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Characterization in the Operas of Penderecki

Karakterizacija v operah Pendereckega

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IZVLEČEK

Karakterizacija v štirih operah Pendereckega je dobro razvita. Vključuje specifične melodične intervale za junake, popačene vokalne linije, uporabo koloraturnega petja in različne oblike cerkvenega petja ter govorjenja.

ABSTRACT

Characterization in the four operas of Krzysztof Penderecki is well developed. It includes specified melodic intervals for characters, distorted vocal lines, the use of coloratura singing and various forms of chanting and speaking.

Introduction

Characterization in dramatic works is a complicated issue. In the first instance it concerns the words chosen and what form of emphasis has been adopted by the writer. The sequence of events in a drama will also have much to do with how the character is allowed to develop, and in particular how each character responds to the new situations that arise. In addition, the actual performance by the actors in a spoken drama can add a new dimension to the definition of the character in a spoken play. When making the transfer to an operatic scenario, the words obviously are still of the first importance, but now the way that the words are set to music (if at all) and the level at which the words can be understood by the audience are now particularly relevant. When setting the words of a play for an opera we can expect that, to keep the amount of the sung words to a reasonable size, considerable reduction in the amount of text used is necessary. Typically, an operatic composer may use less than a third of the

words of the original script. It is quite normal for a composer together with the librettist as well as making a reduction in the size of the text may feel the need to recast the work in order to accommodate the change of medium. An opera tends to work best if the issues are kept uncomplicated as the audience will need to pay attention to a number of things at once and might otherwise become confused. Operas like Berg's *Wozzeck* and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* are effective in many ways because they concentrate on specific character definition in individual scenes in the early stages and let the drama develop out of these cameos in the later acts. To some extent this has been carried over from the original plays, but the musical reinforcement of these scenes makes an elaborate operatic text unnecessary.

The protagonists in Penderecki's four operas have many striking features: none can be seen to be "ordinary." Penderecki's job as composer and that of his librettist (sometimes himself) was to distil the essence of these characters and focus on the most important features, even if there was some risk of oversimplification. In the first instance characterization is partly a question of identity, partly a question of interaction and partly a question of development. A good way to investigate the process of transformation from book and/or play to opera is to examine the texts to determine some of the features of the original and then look to the words that Penderecki has chosen to set and how he has set them to music. This is one of the most important means by which the composer is able to influence the characterization of his performers. Because there has been a certain amount of criticism of Penderecki's operatic characterization in early reports on the operas, it is also a purpose of the present essay to address some of the issues raised.

The Devils of Loudun

The time of the action of Penderecki's first opera, *The Devils of Loudun*, is the 1630s. The work is based on the extensive and elaborate book of the same title by Aldous Huxley and the play derived from it, *The Devils* of 1961 by John Whiting.¹ Penderecki made his own libretto in German, basing it on the translation by Erich Fried of Whiting's play, calling the opera *Die Teufel von Loudun*.²

Huxley's book is full of long excursions into philosophy, but also has some elaborate characterization of the protagonists, Urbain Grandier and Sœur Jeanne and the subsidiary characters, especially Adam and Mannoury, who did so much to engineer Grandier's downfall, and it is here that we will start. Grandier is described by Huxley as "a man in the prime of youth, tall, athletic, with an air of grave authority, even ... of majesty."³ However, "The new parson, it was only too obvious, took an interest in

1 Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudun* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952); John Whiting, *The Devils* (London: Heinemann, 1961).

2 The published score (Mainz: Schott, 1969) also includes the alternative English title used here and an English singing version adapted by Desmond Clayton from Whiting's play. Penderecki's revisions of 1972 and 1975 do not affect any of the points made in this study.

