The Use of Greek Tragedy in the History of Opera

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Throughout the history of music the ancient Greek tragedies have inspired composers of operas, ballets, oratorios, and symphonic works. The frequent use of Greek themes stems from many reasons, foremost of which are the power and force of these ancient legends, the philosophical problems they present, and the question of man's fate that lies within them.

These myths are among the oldest sources of inspiration in Western art. Unlike the Bible, which composers have generally approached reverently, they have been subject to revision and varying attitudes depending on changes in outlook from one culture to the next. Each generation sees the legends in the light of its own experience and environment, and the subject matter of opera used by that generation reflects its own preoccupations, prejudices, and preferences. As a result, not only have the musical treatments and interpretations of plots and characterizations of the Greek tragedies varied in different periods,[1] but each age also appears to have its own attitudes as to which tragedies provide suitable material for operatic presentation. Thus, certain themes become favorites for a time, only to give way to others in a later age.

This article presents a survey of these changing preferences and prejudices as they pertain to the use of Greek tragedy as subject matter for opera,[2] as well as a tentative chronological listing of the operas based on certain themes from Greek tragedy.

It is not known at which point the Greek tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were no longer presented in their original form, but by the time of Plato dramatists were dealing with politics, war, love, and philosophy, as well as with the deeds of gods and ancestors.

Rome borrowed the dramas, performance methods, and music from the Greek theater and then expanded, exaggerated, and distorted these borrowings. In the 3rd century A.D., Athenaeus, a Greek living in Rome, complained that "in ancient times the Greeks were music lovers, but later, with the breakdown of order, when practically all the ancient customs fell into decay, this devotion to principle ceased, and debased fashions in music came to light." In olden days, he continued, "it was the acts of heroes and the praise of gods that the poets put to song-music."[3]

In spite of the Romans' preference for sensational spectacle, violence, rhetoric, and sensuality, Greek tragedy in some form continued to be cultivated at least into the 3rd century. After the general recognition and acceptance of Christianity, all arenas, including the theaters, were closed, and a new era in the history of music and its relationship to the theater began.

Like the ancient Greeks, the early Christian fathers considered music

important in influencing the thoughts and emotions of men. Among the scholars and teachers of the time was Clement of Alexandria, who in his "Exhortation to the Greeks" (c. 200 A.D.) voiced the kind of opposition to the ancient tragedies which influenced the course of music throughout the medieval period:

> For my own part, mere legend though they are, I cannot bear the thought of all the calamities that are worked up into tragedy; yet in your hands the words of these evils have become dramas, and the actors of the dramas are a sight that gladdens your heart. But as for the dramas and the . . . poets, who are altogether like drunken men, let us wreathe them, if you like, with ivy, while they are performing the mad revels of the Bacchic rite, and shut them up. . . .
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> Under cover of music they have outraged human life, being influenced by daemons, through some artful sorcery, to compass man's ruin. By commemorating deeds of violence in their religious rites, and by bringing stories of sorrow into worship, they were the first to lead men by the hand to idolatry.[4]

This new doctrine of morality was foreign to the Greek doctrine of Fate, and the Greek tragedies were seen as tales of horror, parricide, incest, and violence. As a result of the activities of the Church, the theaters, with their music and drama, were abolished at the end of the Roman Empire, and liturgical dramas took their place.

But although the tragedy and the theaters of the Greeks and Romans were not known to the masses during the Middle Ages, the great classical tragedies were studied in their Latin translations in the schools of Europe. During the Renaissance, the knowledge of the classics of antiquity spread. In 1423 the plays of Sophocles and Aeschylus were first brought to Italy by Giovanni Aurispa, a humanist and educator, and the study of Greek made rapid progress. By the end of the century choruses in tragedies presented in the schools were sometimes set to music.

During the 16th century Renaissance artists turned to Greek themes more often in spectacles characterized by a *mélange* of gods, heroes, nymphs, satyrs, shepherds and shepherdesses, stupendous scenic effects, and a bringing together of song, dance, music, and costume. Some plays, written in imitation of the Greek originals, were performed as *intermedii* with solos, duets, madrigals, instrumental pieces, and choruses. Among these was an *Alkestis* by Hans Sachs (1555), which has been lost.

The *Académie de poésie et de musique* was founded in France by the poet Baïf in 1570 during the reign of Charles IX. Its purpose was to restore the ancient drama, and towards the end of the reign of Henry III, the *Académie* was about to present "une pièce de théâtre en vers mésurés à la façon des Grècs,"[5] when political troubles interfered.

In 1585 the first performance of a Greek tragedy with choruses set to music took place in a modern theater. Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, translated into

Italian by the scholar and statesman Orsatto Giustiniani, with music by Andrea Gabrieli, was chosen to inaugurate the opening of Vicenza's Teatro Olimpico. Although the production became the 16th-century model for performance practices of musical dramas,[6] Oedipus himself was banished, for it was apparently not until almost two hundred years later that an opera was based on his tragic story.

