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STRAUSS AND VON HOFMANNSTHAL'S *ELEKTRA*: THE REALISATION OF MYTH IN MUSIC

ALLAN CAMPBELL THOMPSON

STRAUSS AND VON HOFMANNSTHAL'S *ELEKTRA*: THE REALISATION OF MYTH IN MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the realisation of myth through music in the music-drama *Elektra* by Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal; that is, it studies aspects of the mythological that distinguish *Elektra* from compositions in which the score is a mere accompaniment to, rather than a furtherance of, a mythical plot. Although the study of the role of myth has in recent years become central in the fields of art and literature, little attention has been given to the interaction between myth and music. The intention of this study is to apply the most important theories of myth to the music and text of *Elektra* in order to establish the mythical nature of the opera. The theories of archetypal imagery are of particular importance, specifically those of the tragic, the hero-mythical, and the demonic; and attention has also been given to the functionality of leitmotifs, tonal-relationships and musical structure in the realisation of myth as art. As the opera is a product of the nineteenth century *fin-de-siècle*, contemporary attitudes to the meaning of myth play a vital role in defining *Elektra*, as do the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud. The result is the creation of a modern mythological work through the medium of music-drama.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Music in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

_____

_____ day of _____, 19__.

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

All quotations from the libretto of *Elektra* are taken from the translation by Anthony Hose in the English National Opera Guide *Salome/Elektra*, edited by Nicholas John (London Riverrun: 1988).

The spellings 'Electra', 'Clytaemnestra', 'Orestes' and 'Aegisthus' refer to the characters in the tragedy *Electra* by Sophocles, and to the original myth.
The spellings 'Elektra', 'Klytemnestra', 'Orest' and 'Aegisth' refer to the drama *Elektra* by von Hofmannsthal, and to the opera *Elektra* by Strauss and von Hofmannsthal.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION I:

THE HISTORY OF MYTH AND MUSIC

1.1 MYTH AND MUSIC IN ANCIENT GREECE

The history of Western art music as we know it begins with the chants and plainsong used in the ceremonies of the early Christian church, which in turn trace their roots back to an Indic heritage. Yet throughout the history of civilisation, scholars, artists and many others have turned to the heritage of Ancient Greece for inspiration, learning, instruction and moderation. However, whilst the architecture, literature and art of the Ancients are extant, the same cannot be said of their music. Only twelve altered manuscripts survive, and even these give no indication of a definitive performance practice or exact sound. Written texts dealing with the theory and aesthetics of music do exist, and from these texts scholars have been able to determine the role of music in Ancient Greece and, more particularly, its function in the mythology of the era.

Greek writing is full of examples of musicians who carry the origins of music back to mythological times: Apollo, Amphion and Orpheus are obvious examples of such musicians, and all are portrayed not only as skilled

practitioners of their art, but also as its inventors. I. Kassler, in an essay entitled *Apollo and Dionysius: Music Theory and the Western Tradition of Epistemology* (Straimchamps 1984: 457), states that "the beginnings of music theory are to be found deep in Western mythology, where an antithesis is established between order and disorder." This order and disorder is symbolised by the two gods Apollo and Dionysius respectively: the former, god of rejuvenation and purification as well as the preserver of life, represents harmony in the cosmos. Dionysius, on the other hand, is the dissonant usurper of rationality, and is a symbol of desire and physical appetites. In true Greek fashion, each god was represented musically by use of a musical instrument at rites of worship. Dionysius (or Bacchus, as he is more commonly known) was worshipped with the aulos, a double-pipe reed instrument resembling an oboe, with a shrill and piercing tone. This instrument, used singly, was also a feature of Greek tragedy that is believed to have developed from the ceremonies worshipping Dionysius. In strong contrast, the cult of Apollo, situated on the isle of Delphi, favoured the lyre as its principal instrument of worship. Unlike the passions aroused by the aulos, the lyre soothed passions and promoted rationality and calm. Nonetheless, both sects were reliant on music as an integral part of their devotion, and this is true of a large part of Greek religious life. In fact, the word 'music' itself is an adjectival form of the word 'muse', a muse being a divine guardian of artistic or scientific inspiration. Originally three, the eventual nine muses each presided over a specific branch of science or art, and were often invoked in aid of the creative process, even in recent times. The

