Tebaldini, Gnecchi, and Strauss

Michael Horwath

A piece may be classified as a quotation or a plagiarism whether, on the one hand, the borrowings are conscious or unconscious and whether, on the other, they are legitimate or illegitimate. Illegitimate plagiarisms are those committed with the aim of creating a deception in order to further one's own enrichment or prestige. To fit this category, the plagiarism must agree enough with one or more previously written art works of a second person that one can, in any event, exclude coincidence as the cause of this similarity. The greater the number of duplications or similarities that can be shown, the surer one can be that a given instance is a case of genuine plagiarism. With works that are revisions and variations, on the contrary, one can in no way speak of plagiarism, inasmuch as the original work, or at least its creator, is acknowledged and cited.

One of the clearest examples of would-be plagiarism is Mozart's Requiem—a work which Prince Walsegg commissioned secretly so that it could be issued in that nobleman's handwritten copy as his own work. However, a material payment to the creator of the art work has no influence on the intellectual property of the work. In other words, even with the consent of the composer the spiritual possession cannot be passed on or sold to someone else.¹

Unconscious plagiarisms are very common.² They arise, basically, from two causes: (1) through "technical" aspects of the setting. Thus it is not surprising that the theme (a broken major triad) of Pallavincino's La Gerusalemme liberata reappears note for note in Mozart's Bastien und Bastienne and again as the first theme of Beethoven's Eroica. In all three cases it is possible that the composer proceeded from the natural tones of the hunting horn. (2) A much more common origin of an unconscious borrowing would seem to be the "parallelism" of one composer's musical thought with that of another. In this case it is a question of a "musical idiom" of the era. A composer uses a theme that he knows, while being convinced that it is his own; the appearance of the same thread in the works of two composers, therefore, can often be explained as a "manifestation of the time." (The distinction made here is between one composer hearing another's theme and using it as his own, and two composers hearing and reworking the same "idiom of the time.") There are countless examples of such unconscious borrowings and only a few striking ones can be cited here:

(a) the Tannhaüser chorus "Freudig begrüssen wir die edele Halle"; the Freischütz aria "Wie nahte mir der Schlummer" at the words "Himmel nimm des Dankes" (ex. 1a)



(b) the Zauberflöte duet "Bei Männern, welche Liebe" in the section "Könnte jeder brave Mann"; Schubert's Heidenröslein: "Sah' ein Knab" (ex. 1b)



(c) Die Walküre, Act III, Scene 3, at the words "War es so niedrig, was ich dir tat"; the Freischütz overture: third and fourth measures (ex. 1c)



(d) the Loewe ballade *Die Uhr* at the words "Sie blieb von selber stehn" Schumann's *Frühlingsfahrt*; "Ach Gott, führ uns liebreich zu Dir" (ex. 1d).



The boundaries between illegitimate and legitimate borrowing are hard to define.³ Borrowings may also be intended to honor an earlier master, considered an apotheosis of musical thought. In no way illegitimate is a quotation from one's own works, such as Mozart's in *Don Giovanni* (from *Figaro*) or Wagner's in *Meistersinger* (from *Tristan*).

We can find quotations used frequently in the operas of Richard Strauss.⁴ Strauss used musical quotations essentially as a technique to achieve irony. He employed thematically unrelated quotations or, on the other hand, melodies based on a text which in fact has nothing to do with the action, but which nonetheless evokes a distinct recollection in the listener. Thus in his opera Ariadne auf Naxos Strauss frequently used melodies from Lully's music to Molière's Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, and achieved new effects through old dance tunes and instrumentation. In the introduction to the second act of the first version of Ariadne Strauss employed Lully's sarabande. This is a case, then, of using old music in order to introduce the listener to the plot appropriately. The quotation from Rheingold (images of waves from the opening section), which is used in the spot where the Rhine salmon is served, is ironic, however. In the same banquet music "La donna è mobile" from Verdi's Rigoletto is also heard, abruptedly and undisguised.

