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Strauss and Von Hofmansthal's Elektra: the realisation of myth in music

Thompson, Allan Campbell

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central to the unfolding of the myth, and to other characters' responses to it. Thus the opera is mythical in a way the play cannot be, due to the importance of the musical contribution. The music functions as a creator of atmosphere and ambience, as a means of defining the nature of every character, and a provider of a variety of different moods, from hatred to exultation, from sensuousness to resolve. Without the huge orchestral outburst after Aegisth's death, and the following dance melodies and rhythms, Elektra's triumph loses most of its emotion and intensity, and her death becomes trivial. With the music her victory becomes a form of mythical exaltation and her death mythically ironic. Strauss uses intervals, chords and rhythmic techniques based on Romantic tradition, yet in their most extreme form in order to create the most extreme mythological opera. Debussy's mythical opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* may have revolutionised the course of musical development in the twentieth century by its total rejection of Wagnerian theory, but despite the excellence of its score it contains little that contributes to the mythical nature of its plot. Although Strauss was not as concerned with creating musical mythologies as was Richard Wagner, his development of Wagnerian techniques and romantic theory ensured that his mythical creations were as structurally and musically valid as any of Wagner's music-dramas. This is true not only in terms of the concepts of the mythological and the heroic, but also in terms of the Wagnerian leitmotif technique used to musically create these concepts.

CHAPTER 9

THE USE OF LEITMOTIFS

The word 'leitmotif' was a term invented by Hans von Wolzogen, an acquaintance of Richard Wagner, to denote the fundamental method of composition in Wagner's later operas in which he represented characters, typical situations and recurrent ideas by means of musical motifs. Leitmotifs (leading-motives) are not rigidly fixed melodies but are used fairly flexibly with modifications in rhythm, intervals, etc., according to the requirements of a particular situation. Although Wagner was the first to make consistent use of the leitmotif, his method is apparent in the works of other earlier composers. The best known example is Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, where the leitmotif is known by the French term 'ideé fixe'. This technique had a huge influence on post-Wagnerian composition in the fields of opera and symphonic music (particularly the symphonic poem). Richard Strauss, a fervent admirer of Wagner, was able to build upon this foundation in his own symphonic compositions and, most notably, in his operas. Strauss did not use the leitmotif in the same way as Wagner, but rather modified it for his own particular needs. Wagner's motifs span entire operas, and are derived from basic thematic material stated in the earlier parts of compositions. Strauss uses his motifs either in the Wagnerian sense of derivation or, more frequently, as simple

themes used to emphasise only one character or event in the opera. For example, in *Elektra* Aegisth's banal and nonchalant two bar fragment is never developed, but appears in its original form every time it is heard. Other motifs, particularly Agamemnon's, pervade much of the score and result in a number of derivations. The result is an overall less complex musical theory of association and derivation than Wagner's, but with a no less intense dramatic effect. The use of the more complicated association is also important in creating mythological situations through musical means. As *Elektra* is a mythological opera its leitmotif structure is vital in conveying the myth to its audience.

It has already been established that Agamemnon is the central heroic figure of *Elektra*, and this mythological function is emphasised through his corresponding musical material. His motif is the only one that pervades every scene in the score, actually opening and closing the entire opera. It constantly appears in its original form - a falling fourth followed by a rising sixth:



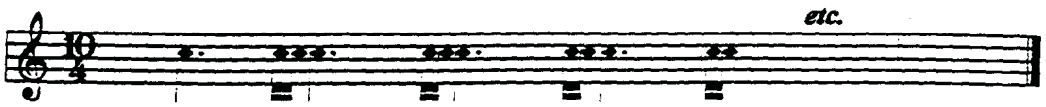
It also appears in a number of derivations, each further indicating his central importance. This is particularly evident in the way in which Strauss employs the motif by inscribing it into the lines of other characters. Usually the derivations use the same basic pattern as above; hence Elektra's mourning theme



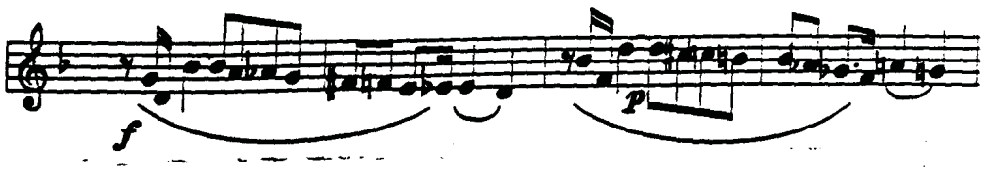
and Orest's recognition theme



both have the same intervallic and rhythmical qualities as the original motif, altered only in terms of progression and/or harmony to achieve their individual nature. However, the motif also gives rise to derivations of a rhythmical sort, such as the motif associated with sympathy which is first heard in the fifth maid's 'hymn' of scene i. Here the contours are different, as well as the intervals (rising - falling, rather than falling - rising), but the rhythmical repetition



is clearly related to Agamemnon's theme. The motif also goes through some negative derivations, and this is particularly true of scene vi, the 'recognition' scene. Here, the theme:



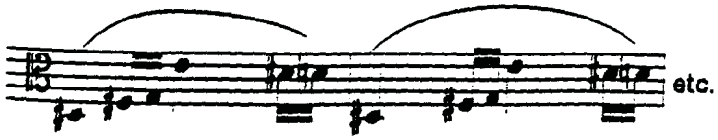
is used to suggest Agamemnon's presence at the meeting of Elektra and Orest, but when Orest attempts to embrace his sister he is violently repulsed, and there follows a description of how Elektra's awakening sexuality was stunted by the presence of her father. Throughout the opera the theme also goes through a variety of atmospheric changes, from the soft legato meanderings of scenes ii

and vi, to the violent accented fanfares of the closing bars. As a result, it becomes integral to the development of the plot and vital to the 'solution-in-music' of the mythical problem. Thus, when Aegisth is lured into the palace and murdered by Orest, the music expresses not only Elektra's triumph, but also Agamemnon's principal motif in a huge orchestral setting. The motif also functions mythologically in setting Agamemnon apart, whilst spreading his influence inexorably through the consciousness of the physical characters.

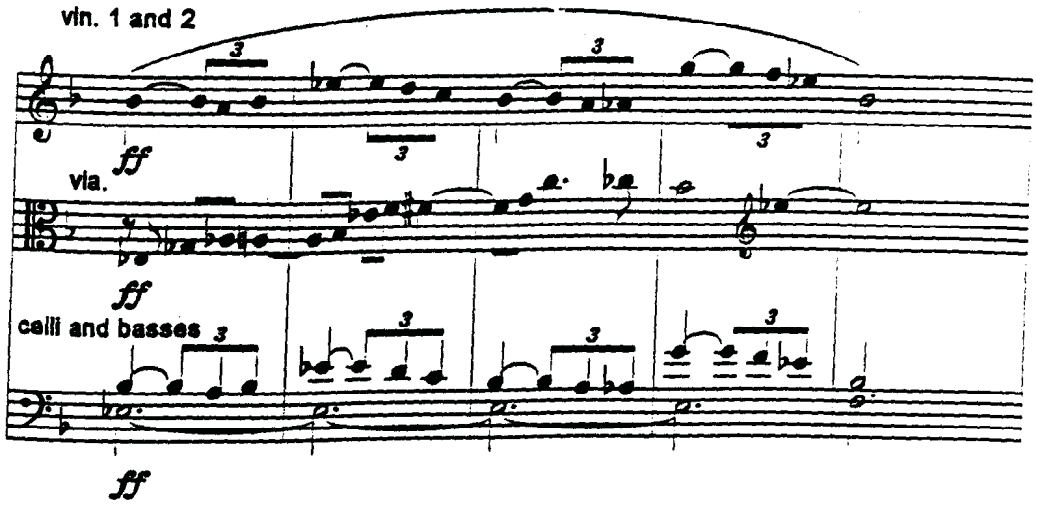
Another particularly 'mythological' leitmotif is that of the family bond, or the inheritance of Agamemnon as it is also known. This theme (quoted on page 65 in connection with the tragic and heroic archetypes of the opera) is, after the Agamemnon motif, the most important theme of the opera as it symbolises not only past family ties, but the bonds that are needed in order to create a new future. It is heard often in its original form as a feature of Elektra's musical construction, but also appears in derivations and as part of other characters or situations. It is even associated with Klytemnestra in scene four as she remembers how her family used to be. The theme is played here by the cor anglais, bassoon and solo cello in a *sotto voce* passage that suggests her alienation from the 'true' family of Elektra, Orest and Agamemnon (and to a lesser extent, Chrysothemis):



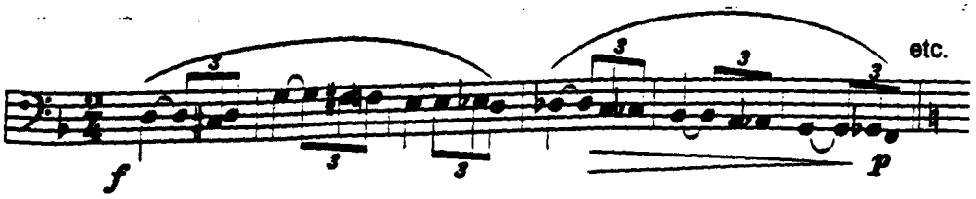
This is further emphasised in the interlude before scene v as the theme becomes harmonically anguished and chromatically violent in its effect, as well as rhythmically more urgent:



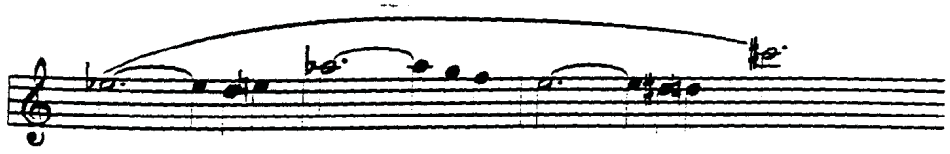
The theme has now been transformed into a negative one, and scene v sees a further destructive derivation appear as Elektra attempts to seduce her sister to help her in the murder of Klytemnestra and Aegisth.



