

Cultural Industry Essay:

Marilyn Manson's LP Trilogy

Introduction

This essay is going to be about Marilyn Manson's LP trilogy which include *Antichrist Superstar*, *Mechanical Animals* and *Holy Wood*. This rock opera cycle trilogy is perfect representative of postmodernist art piece. It references everything, from Beatles to renaissance fine art. The idea is to make intertextual semiotic read-through and to recognize elements of postmodernism and how the artist played with concepts and meanings to create a dystopian microcosm of his own. Through this analysis the idea is also to capture the way Jungian archetypes and models are used not just in creating rock poetry, but also performance and imagery that followed album releases. Furthermore, new questions arise when discussing the role of rock poetry and performance in future of the music and performative arts.

Theoretical Concept

So, some of the analytical methods are deconstructionism and structuralism. Semiotical interpretation and postmodern theory of popular culture will also be used in reading out artist's interviews and artwork itself. Some of the symbols from the artwork are going to be exhibited through Jungian dream analysis and his archetypes. Jungian concepts are going to be used not in an academical manner, but rather as cultural reference. Comparative mythology methods will also be used in order to connect something as diverse as Mayans, Greeks, Zarathustra and 90's American pop culture. It is necessary to use more than one perspective in order to gain full vision of both sides of creating process; which includes not just creating but also reading. As every postmodern work of art, meanings are ambiguous and depend strongly on reader's perspective. However, artist was deeply aware of using elements of psychology and using them in creating the meta-narrative of the trilogy. Furthermore, it is the perfect example of how interpretation depends not just on consumer, but also on the prescriptions provided by artists itself. In other words, there are always at least two sides of every story; the contextual anchorage created by the artist (concept), and the other one is just consumers interpretation and demystification of codes.

As we can see, these three LPs should reflect somewhat non-linear storyline which is, in very postmodern fashion, left vague and prone to interpretations. According to Manson, story is cyclical. (3) It is great example of pastiche, making references to anything from Dante's *Divine Comedy* to something as mundane as Beatles. Real moral relativization and value crisis is perfectly demonstrated in this hybrid of drama and rock music. It's a great play on perspectives and established dogmas; and sometimes this play with meanings and ambiguities goes so deep that might seem shallow and immature. Manson uses deconstructionism in a very artistic way and questions the values between sacred and profane. He uses Christianity symbols and bible content in "sacrilegious" context, to expose, as he says, the hypocrisy of

religious institutions. (Beliefnet.com, 2017) His work is, as he says, full of anger, murder, adultery and child sacrifice as much as Bible.

Lot of elements in melody and lyrics are full of references to both pop and high culture artists, writers, philosophers. Manson used the same ideas from other artists and got them new meanings, connotations, and contexts in order to parody. The best example is the way he "borrowed" Bowie's Ziggy Stardust concept to his Mechanical Animals album, that used Bowie elements so obviously in order to expose other side of the story. Manson described this intention as both homage to Bowie and self-mockery to his messianic complex and self-indulgent personality. Even his band and compositions reflected 70's rock era. Manson adopted some of Bowie's vocal techniques and cockney accent in order to parody the shallowness of today's music industry and lack of originality. Every of these three stories can be interpreted as upside-down Divine Comedy. As Manson noted in one of the interviews, he didn't use all concepts deliberately, and didn't have one chronological storyline, but some of the concepts were put retroactively. Story was writing itself, and he was just there to tell it. Marilyn Manson noted retrospectively that the real storyline should go chronologically back wise, starting from the last trilogy piece, Holy Wood. (Sacco, 2017)

The extensive use of occult and religious knowledge is another notion of postmodern relativization; popularization of gnostic elements and instantization of the occult symbolism is one of the parameters that show the pop-spirituality phenomena; everything becomes commodified, demystified, and relativized; perfect example of profanisation. As we know that Jung based his archetype analysis on tarot and gnosis, Manson also used those elements to re-create a gnostic journey of character named Adam Kadmon who is willing to save the world by using that knowledge he got from the Tree of Knowledge (*Holy Wood*), but instead becomes alienated from the world, becomes a rock star corrupted by fame, drugs (*Mechanical Animals*). He gets disappointed by the fact that he can't change the world and realizes that he becomes the thing he is fighting against, amoral fascistoid human being (*Antichrist Superstar*).

Analysis

There are a lot of archetypes that Manson embodies through his work. Binary opposed concepts (which is represented even in the artist's name) are here to make listener rethink the usual "black and white" perspective, the concepts of good and evil. That could be one of the interpretations of artist name; equalization of Marilyn and Manson by reductio ad absurdum analogy. Triptych is, full of social criticism which, deliberately or not, reflects postmodern phenomena such as relativization and juxtaposing the traditional values and moral law, disintegration of drama analogy and dehierarchisation. Albums are full of contradictions and conflicted emotions. Cynism, misanthropy and aesthetics of ugliness are main shock value that

make this triptych artistically vital and relevant." A typical Jungian hero story a bit upside down; the hero in this story is an alienated 21st century confused boy who wants to change the world for the better, but in a very Nietzschean fashion, becomes a monster he's fighting against. That's the locus that we can track the "anti-hero" of nihilist philosophy, the idea of fool and hanged man in tarot; the hero with good intentions who is rather blind and becomes entangled by its own shadow in order to retaliate the disappointment he feels about passive society and ignorant masses. (Nichols, 1988)