The opera *Intermezzo* is peppered with quotations. Often they are hidden, cleverly woven into the instrumentation, so that it is difficult even for the practiced listener to understand these "jests" at first hearing. Worthy of mention in this context is the passage "Mir passt das ganze Milieu nicht," at which point Gounod's melody from *Faust*, "Laisse moi contempler ton visage," sounds.

In the opera Schweigsame Frau Strauss used quotation sources with which few people would be familiar, together with very well-known melodies from many stylistic periods in music history. In the wedding ceremony music from The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book is used; in the exposé of the notary melodies by Martin Peerson are heard. Monteverdi's opera L'Incoronazione di Pobbea makes its appearance with the aria "Sento un certo non so che" in the singing lesson of the Strauss opera. Directly following this Monteverdi quotation is the aria "Dolc' Amor, Bendat' alato" from Giovanni Legrenzi's opera Eteocle e Polinice. Wagner's Rheingold fansare sounds at the words "... solange die Leute Geld haben, saufen sie." Further on in the score of Schweigsame Frau can be found the hunting motive from Wagner's Tannhaüser and also the aria "Behüt' dich Gott, es wär' zu schön gewesen" from the opera Der Trompeter von Säckingen by Nessler, which is followed by the entrance song of Papageno from Mozart's Zauberflöte. Verdi's "La donna è mobile" also returns once more, this time to the text "Cavaliere Vanuzzis Ruhm ist bis in unser Vaterland gedrungen." Similarly, in the operetta-like music of Liebe der Danae, there are sizable reminiscences of Wagner's Wotan in the presentation of Jupiter.

Strauss used all these quotations after the sharp attacks levelled against him upon the appearance of his opera *Elektra*. Giovanni Tebaldini, in his

essay "Telepatia musicale?" (Rivista Musicale Italiana [1909] 16:400–12), had accused Richard Strauss of committing a violation of copyright in the opera Elektra, alleging plagiarism of the opera Cassandra by the Italian Vittorio Gnecchi. In his essay Tebaldini presented, in addition to many no longer provable charges, forty-eight comparative musical examples which were supposed to prove that the opera Elektra was merely a revised Cassandra.

The opera Cassandra (on a text by Luigi Illica⁶) was first performed on December 5, 1905, in the Teatro Comunale in Bologna, and also toured various other cities later on (e.g., Vienna in 1911). It is known that Gnecchi sent Richard Strauss a score of Cassandra from Turin. Elektra was completed on September 22, 1908, in Garmisch, and received its first performance in Dresden on January 25, 1909; therefore Gnecchi's opera is without a doubt older than that of Richard Strauss.

We have little tangible information about the origin and development of Cassandra but much, on the contrary, about Elektra. The collection of Dr. Levin in Cambridge⁷ contains a sketch book which includes the first two-fifths of the opera. Appearing on the title page is "Elektra, final copy" and on the reverse side, "Elektra alone, b flat minor, in public, b minor; Agamemnon, c minor; victory dance, c major." From the letters of Richard Strauss, especially those to Hugo von Hofmannsthal, we can learn something about the genesis of Elektra. "I'm already busy with the first scene of Electra; the work, however, is not progressing rapidly," Strauss wrote on June 16, 1906. In a letter of June 22, 1908, he said, "I can let her [Chrysothemis] repeatedly stammer 'Orest, Orest, Orest'" (see Gnecchi's Cassandra, p. 232, line 1, as pointed out in Tebaldini's Example XV, No. 47). Strauss himself expressed an opinion about the Tebaldini essay only once:

Do you know a better way to combat hate and envy than by maintaining a dignified silence? You of course know the story of Hercules and the Hydra? Concerning the case of Cassandra-Elektra, I had already decided not to reply to it since I did not yet know Mr. Tebaldini's publicity brochure for Gnecchi. Now that I know it, I will really be quiet. For the entire story is really too silly, apart from the obnoxious hints of chauvinism which can be clearly discerned in the Italian and French attacks against me, against which one must always offer as a contrast the widest hospitality that Germany, more than any other country in the world, accords Italian and French art, and for which she is thanked so little by her neighbors [from a letter written to Romain Rolland from Garmisch, May 8, 1909].

