

# The Cosmos of Yolante: Knowing Without Seeing

Detlev Quintern

**Abstract** *Yolante*, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's last opera (1891), is based on the lyrical drama *King Rene's Daughter*, written by the Danish writer and poet Henrik Hertz in 1845. It entails layers of philosophical dimensions, which invite to be unraveled while applying the "tools" of the phenomenology of life (Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka) in order to achieve not only a more detailed understanding of philosophical messages in the lyrical drama, but likewise to utilize the phenomenology of life as a starting point for a cross-cultural re-reading of *King Rene's Daughter*. Yolante, the central female protagonist, lost her eyesight at the age of 1 due to a traumatic experience. At 16 she owes the restoration of her vision to the creative interplay of self-knowledge and the communicative forces of life by experiencing the *unity-of-everything-there-is-alive* (A.-T. Tymieniecka), echoing divine love.

The opera *Yolante* belongs to the group of late works by the Russian composer Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) and became the last opera to be premiered in Tchaikovsky's lifetime. Its one-act libretto, written by Modest Tchaikovsky, the composer's younger brother, in the second half of 1891, almost a year prior to its first public appearance in St. Petersburg, is based on Vladimir Zotov's Russian adaptation (1864) of a lyrical drama by the Danish writer and poet Henrik Hertz (1797–1870).

Originally entitled in Danish *Kong Renes Datter*, meaning *King Rene's Daughter*, the one-act verse drama enjoyed such a tremendous popularity following its first publication in 1845 that it was subsequently translated into almost every European

---

I gratefully acknowledge Jana Nittel's indispensable help with the English version of this paper.

D. Quintern (✉)

Director for Development and Training

Prof. Dr. Fuat Sezgin Research Foundation for the History of Science in Islam,

Gülhane Parkı İçi, Eminönü, Fatih, İstanbul 34122, Turkey

e-mail: [cdq@uni-bremen.de](mailto:cdq@uni-bremen.de); <http://detlevquintern.wordpress.com>

language. A German translation was published in Bremen in 1871,<sup>1</sup> in addition to the several English translations, including those by Jane Frances Chapman (1845) and Theodore Martin (1850).<sup>2</sup> With Maude Fealy and Harry Benham in the lead roles, *King Rene's Daughter* was first transferred to the screen in 1913, as a silent film of the same title produced by the New York based Thanhouser Company, one of the first motion picture studios at the time. *Love's Light*, or *Das Licht der Liebe*, a DEFA film produced in German/Czech collaboration in the 1990s presents itself as a more recent rendering, beautifully but firmly turning the original drama into a fairy tale for children.

According to the German language edition of 1871 of *King Rene's Daughter*, Henrik Hertz briefly outlined in an introduction the historical context of his work, which is seemingly set in fifteenth-century Europe: King René of Anjou, the Count of Provence comes to an understanding with Count Antoine of Vaudémont regarding the succession to the Duchy of Lorraine by strategically engaging in political match making. The dynastic alliance between both houses was to be established through the union of King René's daughter Yolande and Count Antoine of Vaudémont's son.<sup>3</sup> Although it has become generally accepted that the story features historically documented figures of the close-knit fifteenth-century European nobility, such as of the Lorraine, the Provence and even beyond, the question of potentially earlier literary precursors to the drama by Hertz, either Provençal or likewise older fictional representations has yet to be settled. Several hints and traces seem however to encourage further research.

