

## Dallapiccola's Ulisse in Frankfurt

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## Review

### Dallapiccola's *Ulisse* in Frankfurt

Oper Frankfurt production premiere, June 26, 2022

Music and Libretto: Luigi Dallapiccola

Conductor: Francesco Lanzillotta

Director: Tatjana Gürbaca

Scenic and Lighting Design: Klaus Grünberg

Costume Design: Silke Willrett

Chorus Master: Tilman Michael

Dramaturg: Maximilian Enderle

Ulysses: Iain MacNeil

Circe/Melantho: Katharina Magiera

Calypso/Penelope: Juanita Lascarro

Demodocus/Tiresias: Yves Saelens

Nausicaa: Sarah Aristidou

King Alcinous: Andreas Bauer Kanebas

Anticleia: Claudia Mahnke

Antinous: Danylo Matviienko

Eurymachus: Jaeil Kim

Pisander: Sebastian Geyer

Eumaeus: Brian Michael Moore

Telemachus: Dmitry Egorov

First Maid: Marvic Monreal

Second Maid: Stefanie Heidinger

A Lotus-eater: Julia Bell

It is all too easy for Anglo-American commentators today, looking back at the determined compositional pursuit in the 1960s and 70s of what Arnold Whittall then described as “that most demanding prize, the convincing full-length twelve-note opera,”<sup>1</sup> to conclude that all this effort—on the part not just of composers, of course, but also singers, instrumentalists, conductors and all the other technical specialists required to mount an opera (not to speak of the expense)—came to little more than a series of white elephants. When Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, in the notoriously downbeat conclusion to the first edition of their joint history, observed that the

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commissioning of operas after 1945 “became a matter of the Emperor and his new clothes,” their language was cruel, but not inaccurate. The history of twelve-note opera in English only exemplifies their claim that “a list of high-profile disasters”—operatic premieres between 1950 and 1980, that is—“could proliferate almost endlessly.”<sup>2</sup>

But this is very much an Anglophone perspective. In continental European, and especially German, opera houses, the work of certain primarily German and Italian post-Schoenbergian composers of the 1960s and 70s has retained a presence that in the United Kingdom or the United States it signally lacks. Abbate and Parker do not mention Bernd Alois Zimmerman (1918–70) or Luigi Nono (1924–90), though the former’s *Die Soldaten* (Cologne 1965) is now well established, while the latter’s *Intolleranza 1960* (Venice 1961) and *Al gran sole carico d’amore* (Milan 1975) do not lag far behind in numbers of performances. If the star of Hans Werner Henze (1926–2012) has waned since his death, several of his operas—from the 1960s and 70s notably *Elegy for Young Lovers* (Schwetzingen 1961) and *The Bassarids* (Salzburg 1966)—are still staged quite frequently. The *Lear* (Munich 1978) of Aribert Reimann (1936–) outdoes all these works in its number of productions. And the real success story of recent years, when it comes to twelve-tone repertory, belongs to another name unacknowledged by Abbate and Parker (they do mention Henze): Luigi Dallapiccola (1904–75).

Though it fell out of fashion in the 1980s and 90s, Dallapiccola’s *Il prigioniero* (Florence 1950) has seen a dramatic revival of its fortunes, especially since the composer’s centenary. There have also been two new recordings.<sup>3</sup> But if German opera houses are not scared of post-Schoenbergian repertory, and Dallapiccola is enjoying a renaissance, why has it been so long since anyone staged the full-length *Ulisse* (Berlin 1968)? That Frankfurt should now have taken this step is appropriate: the house’s 2004 production of *Il prigioniero*—on a double bill with Dallapiccola’s previous one-acter, *Volo di notte* (Florence 1940)—has been twice revived (in 2005 and 2012). Even Frankfurt has taken its time, though.

In truth, there is nothing surprising here. For if there was ever an operatic white elephant, it was *Ulisse*. Quite why this should be so will be explored below. But the opera’s performance history immediately bears out the judgment. Its composition having occupied Dallapiccola for well over a decade (the full score is dated 1960–68, but work was already underway in 1956), the premiere of *Ulisse* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, on September 29, 1968, was much anticipated. “The eyes of the whole musical world” were on Dallapiccola, so John Waterhouse tell us.<sup>4</sup> The composer was at the height of his international reputation: *Il prigioniero* was being staged even more frequently than it is today.<sup>5</sup> “High-profile” *Ulisse* certainly was, and if not a “disaster,” then very far from a lasting success. To be sure, the composer’s standing guaranteed a clutch of initial stagings. The Berlin production was revived in autumn 1969; in January 1970 it transferred to La Scala. In the same year a new production

was mounted by the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf, which in 1972 was also presented in Florence; in 1971, *Ulisse* was staged at the Théâtre des Arts in Rouen. But in the five decades before Frankfurt took up the opera in 2022, there had been just two further productions: in Oldenburg (1980) and Turin (1986).<sup>6</sup> There have been some high-profile concert performances.<sup>7</sup> Further performances or studio recordings have been organized on at least four occasions by radio stations; *Ulisse* has also attracted some academic attention.<sup>8</sup> But as a stage work, it has long looked to be dead.

### FAILURE?

It would be disingenuous again to question this state of affairs. Though the premiere was a success with the public—thirty-six curtain calls, according to one eyewitness<sup>9</sup>—the critical reception was very mixed. In response, the composer accused “foreign [i.e., non-Italian] critics” of failing to appreciate the specifically Italian character of his reading of Homer, filtered through Dante; he also regarded commentators as misguided in their complaints about the opera’s avoidance of political commitment.<sup>10</sup> Yet the real problems lay elsewhere. As Julia van Hees puts it, the critics experienced *Ulisse* as “thin on plot” and lacking in “theatrically effective representation.”<sup>11</sup> Part of the blame would seem to have lain with the academically “Greek” staging of Gustav Rudolf Sellner, booed not just on the first night, but also subsequently.<sup>12</sup> And then there was Dallapiccola’s music.

In the early reception, national pride was evidently at stake. As Caroline Lüderssen reports, it was the Germans and British who found *Ulisse* undramatic, not the Italians.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, the review posted by the Turinese critic Massimo Mila was ecstatic. “Dallapiccola’s Masterpiece *Ulisse* Triumphs in Berlin,” ran the headline. The subheading explained that “The Italian composer has demonstrated that lyric opera is still possible with the language of serial music.”<sup>14</sup> Other leading Italian critics were more circumspect, however. According to Leonardo Pinzauti, critic of the Florentine *La Nazione*, the music, for all its moments of beauty and drama, sometimes appeared to lose “precisely that ‘Verdian’ continuity which Dallapiccola showed himself able to express in *Il prigioniero*.” For Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi, the composer’s gifts did not extend to the musical “description of action.” And Fedele d’Amico argued that the essentially static nature of Dallapiccola’s language meant that his music was unable “to participate in the vicissitudes of an event,” or to sustain a “direct relation” with the stage.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, complaints that *Ulisse* seemed closer to an oratorio than a true opera were primarily German, but the lack of enthusiasm shown by British critics was par for the course generally.<sup>16</sup>

One commentator notably prepared to call a spade a spade was Dallapiccola’s pupil, Reginald Smith Brindle. There is a “strange lack of rhythmic intensity in his creative powers,” Smith Brindle wrote. “Certainly his music has never had any

motoric drive. His musical movement is habitually slow, with a vague pulse, while for contrast his only alternative is a fast, frenetic *precipitoso* which rapidly burns itself out. There is literally no evenly-flowing *moderato* or propulsive *allegro* in the whole of his music.”<sup>17</sup> Smith Brindle was writing without having seen *Ulisse* on stage; other British critics, likewise judging on the basis of broadcasts or recordings (or so one assumes), have continued to come to similar conclusions. “The austere constraints of Dallapiccola’s late style simply have to be accepted if one is to perceive the often exquisite delicacy and bloom of its internal detail”: thus Bayan Northcott.<sup>18</sup> And indeed, to sit with a recording and score of *Ulisse* (between 1986 and 2022, the only way to experience this opera) can be to test one’s patience. Particularly tough going is act 1, scene 3, an extended dialogue between Ulysses and the witch Circe. It may seem extraordinary that, on the third night, the Berlin audience burst into applause at its conclusion. But Jean Madeira, the first Circe, had the kind of personality that would make the Colosseum look small, or so Mila reported.<sup>19</sup>

