

The First International Conference
Psychology and Music – Interdisciplinary Encounters
Pre-conference Program October 21–23, 2019
Conference Program October 24–26, 2019

Main Organizer

Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade

Co-organizers

Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade
Psychology of Music Section, Serbian Psychological Society

How to cite this volume

Bogunović, B. & Nikolić, S. (Eds.) (2020). *Proceedings of PAM-IE Belgrade 2019*. Belgrade: Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade.

Proceedings of the First International Conference
Psychology and Music – Interdisciplinary Encounters

Editors

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Publisher

Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade, Kralja Milana 50, Belgrade

For Publisher

Dean of the Faculty of Music
Ljiljana Nestorovska

Editor-in-Chief of the Faculty of Music Publications

Gordana Karan

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Cover Design

Stefan Ignjatović

Technical Editor and Pre-press

Dušan Ćasić

ISBN 978-86-81340-20-2

PAM-IE Belgrade 2019 Conference and this publication were supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

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PROCEEDINGS

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UNIVERSITY OF ARTS IN BELGRADE
FACULTY OF MUSIC

Belgrade, 2020

Ondine as an Anima in the Context of Narrative Strategies of Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*

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Abstract

The theoretical background of this paper is based on psychological theory in the widest sense of the word, in a way, it was formulated by Carl Gustave Jung in his analytical psychology (Jung, 1969, 1966/1996). Our theoretical platform is complemented with narratology, semiotics, and music analysis (Bal, 2000; Bruhn, 1997; Prince, 2003; Tarasti, 1994, 2000, 2002). One should have in mind the fact that all aforementioned approaches will be adjusted to a specific theoretical needs of a central object of interest – musical piece itself. Special emphasis is going to be put on an anima concept as an archetype of the unconscious and also as a term in a broader sense. It is envisaged that the study emphasizes the importance of the application of psychological theories in art research (Jung, 1966). One of the goals of this paper is to present various possibilities of interpretation of narratives in the musical work through the working of the anima concept: Bertrand's poem as a chronicle frame, mythical discourse, Ravel's composition as a musical framework, allegorical display of the path of individuation, musical process as a metaphor of the psychosexual dynamics (Palja, 2002), a chain of archetypes as a narrative of the collective unconscious and the story of anima itself. The significance of the study in which the applicative potential of the anima concept has been explored is primarily interdisciplinary. Musicological discourse is enriched by the terminology and conceptual settings of the analytical theory, whereas narratology attains concrete examples of anthropological character through understanding the psychological dynamics and artistic/musical vision as the manifestation of specific ways of storytelling. Psychological aspects and conditionality of musical narration, as well as propositional models of detection of the effects of anima within the musical work, enlarge the fund and certain type of knowledge in the field of applied psychology.

Introduction and Theoretical Background

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), the distinguished French composer, could be considered as one of the first authors in early modern music, along with Mahler, Debussy, Scriabin, etc. Several poetical innovations that separate Ravel's oeuvre from classical-romantic canon have been applied in his paradigmatic and unprecedented program cycle for piano solo called *Gaspard de la Nuit* (*Trois poèmes d'après Aloysius Bertrand*), finished in 1908. The textual (prose in verses) template is not only an inspiration for creative endeavor but an integral part of the score, in the essential and ontological sense. *Gaspard de la Nuit* represents the pinnacle of composer's evolution, logical outcome after *Jeux d'eau* (1901) and *Une barque sur l'océan* from *Miroirs* (1905), and heyday in the development of fantastic/character piano pieces such as *Carnaval* by Schumann, *Années de pèlerinage* by Liszt and *Pictures at an Exhibition* by Mussorgsky. It should be noted that three movements form the cycle: *Ondine*, *Le gibet*, and *Scarbo*. One of the possibilities when we envisage composition as unity is to expound it as a nightmare in three episodes. Continuous "work" of the conscious, particular as well as collective one, points out to the larger narrative (mythological era – Christianity – modern/technological/machine era).