3 Huxley, *The Devils of Loudun*, 6.

his female parishioners that was more than merely pastoral.”⁴ Huxley summarises his sexual morality in relation to his vows as a priest in the following way: “A promise to perform the impossible is not binding. For the young male continence is impossible. Therefore no vow involving such continence is binding.”⁵ In his professional capacity he had “along with solid talents, the most dazzling of gifts, and the most dangerous – eloquence,”⁶ but is clear that his lifestyle, including his outspoken language as well as his sexual proclivities, helped him to make many enemies, including the chemist Adam and the surgeon Mannoury. By noting the stocks of contemporary medicines, Huxley deduced that Adam’s establishment was a middle-ranking pharmacy, but also that his position in the community gave him access to much confidential information as well as opportunities to influence people with whom he came in contact and generally to manipulate public opinion.⁷ Although he is in fact referring to Grandier, Huxley’s words can equally apply to others who schemed the demise of Grandier, especially to the evil machinations of Adam: “For a clever man, nothing is easier than to find arguments that will convince him that he is doing right when he is doing what he wants to do.”⁸ This leads us to the visions of Sœur Jeanne which involved Grandier in alleged acts in what she thought were those of demonic possession. Sœur Jeanne was deformed and unattractive, with “a chronic resentment which made it impossible for her either to feel affection or to permit herself to be loved.”⁹ At various points it is hinted that the catalyst for her alleged possession was Grandier’s rejection of her proposition to become director of the local order. The contemporary chronicler Jean-Joseph Surin noted her laugh which made him find it difficult to take her seriously, and which Huxley describes as “of derision or of cynicism.”¹⁰ The hint is that she is not of completely sound mind is made repeatedly, a feature that is clearly indicated by the techniques that Penderecki uses in setting her words.

John Whiting’s transformation of these characteristics into his play, *The Devils*, is very illuminating in the way that it distils the essence of Huxley’s study. The characters take on many of the features given in detail by Huxley, but do it in a subtle way. Because Penderecki’s setting is principally based on the play, the way that Whiting and Penderecki treat the different people is clearly linked.

As the leading character in the play, Grandier commands our attention first of all. In the opening act of the play and the opera he appears in various contexts. In the first scene of the opera he appears as an image in a vision of Sœur Jeanne as she receives his rejection of her offer of the post of spiritual adviser to her convent. His presence is almost incidental to the nun’s incredibly vivid visionary singing which is characterized by short phrases of repeated notes followed by large leaps of a minor ninth both upward and downward indicating her visionary mood or even her allegedly demented state.¹¹

4 Ibid., 7.

5 Ibid., 15.

6 Ibid., 20.

7 Ibid., 47.

8 Ibid., 51.

9 Ibid., 110.

10 Ibid., 110–111.

11 Krzysztof Penderecki, *Die Teufel von Loudun – The Devils of Loudun*, score (Mainz: Schott, 1969), 3–7.

Later in scene six her lines become even more distorted.¹² In the second scene Grandier is mentioned in passing by Adam and Mannoury, the chemist and surgeon respectively. Again Grandier is not present but the dialogue by the two has a character of its own with its disjointed phrases suggesting something of the nature of busybodies plotting and scheming.¹³ Robert Hatten pertinently remarked: “The characters Adam, a chemist, and Mannoury, a surgeon, call to mind the Captain and the Doctor in *Wozzeck*, and they share a kind of comic/grotesque music with disjunctive vocal lines and minimal instrumental commentary.”¹⁴ Finally in the third scene Grandier appears in a bathtub with the widow Ninon. While there are still some ninths in the vocal lines, the melodic movement is mostly by semitones, thirds and fifths. Groups of repeated notes are common, but the tone of the dialogue is fairly restrained and comforting.¹⁵ It is in the next scene where Grandier is confronted by Adam and Mannoury that the dialogue character becomes more complex and we can begin to see the way that Penderecki separates his characters by means of differing intervals in the melodic lines. Adam and Mannoury sing the words “Pretend indiff’rence” (‘Gleichgultig spielen’) on a falling tritone, but then adopt a more conciliatory tone with rising and falling semitones.

Another device that Penderecki frequently uses for Grandier’s priestly actions is the spoken or chanted word. Clearly this reflects the sound of the priest in church in a way that nothing else can do. There is the risk, however, that this generalized or generic characterization might seem like an easy option for the composer, especially if it is used frequently. Arnold Whittall makes this point in a review of the work: “Yet there’s an air of the perfunctory in the way Penderecki so often falls back on normal or heightened speech, even at such crucial moments as the pronouncing of the death sentence on the wayward yet honourable priest, Grandier, and his response.”¹⁶

