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«Das Land der Griechen mit der Seele suchend»:

Prometheus, Beethoven and the role of the founding myths in Strauss and Hofmannsthal's reworking Die Ruinen von Athen

Abstract

Among the lesser results of the collaboration between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the Festspiel *Die Ruinen von Athen* (1924) plays a key-role, as a unique reworking of two Beethoven's compositions – namely the incidental music written for the inauguration of the German theatre in Pest (1812) having the same title and *Die Geschöpfe von Prometheus*, the only ballet in the catalogue of the Meister of Bonn. The freedom in treating original materials as far as the organization and interpolation of musical numbers are concerned, actually reveals a deep carefulness on one hand in preserving the single pieces authentic, on the other in giving to the global form of Festspiel a new interpretation, possibly responding to the increased need for mythology by the modern age and the redefinition of a *Kulturnation*, with reference to the early 20th century German panorama.

1. Introduction

The adaptation of Beethoven's Festspiel *Die Ruinen von Athen* by Hofmannsthal and Strauss – including some pieces of music from the only Ballet composed by the Meister of Bonn, *Die Geschöpfe von Prometheus* – surely belongs to the most unknown pages of the music history of the XX century. The first performance took place on September 20, 1924, at Operntheater in Wien with a repeat the following year. Subsequently it had no result up to recent times, except for some performances as purely orchestral pieces, without recitatives and theatrical parts¹.

As far as recordings are concerned, the only version which could be noted is the live performance by the Bamberger Symphoniker Orchestra and Chor under the baton of Rickenbacher, released by Koch Classics in collaboration with the Bayerischer

¹ Bamberger Smphoniker 1998 (conductor: Karl Anton Rickenbacher), Bonner Beethovenfest 2001 (conductor: Philippe Entremont) and in most recent time Dresdner Philharmonie 2006 (again under the baton of Entremont), Nürnberger Symphoniker 2009 (conductor: Till Fabian Weser), Staatsorchester Stuttgart 2013 (conductor: Constantinos Carydis).

Rundfunk, as part of a set effectively named *The Unknown Richard Strauss*². Even the publishing results are quite scarce, since the only existing score is actually a piano reduction by Otto Singer dating back to 1925³. Eventually, the work has been widely neglected by musicologists, perhaps due to its character of reworking.

Therefore, it represents a fascinating and unique case in Beethoven's reception: moving from two of his less popular compositions, though belonging to the composer's maturity⁴, *Die Ruinen von Athen* ended up being enumerated among the less known works in the Strauss catalogue itself. On the other hand, it allows the scholars a glimpse of Strauss and Hofmannsthal's concept of music, dance and theatre, constituting a paradigmatic case of how the two artists reacted at the opening of the modern age with an experimental work, by reinterpreting both the myths: the Greek one as a first and Beethoven's as a second. Reworking is in this case a device for introducing the classical confrontation between myth and modernity: consequently, Beethoven's opus, as often happened in the XIX and XX century, might be regarded as a necessary intermediary, multiplying levels of interpretation and offering kaleidoscopic perspectives on understanding.

Before focusing on the resumption of Hofmannsthal and Strauss it will then be appropriate to recall some features of Beethoven's works.

2. Beethoven's *Ruinen von Athen* op.113

Die Ruinen von Athen op.113 is often classified as 'incidental music'⁵. Written by Beethoven in 1811 for a script by August von Kotzebue, it was performed for the first time at the inauguration of the German Theatre in Pest in 1812⁶. The work was commissioned by Franz Joseph Karl, Archduke of Austria, who wanted to celebrate and strengthen Hungary's loyalty to the Austrian monarchy through this gift. In 1808 Kotzebue was in charge of writing a Festspiel for the opening event, presenting a musical prelude and postlude for which Beethoven was commissioned. The music was

² With the participation of Bodil Arnesen (soprano), Yaron Windmüller (baritone) and Franz-Josef Selig (bass). Label: Deutsche Grammophon (DG) Copyright: 1999 Universal Music Classics & Jazz, a division of Universal Music GmbH.

³ Published by A. Fürstner, Berlin 1925.

