

Senza sangue (Without Blood)

Peter Eötvös

For me,” Peter Eötvös has said, “composition consists of the enchantment of the audience through sound. ... I am interested in the technique which allows me to transform the unbelievable into sounds.” Born in Transylvania, he views himself as part of a Hungarian musical tradition that extends through Kodály, Bartók, Ligeti, and Kurtág, all of whose music he has championed. This national attachment is explicit in a work such as his *Psychokosmos* (1993), a concerto for cimbalom (a hammered dulcimer deeply associated with Hungarian music), but his scores are more likely to reflect less obvious national strands of avant-garde exploration.

Eötvös studied composition at the Budapest Academy of Music and conducting at the Hochschule für Musik in Cologne, where he was involved with the West German Radio music studio throughout the 1970s. From 1968 to 1976 he performed regularly with the Stockhausen Ensemble. In 1978, at the invitation of Pierre Boulez, he conducted the inaugural concert of IRCAM in Paris. He was subsequently appointed music director of the Ensemble InterContemporain, which he led until 1991, developing a parallel reputation for leading mainstream orchestras in contemporary works. He was principal guest conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra from 1985 to 1988; chief conductor of the Radio Chamber Orchestra of Hilversum from 1994 to 2005; principal guest conductor for modern and contemporary repertoire for Sweden’s Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, from 2003 to 2007; and principal guest conductor for the Radio Symphony Orchestra in Vienna from 2009 to 2012. Eötvös has taught at the conservatories of Karlsruhe and Cologne, and he sets aside significant portions of his schedule for teaching, appearing at notable festivals and new-music study centers throughout the world. In 1991 he founded the International Eötvös Institute and Foundation

and in 2004 created the Eötvös Contemporary Music Foundation in Budapest for young conductors and composers.

His work in contemporary music has earned awards including the Hungarian Bartók Prize (1997), Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award (2002), Cannes Classical Award in the category of Best Living Composer (2004), Frankfurt Music Prize (2007), and Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale (2011). Eötvös has been inducted into the Berlin Academy of the Arts, Hungarian Academy of Letters and Arts, Saxon Academy of the Arts (Dresden), and Royal Swedish Academy of Music; in 2003 he was awarded the title of Commandeur de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from the French Government.

IN SHORT

Born: January 2, 1944, in Odorheiu Secuiesc, Székelyudvarhely, Szeklerlad, Transylvania (then in Hungary, now in Romania)

Resides: in Budapest, Hungary

Work composed: 2014, on commission from the New York Philharmonic and KölnMusik; revisions completed February 9, 2015; libretto by Mari Mezei, after the novel *Senza sangue (Without Blood)* by Alessandro Baricco; the score is inscribed “Invocation to Henri Dutilleux”

World premiere: May 1, 2015, on the New York Philharmonic’s EUROPE / SPRING 2015 tour, at the Philharmonie in Cologne, Germany, as part of the Acht Brücken/Music for Cologne 2015 festival, by the New York Philharmonic, Alan Gilbert, conductor, Anne Sofie von Otter, Russell Braun, soloists. These performances mark the U.S. Premiere.

Estimated duration: ca. 45 minutes

When the late composer Henri Dutilleux was awarded the 2011 Marie-Josée Kravis Prize for New Music at the New York Philharmonic, he chose to divide the financial portion of that honor among three younger composers, of whom Eötvös was one. *Senza sangue* is the result of that commission. Eötvös observes:

The opera commences with two calm notes: B–D, which in Hungarian and in German are spelled H–D, the initials of the name Henri Dutilleux. He passed away in 2013, and my opera is written in his memory.

Eötvös's previous operas include *Le balcon* (based on Genet's play), *Love and Other Demons* (after García Márquez), and *Angels in America* (after Tony Kushner's theatrical classic). "I had

long been tempted by the idea of writing a one-act opera to go before Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, to which in spirit, style, and dramaturgy it would be related," he says, adding:

I feel that with the librettist Mari Mezei we found in the short novel *Senza sangue*, by Alessandro Baricco, a situation that has many points of reference with *Bluebeard* but is completely independent from it. For the most part I have retained Baricco's original text, so this opera is sung in Italian. As in all of my operas, it is very important for me that the text should remain completely intelligible, that the melodies support, form, and give tension to the text. This is a theatrical approach, but for me opera, too, is no less than theater.

