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**FEMININE SACRALITY AS AN EMANATION OF RITUAL SACRIFICE IN
THE GREEK TRAGEDY AND MUSICAL DRAMA**

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ABSTRACT
OF THE PHD THESIS ENTITLED
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DEFENDED BY PHD CANDIDATE GABRIELA DIANA ZERIU

This thesis represents a symbolic homage brought to Diotima, the mysterious woman who transformed Socrates from being a teacher to being a student. Considering this context, the Platonic dialogue *Banquet* could be considered a “feast” dedicated to the woman as a concept, as she is the only one who can reveal the great mystery of fecundity and cosmic cycle. Therefore, my doctoral thesis, glorifies this everlasting-procreator form, this unique and fantastic quality of the woman principle of giving and especially of calling to life all the living forms.

There is a mystery of the Great Cosmic Mother (known under hundreds of epiphanies), a kind of universal maternity, which also implies eschatological valences – as everything that is born will return to “the dark womb” of Mother Gaea.

At the same time, my purpose is to illustrate the metaphysical coordinates of the feminine archetype, starting from Goethe’s Mothers from *Faust*, going to the mystery of the ritual virginity or through the destiny of the sublime maidens from the Greek tragedy, namely: Iphigenia, Electra, Antigone etc.

Connected to the feminine principle and to the feminine sacrality, there are the transcendent cults and rituals, from the witch cult to the cult of Holy Virgin Mary, as a theological model for an exemplar femininity. This feminine sacrality principle is manifested in the history of the Romanian spirituality itself. We all grew up with stories about fairies, *sânziene*, *drăgaice* or *iele*. Our grandmothers used to tell us about the fairies that danced under the clear moon and punished the way too curious mortals. We should remember CamilPetrescu’s famous play *The Iele’s Dance* and the identity between the *iele* and the Platonic ideas. Who has not seen and enjoyed the *călușari*’s cathartic dance, a secret masculine fraternity, settled under the patronage of the feminine sacrality? The *călușari* secretly bow to Herodiana, the Fairy Lady or the Queen of the Witches. Saving Eve’s condition, both in transcendent and in immanent, the Virgin Mary is chosen to handle a

decayed humanity due to the originary sin. Jesus' birth becomes the „portal” through which the eternity has come into the world, Virgin Mary becoming the Great Intercessor between God and humans.

Chapter I – “Art as an emanation of the transcendent” is in fact a plea for supporting the religious roots of art. Mircea Eliade unites the religious act with the entire primordial creative activities, and the “divine artisan” is, at the same time, architect, painter, dancer or musician.

The defining element in the structure of the sacred is the archetype, which presents it to the world. In its essence, the archetype is “an exemplar model”, a repetitive divine pattern to which the human being always goes, however this repetition has an acute ritual and symbolic character, looking for remaking the primordial act of creation. That is the reason why the cosmogonical myth not only paralyzes the creative enthusiasm of a person because of its perfection, but it also incites to creation. The conclusion is that the human becomes the creator precisely after completely assuming this myth.

At the same time, creation is about the creator's obligation to sacrifice something or someone close. However, the sacrifice cannot be performed without a violent ritual. The sacrificial theology is at the basis of the cosmogonical myths, considering that without the act of sacrifice, the world could not be “born”. The most notable to this perspective is Prajapati's myth related in Vede: warming himself beyond measure, Prajapati creates the universe through emanation, by multiplying himself indefinitely. Waters, earth, mountains, gods and the rows of bricks from the fire altar are born from his cosmic body. Prajapati's identification with the fire altar, the sacred place for sacrifice, represents the identification of the primordial giant with the sacrifice itself. Nevertheless, through the creative sacrifice Prajapati drains completely, and he sacrifices himself for the creation. As Mircea Eliade illustrates (in *The History of Religious Ideas and Beliefs*) the primordial giant, disjointed for the creation, becomes the fire altar. Building the sacrifice metaphysics, the priests rebuilt his being through the rows of bricks that form the altar. The history of the religions abounds in sacrificial cosmogonical myths, illustrating the primacy of the sacrificial act. Obviously in Christianity the absolute triumph of the sacrificial theology is reached through the crucifixion of Jesus. God loved the world to that extent that he sacrificed his only son. The Cross confirms the crucifixion, the supreme sacrifice, but it also synthesizes all the sacraments of the Christianity, from the beginning to the final Parousia. Being accepted as a sacred space of the sacrificed, the cross deifies the human's soul now and for eternity. For

the human existence, the creative valence of sacrifice is maintained and it presupposes the moral regeneration of the community and the reintegration in the universal bio-cosmic rhythms. Representative to this perspective is *The Ballad of Master Manole*, which is understood as a cosmogonical ballad, as the master, through the creation gesture, is in fact rebuilding the cosmogony.

Representative is the fact that the solution comes to him through a dream when God “whispers” the master, that any other alternative will not support his creation:

"In my sleep meseemed
A whisper from high,
A voice from the sky,
Told me verily
That whatever we
In daytime have wrought
Shall nights come to naught,
Crumble down like rot;
Till we, one and all,
Make an oath to wall
Whose bonny wife erst,
Whose dear sister first,
Haps to come this way
At the break of day,
Bringing meat and drink
To husband or kin.”¹

The ritualistic invocation to the feminine principle as an eternal savior reflects the intriguing capacity of regeneration of this principle.

Through each birth, the women of the world restart the Creation from where it stopped with the last death. Samuel Becket says that: “Women give birth riding a tomb, the day shines for a moment, and then it is night again... Riding a tomb and a hard birth.”²

In *The Road to the Centre*, Mircea Eliade draws the attention upon the fact that every time there is a rupture or a major accident in the living world, the attempt of fixing or solving

¹ *The Ballad of Master Manole*, translated by Dan Dutescu, Editura Albatros, 1976

² Samuel Beckett, *Așteptându-l pe Godot*, București, Editura Cartea Veche, 2007, pp. 87 – 89, our transl.

is completely inadequate. The only solution is “the return to the Creative moment”, namely to repeat the creative act. Considering this concept, the woman is the eternal carrier of the creative act, therefore, to complete their creation, the masters bound themselves under a tremendous oath:

„Whose bonny wife erst,
Whose dear sister first,
Haps to come this way
At the break of day,
Her we'll offer up,
Her we shall build up!”³

At this moment, the violent death is mentioned for the first time, the ritualistic death of the woman or virgin, in order to transfer the life from her body into the coldness of the stone wall.

