

## **An Aesthetic Deconstruction of R. Wagner's Mythological Time in "Salome", by R. Strauss**

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*The article aims to indicate the roots of musical time and musical forms in various types of mythopoetical thought, of which we propose the consideration of musical time within an interdisciplinary context, engaging philosophical concepts and art history studies of mythology. Among the objectives is the necessity to reveal the implicit connections of typical compositional structures in the European opera of the modern era with mythological prototypes; to demonstrate the ways of synthesizing mythological temporal concepts. The subject of research here includes the following aspects: a) mythological time in Wagner's musical dramas as a synthesis of pagan and Christian ideas (independent of plot), cyclic and finite time; b) time of theatrical play in R. Strauss's opera Salome; and c) R. Strauss's composition as an aesthetic deconstruction of Wagner's musical mythology. Wagner's legacy inspired many ways to exhibit such deconstruction; among these, R. Strauss's opera Salome can be considered the most impressive and significant. Wagner's ideas of Liebestod (in his Tristan und Isolde) and the Christian mystery (in Parsifal) were deconstructed in Strauss's Salome. An investigation concerning cyclicality in the composition of the opera with its different mythological backgrounds is the main purpose of this research.*

### **Introduction**

The genre of opera has always posed the composer a particular problem in terms of form as well as the becoming of time within a performance. In different periods, this task has been solved in different ways. The romantic approach to the shaping of opera, established from two-thirds of the way through the 19th century, was expressed most consistently by Richard Wagner, and then by his follower Richard Strauss. The essence of this approach is that opera finally began to be perceived as a single process of development with its own leitmotifs, recurrences and compositional arcs. The purpose of this article is to determine the connection between an operatic composition and its defining mythological basis of one kind or another (pagan, Christian, Nietzschean), as well as their interaction.

To achieve this goal, the tasks are as follows: a) using the example of Wagner's operas to show how composition, primarily the cyclic repetition of themes, are determined by a sense of time in those myths that underlie the libretto; b) to show the specifics of the composition of Strauss's opera *Salome*, in which, on the one hand, Wagner's principles are developed, whilst on the other hand, the most important foundations of his mythology and aesthetics are revised in such a way that their artistic deconstruction is carried out.

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The tasks set above determine the structure of the article. The first section, "Cyclicity in the composition of Wagner's operas", is devoted to all the, often referenced as, "reformatory" operas of the composer – from *Der fliegende Holländer* to *Parsifal*, with an emphasis on the tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and highlighting the specifics of the compositional solution of *Tristan und Isolde*. It will be shown how the principle of cyclic recurrences was adapted by Wagner to both pagan (for which the cyclicity of time is the most organic) and Christian myths.

The second section of the article is devoted to R. Strauss's opera *Salome* and the underlying drama by Oscar Wilde. It will detail how the cyclic repetitions in this opera, while maintaining a single deep foundation, have a different artistic meaning and are associated with the contemporary Nietzschean mythology of the composer.

### Literature Review, Materials and Methods

To date, there are many studies devoted, on the one hand, to the connection of the opera and especially that of Wagner to mythology, and on the other hand, to the consideration of the operas of Wagner and Strauss as an integral artistic whole. In the first group, the most representative and significant are the aesthetic and philosophical works of Aleksei Losev: "*Philosophical commentary on the dramas of Richard Wagner*",<sup>1</sup> "*The Problem of Richard Wagner in the past and present*".<sup>2</sup>

The works of the second group, starting with the famous but controversial work by A. Lorenz "*The Mystery of Form in Richard Wagner*",<sup>3</sup> then by Carl Dahlhaus "*Musical Drama as a Symphonic Opera*" [Dahlhaus, 1976–1978], are devoted to the issues of form building outside of the connection with mythological foundations. A special approach has also been taken within the tradition of studying operatic forms from the point of view of symmetry. This is an area which originates in the works of Goncharenko and Rovenko.<sup>4</sup> In this article, the questions of form are considered precisely in connection with extra-musical factors and, above all, with mythology.

Our material includes Wagner's operas between the years 1842-1882 (from *Der fliegende Holländer* to *Parsifal*) and Strauss's opera *Salome* based on Wilde's drama, along with the underlying literary texts and myths. The research methods, as

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1. A. Losev, "Filosofskij kommentarij k dramam Vagnera," in *Losev A.F. Forma – Stil – Vyrazhenie [Form – Style – Expression]* (Moscow: Mysl', 1995), 667-731.

