

CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF *PLEROMA*: A DIGITAL DRAMA AND ITS RELEVANCE
TO TRAGIC FORM IN MUSIC

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of
MASTER of MUSIC

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

December 2010

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Lucas, Stephen. Critical Discussion of *Pleroma*: A Digital Drama and Its Relevance to Tragic Form in Music. Master of Music (Composition), December 2010, 58 pp., 12 illustrations, references, 24 titles.

Pleroma is a digital drama: a work composed of digital animation combined with electroacoustic music, presenting an original dramatic narrative. *Pleroma's* dramatic elements evoke both the classical form of tragedy and the concept of perceptual paradox. A structural overview of the drama and its characters and a plot synopsis are given to provide context for the critical discussion. Analytical descriptions of Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture Op.62* and Mahler's Symphony No. 9 are provided to give background on tragic form and Platonic allegory in music.

An investigation into the elements discussed in the analysis of the instrumental works reveals several layers of possible interpretation in *Pleroma*. Dramatic elements allow for tragic narratives to be constructed, but they are complemented by character associations formed by pitch relationships, stylistic juxtapositions, and instrumentation.

A copy of the dramatic text is included to supplement the multimedia production.

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PART I
CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Dramatic and Technical Overview of *Pleroma*

Introduction

Multimedia art is difficult to analyze objectively, in part because of the advances in technological possibilities over the last several decades. This is especially problematic when an artist strives to evoke traditional archetypes, using modern techniques and media; the conflict arises when attempting to separate the artistic concepts from the technical implementations of the work. Ideally this problem should be an impetus to disconnect fundamental artistic concepts from their traditional forms, allowing them to flourish in a contemporary context.

Pleroma is a two-act digital drama: a musical drama in which all characters are presented as computer-generated animations, whose utterances are computer-generated quasi-speech (translated via sub- and supertitles of an original text). The drama is underscored and embodied in electroacoustic music accompanying the characters' vocalizations. At its core level, the work is a tragic drama based on the interaction between archetypal characters; these components are built up into an audiovisual composition. The intention is to depict ancient tragic forms in a fundamentally new way. The totality of the music, drama, and video in *Pleroma* demonstrate the ability to manifest the fundamental archetypes of ancient tragedy in a composition.

The title *Pleroma* refers to the central being in a mythological cosmology. Pleroma is at once creator and participant in a world characterized by balance,

stasis, and perpetually unresolved loves. The other characters are in pairs, embodying the balance and stasis of Pleroma's creation: Abraxas and Gnosis; Tiamat and Logos; Ahriman and Asura; Helios and Nix. The drama unfolds as Pleroma, disgusted with the symmetry of his creation, intentionally disrupts and unbalances it.

Character Descriptions¹

Individual Characters

Pleroma is depicted as a floating eyeball with half of a blue, translucent eyelid encircling its form (fig. 1). He² is the creator of all the other characters, and has the ability to observe and converse with any of them at his discretion. The only reason proposed as to why he created his world is a desire to have something balanced and unchanging. However, he eventually realizes that most of his creations are unhappy with his structure, causing him to instigate the central plot of the work. His name comes from the Greek word for fullness, but also represents the creative force from Gnostic texts.³ Pleroma's voice is distinguished by a mid-high register, with a bright, abrasive timbre.

¹Comprehensive character descriptions and plot synopsis are necessary before any critical assertions can be made. These sections will clarify some of the content which is intentionally mysterious in the final libretto and production.

²All the characters in *Pleroma* are ambiguous in gender; this makes pronoun usage problematic. Characters in this document will retain consistent gender identifications solely for the purpose of clarity.

³John M. Dillon, "Pleroma and Noetic Cosmos: A Comparative Study." In *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 99-110.

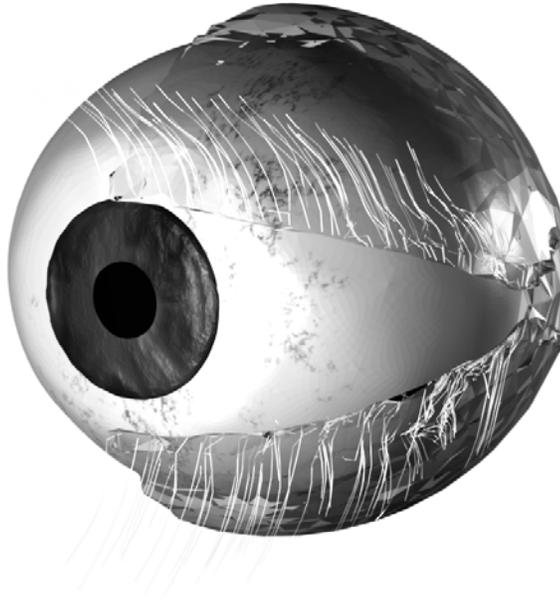


Fig. 1. Appearance of Pleroma.

Abraxas and Gnosis are two sides of a double-headed creature and serve as advisers to Pleroma. Abraxas has a head that resembles some type of bird, with hair made of fire, and Gnosis's head resembles a metallic robot, with hair made of wires (fig. 2). They reside in a dark, cavernous room and are visited by the other characters. They are intended to represent the forces of nature and knowledge, but they are only specifically referred to as upholders of the balance Pleroma has created. Abraxas's name comes from Gnostic texts but refers specifically to Carl Jung's personification of synthesis and maturity.⁴ Gnosis's name is directly referential to Gnosticism, with *gnosis* being a Greek word for

⁴Stephan A. Hoeller, *The Gnostic Jung and the Seven Sermons to the Dead* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1982), pp. 76-82.

“knowledge.” The voices of Abraxas and Gnosis are soft and use a filtered vocoder timbre.

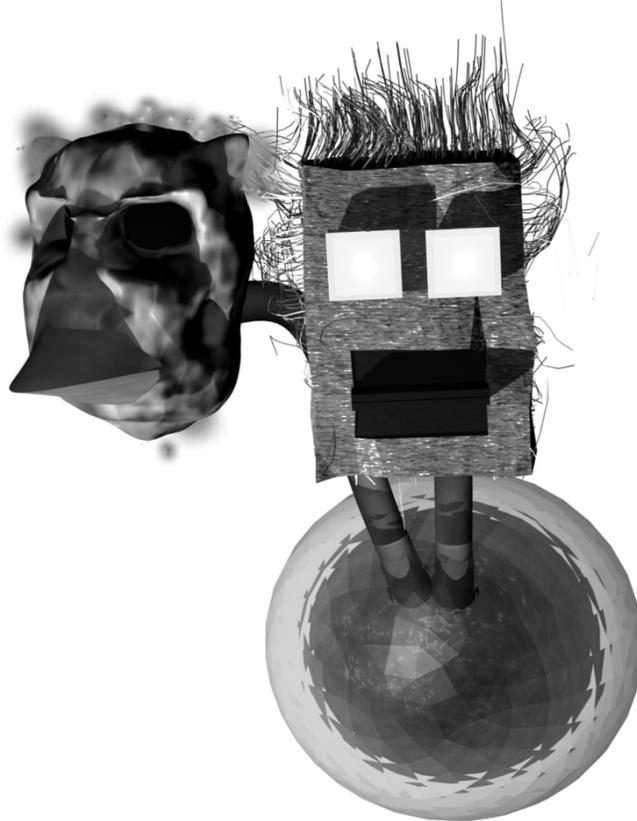


Fig. 2. Appearance of Abraxas and Gnosis.

Tiamat is a ghostlike cloud of black particles with one arm and no distinct facial features (fig. 3). He is a representation of chaos and disorder, making him a prime candidate for Pleroma's plan to disrupt his universe. Tiamat holds an apparently one-sided love for Logos, which makes him somewhat emotionally unstable. Tiamat's name is a reference to a chaos monster in Babylonian mythology; after an encounter with the hero Marduk, Tiamat's corpse formed the

land and the sea.⁵ Tiamat's voice is low and raspy, with granulated reverberations trailing afterward.



