

The Significance of The White Goddess for Musical Thought.

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Part One: The Five Seasons: Graves' Goddess Sings

Drinking deep from the cauldron of erudite, cross-cultural, interdisciplinary researches that is Robert Graves' formidable 'historical grammar of poetic myth', I wish, in this article, to develop his analysis to generate a grammar of musical myth.

In my book *The Song of the Earth: Music and the Great Mother in Twentieth Century Europe*, I extend Graves' system of correspondences between the five vowels of the *Ogham* tree alphabet, a Five-Fold Goddess and a Venusian Five Season year (Graves, 266-277) to include musical notes and processes: I show how Graves' pentad may be represented by a five-note scale issuing from the wellsprings of the startlingly similar musico-cosmological systems of Babylonia (as noted by Plutarch in *Timaeus* 31) and China (as described in the fourth century *Chou Li*). Both systems are compared and contrasted by Curt Sachs (1943:77, 109-110). The responsibility of other Gravesian concerns for the formal articulation of much of the music by Muse-musicians Debussy and Maxwell-Davies such as the Venusian number 72 and the Lunar number 9, will be noted in the second part of this paper. Locating such symbolism in music may be termed Gravesian analysis, as the searching for archetypes is termed Jungian.

The White Goddess as Pentad, Venus as Apple Goddess, hangs on the oldest boughs of Western music, the dog, roebuck and lapwing concealing her deep within the thicket of Gregorian plainchant: Guido D'Arezzo's ascending stepwise series of six notes, a hexachord, for teaching and learning plainsong melodies, was sung to the syllables *ut re mi fa sol la* (Sachs, 1943: 300). This hexachord, the medieval equivalent of *Doh re mi* etc. contained five different vowels, beginning with Graves' summer vowel, *U*. The vowels then proceed in the order 'phonetically expressive' of the retreat and subsequent

progress of the year, the highest vowel reiterating the New Year Vowel, A (Graves, 287).

Guido D'Arezzo, the prior of Avellano, as he explained to 'beloved Brother Michael', circa 1030, derived his hexachord from the initial notes and syllables of these consecutive phrases from an eighth century hymn sung on Midsummer's Day for the Feast of the Birth of John the Baptist (Strunk, 121)- *Ut queant laxis resonare fibris mira gestorum famuli tuorum, Solve polluti labri reatum Sancte Joannes*. Whilst the whole hymn is unambiguously in the sober *hypodorian* mode ending on D, approved by the church, Guido's hexachord outlines what is known today as the innocuous C major scale, but to the medieval ecclesiastic as the tabooed *modus lascivus*. (The eight modes, allegedly prescribed by Pope Gregory the Great (reigned 590-604), were collections of seven distinct pitch names, whose range and concluding notes were specified; paradigms under which most liturgical chants could be classified.)

The association of the *modus lascivus* with songs of an erotic and/or pagan nature by 'goliards' (contemporary poets writing in latin), such as the 10th century *O admirabile Veneris ydolum*, may have contributed to its excommunication from the ecclesiastical canon. Whilst this song was not set to a *canonical* chant, since the Carolingian Renaissance, even Classical pagan authors *had* been sung to authorised plainsong; Horace's *Ode*, iv, 11, for instance, depicting youthful desire inflamed by Alban wine, was sung to the Hymn to St. John the Baptist (New Grove, ii, 799).

Since both St. John, according to some traditions (Graves, 175) and Hercules were beheaded on Midsummer's Day (Graves, 120), it is tempting to associate the hymn with the licentious rites that may have accompanied this celebration of the ritual slaughter of this consort of the White Goddess. (Graves himself identifies St. John the baptist with Hercules (130)).

Feigning ignorance of St. John's distinguished ancestry, Guido and most of his commentators were at pains to emphasise the purely *didactic* nature of his hexachord. However, the fact that each of the twenty notes of the complete medieval scale or *gamut* were assigned to parts of the hand as were the letters of the Druidic *Ogham* alphabet is convincing evidence, prompted by Graves (109), for the existence of an

unwritten, heretical corpus of hymns and chants to the White Goddess, disseminated with this secret digital cypher.

