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“Hinter den Spiegeln warten nur Spiegel”: Myth, Dystopia, and Utopia in Peter Eötvös’s *Paradise Reloaded (Lilith)*

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“Hinter den Spiegeln warten nur Spiegel”: Myth, Dystopia, and Utopia in Peter Eötvös’s *Paradise Reloaded (Lilith)*

Abstract

This article argues that operatic attention to myth has evolved in new directions in recent years, in counterpoint to a trend for representing recent historical and celebrity narratives on stage. I analyze Péter Eötvös’s opera *Paradise Reloaded (Lilith)* as an example of composers engaging ‘distant pasts’ as a vehicle to interrogate political presents. Using Jewish and secular myths of Lilith, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and Imre Madách’s *The Tragedy of Man*, Eötvös and librettist Albert Ostermaier construct a feminist-philosophical exploration of knowledge and truth, reflecting themes in modern European society from refugee crises to Putin’s Russia. My approach is three-fold: I suggest that their musical and narrative modes both parody and rely on operatic conventions, centered on the transformation of Lilith from demon-seductress to protagonist. I locate the opera’s utopian/dystopian soundworld in a lineage of 20th century European approaches to satire, irony, and the grotesque in music, exemplified in Shostakovich and Ligeti, drawing on Esti Sheinberg’s theoretical framework. I situate this study within the ‘living archive’ of contemporary opera: the contrasting aesthetics of the opera’s three key stagings — Neue Oper Wien (2013), Theater Chemnitz (2015), and Theater Bielefeld (2020) — and my interviews with Eötvös, Ostermaier, and others involved. Finally, I position Eötvös’s own history as a lens to evaluate intersecting musical and political identities, engaging especially Anna Dalos and Rachel Beckles Willson’s work on post-Cold War Central European composers. Ultimately, I propose that *Paradise Reloaded* offers a revival of Lilith mythology for the 21st century, demanding attention to how opera can navigate a dialectic of dystopian/utopian pasts, presents, and futures.

Zusammenfassung

Alternativ zur Darstellung von zeithistorischen und biographischen Narrativen auf der Opernbühne hat sich in den letzten Jahren eine gegensätzliche Auseinandersetzung mit dem Mythischen Oper entwickelt. Dieser Aufsatz analysiert Péter Eötvös’ Oper *Paradise Reloaded (Lilith)* (2013) als Beispiel für eine kompositorische Annäherung an eine ‚zurückliegende Vergangenheit‘ als Mittel zur Befragung der politischen Situation der Gegenwart.

Unter Verwendung jüdischer und weltlicher Geschichten von Lilith, John Miltons *Paradise Lost* (*Das vergangene Paradies*) und Imre Madáchs *The Tragedy of Man* konstruiert Eötvös mit dem Librettisten Albert Ostermeiner eine feministisch-philosophische Erkundung von Wissen und Wahrheit, die aktuelle politische Themen aufgreift – von der Flüchtlingskrise bis zu Putins Russland. Die Herangehensweise ist dreiteilig: Vorgeschlagen wird, dass die musikalische und die narrative Ebene nicht nur auf Konventionen der Opern basieren, sondern diese auch parodieren. Im Mittelpunkt steht dabei die Transformation von Lilith von einer dämonischen Verführerin zur Protagonistin. Die dystopische/utopische Klangwelt wird dabei in einer Linie mit satirischen, ironischen oder grotesken Werken des 20. Jahrhundert situiert, wie etwa Šostakovič und Ligeti. Der theoretische Rahmen bezieht sich auf Esti Sheinberg.

Diese Studie verortet sich innerhalb eines ‘lebendigen Archivs’ zeitgenössischer Oper und berücksichtigt nicht nur Interviews mit Eötvös und Ostermeier, sondern auch anderen Beteiligten der drei betrachteten, unterschiedlichen Produktionen an der Neuen Oper Wien (2013), am Theater Chemnitz (2015) und am Theater Bielefeld (2020). Ferner wird unter Berücksichtigung von Anna Dalos und Rachel Beckles Schrift über europäische Komponisten nach dem Kalten Krieg eine Betrachtung von Eötvös‘ Biographie vorgenommen, um Überlappungen von musikalischen und politischen Identitäten beurteilen zu können. *Paradise Reloaded* präsentiert in diesem Sinne eine Wiederbelebung des Lilith-Mythos für das 21. Jahrhundert. Die Oper verhandelt das Verhältnis von dystopischen und utopischen Vergangenheiten, Gegenwarten und Zukünftigem.

Hinter den Spiegeln warten nur Spiegel”: Utopian Lilith and Dystopian Mythologies in Peter Eötvös’s *Paradise Reloaded (Lilith)*

“Behind the mirror lies another mirror.” If we think we can get to something better than this world, our attempts to break through will yield but more illusions. If we try to smash the mirror, we will only be faced with yet more, our lives fated to repeat, to fold in on us again and again. In Peter Eötvös and Albert Ostermaier’s 2013 opera *Paradise Reloaded (Lilith)* (hereafter *Paradise Reloaded*), mirrors function as a rhetorical device of distorted reality and failure, of the history of humanity compressed into a whirlwind ninety minutes. Adam and Eve, the forebears of western civilization, are doomed to seek a better world, and never find it; Lilith, feminine transgressor par excellence, is both the disruption and the solution to this cycle.

Eötvös’s career as composer and conductor has yielded a steady output of operas since his first substantial foray into the genre with *Three Sisters* in 1997.[1] *Paradise Reloaded* is his most recent opera to date, and has been received with similar success, with four significant performance runs at major European houses. Its premiere took place in Vienna at the Neue Oper Wien in 2013, followed by the Hungarian premiere (same production) in Budapest in 2014. Two entirely new productions have been mounted since, both in Germany, at the Theater Chemnitz in 2015, and the Theater Bielefeld in January 2020.[2] With three aesthetically very contrasting stagings in circulation, the different aspects of the opera’s plot which I discuss here are extremely malleable. Each production has offered its own commentary on the central themes at play: the question of humanity’s origins, dystopian reflections and speculations on the past, present, and future, and the power of Lilith as a mythical figure for the 21st century.

Discussing Eötvös’s operas prior to *Paradise Reloaded*, Aurore Rivals proposed that “each literary or dramatic work after which the libretto of your operas is written is anchored in an historic past […] entailing humanist and social values unique to a given place or tradition.”[3] *Paradise Reloaded* is deeply

[1] Péter Eötvös had composed two opera-type pieces before: *Harakiri* (1973) and *Radamès* (1976).
[2] Further performances in April 2020 at the Theater Bielefeld were cancelled due to COVID-19.
[3] *Entretiens autour des cinq premiers opéras de Péter Eötvös*, ed. Aurore Rivals, Château-Gontier 2012, p. 67. Translation my own.

concerned with humanity and human behavior, but is anchored in many pasts. In this article, I demonstrate how the opera is woven together from multiple literary and mythological sources, outlining how it intermingles references to Lilith myths within a darkly comic narrative of an epic journey through humanity's origins, development, and possible futures. Situating it in the context of contemporary operatic interest in myth, I suggest that it shares several key aspects in common regarding approaches to time and dramatic form, but blends these with intertextual allusions and dystopian settings. Focusing on examples from the central scenes of the opera, I argue that it employs classic techniques of satire, parody, the absurd and the grotesque to offer a comic but politically potent narrative of human behavior. In closing, I reflect on Eötvös's suggestion that Lilith represents a utopian potential, and what significance this might have for the opera's future.

Sources and Origins

Recent scholarship has shown that at least two modes of engagement with myth have a significant presence in contemporary opera of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries: interest in retelling classic myths, fables, and similar stories, and the adoption of formal and narrative properties of myth in music, text, and dramaturgy. Marta Grabócz argues in her examination of French and Italian works from the 1980s and 1990s that a resurgence of interest in archetypal 'hero myths' in operas since the 20th century has resulted in significant attention to ritual-based narratives. For Grabócz, late 20th century opera "is centered primarily on the rite of initiation of a central character in the story."[4] Yayoi Uno Everett's landmark study of works by Osvaldo Golijov, John Adams, and Saariaho similarly focuses on operas which "reinterpret myth and enact narrative strategies that depart from conventional forms of storytelling."[5] *Paradise Reloaded* adopts similar techniques in employing stasis, circularity, abstraction, atemporality, and lack of linear progress, on which I expand below. Perhaps

[4] Márta Grabócz, "Archetypes of Initiation and Static Temporality in Contemporary Opera: Works of François-Bernard Mâche, Pascal Dusapin, and Gualtiero Dazzi," in: *Music and Narrative since 1900*, ed. Michael L. Klein and Nicholas Reyland, Bloomington, 2013, pp. 101–124, here p. 102.
[5] Yayoi Uno Everett, *Reconfiguring Myth and Narrative*: *Osvaldo Golijov, Kaija Saariaho, John Adams, and Tan Dun*, Bloomington, 2015, p. 12.