The different layers that are created by Penderecki not just in the dialogue between Grandier and Adam and Mannoury, but also in other parts of the opera bring into play an effective means of characterization. Robert Hatten noted this point very clearly when he said: “... by alternating musical styles, Penderecki also sets up several planes of expressive characterization.”¹⁷ The most significant passages of this nature occur in Act 3. In scene 1 the action is taking place in three sections of the stage. In one section Grandier is alone lying on the straw of his cell, in the second are Sœur Jeanne and Mignon and in the third Mannoury, the surgeon. The split-level operation is presented simply. Bontemps the jailer reports that the people are waiting for Grandier’s execution even before there has been a trial. The ironic juxtaposition of Grandier’s fears for his fate and Mignon’s urge to go to sleep are marked by a clash of pitches.¹⁸ The irony is even stronger in the interweaving of the words of Jeanne and Grandier in this scene.¹⁹

12 Ibid., 33–34.

13 Ibid., 22–23.

14 Robert S. Hatten, “Penderecki’s Operas in the Context of Twentieth-century Opera”, in Teresa Malecka (ed), *Krzysztof Penderecki’s Music in the Context of 20th-century Theatre* (Kraków, 1998), 19.

15 Krzysztof Penderecki, *Die Teufel von Loudun ...*, 22–23.

16 Arnold Whittall in *Gramophone*, June 1996, 95–96.

17 Hatten, “Penderecki’s Operas in ...”, 19.

18 See Penderecki, *Die Teufel von Loudun ...*, 135.

19 Ibid., 135–139.

In addition to the personal identity of the characters, Adrian Thomas put forward the idea that the composer may not have been really aiming for characterization of the *dramatis personae*, but rather the action: “Musical as opposed to dramatic characterization of the principals is not Penderecki’s primary compositional focus. This lies in the contrasts of pace and of vocal and instrumental textures, all of which are particularly effective in the interlocking structure of Act 1.”²⁰ The same point is made by Robert Hatten in his survey of Penderecki’s operas: “... In striking opposition, sound-mass techniques are used to convey the mysteries of religious obsession and unholy possession that swirl around Jeanne, the prioress of the Ursuline order, and Grandier when he enters the church to pray for salvation.”²¹

Overall the thirteen short scenes of Act 1 present a range of character sketches that make the development of the rest of the drama clear by its presentation of musical features. “The alternation between styles and length of scenes creates effective characterization and pacing in this act.”²² It is not really a question of musical as opposed to dramatic characterization – the characterization shown in the vocal lines is completely unambiguous in its meaning, while the overall dramatic pacing is achieved in part by the skilful manipulation of textures. The examples noted above indicate that Penderecki has aimed at personal characterization, one which comes across in performance. However, the ideas that Thomas and Hatten put forward show that the composer is also maintaining a strong dramatic and structural sense.

Paradise Lost

For his second opera Penderecki chose a much less dramatic subject and, unlike his other three operas, it is not based on a stage play. By selecting the story of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, he inevitably made the plot less full of violent or dramatic incident than *The Devils of Loudun*, yet its moral tone was just as explicit. The libretto was fashioned from Milton’s epic poem by Christopher Fry, but its generally low-key tone is still maintained in the operatic libretto. It is true that Penderecki did not call the work an opera, but thought of it as a *sacra rappresentazione*, that is according to the Renaissance idea of a sacred performance rather than a Romantic opera. Fry added the figure of John Milton himself as a narrator, a fact which made the work even less like an opera, but more like an oratorio, for example, Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex*. All this has obvious implications for any characterization in the work.

The main characters that appear in the work are Milton himself, Adam and Eve, Satan and God. Penderecki’s treatment of their music is distinctive and makes a clear differentiation between them. As mentioned above, the poet Milton as narrator is a spoken part, totally detached from the action, as obviously he would take no part in the creation story, but the composer does ensure that there is a musical characterization underlying his words. For example, when Milton opens with the words: “Hail, holy

20 Adrian Thomas in Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London: Macmillan, 1992) vol.1, p.1147.

21 Hatten, “Penderecki’s Operas in ...”, 19–20.

22 Ibid.

Light! Before the Sun, before the Heavens thou went. May I express thee? But thou revisited not those eyes that roll in vain to find thy piercing ray,”²³ Penderecki sustains a dyad of B flat/D flat while the clarinets and some of the strings play three descending semitones. It is no coincidence that the music that has preceded this consists almost exclusively of rising and falling semitones with occasional leaps of the diminished fifth. This material is used to produce a complex texture in which the intervals have a certain “sameness” in which it is difficult to find dramatic contrast. It is this very point that was made by Harold Blumenfeld when writing about the first performance: “Penderecki’s three-hour score is laden with disappointments ... it lacks contour and contrast, and embodies insufficient musical characterization of the clash of forces and events.”²⁴

