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ASSOCIATIVE TONALITY AND TONAL-HARMONIC THIRD RELATIONS IN THE INTERPRETATION OF TEXTUAL AND DRAMATIC MEANINGS IN RICHARD STRAUSS'S *ELEKTRA**

Abstract: The subject of research in this paper is the specific manifestation of associative tonality and tonal-harmonic third relations in Strauss's opera *Elektra*. Originating from the analytical discourse of several authors, dedicated to opera and music drama, associative tonality is a dramatic-tonal concept within which a certain key is consistently associated with a specific dramatic element, such as character, collectivity, event, feeling and more. In addition to the strong presence of associative keys related to the dramatic characters, *Elektra* is distinctly characterized by a chromatic and doubly-chromatic third relation that occurs both between chords and between keys. It is important for the harmonic language of the opera that these two types of relations that are formed between keys, at certain moments become more important than the manifestation of one particular key. New achievements in the field of hermeneutic musical analysis represent the initial assumption in this paper, and within these achievements it is possible to talk about the interpretive analysis of harmony as an interpretation of an opera or music drama. The paper aims to examine the ways in which associative tonality, on the one hand, and two types of third relationships between keys and between chords, on the other hand, function as instances of interpre-

* The paper is based on a part of the research conducted in the PhD dissertation of the author. See: Marko Aleksić, MA, *The Role of Harmony in the Formation of a Network of Interpretative Relations in German Opera and the Symphonic Lied of the Second Half of the Nineteenth and the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, Belgrade, 2021 (mentor: distinguished professor Ana Stefanović, PhD).

tation, which would provide a deep or completely new understanding of the elements of dramatic structure.

Keywords: harmony, associative tonality, interpretive analysis, Richard Strauss, *Elektra*, chromatic third relationship, doubly-chromatic relationship.

Theoretical assumptions of associative tonality

The associative use of tonality, simply and more often in recent literature referred to as associative tonality, represents a specific type of semantic manifestation of tonality in opera and music drama, within which a certain key is consistently associated with a specific dramatic element, such as a character, collectivity, event, situation or feeling. The American musicologist Robert Bailey (1937–2012) dealt with this phenomenon most consistently in his work. In his analysis of Richard Wagner's (1813–1883) *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Bailey points to two ways of realizing tonal associativity, from which one can understand the power of its potential within the tonal system of music drama: "First of all, specific melodies or motives can be associated with a particular pitch level; and secondly, a particular tonality can be associated with particular characters or, in the earlier operas, with underlying dramatic themes."¹ Some authors emphasize associative tonality as a concept that is more important for an opera than the melodic representation of the dramatic element, in its usual leitmotif sense, taking into account the premise that "persons and ideas may be associated with keys as well as with tunes. But a focus on tonality rather than on theme draws attention to structure rather than to form."² Although this attitude obviously points to the superiority of tonal associativity over melodic associativity, it is necessary to point out at this moment an important aspect of the relationship between leitmotif and associative tonality. Namely, the leitmotif may or may not be related to associative tonality:³ understood in its basic meaning, as a melodic-rhythmic con-

¹ Robert Bailey, "The Structure of the 'Ring' and Its Evolution", *19th-Century Music*, 1/1, 1977, 51.

² J. P. E. Harper-Scott, "Medieval Romance and Wagner's Musical Narrative in the 'Ring'", *19th-Century Music*, 32/3, 2009, 230.

³ At this point, it seems important to point out that associative tonality signifies a phenomenon that is sometimes called *leittonalität* (leit-tonality) in the literature. In this paper, we opted for the use of the term associative tonality, due to the fact that in the contemporary literature dealing with the tonal system of Wagner's and Richard Strauss' (1864–1949) operas, the term associative tonality is mainly used, but also because in that

figuration, the leitmotif can be in a certain key, i.e. in its “own” key, and in that case both the leitmotif and that certain associative key are referentially connected with the same dramatic element; however, if the leitmotif, as, therefore, primarily a melodic-rhythmic configuration, is transposed into other tonality/tonalities, only the leitmotif will have a referential connection with that dramatic element, but not the key. Very often, the semantic field of associative tonality is extended to certain chords or to certain harmonic functions that can be related to a specific dramatic element. The same thing applies to such an “associative chord”: it can appear in the preferred key (usually it is the key that is either the first in which such a chord appeared, or the one that accompanies the largest number of occurrences of that chord, in the course of the opera), but will have the same associative meaning when it appears in a different key. In the latter case, in order to define the correct meaning of such an “associative chord”, and finally, for the undisturbed auditory perception of this chord, it is usually necessary that the chord itself has a very specific sonority (to mention but an example of the “Tristan chord”, with its characteristic juncture of the French sixth and chromatic suspension, or the “Elektra chord”, with its bitonal pairing of triads). Therefore, Bailey insists that we view associative tonality as a concept that extends its meaning to wider structural units and is often so strong in the overall tonal framework of the piece, that the tonal context of that piece is not only adapted to associative keys, but also formed by associative keys.⁴ Bailey considers associative tonality to be one of the four specific tonal concepts that strongly characterize Wagner’s music (along with classical, expressive and directional tonality) and through which the ways in which the composer uses tonality for narrative purposes are presented.⁵ However, Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, who significantly upgraded Bailey’s theory, emphasizes that of these four concepts, the last three occupy a central place precisely because they are not only tonal but also dramatic-tonal concepts.⁶ In that sense, the dramatic component of as-

literature, in comparison with the one that deals with *leittonalität*, the interpretive potential of such a manifestation of tonality is nevertheless more comprehensively elaborated.

⁴ Cf. Robert Bailey, op. cit., 53.

⁵ Cf. Ibid., pp. 48–61; Robert Bailey, “An Analytical Study of the Sketches and Drafts”, in: Robert Bailey (Ed.), *Wagner: Prelude and Transfiguration from ‘Tristan und Isolde’*, New York, Norton, 1985, 113–146.