The White Goddess shines with ever increasing luminosity throughout most of the last movement of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. Composed in 1908 when he was suffering from a serious heart condition (New Grove xi, 511), this movement, *Der Abschied*, is a setting of Bethge's 19th century German translations of two Chinese poems: Mong-Kao-Jen's *In Erwartung des Freundes* and Wang Wei's *Der Abschied* (Mitchell, 334-335). This piece is not only a farewell to life, but a valediction to the fear and revulsion the Occident has long associated with death, inculcated by the prevalent patriarchal ideologies, and a 'rematriation' of the Oriental acceptance of death.

As in Chinese tradition, Mahler's death is announced with two sets of three strokes on the tamtam (a large gong) (New Grove vi, 523). The final tamtam stroke at bar nine is the only bar with five beats in the whole *Abschied*; a disruption of the prevalent four-beat metre. In order to find a suitable *modus operandi* for attempting a 'Gravesian' interpretation of these purely musical phenomena, an investigation of Graves' analytical methods applied to some of his concerns in *The White Goddess*, poetry and architecture, for instance, is instructive.

Graves often attributes widely diverse constellations of mythico-anthropological meaning to significant features of a poem or building. He asserts, for example, that the 'twelve beats' in each half of his religious charm to the White Goddess suggests, 'a dance by twelve persons around a circle of twelve standing stones' (Graves, 368) and believes that Stonehenge's 'plan of the five dolmens corresponds exactly with the disc alphabet' (Graves, 283), both the alphabet and the stones expressing a hypothetical five-season calendar.

As the metre of Graves' invocation and the number of dolmens at Stonehenge seems sufficiently significant to Graves to warrant a 'Gravesian' interpretation, so a piece of music must contain a musical event of similar import to justify the continued application of 'Gravesian' analysis. Having judged the event worthy of attention, the analyst must dive into the perilous waters of the collective unconscious, clinging to Ariadne's thread. This life-line may be spun from (1) relevant data surrounding the event *within* the work and (2) the possible intentions of the composer (in this instance, Mahler), guided

by knowledge of his current preoccupations and contemporary thought.

As Mahler was aware of the philosophy of the orientalist Wagner (who read Schopenhauer) and Fechner (Mitchell 460, 128), it is *possible* that an association of the number five with the five-petalled lotus of Eastern philosophy was not inconceivable to him. Five *was* the lotus to Graves; it was 'the golden cup of the sun' bearing Hercules the Sun God homeward at sunset (128). That this ninth, five-beat lotus-bar may also be a lotus-Goddess will not become evident until a harmonic phenomenon is observed later in the movement (as will shortly be noted).

A harmonic inflection, the replacement of a hitherto ubiquitous black note (E flat) by a white one (E) also draws attention to this ninth bar and supports the association of this bar with a moon Goddess. Mahler may have emphasised this bar because even the number *alone* denotes the moon, both for the Chinese (if the top line of the ninth hexagram of the *I Ching* signified nine, 'the moon is nearly full' (Wilhelm, 43)) and for many European cultures (Graves, 382). If these conjectures are accepted, the interpretation of the ninth, lengthened, bar as 'the Nine-fold Lunar Goddess' expanding her ninth bar to accommodate the Five-Fold Lotus Goddess is a reasonable, 'Gravesian', analysis. It is similar to Graves' belief that the nine bramble leaves are sacred to both the 'Pentad and Triad of seasonal Goddesses' (Graves, 385).

As Mahler/the sun bids 'farewell' in bars 19-26 of *Der Abschied*, floating westward on his lotus, some pitches are lowered; the tonality darkens and the pulse of the music is temporarily suspended—Apollo has begun his annual winter break in the land of the Hyperboreans. One bar later, the moon 'floats through the blue lake of heaven like a silver bark'. The moon-boat is silver, Mahler choosing to paint her with the notes of C major (consisting of only the white keys of the piano, ruled by the principal note, C), which contrasts with the dying golden sun, tinted with the 'darker' key of C minor. (C minor shares the same principal note as C major, but three other notes of the scale are lowered or darkened; E becoming E flat, for instance.) In Oriental philosophy, silver and gold are the two colours of the *Yin* and *Yang*, the feminine and masculine principles of the *I Ching* (Campbell,

vol. II, 24).

Through the interaction of the *Yin* and *Yang*, borne by 'the mother...of all things' (Campbell, vol II, 24) everything (lit., the ten thousand things) comes into being (Fung Yu-lan, 445). One expression of the occurrence of this multiplicity within unity is the annual cyclical procession of the twelve months. This cycle is represented by the derivation of the twelve notes or *liuh* of the Chinese musical system from a fundamental pitch produced by a nine inch pipe. The ratios in this system between adjacent notes, alternatively 3:2 and 3:4, were investigated by Pythagorus and introduced into China in the 3rd century BC either as a result of the Asiatic conquests of Alexander the Great or by the peace loving Tochars who had lived on the southeastern border of the Gobi desert since the 13th century BC (Sachs, 1943: 114).