The Story

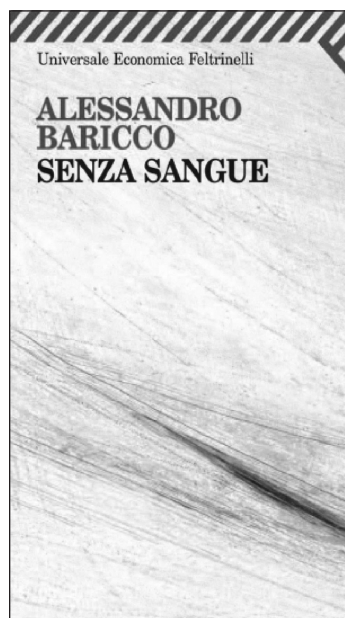
Alessandro Baricco's novel (or novella) *Senza sangue* was originally published in 2002 in Italy and quickly gained widespread international popularity through translations into several languages. The English version, translated by Ann Goldstein under the title *Without Blood*, was published in 2004 by Alfred A. Knopf.

Composer Peter Eötvös provides this plot summary:

During a civil war, a group of men kills the family of a young girl. She looks into the eyes of the 20-year-old boy who has shot her father but has chosen not to kill her. After the tragedy, the girl – then woman – spends her life in a schizophrenic state, seeking retribution by arranging the deaths of her family's murderers, one by one.

Mari Mezei's libretto focuses on the last portion of the novel, which takes place years later, when the daughter finally meets the marauder who spared her life. In the course of their conversation, the story takes a new turn. The woman has come not to avenge herself but rather to be saved by the man once again. She longs to relive that glance from long ago: "He who has saved us once, can do so again and again."

Questions, singularly timely today, remain unanswered. Can murder be excused by faith in a better world? Can revenge save a broken life? Was the fight for a better world in vain if it did not succeed? There are no answers, but the characters know that *their* lives became inextricably intertwined on that fateful day; only through each other can they ever hope to make life meaningful again.



Cover of the original Italian edition

Instrumentation: four flutes (one doubling alto flute, two doubling piccolo), two oboes and English horn, three clarinets (one doubling contrabass clarinet), three bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets (one doubling flugelhorn), four trombones, tuba, timpani, suspended cymbals, Chinese cymbal, bass drum, xylophone, guiro, metal cabaza (a gourd-shaped rattle), triangles, crotales, tubular bells, tam-tam, three Burma gongs, tambourine, orchestra bells, maracas, two harps,

celeste, and strings, in addition to the solo mezzo-soprano (The Woman) and baritone (The Man).

Peter Eötvös's Senza sangue, Opera in One Act for Two Singers and Orchestra, after the novel by Alessandro Baricco; libretto by Mari Mezei; used by arrangement with European American Music Distributors Company, sole U.S. and Canadian agent for Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG, Mainz, Germany, publisher and copyright owner.

In the Composer's Words

Senza sangue is my tenth opera, and I prepared for it like a film director who decides he's going to shoot his next film in black and white. In my previous operas I strove for a colorful palette of sound, but here I aim for sharp contrasts, and shades of black, grey, and white. The instrumentation is identical to that of Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* (except for the organ, which Bartók used but I do not). There are two reasons for this: my hope is that *Senza sangue* will be performed in opera houses before *Bluebeard*. There is a practical advantage in rehearsals and performances if the same musicians play and the orchestra pit doesn't have to be reorganized. The other reason is that in the orchestral material, rather than polyphony I have emphasized a mass of sound: many instruments play the same line, creating a weighty sound, like a stroke in Japanese calligraphy, where a single black line is drawn with a thick brush. As with the orchestral sound, I composed the vocal parts with vigorous gestures, evoking the expressive style in black-and-white films.



The two elderly protagonists of this opera, The Woman and The Man, have been preparing all their lives for this meeting. It is thus understandable that every sentence is full of tension and the relationship between them changes continuously — another way in which it resembles *Bluebeard*. A further similarity is that I, too, have divided the plot into seven scenes. The tension of the scenes forms a contour of waves, coming to a climax in scene six, and finally at the end of the opera takes a surprising turn in the form of a bashful confession of love. The closing moments of *Bluebeard* lead us into the eternal darkness. In *Senza sangue*, for the couple at the final stage of their lives, perhaps light is now dawning.