⁶ Cf. Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, “The End of ‘Die Feen’ and Wagner’s Beginnings: Multiple Approaches to an Early Example of Double-Tonic Complex, Associative Theme and Wagnerian Form”, *Music Analysis*, III/25, 2006, 321–322.

sociative tonality will be the focus of this paper. Along with Bailey, his student Patrick McCreless and Bribitzer-Stull, many other scientists in the world of music theory and musicology deal with the issue of associative tonality.⁷ Also important is the fact that key associations are largely pre-conceived by composers, which, in addition to studies dedicated to Wagner, is confirmed by those who deal with the operas of Richard Strauss.⁸

Associative Tonality and Tonal/Harmonic Third-Relations in *Elektra*

There is no doubt, therefore, that in Strauss's *Elektra*, which will be in the analytical focus of this paper, there is a manifestation of associative tonality. At the same time, one of the basic characteristics of the harmonic language of this opera is the third-relations, primarily those that are formed between keys, and then those that one can perceive in the relationship between individual chords within one key. There are three types of third-relations in *Elektra*, which are usually found in tonal music: the diatonic, chromatic and doubly-chromatic third relationship.⁹ Of particular importance are the sec-

⁷ Among the authors who wrote on associative tonality are Alfred Lorenz (1868–1939), Carl Dahlhaus (1928–1989), but also Warren J. Darcy, Nors Josephson, Reinhold Brinkmann (1934–2010), Tethys Carpenter, and many others.

⁸ Derrick Puffett (1946–1996) writes on Strauss' *Salome*: "(...) we can see that Strauss was thinking in terms of 'associative tonality', the technique of dramatic key association he had inherited from Wagner. (...) his entire tonal scheme was implicit in his earliest, pre-sketch annotations to the play; it only remained for him to work it out in detail." (Derrick Puffett, *Richard Strauss: 'Salome'*. Cambridge–New York–Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 47). Also, cf. Bryan Gilliam, *Richard Strauss's 'Elektra'*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991, 208, 215.

⁹ The diatonic third relationship is a relationship between two triads whose roots are related by a major third or minor third, and contain two common tones. This relationship is shared by two chords of the opposite mode – one is major triad, and the other is minor triad (e. g. triads of C – E – G and A – C – E, respectively, are diatonic third-related; likewise, triads of C – E – G and E – G – B, respectively, are diatonic third-related, etc.). The Chromatic third relationship is a relationship between two triads whose roots are related by a major third or minor third, and contain one common tone. This relationship is shared by two chords of the same mode – both are major triads or minor triads (e. g. triads of C – E – G and A – C sharp – E, respectively, are chromatic third-related; likewise, the triads of C – E – G and A flat – C – E flat, respectively, are chromatic third-related, etc.). Finally, the doubly-chromatic third relationship is a relationship shared by two chords of the opposite mode, with roots a third apart and no common tones (e. g. triads of C – E – G and A flat – C flat – E flat, respectively, are doubly-chromatic third-related; similarly, triads of C – E – G and E flat – G flat – B flat, respectively, are doubly-

ond and third types of third relationship. Starting from the assumption that the harmonic language of an opera can generally be subjected to hermeneutic musical analysis, we will try to consider the interpretive possibilities of these two specific harmonic concepts – associative tonality, and third-relations between chords and/or keys. These concepts, in addition to being manifested in the usual way – as dramatic-tonal, and tonal/harmonic concepts, respectively – intersect and permeate in a specific way and thus enable the interpretation of dramatic and textual meanings. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to show the full capacity of the associative tonality and third-relations between chords and keys, both understood as instances of interpretation. In other words, the aim of the paper is to point out the ways in which these two concepts provide a deep or completely new understanding of the position of the dramatic characters and different states or feelings in the dramatic course of the opera.

ASSOCIATIVE TONALITY

At the beginning of this analysis, it is necessary to consider the basic aspects of the manifestation of associative tonality in Strauss' opera *Elektra*. The starting premise in this regard is the fact that most of the characters in the opera are related with their own associative key. Thus, among all the associative keys of the characters, E flat major is most strongly affirmed as the associative key of Elektra's sister Chrysothemis. E flat major accompanies most of her appearances in the opera, and the specific strength of that associative key is supported by the fact that in these situations its harmonic content is mostly diatonic, which, given the style and harmonic language of the opera as a whole, can be considered somewhat unexpected. C minor is the associative key of Agamemnon – the father of Elektra, Chrysothemis and Orestes and Klytämnestra's husband – and appears only when a reference is made to him in the dramatic discourse, since this character never appears on stage and since, more precisely, only the dead Agamemnon is relevant to this drama. For this very reason, as we shall see, Agamemnon's associative key will turn out to be the associative key of death.¹⁰ Despite his modest appearance on the

chromatic third-related). Also, these relationships could be shared by two keys, if one of three types of third relationships is shared by tonic triads of those two keys.

¹⁰ While according to some, C minor, as the associative key of death, represents at the same time Agamemnon's key, Bryan Gilliam asserts that C major, which marks the final repentance for the assassination of the king, also can be taken as Agamemnon's proper associative key (cf. Bryan Gilliam, op. cit., 125).

stage, Orestes is an unequivocally important figure in the opera, and it is understandable that he was also “assigned” an associative key – D minor. In this case, too, Orestes’ key appears even when the character is not present on the stage, that is, when he is only referred to in the libretto.¹¹ F major is an associative key of Aegisthus, Elektra’s stepfather, but in that associative meaning F major very rarely appears as a properly affirmed key, established through certain chordal progressions. In fact, only one chord usually participates in appearances of F major, and that chord is a tonic sixth chord. Such a reduction of F major’s harmonic content paradoxically supports its associative capacity, so the occurrences of the tonic sixth chord of this key almost always have a reference to Aegisthus. Although a high degree of agreement can be observed in the theoretical literature on the issue of most associative keys in *Elektra*, in certain cases there have not always been consistent interpretations. Thus, the character of Klytämnestra, the wife of the murdered Agamemnon and Elektra’s mother, is associated with F sharp major,¹² but also with B flat minor.¹³ The latter one can also signify Agamemnon,¹⁴ although, as already pointed out, he is associated with C minor. However, a kind of paradox of the opera’s harmonic language is the fact that Elektra, being the main character, does not have her own associative key, especially if we bear in mind that almost all the

¹¹ Because D minor appears as a key background, and very often as but a chordal background (thanks to the tonic chord of this key) for utterances about Orestes or dramatic situations in which false news of his death was announced (for example, at the moments when Klytämnestra announces that Orestes was killed in exile /rehearsal number 262/ or when Chrysothemis is horrified and shouts *Orestes is dead! /Orest ist tot!*, reh. nr. 5a/bars 3–6/), this key is also considered an associative key of death (cf. Kurt Overhoff, *Die Elektra-Partitur von Richard Strauss: Ein Lehrbuch für die Technik der dramatischen Komposition*. Salzburg: Pustet, 1978, 32; see: Carolyn Abbate, „Elektra’s Voice: Music and Language in Strauss’s Opera”, in: Derrick Puffett /Ed./, *Richard Strauss: ‘Elektra’*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 110). Therefore, it seems that it would be more precise to call this key, in the described situations, the associative key of the alleged death, since Orestes remains alive until the end of the opera.