2. A. Losev, "Problema Vagnera v proshlom i nastojaschem," in *Voprosy estetiki* 8. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1968), 67-196

3. A. Lorenz, *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner* (Berlin: Max Hesse, (1924-1933)).

4. S. Goncharenko, *Zerkalnaja simmetrija v muzyke* (Novosibirsk: NGK, 1993); E. Rovenko, "On Semantic Factors of the Mirror Symmetry in Vincent D'Indy's Oeuvres," in *Symmetry Festival 2024. "Leaning" Symmetry. 17-20 July, Pisa, Italy. Conference Proceedings. Symmetry: Culture and Science. The Journal of the Symmetrion*, (2024), 113-116.

necessity dictates, have combined musicological methods of analysis of form, the interdisciplinary method of interrelated study of musical and literary texts, as well as the method of historical and contextual parallels.

## **Cyclicity in the Compositions of Wagner's Operas**

### **Mythological Background**

One of the fundamental principles of Wagner's theory and practice of *Gesamtkunstwerk* is the construction of the musical composition of an opera not on the basis of traditional musical forms, but on the basis of the verbal text of the drama (libretto) underlying it (according to Wagner's principle that the word gives form to music). Thus, the musical form and musical narrative are determined by the verbal narrative. However, there is a considerable difference between form as a complete and balanced architectonic and narrative as a process, despite the fact that they represent "two sides of the same coin." The problem of completeness of form, which Wagner inevitably faced, was solved in the most natural way. It is important to understand that all, what is often referred to as, "purely musical" forms ultimately have some kind of extra-musical foundations (mythological, ritual, rhetorical, etc.). The mythological foundations are the most profound and comprehensive among those listed. In myth, all of the "pillars", that is to say, "supporting" moments of the structure, including the organization of spatial-temporal continuum, are identical to the meaning of the myth and its content. In fact, a similar identity of form and content is inherent in music.

Evidently, feeling the deep kinship between music and myth (although not being fully aware of this), Wagner, invoking another fundamental principle of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, argues that myth is the necessary basis for the narrative of the operatic libretto. And since myth is, according to Wagner, the beginning and the end of history – a comprehensive, fundamental text, then it carries in itself, in its own content, a semantic completeness that appears as a completeness of the structure.

Creating modern, Romantic myths, Wagner, at the same time, referred to ancient mythology both in terms of the pagan, i.e. old German type and the Christian type. The mythological time generally constitutes a complex blend of various temporal concepts, such as cyclic time, "arrow of time", "static" time (life in Eternity).

Undoubtedly, in the artistic works of the 19th and 20th centuries, all these archaic concepts of time are present indirectly and in complex synthetic combinations. Nevertheless, their relevance is also evidenced by many studies by modern musicologists related to European music of the New Age.<sup>5</sup> For example, Taylor

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5. B. Taylor, *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory: The Romantic Conception of Cyclic Form* (UK: Cambridge University Press, The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, 2011), 19-20;

cites Karol Berger's idea of contrasting cyclic time in Baroque music (its symbol is a circle) and linear time in classical music (its symbol is an arrow). At the same time, Berger believes that the cyclic time of Baroque music exists in absolute Newtonian time. As we can see, Berger uses the concept of cyclic time outside of its connection with archaic mythology and in a special semantic, purely musical context. The questions also involuntarily arise (they were also raised by Taylor, following many scientists):<sup>6</sup> is time related to events; that is, whether it is determined by them or by our thinking, being one of the *a priori* forms of cognition (Kant), or does it exist independently of both of them at all? However, in any case, since we are talking about artistic, that is, virtual, constructed time, it is logical to assume a strong connection with material and mental "filling".

The synthesis of the temporal concepts in musical drama is even more intricate, since the time of each art type is specific. Thus, the synthesis of various forms of art itself presupposes the synthesis of musical and literary-dramatic temporal concepts.

In contrast, Wagner's opera reform was precisely aimed at creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk* with a unified time, which in fact, contrary to a number of Wagner's statements from the mid-19th century, would be determined by music. According to Dahlhaus,<sup>7</sup> it was in relation to the "symphonic operas" of Wagner and his followers that it became possible for the first time to talk about opera as a single unified musical work. This exaggeration by Dahlhaus has a deep meaning. In addition to the important statement of a new quality in the opera genre itself, we can actually talk about how Wagner came "from the opposite" to the idea of "absolute music" (not in his own, but in a broader sense, characteristic of the end of the 19th century). This can be also deduced from the book by Bonds, who writes about the convergence of the positions of both Hanslick and Wagner.<sup>8</sup>

Undoubtedly, the subordination of a verbal-dramatic narrative to a musical one was not easy. The tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* testifies to the complex process of combining different arts on a new basis. But already in *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal*, not only a harmonious synthesis was achieved, but also a convincing dominance of music. Below, it will be shown how the musical form becomes a compositional and semantic "frame" for the narrative, creating an arch between the orchestral overture (or introduction) and certain operatic scenes, and thus absorbs the entire dramatic action.