“If, as it is shown through a considerable number of archaic traditions, any violent death is creative, namely it projects the soul of the sacrificed one into a new body, it is clearly understandable that the soul of the one sacrificed as a foundation stone is projected into its new architectonic body, which lasts after it is endowed with life.”⁴

In vain Manole tries to stop his wife from her way, what has to be done, will be done and Manole gives her one last kiss, the death kiss:

„His sweet bride he kissed,
Saw her through a mist,
In his arms he clasped her,
Up the steps he helped her”⁵.

The terrifying work of Manole is accomplished step by step, in a sinister death game. The rising of the wall is symmetric with the progressive loss of the vital forces. Under the immurement, slowly Ana's organic body becomes “liturgical body”. Therefore the moment

³ *The Ballad of Master Manole.*

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Drumul spre Centru*, București, Editura Univers, 1991, p. 454, our transl.

⁵ *The Ballad of Master Manole.*

of losing her life coincides with the moving of her organic body into its new form, as an architectonic body. Ana does not come to live at the monastery, but to become one with the monastery, as her soul is projected between the walls of it, making it to last through ages. That is the reason for the sacrifice – to continue living in a stone body.

“Master Manole’s wife continues her existence in cosmos in a new body, the architectonic body of the Argeş Monastery. Designed – through a ritual death – in a different cosmic level, other than the one she existed as a human being, the destiny of Master Manole’s wife is to know a continuity that is not allowed to human beings.”⁶

However after he accomplishes his creation, Manole becomes a stranger and he loses himself in relation to the world. Hearing the voice of his beloved wife, Manole cuts all the connections with this world of pain. Thus Manole’s violent death is also a ritualistic death, as it simply prolongs his existence at the same cosmic level as Ana started existing. The metamorphosis of the bodies of the two husbands makes their union into eternity possible.

Manole’s Ana represents one of the most sublime feminine models of human sacrifice from the history of the Romanian spirituality. As a mark of love, but also of opposite conjunctions, the masculine principle becomes the aquatic principle (the fountain that appears where Manole fell) which is a fundamental feminine element. At the same time, the feminine principle becomes the masculine principle of the architectonic creation.

In the subchapter “The Problematic of the sacrality in Theatre”, my purpose is to illustrate the substantial connection, the existence between the sacrality and the genesis of the theatric art. I have started from the premise that the first actors of the humankind were the priests, as they were the incarnation of the immortals during the sacred ceremonies. These ceremonies had a profound dramatic character, representative for this aspect being the ceremonies for the New Year. The cosmogonical poems presented during these ceremonies, were not told, but interpreted by the priests. The history of religions confirms the existence of such scenarios at the Egyptians, the Indians, the Iranians, the Babylonians etc. The mythological Australian tradition claims that the world has the chance of being created again at a spiritual level, while the great actors of these ceremonies are the priests. “The priest reproduces the exemplar itinerary of the immortals and he repeats their gestures

⁶ Mircea Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 84, our transl.

and words, he is brief and he ends up embodying the immortals.”⁷

The scenic identification is so perfect that “the public” behaves as if in front of them there are the immortals themselves. That is why they have to be protected of the impurity and imperfection of the lay universe: “The priest who embodies the immortals becomes for a certain period of time the immortal person, therefore he does not have to be looked at, nor touched.”⁸

Another great “actor” of humankind, who is born from the sacrality of the initiation ceremony and the reach of trance, is the shaman. Similar to the actor, the shaman has a profound belief in the truth of his epitomes. Completely convinced that he handles the secret language and the being of animals, the shaman believed that once he took on the skin of an animal, he became the animal itself. That is why the shaman showed high skills in acting as he managed including to imitate the language of those animals. The shaman barked as a dog, baaed as a sheep, neighed as a horse, mooed as a bull. In conclusion he could perfectly imitate the “voice” of animals, the song of the birds or the flapping of wings.

Starting from this reality of the shamans, we cannot move on without mentioning the famous improvisation with the animals exercises created by Viola Spolin. For study and observation, the students are sent at the Zoological Garden to analyse the movement, the rhythm and the physical characteristics of the animals, before the stages of the exercises themselves:

“Each actor is responsible for the physical traits of his animal and then he walks as the animal following his teacher’s instructions... When the actors have abandoned the features of the chosen animal and have gained new body rhythms, ask them for their animal to make sounds. Continue leading them through indications until all the resistance disappear and the sound and the movement of the body forms a unity.”⁹

Apart from the shaman technique, whose finality is in the identification with that specific animal, in the case of the actor’s technique, the identification represents only the debut of the creative act. Achieving certain expression means through the exercises with the animals must be followed by their integration in the process of building the Character. For instance, using the rhythm used in “talking” by a certain animal can lead to finding the

⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Mitul eternei reînțoarceri*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 1999, p. 59, our transl.

⁸ Op. cit., p. 60, our transl.

⁹ Viola Spolin, *Improvizație pentru Teatru*, U.N.A.T.C. Press, București, Ediția 1999, 2008, p. 243, our transl.

tonality of the voice of the character. Therefore, in trying to achieve a low vocal tone, the actor was given the idea of picturing a hippopotamus. Together with Viola Spolin, Grotowski uses as well the exercise based on sounds produced by animals in his preparation of future actors.

“The tiger: a long roar that continues on the same intonation with the same breath. The snake: a long hiss that continues on the same intonation with the same breath. The cow: a long moo that continues on the same intonation with the same breath. During these exercises the body has to stimulate the produced sounds. The most elementary movements of these animals have to be performed corporally.”¹⁰

Returning to the theatric of the shaman’s practices, one of the most notable techniques is the ceremony of going down in the Inferno to free the souls of the dead and bring them into the deads’ kingdom. During the trance, the shaman is impregnated with the souls of the dead, having their exact voice.