verbal relation between 'music' and 'Muse' suggests that the art of music to the Greeks was not merely for entertainment or recreation, but rather a functional element in the search for beauty and meaning in life. This quest was represented by the decisive role of music within the myths of the period and its continuing role in the myth-tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides: "It is in the nature of the simplest and oldest form of drama that, at the height of intensity and feeling and excitement, it turns into music, because music is able to express emotions when the deeply stirred soul of man can utter only inarticulate cries." (Lang 1983: 12.) In the myth-tragedies of the early Greek poets, music is known to have played a prominent part, but how prominent, and in what context, is uncertain. It is known that the chorus played an intermediary role, and that much of the drama was sung as well as spoken. The supreme example of a musico-drama using mythological material is *Agamemnon*, the first tragedy of the *Oresteia* trilogy by the playwright Aeschylus. Throughout *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus' power as a composer as well as a poet is never in doubt. His use of the lyrical chorus, his inherently musical thought and his exploitation of rhythm as a musical as well as a dramatic device all reinforce what Lang had in mind regarding intensity of feeling; that "it is beyond our ability to realise at this date the psychological effects created by Aeschylean music. Before *Agamemnon* the tragedy had been a lyrico-musical genre; afterwards it became a drama with music ... *Agamemnon* convinces us that tragedy was indeed born from the spirit of music" (Lang: 12) - and the spirit of music was born together with the spirit of myth.

The Greek (or more specifically, Apollonian) compulsion to perfect all areas of their existence and reduce meaning to a rational ordered system encompassed the art of music as well. This quest for perfection reached its peak with the teachings and theories of Pythagoras, which emphasised the interrelation between music and numbers: as the understanding of numbers led to a greater understanding of a physical as well as spiritual existence, so too would the understanding of music reflect the harmony of the universe and the compatibility of myth and cosmos. Music, so important in the life of the individual, could also alter the state of the universe; hence the proliferation of miracles attributed to the legendary musicians of mythology. The Pythagorean and Platonic ideals of music and myth were to reappear centuries later in the Middle Ages and Renaissance in the guise of Neo-Platonism, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

An investigation into music in the Ancient Greek civilisation indicates that it was an integral part of the religious and secular myths of the time, whether it was an element of a mythical story or an accompaniment to a divine rite. It was not until the era of Wagner and late Romanticism that the two forces of music and myth were once more to be so naturally entwined. It was in fact the dramas of Aeschylus, and particularly the *Oresteia* trilogy, that inspired Wagner to realise his own mythical creations in a complete art-work. In the interim myth went through various stages of importance in musical thought, ranging from the philosophical reasoning of the Renaissance to the bland mythical ornamentation

of the rococo. But first it is necessary to examine the role of myth in music in the Middle Ages, as this is the beginning proper of Western art music as a whole.

1.2 THE MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE

By the time of the Middle Ages, music had become subservient to the needs of the early Christian church. Although scholars did return to the ideals of Greece, the church harboured deep suspicions of any pagan culture which might taint the purity of Christianity. One group of intellectuals who opposed the paranoia of the church were the Neo-Platonists, who used the teachings of Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras in order to revive the ideals of Greek philosophy. One of this group, Manlius Servinus Boethius (470-525), used the numerical theories of Pythagoras to formulate a unique theory of musical aesthetics. He argued that music was a mythological 'guide' to divine perfection and beauty, a way of depicting the ultimate state of God and his creation. In order to achieve this, music had to be expressed in numerical ratios. In other words, numbers had to be made audible: "It is here that music achieves its real place in medieval philosophy, for as a microcosm in the macrocosm it can duplicate on a small scale the power of numbers inherent in the otherwise almost incomprehensible expanse around us." (Scay 1975: 20.) Thus there existed two poles of thought regarding the function of music. As the rituals of the church demanded that music was no more than a sacred accompaniment, performance practice was

