp minor pentatonic; the torture room, the armoury, the sea of tears and the dungeon of his former wives are kept in minor tonalities, whereas the three middle doors, showing initially 'positive' secrets (the treasury, the gardens, the estates), resound in major tonalities. Although 'minor' and 'major' have lost their traditional (triad-based) meaning, they have not lost their traditional connotations!

*Halewijn* is also through-composed, but in two acts, and divided into nine *tableaux*. Like the rooms of *Bluebeard's Castle*, they also have their own tonality, stepwise progressing from C through D, E, F, F sharp, G, A flat, B flat back to C. Thus, both operas have found a harmonic implementation of the 'full circle'. The idea of returning to the beginning was already incorporated in the main theme itself, *Halewijn's* song (ending on the same motive with which it began). Pijper claims that his other melodies are also derived from this one, and throughout the opera we recognize the divided fourth as the *germ cell* of further melodic development.

### 5 – Symbolism and individuation

What does this motive – personified by *Halewijn* or Bluebeard, by Judit or Ariane, by nobleman and princess, and further exemplified by an immortal song, by gigantic wealth and by tons of blood – have to tell us? What do the two operas 'symbolize'?

First of all, we have to be clear about the difference between *symbolism* (small -s-) and *Symbolism* (capital -S-). Everything can be seen (heard, understood) in a *literal* sense and also in a great many non-literal, *metaphorical* senses. Not all senses are equally relevant, but their mutual relevance is

dynamical: it may change according to time and circumstances. For instance: when we see an attractive bundle of roses at the florist's, we can buy it without thinking of any possible metaphorical associations. Listening to *Sah ein Knab' ein Rösslein steh'n*, we know immediately that we are dealing with the description of an awakening erotic relationship. We are used to a rose being used as a symbol for love: the colour, the smell, but also the *brechen und stechen* that the concept of a rose evokes, make it a suitable symbol for that function. For Goethe or Schubert, there is no need to make that symbolism explicit – the metaphorical reference is implicitly understood, *but nothing is fatally lost if the listener fails to pick it up*. The little story might as well be enjoyed as it is told, without searching for something 'behind' the words in their literal sense.

With the Symbolist writings of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Maeterlinck, European literary history entered a new age. In Symbolism, the symbolism must not be overlooked; otherwise, the gist of the work will be missed. At the same time, the question 'what is the work symbolic of?' should not be asked too emphatically. In Symbolism, symbolism is generally vague, subdued, and indeterminate; it is not *allegorical* but *evocative* of a potential reservoir of non-literal meaning. This Symbolist feature has become a characteristic of modern art, not only in literature: modern art may refer to the potentiality of meaning without specifically meaning this or that.<sup>39</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer declares that it is this very *indeterminacy of reference* which brings modern art alive and makes it significant for us.<sup>40</sup> Symbolism exemplified this characteristic so convincingly that today, the majority of the readership takes it for granted that a literary text does not (only) mean what it literally says, and there is no point in continuing to use the term *Symbolist* to indicate that.

At the same time, this provided for a greater autonomy for the artistic object at its level of presentation. The 'literal' meaning did not vanish, but acquired a more sovereign relationship with the domain of potential meanings of the work. In drama, such meanings may be found at three levels: at the level of the presentation itself (the inter-individual level), accepting each character as being a different person; at the psychological level, where different characters stand for character traits of the same person (the intra-individual level), or at the socio-cultural level, where the characters represent more than their private situation (the supra-individual level).

<sup>39</sup> With hindsight, this indeterminate symbolism also sheds a different light on our understanding of earlier art: we are more receptive to implicit meanings in earlier art today than when symbolism was primarily understood as allegorical.

<sup>40</sup> 'Es ist gerade die Unbestimmtheit des Verweisens, durch die wir von moderner Kunst angesprochen werden und die uns mit dem Bewusstsein der Bedeutsamkeit, der ausgezeichneten Bedeutung dessen, was wir vor Augen haben, erfüllt.' H.-G. Gadamer, *Die Aktualität des Schönen*, Stuttgart 1977, p. 41.

