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THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE REINTERPRETATIONS OF THE MYTHICAL STORY OF MEDEA IN THE LIGHT OF TRANSLATION THEORY

MYTH AND TRANSLATION: DEFINITIONS

From the point of view of epistemology and cultural anthropology, myth and translation are two entirely different phenomena. Despite the apparent distance between them, it seems that bringing these two phenomena together within this article might turn out as fruitful and produce unexpected results. Among many existing definitions of the myth, one of the most relevant is the definition formulated by the Romanian philosopher of religion and historian Mircea Eliade:

> In the usual meaning of the word, [myth is understood], as "fable," "invention," "fiction," while, on the contrary, in the archaic societies, "myth" means a "true story" and, beyond that, a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant. (Eliade 1963, 1)

Indeed, while myth is usually a fictional narrative, it has the power to explain things beyond knowledge to people and convey certain truths about humanity universal to the Western culture in an exemplary, accessible form.

As for translation, let us reiterate one of the first historical attempts at scholarly definition, provided by Pierre Daniel Huet:

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In the first place the term translation [*interpretatio*] is very widely known. Routinely included in this term is: Every form of discourse by which a matter not understood is made known…. Further, the definition of this word has been extended to include the explanation of obscure areas of learning, the solution of riddles and dreams, the interpretation of oracles, the solution of a confused problem and, finally, the clarification of any matter not understood whatever. However, for us at this time what is meant by the word 'translation' [*interpretatio*] is, strictly speaking: the transfer of some discourse into another language. (Huet 1680, 16; English translation by Edwin Dolin, quoted in *Western Translation Theory*, 166).

Therefore, if myth and translation have different natures, is there any connection between them? Perhaps the simplest way would be to acknowledge that myth is usually the source text (narrative), and translation is one of the possible vehicles of its dissemination. Moreover, Novalis (1798) brought the two terms together by mentioning a "mythic translation" as one of his translation types, alongside grammatical and transformative translation:

A translation is either grammatical, or transformative, or mythic. Of these, mythic translations are translations in the noblest style: they reveal the pure and perfect character of the individual work of art. The work of art they give us is not the actual one, but its ideal. These translations do not yet exist in any full or completed form; but there are clear traces of them in the spirit of many critical and descriptive pieces on works of art, or wherever a poetic spirit is thoroughly melded with a philosophical mind. In part, Greek mythology is a translation of this sort of a national religion; the Madonna of modern times is another such myth. (Novalis 1798, 15; English translation from *Western Translation Theory*, 213)

It is not entirely clear what is meant by the term "mythic translation" here, perhaps except for some undetermined, abstract ideal of translation. On the one hand, it can be a hermeneutic interpretation of some artistic work; on the other, an intersemiotic phenomenon, such as, for example, ekphrasis, or perhaps artistic elaborations of the narratives originally belonging to the oral tradition or symbolic representation of cultural or religious phenomena, which does not exist in any finished form, yet functions as a reference for many works of art. It is therefore a specific case of translation, in which the typical dynamics between the source and target text and the author and translator is disturbed.

To be more precise, we could reiterate the claim made by Polish translation scholar Edward Balcerzan that the major difference between an original artistic text and translation is that the original is intended to appear as a singular,

finished, one-off work of art, while translation is inherently a multiple and renewable process with no end (Balcerzan 2019, 106). In translating myths, on the other hand, the original (source text) is usually of an unstable, polyversional character, which makes such prerequisites of translation as equivalence (cf. Venuti 2004, 5; Kenny 2009, 98; Marais 2019, 14) much less relevant. The role and character of translations of mythical stories is therefore less reproductive and more transformative.

TYPOLOGIES OF TRANSLATION

Speaking of translation, we often think of the notion of interlingual translation by Jakobson. However, some translation scholars with semiotic background tend to understand the term more broadly and are more eager to include translation to, from, or between non-verbal systems, in their general theories. For example, Dinda Gorleé, as a representative of the Peircean semiotic school, postulated an elaboration of a more general theory of signs; one which would provide scope to study all possible translational phenomena, not only linguistic ones (1994, 11). Peeter Torop, as a representative of the Tartu-Moscow school (1997, 24), suggested:

> the concept of total translation, which on one hand means a widening of the range of problems and phenomena that form the object of translation studies. On the other hand, the concept of total translation symbolizes the search for a comprehensive methodology and an attempt to methodologically "translate" the findings of other disciplines into one interdisciplinary field of translation studies.