Bearing in mind that "the praxis of art is a psychological activity" (Jung, 1966: 65), *Ondine*, as a multilayered and polysemic piece of music, is an ideal object for interdisciplinary treatment. Thereby, we should separate personalistic and archetypal creative fantasy, which means that we will not take into account the psyche of the composer himself, but rather the process, psychological and musical, in its interference

with personal and biographical reflections. Importance of actuality of this phenomenon, that “aliveness of creative processes” (certain energetic charge), should be accepted without any doubt because precisely this occurrence testifies about the ontological reality of work of art and archetype as such. On the hub of crossroads, one encounters the chimera of the collective unconscious with the question: Who speaks with thousands of voices? (thousands of meanings, readings, interpretations and so on). Until we expose the heteroglossia matrix, we can follow the voice of music as “manner through which the psyche logos express itself”.

Our study is dedicated to the interpretation of a narrative matrix in *Ondine* with a special review on anima function as an important factor in shaping musical and textual flow. We are going to present and suggest several different angles from which one can understand the narrative¹ as a whole. Apart from anima archetype in the Jungian sense, during the discussion, we will use the musical semiotics (suitable for uncovering symbols from deeper structures) and applied narratology. The broader frame of our debate is founded on concepts derived from analytical psychology.

According to Sigmund Freud (Frojd, 1981) psychoanalysis can be understood, inter alia, as metapsychology that converses special cases amongst literary, visual, theatrical, film and musical arts. More than a hundred years pass by in interactions between complex psychoanalytic paradigms and, mostly, poetical art theories. These relations during the last century, besides other things, exist in the form of Jungian theory of collective unconscious and archetype, as a theory of mutual symbolic interference between West and eastern cultures (Šuvaković, 2011: 599). Daryl Sharp identifies archetype as “primordial, structural elements of the human psyche. Archetypes are systems of readiness for action, and at the same time, images and emotions. They are inherited with the brain structure-indeed they are its psychic aspect. They represent, on the

one hand, a very strong instinctive conservatism, while, on the other hand, they are the most effective means conceivable of instinctive adaptation. They are thus, essentially, the chthonic portion of the psyche ... that portion through which the psyche is attached to nature” (Sharp, 1991). Archetypes are suitable for adaptation in musicological consideration, precisely because of its non-material and symbolic character. The subject of our analysis dictated further theoretical constriction. For *Ondine*, there was no suspicion when it comes to choosing an adequate archetype. Anima is a challenge for designation, even for the Jung himself. “The anima is a personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in a man’s psyche, such as vague feelings and moods, prophetic hunches, receptiveness to the irrational, capacity for personal love, feeling for nature, and – last but not least – his relation to the unconscious” (Jung, 1964: 177). No better definition could be selected to describe the content of *Ondine*. The presence of Anima is largely reported in fairy tales, myths, literature, religions, ethnic traditions, and arts. This universal existence of feminine archetype in forms of fairy, witch, princess, queen or goddess places it at the center of the inquiry.

Our approach includes musical semiotics and applied narratology. The latter is essential for understanding narrative conditions and functions. The theory of narrative text enables us to locate a focal point in order to properly reconstruct the given event. Musical semiotics, postulated by Tarasti, helped us to identify significant signs under the previously revealed narrative context, including the compound ones. The network of spatiality, temporality, and actoriality represents the tripartite system designed to comprehend musical space (vertical component), time (horizontal component) and action (energetic component). Both approaches, empowered with Jung’s theory, offer better insight into the psychological basis of creative impulse in a musical piece similar to *Ondine*.

