

Sie werden sicher bemerkt haben, dass die Argumentation fortwährend in sich kreist. Aber dies ist meines Erachtens unumgänglich. Der Surrealismus wäre ohne die Psychoanalyse Freuds nicht denkbar, die Postmoderne nicht ohne den Surrealismus, das Reflektieren über die Postmoderne nicht ohne die Psychoanalyse und die Prämissen des Surrealismus. Ebenso ist das Sammeln als postmodernes Kriterium und in dieser neuen Ausprägung nicht ohne die Psychoanalyse und den Surrealismus denkbar. Dem Analytiker fällt hierbei die Aufgabe zu, diese kulturellen Diskurse – denn die Psychoanalyse ist in ihrer Historizität betrachtet nichts anderes als ein weiterer Diskurs in unserer Kultur, die unser Denken und Handeln bestimmt – gegeneinander abzuwägen und für die Analyse nutzbar zu machen, mit dem letztendlichen Ziel, zu verstehen und zu urteilen.

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## Seduction and Impotence: Readings of Mescalina and Nekrotzar

The conclusion of Ligeti's bizarre and ironic opera, *Le Grand Macabre* (1971), might seem lucid enough to convince the opera-goer that the variegated scenes and events portrayed are brought to an acceptable resolution. The consonant music of the concluding Passacaglia and the return of the full cast to the stage might lull one into a sense of satisfaction with the plot as a whole. After all, at the end of the opera, all the characters except Nekrotzar are alive and well, Breughelland is as lovely as it was in the first scene, and the music of the Passacaglia reinforces the overall positive mood with its consonance and its life-affirming text. I contend that despite the overall ›happy ending‹ of the opera, the conclusion of *Le Grand Macabre* is extraordinarily ambiguous. In a 1981 interview with Claude Samuel, Ligeti points to a purposeful ambiguity that he intended to include in the design of the opera: »If Nekrotzar is really Death, then Death is dead, we have passed into a state of eternal life, we are in paradise and we have lived through the Last Judgment without realizing it. But if Nekrotzar is a charlatan, nothing has changed; he is dead and we have won a reprieve.«<sup>1</sup> In other words, if Nekrotzar is Death, and he failed at his job because he was exhausted from all the sex and drinking in which he engaged in Scenes Two and Three, then Breughelland, and we the audience, are saved from ever having to die and face the Last Judgment. If, on the other hand, Nekrotzar is merely pretending to be Death, then his demise at the end of the opera is only his own, and the inhabitants of Breughelland, and by extension we the audience, must still contend with the eventuality of death and Last Judgment.

1 György Ligeti, *Ligeti in Conversation with Péter Várnai, Joseph Häusler, Claude Samuel and Himself*, London 1983, p. 117.

Ralph P. Locke, in his essay »What Are These Women Doing in Opera?« lists the various stereotypical female operatic characters with which opera audiences are familiar, such as »the passive innocent«, »the woman who dares to love against the rules«, »the possessive mother« and »the coquette or *femme fatale*«. <sup>2</sup> While Locke is arguing that there are female opera characters who do not fulfill these negative stereotypes, it is not insignificant that he, and other scholars, can point to these categories of female representation in opera, and it is the final category of women in opera – the *femme fatale* – that most concerns us presently.

Mescalina embodies the operatic *femme fatale*, and as such, she displays characteristics that define not only her behavior, but which also set up expectations for how other characters will react to her. The ways in which Mescalina personifies a *femme fatale* and the ways in which she departs from the stereotype create the potential for an interpretation of the opera based on the power struggle between normative male and female gender roles, and especially as they are portrayed in opera. I will demonstrate how this power struggle relates to Nekrotzar and his role as Death or as a masquerader of Death.

Many scholars mark the emergence of the feminist movement in the late 19th century as a precipitating factor of the *femme fatale* phenomenon that occurred in novels and plays in the late 19th century, and later in cinematography of the 20th century. The 1890s saw a rise in political action on the part of women seeking equal rights to men, as well as novels and plays that addressed the sexual relations frankly. The combination of political and artistic changes sparked a »backlash« in which female sexuality was represented as a threat to social health and morality. <sup>3</sup>

Film theorist Mary Ann Doane also traces the origins of the *femme fatale* to social anxiety instigated by incipient feminism in the late 19th century, and she notes that »the power accorded to the *femme fatale* is a function of fears linked to the notions of uncontrollable drives, the fading of subjectivity, and the loss of conscious agency – all themes of the emergent theories of psychoanalysis«. <sup>4</sup>

The *femme fatale* appeared first in late 19th-century novels and plays, including Oscar Wilde's play, *Salomé* (1892), and Frank Wedekind's *Lulu* plays (*Earth Spirit*, 1892 and *Pandora's Box*, 1902). These plays, and many others that feature *femmes fatales* would be transferred to the media of opera and film in the early 20th century. Through its prevalence in these genres, the stereotype of the ravishing woman has become deeply embedded in European and North American culture and continues to be perpetuated in works of the 20th and 21st centuries.