Fig. 3. Appearance of Tiamat.

Logos is a blue orb, surrounded by a purple cube and a cloud of luminescent hairs (fig. 4). She is a representation of order and structure, but only appears in one scene, due to her apparent lack of interest in Tiamat's affection. She is seen in juxtaposition to bright blue crystal shards, one of which is retrieved by Tiamat as a memento of her. Logos's name is in reference to a Greek word for "reason," however it is also used as a title for knowledge and discourse by ancient philosophers. Logos does not speak; her musical depiction is accomplished solely by the instrumental accompaniment.

⁵Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Battle between Marduk and Tiamat," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88.1 (1968): pp. 104-108.

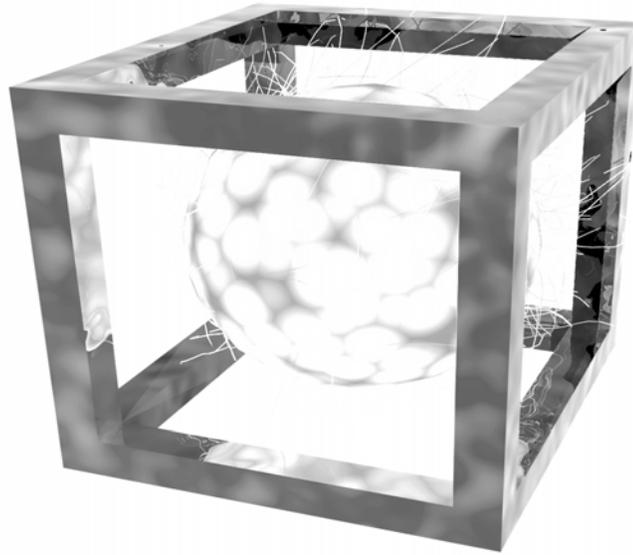


Fig. 4. Appearance of Logos.

Ahriman is a humanoid figure made up of fire-like particles and a vaguely human face (fig. 5). She is a representation of destruction, but is not intrinsically violent or malevolent. Ahriman loves Asura, but her destructive forces create a boundary between them, leaving Ahriman emotionally depressed. Ahriman's name comes from the Modern Persian equivalent of Zoroastrianism's personification of destruction, referred to as Angra Mainyu in earlier texts.⁶ Ahriman's voice has a dissonant whistle-like timbre.

⁶Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism. Volume 1: The Early Period* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 1996), pp. 192-194.



Fig. 5. Appearance of Ahriman.

Asura is a large tree-shaped being that resides on a small island surrounded by Ahriman's barren wasteland (fig. 6). He is a representation of creation and life, distinguished as such by the variety of foliage surrounding his body. It is unclear whether he reciprocates Ahriman's affection, because the boundary between them makes any contact impossible. Asura's name is misleadingly related to sinful deities in Hinduism; however, the intended reference is to the alternate name of Ahura-Mazda, the twin of the aforementioned Angra Mainyu. Ahura-Mazda is the creator and upholder of truth,

in the tradition of Zoroastrianism.⁶ This deceptive name difference avoids confusion between the names of the two Zoroastrian twins, but also avoids the issue of the twins being rivals rather than lovers. Similar to Logos, Asura has no speaking parts.

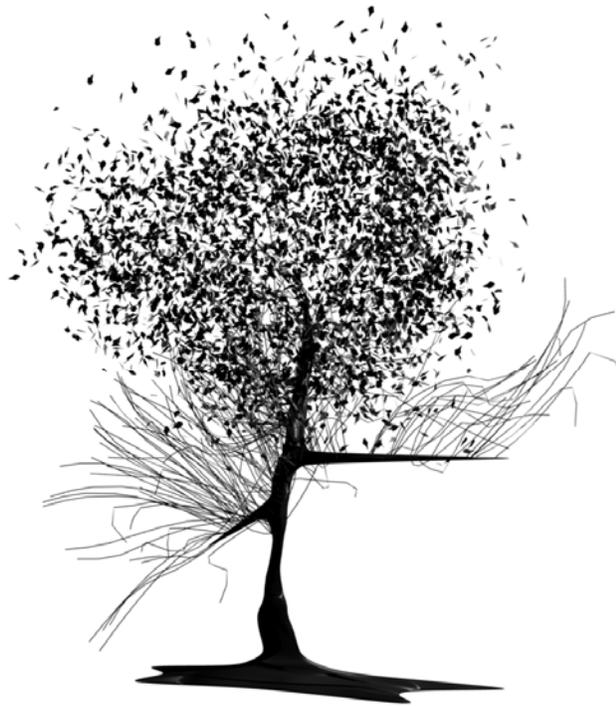


Fig. 6. Appearance of Asura.

Helios and Nix are formless characters representing light and darkness respectively (fig. 7). They are only shown as black and white waves that push up against each other, but are ultimately separated. Their situation is similar to the other lovers, except that they distinctly care for each other and are able to communicate to some degree. Their names reference the Greek words *helios* for “sun” and *nyx* for “night.” Helios has an abrupt, gravelly voice, while Nix's speech

is light and flute-like.



Fig. 7. Appearance of Helios and Nix

Although all of the characters have specific inspirations for their names and attributes, most of the similarities between them and their mythological counterparts have little effect on the plot; the main exception to this is the influence of Gnostic mythology. Rather than hiding the inspirations for these characters by changing their names, the libretto uses the original names to invoke the resonance of the ancient archetypes.

Visual Tendencies

Although the characters retain their individual visual features, there are several homogenizing elements that affect the appearance of the video. Scene environments⁷ are mostly stark landscapes with uniform shapes and no movement; some of these environments resemble real-world places like

⁷“Environment” is an animation term used to describe non-character elements of a scene.

mountain ranges, deserts, and caves. This lack of complexity draws attention to the motion of the characters and increases focus on the display of the text.

All of the character designs employ moving particle systems, giving them constant visual activity, even if their gestures or movement are limited. In the case of Tiamat, Ahriman, Asura, and Abraxas, this manifests as clouds of small objects that are emitted from or comprise the characters' shapes. These particle objects react to their character's motion and to physics simulators placed in the scene, sometimes causing them to be thrown from their character's form entirely. In the case of Pleroma, Asura, Logos, and Gnosis, particle systems are represented by hairs, which move freely around the character in a manner similar to particle objects, but stay attached at roots on the character's form.

Several character depictions emphasize human facial features. Pleroma resembles a human eyeball and Ahriman, Abraxas, and Gnosis have mask-like heads mounted on disproportionately small bodies. Ahriman and Tiamat also have roughly humanoid body shapes, although they are comprised of moving particles. These human features increase the plausibility of abstractly formed characters harboring human emotions. They also add a visual element of resemblance and differentiation between characters.

Plot Synopsis

Pleroma begins with a view of Helios and Nix attempting to converse about their desire to be with each other; although they are depicted as black and white waves pressing up against each other, they are unable to accomplish their

union or attain any direct communication. Pleroma witnesses this turmoil and feels sorry for his creations. He expresses the boredom he has fallen into with his balanced universe. Meanwhile, Tiamat is seen pining over Logos with advances that are apparently not even recognized; after mourning his situation, Tiamat retrieves a shard from where Logos was hovering. In a similar scene, Ahriman is depicted a chasm away from her love, Asura, whose non-response is similar to that of Logos; however, is somewhat unclear if Asura is spurning Ahriman's affection, or is simply unable to reply, due to the fiery expanse between them. Again, Pleroma becomes saddened over the decay his world has fallen into; he travels to a dark cavern to consult with Abraxas and Gnosis, who try to explain to him that the things he is witnessing are part of the balance he instilled into his harmonious creation, attempting to dissuade him from changing anything. Pleroma does not seem brightened by this idea, and continues to feel compassion for the others.

