In THE GARDEN (1987; IMI 6682), the fourth opera we have written, I turned to the ancient and best known myth of all: the story of Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. I used it as I pleased – how else could it be done? In the first act the pair go out into the world to conquer it. In the second, having conquered the world and created a civilization, Eve longs to return to her first love – the Serpent. They attempt to go back but fail. Eve discovers, to her frustration, that the Serpent has not remained the eternal young lover she remembers. It too has aged, time has taken its toll of it and of the Garden. Adam and Eve prepare for their return to the world.

3 In all that we have written up to THE HAND, there had been drama, plot, dramatic personae – either in a “conventional” or in an “avant-gardist” manner. The dialogues were meant to tell the audience something that reached beyond music. I have attempted to say something about Time; about the links between Man and his place in the World.

In THE HAND I entered, for the first time, the world of pure fantasy embodied by its complete autonomy. Here the dream is more strongly present than in any of our other works. For the first time, one character is on stage, quite solitary, and its aloveness is part of the subject matter. The verbal texture reaches almost the density of poetry, which gives the piece a very special quality.

In THE HAND we have abandoned completely any theatrical aids. Even if the singer (the Palmist) can act and does so, the acting is of no importance. THE HAND materializes in the mind’s eye it could be done.

4 All our joint ventures, prior to THE HAND, started with a telephone call from Josef, telling me: “I have been commissioned to write an opera – do you have anything?” and it would transpire that, indeed, I did have “something”, or “something” would take shape in a series of conversations between us. These conversations, which have lasted on and off for over twenty years, served me as a fount of knowledge in establishing the relationship between words and music; between music and the stage; what is modern opera; the interdependence of political message and music et cetera.

Unlike on other occasions, no commission has been received for THE HAND. In 1988 Tal told me of a new short piece he had written entitled SCENE, from the Diary of Franz Kafka, June 25, 1914, for female voice without accompaniment (1978; IMI 6184). After hearing and seeing the piece performed at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, I realized that in fact, any piece of writing can be put to music even if it was not originally meant to serve as text for a musical composition. I then suggested that he add a piece for the same singer on a text of mine to make up the second half of the programme.

When I made this proposal to my composer I had no idea what text I was going to offer him. The notion of THE HAND popped up much later, after I have been toying around with ideas – something which has never been possible before as the formal structure is a sine qua non for opera libretti.

Only after THE HAND had been written did I find analogies between it and the drawings of Escher in which one climbs up stairs which go down and in which the fishes swimming from the right turn (how?) into birds flying to the left. Later on I came across an unanticipated story by Julio Cortazar, which tells of a man who reads a story about a murder and realizes, towards the end of it, that he himself is the intended victim. The fantastic tales by Borges and Marquez evoked a maelstrom of thoughts and emotions in me. One day I suddenly recalled a story which for years has been resting deep in the recesses of my consciousness: A detective in charge of an enquiry into a murder case discovers, to his utter amazement, that it is he who is the murderer – ergo, the famous story of Oedipus Rex.

5 THE HAND is a tale of an amazing metamorphosis. Is this not also the nature of all art? We can but propose a starting point to a work of art, but in the course of creation it takes shape and form inherent in it, so that the end result is a surprise to the artist himself. Indeed, that is what is happening with this article; I have set out to say a few words about THE HAND and have, in this final sentence come to wherever it is I have come to and I must thank you, Reader, for coming along with me.

Israel Eliraz was born in Jerusalem in 1936. He began publishing his works in 1963 and, the same year, won the National Council of Culture and Art Prize for his play "Three Women in Yellow." Since then he has written ten plays, numerous radio plays and the highly regarded poetry, published since 1980, comprises eight books of verse and recently, a tome of selected poems (MIDDELE 1980-1980) has been published by Siflat Poalim, Tel-Aviv. Apart from his close collaboration with the composer Josef Tal, Eliraz has written texts for compositions by Morris Cotel, Aharan Harlap, Mark Kopytman and Shulamit Ran. He is at present director of "Karem" College for Teachers in Jerusalem.