A superficial study of the forty-eight Tebaldini examples (see the appendix to this article) undoubtedly might give the impression that the accusation is correct, that Strauss had actually "reworked" Cassandra into Elektra.

In Example I (Nos. 1-5) Tebaldini tries to prove that the melody of the "Agamemnon children" is a clever copy from the prologue of *Cassandra*. It is altogether possible that Strauss remembered this melody, but does it

really give the same impression? In the indictment this theme appears in four other examples. Is it forbidden to work out a melody, to develop it?

Tebaldini's Example II (No. 6) seems, at first glance, to be actually very "plagiaristic," but should be regarded as a melodic and harmonic development which was perfectly normal at the turn of the century (therefore an "idiom of the time," as discussed above).

In Example III (Nos. 7 and 8) the descriptive mood is very similar; however no comparable harmonic means are used.

In Example IV (Nos. 9 and 10) a similarity is hardly ascertainable. Should the extraordinary pp or p and the dolcissimo or molto expressivo be considered significant here? Not shown by Tebaldini, in any case, is the crescendo before No. 10 in the score.

Example V (No. 11) is put together from various places in Cassandra in such a way that a comparison would be completely out of place.

Example VI (Nos. 12–14) again links unrelated melodic elements in order to give the impression of a similarity to *Elektra*. It should be mentioned here that any given succession of three to four specific notes can be found in almost any great work of music.

That the musical illustrations cited in Example VII (Nos. 15 and 16) really show a very great similarity is due to the not very original use of the major scale from the third upwards. Everything else in this example has turned into an insignificant complex through the assembly and combination of various incongruous sections from the opera *Elektra*. (Tebaldini at this point needed four different places in the score as "proof" of the similarity of four measures.)

In Example VIII (Nos. 17–22) only A-A₂ is of some interest. Indeed, similar phrases are also found in Puccini (*Tosca*). The phrases D and B are, as scales, without particular significance (as before in No. 15A). In C one can hardly speak of similarity any more than in C₁. There is no resemblance in No. 20, except for the tonal succession f-a-b; the rhythm, likewise, diverges sharply; the notes inbetween are ignored. The next number presents a slight alteration of No. 20 (that is, a-b-d, or f-g-b), which is in no way an unusual tonal succession, even if there is some rhythmic coincidence. No. 23 shows a descending scale, 8 followed by an upward octave leap.

Example IX presents certain (quite conventional) rhythms in No. 24; the arpeggiated jump of a tenth had already appeared in many works of older composers (e.g., in Richard Wagner). In No. 25 Gnecchi uses the arpeggiated seventh chord with altogether greatly altered intervals. At this point only a rhythmic relationship with *Elektra* can be established.

In Example X, No. 27, Tebaldini actually offers an instance that is convincing in its great similarity. A definite justification can be made for No. 28 also, although in this case various sections of *Elektra* are again combined. The use of scales (albeit also partially altered) which return prematurely to the starting note is found in all these examples and also in No. 29. (In a faster tempo such passages would not be at all noticeable.)

A correspondence in Example XI cannot be established, even through a clever presentation (which Tebaldini undoubtedly has found). Why the upper c# is abruptly printed lightly in Example XII, No. 34, cannot be perceived from the Cassandra score.

Example XIII presents a series of thoroughly common flourishes which Gnecchi uses, as does Strauss. Nos. 35 and 36 are contrived similarities; No. 35 is, in fact, without a page reference from the piano score. In No. 37 there is, to be sure, a rhythmic similarity, but the effect (and this is, of course, decisive in the end) is radically different. The Cassandra example is a model of "Italian melody"; the Elektra excerpt is a drumming rhythm, without regard to the melodic lines. In No. 38 no rhythmic similarities are present; in this case, however, the tonal successions agree. Whether the succession of the notes c–g is particularly original may be questioned. Nos. 39 and 40 show hardly any appreciable similarities. A certain relationship cannot be denied in No. 41, and Nos. 42 and 43 are also cleverly selected examples.