Shortly after Gabrieli's *Oedipus Rex* the Florentine Camerata was formed with the aim of returning to the greatness of Greek tragedy, but the new Christian interpretations could not accept the Greek concept of Fate which was so intimately related to Greek religion and to the Greek theater. The first operas produced in Florence were really festivals to celebrate occasions at court, and this may account for the fact that Greek tragedies were not used as subject matter. Ottavio Rinuccini, as librettist, provided a happy ending for the opera *Euridice* (1600). In his preface to the work, he described the approval with which such representations as his were received; he wrote that "some may feel that I have been overly bold in changing the end of the fable of Orpheus; but so it seemed fitting to me at a time of such rejoicing."[7]

Several years later Striggio, the librettist for Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607), intended to portray Orpheus' death at the hands of the Bacchantes but did not do so for fear of offending the court. Instead, he had Apollo lead Orpheus to heaven to seek Euridice in the beauty of the stars and the sun. These "happy endings" were typical of the period, and the operas of the early Baroque became a mixture of love story, pastorale, and fairy tale.

In her study of the use of *Alceste* as subject matter in opera, Abert states that the Florentines would have thought it impossible to set a complete Greek drama to music.[8] It appears from Rinuccini's and Striggio's treatments of the Orpheus legend that one reason for the rejection of Greek tragedy as subject matter during a period in which the "restoration" of the ancient theater was an ideal was that Greek tragedies were, in fact, "tragic." Their themes—the anguish and suffering depicted, the portrayal of rulers with all too human weaknesses—were inappropriate for the festive court occasions for which opera was supposed to be written.

Amid general corruption, political assassinations, and insecure conditions, the first public opera house, the Teatro San Cassiano, was opened in Venice in 1637, and the masses, with their taste for longer, more spectacular works, gained admittance to the world of opera. The genre became a craze, and all the earlier tendencies were amplified. Librettos caricatured the Greek myths, so that gods acted like characters in an intrigue-filled farce based, in part, on the life of the period. Tangled sub-plots, extraneous characters, mistaken identities, disguises, double triangles, casts of characters involving monsters, nymphs, and tritons, numerous stage machines for miracles, apparitions, transformations—all catered to the age's taste for spectacle and amusement and to the vanity of the absolute monarch (if there was one), the privileged nobility, or the wealthy middle class. Throughout the 17th century, Greek legend was a major source of librettos, and there were at least sixty-nine

operas based on ancient Greek mythology which provided subject matter for two-thirds of those written and produced up to 1650, for a little more than half from 1650 to 1675, and for a little less than half from 1675 to 1700.[9]

This, then, was the picture of the opera stage when in 1649, almost half a century after the Camerata, the first opera based on a classic Greek tragedy, Cavalli's *Giasone*, was produced. In 1660 Ziani's *L'Antigona delusa da Alceste* (with a libretto by Aureli), was presented in Venice. Like other operas of the time, it was a drama of love, hate, revenge, and jealousy. The libretto was a fantastic distortion of Euripides' original play, in which the old ideas of Fate and Friendship played no role.

The Greek tragedy of Euripides contains a scene in which Alceste is veiled after being rescued from Death by Hercules, and another in which she expresses her fear that Admetos will take a new wife in her place after her self-sacrifice. These scenes (together with Alceste's devotion, Admetos' fatal illness, and the final rescue by Hercules) provided a better starting point for the favorite type of Baroque libretto than those of any other Greek tragedy. Aureli's libretto included mistaken identity, disguises, comic scenes, and two love stories ending with two happy couples, Alceste and Trasimedes (Admeto's brother) and Antigona (a foreign princess) and Admetos. Butler believes that this distortion and the preoccupation of Baroque librettos with infidelity were based on Christian ethics and constitute the hallmark of modernity.[10]

In the last years of the Baroque period, beauty and charm began to dominate opera as the works became more superficial. Machines were still popular, and the happy ending was mandatory. During this period a new heroine from the pages of Greek tragedy appeared on the stage in operas supposedly based on Euripides' *Iphigenia*. One such opera, *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1704) by Henri Desmarets, contained distortions of the plot, and ballet, pageantry, and elaborate stage settings. At least five more operas based on *Iphigenia* (in Tauris or in Aulis) appeared during the next fifteen years. At the close of the Baroque period, Alceste and Iphigenia were still the legendary figures upon whom most of the operas based on themes from Greek tragedy relied.