With Maeterlinck as its testator, it is clear that Bartók's *Bluebeard* must be situated in the tradition of (literary) Symbolism. The connection between Hungarian modernism and Symbolism has been particularly strong; the symbolist poet Endre Ady was an important source of inspiration for Bartók's modernist generation, and in particular also for Balázs and Bartók themselves.<sup>41</sup> Zoltán Kodály qualified *Bluebeard's Castle* as 'the Hungarian *Pelléas*', in his review in *Nyugat*.<sup>42</sup>

The symbolism is first of all in the inter-individual drama.<sup>43</sup> This was reduced to a minimum: it is a drama without action, the extreme counterpart of Colman's *grand dramatic romance* in which the rescuing brothers come rushing on stage on their horses, and take Bluebeard's life in a chivalric battle. The former women are then supernumeraries, nominal figures for whom the opera company might just as well use puppets in order to save expenses. Even if for Balázs and Bartók they are not dead (as in Perrault's fairy tale), they are silent anyway, and no action is needed on their part. But what action preceded their deplorable fate? Here we meet with symbolism at the *Heidenrösslein* level: the fate of the former women is better understood by considering them as victims of *la petite mort*, rather than of literal assassination.<sup>44</sup> This is also in line with Judit's fear and her questions to Bluebeard: 'whom did you love before me?' 'how did you love her?' 'was she more beautiful than me'? These are the very questions Bluebeard tries to prevent her from asking: 'Judit, love me, ask no questions!'

This reading would also help to understand how the *Halewijn* ballad could have served as a premonition for young virgins attracted by the other sex: don't go with strangers, postpone the loss of your virginity until everyone in the family consents. The tree of knowledge which these young ladies should not eat from is the tree of *carnal* knowledge. Bruno Bettelheim is

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<sup>41</sup> For the mental context of this generation, and in particular for Ady's influence and Bartók's intellectual surroundings at the time he wrote *Bluebeard's Castle*, see J. Frigyesi, *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest*, Berkeley 1998. Balázs himself dedicated two poems to Ady.

<sup>42</sup> Z. Kodály, 'Bartók Béla első operája', in *Nyugat*, Vol. XI, 1918, pp. 937–939. English translation: 'Béla Bartók's first opera', in *The selected writings of Zoltán Kodály*, Budapest 1974, pp. 83–85.

<sup>43</sup> The recognition of the drama at the inter-individual level is beautifully illustrated in Françoise Gilot's *Life with Picasso*, in which she describes the presence of Picasso's three former wives during her own marriage with the painter in terms that relate directly to *Bluebeard's Castle*. See the fragments in Suhrbier's *Blaubarts Geheimnis*, p. 12 and p. 69. Less famous illustrations of the 'Bluebeard complex' nowadays can be seen in TV-programmes such as the Oprah Winfrey show, where the hostess confronts her guests with the archetypal model of the girl who expects to be the last and final woman in the life of her Prince Charming.

<sup>44</sup> See also Anastasia Siopsi's remarks on the relationship between love and death in Romantic aesthetics, in 'The Maiden and Death', in *Muzikologija* No. 4, 2004, p. 84.

more straightforward about this interpretation: 'The key that opens the door to a secret room suggests associations to the male sexual organ, particularly in first intercourse when the hymen is broken and blood gets on it. If this is one of the hidden meanings, then it makes sense that the blood cannot be washed away: defloration is an irreversible event'.<sup>45</sup> This would also account for the warning given to the king's daughter in the *Halewijn* ballad: 'who thither go, do not return!'

Bettelheim, carefully, speaks about 'one of the hidden meanings', and he points to others: the 'destructive aspects of sex', the possibility 'that the woman had sexual relations' herself, during her husband's absence, and children's suspicions 'that adults have terrible sexual secrets'.