As this is an attempt at physical coercion, the music reaches new levels of sensuousness, with Elektra making use of the inheritance theme to achieve her own ends. This cynical use of the motif further undermines the dignity of its first appearance, and it reaches its lowest level in scene vi where it is transformed into a reflection of Elektra's pitiful state:

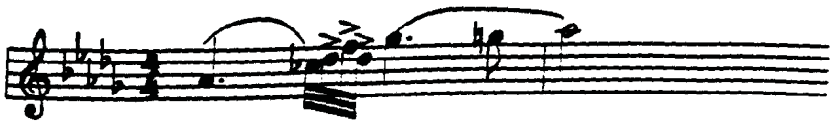


The dramatic action of Elektra's refusal to let her brother touch her, combined with the inheritance theme, is an indication of just how far the theme has been eroded. It is only in the finale that it is restored to its former melodic power as it becomes an integral part of the dance of triumph. This indicates that not only has Orestes completed his task, but he has also re-established his family as Elektra had wished it. Elektra's subsequent death denies this, but during the dance she believes this to be the case:

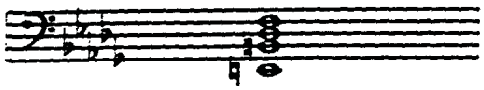


The mythological use of this motif is related to the concept of society as it serves to portray the family, or in the broader sense, the community from which Agamemnon was violently removed. Although it is not quite as functional as the themes related to Agamemnon, it develops from initial dignity, to anguish, to decadence and finally to triumph and reflects how the myth has progressed from the need for retribution to the achievement of it.

The third major motif is the one of hatred, and is inextricably linked to Elektra and her interpretation of her world, becoming a virtual mirror of her thought process. The basic theme derives from the main object of her hatred, Klytemnestra, although it is not used exclusively with reference to her mother.



The hatred motif occurs for the first time in the opening scene when Elektra rushes onto the stage, and is heard for the second time just prior to her monologue. It then appears at regular intervals throughout the work, mainly in its original form. The only themes derived from this are the Klytemnestra 'chord'

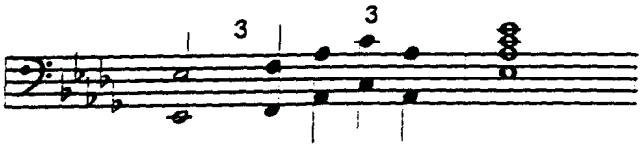


(used as a harmonic basis to Elektra's tirades against her mother), and the dance of triumph in the finale. Here it is ironically transformed into a triumphant waltz-like rhythm, accompanying Elektra in her apotheosis. Vengeance is in this case the key to transformation: musically the motif changes from hatred to triumph; dramatically, loathing turns into exultation.



The use of this hatred motif, hinted at earlier in scene ii, is now a motif of joy indicating further that it belongs solely to Elektra, and has changed character throughout the opera in sympathy with the changes in Elektra's mood. Therefore, during the 'recognition' scene, Elektra describes her father as "jealous" and someone who "sent to me this hate, this great hollow-eyed hate as bridegroom" to the accompaniment of the hatred motif. This use of the

theme indicates that its source is not only Klytemnestra, but Agamemnon as well. It is remarkably out of place amongst the more tender moments that characterise this scene, but also reconfirms Agamemnon's archetypal demonic nature. In stark contrast to the hatred motif is the motif of Elektra's regality. This majestic rising fanfare-like figure appears at every key moment of the action, particularly during her various imaginary triumphs. It appears, like the hatred theme, for the first time in the monologue and again during the confrontation with Klytemnestra. It is also transformed into a motif representing Elektra's overall dominance over her tormentors, and reaches its fullest potential in the passage immediately before Aegisth's death:

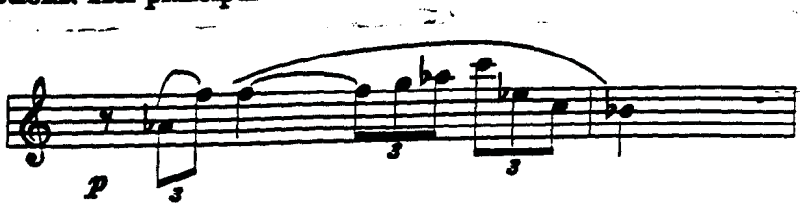


Apart from Agamemnon, other characters are also musically portrayed by motifs indicative of their status and personality. The chord mentioned earlier in connection with Klytemnestra is an example of this, but she also has numerous others which were discussed in more detail in the chapter dealing with demonic imagery. These include motifs of evil, of her unspeakable appearance, and her false authority. However, the fact that these motifs do not have important derivations, and act as referents rather than substantially altering the course of the action, indicates the static nature of her evil. This of course is also true of Aegisth, whose motif also never changes. Klytemnestra's character is never one-dimensional, even if she still remains little more than a caricature of evil.

