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René Leibowitz's *Todos caerán:* Grand Opéra as (Critique of) New Music Theater

Esteban Buch
CRAL/ EHESS

The new music theatre that emerged in Europe in the fifties and sixties was not always greeted with enthusiasm.[1] New music theatre pieces were often accused of being failures, and of being examples of a failed genre; indeed, hostile criticism was arguably instrumental in new music theatre coming to be perceived as a genre in the first place. Negative reactions were frequent whenever these works were exposed to broader audiences than contemporary music circles, starting with these opera critics and fans prone to think that music drama had ended with, say, Giacomo Puccini in 1924. But they could also be found amongst other groups, including contemporary composers. In a sense, the divide between opera and music theatre was also an inner dispute of the contemporary music world. Many composers who dismissed opera as reactionary and *bourgeois* avoided calling their avant-gardist pieces *operas*, as if to enhance their own aesthetic identity. In turn, other composers who called their works *operas* differentiated them from what they described as *anti-operas*. Some even talked of *anti-anti-operas*. And these critics of new music theatre were no less vociferous than the proponents; on the contrary, their modernist credentials gave them the authority – or so they thought - to claim, louder than others, that the king had no clothes.

René Leibowitz (1913-1972) is a case in point. Born in Warsaw and established in Paris in the 1920s, he was recognized in France after the war as the modernist musician *par excellence*, especially as teacher of composers interested in twelve-tone technique. The author of seminal books on the Viennese School, he was also influential

[1] The author thanks Antoinette Molinié, Humbert Camerlo, and Heidy Zimmermann (at the Paul Sacher Stiftung) for their support and help, and Cora Leibowitz, Tamara Leibowitz, and Monique Lévi-Strauss for their authorization to reproduce excerpts of René Leibowitz's scores and to quote his correspondence with Claude Lévi-Strauss. A previous version of this essay was presented at the international conference *Hommage à René Leibowitz*, Centre de Documentation sur la Musique Contemporaine (CMDC), Paris, 3 October 2013.

as a music critic for *Les Temps modernes*, Jean-Paul Sartre's and Simone de Beauvoir's journal, and for *Critique*, led by his friend Georges Bataille (see Kapp 1987, Mosch 1992, Meine 2000, Schürmann 2010). An active conductor of the classic and operatic repertoire, his performances of Beethoven and Offenbach were appreciated at the time, and are still worth hearing today. He also published in 1957 a *Histoire de l'opéra,* meant to accompany the "very special favour" enjoyed by the genre at the time (Leibowitz 1957). And, most important for our topic, he was a prolific composer with a long-established interest in music for the stage, whose catalogue includes *La nuit close* op. 17 (1949), "*drame musical*" on a libretto by writer and critic Georges Limbour (1900-1970); *La circulaire de minuit* op.30 (1953), "*opéra en trois actes*", also after Limbour; *Les Espagnols à Venise* op. 60 (1963), "*opéra bouffe"*, his last with Limbour ; *Labyrinthe* op. 85 (1969), "*drame musical"* on a text of his own after Baudelaire ; and *Todos caerán* op. 91 (1971), "*opéra en deux actes et cinq tableaux",* on a libretto of his own – his most ambitious stage work, never performed in its entirety to this day.[2]

In fact, of Leibowitz's five operas, only one was ever performed, namely *Les Espagnols à Venise,* in 1970 at Grenoble's Maison de la Culture, directed by Humbert Camerlo and conducted by himself. By no means a man of the opera establishment, even if he did conduct major works of the repertoire, he was known for modernist achievements like the first French performances of Schoenberg's *Erwartung* (1966) and *Die glückliche Hand* (1968), both with Camerlo. Just before his untimely death in 1972, he shared his thoughts on contemporary music theatre in his last book, *Les fantômes de l'opéra,* dedicated to the history of opera from Monteverdi to Schoenberg, published fifteen years after his first book on the topic (Leibowitz 1972). Even if his views on recent productions appear only fleetingly in the prologue and the epilogue, they are important because they frame Leibowitz's discourse on opera as a genre, which he set out to defend and promote in times of unpopularity and ideological defiance.

In this book, he claims that the great opera composers of the past were "true revolutionaries", since their works were the result of "an opposition and a revolt against the society that generated them". One of his favorite examples is *Tosca,* an *opéra contestataire,* a "dissenting opera" whose subject matter – he adds, borrowing Sartre's vocabulary, as he already did in 1957 - is proof of Puccini's "*engagement*" (Leibowitz 1972: 263). Along these lines, he opposes in the prologue the authentic "revolutionary

[2] Scenes 4 and 5 and the Interlude of the Premier Tableau of Act I were performed in a concert version by the Schola Heidelberg and the ensemble aisthesis, conducted by Walter Nussbaum, at the Klangforum Heidelberg, on 28 October 2017.

will" of the composers of operatic masterpieces to the *dilettantisme* and *amateurisme* of contemporary composers and artists:

> The common trait to all we usually talk of as "avant-garde" (be they *happenings,* "improvisations", or "artistic laboratories" travelling around the world), is that, more often than not, it relies on clichés and hackneyed formulas.
>
> One might think that if it did not exist, someone should invent it. The problem is that *all this has already been invented,* and if our dilettantes were not such, they would know that since the beginning of our century there have been several "movements" – German expressionism, Italian futurism, Surrealism- of which our current "avant-gardists" only produce pale imitations. (Leibowitz 1972: 15, emphasis in original)

In the epilogue, Leibowitz dedicates a whole section to "the complex of the avant-garde", debunking "*les fantoches de la contestation*", the "puppets of dissent" that, he says, have been particularly active since May 1968. He goes on :

> Most of the avant-garde ignores even the existence of lyric art, or has of it a limited idea that can't but inspire contempt and distrust. This makes it prone to surrender to *fantoches.*
>
> Some did try, though, here and there. Without going into details – the topic is not worth it - let's say they do it in a spirit that, for want of a better word, I call "nihilist". They want to produce operas that are not operas, or that represent some "emancipation", as a kind of opera that was "never done before".
>
> Again, the futility of it all does not merit closer examination. Their real and deep motivations are *à la mode* imperatives that are meaningless, and actually not new at all. In order to scandalize, not only the singers, choirs and extras get dressed – or undressed - but also the members of the orchestra and the conductor (they all participate in the "action"); with the help of eroticism and simple pornography (…), opera is supposed to have been "revolutionized". (Leibowitz 1972: 367-8)

It is a pity that Leibowitz declined to "go into details". One might wonder, for example, what he had in mind when he talked about "pornography". Even if there was no explicit eroticism in it, a candidate is Sylvano Bussotti's *La Passion selon Sade,* whose first performance in 1966 at *Le Domaine musical* had been the target of violent criticism. The critic of *Le Monde* dismissed it as "a college student's hoax", a "kind of farce" without "any reason to exist", nor true novelty : "It's rather like a resurgence of the epidemic of Dadaism" (Siohan 1966). While this last might suggest dislike not only for Bussotti's work but also for historical Dadaism, the critic regarded the new piece as an involuntary and impoverished remake of historical avant-gardes, just as Leibowitz later did. Yet, he also expressed disappointment regarding his hopes of

living "the experience of a new music theatre" – by which he implied that he *was* looking forward to a new music theatre in the first place (*ibid.*). Now, claims of support for true novelty, as compared to the actual novelty being judged, are typical reactions of conservative critics. But this shows that Leibowitz's skeptical position, far from being idiosyncratic, was part of a larger debate.