At the beginning of Act 2, Tiamat experiences a vision of Helios and Nix, which reminds him of his own unfulfilled love. Pleroma appears before him and tries to explain that this unrest is indeed permeating the world, but Tiamat is too shocked by the giant figure before him, and he begins to question his own sanity. Pleroma gets his attention by showing him a vision of Ahriman and Asura, but tells Tiamat that they are actually the happy ones, and their fulfillment is corrupting the world. Tiamat, in his vulnerable state, becomes enraged; this is exacerbated by Pleroma encouraging him to kill Ahriman and Asura. Pleroma

tells Tiamat that he will be transported to the cavern of Abraxas and Gnosis, where he will learn what he needs to do.

At this point, the time line of the plot becomes disconnected. The viewer hears Tiamat and Ahriman visiting the cavern at the same time and having almost identical conversations with Abraxas and Gnosis (although none of the characters seem to recognize this contradiction). Gnosis is disturbed at the idea that Pleroma has intervened with the harmony of the world; again Abraxas and Gnosis explain that the static lives being experienced are in fact peaceful, using Helios and Nix as evidence. Both Ahriman and Tiamat come to the conclusion that their desire for revenge is too great, but it is too dark in the cavern to see exactly what happens.

In the next scene, Ahriman is seen in her wasteland, hysterical about something terrible that has happened; Pleroma arrives and attempts to console her, but like Tiamat, Ahriman is more disturbed than relieved. During their discussion, Asura is seen in the background, but instead of green and fertile, he appears brown and lifeless. Pleroma shows Ahriman a vision of Tiamat and Logos, and explains that they are Asura's murderers; this enrages Ahriman, but she is still reluctant to exact revenge. Pleroma encourages her, saying that he will take her to Abraxas and Gnosis, from whom she will learn how to relieve her pain (this refers to the previous scene with Abraxas and Gnosis, which now appears to be a foreshadowing or "flash-forward"). Ahriman is frightened and climbs into the garden with the deceased Asura; she retrieves a shard

(resembling the one Tiamat held), which is embedded in Asura's body.

In the final scene, Pleroma is seen wandering away and Asura is apparently alive; however, the shard Tiamat was carrying falls from the sky, impaling Asura. At the same time, the shard Ahriman retrieved is seen falling upon Tiamat in his lair. This juxtaposition, along with the simultaneous conversations of Scene V, upends the notion of narrative continuity; cause and effect are thrown into question. The ending becomes ambiguous, and at least two different time lines can be constructed. The most obvious construction of the plot would be: Tiamat became enraged, and, after consulting with Abraxas and Gnosis, threw the shard down upon Asura, killing him; Ahriman consulted with Pleroma and retrieved the shard; Ahriman then consulted with Abraxas and Gnosis much as Tiamat had done; and in a similar fury, Ahriman flung the shard at Tiamat, presumably killing him. Another possible interpretation of the ending is that much of the plot was told out of order: it is possible that Pleroma originally used the shard of Logos to attack Asura, who did not die immediately, but whose injuries prevented him from responding to Ahriman. This would lead Ahriman to eventually attack Tiamat, which could explain Logos's aversion and the shards that were seen on the ground. In this version, Tiamat did not necessarily succumb to his rage in the cavern. The subterranean scene with Abraxas and Gnosis is crucial to the narrative, whose ambiguous chronology and motivations reflect the unbalancing of a previously stable cosmology.

Technical Overview

The technical production of *Pleroma* involved several stages of designing and creating the musical materials, animations, and composited video. The primary goals of the music are to articulate the character identities and to drive the aesthetic structure of the composition. The video takes a secondary role and reinforces the character relationships and the drama.

- I. Overture
 - a. Quotations of percussive electronic gestures and bass guitar 0:00-0:33
 - b. Percussive hits in crescendo 0:33-0:46
 - c. Reverberation 0:36-1:04

- II. Scene I
 - a. Alternation between electric piano and synth pads 1:04-3:55
-Helios and Nix
 - b. Transition to Scene II: drums and guitar 3:55-04:50

- III. Scene II
 - a. Long percussive hits with bright synth 4:50-6:55
-Pleroma

- IV. Scene IIIa
 - a. Bass guitar dirge 6:55-7:36
-Tiamat
 - b. Bells interlude 7:36-7:55
-Logos
 - c. Continuation of Bass guitar 7:55-9:10
-Tiamat

- V. Scene IIIb
 - a. Percussive electronic gestures, kick/crash 9:10-10:02
-Ahriman
 - b. Mellow synth interlude 10:02-10:27
-Asura
 - c. Percussive electronic gestures, kick/crash 10:27-11:15
-Ahriman
 - d. Transition to Scene IIIc: long percussive hits foreshadowing IIIc 11:15-12:02

- VI. Scene IIIc
 - a. Long percussive hits, fast bright synthesizer 12:02-13:13
-Pleroma
 - b. Quotation from Scene II 13:13-13:25
-Pleroma
 - c. Synthesized strings/choir 13:25-15:00
-Abraxas and Gnosis
 - d. Fast synthesizer 15:00-15:32
-Pleroma

Fig.8. Structural Map, Act 1.

VII. Scene IV

- a. Quotation from scene I 15:32-16:07
- b. Bass guitar dirge joins 16:07-16:56
 - Tiamat
- c. Fast bright synthesizer 16:56-18:10
 - Pleroma
- d. Progressive rock: bass, electric piano, fast synth, drums 18:10-20:00
 - Tiamat and Pleroma
- e. Quotation from Scene IIIb: percussive gestures, mellow synth 20:00-20:36
 - Pleroma
- f. Erratic bass guitar, drums, and cymbals 20:36-21:29
 - Tiamat
- g. Progressive rock: bass, electric piano, fast synth, drums 21:29-23:12
 - Tiamat and Pleroma
- h. Transition to scene V: bass drone 23:12-24:00
 - Tiamat

VIII: Scene V

- a. Bass guitar dirge, percussive electronic gestures, strings 24:00-26:19
 - Tiamat, Ahriman, Abraxas, and Gnosis
- b. Distorted quotation from Scene I: 26:19-26:45
 - Abraxas and Gnosis
- c. Bass drone 26:45-27:22
 - Tiamat and Ahriman

IX: Scene VI

- a. Mellow synth and percussive gestures 27:22-28:25
 - Ahriman
- b. Fast bright synthesizer 28:25-29:34
 - Interspersed distorted long percussive hits
 - Pleroma
- c. Chaotic kick, crash, guitar, percussive electronic gestures, fast synth 29:34-31:16
 - Ahriman and Pleroma
- d. Quotation from scene IIIb with mellow synthesizer 31:16-31:40
 - Asura
- e. Quotation from scene IIIa 31:40-32:28
 - Pleroma
- f. Erratic guitar, drums, and cymbals 32:28-33:13
 - Ahriman
- g. Chaotic kick, crash, guitar, percussive electronic gestures, fast synth 33:13-34:56
 - Ahriman and Pleroma
- h. Bass drone 34:56 35:36
 - Ahriman

X: Coda

- a. Mellow synth solo 35:36-35:55
- b. Percussive hits in crescendo leading to quote from Scene II 35:55-36:17
- c. Long, chaotic reverberation 36:17-36:55

Fig. 9. Structural Map, Act 2.

The two main elements in the music are quasi-vocal gestures and instrumental accompaniments. Each character has a distinct vocal timbre, which is achieved by a unique combination of digital manipulations upon recorded samples; although the text is presented in English via subtitles, the vocalizations are not in any discernible language. This permits more freedom for timbral processing and a more outwardly sonic embodiment of the characters. The instrumentation of the accompaniment assigns specific sounds and sound types to each character; this allows several combinations when characters interact or make reference to one another.