Orest's motifs are also limited in scope, reflecting his minor role in the drama: they are hinted at, alluded to, but ultimately never developed. They occur mainly in references to other characters, such as the trumpet fanfare during the description of Klytemnestra's dreams:

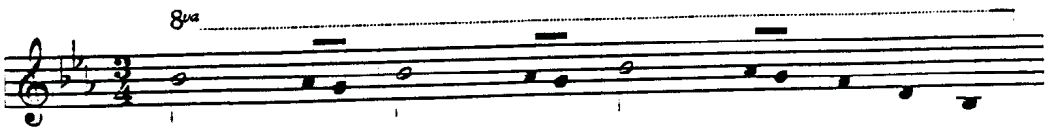


Orest's lack of a coherent and structured musical language, despite his obvious importance to the resolution of the plot, shows that he is little more than a tool to be used by Elektra, after which she is free to pursue her own means of expression during her final dance. Thus Orest, in his exclusion from the main part of the action, becomes less of a character than a catalyst: firstly by being the cause of the only genuinely tender music of the score, and secondly by being able to solve the mythical problem. The music of scene vi is therefore not so much an indication of Elektra's joy at seeing her brother again, but rather of her relief that an end to her torment is in sight. In contrast to the superficial nature of Orest's motifs, those belonging to Chrysothemis provide a number of functions. Her principal motif



is used whenever she pleads with or encourages her sister. This is the most important of her motifs as it acts as a goad or a challenge to the actions of

Elektra. The other motif associated with Chrysothemis is concerned with her desire for freedom and domestic stability, and is strictly tonal:



It is significant that this theme is transformed in scene v into part of the lush and cynical music which accompanies Elektra as she plays on these very desires in order to achieve her ends. It also occurs in the final scene as each sister reacts in her own way to the realisation that Orest has emerged victorious, thus attesting to the fact that the motif, although inherently part of Chrysothemis' musical structure, is universal in its relevance.

From the above it is clear that, unlike Wagner, Strauss employed the leitmotif technique principally in one area, that of characterisation. Every major character is defined as much by his or her musical themes as by his or her presence and actions on stage. Even the universal themes of hatred, bonding and vengeance are usually linked to one character or another, resulting in *Elektra* being more an opera about people and psychology than pure events. Strauss is thus able musically to emphasise the mythological roles of hero, nemesis, antagonist and suppliant without having to rely on the plot. Although other leitmotivic material does exist, it is minor in comparison with that discussed above, and has little to do with the development of the plot as myth. Yet the integrated use of the major leitmotifs is an important factor in realising

the myth in musical terms, and in combination with the structure discussed in the following chapter, it ensures that *Elektra* is, after the *Ring* cycle, the most effective and successful attempt to re-create myth in the medium of music.

CHAPTER 10

THE STRUCTURE OF *ELEKTRA*

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The use of the word 'structure' when dealing with myths is ironic in the sense that it is impossible to discuss any mythology without dealing with its various structures at one point or another: either as the elements that constitute the myth; or as the overall patterns that distinguish a myth, or group of myths, from any other. The first option has already been discussed in chapters five to eight which deal with the use of archetypes and other mythical images that identify *Elektra* as a myth. It is now necessary to look into the other option - the 'macrostructure' of the myth - by examining the features and structural patterns that confirm its mythical nature, as well as its mythical uniqueness. In doing so, it is hoped that it will be possible to "determine the characteristics of the place where meaning is made and coded, [being not so much] concerned with the message or meaning itself." (Doty, 1986: 195.) Any study of structure must also involve the interrelation of parts, and have reference to the totality as witnessed by not only an audience, but also participants of the mythical process. Of greater importance is the relationship between the elements of the myth, and the myth as a whole. These elements, or parts, are in turn governed by various processes of change and flux - "a system of transformation and not a mere collection of elements and their

properties." (Doty: 199.) In a mythological opera such as *Elektra,* there is the further element of music to be taken into account, and this too follows its own patterns of transformation which, when related to the dramatic aspect, produce a greater awareness of the entire myth as it was conceived by Strauss and von Hofmannsthal. An opera's success depends more than anything on the extent to which the music is able to enhance or develop the stage action. As *Elektra* is primarily a dark and brooding myth, the music must consequently express moods of hatred, anguish, hysteria and insanity to a far greater extent than the 'lighter' shades of tenderness and hope. Although the score itself is not purely expressionist, and does not rely on atonality, it still manages to convey the required atmospheric effect through the controlled use of late Romantic harmonic and tonal techniques, which influence the form as well as the expression of the opera.

The form of *Elektra* has been the cause of some debate, but as it shares many stylistic traits with *Salome*, it is worth bearing in mind Strauss' description of the latter as "a symphony in the medium of drama." (Puffet 1989: 57.) A close study of the opera reveals that it does indeed share certain formal characteristics with the classical concept of the sonata, including elements of an exposition, development section, recapitulation and coda. However, it can be argued, perhaps more persuasively, that *Elektra* is based on the form of a symphony with an Introduction, Scherzo, Adagio, and Finale in which all the disparate elements of the preceding 'movements' are brought together. Norman del Mar describes