In this light, the story of the one-act libretto *Yolanthe* of Tchaikovsky's opera might presumably or probably be based on a scarcely documented narrative of Provençal-Arab origin/nature, its plot almost uniquely predestined to invite an intercultural or cross-cultural reading of the text. Besides its pronounced mystical strand, the libretto offers also a contextualization regarding the history of science, here specifically of ophthalmology, a medical branch dealing with the anatomy, physiology and diseases of the eye, which advanced greatly during the Golden Age of Arab-Islamic sciences. This holds particularly true for Al-Andalus (711–1492), located in close proximity to the South of France, a name that stood synonymously for a peaceful coexistence of cultures and belief systems over extended periods of time and not least therefore fostered significant developments and breakthroughs in the sciences, medicine and philosophy. Even so, while transcending intercultural and/or cross-cultural dimensions as well as representations of the history of science, the libretto *Yolanthe* also stipulates further philosophical and epistemological enquiries into the relationship of knowledge of God, universal knowledge and knowledge of reality in the context of love as motivating and instigating force.

---

<sup>1</sup>Hertz, Henrik, *König Rene's Tochter*, translated into German by Willatzen, P.J. (Bremen: Kühnmann's Buchhandlung, 1871).

<sup>2</sup>Martin, Theodore. *King René's daughter: a Danish lyrical drama*, (Boston: W. Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1850).

<sup>3</sup>Hertz, Henrik, *König Rene's Tochter*, translated into German by Willatzen, P.J., (Bremen: Kühnmann's Buchhandlung, 1871).

Explored on a deeper, in other words, more fundamental and philosophical level, *Yolante* can be described as an exemplary didactic play that invites a cross-cultural re-reading in the context of the *phenomenology of life*, as developed by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka in recent decades.

## **Yolante's Cosmos: Knowing Without Seeing**

Emotional learning, intuition, cognition and applied sciences, in this case, ophthalmology, and finally metaphysics are entwined in the story of Yolante, forming an interwoven web of knowledge. Ultimately it is the conscious love, which enables Yolante to recover her previously lost eyesight. But how does she arrive at such a state or condition, in other words, this conscious love and what are the links between conscious or knowing love and the “science of eyes”, the literal translation of ophthalmology, as practiced by Ibn Yahya, the trusted friend and teacher who Yolante relies on since the early days of her childhood? A brief summary of the plot will support any further attempt to approach these questions.

## **King René's Daughter: The Drama's Historical and Cultural Context**

Yolante, daughter of King René, lost her eyesight during an accident in her parent's castle. While the castle was engulfed in flames, the infant child, wrapped in a pillow, was dropped from one of the castle's windows. Although this brave act spared the life of Yolante, it also left the 1-year-old blinded. At this point the reader is not privy to the specific reasons or causes of the impairment. Shielded from any knowledge of what seeing might be and discouraged to engage in associative contemplations on this sensory mode, the grown-up Yolante remains wholly unaware of her blindness. Since the traumatic events of her childhood she has been placed in the remote and secluded valley of Vaucluse, lovingly brought up and looked after by Bertrand and his wife Martha. King René, her father visits frequently whenever he happens to pass through the area.

Ibn Yahya, in the New York edition of 1867 referred to as a so-called Moorish physician, is a famous Arab scholar whom her father had sent for from Cordoba. As an intimate friend and teacher he not only treats Yolante medically and therapeutically, but provides in addition lessons on music and musical instruments, probably the Arab *Qanun*, a rather popular instrument in Al-Andalus that has found its way to the Provence and on to Europe, before it arrived in the form of the zither in Alpine folk music. Yolante was also trained in poetry, contemporary troubadour songs and lyrical composition; as well as in the natural sciences which is implied through her close knowledge of zoology, botany, and mineralogy. Her teacher emphasizes at one point, the superiority of the laws of nature and, indirectly, the superiority of their

empirical observation over astrological speculation. “Yet the stars [...]. They influence [t]he fortunes of mankind, yet do they not [r]ule Nature’s laws with absolute control.”<sup>4</sup> “Sie (die Sterne, D.Q.) üben wohl auf das Schicksal Einfluss, doch bezwingen sie’s nicht mit Macht und wider die Natur.”<sup>5</sup>

