

“DON’T YOU REMEMBER ME, ADAM?” THE CHARACTER OF LILITH IN PÉTER EÖTVÖS’S OPERAS

Zsuzsanna Könyves-Tóth

1. Lilith, Adam’s first wife

1.1 The myth of Lilith

The name of Lilith may be unknown to many. Most people have never heard of Adam’s first wife, the mother of demons, or a symbol of feminism. The book titled *Hebrew Myths*¹—which Péter Eötvös used while composing his opera *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*—mentions more sources, such as *Alphabet of Ben Sira* or *Yalqut Reubeni*, that document her legend. From this book we learned that “God created man and woman in His own image” from the earth, and called her Lilith. Adam and Lilith began to fight. She asked, “Why must I lie beneath you?” and continued, “I also was made from dust and am therefore your equal.” Because of their disagreement she pronounced the Ineffable Name and flew away into the sky. In response to Adam’s prayer, God sent three angels after her to bring her back, but she refused to return and instead agreed to give birth and kill one hundred demon children every day.²

1.2 Lilith in Eötvös’s operas

The idea of involving the myth of Lilith as a fourth figure next to Adam, Eva, and Lucifer³ in the two operas by Péter Eötvös, *Die Tragödie des Teufels* and *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*, based on the famous Faustian drama by Imre Madách, *The Tragedy of Man*, was suggested by Mari Mezei, the composer’s wife, and the librettist Albert Ostermaier. To balance the ratio of men and women, good and evil, human and devil, they created a “beautiful devil girl”—as the libretto says—whom Lucifer names after himself: Lucy.⁴ As Eötvös stated, all he knew about Lilith was that some women’s rights organizations use her name:

We were raised according to the Bible, but Lilith is missing from there. [...] Based on different texts she is the first wife of Adam who, similar to him, was created from dust. At the same time, Lilith is also a daemon, mother of the daemon kings. Overall, she is a personality who symbolizes

¹ Graves, Robert and Patai, Raphael. 2005 [1963]. *Hebrew Myth. The Book of Genesis*. Manchester: Carcanet Press.

² Ibid. 65–66.

³ I will use the names as they appear in the German libretto.

⁴ Eötvös Péter and Amaral, Pedro. 2005. *parlando–rubato. Beszélgetések, monológok és egyéb kitérők*. Budapest: Rózsavölgyi. 267.

independence, energy and explosiveness. If our starting point is that she was the first wife of Adam, then it would be tremendously interesting to assume that we don't originate from Eva, but Lilith...⁵

The figure of Lilith inspired Eötvös, and during the rehearsals of *Die Tragödie des Teufels*—which premiered in Munich in 2010—it was clear for him that instead of Lucifer, he had to put Lilith in the center of his opera.⁶ He started to work on the text with his wife with the agreement of Ostermaier. They kept the nine scenes where Lilith appears on the stage and asked Ostermaier to write three more. Eötvös created an entirely new work with a new title: *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*, which premiered in Neuen Oper Wien in 2013.⁷

2. The character of Lilith in the two Eötvös operas

2.1 Lucy vs. Lilith

My research showing the differences between the musical appearance of Lucy and Lilith is mainly based on interviews conducted by me with the actress who played Lilith in the second opera, Annette Schön Müller,⁸ two video recordings of the opera premiers,⁹ an official CD of the second opera,¹⁰ and Péter Eötvös's manuscripts, which are in the Peter Eötvös Collection of Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel.

Between the sketches of *Die Tragödie des Teufels* a table can be found showing the presence of the figures in the scenes.

Die Tragödie des Teufels

	1	2	3	3/b	4	5	5/b	6	7	8	9	9/b	10	10/b	11	12	12/b
ADAM		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	
EVA		X	X					X	X	X	X				X	X	
LUCY	X	X	X					X	X	X	X		X		X	X	
LU[CIFER]	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
JER						X		X	X		X					X	
3 RUM	X			X		X	X	X	X		X					X	
SKEL	X		X					X	X	X	X				X		
STRU	X							X	X	X	X				X		
DER L	X					X		X	X	X	X				X		
ARK	X		X			X		X	X	X	X				X		
BORIS	X		X					X	X	X	X				X		

Table 1

⁵ The original language is Hungarian; the translation is my own. Hollós Máté. 23 January 2014. *Eötvös Péter: Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*. [Programme notes] Budapest: Művészetek Palotája. 5–6.

⁶ Ibid. 6.

⁷ Eötvös and Amaral, 2015. 228.

⁸ The interview is in audio format in German language.

⁹ In the library of BMC the amateur, unpublished recordings of both operas can be found.

¹⁰ Eötvös Péter. 2016. *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*. [Audio recording] Budapest: BMC CD.

When I supplement this with my own table of *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*, we can immediately see two things: Eötvös has reduced the characters to a quartet and two trio choruses, and while in the first opera it was Lucifer who sang in almost every picture, now Lilith took his place as the main character of the opera.

Paradise reloaded (Lilith)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
ADAM		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
EVA		X	X	X	X	X			X		X	
LILITH	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
LUCIFER	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	
CHR DER DREI MÄNNER	X	X	X			X						
ENGEL A	X		X	X	X					X		
ENGEL B	X		X	X	X					X		
ENGEL C	X		X	X	X					X		
CHOR DER DREI FRAUEN			X	X	X	X	X			X		

Table 2

The storyline remained, but there is a crucial difference: the ending of the piece. In *Die Tragödie*, only Eva is pregnant, yet when Lucy tells Adam to kill her, he obeys her order. In the second opera it is Lilith who states first that she is expecting a child, but when she asks Adam to kill Eva, she also declares the same news to Adam. Not taking into consideration Lilith's desperate words, he starts a new life with Eva. From this perspective, while the first opera states that we originate from a demon mother, the second leaves open the question whether our roots can be traced back to Eva or Lilith.