The video is comprised of the character animation, the background environments, and the subtitling of the text. The text is essential for understanding of the drama, and thus is presented as clearly and simply as possible. Given that the plot consists mostly of conversations and contains very little action, the video primarily serves to show the details of the characters' forms and how they relate to one another.

Pleroma was originally labeled as a “video opera,” alluding to the technical presentation, dramatic elements, and importance of character-based vocal parts. However, this term implies too many relationships to established traditions in western music. The term “digital drama” expresses the reliance on computer-generated materials and the dramatic structure of the piece's narrative. However, *Pleroma's* form (outlined in figures 8 and 9) is based on the classical tragedy, which implies relationships with past literature. Although the tragic narrative is

most distinctly embodied in the text, the characters' actual voices are pure sound, and related more to pure instrumental music than to vocal music. This makes a discussion of the embodiment of drama in instrumental music useful for the analysis of *Pleroma*.

Conceptual Inspiration

Philip K. Dick's *VALIS*

The plot and text are original to *Pleroma's* composition, but a major conceptual inspiration was drawn from Philip K. Dick's novel, *VALIS*.¹ This novel is somewhat fragmented and contradictory in its form, so inspiration was drawn from a personal synthesis of the concepts. *VALIS* portrays a character coming to terms with his sanity and his purpose in life. This is partly due to his perception that he has been injected by an alien entity with supernatural information regarding the creation of the universe. The character's account explains a creation of the universe very similar to Gnostic Christianity. In this story, an omnipotent force decided to create something, so it made a pair of twins; however, one of the twins (known as the demiurge) was born too early, and was therefore insane and confused. In its damaged state, the demiurge created a chaotic physical universe, with the impression that it was fulfilling its purpose. The other twin was charged with healing/destroying the demiurge, and undoing the chaotic universe in the process; however, due to the atemporal nature of these beings, the healing was destined to happen so therefore it had already happened from the perspective of eternity.

This is the basis for *Pleroma's* plot, however some elements of this story are intentionally unclear. It is not explicit whether Pleroma is the original creative force, or in fact the confused demiurge. If Pleroma is the original entity, either

¹Philip K. Dick, *VALIS* (New York: Vintage, 1991)

Tiamat or Ahriman is the chaotic demiurge, while the other is fated to heal the universe. However, if Pleroma is the demiurge, all of the other characters were created in some imperfect structure, which is eventually unmade through its own flawed design. This describes the relationship between order and chaos; in a sense, they are the same, because they display similar uniformity in their behaviors. The distinction between the result of the demiurge and the result of its destruction would be impossible. The plot of *Pleroma* presents a world which is proclaimed to be perfect, and yet its perfection is found to be its biggest flaw; however, the perfection is attributed to its static nature, making it ambiguous whether it is ordered or chaotic.

Norse Mythology's Loki and Baldr

Norse mythology contains several stories about the trickster god, Loki. Although he is eventually the primary instigator of the destruction of the world, Loki is portrayed as a helpful friend to the Norse gods in many of the mythology's stories. In one of the main stories of *The Prose Edda*, Loki engineers Baldr's death.² Baldr has a vision that he will die, so the other gods seek out oaths from every kind of danger, assuring his invulnerability. Loki feels jealous over this attention, and after learning that Mistletoe was the one material that didn't make the agreement, Loki brings Mistletoe to the blind god Hödr and tricks him into killing Baldr with it. The gods punish Loki with eternal torture, until he eventually escapes and leads an army to destroy the Norse gods and the world. Baldr's

²Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda: Norse Mythology*, trans. and ed. Jesse L. Byock (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), pp. 71-73.

vision was a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that his attainment of invulnerability was the catalyst for the events leading to his death. Norse mythology is paradoxical in that these events are told as though they have not happened yet, but that they are a preordained fate, known even to the Norse gods. Loki is powerless to prevent his own betrayal, punishment, and ultimate death, even though Baldr's vision is the initial catalyst to set the events of the end of the world in motion. Loki's situation is tragic because his fate is an unalterable part of his characterization as a trickster and troublemaker.

The correlation to this legend in *Pleroma's* plot is the scene where the shards are thrown down on Asura and Tiamat. Although the circumstances of this scene are not all clear, there is the same paradox that it could either be an act of chaotic destruction, or a fated progression of an unchangeable future. This is like the demiurge's role of a confused creator, in that order and chaos are clear opposites, and yet it can be difficult to distinguish between the two.

Pleroma's Third Act

The original conception of *Pleroma's* plot contained a third act, which would provide the aftermath of the attacks with the shards. In this act, Tiamat was left disfigured by his injury, causing him to be even more harshly rejected by Logos; eventually he meets with Ahriman and they realize that the similarities of their circumstances have brought them to some unavoidable love. When they are joined in a fulfilled love, the structure of *Pleroma's* universe completely breaks down, but is reborn again, as it was at the beginning of the plot. Although

Pleroma still feels sorrow over the inevitable pain in his balanced world, his outlook is brightened by the knowledge that this stasis is defined by its inevitable urge to change.

This additional act has a clearer resolution than the events of the first two acts, but includes a new paradox over the meaning of the entire plot, if it ends as it began. This story presents many of the same issues regarding the purpose and identity of the demiurge and the inevitable fate of a Loki character, but the mystery after the third act pertains to the meaning of the events, rather than a mystery over the circumstances of the events. Each plot has its merits, but the two act plot was used because it focuses more on the duality of chaos and order and the possible ambiguities of tragedy.

Tragic Form in Music

Introduction

In order to clarify the tragic form of *Pleroma*, structural analyses of Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture, Op.62* (1807) and Mahler's Symphony No. 9 (1910) are provided. These examples provide purely instrumental, musical form evoking dramatic narratives and meta-musical concepts. More importantly, the ideas derived from these works were specific inspirations during the composition of *Pleroma*. This means that the legitimacy of the analytical conclusions is less important than their effect on the structural goals of *Pleroma*.

Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture, Op. 62*

Analysis

The relationship between the form of Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture* and traditional sonata form is of great dramatic importance.¹ Although the piece appears to unfold in a traditional manner, at the beginning of the recapitulation, the first thematic group is missing; the introduction proceeds directly to the transition between theme groups. Wagner proposed the first theme as masculine and the second theme as feminine, the two in conflict with each other through the development, and the masculine theme left crippled by the beginning of the recapitulation.² The dominance of the second theme² is further supported by the modal shift at m. 248 from major to minor, characterizing the persistent nature of

¹ Ludwig van Beethoven, *Coriolan Overture, Opus 62* (New York: Mills Music, 1938).

² Richard Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), pp. 249-255.

the feminine theme, which dwarfs the masculine.³ This is not directly programmatic, but embodies drama in formal transgression.⁴

Alas, this construction presents an irresponsible characterization of the tragic hero, Coriolanus. The Aristotelian tragic hero does not meet his death because of the dominance of other characters, but because of an internal flaw in his personality. By tracing a musical flaw in *Coriolan*, in relationship to the characteristics of a tragic hero, a transcendent narrative can be demonstrated as both a programmatic description of the tragic hero Coriolan, and as an independent work.⁵

The first element of classical tragedy, according to Aristotle, is the noble character of the hero.⁶ The introduction of *Coriolan* contains an alternation between octave Cs in the strings and tutti chords tonicizing the piece in C minor. This presents an ideal of harmonic clarity, before any melody is introduced. Aristotle's tragic hero always begins with success and nobility; only by having an ideal circumstance outlined, can the tragic flaw be most devastating. It is fitting to begin the overture with no complications, as Coriolanus is initially very successful, both in war and politics.

The tragic flaw, or Hamartia, is a trait in the tragic hero which leads him to

³ Roger Fiske, *Beethoven Concertos and Overtures* (England: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1970), p. 56.

⁴ Thomas S. Grey, *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 40-41.