During the Rococo, subjects were drawn more from classical history or legend than from mythology. A number of critics of contemporaneous opera, however, still saw in Greek tragedy the ideal subject matter. In *Il teatro alla moda* (1720), Benedetto Marcello ridiculed the librettos of his time and gave ironic advice to poets:

> The librettist's subject matter need not be historically true. As a matter of fact, since all the Greek and Roman subjects have been treated . . . the modern librettist is faced with the task of inventing a fable and adding to it all kinds of oracles, realistic shipwreck scenes, . . . etc. All that is needed is to have an historical name or two on the public announcement of the work, the rest can then be freely invented and the

only further thing that matters is that the number of verses must not exceed twelve hundred, arias included.[11]

Francesco Algarotti also lamented this change in subject matter; he saw it as an economy measure and regretted that accounts of deities were renounced and historical themes used because they were less magnificent and hence less expensive. In 1755 he advised:

> The poet can conquer these difficulties [the expense of machines in production, the theme not suited for music, the story not familiar enough] only by choosing the subject of his libretto with the greatest care. . . . he should take his plots from events remote in time, or at least in place, that furnish occasion for marvelous happenings while at the same time being extremely simple and well-known.[12]

He went on to recommend especially the story of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, "where to the great variety of settings and machines is superadded the charm of . . . Euripides' poetry. . . . The poet . . . will be in a position to do with opera what has to be done with states which, in order to keep it alive, have to go back to their roots from time to time."[13]

Diderot was another writer who mentioned the suitability of *Iphigenia in Aulis* as subject matter for opera. In his "Entretiens sur *Le Fils Naturel*" (1757), he said of Clytemnestra's despair over the impending sacrifice of Iphigenia, "I know of no verses . . . that are more lyrical, nor of situations that are better suited to imitation by music. Clytemnestra's state of mind must wrest from her inmost heart the cry of nature, and the composer will convey it to my ear in its most subtle shades."[14]

Composers and librettists apparently responded either to these critics or to the same forces in society which elicited their recommendations. In the century prior to Marcello's criticisms, only about a half dozen operas had been based on the Iphigenia legends. In the little more than fifty years between that time and Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774), there were at least fifteen.

But the tragedies of *Agamemnon*, *The Choëphores*, *The Eumenides* (the *Oresteia* trilogy of Aeschylus, which contains the horror-ridden stories of Agamemnon's murder by his wife Clytemnestra and her subsequent murder by her own children, Electra and Orestes), and *Oedipus Rex* (who killed his own father) were almost completely ignored. Gebel wrote an opera based on the Oedipus legend in 1751, but otherwise the Greek tragedies which explored the deepest and most powerful elements of human conflict and passions were avoided, as the Rococo ". . . presented the world with the most lighthearted, amoral, and beautiful entertainments . . . a stage devoid of earnestness, pathos, and solemnity."[15]

The criticisms of the philosophers and intellectuals of the Rococo eventually bore fruit in the next period of operatic history. In 1755, the same year in which Algarotti had urged the use of tragedy as a suitable subject for opera, Johann Winckelmann, the classical archeologist, published his *Gedanken über*

die Nachahmung griechischer Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst, a work which reawakened interest in antiquity.

Gluck was undoubtedly familiar with the ideas of Winckelmann, Algarotti, and Marcello, and with 18th-century aesthetic theory, which saw music as the handmaiden of poetry. In his operas based on the tragedies of *Alceste* (1767), *Iphigenia in Aulis* (1774), and *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1779), he attempted to carry out the ideals of "simplicity and naturalness," which, as he stated in his foreword to *Alceste* (the second opera of his collaboration with the poet Ranieri Calzabigi), "are the highest principles of beauty in all artistic creations."[16] In *Alceste*, especially, Gluck found the "strong passions, grand images and tragic situations," elements which "stir the audience and provide such great harmonic effects."[17]

His version of *Alceste*, however, and others of the 18th century, concentrated on the character's nobility and her inner struggle between motherly and wifely love. The cowardice of Admetos and the friendship of Hercules played small parts. In Gluck's other *tragédies lyriques*, as well, the characters were "more noble" than in the Greek originals. In *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Pylades offers to die with Orestes solely out of friendship. In the Euripides play, however, he was also motivated by his concern with what people would think if he did not die with his friend. "The current conceptions of the relations between men and women were such that they were enamored of the sacrifice, thinking it . . . right and proper . . . in harmony with Christian religious ideals."[18]

This need to stress the noble and self-sacrificing aspects of behavior was but one of the factors which limited the selection of Greek tragedies for the operatic stage. The aesthetic viewpoint which dominated the 18th century was expressed by Christoph Wieland, librettist of Anton Schweitzer's *Alceste* (1773):

> Music ceases to be music when it ceases to give pleasure. . . . Music must refrain from painting the fury of an Oedipus who . . . gouges his eyes and curses the day of his birth. . . . The composer should never forget that . . . when he makes us cry, the tears we shed must not be painful but . . . tears expressing . . . the emotions of an overflowing heart.
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> This consideration would seem to exclude Oedipus . . . and perhaps the majority of the tragic heroes from the lyrical stage.[19]

La Harpe, an influential literary critic and playwright of the period, agreed with Wieland. Writing on what constituted suitable subject-matter for opera, he declared: "I do not wish to hear the cry of a man in pain. I expect from the musician . . . that he will find accents of grief without making them unpleasant . . . I wish the charm of the melody to mingle with the emotion I feel."[20]