2.2 Lilith in focus

The difference between the personalities of Lucy and Lilith can be very well illustrated with a scene close to the end of the piece. In *Die Tragödie des Teufels*, the turning point of the opera comes when suddenly it becomes clear who Lucy is and what her intentions are. In the scene where she first appears in both operas, Lucifer asks her, "What's your name, beautiful lightbringer?"¹¹ When she answers, "Names are only ash and sounds," he gives her the name Lucy. First, his companions echo the name, but one of them says Lilith. In the first opera no

¹¹ All lines from the libretto are originally in German. All translations are mine.

one can hear this quiet remark, but in the latter work one of the angels explains that she is the first wife of Adam, a demon, and that makes a difference in the storyline of the second opera.

After the essential sentence “You cannot kill a shadow,” Lilith starts a monologue about who she was with the lines, “I was his, I was like him” in Scene 11 of *Die Tragödie* and Scene 8 of *Paradise reloaded*. This monologue continues later—in Scene 12 of the first and Scene 10 of the second opera—with the starting sentence “I was your wife before God broke your rib.” These scenes in both operas have central roles dramatically and also in the means of expression. In the following section I analyze the second pair of scenes mentioned above.

2.3 The musical appearance of Lucy and Lilith

The monologue of Lucy in Scene 12 is addressed to Adam. Among the sketches of *Die Tragödie des Teufels* there is a crossed-off page of this scene where a sentence in Hungarian can be read that tells a lot about the situation: LUCY shall go on gabbling, EVA should say it more times, ADAM is confused.¹² This basically means that the two women are speaking simultaneously and Adam can’t understand anything. Although Lucy talks repeatedly to Adam, he only hears Eva and continues his mantra: “no human may arise anymore.” Lucy is very aggressive, and at the end she reaches her goal: Adam kills Eva.

In *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)* this text appears when Adam asks Lucifer to kill Lilith because he realizes Lilith wants to poison Eva. Lilith reacts in a recitative aria,¹³ where instructions according to different sounds and emotions are the most elaborate in the whole opera. The first instruction is that it should be sung very freely, parlando, and the rhythmic notation only makes it easier to read. We then see quite unusual instructions, such as without accusation, Berliner cabaret, like a dog, sarcastic, about Eva pejoratively, scornfully, with very thin voice, sensitive, barely audible or very tender. These are not only related to the voice, but also how to act on the stage. This is very far from classical singing. With regards to this topic Annette Schön Müller said the following:

Generally, there are composers who prefer to use many extreme tones, like Péter Eötvös: vocal motives, very small sounds, even growls, slightly hearable whispers. We can express many emotional things with these sounds. To be able to produce them, you really have to get rid of the idea of classical beauty.

¹² The translation is mine

¹³ This terminology is pronouncedly given by the composer marked in the libretto and in the score as well. Eötvös Péter. 2013. *Paradise reloaded (Lilith) – Oper in 12 Bildern (2012/2013)*. [Printed score] Mainz: Schott. 291.

2.4 Intertextuality in *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*

In the later opera, intertextuality and historical references are very important in addition to the ways of singing. A good example for this is Scene 2, where many references were made. In this scene we can see the moment of the fall of Adam and Eva. The first sentence Lilith utters is, “Don’t you remember me, Adam?” In the score we can read the following: a quiet but very clear “Isolde.” Hearing the very same melody as Wagner wrote in Isolde’s *Liebtestod* it is even more obvious, that here Eötvös showed the topos of a loving, vulnerable woman. We can be sure that Adam’s answer does not match her best hopes. In the score there is an instruction that the performer playing Adam should form an A with his mouth like in the famous painting by Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, when he says, “Is that ... (he invents the word) fear,¹⁴ what I feel here in my chest?” Immediately in the next sentence, we find the second music reference, “Tamino” above the part of Adam with the melody from *The Magic Flute, Portrait Aria*. Lucifer also joins the conversation now as “Jago” with the text “Who advised you, Eva, to bite the apple?”¹⁵

Summary

Only with this glance at some of Lilith’s appearances it becomes clear that the importance and complexity of her character developed significantly between the two operas. The instructions in the score shows that the singer must do more than simply learn the notes. Although many instructions can be found in the score, during the analysis of the video and CD recording it can be seen that the performer has a certain freedom of interpretation. She must be able to sing in different styles and to have exceptional control of her voice, which can be appreciated from the annotations present along the score, where both the singer and the composer worked together to find the best way to express the essence of the character.

¹⁴ In the German language score: (A)----- Angst

¹⁵ In the booklet of the Hungarian premiere, Eötvös sums up these references, highlighting almost all of the mentioned ones complementing them with some less obvious associations. Hollós, 2014. 11.

References

Eötvös Péter and Amaral, Pedro. 2005. *parlando–rubato. Beszélgetések, monológok és egyéb kitérők*. Budapest: Rózsavölgyi.

Eötvös Péter. 2013. *Paradise reloaded (Lilith) – Oper in 12 Bildern (2012/2013)*. [Printed score] Mainz: Schott.

Eötvös Péter. 2016. *Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*. [Audio recording] Budapest: BMC CD.

Graves, Robert and Patai, Raphael. 2005 [1963]. *Hebrew Myth. The Book of Genesis*. Manchester: Carcanet Press.

Hollós Máté. 23 January 2014. *Eötvös Péter: Paradise reloaded (Lilith)*. [Programme notes] Budapest: Művészetek Palotája.