At an international level, Leibowitz was close not only to some professional critics, but also to composers like Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983), who saw his atonal operas, set in historicist contexts with a kind of Verdian dramaturgy, as counter-examples to contemporary "anti-operas" (see Buch 2003). As Eric Drott has documented, while a new *théâtre musical* developed in France by the early 1970s with people like Georges Aperghis, Michel Puig, and Claude Prey, there were "a number of individuals questioning the 'false audacity' and 'false subversiveness' of contemporary composers" (see Drott 2011: 208-9). Even if there is no reason to think that Leibowitz was targeting Puig in *Les fantômes de l'opéra,* the fact that this last was a former pupil of his, whose "chamber opera" *Stigmates* against the Algerian war he had conducted in 1962, shows his proximity to what he was now rejecting (Vichniac 1962).

Leibowitz's dismissal of what he calls avant-garde had a personal dimension, which inspired in him passionate *coups de sang*, rather than systematic analysis of the field. His quarrel with new music theater after May 1968 had roots in the early fifties, when his former pupil Pierre Boulez succeeded in presenting him, in his article 'Schoenberg is dead' and other texts, as a paradigmatic example of academicism and conservatism. In later years, his attachment to Schoenbergian dodecaphony and his plea for twelve-tone "athematicism" could appear as *passé,* compared to integral serialism, indeterminacy, instrumental theatre, and other tendencies of contemporary music. Of course, the triumph of Boulez's aesthetics over Leibowitz's was no law of history but the result of a symbolic fight, whose result, nevertheless, consigned the latter for decades to a reactive position, a fate that resonates in the harshness of his vocabulary (see Kapp 1988; Buch 2018).

Leibowitz's aggressive disdain of avant-garde experiences might appear today as paternalistic and full of prejudice. From a historical perspective, though, it also reminds us that composers and artists of an older generation shared with younger composers the will to renew the field of music theatre, while diverging radically as to the means to achieve it. Leibowitz, for one, was convinced that atonal operas were an appropriate response to the crisis of the genre, and in a provocative Verdian *torniam'al antico* spirit he composed works that addressed contemporary issues while being

consciously clothed in vintage dramaturgy. This was the case of *Les Espagnols à Venise*, the story of the revolt of the people of Venice against an alleged conspiracy of sixteenth-century Spaniards, disguised as modern German tourists.[3]

This *opéra bouffe* achieved only modest success. An unconvinced critic of *Le Monde* noted that "the tradition of this musical genre is no longer really blossoming", and wrote that even regardless of its genre "his *opéra bouffe* is a sad farce whose scenic and musical intentions are hard to understand" (Dandrel 1970). But such reactions notwithstanding, Leibowitz was confident that, thanks to his knowledge of the history of opera and the avant-gardes, and his command of twelve-tone technique, he was better armed than others to revive the great composers' "revolutionary" spirit. As he says in *Les fantômes de l'opéra*, this claim was related to his skepticism towards May 68, a youthful movement that in private conversations he tended to dismiss as immature, illusory, and not really revolutionary.[4] This was not only a matter of age – Leibowitz was 55 years old in 1968 - but also one of political sensibility. His views on May 68 were not unlike those of some people with leftist views and/or who were close to the Communist Party. In 1968, writer Philippe Sollers denounced the movement's "counter-revolutionary leftist spontaneism", a view that in his case was soon to change radically, in favor of Maoism (cited in Hourmant 1996: 115); many years after, an intellectual like Claude Lévi-Strauss still expressed retrospectively his "repugnance" for the *événements* (Éribon 1998/2001: 115-17). Leibowitz, not a revolutionary himself, was familiar with the French left's discourse and pathos, as a long-time collaborator of Sartre, a signatory in 1960 of the *Manifeste des 121* and other statements against the Algerian War, and a man who, in 1967, composed *Four songs Che Guevara in memoriam* op. 80, shortly after the iconic guerrilla's death in Bolivia. Against what he perceived as the failure of the new generation to produce convincing stage works dealing with crucial issues like revolution and eroticism, and maybe against what he perceived as the failure of political and sexual revolution as such, he was ready to show that he – a man in his late fifties, of forward-looking tastes and outlook - could stage a *better* tale of love and revolution.

Thus, between July 1970 and May 1972 Leibowitz composed an opera that, aside from its atonal language, corresponds to his own definition of the *grand opéra français*: "'Wide-reaching', historical (rather than mythological) topics, characters in prey to

[3] René Leibowitz, *Les Espagnols à Venise. Opéra bouffe en un acte de Georges Limbour,* vocal score. Facsimile of the manuscript, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
[4] Antoinette Molinié, personal communications, 18 October 2013 and 25 July 2017; Humbert Camerlo, personal communication, 5 August 2017.

violent passions, many sumptuous settings, crowd scenes with large choirs, many orchestral effects to enrich and give colors to the drama, dance interludes (and sometimes important ballet scenes)" (Leibowitz 1972: 214). Except for the lack of dance, this is a fitting description of *Todos caerán,* a work in two acts and five tableaux that features five main characters, twenty-two secondary roles, two choirs, a brass ensemble onstage, and an imposing orchestra with triple winds and a big percussion set. It pictures a bunch of leftist revolutionaries trying to debunk and kill a cruel right-wing dictator, while getting trapped in tortuous and sublime love affairs, in the exotic setting of an imaginary, contemporary Latin-American island. Close to the title, the manuscript score has the words "pour Antoinette", the woman who, identified as "A.", is also the dedicatee of the prologue of *Les fantômes de l'opéra,* as if Leibowitz was giving her name to the connection between his critique of new music theatre and his contribution to the renewal of opera.[5]