“Suddenly the shaman’s voice changes; he starts talking with a sharp voice because the death woman is actually talking. She complains she does not know the road and she is afraid to be separated from her kinds, and eventually she accepts to be accompanied by the shaman and they go together to the underground land. Arriving there, the spirits of the dead does not allow him to enter together with the new comer... the session starts to become vivid to grotesque as the souls, through the shaman’s voice, start to argue, drink and sing altogether.”¹¹

Between the shaman trance and the actor’s trance there are certain connections. Starting from the great experience of the Balinez theatre, but also from the metaphysical coordinates of his theatre, Antonin Artaud pictured a theatre capable of creating trance moments, similar to the shaman trance. Therefore the Artaudian trance is illustrated by the spirit that “talks” through the actor’s mouth. The trance or the gods’ dance implies a certain disorder, necessary to destruct the limits and to unleash the forces that cuff it. Far from being similar to hysteria, Artaud’s trance presupposes the rigor of some “organized gestures” where the actor is the intermediary between order and disorder, chaos and creation, mathematic precision and the unleashing of some blind forces. In fact, Artaud’s endeavour is to formalize the trance starting with the example of the actors from the Bali

¹⁰ Jerzy Grotowski, *Spre un teatru sărac*, București, Editura Unitext, Seria Magister, 1988, p. 91, our transl.

¹¹ Mircea Eliade, *Șamanismul și tehnicile arhaice ale extazului*, București, Editura Humanitas, 1997, p. 99 – 100, our transl.

Theatre.

“We are here and we suddenly awaken during the metaphysical battle, and the stony part of the body from the trance, hardened by the flux of the cosmic forces, is admirably transposed in this frenetic dance, but at the same time it is ruled by tense angles where one can immediately feel the free fall of the spirit.”¹²

Consequently, the trance can be obtained after a rigorous process, during which the director is the magician who has to know all the secrets of formalizing the gesture, voice, and body of the actor in trance. The actor becomes a medium, who has to know when to free those mechanisms of the subconsciousness.

Artaud’s vision claims that above everything, the theatre is ritual and magic, aspects that empower its cathartic function of sorcerer. The magical efficiency of the theatric act is realised through the force of the gesture, the yell, the incantation, but also through the power of the spoken word. Words acquire “charming” values, generating “sensible emanations”, where the scenic movements and images become “plastic manifestations of force”. It is necessary to mention that this ensemble creates a “hypnotic suggestion” that acts directly upon the spectators’ sensitivity.

At the core of these practices there is a thorough knowledge of the body and its energies, as only the physical language is capable of transmitting the species native archetypes or primordial emotions. Artaud will postulate the existence of certain magical means of the theatre, which are “organic” practices upon the spectators.

These are related to music, mimics, incantations, pantomime, rhythmical gestures, etc., without being something more than “means of enchanting” the spectators, capable of influencing their spirit through physical means. Therefore the science acquired by the actor allows him to know “the points of the body” that have to be touched in order to throw the spectator in “magical trances”. That is why knowing “the localizations of the spectator’s body” is vital for the actor’s cathartic process. The magic of gestures takes control of those parts of the body determining major changes at a spiritual level. Consequently the spectator is trapped under the power of ancient magic forces and he is overwhelmed by the assault of rhythms used to tame the snakes or of those used in healing practices.

“The actor becomes similar to the shaman through which mysterious calls are transmitted by the great spirits. The phenomenon that occurs is in fact the possession, the

¹² Op. cit., p. 54, our transl.

participants abandon their individuality in order to find the complete unity of the being. The ritual contributes to it.”¹³

Jerzy Grotowski will connect his theatric poetics to the sacrality through an unusual process, namely the laic negation of Christian belief. He will use the religious concepts and themes, will remove their transcendent senses and will convert them in theatric language. The technique of discovering the essence of theatre starts from the so called “negative theology” – “via negative”.

Considering that this research method belongs strictly to him, Grotowski will focus on the actors’ affirming of all negativities, especially those which stop him to perform. Once identified, there is a long professional process of eliminating them through exercises, but also through a special coaching. Continuing the affirmation of the theatre through its negation, Grotowski will successively eliminate all the useless elements from the path of rediscovering the actor. At the beginning, the classical division of space, hall – scene, will be dropped out, so that the actors are free to perform among the spectators and become an emanation of them. Leaving the contact with the hall, the actors are able to “build” different constructions among the spectators, making them part of the events and the play. This change creates certain laboratory conditions, extremely favorable for his purpose in theatric research.

The elimination of lights obliges the spectator to explore the shadow areas, the lighted areas and the areas where the light comes from fixed sources. Starting from the paintings of El Greco, where the characters are enlightened through a spiritual technique, Grotowski invites the actor to the mystical procedure of enlightenment. The theatre is such a miracle, that the actor “can become shiny”, he can “enlighten”, or he can become himself “a source” of “psychic light”.

The process of elimination continues through the resignation of make-up and stunts, thus determining the illustration of the extraordinary quality of the actors of “metamorphosis” under the astonishing looks of the spectators. This metamorphosing becomes possible only through the use of the body’s expression means, the actor’s ability of building different physiological masks or transmitting certain interior impulses. The suppression of the “unnecessary” elements is continued by Grotowski through the elimination of all the plastic elements from the theatre: mise en scene, costumes or stage

¹³ George Banu, *Reformele teatrului în secolul reînnoirii*, București, Editura Nemira, 2001, p. 174, our transl.

props. The absence of music allows the actor to use his “musical speaking” through different intonations or associations of sounds, etc.

Regarded in its essence, the show is understood as “an act of transgression”. Subjected to a process of seeking for the truth about the own person, the actor is called “to rip off his mask”, give up the mundane stereotypes and the lies. Above all these, the actor needs to have the courage to expose himself in front of the public, showing his real authentic being in front of the spectators. This process of auto revelation is performed on the actor’s body due to the fact that this is the place for the archetypal memory, capable of incarnating all the myths existent in the collective subconsciousness. Consequently the actor is not allowed to have an attitude towards his body similar to a regular person. After an assiduous professional work, the actor has to transform his body into “a capable and obedient tool” that is able to fulfill any task or acting assignment.

