
Stage dramaturgy: A call for pre-eminence based on gender-based perspective and new production issues in contemporaneity

Notes of a stage study on the opera *L'enigma di Lea*
(Portaceli/Argullol/Casablanças) (GTL, 2019)

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English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

Stage supranarrative, as a conceptualisation materialised based on all the visual silent stage vestiges that make up stage dramaturgy, appears to us as a social catalysing instrument due to its mirror effect and, thus, as a valuable self-awareness tool. It is the combination of the foregoing that defines us in each period. This also occurs in the perception of women's identity that reaches the audience of each society through female characters that have been developed and transformed for the stage.

The opera *L'enigma di Lea* (Portaceli, Argullol, Casablanças), which premiered in the 2018-2019 season in the Gran Teatre del Liceu, is a new production and an example of new dramatic writing, a revisionism of a transgressive female myth to which a stage analysis is applied through a gender-based holistic perspective and a female gaze.

Keywords: stage dramaturgy, gender-based perspective, dramatic writing, new production, El Liceu, Carme Portaceli

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The artistic praxis developed both in the international and national fields has led us to advocate a certain added value connoted by staged dramaturgy. At the start of the path, in the early 1990s, we intuitively recognised this added value championed here. Later, through the more than three decades working in stage creation in text-based theatre and opera, we became gradually aware of the resounding significance of its artistic and social function. Now in the first quarter of the 21st century, the concern has emerged about it still lacking a pre-eminent position within the performing arts community.

During years of professionalisation, we have subjected personal intuition and concern to observation, reflection, argumentation and debate, and carefully examined national and international productions. And, in the end, we can confirm that, despite its significance, stage dramaturgy does not occupy the place it deserves. Theatre managers, stage artists themselves, critics and audience tend to trivialise it. Its mirror effect is overlooked and, consequently, its impact is undervalued.

We will now take a step further. We will eschew the recurrent label usually attached to the *personal reading* to speak of the reading of a play or opera by a stage director. The artistic and social value that stage dramaturgy provides becomes a key element of interpretation, as it enables us to detect the social idiosyncrasy pursued by the artistic endeavour. And what we will extract from this mirroring, as you will see, will include data from which other disciplines — humanistic studies in general, social sciences, gender studies, etc. — will necessarily benefit. Hence our concern about it not being considered sufficiently pre-eminent.

Stage dramaturgy provides a suprareading that mainly becomes clear in revisionisms. In essence, two narratives mix when revisiting a universal plot: one is humanistic heritage, with all the meaning that has macerated over the centuries; the other is the inevitable here and now of every new production. A new reading emerges, therefore, when contrasting the foundational story with a newly devised narrative. Foundational stories are, indeed, usually those that come from tradition; the new stories linked to them

are a supranarrative. The former are the ancestral legendary stories that are revised again and again; when we propose the newly generated story, *the other story*, for our stage conceptualisation, it becomes the director's *gaze*.

In its turn, this *other story* can be original, an occasional invention that the stage director creates for a specific revisionism. It can also simply be a story at the service of an idiosyncratic aesthetic, such as in the case of visual artists who have worked as stage directors, like the *Wozzeck* under the direction and stage conceptualisation of the Johannesburg-born artist William Kentridge (GTL, 2021-2022). Or it can even be *another story*, of a very different kind, taken from another context, that is contrasted — and amalgamated — with the first one. In terms of this last mode, we will mention that when writing the thesis from which this article emerges,¹ it has been possible to see an example at the Gran Teatre del Liceu that has corroborated, more than any other, the impact of this suprareading caused by contrasting a revisited plot with a new story emancipated from the foundational story. We are referring to Puccini's *Tosca*, directed by Rafael R. Villalobos (GTL, 2022-2023), who has superimposed on the opera's original story, as freely as he has deemed necessary, the death of Pier Paolo Pasolini in a car accident accompanied by a teenage prostitute with whom he had become passionately infatuated. The result of the contrast between the two stories has involved a vehement tergiversation of the contents of the veristic drama in the successful and forceful suprareading it has instigated. The pairing, however, has been worthwhile as it has spurred the debate in the agora, where the social mirroring has been highlighted and both the intolerance and self-complacency of the different factions have been pointed out.