Wagner, who played a key role in shaping the Romantic concept of time as a directed and truly completed process with a certain degree of openness, had already explored this idea in *Der fliegende Holländer*. The central theme of the opera

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B. Taylor, *The Melody of Time: Music and Temporality in the Romantic Era* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 56, 62.

6. Taylor, *The Melody of Time: Music and Temporality in the Romantic Era*, 62.

7. C. Dahlhaus, "Music Drama as symphonic opera," in *Programmlehre der Bayreuther Festspiel* (Ed.) W. Wagner. (1976-1978), 173-183.

8. M. E. Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

is liberation from the infinity of cyclic time—the curse of eternal life (akin to a “Groundhog Day” scenario)—through its “straightening” and ultimate completion in Eternity, achieved through the fulfillment of redeeming love.

One of the plot sources for the tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was the “Prophecy of the Seeress” from the “Elder Edda”, which contains elements of cyclic time, typical for the most archaic Indo-Germanic myths (Hindu, Greek, Germanic-Scandinavian). They became a part of the tetralogy libretto. At the same time, Wagner had significantly enriched the pagan basis by applying elements of the Christian temporal concept, both in poetic text and, especially, in music. Regarding the poetical source, it is not necessary—though possible—to interpret the tragic ending of the tetralogy (*Götterdämmerung*), as a world catastrophe akin to an apocalypse, despite Wagner’s libretto concluding with the fire of Valhalla. But it is not the case: Wagner intended to show the downfall of the world based on sin (the rejection of love for the sake of world domination) and the redemption of sin—purification. Thus, there are Christian motifs already at the level of ideas and plot. What do we hear in music? The elements of cyclic time are evident and in *Götterdämmerung* they are especially explicit.

### “Der Ring des Nibelungen”

The manifestation of cyclic qualities in such a grandiose and all-embracing concept such as *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (from the origin of the world to its end), explicitly indicate the cyclicity of time (albeit partial). Let us name the most important of these elements: a) the Prologue of *Götterdämmerung*, which opens with the musical matter of the Rhine theme, is an evident varied reprise of the first opera, *Das Rheingold*; moreover, the three Norns directly refer to the three Rhinemaidens; b) the orchestral prelude to Act 3 of *Götterdämmerung* (where the Rhinemaidens themselves appear) is another reprise; c) Siegfried’s narration, combining the verbal story with the corresponding leitmotifs, is a “summary” of the entire tetralogy; d) the Funeral March with Siegfried’s body is not just a reprise and a summary, but a concentrated semantic generalization of the content of the tetralogy, where the utterly dense narrative turns into the architectonics of the purely musical moment (let us recall, that the elements, later called leitmotifs by Wolzogen,<sup>9</sup> Wagner had denoted as “melodic moments”); e) in the last scene of the tetralogy—the flooding of the Rhine (everything has emerged out of water and returns to it)—the ring is given back to the Rhinemaidens, while the music is based on the themes of the Rhine and the Rhinemaidens, thus constituting the most explicit cyclic moment, which manifests in the cyclicity of time; f) if the water element in the tetralogy finale evokes its beginning, then the fire refers to the conclusion of the second opera, *Die Walküre* (Wotan bidding Brünnhilde farewell). Not all the mentioned reprises are

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9. H. von Wolzogen, *Thematischer Leitfaden durch die Musik von Rich. Wagner’s Festspiel ‘Der Ring des Nibelungen’* (Leipzig: Verlag von Edwin Schlaemp, 1876).

exact; most of them are enriched by synthesis. However, it is not the enrichment that prevents the pure cyclicity, but the qualitatively new idea which concludes the tetralogy, i.e., the idea and the leitmotif of redemption by love. It is true that the world has almost returned to its initial state, to the water element with the Rhinemaidens guarding the gold. The path travelled was not in vain: the concluding sorrowful, yet sublime and beautiful theme is the very new meaning achieved through the course of development. This ideal, the idea of salvation through the redemption of love (a Christian idea), has remained unattainable and thus does not entirely cancel the cyclicity of paths of the universe, but, at the same time, it gives hope to quit the eternal circle.

We mentioned only the most evident cyclic episodes in "*Götterdämmerung*" despite there being numerous moments in the other operas, primarily, at the syntactic large-scale thematic level, the level of recurrent leitmotifs. It is not without reason that d'Indy, an adamant follower of Wagnerism, designated all the recurrent themes, both in instrumental pieces and in his operas, as the "cyclic themes".<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the leitmotifs, as part of the symphonic and plot development, reflecting the causal relationship between ideas and events, serve as factors in shaping the concept of temporal linearity.