Grotowski is convinced of the theological truth according to which only a sinner can become a real saint, and he extrapolates this truth on the theatre.

“The things are really easy, I am talking here about holiness from the point of view of an unfaithful: about a “laic holiness”. From the moment the actor does not show his body in exchange for pecuniary values, but he releases it from any oppressive resistance due to spiritual impulses, when it is consumed by fire or otherwise destroyed – then he stops selling his body and starts giving it away, reedits the gesture of salvation and reaches a state close to sanctity.”¹⁴

This purified and brought to its essence theatre corresponds “the sacralised actor” who is placed at an ontological opposition with “the court actor”. The difference between the technique of “the saint actor” and “the court actor” is identical with the one between the courtesan’s abilities and the act of complete commitment of true love. If the former technique is deductive, consisting in developing some skills, the “sacralised actor’s” technique is inductive. He needs to be capable of “divulging the psychic reflexes” (only partially formed), to learn the science of using the air that transports the sounds so that it produces a vibration, to amplify the sound through a certain type of resonator, to search all the possibilities of the organism becoming aware of the existence of a limited number of resonators (cranial, thoracic, nasal, occipital, laryngeal, interdental, to which others can be added). This type of actor is not satisfied only with handling the diaphragm respiration, as

¹⁴ Op. cit., p. 78, our transl.

he knows that the difference between the scenic actions determines the difference between the “respiratory reactions”. The discontentment of the master adds to all these, and it refers to the diction learned at the theatre faculty, which is based on the closing of the larynges, corrected with the developing of the ability of opening it; together with the science of “controlling from the outside”, if it is open or closed. Solving all these issues is of a vital importance for the “sacralised actor”, together with acknowledging that the road towards becoming an actor is offered by his own body.

“As long as he feels his own body, he is not ready for the exposure act. The body has to be relieved of every resistance; to a certain extent, it practically should cease to exist.”¹⁵

Grotowski treats the body as “a tank of profound impulses”, according to George Banu’s expression, considering that the actor’s authentic reaction should have its origin inside his body, as everything that comes from the outside represents nothing more than the end of the process. Grotowski’s essential preoccupation is focused on stimulating that authentic “sensorial flux”, through training the rapidity of the reflexes and not through fixing their expression. That is why the great theatre man will support the vital necessity of reaching a “flux of signs” accomplished with the entire organism. This mysterious “flux of signs” represents the actor’s part or the trampoline that will help him mobilize the private connections, own life experiences and use them in building the character. At the same time the actor must reach a promptitude and reaction speed that allows him to avoid at any cost the “infiltration of thought” as the ratiocination kills the creative spontaneity.

This is why Grotowski argues in favour of the actor’s complete trust in their own body, as the „organ” which secures the transfer from the „un-self”, the image and mask the others can see, to „the authentic self”. That is, to the „unique and irrepeatable one”, in the integrity of one’s nature, „the corporeal, naked one”.

In defense of abolishing divisions, in order to remake the being’s original unity, Grotowski removes the „competition” of history, its concrete social determinations. In an original manner, in terms of the reception of the theatrical performance, Grotowski apparently gets closer to Artaud, even if the two seem to be in a fundamental contradiction. He „adopts the same agenda as Artaud: remaking the being by means of the contact with its archetypal sources. Atemporality defines this communication mode

¹⁵ Idem., p. 82, our transl.

which leads back to the archaic sensitivity...Grotowski can be accused of the same things as Artaud: they escape from the social space, from history.”¹⁶

If, with the „courtesan actor”, we witness the accumulation of stimulating processes, which lack anticipation, with the „sacralized actor” we witness an unveiling, a complete, almost ecstatic abandonment. It must be added here that the unveiling implies the actor’s diving into the depths and intimate layers of their personality so they can give it up, becoming „a living offering” for the spectators, evening after evening, role after role, performance after performance. But this sacrificial act implies summoning all the actor’s physical and psychical forces, and the actor is, eventually, expected to reach „a state of passive availability”. This complete unveiling must work as a necessary preamble for the creation of „an active score.”

In an attempt to define this „pre-action” state, Grotowski chooses the theological concept of „piousness”, adding that this secular piousness actually means the psychical inclination in which the subject expresses, rather than the desire to accomplish a thing, the desire to give up not accomplishing it.

Grotowski theatrically glorifies and transfers into the lay sphere a fundamentally Christian virtue: self-sacrifice, a virtue which consolidates the unconditional love for the one close to you.

„When I lose myself, then I find myself” – reads the text of St. Antoine of Padova’s prayer. The great theatre theorist also talks about the actor completely losing themselves in front of the spectator, the ultimate abandonment.

In what concerns the master-disciple relationship, Grotowski presents it under the auspices of an intense Apocalypse verse, which he chose as an outstanding model for his entire life: „I shall spit you out of my mouth if you are neither warm, nor cold”. Together with the „theatre apostles” who followed in his footsteps, the master embraced the path of absolute abandonment, with no limits or reserves. As George Banu rightfully noted, they were the „martyrs of the poor theatre”, the lay saints of the stage. Some collapsed and gave up this path, but others moved on, to the very end – until the „redemption” of the theatre from everything that was artificial, inauthentic.

Paraphrasing Christ’s biblical phrase used to characterize Mary Magdalene, we can also say, referring to these theatre apostles: „Much will be forgiven, for they loved the

¹⁶ George Banu, op. cit., p. 210, our transl.

Theatre much.”

As for the method, Grotowski doesn't see himself as an acting teacher, but as a „spiritual master”. The Grotowskian actor's thirst for knowledge is symmetrical with the master's progress, projected in the work with the actor, or, rather, „discovered in himself.” We can notice here meanings and similarities with the Socratic maieutic method to discover the truth. In these terms, the spiritual master's mission is not to teach an actor this or that, but to enable them to be reborn. This rebirth goes together with the master's successive rebirths, with other past or present actors' rebirths.

The actor's work can thus experience a special phenomenon, the „double birth”. It is the moment when the actor is born again into this world – not only in artistic terms, but in terms of their personality. „Their birth is followed by the birth, which repeats itself again and again, of their advisor, who watches on the actor and – forgive this sentence – assists them in the final acceptance of human essence.”¹⁷

For Peter Brook, theatre cannot be separated from sacredness, because theatre is the art which makes the invisible world visible. Brook's famous fluidity proves that everything changes and nothing lives forever.