* * *

Why, of all possible subjects, did Leibowitz write an opera on a Latin-American revolution? At the time, Latin America was often a matter of debate in France - especially Cuba and Chile - and for many it was common sense that a revolution *of some kind* was a positive political and/or cultural horizon (Bantigny 2016). But in 1971 the "Padilla affair" – the name of a writer persecuted by Castro's regime - estranged many of Leibowitz's friends, such as Sartre and Michel Leiris, from the Cuban revolution, thus casting the very figure of the revolutionary under a darker, controversial light.[6] And, except for his songs for Che Guevara, Leibowitz had never directly addressed political subjects in his music before, nor did he have a strong political interest in revolution, nor a lasting personal connection with Latin-America, which he had briefly toured in 1957 as a conductor (see Schürmann 2010: 413-15).[7]

Yet, a new element in the composer's private life might explain his decision to deal intensively with the topic in 1971 and 1972. The composition of *Todos caerán* can be partially reconstructed thanks to the letters he wrote to Monique and Claude Lévi-Strauss, this last being not only a famous specialist of Latin-American cultures but also a passionate Wagnerite and opera lover, who in his books compared music and

[5] René Leibowitz, *Todos caerán. Opéra en deux actes et cinq tableaux,* op. 91, orchestral score and vocal score. Facsimiles of the manuscripts, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
[6] "La lettre des intellectuels à M. Fidel Castro", *Le Monde,* 22.05.1972.
[7] In 1957 Leibowitz gave concerts in Mexico and Venezuela. A second tour to Chile and Argentina was planned for 1958 but was probably cancelled, according to sources in Buenos Aires. Silvia Glocer to author, 19.04.208.

mythology.[8] The musician and the anthropologist met in the late 1940s, and became closer friends during the sixties (Faivre d'Arcier 2013; Meine 2000: 64-69). Their relationship became a collaboration in 1970, when Lévi-Strauss made a scenography for Leibowitz's and Camerlo's production of Ravel's *L'heure espagnole*, given in Grenoble as a complement to the first performance of *Les Espagnols à Venise*. The costumes and scenography for this last piece were made by Victoria von Hagen, an archeologist who also specialized in Latin-America and was close to Lévi-Strauss (see von Hagen 1972), with whom Leibowitz had a lasting, intimate relationship.

On 17 May 1970, Leibowitz's long-time friend and collaborator Georges Limbour drowned on a Spanish beach, leaving him without a librettist. In August, the composer wrote to Lévi-Strauss:

> I still don't know for sure what I'll be busy with this summer. I'd like to write a new opera (a "grand" one, in 3 acts), but - since Limbour's death - I don't know how to do it. I wrote musical sketches for several scenes, but I don't feel ready to write a libretto. I'll take with me Shakespeare's Chronicles and other Elizabethan historical plays, hoping to find there at least a "plot".[9]

The two men must have discussed Leibowitz's new project, for shortly after that Lévi-Strauss lent him an unidentified theatre piece as a basis for a libretto. But the composer had already made his mind for a different kind of subject :

> Thank you for thinking about a libretto for me. I don't want to take your copy away from you, but perhaps I could read it at your place, without bothering you. Also, if you had an hour, and if you don't mind, I'd like to show you some notes I took for my "historical" (or "political") subject. That might give you some idea of a play for me to read.[10]

Besides suggesting that Leibowitz could start writing music for an opera before having the libretto and even before knowing the subject matter, this letter shows that the choice of a "grand" opera on a "historical" or "political" subject came before finding the subject in question. By March 1971 his thoughts had evolved a little further:

> I've worked quite a lot on my new opera (two and a half scenes from Act 1), and I start to have some ideas for the plot. But I need

[8] Unfortunately, Lévi-Strauss answers to Leibowitz's letters are apparently lost (except for the last one, quoted below). On Lévi-Strauss and music, see Nattiez 2008 and Meine 2000 : 65.
[9] René Leibowitz to Claude Lévi-Strauss, 3 August 1970, manuscript letter, collection NAF 28150 (195), Bibliothèque nationale de France.
[10] René Leibowitz to Claude Lévi-Strauss, 26 September 1970, manuscript letter, collection NAF 28150 (195), BnF.

> your advice again, and also Monique's. Can I show it to you in the coming days, without abusing of your time and patience?[11]

A couple of months later, the "ideas for the plot" had become precise enough to make headway with the structure of the second act:

> I thank you again for your interest in my work, I really appreciate your advice and your ideas. I'll try to organize the dramatic action of the second act, and I'll show it to you, hopefully without trying your patience.[12]

The letters to Lévi-Strauss suggest that Leibowitz found his subject between October 1970 and March 1971, a subject that was actually less "historical" than "political", in the sense that it was based on contemporary events. But how did he find it? By the end of 1970, at a dinner at his friend Salomon Resnik's - an Argentine-born psychoanalyst connected with Latin-American circles - the composer met Antoinette Molinié, an anthropologist just returned from her PhD fieldwork in Peru, focused on the impact of agrarian reform on Indian populations (Fioravanti-Molinié 1971). The young woman was fully consubstantiated with the cause of Latin-American revolution: "The massive introduction of money in the community", she wrote in a paper on the Huanchay valley, "tends to develop wage labour", thus "destructuring" traditional society (Fioravanti-Molinié 1975: 106). Close at the time to the Communist Party, she was soon to abandon her Marxist orientation and embrace a culturalist approach more akin to Lévi-Strauss, whom she eventually met through her new friend.[13] Thirty years younger than Leibowitz, she was to be his *dernier amour*.

During her first fieldwork in Peru, Molinié visited the revolutionary leader Hugo Blanco, then resident in a prison island near the Callao port, and one of the key figures of the *guevarista* movement in South America, in opposition to general Velasco Alvarado's military government, in power since 1968.[14] Blanco, a Trotskyist union leader, had been in jail since 1963, and had escaped the death penalty partly thanks to the mobilization of Sartre, Beauvoir, Leiris and other intellectuals,[15] before being given an amnesty by Velasco in December 1970, shortly after the anthropologist's visit. Another intriguing episode of her trip was her encounter with an American travel

[11] René Leibowitz to Claude Lévi-Strauss, 27 March 1971, manuscript letter, collection NAF 28150 (195), BnF.
[12] René Leibowitz to Claude Lévi-Strauss, 7 May 1971, manuscript letter, collection NAF 28150 (195), BnF.
[13] Antoinette Molinié's books on Peru include Molinié 1982 and Molinié and Galinier 2006.
[14] Antoinette Molinié, personal communications, 18 October 2013 and 25, July 2017. See Niedergang 1970.
[15] "Le leader paysan péruvien Hugo Blanco menacé d'exécution", *Le Monde* (26 November 1966).

companion who – she learnt afterwards - was suspected of being a CIA agent. There are few doubts that what Antoinette told her friend René about the Peruvian revolutionary scene was a powerful inspiration for his opera project: "The story of *Todos Caerán* ran in all our conversations", she says.[16] Leibowitz used a text by her for the opera's last aria, where a character named Esmeralda sings, just before throwing herself into the sea:

> I kissed the flowers, hurting my hands. How beautiful they were, and how much they trouble me. You ask me to tell you more about my silence, as you often do, without any hope of understanding it. (…) You know so many things, that I feel isolated as the red of your flowers. (…) Are you the one who talked about death? But everything is so beautiful, and I care for it as if it were some imaginary treasure in an island.[17]

In July 1972, Antoinette returned to Peru, leaving René to write passionate letters while dreaming of living together in Chicago, as he had proposed before her departure. Almost at the same time, the composer wrote to his friend Paul Dessau: "My opera is ready. I'm quite satisfied. Still no title".[18] And two weeks later, to Lévi-Strauss: "I finally finished my opera, and now I'll have to wait 3 or 4 years before having it (perhaps) performed". [19] Lévi-Straus answered a few days later: "Congratulations for the completion of the opera, I hope we'll soon be able to hear it (maybe first played by you at the piano?). I warmly thank you for sending me – and for having written - this text that touches me".[20] To Dessau again, on 4 August, he spoke of "my unnamed opera (but the title is forthcoming)".[21] The title must have been decided in the very days that followed, while preparing fair copies of the orchestral score and the vocal score, where it appears on the cover sheet; the typewritten libretto has the title and the mention "Pour Antoinette" written in ink, as if added afterwards.[22]

On 22 August, the composer wrote to his friend Camerlo: "I have some circulatory disorders and I have to do lots of medical tests, X-rays, etc. (Nothing really serious, *almeno lo spero*)."[23] On the evening of 28 August, in Paris, he suffered a fatal

[16] Molinié, personal communication, 25 July 2017.
[17] René Leibowitz, Libretto for *Todos Caerán*, n/p, and Antoinette Molinié, manuscript, Archive Antoinette Molinié.
[18] René Leibowitz to Paul Dessau, 29 June 1972, cited in Schürmann 2010: 540.
[19] René Leibowitz to Claude Lévi-Strauss, 12 July 1972, manuscript letter, collection NAF 28150 (195), BnF.
[20] Claude Lévi-Strauss to René Leibowitz, 17 July 1972, manuscript letter, Sammlung Leibowitz, Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel.
[21] René Leibowitz to Paul Dessau, 4 August 1972, cited in Schürmann 2010: 540.
[22] Archive Antoinette Molinié.
[23] René Leibowitz to Humbert Camerlo, 22.08.1972, cited in Camerlo, unpublished essay.

heart attack. Soon after, Antoinette Molinié received in Peru a telegram from Claude Lévi-Strauss, announcing to her the death of René Leibowitz.

* * *

Todos caerán, Spanish for *Everyone must fall*, is the title of a picture by Goya with no direct relationship to the revolution, nor to Latin America (Fig. 1). It is one of his *Caprichos*, number 19 of the famous print series published in 1799, which Molinié remembers admiring in a book, together with the composer.[24] The etching shows an old woman and two girls impaling with a stick a human-headed bird, while in the sky other anthropomorphic male birds fly around a sitting female character with human head and breasts, and the body of a bird. The title is written down below. The artist supposedly commented, in a manuscript held at the Museo del Prado in Madrid: *Y que no escarmienten los que van a caer con el ejemplo de los que han caído! pero no hay más remedio todos caerán*. ("And those who are about to fall won't take warning from those who have fallen! But there is no remedy: all will fall.")[25] In Goya, the words *Todos caerán* seem to allude to men's moral weaknesses and to their vulnerability to corruption by prostitutes, as well as to women's cruel revolt against their oppressive power. The *Caprichos'* most famous title, "The sleep of reason produces monsters", coupled to Goya's reputation as a non-conformist artist, must have resonated with Leibowitz's interest in developing a critical, "revolutionary" art (see Nehamas 2001). In fact the picture itself appears less related to his opera than these Spanish words, read as a prophecy of the fall of the actors of his Latin American tale. While the libretto is in French, the characters all have Spanish names (except for Isabella, whose spelling is Italian, perhaps as a mistake for Isabel).

[24] Molinié, personal communication, 25.07.2017.
[25] Translation from Heckes 1978.



Figure 1. Francisco de Goya, *Todos caerán* (*Los caprichos* no. 19)

"The action is set today in an imaginary island", says the score. The work stages a right-wing dictator, Salvador (bass), backed by the Army and the Church, and a

group of revolutionaries led by Carlos (tenor). It is hard not to think of Cuba under Batista on the eve of Castro's revolution, even if one can dream of some other Latin-American country led by a cartoon-like character such as General Alcázar in Hergé's *Tintin*. In that respect, this fiction does differ from 1971 Peru, governed by General Velasco Alvarado, a dictator with leftist leanings who, whatever his wrongdoings, does not qualify for the sinister cliché incarnated by, say, General Somoza in Nicaragua, General Trujillo in Guatemala or General Stroessner in Paraguay (see Stephens 1983). In Leibowitz's opera, a statue of Bolivar, the nineteenth-century hero of South-American independence, is set in front of the Presidential Palace.