Looking more closely at Dallapiccola’s music, the problem is not one of characterization. Circe is a *Heldenmezzo*, with the range f-sharp–a<sup>2</sup>: a voice type unlike any other in *Ulisse*. Her melodic lines are distinctive in their melismatic decoration. And she has her own motive, introduced by the horns just prior to her first vocal entry (I/496), which is both easily recognizable in terms of both intervals and rhythm, and clearly associated with her character. All these traditional operatic desiderata are scrupulously fulfilled by the composer. But they are not enough to save the situation, it would appear. For critics like Smith Brindle, Whittall, Waterhouse, and Northcott, there remains a problem of pace, or rather, of momentum. Deprived of the possibility of seeing the work on stage, they can only conclude: *Ulisse* is beautifully composed, but slow.<sup>20</sup>

There is also a problem of expression. Here we need to make a brief theoretical detour, in the direction of Kofi Agawu’s distinction between “introversive” and “extroversive” semiosis, roughly corresponding to “structural” and “expressive” elements of the Classical style.<sup>21</sup> The ease with which this distinction appears to be applicable to twelve-tone repertory is illusory—and that is the point. Any suggestion that the twelve-tone structure of *Ulisse* (or of any twelve-tone work) constitutes its introversive semiosis cannot be sustained. We may perceive that the intervallic character of Circe’s lines is different from that of those sung by Ulysses: they employ different rows. Yet the series as such do not structure our listening. While the Schenkerian middlegrounds employed by Agawu to illustrate introversive semiosis are also abstract, we have no difficulty hearing tonal closure in the Classical style. We do not hear the completion of twelve-tone aggregates.

The issues raised here can quickly become fraught. How does Dallapiccola’s music make aural sense? Does it make sense at all? In relation to *Ulisse*, the most lucid discussion is that of Anthony Sellors, who recognizes that the listener to this opera hears not series but motives (like Circe’s). Sellors individuates around fifty of

these, mostly very short. The score, he suggests, is an immense “mosaic.”<sup>22</sup> And the point is well taken: the motives are often clearly distinguishable, and one can learn to identify them. The problem is that Sellors evades the next question: how we get from one motive to another. Is there any immanent continuity, or does Dallapiccola operate simply by juxtaposition? Sellors writes of a “collage.”<sup>23</sup> For much of *Ulisse*, it seems fair to suggest that continuity resides more in the vocal lines than in the orchestra. But that, in turn, suggests that this continuity may be as much verbal as musical, the sense of a vocal phrase turning on the syntax of the poetry as much as on that of the notes.

And we have not even arrived at extroversive semiosis. Here a comparison with *Il prigioniero* is helpful. For the latter contains plenty of Agawu’s “topics”: referential associations with other kinds of music that help grant the score its expressivity.<sup>24</sup> When a critic refers to “mingled echoes of Verdi, Debussy and Berg” in *Il prigioniero*,<sup>25</sup> he surely means that Dallapiccola’s music is expressive in much the same ways as *Otello*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, or *Wozzeck*. Listeners have not needed a topical label to hear that the opening of *Il prigioniero* resembles that of *Tosca*. Dallapiccola’s language of the 1940s operates within the terms of a traditional expressive rhetoric. But by the 1950s, Sellors notes, the composer had removed from his style “all overt traces of other people’s music.”<sup>26</sup> To be sure, he does not entirely dispense with the extroversive dimension. The opening texture of act 2 of *Ulisse*, with its even quarter notes (see II/1–18, frequently recurring and anticipated at mm. 387–91 of the Prologue), sounds like a distant homage to Debussy’s “Nuages,” from the orchestral *Nocturnes* (1897–99).<sup>27</sup> When, much later in the same act, the suitors encourage Melantho to dance, Dallapiccola’s music has a distinct waltz character, which lasts all the way—ironically—until she starts dancing (see II/593–694; also II/398–420 and II/756–804). In the third episode of the Prologue, the ball game played by Nausicaa’s maids is accompanied by scherzo-type material (beginning at m. 148) that might be traced back, via the *Allegro misterioso* of Berg’s *Lyric Suite* (1925–26), even to Mendelssohn. Dallapiccola’s score also abounds in chorale-like passages, chains of harmonies moving steadily in rhythmic unison. Yet it is not difficult to see why critics have always complained that *Ulisse* communicates with a reduced expressive vividness, compared to *Il prigioniero*.

For Whittall, the fact that the twelve-tone structure of *Ulisse* lacks the “added perspective of tonal harmony,” which is precisely the ingredient lending “momentum” to the earlier opera, “says nothing about serialism as such.”<sup>28</sup> But for the late Richard Taruskin, in his strident polemical attack on Donald Martino (another Dallapiccola pupil, incidentally), it says everything. Without the “subtle gradations of harmony” afforded by tonality, music that aspires to conventional expressivity—as Dallapiccola’s certainly does—is constrained to gestures that are “primitive and simplistic in the extreme.”<sup>29</sup> Smith Brindle is incorrect to suggest that *Ulisse* contains “literally no even-flowing moderato or propulsive allegro.” The long passages

of one-in-a-measure waltz time in act 2 are just that; and one should also note the forward-urging character of Demodocus's narration in act 1, scene 1, which spills into the scene change and the start of scene 2. Yet Taruskin's observation of the requirement, in this kind of repertory, for "constant" and "huge contrasts in loudness and register," maps neatly onto Smith Brindle's point about Dallapiccola's restriction to two polarized musical types. The more conventionally associative passages in *Ulisse* notably have in common a continuous, steady pulse. It is the lack of such a pulse that renders the dialogue between Ulysses and Circe so difficult for the score-bound listener. In this exceptionally fragmented and expressively polarized ten-minute scene, it can be hard to sense any immanent musical necessity: hence the slowness. And hence perhaps also the lack of seductiveness—noted by Sellors—in Circe's music.<sup>30</sup> Evidently, she is meant to be a Kundry figure, posing as the hero's second mother in a passage referred to by Dallapiccola as a "berceuse" (I/530–47), and later attempting to "embrace" the hero (I/565–68). Yet the "berceuse" lacks any obvious referential associations, while the attempted "embrace," a splintered *fortissimo* outburst, has more of the character of a violent physical assault.

#### FRANKFURT

Enough of this negativity. After so many arguments that would confine *Ulisse* to the white elephants' graveyard, it is a pleasure to report that at Oper Frankfurt, in the new production by Tatjana Gürbaca, conducted by Francesco Lanzilotta, with the baritone Ian MacNeil in the title role, *Ulisse* was not slow at all; nor was it sexless. The lack of slowness was partly just a matter of tempi: the opera was given without intervals in two hours, a full quarter of an hour faster than the world premiere (when the conductor was Lorin Maazel), or indeed the first Italian performance (under Hans-Georg Ratjen).<sup>31</sup> The orchestra was on the third night of a seven-night run, playing the score with a confidence and fluency beyond the reach of the earliest ensembles, and not to be found in the various radio performances either (in which the players are presumably sight-reading). But it implies no disservice to Lanzilotta and his musicians to say that the major work of transformation was achieved on stage. To put it bluntly, Gürbaca showed that *Ulisse* is an opera. For all its distance from tradition, the work communicated with the kind of dramatic force and directness associated with the classics of the Italian repertory.

Anyone in the Frankfurt audience hoping for a respectful realization of Dallapiccola's directions will certainly have been disappointed. Gürbaca provided a thorough re-interpretation of the opera, to the point, in certain respects, of instituting its critique. There was a lesson here for scholars of musical modernism. Even twelve-tone operas were intended to be staged. The live experience of *Ulisse*, both verbal-musical and visual, acted as a reminder that writing about opera in terms of

score and libretto alone concerns itself with an abstraction, not so different from writing about twelve-tone structures without listening to them.