By contrasting stories, we develop the stage dramaturgy and ferociously call upon all of us as the implicit receivers (Batlle, 2020: 259). The effect that takes place in all cases is that of a different understanding, very likely new and unexpected, from the one canonically agreed. A new bias, like a new colour, through which to look at the environment, manipulates its meaning, perverts it, certainly, and at the same time — we cannot deny its power —, enriches it.

This power of the supranarrative not only appears in the revisiting. It is increasingly also seen more often in brand new dramatic writing productions. It is noticed more vehemently in productions in which the work of a “body writing” leads to a silent visual dramaturgy (*Estudis Escènics*, 2022) in parallel to the text-based dramaturgy.

In text-based theatre, the very nature of the creative process can bring about this supranarrative in a more cohesive way. During the rehearsals, if there is enough time and room for research into stage language, it can occur more spontaneously. But this does not mean that the stage dramaturgy prevails in the preliminary production phases. It is not usually aprioristic in relation to the main story because it often emerges on the go. As an example, we have seen it in productions this season in Barcelona such as *Animal negre*

1. The data, names and references that will be gradually cited through this article are enlarged upon, contrasted and documented in the corpus of the aforementioned thesis. Submission: July 2023; defence: September 20th, 2023. Universitat Rovira i Virgili. Thesis supervisor: Dr Jesús Carruesco Garcia.

tristes, by Anja Hilling, directed by Julio Manrique, at the Sala Beckett; *Zona inundable*, by Marta Barceló, directed by Marta Gil Polo, at the TNC; and *Viatge d'hivern*, by Elfriede Jelinek, directed by Magda Puyo, at the Sala Beckett (BCN, 2022-2023 season).

The issues related to new productions are many and certainly all highly complex. However, without doubt, one that most compromises the stage performance is the paradox of corroborating this idiosyncratic added value developed by the stage dramaturgy and having eluded its pre-eminence in the embryonic phase of the stage creation process. This paradox jeopardises, in all its vulnerability, the reception by both critics and audience.

We have determined the parameters in which our paradox appears more vehemently on the stages of Catalonia, eventually delimiting the frame of study with three. They belong to independent idiosyncrasies and, precisely because of this, when bringing them together, we believe that they allow us to take stock of our performing arts contemporaneity and, consequently, to see how it boldly highlights major social and artistic issues.

Therefore, let us begin by considering the first of the three parameters: the approach to the myths and their revisiting from the here and now. Because of the inherent quality of the myth as a universal plot, it is in its revisionism where the stage dramaturgy appears more eloquently pre-eminent. The second parameter is the new production of new dramatic writing. Indeed, given the scope of the issue it connotes, it is an unavoidable filter. And the last of the three must, irremissibly, be the gender-based perspective, because of its current incontrovertibility when lending a scientific character to any artistic and social analysis in our contemporaneity, as argued by Díaz (Díaz, 2020).²

All of this becomes more apparent in opera. We will overlook the fact that we would also see it in the revisiting of classical musicals; even in the remakes of a cinema classic, of course. But we focus on opera as a genre because, among other reasons that we will detail next, opera has from the outset all the diverse requisites that make it unique. The main and most evident requisites are: the fact of creating shows included in the regular and stable programming of a theatre or within the framework of a festival; being one of the greatest live performance arts because of the human capital involved — senders and receivers —; having a high-cost production, which makes it the showcase of manifestations of power and, because of this very opulence, it becomes comparatively superior to most theatre events. This means that to perform it many more stage resources are developed; in other words, the essential tools for any stage dramaturgy. A genre of such scope provides the ideal ecosystem to explore in a study of these parameters.

