

In 1858 Hector Berlioz completed his opera *Les Troyens*, a work that was never to be performed in its entirety during his lifetime. The opera re-works Virgil's *Aeneid*, particularly the plot of books 2 and 4, by framing the story around the figures of Cassandra (Acts 1-2) and Dido (Acts 3-5).

Berlioz wrote, 'People who borrow without prior consent are called thieves, unfaithful interpreters are slanderers and assassins' (Berlioz 1852, 85). This paper will address the issue of how, and why, Berlioz felt that he was not being an 'unfaithful interpreter' by inflating the role of Cassandra from the marginalized character of Virgil's poem to a heroine who carries the weight of the first 85 minutes of his opera. In fact Berlioz identifies the figure of Cassandra and her prophetic gift with aspects of the process of reception, interpretation, and re-writing that mark the creative artist who works within a canon – issues that were as much Virgil's problem as Berlioz's.

The most detailed description of Cassandra's meta-poetic role in *Les Troyens* comes in an article by Doumet (1999), while the groundwork in recent Anglophone classical scholarship on *Les Troyens* was laid by Fitzgerald (2000). In my paper I also take into account recent work in musicology and acknowledge the methodological approaches of the increasing numbers of recent books and collections of essays on the classical tradition.

The paper will discuss some of the ways in which Berlioz's Cassandra personifies the struggle to create a masterpiece for its time and beyond, and specifically, to represents the perils of trying to translate a written text into a musical performance. Berlioz famously described the plight of contemporary music as follows: 'It is Virgil's Cassandra, the inspired virgin fought over by Greeks and Trojans, whose prophetic words go unheeded and who raises her eyes to heaven, her eyes alone, for her hands are bound with chains' (Berlioz 1852, 273). In this excerpt Berlioz virtually translates *Aeneid* 2.405-6: *ad caelum tendens ardentia lumina frustra / lumina, nam teneras arcebant vincula palmas*. For Berlioz, Cassandra's knowledge of the artistic future is not simply a form of vision, but specifically a gaze identified with reading: in the opera she claims that *au livre du destin mon regard a su lire* ('My gaze has learned to read in the book of destiny'). Moreover, just as Berlioz's learned music had trouble reaching its audience, Cassandra fails to translate her knowledge for a wider public. In *Les Troyens* the dactylic rhythms used in Cassandra's repeated lament, *tu ne m'écoutes pas* ('You aren't listening to me') represent the continued tradition of hexameter epic, once oral, then textual, and now musical – but unheard or misunderstood. The music that *is* heard and understood is described as creating *ivresse* (intoxication). *Ivresse* is a loaded word used by French Romantic writers to describe a kind of Bacchic poetics. The term is repeatedly used by Berlioz's Cassandra to describe the ignorant and over-emotional response of her fellow-citizens, but it is also used of Cassandra by her onlookers: *Bacchante à l'oeil d'azur s'enivrant d'harmonie!* ('A maenad with blue eyes, intoxicated with music!'). *Ivresse* has an ambiguous relationship with the more intellectualized examination of the *livre du destin* that Cassandra likes to lay claim to. Cassandra enacts a conflict between learned and inspired or inspirational art forms, a conflict that is imperfectly received and understood by her audience. Berlioz, however, as Virgil's audience, realizes the truth of Steiner's formulation: 'As in great translation, so in a great musical setting, something is added to the original text. But that which is added "was already there"' (Steiner 1992, 446).

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