As will be seen, a version of the complete series of 12 *liuh* was not *completely* expressed in the west until the 17th century, most eloquently by Bach in *Das wohltemperierte Klavier* of 1722. However, Pythagorean tuning *was* applied to the specific *seven-note* modal architecture of individual movements, remaining in vogue throughout the Middle Ages despite the fragmentation of the Greece of Pythagoras. This 'Pre-Socratic Greece' writes Wilfrid Mellers (8) 'was still mainly an oral, nonliterate culture, intuitive, irrational, built on the all-embracing love of the earth goddess, Demeter... at war with, and too powerful to be absorbed by the new empirical rationalistic patriarchy. This potestas—this patriarchal authority—was taken over by Roman civilisation; and in Greece, the unity of Pythagorean science split into Platonism and Aristotelianism, and the Dark Ages split 'spirit from the natural world' and the Goddess went underground, appearing as the unattainable Dark Goddess—the Sophia of the Troubadours often masquerading as the Virgin Mary, with her 'death aspect' emphasised (Mellers, 11).

The Goddess' cult of the Virgin continued to flourish in the late Middle Ages. However, the complete Pythagorean tonal cycle, the 12 Chinese *liuh*, was not yet sufficiently developed as an aural analogy for her cyclic nature. This cyclic aspect, the Goddess of the cycle of life, death and rebirth *did* emerge as the canonic device structuring such works as *Summer is y-commun in* (c.1280) and Machaut's 14th cen-

tury *Mon fin est ma commencement* ('My end is my beginning'). The canon is a serpentine melody biting its own tail, a musical *Ouroboros*: often the repetition of a melody in a second voice before the original version has finished, the repeated version in turn dovetailed with a further statement of the original melody and so on. The origins of the cyclic aspect of the Goddess principle (Campbell, vol. I; 127 and 313) was situated, in 1923 by Frobenius in an area south of the tropic of Cancer from West Africa, through India and the Malay Archipelago and Melanesia, his 'tropical planting culture' (Campbell, vol. II: 153).

After Western musical theorists such as Penna tabulated a version of the complete 12-note cycle in the 17th century, 18th century composers like Haydn and Mozart (with the aid of an 'equally tempered' 12-note cycle which modified the pure Pythagorean ratio of 3:2 to eradicate an anomaly of the system), imposed the dialectic (as propounded by the contemporary Prussian philosopher, Fichte) between the fundamental pitch expressed as the principal key, and the eleven subordinate pitches denoted by subsidiary keys: the ego—the subject pitted against the non-ego—the object (Balantine, 20).

Although a pupil of Haydn, Beethoven rejected his teacher's espousal of dialectic in many works, preferring the variation of a single theme in pieces such as the Piano Sonata Op. 111 and the Diabelli Variations. In such works, Beethoven relinquishes the desire to change key and the need for subsidiary, contrasting themes, dissolving the object back into the subject, destroying the barrier between 'inner' and 'outer' life. This Beethoven (who also copied out texts of Persian mysticism, who framed some ancient Egyptian inscriptions on the same theme, and kept both of these texts on his writing desk) was thus, with Balzac and Chopin, a distinguished 'advance guard' for the musical Oriental Renaissance—a term first used by the poet and critic Friedrich Schlegel in 1803 (Batchelor, 252).

A century of Oriental revivalism in Europe thus prepared Mahler for his farewell to the heroic posturing of the patriarchal, Indo-European equestrian warrior culture and his return to the White Goddess, to the Unity of Being. This notion is symbolised, from bar 454, by his gradual release from the world of tonal dialectic, the twelve notes or months of the Chinese cycle expressed as keys set in dramatic opposition, emblematic of the illusory passing of time creat-

ed by the Indian Goddess of delusion, Maya (Rawson, 150)- and then his passage to the timeless world of the five 'correct notes', *cheng-sheng*, of traditional Confucian Chinese music theory (New Grove, iv: 252): *kung* (C), *shang* (D), *chiao* (E), *chih* (G), *yu* (A). This is finally achieved in bar 532, by relinquishing seven of the twelve available notes and remaining in one key (eschewing tonal dialectic). Thus, at any one time, until bar 454, each of the twelve notes of the Chinese series is mistress of six subordinate pitches forming an Occidental seven-note scale. In tonal dialectic, such a seven-note collection dominated by one principal pitch is juxtaposed with another set of seven notes, differing from the first collection by as many as five notes (as at bar 345 when D minor usurps D flat major).