Narrative Patterns

There is, at least for the occasion, eight possible narrative matrices in, both structurally and super structurally, *Ondine* from the cycle *Gas-*

¹ Narrative is a representation of one or more real or fictive events communicated by one, two, or several narrators to one, two, or several narratees (Prince, 2003: 58).

pard de la Nuit: Bertrand's story, musical piece with poem, musical form itself, Anima as a guide, stages of Anima, Anima as alive carrier, chain of archetypes and psychosexual dynamics. The number of narrative patterns is, naturally, not exhausted with this list. Our hypothesis, here in the form of proposed narratives, serves as a logical sketch of a primary problem in this work.

Choosing a poet's standpoint as a focal² angle drives our attention to the text of Bertrand's prose poem.³ Nevertheless, one should not neglect certain conditions that exist and acts behind the text genesis. These conditions, according to our assumption, shape the vital elements of the phenomenon. However, we will have to make an exegesis of a story.⁴ Explanation aims at a psychological level, in particular. In narratives, Anima can be, as it mostly is, a representation/notion/image (symbolic plane) with one exception, where Anima is an alive, self-conscious, and energetic actuator of the creative process (ontological plane). Tale format is analogous to a content form in which the subjects of an analysis render themselves inside the frame of analytical psychology, for example, when they speak about dreams. Many topics of the unconscious are hidden in deeper textual layers as a metaphor, allegory, symbol, etc. In that respect, interpretation and explanation are necessary for understanding both the psychological state of a man and the comprehension of artwork in its details.

Bertrand uses various symbols in his prose poem: Voice, Water, Moon, Siren, Mistress, Castle, Lake, Fire, Earth, Air, Father and so on. Here, the Voice is the Ondine, our famous siren, which, in the role of Anima, addresses to a poet, directly. In the poem, the mysterious Mistress of the Castle appears, but it is not so clear what she

represents. The action revealed on the lake, for which one can presuppose subconscious. The element of water connects conscious and unconscious. When the water appears as rain, it is closer to a conscious state, and opposite, when water resurfaces itself in the form of a lake and serves as a building material of "liquid watery beings" it represents unconscious. The Moon has a function of totality symbol (mandala – ancient Sanskrit word for circle, roughly speaking), under whose light the action takes place. Our poet gets a guide for his journey through misty unconscious: possessive and negative Anima, who tries everything to hold him under the spell of her world, even to make him the "king of the lake". No matter what she does, Bertrand rejects the offer, he no longer wants to hear the enchanting and indulging voice of Anima, constantly ready for a hypnotic effect. Then, he integrated real Anima (in a form of mortal women, angry and huffish) in the conscious part of his psyche. Precisely in this decisive moment, Bertrand (as own hero in a poem) awakes in front of a window, streaked with raindrops. Poet is on the road of individuation, making progress through wakened dialog with Anima. The question of his feminine side is central for the poem's narrative, starting with introductory stanzas given in a direct speech, uttered by Ondine. By arranging exposition in this way, Bertrand emphasizes the importance of the statement given by Ondine. She takes multifold functions: spokesman, heroine, central protagonist and the inner voice of wisdom. The very beginning of a story starts with her irresistible pronunciation. Ondine is the main actor⁵ (with most actantial⁶ roles), narrator, even the focal angle from which the tale unfolds. This dominant capacity can result, both with positive and negative influence on the female side of Bertrand's consciousness. Still, especially when we analyze the last two stanzas of a poem, it is obvious that the poet

² Focalization is the perspective in terms of which the narrated situations and events are presented (Prince, 2003: 31–32).

³ The whole prose poem on English language one can find in literature (Radeta, 2019: 331).

⁴ Story is the content plane of narrative as opposed to its expression plane or discourse; the "what" of a narrative as opposed to its "how" (Prince, 2003: 93).

⁵ Actants are syntactic units. Actantial roles are defined in terms of their modal content and function in narrative. Actors emerge through semes of individuation. Several actors may embody a single actant and vice versa (Tarasti, 1994: 303).

