

ALTERITY AND IDENTITY
PALE WHITE, STRANGE BLACK, VIOLENT PURPLE:
DANCING WITH SALOME AND ELEKTRA

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*Those who don't understand
the past are condemned to revive it..*
Faust, Goethe

*She is not repugnant today. She
speaks like a doctor.*
Klytämnestra, Elektra,
Skauss/Hofmannsthal¹

The closing years of the nineteenth century impose a structural redefinition of the «dangerous» feminine gender. In order to make acceptable the primordial social fear of unconscious «chaotic» images, the woman will be seen as its most immediate transmitter. Her body is elected the best channel to decode this communication, privileged mirror of its secretive inconsistencies. We envisage a term that call denote with particular acuity this immense power that needs to be restrained: dance. In fact, when control over the human body occupies a prominent position through a firmly installed complex of posture, gestures and movements², an instant of expressive motion will be seen as a dangerous cathartic, seductive, or simply disturbed

¹ 'Our free translations of *Salome* and *Elektra* German librettos.

² The systematic study of GEORGES VIGARELLO (1978) on the pedagogic power of the body over the epochs concedes an important part to the organisation of posture, the nuances of behaviour, its continual regulations defined by an alliance between release and constraint. The specialist puts in evidence the 19th century advances on physiological studies, the analysis of each movement, the researches on psycho-somatic energies, depending of a continual exchange between the organism and the social sphere. He affirms that surveillance discreetly becomes self-surveillance. cf. the sociological and psychosociological approach to human body as structure and myth in MICHEL BERNARD's (1972) fundamental work, which develops the idea of observation and judgment over the postures and movements. cf. also the strategies of surveillance and social regulation well defined in the study of PETER STALLYBRASS and ALLON WHITE (1986). cf. another point of view on this intensive control and on the clinical gaze by JANN MATLOCK (1994).

formulation³. We will defend the idea that *Salome* and *Elektra*, one act operas created by Richard Strauss in the early years of this new century, are not music dramas punctuated by a choreographed episode, but total dances. Its dimension surpasses simple tales developed in vectorial time, constituting a psycho-physiological statement that challenges chronological and rational consciousness through a collision of fragments of remembrance and waiting⁴, in one unique instant of an obsessively redundant present⁵. This pressure will induce a sense of strangeness defined in first place by the painful confront with the most profound and consequently disturbing anachronistic exposure of reality. The instances defined as being dance –the seven veils ostentation by the Judaea princess and the devilish tarantella⁶ over the blood, by the Greek heroine– can't be seen in its academical traditional significance but as a peek of a global inner gesture and as architectonic inflections.

The passive role instituted in the feminine gender in a tumultuous but nevertheless strictly well defined social structure will be the main reason for the deviated behaviours emerging among these hyper-controlled figures.⁷ In fact, a conflict arises between the characteristics of the role assigned to women and their real inner aspirations and

³ "bodies have consistently been seen as alien, if not enemies, in the struggle to achieve a state of reason" cf. MARTHA NOEL EVANS (1991, p.230).

⁴ Here we can denote a particular setting up of a transformed time. Pressure of the present as a paradox that collects the tensions of an unchangeable past with an impossible future. That's a stop in time, depicted present, which contradicts its regular flow and fugitive faculty. Could we speak then of a will to suppress the usual conception of time, materialising it in an intensive instant? PAUL RICOEUR (1991) writes about the living present as a surface where we find the crossed vectors of remembrance and expectation, alluding for instance to the studies of Nietzsche ("the strength of the present") and Saint Augustine (memory, vision, waiting). In reality, to St. Augustine, time is in intimate complicity with soul. It's in the soul that we measure time (human life finding its correspondence in the life of the soul) nevertheless this dimension establish its foundations on eternity (cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, 1951). In reality it is in here that relies the tragedy of our heroines, their souls (unconscious surfaces) mark their real, peculiar, individual time, which being repetitive/circular, does not to transcend a "glint". (cf. JULIA KRISTEVA, 1993).

⁵ Freud gives particular importance to time dysfunction as an essential characteristic of the symptomatologies of his disturbed patients, and will develop this idea in what concerns the unconscious mechanisms in general." The processes of the system Ucs. are timeless; i.e. they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all. Reference to time is bound up, once again, with the work of the system Cs." cf. the essay on Metapsychology by SIGMUND FREUD (1915, p. 186). Developing the idea introduced in the former footnote, we can determine the 'maladie de la memoire' (cf. SIGMUND FREUD, 1983b) in which are involved not only the protagonists but their total entourage.