Beginning with *Holy Wood* (which is released 2000), the story loosely follows a journey of Adam Kadmon, synonym to the primordial man (son of God) in a very biblical fashion; just upside down. We follow him through his spiritual decadence, Eden exile and his moral downfall to Earth; where he becomes victim of his own delusion that he could change the world. Through this allegory, Manson retrospectively reflects his own journey to stardom and disappointment with his own messianic complex. In order to understand the context of the story better, it's good to know that *Holy Wood* concept is directly inspired by Manson's "scapegoating" story. In 1999, he was blamed for school shooting that occurred in Columbine and got witch-hunted by Christian and right-wing activists. He became victim of his own creation, his Marilyn Manson persona which represented everything America was afraid at a time. He became an anti-hero he so cynically mocked in his earlier works. "Life started to imitate art; I was writing the future". The representation of Marilyn Manson in media was ambiguous as his pseudonym; being both glorified for his smart and realistic statements and questions, and on the other side, being represented as inhuman satanic clown that brings the apocalypse to the frenetic fin-du-siècle USA.

Second trilogy part, *LP Mechanical Animals* (1998), supposed to be a sequel to *Antichrist Superstar*, but it ended up as a prequel. This Bowiesque piece is intentional retell of Ziggy Stardust story, this time in 90's digitalized UFO-crazed America. For this LP, Manson adopted glam rock androgynous appearance. Even music went fully 70s Bowie, full of melodies and lush soundscapes. Marilyn Manson embodies the sexless gray alien Omega who falls down to Earth somewhere in Californian desert and immediately caught attention of the "beautiful people" (term that Manson used to Hollywood elite and showbiz corporate moguls). Omega soon becomes a best-selling rock star with his band *Mechanical Animals*. LP is a two part-story, symbolically named Alpha and Omega. Alpha and Omega are supposed to represent two parts of personality, hero and shadow archetype. Alpha character is represented as hero, with human compassion and belief that his songs can change the world for the better. It is an allegory for the alienated man who gets in contact with his human side and emotions, and it's characterized with optimism, hope, but also melancholy and disappointment. Alpha songs are mostly about alienation, *weltschmerz*, love and betrayal. In Jungian terms, Alpha could easily

be categorized as Anima, due to its fragility and sensitive personality dominated by emotions and empathy; *ingénue*. Alpha songs perfectly describe the state of a human soul in the dawn of the 21st century technocratic America. Careerwise, these songs are often considered to be Manson's emotionally rawest and sincerest in his opus. On the other side of the LP, we follow Omega, representation of nihilistic, superficial, and disposable rock star persona which glorifies death, drugs, profanity and moral decay; typical representation of hero's shadow. Both characters can be also described as trickster figures, due to very subtle sarcasm effect and cynical play on words that resonate throughout songs and lyrics. The music and its aesthetic are sometimes intentionally too plastic and "fake", in order to reinforce feelings of shallowness and disposability of pop culture. The greatest example is one of LP's singles like The Dope Show which is ironic spin on Hollywood's drug culture and glorification of fame. The element of the fool archetype is strong in this one especially because Omega is not aware that he is just a disposable material; but rather dreams about changing the world for the better.

To deepen our insight in this cryptic yet self-revealing rock opera, we should examine used imagery and their origins. Lightning bolt is a sign that was previously used by Bowie on his Aladdin Sane cover. Intentionally or not, it probably represents Heyoka archetype (court jester, joker). (Os Uma, 2017) Heyoka archetype is represented similarly in different cultures and mythologies; it is a sacred clown who makes fool of himself in order to heal his tribe and to teach them through jokes, paradoxical scenes, and deeds. In Balkans tradition, story of Antun Tun is best equivalent to Heyoka. In Commedia del'Arte, Pierott character fits Heyoka description perfectly. As an artist, Manson was fully aware of his modus operandi which is perfectly concise in one of his interviews. He said he mocks gimmickry by gimmickry (5), and that perfectly fits to the lightning bolt symbolism.

For his Antichrist Superstar tour, Manson was also mocking fascism and preaching. He equates Hitler with priests as he preaches on altar-like podium against Christianity and fascism of beauty. He combines Morrison's insane theater, Bowie's chameleonism and Dali's shock in such a manner you can never be sure; is he just vain pretender and unoriginal performer, or further extension of their ideas?

It's interesting to see how Manson borrows verses and plays on words in order to intensify feelings of alienation and misanthropy. One of the best examples is on song Disposable Teens, where he plays on word with Lennon's famous Revolution 1 refrain, from Beatles' White Album.

Conclusion

His main resource of inspiration was American culture since 60's towards the millennial bug. Picking pseudonym as two most famous personalities, sex symbol actress Monroe and serial killer Manson tell a lot about artists fascination with American system of values. As a journalist himself, Marilyn Manson knew very well how victimization and spectacle was one of media's most powerful weapons, and he exhibited those mechanism very clearly through his parody. Here we come back to the basics of what rock music used to represent within nation. It represented rebellion, independence, freedom of speech and expression of the masses. Rock poetry represents danger because it can, just like Hitler's speeches, delude masses as much as it can make people free. It's not just about music nowadays. Music is just one of the layers that approves the context, rather than the essence. That is postmodernism, when music becomes politically active, when it becomes visible and merely a decoration that follows ideologies and states of mind. To me, these three LPs are more like a multimedia novel or poetry puzzle game rather than music albums. It seems like LP's content continually rewrites itself for the sake of biting its own tail. In other words, what excites me about postmodernism is that there is no end in reinventing the un-existent truth. Disappearance of clear boundaries between subject and object, between spectator and the spectated, is very well defined in one of the verses from song Man That You Fear, that captures the post-postmodern zeitgeist very well:

"We're on the other side, the screen is us and we're T.V."

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