⁶ Actant is a fundamental role at the level of narrative deep structure (Prince, 2003: 1).

managed to bring round his feminine side under the enrapture of Anima. Bertrand reached out to the level of personal choice, thus successfully returned to the realm of “real”. Willingly changing the future position of a lake king (this offer could be understood as an egoistic projection) for the love of mortal women, Bertrand has mastered his own fantasy (usually maiden with fairy-like character, so beautiful that she petrifies the subject, *la femme fatale* type) in the same time reviving the emotional and spiritual capacity through his mature relationship toward worldly women. The whole narrative points to the autodiegetic⁷ principle.

The second narrative is a subset of the intersection between poem and musical structure semiotically explained. A table showing the described relation and the concomitant argumentation one can find in the literature (Radeta, 2011: 64). However, it is worth mentioning that Anima, here in the form of crucial actor Ondine, shape structural and contextual plane, validating both the musical processes and associative network emanating from the prose poem.

The case of the musical form itself as a focalizing factor is interesting from various aspects. First, the polyvalent character of micro- and macro-formal elements is one of the obvious symptoms of Anima’s presence. The second important insight concerns the sonata form as a vague container of whole creative input. Dramaturgical and theatrical power implanted in threefold edifice practically serves as a scene for Anima’s performance. The table contains a comparison among sonata form and the scenic/drama shape of the poem one can find in an external source, with the following discussion (Radeta, 2011: 49–75, 110).

Psychological questions are more clearly present in the fourth narrative. The role of guide through the unconscious part of the psyche, which is so commonly attributed to Anima, makes another layer in “complex heteronomous text which travels through time” (Radeta, 2012: 117) and affects the soul. Narrative patterns that originated from Anima’s focal point func-

tion as a spotlight, illuminating wanted details and, at the same time, concealing less desirable things. Also, the dynamics of alternation between entering and leaving the conscious zone somewhat resemble to the movement of the waves and lunar phase. Separation from water element, represented by water seme⁸, leads hero’s (but also ours as well) psyche to conscious. The fascinating thing is, from the angle of the presented narrative, that complete flow (both textual and acoustical/musical) is directed toward conscious, merely simultaneously starting from and stimulated by the unconscious. This paradox at first glance, is primarily reconciled by musical means, mostly with texture and key scheme (see Radeta, 2019). As our table shows (see Table 1), shifting parts are governed by the norm, in order of appearance regularly with some distinctive outweighs in duration when unconscious dominates. We should notice that water as a natural phenomenon on the psychic level gravitates to the unconscious, leaving us with the notion that the conscious state is artificial, even construct in some way. Anima fails in prevailing at the battleground with constructed, civilized consciousness. On the other hand, in the positive reading of the described situation, Anima helped our hero to bring the feminine side to the light of the conscious.

Table 1. Ondine as anima-guide through the unconscious.

Psyche	Measure
Unconscious	1–22
Conscious	23–30
Unconscious	31–72
Conscious	73–80
Unconscious-to-conscious	81–84
Conscious	85–92

The next narrative leads us more deeply to the realm of Anima, where we encounter the story from the perspective of distinctive types that arise during the process of her evolution. These phenomenal stages are discussed inside the

⁷ Autodiegetic narrative is a first-person narrative the narrator of which is also the protagonist or the hero (Prince, 2003: 9).

⁸ Seme is a features of the signified (Tarasti, 1994: 304).

psychological discourse (Jung, 1964: 177–188). Nevertheless, their influence goes even further. Whole *Ondine* from *Gaspard de la Nuit* is proof of the transcendent nature of qualities symptomatic for the psyche. Individual and peculiar hallmarks of psychic forms engraved themselves on musical texture with such persuasiveness that excludes any reasonable doubt. We propose the following order:

1. The figure of Eve – erotic/sensual aspect m. 1–42
2. Faust's Helene – romantic, aesthetic, and sexual aspect m. 43–72
3. Virgin Mary – spiritual love m. 73–80
4. Sapientia – transcendent feminine wisdom m. 81–92