⁵ Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) pp. 42-45.

⁶ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. and ed. S. H. Butcher (New York: Cosimo Classics, 1974), p. 35.

his death.⁷ In m. 40 (fig. 10), the first theme is still being used in a bridge section, and the glorious VII/V with F-sharp in the bass finally resurfaces at the peak of a dynamic crescendo to reassure the listener of Coriolanus's strength. However, the F-sharp is not allowed to resolve upward, and the bass begins another trajectory of downward steps, unsettling the triumphant harmony of the beginning. This illustrates both sides of the Coriolanus character; his initial qualities make his success seem inevitable, but there is a lingering problem in his direction. This point represents the tragic hero's Hamartia, but is not merely foreshadowing. The death of the hero is fated from the beginning, and the downward bass motion shows it to be inevitable, despite the attractive strength of the motivic material.



Fig. 10. Beethoven, *Coriolan*. Bridge to Thematic Group Two, mm. 36-50.

Although the second theme is certainly influential in the downfall of the first

⁷ Aristotle, p. 36.

theme, the bass line clarifies the conflict between the ideal harmonic motion from the introduction and the Hamartia. The development (m. 102) continues the tension proposed in m. 40; a Hamartia between F-sharp and G is undercut by descending bass lines (as at mm. 106-109) (fig. 9-10).

The actual moment of reversal of fortune, or Peripeteia, occurs in m. 158 when the reprise introduction is interrupted by the bridge to the reprise second theme. The Hamartia is further accentuated by the B in m. 158 collapsing to the B-flat in m. 163, beginning another descending bass line. This descent and structural deviation is caused by the internal conflict of the first theme, even before the reprise of the second theme begins.

The image displays a page of a musical score for the development section of Beethoven's *Coriolan*, specifically measures 103 through 107. The score is arranged in a multi-staff format. The top section includes staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Fg.), Cor Anglais (Cor. (Es)), Trombone (Tbe. (C)), and Timpani (Timp.). The bottom section includes staves for Violin (Vl.), Viola (Va.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The Bassoon part (Fg.) is the central focus, showing a melodic line with dynamic markings such as *f*, *fp*, and *p*. A second ending bracket is visible above the Bassoon staff in measure 103. The score is written in a key signature of two flats and a common time signature.

Fig. 11. Beethoven, *Coriolan*. Bassoon Part in Development, mm. 103-107.

The image displays a page of a musical score for Beethoven's opera *Coriolan*, specifically the Bassoon part in development from measures 100 to 112. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments listed on the left are Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Fg.), Horn (E-flat) (Cor. (Es)), Trombone (C) (Tbe. (C)), Timpani (Timp.), Violin (VI.), Viola (Va.), Violoncello (Vo.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 2/4. The score begins at measure 110, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Bassoon part (Fg.) is highlighted with a white box and features a melodic line with a 'zu 2' marking, indicating a second ending or a specific articulation. The other instruments provide harmonic support, with the strings playing a rhythmic pattern and the woodwinds and brass playing sustained chords and melodic fragments.

Fig. 12. Beethoven, *Coriolan*. Bassoon Part in Development, mm. 100-112.

Coriolanus's recognition of his prideful flaw, the Anagnorisis in Aristotle's model of tragedy, is manifested during the coda when the introduction returns in mm. 276-290. The harmony suggests a glimmer of hope; upward stepping bass passages in mm. 288-292 are produced by modal mixture and tonicization. This is representative of the tragic hero himself; although he cannot prevent his death, he reconciles with his Hamartia and meets his physical defeat with honor. This small victory does not erase the Peripeteia, but does provide some metaphysical consolation.

The final step for the tragic hero is to evoke pity and fear from the audience, upon their recognition that they would fare no better under similar circumstances. Fragments of the first theme at the end of the work serve this function. They remind the listener of how attractive the qualities were in the first theme, but that they were cut short in the collapse of the recapitulation. There is no reminiscence for the second theme, because it is clear by now that the focus was always the tragic hero.

The transcendent, hermeneutical conclusion of Beethoven's hero can be emphasized by contrasting the endings of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and Collin's *Coriolan*.⁸ In Shakespeare's play, the hero is assassinated by the Volscians after being persuaded by his mother Volumnia to halt their attack on Rome; however, in Collin's play, the hero commits suicide as a means to free himself from the choice between honor and mercy. Although the end result may seem similar,

⁸ Michael Broyles, *Beethoven: The Emergence and Evolution* (New York: Excelsior Music Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 142-144.

there is a philosophical difference in whether or not the tragic hero has a dynamic or static role in the plot, despite his recognition of his fatal flaw.

Beethoven's interpretation is structured to assert that the tragic hero is destined to die from the beginning, but the victory in the internal struggle is far more important to the physical ending. The ending of the overture has octave Cs just as it began, to imply the circular nature of this theme, in that the struggle is ongoing, and the hero meets his internal conflict with victory each time.

Relationship to Pleroma

The implementation of these ideas in *Pleroma* is more complicated, because there is neither a traditional structure like sonata form for the suggestion of pivotal sections nor a distinctly primary theme to represent the tragic hero. The placement of instruments and musical styles in *Pleroma's* instrumental accompaniment is the main parallel to the structure in *Coriolan*.

Scene IIIb introduces Ahriman and her affiliated major instrument, the percussive electronic gestures. This is interrupted by the mellow synthesizer, symbolizing Asura, which is similar to the feminine theme following the masculine theme in *Coriolan*. The plot proceeds to Ahriman appearing again in Scene V with the percussive electronic gestures. There is no apparent dilemma in the relationship between Ahriman and her affiliated instrument until Scene IV, where the same interrupting appearance of the mellow synthesizer accompanies Asura, but now it is represented as a memory, because Asura is dead at this point in the drama. This parallels the interruption of the second theme in *Coriolan*, but it is

clear that Asura is not directly causing any harm because he is already dead. This interruption is followed by a quotation from Scene IIIa with Tiamat; this vision causes the dramatic outcry of Asura, accompanied by distorted guitar. This is a tragic moment of Peripeteia, in which Ahriman's emotional wound is revealed. However, the instrumentation reveals the guitar to be a secondary instrument for Ahriman. The guitar was first heard in the transition to Scene II, without any reference to Ahriman; however, it resurfaces in the background during Scene IV, only to be prominent during Ahriman's outrage. The guitar is also significant because of its relationship to Tiamat's (Asura's apparent murderer) bass guitar in Scenes II, IV, and V. The derivation from *Coriolan* is the use of a hidden musical flaw being obscured by an apparent conflict between themes. In this case, the flaw is a displaced instrumentation element. The other interpretation is that the affirmation of the guitar's association with Ahriman proves her similarity to Tiamat and his instrumentation. Ahriman's flaw could be a denial of this similarity, until it finally appears in the moment Ahriman begins to contemplate revenge.

Mahler's Symphony No. 9

Analysis

Mahler's Symphony No. 9 (1910)⁹ also embodies tragedy in instrumental music. This piece represents an inspiration for meta-musical ideas influencing duality in musical structure. Symphony No. 9 represents a crucial biographical

⁹ Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 9* (Vienna: Universal-Edition, 1912)

point in Mahler's oeuvre; he discovered the infidelity of his wife Alma Schindler, he still endured a busy conducting career, and his early death was predicted due to the diagnosis of a heart condition. During this time, he reunited with his friend, poet-philosopher Siegfried Lipiner, whom Mahler had been close with until his marriage to Schindler.¹⁰ Perhaps because of these personal trials and the new influences from Lipiner, the tonal and conceptual structure of Mahler's Ninth focus on a philosophical construct similar to Plato's Cave allegory.¹¹

In his philosophical writings, Lipiner took special interest in Arthur Schopenhauer's "*Wille zum Leben*."¹² This concept proposes that humans live in a world of desire, but the goal of fulfilling this desire is futile, because it represents both a sociological barrier and a practical impossibility.¹³

This notion has its roots in Plato's allegory of The Cave, as outlined in *Republic*. The allegory describes a cave in which prisoners only see a world restricted to moving shadows reflected onto the wall in front of them and can only hear sounds echoing into the cave from outside; when one of the prisoners escapes, he is met with both the enlightenment of understanding of the larger scope of the world and a realization that his experiences would be meaningless

¹⁰ Stephen E. Hefling, "The Ninth Symphony," *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell and Andrew Nicholson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 468.