This may all be true, but it does not account satisfactorily for the persistence of the Bluebeard/Halewijn motive in the 20th century. The Freudian age was not in need of fairy tales to disguise sexual secrets. Yet the stream of new variants persisted, in all branches of art (including the new one: film<sup>46</sup>) as well as in criticism and interpretation. After the initial shock of the Freudian awakening was overcome, it became clear that in the domain of symbolism, sexuality was not only a *signified* but also, in its turn, a powerful potential *signifier*. Reference to sexuality, more explicitly or more indeterminately, is an effective means to evoke the process of self-development, of resolving the conflicts and undergoing the *rites de passage* that go with the transitional stages of life, the process which Jungian psychology refers to as *individuation*. The dynamics of growing up, maturing, discovering secrets, things you always wanted to know but were afraid to ask (knowing all too well that those who might give the answers would keep these to themselves, or make you believe that you would not understand anyway), trespassing on the commandments, interfering in other people's business, revealing connections that were hidden to you before – all these experiences are part and parcel of what it means to lead the life of a human being, and the vicissitudes of Halewijn and Bluebeard seem to offer suitable metaphors to appropriate these experiences.

But *whose* individuation? From Perrault through Colman to Offenbach, writers have agreed that female curiosity is *the* subject of the story. Its educative function as a premonition is directed towards married wives, in order for them to keep their charming noses to the grindstone of bourgeois marriage and, in particular, to keep them out of their husbands' *affairs*. During the 18th and most of the 19th centuries, women who failed to do so

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<sup>45</sup> B. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, London 1976, p. 300.

<sup>46</sup> This already began before Balázs wrote his drama: in 1901, Georges Méliès had produced *Barbe-Bleue*. In 1923, Sam Wood directed *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, which became better known in the 1938 remake by Ernst Lubitsch, and after the war followed the Bluebeard films by Christian Jaque (1951) and Edward Druktryk (1973).

were considered *disobedient* (which called for punishment). At the end of the 19th century, they were considered *hysterical* (which called for treatment).

After 1900, however, the diagnostic focus shifted from women to men, and at the same time from the interaction between characters to the more complicated internal psychology of the modern individual. Freud's famous analysis of the case of *Dora K.*, in his 1899 study of hysteria, was the direct source of inspiration for the texts that Georg Trakl wrote to accompany his puppet play *Blaubart*.<sup>47</sup> This puppet play, in its turn, laid the foundation for Franz Hummel's chamber opera *Blaubart* (1985).<sup>48</sup> Together with the ballet by Pina Bausch, *Blaubart – beim Anhören einer Tonbandaufnahme von Béla Bartóks Oper Herzog Blaubarts Burg* (1977), this chamber opera illustrates how the shift from women to men was paralleled by a shift from hysteria to neurosis. There is a strong emphasis on the continuous repetition of the same action, however unsuccessful it may be. Pina Bausch does not confront us with a Bluebeard who wants to prevent Judit's confrontation with his past, but with a Judit who wants Bluebeard to face his own behaviour and to engage in that confrontation.

This sheds a different light on *Bluebeard's Castle*; although Bartók's Bluebeard survives (as opposed to the original Barbe-Bleue), he comes out as the loser. He is not the one who carries out the ordeal, but neither is Judit; she does not come out as the *Judita Triumphans* whom she expected to be. As in Greek tragedy, fate catches up with both of them. Bluebeard's serial killings are not committed by his own free will; he is an *Angstmörder* rather than a *Lustmörder*, according to Hartwig Suhrbier.<sup>49</sup> As a premonition, this message seems to be directed not so much to the woman as to the man – and indeed, Suhrbier believes Pina Bausch's ballet to be dealing with the everyday 'Neurotiker und Durchschnittsmann'; in other words, with the 'ganz normale, kaputte Mann unserer Tage'.<sup>50</sup> Bluebeard does not so much fear Judit; rather, he is afraid of himself.

### 6 – *Light in darkness?*

One may indeed wonder who the protagonist is in the confrontation between these two. In Jungian terms, Judit is Bluebeard's *anima* – the feminine side of his gloomy personality which reveals a 'deeper' self than his unapproachable *persona* does. On the other hand, Jungians also interpret

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<sup>47</sup> 'Blaubart. Ein Puppenspiel', in G. Trakl, *Dichtungen und Briefe*, Salzburg 1969, Vol. 1, pp. 435–445.