The fascination with sonic sensuality prevails in the first half of a musical piece. Satiety with timbre, seventh-chords, ninth chords, vibrant rhythmic pulse, multilayer texture, acoustic effects, and much more, represents the attractiveness of Eve. A thing gets complicated when we encounter plot elements that gave rise to the romantic figure of Helene, conflicted by separation of primal unity. In musical terms, the development section provides the necessary plateau for staging the dramatic scene. After the storm, the calm nature and prolific reprise show us how the face of Anima changed under the influence of lived suffering. Attained spirituality came as a result of the synthesis of the previous stages. Love in a musical context is depicted by sufficiently large space for the inclusion of every existed element. The even higher platform is reached in the contour of Sapientia. Only this stage is proper for eternity, and this is the reason for Ravel to finish his piece with the transcendent paradigm. In the crystal arpeggio chords, the composer reflects the purity of feminine wisdom. The whole typological range of Anima is present in the musical process.

The aliveness of the Anima is, even more so, apparent in the next narrative matrix. In this case, the focal point is Anima, both as an archetype and a being (contingent or independent). Her presence in music is materialized through main theme complexes that can be interpreted

as isotopy⁹, in semiotic terms. We have found four theme complexes in *Ondine*, who formed four pillars in a piece architectonic (see Figures 1–4). Also, isotopies indicate actuality, tangibility and uniformity (thus the identity) of Anima being, which directly acts/works on the surface and depth of musical texture.



Figure 1. Ego theme – Ravel, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, *Ondine*, m. 3–4.



Figure 2. Mature theme – Ravel, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, *Ondine*, m. 43.



Figure 3. Shadow theme – Ravel, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, *Ondine*, m. 48



Figure 4. Integrated theme – Ravel, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, *Ondine*, m. 81.

One should notice the artistic and skillful care with which Ravel portrays Anima as an alive carrier of psyche content. All four isotopies (ego, mature, shadow, and integrated) are crafted to conform to special technical output and spiritual appearance. The personal quality of Anima is situated in a melodic line (first with legato expressiveness, then in one breath,

⁹ Isotopy is a set of semantic categories whose redundancy guarantees the coherence of a sign complex and makes possible the uniform reading of any text (Tarasti, 1994: 304).

afterward shadowed with octave doubling and finally nested in four-part texture). The contextual plane is evoked by working on water seme (solid but a liquid block in first, then slightly diluted and excited, afterward tempestuous and at last wavy with regularity). Every described feature contributes to the aliveness of the Anima phenomenon in musical surroundings.

Our seventh narrative pattern is realized from the string of archetypes. Table 2 informs us about psychological content and order of exposure. Definitions of used concepts, terms and symbols can be found in the literature (Jung, 1969, 1966/1996).

Mere possibility to explain the musical process with archetypal discourse is fascinating and thrilling discovery. The intermingling of the paradigmatic and distributional level of sound manifestation is connected in the sphere of the psyche. The nature of energy flow and course of action in the musical realm parallels the psyche dynamic, whose interpretation matches perfectly with sound structures. It seems like our hero

from the poem is on the road of individuation (Jung, 1964: 160–229). Once again, we must conclude that the Anima role in personal maturing of a subject is crucial.

Last, but not less important is a narrative matrix closely related to sexuality. Arousal and instinctive potential of mythic mermaids and nymphs are a common theme in cultural studies and analytical psychology as well through the concept of Anima. In our example, the emotional and general psychic side of sex and its manifestation is, therefore, built-in content. The whole *Ondine* movement from *Gaspard de la Nuit* can be understood as an allegorical representation of the sexual act itself. For a detailed study of this question, one can consult the external source (Radeta, 2012: 115–116).