surprisingly, though, it does not actually convert the story of Lilith into a dramatic narrative, either as adaptation or allegory, although Eötvös and Ostermaier undertook considerable research into and drew much inspiration from the Lilith myths. According to Eötvös, they relied primarily on Robert Graves and Raphael Patai's authoritative account of Lilith mythology in *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (1964). The program for the Vienna premiere emphasized this, offering overviews of the myth and materials ranging from ancient objects and texts to modern poetry, sculpture, and paintings inspired by Lilith. Lilith has existed in almost unimaginably diverse forms for thousands of years. Patai notes that her roots extend far back to the Gilgamesh epic, and to goddesses of Mesopotamian mythology (after 3000 B.C.E), Lamashtu and Ishtar.[6] Modern understandings of Lilith evolved primarily from Jewish sources of late antiquity: she is mentioned once in Isaiah in the Old Testament, several times in the Babylonian Talmud, but the story most commonly understood today has its origins in a *midrash* in the *Alphabet Ben Sira*, an anonymous collection of stories and proverbs written in Aramaic and Hebrew (6th–11th centuries C.E.). Here Lilith is described explicitly as Adam's 'first wife,' banished to the Red Sea for being disobedient and not submissive. There she was doomed to give birth to thousands of demonic children, who would all perish. In terms of her creation, sources vary considerably,[7] but it is clear that she was not made from Adam, like Eve, and thus was created equal. Lilly Rivlin argues that the compiler of the *Alphabet Ben Sira* needed to obliterate this notion of equality by having the legend punish Lilith for her sexual and personal independence.[8]

This narrative gives rise to a range of what I call Lilith *topoi*. Lilith as witch, sorceress, night hag, evil spirit: a woman who possesses dangerous power, often used for wicked deeds such as stealing the semen of men; abducting (sometimes devouring) children, and also causing the demise of unborn fetuses. Lilith as siren, temptress: known to seduce men, bewitch them into submission. Lilith as dangerous mother, a threat all children. In Judith Plaskow's words, Lilith is a "classic example of male projection […] [she] is not a demon; rather she is a

[6] Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess,* 3rd ed., Detroit, 1990, pp. 221–222.
[7] Graves and Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis*, New York, 1963.
[8] Lilly Rivlin, "Lilith," in: *Which Lilith? Feminist Writers Re-Create the World's First Woman*, ed. Enid Dame, Lilly Rivlin, and Henry Wenkart, Northvale, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 3–14.

woman named a demon by a tradition that does not know what to do with strong women.”[9] Many centuries of Liliths can be traced, from folk myths of late antiquity to Romantic opera to Hollywood *femmes fatales* and even current television series.

Paradise Reloaded is shaped enormously by this vast Lilith mythology, but the plot derives more directly from Imre Madách’s epic 1861 poem *The Tragedy of Man* (*Az ember tragédiája*), one of the most celebrated works of Hungarian literature. Eötvös and Ostermaier had already collaborated on the 2010 opera *Die Tragödie des Teufels* (Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich) based on this text.[10] Lilith is not a character in Madách’s *Tragedy*; *Die Tragödie* reveals a ‘Lucy’ only at the end. Introducing Lilith as the central character in *Paradise Reloaded* is a substantial dramatic shift away from Madách,[11] partly explained by Eötvös’s dissatisfaction with *Die Tragödie*, expressed to me in our conversations.[12] *Paradise Reloaded*, on which Mari Mezei also worked to refine and alter the libretto, is not a blank slate, still relying on *The Tragedy of Man* for its basic structure — but it is substantially altered. In addition to engaging Lilith mythology, it also embraces the myriad literary influences on Madách’s work, especially John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), as made clear in the title change.
Fig. 1 shows a comparison of Madách’s structure with the libretto. In addition to four passages unfolding in or near Heaven, the poem journeys to ten different locations around the world over the course of several millennia (one is ‘visited’ twice). The libretto retains some key elements, such as an overall trajectory from Paradise/Eden/The Fall to an outer-Paradise no-man’s land, and the mirroring of two scenes (3 & 9). In Madách’s *Tragedy*, after Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden, Lucifer brings Adam on a chaotic journey through thousands of years of human life, as the Archangel Michael shows Adam in *Paradise Lost*: “Know I am sent/To show thee what shall come in future days/To thee and to thy

[9] Judith Plaskow, “Lilith Revisited” (1995), reprinted in: *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003*, ed. with Donna Berman, Boston 2005, p. 82.
[10] The libretti for both operas are based on the 1933 German translation of Madách’s Tragedy by Jenő Mohácsi.
[11] My conversations with Péter Eötvös took place in his studio in Budapest in January 2020. I am grateful for his kind assistance in discussing his opera.
[12] *Die Tragödie* had an initial run of six, then four repeat performances the following year (also in Munich).

offspring; good with bad” (XI: 355–57).[13] At each stage, Adam transforms into a different historical persona, such as a pharaoh or Johannes Kepler. Both Lilith and Lucifer offer this to Adam in *Paradise Reloaded*: together, in Scene 2 (“Come with us, we will show you another Paradise”) and Lucifer alone, e.g. in Scene 3: “You can be God. I will show you humankind throughout all time, in war and peace.”[14] With the poem’s inspiration from Milton also comes a litany of literary influences, from Classical to early modern epics,[15] to the Faust legends that formatively shaped Madách.[16]

Erika Gottlieb describes Madách’s *Tragedy* dialectically, as a “consistently compelling parallel between the eschatology of salvation and damnation and the secular, political images of utopia and dystopia.”[17] *Paradise Reloaded* exhibits far less concern with the possibilities of religious redemption — far from it, as religious devotion and divine power are consistently subject to parody. The opera also adopts aspects of dystopian aesthetics without really acting as a piece of dystopian *or* utopian fiction: at no point is an alternative society even partly established that is either twisted and dangerous or idealized. Most importantly, the opera offers none of the named locations or identities found in Madách. Paradise, and the liminal spaces around it, are imagined, intangible realms, but the central parts, Scenes 3–7, are elusive, not specific: Scene 3 is an “artificial city” (*die künstliche Stadt*); Scene 4 is unnamed, just setting a “protest”; Scene 5 is a “bombed city” (*eine zerbombte Stadt*); Scene 6 is “the future,” and Scene 7 moves to outer space. Furthermore, rather than give the characters specific new personas, they transform in each journey scene into generic figures such as “migrant,” “general,” “wife,” “son.”

[13] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* ed. John Leonard, London 2000.
[14] “Du kannst Gott sein. Ich werde dir die Menschen zu allen Zeiten zeigen, im Krieg und im Frieden.” Quotations from the libretto are from the published text given in the CD liner notes, *Paradise Reloaded (Lilith)*, BMC CD 226, Budapest, 2016. All translations my own.
[15] See Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, “The Genres of Paradise Lost,” in: *The Cambridge Companion to Milton,* ed. Denis Danielson (2nd edition), Cambridge 1999, pp. 113–129.
[16] There are long-standing comparisons between Goethe’s *Faust* and Madách’s work, but I do not engage *Faust* in this article, as it is less pertinent to the opera than the poem.
[17] Erika Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial*, Montreal 2001, p. 44.

The Tragedy of Man			*Paradise Reloaded*		
Scene	**Location**	**Comments**	**Scene**	**Location**	**Comments**
1	Heaven/Earth	Lucifer rejects God	1	Heaven/Earth	Lucifer & Angels write resignation letter to God; they meet Lilith
2	Paradise: Eden	Temptation and the Fall	2	Paradise/The Fall	Temptation and Fall; Lilith gives Eve the apple.
3	Outside Paradise	Lucifer offers Adam the journey			Lilith and Lucifer offer Adam and Eve a journey: they all depart.
4	Ancient Egypt	Adam as a Pharaoh	3	Artificial City	Adam and Eve as migrants
5	Ancient Athens	Adam as General Miltiades	4	None specified	A protest; Adam as a General; Eve his son; Lilith his wife
6	Ancient Rome	Adam as Sergiolus	5	A Bombed City	Eve, Lilith, female chorus as “black widows”/suicide bombers Lucifer and Adam watch
7	Constantinople	The Crusades			
8	Prague: Imperial Palace, 1600s	Adam as Johannes Kepler			
9	Paris: 1790s	Adam as Georges Danton			
10	Prague: Imperial Palace, 1600s	Adam as Kepler			
11	London: 1860s	“The Present”			
12	Phalanstère	Future vision; utopian socialist scientific facility	6	The Future (Phalanstère)	Eve as a hospital patient; Angels perform a satire
13	Outer Space	Adam tries to escape Earth	7	Outer Space	Adam tries to escape Earth with Eve
14	Ice Wasteland	Thousands of years in the future: Adam and Lucifer meet an Eskimo	8	None specified (Mirror of Scene 3)	Lilith/Lucifer duet
			9		Eve appears dead
			10		Lilith/Lucifer/Adam confrontation
15	Outside Paradise	Return to outside Paradise; God tells Adam to strive on	11	Outside Paradise/ Wasteland	Final confrontation; Adam and Eve leave; Lucifer returns to God
			12		Lilith alone; soliloquy

Figure 1: Comparison of narrative structure and scene order of Madách’s *Tragedy* and the libretto for *Paradise Reloaded*.