### Compositional Rhymes: From Wagner's Early Operas to Parsifal

If ancient German and Scandinavian mythology established a basis for the mythology of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, even before Wagner structured an arc associated with cyclicity, then in other cases, when the mythological narrative does not imply such cyclicity, Wagner constructs it himself. In fact, the cyclic movement, according to the concept of "the initial state (ideal) – violation of harmony (sin) – restoration of harmony and redemption of sin" had been developed in Wagner's work long before *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Only the initial state was manifested before the beginning of the verbal narrative – in the orchestral overtures or introductions. Previously in the overtures of *Der fliegende Holländer* and, to a greater extent, of *Tannhäuser*, the formation of such an arc can be seen (Wagner later returned to it in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*). But already in the opera following *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, a new quality was achieved. The rejection of the overture with contrasting themes and its replacement with a monolithic introduction (*Vorspiel*) focused attention precisely on the ideal that is given in the orchestral introduction and in the finale of the opera in all its purity. It is especially important that this arc

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10. V. d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* (Paris: Durand et Cie, 1909), p. 385-391. Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* (Paris: Durand et Cie, 1933), , 6, 96, 107, 110, 131, 132, 134, 146, 150, 153, 155, 160, 162, 164, 165, 167, 168, 170-173, 175, 197-203, 207, 219, 221, 258, 260, 264, 266, 267, 269, 270, 275, 280. Rovenko, "Translatory Symmetry as a Constructive Basis of the 'Cyclic Principle'. Music and Architecture in Interpretation of Vincent D'Indy," *Symmetry: Culture and Science* 32, no. 2 (2021): 257-260.

is also complemented by a repetition of the material and the recurrence of the key used in the introduction (A-dur) in the first act, at the moment of the miraculous appearance of Lohengrin; thus, we can talk, not just about the arc itself, but about a more developed cyclicity – i.e. a threefold repetition. The distinct materialization of the ideal in the image of the Holy Grail was continued by Wagner in his final opera, *Parsifal*, a Christian mystery that provided a positive solution to the problem of salvation, in contrast to the completion of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

However, the shift in emphasis in *Parsifal* from a pagan myth to a Christian narrative did not prevent Wagner from using almost the same cyclic scheme with an arch between the opening and the finale of the opera. Unlike *Lohengrin*, the ideal given at the beginning is not so monolithic: the orchestral introduction, in addition to the Grail, includes such essential themes related to Christianity as the Last Supper of the Apostles and the tragic theme of the “sufferings of the Saviour” (there is no connection with the illusory “anti-world” of sin – Klingsor and Kundry – in the introduction). This, therefore, is the fundamental difference between the overtures of the earlier operas – *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*, on the one hand, and the *Vorspiel* of *Parsifal*, on the other.

The idea of cyclicity in *Parsifal* is implemented at all the musical levels,<sup>11</sup> beginning with the first theme of the Prelude (the motif of *Communion*), distinguished by the minor element in its middle, which symbolizes Amfortas’s wound inflicted at the moment of Kundry’s kiss (sin), and up to the composition of the entire opera, the second, central act of which takes place in the illusory kingdom of evil – Klingsor’s castle. Kundry’s kissing Amfortas (it happened before the beginning of the opera and, similar to many episodes of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, is narrated directly to the audience) corresponds to her kissing Parsifal; the latter results in his obtaining wisdom and compassion for wickedness (the redemption of sin). The musical similarity of the ritual scenes in the first and the third acts creates a rather stable sense of cyclicity; however, the considerable novelty of both plot and music of the third act (the wisdom of the former “pure fool” Parsifal, the baptism of Kundry, the Good Friday miracle, Amfortas’s healing) indicate the transformation, achievement of a new quality. It is also explicitly shown by the renewal of the leitmotifs in the opera’s final scene: both the motif of *Communion* and the motif of the spear are devoid of the minor element (Amfortas’s wound), instead, the ascending phrase from the motif of the Grail sounds at once; the tritone in the motif of the “pure fool” is substituted by a perfect fifth, which results in the semblance of the sequential “swaying” of fifths in the melody to the “swaying” of fourths in the motif of bells. It should be noted that in the Christian mystery *Parsifal*, the achievement of a new quality in the finale (the linear direction of time) is not as distinct as in the “pagan mystery” of the tetralogy.

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11. Lorenz, *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner*, (1924-1933).