This comprehension of science points also to the prevailing thinking and understanding of science in Al-Andalus, which was undoubtedly guided by ideas regarding the individual’s responsibility for his or her own actions and the desire for acquiring knowledge and insight about the developments of nature. One day, however, the royal messenger, Sir Almerik, announces the visit of the king that is Yolathe’s father and that of the physician, Ibn Yahya, the famous Moor.<sup>6</sup> Ibn Yahya had initially forecast a complete cure of the girl before her 16th birthday, but was dissuaded from his undertaking since he believed that Yolathe’s awareness and recognition of her own blindness was an essential precondition for the restoration of her eyesight. Yolathe “[m]ust comprehend what she till now has lack’d, Must learn this very day that she is blind.”<sup>7</sup> With these very words he attempts to convince King René that Yolathe’s ignorance of her condition will fail to establish, if not prevent the happiness of his daughter. Just this day, for the lyrical drama’s timeline lasts from midday to sunset,<sup>8</sup> in other words on the day which Ibn Yahya suggested to be the day of revelation, two strangers enter the valley. Count Tristan of Vaudemont and his friend, Sir Geoffrey of Orange, himself a famous troubadour, and each slung a zither around their shoulders, gain by chance access to the valley through a mysterious entrance, a moss-covered gate, concealed in a cliff. Once arrived in this heavenly place, Tristan discovers the sleeping Yolathe in her chamber and enthralled by her gracefulness and sweetness, falls immediately in love with her. In vain Geoffrey tries to convince Tristan of the necessity to leave this mysterious and enchanted place. Whilst softly kissing her, Tristan removes the stone that always rests on Yolathe’s chest during her induced sleep. In the past it was only Ibn Yahya who placed the stone on Yolathe in order to transport her into a deep sleep and it was only he that awakened Yolathe by removing it. This task however is now unexpectedly performed by Tristan. King René’s daughter, thus awoken, seems no less impressed by the sight of her two guests and offers wine and fruits as refreshment. At the end of the poetic dialogue that unfolds between the two central protagonists, Tristan overwhelmed by devotion to the beloved Yolathe, decides to abandon his given promise of betrothal to King René’s daughter, blissfully ignorant that she is the very woman he so longingly pursues. In due course he becomes aware of Yolathe’s visual impairment by asking her first for a red and then for a white

<sup>4</sup>Martin, Theodore. *King René’s daughter: a Danish lyrical drama*, (Boston: W. Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1850), p. 27.

<sup>5</sup>Hertz, Henrik, *König Rene’s Tochter*, translated into German by Willatzen, P.J. (Bremen: Kühnmann’s Buchhandlung, 1875), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Hertz, Henrik, *King René’s Daughter: A Danish Lyrical Drama*. Translated by Theodore Martin. (New York: Leypoldt and Holt, 1867), p. 27.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., xiii.

rose as a keepsake. The king's daughter who is yet to learn of the multitude of colors presents him on each occasion with a differently colored blossom. When finally departing the valley in order to rejoin his friend Geoffrey, Tristan vows to return and to win Yolante's affections.

In the fifth scene of the lyrical drama, Martha by returning to the palace makes the startling discovery that Yolante has awakened by herself, an observation the latter strongly affirms. She relates her experience with the two strangers to Martha, a conversation secretly overheard by her father and Ibn Yahya. Soon after King René makes his presence noticed and announces Ibn Yahya with the words: "Thy tutor, *Ibn Yahya*, comes with me".<sup>9</sup> They, too, now officially learn of the appearance of a stranger who has raised her from her slumber and subsequently acquainted her with the knowledge of her blindness. This is the moment that Ibn Yahya had anticipated for Yolante's cure. The ensuing dialogue between King René and his daughter regarding the nature and relationship of seeing and knowledge will be at the centre of a more detailed discussion in the later parts of this article. Tristan, still strongly in love with Yolante, returns. He kindly requests to be relieved from his first promise of marriage and finally discovers that his future wife and the object of his desire are identical. Now the moment of healing as anticipated by Ibn Yahya has finally arrived and Yolante regains her eyesight. Initially overcome by the intense brightness that surrounds her she first lays eyes on her father whose voice she immediately recognizes. Moments later she is frightened by the sudden and unfamiliar sight of the date palm trees, but is calmly consoled by Ibn Yahya. King René blesses the union of both lovers by handing over his daughter to Tristan, who in turn gladly embraces her. In Tchaikovsky's opera, unlike in the numerous literary precursors, two mezzo-sopranos join the stage as Yolante's female friends Laura and Brigitte in the final moments of the opera. Fully aware of Yolante's regained eyesight, Brigitte breaks into a song of gratitude and jubilation: "Heaven, hear mercifully our song of gratitude. You didst send her the light. You didst send her the light. You are omniscient in the smallest things; magnificent just as the water drops, the full sun shines bright..."<sup>10</sup>