Although Gluck challenged this viewpoint and wrote in reply, "If some wicked person should say . . . that Sophocles in the finest of his tragedies . . .

dared to show . . . Oedipus with his bloody eyes, and that . . . the unfortunate King . . . must have expressed the deepest sorrow, I will retort that M. de La Harpe does not wish to hear the cry of a man in suffering,"[21] he did not attempt an opera based on the Oedipus tragedy. There were a few operas using the Oedipus theme between 1770 and 1830. Of this group Sacchini's *Oedipe à Colone* (1786) was the most successful. Although it was cooly received in France, it was well liked in England and Italy and by 1844 had received 583 performances.

The story of Electra was attempted in opera for the first time during the Classical period. In 1782 *Electre* by Lemoyne, with a libretto by Guillard, was produced, and it shocked audiences. Clytemnestra's murder was committed on the stage, this action violating 18th-century aesthetic values and making the dénouement even more terrible than in the original tragedy. Häffner wrote an *Electra* in 1787, and Champein composed music for a literal translation of Sophocles' *Elektra* in the 1790's. This work was rehearsed and received with great applause at the Opera, but at the last moment the authorities refused to permit it to be performed.

La Harpe also reflected the conceptions of his era when he declared, "Agamemnon is a coldly atrocious piece . . . As for [the character] of Clytemnestra, it seems to me that one cannot tolerate her at all: she is an atrocity which is revolting."[22]

Thus, Alceste, Antigone, and Iphigenia remained the favorites. During the Classical period, the interest in Greek tragedy was evident in at least seventy-five operas based on the dramas of ancient Greece. Most of these, however, dealt with the noble, self-sacrificing heroines, and only a handful with the tragic, violent figures of Oedipus, Electra, and Orestes. Agamemnon and Clytemnestra were apparently still completely rejected as possible subject matter.

By 1800 the peak of the worship of Antiquity had passed, and the Western world was entering a new century with changing values.

Throughout the Romantic period, interest in Greek legend was superseded by musical nationalism, Wagner's theories of the music drama, and the predominance of program music. In opera, favored subjects included modern history, fairy tale, folk legend, medieval history, and (later) everyday life. A marked decrease occurred in the number of operas based on the Greek tragedies. Writers were apparently bored with Alceste and Iphigenia, and Antigone also fell into disfavor. From 1830 to 1900 there were fewer than fifteen operas based on Greek tragedy. Of these, none seems to have been taken from the tragedy of Iphigenia.

Several composers did turn to Aeschylus' dramas, however. "The *Agamemnon* was . . . particularly admired by Napoleon. . . . he had long desired to produce a Greek play—in a good French translation—in its initial integrity, with choruses, music, etc. The project did not materialize."[23] The works based on *Oresteia* include *Agamemnon* (1847) by Treves, a "burlesque tragedy" by Hervé (1856), and Taneev's trilogy *Oresteia* (1895). There were also

several operas about Medea, including two parodies of the Medea and Jason story.

Then, in 1909, Richard Strauss shocked the musical world with *Elektra* which contained the most brutal and violent music of any opera written up to that time.[24] Strauss was deeply interested in the writings of current philosophers and social critics and in psychological "analysis." The music drama, with a libretto by von Hofmannsthal, stresses Electra's pathological desire for vengeance and her exultation over the murders of her mother and her mother's lover Aegisthus. It is more a study and explanation of Electra's feelings than a drama, as it suggests Electra's unconscious erotic attachment to her father.

Whether society was ready for works like those of Strauss, or whether Strauss paved the way for such works, there followed a marked change in the number of operas based on the Greek tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and in the direction taken in the choice of subject matter. Since Strauss's *Elektra*, there have been at least thirty musical theater pieces on the tragic themes of Greek drama, and of these, more than half have dealt with the Orestes, Oedipus, Electra, and Agamemnon legends.

One of these music dramas is *Alkestis* (1924) by Egon Wellesz, who saw the ancient legends as timeless:

> It is the nature of the stories which the Greek poets have left to us that many different facets are contained in them, so that every age can turn to that in which it may see its own experience . . . each age has formed them afresh, and so filled them with its own life.[25]

His major concern was to restore the role of Fate in the drama, so that its "power . . . is to be discerned in the events on the stage, instead of caprice and arbitrariness."[26] The libretto by von Hofmannsthal was completed by Wellesz and does stress the overriding power of Fate.