Identity functions abstractly in *Paradise Reloaded*, beyond the obvious ways in which biblical and mythical figures are themselves already symbolic. The characters reflect what Everett refers to, in contemporary operas based on myths, as bringing “shadow representations of archetypal figures into our interpretation of characters.”[18] Moreover, Adam, Lilith, and Eve are not mere voyeurs, passively watching past, present, and future, but neither are they fully transformed into the new characters in each scene. Instead, there is a kind of doubled consciousness where the characters inhabit a new body *at the same time* that they are thinking, feeling, and acting as their ‘original’ identity, both part of and external to the action. In the premiere production, the stage design also allowed for different characters to be inhabiting different positions (watchers/participants/controller) via a raised platform in line with the lighting rig from which the action playing out below could be observed. This process also operates differently for each character, and Lucifer and Lilith, there is a third layer as they also act as guides.

Ambiguity thus functions throughout the opera as an effective strategy to shift the dramatic premise away from the focus on Adam’s transformative journey and towards exploring Lilith’s disruptive potential. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák argues that Adam’s “obsession with history” in Madách’s *Tragedy* “has led to the paralysis of personality, a loss of self-respect.”[19] The opera extends this to Lucifer also, who undergoes a similar (if slightly less devastating) series of identity crises. Lilith’s identity in *Paradise Reloaded*, however, is about agency, as she is controlling the host identities in each scene. And unlike Kundry, the *Namenlose* witch-seductress of Wagner’s *Parsifal* which partly inspired Eötvös, Lilith is both named and consequently more powerful. Scene 1 establishes this, when — like Kundry — we hear Lilith first sing unseen. Lucifer cannot fix her identity:

> LUCIFER: What is your name, then, dear little devil woman?
> LILITH: What’s in a name, O Bringer of light!
> THREE ANGELS*:* Lucifer, Lucifer, Lucifer…
> LUCIFER: Then I shall call you… Lucy!
> ANGEL B: Lucy??

[18] Everett, *Reconfiguring Myth and Narrative in Contemporary Opera* (see nt. 5), p. 198.
[19] Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, “Romantic Drama in Hungary,” in *Romantic Drama: A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages*, ed. Gerald Ernest Paul Gillespie, Amsterdam 1994, pp. 297–315, here pp. 309–310.

> ANGEL C: No, no, no! She's Lilith! What the devil — doesn't he see who she is?
> ANGEL A: He is blinded by the light!
> ANGEL B (whispering to the audience): It is Adam's first wife, Lilith. She is a demon![20]

That Lucifer attempts to name her as a female version of himself — Lucy — symbolizes millennia of men, and God himself, who have tried and failed to control Lilith (as well as cross-referencing *Die Tragödie*). From the outset, Lilith is shown musically and dramatically to exert a powerful force over all. Yet Eötvös states that "my opera is not about equal rights of men and women, but the development of society and civilization with Lilith, instead of Eve, as its starting point."[21] The tendency to disavow political forms of feminism here is in tension with the opera's central emphasis on asserting the power of Lilith, a quintessential figure of female strength and subversion. This ties in with the opera's general preference to forgo explicit political signaling in favor of indeterminate symbolism. Lilith's role, however, is fundamentally to rupture history as we know it, as she proclaims at the end of Scene 1:

> (to the Angels) You talk a lot, like a choir of angels!
> (to Lucifer) But I will bring history to an end! Get ready![22]

It is also Lilith, not the devil, who tempts Eve with the apple in the opera. Lilith as the serpent has precedence; for instance, the illustrated 15th century German Furtmeyr Bible depicts Lilith as the serpent with a woman's head — and Lilith's tell-tale long golden locks (Fig. 2). Above, we see Eve's fully formed nude body emerging from Adam's ribcage, accentuating her and Lilith's different origins. Lilith references this in Scene 10, confronting Adam: "I was your wife, before God broke your rib, to make Eve out of these bones."[23] Her subversive function is directed, from the moment she emerges from the shadows in the first scene,

[20] "Wie heißt du denn, schöne Teufelin?" "Namen sind Schall und Rauch, Lichtbringer!" "Lucifer, Lucifer, Lucifer…" "Dann nenn ich dich…Lucy!" "Lucy??" "Nein, nein, nein! Es ist doch Lilith! Zum Teufel, sieht er nicht, wer sie ist?" "Er ist geblendet vom Licht!"
[21] Péter Eötvös, *Work of the Week: Péter Eötvös's Paradise Reloaded*; https://en.schott-music.com/work-of-the-week-Péter-Eötvös-paradise-reloaded-lilith (accessed: 12 January 2020).
[22] "Ihr seid geschwätzig wie ein Engelschor! (*zu Lucifer*) Aber ich bring die Geschichte zu Ende! Mach dich fertig!"
[23] "Ich war deine Frau, bevor Gott dir die Rippe brach, diesen Knochen Eva schuf."

towards an entire history that condemned and reviled her and, in Julia Kristeva's words, all "females who can wreck the infinite."[24]

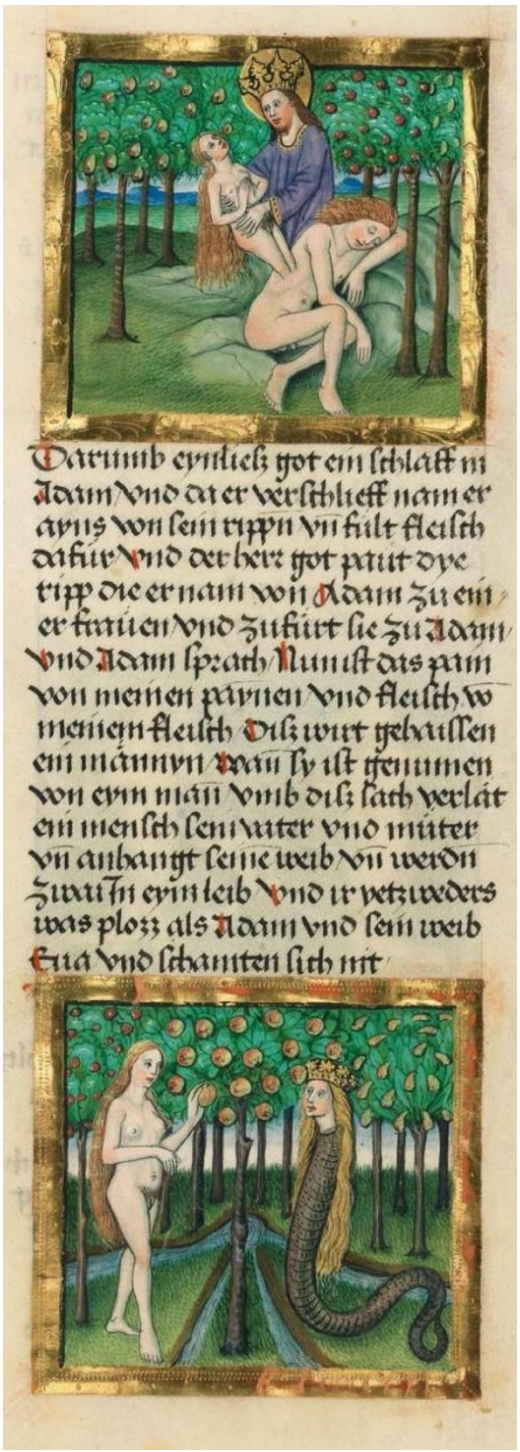


Figure 2. Inset miniatures depicting scenes from Genesis, with Lilith as serpent in the Furtmeyr Bible (late 15th century). Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 8010a, f. 10r.

[24] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York 1982, p. 157.

Lilith’s history-ending activities are ambiguous and unspecific, however. Identity and place are extremely fragile throughout *Paradise Reloaded*, but so too is its representation of time. I am not concerned here with “performance” time — how the live event is temporally experienced — but with how different time-concepts are represented within the opera. The narrative continues to suggest action moving forward and backwards in time. However, because the ‘places’ they visit are understood to be eras in human civilization, this results in a continuous unsettled doubled form of motion, where every movement back is also one forward. When Adam reaches the ‘present’ in Madách’s *Tragedy*, it is the present of the writer’s reality. When he moves into an imagined future, we could say that from any post-1860s reader’s perspective, those events as also become part of humanity’s past. Rather like reading George Orwell’s *1984* decades hence, the dystopian/utopian futures imagined by the author exist in a new relationship with those imaginable by us as readers or spectators. Fig. 3 illustrates this temporal structure. Arrows indicate the narrative direction.

This sense of doubled motion is ostensibly the same both in Madách’s *Tragedy* and the opera, but in the latter, because there are no real locations given, Scenes 3–5 do not belong to historical pasts. Scenes 6–7 continue this ambiguity because they are supposed to be set in “the future” — is this a future that reflects our present, as spectators, or is this a speculation on what might yet lie ahead for us? One answer is that the tropes of futuristic imagining presented in both *Tragedy* and *Paradise Reloaded* are generic, not specific. They do not indicate a *specific* future time but draw on typical ideas of speculative fiction — barren wastelands, mysterious scientific facilities, space travel, and so on. Fig. 4 illustrates how the schema I suggested for *Tragedy* can be mapped onto the opera. I place Lilith and Lucifer within the “eternity” frame to indicate their positions as guides drawn from a non-human realm, and although Scene 1 is described as “Earth,” after the rebel angels have left Heaven, this is evidently not in fact Earth properly; I place it within the liminal “Outer-Paradise.”