— Peter Eötvös

TEXT & TRANSLATION

Senza sangue

Opera in One Act for Two Singers and Orchestra, after the novel by Alessandro Baricco
Libretto by Mari Mezei

Setting: *A town square, on one side a small kiosk; in the center, a café terrace; on the other side, not far away, a small hotel.*

Scene I: *An elegant old woman enters from the side of the hotel and slowly approaches the newsstand, stopping to look at the hotel and café. In the kiosk, an elderly man arranges lottery tickets hanging from a string, and examines them one by one.*

The Man

*È un buon numero.
Ha due otto messi
in posizione simmetrica:
è un buon numero.*

This is a good number.
It has two eights
in a symmetrical position:
It's a good number.

(The woman approaches and leans over the counter.)

The Woman

Buona sera.

Good evening.

The Man

Buona sera.

Good evening.

The Woman

Volevo comprare un biglietto.

I wanted to buy a ticket.

(The man raises his eyes and stares at the woman.)

The Man

È molto che aspettava?

Have you been waiting long?

The Woman

*No, perché?
Volevo un biglietto.
Può prenderlo da quella striscia?*

No, why?
I wanted a ticket.
Can you take one from that strip?

The Man

Scusi. Questa?

Sorry. This one?

(Please turn the page quietly.)

The Woman

Sì.
Lei non è cieco?
 Vero?

Yes.
 You're not blind, are you?
 Truly?

The Man

Perché dovrei essere cieco?

Why should I be blind?

The Woman

*Non so, immagino che c'entri con quella storia
 che la fortuna è cieca.
 Di solito
 voi venditori
 siete molto vecchi.*

I don't know. I guess it has to do with that story
 about luck being blind.
 Usually
 you vendors
 are very old.

The Man

Non sono cieco, ma vecchio sì.

I'm not blind, but old, yes.

The Woman

Quanti anni ha?

How old are you?

The Man

*Settantadue.
 Ma questo è un buon numero.*

Seventy-two.
 But this is a good number.

(He indicates the ticket.)

In genere porta bene.

It usually brings good luck.

The Woman

*Mi chiedevo se avesse voglia di venire a bere
 qualcosa con me.*

I wondered if you'd like to come and have a
 drink with me.

The Man

Io? Io ... non posso.

I? I ... I can't.

The Woman

*Solo un bicchiere.
 Venga con me.*

Just one glass.
 Come with me.

The Man

*Mi spiace ...
 davvero non posso farlo.
 Non posso andarmene ora.*

I'm sorry ...
 I really can't.
 I can't leave now.

The Woman

*Venga con me.
 È vero che la chiamavano Tito?
 Venga con me.*

Come with me.
 Is it true that you're called Tito?
 Come with me.

(The man gives a nod and begins to close the kiosk, slowly, with great care.)

Lei sa dove potremmo andare?

Do you know where we might go?

The Man

Di qua.

Here.

(Pointing the way.)

Conosco un caffè tranquillo.

I know a quiet café.

(The man continues to arrange the kiosk.)

Ho finito.

I've finished.

(They head toward the café terrace at the center of the stage.)

Scene II

(They sit on the café terrace.)

The Man

*È venuta fin qui per cercare me.
Adesso mi ha trovato.*

You came here to look for me.
Now you've found me.

*Molti anni fa,
Lei ha visto tre uomini
uccidere Suo padre,
a sangue freddo.
Di quei tre, sono
l'unico ancora vivo.*

Many years ago,
You saw three men
kill your father,
in cold blood.
Of those three,
I'm the only one still alive.

The Woman

Lei è diverso.

You are different.

*Quando ero bambina il mio nome era Nina.
Ma finì tutto quel giorno.
Nessuno mi ha più chiamata con quel nome.
Mi piaceva: Nina.
Conosceva mio padre, prima?*

When I was a child my name was Nina.
But everything ended that day.
No one has called me by that name since.
I liked it: Nina.
Did you know my father back then?