Honegger's *Antigone* (1927) was written to Cocteau's abridgment of Sophocles' play and shows Man in the grip of the destiny he has created for himself. Carl Orff wrote two works based on Sophocles' tragedies, *Antigone* (1949) and *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1959). Both follow the original stories closely. Questioned concerning his choice of such dramas, Orff declared:

> Sometimes I am asked why in the main I choose old material for my stage works. I do not feel it to be old, but only valid. The dated elements are lost and the spiritual strength remains.[27]

One of the more important operas of the 20th century is Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* (1927), a setting of Cocteau's version of the Sophocles drama. The goal of this work, Stravinsky said, is:

> . . . to focus the drama not on Oedipus himself . . . but on the 'fatal development' which . . . is the meaning of the play. . . . Oedipus, the

man, is a subject for a . . . symbolic treatment that depends upon the interpretation of experience and is principally psychological.

The geometry of tragedy is what interested me, the inevitable intersecting of lines.[28]

Stravinsky believed that his audience was "not indifferent to the fate of the person, but . . . far more concerned with the person of the fate and the delineation of it which can be achieved uniquely in music . . . [where] the portrait of the individual as the victim of circumstances is made far more starkly effective by this static presence."[29] This interpretation can be related to the composer's profound religious feeling and to his belief in a great order presiding over the universe. Stravinsky declared that "the music was composed during my strictest and most earnest period of Christian Orthodoxy" and that he most certainly believed "in a system beyond Nature."[30] Cocteau's libretto for *Oedipus Rex* remains close to the original Greek tragedy in its portrayal of the power of Fate in Oedipus' life.

In 1952 Darius Milhaud, composer of the trilogy *Oresteia* (*Agamemnon*, *Les Choéphores*, and *Les Euménides*), writing on the future of music, declared:

> One knows . . . that there have always been catastrophes in the history of the world. And yet one can only confirm that these catastrophes have not prevented the world from continuing to exist. . . . Doubt seems to me to be not only superficial but ridiculous. . . . Courage![31]

Milhaud worked for ten years to set the *Oresteia* trilogy to music. There are similarities, apparently, between the theme of Aeschylus' work, which deals with mankind's redemption and the furtherance of knowledge and progress through suffering and catastrophe, and Darius Milhaud's personal philosophy. The libretto of *L'Orestie* is by Claudel, whose version of the dramas follows that of Aeschylus and is close to the original tragedies in all facets, including the representation of Orestes' murder of his mother as being not a result of free choice, but on the injunction of a god.

Other operas since the First World War have included Leoncavallo's *Edipo Re* (1920), a grand opera which follows the original story closely, Enesco's *Oedipus* (1936), which uses microtones, and Partch's "electronic" opera *King Oedipus* (1961), as well as Louise Talma's *Alkestiade* (1956), which is a setting of Thornton Wilder's play and does not depart from the original story by making Alceste's wifely devotion the only major theme.

In 1965 Pizzetti's *Clitemnestra* was performed at Milan's La Scala. A critic said of this piece: "Musically, the work was . . . somber, repetitive, unnecessarily difficult to sing. But as exciting theater, the blood-thirsty Agamemnon legend is hard to beat. . . ."[32] The most recent of this series is Martin David Levy's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which had its premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1968.

A number of characteristics appear to be evident in all these works. There is a frequent choice of a text by an outstanding writer (Cocteau, Claudel, Wilder, Hölderlin, Hofmannsthal); less alteration of plot than in previous

eras (except in Křenek's deliberate distortion in *Das Leben des Orestes*, 1930); concern with dramatic values; use of such devices as choral singing, choral dancing, "quasi parlando," "speech chant"; frequent use of the chorus (some of the works are called "choral dramas"); and simple staging.[33] All of these suggest the performance practices of ancient Greece. Above all, there is a seriousness in approach which seems to indicate an earnest searching for ways to express the Greek tragedy through modern idioms, and a reawakened interest in and approval of the dramas dealing with profound inner conflicts and problems of humanity.

The acceptance of these tragedies as suitable subject matter for opera may be the result of a certain affinity between some contemporary viewpoints and those of ancient Greece. Unlike the Classical period, with its optimism and faith in reasoned solutions, the Baroque period, with its protagonists dominated by one "affect" or feeling, or the Middle Ages, with its conception of sin and rejection of much of the subject matter of Greek tragedy as stage material, modern audiences, writers, and composers accept and explore the role of Fate in human life and the complexity of human emotions. Gone is the demand for happy endings—violence of emotions and action is acceptable on the stage. The modern age can understand Sophocles' ironic fatalism, Euripides' human realism, and Aeschylus' conflict-filled emotion-driven protagonists.

The appended listing of operas based on Greek tragedies has been compiled from the bibliographical sources indicated on p. 94. Many of these volumes or studies refer to some works not mentioned elsewhere. None contains more than a small percentage of the total. Where different dates were given for the same opera in different sources, the writer has used the date given in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (5th edition, 1954). Where there is a discrepancy in dates in the works not listed in *Grove's*, the earliest date has been selected.