It is in opera, indeed, where the practice of stage dramaturgy is more clearly apparent and developed. We have endless examples in both international and national productions performed throughout the Western world, mainly in the last four decades. Opera programming consists of a

2. Díaz' postulate, with which we concur, is holistic as he does not admit or validate any kind of study of any scientific or humanist branch without the globalising and cross-cutting application of the gender-based perspective, identity and parity, through the filter of what is being researched.

consuetudinary repertoire that, in many cases, deals with universal myths and plots. This repertoire is revisited in many new productions and performed in constant revivals. Given its nature, therefore, it is where the stage dramaturgy is exponentially developed, and where, certainly, it most eloquently stands out. In Catalonia, at present, the stage dramaturgy of an opera production becomes the visible tip of the enormous iceberg of a new public and institutional production. Therefore, the stage dramaturgy appears to us, here more than in any other stage creation, as holding the final responsibility for anchoring the points of relation with the audience at whom it is aimed, struggling desperately when necessary to guarantee the dialogue. And if the stage conceptualisation has not been considered pre-eminent in the preliminary phases of the creative process of a new production of new dramaturgy for a new composition, it is when disparities in interpretation may have emerged, with the result of a distorted content that bewilders the audience...

When commencing the methodological process to corroborate this argument, and applying all three parameters at once, I recalled a production — before I ever imagined that I would embark on a PhD — that had been premiered in Barcelona less than one year before I began the research. When I was leaving the opera house — I recall very clearly — I realised that the intuition and concern of my career had been reaffirmed; and that production would later make up the corpus of my thesis. It was the opera *L'enigma di Lea*, premiered at El Liceu on 9 February 2019, with music by Benet Casablancas, libretto by Rafael Argullol, and stage direction by Carme Portaceli (GTL, 2018-2019a).

Following the canonical hierarchy of the opera, the commission was first given to the composer Benet Casablancas, who asked his friend Rafael Argullol to write the libretto. Some of the singers had already been selected in the preliminary phases and, taking into account their vocal tessitura (Egea, 2012 and 2017), the score was composed. The search for a stage director did not begin until the score with the text was completed, some years later, and with all the singers and musicians selected (GTL, 2018-2019b).

This commission fell between the mandates of two artistic directors of the Gran Teatre del Liceu: Joan Matabosch, from 1999 to 2014 — after the reconstruction of the opera house following the fire on 31 January 1994 —,³ and Christina Scheppelmann, who from June 2014 took on the artistic direction until 2019, when she was replaced by its current artistic director Víctor García de Gomar. *L'enigma di Lea* was, therefore, a commission by Matabosch, and was produced and premiered under the mandate of the German conductor.

With the aim of reconsidering ourselves as a stage community, we only had to sift through, from inside, what already existed. Therefore, the process of taking note of the artistic and conceptual richness of the production of this stage piece has underpinned my argument. It has been so since it was first commissioned, as announced by the media, passing through the process

3. From 2014, coinciding with the death of the renowned Belgian artistic director Gerard Mortier, Joan Matabosch was asked to take on the artistic direction of the Teatro Real in Madrid, and still currently holds this position.

of its staging, premiere and performances, until the subsequent response of audience and critics (GTL, 2018-2019b). Everything was inside, implicit. It was so apparent that I only had to examine it in detail, leaving aside any respect and artistic admiration.

In order to contextualise the need for this pre-eminence of stage dramaturgy in this study, the credits of a total of 246 productions performed at El Liceu, during the first twenty seasons of the 21st century, have been exhaustively reviewed.

This opera house — with an audience capacity of 2,294 — is the most important in Catalonia and one of the greatest in Spain, as well as a benchmark both at a European and international level.