To repeat: *Ulisse* is an opera. That was always Mila's point. Granted, the work, like much modernist art, tends to the symbolic. It has left behind the psychological naturalism that is the mainstay of the bourgeois repertory. Ulysses himself is a symbol: modern man in his anguished search for identity. But in the early scenes of act 1, he is also the intrepid hero of Homer's epic; moreover, at least three of the women he encounters—Mila lists Nausicaa, Circe, and Melanthe—are not in the least symbolic, but creatures of “flesh and blood.”<sup>32</sup> Romano Pezzati, in his full-length monograph on the work, disagrees. In the tradition that leads from act 3 of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (Munich 1857) to Nono's *Prometeo* (Venice 1984), the drama of *Ulisse* is to be considered essentially internal, which is to say, musical. To watch *Ulisse* as if it belonged to the standard Italian repertory can lead only to an “inattentive and reductive perception of the opera.”<sup>33</sup> And yet the revelation of the Frankfurt production was that Dallapiccola's austere and doubtless excessively homogeneous music finds its effective complement in a richly concrete, busy and heterogeneous stage, without a hint of the sub-Wagnerian hieratic posturing that tradition dictates for mythic topics—though it has to be conceded that MacNeil, outstanding both vocally and dramatically as Ulysses, was sporting decidedly *Lord of the Rings*-style long hair and beard.



Ulysses and his crew, act 1, scene 2. Photo by Barbara Aumüller, for Oper Frankfurt, used by permission.

This was a modern-dress *Ulisse*, especially in act 1. In act 2, as Silke Willrett, the costume designer, explained in the program book, there were “quotations from Greek theatre,” but these were viewed through “a kind of pop art filter.”<sup>34</sup> Ulysses’



bow, for example, was obviously plastic, and a shocking pink: during the scene-change between act 2, scenes 1 and 2, it rose through the stage in a huge glass cabinet. There were plenty of such quirky, even humorous touches: Ulysses' crew in act 1, scene 2, and the preceding scene-change, wearing bright red jump suits and white crash helmets; the Lotus-eaters also in red, carrying enormous helium balloons, of the kind used by children's entertainers; Alcinous as an aging film or rock star, miming the murder of Agamemnon (as narrated by Demodocus in act 1, scene 1) with a toy silver rifle, or dancing some kind of soft-shoe shuffle on his own at odd moments; the Suitors in act 2 in spangly jockstraps worn over their clothing; Telemachus in large furry boots; and so on.

Some of these moments were distinctly silly, above all, the cheerleaders in Alcinous's palace (act 1, scene 1) shaking (and also loudly rustling) their pom-poms in time to the repeated chords, on harps and pizzicato strings, that punctuate Demodocus's recitation. At other points, though, as we shall see, the production posed questions of the utmost seriousness. And where the cheerleaders are concerned, at least one can be sure that they were meant to raise a smile. These chords are a rare instance of Dallapiccola flinging aside his hesitation before extroverted semiosis: they are evidently intended to represent Demodocus strumming on his lyre. If Gürbaca chose here to ignore the cue for bardic action, that may have been just as well.<sup>35</sup>

One might think that the decision to give the opera in German also countermanded the composer's intentions, though in fact he was in favor of translations.<sup>36</sup> This same one (by Carl-Heinrich Kreith) was used for the premiere. As ever, Dallapiccola prepared the libretto himself, which he based, following the examples of Monteverdi's *Il ritorno di Ulisse in patria*, of which Dallapiccola made a performing edition with full symphony orchestra (Florence 1942), or Fauré's *Pénélope* (Monte Carlo 1913), on Homer. More ambitious in this respect than Monteverdi's or Fauré's librettists, Dallapiccola does not restrict the action to Ithaca, that is, to books 13–24 of *The Odyssey*, which we reach only in act 2. Apart from the "Telemachid" (books 1–4), which is omitted, most of the epic is squeezed into two acts and a prologue; particularly since, in the course of act 1, Dallapiccola ensures that various episodes of the epic not transformed into operatic scenes (the Cyclops of book 9, the Laestrygonians of book 10, Scylla and Charybdis from book 12) are at least alluded to (see 1/280–93 and 1005–12).

While act 2, corresponding roughly to the action of the operas of Monteverdi and Fauré, is set on Ithaca, act 1, corresponding to Homer's books 7–12, is set in the palace of Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians. Here, upon invitation, Demodocus sings and Ulysses reveals his name, before proceeding to a narrative of his adventures, conveyed (again as in Homer) by a series of flashbacks. We have the Lotus-eaters in scene 2, Circe in scene 3 and the Underworld in scene 4 (where Ulysses meets both his mother, Anticleia, and the blind seer Tiresias); we return to Alcinous's palace in

scene 5. And before act 1, there is a Prologue in three episodes: first, Calypso alone on her island (see Homer's book 5); second, an orchestral interlude representing Poseidon, furious with Ulysses for having blinded his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus (as related in book 9); third, Ulysses' arrival on the shores of Scheria (the land of the Phaeacians) and his meeting with Nausicaa, daughter of Alcinous (book 6). But as if to emphasize the way in which the new production was a reading of the opera, rather than a mere carrying out of authorial instructions, the action of the Frankfurt *Ulisse* began before the beginning. Prior to the opera's first sounds, a group of tourists were guided around Klaus Grünberg's set, whose dark columns had a look somewhere between broken stele and an underground car park. Among the group was Ulysses himself, yet to be singled out for his role in the drama to come.

### METAPHYSICS 1: THE "INNER BOOK"

Why is it so significant that Gürbaca and her team produced a reading of *Ulisse*? This kind of *Regieoper* is nowadays standard. The point is that we can be sure the composer himself would have vehemently disapproved. We can start to see why by returning to introversive and extroversive semiosis. Dallapiccola's aversion to the latter in *Ulisse* exemplifies what Raymond Guess has recently described as the characteristically "modernist goal of making his work a completely self-contained universe."<sup>37</sup> The composer is bent on creating the impression that every aspect of his score is the sole product of his own impulses, in regard to which extroversive references would constitute a transgression. In this respect, his work is directly opposed to one of its most frequently cited models, the prose of James Joyce, in which extroversive semiosis is taken to its limit.<sup>38</sup> Dallapiccola may have talked endlessly about Joyce, but as the composer's most celebrated pupil, Luciano Berio, explains, *Ulisse* is not *Ulysses*: "a granitic stoicism, both spiritual and poetic, in the former, and a phantasmagoric entanglement of different forms, techniques and lexicons in the latter."<sup>39</sup> To put it another way, if both *Ulysses* and *Ulisse* exemplify the modernist "Book of the World," in Fredric Jameson's phrase, then rather than attempt to bring the world into the book, in Joyce's manner, Dallapiccola wants to create the world out of himself.

The desire for absolute self-referentiality extends beyond the opera to its interpretation. In October 1967, on being awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Michigan, and before he had completed the full score of *Ulisse*, Dallapiccola gave a lecture, in English, with the title "Birth of a Libretto." This was published, simultaneously, as "Nascita di un libretto d'opera" and "Geburt eines Librettos," in the month before the premiere; and then (in an abridged version) as "Birth of a Libretto," a month after the first BBC broadcast in September 1969.<sup>40</sup> The procedure might seem unexceptionable. Given the extent to which composers since the middle of the nineteenth century have been prevailed upon, or indeed

keen, to explain their work in prose, why should audiences not learn what Dallapiccola had to say about his opera?

In the program-book essay for the Italian premiere, he begins in apparently liberal mode. “Consistent with our sensibility, our tradition, our culture,” Dallapiccola concedes, we may “see. . . things” in a work of which the artist was unaware. But by the same token, he continues, we may fail to achieve its “exact perception.”<sup>41</sup> The point is clear: there is a core of intended significance in an artwork, which critics must accept, on pain of falling into error. And, on the whole, they have acquiesced. Anyone familiar with the academic literature on Dallapiccola cannot fail to be struck by the degree to which it consists of quotations of the composer’s own self-interpretations. The problem is what we are asked to accept in this case: nothing less than a full-blown metaphysics of identity, consonant with the project of a self-reliant aesthetic totality sketched above.