¹² Cf. Bryan Gilliam, op. cit., 72.

¹³ Cf. Derrick Puffett, “The Music of ‘Elektra’: Some Preliminary Thoughts”, in: Derrick Puffett (Ed.), op. cit., 39.

¹⁴ Of the many harmonizations of the “Agamemnon motive”, for Arnold Whittall the proper harmonization is the one in B minor, which enables the interpretation of this key association proposed in this paper: “One important detail in the Fifth Maid’s defence of Elektra is the appearance of the Agamemnon motive in the ‘correct’ B flat minor area, at Fig. 20.” (Arnold Whittall, “Dramatic Structure and Tonal Organisation”, in: Derrick Puffett /Ed./, op. cit., 60).

other characters have either the proper associative key (Chrysothemis, Orestes, Klytämnestra), or some kind of key associativity (tonic sixth chord of F major, which signifies Aegisthus). Theorists and musicologists mainly see the explanation of this unusual situation in the appearance of a specific chord known as the 'Elektra chord', which in a way compensates for the absence of Elektra's associative key, but also in giving another associative meaning to B flat minor, signifying it as a key which could also refer to Elektra's loneliness.¹⁵

Another kind of manifestation of this dramatic-tonal concept in *Elektra* refers to the associative keys of events, states and feelings. Death is the state and/or the event on which the entire drama in the opera is centered: the dead Agamemnon is almost constantly part of the narrative, Klytämnestra and Aegisthus are punished for Agamemnon's death by their own death, and, finally, the main character, Elektra, also dies herself. In this respect, C minor and E flat minor are largely identified as keys which are associated with death. However, this kind of key associativity can only be spoken of in connection with the concrete death of an individual in the opera. On the one hand, the associative connection between C minor and death in *Elektra* is justified when this key, as it was said, represents (the murdered) Agamemnon, and this connection is very often realized through the appearance of Agamemnon's leitmotif within the arpeggiated tonic six-four chord of C minor. Since it is one of the most important keys in the final part of the opera, appearing almost exactly at the moment when Elektra dies, the C minor can gain the meaning of the associative key of her death. On the other hand, Bryan Gilliam considers E flat minor the associative key of death in *Elektra*, due to the fact that this key signifies not only Orestes' alleged death, announced in the middle of the opera (rehearsal number 262 / bars 5–7), but also Elektra's death.¹⁶ However, Gilliam ignores the fact that at the moment of her death, together with this key, it is the C minor that appears.¹⁷ Unlike these two minor keys, which are associatively connected with death, certain major keys are connected with states or feelings that refer to life, and to all the beauty, passions and emotions that life provides. Thus, for example, Strauss uses E major to express Dionysian, Bacchic, and even erotic feelings in music, which is best represented in the depiction of the menadic state of beings in Elektra's

¹⁵ Cf. Bryan Gilliam, op. cit., 72.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 159, 212 (Gilliam refers here to Strauss's drafts).

¹⁷ See Example 5.

Dance following Aegisthus' assassination (291a/1–221a/1). We can also say that A flat major is an associative key of nostalgia for the past, happy times, bearing in mind, above all, Elektra's soliloquy filled with the nostalgic memory of her father and addressing him as if he were alive,¹⁸ as well as the tonal background of A flat major, filled with diatonic harmonic content, which characterizes that soliloquy.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ASSOCIATIVE TONALITY AND TONAL-HARMONIC THIRD-RELATIONS

Two keys between which the third-relation is apparent – F sharp major, as Klytämnestra's, and D minor, as Orestes' associative key, respectively – appear as a tonal basis for Klytämnestra's utterance in the central part of the fourth scene¹⁹ of *Elektra*, which is entirely formed as a dialogue between her and her problematic daughter (Example 1). The topic of this tense conversation between the two women is Orestes. After Klytämnestra expelled Orestes,

¹⁸ *Let me behold thee, leave me not this day Alone! / But as thy wont is, like a shadow, From / the walls' recesses come to greet thy child! (Ich will dich sehn, laß mich heute nicht allein! / Nur so wie gestern, wie ein Schatten, dort / im Mauerwinkel zeig dich deinem Kind!).* English translation by Alfred Kalisch. Quoted from the vocal score of *Elektra* (Richard Strauss, *Elektra*, op. 58, Klavierauszug von Carl Besl, London – Paris – Bonn – Johannesburg – Sydney – Toronto – New York, Boosey & Hawkes – Furstner, S. a.).