The character of Milton with his spoken part is neutral, but the textural saturation of the orchestral parts is almost overwhelming, creating a characterization not in the notes of the vocal part, but in the accompanying sounds. It is a strangely amorphous texture that he uses. Adrian Thomas recognised this problem when he said: “If *Paradise Lost* falls short, it is largely because the musical language is severely restricted by Penderecki’s obvious reliance on sequences of semitones and tritones.”²⁵

Adam, Eve and Satan, however, make their own characters evident by the use of intervals in a way that makes it possible to recognise them on a conscious or at the very least an unconscious level. For example Satan’s line often uses the augmented fourth, the tritone or, very appropriately, the *diabolus in musica*.²⁶ Eve who is being tempted by Satan has a much more smoothly set out melodic line including intervals not found in Satan’s music, especially the minor third,²⁷ but when Satan enters, her lines now take on some of the tritones.²⁸ At the moment that Eve tastes the forbidden fruit we have a series of semitones linked by minor thirds.²⁹ Adam’s vocal lines tend to have both the minor third and tritone, something that the composer uses to exploit some form of ambivalence in the character. We can see this in his recitative just after he (man) was created and when he meets Eve in the Garden of Eden.³⁰ The intervals that the composer uses here are a mixture of Satan’s and Eve’s. The voice of God is like Milton’s, a spoken part, and, like the accompaniment to the poet’s words, is supported by sustained octaves.

Finally there is some use of instruments to identify the protagonists, as identified by Wolfgang Schwinger: “The principal characters are also associated with particular instrumental timbres, Adam chiefly with strings, Eve with woodwind, Satan with brass, Sin with cor anglais and bass clarinet, while Death has castanets which combine with his countertenor voice to produce an eerie unreal effect.”³¹

Overall, then, Penderecki concentrates his musical characterization in the vocal lines, with a distinct variety of intervals used and a clearly noticeable interaction of the

23 Krzysztof Penderecki, *Paradise Lost*, full score (Mainz: Schott, 1978), 4.

24 *The Musical Times*, February 1979, p.146.

25 In Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London: Macmillan, 1992) vol.3, p.942.

26 Krzysztof Penderecki, *Paradise Lost*, full score (Mainz: Schott, 1978), 4–5, 20–21, 30–31.

27 *Ibid.*, 14–15.

28 *Ibid.*, 16–17, 20–21.

29 *Ibid.*, 25.

30 *Ibid.*, 8–9.

31 Wolfgang Schwinger, *Krzysztof Penderecki: his life and work* (London: Schott, 1989), 263.

intervals used by the different characters. While the textures have a certain uniformity, this only enhances the effect of the intervals chosen to represent the protagonists.

Die schwarze Maske

For his third opera Penderecki selected a drama by the German playwright, Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946), who over his long career wrote many plays that continue to hold the attention in German-speaking countries, but have less durability in English-speaking countries than, say, Bertolt Brecht or Frank Wedekind.

His early works included a number of *novellas* (extended short stories) of which the most famous is *Bahnwärter Thiel* ('Lineman Thiel') of 1887, a masterpiece of characterization. The story of a working-class railway lineman or flagman whose aggressive second wife contrasts very strongly with his more gentle late first wife provides material for deep psychological study. It works on two levels, the ordinary realistic domestic situation in which Thiel is subjected to his wife's harassment, and on the other hand the fantasy-world that he creates while actually doing his job. The novella is portrayed as a good example of German "Naturalism," the conflict between living by nature and adjusting to the newer technical and technological means.

The detailed characterization is often presented in a clear but very matter-of-fact way. From this early story with its precise but low-key characterization, Hauptmann moved into a wide range of strongly dramatic works covering many aspects of German society, including the philosophy of naturalism. By the middle of the first decade of the 20th century, the element of fantasy which had first appeared tentatively in *Bahnwärter Thiel* took on a more prominent position in his work. This appears strongly in what is described as "a German fairytale drama," *Die versunkene Glocke* ('The Sunken Bell') and *Hanneles Himmelfahrt* ('Hannele's Journey to Heaven'). It is particularly evident in a play that some consider his masterpiece, *Und Pippa tanzt!* of 1905, subtitled *Ein Glashüttenmärchen* ('A Glassworks Fairy Tale').³² For our purposes, the most important fact is that Hauptmann is now dealing with a fairly large number of characters whose interactions are complex and not always logical. Coupled with this is a considerable degree of fantasy which has been interpreted as symbolic or even mystical. This has invited certain criticism, for example, from Margaret Sinden: "Even a symbolic or mystical work, moreover, must have a coherence of its own kind, and critics with the best will in the world have been unable to make sense, on any level, of the details of Hauptmann's characters and action. ... *Pippa* is a completely eclectic work; it contains everything from contemporary jargon to reflections from the worlds of fairy-tale and legend, of Maeterlinck and Boecklin, of Plato and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*."³³