*Femmes fatales* are not characters who are undone by broken hearts, nor do they wilt away, as female operatic victims so frequently do – this according to Catherine Clément

2 Ralph P. Locke, »What Are These Women Doing in Opera?« in: *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, ed. by Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith, New York 1995, p. 61.

3 Rebecca Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death*, London 1992, p. 12–15. Connected to the 19th-century interest in morality was a morbid fascination with disease and the concept of a diseased society. See Stott's introduction as well as Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, »Staging the Female Body: Richard Strauss's *Salome*«, in: *Siren Songs*, ed. by Mary Ann Smart, Princeton 2000, p. 201–224.

4 Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*, New York 1991, p. 2.

in her book, *Opera, or The Undoing of Women*.<sup>5</sup> Rather, *femmes fatales* are powerful women who are aware of their sexuality and use it as an exploitative tool in order to achieve their goals. This strong sense of individuality and self-knowledge combined with their sexual appeal causes other characters in the opera, and equally, viewers of the opera, to regard them with large amounts of both titillation and anxiety. Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon comment on this point: »Salome is obviously the typical *femme fatale* in the operatic tradition of Carmen, Kundry, Dalilah, and, later, Lulu – the demonic beauty who could lure men to damnation, and therefore aroused in her beholder fear along with attraction, terror along with desire.«<sup>6</sup>

Mescalina's possession of certain characteristics of a *femme fatale* and her distinct lack of other stereotypical traits serves to create humorous if slightly uncomfortable situations in the second scene of *Le Grand Macabre*. The opera viewer will first notice that, although she is garbed in a fetishistic outfit of leather, Mescalina is not a conventionally attractive woman. Ligeti's directions in the score are that »Mescalina, completely clothed in leather, is fat and vulgar«<sup>7</sup>. Mescalina's leather garb – the traditional outfit of a dominatrix – forces the viewer to reconsider his or her views of who is attractive, or perhaps for whom it is permissible to be openly sexual. Mescalina is clearly dressed for sexual activity, but is it acceptable for »fat, plain« women to be sexual onstage? Operatic tradition embraces divas that are beautiful, or at least the audience is often asked to suspend disbelief in order to see these leading ladies as beautiful, regardless of their actual physical appearance. Mescalina's body, despite her leather outfit, does not fit the standard for physical beauty that has come to be associated with operatic divas or *femmes fatales*, though, Mescalina does terrify Astradamors. However, Astradamors's terror of Mescalina is more about his bodily safety and his reluctance to engage in sexual activity with her, rather than any concern about being lured into damnation.

In addition to expecting operatic *femmes fatales* to be beautiful, we also expect the sounds emanating from our favorite divas to be commensurate with their beautiful bodies: the sounds an operatic *femme fatale* makes are part of her seductive nature. She not only seduces the male characters onstage, she seduces the ears of the opera-goer. For example, Lulu's series, in an opera based on serial techniques, is a collection of intervals that nearly gives the impression of tonality – the first hexachord is entirely diatonic. Again, Mescalina does not fulfill this stereotype, and furthermore, her vocal utterances are often so unaesthetic that they can be regarded as a mockery of typical diva performance: many of Mescalina's lines in Scene Two are not even sung – they are spoken, or worse, she screams. When Mescalina does sing, her melodic lines are short and disjunct. Her duet with Astradamors is a sharp contrast with the flowing intertwined lines of the young and beautiful lovers portrayed in the first scene, Amando and Amanda.

5 Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, transl. by Betsey Wing, Minneapolis 1988.