unable to extend much beyond this, despite the efforts of intellectuals such as Boethius. It was to be the Renaissance's revival of Hellenism and the creation of opera that would open the way for the development of both music and drama and, as an extension, myth. Medieval Neo-Platonism had disappeared by the middle of the thirteenth century, but re-established itself in a far more intellectual form during the High Renaissance. Its impact was concentrated mainly in Italy where groups such as the 'Platonic Academy' and the 'Camerata' were established to discuss, *inter alia*, science, art and rhetoric. To these groups, myth was the ideal means of symbolising truth, and figures such as Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75) and later Pierre de Ronsard (1524-85) proposed using myth to 'conceal' certain truths that would be revealed only through the performance of the myth. Thus the prevalence of mythological characters in Renaissance art (nymphs, gods, heroes, etc.) is not always purely decorative; they were also an attempt to explain the human condition in order that "we may see there something of our own nature, if not openly, then as through a glass, darkly." (Donington 1978: 5.) In a similar manner, music of the Renaissance period was often viewed as symbolic in itself. Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), a leading Alchemist and Neo-Platonist, theorised that music (and the numbers related to it) was a form of guide through the celestial, and therefore spiritual, spheres. Part of the use of myth at the time included a strong inclination towards the Greek musician-god Orpheus, and Ficino invented the 'Orphic' texts (classical poems accompanied by lyre) according to this following. "Orpheus was brought back to life to prove in person on stage the magic power of music

which, when put to the service of love, can master nature and conquer hell." (Katz 1986: 113.)

This interaction between the Orphic texts and music in general was another way of achieving the Neo-Platonic aim of 'revealing through concealing', and became the basis for the very earliest attempts at creating music drama. *Fabula d'Orfeo*, an 'entertainment' written by Angelo Poliziano (fl. 1470), attempts to internalise the experience of myth in his audience through the synthesis of music and drama. The music was a path to the imagination, while the mind absorbed the hidden qualities of the myth. *Fabula d'Orfeo* in turn influenced the creation of the first genuine opera, *Dafne,* by Ottavio Rinuccini (1562-1621). This opera is considered the first as it contains "the thought of a drama all in music, and the thought of music to carry it as one and the same thought" (Donington: 7), and is clearly mythological in its intent. The plot is a reflection of the ambivalence of the human condition, symbolised by the use of contrasting characters: Cupid (sexual desire) as opposed to Apollo (reason and consciousness); Earth Venus (carnality) as embodied in Heavenly Venus (platonic love). The use of the underworld suggests the uncertainty and unconsciousness of man. *Dafne* is without doubt a mythological opera, but it is primarily in the drama that this is so: the music becomes little more than accompaniment, or at most a stimulation of the imagination.

By the time the Age of Reason had ended, the mythical imagery of the Neo-Platonists had been reduced to a mere ornamental role. Mythological opera such as Monteverdi's *Orfeo* of 1607, and Lully's *Aramis* of 1684 do little more than offer a 'light against darkness' situation which does not really affect the listener in any profound way. Some scholars, such as Robert Donington arguing from a Jungian standpoint, have claimed that the very nature of myth in a dramatic plot (operatic or otherwise) is sufficient to stimulate the minds of audiences either consciously or unconsciously, and that the music is instrumental in facilitating this. Yet practically, the roles of myth and music on the operatic stage had become separate concepts by the Baroque era, and music had been reduced to the subservient role of accompaniment.

