

## Metaphysical Meanings and Archetypal Romanian Symbols in Today's Romanian Music

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**Abstract:** Late 20<sup>th</sup>-century Romanian composition stood out, above all, by its ability to open itself to novelty and experiment, and virtually align itself with everything that Western Europe considered to be an avant-garde artistic movement at that time. However, as time has shown, this “synchrony” – which is sometimes translated by the terms of the binomial “national-universal” or, more precisely, “local-global” – happened somewhat selectively, avoiding the excesses and the extremes specific to the radical-nihilistic attitude present in other contemporary music cultures. One of the “keys” of this reconciliation strategy brings to the fore the Romanian composers’ preference for the great philosophical themes of our traditional culture, imbued with the metaphysical meanings and archetypal symbols delivered by myths and legends that have turned into veritable universals. **Liviu Glodeanu** and **Sigismund Toduță** are (only) two of the creators who leaned with undisguised passion on various Romanian myths that they masterfully integrated into two extremely valuable opera. The former dedicated himself to the pre-Christian age and elevated the pagan rituals revolving around **Zamolxis** – the feared god of our ancestors, the Dacians – to the rank of an emblematic vision. The latter resized the dimensions of the myth of the ultimate sacrifice, masoning oneself in stone in order to build the temple of God – the church, as **Master Manole** represents – along with the ballad of Miorița – one of the founding legends of the Romanian people’s spiritual identity. In our approach, we will show some of the conceptual and language foundations of the aforementioned works.

Key-words: archetypal symbols, myth, pagan rituals, contemporary languages, poetic drama

### 1. Introduction

Late 20<sup>th</sup>-century Romanian composition stood out, above all, by its ability to open itself to novelty and experiment, and virtually align itself with everything that Western Europe considered to be an avant-garde artistic movement at that time. However, as time has shown, this “synchrony” – which is sometimes translated by the terms of the binomial “national-universal” or, more precisely, “local-global” –

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## 2. The conceptual and language foundations in the works *Master Manole* (Sigismund Toduță) and *Zamolxe* (Liviu Glodeanu)

### 2.1. Opera-oratorio *Master Manole* by Sigismund Toduță

Before discussing some of the conceptual and language foundations of the aforementioned works, the strategic importance of two common sources, or starting points, must also be emphasized: their common playwright – **Lucian Blaga**; and their common genre – **poetic drama**.

As Tatiana Oltean emphasized, “poetic drama invites reflection, necessarily involves existential and ontological meditation, and cultivates ambiguity, suggestion, allusion. This very fact brings poetry very close to drama and gives to this genre the somewhat unrealistic nature of complex theatrical imagery. In this context, meditative-philosophical monologue is given a very important place and extent in interwar drama – not only in monodrama, but also in drama. The great monologues of the main characters in the plays *Zamolxis* and *Master Manole* by Lucian Blaga, along with the monodrama works by Marin Sorescu, play an essential role in this respect” (Oltean 2012, 118-119).

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuing throughout the 20th century, the theme/myth of **sacrifice for creation** fascinated to the point of obsession several generations of Romanian composers. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the myth of *Master Manole* attracted George Enescu’s attention too, and for a long time. While searching feverishly for a topic for his opera – which, ultimately, led

him to stop on the myth of *Oedipus* –, the composer also tried this perspective, which was undermined, it seems, by the lack of an adequate libretto.

Like in the Romanian folk legend, the opera-oratorio *Master Manole* by Sigismund Toduță was, for its author, a long and arduous process of construction/re-construction. The two versions elaborated a very long time apart from each other are a testament to that, as the comparative study elaborated by the Cluj-based composer Dan Voiculescu clearly shows (Voiculescu 2004, 82-84).