¹⁹ Unlike his earlier musical drama *Salome*, Strauss did not give a division into scenes in the *Elektra* score. The division used in this paper is based on the works of Margery Enix (Margery Enix, "A Reassessment of *Elektra* by Strauss", *Indiana Theory Review*, 2/3, 1979, 33) and Michel Veilleux (Michel Veilleux, „La Structure Dramatique d'*Elektra* de Strauss", *La Scena Musicale*, 6/8, 2001, 5), due to easier navigation in the discourse on the analyzed segments of this musical drama. According to the structuring proposed in the mentioned works, *Elektra* is divided into eight scenes. Enix makes a division by indicating the precise beginning and end of each scene in the score (according to the score numbers and bars within them), at the same time grouping them into a scheme of sonata form. Veilleux, on the other hand, gives names to these scenes according to their dramatic crux, but without precisely positioning the beginning and end of these scenes in the score. Combining these two proposals resulted in the following structuring of Strauss's *Elektra*: first scene (beginning – score number 34/bar 11) – prologue of the maids; second scene (34/12–63/8) – Elektra alone; third scene (64/1–129/6) – Elektra and Chrysothemis; fourth scene (130/1–275/4) – Elektra and Klytämnestra; fifth scene (1a/1–119a/10) – Elektra and Chrysothemis; sixth scene (120a/1–186a/15) – Elektra and Orestes; seventh scene (187a/1–218a/5) – Elektra and Aegisthus; and, eighth scene (219a/1–end) – Elektra and Chrysothemis.

a potential avenger of Agamemnon's death, from the family house of the Atreids, Elektra accuses her mother of doing everything to kill her son, even when he was already in exile. Klytämnestra unconvincingly replies that the exile, in which Orestes still lives, actually saved him. The last in a long series of Klytämnestra's references to her son (*They that roam abroad, what can they harm me?*)²⁰ is given in his associative key, D minor, which is determined through the double appearance of its tonic chord. This key, in addition to representing Orestes himself, also refers to Klytämnestra's obsessive fear that he will return one day. The sudden turn of her discourse, which immediately follows, along with the sudden modulation to F sharp major, has the meaning of returning to her belief that she can be completely safe (*Here I abide and am the mistress.*)²¹ This brief appearance of Klytämnestra's associative key operates not only as a mere affirmation of her utterance in which she confirms herself as someone who has all the power in her hands, but also, to some extent, as confirmation of her peace of mind, which she needs so much at this moment. Thus, the basic semantic level of this tonal relation refers to Klytämnestra's obsession with her son's possible revenge for Agamemnon's death (D minor), on the one hand, and her still quite strong conviction that nothing will happen to her in that regard (F sharp major), on the other. At the same time, but only at a first glance, the latter feeling prevails. However, the third-relation not only exists between the two keys, but is also incorporated into the relations between the chords within both keys, which is confirmed by the multiple appearance of a chromatic third relationship, affirmed by mediant chords and corresponding harmonic progressions. In other words, while the doubly-chromatic third relationship between the two keys symbolically underscores the great distance between Klytämnestra and Orestes, the chromatic third relationships between chords, which fulfil both keys, could be interpreted as confirming the twofold similarity between the two characters: they are not just a mother and a son, but both carry the stigma of a crime. Klytämnestra is the culprit of a crime in the past, and Orestes of one that is yet to come: he is going to kill both his mother Klytämnestra and her lover Aegisthus.

²⁰ *Was kümmert mich, wer außer Haus ist.*

²¹ *Ich lebe hier und bin die Herrin.*

Example 1: Richard Strauss, *Elektra*, reh. nr. 221 / bar 7 – 222/3

(Sehr schnell)
Klytämnestra

wer au ßer Haus ist. Ich le - be hier und bin die Her - rin.
далеко же од куће. Ја живим овде и господарица сам.

p *fpp* *pp*

d: t sm Fis: T f MD D

Let's now consider another possibility of interpreting major third-relations between chords and keys in *Elektra*. At the end of the seventh and at the beginning of the last, eighth scene of the opera, two segments can be noticed that contain progressions of three chords, i.e. three keys, which are arranged in descending major thirds (214a/1–221a/1). Since these progressions represent the harmonic basis of utterances which refer to death in one way or another, the meaning of the associative tonality of death is extended to the entire chord/tonal structure. The first segment is chordal and consists of the triads *F – A flat – C*, *D flat – F – A flat* and *A – C sharp – E*, and forms the succession of the diatonic and chromatic third-relation, respectively. The segment lasts only one bar (214a/1), but its chords appear as a harmonic grounding for a dramatic climax that coincides with the moment of Aegisthus' death, which comes immediately after his death cry *They murder me!*²² (Example 2).²³ The second segment is tonal and is built by three keys – *C minor*, *A flat minor* and *E major* – with quite the opposite succession of chromatic, and diatonic third-relation, respectively. This segment, unlike the former, occupies a much longer section of the musical score (216a/1–221a/1). The chordal/tonal progression of that segment accompanies the utterances of Aegisthus, Elektra and Chrysothemis, which intersect in a dramatic moment:

²² *Sie morden mich!*

²³ Since it is not possible to establish one consistent key in this segment, the three chords in the example are not marked with the usual harmonic figure, but with a letter mark. The lowercase letter denotes the minor triad (*f* = *F – A flat – C*), and the capital letter – the major triad (*Des* = *D flat – F – A flat*; *A* = *A – C sharp – E*).

when asked by the mortally wounded Aegisthus – *Do none hear me?*²⁴ – Elektra answers victoriously, but sarcastically – *Agamemnon hears thee!*;²⁵ Aegisthus immediately after that dies with the last cry to which no one will respond – *Woe is me!*;²⁶ finally, Chrysothemis, as if nothing had happened, is undisguisedly delighted after meeting her brother again, who, she thought, would never return from exile – *Elektra, Sister! Come with us! O come with us! To greet our brother: he is here!*²⁷

Example 2: R. Strauss, *Elektra*, 213a/8–214a/1

(Schnell)
Aegisth
Sie mor - den mich!
Убише ме!
VI.
Alle Streicher
ff col 8va
ff
fis: D⁹
f Des A

In these two segments, there are a total of six different keys or potential keys, of which only one, C minor, is associated with death. At the same time, this associative meaning is expanded from the C minor to the intertwining of chord and tonal relations previously described, and this expansion is a result of the specific interaction between the musical and textual levels. Since the utterances about death prevail in the given discourse and since there is a kind of absolutization of death in this part of the opera – because, in a way, all actors are connected with death, even those who are loosely associated with it – C minor as an associative key of death and the tonal accompaniment of one