⁴ Prometheus was composed in 1801 and is numbered as op. 43, *Die Ruinen von Athen* dates back to 1811 but was published posthumously as op.113.

⁵ The expression 'incidental music' or 'stage music', in use since the second half of the XIX c. and probably derived from German 'Inzidentmusik', originally indicated all kinds of music occurring on the stage – songs, dances, marches – within a dialogue scenes, referring to its 'intradiegetic' character, rather than 'casual' (cf. NGrove online Dictionary: 'Incidental music' – 15.02.2017)

⁶ Buda and Pest were united in one city only in 1872.

composed in a few weeks, but despite this the deadline for the representation – set on October 4, 1811, the emperor's name day – could not be met and the work had its premiere only on February 9 of the following year. The sequence of numbers as appeared in the final version of the work included:

1. Overture (Andante con moto, G minor – Allegro, ma non troppo, G major)
2. Chorus: Tochter des mächtigen Zeus (Andante poco sostenuto, E-flat major)
3. Duet (a Greek and a Greek girl): Ohne Verschulden Knechtschaft dulden (Andante con moto – Poco più mosso, G minor)
4. Dervish Chorus: Du hast in deines Ärmels Falten (Allegro, ma non troppo – E minor)
5. Turkish March (Vivace – B-flat major)
6. Music from the back of the stage (Allegro assai ma non troppo – C major)
7. March with chorus, Op. 114: Schmückt die Altare (moderate Assai – E-flat major)
8. Recitative: Mit Freude reger
9. Chorus: Wir tragen empfängliche Herzen im Busen (Allegretto ma non troppo – G major)
10. Air and Chorus: Will unser Genius noch einen Wunsch gewähren? (Adagio – C major) Er ist's! Wir sind erhört! (Allegro con brio – C major)
11. Chorus: Heil unserm König! (Allegro con fuoco – A major)

As reported in the table, it consisted of eleven numbers, with a prelude originally having the title *König Stefan*,⁷ as a homage to the first Hungarian king, and a postlude with the same title of the festival, *Die Ruinen von Athen*. The composition also includes some significant numbers, like the *Dervishes Chorus*, the March with chorus *Schmückt die Altare* (later executed autonomously and catalogued as Beethoven's opus number 114), and especially the *Turkish March*, adapted for orchestra from an earlier composition, namely the *Theme and variations for piano op.76*, composed by Beethoven himself in 1809.

Some decades later, in 1852, Franz Liszt, in his work of transcription and arrangement of beethovenian compositions, derived a Fantasy for piano and orchestra, entitled *Fantasie über Motive aus Beethovens Ruinen von Athen S.122* and first performed by the composer himself in his famous concert in Pest on January, 6 1853⁸.

As for the plot, the Festspiel is set at Beethoven and Kotzebue's time. The goddess Athena, revived after hundreds of years, finds her city and the temple dedicated to her – the Parthenon – destroyed and the whole region invaded by the Ottomans. Hearing the dialogue between a Greek and a girl (*Duet*), she learns that her people cannot stand the

⁷ The *Overture* in g minor was published separately in 1823 in Vienna by Steiner with opus number 113 and is sometimes performed as an autonomous instrumental piece. The first complete edition of the whole work appeared posthumously in 1846.

⁸ First edition by Siegel, Leipzig in 1865; dedication to Nikolay Rubinstein.

harassment of the Turks (*'Ohne Verschulden Knechtschaft dulden'*): this encourages them to rebel. In an attempt to seek support, the daughter of Zeus leaves for Rome with Hermes, but once again the eternal city is found devastated by barbarians, too. She was therefore persuaded that civilization now flourished elsewhere in northern Europe and guided to the city of Pest, where in fact the Habsburg monarchy reigns. There, the two Olympian gods have the opportunity to participate in the premiere of the newly built theatre and to witness the absolute success of the muses Thalia and Melpomene. The human qualities that seemed hopelessly lost, are consequently rediscovered in Pest, under the reign of Emperor Franz. For this reason, among the busts of the two above mentioned muses, Zeus puts the emperor, too, who is symbolically crowned by Athena. The Festspiel ends significantly with the chorus *Heil unserm König! Heil! Dankend schwören wir aufs Neue alte ungarische Treue.*