⁶ Jung remarks that "The devil is a variant of the 'shadow' archetype, i.e., of the dangerous aspect of the unrecognised dark half of the personality." (CARL-GUSTAV JUNG, 1953a, p. 94). So, we apply the term of "devilish" as an alter dimension of the individual, in the same sense that we will use the concept of shadow, strongly impregnated in *Elektra's* tragedy. The demoniacal power attributed to this character, as well as to Salome, consists effectively in the expansion of an unconscious sensitiveness, seen as a mystic complex of attitudes. Continuing Jung's reflections "One of the archetypes that is almost invariably met within the projection of unconscious collective contents is the 'magic demon' with mysterious powers." One can note this dense power standing out when the Atride Princess reflects the first assassinate.: "Schreit auf wie ein Dämon" (screaming as a demon) Triff noch ein mal!. The parallel with *Salome* is evident: "Schlag zu, schlag zu, Naaman, schlag zu ich dir..." (Strike, strike, Naaman, strike I tell you ...).

⁷ On hysterics as overgifted women, dominating their intellectual needs cf. PAULA G. RIBEIRO (1996).

needs. These exigencies are primarily generated in a particularly active psychological progression of difficult and contradictory steps of growing maturity.⁸

Therefore, this excess of activity and exigence will often appear translated through an established clinical configuration. The «neurosis» of the two most enigmatic young protagonists of Strauss's operas will lead them to a state of presumable incoordination that is, in reality, an expression of freedom. It is this instinctive gestural behaviour that induces us to visualise these characters as dancers. Ephemeral dancers, mortal bodies. Hence, we agree with Dominique Dupuy when he says that the dancer is the "normal corporeal man" (*l'homme corporel normal*).⁹ A long and hypnotic dance will be designed from the very beginning of the play mainly through the definition of an incantatory global morphology. The magnetic power based on the symbolic quality of the work is therefore generated by a music-dramatic complex of mechanisms which underlines the recurrence of an obsessive idea.

Hence, the dramatic configuration of the protagonists creates a distance between them and the group, alterity fundamented on the peculiar behaviour that is progressively built upon a pathogenic. So, instead of creating a compromise, the comments addressed to woman believed to be mad will increase a communication gap between the two sides, putting in evidence the pattern of behaviour of the latter. The moment of distinct dance will constitute the apotheoses of this alienation. In fact, the insistent demands Herod addresses to his niece –*Tanz für mir*, will lead precisely to the final rupture between herself and the entourage. Paraphrasing Linda Saladin's reading of this dialectical subject «The dance is a means of transforming her into a living artifice or rather a mechanism for distancing her so that he may memorise his desire for her.»¹⁰ Therefore, we must understand the profile of these princesses not only as isolate instances of spiritual «disturbances» but also as determinations of the patriarchal society, as a way of expurgating its difficulties through the condemnation of one individual. Salome and Elektra, two entities marked by the violent subtraction of an omnipotent father, disconcerted in their grief and unconsciously compelled to recreate incessantly this episode, will be trapped in a circularity of the present. Both of them are submitted to a social label of madness and incivility in order to reassure the community. The psychiatrist Eric Daviller develops this idea in his Ph.D. dissertation, defending the function of madness as mainly sacrificial: «Un bouc émissaire est désigné par le groupe qui se declanche ainsi de ses propres contradictions. Il y a transfert du groupe sur un individu-symptôme; le groupe fonde

⁸ Assoum remarks the extreme complexity of the demanding steps in the process of "devenir-femme" studied in Freud essays (cf. PAUL-LAURENT ASSOUM, 1995, p. XIV-XV).

⁹ Cf. DOMINIQUE DUPUY (1997, p. 12). On dance as a natural attitude of the body cf. also DANIEL SIBONY (1995). On Salome's dance as a surpassing or even denial of the body in view of its spiritualisation, and as an act between control and release cf. MARIO VIEIRA DE CARVALHO, (1995, pp. 481-484).

¹⁰ Cf. LINDA SALADIN, (1993, p. 135).

son unification sur le rejet de l'individu- systôme (...)»¹¹ So, deliberated alienation of elected members to reinforce the unity of the group in its structure of conventioned normality.