6 Hutcheon and Hutcheon, »Staging the Female Body«, p. 210.

7 György Ligeti and Michael Meschke, *Le Grand Macabre: Oper in Zwei Akten*, Textbuch, Mainz 1990, p. 12. This is my transl. of the German: »Mescalina ganz in Leder gekleidet, ist dick und ordinär.«

In addition to being more physically attractive than normal, *femmes fatales* typically have extraordinary sexual appetites. Salome's sexual appetite in its enormity leads directly to Jochanaan's death, which leads in turn to Salome's execution. In a like manner, Lulu's interest in sex with many people also leads to several deaths, including her own. Mescalina, too, fulfills the image of a sexually insatiable woman; she expresses her libido to the extent that she appears quite monstrous. Her fearsomeness and exhausting sexual appetite is apparent in Astradamors' anxious responses to her overtures. Later, after she falls asleep in the midst of ordering Astradamors to do several chores, the audience and Astradamors overhear a conversation between Mescalina and Venus in which the former demands a new and »well-hung« lover.<sup>8</sup> We also learn that Venus has supplied many men to Mescalina, but that Mescalina has found them to be inadequate to her sexual needs. After using them sexually, Mescalina cuckolds and discards them, and not gently, or so we are led to imagine.<sup>9</sup>

One result of the enormous sexual appeal combined with the insatiable libidos of *femmes fatales* in opera libretti is the degradation of male authority and male dignity – a fate often viewed as worse than death by both operatic characters and their audiences. Because of the degradation these sexually aggressive women inflict on men, it is necessary for *femmes fatales* to die in order to re-establish acceptable moral authority at the end of an opera, and often they do.

Like most *femmes fatales* Mescalina is subjected to male violence during the course of the opera. When Nekrotzar enters Mescalina and Astradamors' home in Scene Two, he overhears Mescalina's demands to Venus for sexual satisfaction and moves toward her »like Frankenstein's monster«, as if her allure is too powerful for him to resist.<sup>10</sup> As he approaches her sleeping figure, Nekrotzar tells Mescalina that he intends to fulfill her sexual wishes. If we are to judge by the reactions of the other characters that are in the libretto, Nekrotzar's performance is indeed a feat steeped in virility. Piet and Astradamors make comments in the vein of »Such prowess!« and »Merciless, what cleverness!«<sup>11</sup> The goddess of love, meanwhile, looks on in horror as her feminine domain – Mescalina's body – is desecrated in the »stylized love-scene«<sup>12</sup>. Nekrotzar completes the rape with a supremely patriarchal act: he kills Mescalina with a vampire-like bite on her neck. Her demise seems to be confirmed when Piet and Astradamors struggle clumsily to move her unwieldy body to the cellar.

According to several scholars, such as Sander L. Gilman, opera is an art form that is concerned with shaping and criticizing society more so than in reflecting it;<sup>13</sup> if this is so, then women who threaten male authority must die by the end of an opera in order to re-establish masculine dominance and dignity. In *Le Grand Macabre*, Nekrotzar seems to em-

8 Ligeti and Meschke, *Le Grand Macabre: Oper in Zwei Akten* [score], Mainz 1997, p. 114–115.

9 Ibid., p. 115–116.

10 Ibid., p. 117.

11 Ibid., p. 119.

12 Ibid., p. 118–120.

13 See for example Sander L. Gilman, »Strauss and the Pervert«, in: *Reading Opera*, ed. by Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, Princeton 1988; and Ralph P. Locke, »What Are These Women Doing in Opera?«, p. 76–77.

body virile power, at least for the first three scenes. He has no qualms about subjugating people to his will, and the characters whom he encounters are by turns terrified and in awe of him. For example, Nekrotzar forces Piet the Pot to serve as his beast of burden throughout the opera; he rapes and murders Mescalina – not an un-empowered woman; and, in the third scene, Nekrotzar enters the auditorium with a full procession of demonic followers and cows both Prince Go-go and his nervous chief of security, Gepopo. The pageantry of his entry reinforces Nekrotzar's image as a powerful figure: an individual to be feared.

Nekrotzar's grasp on power seems to slip at the end of Scene Three as he becomes so inebriated that he nearly forgets to fulfill his duties as bringer of death to Breughelland. At the last minute he remembers his task and from the back of Prince Go-go's rocking horse he announces grandly and with elaborate gestures, »In the name of the Almighty, I now smite the world to pieces. Yes, it is done! Is done! All is done!«<sup>14</sup> The curtain falls as the intermezzo is played by the orchestra in the darkened auditorium. The music of this intermezzo is some of the most powerful writing in the opera, and the lack of scenery or action at which to look creates an eerie mood, if not a downright terrifying one. Without any words or action, the impression is created that the end of the world has arrived, thus the music and lighting reinforce Nekrotzar's grasp on power.