²⁴ *Hört mich niemand?*

²⁵ *Agamemnon hört dich!*

²⁶ *Weh mir!*

²⁷ *Elektra! Schwester! komm mit uns! O komm / mit uns! es ist der Bruder drin im Haus!*

part of this discourse of death, extends the meaning of death to the major third-relation which exists between these three keys and three chords, respectively, which accompany the moment of Aegisthus' murder. Let us remember, death is the basic meaning of Elektra's and Aegisthus's utterances, but not Chrysothemis', which is almost completely independent of the other two utterances and speaks of the happiness of Agamemnon's children who finally gathered. Chrysothemis, who is almost the only person involved in the family tragedy to be an opponent of violence and death, announces that Orestes is at home and invites Elektra to join them. Since Orestes came to his parents' house primarily with the task of killing his mother and stepfather, from this call to Elektra one concludes that all three of Agamemnon's children should be part of the same discourse, the "discourse of death". Elektra as the inspirer of revenge and Orestes as its executor are, of course, part of that "discourse", but that, until this moment, could not be said of Chrysothemis. The possibility of this "new" Chrysothemis being perceived was achieved, therefore, through the proposed harmonic interpretation of the textual meaning: Chrysothemis, in a way, admits to herself, without ever saying it, that she is also part of the general environment of death, which, at the same time, led to a different understanding of this character's position in the opera. Namely, the lack of her reaction to the death of her mother and stepfather is more than symptomatic and can be justified only by the fact that she shares the same urge for vengeance with her brother and sister. This interpretation is additionally supported by E major as the tonal basis of her utterance. E major fully assumes the role of her associative key, E flat major. This is confirmed by the almost completely diatonic harmony of E major, which is also quite consistent with the predominantly diatonic chords that characterize her associative key. However, if we add to this the associative meaning of E major, which refers to Dionysian feelings in the opera, as it was pointed out earlier, the ground for understanding a different Chrysothemis has been fully prepared.

The keys organized in the mediant circle²⁸ of minor thirds significantly contribute to the interpretation of Chrysothemis' appearance in the third scene of the opera. This circle begins and ends in her associative key, E flat major, and at its end a relative key appears once more, so the following sequence is formed: E flat major, G flat major, A major, C minor, E flat major,

²⁸ Cf. Dejan Despić, *Harmonija sa harmonskom analizom*, Beograd, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2002, 155, 212, 364.

and C minor (75/1–78/5). One can easily observe that this part of the dialogue between the two sisters, Chrysothemis and Elektra, is based on consistent third relations between keys. In contrast to some previously described situations, the progression of keys in this case has not been based on a specific type of third relationship, because all three types are observed: diatonic, chromatic and doubly-chromatic third relationships. The simplest of these types of relationship, the diatonic third relationship, still has a certain advantage over the other two, given the fact that E flat major and C minor, which – as relative keys – form this type of third relationship, are the only ones to appear twice and the only ones are confirmed by cadences, almost traditional ones (complete cadence in E flat major, in 75/4-8; melodic close and also complete cadence in C minor, in 77/8-78/5). Such a concept of a given segment of the third scene, within which there is a division into a more stable part (relative keys confirmed by cadences) and a more unstable one (mediant circle of keys, which includes both chromatic and doubly-chromatic third relationships), supports the dramatic and textual meaning, which is also articulated at two parallel semantic levels. On the one hand, the general dramatic profiling of Chrysothemis' character, as a counterpoise to Elektra's character, emphasizes the former as a mentally more stable, life-optimistic and, in general, cheerful person in relation to her sister. This is supported in the music by the predominantly diatonic harmonic content of all participating keys, and primarily by her associative key. On the other hand, in this situation, Chrysothemis does not refer, as she often does, to the happiness of life, but expresses doubt as to whether that happiness will ever really come into her life. This skepticism, deciphered from her figurative speech about her mental anguish,²⁹ is crowned by an allegory of the doubt that she will never actually become a mother, as indicated by the phrase about an empty room, empty probably because there is no baby and its cradle, about which she has been dreaming for so long.³⁰ The mediant circle of keys, empowered with the affirmation of all types of third relationships, is precisely the support for this kind of doubt she is talking about.

²⁹ *Within me burneth all my Soul, / It drives me aye to roam the house distraught; / In hall nor chamber find I rest; I must / From one for corner to the other ah! / From roof to vault I seem to hear voices... (Ich hab's wie Feuer in der Brust, / es treibt mich immerfort herum im Haus, / in keiner Kammer leidet's mich, ich muß / von einer Schwelle auf die andre, ach! / treppauf, treppab, mir ist, als rief' es mich...).*

³⁰ *... and when I seek them, See I bare rooms staring / At me. (...und komm ich hin, so stiert ein leeres Zimmer / mich an.).*

C minor and E minor have significant interpretive potential, and they are marked as keys that are associatively connected with death and which, at the same time, are chromatic third-related. That associative role of the former key is affirmed mainly through the “Agamemnon motive”, which in most cases is based on its tonic triad; likewise, the latter key is associated with death, due to the fact that at the moment of Elektra’s death, in the final bars of the opera, its tonic triad appears. At the very end of the opera, there is a specific interaction of these two keys, so they, reduced to their tonic triads, form a dramaturgically tense final cadence, when Elektra, exhausted by dance, falls dead (Example 3). However, the moment of her death, marked by the tonic chord in E flat minor, is expressively overpowered in the music itself, because in the last bars of the opera there is a sudden change from the triad *E flat – G flat – B flat* to the major triad *C – E – G*. Tethys Carpenter called this quick shift of chords a “brutal juxtaposition”³¹ of two keys, which can be taken as the true climax of the opera. Not only is the chromatic third relation transformed into a doubly-chromatic one, but this transformation is the result of a modal interchange, whose effect on both associative keys of death spreads throughout the opera, and is embodied only at its end. On the one hand, E flat minor at the end of the opera signifies the transformation, that is, the simultaneous harmonic and meaningful mutation of E flat major, the associative key of Elektra’s sister Chrysothemis. Various explanations for this modal interchange have been offered in the literature. Thus, Bryan Gilliam considers this procedure a natural consequence of the relationship in which two keys, E flat minor – a key that signifies an *alleged death*, i.e. Orestes’ “death” earlier in the opera – and E flat major – a key which, in addition to referring to Chrysothemis, also signifies a strong *desire for life* – must eventually be followed by the recurrence of E flat minor, but which will then signify the *actual death*, in this case, Elektra’s death.³² Lawrence Kramer, however, interprets this “reversal” of E flat major into E flat minor at the moment of Elektra’s death as a sign of her “scourging”, less because of her incitement to the murder of her mother and stepfather, and more because of her desire to involve her sister in this vengeful endeavour, in which she herself and their brother already participate.³³ On the other hand, C major in the Dance appears, as we

³¹ Tethys Carpenter, “The Musical Language of ‘Elektra’”, in: Derrick Puffett (Ed.), op. cit., 103–105.