Although beginning in earnest in bar 454, the interpenetration of these different *Weltanschauungen* begins with the introduction of E in bar nine, previously identified as the principal Gravesian lunar bar dedicated to the Five-fold Goddess. E, a note foreign to the predominant key of C minor is the third of the five 'correct notes'—*chiao*, the final note of the piece, eminently suitable for a work about death and subsequent resurrection, *chiao* being correlated since the Han dynasty with the East, with green, with goodness, and with Spring. The other four 'correct notes' are also linked to a similar array of corresponding objects/ideas (Campbell, vol. II: 432).

Such quintuple groupings are found in the *Sankhya* system of the Indian sage Kapila (c.600 BC); the five elements are associated with the five senses for instance: space to hearing; wind to touch; fire to sight; water to taste and earth to smell (Campbell, vol.II:431). The earliest surviving system of such correspondences is found in the Greek fragments of Anaximander—611-547 BC. Joseph Campbell (vol. II: 431) suggests that 'based on the distribution pattern...evidence...must appear in the tablets of Sumer and Akkad'.

The number of melodic archetypes or 'Great *Ragas*' of the music of India is also five, springing from Shiva Mahadeva's five heads (Sachs, 1943: 178). Indeed, Mahler's principal melodic line may be likened to a *raga* which is subject to a series of variations of increasing complexity over a recurrent rhythmic cycle or *avarta*, a ritual reenactment of the cyclic nature of existence and the cycle of the seasons. In the first 54 bars of *Der Abschied*, the *avarta* is presented five times.

Assuming 'Gravesian' symbolism, these numbers structuring the opening may be understood as a consecration of the movement to both the Five-fold and the Nine-fold Goddess.

The voice enters *five* quavers before the second statement of the *avarta* given to the flute coloured, in bar 23, with a characteristic note, the sharpened fourth from the Indian *raga Lalit* creating tonal ambiguity (to Western ears suggesting a *new* key). *Lalit* means fickle, restless or beautiful, an epithet of the Lotus/Love Goddess, Shri Lakshmi. This *raga* should only be played at dawn (Danielou, 101-3), an ambiguous, transitional period appropriate for the death and transfiguration of Mahler's soul.

In contrast to the first lines of this phrase in which '*scheidet*' is set as two single-beat notes within the predominant four beat metre, the accented syllables of the following lines are given two beats, distending the regular four-beat rhythm, supplanting the qualitative accentuation of German poetry with the quantitative accentuation of oriental poetry. Mahler has assumed a 'Pre-Raphaelite' persona, returning to the ecstatic, mystical worship of Sophia or Mary, unfettered by the constricting rhythms concomitant with the Renaissance ideology of the dualism of life and death welcomed by Pietro Aron in *de institutione harmonica* of 1516 (Sachs 1953:93), the metre of Graves' 'sun-poetry' inflected with the rhythms of 'moon-music' (Graves vii). At the end of the first stanza, the flute plays a transcription of crane song. This bird, Graves notes (277), is sacred to the Triple Goddess, taking nine steps before flight, displaying white, red and black, the Goddess's three colours, her flight in chevron formation suggesting the arrow-heads of 'all early alphabets' (Graves 221).

In both Western and Oriental mythologies, the crane guides the hero through a rite of passage. In Delos, a Crane Dance introduced by Theseus represented a journey through the Labyrinth (Graves 221). In China, the Crane Goddess, Hsi Wang Mu, the Queen Mother of the West, stands on K'un-Lun mountain under pine trees, the dark pine trees mentioned in bars 47-49 of *Der Abschied*, distributing miraculous peaches of Immortality to the souls of the blessed dead, escorting them to their resting place (Larousse, 382). The evergreen property of these dark trees (*dunklen Fichten*) led to their apprehension as the metamorphosed form of Attis, brought back to life by the Western Goddess of Resurrection, Cybele (Frazer, 267-276).

