MYTHS, THE FOCUS OF 20TH CENTURY COMPOSERS. AUREL STROE – *ORESTIA II*

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SUMMARY. It is particularly in the second half of the 20th century that the musical milieu displays extremely interesting ideas and creative concepts. Thus, the composers' focus on myths and their world – with the respective archetypal layers, almost naturally function as an extension of the aesthetic spectrum progressing towards a philosophy of existence. A myth is ceremoniously and metaphorically shaped and is composed of archetypal elements incorporated in its formal expression. Myth interpretation renders human consciousness more harmonious and facilitates the understanding of these archetypal images.

Keywords: archetypal stories, myth, archetypal content

On the conscious and unconscious psyche from a Jungian perspective

According to Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) *the psyche* includes *the conscious psyche* – the centre of consciousness is the Ego; and *the unconscious psyche*-the Self is the central archetype.

The conscious Ego is the personal *consciousness,* the individual reality. It displays a systematic tendency and it „thinks" along a several years' time span. Contrastingly, *the unconscious* and its phenomenology seems to manifest in a chaotic manner, definitely unsystematic and existing during millennial long periods of time. It is a reality *in potentia*, a reality of undiscovered features; one that connects the past – a content that looks back towards the prehistoric world of instincts – to the future – with a pronounced predictability as to the human destiny.

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In fact, any human once born „reproduces the latest stage of evolution that has been reached" as well as „unconsciously contains, as an a priori fact, the entirety of the psychical structure gradually developed along his ancestral line, in an ascending or descending trajectory"[2]. *Consciousness* becomes alienated from these preconditions as it does not acknowledge the fact that they can influence individual destiny. On the contrary it has a tendency of experiencing individual life as if it was unique and non-repeatable. Actually, that which it considers as something new is, for humanity, an archaic story.

Therefore, *the conscious Ego* is always endowed with a new beginning and an early finality whereas the unconscious *psyche* is unfathomably ancient and can be rendered as a permanently evolving loop – and so elongated towards a distant future.

The *unconscious* reality remains in a latent or non-existent state until the moment that certain external elements are activated which undertake the function of a trigger mechanism. It is the case of emotions, affections which emerge as involuntary, instinctive reactions and constitute the factors that undermine the rational order imposed on by *consciousness.*

The *unconscious* generates dreams and visions, emotions and so its intervention is directed towards a precise purpose. Moreover, even if it acts contrary to *consciousness* – since that which is most important for the life of the *unconscious i*s ranked lowest within *consciousness* and vice versa[3] (Jung, 2005: 41), it remains compensatory in its expression, meaning that it incessantly seems to attempt to reestablish the lost balance between the two.

The harmonization of *conscious* and *unconscious* data is rendered by the prolonged *process of individuation*; it is an irrational process defined by a grasp of *symbols* since they themselves unify the contents of the two. This union brings about new attitudes of c*onsciousness*[4].

Studies reveal the fact that the entire existence of primitive people was grounded in an extremely acute *intuition,* which has meanwhile diminished if only on a conscious level. It remains part of the unconscious and it finds expression precisely in the images rendered by *dreams* – „the *symbols* in a dream are the essential messengers from the instinctive segments of the human mind towards the rational ones, their interpretation enriches the scarcity of *consciousness*, so that the latter learns to understand once more the forgotten language of instincts"[5].

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[2] Jung, Carl Gustav. *Archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Opere Complete 9/1. Editura TREI, București, 2014, p. 314.

[3] Jung, Carl Gustav. *Aion. Contributions to the Symbolism of Self*. Opere Complete 9/2. Editura TREI, București, 2005, p. 41.

[4] Jung, Carl Gustav. *Archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Opere Complete 9/1. Editura TREI, București, 2014, p. 325.

[5] Jung, Carl Gustav. Von Franz, Marie-Louise. Henderson, Joseph L. Jacobi, Jolande. Jaffe, Aniela.*The human and his symbols*. Editura TREI, București, 2017, p. 60.

The coordinator of *dreams* is the Self which represents „the internal guiding factor" and „the organizing centre which pursues the enrichment and growth of personality"[6] – it is the motor, the trigger factor of the process of individuation. In order to attain a profound existential form, the Self must become free from the intentions of continuous planning, of its attitude defining a member of the pragmatic society[7] and be receptive to the clues and messages generated by the Self.

It is indeed the assignment of each individual to uniquely attain personal fulfilment and it must be noted that for each there is a particular kind of fulfilment – even if one can identify certain similitudes between individuals, personalities, experiences etc. different elements can also be distinguished. As a result, it is practically impossible to synthesize the infinite variations of the individuation process. In the same way the psychical material cannot be completely systematized since it constitutes „a living experience, emotional and irrational in its nature as well as eternally changing"[8].