³² Cf. Bryan Gilliam, op. cit., 231.

³³ Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, University of California Press, 2007, 198.

shall see, as the associative key of Elektra's triumph and, at the same time, as the associative key of the triumph of vengeance on Agamemnon's murderers and the restoration of the old order. Therefore, the triad $C - E - G$ at the end of the opera is a sign of the transformation of C minor, the associative key of Agamemnon's death, into C major, the associative key of triumph, more than it is the chord whose significance is exhausted in the rapid, "brutal juxtaposition" of the two keys, which Carpenter speaks of.

Example 3: R. Strauss, *Elektra*, 261a/13–262a/10 (the end of the opera)

(Sehr schnell) allmählich breiter

Chrysothemis

O - rest! Opećme! O -

pp *ff* *mf*

es: t → c: t

7 *ritard. molto* **langsam**

Chry. rest! Opećme!

dim. *f* *p* *molto cresc.* *ff* *fff*

c: t P⁷ D⁷ T → es: t C: T

One can observe two levels of interpretation in this. Within the first of these, the chromatic third relationship between two minor keys, as associative keys (chords) of death, is also articulated as the relationship between Agamemnon and his daughter, who acts as the crucial person for taking revenge on Agamemnon's murderers.³⁴ This interpretation comes to the fore at the very

³⁴ It should also be noted that Tethys Carpenter believes that these two tonalities reflect "the dark side of Elektra's character" (Tethys Carpenter, op. cit., 105).

end of the opera, where the E flat minor is manifested as the associative key of Elektra's death, and the C minor becomes completely established as the associative key of Agamemnon's death, while the latter also achieves the meaning of ultimate vengeance for the king's murder. In the second, more complex level of interpretation, these keys are subjected to a modal interchange, which bears both harmonic and meaningful transformation, the latter being even the stronger one. Namely, the double modal interchange between the existing associative keys – E flat major into E flat minor, and C minor into C major, respectively – is intertwined with the establishment of a new semantic layer derived from the primary semantic configuration, according to which the modal interchange from the major key into the parallel minor key has the meaning of “darkening”, as well as the modal interchange from the minor key into the parallel major key has the meaning of “enlightenment”: through the modal interchange from E flat major into E flat minor, life was “undone” into death, and through the modal interchange from C minor into C major, death was “defeated” by life, symbolically in the last bar of the opera.³⁵ In this way, the chromatic third relation between the chords and between the keys is intersected with the modal interchange, which resulted in the specific interpretation of the relationship between life and death at the end of the drama. Life in happiness, which, after a series of tragedies, the surviving characters deserved in one way or another, triumphs over death. More precisely, it triumphs over all the deaths that fate assigned to the house of the Atreids – over Iphigenia's, Agamemnon's, Klytämnestra's, Aegisthus' and, finally, Elektra's death – and such a new, promised life, which we can only assume, but which the opera did not “reveal”, is confirmed by the final C major.

The last scene of *Elektra* (219a/1–262a/10) is defined by a specific tension between C major and E major, two keys between whose tonic triads a chromatic third relationship is formed. The specificity of this tension is justified by several factors. Namely, C major functions as the principal key of the scene, and E major as its secondary key, with the scene beginning in E major and ending in C major.³⁶ Then, these are the main keys of Elektra's Dance, the most significant part of this scene. Finally, the associative status of C major as

³⁵ A similar associative meaning of C major is already formed in the sixth scene, which will be discussed later.

³⁶ In this sense, the factual existence of two tonic chords gives room for the interpretation of harmonic structure from the aspect of a specific theoretical-analytical phenomenon known as the *double-tonic complex* (cf. Robert Bailey, “An Analytical Study...”, op. cit., 121–122, 125–126, 134; Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, op. cit., 324).

the key of Elektra's triumph, which has gradually been formed during the course of the opera, gained its superstructure at the very end of the opera, by forming an interpretation according to which C major can become an associative key of restoration of the old patriarchal order,³⁷ and for this restoration the preconditions were the deaths of Klytämnestra and Aegisthus. However, the triumph of that order was ensured by the fact that, in the end, Elektra sacrificed herself in some way.

In his analysis of the harmonic structure of *Elektra*, Gilliam argues that the final scene of the opera was organized both as an "extended conflict" between these two tonal centers, and as their intimate binding together.³⁸ It is precisely from the contradiction that exists in the relationship between the "conflict" of these two keys and their "binding together" that our interpretation will emerge, as a kind of hermeneutic superstructure of this statement of Gilliam's. Thus, we will understand intimate binding together as a consequence of the existence of the almost identical harmonic content in these two keys, which is represented by tonic triads and dominant seventh chords in long durations, and especially by the specific harmonic progression of the diminished seventh chord of VI#,³⁹ and the dominant seventh chord (Examples 4 and 5). However, we will understand "conflict" as muted rather than extended, due to the described similarity between the harmonic contents of these keys. Based on that similarity, it is much easier to emphasize the contrast that results from the chromatic third relationship between the tonic triads of these keys, all the more because these two keys do not follow each other at any point in the score. The semantic spheres of the two keys reveal an even greater contrast if we take into account the passages in which here, as well as the previous parts of the opera, these keys represent the tonal ground of the utterances of certain characters. On the one hand, C major, represented by a tonic chord of unusually long duration, serves to justify Elektra as the passionate instigator of blood vengeance on Klytämnestra and Aegisthus.⁴⁰

³⁷ Cf. Bryan Gilliam, op. cit., 125. The associative relation between C major and the order, that is, between this key and the establishment of balance after a certain tense state has been noticed in numerous other works by Strauss.

³⁸ Ibid., 101–102.

³⁹ This harmonic figure refers to the sharpened VI scale degree, also figured in theoretical literature as VI#.