A decade later, Paolo Fabbri overtly admitted that every semiotic system can be translated into another semiotic system (2008, 161). More recently, a South-African scholar Kobus Marais formulated a universal typology of translations that would involve mediations between all types of verbal and nonverbal semiotic systems. An important caveat to be made is that notions of inter-, intra- and extra-systemic translation proposed by this author are designed as deictic, and therefore always depend on the point of observation, i.e., the same relations in translation can be considered as inter-systemic, or intra-systemic, depending on the context. However, for our considerations, it seems productive to use these notions in order to reorganize the classification of translations departing from Jakobson. Below is a summary of all categories

describing various types of translations, their most general definitions, and their possible respective category in Marais's typology:

Intralinguistic translation (Jakobson 1959)	Translation within one language	Intrasystemic translation (Marais 2019; cf. Eco 2001)
Translation proper (Jakobson 1959)	Translation between two languages	Intersystemic translation (Marais 2019; cf. Eco 2001)
Intersemiotic translation (Jakobson 1959)	Nonverbal translation of a verbal text	Extrasystemic translation (Marais 2019)
Ekphrasis (Krieger 1992; Elleström 2020; Clüver 1998; cf. Bruhn 2000)	Verbal representation of a nonverbal text	
Transduction (e.g., Doležel 1998; Sebeok 1991; Gorlée 1994)	Nonverbal translation of (another) nonverbal text	

The conceptualization of translation as a process which can occur between different semiotic systems entitles us to look at different artistic elaborations of mythical stories from the perspective of translation theory and to include music in these considerations.

THE MYTHICAL STORY OF MEDEA AND ITS INTERSEMIOTIC
TRANSLATIONS INTO MUSIC

The mythical story of the Greek sorceress Medea, portrayed as a semidivine being or as a witch, appears in the following Antique sources:

Apollodorus, *Library*
Apollonius of Rhodes, *Voyage of the Argonauts*
Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*
Hesiod, *Theogony*
Ovid, *Heroides*; *Metamorphoses*
Pindar, *Pythian Odes*
Euripides, *Medea*
Seneca, *Medea* (as Latin *fabula crepidata*).

In Greek mythology, Medea is a princess of Colchis, a daughter of King Aeetes and granddaughter of Helios. According to some sources, she falls in

love with the hero Jason and uses her witchcraft to help him obtain the golden fleece, by putting the dragon guarding it to sleep. Jason and Medea then escape, followed by Aeetes' fleet. In some versions, Medea kills her infant brother, Apsyrtus, and scatters his limbs on the sea to slow down her pursuers.

As Medea continues to perform her witchcraft, Jason becomes more and more wary of her. They move to Corinth, where Jason ultimately decides to leave Medea and marry Creusa, the daughter of the king of Corinth. (At this point the events represented in Euripides' *Medea* begin). For Medea, this means she will have to leave Corinth and become separated from her children. Within one day she is allowed to remain in Corinth before leaving, Medea kills Creusa in revenge by sending her a poisoned robe. Creon also dies of despair, seeing his daughter dead. To maximize Jason's suffering, Medea kills her two children and then leaves for Athens (*Encyclopedia*, 305–7).

Euripides's play, and also later Pierre Corneille's version, were the basis for the libretti of a few French operas, including those by Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Luigi Cherubini and Pascal Dusapin, out of which Cherubini's setting is the most famous one. In its original version, the work belongs to the genre of *opéra comique* and contains spoken dialogues. Interestingly though, the work was firstly popularized in German translation by Georg Friedrich Treitschke with recitatives composed by Franz Lachner (1855), and secondly, in the Italian translation of the Lachner version by Carlo Zangarini (1909). Probably due to the extremely demanding role of Medea (soprano), designed by Cherubini for Madame Scio, the work was not very popular. Thanks to Maria Callas, however, Zangarini's Italian version was revived and is currently the most frequently performed version. Apart from the opera, the myth is also present in 20th-century popular culture, whose Pier Paolo Pasolini's film production *Medea* (1969) is one of the top examples. As for Polish culture, a theatrical play in the convention of satirical cabaret with music ("muzykał") under the title *Medea, moja sympatia* (1977), by Jeremi Przybora and Jerzy Wasowski, stands out. In the present article three different examples of reinterpretations of the mythical story of Medea presented through diverse types of performative arts including music are discussed:

- Luigi Cherubini—*Medea* (opera)
- Pier Paolo Pasolini—*Medea* (film)
- Jeremi Przybora/Jerzy Wasowski—*Medea, moja sympatia* (theatrical play with music, recorded as TV show).

The essential question is about the role of music and its translational and significative potential in an interpretation of a mythical story t. While observing all three versions of the mythical story, we can distinguish the following categories of phenomena translatable into music:

(1) Affects and emotions (Cherubini)

The mythical story of Medea provides a space for depicting the heroine's inner life by portraying her complex emotional states, which drove her to the terrible revenge and a series of murders. As Constantin Floros wrote, "psychologists maintain that love and hatred are enemy siblings. There are probably few people who have not at some time experienced love-hate—that peculiar in-between state between affection and aversion" (2012, 34). The aria, *Vous voyez de vos fils la mère....* (Italian: *Dei tuoi figli*) is such an example of an ambiguous love-hate relationship of Medea and Jason: while still passionately in love, at the same time she feels hatred and resentment towards her husband upon his betrayal. Cherubini used the conventional operatic devices of his day, such as contrasting a lyrical melody with abrupt rhetorical exclamations full of rage, to show the unpredictability of the protagonist's character.