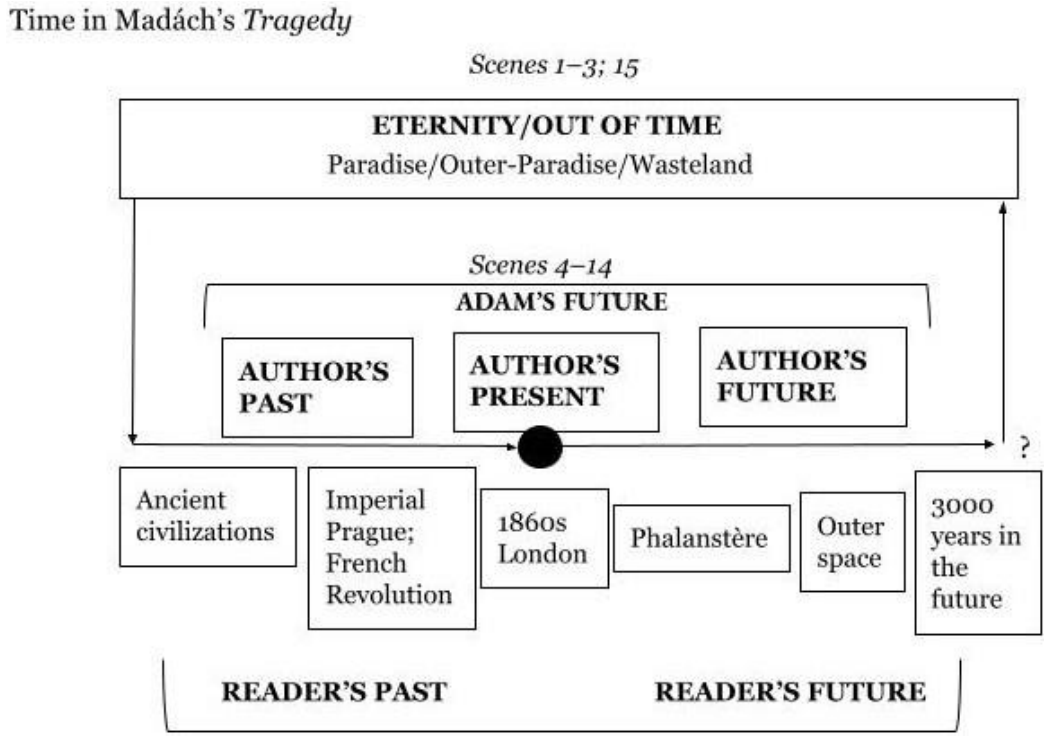


Figure 3: Temporal structure of the narrative in Madách's *Tragedy*.

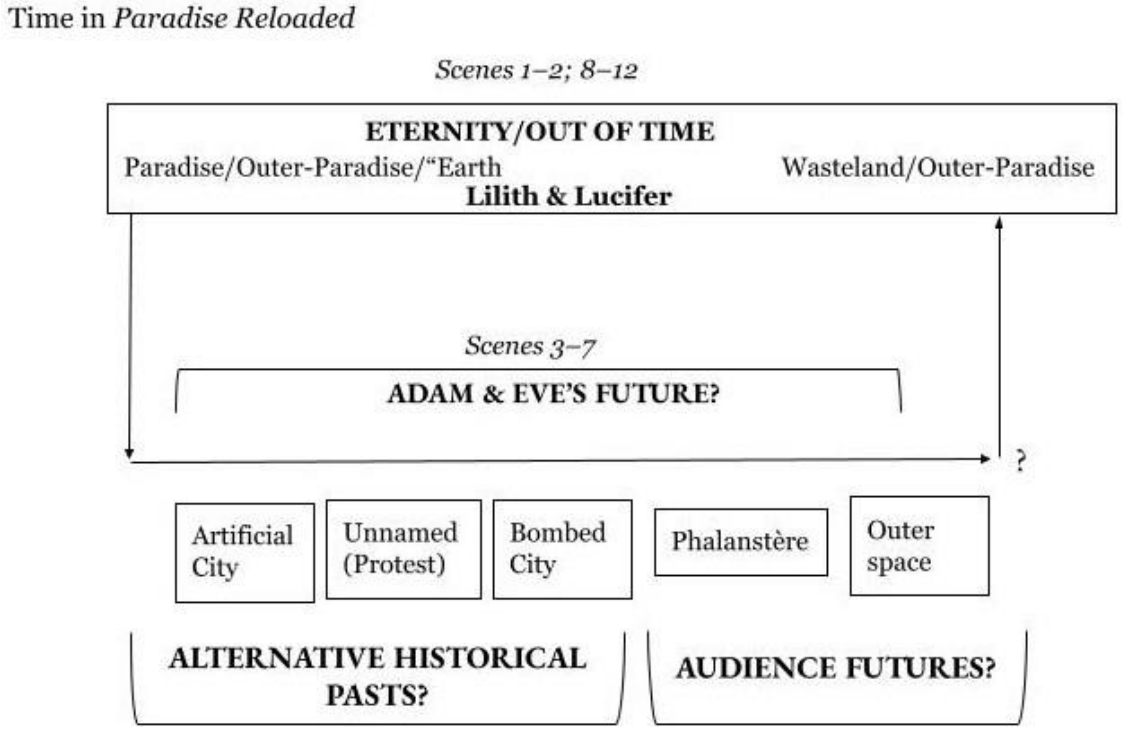


Figure 4: Temporal structure of the narrative in *Paradise Reloaded*.

Thus it is never explicit that what we are witnessing in the journey scenes is Lilith-history — a different story of humanity according to Lilith, rather than Adam and Eve. That would reflect the ‘alternative history’ form of dystopian narratives seen in works such as Philip K. Dick’s 1962 novel *The Man in the High Castle* — the world as it might have been. Moreover, because the middle scenes are no longer tethered to specific historical moments, there is good reason to suggest that the ‘journey’ in *Paradise Reloaded* is fundamentally a metaphorical one, a kind of collective thought experiment, wherein Lilith and Lucifer possess knowledge about both distant pasts and distant futures that transcends time and space. The characters are not ‘traveling’ in a conventional sense, but undergoing shared experiences whose form is ultimately left to our imagination — are they shared hallucinations, dreams, visions?

One effect of the thoroughly ambiguous and fluid constructions of time and space within *Paradise Reloaded* is a pervasive loss of goal-directed action. In Everett’s discussion of Kaija Saariaho’s *L’amour de loin* (2000), she argues that the “absence of teleology [w]as an essential feature of the musical drama.”[25] *Paradise Reloaded* shares this, but in a rhetorical frame of constant failure, rather than the suspended stasis of *L’amour de loin*. Zsolt Czigányik argues that Madách’s *Tragedy* “presents human history as a series of failed attempts to improve human existence,”[26] but this task is Sisyphean: he reaches no conclusion in the poem, and God’s words at the end speak only of the need continually to strive — “Man, fight on and trust!” (“Mensch, kämpfe und vertraue!”).[27] God has zero presence or authority in *Paradise Reloaded*. Madách’s closing motto is thus parodied from the start of the opera, beginning where the poem ends in offering an ironic take as Lucifer writes a “resignation letter” to God:

> God (comma), what do you advise me; “Fight on and trust” (period). You fight like a child (comma).

The opera satirizes man’s ‘quest for knowledge,’ presenting an anti-teleology which recalls Grabócz’s description of the importance of ritual, stasis, and cyclical

[25] Everett, *Reconfiguring Myth and Narrative* (see nt. 5), p. ix.
[26] Zsolt Czigányik, “From the Bright Future of the Nation to the Dark Future of Mankind: Jókai and Karinthy in Hungarian Utopian Tradition” in: *Hungarian Cultural Studies* 8 (2015), pp. 12–23, here p. 14.
[27] The original Hungarian is “Mondottam, ember: küzdj és bízva bízzál!”.

states in contemporary operas. These narratives abandon “any quest for redemption from the very outset”:[28] every scene in *Paradise Reloaded* is beset with challenges without any obvious goal. Linear progressions, both historical, psychological, or temporal, are negated, mirroring also Grabócz’s description of “*repetition in the description of the same state of* soul throughout a true or imaginary journey and articulated solely by variations.”[29] Repetition is embedded both in the dramatic structure as a whole and in each scene, where physical thirst and the denial of water also functions throughout the opera functions as a running metaphor for the fundamental need to know and the eternally unsatisfied state of human existence. Every scene is built on a failure that is already present from the beginning, and by the end, we appear to have witnessed the characters moving forward in time, but they have progressed nowhere. Adam and Eve are evidently psychologically affected by the ‘journey,’ and yet their closing moments show them once more rejecting their present in favor of an unspecific ‘better’ future, once again declaring “We don’t need God, Or you, shadows! We’re smashing through the mirror; let’s see what’s behind it!” We end at the beginning: the cycle begins again. Only Lilith, as I suggest later, offers a way out.

