

Both Here and Gone: Polish Individuation in Teatr Piesn Kozla's *Chronicles – A Lamentation*

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Alternative Polish theatre, since the early 1990's, has sought to find a new "interpretation appropriate to this stage, in order to connect the life of the past that still exists with the life of the present" (Jung, 1951: par. 267). According to Kathleen Cioffi, the alternative theatre should have died in Poland after losing opposition to Communism as its *raison d'être*. Instead, as Cioffi suggests, the theatre "experienced a revitalization" (Cioffi, 2004: 44). As newly evolving archetypes supplant those which came before 1989 one can see the individuation process of a people in transition. Jung tells us that there is a link between *symbol change* and a change in human consciousness. In my opinion, a Jungian interpretation of Teatr Piesn Kozla's production of *Chronicles – A Lamentation*, which I believe links the Gilgamesh myth to Poland's nascent democracy, helps to substantiate Cioffi's claim.

Chronicles concentrates on the epic of Gilgamesh, a Sumerian myth inscribed on stone tablets over 5,000 years ago, and won Best International Show at the Edinburgh Festival in 2004, as well as The Scotsman Fringe First; the year before it was awarded The Grand Prix at the Festival of Acting in Kalisz, a very prestigious event in Poland. In 2005, *Chronicles* toured Britain, which included some performances at the Barbican. Teatr Piesn Kozla (Song of the Goat) was founded by Grzegorz Bral and Anna Zubrzycki in 1996. For the first four years the company held residence in The Grotowski Centre for

Theatre Culture Research. Since 2002, however, they have had their own performance/rehearsal space in Wrocław. Tom Sellar, of *The Village Voice*, entitled his review of the performance “Grotowski’s Living Legacy” (Sellar, 2004). While this claim has some truth, a majority of the influence, in terms of format and musical style, is owed to Garzdienice; which should come as no surprise considering Zubrzycki was the principal actress of Staniewski’s company for nearly seventeen years.

The key to understanding the social relevance of *Chronicles* is through its use of archetypes. Jung believed that the ultimate goal of the myth was to find our own place and the meaning of our own epoch in the greater process of the historical enlargement of the human consciousness. “Myths are related to the collective consciousness of a certain time as dreams are related to the consciousness of the dreamer” (Jung, 1956: 16). So that a myth, which (re)presents itself to a culture, will carry with it a number of archetypes; these myths, according to Jungian thought, are the spontaneous expressions of the unconscious, and, like archetypal dreams, they contain deep intuitions and anticipations of the future. This is of particular interest to Polish theatre today because, psychoanalytically speaking, *archetypal dreams occur in times of transition*. “Mythological motifs have portrayed psychic processes of transformation since the earliest times” (Jung, 1956: 9). The questions one needs to ask of the theatre: What must be the social unconscious for such a dream to occur? What issues does the myth address for the collective unconscious?

The reason archetypal dreams occur in times of transition is connected to the role of the Hero. In the case of *Chronicles – A Lamentation* Gilgamesh is the hero figure; that the hero is not Odysseus or Achilles is noteworthy, and indicates a different psychic stage of the collective consciousness. Whereas the dream of an individual dreamer has to do with the projection of the ego, the staged myth projects the Hero on the social consciousness. The process of individuation which Gilgamesh undergoes over the course of the performance (i.e. his separation from the mother by way of a close friendship with Enkidu; the death of Enkidu; the assistance of an ancestor; the search for immortality) has to do with the *anticipation* of an ego-consciousness rather than the attainment of one. This is because “the myth is always ahead of the level of actual consciousness of the time” (Kluger, 1991: 22). In this way the performance addresses the current problem of Polish identity rather than the resolution of its transformation. The culmination of Gilgamesh’s journey is an indication of psychic wholeness in respect of the development of the Hero’s ego as symbolic of the community moving towards completeness (Kluger 1991: 17). From this point the myth becomes important in the creation of new value systems. Golaczynska quotes Augustynowicz, a prominent Polish director based in Lublin, on her notion that mass culture, which is itself dictated by the market, controls “the consciousness, the imagination, and the symbolic thinking of young people” (Golaczynska, 2001: 194) one can see that the values of the next generation of Poles are in flux. The Hero myth attempts a prediction of those values; and may also reveal which values are unrealistic.