32 Incidentally, it was this play that Alban Berg had selected for the text of his second opera. However, as he was unable to reach a satisfactory financial arrangement with Hauptmann and his publishers, Berg abandoned this plan and substituted the Lulu plays by Frank Wedekind. What may well have appealed to Berg is that there is implied or explicit musical activity within the play, something that was also contained in Wedekind's Lulu plays.

33 Margaret Sinden, *Gerhart Hauptmann: The Prose Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 101-102.

Taking the opposite view, it is precisely the way that illogicality and incoherence characterizes many aspects of human life that makes the play so compelling. The interactions of the main character, Pippa, with her different admirers, is the main point of the play and these are enacted by situations which are believable if somewhat strange. She is also a skilful dancer and it is in her dancing that she meets her ultimate fate. To sum up, *Und Pippa tanzt!* has the interaction of a number of characters, it has a fantasy-world, and it has the “dance of death,” three features which it has in common with the plot of his one-act play *Die schwarze Maske* (‘The Black Mask’) of 1929,³⁴ which Penderecki chose to set for his third opera.

While Penderecki and his librettist, Harry Kupfer, recast the structure of *Die schwarze Maske* for the opera and altered a number of the details of the action, the essence of the play remains: the exposure of a hidden past by the most dramatic and fearful means; the assembly of a wide variety of human characters each of whose survivals depends on that of the others; and most importantly a metaphor for the fragility of the human condition in both its independent and its interdependent nature. In the words of Regina Chłopicka: “... the centre of gravity has been moved from the action to internally-tense situations, which precede the approaching catastrophe.”³⁵ Without this action, this feature obviously puts a heavy responsibility on the composer to make his music reinforce the interaction of the characters in a meaningful way and it is this that Penderecki does with some considerable conviction. It parallels the madness of Hauptmann’s Thiel or even more strikingly Sœur Jeanne from *The Devils of Loudun* together with the frenzied and ultimately fatal dancing of Pippa in a dance of death that recalls the final dance of the heroine in Richard Strauss’s *Salome* or a few years later in his *Elektra*.

The wide range of people that are to be found at the dinner party of the mayor of Bolkenhain in *Die schwarze Maske* are characterized very subtly but carefully. These characters are presented singly and in duets before a number of short and longer ensembles are used. The interval structure which Penderecki used in his previous operas is still present, but in the ensembles the individual characters are not so clear-cut and it is the dramatic action that is more important. One can compare these profitably with some of the ensembles in Alban Berg’s *Lulu*. In the present drama, however, the chief character, Benigna, is given the most important part of all in two scenes, the first for her confession and the second for her madness. The former gives all the details of her past in Amsterdam in a much extended monologue,³⁶ preparing us for the dramatic events to follow when her former lover, Johnson, reappears, first as the Black Mask, and then in his own identity. In the scene of Benigna’s madness³⁷ her vocal lines become very distorted and angular, as did those of Sœur Jeanne in *The Devils of Loudun*. This leads to the final catastrophe in which all of the characters with the exception of one, the Jew Löwe, meet their end. This development is something which has puzzled

34 Gerhart Hauptmann, *Spuk: Die schwarze maske, Schauspiel; Hexenritt, ein Satyrspiel* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1930).

35 Regina Chłopicka, “*The Black Mask: A Contemporary Expressionistic Vision of danse macabre*,” in Teresa Malecka, ed., *Krzysztof Penderecki’s Music in the Context of 20th-century Theatre* (Kraków, 1998), 193.