## Ophthalmology in *King René's Daughter*

At this point I would like to return to some of the ophthalmological references the text seems to offer. When King René refers to what he has recently read in a book kept in his possession, "[t]hat oftentimes an unsound eye is cured [b]y application

---

<sup>9</sup>Hertz, Henrik, *King René's Daughter: A Danish Lyrical Drama*. Translated by Theodore Martin. (New York: Leypoldt and Holt, 1867), p. 75.

<sup>10</sup>*Jolante*, Lyrische Oper in einem Aufzuge, nach Henrik Hertz 'König René's Tochter von Modest Tschaikowsky, deutsche Umdichtung von Hans Schmidt, Textbuch (Hamburg, Leipzig: D. Rather), p. 40.

of the surgeon's knife",<sup>11</sup> he underlines his knowledge and possession of works on cataract surgery. Ibn Yahya however rejects such a method at this point by responding: "Would aid us little, should I have recourse [t]o instruments".<sup>12</sup> This singular statement equally implies that he is quite familiar with the option of surgical intervention of the eye lens.

Ibn al-Haitham (965–1040/1041), the founder of modern optics, developed a theory of seeing or visual perception which explored the theories of light in relation to the structure of the eye and the transmission of visual perception to the brain, thus correcting classic misconceptions. By doing so he revolutionized the understanding of how human vision operates as well as of the movements of light. The awareness of seeing in Antiquity was characterized by a discussion whether the eye sends rays towards the object or not (e.g. *Aristotle*); whereas the Arabic-Islamic Sciences in the first quarter of the tenth century verified that it is the object which reflects the light. It was Ibn al-Haitham who emphasized that nothing comes out of the eye, but that the outer world is perceived through straight rays of light; their ends are focused (bundled) in the centre of the eye. Thus the objects' forms are "transferred by lines, which the mathematicians call seeing rays."<sup>13</sup> Ibn al-Haitham verified his hypothesis by experiments with different forms of mirrors (concave, convex etc.) in order to gain this groundbreaking new understanding which also required as a precondition, precise knowledge of the eye's anatomy with its spherical form of the cornea and the visual nerve that connects it to the brain. His integrated and deep understanding of the interplay of light and visual perception enhanced the ophthalmology and cataract surgery. Below, in the context of perception and cognition we will come back to Ibn al-Haitham. As early as at the end of the tenth Century *al-Mausili* described the radical operation of the soft cataract by suction with a metal syringe (cannula, a hypodermic needle) he had devised for that purpose.<sup>14</sup> Although eye surgery had been undertaken prior to al-Mausili's innovative invention, it remained merely cosmetically in scope and failed to improve the quality of the patient's eyesight.

But beyond ophthalmological questions the physiological absence of eyesight in the drama *Yolanthe* seems to function as an indicator for the yet to be obtained divine love. Blindness serves here as a metaphor for Yolanthe's lack of self-knowledge and knowledge and love for God. Nevertheless, it is Ibn Yahya, who initiates and supports this process of transformation. The interaction between two pathways to the knowledge of one and the same truth, namely the scientific

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Sabra, Abdelhamid I., *The Optics of Ibn al-Haytham, Book I-III, On direct Vision* (London 1989), S. 82, cit: Belting, Hans, *Florenz und Bagdad, Eine westöstliche Geschichte des Blicks*, (München: C.H. Beck, 2008), S. 113.