1.3 ROMANTICISM AND MYTH

Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, myth served no other purpose than as a source for operatic plots. This began to change with the first stirrings of Romanticism as artists started to view their creative impulses in the light of a national mythology. In Germany the mythologies of Greece and Rome were declared archaic, and so began the development of a 'new' mythology: the forging of Aryan national epics, fairy-tales and literature into a contemporary style. Although this resulted in a juxtaposition between the collective forms of the reconstructed mythology, and the powers of the individual and his creative spirit, it nevertheless became one the most important

factors of the age. Music was also strongly affected by the new mythology and, as a result, attempted "in the most impressive way to represent the structure of mythical consciousness." (Tarasti 1979: 62.)

In such a way, music could stimulate the dormant mythical psyche of the collective unconscious to a conscious realisation of its properties. The first composer to consciously use myth as a functional part of a musical score was Franz Liszt (1811-86) whose symphonic poems are overt expressions of mythological ideals. By associating a musical motif with a character or concept, Liszt then followed the actions of the character by altering this theme through techniques such as rhythmic disturbance, or sudden modulation. Using such techniques ensured that the tone-poems were not mere narratives of a hero's life, but rather an abstraction that allowed for mythological symbolisation. Thus *Tasso* deals with the conflicts encountered by the Romantic artist; *Prometheus* with the difficulty of human achievement; and *Faust* with the contradiction between unrestrained knowledge, and love and redemption. The mythological symphonic poem culminated in *Die Ideale* in which a hero is excluded altogether, leaving only the abstract concepts. This early work in a mytho-musical form was to lead directly to the ultimate synthesis of myth and music - the German Romantic opera.

Carl Maria von Weber (1786 - 1826) was the first genuinely Romantic composer who addressed the need for a national opera with patriotic

aspirations. *Der Freischütz* (1821) owed its success to its genuine roots in popular legend, and its expression of the cultural identity of the German people. Its plot is drawn from medieval literature, and it features both mythological and supernatural characters. This work became "one of the highest peaks ever attained by German opera" (Lang 1983: 800) and its influence on the theory and music of perhaps the greatest mythological opera composer, Richard Wagner (1813-83), is immeasurable. Wagner was intensely concerned with, and harboured a great love for, Greek culture and tradition. His theories on the subject of ancient tragedy reflect this to the extent that Friedrich Nietzsche labelled him "The true heir of the Greek Tragedians." (Nietzsche 1956: 72.) The tragedy that had the most lasting influence on Wagner was the *Oresteia* trilogy by Aeschylus, in the brilliant German translation by Johann Droysen (1808-84). Droysen's translation emphasises the doom-ridden house, condemned by its distant past to a future of guilt and retribution. Wagner adopted this view wholeheartedly, together with its clear bias towards nationalism. The conservative message Wagner found in the *Oresteia* was parallel to the role he expected to play in the hoped-for revolution for a united Germany. However, despite the profound effect that the spirit of Greek tragedy had on him, Wagner admitted in the theoretical *Oper und Drama* that it was the concept of myth that provided the true impetus for his creative ideals: "From the essence of Mythos alone can we learn to comprehend the highest Grecian artwork ... tragedy is the artistic embodiment of the spirit and contents of Greek mythos" (p153).

Myth had always occupied a vital position in Wagner's creative processes. In his essay *A Communication to my Friends*, he compared the wanderings of his hero in *Der fliegende Höllander* to those of the Greek hero Ulysses, and describes him as a mythical creation of the 'Volk'. In both *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* he combines historical characters with legendary ones. However, his greatest mythological work is the colossal *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, one of the pre-eminent musical and dramatic phenomena of the late nineteenth century. In the four consecutive music-dramas of the *Ring* cycle, the aspects of myth, legend and contemporary Romantic concerns of nationalism and art are reconstructed in a manner which Carl Maria von Weber had initiated over fifty years before, but which Wagner refined and perfected into a unified musical-dramatic whole. Therefore, in Wagner's operas the orchestra plays the part of the chorus in Greek tragedy in its emotional effect, while in its individual reality singers assume the role. The use of the orchestra serves two purposes: firstly, it makes sense of the dramatic action on stage by relating the actor's surroundings to his inner emotions; and secondly it converts thought into emotional understanding. Wagner was of the opinion that the poet is the one person able to distil the 'mythos' into a dramatic medium, allowing an audience to interpret its own existence. When such a mythical drama is combined with music, the orchestra becomes part of the audience's response to the myth, and the poet and musician unite in the orchestra. Whereas in earlier opera the music was an embellishment of the text, in Wagner it becomes not

only part of the mythical structure, but also a powerful initiator of that same structure.