36 Krzysztof Penderecki, *Die schwarze Maske*, vocal score (Mainz: Schott, 1986), 240–244.

37 *Ibid.*, 365–371.

many commentators, including the normally perceptive Richard Morrison who thinks that: "the action seems entirely without motive or logic,"³⁸ what has frequently been called *danse macabre*. Penderecki takes this interpretation literally with a huge dance supported by intense drumming, as vividly described by Paul Griffiths at the first performance in Salzburg:

*The irruption of Africa into the score is potent: there is a stark contrast between the fierce drumming that enters about a third of the way through this 100-minute single act and the sometimes skittish, sometimes relentless, perpetual motion of the main substance. And the most effective moment in the whole opera comes at the very end when the slave beats his tattoo for a danse macabre executed by nearly all the cast; only the Jewish merchant, excellently acted and sung by Gunter Reich, is left as observer of the tragedy.*³⁹

But even this characterization does not completely convince, as Paul Griffiths said in the same article: "Such characterization, though, owes a lot to the cast: the people do not live in what Penderecki has written for them, nor does the opera."⁴⁰ Somehow the actors/singers have brought the drama to life which is obviously how things should be. The important point is that Penderecki has given them the *means* to do so, and one cannot say that about every opera.

Ubu Rex

During Penderecki's composing career there have been various promises about a setting of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*.⁴¹ The translation into an opera of this grotesque satire on the misuse of power, set "somewhere in Poland," only materialised in 1990, after the bulk of the abuse, especially in Poland, that was the indirect target of Penderecki's treatment, became a fact of history. Of the composer's four operatic topics, it is in many ways the scherzo. Unlike *Die schwarze Maske* and *Paradise Lost*, but like *The Devils of Loudun*, the opera was set in translation, in this case from the original French to the German text of Jerzy Jarocki and the composer.

To turn Jarry's discursive play with its colloquial French into a concise opera in German presented some problems. The large number of scenes (33) and acts (5) needed to be rationalized: Penderecki and Jarocki settled for two acts with five scenes each, together with a prologue and epilogue. While this made the structure and the dramatic plot clearer, it tended to put the main focus on the principal characters. The two protagonists in Jarry's play and Penderecki's opera are Father Ubu and his wife, Mother Ubu. He is vulgar, shallow and impulsive, doing the first thing that comes into his head, but constantly having his mind changed by someone else, usually his wife.

38 Richard Morrison, "Rum evening at the dinner-table," in *The Times* (London), May 17, 1990.

39 Paul Griffiths, "Expressionism crudely debased," *The Times* (London), August 19, 1986.

40 Ibid..

41 The full text is printed in, Jarry, *Ubu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 27-132.

His vacillations take place all the time. Underneath she is cold and calculating, using Father Ubu as a tool for her own advancement; superficially, however, she goes along with all the manners and vulgarity of her husband, and encourages him when he follows her suggestions, but actively discourages him from his usual stance of idleness and lack of concentration when it does not suit her purposes. She constantly plays to his empty vanity when he sees the trappings of power in front of him and the abuses in which he can then indulge.

The musical characterization of Father and Mother Ubu in Penderecki's opera makes a very intriguing study. Clearly Father Ubu has an unstable personality, a feature reflected in his constantly moving from singing to speech. His sung vocal lines are full of large leaps of a seventh or ninth with more than a passing similarity with those of *Wozzeck* in Alban Berg's opera. The rhythms are very irregular and unpredictable. Sometimes there is an extraneous fussy counterpoint to suggest an underlying unstable character. For example in the first scene Ubu's speaking is accompanied by erratic phrases from the bass clarinet and bassoon⁴² and his singing overlaid by aimless scurrying from the violins.⁴³ Mother Ubu, on the other hand, is completely stable. When she is scheming, her melodic lines are fairly regular, often moving by step, with only the occasional controlled leaps. Her part often includes coloratura writing, in line with the operatic tradition of dominant women. A good example of this is found when she presents to Father Ubu the final piece of persuasion to carry out the murderous assassination of the King.⁴⁴ A humorous passage in which Father Ubu tries to imitate Mother Ubu's coloratura gives us an example of Mother Ubu's persuasive powers over Ubu himself.⁴⁵ These examples should give a clear indication of how Penderecki has defined his characters: their musical and dramatic personalities are completely consistent. It is perhaps not surprising that the depth of character is not immediately obvious, because the knockabout nature of the drama of *Ubu Rex* is very clear and instantly appreciated. Stephen Pettit felt that the former point applied: "There's no deep characterization,"⁴⁶ while Nick Kimberley did respond to the superficial clowning that must surround any version of the Ubu story: "Penderecki's music, more an imitation of knockabout than the real thing, had little chance to develop beyond burlesque bel canto, but the singers did what they could to inject character."⁴⁷