„Still, theatre is not just a spiritual subject. Theatre is the external ally of the spiritual road and exists in order to allow a glimpse into the invisible world, interwoven with our every-day world, which our senses usually ignore altogether.”¹⁸

But, at the same time, theatre is a living form, able to reflect the topicality of the life to which the human being is connected. After all, theatre is the art which reflects the human condition itself.

The internationalism of Brook's searches actually reflects his dramatic aspiration for „the original theatre”, which he and the team of the Centre tried to find all over the world. What Brook sought was the original human being, as an expression of concrete corporality, which is unpolished and unrefined. The humans and their body!

„First, the search for the essence – which he was so fond of – leads to the assimilation of the „original” with the sacred... The original human being is not, for Brook, the goal that must be reached, but rather a reality which must be revealed.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Jerzy Grotowski, *Teatrul și ritual. Scrieri esențiale.*, București, Editura Nemira, 2014, p. 77, our transl.

¹⁸ Peter Brook, *Fără secrete. Gânduri despre actorie și teatru.*, București, Editura Polirom, 2005, p. 302, our transl.

¹⁹ Peter Brook, *Fără secrete. Gânduri despre actorie și teatru.*, București, Editura Nemira, 2012, p. 101, our

In the name of the same „ab origo” quest, Brook carries his initiatic search, together with his group of moving actors and his magic carpet, which, once stretched out, generated and separated worlds. A pilgrim of the absolute, Brook remains a genuine Marco Polo of the stage, with his attempt to bring together countries and continents by means of the theatrical language. Brook was consumed by his desire to discover the origins of the theatre, which he passionately searched on all continents. It is not a coincidence that the great man was convinced that bringing together people of various races and cultures (after they overcome natural barriers and obstacles) engenders a miracle which is impossible to explain:

„When barriers disappear, everybody’s gestures and tone of voice become a part of the same language, expressing, for one moment, a truth shared by everyone, which the public witnesses: this is the moment towards which the theatre is striving.”²⁰

It is obvious that Brook’s approach has metaphysical connotations, as he searches for the Being’s lost unity, that original Oneness philosophers talked about, which shatters to pieces the fragmented plurality of the worlds. Longing for the Being of the Theatre, Brook is dominated by the desire to discover the theatre’s universal language. The architecture of this language is not made up of words, but of other forms of theatrical communication, such as: body language, colour language, costume language, rhythm language, decor language and light language. It is, again, not a coincidence that the „empty space” was generated by his desire to reach the essence of the theatre. According to his own confession, the work bears this title because, if there had been something there, „the space would no longer be empty”, and an empty space never tells a story, which is a challenge for the spectator’s imagination and mind. Invited to action, actors have the ability to fill the void since the empty space allows the acceptance of all conventions, being independent of any rigid form.

The concept of the empty space led to the performances of Brook’s group all over the world. „The performance on the carpet” enabled the creation of a neutral space, which was, at the same time, attractive – a space where anything could happen. This space-suggestion, devoid of any decorative exposure, gives life to the theatre story, while the public’s imagination is unbound. At the same time, the carpet acquires

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²⁰ Peter Brook, op. cit., p. 109, our transl.

ontological dimensions, being the key element which secures the passage from one world into another.

„The essentialized version of Brook’s soil is the carpet... The carpet shrinks and separates the space of the performance. Laid out on a surface, the carpet leaves the theatrical act open on all sides, while the public can go around it...Where there is a carpet, the theatre can exist.”²¹ When discussing the complicated issue of the forms, Brook believes that any thing or being must have a shape. He adds that this very shape can be a major obstacle in life’s path – a life which, essentially, is devoid of shape. However, the human being is bound to lie within the shape or shapes of the living, which is a major and especially an unavoidable compromise. In theatre, the concrete form is the performance, while the director must always be able to distinguish between the virtual and the finite form. The spectacular form goes from within towards the outside world, merging, in a melting pot, all the elements that were responsible for its aggregation.

At the same time, the director must not be dominated by the idea that the dramatic text, like the musical score, are „sacred forms”, because there are no limits for the possibilities of the virtual forms contained by a masterpiece. But, between latent and concrete, there is a fluid of shapeless energies „like an explosion Brook compares with the Hindu term of *sphota*”. Explosions generate form, but this shape must not be invented only by the director, it has to be the result of a creative *mélange*.

Consequently, this „*sphota* ” is like a plant which grows, opens for a while, then withers and dies, making way for another plant. This process can go on and on, the flow continues.

„In the empty space, I wrote, a shape, once created, is already dying...no form, no matter how great, can be the best vessel to carry a living experience, once the historical context has changed.”

When it comes to the content of the shape, George Banu emphasizes that Brook’s theatre is the „theatre of simple forms”; this simplicity occurs in the name of the essential cosmicity of the theatrical act. This simplicity is also based on Brook’s anti-intellectualism, as well as his firm conviction that (self-sufficient) reason empties the theatrical act of its vital energies.

²¹ George Banu, Peter Brook, *Spre teatrul formelor simple*, București, Editura Polirom, 2005, p. 85, our transl.

It is equally true that a created form „is already dying” awaiting to be replaced by another and another form, the important element being the fluidity, not the „stagnation” in one context or another. But the simplicity of the form implies the matter’s progressive dispossession of its evocative power, which makes Brook decide to accept the smallest number of concrete elements within the space of the stage.

„With successive removals, Brook accomplishes, in space, what the murmur is for the voice. Everything seems to lead to a probable disappearance, the stage is barely differentiated from the stalls by a random detail and this creates a sense of shared intimacy.”²²

Because his theatre departs from Shakespeare and returns to Shakespeare, Brook postulates „the Shakespearean fluidity” as the main feature on any theatrical performance. Seen as the most complex expression of the living, fluidity means both accepting the dynamism of life and rendering it in its full relativity. Starting from the fluidity of the Shakespearean space, Brook identifies the space of the stage as a river in which „the characters are bathing” and which generates „irradiant words”, like a rock amidst the waves. But Brook’s theatrical fluidity can be also understood as a „premonitory fluidity”, according to George Banu, because it unequivocally anticipates the future success of the cinema.