Two archetypes of social implication are expressed in *Chronicles – A Lamentation*: the Mother archetype and the liberation of the son from the Mother vis-à-vis the process of individuation. The reflection of Poland's former political regime as the Mother archetype is broken into three parts within the play: Ishtar (orgiastic emotionality); The Wild Cow, Gilgamesh's Mother (cherishing and nourishing goodness); Death (stygian depths).¹ It is the job of Gilgamesh, both the King and the son, to overcome the Mother. This process is known as individuation. It is important to regard the Mother archetype, at the beginning of the performance, as the Master-Signifier, so that, by the end, Gilgamesh (and the audience by proxy) see her position as illusory. This is the very process of transition Poland has experienced over the past seventeen years. Slavoj Žižek opens his book *Tarrying With the Negative* with the image of Ceaușescu's overthrow. The citizens of Bucharest are described waving their national flag as they watch their former leader being carried away. On this day, however, the communist star, positioned in the centre of the flag for nearly four decades, had been cut out with scissors. With the removal of the star; the organizing principle of national life; "the hole in the big Other, symbolic order, [was] visible" (Žižek, 1994: 1). Thus began the intermediate phase, i.e. the period when one Master-Signifier has lost hegemonic power "without yet being replaced by a new one" (Žižek, 1994: 1). It is the end of this so-called intermediate phase that we are witnessing in *Chronicles*: the end of the reign of the Mother in the collective unconscious.

The performance begins, appropriately, with a lament. The sound, inspired by a tradition of music in northern Epiros, a region between Greece and Albania, is stirring and

¹ Jung uses Indian mythology to divide these aspects of the Mother archetype: Satva, Rajas, Tamas.

affective. We are introduced to Gilgamesh: a brutal ruler obsessed with a specific goal of building of the wall of Uruk. He oppresses his people on account of his obsession with this task. What we can see at this point is the failure of the ruling power to meet the needs of his people. At the crescendo of the lament the actors pull apart and Enkidu is born: nature's solution to the psychological situation. Enkidu is Gilgamesh's chthonic counterpart (Kluger, 1991: 32). His movements are animal-like, he wears no shirt, you can see the sweat on his back as he dances and twirls. He dances alone, for he is alone in nature. Through his show of strength, independence and virility, one can immediately see that he will be a match for Gilgamesh.

And within moments of his apparition, the goddess Ishtar appears. She is a youthful aspect of the Mother archetype. Circling Enkidu, the actress licks at his salty skin, embraces him, pulls him to the ground, wraps her legs round his body, seduces him. Her intention is not merely physical, but spiritual. By seducing Enkidu, Ishtar draws him out of the animal world. In the myth his realization of this withdrawal comes from the *reaction* of the animals; in the performance it comes through Ishtar's response to him. Enkidu has been *seen*, recognised, and "if you are seen you have to see yourself and you have to become conscious," because "we cannot really know ourselves without being confronted" (Kluger, 1991: 42). And so we have the chthonic character brought into the conscious world before the audience. This primitive man who must confront Gilgamesh - the civilised man. Their meeting is necessary, because Gilgamesh, as a ruling power, must be brought back down to the *human* level.

Through this dance with the youthful aspect of the Mother archetype Enkidu is exposed to *logos*. Ishtar is separating him from his instincts, in order to bring him to civilization. And so Enkidu agrees to go to the palace because “he (is) yearning for one to know his heart, a friend” (Foster, 2001: 9). Yet it is not as a friend that we see Enkidu approach Gilgamesh in the performance, but as a lover. The actors move toward each other as if they are squaring off in a mating ritual: they slowly circle, muscles flexing, teeth bared, breath heavy and aggressive. Gilgamesh is the first to attack. Another dance begins; this one more aggressive than the dance between Enkidu and Ishtar, and yet no less sexual. The two men fight, lunge, tear at each other’s bodies. Enkidu grips Gilgamesh and presses him to the ground. Sweat dripping from their faces, Gilgamesh subdued, the two men embrace under the watchful eye of the three aspects of the Mother: Ishtar, Gilgamesh’s Mother and Death (the maiden, the mother and the crone). This dance has two ramifications: the sexualization of the Enkidu/Gilgamesh relationship and the transformation of Gilgamesh from tyrant to Hero.