OPERAS BASED ON SELECTED GREEK TRAGEDIES

ALCESTE

Date	*Composer*	*Title of Opera*
1660	Ziani, P. A.	L'Antigona delusa da Alceste
1674	Lully, J. B.	Alceste
1680	Franck, M.	Alceste
1693	Strungk, N. A.	Alceste
1699	Draghi, A.	Alceste
1702	Magni, P.	Admeto, Re di Tessaglia
1718	Porsile, G.	Alceste (Festa teatrale)
1719	Schürmann, G. C.	Die getreue Alceste
1727	Handel, G. F.	Admeto, Re di Tessaglia

Date	*Composer*	*Title of Opera*
1728	Dominique, ?	Alceste (parody of Lully's opera)
1744	Lampugnani, G. B.	Alceste
1750	Handel, G. F.	Alceste (lost)
1758	Favart, C. S.	La Noce interrompue (parody of Lully's opera)
1758	Raupach, H. F.	Alcesta
1767	Gluck, C. W.	Alceste
1769	Guglielmi, P.	Alceste
1773	Schweitzer, A.	Alceste
1780	Wolf, E.	Alceste
1786	Benda, F. W. H.	Alceste
1786	Gresnick, A. F.	Alceste
1793	Portugal, M. A. (Portogallo)	Alceste
1794	Guglielmi, P.	Admeto
1806	Mueller, W.	Die neue Alceste (parody)
1847	Elwart, A. E. E.	Alcestis (incidental music to Euripides' work)
1852	Staffa, G.	Alceste
1882	Gambaro, A.	Alceste
1922	Boughton, R.	Alkestis
1924	Wellesz, E.	Alkestis
1956	Talma, L.	Alkestiade

ANTIGONE (or *ANTIGONA*)*

Date	*Composer*	*Date*	*Composer*
1718	Orlandini, G. M.	1790	Zingarelli, N. A.
1725	Gandini, A.	1791	Winter, P. von
1745	Bernasconi, A.	1796	Bianchi, Fr.
1751	Galuppi, B.	1800	Basili, F.
1752	Casali, G. B.	1808	Poissl, J. N.
1772	Traetta, T.	1824	Gardin, ?
1774	Mysliveček, J.	1841	Mendelssohn, F. (incidental music)
1775	Latilla, G.	1863	Weingartner, F.
1782	Mortellari, M. C.	1927	Honegger, A.
1786	Parenti, F. P. M.	1942	Pallantios, M.
1787	Hoszisky (Horzizky), F.	1949	Orff, C.
1788	Dutillieu, P.	1954	Joubert, J.
1789	Campobasso, A. V.		

**Antigono* is the story concerned with Alexander the Great and should not be confused with the above listing. It was set to music by G. Porta (1724), G. B. Lampugnani (1738), J. A. Hasse (1743), B. Galuppi (1746), N. Conforto (1750), G. Santis (*c.* 1750), G. Wagenseil (1750), C. W. Gluck (1756), J. Durán (1760), V. L. Ciampi (1762), N. Piccinni (1762), T. Traetta (1764), F. Zannetti (1765), P. Guglielmi (1767), G. F. Maio (1768), J. G. Schwanberg (1769), P. Cafaro (1770), P. Anfossi (1773), T. Giordani (1774), G. Gazzaniga (1779), L. Gatti (1781), G. Paisiello (1785), N. A. Zingarelli (1786), L. Caruso (1788), V. Righini (1788), Lauro Rossi (*c.* 1790), and F. Ceracchini (1794).

IPHIGENIA

Date	*Composer*	*Title of Opera*
1699	Keiser, R.	Die wunderbar-errettete Iphigenia
1704	Desmarets, H. and A. Campra	Iphigénie en Tauride

Date	*Composer*	*Title of Opera*
1706	Coletti, A. B.	Ifigenia
1713	Scarlatti, D.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1713	Scarlatti, D.	Ifigenia in Tauri [sic]
1718	Caldara, A.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1719	Orlandini, G. M.	Ifigenia in Tauride
1725	Vinci, L.	Ifigenia in Tauride
1735	Porpora, N.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1739	Aliprandi, B.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1745	Avossa, G.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1748	Graun, C. H.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1751	Jommelli, N.	Ifigenia in Aulide (some arias by Traetta in 1753 performance in Naples)
1756	Mazzoni, A. M.	Ifigenia in Tauride
1762	Bertoni, F. G.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1763	Traetta, T.	Ifigenia in Tauride
1764	Maio (Majo), G. F.	Ifigenia in Tauride
1764	Maio (Majo), G. F.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1765	Agricola, J. F.	Ifigenia in Tauride
1765	Guglielmi, P.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1768	Galuppi, B.	Ifigenia in Tauride
1771	Jommelli, N.	Ifigenia in Tauride
1774	Gluck, C. W.	Iphigénie in Aulide
1777	Solari, G.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1777	Sarti, G.	Ifigenia
1778	Despreaux, ?	Momie (parody of Gluck's Iphigénie en Aulide)
1779	Anonymous	Iphise aux Boulevards (parody of Gluck's Iphigénie en Tauride)
1779	Favart, C. F. and F. J. Prot	Les Rêveries renouvelées des Grecs (parody of Gluck's Iphigénie en Tauride; based on Favart's 1757 parody, La petite Iphigénie)
1779	Gluck, C. W.	Iphigénie en Tauride
1781	Piccinni, N.	Iphigénie en Tauride
1781	Solar, Martin y	Ifigenia in Aulide
1784	Monza, C.	Ifigenia in Tauride
1784	Prati, A.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1785	Pleyel, I.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1785	Tarchi, A.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1785	Tarchi, A.	Ifigenia in Tauride
1786	Giordini, G.(?)	Ifigenia in Aulide
1787	Zingarelli, N.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1788	Cherubini, L.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1789	Campobasso, A. V.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1798	Mosca, G.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1798	Rossi, L.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1804	Trento, V.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1806	Mayer, ?	Ifigenia in Aulide
1807	Danzi, F.	Iphigenia
1809	Federici, V.	Ifigenia in Aulide
1811	Mayr, J. S.	Il sacrificio d'Ifigenia
1817	Carafo, P.	Ifigenia in Tauride
1951	Pizzetti, I.	Ifigenia

