

And They Shall Be Known By How They Remember Their Dead

„Τέμενος“: Requiem and Stabat Mater by Vladimir Martynov

As long as man reflects on his being in relationship to his world he asks questions that are of existential meaning to him: How and through whom or what did this world come into existence? Is it *a priori* good? Was there an “absolute” beginning, will there be an “absolute” end? What in the first place - is “time”, and what is “space”? Or: What is “truth”, what is “beauty”? Is there goodness as such? And how or through what did “evil” come into this world? Eventually man looks into the mirror and watches himself: Is his species at the top of all other forms of created life? Or is there something higher, some superior being? What is his “life”, what meaning could it possibly have? What will await him after death? Is there anything beyond this world structure that can be sensed and spiritually experienced by man?

Questions, questions of life, of being. We call them „μῦθοι – myths”.

As long as man addresses these mythical questions he attempts to answer them for himself, and yet according to his own knowledge and within the framework of images and ciphers of his historical time. These attempts to answer - we call them „λόγοι – Logoi” - are “inter-subjective” statements, which are, however, dependent on time. For us, as future generations, they represent the way the people of that cultural phase saw themselves. Those statements are only valid and convincing within their cultural period. They can be overruled and pushed aside at any moment by developments, experiences, insights or conclusions that are more up-to-date. Nevertheless they often demand, even after a longer period of time, some kind of fundamentalist oath of allegiance - as in the case of the scientist Galilei. They may be the irrational cause of religious wars (as in Northern Ireland). And they become more sacrosanct the older they become, because they are less reflected upon (the Christmas event is an example). Their theologically underlined implications and demands become - even in totally secularized societies - the effective background for ethical-moral beliefs (like the infallibility of the pope) as well as public and private law legislations (Sunday regulations).

Some of these “Logoi” however are not bound to this layer of just normative ethics or attitudes of social conformity. They gained a status that we call “art”. We may test, at some point, whether art can demonstrate its greatness examining its way of attempting to answer such existential questions.

The enciphered answers of man have always included his response to the death of someone who was more or less close to him. Whether he deeply feels grief in the loss of a beloved or welcomes the end of the deceased's physical pain in a more rather rational way; how he lays out the corpse and buries it - and after that shows that life goes on; whether and in what way he remembers the dead, where to and under what aspects he tries to escape or take refuge, to whom he humbly prays - all of this behaviour is a “Logos”, an attempt to answer the finally unanswerable question of death, the question of what was before our life and what will be after.

With Christianity the ritual of death for the occidental middle European culture group focused on the central aspect of belief, that is the celebration of Eucharist. While the core of the Sunday liturgy was meant for remembering the breaking of the bread,

confirming the communion with the "Lord", and also remembering the death and resurrection of Christ, the liturgy of the dead was meant to bring the deceased back into the living community of the faithful by calling his or her name and writing it into the "liber vitae", into the "Book of Life". And more: Just like Christ who died and resurrected - that was the conviction - the deceased will also rise from the dead. The mourning for the deceased is surpassed and even overcome by this faithful hope.

When the common Eucharist celebration of the early Church developed into a hierarchical ranked liturgy and - with its ritualistic unfolding - religious poetry as well as its musical articulation, eventually even the aesthetic presentation of both arts became integrated into the service, immediately the double aspect of the requiem mass became prevalent: On one hand the ambivalence between mourning and the hope for resurrection, on the other hand the ambivalence between "memoria Christi" and remembering the deceased individual. The text focuses on a formula the beginning of which gave the whole ritual its name. The formula uses the plural form "Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine - Give them eternal peace, o Lord" And the continuation: "et lux perpetua luceat eis - and let an everlasting light shine on them."

