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Revision, recreation or continuation?
Péter Eötvös's operas *Die Tragödie des Teufels* and
Paradise Reloaded (Lilith)

PhD Theses

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I. The topic and the antecedents of the research

In 2010 Péter Eötvös's opera *Die Tragödie des Teufels*, based on *The Tragedy of Man* with a text by Albert Ostermaier, was premiered in Munich, to which not only the critics but also the composer himself had an ambivalent attitude, to the extent that he later withdrew his work. Eötvös however was not willing to let the subject go, and decided to rewrite the opera's music after rearranging the libretto, but this time not in response to a specific commission, but purely of his own volition, which had never been seen before or since than in the composer's operatic oeuvre. The new work, *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*, was premiered by the Neue Oper Wien in Vienna in 2013 and subsequently performed in three other cities. Revisions are often part of the compositional process for Eötvös: even after the premiere, the composer is fond of making them and refining his earlier ideas, so there are early and later versions of many of his works, reduced or rearranged, translated into other languages, or even corrected pieces, but he rarely denied his works. In my dissertation I have used the two Madách operas as examples to investigate the reasons for the rewriting and to follow the process of transformation.

The research of Eötvös's operatic oeuvre began in France in the early 2000s, the most significant result of which is the French-language volume edited by Márta Grabócz, which discusses four of the composer's operas (*Les opéras de Peter Eötvös. Entre orient et occident*, 2012). Another fundamental work, also the only one available in Hungarian, is the book of interviews between Pedro Amaral and Péter Eötvös (*Parlando–rubato. Beszélgetések, monológok és egyéb kitérők*, 2015), which details the operas from *Harakiri* to *Die Tragödie des Teufels* in the form of professional discussions, and an extended edition of which has also been published in German (*Parlando – Rubato. Gespräche, Mologole und andere Umwege*, 2018). In the 2000s, two volumes of studies in German were also published: the first is a book edited by Hans-Klaus Jungheinrich containing edited versions of the lectures of the Eötvös Symposium held in Frankfurt am Main in 2004 (*Identitäten*, 2005), and the second is a volume of studies edited by Michael Kunkel containing documents from the 2005/2006 Eötvös year at the Basel Conservatory of Music (*Kosmoi*, 2007). The latter book also includes a number of writings by Hungarian authors: essays by András Varga Bálint, Tamás Váczi, Zoltán Farkas, Péter Laki and László Sály. Other scholarly works by Hungarian researchers such as Anna Dalos, Krisztina Megyeri and Gergely Vajda are also significant. Several Hungarian and foreign-language dissertations on Eötvös's oeuvre have been published in recent years, including one at Columbia University (*Distant Pasts*

Reimagined: Encountering the Political Present in 21st-Century Opera, 2020), which analyses *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)* among other contemporary operas. Besides this thesis there are no other major academic works on any of the Madách operas, only a few shorter publicity pieces.

II. Sources

In addition to the above-mentioned literature, important parts of the source material for my dissertation are the interviews with Péter Eötvös and other participants in opera productions: in addition to the numerous writings published in print, I myself conducted two interviews with the composer about the script (2019) and his compositional method (2021), one with Ostermaier about the script (2019), and one with Annette Schönmüller, the singer of the premiere of *Paradise Reloaded (Lilith)*, about her portrayal of Lilith (2018). The main sources of the reception of these two works, apart from the interviews and the programme notes, are the reviews, a list of which I obtained partly from the venues of the premieres and partly from my own press collection. In my dissertation I have also used a number of books and studies not only in the field of musicology but also in other disciplines. I had the opportunity to access manuscript materials of both operas in connection with the creation and analysis of the works: I spent four days in the summer of 2018 at the Paul Sacher Stiftung, where the manuscript materials of *Die Tragödie des Teufels* are kept, and in the autumn of 2018, I had the opportunity to look into the private collection of Péter Eötvös, where the materials of *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)* can be found. I had access to the scores of the operas through the Schott publisher and found recordings of both premieres in the BMC library.

III. Research methods and the structure of the thesis

The central element of my dissertation was the analysis of the music and the libretto, for which I mainly used the aforementioned primary sources, the scores and available recordings of the operas, but I also took into account analyses by other researchers and Eötvös's statements. An important part of the thesis is the contextualisation of Eötvös's oeuvre and the exploration of the textual and musical sources of the two Madách operas, for which I have used partly Hungarian, but mainly foreign-language literature. It was indispensable to examine the myth of Lucifer and Lilith, which I approached from a cultural and religious-historical perspective, and to deal with the significance of the two fictional characters in the history of opera. I also considered it very important to analyse the history of interpretation in order

to explore the reasons for the re-creation, which was made possible, among other things, by reading the very large amount of press material that was produced in connection with the performances. Interviews with the composer and the collaborators of the two operas gave me first-hand information about the stages of the creation process, which I supplemented with an analysis of the sketches. In my analyses, I have always tried to develop an objective point of view, so I have always been critical of the information and tried to form an opinion based on several sources. Based on Eötvös's statements and my own sketch research, I examined the composer's working method, which has so far only appeared rarely in the field of Eötvös research. The musical analysis also included an exploration of the extremely diverse system of intertextual allusions found in the operas, a characterisation of the individual figures of both operas and an evaluation of their interrelationships, as well as a formal analysis.

