

THE BENEFITS OF USING WORKS ADAPTED FROM EPICS TO OPERAS FOR THE TEACHING OF EPICS

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ABSTRACT

Epics as products of oral literature tradition have found their way into the forms of performance since the disappearance of the epic tradition, opera being one of such forms of performance. Difficulties are observed in the teaching of epics in high-schools because they express the life and times of an era distant from the students' time period. In the teaching of epics, it is possible to make use of multi-dimensional contributions made by an inter-disciplinary learning environment and form an effective learning environment by means of the works adapted from epics to opera. The present paper aims to present the relationship between epics and opera, a short history of opera in Turkey, major works adapted from Turkish and world epics, the benefits of making use of the works adapted from epics to opera, the works of literature and opera with titles, and some ways of making use of them in the teaching of epics.

Keywords: The teaching of epics, opera, effective teaching, inter-disciplinary learning.

INTRODUCTION

It is possible to make use of modern genres of art in the teaching of epics, which are the products of oral culture in which the stories of heroism, natural disasters, wars, immigrations, love and religion as formed in mythological eras and holding a position in the anonymous memory and common emotions of a nation. New forms of performance have emerged since the modern branches of art were developed and made widespread. The topics of epics have attracted attention for such works of art as drama, painting, miniature, and cinema, among which is opera with the works adapted from epics.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

The present study aims to specify the contributions of epics especially in their forms as in the secondary education curricula, and to combine these contributions with the gains of the art of opera so as to present them to learners as the hereditary stock of knowledge. Some difficulties are experienced in the analysis of the texts, as epics tell about the life and times of a period much far from the contemporary period of the learners. For the present study, the epics in secondary education curricula are investigated diachronically and the educational functions of epics are specified. Some major works adapted from Turkish and world epics to opera are also specified so that using opera in the teaching of epics can be facilitated for teachers. In addition, the benefits of making use of operas in the teaching of epics are discussed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Relevant literature was reviewed and major works of opera adapted from epics were found out. The epics from which those works were adapted, the names of their composers and writers as well as the date of their first performance were expressed in tabular form. The outputs of the Epics Era Turkish Literature unit in secondary education Turkish Literature course and the benefits of teaching epics by means of the works of opera were enumerated in a comparative fashion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**Epics And The Art Of Opera**

Epics preserved their importance for centuries for illiterate societies and people as the most important means of public education. It is also noteworthy that the heroes in epics form samples for young people for personality development, moral development, and social development as well as their capacity to present the most beautiful samples of language to be used in mother tongue education. Young people can compare and contrast the birth of the myths in their culture, the reasons for the development of mythological elements, and their importance. Besides, through the development of the values and likes of the era of the epics in their minds, awareness is raised to realize the reflections of epics on the contemporary literature. Epics make it possible for people to reach the subtleties, beliefs and traditions of the culture that they handle and to feel the aesthetic taste. In comparison with the other literary genres, epics possess greater importance in the

dissemination of the national identity, historical understanding, cultural life, way of living, ideals and the aesthetic understanding. They also give spiritual satisfaction to their audience in relation to the success and dignity of their nation, and transfer the common system of values and social conduct as well as the forms of behaviour of the nation (İnce, 2009: 195-200). However, such difficulties are observed in the teaching of the works of youth literature which contain mythological elements. These difficulties are related to epics and include the mentality and tastes framing the era of the epics, the myths, their causes, the birth of epics, and the life of heroes in epics because they are far from the life of the young people.

The fact that literature conveys not only scientific data but feelings and aesthetic taste denotes their position on a common ground with other fine arts. It will, therefore, be meaningful to make use of operas by means of an established inter-disciplinary relationship. For this purpose, Integrated Arts Education Method is used in the United States in art courses (Gökay, 2003: 335). The art of opera was born as a product of the endeavour in which musicians together with poets were involved. The topics and heroes of the early examples of the works of opera were fed by Greek mythology. Since the first opera, *Daphne*, composed in 1594, mythology has been an indispensable source of inspiration for the art of opera. Mythology presents stories based on such basic prototypes as the good, the bad, the lover, etc. and such basic emotions as hatred, enmity, love, etc., which is in line with the operatic tradition. It can be said that the art of opera has shaped its technical conditions according to mythology. For a spectator who has knowledge of Turkish and world mythology, the priority is on the musical quality while he is watching an opera which has borrowed its topic from mythology, because what is told in the work is what the spectator has already acquired. In our age, students should enjoy good education on literature so that the interest in the art of opera and musical appreciation can be enhanced.