A large amount of wide-ranging data has been compiled. Precisely because of its cross-cutting nature, we have noted its great significance. Moreover, in the framework of a holistic gender-based perspective, the issue of parity has also prevailed in this data. Thus, in the 246 productions performed on the main stage of the Gran Teatre del Liceu, Carme Portaceli is the second female Catalan stage director who has had the opportunity to contribute *her gaze*, after Núria Espert, out of the only six national and international women directors who have done so in our timeframe.⁴ Out of these directors, four are from other European origins: Liliana Cavani, Phyllida Lloyd, Annilese Miskimmon and Lotte de Beer. Carme Portaceli is the last of the six, and she is also the last within the timeframe of study.

In terms of the female incursion and their stage gaze, in an international sense, on the main stage of the Gran Teatre del Liceu, the number of female directors contrasts with that of men, who have contributed their gaze to the remaining 240 productions. In twenty years of productions, the 240 directed by men include those that have been revived in more than one season. This is only in relation to the main stage of El Liceu, given that if we counted the men who have directed a production in the Foyer, the number and list of men would overwhelm us even more. We highlight, therefore, the lack of stage dramaturgy with a female gaze of genuinely transgressive feminine characters such as Salome, Dalila, Carmen, Traviata, Madama Butterfly and Norma, an opera that, with 26 revivals and a total of 155 performances, is one of the most revisited since it was first staged in El Liceu in 1847, until its last performance in February 2015, without any of its productions having been seen from the female gaze. And the same can be said about Tosca, a transgressor among female transgressors, given that, as we have mentioned in this article, a production seen in the current season, however interesting the stage dramaturgy, is again by a man, always a man. In this stage dramaturgy, in particular, it is important to highlight that Tosca — the female myth, the woman — has been completely diluted and eclipsed to the detriment of the interests of the male gaze that conceived it.

In the local sphere, Catalan female directors contrast with the 22 male directors who, also, have worked on more than one production. Therefore,

4. The author of this article was asked to direct a brand new production in the Foyer, *Remena nena* (2004), thus becoming the first local female stage director in the 21st century in the Foyer, holding second place within El Liceu among the aforementioned female directors.

more than 22 productions by Catalan directors have been seen at the Gran Teatre del Liceu. But they are 22 male directors who were given the opportunity to express themselves on the stage in comparison to the two aforementioned women, who have only been entrusted with a single production each, bearing in mind the artistic showcase that a venue of these characteristics involves, along with the social repercussions entailed, as well as the idiosyncratic, stage, creative, conceptual and philosophical potential of this venue as it is aimed at a local audience.

Moreover, out of the data compiled, and we mention it here only by the way as we feel it is worthwhile pointing it out, during the first two decades of the 21st century there has not been a single female composer or female librettist.

Consequently, in 20 season programmes, in terms of the universal plots related to a transgressive female myth, a total of 32 operas have been seen, all through a male gaze, with the sole exception of the opera whose stage dramaturgy we will analyse, *L'enigma di Lea*, which is, therefore, the only one on which the three parameters outlined come together, and thus makes up the corpus of our study. This analysis comprises diverse pieces that are inserted into each other. We could easily compare it to a matryoshka doll as from its prefiguration until its final materialisation we would be referring to the same thing. From this paradigm, we have explored the most interior piece: the premiered opera. This responds to the resonances for which it was conceived. And, as it is, in essence, an opera premiered for the first time, the final object of the stage endeavour, we have extrapolated and magnified from it the artistic, social and cultural panorama which brought it about.

The core of the study has consisted of analysing the transposition onto the current stage of a new text. We have broken down the strategy that has been developed for a drama to reach the stage that might be labelled as *untimely* (Batlle, 2020). It is, in short, about how a Start Text (ST), of a new contemporary dramatic writing, has been transferred to the stage device to become a Goal Show (GS).

This transposition, in its turn, falls within the selection of the three converging parameters: the new production, based on the conception of the writing of a new text, which has worked as a foundation for a musical score, and the material to be put on stage; the content of this text, which, as it has been newly created, is the revisionism of a myth, as a universal plot, widely developed and explored in depth within the genre; and, when this ancestral myth is declared feminine and transgressive, the role played by the gender-based perspective (Francés, 2022), of a female gaze,⁵ within a holistic frame, in the first quarter of the 21st century has been assessed.