In the first chapter of my doctoral thesis, I overviewed the history of opera in the 20th and 21st centuries and tried to place Eötvös on this colourful palette. I examined his operatic language through his biography and then looked at the operas written before *Die Tragödie*, thus reviewing not only his operatic oeuvre but also the most important stages of his private and professional life. I have also briefly dealt with Eötvös's personal beliefs and works on transcendental themes, and summarised in one chapter what is currently known about the composer's musical language and style. In the third sub-chapter, I dealt with the myth of Lucifer and Lilith, placing the biblical evil figure in a new context and exploring through apocryphal sources the very complex personality and history of Lilith, as well as the feminist aspects of her myth. I also felt it was crucial to discuss these details because it would later help me to understand the operatic portrayal of the two characters.

In the second chapter I dealt in detail with the genesis of the two Madách operas, then I continued my thesis by examining the librettos. I explored the sources used by Ostermaier, dealt with questions of genre, the method of libretto editing used by Eötvös and his wife, Mari Mezei, the form of the libretto, and finally compared the plots of *The Tragedy of Man*, *Die Tragödie des Teufels* and *Paradise Reloaded (Lilith)*, which gave me a clearer picture of the changes that the original text underwent before the second libretto was created. In the next sub-chapter, the question of politics was discussed, and finally, the reception history of the works was examined.

In the third chapter I focused on the music of the operas. The sub-chapter on Eötvös's compositional methods is in fact a case study: through the compositional process of the two Madách operas I tried to get an idea of the composer's working methods and the steps usually taken in creating an

opera. In the second sub-chapter I examined the archetypes of the characters in the operas and their interrelationships. I then went on to compare the music of the two operas, highlighting both the differences and the points of convergence in the setting of the same passages. In separate subsections, I examined Eötvös's portrayal of God in *Die Tragödie des Teufels* and *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*. Finally, I examined the form of the opera and the genres represented in the two works. I dealt with the topic of *Leitmotiv*, the grand form, the musical formulation of the recurring phrases that function as landmarks and finally the presence of traditional genres in the two operas.

IV. Results

In my examination of 20th–21st century opera history and the international opera scene, I have found that Eötvös was one of the few Hungarian composers—alongside Bartók, Ligeti and Kurtág—to break into the international opera scene with his operatic oeuvre. In relation to the composer's musical language, I have defined some of the main characteristic trends. In terms of style the composer's analysts sometimes refer to Eötvös as a 'polystylist', which is consistent with the composer's own view that his operas were all written in different styles. I have found that Eötvös, although for many years was a member of Stockhausen's closest professional circle, does not really belong to any compositional school. The only strong influence that Eötvös acknowledges and likes to emphasise is that of Bartók. Both constructive and free structuring principles can be detected in his music. The first category includes the interval-centred structuring and, to a certain extent, Weberian serialism, which at one time influenced Eötvös, but from which he later moved away. In addition to analytical composition, improvisation also plays an important role in Eötvös's music. In general, although Eötvös does not belong to the mainstream of popular composition, he always tries to keep the needs of the audience and the client in mind, so that his works can be considered among the more accessible contemporary music. In relation to Eötvös's personal beliefs, I have found that although the atheistic composer has an attitude to the different religions, churches and belief systems as an outsider, ritual thinking is close to him, so that he uses such gestures in several of his works. In many of his operas religion is often the subject matter, the material for the libretto, which the composer researches with scientific rigour. He sees religion as part of the culture, not as an inner conviction, and thus always maintains a distance. I then examined how the figures of Lucifer and Lilith appear in the two operas: after reviewing various sources on the history of religion and culture and discussing the operatic appearance of the two figures, it became clear that neither of them can be described as

categorically evil, and that on the basis of their ambiguous myths, Eötvös portrayed their characters in a complex, very human way in the two Madách operas.