“I fell into the Lancrăm’s poet magic circle – Sigismund Toduță confessed on the occasion of the work’s first absolute audition in Cluj, on October 1, 1985. Like the masons in the *Master Manole* drama, fascinated by the ‘unique appearance of the place’, I also uttered, along with them, the words: ‘Master, we are coming!’. But, unlike the masons gathered to build a church ‘from earth and water, from light and wind’, I have been dwelling in Blaga’s magic circle, masoning not for seven years, but for six times seven years, trying to understand the meaning of the words, the point of the thoughts, the depth of the symbol and the charm of the metaphor. And from the symbol of the passion grafted into the soul, from the passion of building that he sings with incomparable mastery in the drama *Master Manole*, I also asked, together with the poet: ‘For what unknown fault was I punished with the longing to create beauty?, and stayed close to this unique subject for half a century’ (Țăranu 2004, 73).

Instead of recreating the epic thread of this well-known folk legend, we preferred a brief presentation of Blaga’s characters, in an attempt to capture their characterological essence and their way of interacting within the symbolic-philosophical texture of the drama.

**Manole** is a “chosen one”, called to reconstruct, to relive on a human scale the drama of creation and the Creator. He receives the mission to build a church, but not in any way: in order to erect it he must pay the price of sacrificing his most beloved creature – his wife, Mira. Thus, **life** and **creation** – positioned antithetically – exhaust him, sacrificing *the other* consumes him, the work of art swallows him completely, annihilating him on an existential level. In the end, he becomes a shadow of what he used to be, and ends up talking about himself in the third person, meeting, at another, virtual level, the Blagian idea formulated by the poet-philosopher in his *Trilogy of Culture*: “a creation passes over lives and often devastates even its creator”.

Like Ana – the protagonist in the folk ballad –, **Mira** is the embodiment of innocence, joy and play – characteristics that bring her closer to the sublime and transcendence. Mira is sacrifice, an offering brought to Creation, a condition of foundation and perpetuity. She enters the sacrificial “hora” prepared by Manole like in a ritual of love and faith, humility and prayer, with human fear, with human

pain. But Mira disappears beyond the walls enveloped in the “smooth light” coming from Above.

**Bogumil** emerges as a symbolic, significantly antinomian (opposable), character whose purpose is to keep the balance in the relationship between man and the sacred. He is the defender of dogma and the protector of the divine will, rejecting vehemently all human sacrifice, the offering proposed by Manole as the final solution: Bogumil is the voice of thunder that apocalyptically invokes the sixth commandment: “It was once engraved in stone: you shall not kill! And, ever since, no other flash of lightning has struck to erase the commandments”.

**Găman** is a mysterious being, maybe even weird, cumbersome, repulsive and, therefore, not very desirable. His atypical personality recommends him as the possessor of unusual powers, such as his intuitive perception of the secrets of nature and, above all, his premonition about Mira’s sacrifice.

**The craftsmen, and other characters** who gravitate around Manole, are not necessarily secondary characters. They are external projections of the Great Master who, by their ability to reflect, their attitude and (partially) their actions, shape Manole’s decisions, either at a cognitive level – probing for deep knowledge of the world’s secrets – or at a pragmatic level – making the decision of continuing the construction at any cost (before the solution of the sacrifice can even be envisaged). Thus, the Masters, for example, become an *alter ego* of Manole, who “infects” them with his passion, chaining them to his own destiny.

Completed in 1983 (this is the second version of the work), the oratorio *Master Manole* is a **synthesis** of Toduță’s language, a **corollary** of his compositional experience which showcases his entire arsenal of means of expression and compositional techniques painstakingly polished by the many decades he spent lingering over the musical score.

Structured in three acts, the work is based on a dichotomous principle of succession/advancement, alternating different opposing couples, such as: dynamic-static (acts I and III vs. act II), diatonic-chromatic, homophonic-polyphonic, isorhythmic-polyrhythmic, singing-speaking, etc.