In the analysis we have also found the mirroring of what we examine through female characters that have been worked on and transformed for the stage; in other words, the perception of the woman's identity for each period, and which part of it is addressed at the audience of each society.

5. We are referring to the postulates of the Second-wave feminism.

For *L'enigma di Lea* it was not established that the supranarrative was a text taken from another context; what the implicit spectator had to grasp was the personal approach with which Carme Portaceli made us navigate through the suprareading that was gradually unleashed. Each and every one of the visual and silent vestiges — including those inherent to dance dramaturgy, as we also argued in the 5th Symposium of Estudis Escènics held at the Institut del Teatre in Barcelona in autumn 2022⁶ — make up this personal story with which the foundational story has been contrasted.

The analysis indefectibly shows that Carme Portaceli's gaze, which unleashes her embodied stage dramaturgy in *L'enigma di Lea*, as in the whole production, with the entire stage creative team and the performers with whom she worked,⁷ is highly cohesive, but that its confrontation with the foundational story becomes controversial and explosive. Indeed, an extensive, polyhedric, and in many respects, both lucidly arguable and enriching compendium of texts has been extracted from this analysis. We next list some of the notable issues in relation with the contemporary reception and that tell us about the kind of society we are: the fact that two characters address Lea as "God's whore"; Lea's journey given the abuse of power to which she is subjected as sexual merchandise — epically, oneirically, poetically and factually —, in relation to each and every one of the characters, including the artists who want to possess her; the enormous blood stain on Lea's dress from the pelvis to the ankles; eroticism and desexualisation; Lea's dance at the start and Lea's and Ram's dance towards the end, with which she was seen on the stage with eight dancers (Argullol, 2019 - Portaceli GTL-TV3, 2019). Moreover, issues have been linked to contents related to:⁸ Io as Lea's predecessor; Prometheus as a prefiguration of Ram; Lea's wandering; creation in artists; rationality versus sensitivity; unavoidable fate; love and lack of affection; the border; outsiders; divine retribution. Also issues that lend cohesion to the beat of stage contemporaneity and of society: new production issues — world premiere. New dramatic writing issues and the transposition to contemporary stage dramaturgy: content in text/content in images; didascalies; frames; Aristotelian unities (and their absence); stage time/dreamful time; issues related to transferring the material text into an opera libretto at the service of the stage device; the stage choir; choreographies; direction of movement, acting techniques; stage castings; creative designs: set design — stage space, costumes, hair and make-up, lighting — light space —, and videoart; stage technology, human components and technical and technological

6. As expressed in the presentation, the choreography by Ferran Carvajal becomes very beautiful, not only formally but, above all, for the capacity to contain this gaze we are referring to in the cross-cutting nature of the conceptualisation of stage direction.

7. Carme Portaceli's stage creative team included Paco Azorín as set designer; Antonio Belart as costume designer and hair and make-up artist; Ignasi Camprodon as lighting designer; Ferran Carvajal, as previously mentioned, as choreographer (and responsible for movement direction); and Miquel Àngel Raió as responsible for the videocreation. You can see the remaining artistic credits and singers in the programme (GTL, 2018-2019a).

8. For this block of themes, we have also referenced, based on the analysis of the opera, as it will be possible to see in the resulting thesis, everything related to *El fin del mundo como obra de arte* (Argullol, 2007); *Theogony. Works and Days*, by Hesiod; *Prometheus Bound*, by Aeschylus; *Pasión del Dios que quiso ser hombre* (Argullol, 2014); *Prometheus* (Müller, 1967-68, premiered in Madrid in 1969) and, of course, *El enigma de Lea. Cuento mítico para una ópera* (Argullol, 2019).

logistics behind the live show in real time. And also: issues related to emotion (and/or its absence) as it is an unavoidable concern in theatre productions: in *Lea* — internal conflict and its development —, as well as in the whole of the story; other issues on emotion linked to the show: music and text and conflict subjected to our interpretation of how the characters are portrayed. Or even: language-related issues. And, with reference to the audience, the show-audience erotic relationship.