When talking about the „geometrization” of the stage, Brook selects the circle as the perfect and essential shape of his theatre. As a symbol of the absolute, the circle is the Centre of his theatre, as this is the locus where – metaphorically – the entire universe is concentrated. Like the metaphysical circle of *Faust’s* Mothers, the theatrical circle is the simple form that unifies the cosmic elements, which, at the same time, removes everything that is unnecessary.

In its essence, the circle opposes random fragmentation or crumbling, as well as any rift. The circle is perfect in itself, representing the „axis mundi” Mircea Eliade talked about. This is why whatever is included in the circle’s circumference acquires absolute values. Eventually, the circle is the equivalent of the wheel in the theatrical space.

The theatrical circle is the circle „divided” between actors and spectators, while the spectator’s axiologic judgment is influenced by the perfection of the circle which is achieved.

²² Op. cit., p. 270.

The visible-invisible binome is explained by Brook as the implied permanence of the invisible in the depths of our being. Unlike the visible, subject to transformation, multiplicity and death, the invisible escapes the flow of time, thus annulling its ontological limits.

An actor of the invisible, the director communicates with this realm during the pre-creative process, by non-rational means, such as: strong, but very blurred intuitions, undefined premonitions, vague impressions, etc. The director essentially sees and fails to see the secret source from whose depth „the play is calling them”. This blurred vision leads to failed experiments or repeated errors caused by his vision being focused on the outer rather than the inner side of the theatrical process. At this stage, the director’s vision is a „mirroring exercise”, as the mirror, according to St. Maxim The Confessor, „reflects the image of original things”, but doesn’t embrace things in „their substance”. Brook’s solution for this stage is listening, the director’s essential, humble, ultimate hearing of the „magic sound” which will trigger their creation.

The second chapter of the thesis, „The Feminine Sacrificial Act in the Ancient Myth”, analyzes the concept of sacrifice in the Greek tragedy, illustrating the substantial connection between ritual violence and the transcendental dimension of sacrifice. As pointed out by René Gérard (v. *Violence and the Sacred*), sacrifice should be regarded as the consequence of a mediation between the sacrificer and the divinity. Sacrifice essentially redeems the entire community from evil and sin, having the meaning of a moral katharsis. „Perceived as a very sacred action, legitimate violence must be performed in the spirit of *pietas*, which defines all aspects of religious life. History indicates that human sacrifice (whose echoes became the structural foundation of the tragedy) was performed by the Greeks during the Mycenaic age.”²³

An example supporting the above mentioned idea is Euripides’ tragedy *Bacchae*. In this play, the god himself, Dionysus, plays the part of the sacrificer, preparing Pentheus for the offering. So, under the pretense that he is arranging his hair and costume, Dionysus touches his head, torso and legs, ritualistically. It is significant to note that *Bacchae* offers an example of collective sacrifice, in the sense that all Bacchae (including the unfortunate Agave) take part in the sacrifice. As the god endowed them with savage force, the Bacchae perform the sacrifice bare-handed, without any weapon.

²³ René Gérard, *Violența și Sacrul*, București, Editura Nemira, 1995, p.90, our transl.

This is what René Girard calls the „ritualistic sparagmos”, that is, the victim being torn to pieces while still alive by the Bacchae group.

„The women cried in triumph/one brandished an arm, another held a foot complete with hunting boot/the women’s nailstore his ribs apart./Their hands grew bloody, tossing bits of flesh back and forth, for fun.”²⁴.

Tearing the victim apart by the dehumanized audience reflects the anarchy and cruelty practiced by this feminine cult. The god’s revenge is so terrible that he has Agave herself initiate the bloody ritual. The delirium, the trouble of the mind and the hallucinations caused by Dionysus make the unhappy Agave incapable of recognizing her own son. He tries in vain to call her name, appealing to her maternal love: „His priestess mother first began the slaughter./She hurled herself at him. [...] She seized his left arm, below the elbow,/pushed her foot against the poor man’s ribs,/then tore his shoulder out.”²⁵.

The third chapter, entitled „The Metamorphoses of the Sacrificial Act and The Sublime Virgins in the Universe of the Ancient Greek Tragedy”, focuses on the sacrificial motif featured in the great Greek tragedies. It is not a coincidence that René Girard refers to an ancestral connection between sexuality and violence, a motif shared by all religions. At the same time, there is an equivalence between ritualistic virginity and impure blood. For Iphigenia, the collective violence (caused by the ships being stopped at Aulis) of the masculine principle starts once Challas’ propechy is made known. As commander of the army heading for Troy, Agamemnon has no other option but sacrifice. Iphigenia’s plea is in vain when she appeals to his paternal love: „Hellas commands that I sacrifice you,/ with or against my will, beyond myself.”²⁶

The feminine principle must be sacrificed in the name of the masculine principle, with a view to the „ritual cleansing” of the future war crimes. Because, soon enough, the dark and impure blood of murder will be spilled on the land, all soldiers will become impure. It goes without saying that, with the sacrifice, the impure and thickened blood of murder will be „cleaned” by the virgin’s clean and fresh blood. In fact, Iphigenia herself is aware of the sacred power of innocent blood: „My blood, sacrificed at fate’s will/ will

²⁴ English translation of Euripides, *Bacchae*, at <http://johnstoniatexts.x10host.com/euripides/bacchahtml.html>.

²⁵ Op. cit.

²⁶ (English translation of Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, at <http://johnstoniatexts.x10host.com/aeschylus/agamemnonpdf.pdf> .

remove the bad omens.”²⁷. Iphigenia joins a line of sublime virgins in the Greek tragedies, subject to sacrificial violence (willingly or unwillingly) such as Antigone or Polyxena.

