

Research article

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### Concerning the Question of Anthropomorphic Metaphors in Music (Semiotic Aspect)\*

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**Abstract.** In this article, the author continues to develop the problem of anthropomorphism in musical thinking, considered through the prism of the opposition of *male/female*, which serves as the “universal classifier” of mythological modeling (according to Tatiana Tsivyan). Of the rather large number of examples of the *male/female* anthropomorphic metaphor preserved in the mythopoetics of the peoples of the world, a selection is presented of those that are manifested at different levels of musical thinking. The prevalence of this anthropomorphic metaphor may indicate its deep psychobiological roots and archetypal nature, which ensures its high musical and aesthetic potential, preservation, development and relevance. The widespread modal archetype of the “trichord in a fourth,” represented as a conjugation of *greater* and *lesser* spaces (“modal acoustic fields,” for example, *D-F* and *F-G*) in the volume of a fourth (*D-G*) is considered from the point of view of the anthropomorphic metaphor *male/female* and semantically related fields such as *heaven/earth, father/mother*. The prevalence of this modal archetype is explained by its correspondence to the “golden proportion,” where the greater is related to the lesser as the whole is to the greater ( $3/2 = 5/3$ , in semitones). The most favourable conditions for the manifestation of the continuous properties of the “trichord in a fourth” modal archetype and typologically similar binary-asymmetric structures as the root basis of musical language are noted.

**Keywords:** semiology of music, anthropomorphism, anthropomorphic metaphor *male/female* in music, “trichord in fourth” modal archetype as an anthropomorphic metaphor, birthing ritual songs, musical language

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## К вопросу об антропоморфных метафорах в музыке (семиотический аспект)

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**Аннотация.** В данной статье автор продолжает разработку проблемы антропоморфизма в музыкальном мышлении, рассматриваемой через призму оппозиции *мужской/женский* — «универсального классификатора» мифологического моделирования (согласно Татьяне Цивьян). Из довольно большого числа примеров антропоморфной метафоры *мужской/женский*, сохранившихся в мифопоэтике народов мира, в статье приводятся те, которые показывают возможность её проявления на разных уровнях музыкального мышления. По мнению автора, распространённость данной антропоморфной метафоры может свидетельствовать о её глубокой психобиологической укоренённости, архетипичности, обеспечивающей высокий музыкально-эстетический потенциал, сохранение, развитие и востребованность. Широко распространённый ладовый архетип «трихорд в кварте», представляемый как сопряжённость *большего* и *меньшего* пространств («ладоакустических полей», например, *d-f* и *f-g*) в объёме кварты (*d-g*) рассматривается с точки зрения антропоморфной метафоры *мужской/женский* и семантически родственных ей, таких как *небо/земля, отец/мать*. Распространённость данного ладового архетипа объясняется его соответствием «золотой пропорции», где большее так относится к меньшему, как целое к большему ( $3/2 = 5/3$ , в полутонах). Отмечаются наиболее благоприятные условия для проявления континуальных свойств ладового архетипа «трихорд в кварте» и типологически сходных бинарно-асимметричных структур как корневой основы музыкального языка.

**Ключевые слова:** семиология музыки, антропоморфизм, антропоморфная метафора *мужской/женский* в музыке, ладовый архетип «трихорд в кварте» как антропоморфная метафора, родинные песни, музыкальный язык

### Introduction

Anthropomorphism and anthropomorphisation refer to the process of likening objects and phenomena to humans and their actions. Man's ability to hear or see the "human" in the surrounding world, which endows music with its human properties, reveals itself in music in unexpected forms.

The emergence of anthropomorphism as a manifestation of the human factor in language is explained according to the principle of

anthropocentrism. In language, this is expressed in the individual drawing analogies between his or her own organism and ideas about the world, which is seen as a result of bringing to the forefront "the general substantial character of the human essence." [1, p. 199] The most ancient mythopoetic symbols of this kind include, for example, the omphalos ("navel of the world"), known in various cultural traditions, or the first man Purusha, from whom, according to ancient Indian mythology, the elements of the cosmos arose.