<sup>14</sup> Hirschberg, Julius, *Geschichte der Augenheilkunde im Mittelalter* (Leipzig 1908), cit.: Sezgin, Fuat, *Science and Technology in Islam*, Vol. I, Introduction, (Frankfurt a.M.: Institut für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften), p. 21.

and the spiritual one, is highly characteristic of the Islamic philosophy which transcends various denominations and its corresponding understanding of sciences in Al-Andalus.

## Knowing Without Seeing

### *Perception and Cognition*

In the ensuing dialogue between Tristan and Yolante, who greatly endeavors to pick the right-colored rose Tristan wishes to receive, appears a moment of uncertainty when Yolante having contemplated on what he might mean by asking for a red rose responds: “Take it thyself!”<sup>15</sup> With these words she invites Tristan to imitate her pathway to knowledge, a path, lying beyond the visualization of the color spectrum that includes the feeling objects’ texture, their shape, as well as the perception of the fragrance, which in turn enable her to distinguish between a rose and a carnation. Yolante also identifies and distinguishes between the different species of singing birds by way of differentiated hearing of the various sounds and chirping patterns. Color perception, however, seems in this context to be an almost negligible level of cognition, for Yolante’s description of plants for example are so much more detailed, accurate, diverse and multidimensional than they would be if she were able to visually perceive these. If so, she would perhaps focus entirely on the color of things whilst neglecting to explore their internal structure, and returning to our example, the internal, microcosmic structure of plants. Yolante proceeds by asking Tristan to teach her the application of her eyes: “Yet with the help of sight? They told me not of that. An Instruments [f]ashion’d by art, or but a tool, perhaps? I do not know this sight. Canst teach me, then, [i]ts use and purpose?”<sup>16</sup>

At this point, the lyrical drama reveals various epistemological dimensions, which are referring to Arab-Islamic sources, if we are indeed to believe that Yolante has followed the instructions of her tutor Ibn Yahya. The Arab-Islamic philosopher, astronomer, mathematician and physician, Ibn Tufail (1110–1184), primarily based in Al-Andalus, and author of *Hay Ibn Yaqzan* (philosophus autodidactus), draws on an analogy: “Just imagine a human being born blind, who has an excellent natural disposition, a strong intuition, a good memory and excellent ideas”.<sup>17</sup> This visually impaired man is capable of being perfectly oriented in the city by way of increased development of his remaining senses. The colors, however, he only knows as a name and by the definitions that refer to them. Ibn Tufail further clarifies and

---

<sup>15</sup>Hertz, Henrik, *King René’s Daughter: A Danish Lyrical Drama*. Translated by Theodore Martin. (New York: Leypoldt and Holt, 1867), p. 61.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>17</sup>Ibn Tufail, Abu Bakr, *Der Philosoph als Autodidakt, Hays ibn Yaqzan, Ein philosophischer Inselroman*, transl. by Schaerer, P.O., (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004), p. 6.