From a musical viewpoint, a few elements deserve some attention: focusing on the most significant numbers of the composition, for instance, the formal originality of the *Ouverture* should be mentioned. Although reflecting the tonal structure of a sonata-form, it differs remarkably from ordinary models with regard to the thematic features. The Introduction (*Andante con moto*, g minor) is followed by the first theme (*Allegro ma non troppo*, characterized by the timbre of the oboe) and subsequently by the transition to the second thematic area (always performed by the oboe in the dominant tone). An original aspect is in the development, which, entirely based on the technique of the *deminutio*, is based on introductive and transitional materials with no reference to the main themes. The Recapitulation is only marked by the return to the main tone (g minor), but again without being thematically identified.

Concerning the orchestration, it might be noticed that, besides the traditional orchestra with soprano, bass and choir, Beethoven employs also woods in pairs and even four horns, an unusual number for that time⁹. “Roaring” percussions are then prescribed by the author in the autograph to emphasize the famous *Turkish March* – timbre effects associated with the roar of the Turkish bands, according to the sensitiveness of the time. “*Turquerie*”, however, did not represent a Beethovenian extravagance, but a very popular style already in the late eighteenth century, and codified by some musical theorists. Among the various distinctive stylistic features of the “Turkish music” as described by Schubart, for instance, there is the use of third intervals and of four-note groups: it is worth noticing that Beethoven’s march in this sense recalls the most famous one by Mozart (Sonata in A Major K331 for piano, third movement, also known as “Rondo alla turca”) simply overturning the diastematic profile of the second sentence as in a horizontally axed mirror.

⁹ Note that the same instrumentation appears in the Ninth Symphony, in the variations of the Turkish march of the Finale.

3. *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus*

Prometheus is the only ballet composed by Beethoven. Chronologically preceding *Die Ruinen von Athen*, it was first represented at the Burgertheater in Vienna on March 28, 1801. The following year Beethoven himself was to prepare a piano reduction¹⁰, dedicated to the princess Lichnowski, the wife of one of the most renowned Beethoven's protectors. The orchestral Overture was the first to be published in 1804 with the original Italian title *Gli uomini di Prometeo*¹¹, later definitely amended as *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus*.

The ballet was the result of a collaboration between Beethoven and one of the protagonists of the Viennese musical scene, who already had great reputation and appreciation: the choreographer and dancer Neapolitan Salvatore Viganò (Naples, 1769 – Milan, 1821)¹².

Since the original choreography of the ballet has not survived and several changes were prepared over time, it would be of little use here to propose a definitive version. In general, the mythological theme might be summarized as the endless struggle of Man for the conquest of reason, with a strong reinterpretation of Aeschylus' Prometheus in an enlightened key. The protagonist of such an allegory, as known, is the titan Prometheus, sublime spirit who steals fire – as a symbol for the light of reason – from the gods and gifts it to men, who until that time were creatures modelled in clay and lacking any reason and sensitivity for beauty. In the ballet, the creatures are symbolized by two animated statues that, thanks to the power of harmony, have access to human passions. Conducted to Parnassus by Prometheus, they are entrusted to Apollo, to be educated in the arts: consequently, they are introduced to the musical art by Amphion, Arion and Orpheus, to the tragedy and comedy by Melpomene and Thalia, to the pastoral dance by Terpsichore and Pan and to the heroic dance by Bacchus.

The outcome of such a collaboration between Viganò and Beethoven, however, seemed quite disappointing according to the Viennese contemporary reviewers, who lukewarmly welcomed the work as “too erudite”¹³; Haydn himself, to whom Beethoven submitted the score, gave a severe judgment. The evaluation of the work did not improve in the years to come: music criticism has never shown much enthusiasm

¹⁰ BEETHOVEN [1801].

¹¹ It was originally a “heroic allegorical ballet” in two acts conceived by Viganò himself, later organized by Beethoven in sixteen numbers.