Also, because opera is a branch of art born in Italy, the works taking some of the topics and heroes from *Iliad* and *Odyssey* constitute a large part of the list of the works adapted from epics to the opera. This list should undoubtedly feature the four pieces of great work written and composed by Richard Wagner adapting *Nibelungen*. The works handling various sections and heroes of *Kalevala*, a Finnish epic adapted and re-adapted several tens of times at several times, also hold a significant fraction of the list. The number of the works derived from the topics in mythology may count tens of thousands. Today, we have about 70 pieces of work taking *Orpheus*, a hero of Greek mythology, as the topic. The major works taking epics and their heroes are listed in the present study also on the criteria of their frequency of appearance in repertoires. Adaptations provide for a better understanding of both of the works content-wise. It can be seen that some works are loyal to the topic of the epic, some only develop the heroes depicted in the epic, and some re-tell the epic through a different plot. The literary work may differ according to the viewpoint of the author writing the adapted version, the technical qualities of the artistic genre into which the work is adapted, the artistic understanding of the era in which the adaptation is made, the target audience, and economical and technical conditions. However, the technical suitability of the work in adapting the work to opera is one of the most important conditions. As much as the literary works adapted to opera are concerned, Shakespeare is the poet whose works have been adapted to opera for the most part. His works handle the basic and universal human values

and emotions, open wide doors to the imagination of the artist adapting the works for the opera, contain sections almost specially written for music. And, these all bring the highly educated Shakespeare readers to the exquisite musical taste, making the art of opera popular among a large audience. However, despite the availability of over three hundred adaptations from Shakespeare, they hold a minor part in today's repertoires insofar as their success and acceptance by the audience are concerned. The art of opera has accomplished the heavy task of popularizing on stage such literary works as *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Carmen*, *La Dame aux camélias*, *Gilgamesh*, *Ferhat and Shirin*, *Moby Dick*, etc. The works of opera translated into Turkish ensure more efficient results in literature education.

HISTORY OF OPERA AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN TURKEY OPERA

The opera expresses the collaborative form of music, drama, and stage performance. It would be reasonable to take a brief glance at the development of the art of opera in Turkey before continuing with its importance. In the XVIIth century, opera was meant to entertain distinguished class by the narration of elements in rural life. Turkey met the opera as it was described in Ottoman ambassadors' books of the embassy. A foreign opera company performed at the Topkapi Palace in 1797 during the reign of Selim III (Ertekin, 2007: 1-7). An Italian opera company performed *Ernani*, opera by Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi, in Pera, Istanbul, in 1846. Sultan Abdulmecid I watched the first performance of *Il Trovatore* and expressed his appreciation of the singers. Turkish intellectuals were also influenced by the performances of Italian opera companies. Hayrullah Efendi, then a student at Medical School, wrote the libretto of the first Turkish opera, titled *The Story of Ibrahim Gulsheni and Ibrahim Pasha*, during that period. He inserted ghazals instead of arias into the work (Baltacan, 2006: 2-4). Several of Giuseppe Verdi's works were performed at Ottoman Palaces during the second half of the XIXth century, among which was *Attila*, which was greatly liked and then re-performed. An article published in the daily, *Ceride-i Havadis*, informed the public on the subtleties of drama and opera and how they should be watched (Ertekin, 2007: 44-54).

After the proclamation of Republic, Ataturk's reformist policies had their reflections on the opera. The establishment of Ankara School of Music Teaching and Darilelhan in Istanbul formed the early steps of this movement. Italian operatic tradition was taken as an example in the development of opera in Turkey, and Italian teachers were invited for this purpose. Ataturk encouraged and oriented composers and singers in composing and performance of operas. In 1940, music, ballet, and drama departments were opened in the state conservatoire. In 1970, Ahmet Adnan Saygun's *Koroghlu*, the second opera, was staged. State Opera and Ballet was established in Istanbul, Izmir, Mersin and Antalya, in 1970, 1983, 1992, and 1999, respectively.