MEDEA

Date	*Composer*	*Title of Opera*
1649	Cavalli, F.	Giasone
1675	Giannettini, A.	Medea in Atene
1692	Kusser, J. S.	Jason
1692	Charpentier, M. A.	Médée
1713	Salomon, ?	Médée et Jason
1726	Brusa, G. F.	Medea e Giasone
1727	Dominique, ?	Médée et Jason (parody of Salomon opera)
1735	Vinci, L.	Medea riconoscinta
1744	Perez, D.	Medea
1752	Gebel, G.	Medea
1772	Cannabich, C.	Médée et Jason
1775	Benda, F.	Medea (monodrama)
1786	Vogel, J. C.	Toison d'Or (Médée à Colchos)
1788	Naumann, J. G.	Medea in Colchide ossia Il ritorno di Giasone in Grecia
1789	Winter, P. von	Medea und Jason
1792	Marinelli, G.	La Vendetta di Medea
1797	Cherubini, L.	Médée
1798	Piticchio, F.	La Vendetta di Medea
1805	Langlé, H. F. M.	Médée
1813	Fontenelle, M. Granges	Médée et Jason
1813	Mayr, J. S.	Medea in Corinto
1815	Coccia, C.	Medea e Giasone
1822	Mueller, W.	Die neue Medea (parody)
1838	Celli, F.	Medea
1843	Pacini, G.	Medea
1851	Mercadante, G. S. R.	Medea
1866	Krempelsetzer, G.	Medea (Das Orakel in Delphi)
1935	Engel, L.	Medea
1939	Milhaud, D.	Médée

OEDIPUS

Date	*Composer*	*Title of Opera*
1751	Gebel, G.	Oedipe
1779	Désaugiers, M.-A.	Le Petit Oedipe
1786	Sacchini, A. M. G.	Oedipe à Colone
1791	Mereaux, N. J. (Le Froid de)	Oedipe à Thebes (Oedipe et Jocaste)
1797	Dibdin, C.	The Sphinx (?)
1802	Zingarelli, N. A.	Edipo a Colono
1874	Lassen, E.	Oedipus
1920	Leoncavallo, R.	Edipo Re
1927	Stravinsky, I.	Oedipus Rex
1936	Enesco, G.	Oedipe
1959	Orff, C.	Oedipus Tyrannus
1961	Partch, H.	King Oedipus

THE ORESTEIA (AGAMEMNON, THE CHOEPHORES, THE EUMENIDES,
i.e., operas dealing with Electra, Orestes, Clytemnestra, or Agamemnon)

Date	*Composer*	*Title of Opera*
1681	Perti, G. A.	Oreste
1723	Micheli, B.	L'Oreste
1734	Handel, G. F.	Orestes (mainly from other Handel works, with new overture)
1772	Agricola, J. F.	Oreste e Pilade
1780	Cannabich, C.	Elektra (melodrama)
1782	Lemoyne, J. B.	Electra
1783	Cimarosa, D.	Orestes ("opéra comique")
1787	Häffner, J. C. F.	Electra
1789	Hoszisky (Horzizky), F.	Orestes
179?	Champein, S.	Electra
1800	Zingarelli, N. A.	Clitennestra
1808	Morlacchi, F.	Orestes
1818	Kreutzer, K.	Orestes
1847	Treves, ?	Agamemnon
1856	Hervé (Florimond Ronger)	Agamemnon ("tragédie burlesque")
1872	Alberti, ?	Orestes
1895	Taneev, S. I.	Oresteya (trilogy)
19?	Cuclin, D.	Agamemnon
1902	Weingartner, F.	Orestes
1905	Gnecchi, V.	Cassandra
1909	Strauss, R.	Elektra
1913–22	Milhaud, D.	L'Orestie trilogy: Agamemnon (one scene set to music, 1913) Les Choéphores, (1915) Les Euménides (1917–22)
1924	Linstead, G. F.	Oresteia (trilogy)
1930	Křenek, E.	Das Leben des Orest
1950	Demuth, N.	The Oresteia (trilogy)
1961	Badings, H.	Orestes
1965	Pizzetti, I.	Clitemnestra
1967	Levy, M. D.	Mourning Becomes Electra