We see this in an extraordinary passage from “Nascita di un libretto d’opera” itself. Having discussed at length his childhood recollections of a 1911 film of *The Odyssey*, in an apparent non sequitur, Dallapiccola turns to a questionnaire he was sent in 1938 by the psychologist and musicologist Julius Bahle, inquiring after his working methods. The composer recalls his own surprise at discovering that these methods were, in a sense, always the same: with every piece, what came first was not a “germ cell,” but “the culminating point of the whole composition.”<sup>42</sup> Dallapiccola’s reason for telling his audience this is not, as one might suspect, a prelude to discussing the first sketches for his new opera. He has something more grandiose in mind. In 1932, he explains, at the start of his professional career, he drafted a libretto with the title (after Emilio De’ Cavalieri) *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo*. It was immature and very much of its time, yet, in the way this text “presented us the life of man: which means his errors, his questions, his endless struggle,” it already broached the concerns of *Ulisse*, thirty-five years later.<sup>43</sup>

Dallapiccola draws the moral himself. It is not just that his individual compositions are first conceived in terms of their culminating point. Insofar as *Ulisse* was to be the *summa* of his entire career, he had already grasped its core in 1932. It is as if Dallapiccola were trying to tell us that, having intuited the culmination of his life’s work at age twenty-eight, over the following three-and-a-half decades, he needed only to attend to what had already been revealed to him. And indeed, he did subscribe to something like this belief. If Dallapiccola’s references to Joyce with respect to his own aesthetic stance can appear misguided, his equally frequent talk of Proust seems much less so. From *Le temps retrouvé*, the last volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, he latched onto the dual notion, itself drawn from Schopenhauer, first, that the work of art pre-exists its author—that it is discovered, not made; and second, that the content of this work is to be found not in the real world, but in the artist’s “inner book,” which he alone can read.<sup>44</sup>

Two consequences follow for the interpretation of Dallapiccola's work. The first concerns its relation to history. Commentators, especially those on the more journalistic side, have always wanted to understand the composer as a political figure; works like *Il prigioniero* have long been established as protesting against "totalitarianism." But, as the composer explained to critics dismayed by the apparent lack of political engagement in *Ulisse*, the actuality of his opera lay not in any reference to contemporary events, but rather in its spiritual propositions.<sup>45</sup> The other consequence concerns the composer's autobiographical conception of his creative activity. Given that everything derives from Dallapiccola's "inner book," without knowledge of the composer's life, we will be unable to understand his work. It is just as well that he left behind such a wealth of reminiscence. The secondary literature ceaselessly recycles it.

If commentary on Dallapiccola is to rely to such an extent on the regurgitation of his own words, it might as well just refer to these and have done. More seriously, the kind of metaphysical assumptions made by the composer should surely not simply be taken over by critics, for all that *Ulisse* itself can seem heavily dependent on them (as we shall see). For why should a composer be the final arbiter of the meaning of his work? If *Ulisse* is going to survive its historical moment—and one stage production in thirty-five years is no healthy state of affairs—then this opera will have to change in meaning as performers and audiences reinterpret it. To insist on Dallapiccola's own understanding of his opera is to imprison it in assumptions of fifty years ago and more, some of which can appear worse than merely old-fashioned.

#### THE FIVE POSSIBLE TYPES OF WOMEN

It is not the metaphysics to which today's readers are most likely forcefully to object in "Nascita di un libretto d'opera," but the misogyny: the term is not used lightly. Some years after leaving school, Dallapiccola tells us, he realized that there were aspects of *The Odyssey* to which his teachers had failed to draw attention, notably the way in which "the poem. . . presents an admirable characterization of the five possible types of women."<sup>46</sup> What are we to make of this remarkable assertion? Lüderssen politely notes that it only approximates to Jung's archetypes: that its "derivation. . . remains unclear."<sup>47</sup> Its application to the opera is clear enough, however. As Dallapiccola himself says, Calypso is "the inspirer," in other words, the muse; Nausicaa stands for "renunciation," or rather, purity; Circe combines "carnality" and "intelligence"—we shall return to this interesting duality; and Penelope is "heroic," which is to say (in this case) that she is faithful.<sup>48</sup> What is crucial here, though, is the comparison of these types with Ulysses. The inference is obvious. If man searches for his identity, woman has no need to do so, for it is already given to her. There is no sixth female type, Dallapiccola reassures us.<sup>49</sup>

Gürbaca sees things differently, indeed dialectically. “Masculinity and femininity in *Ulisse*. . . stand for antagonistic powers, which are mutually dependent,” she says in the program book. “In Dallapiccola’s opera the female figures often appear to me as an antithesis to Odysseus, through which a development is alone made possible.”<sup>50</sup> In the theater, an intention to grant the female characters agency was quickly evident. At the start of the Prologue, Calypso, commandingly sung by Juanita Lascarro, rather than being abandoned to bemoan her fate on Oggygia, picked Ulysses out of the crowd and accused him directly: all his talk of wanting to return to Ithaca was a lie. Then, a couple of scenes later, Gürbaca produced a striking eroticization of the dramatic situation, and not in Ulysses’ favor.

At this point, we need to appreciate the way in which, rather like Berg in *Lulu*, Dallapiccola has certain of his singers in double roles. There are two pairs of female characters treated in this manner: the divine Calypso and the witch Circe have “real life,” Ithacan counterparts in Penelope and Melanthe; the latter Dallapiccola calls a “little prostitute.”<sup>51</sup> But as David Drew observes, the Phaeacian princess Nausicaa (introduced in the Prologue’s third episode) has no Ithacan double, and indeed cannot, since she represents a “primal innocence” that connotes the Christian divine (rather than the ancient Greek variety), unavailable on the island, which is a stand-in for the despoiled “modern world.”<sup>52</sup> It is a neat interpretation, but one that obscures the sense in which Nausicaa does in fact have a double—a negative one, in the shape of Melanthe. For while commentators have not quite managed to bring this out (though Van Hees comes close), *Ulisse* clearly instantiates the virgin-whore dichotomy that operatic history had placed on stage well before Sigmund Freud: think of Micaëla and Carmen, or indeed Monteverdi’s opposition of Melanthe and Penelope.<sup>53</sup>

Nausicaa may be the “good” girl, but she has had a disturbing dream. In a stratospheric narration (handled with ease in Frankfurt by Sarah Aristidou), she tells the First Maid how she saw her future husband, who spoke to her before vanishing. Ulysses then appears for real (it was him in the dream, of course) and praises Nausicaa’s beauty; she leads him off to meet her father, evidently with marriage in mind. By act 1, scene 5, though, when she reappears, Nausicaa has understood that this is not he: hence her “renunciation.” At the close of the act, Dallapiccola directs that Ulysses and Nausicaa hold out their arms toward each other, but do not touch; nor does it seem, from the composer’s directions, that they should make physical contact in the Prologue, though Ulysses might perhaps touch Nausicaa’s feet in prostration. Gürbaca transformed the episode into something like a predatory sexual encounter, compounded in its disturbing effect by the way in which Nausicaa and her friends (not maids here), playing a stylized badminton, were dressed in school uniforms. Nausicaa looked scared: her words “Ach träumen, träumen. . . ich wünschte nur zu träumen. . . [Oh dreaming, dreaming. . . I only wanted to be

dreaming. . .]” took on a surely unintended significance. At the close of the Prologue, she was spreadeagled upside-down to the viewer, with Ulysses’ head up her skirt. Was this gratuitous provocation? Or did it point up the sexual hypocrisy of the drama as a whole? After all, Penelope has remained chaste, while Ulysses has slept with both Circe and Calypso. For Freud, the whore comes into play opposite the virgin because the “civilized” husband is unable to find full sexual satisfaction with his nicely brought-up wife, who stands unconsciously for his mother or sister (this is Don José’s problem).<sup>54</sup> Tearing through this taboo, Gürbaca’s Ulysses destroyed the opera’s polarity of “sacred” and “profane” love (Nausicaa vs. Melanthe).