<sup>48</sup> To the best of my knowledge, Hummel's chamber opera is the first atonal rendering of Bluebeard.

<sup>49</sup> *Blaubarts Geheimnis*, p. 95. Suhrbier wrote his Bluebeard study under the influence of Pina Bausch's ballet.

<sup>50</sup> *Blaubarts Geheimnis*, p. 61 and p. 62.

Bluebeard as the woman's 'negative *animus*', and explain his role in her life as representing 'all those semiconscious, cold, destructive reflections that invade a woman in the small hours, especially when she has failed to realize some obligation of feeling'.<sup>51</sup> The process of individuation works both ways; both archetypes are reminiscent of a complementary aspect of a personality. But in this respect, there is a difference between *Bluebeard's Castle* and *Halewijn* – a difference in the balance between drama and individuation. While Van Lokhorst specifies 'Holland in the early Middle Ages' as the time and place of her husband's opera, Balázs suggests the possibility of an intra-individual interpretation by setting the opera in a timeless and spaceless realm, and by submitting a few questions to the audience in the prologue: 'what does the old saga mean, ladies and gentlemen, and where is the stage, inside or out?' The theatre curtain that will rise and fall is compared to the spectators' eyelids. They should give the drama its place, *eyes wide shut*. In this way, Balázs emphasizes the psychological approach, whereas the Pijpers take the public away from everyday reality by stressing the mystical element of the magic song in the dramatic context.

Like Ariane and Judit, the king's daughter represents the voice of reason which brings the light of insight; but the person of Halewijn is a different counterforce than Bluebeard is, in the sense that he *also* possesses a kind of insight. There is a sort of knowledge, which the king's daughter has no access to. This is the knowledge of nature, of instinct, which is portrayed here as *pre-human* rather than *in-human*. Halewijn says straightforwardly to the king's daughter that there are things 'she should not know, and will not understand'; but when she persists in her attempt to see through him, he tries to explain, by telling her that in her world, a tree consists of wood for planks – not so for him.

In her own comment on the drama<sup>52</sup>, Van Lokhorst makes clear that Pijper's *Halewijn* has consistently intended to put the rational attitude of the king's daughter in second place, and to focus on Halewijn himself – and on the forces he represents, which will never bend to reason. Halewijn is a chthonic symbol of nature, just like a tree or an avalanche might be. There is no point in condemning nature, even when it is destructive. This is why in the opera – as opposed to the ballad – Halewijn's head, when it is put on the table in the palace, resumes its eternal chant: 'I sing a song that will not die ...'. The Pijpers see in Halewijn the *poète maudit anti-bourgeois* that the forces of reason and progress will not be able to extinguish.<sup>53</sup> Their acclaim

<sup>51</sup> M.L. von Franz, 'The process of individuation', in *Man and his Symbols*, ed. C.G. Jung, London 1964, p. 191.

<sup>52</sup> In the booklet published by the *Wagnervereeniging* on the occasion of the premiere, Amsterdam 1933, pp. 6–8.

<sup>53</sup> See T. de Haan, 'Wat zong Heer Halewijn?', in *Nederlandse Volksverhalen*, The Hague 1976, pp. 104–110.

of Halewijn as a libertine freebooter is an offshoot of the Romantic adoration of '*le bon sauvage*', even if the *sauvage* is not that *bon* after all. In this respect, there is an interesting cross-relation with Maeterlinck/Dukas, which I have not mentioned yet: the role of the king's daughter is not to be sung at the top of her voice, as Halewijn's is, but to be performed in *Sprechgesang*. For she represents the lack of artisticity that will always set her apart from the 'natural musician' Halewijn, whose song will not die. In *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*, on the other hand, Bluebeard's singing dies already at the end of the first act; in the second and third acts, he has no text at all. His realm is being overthrown, and he is literally silenced. Nevertheless, Ariane fails in her mission, as did Judit and the king's daughter. The three women bravely rise up against the power of their suppressor, but that power is not broken.