⁴⁰ Arnold Whittall correctly interprets this new dramaturgical position of Elektra at the very end of the opera: "Elektra's principal quality is not that she is 'good' but that she is completely free of guilt." (Arnold Whittall, op. cit., 61).

Elektra sees such a legitimization of this crime in the perception that, with her sister and brother, she approached the gods (*We, we who accomplish, we are with the gods.*)⁴¹ and, moreover, that they, Agamemnon's children, became equal to the gods (*Sie fahren dahin wie die Schärfe des Schwerts / durch uns, die Götter. [They go on their way, like a two-edged sword, / The gods through man's soul]*, Example 6), and consequently, a crime in the name of divine justice can be forgiven.⁴²

Example 4: R. Strauss, *Elektra*, 239a/1–4

(Sehr bewegt und schwungvoll)
Chrysothemis

Hörst du's nicht? Gut sind die Göt-ter, gut!
Зар не чуеи? Добри су богови, добри!

Elektra

Fin-ster nis ge-sät- und ern-te Lust ü-ber Lust. Ich war ein
Таму сам посејала и жањем радост над радосту.

p *p* *cresc.* *espr.* *p*

C: D⁷ -VI<⁷ D⁷ VII_B⁷ D⁷

<T>

Example 5: R. Strauss, *Elektra*, 247a/4–7

(Etwas breit und wuchtig)
Pauken

f *cresc.* *ff*

E: T — ⁶-VI<² D⁷ -VI<⁷ D⁷ -VI<⁷ D⁷

<T/D ostinato>

⁴¹ *Wir sind bei den Göttern, wir Vollbringenden.*

⁴² Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929), whose prose text Strauss used as the libretto for his opera, refers here to the myth of Elektra, in which it is told that revenge on Agamemnon's murderers is in the hands of the god Apollo.

Example 6: R. Strauss, *Elektra*, 236a/1–237a/4

Sehr bewegt und schwungvoll
Elektra

Wir sind bei den Göttern, wir Vollbringen.
 Ми, који смо уз богове, ми одлучујемо.

VI. *cresc.*

ff *fp*

C: T
 6 <D>

Elek. - gen-den. *8^{va}* Sie *8^{va}*
 Onu

VI. *cresc.* *ff* *p*

9 <D> <T>

Chrysothemis

Al-len sind die Ge-sich-ter ver-wan-delt.
 Свима су лица преображена.

Elek. fah-ren da-hin wie die Schär-fe des Schwerts durch uns, die Göt-ter,
 иду, као са оштрим мачевима, на нас, богове,

mf *pp*

T VII⁷_D K⁶₄ -VI<⁷ D⁷
 <T> <D>

As it was pointed out, the meaning of C major as the key that signifies the triumph of life over death is gradually formed during the opera, primarily through the relation of this key its parallel minor, i.e. C minor, as the key of death. One can recall, C minor appears in the seventh scene (187a/1–218a/5), at the moment of the murders of Klytämnestra and Aegisthus, but even before that, in the sixth scene (120a/1–186a/15), when Klytämnestra hears the whispered news about Orestes' death, which much later will turn out to be an alleged death. However, the appearance of C major later in the sixth scene, when Orestes, on returning to the family house, convinced the sisters that he was still alive, empowered the mentioned associative meaning of this key. On the other hand, E major is characterized by an internal conflict that also reflects the conflict between the sisters. In this key, there are two cadences at the ends of the utterances of Elektra and Chrysothemis, respectively, but those cadences end at different pitches and different chords, which further emphasizes the interpretive potential of the key itself. The world of the gods about which – each in her own way – Elektra and Chrysothemis sing, at this moment seems to be the only point of concord between the two. After the revenge she was intent on taking, practically with her whole being, following her father's death, Elektra becomes convinced that her life has achieved its goal and is – one can freely say – taken to the world of the gods. This was declared in her words that all three of them – Elektra, Chrysothemis and Orestes – are with the gods (*sind bei den Göttern*), and was then confirmed by her next utterance that *Love destroyeth, but no man can go the appointed way, / that love hath never known!* (246a/2–247a/1),⁴³ obviously referring to the “other” world which she will soon join. The end of Elektra's utterance is adequately accompanied by a harmonic cadence on the dominant chord of E major, i.e. by the melodic cadence on the dominant pitch of the same key (Example 7, bar 3). Chrysothemis, for her part, celebrates joy, but not because of the victory of justice, but because of the end of her and her sister's actual captivity, because of the forthcoming meeting with her brother in freedom and, above all, because of the promised life in happiness she believes is about to come. Her cadence coincides with the orchestral one, but in terms of harmony and melody it is opposed to Elektra's cadence and is on the tonic chord of E major, i.e. on the tonic pitch of the same key (Example 7, bar 5).

⁴³ *Liebe tötet, aber keiner fährt dahin / und hat die Liebe nicht gekannt!*

Example 7: R. Strauss, *Elektra*, 246a/7–247a/1

(Immer lebhafter)
Chrysothemis

Elektra

E - lek - tra, ich muß bei mei - nem
Elektra, ja морам уз свој

Lie - be nicht ge - kannt!
љубав није познао!

f *p*

E: D⁷

4 Chry.

Etwas breit und wuchtig

Bru - der stehn!
брата да станем!

rit. *f*

D⁷ <T> S T

E major and C major are also the main keys of Elektra's Dance, the dramatic segment positioned at the end of this opera. Before we look at the interpretive capacities of the third relationship between these two keys, we will look at the dramaturgical features of the Dance. Namely, Gilliam points out that Elektra's dance is a combination of two types of dance, a monadic, solo dance, and also an ecstatic Dionysian dance, on the one hand, and a round, group dance, on the other hand. Her menadic dance is the "dance of transcendence", the dance of her "personal ecstasy", which is the "primary vehicle for her catharsis",⁴⁴ while the group dance as "[T]he triumphant round dance symbolizes restored social harmony after the socially dissonant elements – Klytämnestra and Aegisthus – have been removed. After the murders, the

⁴⁴ Bryan Gilliam, op. cit., 226–227.