The relevance of identifying and studying anthropomorphic metaphors in musical language and thinking is of particular theoretical and practical interest given the increased attention to metaphor, corporeality and musical gesture that can currently be observed in musicological practice.

Although anthropomorphic metaphors in music have as yet been little studied, one can note a number of valuable observations in Vyacheslav Medushevsky's research devoted to the intonational form of music. Here corporeality is considered as a special property of musical intonation, representing a "condensed statement of the whole body," forming a basis to reveal the hidden meaning of musical intonation in the real-plastic reading of music. [2, p. 170] According to the scholar, intonation — like the human body — weaves together biological and social elements to imbue some of its most generalised images with an anthropomorphic character that is characterised as either masculine or feminine. [Ibid., pp. 58–59] Musical intonation is perceived as living due to its reflection of a living person in the integrity of his body movements associated with breathing, vocal cords, facial expressions and gestures, [Ibid., p. 168] thus creating the basis for the emergence of anthropomorphic metaphors in musical thinking.

Among foreign researchers, we may note the book by Arnie Cox, [3] in which anthropomorphisation is considered as one of the major types of musical metaphor. In this case, music is understood as a kind of "embodied meaning," associated with corporeality and the sphere of the unconscious. The type of thinking that corresponds to this understanding of music is defined as "embodied cognition." Cox proposes to consider the question of anthropomorphisation — or personification — from the point of view of its relation to the mimetic and/or non-mimetic mode of engagement.

One of the properties of anthropomorphism in musical thinking (in all likelihood, the most ancient — and, by virtue of this, presupposing the unity of mimetic and non-mimetic methods of involvement) can be considered the semantisation of elements of musical language through the prism of the opposition *male/female*, which can be found, first of all, in traditional musical cultures and the musical cultures of antiquity. In subsequent layers of music related to the written compositional tradition, its manifestations are less noticeable.

Thus, the present work sets out to examine the opposition *male/female* (hereinafter *m/f*) from the point of view of anthropomorphism in musical thinking as an independent problem of musical semiology.

### **The Anthropomorphic Metaphor of *Male/Female*: a Manifestation of the "Universal Classifier" in Music**

Our focus on anthropomorphism is connected with the study of the problem of the continuous and the discrete in musical thinking, which involves a concentration of attention on "musical thinking of the mythological type." This type of thinking differs from non-mythological thinking in terms of the predominance of the "continuous" over the "discrete." A special role in the formation of musical thinking in the early stages of human culture — that is, in the era of the primacy of mythological thinking — belongs to the "myth — symbol — ritual" cognitive model, which has special continuous properties. [4]

Yuri Lotman identifies homeomorphism — the pattern underlying the closed, cyclical relation to time — as the chief organising structural principle of mythological consciousness. Here, the entire diversity of human relationships is reduced to the history of the archetypal couple — Man and Woman. [5, pp. 6–7]

Let us give just a few examples of the *m/f* anthropomorphic metaphor that have come down

to us in early monuments of music theory. In Ancient Greece and Rome, the wedding melody was performed by two auloi of different sizes, which symbolised the husband (larger) and the wife (smaller). The 2nd-century grammarian and lexicographer Pollux reports (IV 80): “The wedding melody was played by two auloi, forming a consonance. One of them was greater [than the other], as the husband should be greater [than the wife. — E.A.]. However, the auloi that accompany drinking parties are small and equal in size because equality befits a feast” (Cit. ex: [6, p. 45]). In Ancient India (i.e., in Vedic culture), the relationship between melody and poetic meter was also examined through the prism of the *m/f* opposition. In ancient China, husband and wife were symbolised by stringed instruments *qin* and *se*. In this context, the “mutual agreement” of the instruments was supposed to signify harmony in the family. [7, p. 28] In the ancient Chinese notational system *lü-lü* (*lü zi pu*), several levels of manifestation of the *m/f* opposition are distinguished. For example, to play the pentatonic scale, which forms the modal basis of Chinese music, it was necessary *to use together* the sounds of two abstract scales, into which the twelve-step chromatic scale *lü-lü* is *divided* — “female” (*yin*) and “male” (*yang*). [8, pp. 63–64]