Maeterlinck, Balázs and Van Lokhorst each present their own rendition of what the gospel according to St. John concisely summarizes: 'And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not' (John 1:5). I have already hinted at the biblical 'tree of knowledge'; and Ludwig Tieck's remark, quoted in Section 3, that 'Curiosity is the sin that brings in all other sins', contains a hardly hidden allusion to Eve's tasting the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3).

Ariane, Judit and the king's daughter were proven guilty of a deadly sin, if committed by women: *la volonté de savoir*. Eve was their original mother. Ariane was most faithful to Eve, and she knew what she was heading for: 'I am going to find the forbidden door – everything which is allowed will not help us any further'. If Bluebeard did not want his wife to open the door, why then did he give her the key in the first place? Or, analogously: if God did not want mankind to eat from the tree of knowledge, then why did he plant it in the Garden of Eden?

The fact that Perrault's fairy tale can so easily be identified with the event that was, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, accepted for a long time as the foundation of the human condition on earth, suggests that it exemplifies a fundamental conflict – connected not only with personal individuation but also with a more encompassing attempt for liberation. This idea is strengthened by the intertextual references we find in the names of Eve's daughters: Ariane has clearly taken her name from *Ariadne*, who was instrumental in liberating the Cretan people from the dark forces of the Minotaur, and the deuterocanonical book of *Judith* tells how Judith redeemed the population of the city of Bethulia from the Assyrians: by first seducing and then beheading their chief-commander Holofernes – with his own sword; in triumph she takes his head with her. This is very similar to what happens in the ballad,



and there are even variants from the folk tradition which explicitly mention Holofernes and compare the king's daughter to the biblical Judith.<sup>54</sup>

In the 20th century, a number of commentators experienced 'Bluebeard' and especially his hardly accessible 'castle' with its heavy 'doors' as a metaphor not so much for our personal lives, but, supra-individually, as a painful confrontation with the situation our civilisation finds itself in, now that Enlightenment seems to have come across barriers that refuse to give way under its seemingly liberating influence. Frederick the Great's pastiche, although written with the intention to satirize symbolical exegesis of biblical fragments, received more imitation than the king could ever have expected!

Maeterlinck himself set the tone when he compared the hardships of Soeur Ygraine (who, in his puppet play *La Mort de Tintagiles*, tries in vain to make her way through an enormous, massive door) to the overall *condition humaine*: 'We are all waiting in front of the gate which does not only separate life from death, but also past from future, the known from the unknown, and man from his God.'<sup>55</sup> And in the same vein, George Steiner continues: 'We seem to stand, in regard to a theory of culture, where Bartók's Judith stands, when she asks to open the last door on the night.'<sup>56</sup> The process of civilisation compels us to do so: 'We open the successive doors in Bluebeard's castle because "they are there", because each leads to the next by a logic of intensification which is that of the mind's own awareness of being. To leave one door closed would not only be cowardice, but a betrayal – radical, self-mutilating – of the inquisitive, probing, forward-tensed stance of our species. We are hunters after reality, wherever it may lead.'<sup>57</sup> Susan McClary, who gave feminism a voice within musicology, used the same association when she compared Bluebeard's dwelling-place to the ivory tower of musicology itself. She feels like 'a material girl in Bluebeard's castle': 'As a woman in musicology, I find myself thinking about Judith quite often – especially now, as I begin asking new kinds of questions about music with the aid of feminist critical theory. Like Judith, I have been granted access by my mentors to an astonishing cultural legacy: musical repertoires from all of history and the entire globe, repertoires of extraordinary

<sup>54</sup> See F. van Duyse, *Het oude Nederlandsche Lied*, The Hague/Antwerp 1903, Vol. I, p. 3, or J. Vanhecke, *Het hoofd werd op de tafel gezet*, p. 144–146. Sophus Bugge has argued that the name *Halewijn* is a corruption of *Holofernes*; see his 'Bidrag til den nordiske Balladedigtningens Historie' in *Det Philologisk-historiske Samfunds Mindeskrift*, Copenhagen 1879, pp. 75–92. His argument is discussed in *Het hoofd werd op de tafel gezet*, pp. 77–80.