From the auditorium we believe we are seeing a show, but it is us who we see. The matryoshka doll is made of the raw material in all its pieces. The bigger outer shells are the cosmos we live in; the interiors, and exponentially the tiniest one, are the stage work.

The conclusion we will gradually reach will be that, given the enormous conflict of interest — and controversial theoretical framework — produced in the synergy caused by a new local production, a new stage creation, a new dramatic literature, it would be necessary to consider, from the preliminary phases of the design of a new stage creative process, this pre-eminence of the determining added value of the stage dramaturgy that we analyse here.

It is in relation to the symbols and language of the visual impact — and of the secrets that may appear between fissures, as Durand (1971) would say — that we grasp the imageries of communicative creation. In this respect, the stage dramaturgy shares with the cinematographic language the impact produced by the obviousness of its visual nature (Bou, 2004: 15). Despite this truism, highlighting the impact of the visual, as will be clear in the complete stage analysis of the three acts of *L'enigma di Lea* that can be traced in the thesis, is indispensable here. In terms of the approach to the female icon, anywhere other than in the Hollywood iconography the influence and stigmatisation is very evident. This iconography, in its turn, has been coated with all the semiotics contained in humanism. Throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries, we have witnessed the phenomenology of creators that shape, in a habitual and agreed manner, female characters who are intended to be radically new, based on this imaginary, aware, moreover, that their audience will measure and recast them in relation to the female symbolic universe immortalised by classic cinema. This visual imprint of the female iconographies recreated within the syncretism that Hollywood gestated and evolved, mainly during the golden era in the interwar period and almost until the 1960s, was characterised, as is well known, by the highly sexualised identification of the woman, and by the tyrannical misogyny that those responsible for the American dream — producers, directors and scriptwriters — generated. On celluloid — argues Verjat (Bou, 2004: 9) — male heroes were recognised by “a world of men, defined by men, performed by men, and aimed at men from the city,” a statement to which we will add that the design of the female icon, seen — exclusively — from the perspective of men and — also exclusively — at the service of men, was also recognised.

We will ignore the fact that today blockbusters are still the main exponents of all this. But it is not only supported by the whole of multimedia. It is quite apparent in classical text-based narratives and dramaturgies, of course, but also in contemporary ones; poems and lyrics; and librettos for

operas and musicals. We must undertake the stage transpositions of these literatures. The description of the woman canonised by Hollywood is so socially accepted that it becomes undetectable even by the creators and the general public. The female characters that have become legendary icons in the opera genre are also, as Verjat (Bou, 2004) points out, for cinema, products by men for men, as is, looking back throughout the history of music and opera, the choice made by the composers and the prefiguration that stigmatises them in the libretto. At present, we see it in the stage dramaturgy, in the revisionisms of these great characters made by male supremacy.

A superimposition of different archetypes will gradually be outlined, as a result of the fascination of cinema creators with female figuration — exacerbated, as Bou (2004: 21) states, in the creation of the female character. We will see this same process, rooted in the 20th century, in the literaturisation of Lea — Io is her predecessor —, although it is a character gestated by a new dramatic writing, a commission from the first quarter of the 21st century.

However, before the literaturisation of Lea, all this has a long tradition. In the scenes created by the most renowned, prestigious and popular opera stage directors in the last two decades, and above all by Catalan stage directors (the 22 we mentioned above), we have been able to see Carmens linked to the spell cast by Rita Hayworth (femme fatale: Pandora); challenging Traviatas in the style of Vivian Leigh (Southern belle: Athena); Salomé in the tessitura of Garbo in *Mata Hari*: Lilith; Sentas from *The Wandering Dutch* trying to stand out like Ava Gardner, in a mix between Pandora and Persephone... and many more star prefigurations completely assimilated into our collective imaginary. Emulating Liz Taylor's Cleopatra as a Demeter proud of her power, we find a series of female myths that have held power in opera librettos and scores (Turandot, Norma, Dalila, Medea...), whose productions and revisionism can be found on the Internet, so that we can see to what extent, based on this same, now classic, reference they could be iconographed in opera by the respective stage dramaturgies of their creators.