The Man

Sapevo chi era.

I knew who he was.

The Woman

*Era un padre splendido.
Lui mi avvertì:*

He was a wonderful father.
He warned me:

*“Ascoltami, Nina.
Adesso arriverà della gente.
Non voglio che ti veda.
Devi nasconderti,
la cosa migliore è che ti nasconda
e aspetti che se ne vadano.”*

“Listen to me, Nina.
People will come now.
I don't want him to see you.
You must hide;
It's best that you hide
and wait for them to leave.”

(The man looks at the woman.)

È vero che gli ha sparato Lui per primo?

It is true that you shot him first?

(Please turn the page quietly.)

The Man

Che importa ...

Ma poi ...

Aprii la botola.

*C'era una bambina là dentro,
rannicchiata sul fianco.*

Le puntai contro la pistola.

Girò la testa, e mi guardò.

What does it matter?

But then ...

I opened the trap door.

There was a girl in there,
huddled on her side.

Then I aimed the gun.

She turned her head and looked at me.

The Woman

Lo ricorda?

You remember?

The Man

*Non l'ho mai detto a nessuno
che Lei era là.*

I never told anyone
that you were there.

The Woman

Lei aveva vent'anni.

Era il più giovane ...

You were twenty years old.

You were the youngest ...

The Man

Cominciai a pensare

che era meglio dimenticare.

A un certo punto però venne fuori

che la figlia di Roca era viva,

la nascondevano in un villaggio.

*Capii che non mi sarei più liberato
di quella storia.*

Nè io, nè gli altri.

I began to think

that was best forgotten.

At some point, however, it became known
that Roca's daughter was alive,

hiding in a village.

I realized that I would never be free
of that story.

Neither I nor the others.

The Woman

Gradisce qualcosa da bere?

Would you like something to drink?

The Man

Vado io a prendere qualcosa.

I'm going to get something.

(The man enters the café.)

Scene III: Monologue

Per quanto la vita sia

incomprensibile,

la attraversiamo

con l'unico desiderio

di ritornare all'inferno

che ci ha generati.

As life is

incomprehensible,

we pass through it

with the sole desire

of returning to the hell

we came from.

Nulla,

nulla è più forte

di quell'istinto a tornare

dove ci hanno spezzati,

e a replicare quell'istante per anni,

pensando che chi ci ha salvati una volta

lo possa fare per sempre.

Nothing,

nothing is stronger

than that instinct to return

to where they have broken us,

and to repeat that moment for years,

thinking that the one who saved us once

can do so forever.

*In un lungo inferno,
identico a quello da cui veniamo.
Ma d'improvviso clemente.
E senza sangue.*

In a lingering hell,
just like the one from which we come.
But suddenly benevolent.
And without blood.

Scene IV

(The man returns, offering a glass to the woman.)

The Man

*Capii che non mi sarei
più liberato
di quella storia.
Nè io,
nè gli altri.*

I realized that I would
never be free
of that story.
Neither I,
nor the others.

*Per un po' mi convinsi
che non sarebbe accaduto nulla.
Ma poi morì Salinas,
in quel modo strano.*

For a while I was convinced
that nothing would happen.
But then Salinas died,
in that strange way.

The Woman

In quel modo strano ...

In that strange way ...

The Man

*L'avevano trovato morto nel suo letto.
Si diceva che il suo medico l'avesse avvelenato,
un po' ogni giorno,
lentamente,
per mesi.*

They had found him dead in his bed.
It was said that his doctor had poisoned him,
a little each day,
slowly,
for months.

The Woman

*Tutte queste storie
gliele hanno raccontate
i suoi amici?*

All of these stories
were told to you
by his friends?

The Man

Sì.

Yes.

The Woman

E Lei ci crede?

And you believe it?

The Man

Sì.

Yes.

The Woman

*Mi dica,
cos'altro sa di me?*

Tell me,
what else do you know about me?

(Please turn the page quietly.)