Other 20th Century Operas Based on Greek Tragedies

Date	*Composer*	*Title of Opera*
19?	Gray, C.	Trojan Women
1915	Pizzetti, I.	Fedra
1915	Romani, R.	Fedra
1915	Senilov, V.	Hippolytus
1925	Roussel, A.	La Naissance de la Lyre
1931	Wellesz, E.	Bakchantinnen
1940	Thomson, V.	The Trojan Women (incidental music)
1941	Thomson, V.	Oedipus Tyrannus (incidental music)
1948	Ghedini, G. F.	Le baccanti
1951	Cortese, L.	Prometeo
1961	Mihalovici, M.	Phaedre

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NOTES

[1] Several studies have dealt with interpretations of specific tragedies in operatic history. These include: Anna Amalie Abert, "Der Geschmackswandel auf der Opernbühne, am Alkestis-Stoff dargestellt," *Die Musikforschung* (1953) 6:214–35; Harold Edgar Johnson, "Iphigenia in Tauris as the Subject for French Opera," (unpublished Master's thesis, Cornell University, 1939).

[2] This article stems in part from the writer's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Greek Tragedy in the Theatre Pieces of Stravinsky and Milhaud" (New York University, 1968), which includes a survey of the musical treatments and changing interpretations of Greek tragedy in operatic history.

[3] Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists,* trans. Charles Burton Gulick (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1937), VI, p. 417.

[4] *Clement of Alexandria,* trans. G. W. Butterworth (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), pp. 5–9.

[5] Paul Henry Lang, "The Literary Aspects of the History of Opera in France," (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, 1934), p. 83, citing Baïf, *Oeuvres Complets.*

[6] Leo Schrade, *La Réprésentation d'Edipo Tiranno au Teatro Olimpico (Vicenza, 1585)* (Paris, 1960), p. 32.

[7] Ottavio Rinuccini, "Preface to Euridice," in *The Essence of Opera,* ed. Ulrich Weisstein (London, 1964), p. 19.

[8] Abert, *op. cit.,* p. 216.

[9] From the listing of "important operas" in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (5th ed.; London and New York, 1954), VI, 233 ff.

[10] E. M. Butler, "Alkestis in Modern Dress," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* (1937–38) 1:59.

[11] "Il Teatro Alla Moda—Part I," trans. and annotated by Reinhard G. Pauly, *The Musical Quarterly* (1948) 34:375.

[12] Francesco Algarotti, "Essay on Opera," *in* Weisstein, *op. cit.,* pp. 72–73.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

[14] Denis Diderot, "Entretiens sur Le Fils Naturel," *in* Weisstein, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

[15] Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* (New York, 1941), p. 532.

[16] Gluck, "Dedication of *Alceste*," 1769, *in* Weisstein, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

[17] Gluck, "Dedication of *Paride ed Elena*," 1770, *in* Weisstein, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

[18] Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

[19] Christoph Martin Wieland, "Essay concerning German Opera and a Few Related Subjects," *in* Weisstein, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

[20] La Harpe, letter to *Journal de Poétique et de Littérature*, October, 1777, *in* C. W. Gluck, *The Collected Correspondence and Papers*, ed. Hedwig and E. H. Mueller von Asow (London, 1962), p. 103.

[21] Gluck, open letter to La Harpe, 1777, *ibid.*, p. 101.

[22] William H. Matheson, *Claudel and Aeschylus* (Ann Arbor [1965]), p. 6, citing La Harpe, *Cours de littérature*, I, p. 84. English translation by the author.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[24] See Michael Horwath's "Tebaldini, Gnecchi, and Strauss," *Current Musicology* (1970) 10:74–81, for a discussion on whether *Elektra* was a plagiarism of Vittorio Gnecchi's *Cassandra*, which was first performed in Bologna in 1905.

[25] Egon Wellesz, *Essays on Opera* (London, 1950), p. 146.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 140.

[27] Andreas Liess, *Carl Orff*, trans. Adelheid and Herbert Parkin (London, 1966), p. 36.

[28] Igor Stravinsky, "On *Oedipus Rex*," *Encounter* (1962) 18:30–31.

[29] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary* (New York, 1963), p. 7.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[31] Darius Milhaud, "Ich glaube an die Zukunft," *Melos* (1952) 19:242–43. English translation by the author.

[32] "Music," *Time* (March 12, 1965), p. 50.

[33] Helmut Huchzermeyer, "Zur Aufführung antiker Tragödien auf der modernen Bühne," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (1962) 123:492–97.