The very early structure of all the texts and the corresponding, remarkably simple and nonfigurative music prove the very old age of the requiem mass. Here the daily changing chants of procession - Introitus, Graduale, Offertorium and Communio - are not separated from the fixed parts Kyrie, Sanctus and Agnus Dei but conveyed all together as "plena mass". In the course of time further parts were added to the core pieces, parts that through their very different perspectives hint at a remarkable development of religious feelings and understanding. Since the 9th and 10th century the Graduale ("Requiem..." as in Introitus) has been followed by a "Tractus" ("Absolve Domine - O Lord, redeem the souls of all deceased ones from any bond of guilt!") And from the first half of the 13th century onwards this part is "sequenced" by the "dies irae" - ("Day of wrath that lets the world fall into ashes") including a detailed description of the "Judgement Day". Both parts are strongly influenced by a drastically increased sin-consciousness, a terrible fear of hell that later would make Martin Luther ask how he should obtain a "merciful God".

In his "Requiem" (for choir, solo violin and string orchestra) Vladimir Martinov returns to the original theological concept of the requiem mass as well as to its unspoilt piousness: Not grieving the loss, not fearing the judgement but transcendently asking for "eternal peace" and the "everlasting light". In this way he "translates" the mythical questions concerning the Eternal and Everlasting as well as the urgency of faithful prayers into "Logoi", into very varied autonomous-musical ciphers.

The first cipher we hear at the very beginning: Six simple four-part G major triads that reach the classical form of eight bars through a dilated 3/2-1/2 rhythm. These eight bars of the beginning are carried out with four more lively bars. The harmonies are still very simple (tonic-dominant-tonic), the soprano melody intonates a motif that occurs in whole again and again, the middle voices provide a minimum of harmonic colour by a chromatic movement. The string orchestra completes this opening part in a slightly varying phrase of eight bars. That might suggest an association of peace and eternity. But so far the listener can hardly hear the question and so he can not expect any answer. The same applies to the next part of the composition (Introitus B) , which begins like a fugato and then limits itself to elaborate on the already before used elements. (*"To you, o Lord, returns all flesh..."*, Psalm 65, 2-3). This movement

ends (as is expected and common) with a variation of the opening part. We are dealing here with a miniature version of the A-B-A form. The harmonic field never transcends the tonal system, the instrumental clause stays within the traditional frame of the interplay between choir and orchestra, which is the well-known musical language of - lets say - the 19th century. Martinov uses only the most simple musical means and gains for himself and the listener a certain distance that might lead to a meditative approach to encounter death or the death of someone. The ending phrase makes one aware: The strings stay on a half cadence which traditionally means a question cipher.

The second cipher we find in the beginning of the "Kyrie". Between the two tones of an octave which is sung without text and is held almost endlessly like an early medieval Bordune bass, two alto voices are singing (in antiphony) fast moving tone garlands that remind us of Arabic sound colour and seem to grow rampantly into eternity. The diatonic figures - shifting up and down - flow in into an "Organum" complex with parallel conducted voices and finally at the end of this part are taken up by the instrumental ensemble with a powerful and emotional solo violin. This gives a clear form to the Kyrie movement and at the same time the general sound gets a double sidedness moving between feeling and ratio.

The third cipher, a third logos so to say, lends the Sequence "Dies irae" its structural scaffolding. On a simple third interval which is repeated fast and regularly and then hardly noticeable extends into smooth harmonies, into simple harmonious sequences and modulations, the first seventeen three liners of the Sequence are scanned as if coming from a speech machine. The "Lacrimosa" complex ("That will be a day of tears...") - the only part that is set to music separately - has the same intensity due to rhythmical sound repetitions.