The dramatic central line of *Elektra* –revenge, is an extremely intense nevertheless passive feeling, that will perpetuate this status of otherness.¹² The image is introduced at the very beginning of the play, and stated in an increasingly pulsation until its accomplishment, significantly not by the mainly concerned one but through the will of an active alter-ego: the brother. *Der ist seilig, der tun darf*¹³ says the turbulent woman to Oreste, as he affirms, on arriving, a real determination in murdering their father traitors. Hence, Elektra's projects of revenge are progressively built through a trajectory of psychological effervescence, not by action but by attitudes. Furthermore, the Greek princess, in her first intervention, proposes this posture as a global act of dance, that is, in the conception of a fundamentally lyric or artistic mechanism:

(...) dein Sohn Orest und deine Tochter, wir drei, wenn alles dies vollbracht (...) dan tanzen wir, dein Blut, rings um dein Grab.¹⁴

Here, she precises the strength of her movements through space and, even more relevant, the powerlessness of the language, clearly showing the above mentioned decline between her and the surrounding. We appeal to the symbolic and enigmatic words of Carl Gustav Jung make reference to the polisemantic and atavistic idea of shadow, which has a decisive dynamic power in the play: «L'ombre, prise au sens le plus profond, est l'invisible queue de saurien que l'homme trame encore derriere lui. Soigneusement separee elle devient le serpent sacre du mystere. Seuls les singes s'en servent pour parader.»¹⁵

Und über Leichen hin werd 'ich das Knie hochheben Schritt für Schritt, und die mich werden so tanzen sehn, ja, die meinen Schatten von weitem nur so werden tanzen sehn (...)»¹⁶

¹¹ ERIC DAVILLER, (1977, p.193-194)quoted by ANNICK de SOUZENELLE (1991, pp.298). Strauss heroines are not only independent woman, with defined wills and traumas, but also victims of a disturbed system, as SOUZENELLE (1991, p.299) tells us "Plus que nous pensons, la maladie d'un membre d'une famille et d'un groupe est la decharge inconsciente de cette famille ou de ce groupe qui transfere sur le malade son poids d'energies perverties ou inaccomplies."

¹² The desire to act against the aggression of the setting is so strong, that leads her to a paroxysm. One can use once again the words of SOUZENELLE (1991, p.127) to develop this idea of rejection and inaction "Si on la traite comme maladie (la schizophrénie), isolant davantage encore celui qui vit cette epreuve derriere une quelconque camisole, on maintient celui la a une etape du processus, laquelle schizee, elle, de son contexte, sterilise l'evolution et devient effondrement pathologique

¹³ *He is fortunate. who can act.*

¹⁴ *your son Orest and your two daughters, we three, when all this is fulfilled (...) then we, your blood, shall dance round by your grave.*

¹⁵ CARL GUSTAV JUNG (1963, p.261).

¹⁶ *And over the corpses there I'll lift my legs high up step by step, and they shall see how I dance about, yes, those who are far off may only see just how my shadows dance (...).*

Opposed to the light of consciousness and reason, the dancing shadows the daughter of Agamemnon imagines that will be seen by the citizens are the direct projection of her unconscious and, furthermore, emphasises the imperatives of her corporeal existence –it is the body that generates the shadow.¹⁷ And this body, this animal body with an animal soul is a living system that obeys instinct in an absolute way.¹⁸ She defines a transatlantic supreme episode that resembles a displaying of possession:

*die werden sagen: einem grossen König wird hier ein grosses Prunkfest angestellt von seinem Fleisch und Blut, und glücklich ist, wer Kinder hat, die um sein hohes Grab so königliche Siegestänze tanzen!*¹⁹

The dance is seen as the emergence of this primitive, unadapted energy, materialised in an archetype that designs the dangerous traits of the obscure part of the human being. From the first moments of the play, this final scene will be envisaged as a symbolic mark of destruction of the king's assassins, and should allow consequently the recognition of Elektra's repression. So, the pattern of behaviour is progressively developed, kinaesthetic and psychologically, with the clear object of this last performance.