Conclusion

While there have been various criticisms of aspects of Penderecki's music and his lack of proper character definition, this broad and necessarily selective examination points to the fact that the composer has taken seriously the idea of making his characters clear to the audience. Some of the adverse comments have simply been the result

42 Krzystof Penderecki, *Ubu Rex*, full score (Mainz: Schott, 1991), 30.

43 *Ibid.*, 31–32.

44 *Ibid.*, 33.

45 *Ibid.*, 23–24.

46 *The Sunday Times*, May 2, 2004, Culture Section, 31.

47 *The Evening Standard* (London), April 26, 2004, 47.

only of a superficial acquaintance with the music, while others have shown a disliking for the techniques that Penderecki was using. In the case of *The Devils of Loudun*, the avant-garde techniques found in the opera were likened to the kind of sound effects found in second rate films. The criticism is easy to make and difficult to disprove, as it is only with better acquaintance with the music can one understand the more subtle aspects of the composer's manipulation of character. Because *Paradise Lost* has a much slower action and fairly limited number of intervals used, its reflective nature did not appeal to some of the early critics. On better acquaintance, one can appreciate the more subtle nature of Penderecki's characterization of the protagonists. The story embraced in Gerhart Hauptmann's play *Die schwarze Maske* is clearly a fantastic one that invites some measure of incredulity, but Penderecki was able to draw from it many musical features that he could develop into the great climax of the dance. Like Hauptmann's earlier play *Und Pippa tanzt!* which Alban Berg wanted to set, it blends realism with fantasy in a fable that positively demands musical treatment. That Benigna's outburst has a very strong coloratura nature is something that is taken up with even more attention in the part for Mother Ubu in *Ubu Rex*. In fact it acts as a parable for many facets of the human condition, something that is not obvious if the opera is taken literally. Penderecki's fourth opera tightens up the structure of Jarry's original play, *Ubu roi*, and at the same time makes the satire on power much more explicit, losing some of the informality and raciness of the original French play. This is a loss that the composer compensates for with his wide range of musical humour, something that emerges in countless ways as the music becomes more familiar. Even if some of the earlier critics felt that the humour was not subtle enough, the opera is convincing proof that it is still possible to create a modern comedy opera. Of course, like all of the subjects that Penderecki has chosen for his operas, it has a much deeper message, something that his various forms of characterization emphasize.

POVZETEK

Pendereckijeva karakterizacija v njegovih štirih operah je precej raznolika in vključuje številne tehnike. V *Hudičih iz Louduna* (*The Devils of Loudun*), ki temeljijo na knjigi Aldousa Huxleyja in na dramski igri *Hudiči* (*The Devils*) Johna Whitinga, skladatelj uporablja za definicijo oseb melodične intervale, raznovrstne ritme in kombinacijo govorjenja in cerkvenega petja v silovito dramatičnem kontekstu. *Izgubljeni raj* (*Paradise Lost*), z libretom Christopherja Fryja, ki temelji na epski pesnitvi Johna Miltona, je veliko bolj umirjen, vendar se za označevanje oseb opira na intervale in instrumentalni kolorit. *Črna maska* (*Die schwarze Maske*), ki temelji na istoimenski

dramski igri Gerharta Hauptmanna, razsvetljuje bizarni svet opere, v kateri je blaznost glavne junakinje prikazana s popačenimi vokalnimi linijami, koloraturnim petjem in mrtvaškim plesom. Pendereckijeva četrta opera, *Ubu Rex*, ki temelji na fantazijski drami *Ubu roi* Alfreda Jarryja, se osredinja na karakterizacijo kralja Ubuja in njegove žene. Kralj je vulgaren, plehek in srborit, medtem ko je žena hladna in preračunljiva. V Ubujevih petih linijah je polno velikih skokov z zelo neobičajnimi in nepredvidljivimi ritmi. Melodične linije kraljeve žene so pravilne, pogosto se premikajo korak za korakom, ki jih le včasih prekinajo kontrolirani skoki in dokaj pogosto koloraturno petje – v skladu z operno tradicijo dominantnih žensk.