## The Specifics of the Connections between the Arcs in "Tristan and Isolde"

A more complex cyclic configuration is embodied in *Tristan und Isolde*. As we have seen, in Wagner's operas (and even in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*), cyclic repetition never exists unchanged – it is always enriched by the linear orientation of the narrative, the statement of a new quality. In *Tristan und Isolde*, the linear, directional aspiration is so strong (from *Sehnsucht* – to love in death, *Liebestod*) that it was realized in the form of not one, but two cyclic arcs on a different thematic basis. The material of the orchestral introduction, the state of *Sehnsucht*, is reproduced in the key scene of the first act – the scene where a love potion is taken. In the second act, the final themes of the opera are formed (as the ultimate goal, ideal) – *Liebestod* and "the death of Isolde". Only their end, and ecstatic affirmation, in the second act, did not take place – it was interrupted by the arrival of King Mark, Isolde's fiancé.

The arc arises from the fact that this statement, which the heroes in love actively sought, was only postponed. It took place at the very end of the opera, when Tristan was already dead and Isolde lay dead next to him in a sublime, spiritual ecstasy of love. Thus, the composition of *Tristan und Isolde* has a special processuality: one cycle is replaced by another, as if it opens, forming a spiral. The major sound of the theme of Isolde's death produces a genuine romantic ideal – the truth of love as a force that redeems and enlightens (and therefore conquers) death itself.

Finally, the initial motif of *Sehnsucht* still sounds, pacifying in the final major tonic – whereby the thematic arc is still observed.

## "Salome" of R. Strauss

### Deconstruction of Wagnerian Models

Just a quarter of a century after the premiere of *Parsifal*, the acclaimed premiere of Richard Strauss's opera *Salome* took place. His nickname "Richard the Second", which he received at that time, and which was given to the German composer at the turn of the Art Nouveau era, clearly indicated a connection with his great predecessor. Indeed, Strauss began his career in early operas as a follower of the Wagnerian tradition and its principles, but it was in *Salome* that he entered into a tangible creative dialogue with "Richard the First". As it will be seen, on the one hand, Strauss continued to develop the principles of building Wagnerian-style musical dramas, and on the other hand, deconstructed the most important principles of romantic aesthetics, which at one time determined all of Wagner's innovations.

The very principle of the operatic libretto's reliance on mythology has been deconstructed. It is true that Strauss relied on a plot that ultimately dated back to the Bible, but this is a private episode about the dance of Salome, who demanded John's head from Herod as a reward; in the Bible this is conveyed extremely

concisely, in a few words, even without the name of the dancer. It is clear that the new, unprecedented embodiment of this plot was due to the drama of an outstanding representative of modernity – this being Oscar Wilde.

Unlike Wagner, who himself composed librettos based on a variety of sources, deeply reinterpreted and remade them, Strauss used the text (more precisely, the translation from French into German) of the play by Oscar Wilde, who, reinterpreting the biblical plot, used the aesthetic resources of modernity he had at his disposal.

First of all, the ideal of Wagner's key concept of love as self-sacrifice, renunciation of one's self and dissolution, dying in the arms of one's beloved (Tristan and Isolde, Senta, Elisabeth, Brünnhilde) is debunked. In the heroine of Strauss's opera, *Salome*, there only exists those other attributes of love – possession and power. Instead of sacrificial love, we see destructive love in the truest sense of the word. In fact, the whole final scene of *Salome*, the ecstatic monologue of the main character passionately kissing the severed head of Jochanaan, can be perceived as a parody of the final scene of Isolde's death (from *Tristan und Isolde*), where Isolde dies next to the body of Tristan, and this death asserts the triumph and invincibility of love in a paradoxical romantic unity – *Liebestod*. This parallel is far from accidental and is confirmed by the music, i.e. the very first bars of the opera, an ascending chromatic motif formed from the *gis*, sounds in the upper voices of the orchestra – a barely perceptible allusion to the *Liebestod* motif that opens the opera *Tristan und Isolde*.

Another reinterpreted model for Strauss's *Salome* is Wagner's opera *Parsifal*. Or rather, the juxtaposition of two worlds: Christian asceticism and sensual pleasures: Wagner's is the confrontation between Parsifal and Kundry, Strauss's is Jochanaan and Salome. And in both cases, a woman's kiss plays a key role. In Wagner's opera, Kundry kisses Amfortas first, which causes him to lose his sacred relics and get hit with a spear, before then kissing Parsifal. But Parsifal, instead of submitting to temptation, is imbued with Christian compassion for the wound of Amfortas and gains strength to save the situation in the castle of Monsalvat. In Strauss's opera, Salome kisses the dead lips of a severed head, and this kiss is also deeply symbolic – it is a sign of pathological love-violence, as a result of which Salome is killed. Here again we see a subtle musical connection with *Parsifal*: the soft ending of Jochanaan's leittheme (which begins rather harshly) resembles the tragic theme of "the sufferings of the Saviour" from *Parsifal*.