Archetypal stories

Archetypal stories are rooted in those *experiences, dreams* and even *hallucinations* which render an *archetypal content*. Essentially individual experience is no more than a projection of the *collective unconscious*, the purpose being that of creating a new story, an actual one that includes pre-existent material.

According to Marie-Louise von Franz[9], „the more original versions of folk *stories* are local *legends* and parapsychological histories, miraculous stories which emerged from invasions of the *collective unconscious* as lucid hallucinations"[10]. Unlike *myths* which enjoyed tremendous notoriety due to excessive orality, *legends* are the ones to render the idea of a recorded historical time.

As far as *myths* are concerned, Jung places their origin „in the times of the primitive story-teller and his dreams; they are originated from the people who are moved by the vibration of their fantasies"[11] and they are akin to the poets and philosophers who have succeeded them. In the course of time, civilisations were preoccupied by the origin and authenticity of myths

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[6] Jung et al., op. cit, p. 206.
[7] The traditions of an advanced society as well as knowledge can diminish or even block authentic experience.
[8] Jung et al., op. cit, p. 212.
[9] A phenomenon discovered and described by other researchers, too: Max Luthi, Jacob Wyrsch (1892-1980), Heinrich Burkhard (1861-1914) and others.
[10] Von Franz, Marie-Louise. *Interpretation of fairy tales*. Editura TREI, București, 2019, p. 39-40.
[11] Jung et al., op. cit, p. 110.

and concluded that they are archaic traditions presented in a hyperbolic manner. Thus, the metaphorical content was demeaned.

As a consequence, upon following their trajectory in time, it becomes noticeable that the motif of adaptability to contemporary times has influenced and even threatened the existence of *myths* and characters pertaining to them: the ancient gods are reduced to merely civic patrons, like historical or literary characters, while *myths* are rendered as supernatural stories. The mythical symbolism is annihilated since the narrative itself is interpreted as biography, history and science. The current trend has been nevertheless to rediscover the ancient clues and bring the *archetypal images* back into the focus of the modern individual, and so to restore some essential meaning governing the Universe.

As the initial populations only had *myths*, when the respective civilisations declined or vanished, fragments of those myths lived on in *fairytales*. These are the expression of psychical processes underlying the collective unconscious in its simplest and purest form.

The relation between mythology and the mystery of the unconscious

In his attempt to understand the mystery of the *unconscious*, the modern man is directed towards an insight into *mythological symbolism* as one of its categories refers to the numinous beings, the demigods or humans endowed with supernatural powers. Thus, the *hero's myth* presents a superhuman and the stories about him inspire the social individual as the hero becomes a role model he seeks to emulate. Therefore, he will adopt a way of life which imitates the heroic character.

Indeed, this attitude completely contrasts to that of previous civilisations who never consciously reflected on their *symbols* but inhabited them and actually became influenced by their meaning. This aspect is explained by the fact that in the beginning human deeds and actions were carried out in an *unconscious* manner, and it was only later that humans began to reflect on the causes which determined the course of their action[12].

Whether the times under consideration are closer or farther away from ours, the fact is that these elements represent a necessity for the mental health of any people. They are the main source of energy which render life on Earth meaningful and confer structure to human society morally and socially. When they are supressed or cease to be the source of human concern the consequences can only be negative – they lead to moral degradation, spiritual disintegration, social disorder, dissociation.

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[12] Jung et al., op. cit, p. 100.

The de-humanizing of the modern individual – the fact that he does not respond anymore to *symbols* and numinous ideas, that he has lost the affective, unconscious connexion with natural phenomena – is a result of a loss of emotional energy and of the relation with nature as a result of scientific progress and the prevalence of reason.

This deficit is balanced (or at least there is an attempt to balance it) by compensatory activity realized through *dreams* and their underlying *symbols.* This is an attempt to connect to the *unconscious* which has preserved the primitive features that formed a part of the original mind; the *unconscious* deems to revive some aspects which have been lost to the human mind in the course of historical evolution (illusions, fantasies, instincts, forms of archaic thought).

The study of *individual symbolism*, respectively of the *collective* one requires enormous effort. And yet it is essential in order to salvage a society dominated by subjective consciousness which has renounced visions as well as the powerful, vital ideas which could grant some certainty that the present human condition is tackled appropriately.

Myths as inspiration for artistic creativity

The *myth* represents a dynamic system of *symbols* and *archetypes* which, applied to a formal scheme outlines a story[13]. Modernism proposes a multilateral approach to it – from a historical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, scientific perspective. Musically, the *cosmographic* and t*ranscendenta*l myths are tackled in various hypostases – from the underlying structural idea to significances of gestures and timbral colour, with view to devising an architectonic form as an artistic symbol of the mythical vision on existence.

