

04 2020

FLUX

Libretto

Context | Narrative

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Characters

Agatha

Mary

Power, Prudence, Two Erinyes, A Leader, An Attendant

Setting

Steintheater

Context and Background

Agatha and Mary, two *common* women, are close friends.

What is meant here by ‘common’? We mean that, to a third eye, they appear exactly like the vast majority of other people of their age and background: with common desires, like to have fun; common fears, like to be left alone; and common hopes, like to be happy and satisfied in life.

They are both relatively young, in their twenties. Mary is slightly older than Agatha, maybe 2-3 years older. Seldomly this comes across in her attitude towards Agatha, which can seem almost sisterly at times.

They both live in the same town while engaged in doing different things: after attending primary school together, their lives started taking different directions — they nevertheless always kept close, motivated by mutual affection, a precious sense of familiarity, and fascination deriving from their differences. Mary is now a scribe for teenagers affected by dyslexia, and Agatha is a media artist, working mostly in video, sculpture and sound.

Agatha is on medication for epileptic attacks she’s been suffering from since childhood. Her doctor recently prescribed her with a new, strongly soothing medication, providing a sense of intense physical ease and pleasure, similar to opium.

One afternoon, deciding within split seconds out of pure curiosity and being herself surprised of it, she decides to take ten times the prescribed dose.

It’s Sunday late afternoon, and the medication begins showing its effects while Agatha and Mary are having a walk together. As the dose kicks in, Agatha enters an *altered state of consciousness* ([ASC](#)), which in her case amounts to a psychological, physical and sensorial enhancement. She starts experiencing *visions* — not deformations, additions to reality or imagined things — that is, not

hallucinations, but *visions*: she sees things for what they really are, she sees them further, she sees their *truth*. As these effects and her condition become clearer to her, she understands that a sort of prelude to her life has ended, and that she's actually been waiting for this sensitivity and 'freedom of will' all her life.

Mary's state of consciousness is also altered: understanding the situation and seeing Agatha entering such a strong state, her references are lost as she enters a totally unknown ground. She can only cling to an under-the-skin feeling realising that this new experience is somehow the beginning of a new stage of her life she still cannot imagine. So she can only rely on her instincts, she stops thinking analytically and she only reacts. She lives this state *with* Agatha.

When our consciousness is altered and our own world gets off its usual track, starting to flourish or collapse, under our eyes, we can immediately realise how *central* we are with respect to a world we like to think of as external and ordered beyond our control.

As one's consciousness is altered, nothing else than the alteration *really* matters. *Everything is altered*, from the slightest detail of our own lives to what matters most to us. Everything feels out of its ordinary place. Whether the alteration is chemical/physical/perceptual or linked to values (like a loss, or an event creating profound disillusionment), for as long as our consciousness remains altered *there is nothing else, nothing 'different' from it*.

Our alteration *identifies* our consciousness, and we realise, in those moments, that we are everything there is, the center piece of what we call 'world'.

Agatha's and Mary's altered states of consciousness thus make them archetypes, universal subjects: **the value of what they live — their experiences, feelings and 'revelations' — becomes accessible and valid for us as well, because Agatha and Mary are central like we would be** — because we would experience their visions *in exactly the same way*, if we were to be in their place. We would be in their same position with respect to our own feelings — whatever they might be once altered, they would reveal our world to us like theirs reveal their worlds to them: because we would be the center of the very world that is changing.

Consciousness shifts unveil the one human feature we could say we all have in common, a sort of '*centrality of perspective*'.

In this way, Agatha and Mary can be thought to represent us all, and their experiences, feelings, and decisions, to be not just theirs, but *human*.

In the opera, we are inside *their* world — inside *their altered state*. We are all with them like Mary is with Agatha. The Steintheater and its park are part of their alteration.

The opera begins.



PROLOGUE

(bars 1-36)

Agatha and Mary are walking together, next to each other, along a desert they cannot see the end of. They arrive at the Steintheater, and Agatha stops walking: she recognises in the vault-shaped rock the centre of the earth.

SCENE 1

(bars 37-100)

Framed by the Steintheater, Agatha and Mary sit by a table, playing a weird board game which represents their lives and interactions. As they play they confide to each other, and daringly begin to use a new language.

They finally put together a first composite expression — a sort of formula — in this language (bars 68-73), and they realise they can now use the language to develop rhythms and choruses. As they begin exploring these possibilities, two 'entities' start springing from Agatha and Mary's foreheads — from Agatha's head springs something Agatha interprets as the allegory of Power ('C' Line), and from Mary's head something she interprets as the allegory of Prudence ('D' line).

SCENE 2

(bars 101 – 223)

Power appears to Agatha as a child replicating everything she sees, learning immediately whatever he/she copies and growing in both size and looks unnaturally quick. Prudence instead appears to Agatha as a human with no genitals, no navel and no nipples, holding a mirror facing outward.

Agatha and Mary begin a dialogue with Power. Prudence stands near them by the side, only once trying to intervene.

Agatha and Mary pour out their hearts to that little child (Power), who by the end of the exchange has grown into a middle aged woman. They are drained.

As Prudence takes the word and starts feeding Power with lyricism, Agatha and Mary are left begging: they beg Power to prolong their experience.

INTERLUDE 1

(bars 224 — 263)

Greek Chorus — Agatha and Mary engage in virtuoso choral acrobatics to paint a full picture of the expressive power of their new language.

SCENE 3

(bars 264 — 296)

Agatha and Mary fell asleep for brief moments and are now just waking up, still altered.

Agatha clearly remembers everything that just happened. Mary's memories, on the other hand, are less vivid and more dream-like. Feeling very sensitive, she expresses to Agatha what 'passion' means to her. Agatha immediately understands Mary, marries her ideal and joins her. Their communion is stronger than ever. In Mary's truthfulness, Agatha can recognise — and hear — also the Male Gender ('D' Line). Their voices merge into one ('C' line), resounding around the space, and in perfect unison they bend down to kiss the ground.

SCENES 4 and 5

(bars 297 — 456)

Agatha and Mary still have their lips on the ground when two Erinyes ('C' and 'D' lines) appear behind them.

Agatha and Mary initiate a ritual with the Erinyes, presenting a narrative centred on the capacity of the earth to generate minerals as a cancerous process as well as the essential source of technology.

INTERLUDE 2

(bars 457 — 531)

The end of the ritual — a static re-enactment of the constellation of Ursa Minor.

SCENE 6

(bars 532 — 608)

Agatha and Mary have fallen asleep. A Leader ('C' line) comes forth followed by an Attendant ('D' line).

The Leader begins a fragmented plea, carrying an implicit, crude violence. Now awoken, Agatha and Mary are suffering physically and emotionally at everything they hear, and even more at everything that comes out of their mouths in return. Agatha takes the conscious decision of giving herself up to the Leader, renouncing to fight her and committing to be satisfied with and explore the extreme fascination the Leader produces. Mary, hesitating at first, finally commits and follows Agatha's behaviour.

Agatha and Mary are thus first stripped then nourished by the Leader and the Attendant. Now undressed, we realise their naked skins are beautifully painted. The nourishing is accompanied by chants of glory, lead by the Leader and sang by the four together, forewarning the peak of an already rising tension.

Yet something now flashes in Agatha's mind. She realises that, just like she decided to give herself in — indeed *because* she decided to give herself in, this decision isn't final. She can see more, she can think more, she can consciously choose more.

Her eyes grow calm, secure, strong, somehow ecstatic. She simply starts to fluidly, effortlessly walking ahead in a perfectly straight line. Mary walks right next to her and like her. They keep walking, looking ahead, disappearing into the woods.