Of course, the scenes of seduction and even love in death (for all the specificity of Wagner's *Liebestod*) belong to the archetypal foundations of operatic plots in general. And Oscar Wilde, writing his drama *Salomé*, would have unlikely been concerning himself with Wagner specifically. However, Richard Strauss quite consciously relied on Wagner's poetics and developed the principles of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. At the stage of creating *Salome*, his thinking was based on Wagner's musical and mythological field, and therefore it would have been absolutely impossible to perceive this opera outside of this context and without reference to Wagner. In other words, Strauss, among the many archetypes, emphasizes exactly

what was most significant for Wagner. At the same time, Strauss diminishes all the most important foundations of Wagner's new romantic mythological form, removing it from its pedestal. One could say that he parodies the lofty ideas and feelings contained in Wagner's operas, if not only for one important reason, namely, there is no parody in the music itself, it remains romantic, poetic and beautiful. And this is what creates a much greater dissonance than if Strauss had written music as pathologically repulsive as the feelings of the main character. But after all, Salome is really in love with Jochanaan in her own way, unlike Kundry, she longs to kiss him on the lips, regardless of Klingsor's instructions, but instead following her passion and her will. As a supplementary point of interest, it is worth noting a compelling detail: according to the narrative of her backstory, Kundry, formerly identified as Herodias, derided Christ on his way to Golgotha. Unlike the fate of the Flying Dutchman, she did not face death, but instead became emblematic of the "eternal femininity" in its adverse manifestation within the "anti-world". However, the convergence of events reveals that Salome is Herodias's daughter, thereby completing the circle of connections – the "circle has closed".

Strauss, historically regarded as straddling the border between Romanticism and Modernism—belonging to both epochs yet only partially to each style—masterfully played with Romantic archetypes. As is well-known, he called his opera a scherzo but with a fatal conclusion.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, we are not discussing parody, but rather a play of deconstruction and, furthermore, demythologization (it is important to explain here that we are not talking about abandoning the myth at all, but only about rethinking the myths of the past, as a result of which new ones are inevitably created).

### The Specifics of Oscar Wilde's Text

Wilde, who wrote *Salomé* in a language in which he is not a native speaker, experienced a natural lack of freedom amongst other difficulties.<sup>13</sup> However, being a talented individual, he managed to turn this flaw into a virtue and make it the basis for his expressive compositional techniques. When reading a drama, a huge number of repetitions – repetitive phrases, situations, images – immediately attract attention. With this in mind, Wilde used a technique characteristic of the fairy tale genre, and gave it a completely hypertrophied appearance, which is unlikely to be seen in any popular fairy tale. Since it does not reflect this genre entirely, the repetitions involuntarily create a feeling of something epic, ritualistic, magical and incantatory. He masterfully applied repetitions in a situation of requests – requests

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12. E. Krause, *Richard Strauss, Gestalt und Werk* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1956), 198.

13. J. Loesch, "« C'est curieux ça » : L'écriture translingue comme démarche esthétique dans la *Salomé* d'Oscar Wilde," in *Vivre entre les langues, écrire en français..* (Eds.) Olga Anokhina, and Alain Ausoni (Editions des archives contemporaines, Coll. "Multilinguisme, traduction, création", 2019), 111-120.

that are almost impossible and which are not satisfied on the first reception. These requests are wordy, filled with all sorts of rhetorical techniques and tropes. At first, Salomé persuades Narraboth to bring Iokanaan to her from prison three times. Then Salomé, also three times, turns to Iokanaan, trying to touch his body, hair and kiss his mouth. The last request is then concentrated into one short phrase, which, in turn, is repeated like a spell, told nine times over. Following this, Hérode addresses Salomé three times, offering her fruits, wine, and a place on the throne, but in the end everything is replaced by a request for a dance in the form of a short phrase repeated four times. Subsequently, Salomé frantically demands Iokanaan's head from Hérode six times as a reward for dancing, and Hérode makes four attempts to refuse in response.

In addition to the above, some more important repetitions can be named: the initial phrase "How beautiful Princess Salomé is tonight" – 3 times; phrases about the Moon – eight times, of which in five of these the moon is compared to a woman; phrases concerning the wind (15 times), which are sometimes accompanied by phrases concerning the mysterious flapping of wings (7 times), prophecies about the coming of Jesus Christ (mostly from the mouth of Iokanaan) – 12 times, amongst others. Thus, Wilde's text is saturated to the limit with elements of cyclicity, which, as if "gaining momentum", eventually break the cycles (when the desire is satisfied), leading to certain fatal events that propel the drama to a denouement. In general, this development resembles a spiral in which various and partially open cycles are combined (from Wagner's operas, in addition to *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, such a dramatic profile is most vividly embodied in *Tristan und Isolde*).