There are works to illustrate that such as *Oedipus* (1931) by George Enescu, the *Bassarids* (1966) by the German composer Hans Werner Henze as well as the trilogy *Closed Citadels* – musical in three acts*: Orestia I. Agamemnon* (1973), *Orestia II. The Libation Bearers* (1983) and *Orestia III. The Eumenides* (1988) by Aurel Stroe; the ancient Greek myths as well as the Christian medieval ones are an inspiration source for Tiberiu Olah – *The Trojans*, stage music (1966), Liviu Glodeanu – *Ulysses*, vocal orchestral work (1968) as well as the opera *Zamolxis (*1969) and also Doina Rotaru – *Chimeras*, orchestral work (1994) a o.[14].

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[13] Banciu, Ecaterina. *Aesthetical archetypes of the ethos-affectus relation in the history of music*. Editura MediaMusica, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 50.

[14] For further examples see Banciu, Ecaterina. *Aesthetical archetypes of the ethos-affectus relation in the history of music*. Editura MediaMusica, Cluj-Napoca, 2006.

The interest in *mythology* has crossed the temporal border into the 21th century. A composer that presented contemporary integrations of the mythological subject was Dan Dediu. He would systematically reinterpret *myths*, philosophical concepts and linguistic theories with surprising skill[15] – see his work *Hibernator* for trombone and orchestra (2010), a drama in 5 tableaux[16] which progresses towards irony on a humorous note, and which displays nuances that at a certain point touch upon the grotesque. The work seems to allude to the *Cave Myth* in Plato's *Republic* and the musical discourse aims at capturing the moment of exiting the cave as a symbol of the access to spirituality.

Aurel Stroe. The Orestia suite

The *myths* of Greek antiquity represent a permanent source of inspiration for art creators and an indispensable component that facilitates the reconnection with the internal world of the individual, while enabling the exploration of the time and space dimensions of the world cultural memory. *Myths* and *rituals* of the Greek civilisation are powerful symbols of profound significance and their re-dimensioning into the present time once again reaffirms the ongoing presence of this ancient past within the various stages of humanity.

Orestia after Aeschylus follows the series of unfortunate and unsettling events which gravitate around the House of Atreides: the murder of Agamemnon by his wife Clytemnestra (in *Orestia I. Agamemnon*), the reunion of Agamemnon's children – Electra and Orestes, their planning to avenge their father by killing Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and Oreste completing the action (*Orestia II. The Libation Bearers*) and the consequences of his action (*Orestia III. The Eumenides*).

The events are centred on the bloody murders which affect the generations of the House in an endless cycle of events. These direct attention to an important aspect, namely the troubled nature of the heritage and the responsibilities which underlie it (Oreste's case and the duty to avenge his father in order to restore justice). Yet, the last part seems to render a context that favours the breaking of this cycle of catastrophe by implementing the idea of a transition from a primitive society, governed by instinct, to a rational society (Oreste's deed is judged and the justification for the act of being tortured by the Furies for that is determined).

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[15] Petecel Theodoru, Despina. *SIMN 2010 – an opportunity to reflect on the arts of the 20th-21st centuries: iconoclasm or a game culture?*. In Revista MUZICA 3, 2010, p. 28.

[16] *The Cave, Intermezzo I, Dreaming the Dreamer, Intermezzo II and The Commutation.*

In his approach of the *Orestia* suite, composer Aurel Stroe proposes a unifying philosophical and aesthetical vision. The work is a morphogenetic composition and musicologist Sorin Lerescu identifies complex theatrical virtues[17]; the work is invested with valuable symbolical attributes due to the *archetypal* substrate, by means of the mythical characters and by the themes tackled.

Before engaging with the middle part of the work, it is necessary to discuss a few particularities of the other two parts of the suite.

For *Orestia I. Agamemnon*, Aurel Stroe builds a musical universe which is imbued with significance, with continuously evolving sonic structures; the composer resorts to the ancestral folk melos, to noise and archaic forms of song and utterance, to a byzantine type of melody and rhythms rendered by an entire percussionist apparatus as well as to magnetic tape and organ.

The work oscillates between meditative moments, still, flat scenes and contrasting parts, surprisingly shocking as to the timbre and the dynamic employed. All these are subordinate to a fluent musical discourse which is continuously evolving and precipitates up to the extreme point of psychical resistance. Implacable fate, revenge, evoking specific feelings or a specific period are aspects which are intentionally suggested by such particular dynamic proposition.

Subsequently in *Orestia III. The Eumenides*, the saxophone is employed in various timbral hypostases and represents a key element – the entire construction gravitates around it – so that it renders the essence of the entire sonic endeavour. The vision is completed by the presence of the choir and the vocal soloists, accompanied by the colour percussion (maracas, castanets).

The timbral vitality and the emphasis on the vocal melodic trajectory, as they are set up in the first two works, render such orchestral presence as a signature aesthetic vision of the composer Aurel Stroe.