Dystopian Paradise

Aaron S. Rosenfeld’s summary of dystopia suggests it can signify a kind of impulse; a sermon to preach of dangers; a dream; a warning; speculative flights of imagination, or indulgent escapism.[30] What is the purpose of dystopia in *Paradise Reloaded*? I suggest it is really a mix of all of these: it indulges in fancy and imagination, it offers dream-like states, and it seems both to preach of human wrongdoings and warn us of unspecified dangers ahead in a twisted future. But it is also fundamentally not a tragic drama, departing both from the brooding and misanthropic tone of Madách’s *Tragedy* and the religious gravity of *Paradise Lost*; as Frank Beerman, musical director for the Theater Chemnitz production,

[28] Grabócz, “Archetypes of Initiation and Static Temporality in Contemporary Opera” (see nt. 4), p. 105.
[29] Ibid., p. 107, emphasis original.
[30] Aaron S. Rosenfeld, *Character and Dystopia: The Last Men*, New York 2020, p. 3.

notes: “for me it is a work that deals with a fundamental human question in terms of content, but does it in a way that is so unique to Eötvös: it always happens with a certain amount of humor.”[31] As in many of Eötvös’s previous operas, the attraction to irony, satire, and parody continues to be palpable. Indeed, Anna Dalos reads a meta-narrative into Eötvös’s penchant for satire in all his works, arguing that they play with “humor and self-irony, and querying constantly the artist’s role in the creation of works of art.”[32] Overall, things tend to get darker and more grotesque as the journey proceeds, but there is always a tinge of irony and biting comedy that draws it back from bleakness.

The evocation of Paradise and the Fall, for instance, is a relatively gentle introduction to the opera’s dystopian satires. The orchestral prelude is designed to evoke the expansive cosmos, with deep rumbling percussion, a dissonant, high-pitched accordion drone, and erratic strings. Eötvös returns to this soundworld on several occasions as a way to signify the fearsome abyss of the universe, for instance in Scene 7 in outer space. At the transition to Scene 1, as Lucifer dictates his letter to his hamfisted angel-secretaries, the atmosphere changes quickly, giving way to a punchy, darkly comic soundscape that will dominate throughout the opera. Each production has taken a contrasting approach to evoking the textual and musical absurdity visually, particularly in staging the Paradise/outer-Paradise realms. In the Vienna première, the aesthetic is self-consciously comic, directed by Johannes Erath, décor by Katrin Connan, and costumes by Martina Haubenwaller. It offers a tongue-in-cheek eroticism: most characters remain barely clothed, Adam and Eve covered not with fig leaves but skimpy swimwear. Muscular, shirtless, and appearing to have been slathered in oil, Adam and Lucifer are differentiated through the large pair of feathered white wings attached to the latter. Lilith wears a long pale dress in these early scenes; the Angels grubby white undershirts and small, fancy-dress style feathery wings, and the women’s chorus in long blue ballgowns. The costumes change slightly in each scene, but the deliberately glitzy and trashy spirit remains.

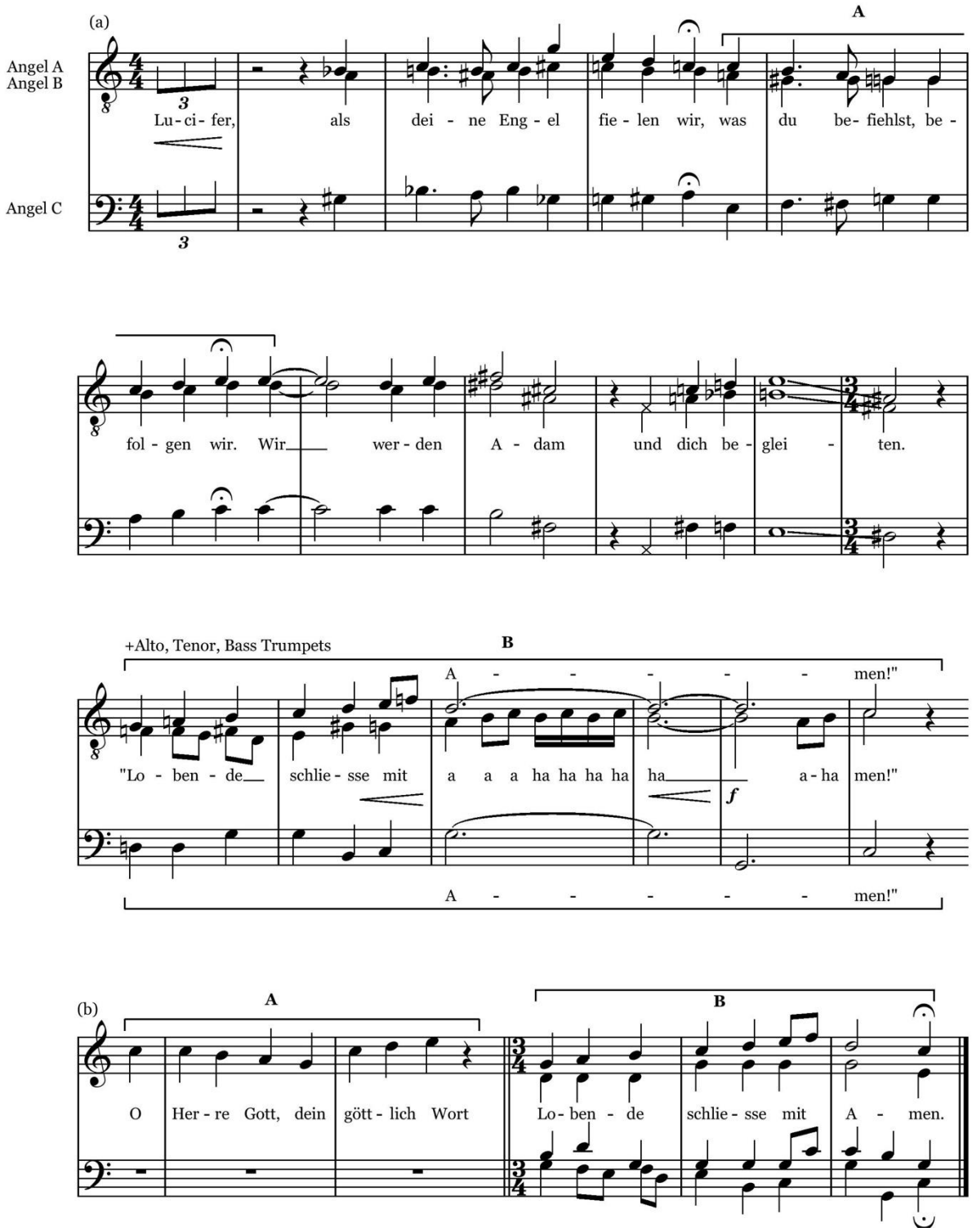
[31] “Für mich, ist es ein Werk, das sich inhaltlich mit einer Ur-Menschheitsfrage auseinandersetzt, das aber auf einer Art und Weise tut, die Eötvös so eigen ist: Es passiert immer mit einer gewissen Portion Humor.” Frank Beerman in conversation with Jón Philipp von Linden, qtd. in: *Paradise Reloaded (Lilith)*, program booklet, Theater Chemnitz 2015, pp. 22–25, p. 23.
[32] Anna Dalos, “Searching for the Composer’s Role in Péter Eötvös’ First Creative Period (1963–1989)” in: *Perspectives of New Music* 54 (2016), no. 2, pp. 93–105, here p. 93.

The Theater Chemnitz staging, produced by Helen Malkowsky, stage design by Hermann Feuchter, and costumes by Henrike Bromber, was a tad more muted in aesthetic. Lilith and Eve were typically in negligées (black/white respectively) or other plain, monochromatic attire; Adam and Lucifer in smart-casual style dress (plain shirts, trousers, jackets). The framing setting was intended to evoke a crumbling East German hotel, with the Angels in military garb. Nonetheless, the shabby mid-century modern look also allowed for Soviet-era kitsch and absurd visual spectacle, such as in the use of a children’s chorus in blonde wigs and shiny gold jumpsuits. The most recent production at the Theater Bielefeld in 2020 took yet another route, directed by Wolfgang Nägele with staging by Stefan Mayer and costumes by Irina Spreckelmeyer, opting for a surrealist and absurdist aesthetic throughout. As shown in Fig. 5, in the Eden/Paradise scenes, the lush garden is enclosed within the glass box beloved of contemporary opera stagings, Lilith all in black, the Angels and female chorus as macabre gravediggers in black, and Adam and Eve in beige, straitjacket-esque bodysuits.

Figure 5: Lilith, Eve, Adam, and Angels in Paradise/Outer-Paradise, *Paradise Reloaded*, Theater Bielefeld, January 2020. Photo © Bettina Stöeß. Used with permission.