THE WORKS ADAPTED FROM TURKISH AND WORLD EPICS TO OPERA

Ahmet Adnan Saygun's *Ozsoy*, *Gilgamesh*, and *Koroghlu*, Sabahattin Kalender's *Dumrul the Mad*, and Cengiz Tanç's *Dumrul the Mad* are among the most important Turkish operatic works adapted from epics. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (the first president of Turkey), with his great interest in contemporary arts, had his wish and

encouragement for the composition of the first opera works. The Turkish opera works with topics from epics can be summarized as the following:

Özsoy Opera

An opera composed by Ahmet Adnan Saygun on a libretto by Münir Hayri Egeli, in three acts and twelve scenes. Premiere performance was given in Ankara, 19 June 1934. By Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's wish, the opera was composed to be staged for the Shah of Iran, Shah Reza Pahlavi. It draws from Persian poet Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. The hero fights against the dark and illuminates his people, who, in turn, elect Fereydu as their khan. Fereydu had three sons, called Tûr, Iraj, and Selm, who symbolize Turks, Iranians, and Europeans, respectively. By Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's proposal, Selm was removed from the opera and Tur and Iraj were addressed to as twin brothers, who were sentenced to be apart all their lives long by the wicked god Ahriman. At the end of the work, the poet says, pointing to Atatürk and the Shah of Iran, seated before the stage, "This is Tur, this is Iraj; every Turk is a Tur, and every Iranian is an Iraj."

Koroghlu

First composed, as epic, by Üzeyir Hacıbeyli on a libretto by Mehmed Said Ordubadi in 1937, the Koroghlu opera was staged by Azerbaijani State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre with a collaboration of opera artists from six countries, then re-performed in Bishkek, Almaty, Ankara, and Baku by the contribution of Turksoy Foundation. The epic was composed for a second time under the title of Epic of Koroghlu by Ahmet Adnan Saygun on a libretto by Salahattin Batu, in three acts and eight scenes. Its premiere performance was given in Istanbul, 25 June 1973. Stage director was Aydın Gün, and choirmaster was Gustav F. Kuhn.

Dumrul The Mad

The epic was first composed with the title of Dumrul the Mad by Sabahattin Kalender on a libretto by Suat Taşer in 1958. Later, another adaptation of the epic, composed and written by Cengiz Tanç in three acts and five scenes, was given the premiere performance in 1979. The cast was a heroic tenor acting Dumrul, basso profundo for the Angel of Death, bass for Dumrul's father, alto for Dumrul's mother, and soprano for Dumrul's wife.

Gilgamesh

The epic was first composed by Nüvid Kodallı on a libretto by Orhan Asena in four acts in 1962, and its premiere performance was given in Ankara in 1964. The cast was a bass acting Gilgamesh, soprano for Ishtar, soprano for Me-Liza, baritone for En-Ki-Du. The epic was later re-composed with the title of Gilgamesh by Ahmet Adnan Saygun in 1970 on a libretto re-written.

HOW TO USE THE WORKS ADAPTED FROM EPICS TO OPERAS

The enhancement of the art of opera in Turkey and public interest in it has been rather slow. It has been shaded by such means of communication as television, radio, internet and video, and has not yet reached a desirable level. This artistic genre has had some problems both in itself and between the other genres in Turkey. Among the major problems related to this art in Turkey are the theatre building, stage, training of opera singers, funding, personnel, management, administration and art production (Millard, 2007: 241). These problems heighten the barriers before artistic and aesthetic taste and using it for educational purposes.

In the teacher training programmes at higher education, and whatever the field, arts education should be given due place in the curricula, and teachers should gain a sense of appreciation for all the genres of art. The opera performances in their own or neighbouring cities should be tracked by the course teacher. When there are performances of the works adapted from epics to operas, students should be taken to the performances as a class or extra-curricular activity. Class visits to places outside the cities can be scheduled for the dates of these performances and students from small cities will meet this art. Students' attention is drawn to a set of points before the opera performance. And, after the performance, they will grasp the work and the epic better by means of the questions and explanation by the teacher. Students with no opportunities to view operas or with poor economic conditions can be introduced to operas in classroom settings by means of (maximum) 20-minute sequences depicting scenes drawn from the epics on DVDs or VCD's. These scenes can be matched with the scenes of the operas. Because of the difficulty of viewing an opera performance on the stage in many parts of Turkey, it is essential that DVD's be played in the classroom so that the art of opera and the opera-literature relationship can be introduced.