¹¹ This biographical information on Mahler supports the argument for meta-musical influences on Mahler's compositional goals.

¹² Jacob Golomb, *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 218-220.

¹³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World As Will and Representation*, trans. Richard E. Aquila and David Carus (New York, Pearson Longman, 2008), pp. 31-47.

to the other, unenlightened prisoners.¹⁴ The correlation to Schopenhauer is that the enlightened prisoner recognizes the cave as a world of representation, which is defined by perception, rather than desire; his knowledge of the cave's restrictions redefine the definition of that world and also of himself. However, the paradox is that the prisoner's freedom exposes him to the uncertainty that his new world is any more real than the cave, along with the pain of alienation from his old friends. Human desires can be escaped temporarily by redefining the world by its representations of perception, but defining perception is ultimately futile.

Mahler's Tonal Structure

Mahler's Symphony No. 9 begins in D minor, but the fourth movement begins and ends in D-flat major. Chromatic conflict (particularly the use of the Neapolitan chord) foreshadows the drama of the fourth movement, but the movement itself is categorically different from its predecessors. The tonal stability of its rondo-variation form resists development, but Mahler opposes this stability by contrasting variations in thematic material and using the key of D-flat major to spoil the apparently inevitable resolutions into the key of D major.

Anthony Newcomb asserts that Mahler's Ninth Symphony functions as a *Bildungsroman* narrative, a novelistic genre that presents the psychological, moral and social shaping of the personality of the (generally young and

¹⁴ Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Republic: a study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 127-155.

inexperienced) protagonist.¹⁵ This is represented harmonically through the conflict between D major as a key and as the Neapolitan of D-flat, a recurrent feature of the dramatic crisis in this movement. The triumphant resolution from D minor to D major at the symphony's end is wrenched chromatically against expectation and desire. D-flat minor represents the world in opposition to the *Bildungsroman* character, until he finally accepts it as his own; the D minor's resolution to D major validates its place as a typical Neapolitan, symbolizing the character's acceptance by society.

This archetype is also pertinent to the Plato's Cave philosophy. There are allusions to the D-flat tonality throughout the first three movements; these moments of foreshadowing can be heard as the prisoner's ability to hear sounds outside the cave, without understanding their meaning. Similarly, thematic allusions to the first three movements and harmonic progressions implying D major cannot be understood in the same way they were originally, because they are caught in the new orbit of D-flat.

This allegory further emphasizes the importance of the rondo-variation form; a traditional sonata form relies on creating an unstable harmonic context, in which to form a new representation of the original materials during the recapitulation, but the rondo-variation uses a constantly shifting harmonic context, which is both stabilized and varied by the recurring thematic material.

¹⁵ Anthony Newcomb, "Narrative archetypes and Mahler's Ninth Symphony." *Music and text: critical inquiries*, ed. Steven Paul Scher (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 118-121.

Relationship to Pleroma

Scene IIIa introduces the bass guitar as the primary instrument associated with Tiamat. However, in Scene IV, he witnesses a vision of Helios and Nix, enlightening his perception of the universal nature of his unfulfilled love. For much of the rest of Scene IV, Tiamat's instrumentation borrows the electric piano instrument which was initially associated with Helios, symbolizing the beginning of Tiamat's transformation after his vision. In Scene V, the electric piano reenters after a reference to Helios and Nix, but now it is distorted, symbolizing its new relationship to Tiamat. The resolution of Tiamat's plot line occurs when he is apparently destroyed by the shard in the final scene, this time without the accompaniment of the electric piano.

The tonal duality of the Mahler is mirrored by the duality of Tiamat's relationship to the bass guitar and electric piano. The electric piano is the first instrument heard in Scene I, with Helios and Nix appearing as simplified symbols of the conflict in *Pleroma*. However, when the electric piano begins to integrate with the instrumentation of Tiamat, it eventually becomes tainted and cast off. The D minor in the Mahler is the primary key throughout the symphony, but when it becomes clear that it is merely the Neapolitan of D-flat, it becomes tainted and eventually must conform, becoming D major.

The conceptual nature of the tonality in Mahler's symphony also parallels the perception of the dramatic narrative in *Pleroma*. In the Mahler, the ultimate realization of D-flat overriding the D tonality makes subsequent listening of the

symphony paradoxical; D can be interpreted as the inevitable Neapolitan for the entire symphony, changing the conceptual relationship of every chord in the piece. This is similar in the plot of *Pleroma* because the realization of the disrupted time line changes the possibilities of the time line in the first act. This extends to the relationship of the characters to the tragic form, because a reinterpreted time line could influence the tragic elements of the characters.

Dramatic Tragedy in *Pleroma*

Analytical Problems

Discussion of the tragic elements in the plot of *Pleroma* is difficult. Three of the main characters (Pleroma, Tiamat, and Ahriman) have the possibility of being considered a tragic hero, but it is not typical in a tragedy to have multiple dynamic heroes. Scene V intentionally disrupts the time line of the narrative, creating several interpretations of the actual order of events or the occurrence of unobserved events. Depending on the interpretation of the narrative and chronological structure, any of these characters might assume the heroic role. Because of these issues, each of the potential tragic heroes will be compared to Aristotle's model.

Pleroma as the Tragic Hero

Pleroma is the most noble of candidates, in that his position as creator of all things gives him both authority over the other characters and the furthest distance to fall towards Peripeteia. He is described by Abraxas and Gnosis in Scene IIIc as having sincere intentions of harmony in creating the other

characters; he also inspires awe and fear in Tiamat and Ahriman when he visits them. Pleroma's Hamartia is more difficult to discern because he relies on influence and coercion, rather than taking any direct action. However, in the interpretation of the time line where Pleroma is the initial attacker with the shard, he clearly shows a lack of foresight about the repercussions of his actions; it could even be inferred that the creation of his universe showed lack of foresight. This could also be likened to Coriolanus's inability to stop a chain of events once he set them into motion; Pleroma clearly feels guilt over the death of Asura, as he is compassionate towards all his creations, but he continues his plan to unbalance his world, regardless of the consequences. Pleroma's Peripeteia is the least clear, because he is never depicted as suffering any physical injury; his disgust with his creation and emotional stress over every other character's unhappiness are the most pain he experiences. However, if Scene II is taken to occur after Act 2, it is possible that Pleroma has upset or destroyed all of his creations to the point that he can do nothing but mourn his loss; it is notable that in this scene, he never expresses any intention of future action. This idea further supports Pleroma's Anagnorisis: his depression in Scene II could be his recognition and acceptance of his failure as a creator.

Pleroma's depiction as the tragic hero relies on a flexible interpretation of the plot's time line; given such an interpretation, however, it is difficult to consider any of the events in the plot without rearranging their relationship to the tragedy. This puts the audience complicitous with Pleroma's role as creator and

interpreter of his universe, and makes all elements of the plot intrinsic elements of the tragedy. Because Pleroma is in more scenes than any other character, and he displays the broadest scope of self-awareness, any of his words could represent his regret over either passivity or action.