Actually, the conception of releasing the human being through natural and instinctive movements started its way with the first studies of clinical psychology and would progressively instaurate some definitive expressions in the art of developing the body motion in space. The refusal of academic dance principles was built through research works within a field that was also being explored by the precursors of psychoanalysis as Jean-Martin Charcot²⁰ and Pierre Janet. It was envisaged as the domain of neurological and psychopathological studies –clinical pictures of dissociative symptoms and parallel syndromes emerging in hospitalised patients, with the particular focus on hysterics.

Some names remained attached to new dance aesthetics through the realisation of

¹⁷ Jung conceives the shadow, as we already mentioned, as the deepest human dimension, the image of the instinct that can be seen as primitive and as an inferior constituent of personality from a perspective of the consciousness. Therefore, being an inner component of the global human being, it will be nevertheless repressed to avoid the violent forces that it can give rise to. "A dim premonition tells us that we cannot be whole without this negative side, that we have a body which, like all bodies, cast a shadow, and that if we deny this body we cease to be three-dimensional and become flat and without substance." (CARL GUSTAV JUNG, 1953a, p.29). cf. also JUNG (1953b).

¹⁸ Cf. CARL-GUSTAV JUNG, (1953b, p. 30) "...this body is a beast with a beast's soul, an organism that gives unquestioning obedience to instinct. To unite oneself with this shadow is to say yes to instinct, that formidable dynamism lurking in the background."

¹⁹ *They will all say: Such a mighty monarch's here, for such festive pomp and pageantry is held by his flesh and blood. and happy is he who has children, that round his holy grave perform such royal dances of triumph.*

²⁰ cf. article of SIGMUND FREUD on Charcot (1893a,p.11-23)

motion studies, such as François Delsarte²¹, but is Isadora Duncan who would represent perfectly in practice this innovative purposes, having a fundamental role in its disclosure. It is important to remark that in the early years of experimentation, the Duncan's method relied precisely on its absence, showing the imperative relief given to instincts: «Nous appelions notre methode un système nouveau, mais, à vrai dire, il n'y avait pas de système. Je suivais ma fantasia et j'improvisais.»²² In this way, and emphasising the decisive repercussion of the psychoanalytical revolution over the society in general and in particular upon its most instinctive and immediate manifestation that is art, poliartistic works of the beginning of the century will be increasingly characterised by a deeper compromise between its different and complementary parts, as an unique combined expression²³. A physical truth emerges in several musico-dramatic proposals, revealing a strong new corporeality, in it's full sense of an indissociable bynomium of body and mind.

*Sie ist seltsam. Wie eine kleine Prinzessin, deren Fusse weisse Tauben sind. Man Könnte meinen, sie tanzt.*²⁴

Salome, through the eyes of the young siren, at the very beginning of the work, is dancing, although her movements are slow and introspective, just quietly gliding. It's a secretive dance. «In begeistertem Pathos», «in ecstatic Pathos», is the didascaly that illustrates the already mentioned moment in which Elektra foresees her final dance as a celebration of success. So, a stretched quietness strongly expresses the euphoric episode. According to the specialist in theatre anthropology Eugenio Barba, in his determination to break the frontiers between dance and theatre, «it's important to search for the concealed dance that gives intensity to the (actor's) presence.»²⁵ The body performance is first of all an inner energy, a pulsional dimension that can be dance, if the work allows this nomenclature in creating conditions to its resurgence. Barba speaks of the importance of «les ondes d'un rythme, d'une action forte qui l'habite (l'acteur) dans les profondeurs du corps, même s'il se meut par mouvements

²¹ Delsarte envisages man as a star in expansion on the space of consciousness and in the domain of "gestalt". Indissociable relationships regulate the unity of the powers of human being (life, soul, spirit) and the unity of its expressions (voice, gesture, word). cf ALAIN PORTE, (1992, p. 91), and all the chapter on the "Compendium", a demonstrative graphic about human forces (1992, p.91-146: "Le Compendium - Le geste"). cf. also same reference (1992, p. 35-50).

²² ISADORA DUNCAN (1928, p.29) refering to her early years as teenager when, around 1882, both she and her sister attribute themselves a status of dance teachers: "Je suivais ma fantasia et j'improvisais, enseignant tous les gestes jolis qui me passaient par la tete."