To be noted that the trilogy is marked by Eastern-European influences and also by some from beyond the European sphere, and that it proposes a new aesthetic synthesis – *repetitiveness* and vocality are subjected to a new aesthetic vision, the transition from song to speech, the open architectonic form, the connection with ancient *myths*, with heterophonic song, the reintegration of micro-intervals into the melodic discourse, the employment of extreme register for voice and instruments, all of these imposing an original compositional vision.

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[17] Lerescu, Sorin. *Instrumental Theatre*. Editura Fundaţiei România de Mâine, Bucureşti, 2001, p. 67.

Orestia II. The Libation Bearers

Orestia II is a musical in two acts (E.g. 1). The first act can be symbolically described by terms such as night, sky, thunder, water, river, un-mourned grave, beasts, viper, as well as arrow, eagle, sacred oath. The events unfold around these terms – mourning for the lost father, Electra encounters Orestes, „the redeemer of royal houses" and the realization of the revenge plan.

The second act centres on the carrying out of the plan – the court plot followed by the murder of Clitemnestra and Aegisthus; the son being sent by the gods to avenge his father is symbolically associated with terms such as freedom, justice, light, rest, appeasement.

Despite the architectonic structure of the work *Orestia II. The Libation Bearers* being based on a minimal, simplified material, the composer articulates a grandiose type of music – one of the main particularities defining his compositional style.

Aurel Stroe opts for a limited orchestral ensemble: oboe, violin, viola, cello, organ, magnetic tape, an extended section of percussion instruments and adjacent beaters (wooden beaters (dure, soffici e morbide), metal triangle beater, metal broomsticks), handled by two instrument players. The orchestral ensemble is completed by the 11 bird whistles (uccelli) manipulated by the libation bearers' choir and by certain instrument players, when the score requires their intervention.

Actually, both the instrument players and the vocal performers are to play, as the musical discourse unfolds, not only the whistles mentioned before but also percussion instruments. Naturally, they intervene according to the composer's directions. Moreover, the instrument players are given the opportunity to take part in the dramatic plot, respectively to merge with the choir when the score allows it[18] – a more than obvious reference to the idea of *instrumental theatre*.

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[18] Stroe, Aurel. *Orestia II* (score), Editura Muzicală, București, p. 3.

E.g. 1

Aurel Stroe. *Orestia II* (the beginning of the work)

As far as the characters are concerned (baritone, mezzosoprano, „mezzo-grave", bass pedaller, trombone and an actor) and also for the libation bearers group (2 sopranos and 3 mezzosoprano) a predilection for the medium and grave register is evident as well as the exact guidelines from the author that these are to be included in certain patterns, to fulfil certain requirements; they are to enhance the dramatism and a certain primitivism – harsh voices, with almost no vibration (with the exception of Orestes (a baritone)

Orestia II. The libation Bearers makes use of fragments from Romanian carols and some from other cultures – Mongolian melodies, Indonesian ones, Indian, Abyssinian. These are assimilated into the basic structure by various means, such as heterophonic transcription of the melody into the spirit of the score, synchronization with other contrasting melodies, implementation of some changes in significance[19], various alterations of the melody, and respectively of the rhythm.

The work is particularized by the differentiated treatment of rhythm, respectively of the melodic structure, depending on the characters' typology or on the context proposed by the dramatic material. It can also be noted the composer's concern for the mixed timbre between the vocal soloist and the instrument – instruments are transformed into characters playing a special dramatic role. This relation yields another important feature – the voice is not conferred the highest rank within the opera, as it was naturally the case up to that point, but it attempts to assume some characteristics of the instrument. Equalizing the two modes of musical expression renders a new kind of sonic evolution.

Conclusion

As compared to science which might be considered an evolutionary effort, it is possible to regard *mythology* as an involution effort. Yet one cannot disregard the capacity of the latter to serve as an inexhaustible source of wisdom. Even if these teachings might constantly be subjected to reinterpretation, their archaic fundament and implicitly the organic affiliation to the conception about the Universe cannot be disputed[20].

Myths can fall into decline just as *symbols* can be strongly secularized. Nevertheless, they will not disappear permanently since they pertain to the human being so they are to be encountered in various hypostases of human life[21]. Therefore, they are manifest in various areas of human endeavour including that of music, according each time to a different dynamic depending on the historical age, the individual needs as well as on the needs of the society the individual is part of.

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[19] With regards to the metamorphosis of the melody into a scale belonging to a different system of organizing pitches, the change in tunning.

[20] Kernbach, Victor. *Essential Myths.* Editura Științifică și enciclopedică, București, 1978, p. 15.

[21] Eliade, Mircea. *Images and symbols*. Editura Humanitas, București, 1994, p. 31-32.

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