Polyxena’s tragedy is the tragedy of the virgin being sacrificed by the victors on Achilles’ tomb, to enable the ships (stopped at the shores of Troy) to get wind in sails and return home safely. To get wind in the sails, Achilles’ shadow demands Polyxena as „compensatory sacrifice” as she is the daughter of Hecuba and Priam. We can’t help noticing the similarity between Iphigenia’s and Polyxena’s destiny, since both sacrifices are performed with the hope of getting good winds in the fleet’s sails. The earth-sea ambivalence is reminiscent of an archaic Greek cult, as well as of the transcendental valorization of elements of the genesis.

Going to war, the heroes walk away from the feminine sacrality, from Mother Gaea, to join the masculine sacrality, the empire of the god Neptune. Leaving the earth behind entails the separation from the stable maternal space, while sailing on the sea means facing the unknown and the unpredictable.

Confronting the two types of sacrality (feminine and masculine) has only one neutral solution, which is ritualistic virginity. This results in the fact that the reconciliation of the two types of sacrality is possible only by the sacrality of the sacrifice.

Mother Gaea implies the separation from the female element, from the representatives of femininity: mothers, sisters, lovers, fiances, or wives. When the war is over, the masculine collectivity leaves the realm of Neptune to return to Gaea. But this transition requires the sacrifice of a pure being – a virgin – in order to pay for the masculine element’s state of alienation.

Polyxena’s sacrificial ceremonial follows the same pattern as Iphigenia’s. At first, the virgin performs the ritualistic incantations, while all the men, significantly, pray together with the sacrificer. The entire community takes part in the sacrificial act, there being a strange connection between the extreme violence and the pious state. „Son of Peleus, father mine, accept the offering I pour thee to appease thy spirit, strong to raise the

²⁷ Op. cit.

dead; and come to drink the black blood of a virgin pure, which I and the host are offering thee.”²⁸

On her way to the altar, the virgin shows exceptional dignity and courage. She refuses to let herself dragged to the altar, ennobling with royal grace the cruelty of the sacrificial act. Strongly impressed by the virgin’s bravery, Achilles’ son feels, for an instant, sympathy for the victim. But, upon remembering the duty he must accomplish, he „cleft with the steel the channels of her breath, and streams of blood gushed forth.”²⁹

The pure gushing blood of the innocent victim is connected with the pre-cosmic purity of the water element. The savage ritual is performed by replicating the original violence. What remains after death is the reaction of sympathy blended with endless admiration for the sacrificed victim. The sacrificers pay their respects by throwing leaves or jewels onto the virgin’s body. Some would have even erected a pyre made of the best pine branches. Those who made no such gesture of respect were severely criticized by the others: „Stand'st thou still, ignoble wretch, with never a robe or ornament to bring for the maiden? Wilt thou give naught to her that showed such peerless bravery and spirit?”³⁰.

Apart from the virgins’ sublime sacrifice, the Greek tragedy also introduces the phenomenon of the „sacrificial substitution”, which reaches a climax in Euripides’ *Medea*. Essentially, *Medea* is the tragedy of the sacrifice which doesn’t fit into the pattern of the ritual per se. Very modern in its transfer of the sufferings, erotic betrayals and funest sexual impulses, *Medea* first sacrifices her rival, princess Glaunuke.

Once the poisoned veil is laid on her head, the bloody ritual of the sparagmos begins: „past all recognition now save to a father's eye; for her eyes had lost their tranquil gaze, her face no more its natural look preserved, and from the crown of her head blood and fire in mingled stream ran down; and from her bones the flesh kept peeling off beneath the gnawing of those secret drugs, e'en as when the pine-tree weeps its tears of pitch, a fearsome sight to see.”³¹ A „collateral” sacrificial victim is old Creon, who dies trying to save his daughter: „and if ever he pulled with all his might, from off his bones his aged flesh he tore.”³²

²⁸ English translation of Euripides, *Hecuba*, at <http://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/hecuba.html>

²⁹ Op. cit.

³⁰ Idem.

³¹ English translation of Euripides, *Medea*, <http://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/medea.html>

³² Ibidem

It is obvious that we witness the violent ritual of the sparagmos, which is performed, significantly, without the sacrificer's direct participation. Transformed and dehumanized by her hatred for Jason, Medea turns, from a tender mother, into the priestess of her own children's sacrifice: „I shall kill my sons/ and no one can stop me.“³³

Medea is the tragedy of sacrificial substitution, because Medea chooses to sacrifice her own children when she realizes she cannot kill Jason. As pointed out by René Girard, the infanticide is performed following a ritualistic pattern. Medea carefully prepares the moment of the sacrifice; before killing them, she launches the ritual call and warning requested by sacrificial norms. Medea urges the profane and uninitiated audience to stand back so the success of the bloody ceremony should not be altered: „Those stopped by heaven, let them not stand by the sacrifice I make,/ let them be gone.“³⁴

The modernity of the tragedy can be seen in the way in which the terrible sacrifice is presented. Jason understands only at the very end that his sons were sacrificed on the „altar“ of his marital bed: „When you married me and bore my children,/in your lust for sex and our marriage bed,/you killed them.“³⁵ This is obviously a desacralization of the sacrificial act.

This chapter also includes an argument about the transcendental roots of music. It appears that the first and most sublime singers of humanity are the angels. As Andrei Pleșu argues: „There is an old connection between angels and music. In a way, the supreme occupation of celestial hierarchies is singing. Organized in sublime choirs and orchestras, they endlessly praise the created world and, above all, its Creator, endowed with perfect voices and instruments suitable for hymnology.“³⁶

The great German mystic Jakob Bohme argues that the celestial music unifies, in joy and song, the angels' kingdoms so that the archangels begin to sing the celestial music in close connection with their ascension to God. This engenders a celestial symphony in which angels and archangels employ their entire art to praise God. Rumi, the founder of the „Whirling Dervishes“ brotherhood, believes that music awakens the spirit to true life and that we all listened once to these songs in Paradise, trying now to remember

³³ Idem.

³⁴ Idem.

³⁵ Idem.

³⁶ Andrei Pleșu, *Despre îngeri*, București, Editura Humanitas, 2016, p. 159, our transl.

them. In conclusion, music is understood to be the harmonious „companion” of the divinity and of the great mystic searches.