The first act begins in the street, at night, with the entrance of Rodrigo (baritone), a revolutionary just escaped from Salvador's prison, and deeply troubled after confessing under torture the names of his comrades, including that of his lover Isabella. His sense of guilt, his ambition, and his existential anguish define a tortuous psychology, shared by other masculine characters of the opera. Salvador is a cruel and megalomaniac tyrant, haunted by the loneliness of power and the betrayal of his lover; Carlos is a sacrificial hero, probably modeled on Che Guevera, yet he is plagued by all-too-human desires. The intertwining of political action and personal passion, reminiscent of Sartre's theatre plays, rules the drama throughout the work.
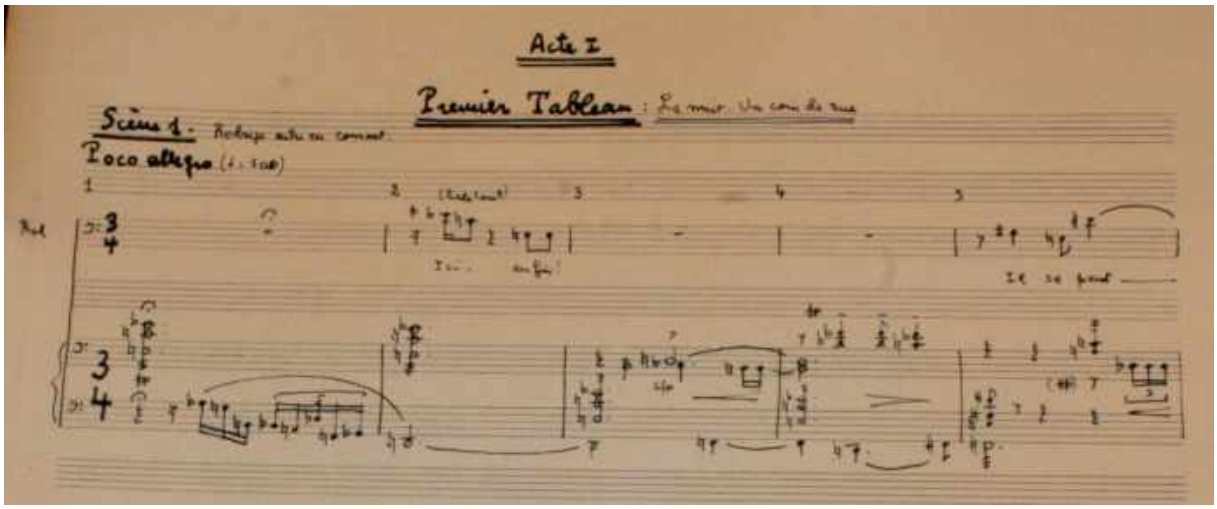
The female characters, far from leading the revolt, as in Goya's picture, are defined by their relationship to men: Isabella, "lover of Rodrigo, collaborator of Carlos", and Esmeralda, "lover of Salvador, in love with Carlos", says the libretto. The two sopranos represent opposite types, the sublime Isabella and the treacherous Esmeralda, who despite their musical importance are secondary in the political plot. Isabella resists Carlos's passionate advances by claiming that loyalty to the Revolution excludes romantic feelings. Esmeralda betrays Salvador not out of political conviction but because of her desperate love for Carlos, and eventually kills Isabella out of jealousy. Even if Isabella's idealism and virtuoso singing make of her a heroine, from a feminist perspective Leibowitz's libretto looks as conservative as most traditional operas. It is true that here the "undoing of women" is but a consequence of the general rule that *everyone must fall* (see Clement 1999).

This melodramatic plot has a comic counterpoint in Pico, Paco and Pongo, a trio of conspirators who try to destabilize the country for the sake of an obscure foreign power, without backing either Salvador's regime or the Revolution. An obvious allusion to Ping, Pong and Pang from Puccini's *Turandot,* and perhaps a more obscure one to Paul, Boum and Puck from Offenbach's *La Duchesse de Gérolstein*, they are

cartoon-like CIA agents, seen in the eye of the anti-imperialist left: ridiculous and mean, yet dangerous and smart enough to survive when everybody else has fallen, leaving the island with an ominous promise to return. All these sub-intrigues are embedded in grandiose crowd tableaux, a public trial of prisoners greeted by the priests, the setting fire to the University by Salvador, a funeral procession for the dictator, and the final explosion of the Presidential Palace. During an interlude, a choir of prisoners who wait for their death brings an echo of *Fidelio*. The revolution seems to fail at the end of the first act, when Salvador arrests Carlos and his friends. Yet in the second act the dictator is shot by Rodrigo in a moment of confusion, while Carlos lies dying in a dungeon jail. Rodrigo's and Esmeralda's deaths follow. Mortality rates are high in *Todos caerán*, even by the lethal standards of the operatic tradition.

Indeed, the first death is that of an old man from the people, coldly shot by an officer for mumbling a protest against the dictator. The true subject of the plot is less the Revolution than the inexorable fall of everybody, dictators and revolutionaries, men and women alike. From that point of view, Leibowitz's is a desperate, even nihilistic view of the world's state and future. Yet, despite this nihilism, "the people" progressively reveals itself to be the true hero of the story: ready to back the dictator's cruelest actions in the first act, it storms the Presidential Palace in the second, as in a remake of the October Revolution, only to be stopped by the bloody explosion set off by the three *agents provocateurs.* After this grandiose climax, during which the crowds led by a "young priest" and a "young man" occupy the stage over pure orchestral music, the end is open-ended, for survivors sing simultaneously of *espoir* (hope) and *désespoir* (despair).

Overall, the story seems to echo Leibowitz's description of *Tosca,* an opera that "shows us in the crudest possible way the conflict between, on one side, the 'official' will of oppression, and, on the other, the desire for freedom (implying a challenge to established power)" (Leibowitz 1972: 263). What he says about *Don Carlos* also applies here: "situations and characters so diverse, that the imbroglio would be inextricable, without the music's grandiose synthesis" (Leibowitz 1972: 179). Now, the music of *Todos caerán* does operate a (perhaps grandiose) synthesis of the heterogeneous elements of the libretto, but of course Leibowitz's language is very different from Puccini's or Verdi's. As Leibowitz knew very well, atonal operas seldom found their way to opera houses. The work starts with a dodecaphonic series that heralds the musical style of *Todos caerán* (see Example 1).



Example 1. Leibowitz, *Todos caerán,* vocal score: Act I, Premier Tableau, Scene 1, bars 1-2.

Throughout the score, the intervallic structure privileges minor seconds and major thirds. Their function was described in 1980 by Jan Maguire, a disciple of the composer:

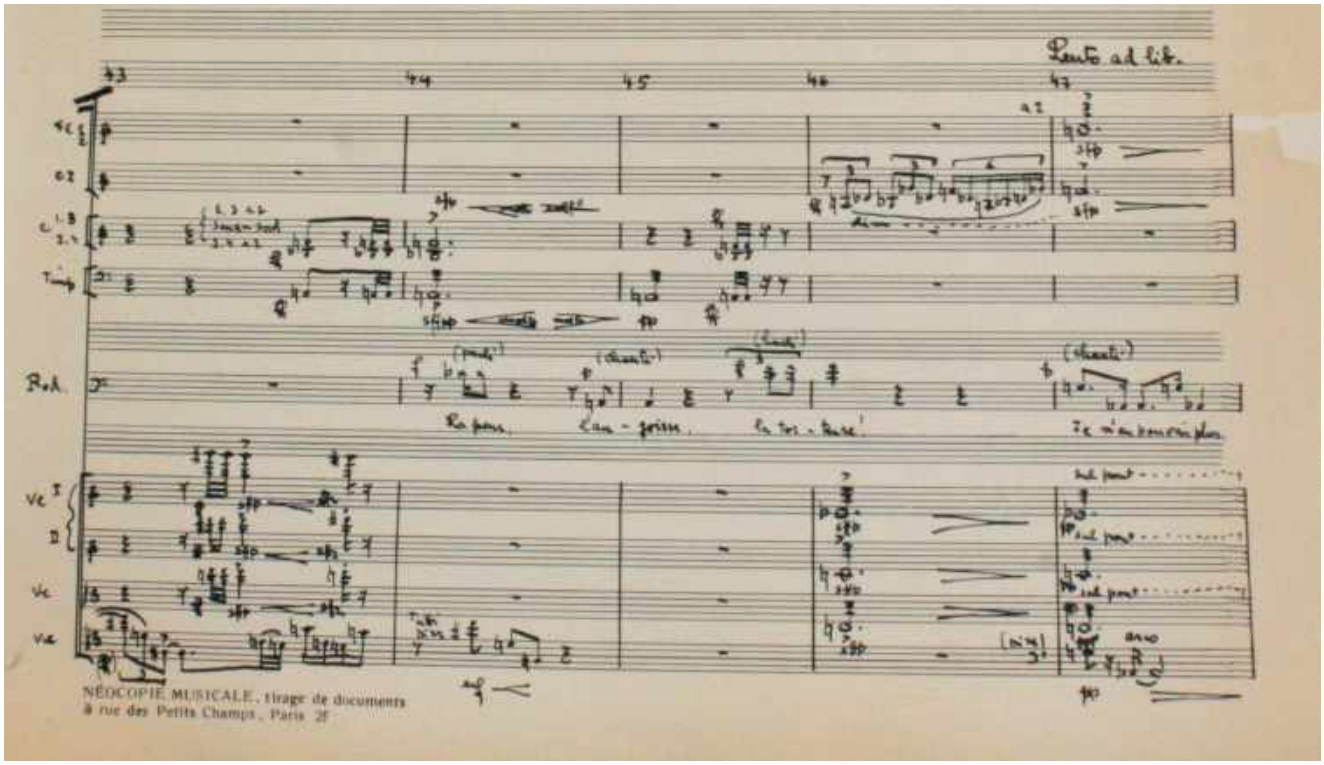
> He maintains integral variation throughout the opera with only two musical elements, his thesis and antithesis: the second and the third. These two intervals, with their inversions, used vertically and horizontally, expressed in an infinite number of forms, rhythms, registers, dynamics, instruments and voices, form the entire work - the fifth, their sum, acting as synthesis between them" (Maguire 1980: 7).

Even if this description is quite unspecific, Maguire's stress on "integral variation" does echo a fundamental feature of the score, namely its athematicism.

Since the late 1940s, athematic composition was Leibowitz's envisioned *telos* for twelve-tone music, soon to be opposed to Boulez's integral serialism; in this late work, it leads him to avoid motivic characterization as a basis for dramatic action (Leibowitz 1949; see Buch 2006). Even if serial operations are not easy to reconstruct in the absence of sketches or other traces of the creative process,[26] it is also pretty clear that series are not used to identify the characters nor to suggest relationships between them, as happens typically in Berg's *Lulu.* Indeed, contrary to received wisdom about Leibowitz's Viennese school "academicism", the frequent use of incomplete series and/or repeated notes deviates from standard, "classic" twelve-tone technique. Coherence, instead, is largely based on atonal style itself and the dominant

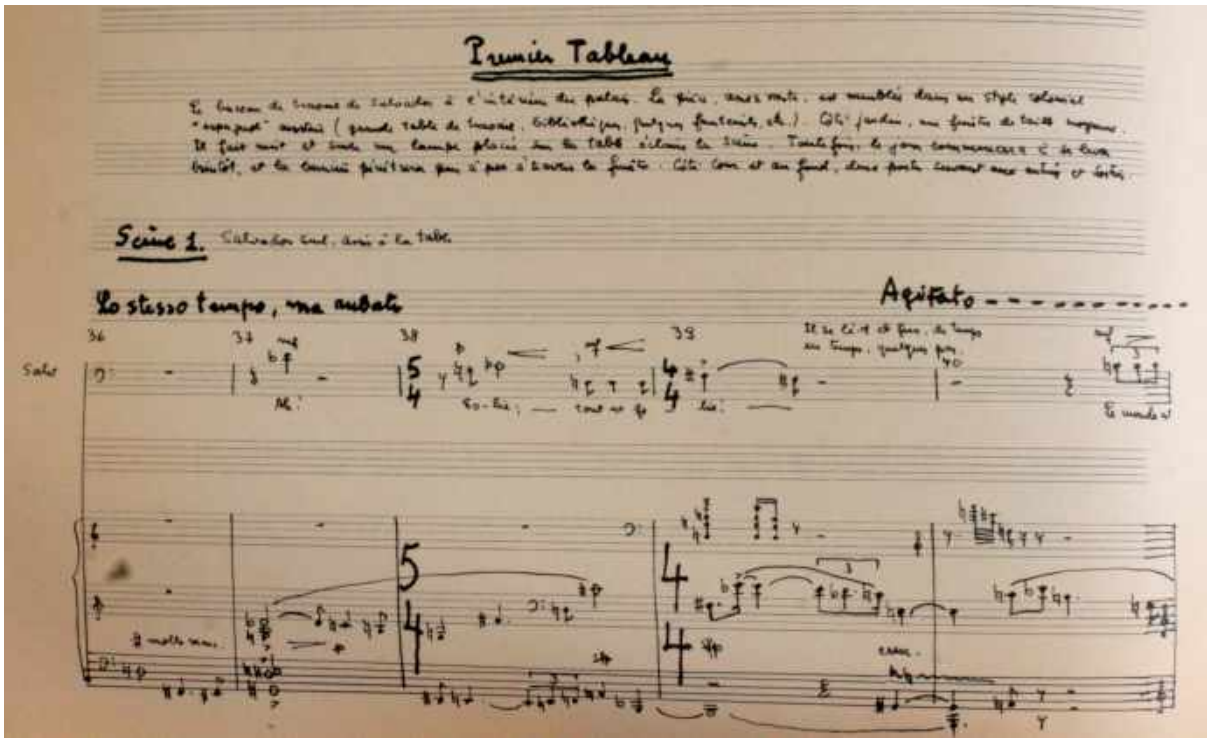
[26] Neither sketches nor other documentary materials related to the opera are included in the René Leibowitz Collection at the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel (Heidy Zimmerman to author, email, 17 August 2017). The original manuscripts of the vocal and orchestral scores, whose photocopies kept at the BnF were the basis of this study, have not been located.