(2) Musical cultures (Pasolini)

The 1969 Pier Paolo Pasolini's filmic adaptation of the Euripides' play stars Maria Callas as an actress, although the film soundtrack does not contain a single note of her singing. The music score for the film is composed of various recordings of folk and ethnic music, including Japanese, Tibetan, Balkan and Persian tunes. It seems that creating a sense of exoticism and remoteness was what affected the director's choice of music: facing the lack of proper historical reconstructions of Ancient Greek music (which would be much more available today), he transposed the feeling of temporal distance into geographic and cultural distance. Moreover, the opening song of the film, *The Segah Mode*, is performed by Hossein Malek on santur—a hammered dulcimer popular in the Middle East and probably connected to the Biblical ψαλτήριον [psalterion]. This is the same instrument on which Zorba the Greek played in the famous novel by Nikos Kazantzakis. It seems that the use of this instrument points the listener, in an indirect way, as a Peircean indexical sign, to the Greek culture.

(3) Symbolic meanings (Przybora/Wasowski)

In 1977, Polish poet, writer and satirist, Jeremi Przybora converted Euripides' play into a satirical comedy *Medea, moja sympatia* with music by Jerzy Wasowski (both of them were famous as members of Kabaret Starszych Panów [Elderly Gentlemen's Cabaret], one of the most popular TV shows in communist Poland). In Przybora's version, which is overtly described on stage as "przetworzenie twórcze" (a "creative re-creation"), the events in the story are arranged in a comic way. When Medea's sons' tragic fate is revealed to them by the oracle, they persuade Medea not to kill them, convincing her they will play dead in front of their father to bring him to despair. Eventually, Jason indeed faints over the pretend dead bodies of his children, but this also turns out fake. As the concluding song says, the adaptor should be praised because although he made the play shallower, he also lessened the slaughter a little bit. All of this makes up for a parody of the myth itself, but even more of the theatrical convention in general.

The music accompanying the spectacle is basically in the form of songs helping to build its comic, entertaining atmosphere. Jerzy Wasowski's musical style is mostly rooted in jazz, with elements of big beat and some influences of classical music. In its overall character, the score is contemporary popular music—yet in a few numbers it incorporates some archaic elements, e.g., the song "Kazirodki" (Little incests) is composed in Mixolydian and Phrygian scales. The song clearly alludes to the Oedipus complex in the two boys. On the other hand, Medea's revenge song "Jazon" (Jason) is written in Dorian scale, with a characteristic series of fauxbourdon chords. These elements awaken the feeling of the mythical space of "long ago and far away" and allow the listener to travel in time. Even though the modal scales used in the song are obviously medieval and are not historically tied to the original Greek music, they also evoke Greece in a symbolic way, if only through their names. Similarly, the musical rhythms based on metric feet derived from Greek poetry remain a distant, yet continuous link to the Ancient Greek culture: in a humorous and parodic marching song "Drep, Drep, do Teb" (Tread, tread to Thebes) principally iambic meter is heard in the sung part, accompanied by anapestic calls of the wind instruments; both metric feet are typical for martial music (Grimalt 2020, 157).

CONCLUSIONS

As it has been stated already, according to Balcerzan, the essence of translation is the multiplicity and renewability of the process. The same qualities belong to an artistic reinterpretation of a mythical story which, according to Eero Tarasti (2021, 18), is intended to establish a relationship between the present and mythical past. Also, although Euripides' play is a fundamental reference (source text) for all the aforementioned interpretations, the boundaries between the original version and translation seem to have become fuzzy; since the mythical story has multiple source versions at its core, the artistic reinterpretations of the myth are less constrained by the necessity of reproducing the original, and function as autonomous works.

Another important aspect of all three interpretations is that in each of them performance plays a prominent role. Performance, by definition, is human action—an action that involves not only the attention of the participants, but also their activity; it gives the performer a feeling of things happening in reality, here and now. According to Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), the aim of performance is to establish a given reality (38). It seems, therefore, that performing arts and audiovisual media productions provide an environment especially conducive for the mythical stories to become re-enacted and renewed in contemporary forms, and therefore brought closer to us today. Music, both as an independent performing art itself, and a part of the intermedial entity, plays a prominent role in this process of establishing a given reality thanks to its ability to translate meanings through the use of different signs that stand, among others, for human emotions, activities, cultures and ethnicities, or historical periods.

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Summary

While myth and translation are two different phenomena, their polyversional character and the ways of their dissemination make it possible to establish a common ground between them. According to Edward Balcerzan, the main difference between an original artistic text and translation is that the original is intended as a finished work of art, while translation is inherently a multiple and renewable process—a quality shared with an artistic reinterpretation of myth, which, in turn, might also involve translating the content across semiotic systems.

This article discusses the role of music in the meaning-making process in three works based on Euripides' play *Medea*: an opera by Luigi Cherubini; Pier Paolo Pasolini's film production and a Polish theatrical play *Medea, moja sympatia* by Jeremi Przybora with music by Jerzy Wasowski), recorded as a TV show. Music plays a prominent role in these interpretations, using signs standing for human emotions, activities, cultures, or historical periods.