The fourth cipher characterizes the "Sanctus": a chain of continuous Jambus rhythms which are accentuated - short-long, short-long - against the normal stressing of words. At last now we may be convinced that Vladimir Martinov has a secret predilection for the elements of the so called "repetitive style" of the "Minimal Music" Perhaps. And we hear sounds that we seem to know from somewhere, from Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll" or from Arvo Pärt, from string quartet phrases between Haydn and Schubert or from impressive organ bass tones as in the beginning of Bach's "Passion of Matthew". Martinov does not interfere with whatever conclusion we make. He is not interested in *how* we pray (and praise), his concern is, *that* we pray (and praise) at all. And especially that we "don't mourn like those who have no hope." (St Paul)

One more cipher is there which can be seen as reliable: At the end of the "Requiem" Vladimir Martinov uses again the dominant half-finale (as in the end of the Introitus) - now not played any more by the ("impersonal") string ensemble, but by the a capella singing ("human") choir. In spite of all requests and intentions of belief, the question - according to the cipher - will remain with us. We will have to find the answer for ourselves.

”Stabat Mater”

Sequences like the “Dies irae” obviously belonged to the most popular texts and musical forms in the liturgy avantgarde of the medieval times. Scientists have proven that almost 5000 of those rhymed prayer verses existed in their prime time, before the Tridentinum (the council of Trident) finished the boom. After that until the latest liturgy reform through the 2nd Vaticanum only four sequences (apart from the “Dies irae”) were allowed for the official form of the service in the catholic church: „Victimae paschali laudes” - chants of praise for Easter (Wipo of Burgundy, † 1084), „Veni Creator Spiritus - Come, spirit of the creator“ for Pentecost (Pope Innocence III., 1179-80), „Lauda Sion Salvatorem - Zion, sing hymns of praise” for the feast of Corpus Christi (Thomas of Aquin, around 1263).

And, as a special case, the “Stabat Mater” (“There the mother stood under the cross where her son hung - and she wept her pain”). The text is probably from the end of the 13th century and enriched in musical form as an original motet the non-liturgical cult. Only when in 1727 Pope Benedict XIII. laid down the feast of the “Seven pains of Maria” to be celebrated in the whole catholic church, this sequence also became part of the liturgy. It is not an “objective” hymn like the “earlier” sequences, but rather a subjectively contemplating lyrical poem showing prayerful compassion, evidence of a new mystical devoutness of the individual, stressing the importance of Maria, which became characteristic for the successors of Francis of Assisi. This rhymed prayer of twenty verses is also an artistic logos answering an existential question: This suffering, this death - for what?

And again we find a sequence of ciphers or Logoi. References to the early organum praxis of the first turn of the millennium, to the extraction of the Major and minor scales out of the ecclesiastical modes. The mirroring of voices moving downwards with upward movements. Then the principles of composition found by Blacher and Messiaen: Methods of letting musical elements, figures, lines and rhythms grow or shrink; the unusual structuring of an octave by non European sequences of semi- and whole tone intervals. And last but not least (again and again) the repetition, the formerly minimalistic serial principle which Vladimir Martinov does not adapt but lets sound through.

What Bernd Alois Zimmermann once formulated in his theorem of the “sphere gestalt of time” one might see applied here in a new way. The possibility to have the most diverse styles and methods at ones disposal and with that also the past, present and perhaps future. But most probably Martinov would take in account only one aspect of Zimmermann's manifest: The omnipresence of death and the great riddle about one of the most existential mysteries.

Tatjana Grindenko has shown with her ensemble “OPUS POSTH.” several times, how historical forms of sound and nowadays feelings can fit well together; that emotional power can sometimes have an aggressive colour; why we are able to amalgamate (can merge) pain and confidence, lament and positive attitude to life, compassion and self assurance into a general human complexity. In this recording some listeners may notice a further aspect: There is a kind of sound globalism. The unusual Russian timbre in the sopranos are part of the new positive discoveries as well as the remarkable blackness of a deep bass, the articulation of the solo violin as well as the vehement beginning of a cello line.

Vladimir Martinov's „Τέμενος – Témenos“ (temple, chapel, consecrated land) will not take away our fear of dying. But it might convey some of the peace and light of which it sings. And perhaps this music which certainly steps out of the liturgical frame can make us aware of how absurd any action is that goes against the human principle of life. But this does not start with terrorism. It has already become every day life reality. And yet: this reality too belongs to the mythical questions. We should be known by our practical answers.

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