As revealed by ethnomusicological investigations, many peoples of the world have ideas about the connection between the size, appearance, design and functions of musical instruments with the *m/f* opposition. The visuality and clarity of this connection in a wide variety of instruments, as Tatiana Tsivyan notes, testifies to their good suitability for expressing the universal sememe associated with fertility, which can easily be transferred to other codes of the world model. It is important to emphasise that the *m/f* opposition is defined

as *dominant* among many other oppositions of mythological modelling, since it is capable of fulfilling the role of a “universal classifier” that has real grounds and is quite clear, but is detached from its materiality and at the same time retains maximum clarity and resolution. [9, p. 89]

### The “Trichord in a Fourth” Modal Archetype as an Anthropomorphic Metaphor of *Male/Female*

The mode may be considered as the essential musical expression of beauty and harmony in music. Since ancient times, man has used modes to express the “active forces” of the universe in music; echoes of such mythological musical thinking are conveyed to us by relict examples of folklore in the form of its deep structures and archetypes. The most ancient modal structure, which not only denotes a complex of meanings that go back to the *m/f* opposition, but also a generating model, is the “trichord,” considered as a binary-asymmetrical structure consisting of two spaces between sounds (modal acoustic fields).<sup>1</sup> In the modal archetype of the “trichord in a fourth” type, widespread in the music of the oral tradition, a binary asymmetry of two spaces with a small difference can be traced — 3 and 2 (in semitones). This ratio of sizes, which is similar to the small difference in height between men and women characteristic of all ethnic groups, [11, p. 100] probably once, in the distant past, became the objective reason for the appearance of the modal form of *the m/f anthropomorphic metaphor*.

The structure of the “trichord in a fourth” type (a term coined by Feodosy Rubtsov) in a rectilinear movement (ascending or descending) consists of two intervals between sounds (modal acoustic fields), which the author considers as *greater and lesser* modal functions. In these

<sup>1</sup> The concept of “modal acoustic field” is based on the energy concept of Ernst Kurth. [10]

structures, it is these fields, and not sounds, as in other systems (for example, in tonality), that are the structural and functional units of the mode. Representing a different type of functional system, such binary structures in their invariant form do not imply filling with other sounds, but are capable of generating variants of the relationship between the larger and smaller fields — albeit only with a small difference between them. More significant for oral and oral-written traditions, the modal archetypes form two broad classes — asymmetrical and symmetrical. Moreover, there are many more types of asymmetrical trichords than symmetrical ones. [12] Such diversity can be explained by the zonal nature of pitch hearing (according to Nikolai Garbuzov), as well as the predominance of relative pitch, ethnocultural processes, and other factors that remain to be clarified.

The most favourable conditions for the manifestation of *invariant* properties of modal archetypes like the “trichord within a fourth” include: predominance of emotional, lyrical (right-hemispheric, continuous) components over rational, active (left-hemispheric, discrete) ones; smooth melodic motion; moderate tempo; legato vocal or cantabile intonation; an unaccented middle pitch. In other cases, we can talk about variations of the original model, right up to broken movement and game form.