On the night I saw *Ulisse*, Katherina Magiera, due to play Circe and Melanthe, was ill with Covid, and her part was taken by a silent actress, with the vocal line sung from the wings. The directorial intent to grant sexual agency to these two characters was nevertheless obvious. Drawing a huge red curtain across the back and side of the stage during the interlude between act 1, scenes 2 and 3, Circe created an intimate atmosphere within which she erotically dominated Ulysses throughout: he spent most of the scene on his back. As for Melanthe, she became, more than Ulysses himself, the focus of act 2; her prominence is in fact already a feature of Dallapiccola’s libretto. In Homer, Melanthe is a minor character, though a tellingly negative one. She is one of Penelope’s slave girls, who is sleeping with Eurymachus, one of the suitors. In book 18, where Melanthe first appears, she taunts Odysseus, whom she does not recognize; she is also rude to him in book 19. On both occasions, the disguised Odysseus responds by threatening retribution from Telemachus; and on the second occasion, Penelope also tells Melanthe that she will pay for her behaviour with her life. Melanthe is presumably among the dozen girls hanged together by Telemachus in book 22.<sup>55</sup>

In Monteverdi, Melanthe has a more important role, but the outlines of her character are softer.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, Dallapiccola’s model for the Melanthe of *Ulisse* is not Monteverdi, and not so much Homer as Gerhart Hauptmann’s nowadays almost completely forgotten 1914 play, *Der Bogen des Odysseus*.<sup>57</sup> Here Melanthe is immediately presented as morally negative in relation to Leucone, Telemachus’s chaste childhood sweetheart (a newly invented character). For Hauptmann, Melanthe is not just Eurymachus’s lover (and widely generous with her favors); she is also of the suitors’ party, keen to see the death of Telemachus and actively hostile to (the disguised) Odysseus. In act 4, the hero has her bound and gagged; at the close of act 5, he orders her hanged, alongside her equally sharp-tongued brother, Melanthius.<sup>58</sup>

To return to Dallapiccola: act 2, scene 1 of *Ulisse* is set by the hut of Ulysses’ loyal swineherd Eumaeus, which overlooks the sea (in *Der Bogen des Odysseus*, Eumaeus has a farm, which is the setting for the entire play). Melanthe and the suitors—

Dallapiccola has three, Antinous, Eurymachus, and Pisander—spot Telemachus's ship, returning from Sparta, for which they have set in place an ambush. That these characters are present at Eumaeus's hut is a detail drawn from Hauptmann, as are Melantho's refusal to serve the disguised Ulysses and Eumaeus's murderous fantasy of her death.<sup>59</sup> In act 2, scene 2, set outside the royal palace, Melantho is conjured up, as it were, by Ulysses. Hearing Penelope's offstage lament, he muses on his wife's embodiment of the qualities of three of the other women he has encountered: the divine Calypso's singing and weaving, Nausicaa's purity, his mother's sweetness. There are only five possible types of women, so one is missing. Here Dallapiccola contradicts Hauptmann. In the play, Penelope is explicitly linked to Circe: that was Odysseus's name for his bride.<sup>60</sup> But in the opera, Circe's characteristics are not to be associated with Penelope, and Melantho now appears, as if Circe were responding to Ulysses' call, or so he cries out (II/463–65). Melantho's most spotlighted moment is in act 2, scene 3, set in the hall of the palace. The suitors urge her to dance, but she is unwilling until Antinous hands her Ulysses' bow. She then performs an increasingly wild dance, culminating in a scream (II/737), which coincides both with the unexpected appearance of Telemachus and with the string of the bow becoming twisted around her neck. This latter bit of business is a prefiguration of Melantho's imminent death. As Ulysses addresses her (II/826–31), prior to firing off the arrows that bring down the suitors: "Le tue chiome / sembreran fiamme, mentre il tuo bel corpo / appeso a un ramo / s'agiterà l'ultima volta! [Your tresses / will resemble flames, while your beautiful body / hung on a branch / will twitch one last time!]" He orders Melantho to be seized; Eumaeus sets upon her and drags her outside.

Why does Melantho have to die? There is little mileage in appealing to Homer. If Dallapiccola could alter so much in relation to the epic, especially when it comes to this character, why insist on her death? The obvious answer, as Catherine Clément long ago insisted, is that, in the misogynistic genre that is opera, transgressive women must always perish.<sup>61</sup> *Ulisse* is no exception. Particularly striking in this respect is act 2, scene 2. Melantho is conjured up in the company of Antinous, to whom she makes an offer. If Antinous is chosen to marry Penelope, he should know that he will always be welcome in Melantho's bed. And she embraces him, as the libretto puts it (II/462). This is the cue for Ulysses to burst out with his recognition in Melantho of Circe; and indeed, it is a crucial moment, for it shows a woman taking the sexual initiative, in a manner archetypically transgressive where opera is concerned: again, one has only to think of *Carmen*.<sup>62</sup> Not surprisingly, this was an element of Melantho's character emphasized by Gürbaca. In act 2, scene 1, when Antinous sent Eurymachus and Pisander back to town, Melantho hitched up her skirt, inviting him to have sex.



Melantho spattered with blood, act 2, scene 3. Photo by Barbara Aumüller, for Oper Frankfurt, used by permission.

And yet, Ulysses does not kill Melanthis only for her confident sexuality, her “carnality”; or not if we take him at his word. He begins his slaughter with her—“Si comincia da lei”—because “Melanthis alone, the bitch, understood [Melanthis sola, la cagna, ha compreso]” (II/821–25). He kills her for her “intelligence.” In another detail drawn from Hauptmann, it is only Melanthis who sees the vengeance in Ulysses’ eyes.<sup>63</sup> Already in act 2, scene 1 she is disturbed, and doubly so in the following scene. She also correctly grasps that the fires on the hills, greeted by the chorus in act 2, scene 1 as a signal of Telemachus’s safe return, are not a good omen, or not for her. This is why she is unwilling to dance in act 2, scene 3. But which is more misogynistic: to kill a woman because she is sexually in charge, or to kill her because she is clever? Gürbaca’s response here was especially telling. Melanthis did not dance in act 2, scene 3; rather, it was the crowd around her that became increasingly orgiastic. And at the end of the act, Ulysses fired no arrows. By this stage, Melanthis had found her way to the glass cabinet within which Ulysses’ bow had arisen in the previous scene: her death did not take place offstage but was symbolized in a bucketful of blood hurled at her by the hero. Only Melanthis died in this production, the rest of the cast staring at her body in a horror-struck tableau. In the synopsis of the opera given in the program book, Gürbaca and Friedrich Eberle, the Frankfurt dramaturg, described the killing of the suitors as the moment at which Ulysses regains his identity.<sup>64</sup> But the stage picture could hardly have been more condemnatory. The suitors were not killed. Male self-affirmation here meant violent female death alone.



## METAPHYSICS 2: GOD

Who is Ulysses? What does he want? “Che sono? Che cerco?”—those are his own words, at the very center of the opera (I/898–9). For Gürbaca, the opera is bound up with the thought of “existentialist philosophers like Sartre or Camus.”<sup>65</sup> In the program book, there was a tag from Camus’s *Carnets*: “Man is nothing in himself. He is but an infinite chance. But he is infinitely responsible for that chance.”<sup>66</sup> Drawn from a note of November 1945, the thought relates to the argument of Camus’s most celebrated philosophical text, *Le mythe de Sisyphe*, published three years earlier. Man finds himself always struggling for meaning in a world devoid of sense. And yet in the lucid awareness of this absurdity, there is freedom. As Camus continues in the 1945 note, “great deeds” have no aim beyond “human productiveness.” The “problem of God will arise” only “when the human limit finally has a meaning.”<sup>67</sup>

Here the difficulties begin. It is not just that Dallapiccola in fact showed little interest in either Sartre or Camus.<sup>68</sup> The ideas from Camus sketched above are also notably dissonant with respect to *Ulisse*. For Dallapiccola’s hero, the thought that he might be “nothing in himself” is torment. Drawing yet again on Hauptmann, the composer makes a great deal of the name *Outis*, “Nobody” or “Noman,” which Ulysses gives himself to trick Polyphemus in book 9.<sup>69</sup> In act 1, scene 1, the word “nessuno” is emphasized by Demodocus and the chorus (I/137–45): who now remembers Ulysses apart from the bards? It stings the hero to the point of self-identification. His name is Ulysses, he explains, but now, reduced as he is to dust, it might as well be “Noman”: “Ch’io sia forse. . . Nessuno?” (I/213–15). In act 1, scene 4, Ulysses refuses to speak his name when questioned by the shades in the Underworld (I/783–99); Dallapiccola nevertheless provides the answer by way of the “nessuno” music from act 1, scene 1: one of the most recognizably “motivic” passages in the score. This recurs when Ulysses asks himself the existential questions cited above, and again in act 2, scene 1, when the disguised Ulysses asks Eumaeus who would now recognize his long-absent king (II/207–12). Again, during the encounter with Melantho and Antinous, Ulysses will not disclose his name. But the music has the answer, which Antinous spells out (II/489). The mockery provokes a crisis: the point at which Ulysses finally resolves to act.