allegorically compares the visually impaired individual with those thinkers and philosophers who have failed to attain a metaphysical level of familiarity to God. "If him, now that he has reached this stage, the eyes are opened and he gains vision or eye sight, then he will find, so he chooses to wander through the city and look around, everything just as he had imagined, and nothing will be unfamiliar to him, [...] new to him (are D.Q.): First, the increased clarity and brightness, and second, the overwhelming pleasure. The condition of the theorists who have not reached such familiarity, equals the condition of this blind man before gaining sight, and the colors that are known to him in that state, are according to *Ibn Bagga* likewise of the following nature: they are too sublime, as that they may be related to the everyday, physical world – God bestows these gifts unto the servants of his choice".<sup>18</sup> Familiarity or intimacy is according to Ibn Tufail, the highest metaphysical level of knowledge of God – a hierarchy of knowledge that is already reflected in the tenth-century curriculum of *Ihwan as-Safa*: "If sense perception is the starting point of the cognitive process, abstraction is then a higher stage of knowledge which is a common feature to all the sciences of the curriculum. Within abstraction there are further degrees of knowledge, which are organized in a hierarchical pattern: the more the seeker advances on the path of knowledge, the higher the knowledge he acquires. The highest of all sciences is metaphysics which, in a hierarchical manner, comprises of (1) the knowledge of God and His attributes, (2) the knowledge of the soul, (3) the knowledge of resurrection and of closeness (mugawara) to the Merciful."<sup>19</sup>

Following the Arab-Islamic theory of learning as established by *Ihwan as-Safa*, training of vision or eye sight marks the highest level of sensual perception. Visual images are attributed to reason in the system of understanding and comprehension. In the book (Kitab) al-Manazir (of Optics), an all-encompassing work on optics, which was first translated into Latin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, *Ibn al-Haytham's* findings, which he collected, using mathematical, geometric and experimental methods, while combining anatomic and optical observations, paved the way for a breakthrough in the history of optics. The "spherical form of the cornea [...] it alone guarantees the unbroken penetration of the rays which advance from all sides of to the centre of the eye and to the centre of vision."<sup>20</sup> Except that objects are only perceived effectively and only exist if they are mentally appropriated, whereby the knowledge, which we have of the objects, our visual perception classifies. Yolante's father outlines aspects of a theory of seeing/vision in the fifth scene that already vaguely resemble the existing studies at the time of *Ibn al-Haitahm*: "Like wind and storm, [light] doth descend unto us from above, [a]nd like to these, with

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>19</sup> Bafioni, Carmela, "From Sense Perception to the Vision of God: A Path towards Knowledge according to the *Ihwan as-Safa*", in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 8 (1998), (Cambridge: University Press, 1998), p. 216.

<sup>20</sup> Schramm, Mathias, "Zur Entwicklung der physiologischen Optik in der arabischen Literatur", in Sezgin, Fuat, *Science and Technology in Islam*, Vol. IV, Medicine, Chemistry, Mineralogy, (Frankfurt a.M.: Institut für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften), p. 19.



swiftness uncontroll'd, [t]he objects which it touches gain a new [s]ignificance, and a peculiar stamp, [a]nd oftentimes with warmth 'tis closely blent. 'This through the eye it finds its way to us, [a]nd by the power of seeing it we gain [a] true perception of the universe, [a]s it went forth from the Creator's hand, [a]nd apprehend His wisdom and His goodness."<sup>21</sup> It is this knowing of the wisdom of God and his goodness, to which Ibn Yahya referred in Yolathe's teachings, the recognition of the inner eye as the highest level of the path of knowledge: "Her inward eye must first be opened, ere [t]he light can pour upon the outward sense. [a] want must be developed in her soul; [a] feeling that anticipates the light – [a] craving sense; for know, my noble liege, [t]hat nothing is on mankind e'er bestowed, [u]nless for it he feels necessity."<sup>22</sup>

The love for God that transcends from Yolathe's inner being ignites love's desires in Tristan. As such it is an encounter that already anticipates Yolathe's transformation as her kindling love for Tristan seems to reflect universal love as a communicative interaction. Preluding each verse with a few notes of his zither, Tristan begins to reveal his affections with the following words: "For all things have life through thee alone, [f]or all things will only be thine own, and close their eyelids when thine do rest."<sup>23</sup> "Dein Herz schlug ja in jedem Sein, Alles beseeltest Du allein – mit Deinem Aug'war aller Aug' geschlossen."<sup>24</sup>