Example XIV shows a highly common octave doubling. (Should the same metronome indication also be considered a proof of plagiarism?) There is also an entirely inappropriate comparison in Example XV, No. 45. For No. 46 Tebaldini needs eleven sections from Cassandra in order to be able to compare them to one Elektra fragment. Essentially this involves repeating earlier examples. No. 47 in the first part shows a similarity of the word "Orest," but everything else is missing in the quotation from Elektra. Only the vocal line which appears in Cassandra is present (in the form of a speaking passage). In the second section the construction is similar, but not the harmony. No. 48 is a clever juxtaposition of themes which were already discussed before, individually.

Vittorio Gnecchi died on February 1, 1953, thus outliving Richard Strauss by a few years. He wrote several other operas (e.g., Virtu d'amare) and ballet music aside from Cassandra, and should be taken quite seriously as a composer. Had he been convinced that Elektra was a so-called "genuine plagiarism," he would himself have probably championed Tebaldini's opinion in 1909, or perhaps have published a tract against Elektra at some later date. But Riemann wrote in his Lexicon that Gnecchi stood far apart from the "Elektra-feud," displaying no interest in "Telepatia musicale?"

These examples were selected very cleverly by Tebaldini and can actually lend great weight to the possibility that Richard Strauss knew the opera Cassandra and remembered portions of it here and there. Certainly a large number of the comparisons are presented unscientifically, even if with great artfulness. In the balance, however, it can be said in the case of Gnecchi versus Strauss that, as in other previously mentioned examples, we are dealing with a quite legitimate use of quotation—the common "musical idiom"—and not with a case of true plagiarism.

If one considers Cassandra independently of any ties to Elektra, the former reveals itself to be an excellent work. The cantabile melodies are strongly reminiscent of Gnecchi's famous contemporary Puccini; the rhythmic

treatment, with its frequent changes of meter, shows that the composer of *Cassandra* was familiar with theories on ancient Greek music.¹⁰ The entire work creates a very nicely rounded impression, doing full justice to Italian opera at the turn of the century. That this attractive opera never became really at home on the large operatic stage is certainly not in any way the fault of Tebaldini and his "Telepatia Musicale?" In any event, it would be worthwhile to remember this opera again and bring it back into the performing repertory.

Dr. Franz Grasberger writes about *Elektra* that it is the "peak of development" in Strauss's operatic creation.¹¹ This is undoubtedly a very wide-spread view and cannot be refuted by Tebaldini's attacks. Strauss doubtlessly found in this music drama an inspiration for a musical form of expression which until then had not even approximately existed.

How did Tebaldini arrive at a comparison of *Elektra* and *Cassandra* in the first place? The answer lies most probably in the content of the two operas; the Hofmannsthal *Elektra* text is, after all, the continuation to some extent of Illica's *Cassandra*. *Cassandra* ends with the death of Agamemnon and the heroine of the title. Elektra begins with the accusation concerning Agamemnon's death. In most works about the ancient Greek myths, the plots, as they are presented in both operas, proceed directly from one into the other. Two chief characters, Agamemnon and his son Orestes, are developed by the epic cycles. Standing in time between these persons are Cassandra and, after Agamemnon's death until the return of Orestes, Elektra. With regard to the subject matter the continuity is singular in the history of music, since even in Wagner's *Ring* the individual sections are never as closely welded to one another in their plots.

Strauss is still often attacked today for his quotations; indeed, one even frequently hears talk of "theft" and cribbing." But if the Strauss works are examined more closely in this respect, it can be shown that the use of quotation makes much higher demands on a composer's ability and originality than does the elaboration of his own musical thoughts. This is because the incorporation of a "musical, foreign body" into one's own personal concept requires, aside from great skill, an immense capacity for "sympathetic attunement."