²³ Vigarello notes this ambiguous link between the emergence of Freudian theories and corporeal expression. "Les techniques nouvelles qui s'étendent, avec quelques nuances, de l'expression corporelle au Movement du Potentiel Humain, s'inspirent d'une imitation, en même temps que d'un éloignement, à l'égard de la psychanalyse: imitation puisqu'un 'langage' aurait à traduire les emotions et les affects soumis à interprétation; et éloignement puisque ce même 'langage' ne serait pas celui du verbe, mais celui du corps.", (GEORGES VIGARELLO, 1978, p.341)

²⁴ *She's strange, like a little princess whose feet are little snow white doves. One can tell that she's dancing*

²⁵ "Je cherche en tout acteur la dance cachée qui donne intensite à sa présence" (cf. EUGENIO BARBA, 1996, p. 18)

infimes, même s'il reste apparemment immobile, ou semble ne rien faire qui rompe une comportement 'normal'.»²⁶ The body presence is sufficient to install a direct way of transmitting the alter dimensions of man: «Le corps lui-même disparaît (...), quoting Isadora Duncan in her reflections on the essence of this art, il n'est qu'un instrument bien accordé, et ce sont les sentiments et les pensées de l'âme qu'il exprime.»²⁷

That's why *Salome* combines so perfectly in this modernist period, marked by new ideologies of representation, a prototype of the pathology of hysteria with a conceptual image of the new dancer. One can state the words of Romain Rolland, reinforcing in fact the organic and neurotic quality of *Salome's* music-drama: «C'est une oeuvre très bien construite, très dramatique, mais toute d'une haleine, du commencement à la fin; et le sujet, que la musique traduit avec puissance, est d'une passion hystérique et morbide.»²⁸ He also makes reference to this same profound intensity in the Atrides tragedy: «jamais Strauss n'a été plus avant dans la peinture de l'âme profonde, de la douleur.»²⁹ To close this idea of coordinated innovation, one could point out the expressive final commentary of Richard Strauss on a letter to his friend and librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal in which he mentions to be already busy with the first scene of *Elektra*: «Always avidly eager for any *Golden dreams*.»³⁰

In fact, one can «read» this opera using the «index» created by Jean-Martin Charcot to define the complete hysterical «grande attaque». He starts with the determination of a conduct that recalls epilepsy, the «epileptoidic phase». This will be mirrored during the first three scenes expanding to the beginning of the fourth, in which the profile of *Salome* is going to become more and more alienated. Secondly, the «large movements» episode will find its correspondence on the dance of the veils. Coming third, the «attitudes passionnelles» configuration (the hallucinatory phase) is materialised in the mono/dialogue of the young woman with the prophet's head and finally the «terminal delirium», translated in feelings of accomplishment and fulfilment after the so desired kiss.³¹

The four phases will appear far less distinctive in what concerns the structure of *Elektra*. Nevertheless, one can realise the building of the work upon these same essences. We can point out the heroine's first intervention as an epileptoidic prelude, in which she reveals in agitation the denouement of the tragedy. Next, we'll find out the passionate expressions in the development of her relationship with respectively her sister, her mother and finally her returned brother, Oreste. Effectively, the emotional density is here more expressionistic than in *Salome's* case. That's why

²⁶ cf. EUGENIO BARBA, (1996, p.18)

²⁷ cf. ISADORA DUNCAN (1928, pp.186)

²⁸ cf. RICHARD STRAUSS, ROMAIN ROLLAND, (1909a, p.146)

²⁹ cf. RICHARD STRAUSS, ROMAIN ROLLAND, (1909b, p.167-168)

³⁰ cf. RICHARD STRAUSS, HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL, (1906b, p.7) The French translation is even more demonstrative of this innovative intention (cf. 1906a, pp. 35) "Toujours avide de *musique d'avenir*"

³¹ cf. SIGMUND FREUD, (1893b, p.13-14), cf. also JEAN-MARTIN CHARCOT, (1887, p.261) Briefly, Charcot defines the four distinct phases distinguished in an hysterical attack 1) the "epileptoidic" 2) "large movements" 3) "attitudes passionnelles" (the hallucinatory phase) and lastly 4) "terminal delirium".

there is an extended surface of deep passional formulas. Once more, the dance apotheoses will denounce the large movements phase, with a coda that one could define as the "final delirium", impregnated in her final words, *Schweig, und tanze* –silence and dance. The ultimate consequence consisting in a paroxysm and paralysis of the members, is going to underline her irremediable death.