The Man

*A che serve?
È la Sua storia.
La conosce meglio di me.*

The Woman

*Non è detto.
Io ricordo una specie
di orfanotrofio.*

*Un giorno arrivò Uribe.
Mi prese con sé.
Disse a tutti
che ero sua figlia.*

*Una sera d'inverno
uscì di casa.
Quella volta,
in taverna,
giocò d'azzardo fino a tardi.
Fu tutta una cosa tra lui e
il conte di Torrelavid.
Uribe, sicuro delle sue carte,
gli stava dietro.
Il conte mise sul piatto
la sua fazenda ...*

The Man

La fazenda?

The Woman

Lei gioca d'azzardo?

The Man

No.

The Woman

*Non credo allora
che possa capire.*

The Man

Ci provi.

The Woman

*La fazenda di Belsito
era la più bella della zona.
Uribe non aveva niente che valesse Belsito.*

Il conte si sporse in avanti e disse:

*“Hai una bella bambina però.
Belsito contro la tua bambina.
È una proposta onesta.”*

What does it matter?
It's your story.
You know it better than I do.

Not necessarily.
I remember some sort
of orphanage.

One day Uribe showed up.
He took me with him.
He told everyone
that I was his daughter.

One winter evening
he left the house.
At that time,
in the tavern,
he gambled late into the night.
It was a matter between him and
Count Torrelavid.
Uribe, sure of his cards,
was keeping up.
But then the Count placed a bet
on his manor ...

His manor?

Do you gamble?

No.

Then I don't think
you can understand.

Try me.

The manor at Belsito
was the most beautiful in the area.
Uribe had nothing that was worth Belsito.

The Count leaned forward and said:

“You have a beautiful daughter, though.
I wager Belsito against your child.
It's an honest proposal.”

*Il conte mi portò via quella notte stessa.
Quando compii quattordici anni
mi sposò.*

The Man

*È strano, strano:
Lei sembra raccontare la vita di un'altra.
Non gliene importa nulla?*

The Woman

*Perché questa storia dovrebbe essere
più falsa di quella che mi ha raccontato Lei?
È una storia come un'altra.*

The Man

È la Sua storia!

The Woman

*Mi dica,
cos'altro sa di me?
Mi racconti il resto.*

Scene V

The Man

*Di Lei si diceva una cosa strana:
Che non parlava.
Che non aveva mai parlato.
La gente aveva paura di Lei.
Anni dopo il conte morì in un incidente.
Dicevano che Lei era matta.
La affidarono ai medici,
in una casa di cura.*

The Woman

*Per quanto uno si sforzi di vivere una sola vita
gli altri ce ne vedranno dentro altre mille.*

The Man

*Qualche anno dopo Lei scomparve
nel nulla.
Qualcuno disse che aveva degli amici
che la tenevano nascosta da qualche parte.*

The Woman

Lei non ha amici?

The Man

No.

The Woman

Perché?

The Count took me away that very night.
When I was fourteen years old
I was married.

It's strange, strange:
You seem to be recounting the life of another.
Does it mean nothing to you?

Why should this story be
less true than the story you told me?
It's a story like any other.

It's your story!

Tell me,
what else do you know about me?
Tell me the rest.

They told a strange story about you:
That you didn't speak.
That you had never spoken.
People were afraid of you.
Years later the Count died in an accident.
They said that you were mad,
entrusted to the care of doctors,
in a sanitarium.

We strive to live one life,
yet others will not see the thousand in it.

A few years later, you vanished
into thin air.
Someone said that you had friends
who kept you hidden somewhere.

Don't you have friends?

No.

Why?

(Please turn the page quietly.)

The Man

Bisognerebbe avere fiducia nel mondo.

We should have faith in the world.

The Woman

Vada avanti ...

Go ahead ...

The Man

*Continuavo a chiedermi di che pazzia mai
potesse essersi ammalata:
se girava urlando per casa o
se semplicemente se ne stava zitta in un angolo,
tenendo stretta in mano la testa di un pettirosso.
Quattro anni dopo morì
el Gurre: un proiettile nella schiena.*

I kept wondering what madness
could have afflicted you;
if you ran around screaming at home
or if you simply stood silently in a corner,
clutching in your hand a robin's head.
Four years after that,
El Gurre died: a bullet in his back.

The Woman

*In tasca gli trovarono un biglietto:
c'era scritto un nome di donna.*

In his pocket they found a piece of paper:
a woman's name was written on it.

The Man

Il Suo.