For Camus, man, “by himself, is inclined to water himself down,” but for Dallapiccola, the lack of an essential identity is a curse: Poseidon’s “revenge,” no less.<sup>70</sup> If Camus seems an inappropriate reference, though, elsewhere the Frankfurt program book suggested a more productive philosophical framework. To grasp this, and indeed the opera’s final significance, we need to confront its “Epilogue,” avoided until now: the point at which Ulysses’ anxiety regarding his identity is unexpectedly quelled in a vision of the divine. Here the thought of Camus or Sartre, fundamentally atheistic, clearly has less relevance. Yet there is also a theistic tradition in existentialism, to which the Frankfurt program book seemed to refer, if not

explicitly. In the co-written synopsis, mentioned above, the Epilogue is provided with a subtitle, “Vom Ich zum Du.” The echo of Martin Buber’s *Ich und Du* (1923) is inescapable.<sup>71</sup>

Buber’s basic claim is simple. Human history evinces an ever-increasing departure from an original state of “relation” with other human beings and the world toward one of “experience”: from immediacy toward conceptualization. In Buber’s language, this is the shift between the basic words “I-You” and “I-It.”<sup>72</sup> The figure of Ulysses would seem emblematic here. Famously, in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944), Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno cast the hero of *The Odyssey* as “the prototype of the bourgeois individual,” whose attitude is one of “unwavering self-assertion.”<sup>73</sup> This does not bring him contentment, but instead alienation—as we see in Dallapiccola’s opera. In Adorno and Horkheimer, the establishment of selfhood rests upon the domination of both external and internal nature, such that its very *raison d’être* becomes obscure.<sup>74</sup> In Buber’s considerably less dialectical theory, Ulysses’ unhappiness would stem from the loss of relation, which is to say, of “actual life.” Indeed, this is encapsulated in Ulysses’ motto-phrase, “Guardare, meravigliarsi, e tornar a guardare [To look, to marvel and to look again],” repeated at various points in the opera (see the Prologue, mm. 25–29 and 59–53; then I/490–95 and II/998–1001). From Buber’s perspective, this phrase would be precisely indicative of the I-It, in which the world is an object held in aesthetic contemplation. Truth cannot be sought, only received and then responded to, in a condition of unmediated reciprocity between I and You.<sup>75</sup>

Adorno, not surprisingly, was contemptuous of such thinking. In Buber’s irrationalism, he snorts, “stupidity becomes the founder of metaphysics.”<sup>76</sup> For all that, a conception of the final moments of *Ulisse* as a “return” from the I-It to the I-You can seem to work quite well. In the Epilogue, Dallapiccola directs that we see Ulysses alone on the sea once more, still unsatisfied, seeking “la Parola, il Nome [the Word, the Name]” that would justify his existence: “Se una voce rompesse il silenzio, il mistero [If only a voice would break the silence, the mystery]” (II/977–93). Suddenly he is visited by grace, encounters the You. “Signore!” Ulysses exclaims, “Non più soli sono il mio cuore e il mare.” “Lord! No longer are they alone, my heart and the sea” (II/1025–33).<sup>77</sup>

But we need to be careful. Dallapiccola’s score for the Epilogue is very much a mosaic, constructed not just from material taken from the rest of *Ulisse* but from many of his other compositions too. Evidently, we are meant to understand the conclusion of the opera in autobiographical terms; and the temptation to link the metaphysics of the opera to Dallapiccola’s conception of his own career is strong. Just as the topic of *Ulisse*, the *summa* of his life’s work, was both always waiting for him, and—in the Epilogue to the opera—retrospectively unifies his various projects into a single endeavor, so divine presence was always waiting for Ulysses, and its

revelation retrospectively grants the hero's life meaning. The circle would seem to be closed: interpretation ends.

Except that it does not, and certainly not if we are reading Buber. For the author of *Ich und Du*, the final moments of *Ulisse* would amount to blasphemy. Truth cannot be sought, we recall, and yet that is precisely what Ulysses is doing: he speaks of "tormenting myself to understand the truth": "tormentarmi per comprendere il vero" (II/1005–7). At the end of the opera, he finds it, or worse, possesses it: since to "know" God is to pervert the I-You into I-It. For Buber, Dallapiccola's Ulysses would be a "theomaniac" [*Gottsüchtiger*]: one who is deluded enough to think that God's role is to support his own ego.<sup>78</sup> The I-You relation is properly one of risk, not of self-affirmation; the I becomes actual only through participation. That is to say, the I-You relation occurs in the world; it is in our relations—and above all in our speech—with other humans that we encounter God.<sup>79</sup>

While she does not cite Buber directly, this is also what Gürbaca thinks. Speaking both of *Ulisse* and *Il prigioniero*, she declares: "Belief here does not mean the vertical relationship between the individual and God, but rather the horizontal relationship between people; divinity only ever shows itself in the capacity to stand in communication with other people and other times."<sup>80</sup> Gürbaca also provides here the key to her staging of the opera's final minutes. During the "Intermezzo sinfonico" that separates act 2, scene 3 from the Epilogue, the horror-stricken partygoers of the suitors' feast were transformed back into the tourists of the opera's opening. We had not seen them since the symmetrically corresponding "Intermezzo sinfonico" between Episodes 1 and 3 of the Prologue, where, in an embodiment of the anger of Poseidon, these same tourists roughed Ulysses up and stripped him down to his underwear. Now, at the conclusion of the hero's adventures, they appeared more sympathetic. Far from sailing alone on the open sea, Ulysses delivered his final monologue among his contemporary companions. At the point of revelation, though, they swiftly left, and Ulysses was left alone. If the aim was to suggest divinity emerging from human communication, this last gesture made the opposite impression.

And that was fair enough. For *Ulisse* has no social vision, or only a negative one. Clearly, Gürbaca was trying to bring a certain communitarian perspective to the opera, but one wonders whether that could ever make much sense. To put it another way, the most convincing philosophical point of reference for *Ulisse* is neither Camus nor Buber but, as Vivienne Suvini-Hand has suggested, Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>81</sup> Ulysses has no relationship with his wife; as Dallapiccola directs, at the end of act 2, scene 3, the two merely stare at each other, and do not touch. He has no relationship with his son, who does not recognize him. Moreover, as Circe teaches the hero in act 1, scene 3, the monsters he encounters are all internal: there is a sense in which we are to understand the opera as the drama of a single consciousness. Ulysses does not return to Ithaca once again. He does not retake his

throne a better ruler for his glimpse of the divine. Far from answering to contemporary problems, as Dallapiccola insisted, the opera tends to solipsism, a mirror image of the composer's autobiographical self-interpretation. Suvini-Hand suggests that the final line, "Non più soli sono il mio cuore e il mare"—a "positive antithesis" to Calypso's opening, "Son soli, un'altra volta, il tuo cuore e il mare"—"unequivocally promotes the concept of communication with God and mankind over isolation."<sup>82</sup> But from a Kierkegaardian perspective, that is to confuse the "ethical" and the "religious," which are not co-extensive. Ulysses leaves Ithaca behind after act 2, scene 3—or, in Kierkegaard's language, "suspends the ethical," his duty to family and community—for the sake of an essentially incommunicable experience.<sup>83</sup> To be sure, he cries "Signore!" and tells us that he is no longer alone, but following the expressionistic upheavals of the vision itself, the music returns to some of its very opening sounds, as if nothing had happened. And indeed, what has happened is between Ulysses and God: beyond representation.

"Die Oper verpufft," said my neighbor, a German colleague. For Berio, the final scene was even "irreverent."<sup>84</sup> The opera house is the space of representation, not truth. What cannot be represented there cannot be effective. If Schoenberg knew that (it is the burden of *Moses und Aron*, after all), the "mystical" and "almost naïve" atmosphere of Dallapiccola's final opera—Berio's adjectives<sup>85</sup>—suggests a message ill-adapted to its medium. Much as one might want to see *Ulisse* performed as frequently as *Il prigioniero*, it is not only the work's length and complexity that stand as obstacles in its path. But one should surely retain an open mind. Up to the very final moments, Gürbaca and her team had successfully granted the opera a new lease of life. Perhaps, in a different production, the ending could be made to work too. It would be nice to think that we might not have to wait another thirty-five years to find out.