By comparing the libretto of the two operas, we could see that *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)* with its shorter text and more thoughtful dramaturgy was much more comprehensible after the revision, both for the reader and the audience watching the opera. What has remained from *Die Tragödie des Teufels* and in some respects even become more elaborate, is the inclusion of the political ideas. Shifting the focus on the figure of Lilith was also successful as Eötvös wanted, so that although the influence of the basic work is still felt in the background, in its ideas the second opera goes beyond *The Tragedy of Man*, raising new questions which, like in the work of Madách, remain unanswered. Regarding the role of politics, I found that although Eötvös was with his own words, “not a political animal”, he is very interested in world politics, open to everything, so that current issues were also present in both Madách operas. Eötvös and Ostermaier highlighted global issues that are relevant not only now, but also in the past and presumably in the future, and thus will not lose their relevance over time. In the light of the analysis of the reception history of the performances of *Die Tragödie* and *Paradise Reloaded* so far, the question arose whether the ambivalent reaction of the press and the public played a role in this almost unique composer’s attitude in the history of opera writing, i.e. in the complete re-creation of a work immediately after its premiere. Although Eötvös himself could probably not give a categorical answer to this question, the opinion of the critics was in any case an important factor in his decision.

By studying Eötvös’s compositional methods, I was able to gain insight into the composer’s workshop. Based on my sources I have identified the stages of the compositional process in eight steps. I have found that the main emphasis is on the right theme, and this basic idea guides the composer through the different stages of the compositional work. In a lengthy chapter on the archetypes and relationships of the characters I dealt with the interval-symbolism of the two operas, and then followed the changes in the characterisation of each figure through detailed musical analysis. An important difference from the first opera is, firstly, that the composer made much better use of the conflicts inherent in the drama and secondly, that for the second time Eötvös was thinking in terms of archetypes. In the case of *Die Tragödie*, we find intertextual references to films and literary works in the libretto, but these appear less in Eötvös’s music, whereas in the second opera the composer identified himself the characters with operatic, visual, mythological and other figures, and not only made this clear in the score, but also generally mentioned in his statements. Comparing the two operas’

corresponding textual settings and events, I found a number of similarities: sometimes the composer used only an idea in the second opera, sometimes he used similar compositional devices and motifs, but I also found examples where two texts were composed identically note for note. One of the most exciting changes was the usage of the chorale melody *Lobe den Herren*, whose presence in the first opera was only made clear to the listener by seeing the score, but in *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)* it appeared three times in the form of different paraphrases. In the formal analysis, I found that the bridge form, that was already present in *Die Tragödie*, is better represented in *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*. After a review of the traditional genres in the two operas, I summarised that, although no specific musical adaptations can be observed, the idea itself remained at the gestural level, and the classical genres often appeared in grotesque form as a mean of humour in the two operas.

Finally, I have attempted to answer the question posed in the title of my dissertation: is *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)* a revision, recreation or continuation of *Die Tragödie des Teufels*? I came to the conclusion that all three definitions are valid. The revision refers mainly to the script, which the Eötvös couple dismantled and reassembled with Ostermaier's help. At the same time, the opera itself and its music were practically recreated by the composer. However, there are also elements which he recycled: sometimes only a single idea was retained, sometimes typical motifs were given new life in the second work, but there were also examples where excerpts in the two operas were matched note for note. Some of these were probably not consciously taken over, we could rather say, that certain musical solutions and melodies remained in the composer's mind involuntarily, which is not surprising, since not much time separated the two works. In fact, it is not as if Eötvös wrote an opera and then later took it up and began composing again, but rather continued the work that he was unable to complete as he had planned due to the tight deadline for the premiere and other external factors. In the second opera, however, he had the opportunity to improve the problematic parts of the script and the dramaturgy, to work with a suitable apparatus and vocal cast for the libretto, to develop the character of Lilith, who has exciting potential, to place greater emphasis on the conflicts between the characters and to refine the system of musical, literary, artistic and political references he had envisioned.

V. Publications and conference papers relating to the subject of the thesis

- „Don't you remember me, Adam?“. The character of Lilith in Péter Eötvös's operas (Vilnius, 2018) – conference paper
- „Ördögi zavar“. A *Die Tragödie des Teufels* müncheni bemutatójának sajtóvisszhangja (Budapest, 2019) – conference paper
- „Diabolical confusion“. The press reception of Péter Eötvös: *Die Tragödie des teufels* in Munich (Milton Keynes, 2020) – conference paper
- One opera in two cities. The press reception of Péter Eötvös: *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)* in Vienna and Budapest (Budapest, 2020) – conference paper
- Eötvös műhelyében. A *Die Tragödie des Teufels* és a *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)* komponálási folyamatáról (Budapest, 2021) – conference paper, that was published in the BTK ZTI Archives for 20th–21st Century Hungarian Music. DOI-identifier: https://doi.org/10.23714/mza.10022_NKFIH_123819