Elektra's monologue as "a finely constructed symphonic exposition" (1962: Vol. 1, 301) and his description of *Salome* as an example of "Lisztian organisation and metamorphosis of motivic germs" (242) could equally be applied to *Elektra*. Although 'categorising' the opera in this way tends to distract attention from its internal energy, it does counter any claims made regarding *Elektra*'s lack of form; on the contrary, it has a highly organised structure. This fact is further reinforced by an examination of the principal tonalities in the opera. As the heir of Wagner and Liszt, Strauss predictably worked according to a broad tonal plan, particularly in the earlier stages of composition. The composer is known to have worked extensively from harmonic and tonal annotations written in his libretto, only adding the vocal lines at a later stage. Although a detailed harmonic analysis is not possible within the scope of this study, it is important to note that certain tonal areas function in a way similar to the system of leitmotifs in that they portray various characters and emotions through the music. The most important of these are as follows:

- **D minor:** One of the central keys of the opera, it is particularly associated with Agamemnon's initial appearances, and together with B-flat major/minor and ultimately C major/minor, constitutes the murdered king's tonal identity.

- **C major\minor:** This tonality is the principal link between Agamemnon and Elektra. It appears in both her anticipatory dance of triumph as well as in the finale, changing from the major to the minor at her death, then back to major as her father claims his victory.

- **E-flat major:** Chrysothemis' principal tonality. It is used to emphasise her longings and frustrations, as well as the finale's resolution of those frustrations. Significantly, it is also used as the harmonic basis of Elektra's attempted exploitation of her sister's predicament.

- **A-flat major:** The only compassionate key of the opera, it appears in relation to the 'family bond' theme, as well as being the principal tonality of the recognition scene.

- **F major:** The tonality of Aegisth.

- **B minor:** The root tonality of Klytemnestra, but often combined through polytonality with other keys, usually in a tritone relationship.

The above are of course isolated from the extreme complexity of the harmonic progression, which is characterised by the use of remote key-relations, polytonality, sudden modulations and other such techniques. By examining each scene individually, it is possible to gain a clearer picture of the harmonic basis of the opera and, at the same time, of the mythical aspects of its structure.

10.2 PART ONE: (Figures 1 to 274)

10.2.1 Scene i (Introduction): The Maids' Scene

The maidservants' scene serves the same function as the ancient Greek chorus - they are the observers of, and commentators on, the action that precedes the drama. In this case they also provide an introduction to the character of Elektra, and present a reflection of the confusion and conflict to follow. Although their

music is tonally disjointed and vividly descriptive, it is not strictly atonal due to its harmonic centre of D minor. This tonality is central to the development of the opera, and it is established in scene i in the first bar. Its key signature of one flat remains in place throughout the scene, despite frequent excursions into extended tonalities. As the action unfolds, a certain structural pattern begins to emerge that will dominate the first part of *Elektra*, and ultimately, the opera as a whole. The pattern is based firstly on an increase in tension and secondly on the changes of mood in each scene: Hatred and fear give way to pity (or, more often, self-pity), and finally to exultation and/or triumph which is then interrupted or thwarted. This sequence, tabulated further on to show the similarity in structure of the first four scenes, is important not only in terms of dramatic coherence, but also in mythological terms, as it highlights the structural nature of the 'mythical problem' within each scene, as well as its final outcome. The beating of the fifth maid is also part of the pattern, that of the 'interruption' of the triumphal mood, and while not a traditionally mythical element, serves to warn the observer of the final ambiguous ending to this particular myth. Apart from introducing the background to the opera and its structural pattern, the first scene also serves the function of introducing the opera's protagonist, Elektra, and preparing the way for her great monologue in the next scene. Thus the structural pattern of this scene could be shown as follows:

-Part 1: Opposition to Elektra.

- Descriptions of maids 1, 2 and 3.

-Part 2: Support for Elektra.

- Sympathy of maid 4, and adoration of maid 5.

- Continued opposition of others.

-Transition: Whipping of maid 5, and emergence of 'sympathy' motif.

[The principal tonality of this first scene is D minor, although other areas are briefly touched upon.]

10.2.2 Scene ii: Elektra Alone

The second scene is, apart from the finale, the most important in the opera as it introduces all the principal themes, symbols and motifs of the work during the monologue, which is in itself a microstructure of the opera as a whole. The scene is split into two distinct and contrasting parts which are separated by a short 'interlude', which itself contains an important theme. The two halves of the scene present Elektra's mourning for her father (including a graphic description of his murder), and an imaginary celebration after he has been avenged (including graphic descriptions of the sacrifices necessary to achieve this). Both sections therefore deal with death and destruction, but in opposing ways: the first is a description of the past, the second a vision of the future. This in itself mirrors the overall action as Part One of *Elektra* is rooted in the past, while Part Two moves rapidly towards an apotheosis. The 'retrospective' part of scene ii opens with an expression of hatred, followed by a strong and sustained B-flat tonality which is

used throughout the opera to reflect Elektra's mourning for Agamemnon. The hymn-like solemnity of this harmonic writing can be compared with similar tonal passages accompanying Jokanaan in *Salome*. Here for the first time in *Elektra*, Strauss is making "an unambiguous tonal assertion at climaxes, with much less stable flux in between." (Puffet: 60.) The B-flat minor tonality does not last very long, however, but is gradually destabilised and replaced by passages of C major/minor at figure 44. The unstable areas are the ones that describe the death of Agamemnon, and the new tonality becomes another of 'his' keys. As the harmonic structure gradually moves towards A-flat major, the mood becomes more and more gentle, culminating in the interlude mentioned on page 65 at the words "come before your child". The mood then shifts to a hysterical type of exultation as dogs, horses and people are massacred in Elektra's mind. The B-flat minor representing mourning has become B-flat major in its imaginary triumph, with literal highpoints at figures 53 and 56. In addition to this, Agamemnon's other key of C becomes strongly major, with its highpoint on the word "königliche", ('royal'; figure 61), before moving towards E-flat major in preparation for the next scene.