From a psychological standpoint, the confrontation between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is that of the conscious and the unconscious: it is therefore imperative that Enkidu, as the chthonic counterpoint, the instinctive force, be more powerful than Gilgamesh, and that the actor playing Enkidu be *shorter* than him, so that while the instincts reach the conscious they do not overwhelm it completely (Kluger, 1991: 79). What we are witnessing is a puberty rite; it challenges the overpowering presence/problem of the Mother. Because Gilgamesh’s libido is neutral it can flow in different directions: spiritual or sexual. The mother complex “gives men ties of astonishing tenderness”

(Jung, 1956: 19). When we see Gilgamesh reaching up with affection to touch Enkidu's cheek, it is as if he loves Enkidu as he might love a woman. But it is important that Enkidu is *not* a woman. His physical presence on stage is domineering, his muscular torso is revealed: *there is nothing feminine about Enkidu*. Out of cultural necessity, Gilgamesh's virility is directed towards virility. Enkidu here disrupts the Hieros Gamos between Gilgamesh and Ishtar. He draws Gilgamesh's desire (what Jung would refer to as libido) away from the Mother. "In matriarchal cultures the libido of man had to concentrate on itself – in order to *get out* of the mother" (Kluger, 1991: 67-68). This is because the mother is all encompassing; she overshadows *all* male activity. In her lament, Gilgamesh's mother has figuratively pressed his eyes shut, not wanting him to be fully conscious.

Kathleen Cioffi notes: "As the actors/shamans reenacted the ancient story of Gilgamesh, I felt their songs throb through my own body and somehow had the illusion that I myself had participated in the ceremony, and been, at least for a little while, healed" (Cioffi, 2004: 48). What Cioffi is experiencing as a spectator is the healing of Gilgamesh's split ego by his reintroduction to his instincts vis-à-vis the reconciliation between Enkidu and Gilgamesh. In their final embrace we are presented with an image of integration: not between one man and another, but between the conscious mind and the instincts, which are separated in an unhealthy relationship with the Mother, i.e. the disempowered citizen claiming back his independent identity outside of the community. So there is a key theme here: the consciousness of human moral conflict (between conscious and instinct)

which has been repressed in a socialist society which does not acknowledge such conflict.²

Gilgamesh has not fulfilled the process of individuation yet. However, he now has the ability to confront the Mother. In the union of Enkidu and Gilgamesh comes the compulsion to cut down the cedar tree in the forest, i.e. “the libido is [now] aimed at the heroic deed of overcoming the mother” (Kluger 1991: 79-80). Enkidu leads Gilgamesh up onto a platform so that he may view the sacred forest. It is noteworthy that the actors are on a platform, so that spatially we see the forest as *beneath* them: the forest is both paradise *and* the underworld. The great cedar therefore grows in the land of death, and here there is an implication of the Mother archetype, for she both gives life and takes it away, indiscriminately. Within the context of the myth, Enkidu and Gilgamesh must ascend the mountain to find the forest. This is a kind of *Gotterdammerung*, for it is the gods which live at the top of the mountain (Kluger, 1991: 99-101). The myth predicts that there is going to be an overthrow of an old regime for a new one. At the top of the mountain stand all the male characters: Gilgamesh, Enkidu, Shaman and The Immortal, Utnapishti. There is a binary on stage, a confrontation between higher consciousness and maternal chaos. That the Shaman has arrived shows the beginning of regime change for he represents “the spiritual impetus which draws man out of lethargy” symbolized by the Mother.

² See Chapter 1 in Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying With The Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham[0]: Duke UP, 1994).