As an example of a music-drama with a mythical structure, the *Ring* offers many insights. In each opera of the cycle sections recur both as mythical content as well as musical realisation. The hero-mythical is a particularly important theme common to all four sections, and is presented both dramatically and in the form of epic narrations. The nature-mythical includes highly symbolic use of phenomena such as rainbows, storms and forest murmurs. Also included are mystical and magical scenes, tragic events and gestural subtleties, all of which are functions of myth. The importance of music in the overall mythical structure becomes apparent with the use of the leitmotifs - musical themes associated with characters, events or objects which recur, develop into other themes, or are added to existing motifs. These themes become devices of a musico- psychological condition which create mythical effects and, as a result, advance the mythical discourse itself. On a broader basis, the structure of the opera is on three distinct levels, namely myth, saga and fairy-tale, with myth and saga often being related to nature and society respectively. Each of these levels can also be linked to specific leitmotifs which develop throughout the four music-dramas, and thus the conflict between nature and society is mirrored by the contrast in leitmotivic material. The leitmotif as a mytho-musical device is more fully discussed in a later chapter on

Straussian music-dramas, but it is sufficient here to consider it as the primary channel for the omniscient portrayal of myth by means of musical discourse.

Richard Wagner, through his unique and pioneering use of myth in his music-dramas, not only brought myth to the stage in an unprecedented manner, but also ensured that the music accompanying the stage action was a fundamental part of the audience's experience of that myth. The interrelation between myth and music, lost to Western art since the days of Ancient Greece, was once again established both theoretically as well as practically, and it was largely due to Wagner that this was to continue in the works of the twentieth century. Although the late nineteenth century saw the highest culmination yet of myth and music, composers such as Richard Strauss, Jean Sibelius, Igor Stravinsky and Oliver Messinen have ensured the continuing spirit of myth in the spirit of music.

1.4 THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The European *fin-de-siècle* witnessed the beginning of the age of science and technology, and myth was no longer applied to the creative unconscious in the Romantic sense; instead it gradually became the domain of anthropologists, cultural historians and scientists, and was consequently reconstructed within the framework of science and 'deep' psychology. Thus mythology in art in the early decades of the twentieth century was a modernised and stylised form,

manifested more than ever on the level of content and expression. The work of Freud and Jung saw the Oedipus myth become more prominent, and this is reflected in the 'Oedipus' operas of Carl Orff (1895-1982), Georges Enesco (1881-1955) and Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971). Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* was the most successful of these. Myth (and its place in the musical oeuvre) was not only influenced by psychology but also by the new patriotism and nationalism sweeping Europe, with the resulting search for a cultural heritage. This included the study of folk legend and music by figures such as Jean Sibelius (1865-1957), Béla Bártók (1881-1945) and Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967): folk myth as well as music appears in Sibelius' *Kullervo* symphony, and Kodály's *Háry János* suite. It was also the age of primitivism, where works were specifically composed as if they were "a reconstruction of a historically or geographically remote culture." (Tarasti 1979: 65.) Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps* and Bártók's *The Miraculous Mandarin* are both representative of this school, with the former being particularly effective in its violent musical depiction of an ancient pagan ceremony. However, primitivism was limited in its scope, and soon gave way to the gentler and more lyrical neo-classical movement of the 1920s. Once again Stravinsky can be taken as a representative of this movement with his opera-drama *Oedipus Rex* of 1928, alluded to earlier. The librettist Jean Cocteau (1889-1963) originally wished to create an ironic atmosphere through the separation of the original myth from its modern context, yet Stravinsky insisted on remaining faithful to the spirit of Sophocles' *Oedipus* tragedy. The composer even went so far as having the final libretto

written in Latin, "in order to create a certain mythical effect by taking as a musical starting point the incantatory elements of this 'petrified' language" (Tarasti: 290). Cocteau still managed to inject some irony into the collaboration by having his narrator clothed in modern dress, which "greatly misinterpreted the myth." (Donington 1978: 205.)