In the *Boibel-Loth* variant of the Irish tree *Ogham*, notched on wooden billets by Druids, Cybele's tree of resurrection, the silver fir, the 'prime birth tree of Northern Europe' (Graves, 185) is considered the first season of the year represented by the letter A, the first letter of *Ailm*, the Gaelic for silver fir. This vowel is the first in the pentad of vowels from this alphabet, each also a tree in a calendar of five 'seasons' (Graves 272). Realising that the Oriental year also consists of five 'seasons', and noting the similarities between the notches of the *Ogham* alphabet and the hexagrams of the *I-Ching*, it is conceivable that the Goidels who brought the tree alphabet into Ireland and the Yamato clans who brought a similar linguistic-cosmological system into Japan were both descendants of a shamanistic, mountain-worshipping, hunting people, originally from North-east and North-central Asia, also bringing the iron Age with them to both countries (Campbell, vol.II: 464-465).

Certainly the note names of the Japanese five-note scale (Harich-Schneider, 134) can be aligned with the vowels of the *Ogham* alphabet.

Table 1 Correspondence of the *Ogham* vowels and the names of the Japanese five-note scale

<i>Ogham</i> vowels: E (Eadha)	I (Idho)	A (Ailm)	O (Onn)	U (Ura)
Japanese notes: Kaku	Chi	Sho	Kyu	U

Unfortunately, the five vowels of the note names of the Japanese five-note scale do not correspond to their Celtic, Goidelic sister series of seasonal vowels.

Fortunately, the names of the Chinese ancestors of these notes, the five 'correct notes' incorporated in the *Huang Fan* system of correlations (Campbell, vol.II 431-2) (itself a development of the correspondences listed in the *Chou Li* dating from the fourth century BC, mentioned above) can each be coupled with an *Ogham* vowel with greater phonetic similarity than their Japanese descendants. Although under this paradigm the Irish and Chinese seasons are generally assigned to different vowels, the Queen of the Irish pentad, the *U* vowel of the

Summer Goddess *is* associated with *Kung*, the ruling season of the Chinese pentad.

The Expression of the Five-fold Goddess

a) The Five Aspects of the Goddess are

1) the Autumn Goddess of rutting and combat 2) The Winter Goddess of Death 3) The New Year Goddess of the three Fates 4) The Spring Goddess of Increase 5) The Summer Goddess of the Leafy Centre of The Year.

b) The Corresponding *Ogham*

Vowels:	E	I	A	O	U
Irish Season:	Autumn	Winter	New Year	Spring	Summer
<i>Chou Li</i> notes:	<i>Chiao</i>	<i>Chih</i>	<i>Shang</i>	<i>Ku</i>	<i>Kung</i>
European Alphabetic					
Pitch Notation:	E	G	D	A	C

These five pitches are the musical archetype of 'the most potent of Deities' representing the 'five' seasons: In India, she is Kali, her five aspects—Kali, Surya, Shiva, Vishnu and Ganesha (Graves, 401). She is Isis in Egypt—Horus, Set, Osiris, Isis, Nephtys her five-fold *persona* (Graves 267). Originally the *Paleolithic* Great Mother, this Five-fold epiphany of the White Goddess may have been invoked by the incantation of the five vowels with these notes.

Whilst matching the numerical value assigned to each vowel in medieval Irish literature with an aspect of the Goddess, Graves also notes (287) that the realignment of vowels in ascending numerical order results in the familiar ordering of the Latin Alphabet.

Table 3 The Realignment of Vowels

Ogham letter:	E	I	A	O	U
Numerical values in Medieval Irish Literature:	2	3	1	4	5
Numerical values placed in Ascending order:	1	2	3	4	5
Realigned Ogham vowel:	A	E	I	O	U
Corresponding notes:	d	e	g	a	c

Although the original seasonal cycle is disguised, if the notes retain their allegiance to the same vowel, they outline the *dorian* mode, sharing the same principal note with St. John's *hypodorian* hymn. This seven-note mode is formed by adding F and B to the five notes of this musico-alphabetical system. The conjunction of these two additional notes was banned by the medieval church, inculcating fear as the *diabolus in musica*. Its proscription is usually ascribed to its astringent quality (Mellers, 35). However, as will be demonstrated in the second part of this paper, there is another rationale for ecclesiastical disquiet: if each of the pitches of the seven-note mode is paired with a vowel and a commonly associated deity, a musical icon of Graves' 'transcendental God of the Hyperboreans' (277) is unveiled and the coupling of these two additional notes becomes the sacred marriage of two powerful pagan deities.

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