A remarkable example of a binary-asymmetric quartal trichord as an anthropomorphic “formula of life” denoting the reproductive function of a person [13] is found in the Buryat *birthing* ritual song described by Lidiya Dashieva in 2009. [14]<sup>2</sup> Modal archetypes consisting of two conjugated fields with distinct functions (greater and lesser) — embodying the roles

of “spouses” and/or “parents” (“father and mother”) — represent a pair capable of creating new life. In the modal archetype, the pair is embodied by two fields conjoined by a common tone, which is of a different structural type — a discrete tone serving a connective function. In the invariant of the modal archetype, the middle sound of the trichord (in ascending or descending movement) is always less significant: neither emphasised rhythmically or articulatorily, it eludes perception. However, in *rodinnye pesni* [birthing songs] associated with the rite of introducing a new person into the kinship community, we observe a different ratio of “actors.” In this case, the great-grandmother sings a song in honour of her *great-granddaughter, who has turned one year old*. Symbolising a one-year-old child, the song features a quick “stepping” motion, typical of a baby who is usually held by the arms due to its legs still being quite weak. Here, at the beginning of the song, the middle tone is treated as an overtone or an appoggiatura (grace note). Then, in the form of “sixteenth notes,” it becomes more prominent but is sung within the syllable’s melisma. Only on the third repetition — after a pause that emphasises its new role at the beginning of the word “Aisaa” — does the middle tone *C*, now articulated clearly as an eighth note, begin to initiate the motif itself. From this moment on, the middle sound becomes an equal part of the trichord, serving to connect the extreme sounds, while remaining part of each of the two “parent” fields. Another interesting example of the juxtaposition of an unstressed and stressed middle tone in a quartal trichord can be found in the incantation of a baby who cries at night, from the musical folklore of the Ainu, the indigenous people of Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands, and Hokkaido (Example No. 1).

<sup>2</sup> See Example No. 1 in the article by Lidiya Dashieva. [14, p. 67]

## Example No.1

Saruba (Khidaka), 1961

$\text{♪} = 0,47"$

tu - ma sa - ke ku va i - kho - ski va mo - kor mo - kor

In the first phrase, the infant is addressed tenderly and gently — through an even descending motion along the trichord tones — but then the intonation  $G\#-F\#$ , the smaller field of the trichord, sounds with augmented emphasis. It is important to note that in both cases the middle sound ( $F\#$ ) appears on an unstressed syllable and is voiced by the “broad” vowel “a” (“ma,” “va”). At the beginning of the second phrase of the trichord motif, the direct movement changes to a “circular movement towards the centre” (in our terminology), which is generally quite soft, coaxing, “embracing” and “pressing” to the baby. However, here the middle sound is sung with a little more pressure, since it is now in accented time and is voiced by the more tense vowel “i” in the syllable “ski.” The crying baby’s incantation ends with a sub-motif where the middle tone predominates over the others. The “reproachful” intonation arises due to the rhythm, as well as the twice repeated vowel “o” in the word “mokor,” when pronouncing which the singer’s face loses its benevolence, as the lips “pout” and stretch out. By expressing dissatisfaction in this way, the singer — through the described musical techniques — can effectively achieve the desired outcome, which is for the child’s crying to cease. It may be surmised that this incantation would not have become established in tradition had such an effect not been realised.

Incantation for When a Baby Cries at Night,  
“Tuma sake ku va”<sup>3</sup>

The widespread prevalence of the modal archetype “trichord in a fourth” can be explained by its harmony: the ratio of values reproduces the “golden ratio,” where the greater is related to the lesser as the whole is to the greater —  $3/2 = 5/3$  (in semitones). And if we take into account the homology of asymmetric binary structures (trichords) and intracellular mechanisms, [13] then the definition of “formula of life” in relation to the trichord becomes more than a metaphor, since it leads into the field of biosemiotics that yields an understanding of the mechanisms of the influence of music on living organisms.

Thus, this modal intonation model in real intonation is capable of expressing the ideal harmony and generative function of the pair “Man and Woman.”