The latter half of the twentieth century has seen the concept of myth become less important in art. With the dissolution of tonality, the redefining of harmony and rhythm, and the re-evaluation of the very notion of music itself, mythology has not found a permanent place in the reconstructed aesthetics of composition. It is largely due to one of the great masters of contemporary music, Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), that myth in music has survived at all. The *Turangalîla* symphony of 1948 is a major mythological composition which blends the figures of Tristan and Yseult with Eastern philosophy, and that of Orpheus with archetypal imagery. And it is this latter element, archetypal imagery, that has found its place in the works of the Surrealist movement, which tends towards the concept of a Dionysian experience according to Nietzsche. The minimalist composer Philip Glass (*1937) in his operatic trilogy *Einstein on the Beach*, *Satyagraha* and *Akhnaten* relates scenes and images through the principles of free association rather than any form of logic. As a result the unconscious is stimulated to relate to the archetypes inherent in the score. Yet according to Donington "these fragments of archetypal imagery are not enough to fuse into a

common relevance, as Blake was able to fuse mythological images of his own invention into a public communication" (224).

Thus in contemporary composition, the concept of myth has become less important as a concrete element, and has largely been replaced by a more abstract form of imagery. Although the theories and music of the late Romantic era exercised a huge influence on future generations, and still occupy positions of importance in modern culture, few attempts were made to continue in the same spirit. It has yet to be seen whether or not art will again use myth in synthesis with itself to create a unitary aesthetic.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION II:

THE CONCEPT OF MYTH

The major problem facing any study concerning myth is the bewildering variety of applications of the term. 'Myth' is an ill-defined and frequently misused category, and any definitions tend to suit the needs of the discipline in which context it is required. The term is used in conjunction with studies in, *inter alia*, anthropology, religion, literature and sexuality, and each makes use of a different definition. On the other hand, attempts at general definitions result in oversimplified statements which cannot really be properly applied to any discipline. It is important to note that although myth is studied as a separate discipline known as mythography, it is rare to find this in isolation. The most important specialists in the study of myth in the twentieth century are all connected to specific fields of interest: Claude Lévi-Strauss to anthropology, Northrop Frye to literature, Gerald Kirk to classical civilisations. In addition to this plethora of uses, the word 'myth' has become one of the most misused 'cant' words of our time. Thus the myth of the male hero as espoused by Hemingway, the Oedipus myth of Freud and the collective unconscious of Lévi-Strauss all accurately reflect the nature of the word in its specific context, but do not help in pinpointing the nature of it. It must be emphasised from the

outset that the term 'myth' is a highly ambiguous one which cannot be exclusive to any one *discipline*.

The definition of myth that will be the most familiar to the majority of people is the one supplied by the Collins English Dictionary: "Myth: a story about superhuman beings of an earlier age taken by preliterate society to be a true account, usually of how natural phenomena, social customs etc. came into existence." (1989: 1018.) This definition is supported by the view that myth is "narrative and irrational, and comes to mean any anonymously composed story telling of origins and destinies, the explanation a society offers its young of why the world is and why we do as we do, its pedagogic images of the nature and destiny of man." (Righter 1975: 3.) Thus common usage of the word 'myth' restricts it to a form of *fallacious history, a false (and often sacred) story or* fairy-tale. The word as we know it today only came into being in the nineteenth century, and is descended from the Greek word 'mythos', meaning utterance in the sense of narrating a tale or story. The Greeks, when using the term, did not intend to "imply anything in particular about the accuracy or falsehoods of these tales, some of which were regarded as containing important elements of truth at least until the time of Plato." (Kirk 1974: 22.) This literal attitude towards myth was common in the ancient world, and it was only with the advent of the philosophy of Plato that the tales were used as a form of 'metaphysical underlining' of his teaching. An example of this is the myth of the cave in *The Republic*, in which a mythical situation is used as an analogy to the