Following these thoughts, one can envisage this triumphant instance (matching with the second phase above mentioned), as a dance within a dance. Both women punctuate their performance with a crisis of motion, closely related to a state of hypnosis, that is, an induced exposure of the inner surfaces. Following the analyst's theories on hypnosis, as a means of reaching and eventually releasing the concealed traumas, we can remark that, in general, this recollection becomes evident only during the hallucinatory phase.³² Isn't the dense sensual approach to the decapitated head of Iokanaan, the violent intensity of the discourse and the strange sense of glory, a clear hallucinatory trajectory that will undoubtedly reveal, by a delicate semiotic structure, the real nature of the traumatic event which generated the journey of grief of Herodias' daughter?

Nun wohl, ich lebe noch, , und dein kopf gehört mir . Ich kann mit ihm tun, was ich will.³³

And couldn't we consider the final silence of Elektra as bringing out the repressed thought to the level of consciousness? In addition, the impact will be so violent that will irreparably lead her to annihilation.

Hysteria symptomatology gives privilege to the corporeal translation of repressions, which in most cases won't find an effective verbal expression. Progressively, one can visualise the assumption of a parallel state in the protagonists profile, the body infiltration of a second condition which dominates the normal conscious.³⁴ Vital instincts are energised through peculiar movements and positions produced in this new conception of Lyric drama. This body agitation and the inability to display a natural verbal narratology, invites us to use Dominique Dupuy's words «...le mouvement profond de la danse est silencieux.»³⁵ Romain Rolland's comments on the *premiere* of *Salome* in Paris, notice that this alter state is immediatly perceived as impregnating the sonorous construction of Strauss': «une musique d'une nervosité malade, sans doute, et touchant à l'hystérie.»³⁶

³² Freud and Breuer show that "the memories which have become the determinants of hysterical phenomena persist for a long time with astonishing freshness and with the whole of their affective colouring." Nevertheless, they'll persist absent or present in a really summary form in a normal physical state. The hypnosis will allow its emergence with an hallucinatory vividness. (cf. SIGMUND FREUD, JOSEPH BREUER, 1893b, p.9) Furthermore, they underline that this will happen in the third phase of the attack - "attitudes passionnelles", exhibiting the hallucinatory reproduction of the remembrance of a major trauma or a series of interconnected part-traumas, which provoked the hysterical syndrome. (1893b, p.14)

³³ Well, I still live, but you are dead, and your head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will

³⁴ cf. SIGMUND FREUD, JOSEPH BREUER, 1893-1895

³⁵ DOMINIQUE DUPUY, (1997, p.12).

³⁶ RICHARD STRAUSS, ROMAIN ROLLAND, (1907, p.150)

After the matricide, Elektra welcomes effusively the next victim, Aegisth, who feels himself disturbed with this bizarre attitude. *Was tanzest du?*, he asks. She refuses to answer and develops her agitated gesture: *indem sie ihn, wie in einem unheimlichen Tanz umkreist, sich plötzlich tief buckend*³⁷ Hoffmansthal envisages the scene as the performance of all anxious pantomime with the torch.³⁸ his episode is going to prepare and activate the triumphal moment of the tragedy. Following the gestural developments until the expressionist ending, we'll point out some of its main lines – either dance or hysterical attack. Hence, during the second assassinate, the princess strongly affirms *Agamemnon hört dich!*, *Agamemnon hears you*, that is, the repression appears and, as the situation approaches the desired end, the patient/dancer is going to feel the revelation, succumbing to it. The visual image created in this last page will be Elektra crouching on the threshold hearing a pretended interior music that invites her to dance *alle warten auf mich: ich weiss doch, dass sie alle warten, weil ich den Reigen führen muss*.³⁹ But, she has no strength to stand up and move. The psychosis puts in evidence a paraphasia. When she finally starts moving, the motor excitement of an hysterical attack will appear,

*Sie hat den Kopf zurückgeworfen wie eine Mänade. Sie wirft das Knie, sie reckt die Arme aus, es ist ein namenloser Tanz, in welchem sie nach vorwärts schreitet.*⁴⁰

Elektra's epilogue, as we mentioned above, is «silence and dancing,» terms to which we can add «death.» This triptych will put in evidence a pacific instinct of self-destruction. Similarly to other cases of advanced hysterical pathology, a progressive degenerescence in what concerns verbal expression will lead the traumatised heroine to a language aphasia. This continual regression will be instaurated since the beginning of the play, with the increasing exposure of an alternative way of living –the second condition mentioned by Freud. That «clinical picture» defines alterations to the primary biological functions such as eating, sleeping, and also social ones as the relationship with the group, communication and moving on space, showing a potential savage state.