When considering the knowledge of the all-creative, here in this lyrical drama figuratively outlined by Yolathe's regaining of her eyesight, as the highest metaphysical level in the hierarchy of knowledge, it becomes clear that Yolathe has already surpassed all of the other subjacent levels that the play refers to. And although, according to the Arab-Islamic development and learning theory, taste, touch, smell and hearing predate seeing, for it is referenced as the final stage of sensual perception in the early childhood development, Yolathe's accurate perception of the environment that is so familiar to her, emphasizes the interaction of levels of perception and cognition in the process of learning as well as how the *unity-of-everything-there-is-alive* (Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka) in the universe, progressively communicates engaged in a continuous process of sensing, learning, knowing and recognizing.

The real existence of every being is connected by countless circuits of accompanying efforts, desires and powers at every turn of transformation, at every moment of its development. They formulate both being and its world.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Hertz, Henrik, *King René's Daughter: A Danish Lyrical Drama*. Translated by Theodore Martin (New York: Leypoldt and Holt, 1867). p. 77.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Hertz, Henrik, *König René's Tochter*, translated into German by Willatzen, P.J. (Bremen: Kühnmann's Buchhandlung, 1875), p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa, cited: Szmyd, Jan, "The role of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka's Philosophy in den "Post-Modern World", Cognitive Optimism, Innovativeness and Creativity" in *Phenomenological Inquiry*, Editor in Chief: Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, Editorial Board: Angela Ales Belo et al., A review of Philosophical Ideas and Trends, Towards the Skies, Vol. 35, October 2011, (Hanover, New Hampshire, USA: The World Institute for Advanced Phenomenological Research and Learning, 2006), p. 41.

## Yolanthe's Cosmos

It is in the context of this cognitive theoretical dimension of the story of Yolanthe that the phenomenology of life (Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka) is applied in this paper in order to achieve not only a more detailed understanding of philosophical statements in the lyrical drama, but likewise to utilize the phenomenology of life as a starting point for a re-reading of *King René's Daughter*. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka emphasizes in various chapters of her study *The Fullness of the Logos in the Key of Life*, the sentient and at the same time communicative part of the Logos as “[t]he communicative and Dionysian Logos of sharing-in-life”<sup>26</sup> or “[t]he communicative rays of the Logos present at the origin of individuation”<sup>27</sup> It is in particular this communicative force of life in the unity-of-everything-there-is-alive, communicative because it is sentient, of the all-pervasive Logos of Life, which allows Yolanthe to recognize various plants so accurately without actually visually seeing them. Not unjustly Yolanthe asks: “Can I see [w]ith these my eyes the nightingale's thick note, [w]hereon I've mused so oft, and vainly striven [t]o follow it in thought, away, away?-Or is her song a flower, whose fragrant breath I know, but not its root, and stem, and leaves?”<sup>28</sup> “Ist's eine Blume, deren Duft ich kenne, doch Wuchs und Stengel nicht und Blatt?”<sup>29</sup>

Awareness regarding the precise nature of things can only be developed through the knowledge of the microcosmic structure of beingness. How would it be possible to capture the structure and ornamentation of a rose without the communicative encounter/interaction in the *Logos of Life*, individualized here in two different forms of life, namely the flower and the human being? This communicative force initiates “interactive exchange”: “Symbiotic linkage and interactive exchange offer the web of life, which among its many functions serves as it were a nervous system, and make the unity-of-everything-there-is-alive, without which no living being would come to exist. In this sense ‘Once is all’”.<sup>30</sup>

However, the path of knowledge as announced for Yolanthe does not end at the cognitive stage of existence, therefore she confronts her father with the following words shortly before her departure and the imminent restoration of her eyesight: “Yet on one point [t]hou dost mistake. ‘Tis not the eye that sees; [h]ere, close beside the heart, our vision lies; [h]ere is it seated in remembrance sweet, [a] reflex

<sup>26</sup>Tymieniecka., Anna-Teresa, *The Fullness of the Logos in the Key of Life*, Book 1, The Case of God in the New Enlightenment, (Dordrecht, NL: Springer, 2009), p. 99.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>28</sup>Hertz, Henrik, *King René's Daughter: A Danish Lyrical Drama*. Translated by Theodore Martin. (New York: Leypoldt and Holt, 1867). p. 82.