Ben Earle

#### NOTES

1. Arnold Whittall, *Music since the First World War* (London: Dent, 1977), 188.

2. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera: The Last Four Hundred Years* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 522, 524. Both these phrases are notably absent from the second edition (London: Penguin, 2015): compare pp. 556, 560.

3. These can be heard on OEHMS Classics, OC 970 (2017) and Chandos, CHSA 5276 (2020). Admittedly, *Il prigioniero* is the odd man out in the present discussion: it is a one-acter, lasting no more than 50 minutes, and is also chronologically earlier than these other operas, composed in 1944–48.

4. John C. G. Waterhouse, "Dallapiccola, Luigi," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 20 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1980), v, 157–62: 158.

5. For the performance history of *Il prigioniero* (up to 2004), see Mario Ruffini, *Luigi Dallapiccola e le Arti figurative* (Venice: Marsilio, 2016), 470–74.

6. For performance data, *ibid.*, 570. Ruffini lists a Berlin revival in spring 1969, but see Caroline Lüderssen, *Der wiedergewonnene Text: ästhetische Konzepte des Librettos im italienischen Musiktheater nach 1960* (Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2012), 80.

7. At the Holland Festival in 1987 and the Salzburg Festival in 1993.

8. Full-length studies of the opera include: Julia van Hees, *Luigi Dallapiccolas Bühnenwerk Ulisse: Untersuchungen zu Werk und Werkgenese* (Kassel: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1994); Anthony Paul Sellors, “*Expressing a Certainty: Musical and Poetic Imagery in Dallapiccola’s Ulisse*,” 2 vols. (PhD diss., King’s College London, 2001); Romano Pezzati, *La memoria di Ulisse: Studi sull’Ulisse di Luigi Dallapiccola*, ed. Mario Ruffini (Milan: Edizioni Suvini Zerboni, 2008). Of the two commercially released recordings of *Ulisse*, the first, on Stradivarius, STR 10063 (1992), is of the premiere; the second, on Naïve, V 4960 (2003), is of a 1975 French Radio performance. In 1973, Italian Radio issued a non-commercial recording on three LPs of a concert performance from the previous year. Bootlegs of the 1970 Italian premiere, drawn from radio broadcasts, also circulate, but the two BBC recordings (first broadcast in 1969 and 1993, respectively) are harder to come by.

9. See Fedele d’Amico, “Il filo rosso di Dallapiccola,” in *Tutte le cronache musicali: “L’Espresso” 1967–1989*, ed. Luigi Bellingardi, 3 vols. (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2000), i, 168–72: 168. A figure above thirty is confirmed in Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi, “Quando gli uomini valgono poco si riuniscono in branchi: Conversazione con Luigi Dallapiccola,” *La fiera letteraria* 43/43 (1968): 12–13: 12.

10. See Luigi Dallapiccola, “Premessa dell’autore,” in the program book for the Italian premiere of *Ulisse* at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, on January 13, 1970, pp. 139–41; repr. as “Nota per il programma della prima esecuzione italiana di ‘Ulisse’ al Teatro alla Scala (13.1.1970),” in Luigi Dallapiccola, *Appunti incontri meditazioni* (Milan: Edizioni Suvini Zerboni, 1970), 189–91; and then in Luigi Dallapiccola, *Parole e musica*, ed. Fiamma Nicolodi (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1980), 532–34. For a version in English, see Luigi Dallapiccola, “*Ulisse* at La Scala: Notes for the Italian Première, 13 January 1970,” in *Dallapiccola on Opera*, ed. and trans. Rudy Shickelford (London: Toccata Press, 1987), 263–66.

11. Van Hees, *Luigi Dallapiccolas Bühnenwerk Ulisse*, 302.

12. See “Il giudizio sull’‘Ulisse’ di Dallapiccola e sulla prima rappresentazione mondiale alla Deutsche Oper di Berlino nei principali commenti della stampa italiana ed internazionale,” *Nuova rivista musicale italiana* 2/6 (1968): 1269–78: 1278. A handful of photographs of the production are

reproduced in Ruffini, *Luigi Dallapiccola e le Arti figurative*, 544–45.

13. Lüderssen, *Der wiedergewonnene Text*, 76–77, n. 286.

14. See Massimo Mila, “Trionfa a Berlino ‘Ulisse’ il capolavoro di Dallapiccola,” *La Stampa* (October 1, 1968): 7; repr. in Luigi Dallapiccola and Massimo Mila, *Tempus aedificandi: Carteggio 1933–1975*, ed. Livio Aragona (San Giuliano Milanese: Accademia di Santa Cecilia/Ricordi, 2005), 401–05.

15. Passages from all three reviews are cited in “Il giudizio sull’‘Ulisse’ di Dallapiccola,” 1271, 1275, 1277. For D’Amico, see also “Il filo rosso di Dallapiccola,” 171; for Lanza Tomasi, see also his “Omero Dante e Joyce i suoi padri,” *La fiera letteraria* 43/43 (1968): 14–15: 15.

16. For *Ulisse* as oratorio, see “Il giudizio sull’‘Ulisse’ di Dallapiccola,” 1273; Van Hees, *Luigi Dallapiccolas Bühnenwerk Ulisse*, 302, 306; Lüderssen, *Der wiedergewonnene Text*, 76, n. 278. For unenthusiastic British responses, see Gerald Larner, “Odysseus in Berlin,” *Guardian* (October 1, 1968): 6; Stanley Sadie, “[Festivals:] Berlin,” *Musical Times* 109/1509 (1968): 1042–43; Peter Heyworth, “Ulysses in Berlin,” *Observer* (October 6, 1968): 29; Desmond Shawe-Taylor, “Odysseus in Search of God,” *Sunday Times* (October 6, 1968): 58.

17. Reginald Smith Brindle, “Italy,” in *Music in the Modern Age*, ed. F. W. Sternfeld (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), 283–308: 300.

18. Bayan Northcott, “Reverberations of 1968,” in *The Way We Listen Now and Other Writings on Music*, ed. Christopher Wintle (London: Plumbago Books, 2009), 169–72: 171.

19. See Dallapiccola and Mila, *Tempus aedificandi*, 279, 402.

20. See Whittall, *Music since the First World War*, 189–90; Waterhouse, “Dallapiccola, Luigi,” 160; Bayan Northcott, “The Forgotten Modernist,” *The Independent* (January 26, 2004): 52–53.

21. V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). Agawu’s source for his distinction is the structural linguistics of Roman Jakobson.

22. Sellors, “*Expressing a Certainty*,” 55, 83, 118.

23. *Ibid.*, 189.

24. To give a few examples: the central “Aria in tre strofe” (mm. 360–440) is clearly a march; nor is it the only march-like passage in the work. The lullaby topic at m. 458 is no less obvious; meanwhile, the counterpoint in the “Primo Intermezzo

Corale" (see m. 151 onwards) has an evidently "learned" character.

25. Peter Evans, cited in Whittall, *Music since the First World War*, 189.

26. Sellors, "Expressing a Certainty," 54.

27. In both cases there is a watery connection, Dallapiccola replacing Debussy's Seine with the Ionian Sea.

28. Whittall, *Music since the First World War*, 189–90.

29. Richard Taruskin, "How Talented Composers Become Useless," *New York Times* (March 10, 1996), section H, p. 31; repr. in Richard Taruskin, *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 86–93; 88, 87.

30. See Sellors, "Expressing a Certainty," 109. At pp. 101–15, Sellors provides a detailed analysis of this scene.

31. For all the critical praise heaped upon Maazel at the premiere, it should be said that his exceptionally well-prepared performance is on the careful side. The only available recording that injects the score of *Ulisse* with the urgency it so clearly needs is the non-commercial RAI version under Zoltán Peskó; but this is not such a well-prepared performance, the orchestra clinging on by the skin of its teeth. It can be heard via <http://digitale.bnc.roma.sbn.it/tecadigitale/dischi> (accessed October 6, 2022).