*Elektra kommt aus dem schon dunkelnden Hausflur gelaufen. Alle drehen sich nach ihr um. Elektra spring zurück wie ein Tier in seinen Schlupwinkel, den einen Arm vor dem Gesicht.*⁴¹

³⁷ she turns around Aegisth, in an uncanny dance, and suddenly stoops on the ground.

³⁸ "Now Aegisthus appears at the entrance (right), Elektra runs towards him and performs her terrifying torch act". (cf. RICHARD STRAUSS, HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL, 1908a, p. 13) In the french translation: "Aegisth apparaît alors à l'entrée, à droite; Electre court à sa rencontre, et exécute devant lui son inquiétante pantomime avec la torche". (cf. RICHARD STRAUSS, HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL, 1908b, pp.43-44)

³⁹ I know (...) they all are waiting, for I must lead the dancing

⁴⁰ throwing back her head like a Maenad, thrusting her knees high in forward movement, flinging her arms wide apart (...).

⁴¹ Elektra's entrance on the stage. *Elektra runs out of the entrance hall (...) Elektra darts back like an animal to its lair, one arm held in front of her face.*

This cathartic episode will be the corollary of her aim for vengeance intimately attached to the above mentioned dense passivity. Death will be the only solution to such an irreversible exhaustion. «La réaction du sujet qui subit quelque dommage n'a d'effet réellement 'cathartique' que lorsqu'elle est vraiment adéquate, comme dans la vengeance.»⁴²

Epilogue

Labels and colours - strangeness and «normality»

*Nichts in der Welt war so weiss wie dein Leib.
Nichts in der Welt war so schwarz wie dein Haar.
In der ganzen Welt war nichts so rot wie dein Mund.
There was nothing in the world so white as your body.
There was nothing in the world so black as your hair.
In all the world there was nothing so red as your mouth.*

Salome and Elektra are one and the same modernist social essence: woman seen as an enigma to which a resolution was not yet found. Consequently, they become subjects under observation, and are supposed to collaborate with the community accepting the label of «hysterics».⁴³ This stigma will reassure a deep-rooted institution of patriarchal sovereignty, that can explain, by this stipulated otherness, not only feminine claimings but also the general instabilities in what concerns the frightening new unconscious world being built on a communal surface. Dance will be a privileged theme associated to the feminine gender, used in multiple works of art, because it furnishes an idealised key –expanded gestures, strange behaviours, agitation and release, seductive imagery– which reinforces alienation by depicting the denial of the established rules and conventions that are parts of a «normal» state. A structural symbolism of essential colours and defined movement (that is, in a shared state of being - body and soul) underlines this tragedies and generates the «fin-de-siècle» ambiguities within a secretive dimension that links the two «disturbed» women. The legendary princesses are pale as dead women, dark as shadows, symbolic moons over black sky, rejected hysterics, alter-individuals, tinted in red of blood, always dancers. Absorbing or reflecting the light. «il est nécessaire d'inonder le corps d'air et de lumière» says Isadora Duncan⁴⁴

⁴² SIGMUND FREUD, JOSEPH BREUER, (1893-1895, P.5)

⁴³ (cf. SARAH KOFMAN, 1983).

⁴⁴ ISADORA DUNCAN, (1928, p. 186).

*Ist es nicht ein seltsames Bild? Es
sieht aus wie ein wahnsinniges Weib*
Don't you think the Moon has a very strange
look? She is like an hysterical woman.
Herod

Abstract

Los años finales del siglo XIX imponen una redefinición del género femenino. Para hacer aceptable el principal miedo social de las imágenes «caóticas» del inconsciente, la mujer empieza a ser vista como su más inmediato transmisor. El cuerpo mujeril es elegido como el mejor canal para decodificar los mensajes del inconsciente, espejo privilegiado de los pensamientos más secretos. La autora de este artículo utiliza la danza como instrumento con la particular propiedad de poner en funcionamiento los sueños, deseos y miedos del inconsciente.

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