<sup>29</sup>Hertz, Henrik, *König Rene's Tochter*, translated into German by Willatzen, P.J., (Bremen: Kühnmann's Buchhandlung, 1875), p. 71.

<sup>30</sup>Tymieniecka., Anna-Teresa, *The Fullness of the Logos in the Key of Life*, Book 1, The Case of God in the New Enlightenment, (Dordrecht, NL: Springer, 2009), p. 189.

of the light that pierced my soul, [t]he light I go with bounding hope to meet.”<sup>31</sup> “Doch in einem irrst Du: Gewisslich, mit dem Auge sieht man nicht. Hier, nach dem Herzen, hier ist das Gesicht. Tief im inneren ruht, wie freudige Erinnerung, ein Nachklang jenes Lichts, das mich getroffen, dem ich nun hoffnungsvoll entgegengehe.”<sup>32</sup> The cosmic ontogenesis of vision and sight meets the light, which references the origin of creativity. Finally, moments before regaining her eyesight, Yolante repeats the following sentences as dictated by Ibn Yahya: “Mysterious being, who to me hast spoken [w]hen darkness veil’d mine eyes, teach me to seek Thee [i]n Thy light’s beams, that do illumine this world; Still, in the world, teach me to cling to Thee! [...]”.<sup>33</sup> The German translation differs here notably (a comparison with the original sources in Danish would be necessary to prove congruence), when identifying “mysterious being” with “Weltengeist” (universal reason or intellect, universal spirit): “Du Weltengeist, der zu mir redete, indes die Nacht mein Aug umhüllte, lehr mich dich suchen in den Strahlen dieser Welt! O, lehr mich, Dich zu lieben in der Welt!”<sup>34</sup>

The philosophy of life, unfolded by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka in the last decades, proves to be a key for a new in-depth scientific research into the dimensions of reality, unraveling the “hidden networks of life.”<sup>35</sup> Against the backdrop of a New Enlightenment the “*ontopoiesis of beingness in generative flux*” (Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka) cannot be traced back to a “mysterious being”. By overcoming the enduring division between empirical and spiritual approaches towards reality, the philosophy of life deciphers the sentient and communicative-creative power of the *Logos of Life* towards the blossom of individualized beingness. In this re-reading of Tchaikovsky’s last opera, in which the central figure’s blindness might also signify the traumatic loss of her beloved mother, Yolante recovers her vision through the communicative-creative interplay of growing sentience into the real. In other words, she attains her self-knowledge while being inspired by the imagination of the *Logos of Life* flowing through the unity-of-everything-there-is-alive.

---

<sup>31</sup> Hertz, Henrik, *King René’s Daughter: A Danish Lyrical Drama*. Translated by Theodore Martin. (New York: Leypoldt and Holt, 1867). p. 82.

<sup>32</sup> Hertz, Henrik, *König René’s Tochter*, translated into German by Willatzen, P.J., (Bremen: Kühnmann’s Buchhandlung, 1875), p. 73.

<sup>33</sup> Hertz, Henrik, *King René’s Daughter: A Danish Lyrical Drama*. Translated by Theodore Martin. (New York: Leypoldt and Holt, 1867). p. 97.

<sup>34</sup> Hertz, Henrik, *König René’s Tochter*, translated into German by Willatzen, P.J., (Bremen: Kühnmann’s Buchhandlung, 1875), p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> Tymieniecka., Anna-Teresa, *Reason, Spirit and the Sacral in the New Enlightenment, Islamic Metaphysics and Recent Phenomenology of Life*, (Dordrecht et al., NL: Springer, 2011), p. 5.