Mythically speaking, the most significant achievement of this scene is the introduction of the problem that faces the hero, namely the avenging of Agamemnon and the triumph of the protagonists. This it does by including musical and textual descriptions of both the murder and the murderers, as well as a foretaste of that triumph. That the mythical problem will be solved is left in no

doubt due to the dominance of major tonalities at the end of the scene. The pattern established in scene i is reinforced here, particularly the element of 'interruption', as Elektra is faced with her ideological opposite, Chrysothemis. A huge block chord consisting of two major triads a minor third apart - the harmonic co-ordinate of Elektra's 'hatred' theme - followed by a polychord made of two minor triads a tritone apart, interrupts her ecstasy, and returns her to the reality of scene iii. Thus the structure of this scene can be shown as follows: (As with the previous scene, it mirrors the overall structure of the opera.)

-Part 1: Entrance of Elektra.

- Recollection of Agamemnon's murder: hatred.
- Appeal for his return: self-pity.

-Part 2: Imaginary dance of triumph.

- Demand for vengeance.
- Description of sacrifices.

-Interruption: Entrance of Chrysothemis.

[The principal tonalities here follow the changes in mood of the scene. They are B-flat minor, followed by a brief moment of A-flat major, then C major and E major. There are of course numerous other tonalities that make appearances too briefly to be considered important to the overall flow of the progression.]

10.2.3 Scene iii: Elektra and Chrysothemis (1)

The third scene, the 'scherzo' movement, has been criticised by Norman del Mar as being "the one weak section of the score" (306), due mainly to its use of an

aria-like passage which seems inconsistent with the more extreme moments of scenes i and ii. Although del Mar's comments may seem valid when discussing the music in isolation, it tends to overlook the dramatic and mythical importance of this scene. If the structure is examined, this becomes more apparent:

-Part 1: Chrysothemis' entrance.

- Elektra: Disgust.

- Chrysothemis: Fear and self-pity.

-Part 2: Chrysothemis' 'hymn' to individual freedom.

- Elektra: Disgust and mockery.

-Interruption and Transition: The approach of Klytemnestra.

[The principal key signature is E-flat major]

As can be seen from this analysis, the scene not only confirms the general pattern of the previous two scenes, but also increases the use of contrast to create its dramatic effect. Musically this is done by making use of the E-flat tonality (symbolic of domestic and individual freedom) as a deliberate contrasting device to the ambiguous tonalities used earlier. This contradicts any claims to the inferiority of the scene, and in fact strengthens it, when it is borne in mind that this key is to be used ironically in scene v where it becomes a part of Elektra's attempt to exploit the frustrations of her sister. In dramatic terms the scene emphasises the difference in character between the naive and frustrated Chrysothemis and the obsessed and hate-driven Elektra. However, even Chrysothemis is forced to acknowledge the hopelessness of their situation, and as

the scene progresses, the differences between herself and Elektra become less well-defined. After the re-establishment of the E-flat key, Chrysothemis sings "far rather dead than living and not living", indicating that, despite her desire for domesticity and children, freedom is the more important objective. This is spelled out by more chromatic writing. Thus the Chrysothemis who announces the imminent approach of Klytemnestra is very similar to her sister in mood and in musical relationship. The 'interruption' that completes the pattern is characterised by the driving rhythms signifying the coming of Klytemnestra, underlined by wild tonal shifts and by extreme chromatic writing, extinguishing the E-flat of scene iii by the time Klytemnestra actually appears on stage. The stage is now set for the epic archetypal conflict between the symbolic opposites of evil and vengeance.

10.2.4 Scene iv: Elektra and Klytemnestra

This is the final scene of the first part of *Elektra,* and in addition to being the most extreme in style it is also the central scene, the turning point of the action. It consists of a confrontation between Elektra and Klytemnestra, which stresses that while Elektra is obsessed, but guilt-free, Klytemnestra is obsessed with her own guilt and her attempts to suppress it. Images of barrenness, decay, corruption and death permeate the text and score, resulting in one of the most disturbing and relentless episodes in twentieth-century composition. Again, the scene is divided into two parts: Klytemnestra and her entourage; and Klytemnestra in conflict with Elektra. At first the music is quiet, unobtrusive and generally built on consonant triads. At figure 145 for example an F-sharp major dominant resolves

through to an F-sharp minor tonality. This is a passage reminiscent of filial tenderness, and is consequently ironic in the light of preceding and future events. The tone becomes even more ironic as the music moves from E major to C major in a subtle but convincing reference to the music that will accompany Elektra's dance of triumph at the death of Klytemnestra. However, as Klytemnestra descends and begins a description of her nightmare, the music again becomes remote, polytonal and expressionistic. This is Strauss in his radical phase, and any individual chords which might appear to clarify the tonal centre are stated ambiguously and fleetingly. Occasionally Strauss uses a tonal area to briefly emphasise a point. For example, B-flat major/minor reminds the listener of Agamemnon's silent importance in this scene, and C major is used to emphasise Elektra's second imaginary triumph near the end of it. Yet, for the most part, the music meanders chromatically until the end of Part One of the opera. The scene can be divided as follows:

-Part 1: Descent of Klytemnestra.