With a spotlight illuminating the underworld we see The Wild Cow, Gilgamesh's Mother, give birth to Ishtar. Gilgamesh encounters both his personal mother and the archetypal Mother. At this moment he must discriminate between them. He must recognise them as separate identities if he is to obtain his independence: for they are separate. This schism relates to Zizek's distinction between the real and the imaginary. Politically, we are controlled by the imaginary, in the case of Communism, by the State, which is panoptical. That the State is omnipresent only in belief is irrelevant; or, only relevant insofar as belief signifies the State's control. The (re)birth of Ishtar is terrifying for Gilgamesh, but he must overcome her as the carrier of the new consciousness. She is strong, attractive, identifiably powerful, and enters the world with a leonine roar. Her strength of course is an element of her threat, for she is fickle and does not know her own strength. And "the less conscious such a mother is of her own personality, the greater her drive: a will to power" (Jung, 1956: 22).

Ishtar wishes Gilgamesh to be her husband. Recognising him as the carrier of a new consciousness she longs to make a union with him. A bond which she will dominate, and which will allow her to retain her position as Master-Signifier. In order to suppress the Hero's rebellious nature she will bring him into her house, the inner-circle, and make him a servant for herself. As a means of doing this Ishtar promises him great wealth. If Gilgamesh says yes to this proposal he will lose his status of consciousness and become a function of the Mother; he will fall back into the cycle of nature, and become an instinctive being (Kluger 1991: 111-146). Like Enkidu, Gilgamesh will be at one with his animal nature. Animals, however, do not lead a free life. This of course is precisely the

danger Poland faced in the mid-nineties with the reemergence of the communist party after a few traumatic years of transition left much of the population disaffected. Jung tells us that being free of the personal mother does not make us free of the archetypal Mother (Jung, 1956: 36). So why is this issue only arising in 2003, fourteen years after the regime change? Because “every human archetypal experience gets its full weight only when it meets in us the maturity to receive and understand it” (Kluger, 1991: 159).

Gilgamesh is already as strong as the archetypal Mother, in that he has the ability to resist her temptation, and yet her proposal is alluring because it is familiar: “And he who went astray finds the right path again, when he beholds thy countenance” (Kluger, 1991: 128). However, “it would be a great danger for Gilgamesh to slide back into the Mother-World now that it has been overcome” (Kluger, 1991: 123). It would be a self-castration rite: a return to the era of the emasculated citizen, where the Mother (State) ‘knew what was best’ for the son. But Gilgamesh denies Ishtar. And so we encounter Ishtar’s rage. She moves towards the spotlight, seething, growling, gnashing her teeth, taking large furious steps. Behind her are Death and Gilgamesh’s Mother, for as Jung says, “the mother is the first world of the child and the last world of the adult” (Jung, 1956: 26). Soon the Shaman figure will step forward, because the era of the Mother is finished. This is the crucial moment of Zizek’s previously mentioned ‘intermediate phase’.

Now that the new consciousness has been freed of the Mother it must face Death. With the spotlight turned out, Death entices Enkidu to join her on the stage. She holds a long wooden pole, with which he is coaxed into a dance. Enkidu is overwhelmed by Death;

again the dance is highly sexualized; and eventually he collapses onto the floor. Gilgamesh finds his dead friend and begins to bark and howl like an animal. Death may be experienced many times in life, but only *once* can it be an archetypal experience. There are therefore a number of implications in Enkidu's death for Gilgamesh. Firstly, we must remember that Gilgamesh is two-thirds divine. But "in realizing death [he] becomes human" (Kluger, 1991: 159). He has moved out of the *status nascendi*, or "the state of becoming in the mother" (Kluger, 1991: 160). For as long as the Mother controlled existence Gilgamesh was unaware of time; he did not have to take responsibility (Kluger, 1991: 140-145). This was one of the privileges of her dominance. The Mother does not recognise her own conflicts, and therefore there was never any moral responsibility under her reign. Jung believed that conflict was a necessary element in the creation of a sense of morality (Kluger, 1991: 130). What we can see in the death of Enkidu, as well as in Gilgamesh's reaction, is the beginnings of a new value system: one which recognizes individual accountability. The impact of death is immense because it suggests the quest for a meaningful life. Here we can see the connection to Augustnowicz's notion that modern values are linked to mass culture, i.e. the sensation of rootlessness that so many Poles are experiencing: a lack of *personal* values is detrimental in a non-socialist society because personal accountability takes on a new status. Kluger also goes on to say that "a loss of values is natural after a shift of consciousness. That is the last word of material culture" (Kluger, 1991: 179).³ Enkidu's death is also Gilgamesh's preparation for the spiritual life, that is to say "the death of the primitive nature" is the end of the "bound human creature dependent on the Mother" (Kluger, 1991: 152). And Gilgamesh "must first accept death because if he hangs on to natural