Yours.

*Da quel giorno ho iniziato ad aspettarla:
sarebbe venuta e mi avrebbe guardato in faccia,
e prima di uccidermi mi avrebbe parlato.
Perchè io avevo aperto la botola
e poi l'avevo richiusa.
Lei non se lo sarebbe dimenticato.*

From that day, I began to wait for you:
You would come and look me in the eyes,
and before killing me, you would speak to me.
Because I had opened the trap door
but then left you trapped down there.
You would never have forgotten that.

Scene VI**The Woman**

*Quella sera là sotto ...
Era talmente assurdo,
sembrava un sogno.
Siete entrati,
Lei gli ha sparato,
poi gli ha sparato Salinas,
e alla fine el Gurre
ha finito il lavoro.
Era un animale.*

There, that night ...
It was so absurd,
it seemed like a dream.
You came in,
you shot him,
then Salinas shot him,
and finally El Gurre
finished the job.
He was an animal.

The Man

Eravamo dei soldati.

We were soldiers.

The Woman

Cosa vuol dire?

What does that mean?

The Man

Combattevamo una guerra.

We fought a war.

The Woman

Era finita la guerra.

The war was over.

The Man

*Non per noi.
Credevamo in un mondo migliore.
Si poteva fare.*

The Woman

*La guerra l'avete vinta.
Questo Li sembra un mondo migliore?*

The Man

Non me lo sono mai chiesto.

The Woman

*Non è vero.
Se l'è chiesto mille volte
ma ha paura di rispondere.
Adesso dovrebbe essere capace di
pronunciarla
questa parola: vendetta.
Lei uccideva per vendetta,
tutti uccidevate per vendetta.*

The Man

*La smetta.
Anche Lei è animata da un desiderio di
vendetta.*

The Woman

Cosa dice?

The Man

*Bisognava passare attraverso la sofferenza,
capisce?*

The Woman

*No.
Non posso capire,
io ero una bambina allora,
sdraiata in un buco sottoterra ...*

The Man

*La smetta.
Faccia quello che deve fare,
ma mi lasci in pace.*

The Woman

Ha paura?

The Man

*Non ho paura.
Sono solo stanco.*

Not for us.
We believed in a better world.
It could have been done.

You've won the war.
Does this seem like a better world?

I have never asked myself.

That's not true.
You've asked yourself a thousand times
but were afraid of the answer.
Now you should be able
to speak
this word: revenge.
You were killing for revenge,
you were all killing everyone for revenge.

Stop it.
You, too, are spurred by the desire for
revenge.

What are you talking about?

You had to live through the suffering,
do you understand?

No.
I cannot understand,
I was a little girl then,
lying in a hole in the ground ...

Stop it.
Do what you must do,
but leave me in peace.

Are you afraid?

I'm not afraid.
I'm just tired.

(Please turn the page quietly.)

Scene VII

(They remain seated in silence, without looking at one another.)

The Man

*Mentre Lei guardavo,
quella sera,
rannicchiata in quel buco,
così bianca, ordinata, e pulita,
provai una specie di pace
che non ho mai più trovato.
Vorrei saperle spiegare ...
Faccia quello che deve fare,
ma mi lasci in pace.*

While I watched you,
that evening,
curled up in that hole,
so white, neat, and clean,
I felt a kind of peace
that I've never found since.
I wish I knew how to explain it ...
Do what you must do,
but leave me in peace.

The Woman

*Lei andrebbe di venire
in albergo con me?*

Would you like to go
to a hotel with me?

(He smiles slightly.)

The Man

Io sono vecchio.

I am old.

The Woman

*Anch'io,
non si aspetti un granchè.
Possiamo andare in un albergo
che nessuno conosce.
Non deve avere paura.*

Me too,
so don't expect too much.
We can go to a hotel
that no one knows.
Don't be afraid.

The Man

*Vorrei che Lei sapesse
che il mio nome è Pedro Cantos.*

I want you to know
that my name is Pedro Cantos.

The Woman

*Pedro Cantos.
Mi chiamo Nina, Nina.*

Pedro Cantos.
My name is Nina, Nina.

(They get up from the table and head toward the hotel.)

The End

*Translation by Cori Ellison.
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