### Musical Cyclicity in Strauss's "Salome"

Strauss understood the logic of the text, but did not reproduce it literally in music. In fact, he went beyond not only Wagner, but also Wilde in this sense. Unusual, unconventional solutions can be seen from the very first bars of the opera. Not only is there no overture or orchestral introduction, but almost immediately, without any preparation, we find ourselves "thrown" into an intense stream of passions and events.

What semantic effect does Strauss achieve by this? Firstly, as in Wilde's drama, there is a sense of the momentary nature of the action, which is emphasized by the first words of the opera: "How beautiful Princess Salome is tonight". Thus, there is not even the slightest hint of both the mythological distance of time and the epic impersonal tone of the narrative. An interesting feature of the artistic time of *Salome* is referred to, according to N. Vlasova, as the "equalization of artistic time and real time: events on stage unfold exactly at the same time interval as this work sounds".<sup>14</sup> Secondly, in all operas of the Romantic era, the overture or orchestral

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14. N. Vlasova, "Музыкальный театр экспрессионизма: К истории одноактной оперы," in *Искусство музыки: Теория и история* (12) (Moscow: GII, 2015), 13.

introduction provides the very essence, the quintessence of the musical drama. Furthermore, as we have seen, in Wagner's operas, this quintessence often turns out to be a model of the ideal to which all subsequent action will strive. Here, in Wilde – Strauss's *Salome*, there is no pre-existing, predetermined, "objective" ideal. As the action progresses, it becomes clear that Jochanaan and various religious groups of Jews have their own ideals. On the other hand, Strauss offers discussions about these ideals in a rather humorous way, without giving them serious reflection or importance. The real ideal for which one may face death becomes Jochanaan's faith in the coming Christ. But, of course, even this positive ideal is almost completely obscured by a falsehood and, at the same time, the most effective ideal of the pathological passion of Salome. There exists in this opera the embodiment of this ideal of Salome that becomes the most essential, and where the Christian ideal appears only insofar as Jochanaan himself becomes the victim of Salome's violent passion. But Salome's ideal arises unexpectedly; it is just her crazy whim. As for the Christian ideal, it disappears with the death of Jochanaan.

This makes it possible to see a connection between both tradition and its reinterpretation, leading to the latest myths, in the composition of the opera and especially in the use of the cyclical method. As it has been shown, cyclic repetitions and arcs in Wagner's operas are often associated with the achievement of a goal, with the final statement of an ideal. In Wilde – Strauss's *Salome*, many cyclical repetitions are also associated with a statement of purpose which is motivated solely by the persistent desire of the characters (primarily Salome, as well as Herod) to satisfy their own desires. All repetitions are insistent demands that eventually achieve results. It would seem that the motive is purely psychological in this regard. However, Oscar Wilde's proximity to Nietzsche's ideas has been highlighted on numerous occasions. Nonetheless, there is a lack of evidence regarding Wilde's direct engagement with Nietzsche's writings.

As for Richard Strauss, there is no doubt about his Nietzscheanism, as evidenced by the symphonic poem *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, written some years before *Salome*. It is clear that in the interpretation of biblical history, both Wilde and Strauss turned out to be close, objectively speaking, to the idea of the superman (*Übermensch*), which practically destroyed the Christian idea. It is important that Nietzsche himself connects the idea of the superman with the idea of the eternal return, which also objectively denies the Christian understanding of time and is in fact a neo-pagan myth.

Following the principle of developing, "progressive" cyclicity (spiral), Strauss acts freely and acts in a variety of ways. In the case of repetitions of brief, particularly significant phrases of the text (Salome's request for a kiss from Jochanaan or the demand for the cutting off of his head), Strauss duplicates these verbal refrains with music. In repeated extensive verbose requests (three threefold repetitions), he creates a variant presentation with increasing tension. But the main thing is that, with his system of leitmotifs, he significantly strengthens the principle of spiral expansion with music, making especially significant moments, along with the most

important monologues, orchestral interludes and Salome's Dance. Throughout the opera, among the many leitmotifs, there are at least seven that are repeated (accurately or variably) constantly, creating a sense of musical cyclicity, in addition to verbal cyclicity. It is worth some grouped themes that play a particularly important role in determining the direction of the drama and its essence.