¹² Nephew of Boccherini, he early started his career the scene in Rome, gaining great fame in Italy and abroad. In Madrid he met Jean Georges Noverre and played an important role in the reform process of the ballet, giving birth to the so-called *coreodramma*, a form of *ballet d'action*, which included ancient forms of mime.

¹³ Cf. KOPITZ (2009, p. 1116).

towards Beethoven's ballet, perhaps reproaching him for not having achieved the same artistic outcomes of other masterpieces. Surely it should be mentioned that for Beethoven, *Prometheus* was an experimental confrontation with a genre who he was not used to: as well as for the more renowned opera *Fidelio*, also the ballet represented an *apax* in his catalogue of works, as already mentioned. Furthermore, in this last case, the music had of course to be subjected to several restrictions and specific stage requirements – not by coincidence the most original points are found in the free parts. However, the stylistic variety and some taste for experimentation might be appreciated, once again in the orchestration, where Beethoven uses particular timbres, such as the harp or the basset horn: the first is involved in the *Adagio* (n. 5) of the Second Act, in the introduction and later in the dialogue with the woodwinds (flute, clarinet, bassoon) and a cello solo in a dance pattern in 6/8; the second in an exchange of passes with the oboe in the *Andante* (n. 14)¹⁴.

However, what is worthy of being remarked is Beethoven's ability to deal with heroic themes of humanity, which will be revealed in later works – f.e. in the Third Symphony (*Eroica*), or in his variations in C minor (also known with the epithet "heroic") – and look already evident in this earlier work. The thematic proximity and kinship between the musical material of the afore mentioned compositions and the *Prometheus* itself appears anything but random.

3. *Die Ruinen von Athen* by Strauss and Hofmannsthal

After shortly recalling the synopsis and the main features of Beethoven's compositions, the reworking by Strauss and Hofmannsthal – apparently consisting of a revival and juxtaposition of pieces of two works ideologically conflicting, both inconsistent with each other and anachronistic at Strauss' time – seems at least questionable.

Retracing back the creative process, it seems that the composer's primitive idea of an adaptation first arose in Spring 1922 while working on Schumann's *Carnaval* and was initially aimed only at *Prometheus*, whose choreographic alterations however offered very rare chances of reconstruction already at the time of Strauss. This might be a reason why the composer turned his librettist's and his own attention to *Die Ruinen von Athen*, which in any case could not provide in their turn sufficient musical material to be reworked in a new piece, according to him.

¹⁴ Morani also underlined that some interesting features appearing in later works, here already detectable: for instance, the Introduction connecting the Overture with the first number (Poco adagio) echoes the storm described in the Sixth Symphony – cf. MORANI, *Beethoven e Prometeo* in Ζήτησις: http://www.rivistazetesis.it/prometeo_beethoven.htm (15.02.2017).

Referring to this, Del Mar writes that the integration of Beethoven's materials certainly responded to a precise desire of the composer: «to bring some of this out of its inevitable neglect was certainly a labour of love»¹⁵. Hofmannsthal reacted with a piece of theatre and ballet: a new form of Festspiel, in which from two works, he managed to make one by directing all the attention to the essence of music – including choirs and sung numbers, which should have preserved the intention of the author as faithfully as possible:¹⁶

I have given thought more than once to *Die Ruinen von Athen*. This is both a difficult and at the same time most attractive task; I imagine a kind of ballet pantomime but with choruses, perhaps even with arias. It will have to be something which does not fly in the face of the original intention. To succeed in this would give me immense pleasure.

Preserving the music of Beethoven, however, was not meant as a prevention from giving the Festspiel a new appearance and meaning. Indeed, it should be mentioned that the term Festspiel itself evoked directly ancient Greek theatrical performances which took place during city festivals. But in German-speaking countries it brought also some strong “Wagnerian implications”, since Wagner was the first to widely employ the term, both for the tetralogy of the *Ring* – with the subtitle of *Bühnenfestspiel* – and for *Parsifal* – defined by the author a *Bühnenweihfestspiel*. The same theatre in Bayreuth was the first in Germany to be called *Festspielhaus*. Consequently, the two authors were actually requested to concoct a completely new form, far from the encomiastic work by Beethoven, but not necessarily corresponding to Wagner's ideal of *Gesamtkunstwerk*: a condition which eventually left them some degree of freedom in rearranging pre-existing musical materials.