main stream of thought in the text. With the development of Christianity, myth became a sacred matter, and much has been made of the similarities between the 'good shepherd' image of both Orpheus and Jesus Christ, with early Christian art sometimes deliberately mixing the two myths, sacred and pagan, into an uneasy alliance. Despite being steeped in a Christian frame of reference, by the time of the Renaissance the perception of mythology had altered radically. Instead of being fallacious history, the study of myths had resulted in a quest for an allegory of truth, a metaphysical riddle which actually denied any literal interpretation. Because the stories could not be taken seriously in the form in which they had survived Christian dominance, they had instead to be representative of one human 'truth' or another. In such a way, mythology became rationalised to a greater extent, and with increasing complexity: "less and less felt, but more and more intellectualised" (Righter: 8). Modern thought has further abstracted the concept. Rather than seeking for literal truth or allegorical interpretation, the twentieth century has posed the question "what place does the phenomenon of myth occupy among the languages of mankind?" (Righter: 9.) The leader in the field of philosophical thought about myth has been Ernst Cassirer, whose *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* of 1955 explored the status of myth as an imaginative language in its own right, "an autonomous form of the human spirit, with its own structure, function, expression, [with] a unity of feeling" (67). Myth today has become a search for society's essence and the foundations of its behaviour and cultural context.

Another modern outlook on myth, and one that is far more controversial than anything previously proposed, is that of the "collective unconscious". This term, coined by Carl Jung (1875-1961) to define some of his theories of psychoanalysis, refers to patterns and structures which are inherited by the human subconscious, arranged into archetypes and subsequently able to be observed by their effects on dreams, behaviour and personality. Jung's studies of myth as the primary occupant of the unconscious resulted in a whole new field of mythical thought. His own definition of the phenomenon is "a collective human being combining the characteristics of both sexes, transcending youth and age, birth and death, and from having at his command a human experience of one or two million years, almost immortal." (Ellmann 1965: 215.) This connects the term 'unconscious' to that of 'collective', that is, the theory that all men and women have a similar if not identical subconsciousness and are therefore 'collectively' part of one unit of humanity. This theory is also prominent in the promotion of the unitary nature of myth, as well as its relevance across all cultural groups and classes. This response to myth is drawn in part from the psychoanalytic work of Jung's colleague Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) who also proposed the importance of symbols drawn from a mythical past and whose own case-studies often make use of mythical archetypes to confirm his theories. The archetype, another Jungian concept, has become one of the most important catchwords of mythography, spreading out from the language of psychoanalysis into a variety of other disciplines. An archetype may be defined in psychological terms as an "unconscious context

that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, [taking] its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear." (Ellman: 654.) In more mythical terms, an archetype is a constantly recurring symbol or motif that is common to all myths or tales of a particular type, and that gives that type the characteristics to be as it is. As a result, the archetype has in itself become a major field of study, and is important in any investigation into the properties of myth.

2.1 THE THEORIES OF CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS

The most important figure in the application of myth as a part of the collective unconscious is the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (*1908), whose use of semiotics and structural analysis in his discipline led to a revival of the field of anthropology, *as well as heated* debate as to whether his methods have any validity in a society governed by realism rather than psychological theories of the unconscious. By drawing on linguistic models, he attempts not only to understand tribal society, *but also to reveal certain characteristics of the human* mind. Lévi-Strauss' ultimate concern is with the "unconscious nature of collective phenomena" (Leach 1970: 23), which was proposed in his pioneering work *Structural Anthropology* of *1963*. By this, he is asserting that principles of thought formation are universally valid. If this is in fact so, then modern as well as primitive communities have equally active thought formations, the difference being that the cultural and educational upbringing of the atomic and