Conclusion

How can one separate psychological, poetical, and creative lineage in the composer's being? Sometimes it is justified only for the purpose of analysis and understanding. Looking at this problem from the perspective of the wholeness, we can get complete and solid insight into a real state. The creative urge is the part of a personality and a psychic component. Composer poetical principles stem not only from a conscious/unconscious part of inner life but are deeply rooted inside a soul/individual, as a unique phenomenon. Also, the psyche is under the profound influence of identity and creativity. This complex inner/outer fluidity verifies a highly sensitive and mosaic entity. Our study tends to sketch and propose some features of the skillful impact of the psyche, in the form of Anima archetype, on musical art, severally Ravel's enigmatic piano piece *Ondine*. The starting hypothesis about the relevance of psychology for art and music, in particular, was largely confirmed on multiple levels. Our exploration of musical and textual structures and surpluses in *Ondine* indicates the affect of the psyche. It shapes the main theme, leading actor, mythic background, formal plane, expression, the story itself, and even focalization. This is only an introduction to further engagement. The feminine image of the unconscious showed obvious will

Table 2. Chain of archetypes and/or mental state.

Archetype (or mental state/ process)	Measure
Child archetype	1–2
Mother/Anima archetype	3–22
Regression	23–30
Child archetype	31–32
Mother/Anima archetype	33–45
Father archetype	46–47
Mother/Anima archetype	48–50
Father archetype	51–52
Mother/Anima archetype	53–57
Father archetype	58–62
Progression	63–66
Ego	67–68
Shadow	69–72
Self	73–80
Persona	81–88
Neurosis	89
Numinous	90–92

power in musical theatre dramatized by Ravel. “Anima gives psychic value to the happenings of the world, including the events of the creative act” (Medić, 2012: 540). Presented and materialized value is not limited only to the realm of creativity. The ambitious potential of Anima is strong enough to cross limits/border/liminality between worlds/otherness. In this freely exposed flux, one should not fall into the trap of fantasy/unreal. Jung explained this notion himself.

“But what does the role of the anima as a guide to the inner world mean in practical terms. This positive function occurs when a man takes seriously the feelings, moods, expectations, and fantasies sent by his anima and when he fixes them in some form, for example, in writing, painting, sculpture, musical composition, or dancing. When he works at this patiently and slowly, other more deeply unconscious material wells up from the depths and connects with the earlier material. After a fantasy has been fixed in some specific form, it must be examined both intellectually and ethically, with an evaluating feeling reaction. And it is essential to regard it as being *absolutely real* [emphasis added]; there must be no lurking doubt that this is ‘only a fantasy’. If this is practiced with devotion over a long period, the process of individuation gradually becomes the single reality and can unfold in its true form” (Jung, 1964: 186).

Unfolding became a true path, both as an analytic tool and the knowledge of Self. In this manner, we are traveling toward episteme, which unites the object of knowledge and subjective mind. In other words, there is no difference between musical piece *Ondine*, Ravel’s homo creator, Bertrand’s words, *Ondine* as an actor, our mind, and Anima. The absolute reality mentioned by Jung offers solid ground for such a conclusion. Narrative matrices propounded and presented in our discussion was born and grown up from the source founded in undivided Real. This is precisely why every one of them is connected to the same core. Focal point serves not to enable centrifugal force but rather to give a complete, “all-seeing” eye insight. Narratology applied to *Ondine* revealed an abundance of occasions. It seems that story-

telling is one of the crucial similarities that conjugate Bertrand, Ravel, *Ondine*, Anima, and theoretical discourse. Our eight narratives should be understood as metatextual and propositional patterns. The voice and energy of Anima are indispensable in every strategical matrix. We mention once again that the reader can get to know about particular cases (narrative matrices) in selected literature (Bruhn, 1997; Radeta, 2011, 2012, 2019). Ending remarks deserves yet another wise voice from the past. “Music expresses in sounds what fantasies and visions express in visual images (...) Music certainly has to do with the collective unconscious” (Jung, 1973: 542).

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