Expressionist orchestral idiom - sometimes infiltrated by chamber-like sonorities, as in Isabella's first aria with bass clarinet and cello solo *obbligati* - and the alternation of lyric, *Sprechgesang* and *parlato* vocal techniques (as in Rodrigo's outburst; see Example 2).
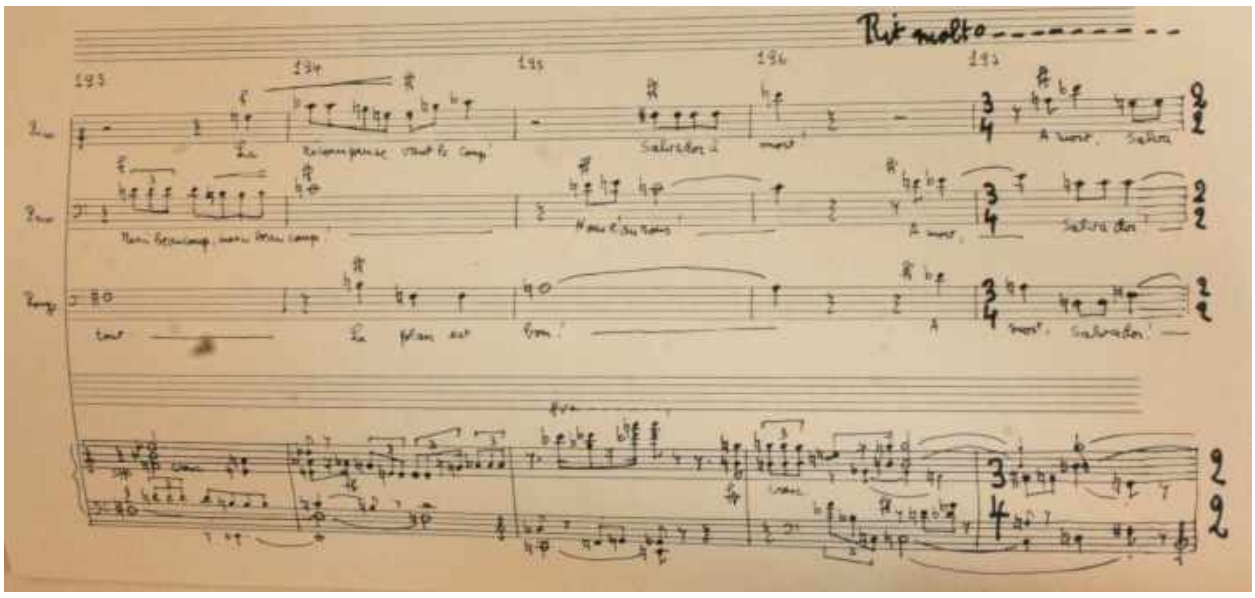


Example 2. Leibowitz, *Todos caerán*, orchestral score: Act I, Premier Tableau, Scene 1, bars 44-6.

As a result, characters are most distinguishable in how they relate to the operatic repertoire. Esmeralda is a kind of Donizetti's Lucia, Isabella is an heir of Puccini's Tosca, Carlos a grandson of Beethoven's Florestan, Salvador a tenebrous bass much in the fashion of Verdi's Philippe II (see Example 3), and so on.
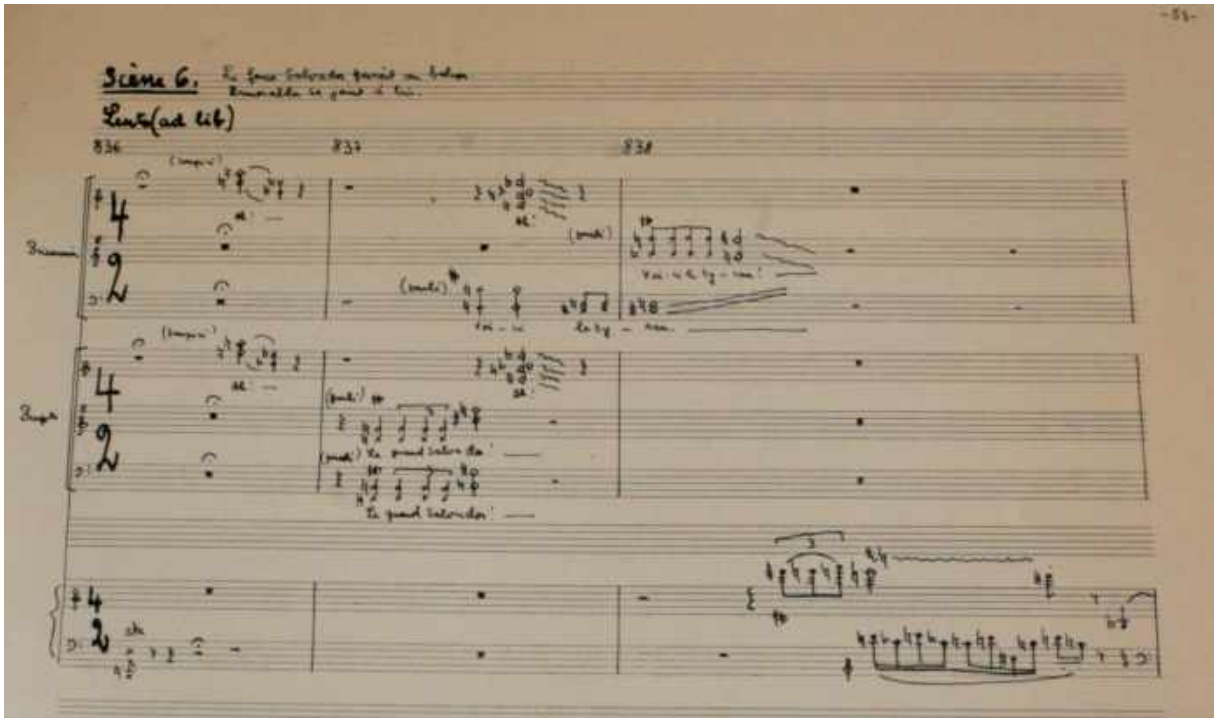


Example 3. Leibowitz, *Todos caerán*, orchestral score: Act II, Premier Tableau, Scene 1, bars 36-40.

This web of classical references is only partially unified by bel canto, for the classical melodic impulse is inflected by Viennese-school features such as huge intervallic leaps (ninths, tenths, and more) and the general avoidance of closure. The only exception is the thematic function of major thirds in the characterization of Pico, Paco and Pongo, as a reminiscence of *Turandot*'s lighter, operetta-like register (see Example 4).



Example 4. Leibowitz, *Todos caerán*, vocal score: Act I, Premier Tableau, Scene 2, bars 193-7.

As to the crowd scenes, their dramatic importance and atonal style might evoke Schoenberg's *Moses und Aaron*. Political issues are often mirrored in differentiated writing for the choirs, like the anticlerical stance of the stiff *Requiem* section, and the emancipatory sign of Expressionist outbursts. In the second Tableau of Act I, though, when Salvador is at the height of his power, the prisoners who denounce the tyrant and the people who praise him are musically indistinguishable, as if to underline the fundamental political ambiguity of the masses (see Example 5).