³ By material culture she is referring to *materia* or *mater*, the Mother

life nothing else can happen” to him (Kluger 1991: 160). Jung believed that “accepting death is the condition for reaching new life” (Kluger 1991: 160).

Next we have Gilgamesh’s descent into the underworld. In *Chronicles* this is signified by a plain wooden table: an interesting and insightful symbol. The photograph, for which the performance is now famous, shows Gilgamesh, Enkidu and Shaman dancing over/ around/ across the table. What is created for the audience is an empty space, i.e. the space beneath the table that they fail to penetrate. The actors are always above or outside this space. Jung would refer to this “underworld” as the expression of *emptiness*, or the great feminine secret. Many expressions of emptiness; such as the chasm, unplumbed depths, the yin, the chalice and so on; intimate man as he finds them alien to his nature (Jung, 1956: 30- 35). This symbolic image of the underworld as a feminine space is ancient, e.g. the Babylonians, who would have been aware of the Gilgamesh myth, believed that a goddess ruled the underworld or shadow world. To be dead, therefore, meant “to be in the power of the dark, devouring mother” (Kluger, 1991: 147-150). Gilgamesh must face this emptiness because he “must fall into the pit in order to make a man of himself” (Jung, 1956: 35).

The two men who dance with him in the underworld are his instinctual self (Enkidu) and the conscious part of the unconscious (Shaman). Here, the play sets up another dialectic: that between the ego and the unconscious. This dialectic leads to individuation, because the “unconscious needs the answer of the ego” for the process to be complete (Kluger, 1991: 173-180). The Shaman figure, being divine (i.e. of the unconscious) is limitless.

Gilgamesh, on the other hand, is not. However, “only what Gilgamesh” the Hero “can integrate can be realized” by the society he symbolizes (Kluger, 1991: 178). The three men together form a whole; a unity barred from them during the reign of the Mother. And it is “the task of Gilgamesh to try to be as complete as he can” (Kluger, 1991: 179).

If Gilgamesh is to take back his humanity/identity, which was denied him under the Mother (e.g. his demasculation resulting from a lack of responsibility for the value systems/moral codes forced upon him, etc.), then he must assimilate death. He must understand that he has boundaries, that he is limited – which is exactly what the Mother herself failed to understand. As long as her power was absolute, she had no need of this essential recognition. This is because absolute power is not in need of consciousness. At this point, for Gilgamesh, the Mother’s “moral ambiguity becomes unacceptable” (Jung, 1956: 36-38) because he understands her limitations. Gilgamesh recognizes her position as Master-Signifier as illusory. She is dependent upon his belief in her. He sees in the Underworld what the Romanians witnessed that fateful day Ceausecu was dethroned and dragged before the nation: the hole in the flag where the communist star once reigned. The timing of this recognition is important because it doesn’t come until *after* he has overcome the Mother. And this is because the archetype only reveals itself to a community *once it is in a position to comprehend it*. Teatr Piesn Kozla’s *Chronicles – A Lamentation* has indeed found an “interpretation appropriate to this stage, in order to connect the life of the past that still exists with the life of the present” (Jung, 1951: par 267). Here is represented the collective unconscious of a nation that has at last rejected

the Mother. What She will be replaced by is another story. For it is in the nature of every new power to attempt to render the hole invisible.

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