As Darko Suvin puts it, “historically and psychologically, dystopia is unthinkable without, and as a rule mingled with, satire.”[33] Perhaps the most obvious musical satire in the opera is a series of parodies of the chorale “Lobe den Herren,” which constitute the main soundworld of the second half of Scene 1 and the majority of Scene 2. Sarcastic praises to God are sung mockingly by the Angels, the female chorus, and briefly Lilith. Scene 1 closes with an *a cappella* parody, show in Example 1a. The first ten measures of the chorale-satire mimic the homorhythm and metrical structure of a typical chorale, but in thoroughly dissonant part-writing. A passing reference to what I believe is the first line of the chorale “O Herre Gott, dein göttlich Wort” occurs near the beginning, marked as “A,” but the main quotation is the last line of the final verse of “Lobe den Herren,” marked as “B.” The original melody for A and Bach’s harmonization of the end of “Lobe den Herren” are shown in Example 1b. Angel A and C’s parts for the last line almost match Bach’s harmonization exactly, but thrown off by Angel B’s sung mimicry of laughing, all ending in an exaggerated flourish, now joined by trumpets. In another moment of intertextuality, Eötvös told me that he intended these chorale passages to resemble the choruses in Mozart’s *Zauberflöte*[34] — the ‘drei Knaben’ have grown up to be sardonic fallen angels.

[33] Darko Suvin, “Theses on Dystopia 2001” in: *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini, New York 2003, pp. 187–202, here p. 190.
[34] In the Chemnitz production, the three Angels were cast as a Rabbi, a Protestant, and a Catholic, making the religious satire more pointed.



Example 1a: Angels’ dissonant chorale-parody of “Lobe den Herren,” *Paradise Reloaded*, end of Scene 1. Reproduced by permission of Schott Music, Mainz. / Example 1b: Chorale tune, “O Herre Gott, dein göttlich Wort” and Bach’s harmonization of the last line to “Lobe den Herren.”

Dystopian Futures

As the opera progresses into the journey scenes, we enter the unsettled temporality outlined earlier in which we are witnessing futuristic dystopian scenes that are also simultaneously potential rewritten pasts. The legacy of György Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* (1977/96) is unmistakable throughout these scenes, but comparisons are beyond the scope of the present article.[35] We can read this self-conscious reference to the artificiality of art, or opera, in Lilith's (and to a lesser extent Lucifer's) control of each journey scene as a process of design, but this ironic play is combined with surrealist, grotesque, and absurdist elements that forge the dystopian landscapes. In Scene 3, for instance, the "Artificial City" is described as "stuffed with peasants and migrants! The sunny metropolis is sweating, and its eyes are bulging out, like a young boa trying to devour a goat."[36] Horror is paired with farcical humor such as when Lilith and Lucifer pass by the action, and the Angels cry "Shit, get down, it's the cops!" ("Scheiße, runter, Bullen!"). We know little of why this land is so tormented and cracked with danger, only that Adam and Eve are wandering and desperately thirsty, tormented by the Angels. We might wonder if the creators are referencing humanitarian crises today — something Eötvös has addressed in his other work, notably the orchestral piece *Alle vittime senza nome* (2017), "created in memory of the numerous Arabic and African individuals who unwittingly climbed into overcrowded boats in the hope of arriving to a happier world and sank in the open sea before even reaching the Italian coast."[37]

In Scene 5, two Angels beat a man to death; the third, as a journalist, photographs the scene, before being held at knifepoint by the others, and screams of "free press" ensue. The women are the focus of this scene, singing of a similar harrowing vision to those of scenes 3 and 4: "I see a city full of clouds of fire, I see wars and soldiers with invisible weapons, and God's name written in blood

[35] See Everett, "Signification of Parody and the Grotesque in György Ligeti's Le Grand Macabre," in: *Music Theory Spectrum* 31 (2009), no. 1, pp. 26–56.
[36] "gestopft mit Landvolk und Migranten! Die Sonnenmetropole schwitzt, und die Augen treten ihr hervor, wie einer jungen Boa beim Versuch, eine Ziege zu verschlingen."
[37] Péter Eötvös, *Alle vittime senza nome*, https://en.schott-music.com/shop/alle-vittime-senza-nome-no344129.html (accessed: 10 February 2021).

everywhere!”[38] They lament for the dead of an unnamed massacre, now preparing to create an explosion that will leave “every daughter a widow, and every mother alone” (“jede Tochter eine Witwe, und jede Mutter allein”), and Eve in “the city of the culprits” (“die Stadt der Täter”). The unspecified setting of the “Wasteland” (“die Wüste”) in which Scenes 3, and 9–12 seem to occur, as well as the “bombed city” of Scene 5, echoes the descriptions of the “unreal city” in T.S. Eliot’s poem: “these hooded hordes swarming/Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth/Ringed by the flat horizon only/What is the city over the mountains/Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air […] Unreal.”[39]

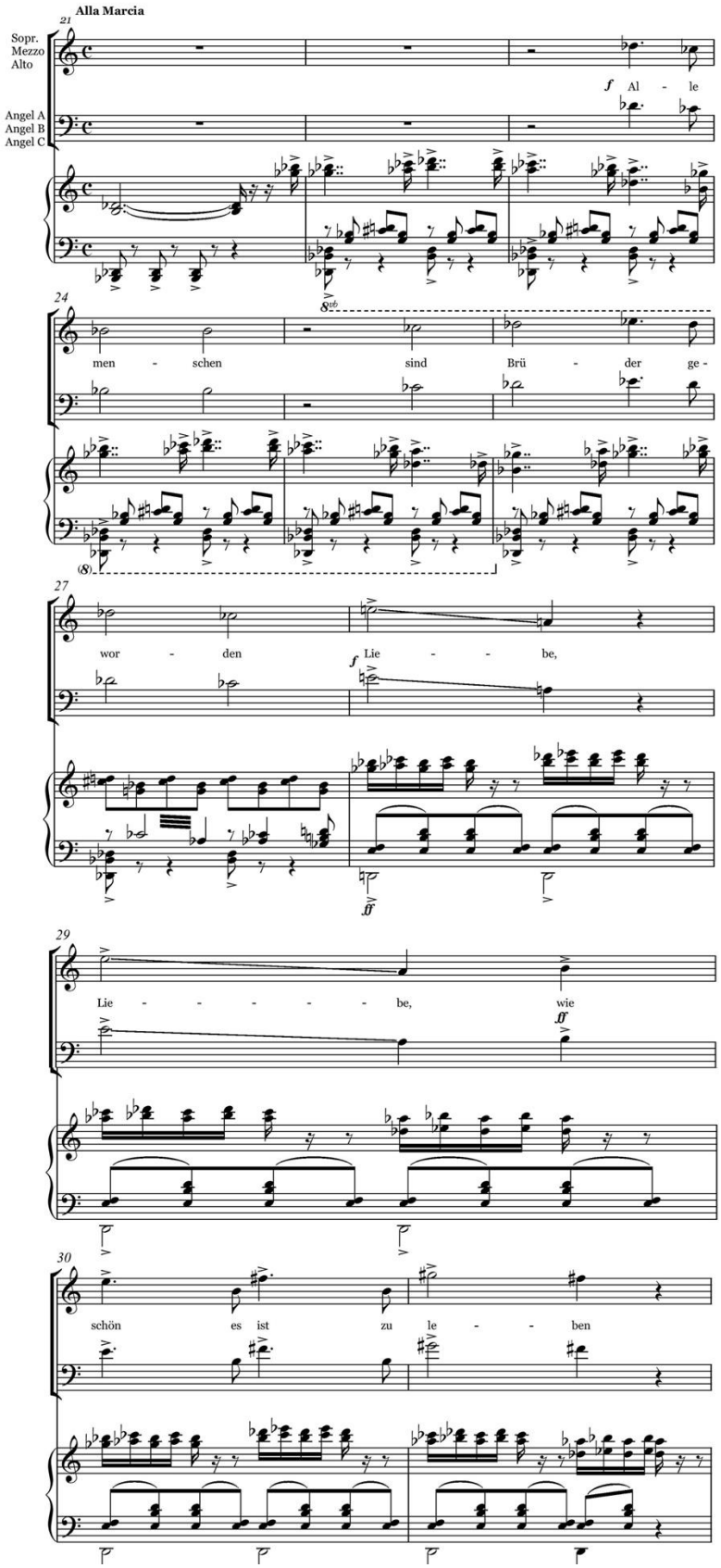
Scene 6 offers a chaotic mélange of science-fiction automatons, the psychological disintegration of Eve, hanging specters of futuristic authoritarianism, which engages deeply with the grotesque mode. Its setting is a “Phalanstère,” taken from Madách, based on utopian socialist communities envisaged by Charles Fourier (1772-1837). Given form in his writings in the 1830s, others drew up plans for “Phalanstères” based on his sketches after his death. Figure 6 shows a design by Victor Considérant (1808-1893),[40] one of Fourier’s disciples who was instrumental in developing and applying his teacher’s socialist philosophies.[41] These remained largely speculative throughout the 19th century.[42] Representing the Fourierists’ mix of socialist theories and the spirit of post-industrial revolution invention, in Madách, the Phalanstère is a vision combining fear and thrill of scientific and philosophical progress from a mid-century perspective. In part because there has never been a successful manifestation of the ideal proposed by Fourier and his followers, the very idea of

[38] “Ich sehe eine Stadt voller Feuerwolken. Kriege und Krieger mit unsichtbaren Waffen sehe ich, und überall den Namen Gottes in Blut geschrieben!”
[39] T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland* [1922] in: *The New Oxford Book of English Verse 1250–1950*, ed. Helen Gardner, Oxford 1972, p. 887.
[40] Victor Considérant, *L’Avenir. Perspective d’un phalanstère ou palais sociétaire dédié à l’humanité, d’après le plan de Charles Fourier* (Bordeaux, n.d.). Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb304544872 (accessed: 15 February 2021).
[41] For more on Considérant’s life and attempts at establishing phalanstery-style communes in France and the United States, see Jonathan Beecher, *Victor Considérant and the Rise and Fall of French Romantic Socialism*, Berkeley 2001.
[42] No fully-fledged Phalanstère was ever realized. Several communes were attempted according to Fourier’s ideals, e.g. the North American Phalanx in Monmouth County, New Jersey in 1843 (burned down in 1857); in Condé-sur-Vesgre; Le Corbusier designed a building in Marseilles in the late 1940s inspired by the idea. For the spread Spanish Fourierism, see Juan Pro, “Thinking of a Utopian Future: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century Spain,” in: *Utopian Studies* 26 (2015), no. 2, pp. 329–48.

the phalanstery takes on mythical qualities something imagined and evoked through drawings, architecture, stories, and now opera, but something that has never really existed. It has much to offer for a dystopian space of imagination in an operatic context.