The final version appeared as in the following table, where the additions to the original scheme of *Die Ruinen* by Beethoven have been marked in italic:

Ouverture Prometheus

1. Chor: Tochter des mächtigen Zeus (Andante poco sostenuto, E-flat Major)
2. Duett: das Mädchen und der Grieche (Andante con moto – Poco più mosso, G minor)
3. Türkisch Marsch (Vivace – B-flat major)
4. *Duett: das Mädchen und der Grieche*
5. Derwisch Chor: Du hast in deines Ärmels Falten (Allegro, ma non troppo – E minor
March with chorus,
6. *Melodram: Der Fremde*

¹⁵ DEL MAR (1986, 37).

¹⁶ Hofmannsthal to Strauss on 15.04.1922, in SACKWILLE-WEST (1980, 351).

7. *Arie: Der Fremde*
8. *Intermezzo (Nr.1 Prometheus)*
9. *Auftritt des Fremden*
10. *Auftritt und Tanz von fünf Mädchen*
11. *Auftritt und Tanz von fünf Jünglingen*
12. *Pastorale: Auftritt eines Jünglings und einer Bacchantin*
13. *Rüpelhaften Spott-Tanz der vier Faune*
14. *Ein Zug springender Bacchantinnen, die Faune*
15. *Bacchanal*
16. *Marsch und Chor*

The work begins with the Overture of *Prometheus* and not that from *Die Ruinen*. Subsequently, the first number, assigned to the choir invisible because placed outside of the scene, follows, with a partially modified text: differently from the original where the speech is addressed to Athena, the ruins themselves are here invoked. The curtain goes up and the decay of Athens suddenly appears in all its desolation. The spectators, however, are no longer Athena and Hermes, but a new mysterious character introduced by Hofmannsthal and Strauss: the *Wanderer* (or the Stranger), whose identity the Greek and the Maiden are questioning about in the following duet. Two Turkish numbers (Choir of the Dervishes and Turkish March) as *Charakterstücke* restore the exotic atmospheres evoked by Beethoven, with a repeat of the second half of the duet interpolated between the two. A practical reason might underlie this choice, as pointed out by Dal Mer: the consistent presence on the stage of several performers acting as Greeks could underline the increased importance of the Greek population in the reinterpretation by Hofmannsthal.

The subsequent number, the monologue of the mysterious *Wanderer*, flows directly into the air of the two horns, originally sung by the priest in the Hungarian temple of the arts, as an invocation to Athens, while now working as a perfect pretext for a long interpolation of numbers from *Prometheus*. This includes: the first 78 measures of nr.1; the famous *Adagio – Andante, quasi Allegretto* with the harp, unique use of the instrument in the entire Beethoven's opus; nr.6, without the last two and a half; the Pastoral, nr.10; the *Terzettino – Grottesco*. with the first 106 original measures replaced by a short introduction referring to the nr. 6; the *Marcia. Allegro con brio – Presto*, without the first 113 original measures; the Final in Eb Major: *Finale. Allegretto – Allegro molto – Presto*, without the last eight measures and directly plugging into *Marcia* and conclusive Choir of *Die Ruinen*.

These numbers are accompanied by a series of Greek dances by Kröllner, initially interpreted by the *Wanderer* as a dream. Subsequently, as the character awakens, he realizes that the dream has become real and he is invited to join the final Bacchanal. As

already experienced in *Elektra*'s Final, the dreamlike Dionysian dance is here assumed by Hofmannsthal as an efficacious alternative to the "heroic" Final of the *Prometheus*, revealing the impossibility of a solution.

In the case of *Die Ruinen*, however, the hero is absorbed by higher thoughts and decides to join the Panathenaic procession of priests, arriving, in the final climax, alongside the same Pallas Athena.