Concerning the first group, we conditionally select impulsive short motifs, the invariant of the melodies of which there is reliance on the third (more often a small one). One of these motifs sounds at the very beginning of the opera, where the other is associated with gloomy forebodings and permeates the entire opera and the third is associated with Salome's demand to get Jochanaan's head (in the threefold repetition of one sound followed by an ascent by a third, they saw the transformation of the initial motif from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, which, thanks to the author's famous comments, is interpreted as a sign of fate). The ostinato repetition of the motif based on a small third (up and down) in Salome's Dance ("Dance of the Seven Veils") creates an image of a magical, almost "wild" ritual, anticipating Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, which will appear eight years after the premiere of Strauss's opera. The same motif, or rather, its fourfold repetition (as it happens in the endings of Beethoven's works) in C minor, completes the opera, almost at the moment of Salome's murder. Another very significant and expressive modification of this brief motif is associated with moments of intense expectation and a feeling of "stopped" time, the uncertainty of the "frozen moment". In its main form, it is performed in the opera at least twice: at the end of the Salome's Dance and at the end of the opera, marked by Salome's words: "I kissed your mouth".

Such tense moments are conveyed by quiet tremolo sounds (as if the audible image of silence), and against them, short phrases – "impulses" of Salome's leitmotif are superimposed polytonally (trill on the dominant in D minor, motif – in E minor). In addition to these studies, the material of this motif also participates greatly in the overall development. By way of comparison, it can be noted that in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the static nature of time is associated with the moments of the beginning and the end of the entire universe. Strauss's method is quite different: time (not real, but psychological) "stops" in the most intense and, by necessity, brief moments. Alban Berg, shortly after, employed this technique and used it in similar situations in his opera *Wozzeck*.

The second group of leitmotifs includes all the lyrical themes of *Salome*, often waltzing, written in the "good old" romantic tradition, which forms an eerie dissonance within the context of the events of the play. One of these themes reaches a climactic, ecstatic sounding in the monologue of Salome with the severed head of Jochanaan. The third group of motifs is related to Jochanaan. Thus, summing up, we can determine the role of all three groups in the composition of the opera. The themes of Jochanaan are the first to disappear: for the final time, his main theme sounds in Salome's Dance, obeying the general waltz-like movement. Already in the Dance and especially in Salome's monologue, lyrical, romantic themes reach a climactic point, and for a while it seems that they constitute the main conclusion

and outcome of the entire opera. However, Herod's instant decision to kill Salome returns to the element of subconscious dark impulses (the themes of the first group), which at the end of the opera acquire the meaning of a fatal, irresistible force.

Another dramatic technique, dating back to the composition of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, is the creation of a concentrated and purely musical (orchestral) generalizing moment of "reprise" in the climax, anticipating the tragic outcome: by analogy with the funeral procession from *Götterdämmerung*, there comes Salome's Dance. It must be said that this symphonic concentration is consistently prepared in orchestral interludes connecting the operatic scenes.

There were even interpretations of the genre of the interpretation of *Salome* as a mystery<sup>15</sup> – of course, this is an exaggeration, but the exaggeration is indicative. Rather, it is an anti-mystery, the deconstruction of mystery, the most virtuosic game of modernity with archaic mystical prototypes, including the playing with cyclic time.

## Conclusions

Different time constructions in Wagner's operas have always had expressive value and extra-musical sense: eternal pagan cyclicality is bad infinity, in its finality the apotheosis of love (even in death) is the gratification (*Der fliegende Holländer*, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*) and a strong factor of the completeness of the whole works. In the operas, based on Christian legends and myths (*Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Parsifal*), Wagner uses compositional arcs as only one turn of cyclicality. In these cases, this arch is a factor of symmetrical completeness and finality of the operas. In Strauss's opera, cyclicality does not have mythological connotations, but rather psychological (instinctive will) or formal and structural. On the basis of Wilde's sense of play with how something is constructed, and Nietzschean ideas of the eternal return and *Übermensch*, Strauss composed opera forms whereby cyclicality became the main principle for the structure of the verbal and musical narrative. At the same time, these were included organically within the dynamics of the momentary flowing of time. Such development is something close to what could be described as a spiral vector, where cyclicality is a strong factor for the accumulation of energy, and, in spite of all "returns", theatrical (musical) time is equal to that of "real" time.

To summarize, we can draw a comprehensive conclusion regarding Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and that of composers post-Wagner, the composition of which is determined by the following points: a) the musical form of the opera being based on a verbal narrative and a theatrical performance, b) the musical form of the opera creating its own formal structures that ensure its completeness and, c) these formal structures not being purely formal, but being determined by the deep structure of mythological time.

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15. A. Predoliak, *Srednevekovaja model misterii v muzykalnom teatre Germanii 19–20 vekov: ot Vagnera k Shtokhauzenu* (Rostov-on-Don: RGK, 2007), 15.

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