- Elektra: Hatred and mockery.
- Klytemnestra: Self-pity.

-Part 2: Dominance of Elektra.

- Elektra: Imaginary exultation.
- Klytemnestra: Terror.

-Interruption and Transition: Joy of Klytemnestra at news of Orest's death.

[The principal tonalities, obscured by the complexity of the score, are B minor moving to B-flat major, followed by C major and minor.]

10.2.5 Summary of Part One

The first part of *Elektra,* as mentioned earlier, is based on a structural pattern that is repeated in each scene and is representative of the opera's overall architecture. It also represents the 'journey' of a character in myth towards a final triumph, although here the facet of the interruption introduces a disquieting aspect to the structure. The pattern of Hatred - Pity - Triumph - Interruption can be more easily understood in tabular form, as each element can be immediately identified with the same elements in other scenes:

	HATRED	PITY	TRIUMPH	INTERRUPTION
Scene i	Hatred and fear of maids 1, 2, and 3.	Sympathy of maid 4.	'Hymn' to Elektra of 5th maid.	Overseer's contempt - Whipping of 5th maid.
Scene ii	Despair of Elektra.	1.Self-pity 2. Pity for Agamemnon.	Imaginary dance of triumph.	Arrival of Chrysothemis
Scene iii	Elektra's contempt for Chrysothemis	Chrysothemis -despair and self-pity.	Imaginary fertility-dance.	Approach of Klytemnestra.
Scene iv	Mutual hatred of mother and daughter.	Nightmare; Self-pity of Klytemnestra .	Elektra's joy at Klytemnestra's 'death'.	News of Orest's death by trainbearer.

The above dramatic structure has certain implications for the mythical structure

of the opera. As each scene goes through violent changes of mood, and finally arrives at a triumphant climax, it conforms to the mythical theory of thesis - antithesis - synthesis discussed on page 23. This constant quest for the resolution of a number of contrary positions is a feature of most mythological studies, and in the first part of *Elektra* these contradictions are manifold. The conflict inherent in the drama is outlined from the outset, beginning with the difference of opinion between the serving maids. Leading from this the principal contrary position is established: Elektra, Orest and Agamemnon are ranged against the forces of Klytemnestra and Aegisth. Other contradictions reinforce this theory of contradiction: One is the militant malevolence of Elektra, as opposed to the pliant and naive expectancy of Chrysothemis; another is the evil and guilt-ridden Klytemnestra's clash with her obsessed but guilt-free daughter. There are also archetypal elements of light and darkness: When Klytemnestra is being threatened by Elektra, the palace is unlit - the news of Orest's death prompts her to call for lighting to reinforce her triumph and relief, and light at this stage is for Elektra premature. It is only in the finale that Elektra, in an ironic parody of her mother, will herself call for light to emphasise her victory. Another difference between the two women is that Klytemnestra is surrounded by servants in an attempt to stave off the inevitable vengeance of Agamemnon, while Elektra is completely alone in her quest for that vengeance. And of course, contradictions are equally present in the music. The most prominent are juxtapositions of major and minor keys, the ironic use of C major and E major, and the polytonality and chromaticism of the 'nightmare' scene. It is useful to note that, musically, each

scene also follows patterns that conform to the mythical pattern tabulated earlier. As can be seen from the table below, each time a triumphal tonality is attained after much flux, it is soon interrupted by more radical uses of chords not particularly related to the 'triumph' chords. As in the dramatic pattern, this is a miniature replication of the overall tonal development, and consequently a microcosm of the musical myth itself. Each scene goes through a dramatic and musical process of development - climax - interruption, with the second and the fourth scenes being the most important, and subsequently having the most intense climaxes and interruptions.

	OPENING TONALITY	DEVELOP - MENT	'TRIUMPH' TONALITY	INTERR - UPTION
Scene i	D minor.	D\Bb minors Allusion, flux.	D minor cadence.	Chromaticism of whipping.
Scene ii	'Hatred' chord of Db and E majors.	Bb minor, replaced with C minor.	C major, shifting to E major.	Hatred chord, staccato and fortissimo.
Scene iii	Db major and E major. - Hatred.	Disorientated use of Eb major.	Eb major: cadence.	Chromaticism gradually obsc- uring Eb maj.
Scene iv	F# minor with E major and C major.	Polytonal and atonal, C minor Bb major\minor.	C major, shifting chromatically to Bb major.	Destabilisation into Part Two.