solitary Elektra wishes to join the group and the community at large. Her dissolution as an individual is achieved through the social gesture of the round dance”.⁴⁵ However, as Elektra never joins the group, she actually dances a solo menadic dance; she only talks about the round dance, but does not perform it in reality, so this ritual “only takes place in her mind”.⁴⁶ Whether they were realized in reality or in her imagination, Strauss gives a description of both types of dance, where in one sketch he determined E major for the menadic dance, and C major for the round dance.⁴⁷ In this way, Elektra’s Dance functions in a dichotomy between E major, which reflects the “bacchic impulse of cathartic celebration”, and C major, which symbolizes “victory and the restoration of order”.⁴⁸ From the perspective that one could establish in the sequence of events in the tragedy of Elektra’s family, this order is not really old, but a new order, established by her father Agamemnon.⁴⁹ This means that the conflict between Elektra and her mother is essentially based on a different value attitude towards different views of the family order: what is an old order for Elektra is a new order for Klytämnestra, and vice versa. E major and C major in this interpretive play represent keys that are very similar in their chord fund (mutedness of the conflict), while semantically they are quite distant from each other, which is partly due to the chromatic third relationship between them (the essence of the conflict). With the approach to the end of the opera, C major prevails and its status as the associative key of Elektra’s victory over Klytämnestra and Aegisthus is confirmed.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 227.

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 227.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁹ Agamemnon, with the halo of the winner of the Trojan War, brings Cassandra, the captured daughter of the Priam, the king of Troy, who becomes his legal mistress. In that way, he actually destroyed the previous order and, thus, established a new, significantly modified kind of patriarchy. For Klytämnestra, this meant that she was no longer the only one, but just one of the several legitimate wives of her husband. However, Agamemnon’s series of crimes – the sacrifice of Klytämnestra’s beloved daughter Iphigenia (cf. Наташа Глишић, *Електра као цивиљни*, Бања Лука, Академија умјетности у Бањој Луци, 2006, 104–105), as well as the murders of Klytämnestra’s first husband and children from that marriage (cf. Stephen A. Black, “‘Mourning Becomes Electra’ as a Greek Tragedy”, *The Eugene O’Neill Review*, 26, 2004, 174) – decisively shaped Klytämnestra’s decision to kill him out of revenge.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to point out the ways in which two specific harmonic concepts that characterize Strauss's opera *Elektra* – associative tonality and chromatic, i.e. doubly-chromatic third relationships between keys and chords – permeate and thus enable the interpretation of different dramatic and textual meanings. Essentially derived from a solid tonal milieu, these concepts indirectly confirm the tonal framework of the opera and show that the often mentioned ideas about “modernism” and the non-tonal conception of its harmonic language have no significant foundation. Observed even in the domain of purely musical meaning, chromatic and doubly-chromatic third relationships between keys, show a significant interpretive potential, standing out as semantically more important than one particular key. This leads to the conclusion that the *relationship between keys* in certain parts of *Elektra* is more important than *one particular key*, and sometimes more important than the manifestation of associative tonality. However, in this opera, the reverse relation is at work, so the meaning of the associative tonality can be extended to the entire tonal, i.e. chordal layer, which is defined by chromatic and doubly-chromatic third relations. Comprehended in that way, these concepts enable a new kind of interpretation of the textual meaning in *Elektra*. Thanks to the harmony that interprets the drama, the antagonisms between the two characters are seen from a different, new perspective, revealing deeper layers of similarities between those characters. The chromatic third relationship between the chords and keys permeates with the modal interchange and results in a new understanding of the dialectic of life and death at the end of *Elektra*. In the end, we can say that the proposed interpretive model, which functions as a specific interweaving of ambiguous capacities of one dramatic-tonal concept and one special relationship between keys and chords, respectively, turns out to be very suitable for perceiving undiscovered meaning in opera.

Translated by the author

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Summary

This paper starts from the assumption that within the hermeneutic musical analysis it is possible to talk about the interpretive harmonic analysis of a musical work and that the results of such an analysis are inevitable in reaching a comprehensive understanding of a work, especially if opera or musical drama are in question. In the paper the ways are analysed in which two specific harmonic concepts permeate in Strauss’s opera *Elektra*, thus enabling the interpretation of different dramatic and textual

meanings. The first of them is the associative tonality, which functions as an interpretive strategy, however, the expanded field of action of this concept is pointed out in the paper. Going beyond the mere key representation of the characters, the associative tonality made it possible to learn many new meanings and knowledge about those characters and their mutual relations. The second concept refers to the chromatic and doubly-chromatic third relationships that occur between keys, but also those that arise in the relations between chords within one tonality, since these relationships represent one of the most distinctive features of the harmonic language of this opera. Through the multiplicity of manifestations of chromatic and doubly-chromatic third relationships between keys, we can conclude that such relationships between keys in certain parts of *Elektra* are more important than the manifestation of one particular key, and sometimes, more important than the manifestation of associative tonality. The extension of the meaning of associative tonality to the entire tonal, i.e. chord layer, which is defined by these third relationships, has also been noticed, and by means of this extension the chromatic third relationship, and not just a certain key, becomes semantically connected with death. The textual meaning has been interpreted, according to which Chrysothemis, despite the “external” position of her dramatic character in the opera, which indicates that she is an opponent of violence and revenge, becomes part of the same, “discourse of revenge” together with Elektra and Orestes,. Thanks to the harmony that interprets the drama, the antagonisms between the two characters are seen from a new perspective, revealing deeper layers of similarities between those characters. The chromatic third relationship between chords and between keys permeates the modal interchange and results in a new understanding of the dialectic of life and death at the end of *Elektra*. This is demonstrated by the modal interchange from E flat major into E flat minor, which reveals the meaning that life was annulled by death, but also by the modal interchange from C minor into C major, which has the opposite meaning of the victory of life over death. Both modal interchanges further explain the relationship between Agamemnon and his daughters, after his death. Another third relationship between keys, that between C major and E major, shed special light on the relationship between two such different, yet such close sisters, Elektra and Chrysothemis, and, at the same time, the relationship between Elektra and Klytämnestra, pointing out that precisely through this tonal dichotomy the opposition is reflected between the ways in which the mother and her daughter perceive family order.