32. See Massimo Mila, "Opera a due dimensioni," in the program book for the Italian premiere, pp. 143–55; repr. as "L'Ulisse' opera a due dimensioni," in Luigi Dallapiccola: *Saggi, testimonianze, carteggio, biografia e bibliografia*, ed. Fiamma Nicolodi (Milan: Edizioni Suvini Zerboni, 1975), 31–41; also, revised, in Massimo Mila, *I costumi della Traviata* (Pordenone: Edizioni Studio Tesi, 1984), 303–18.

33. Pezzati, *La memoria di Ulisse*, 183.

34. See the collective interview, "Suchbewegungen," in the Frankfurt program book, pp. 7–12: 9.

35. At the Berlin premiere, one can only assume that, at 1/54, Demodocus seized the instrument, as the stage directions suggest. To judge by the openly derisive laughter during the following measure of strumming, preserved on the Stradivarius recording, the effect was unhappy. Lanza Tomasi speaks of "an affected expressionism [*un espressionismo di maniera*]" at this point. See his "Omiero Dante e Joyce i suoi padri," 15. The article is headed with a still from

the first production, showing Demodocus with lyre in hand.

36. See Lanza Tomasi, "Quando gli uomini valgono poco," 12.

37. Raymond Guess, *Not Thinking like a Liberal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 147.

38. See, very appositely, Jonathan Berger, "Playing with *Playing with Signs*: A Critical Response to Kofi Agawu," *Journal of Music Theory* 38/2 (1994): 293–313: 306–7.

39. Luciano Berio, *Two Interviews*, ed. and trans. David Osmond-Smith (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1985), 54.

40. See Luigi Dallapiccola, "Nascita di un libretto d'opera," *Nuova rivista musicale italiana* 2/4 (1968): 605–24; repr. in *Appunti incontri meditazioni*, 171–87; and in *Parole e musica*, 511–31; Luigi Dallapiccola, "Geburt eines Librettos," trans. Clelia Nouliau, *Melos* 35/7–8 (1968): 265–78; Luigi Dallapiccola, "Birth of a Libretto," *The Listener* 82/2117 (1969): 553–54. For a complete English translation, based on the version prepared by Mario and Leaura Materassi for Dallapiccola's own use at Ann Arbor, see Shackelford (ed., trans.), *Dallapiccola on Opera*, 232–62; and for the information about the translation, *ibid.*, 24.

41. Dallapiccola, "Ulisse at La Scala," 263.

42. Dallapiccola, "Birth of a Libretto," 234–37.

43. *Ibid.*, 237–39.

44. The notion of "the *pre-existence* of the work of art" crops up at the start of "Nascita di un libretto d'opera." See Dallapiccola, "Birth of a Libretto," 233. But the composer had been quoting Proust on "pre-existence" and the "inner book" since the late 1940s. See, for example the 1949 address, "Considerazioni sull'insegnamento della composizione," in *Atti del sesto congresso internazionale di musica* (Florence: Barbera, 1950), 125–30; repr. as "L'insegnamento della composizione," in *Parole e musica*, 140–46: 143–45. See also Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright, 6 vols. (London: Vintage, 2000), vi, 233–35.

45. Dallapiccola, "Ulisse at La Scala," 266.

46. Dallapiccola, "Birth of a Libretto," 247.

47. Lüderssen, *Der wiedergewonnene Text*, 63, n. 231.

48. Dallapiccola, "Birth of a Libretto," 247–48.

49. *Ibid.*, 248.

50. "Suchbewegungen," 11.

51. 51, Dallapiccola, "Birth of a Libretto," 250. The single male doubling is between Demodocus and Tiresias.

52. David Drew, "Dallapiccola's *Odyssey*," *Listener* 80/2064 (1968): 514–15: 514.

53. As Van Hees puts it (*Luigi Dallapiccolas Bühnenwerk* *Ulisse*, 78), "dignity and degradation . . . stand directly opposite each other."

54. See Sigmund Freud, "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love (Contributions to the Psychology of Love II)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Vintage, 2001), xi, 177–90.

55. See Homer, *The Odyssey*, ed. and trans. Emily Wilson (New York: Norton, 2020), 217, 221–22, 265–66.

56. She has duets with Eurymachus (act 1, scene 2; act 2, scene 4) and in act 1, scene 10, tries unsuccessfully to persuade the queen to choose one of the suitors. After their murder, Melanthe urges punishment for Ulysses, whom she has not recognized (act 3, scene 3), but does not address him herself; nor is she killed.

57. Dallapiccola points out this debt himself ("Birth of a Libretto," 260). In keeping with his desire for aesthetic self-reliance, it is striking that literary borrowings in the libretto have to be scrupulously listed (*ibid.*, 259–62). Accused by Heyworth of cultural ostentation on this account, the composer's response was furious. See Heyworth, "Ulysses in Berlin"; Dallapiccola and Mila, *Tempus aedificandi*, 280.

58. Hauptmann's play can be read in English, as *The Bow of Odysseus*, in *The Dramatic Works of Gerhart Hauptmann*, ed. Ludwig Lewisohn, 9 vols. (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1912–29), vii, 99–234.

59. For the fantasy, see *Ulisse*, 11/174–81; compare Hauptmann, *The Bow of Odysseus*, 125, 149, 150.

60. See Hauptmann, *The Bow of Odysseus*, 222–23.

61. Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (London: Virago, 1989), *passim*.

62. *Ibid.*, 48, 50–51. In respect to Melanthe's association with Circe, it is worth pointing out that *Ulisse* also conforms to the opposition Clément notes between female sorcery, or paganism, and the patriarchal appeal to "the one

god" (the latter to be discussed below). *Ibid.*, 105, 136, 139, 177.

63. See Hauptmann, *The Bow of Odysseus*, 206–7, where Antinous does not take Melanthe's warnings seriously.

64. See Maximilian Enderle and Tatjana Gürbaca, "Handlung," in the Frankfurt program book, pp. 2–3: 3.

65. "Suchbewegungen," 7.

66. Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1942–1951*, trans. Justin O'Brien (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010), 118.

67. See Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin, 2000); Camus, *Notebooks 1942–1951*, 118–19.

68. As the composer Camillo Togni recorded Dallapiccola saying: "You know well that Sartre is not to my taste [Lei sa bene che a me Sartre non è simpatico]." See *Carteggi e scritti di Camillo Togni sul Novecento italiano* (Florence: Olschki, 2001), 206.

69. See Hauptmann, *The Bow of Odysseus*, 144–45, 172–74; Homer, *The Odyssey*, 104–5.

70. Camus, *Notebooks 1942–1951*, 118; Dallapiccola, "Birth of a Libretto," 240.

71. See Enderle and Gürbaca, "Handlung," 3. The English translation (by Lucy Jonas) given at the end of the program book (p. 63) looks even more Buberian: "Vom Ich zum Du" becomes "Me=You."

72. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 87–89, 53–55.

73. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 35.

74. *Ibid.*, 42–43.

75. See Buber, *I and Thou*, 57–63.

76. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (London: Routledge, 2003), 11.

77. This is the inversion of a line set by Dallapiccola in the third of his *Quattro liriche di Antonio Machado* (1948): "Señor, ya estamos solos mi corazón y el mar."

78. See Buber, *I and Thou*, 141, 152, 164.

79. *Ibid.*, 113, 126, 151.

80. "Suchbewegungen," 12.

81. Vivienne Suvini-Hand, "Weaving Texts for a Twentieth-Century Ulysses: Dallapiccola's

Religious Vision in *Ulisse*,” *Italian Studies* 60/1 (2005): 71–98; repr. in Vivienne Suvini-Hand, *Sweet Thunder: Music and Libretti in 1960s Italy* (London: Legenda, 2006), 27–70.

82. *Ibid.*, 35, 48, 51.

83. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, ed. C. Stephen Evans and Sylvia Walsh, trans. Sylvia Walsh (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 2006), 46–106.

84. See Leonardo Pinzauti, “Berio,” in *Musicisti d'oggi: Venti colloqui* (Turin: ERI, 1978), 95–106: 99; repr. in Luciano Berio, *Interviste e colloqui*, ed. Vincenzina Caterina Ottomano (Turin: Einaudi, 2017), 53–64: 55.

85. Berio, *Interviste e colloqui*, 350.