Indeed, it is possible to see that all those who speak of the meanings of the female myths and all the transgressive female myths are men, when in many cases, given the prevailing gaze of the heteropatriarchy, we have been able to prove that they are “fake transgressors”.

In the very few cases when a woman is the stage creator responsible for the revisionism of the opera myth and she wishes to fight against this male world vision, she finds it hard to be a gaze *Amb Ulls Propis* (Momblant, 2013).⁹

Here we are dealing with this “hard work”, with how to escape the prevailing and hegemonic world vision. Only as an example we will mention, now, the *euphemisation* (Durand, 1971: 128; Bou, 2004: 145) used in the imaginaries of the classic film industry. The euphemism we will have to deal with for Lea lies in the proposition “possessed by God” (Argullol, 2019; GTL-TV3, 2019) instead of “raped by God”. Variables, among many others, that Lea has to avoid.

9. *Amb Ulls Propis* is a new dramatic writing text by the author of this article which includes a letter by M. Aurèlia Capmany, from the epistolary *Cartes impertinents de dona a dona*, first published by Editorial Moll, Palma in 1971, in which there is a reference to the premise of the title.

But *Lea* is *new*, in other words, she has never been seen until Carme Portaceli and her stage creative team put her on stage and tried to strip her back, in keeping with the stage logic by which myths and characters who have become such take on their personality just when they are put in front of the audience for whom they were created, just when, from the page, they appear on stage.

It is very difficult to make people understand that the notions of masculinity and femininity, of the diurnal world and nocturnal world, are so characteristic of men and women, in variable proportions, of course, but without any kind of exclusion or specialisation. Verjat tells us that it is logical that we are living at a time in which we are trying to recover female values, for so long disregarded or caricatured; and the research conducted in the last fifty years has borne significant fruit (Bou, 2004: 14); but he also says that “we should not go to the other extreme, to a kind of historical revenge that would add fuel to the fire” (2004: 14), and we will bring it to the fore — although we cannot agree —,¹⁰ because as we have stressed through the focus of this study, female stage directors and, particularly, in opera, are given the cold shoulder.

In the end a male gaze has always shaped the many womanly attributes directly taken from this classic Hollywood constellation of a Hellenistic nature under which we ‘read’ *L’enigma de Lea, cuento mítico para una ópera* (Argullol, 2019), while it is through this very recent and insistent attempt to break that we see it in the transposition on the stage in the world premiere at El Liceu (GTL-TV3, 2019).

Given these extremely unequal figures, we will stop to think about what exactly was sought, during these seasons, in the field of stage direction, when choosing the members of the stage creative team. We have explored the lists of names of men, and we have extrapolated their stage dramaturgy. It is obvious that our aim is to dismiss the mere artistic invalidation of women. Or the affirmation — offensive until obscenity — of their absence. This is not the issue, because if we had looked for them, even having them in front of us, we would not have seen them. A matter of *gazes*. We therefore extrapolate what the dramaturgy made by men has told us throughout these two first decades of the 21st century. For instance, if, faced with aims by the artistic directions of the opera houses — and we are not only referring to the Gran Teatre del Liceu — of achieving levels of maximum theatricality in operas with the objective of distancing ourselves from the canonical artistic directions (i.e., those exclusively specialised in this genre), new names were sought, what was found were male directors. In other performing arts fields, such as text-based theatre, they also mostly had the opportunity to present their projects in the regular programming, while enjoying the usufruct of being the beneficiaries of one production, regardless of its scale. Or, if what was needed was to try to create new aesthetic and conceptual horizons in the opera scene based on videoart directions, stage directions by men were chosen.