Figure 6. Detail from Victor Considérant, *L'Avenir. Perspective d'un phalanstère.*

The Phalanstère appears in *Paradise Reloaded* as a clinical facility for the mentally unwell, where Eve, a patient, is instructed to sing in this scene “wie eine Ophelia” — listless, unstable female faiblesse. Although this is rendered differently across the three productions, the libretto instructs there to be “a large hall. Slowly pulsating, harsh light…Unbearable monotony, bright light.” The Vienna production evoked the lighting most faithfully, with large horizontal bands of white light commandeering the stage. The women appear as cyborgs, making robotic, eerily repetitive motions, buts eventually collapse; Lilith observes that their “batteries are empty” (“ihre Batterie ist alle”). The cyborg-women and Angels sing monotonous, slithering glissandi repeating “Liebe,” while the accordion continues plangently, dissonant with the rest of the orchestra, which evokes the pulsating light musically in a slowly increasing textural mass. Eventually this energy builds and explodes in a sudden outburst: a crashing, dissonant fragment of the “Hymn of Europe” (Ex. 2). Sounding more as Hell’s army advancing than an ode to brotherhood and solidarity — “alle Menschen sind Brüder geworden” — Lucifer and Lilith mock the message, a pointed commentary, perhaps, on the state of the European Union in recent years.



Example 2: Parody of the Hymn of Europe, *Paradise Reloaded,* Scene 6, mm. 21–32. Reproduced by permission of Schott Music, Mainz.

In the Bielefeld production, bizarre figures surround Eve as hallucinations: some have animal heads, but most are dressed in what seem to be caricatured clothes of early Soviet school uniforms (Fig. 7). The whole scene, in every production, reflects Esti Sheinberg's description of the grotesque as "an unresolvable ironic utterance, a hybrid that combines the ludicrous with the horrifying."[43] Almost every possible manifestation of a dystopian grotesque is present: the cultish community implied by the phalanstery, female automata, clinical sterility, psychological hallucinations, and political imagery in text, music, and staging. Where the Bach parodies offered a light-hearted satirical distortion of something familiar that suggests no great threat, this "future" illustrates Sheinberg's classification of the grotesque in music as primarily sensual and emotional rather than intellectual or analytical, conjuring the grotesque which "not only presents, but actually embraces, dysphoric human values: the despised, the ridiculous, the horrifying."[44]

Figure 7: Staging of the *Phalanstère* in *Paradise Reloaded*, Scene 6,
Theater Bielefeld, January 2020. Photo © Bettina Stöeß. Used with permission.

[43] Esti Sheinberg, *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich*, Farnham 2000, p. 207.
[44] Ibid., p. 210.

Eötvös has also drawn attention to his attraction to satire as reflecting Hungarian political history, particularly in *Three Sisters*:

> Because there's plenty of grotesquery and humour in Hungarian thought, the whole Soviet occupation becomes absurd, humorous. One can deal with it [...] I think it's typically Central European, Eastern European [...] it's a kind of intellectual defense against absurdity.[45]

The hellish landscapes in *Paradise Reloaded* have obvious political symbolism, but any specific references are ambiguous. Jonathan Cross's analysis of Harrison Birtwistle's remarkable *The Mask of Orpheus* (1985) attributes the attraction especially to Orphic myths to the cultural and political turmoil of the 20th century, as a "way of coming to terms with contemporary events that were, literally, unspeakable. As in earlier times, retelling mythical stories could help to 'explain' difficult phenomena within a symbolic realm."[46] For Rosenfeld, dystopia today works similarly: "[it] has become ubiquitous in our present age of anxiety, anger, and upheaval."[47] *Paradise Reloaded* constantly teeters on the edge of insinuating what about the present it is reflecting in its absurd dystopian scenes, with the effect that its potential to come to terms with unspeakable horrors of our present age is perhaps diminished in terms of immediate impact upon audiences.

After the Future: Utopian Lilith?

Each setting visited in the journey scenes qualifies as dystopian. Where does that leave us at the opera's ending, having torn through human history? If we accept a definition of utopia as "fictional works which claim truly to describe a community posited at some level as ideal,"[48] is any such community or society ever suggested in *Paradise Reloaded*? The opera never attempts to define a specific utopian vision. In *Paradise Lost* and Madách's *Tragedy*, Lucifer's rebellion is predicated on his attempt to rival God, that he "trusted to have equaled the Most High" (I: 40). Lucifer's promise of showing Adam "a world that

[45] Péter Eötvös, in: Rachel Beckles Willson, "Péter Eötvös in Conversation about 'Three Sisters'" in: *Tempo* 220 (2002), pp. 11–13, here p. 13.
[46] Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: The Mask of Orpheus*, Farnham 2009, p. 9.
[47] Rosenfeld, *Character and Dystopia: The Last Men* (see nt. 30), p. 3.
[48] Thomas More, Francis Bacon, and Henry Neville, ed. Susan Bruce *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis, and The Isle of Pines*, Oxford 1999, p. xi.

gets better," and Adam's own conviction that he and Eve will be able to find it if they just keep on striving forward, offers all the trappings of a promised land to which only he can show the way. Yet, as we know, this is repeatedly shown to be a failure. Lucifer has exhausted the limits of his own disobedience, proclaiming "I'm tired of fighting, I'm only fighting against my own shadow on the wall! God, I'm coming."[49] That Lucifer's plan fails seems to be a warning sign to foolish humans, but the moral of the story here is hardly that we should beware the temptation of a better life, or that we should put our trust in God, resigning ourselves to him alongside Lucifer. God — any God — remains unseen and silent throughout the opera. Only Lilith is presented as she who might "equal the Most High," with power and strength above all others — she who can wreck the infinite.

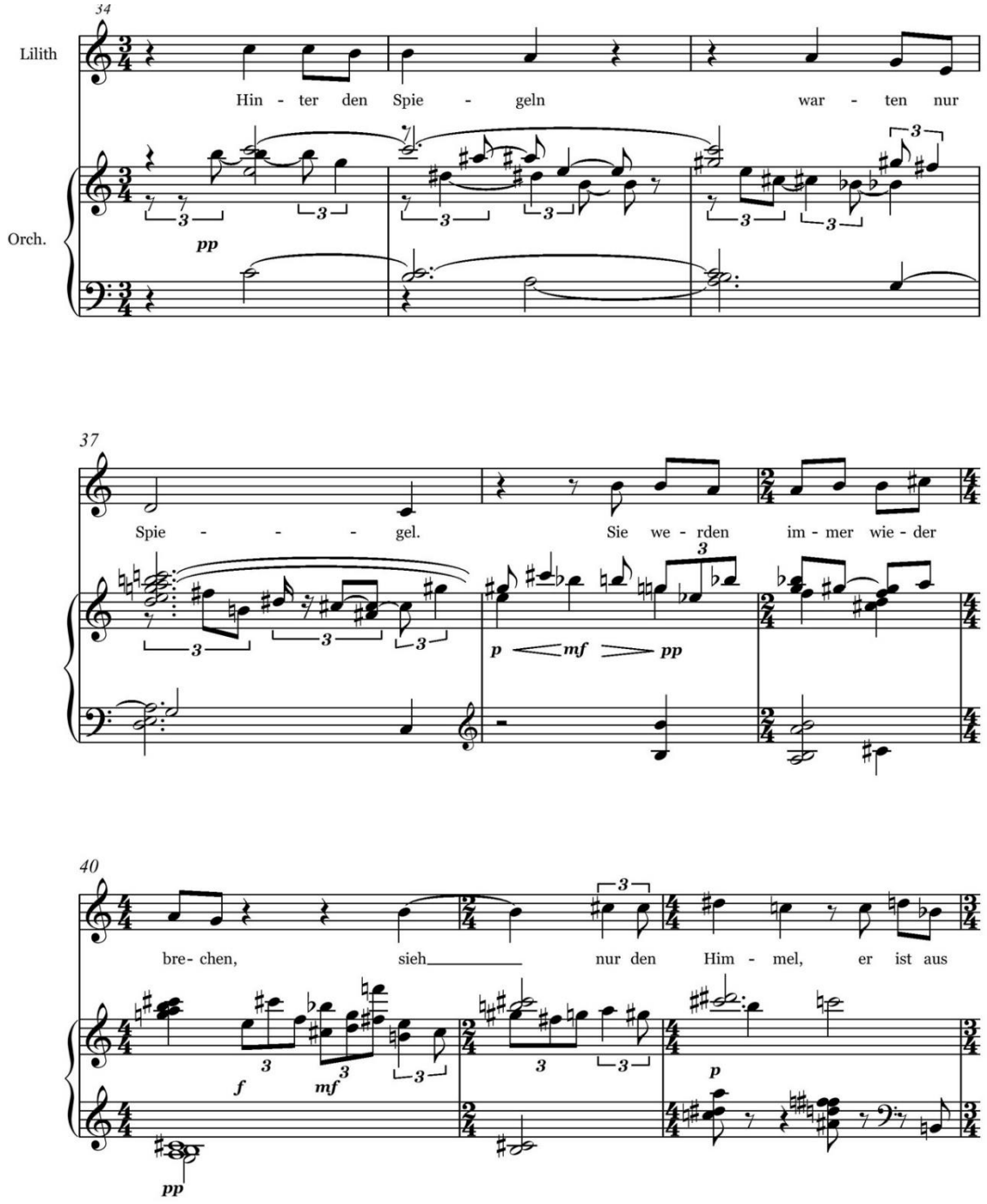
Lucifer's promises are easily dismissed as legitimate contenders for utopia, but hope is not entirely absent in the opera. Lilith's presence from Scene has been a disruption to the status quo, the femme fatale who destroys, emasculates and possesses, bewitches and eviscerates. In Scene 11, Eve and Lilith are both pregnant by Adam, and he has to choose: rather than start a new world with Lilith, he walks away with Eve. Again, we have come full circle: it is as if we are on the verge, at the very end of the opera, of seeing what Lilith's universe has to offer. Lilith addresses the futility of Adam's decision, alone in the final scene:

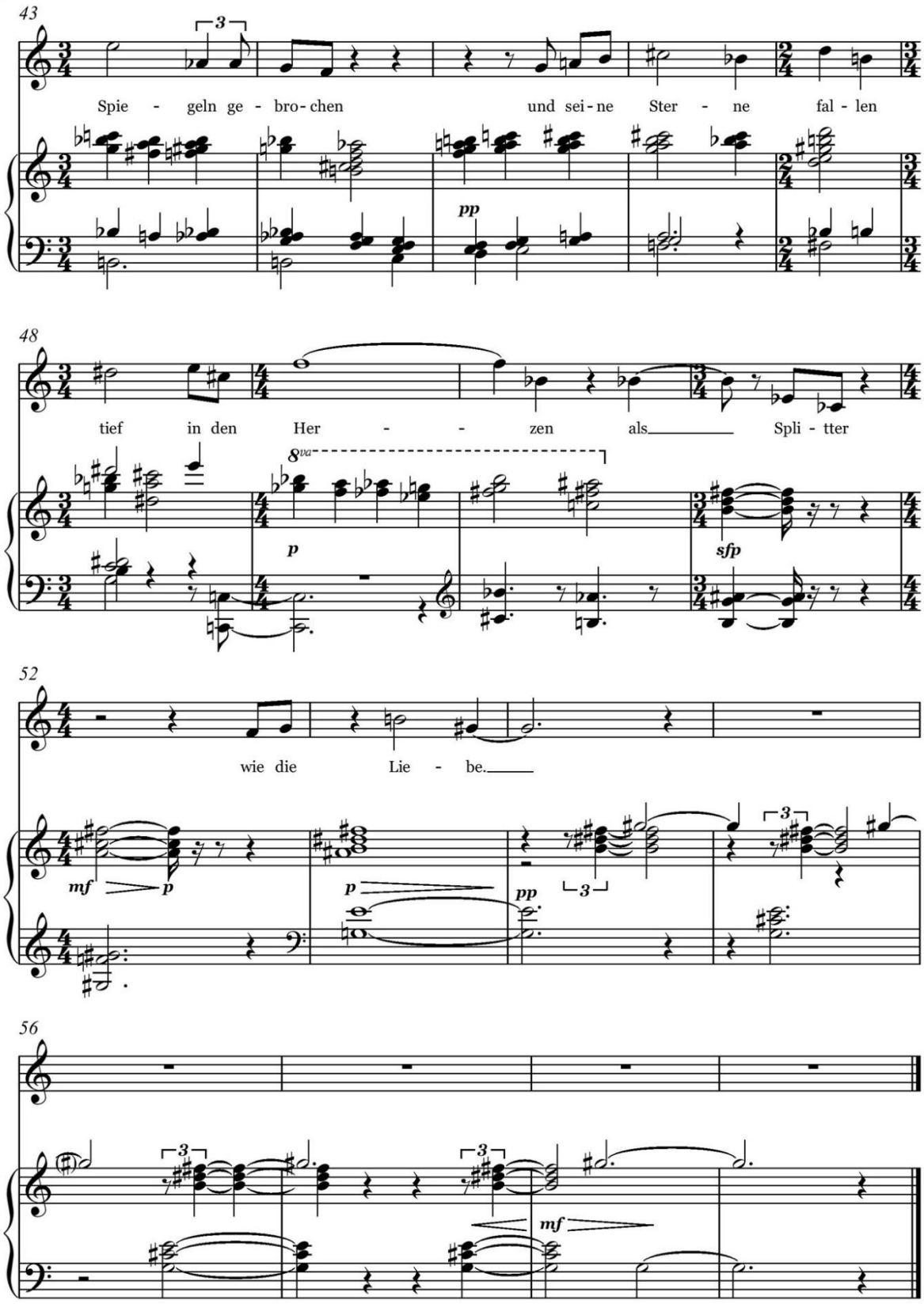
> Behind the mirror lies another mirror. My heart, do you see it, it's made of glass. It becomes blind, like the love it bore. Nothing remains of the world except deceit.
>
> Behind the mirror lies another mirror. They'll smash through again and again; just look at the sky, its reflection breaks, and its stars fall deep into hearts like shards of glass; like love.[50]

The aria is set with a recurring, simple C major descending melody for "Hinter den Spiegeln, warten nur Spiegel," with the orchestra providing a glistening, spiky texture symbolizing the shattering glass. The second half is shown in Example 3. This final scene initially struck me as wholly pessimistic, but Eötvös told me something remarkable: that he equated Lilith with truth itself, that the

[49] "Ich bin des Kämpfens müde, dass ich nur noch gegen meinen eigenen Schatten an der Wand kämpfe! Gott, ich komme."
[50] "Hinter den Spiegeln, warten nur Spiegel. Mein Herz, siehst du's, es ist aus Glas. Es wird blind, wie die Liebe, die es trug, von der Welt bleibt nichts, nur Betrug. Hinter den Spiegeln, warten nur Spiegel, sie werden immer wieder brechen, sieh nur den Himmel, er ist aus Spiegeln gebrochen und seine Sterne fallen tief in den Herzen als Splitter, wie die Liebe."

ending is optimistic only for Lilith, but not for the deceit of the other characters. We hear a challenge implied to the value of truth in current political discourse, though subtle again. This suggests a kind of utopian vision of Lilith that, rather than being articulated throughout the opera, only emerges in its final moments.





Example 3: Piano-vocal reduction of Lilith’s aria and end of opera,
Paradise Reloaded, Scene 12, mm. 34–59. Reproduced by permission of Schott Music, Mainz.

The aria offers space to emotion and heartbreak without reducing Lilith to a woman scorned. Eötvös asserts that “Lilith is no tragic figure”: when the Angels declare at the end of Scene 1 that they are going to “peel the apple” and see the worm inside, Lilith declares herself to be that worm (“und der Wurm bin ich!”), but Eötvös also referred to the Worm as a “humorous symbol for the imperfection in the world.”[51] Lilith as the imperfection, however, is not as the flaw in the world but a potential hidden strength, challenging history as we have known — Lilith is “an omnipotent figure.”[52] Eötvös and Ostermaier see such strength in Lilith that positive futures can come from her alone; she is greater than humanity, truer and stronger. The lingering semitone in the final measure functions as a question mark: will Lilith’s power triumph, or will we just smash through the mirror in endless futility? Much more investigation is necessary as to the potential feminist futures for this opera when a commitment to feminism is lacking overtly, but subtly present throughout. The opera closes not with the preceding dramatic chaos but by gazing to a barely perceptible future, to a vision of the kind that Lola Olufemi articulates when she writes that “feminism is a political project about what *could be*. It’s always looking forward, invested in futures we can’t quite grasp yet.”[53] Even if it is hard to discern a clear message to take away from the opera, standing at the horizon, Lilith invites us to reload once again for the 21st century.

[51] Péter Eötvös, in: Pedro Amaral and Péter Eötvös, *Parlando-Rubato: Gespräche, Monologe und andere Umwege*, Mainz 2018, pp. 267–268.
[52] Eötvös, *Parlando-Rubato* (see nt. 51), p. 267.
[53] Lola Olufemi, *Feminism, Interrupted*, London 2020, p. 1, emphasis original.