Symmetrical modal archetypes, which are far fewer in number, stand in opposition to asymmetrical ones.<sup>4</sup> Preliminary observations show that the semantic field of symmetrical trichords — for example, “major” — stands in opposition to that characterised by asymmetrical trichords. The symmetrical trichord appears in lullabies and play songs, which serve a distinct purpose; in traditional societies, they are generally performed either by children themselves or by grandmothers for their grandchildren. It can be assumed that the opposition of asymmetrical and symmetrical modal archetypes arose historically as an adequate designation of functions that were

<sup>3</sup> Melody taken from the book by Natalia Mamcheva *Mir muzyki ainov* (The World of Ainu Music). [15, p. 112]

<sup>4</sup> For details, see: [12].

very important for the era of the clan system, during which period, in all likelihood, modal forms were formed. If the asymmetrical trichord is associated with the *m/f* opposition as a “generative structure” indicating reproductive age, then the symmetrical trichords are capable of forming a semantic field that unites another — no less important — part of society: “children and the elderly.” According to traditional ideas, such an opposition brings us closer to the world of ancestors and spirits, connecting the past with the future. The existence of such a model is confirmed by the existence of a variety of materials, including those set out in the present author’s publications and as-yet unpublished data. A consideration of the combination of asymmetrical and symmetrical types of trichords, as observed in the so-called “pentatonic,” should be set out in a separate study.

### Conclusion

Interest in the problem of anthropomorphism and anthropomorphic metaphors has grown significantly in recent decades. The exploration of human nature and cognition has gained particular urgency in light of challenges related to artificial intelligence development and social interaction. The creation of metaphors is included among the distinctive capacities of human beings. In linguistics, it is generally accepted that cognitive and linguistic processes cannot be considered in isolation from the phenomenon of human embodiment. Thus, through grounding in humanity’s innate capacity for anthropomorphic and metaphorical thinking, the anthropomorphic metaphor is proposed as a cognitive model for the conventionalisation of thought, which enables both the creation and decoding of such metaphors. In the context of the problem posed in the present work, it is important to note that a feature of anthropomorphic metaphors in verbal language is the predominance of invariant components,

which are gradually formed in each individual as a result of anthropomorphic understanding of the surrounding world and used to “bind” the semantics of polysemantic words. [16, p. 23]

The semiosis of anthropomorphic metaphors associated with the most ancient artefacts of musical culture is united by a genetic link with the “universal classifier” represented by the *male/female* opposition. Thus it becomes possible to include in this semiosphere the widespread modal archetype of the “trichord in a fourth,” which includes a one and half tones and a tone — that is, considered not discretely (as a scale), but continuously, as two spaces expressing the “golden proportion”  $3/2 = 5/3$  (in semitones). Since the “trichord in a fourth” and similar modal archetypes can be considered as belonging to the most ancient layers of musical language, they can be considered as analogues of the “roots” of verbal language, which are preserved in modern musical culture, especially in popular one. In this case, it is the genetic rootedness of such anthropomorphic metaphors that largely ensures an understanding of the musical language “without translation,” allowing us to perceive music (certain types, genres, and styles) as the language of the soul and body. “Music in general did not originate as an art, but as a mode of human existence,” believes Izaly Zemtsovsky, [17, p. 10] an outstanding researcher of the music of oral tradition, who characterised the trichord in fourth as a “modal formula” of the spring calendar songs of the Eastern Slavs and revealed its widespread prevalence in the musical folklore of the peoples of Europe. [18, p. 84]

Further study of the invariant forms of anthropomorphic metaphors can undoubtedly contribute to the development of the semiology of music, deepening musical language along with an understanding of the “anthropology of musical existence” itself. [17] The range of questions that can be connected in one way or another with the problem of anthropomorphism

and anthropomorphic metaphors in music, in our opinion, is very broad — from the study of the singing of Neanderthals, [19] the origin of the evolution of music and

music in the evolution of man [20; 21; 22] to the theory of existential semiotics [23] and the biosemiotic foundations of musical aesthetics. [24; 25]

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