BENEFITS OF USING WORKS ADAPTED FROM EPICS TO OPERAS

The use of audio-visual artistic aids in education enriches the quality of literature education. Visual works of art elevate a person to a place unattainable in other aids in respect to form, rhythm, shape and colour (Özsoy, 2003: 21). It is essential that arts education be offered not only for aesthetic concerns but for educational purposes as well. The benefits of making use of the works of opera within the outputs of the Turkish Literature course, year 10, can be enumerated as the following:

1. When students read the text of an epic, they come across mythological symbols, epic heroes with extraordinary characteristics, and events taking place at an unknown time, which cause difficulties for them to understand the text. By means of the epic as reflected on stage, those symbols, heroes, and actions become concrete and more easily understandable.
2. The students who watch not only the operas adapted from Turkish epics but from world epics as well will know that the epic era is found in different civilizations.
3. The mythological elements found in epics are expressed in a set plot, in costumes representing that period, and in music. This makes it clear for the students that those elements can only be explained by the characteristics of the period.

4. The plot of the epic can be studied by the students by means of now visualized persons and events, which will make it easier for the students to analyze the symbols.
5. The time in the epic and the expression of time can be conveyed effectively to the students by means of stage make-up, dividing of the plot into different acts, and changes in the stage design.
6. Students can better understand and explain the roles of the characters they observe during the course of the opera.
7. The places depicted in epics can be expressed in operas by means of changing stage design and décor within the same play. In the work of opera, it is possible to meet a stage design totally different from that in its epic. The works of opera endeavour to specify the function of place in the epic and express the place in that aspect. The vast places of the epic are met by a limited stage area for performance.
8. The students, having read an epic, view it on stage in a new plot, dances, costumes, music, mimes, and gestures. In this way, their observation skills, visual and auditory attention and tastes can be improved.
9. Universal values of the human and ethical, psychological, sociological, religious and economical issues are reflected in the works of opera as they are emphasized in their epics. This, in turn, leads to the education of the new knowledge.
10. Students are encouraged to make comparisons, discussion, artistic criticism and comments about the work of opera adapted from an epic with their teachers, friends, and families after the performance.
11. Since the topic of the epic is expressed by means of music, dance and other visual arts in opera, the traces in memory will be more difficult to erase.
12. Students develop their attitude for the adaptation of literature to other genres of art, enhance their intellectual background, and improve their inquiring and critical identities, by discovering the artistic aspect of literature.
13. Students make comparisons between the profile of the hero in the epic that they depict in their mind after reading the text of the epic and the hero of the epic as acting on the stage. They transfer many positive traits of the hero, such as wisdom, courage, braveness, benevolence, and patriotism, into their subconscious; and, they may become parts of their character.
14. Meeting students with the works adapted from epics to operas can contribute not only to their cognitive development but to their sensual, emotional and social development as well.
15. A highly privileged state that might not be found in any other educational settings emerges by means of the opera making use of several artistic genres simultaneously. Especially music attracts students to the subject by means of the magical atmosphere it creates addresses to their soul, and liberates them.
16. When the students coming from small cities and alien to many genres of art are introduced to operas by means of school visits, new artistic and literary dimensions will open in them

CONCLUSION

The works adapted from Turkish and world epics to the opera are effective teaching tools in the teaching of epics and eliminating the difficulties experienced in understanding the time, place, heroes, plot, life and times

and mentality of the epic. By means of an inter-disciplinary learning environment, both academic education (literature education) and arts education can be provided. When the students are given the opportunity to view these works of art during individual or school visits, when short showings are not exceeding over twenty minutes from the DVDs or VCD of opera works are organized in the classroom, the plots in epics will be retained in memory for a longer period of time, and interest in stage arts and music will be enhanced. However, teachers should be informed of major works adapted from epics. In this respect, the list of the major works adapted from Turkish and world epics presented in this study will guide the teachers. The present study is aimed to combine education and art, suggest alternative audio-visual educational settings in the teaching of epics, and contribute to the planning of education that is offered in such settings. In this way, it could be possible to pave way for the research to be done on the use of other artistic genres in the teaching of youth education.

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