10. We refer to the famous quotation by Simone de Beauvoir mentioned by Carme Portaceli during the presentation of the 2022-2023 season at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, and which begins thus: “On the day when it will be possible for woman to be loved not in her weakness but in strength,…”

New technologies have always been the realm of men; you only need to look at the frightening lack of parity in this year's Mobile World Congress.¹¹ Or, if pompous names are sought (i.e., artistic personalities in neighbouring fields, as an advertising lure, entities with power), only men were found, given that women did not yet — and still do not — have this power. Or, even if what was sought were trusted men — instead of *people, persons* of trust —, to whom to delegate the responsibility involved in a stage production at the level of those we are dealing with here, obviously such a question is closely linked to the traditional lack of trust of women when offering them the chance to be at the head of big companies, instead of believing that they will be able to handle them successfully. All this only leads us to close the circle again, in the now irremediable realisation of the very heteropatriarchal paradigm: we should not forget that many of the members of the creative teams in the last four decades come from a middle-class environment. In this respect, from one extreme to another, although the socioeconomic situation has favoured men in many fields when succeeding in artistic and/or social promotion, women have physically, energetically, emotionally, economically and logistically remained entangled in the servitude to the family and domestic slavery. These consuetudinary, ancestral, invisible and yet no less restrictive shackles, which we women wore — and still wear, let's not fool ourselves —, despite ourselves, restrict opportunities.

However, now at the end of the first quarter of the third millennium of our era, we can say it loud and clear that there are — increasingly more — female stage directors willing to conceptualise. We are part of a broad generational spectrum, with gazes that try to demonstrate, in a very interesting and risky way, that we are transgressors. Gazes that try to be personal, against all adversity, with the clear difficulty that being so involves, as we are still immersed in the tyranny of the current heteronormative paradigm.

A woman's vision can contrast greatly with, and even diverge from, a man's. The analysis of the stage dramaturgy of *L'enigma di Lea* corroborates this. We will therefore advocate the appropriateness of rethinking ourselves in order to evict the canonical and consuetudinary pyramidal vertical hierarchisation of stage commissions. We will ignore here the extremely evident, conventional and traditional nepotism of the commissions, as well as the achievements of artistic events: allocation of productions, budgeting, and consigning performing arts venues to present the work. We will pursue a context of parity and of horizontal democratisation. As for opera, we call for horizontality from the very moment of the genesis of a creative project for the stage, musical and textual conceptualisation.¹² In

11. This male hypermajority has been reflected throughout the media.

12. As it has been possible to see in the world premiere of a new chamber opera, *La Mujer Tigre*, with music composed by Manuel Busto, stage direction by Fran Pérez Román and dramaturgy by Julio León Rocha, which lends cohesion to the conceptualisation of the stage dramaturgy for the 2021/22 season in coproduction between the Teatro de La Maestranza and the Teatro Lope de Vega in Seville. A commission with the three corresponding assignments since the start of the project, and the work under equal conditions and in unison, in triumvirate, as it was possible to read, as we believe it corresponds to the reality of an opera show of our contemporaneity. Nevertheless, please note that the cast is wholly made up of men.

many other fields¹³ it is already applied: we are referring, certainly, to creative processes, more in agreement, tune and accordance, we are convinced, with what many would like the 21st century to be like.

Therefore, as we have deepened in the analysis, both the starting intuition and the concern that gave rise to it, have been strengthened.



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13. As an example, we have used the case of the Estudio Herreros. Lambda Files. The project for the Munch Museum in Oslo - La Virreina Centre de la Imatge. Barcelona. 29.10.2021-20.02.2022. In the conclusion of the thesis the paragon of this phenomenon is broadened by direct confluence with our argument, given that we would not like it to remain as an epiphenomenon.

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