4. *Some comments in the margin of the reworking*

As previously mentioned, if the inclusion of certain passages from *Prometheus* seem consistent and appropriate – see the *Adagio* with the harp and the *Pastorale* – others do not appear totally convincing. Particularly, the replacement of the Overture from *Die Ruinen* with the one from *Prometheus* arouses some perplexities: if the goal was the revival of Beethoven's works less known to ordinary public, the Overture of *Prometheus* was certainly more renowned and performed as an autonomous orchestral piece. Why then preferring it instead of the other Overture, which also presented interesting formal originality? It seems that Strauss was not convinced of its effectiveness in the incipit and judged it not «impressive» enough, as he wrote to Hofmannsthal¹⁷: «I would like to [...] open instead with the chorus and a suitably modified text». In this way, however, thematic references to the next numbers got lost, since they were appearing in the original Overture of the composition, but of course could not be present in that of *Prometheus*, at the expense of the global cohesion of the form.

In order to avoid such problems of coherence and to enforce the unity of a patchwork-like composition, Hofmannsthal perceived the need to introduce an element of cohesion, which was soon identified in the new figure of the *Wanderer* or *Stranger*, not coincidentally entrusted with the central recitative. As in a melodrama's recitative, the speech of the character over the instrumental part – a sort of dialogue with the music composed by Strauss on purpose – is a device both to integrate the *Wanderer* in the plot and to let him act as a liaison between the two sections. The treatment reserved to such a mysterious key-figure was summarized by Hofmannsthal to Strauss as follows:¹⁸

Dear Dr. Strauss,

After racking my brain for a while I have, I believe, arrived at a solution how to introduce fittingly and in good taste the *Geschoepfe des Prometheus into the ballet spectacle Die Ruinen von Athen* [...]. Taking the *Wanderer* or *Stranger* as an idealized German artist of

¹⁷ Strauss to Hofmannsthal on 25.05.1922, in SACKWILLE-WEST (1980, 352).

¹⁸ Hofmannsthal to Strauss on 26.05.1922, in SACKWILLE-WEST (1980, 353).

those half-forgotten days and giving him the line “Das Land der Griechen mit der Seele suchend” as a kind of motto, I present him as he meditates on the ruins of the past in the deserted market place of Athens and is lighted, like Goethe, by a Promethean, productive, creative spark (which he expresses in the aria with the horns). In short I turn him into Prometheus himself, surrounded by revived figures of the classic age who dance to the rhythm of the ballet music, until at the end we come to the vision of the Panathenaic procession (march and chorus) as the crowning climax.

In the above quoted passage an explicit reference to Goethe emerges – namely the quotation of his verse from *Ifigenia in Tauris*,¹⁹ which had become a sort of short motto to indicate the general Romantic *Sensucht* towards Greek antiquity. However, the reference is also motivated by the fact that Goethe himself wrote a *Prometheus*, too, dating back between 1772 and 1774. The Promethean figure of Beethoven, personifying ideals like the emancipation from authorities and ideologies, seems moreover imbued with Goethe’s reinterpretation of the myth, despite the controversial relationship between the two artists. Even Beethoven’s title of the work, mentioning the human beings as «die Geschöpfe» of Prometheus, might be directly linked to the last verse of the poem.²⁰

Hier sitz ich, forme Menschen
Nach meinem Bilde,
Ein Geschlecht, das mir gleich sei,
Zu Leiden, weinen,
genießen und zu freuen sich,
Und dein nicht zu achten,
Wie ich!

In the reworking by Strauss, however, the figure of Prometheus is effectively abandoned: he does not appear in the action on the stage and no explicit references to the character are present. Similarly, the goddess Athena is just indicated by Hofmannsthal with the generic name of “Göttin”, i.e. a female deity, without a precise personification.

If on a narrative level the deviation from some original themes and characters is evident and probably perceived as necessary by both authors, from a musical viewpoint an absolute coherence and harmony among Beethoven’s numbers included in the reworking is desired. A clear example is represented by the music accompanying the

¹⁹ Reworking of Euripides’ *Ἰφιγένεια ἐν Ταύροις*, it was first written in prose and performed on April 6, 1779 and subsequently rewritten twice: in 1781 in prose and in 1786 in verses. The famous verse above mentioned is from the First Act.