<sup>55</sup> *La Grande Porte*, Paris 1939, p. 7. Ygraine returns in *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*, as do the other female characters who originate from his earlier plays. For Maeterlinck, these were 'his former women'.

<sup>56</sup> G. Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle*, London 1971, p. 95.

<sup>57</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 103.

beauty, power, and formal sophistication. It might be argued that I ought to be grateful, since there has really only been one stipulation in the bargain – namely, that I never ask what any of it means, that I content myself with structural analysis and empirical research.<sup>58</sup>

McClary's identification with the victim/victress of the villain has a wider dimension.

Many commentators believe that the ballad has always had a feminine context. Although generally named after the male character (the Hungarian *Anna Molnár* being an exception to that rule), the story is told from the perspective of a female focalizer. It is her *rite de passage* which is represented in the ballad, not his. Vanhecke notes that at least in Flanders, mentioned by many as the cradle of the ballad, those who remember the ballad from their youth recall that it was always sung by women<sup>59</sup>, and he concludes that it may go back to pagan medieval initiation rites. In those dark ages, women were isolated from corporate life (guilds, fraternities) and they had their own communities. They were often illiterate, which may account for the absence of the *Halewijn* ballad in printed sources before 1836.<sup>60</sup>

It is an attractive thought, yet the gap between the Middle Ages and 1836 is wide. Vanhecke offers no follow-up story that would make the existence of such *Halewijn* rituals credible. In interpretation, the (politically correct) wish can easily become the mother to the thought. In 1984, Hartwig Suhrbier noted that the same feminist tendency had already been present in the fairy tale since Perrault's original version: in the end, it is the woman who is victorious.<sup>61</sup> This may be true at the superficial level of surviving the confrontation, which is where Perrault's story ends. But as we have seen, the last century gave a different context to the archetypal confrontations between *anima* and *animus* as they are personified by the two protagonists. The female is not (as it was in much of the operatic tradition) routinely portrayed as 'the other' that constitutes a disturbance of peace and order – or, to phrase it the Hegelian way, as *nature* in opposition to *spirit*. However, the change did not take place along straight lines. Maeterlinck initiated a different division of roles between the protagonists, and he put Ariane in full command throughout the opera. David Murray has called her attempt to liberate the earlier wives 'quite literally a "Women's Lib" drama'.<sup>62</sup> Even so, within the rich tradition of *liberation opera*, *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* must be the one with the most depressive subtitle: *La délivrance inutile*, 'the wasted liberation'.

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<sup>58</sup> S. McClary, *Feminine Endings – Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, Minneapolis 1991, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> *Het hoofd werd op de tafel gezet*, p. 125.

<sup>60</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>61</sup> *Blaubarts Geheimnis*, p. 55.

<sup>62</sup> In the programme booklet of the April 25, 1999 concert of the American Symphony Orchestra.

Ariane herself escapes the danger which she so courageously confronted, but she fails to set the other women free. Judit and the king's daughter fare no better. All three operas bring light in darkness, but in all three 'darkness comprehended it not'. Judit symbolically 'invades' Bluebeard's head, but loses her own; the king's daughter literally takes Halewijn's, but his realm is not of her world, and his song will not die.

Both Balázs/Bartók and Van Lokhorst/Pijper show the failure of rationality, but in an opposite way. Frigyesi notes, about the interpretation of *Bluebeard's Castle*, that 'critics usually describe Bluebeard as wise and rational and Judith as passionate and narrow-minded'.<sup>63</sup> This is why her attempt is doomed to fail. Bartók himself sympathizes with her; when asked in an interview whether the Bluebeard figure was he himself, he replied: 'and what if I were Judit'? But in *Halewijn*, the king's daughter fails because *she is only rational, and not passionate*. Pijper has re-enchanted the Dionysian forces that his Halewijn represents, and in the end, he identifies with him. He believes that as a composer, he has played the same role towards drama that Halewijn played towards the king's daughter. To his original comment on the opera he added the following lines for the Rotterdam performance: 'This music is fully autonomous, and all possible problems of a psychological, metaphysical or aesthetical nature have already been solved in and through the music. For the ideal listener and viewer, therefore, this work is not something to ponder and philosophize about, but simply something to be watched and listened to.'<sup>64</sup>