(Translated by Margaret Ross Griffel)

NOTES

¹ It is therefore a question of the "moral safeguard" of works' inherent intellectual value. Cf. Fr. Pauli, "Bewusste and unbewusste Melodiebenutzung," $M \times V/3$.

² R. Hennig, "Unbewusste Plagiate," M XXII/3.

³ Cf. Herzfeld, Lexikon der Musik (Illstein, 1957).

⁴ Cf. Hans Erhardt, Richard Strauss.

⁵ An English composer, c. 1572-1650.

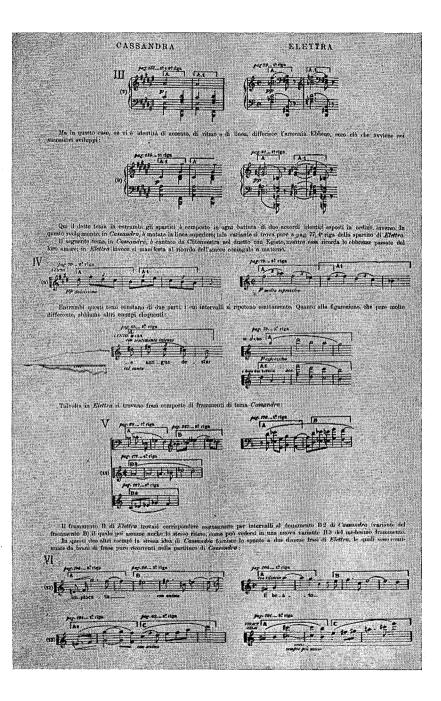
⁶ Illica also wrote the librettos to the Puccini operas La Bohème, Tosca, and Madama Butterfly and text to Giordano's opera Andrea Chenier.

- ⁷ Mueller von Asow, E. H. Richard Strauss: thematisches Verzeichnis I (Vienna: L. Doblinger, 1959), p. 408.
 - ⁸ Compare Numbers 15 and 18.
- ⁹ This tonal succession is presented through the kettledrum line, as is already frequently found in Haydn.
- ¹⁰ Puccini based two of his operas (especially *Turandot*) on the scholarly knowledge of Oriental music; Gnecchi did the same concerning ancient music.
 - ¹¹ Franz Grasberger, Richard Strauss, Hohe Kunst-Erfülltes Leben (Rosenbaum: Vienna).
 - 12 In the ancient Greek myth Cassandra is murdered first, then Agamemnon.

Appendix

On pages 82-91 following are the musical examples referred to in the course of this article. They are taken from the article by Giovanni Tebaldini, "Telepatia musicale?" in the Rivista Musicale Italiana (1909) 16:400-12. The first nine pages have been photographically reproduced, while for the final page the type has been re-set.—Ed.

















si soppone in orchestra, la quale linea però roch manos in Casanodra in altri evilupio dello stesso tenza como mello franci la finamenta di viduppo del como A in Elettra e formato natzamente da brana tella agli eviluppo de disto tenna in Casanodra, indicazione Elettrità degli injuvali, seclassi di solo solto di ponsa, che in Casanodra e di estima. Aggiungiamo (ne in Elettra si trovano, contemporanamento a questo eviluppo, dire sili i teni di Casanodra, il vinno (34 il velta il tenia XIV) a velta.

Ecco, come finiccomo le due cuerto: CASSANDRA ELETTRA

A confermare come tutte le idee musicali e tutti gli spunti citati (ecc presi a caso nello svolgersi di una qualunque melodia, ma assumano in il loro ripetersi e per il loro svolgersi, vengono qui citate alcune fra le identici, talora con varianti. Naturalmente un più accurato studio a citazioni, che vennero qui notate dopo una scorsa sommaria data agli s

CASSANDRA

| | CASSANDRA | |
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| TEMI riportati nelle tavole nel seguente ordine | Indicazioni delle pagine nelle quali si riscontrano i temi citati di "Cassandra" | Indicazioni delle pagine nelle quali si riscontrano i temi citati di "Elettra" |
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