²⁰ GOETHE c.1998, pp. 44-46.

recitative – that «musical ground-work [...] just a soft touch of the strings here and there»²¹ as requested by Hofmannsthal to support the monologue of his character, anything but arbitrary or pretentious. In order to avoid that such a “not even the most fastidious ear should be able to discover a discrepancy [...] between this particle and Beethoven’s style»²², Strauss used the thematic elements from materials and intervals with evidence related to Beethoven’s Third and Fifth Symphony, so doubly ensuring the internal coherence: on one hand in fact, the only truly original integration is based on Beethoven’s own materials, on the other hand, it had been Beethoven himself who quoted in the Final of *Prometheus* the theme of the *Eroica* – which, as previously underlined, was actually recurrent also in other works of his opus.

Furthermore, when the compositional contribution to the work by Strauss is taken into account, it could be asserted that, apart from the internal reorganization of the material, it appears rather insignificant: differently from his rearrangements of other works (such as Mozart’s), in this case Beethoven’s music remains almost unchanged, similarly to Liszt’s attitude while transcribing Beethoven’s work: a sort of reverential fear in approaching the work of the Meister of Bonn.

Of course, one of the unsolved enigmas of the entire work is concerning the identity of the mysterious character: Prometheus, Goethe, Beethoven, Hofmannsthal himself? However, as observed by Del Mar about the *Wanderer*²³,

His identity remains to the end in doubt and one cannot escape the feeling that even Hofmannsthal was never really very clear in his mind on the subject: Pygmalion, Prometheus, Goethe, perhaps Hofmannsthal himself in some degree if truth be told.

It should be mentioned here that from the first projects concerning the adaptation of the drama *Elektra* for the musical theatre until the death of Hofmannsthal, the two artists worked with myths, rewriting and correcting them, experiencing new textual and musical forms, embracing both elements from myth and fairy tale, from tragedy and comedy, thus responding to a process of modernization of the myth and to an increasing need for mythology by the modern age. Both have worked on the myth from the beginning as a pursuit of modernity, as an attempt to overcome the present contingencies through the musical theatre. Consequently, the fact that the original mythological characters, such as Prometheus and Athena, are not clearly spelled out, but mostly alluded to, and some others – like the *Wanderer* – not easily recognizable, is symptomatic evidence that²⁴

²¹ Hofmannsthal to Strauss on 04.06.1924, in SACKWILLE-WEST (1980, 384).

²² Strauss to Hofmannsthal on 26.05.1922, in SACKWILLE-WEST (1980, 353).

²³ DEL MAR 1986.

²⁴ BERGHAHN (2014, 133).

Für beide war die Antike, waren Goethe und Beethoven, Mozart und Shakespeare, Calderon und Molière trigonometrische Punkte, von denen aus die Verwerfungen der Moderne und insbesondere die des Krieges vermessen und neu justiert werden konnten.

Such considerations could then be extended, since the kaleidoscopic perspective taken by Hofmannsthal and Strauss is not limited to the recovery of the ancient, or of the antiquity through Beethoven, but it tends to create a kind of Germanic pantheon, whose first goal is the revival of cultural models reinterpreted in a modern way – a cultural action that in Hofmannsthal's intention falls under the name of ‘conservative revolution’.

It is significant that such a project of mythological theatre is placed for both artists as the sign of a crisis – for Hofmannsthal a linguistic crisis, for Strauss a crisis of traditional musical forms²⁵.

Eventually, as pointed out by Graydon, the reworked *Ruinen* should not be assumed as a merely «hypostasized devaluation of *Kultur* following the defeat in World War I»; on the contrary, they would fulfil a positive role in the so-called post-war process of «redefinition of the German *Kultur*», in the light of its most prominent heroes:

The Strauss/Hofmannsthal *Ruinen* project and its cultural-political implications testify to what by the 1920s had become an increasingly fluid interpretation of both Beethoven the man and his music [...]. Beethoven and his legacy had become critical to the aesthetic of musical modernists and conservatives alike. The composer's seemingly innate “heroism” and the idealism his music appeared to signify practically underwrote the romantic *tópos* in the XIX c. German culture, prompting Thomas Mann to later declare music the “*most German of the arts*”.

²⁵ GRAYDON (2005, 631).

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