Tiamat as the Tragic Hero

Tiamat displays the clearest parallel to a tragic hero like Coriolanus. His nobility is somewhat suspect because he seems self-loathing in almost all his scenes, but there is no indication that any of the other characters doubt his strength; indeed, Pleroma entrusts him to carry out his plan. Tiamat's Hamartia is either his uncompromising need to acquire Logos's affection or his naïveté in accepting Pleroma's injunction to murder. Like Coriolanus, there is some confusion here, but only if it is assumed that any other character has a major effect on the tragic hero's downfall; assuming that the tragic flaw to be internal, Tiamat's blind passion seems more in line with the traditional hubris of a hero. The clear Peripeteia of Tiamat is when he is struck by the shard in the final scene; this is especially ironic because it is his own weapon that eventually causes his apparent defeat. The main fault in Tiamat's depiction as the hero is the end of the piece without any clear Anagnorisis; he shows no remorse over his actions, and the aftermath of the drama is unclear.

The allegory of Plato's Cave suggests an alternate view of Tiamat. If Tiamat retrieved the shard only after it was thrown at him, there is never any point where he experiences any injury, except for his rejection by Logos (which

could be coincidental). The paradox is that the only character with any clear reason to attack Tiamat is Pleroma, with his desire for imbalance. This would not explain why Pleroma would come to counsel Tiamat.

Ahriman as the Tragic Hero

Ahriman shares many of the same traits as Tiamat as a tragic hero. However, a similar problem arises: there are no clear repercussions for Ahriman if the last event that occurs is his attack on Tiamat. In the alternate interpretation of the narrative's time line, Ahriman could have first attacked Tiamat; then the reversal of fortune would be the consequential death of Asura. There is certainly enough remorse to consider this to be Ahriman's Anagnorisis, but typically, the Peripeteia would be a physical wound for the hero, which she never suffers.

All Three Main Characters as Tragic Heroes

Given the arguments for each character's status as a tragic hero, it is possible that all three characters are tragic heroes simultaneously. Considering the discontinuities in time, it is likely that every possible plot line combination actually (rather than possibly) exists; this concept could mean that every character is part of Pleroma's consciousness, rather than an individual. A more definitive explanation is that the plot and text are not quite enough to prove all three as tragic heroes, but the other elements of the composition supplement the evidence.

Musical Representation of Tragedy in *Pleroma*

Introduction

In *Pleroma*, it is important to discern the tragic elements in the musical structure itself, before assessing its relationship to the drama; the transformative recapitulation in *Coriolan* gives an example, in which tragedy is implicit in the work's relationship to sonata form. The music of *Pleroma* offers ambiguities that mirror those of its narrative.

Harmonic Language

The instrumental music in *Pleroma* employs a flexible system of free atonality, but pitch is a conceptual issue at major structural points. During the creation of the primary, musical motives, the minor second interval was considered to be of the highest importance; any pitches that were not part of a minor second were considered to be structurally incomplete. This concept of incompleteness influenced the selection of pitches surrounding the primary motives and the treatment of relationships between these motives. An overall preference for the use of minor seconds helps to draw attention to their implementation in these primary structures.

Bright Synthesizer

The bright synthesizer instrument is used in several scenes, and suggests a tragic structure similar to the Beethoven example. The first appearance of the bright synthesizer is the middle of Scene II, where it accompanies three percussive hits with heavy vibrato; the pitches at this point are F-E-B, which form

a minor second between the F and E. There is also a repeated arpeggiated figure using this instrument in this scene; it is too distorted and in the background to be a major point of arrival in itself, but it insistently suggests future uses of the instrument. When the bright synthesizer returns in Scenes 4 and 6, an extended arpeggio on E-C-B precedes the major point of arrival in the form where the instrumentation is filled out; once the other instruments enter, the synthesizer retains its tendencies towards these pitches, despite deviation. The final chord in the last scene depicts another major point for the bright synthesizer when it plays the same F as in Scene II, but without continuing to E and B. In the context of *Pleroma's* harmonic language, these major structural points suggest a tragic form. The F-E-B collection would require a C or A-sharp to make a minor second with the B; however, the E-C-B collection contains the B and C, but requires F or D-sharp to supplement the E. There are no other major structural points with this instrument for both the E-F and B-C minor seconds to occur simultaneously. When the same use of the E-C-B figure from Scene IV is repeated in Scene VI, the repeat acts as the Peripeteia, in that the incompleteness of the E-C-B figure has stretched across the entire second act. The F in the final scene is the recognition of this failure, as this is the missing note from Scene VI, but the separation across scenes makes the connection imperfect.

The bright synthesizer is the instrument that always accompanies scenes where *Pleroma* appears. This suggests a purely musical tragedy to accompany *Pleroma's* incomplete affirmation as the tragic hero in the drama. The

appearance of the bright synthesizer in the overture is the same as the final scene, but without the full musical context, the note in the overture would not be apparent as an element of the tragedy. However, due to the dramatic implications of the flexible time line and their effects on Pleroma's interpretation as a tragic hero, the note in the overture is a symbol of the bright synthesizer's inevitable imperfection and Pleroma's ultimate failure.

Bass Guitar

Another point for purely musical tragedy is the notes for major structural points in the bass guitar. This instrument's entrance in Scene IIIa prominently uses a repeated minor second between F-sharp and G; although there are other pitches in the passage, these notes are always repeated in their own contained gesture. Then, in the extended bass guitar passage in Scene IV, B tends to move to A and E to F-sharp. The F-sharp here implies a structural reference to the original F-sharp and G gesture, but the lack of a minor second in B, A, E, and F-sharp, calls attention to the missing G. In the final scene, F-sharp is repeated several times before descending to B on the final chord. The tragedy here is the completeness but isolation of the original F-sharp and G gesture; without an initial link to any other pitches, the F-sharp has trouble finding its way back to G after Scene IV. The repetition of the F-sharp in the final scene is the last time for the instrument to complete its minor second again, but it descends to the B that was already used in Scene IV. This tragedy is similar to the situation with the bright synthesizer, in that the promising beginning with the idealized minor

seconds ends with a recognition of defeat.

The bass guitar is the instrument which accompanies Tiamat's scenes. The isolation of the F-sharp and G figure symbolizes Tiamat's single-mindedness in his desire for Logos's affection. The same situation as with the bright synthesizer on the final note in the overture applies to the bass guitar's B in both the overture and the final scene. However, the context is different because there is no F-sharp preceding the B in the overture. This supports the notion that Tiamat's flaw occurs primarily in the manner of his actions, rather than his initial situation; the F-sharp's minor second relationship disappears once Tiamat's tragedy is set in motion.

Conclusions

With a pervasive focus on minor seconds in smaller scale relationships, attention is drawn to larger scale relationships displaying the tragic concepts. However, the figures of the main pitched instruments begin to create structures comprised of all minor seconds, but there is no fulfillment, because the final scene contains no minor seconds. This scene acknowledges the awareness of defeat, and the reconciliation of no further attempts at completion. These tragic manifestations of the harmonic language reflect the universe of Pleroma, in that it seems promising in its original design, but ultimately unravels. The relationships between the major pitched instruments and their affiliated characters supplement the tragic situations in the drama.

Production Techniques

Character Quasi-Vocals

The quasi-vocal sounds of the characters are somewhat removed from the tragic forms of the composition. The goal of the voices was to create unique timbres for each character, but to provide a level of homogeneity throughout all the voices. The intent was to unify the natures of the characters, no matter how much they conflict dramatically or visually. A set of audio-processing tools was created in order to achieve a diverse palette of sound. The tool set is based on the concept of effects processing automation, in which the parameters of sound altering effects are changed over the time of a sound file's playback and recording. Several audio effects (including delay, granulation, reverberation, frequency modulation, wave-shaping, and filtering) were reduced to individual parameters and then mapped to similarly sized automation tables. Additionally, the parameters by which the sound is played back were mapped to the same tables. A group of tools to create and manipulate these tables was created, which allowed for the quick generation of hundreds of unique tables, and the ability to easily adjust them. Simple vocal recordings were then processed by the effects processors, while the tables automated the processors' parameters over the time of playback. Although each table is unique and has a different effect on each effects processor, the combination of so many tables causes the resulting sounds to have generally similar timbre and shape; each individual sound is unique, but the complexity of parameter changes during recording has a homogenizing

effect. The primary changes used to delineate between characters were the routing order of audio between the effects processors and the timbre of the source sounds.