When the curtain rises on Scene Four, the illusion of Nekrotzar's power starts to fade. The setting is »the lovely country of Breughelland; setting as in Scene One«<sup>15</sup>. Piet and Astradamors are floating serenely above the stage discussing their recent deaths when Prince Gogo enters and is accosted by three cutthroats. All six characters discuss the fact of their deaths and the ways in which this changes the hierarchy of Breughelland until Nekrotzar sits up suddenly and exclaims: »Ha! Your Highness still alive? Have I not just lain waste to the entire goddamned world?«<sup>16</sup> Eventually all the other characters come onto the stage, including Mescalina, who is far from dead as she scuffles with Nekrotzar, the Black Minister, the White Minister, and the cutthroats in turn. Finally, even Amando and Amanda emerge from the tomb, looking disheveled, but content. When Nekrotzar realizes that everyone is still quite alive, and that he has indeed not lain waste to the world, he shrivels up into a ball that shrinks until he disappears into the earth.

That Mescalina still lives at the end of the opera proves that even when Nekrotzar appeared to be at the height of his powers, he was actually ineffectual. When we recognize the sign systems of *femme fatale* in Mescalina, then other parts of that system are suggested to us, such as the necessity of her death to re-establish morality and male authority. This is a system of signs and events that has been reinforced frequently in operas, including *La traviata*, *Carmen*, *Parsifal*, *Salome*, *Lulu*, and others as well.

Mescalina's survival at the end of the opera, and her participation in the final Passacaglia, signals that something is not usual. Nekrotzar was not virile enough to murder one deviant woman, one who »ought« to die, a fact that suggests that Nekrotzar was a charlatan all along.

14 Ligeti and Meschke, [score], p. 260–261.

15 Meschke and Ligeti, Textbuch, p. 56. (English transl. by Geoffrey Skelton in the liner notes from the recording: Györgi Ligeti, *Le Grand Macabre*, Philharmonia Orchestra, Esa-Pekka Salonen, London Sinfonietta Voices, Sony Classical CD 01-062312-10, Paris 1998, p. 174.)

16 Ibid., Textbuch, p. 59; [score], p. 178.

Despite the appearance of his manly sexual performance and murder of Mescalina, and the façade of grandeur and power that he maintained during the first three scenes, Nekrotzar was never truly capable of anything. Death has not died. Breughelland, and we, still face the prospect of Last Judgment, but as the Passacaglia tells us:

Fear not to die, good people all!  
 No one knows when the hour will fall!  
 And when it comes, then let it be [...]  
 Farewell, till then, [cheerfully].<sup>17</sup>

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## Paul Hindemith und die Neue Welt

### Aspekte der amerikanischen Hindemith-Rezeption

Am 17. März 1940 war in der *New York Times* folgendes über eine Hindemith-Aufführung zu lesen:

[This is] ultra-modern music, of a texture which would have been wholly incomprehensible to a general musical gathering twenty-five years ago, and which received on this occasion the exceptionally enthusiastic applause of the audience. The [work], beyond doubt [...], is the writing of a master, with his own matured devices, his own style and the unmistakable expression of an exceptional creative vitality.<sup>1</sup>

Die Komposition Paul Hindemiths, die tags zuvor in der New Yorker Carnegie Hall erklungen war, befand sich offensichtlich ganz auf der Höhe der Zeit. Sie wurde von einem Publikum, das ›moderner‹ Musik gegenüber aufgeschlossen war, enthusiastisch aufgenommen, und dieses Publikum hörte das Werk eines deutschen Meisters, der darin – so fügte der Rezensent der *Times* hinzu – seinen unverkennbaren Stil ausformuliert habe: durchweg tonal und, die Form betreffend, stets auf Proportionen und thematische Bezüge bedacht.

Paul Hindemith, der vier Wochen zuvor in den USA angekommen war und dort für die nächsten Jahre zu bleiben beabsichtigte, war bei dieser Aufführung in New York anwesend. Von Buffalo aus – dort gab er an der Universität Kurse – berichtete er seiner Frau Gertrud wenige Tage darauf in einem Brief darüber und fügte diesem die oben in Auszügen wiedergegebene Rezension bei. Er schrieb lapidar: »Erfolg war groß. Du siehst

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Textbuch, p. 56; [score], p. 174.

<sup>1</sup> Olin Downes, »Hindemith Work Concert Feature«, in: *New York Times* 89, Nr. 30003, 17.3.1940, S. 44.