Part One therefore sets out the structure of the opera as a whole, introducing the major musical and operatic thematic material, and most importantly identifying both the mythical problem, as well as the mytho-musical structure. It is left to the second half of *Elektra* to resolve all the contradictions of the first part, and in so doing resolve the mythical problem. As will be shown, this is achieved, albeit with the added contradiction (mirrored in the end of each scene of the first part) of a final interruption which will remain unresolved.

10.3 PART TWO: (Figures 1a to 262a)

Strauss never actually referred to *Elektra* as being in two parts, but the change of numbering at Figure 1a, preceded by a moment of utter silence, is a clear indication of the break between them. From now on the mood becomes even more intense, the desire to complete the task of eliminating Klytemnestra and Aegisth even more urgent. The pattern of the first four scenes differs slightly from that of scenes v to vii, but it is also interesting to note that this entire half follows the earlier pattern: The despair and failure of scene v moves through the brief reconciliation and subsequent self-pity of scene vi to the finale's dance of triumph and abrupt collapse of Elektra. Thus the second part can be seen as both a fulfilment and a frustration of the desires and obsessions of the first part. In mythological terms, the mythical problem created in the beginning of the opera moves rapidly towards its resolution. The hero triumphs, all contradictions are resolved and a type of apotheosis is reached. However, the closing bars of

Elektra contain not only the resolution of the ultimate contradiction, but also the creation of a new and unexpected one. At figure 261a, the final bars of the opera, Elektra is left lifeless on the ground while Chrysothemis attempts to open the doors of the palace. She calls desperately for her brother, and the stage directions at this point read simply "Silence. Curtain." As a result nagging questions are left in the audience's mind: Why does Orest not reappear? Why was it necessary for Elektra to die? Why is Chrysothemis shut out of the palace in the first place, thus denying her all she had earlier wished for? This final dramatic moment of the opera is a radical departure from the original myth, and must be seen in the philosophical context of *fin-de-siècle* mythography, where myth was regarded primarily as a reflection of the darkness of man or, at least, a mirror of (rather than an answer to) all mankind's problems. The questions that are raised at the end of the opera are intentionally left unanswered. The educated listener will perhaps expect that Orest is to have his own struggle with the Furies as a result of his matricide (von Hofmannsthal considered writing such an drama), but it must be remembered that *Elektra* is an opera in isolation - it does not have a past (excepting in its references to Agamemnon's death) nor does it imply a future. What Strauss and von Hofmannsthal have attempted to achieve here is to show without doubt the contradictory nature of myth, and its unreliability in solving all problems. The very fact that Agamemnon impresses his presence indelibly on the music of the finale is a further indication of this. A study of the last three scenes will show to what extent the structure of this myth contributes to its final ambivalence.

10.3.1 Scene v: Elektra and Chrysothemis (2)

Scene v, although the opening scene of Part Two, is still very much a part of the mood and tonalities of Part One. It opens with a D minor tonal centre reminiscent of the opening bars of the first scene before developing into its principal tonality of E-flat major/minor. This key has direct connections with the "weakest scene in the score", scene iii, yet its use in this section tends to contradict del Mar's dismissal of that scene. E-flat major is a tonality which, up to this point, has been a reflection of the fears, frustrations and desires of Chrysothemis. Here, however, the key is taken over by Elektra in order that she may seduce her sister into assisting with the murder of Klytemnestra and Aegisth. The two appearances of E-flat studied simultaneously provide useful evidence of the complexity of its functions. In scene iii, associated with the naive and pliant Chrysothemis, the key features in lengthy and aria-like passages that prompted del Mar's criticism. On the other hand, scene v with its cynical and decadent undertones, sees the tonality frequently dissolve into remote areas before asserting itself again. This contrasting use of an identical tonal area thus not only indicates Elektra's use of an alien tonality for her own ends, but also emphasises the difference in character between the innocence of Chrysothemis and the selfish obsessions of Elektra. To dismiss this harmonic contrast is therefore to ignore the mythical implications of the conflict between protagonist and suppliant.

The structure of this scene differs from the first four in that although it follows the development from despair to triumph, the latter never really occurs.

Interruption of exultation is replaced by frustration of desire, and this becomes the pattern of Part Two. The scene can therefore be divided as follows:

-Part 1: News of Orest's death.

- Denial and rejection

[Interlude: servant's scene]

-Part 2: Seduction scene.

- Self-pity of Chrysothemis \ cynicism of Elektra

-Frustration: Chrysothemis' departure

- Elektra's curse.

[The principal tonality of E-flat has already been discussed, but another feature of this scene is the use of G major, as well as elements of the whole-tone scale.]

10.3.2 Scene vi: Elektra and Orest

The sixth scene is the most genuinely melodic and gentle section of the score, but also sees Elektra dissolve into unprecedented self-pity as Orest attempts to comfort her. This scene does little to further the action of the plot apart from introducing the character who will finally resolve the mythical problem. It can be described as a form of interlude between the frustrations of the fifth scene and the triumph of the finale. Although the harmonic basis remains in a state of flux, the 'recognition' hymn of Elektra is almost wholly in A-flat major, echoing the brief appearance of this tonality in the melodic interlude of scene ii. The structure of scene vi is almost identical to that of the preceding scene, but differs in that the cynical emotions of the latter are mirrored by the genuine emotion of the former.