The somewhat uniform pacing and the regularized overall shapes of the vocal utterances give the impression that the characters are dramatically speaking, rather than singing. This emphasizes the importance of the major instruments affiliated with characters, in that the instruments act as musical extensions of the declarative speech.

Musical Stylistic References

Although the organization of the instruments and characters within the drama are intended to emphasize the tragic form, the stylistic references of the composition and actual instrument choices represent another element of character development. Each character is represented by one major instrument, which begins with its own set of themes and musical styles. These styles are not intended to be distinctly evocative of any specific genres, but to establish a distinct sound world for each major character in the first act. When the three major characters share scenes in pairs during the second act, a composite style is derived from the characters' original sound worlds, creating a new environment for the characters to interact with. In the case of Tiamat and Ahriman, the composite styles between them and Pleroma highlight their similarities, even though their original styles appear unrelated.

Conclusions

The musical and visual elements of *Pleroma* depict a fantastic, yet grim universe, where perfection is manifested as the denial of desire and affection. The stark quality of the video and the similarity of the characters' vocal styles create a slow, contemplative pace, allowing the listener to focus on the unfolding of the drama and the pain of the characters.

In a sense, the overarching concept of this piece is the paradoxical nature of existence. Character is defined by its strength and its flaws. The pursuit of order and structure can be easily confused with the need to change and grow. The intent of *Pleroma* is not for listeners to philosophize about the mysteries of the universe or the complexities of aesthetic questions, but to examine their own experience with a mind open to the past and future.

As in many earlier works, *Pleroma* is abstracting tragedy into timbre, pitch, and time. The Beethoven and Mahler examples demonstrate the ancient archetypes as they can be portrayed in purely instrumental music. The totality of the music, drama, and video in *Pleroma* demonstrate the ability to manifest the fundamental archetypes of ancient tragedy in an electronic music composition.

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PART II
LIBRETTO FOR *PLEROMA*

Act 1

Scene I: Helios Yearns for Nix

HELIOS
Nix?
Are you there?

NIX
Helios?
I sense the warmth of your light.
Where have you gone?

HELIOS
My eyes betray me.
I can no longer find you.

NIX
The shadow that is my heart
finds no solaces in memory.
My torment and my prison.

HELIOS
The fires of my existence
fall empty without you.
Reach out to me!

Scene II: Pleroma Contemplates

PLEROMA
What an unsightly boredom reality has become.

...
This domain holds rotted surveillance.
Jaded stupor is the design
of static balance.

...
Monstrosity of my inspiration
both tower and dungeon.

Scene IIIa: Tiamat Lusts for Logos

TIAMAT
Logos.
Your poise crushes my affection

you ignore my advances,
so that I collapse to the deepest pit?

LOGOS

...

TIAMAT

Your elegance claims
my cluttered mind;
I crumble
for every moment without you

(Tiamat retrieves a shard of Logos's form,
which she has left behind)

Scene IIIb: Ahriman lusts for Asura

AHRIMAN

Asura.

Oh burden of your presence
You tirelessly birth agony
along my path to you.

ASURA

...

AHRIMAN

I unmake all of your creation,
I wither in this affliction
yearning to be near.

Scene IIIc: Pleroma's compassion

PLEROMA

Tiamat and Ahriman;
These desires reflect
the decay of my world.
The mirror of sublimity
reflects only rust and ruin.

Your pains have not gone unnoticed.
I too, dislocated,
must find meaning in these still waters.
Abraxas and Gnosis?

Have you no compassion
for these wretched beings?

ABRAXAS & GNOSIS
Light and Darkness.
Logic and Chaos.
Creation and Destruction.

Each in perfect harmony,
The creation of Pleroma.
Your halcyon vision,
change will defile.

PLEROMA

...

Helios and Nix.
The longer your separation,
deeper a chasm sinks in my mind.

Act 2

Scene IV: Pleroma confronts Tiamat

(Tiamat witnesses a vision of Helios and Nix)

TIAMAT

These wretched creatures?
Has my despair corrupted my mind?
Must all lovers in this bitter world
harvest the fruit of sorrow?
with no purpose

PLEROMA

Tiamat!
Champion of crushed affection.
These creatures you observe-
Helios and Nix-
a symbol of our unrest.

A shard of perfection
with no purpose
wreaks only desolation

TIAMAT

Monstrous vision!
Madness has devoured me.
O elegant Logos;
this is the final dungeon of your evasion.

PLEROMA

Listen to my plea,
your torture is the fallout of my ineptness.
Mend this broken reflection.

TIAMAT

Logos,
madness devours me
I cannot help but haunt you.

(Pleroma shows Tiamat a distorted vision of Ahriman and Asura)

PLEROMA
These lovers-
Ahriman and Asura.
Their fulfillment is our pain.
You must drive them apart.

(Tiamat is enraged at the sight of their fulfillment)

TIAMAT
Traitorous fiends!
This sight rends my already broken heart.
I envy their twisted romance-

PLEROMA
Their delight sucks love from our world.
Destroy them.

TIAMAT
This delirium I have become...
I am broken and feeble

PLEROMA
There is a way;
through Abraxas and Gnosis,
I will take you to them.
Frenzy will save you now.
Strike out at our enemies.

(Pleroma leaves)

TIAMAT
I am frightened.
I cannot continue this endless game;
if I allow torture to consume me...
What will I become?

(Tiamat rides Pleroma's tendrils upward)

Scene V: Tiamat and Ahriman visit Abraxas and Gnosis

ABRAXAS
Exalted warrior?

GNOSIS

What is the meaning of this visit?

TIAMAT & AHRIMAN

I am ill with grief.
Derangement causes grim fantasies.
My world is unraveling.

GNOSIS

Surely Pleroma has not intervened.

ABRAXAS

What have you witnessed?

TIAMAT

The garden of torment.

AHRIMAN

Two lovers foiling my happiness.

TIAMAT & AHRIMAN

I must have retribution.

GNOSIS & ABRAXAS

The natural order is our purpose.
Observe the beauty of Helios and Nix.
Eternal stasis and peace.

TIAMAT & AHRIMAN

If peace is torment,
let this order be the agent of my vengeance.

Scene VI: Pleroma councils Ahriman

AHRIMAN

This wretched act?
Agony shatters my mind?
Must all lovers in this rusted world
harvest the fruit of sorrow?

PLEROMA

Ahriman!
Champion of crushed affection.
The death of your beloved.

Perfection is shattered
without purpose,
wreaking only desolation.

AHRIMAN
Twisted sight!
Madness consumes.
O elegant Asura;
burden of afflicted love

PLEROMA
Listen to my plea;
your torture is the fallout of my ineptness.
Mend this broken reflection

AHRIMAN
Asura,
Wickedness devours me
I cannot help but haunt you

(Pleroma shows Ahriman a distorted vision of Tiamat and Logos)

PLEROMA
These lovers-
Tiamat and Logos.
Their fulfillment is our pain.
Murderers of your treasure.
Drive them apart.

AHRIMAN
Traitorous fiends!
This sight rends my already broken heart.
Revenge-
Is that my only solace now?

PLEROMA
They destroy your world.
Instill balance in your manner.

AHRIMAN
This delirium I have become...

PLEROMA

There is a way;
through Abraxas and Gnosis.
Frenzy slays you now.
Soothe your pain.

(Pleroma leaves)

AHRIMAN

I am frightened.
Those destructive beasts...
Torture consumes me.
What will I do?