Example 5. Leibowitz, *Todos caerán*, vocal score: Act I, Deuxième Tableau, Scene 6, bars 836-8.
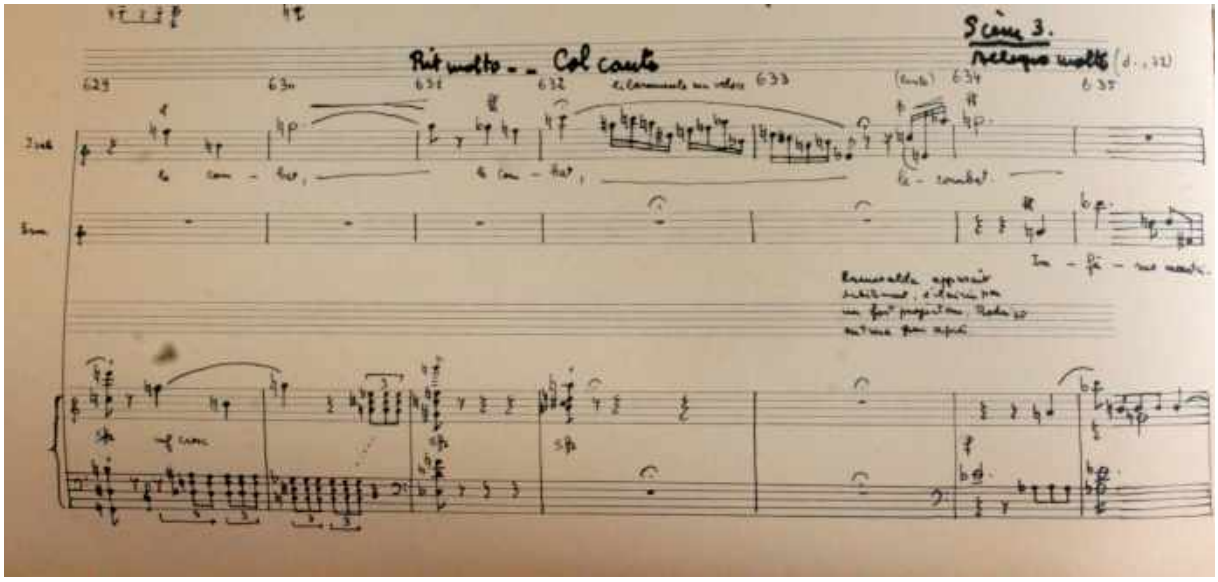
* * *

René Leibowitz once noted that "more than anything else, operas are made out of operas" (Leibowitz 1970). According to Jan Maguire, in *Todos caerán*

> references to traditional opera are intended as parody, but they are also intended in a broader sense to imply all opera itself, not only its passions but also its structure, its existence, and to stand it up against the absurdity of the contemporary political situation, and the pathos of humanity" (Maguire 1980: 10).

Parody, here, should not be taken as designating humour, but rather cross-relationships between genres. *Todos caerán* is a dodecaphonic *grand opéra*, and also a parody of *grand opéra*, in part precisely because it is dodecaphonic. If the suspension

of collective action to leave room to *bel canto* solos gives *grand opéra* its characteristic dramatic thrust, *Todos caerán* seeks to achieve the same thing by way of dodecaphonic *bel canto*, as when Isabella's vocal line hints chromatically at C major, on the words "*le combat*" ("the fight"; see Example 6).



Example 5. Leibowitz, *Todos caerán,* vocal score: Act II, Deuxième Tableau, Scene 2, bars 629-34.

Now, the three CIA characters, who might also evoke the Marx brothers, introduce a comic dimension that differs from the tragic spirit of, say, Auber's *La muette de Portici* (1828), the paradigmatic example of *grand opéra* which also tells the story of a revolution. It cannot be discounted that Leibowitz had in mind pieces like Offenbach's *La Périchole* (1868), an *opéra bouffe* that features a strange Viceroy from Peru and his unsubordinated mistress. Even if *Todos caerán* is very far from Offenbach, the sinister Salvador is literally a *dictateur d'opérette,* an expression that in today's French language does not allude to opera, but rather to actual authoritarian leaders, fond of theatrical apparatuses and phony gesticulations. Maybe Leibowitz wanted to write a satire of the Revolution, as a way to express his skeptical views on Revolution itself. And, contrary again to *grand opéra,* whose subjects were past events that required interpretation in order to relate to the present of the audience, he meant to address current political issues, revolution in Latin America being at the time a hot topic of public debate.

At the same time, as a man overtly hostile to *art engagé* and socialist realism, he did not try to intervene directly in the political arena, as in a kind of *agitprop*. This was coherent with another aspect of the *grand opéra* tradition. "With its sympathetic, heroic

rebels", writes Peter Mondelli, "French grand opera thus presented something seemingly implausible: an officially sanctioned portrayal of historical events running contrary to the beliefs and desires of the ruling classes" (Mondelli 2013: 41; see also Fulcher 1987). But while the nineteenth-century ruling classes had efficient ways to neutralize these works' subversive potential, the ruling classes of Leibowitz's world, i.e. the French intellectual elites, were more prone to sympathize with rebels than with officials, and this he shared with friends like Claude and Monique Lévi-Strauss, Michel Leiris, and also Antoinette Molinié. By the way, it is ironic that Lévi-Strauss accompanied the creative process of a music work so influenced by Sartre, precisely at the time when a public controversy between both intellectuals led the composer to take sides with the first and against the latter.[27] As a matter of fact, *Todos caerán* totally ignores the anthropological specificities of Latin American cultures, starting with the Indians so dear to Lévi-Strauss and Molinié.

Leibowitz's untimely death prevented *Todos caerán* from being considered for production by an opera house. But even before that, prospects for a performance were not very good, as the composer acknowledged in his last letter to Lévi-Strauss. By the time he started writing *Todos caerán,* he couldn't ignore that the exorbitant technical demands of his new score would make a premiere all the more unlikely. Things are not very different today, forty-five years after his death, with Leibowitz trapped in an endless purgatory. Yet the virtual oblivion of this operatic monster can be seen as part of its historical substance. According to Humbert Camerlo - by the time of his friend's death the best candidate to direct the new opera - the composer was prone to disregard feasibility issues out of pure artistic idealism.[28] Maybe this very idealism led Leibowitz to stage his vision of the revolution knowing already quite well that it would be almost as impossible to perform as revolution itself. Far from being a mainstream, conservative project, adapted to the taste of bourgeois opera and opera-goers, *Todos caerán* was an ambitious, challenging project, for the standards of the genre and its political imaginary. This conjecture makes of *Todos caerán* a kind of conceptual work, and puts it in a paradoxical company with the avant-garde the composer was so eager to dismiss while working on his own piece. Pushing this reasoning to its limits, it can be argued that, as an unperformed and unknown *grand opéra révolutionnaire*, René Leibowitz's last opera *is* a work of new music theater.

[27] Leibowitz to Lévi-Strauss, 22 April 1972.
[28] Camerlo, personal communication, 5 August 2017.

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