„Man is a symphonic whole of which only a paragraph can be heard. The angel is the celestial advance of this harmony. He enables us to discover, all of a sudden, our entire sonority, we can hear the still unheard part of our own song.”³⁷

The chapter continues with the subchapter „Philosophical Considerations upon Music”, where I illustrated the perspectives of great philosophers such as Pythagoras, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kant and Nietzsche. Friedrich Nietzsche, in his famous *The Birth of Tragedy*, holds music primarily guilty for the metaphysical decline of European culture. This major axiological guilt was determined, in his view, by the unfortunate appearance of the new dithyramb. Music itself is thus responsible for the great axiological crisis of European culture. „Because of the descriptive character of music, the un-Dionysian spirit annuls the myth and lays the entire European culture under the sign of unessential appearance... the new dithyramb estranged music from itself, degraded it, making it the slave of appearance.”³⁸

Once the genius of music has deserted the tragedy, the metaphysical consolation is no longer possible, being replaced by „deus ex machina”, which „solves” all the problems of the human condition scientifically. The Socratic culture (Socrates and Euripides are the „killers of the tragedy”, imposing the ideal of the theoretical man) vanquished the metaphysical spirit of the tragedy, replacing it with „the joy of the theoretical man”, substituting the metaphysical consolation with a comforting earthly consolation. The descriptive character of music leads to the annulment of the myth and the abandonment of transcendental heights. The prototype of the un-Dionysian culture is Faust, who sells his soul to the Devil for knowledge; knowledge replaces thus creation.

In Nietzsche’s view, the birth of the opera is the most serious symptom of the axiological crisis, given the fact that opera music is an „external”, descriptive music. All of a sudden and in a very unfortunate way, the audience is more interested in the singer’s words than in their music. This causes the promotion of a semi-artistic dimension because of the appearance of the recitative. Far from being a fair combination between epic and lyric declamation, the recitative is in fact a *mélange*, an external conglomerate of these genres.

The fundamentally un-Dionysian art which is the opera appeared as a result of the unmusical man’s absurd desire to understand the meaning of words. „The opera is the

³⁷ Op. cit., p. 227, our transl.

³⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, our transl.

creation of the theoretical man, of the amateur critic, not of the artist ... here music is regarded as a servant and the word as the master.... A strict scrutiny indicates that the bad influence of opera on music coincides perfectly with the entire evolution of modern music."³⁹ In this reversal of values, there is one hope left: the German music of Bach, Beethoven and especially Wagner. „The Dionysian depths of the German spirit” gave birth to this music, the only one capable of rendering the sense of tragic greatness. Of all arts, music only can give the tragic myth such a profound metaphysical significance. The salvation of music consists of reintroducing the contemporary spirit in the depths of the myth because a nation’s value consists of its ability to „put the stamp of eternity” on its culture. This „stamp of eternity”, essentially German, is achieved through Wagner’s genius. Looking back at the lost fatherland of myths, Wagner’s opera responds to the metaphysical nostalgia which is present in the German soul.

The last chapter, „The Feminine Sacrality, A Major Presence in Musical Drama, from the Birth of the Opera to the Modern Lyric Drama”, looks into the presence of female heroines in lyric theatre. I started from the famous *Orpheus ed Euridice* ,continued by Gluk with *Alcesta*, *Iphigenia in Aulia* or *Iphigenia in Taurida*. This great musical reformer’s approach is absolutely exceptional, given his endeavour to present the universal nature of music on the stage, freed from national contexts or specificities.

„I try, with the help of a noble, sensitive, natural song, with the help of a declamation which suits the prosody of each language and the character of each nation, to find a way to produce the music of all nations, to make the differences between national musics disappear.”⁴⁰

Musicologists consider *Iphigenia in Aulia* as the opera closest to Gluk’s reform because it achieves a perfect symbiosis between music and drama. Wagner himself declared his admiration for this opera on several occasions.

In his famous *Opera and Drama*, Wagner argues that both the poet and the musician are „two pilgrims who went on different roads and met after they each covered half of the planet.”⁴¹ For Wagner, in the word-sound connection in musical drama, the word prevails, being a true demiurgical factor. The role of music resides in increasing the word’s power of expression, by specific means of expression. At the same time, the poetic language must find

³⁹ Ibidem, our transl.

⁴⁰ Grigore Constantinescu, *Cintecul lui Orfeu*, Bucuresti, Ed. Eminescu, 1979, p.40, our transl.

⁴¹ Richard Wagner, *Opera si Drama*, Editura Muzicala, Bucuresti, 1983, p. 210, our transl.

its resonating point in the musical theme. Wagner is convinced that the musical drama of the future will enable the poet to turn into a musician and the musician to turn into a poet. In the music of the future, the process of creation follows a recurrent path, in the sense that the musician infiltrates the musical discourse which predates the poet because the song, which contains the harmonic code in its fibre, will determine the poet to legitimize and to elevate their creative effort.

The last subchapter, „Great Theatre Directors in the Opera”, comments on influential performances created by great directors like Peter Brook or Andrei Serban. The latter’s point of view is extremely interesting and useful when he comments on the construction of the musical performance. The great director emphasizes the predominance of the orchestra in any performative construction because the orchestra conceals the entire subtext of the performance. Whatever is not sung on the stage is „said” by the orchestra. If, in the theatre, the subtext is always hidden in the underground realm of the words, in the opera, the subtext is described in the mathematical detail of the musical score. That is why the orchestra can accurately express everything the characters think or feel. In this respect, it is essential that both the director and especially the singers should very carefully listen to everything that is being played in the pit. The discovery of the importance of the opera choir is another aspect Andrei Serban deals with. He thinks it is a grave mistake to regard the choir as an „abstract block” able to carry only mechanical orders. To obtain the desired artistic effect, the director must take them into consideration as individualities, as creative parts of the performance. This is the only way to remove an immobile choir from the stage and to replace it with a choir-artist, able to act and sing with dedication and truthfulness.

The final conclusions of the thesis are that, beyond the various forms or means of expression in Music and Theatre, beyond the apparent oppositions between the masculine and the feminine sacrality, the absolute or the perfection (be it religious or artistic) is situated under the sign of the Whole. The longing for the being’s ontological or artistic unity expresses the nostalgia for the lost paradise.