Bluebeard and Halewijn, even in their exotic settings, and dating 'from old and barbarian times', present existential themes that may be expressed in many ways, but have been recognisable through the ages – themes that provide for conflicts in every individual's life, in any generation. These themes can be denoted by conceptual pairs like nature and culture, male and female, love and hate, pain and pleasure, fear and desire, curiosity and discipline, innocence and guilt, virginity and defloration, honour and dishonour, trespassing and obedience, surveillance and punishment, revenge and pity, and, ultimately, life and death. All these binary opposites lend themselves to more literal as well as to more metaphorical applications, and to interpretations at inter-, intra- or supra-individual levels. The legend we have dealt with here is far from unique in its ability to transform these existential themes into artistic shape; but it has shown, time and again, to be a suitable vehicle for incarnating the transformations which the changes of history demand.

<sup>63</sup> *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest*, p. 227.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in *Thematisch-bibliografische catalogus van de werken van Willem Pijper*, ed. W.C.M. Kloppenburg, Assen 1960, p. 152.

*Алберт ван дер Схоут*

ПЕСМА КОЈА НЕ УМИРЕ  
– ПРОМЕНЉИВИ СИМБОЛИЗАМ У ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЈИ  
ДВЕЈУ МРАЧНИХ ОПЕРА

*(Резиме)*

Шарл Перо (1628–1703) је својим *Причама моје мајке џуске* (1697) увео у књижевност мотив серијског убице који заводи једну за другом низ младих дама. Немогуће је одредити који су били Пероови директни извори или колико је тај мотив стар, али сигурно је да је у овој бајци помешано више типова извора: *народна балада* (и из Источне и из Западне Европе), *развијање леџенде* у усменој традицији (често у едукативној функцији) и, најзад, и вероватно најмање важно: *историјска реалност* (инкарнације овог прототипа).

Народне баладе на тему убиства девојака могу се наћи широм Европе. Могуће је да су се кретале од истока ка западу, а можда је било и обрнуто. Нарочито смо пратили варијанту *Халевејн*, која је била извор за оперу истог наслова холандског композитора Вилема Пејпера (1894–1947). Као и Барток у *Дворцу Плавобрадо*, Пејпер не само што користи мотив из народне легенде, већ и музику која је фолклорног порекла. Ипак, холандски композитор не чини то на тако фундаменталан начин као Барток који је створио потпуно нов музички језик на бази народне традиције. Резултат таквог приступа је преференција сличних музичких мотива. Чиста кварта подељена на малу терцу и велику секунду представља основу за модернистички језик оба композитора; за Пејпера, то се слаже са његовом склоношћу ка октотоници, док Барток користи те елементе у комбинацији са пентатоником и хроматизацијом.

„Порука“ мотива *Плавобрадо* / *Халевејна* доживљава извесно померање у 20. веку. До тада је тај мотив представљао опомену младим девојкама (*Халевејн*) или удатим женама (*Плавобради*) да се не упуштају у љубавне авантуре (или да се не мешају у мужевљеве послове). Женска радозналост, „првобитни грех“ човечанства, био је осуђен најснажније могуће. После 1900. године, фокус се помера са женске радозналости (и хистерије) ка мушкој неурози. Сексуални мотив није сада више само скривена истина коју треба открити, већ се претворио у кључ који може да отвори врата ка психолошком саморазвоју или *индивидуацији* и ка кршењу постојећег реда. У многим својим модерним разрадама мотив *Плавобрадо* / *Халевејна* преобразио се од психолошке у културну драму.

UDC 782.1.035.01:784.4