As a matter of fact, in a more general sense, the entire language used in *Master Manole* results from the **fusion** of apparently disparate phenomena, which have manifested themselves throughout history with strong stylistic autonomy: Neo-Renaissance imitative polyphony and Neo-Baroque-styled variations on *basso ostinato* (the *Passacaglia* in Act II); folk music sonorities and Byzantine melos (the protipokeon girls’ choir in the two versions of act I, and in act III, respectively); modern composition techniques (heterophony, chromatic *clusters*, etc.).

Conceived as an opera-oratorio, the monumental work of the master from Cluj is a demonstration of the durability of the multi-centennial confluence between two

genres launched and intensely cultivated during the musical Baroque, the resulting mixture being essentially defined by the overwhelming weight held by the **choir**, and by the multifunctional nature of this ensemble of historical prestige. Yet, no matter how important, general arguments become secondary when compared to those supported by Toduță's vast choral repertoire; throughout his entire life, the composer's artistry was intertwined with his passion for the unique sonorities of the human voice. This explains the diversity roles played by the choral ensemble in the opera: from **character** to **commentary**, from **atmosphere** to **evocation**, etc.

A first edifying example in this respect illustrates the heavy, two-faced atmosphere of struggle between duty and guilt engendered by the decision to sacrifice Mira. It is rendered through a prolonged wail, dispersed, in a pointillist manner, in a multivocal *stretto*, which in turn extends into an increasingly pronounced and nuanced *lamento*; the whole build-up unfolds against an obsessive and accusatory sound background (see **Fig. 1** S. Toduță, *Master Manole*, Act II, pp. 136-145).

The second example focuses on the amplified (*divisi*) choral apparatus and is related to the actual action of "masonry". The musical moment stands out by the simultaneous combination of two opposite types of sound emission, which, in reality, are nothing but two distinct ways of expressing one and the same state. Thus, some voices proceed to the rhythmic pronunciation of the text, while the remaining voices have precisely determined intonation paths. The fragment is also edifying by its generalized rhythmic *ostinato* (unique formula), a phenomenon that gives special dynamism and tension to the section as a whole (see **Fig. 2** S. Toduță, *Master Manole*, Act III, pp 175-189).

The last example showcases not only the diversity of the sources of expression present in Toduță's creation, in general, and in the work *Master Manole*, in particular, but also the composer's choral mastery when it came to capitalizing on Byzantine monodic sources. From the amplitude of the (often double!) mixed choir, we descend into the fragility and refinement of the girls' choir, which sings, in the original language, the monody of the *Protepokeon* – an offering to innocence and human sacrifice for the majesty and eternity of Creation (see **Fig. 3** S. Toduță, *Master Manole*, Act III, p. 214).

## 2.2. The opera *Zamolxis* by Liviu Glodeanu

The opera *Zamolxis* by Liviu Glodeanu – with a libretto by the composer based on Lucian Blaga's homonymous 3-act drama – is conceived as a suite of five "tableaux", each bearing a suggestive title: 1. *Pagan ritual*; 2. *Exhortation*; 3. *Opprobrium*; 4. *Conjuration*; 5. *Ritual for Zamolxis*. The work was designed with a two-fold purpose, i.e., to be performed on both the stage and the radio, and

is also part of a modular or mosaic-like concept, with fixed or closed numbers, in a cyclic arrangement. The contribution of the vocals, and of the choir in particular, places this music in the sphere of the opera-oratorio genre, which results in a series of affinities with Toduță's dramatic vision in *Master Manole*.

In order to elaborate and exemplify this – outside a comparative analysis per se – let us emphasize that Liviu Glodeanu's operatic vision is dominated by a two-faceted type of vocality: **singing** and **speaking**.

In this respect, free declamation, like the *sprechgesang* technique, monopolizes entire acts. Assigned to the soloists (the Magus, Zamolxis), this theatrical manner of speaking establishes (or substitutes) the idea of a reflexive-philosophical monologue, which involves the "freezing" of any movement or stage action. Hence, the (willfully) static nature of Acts II and IV.

Complementary to free declamation, rhythmic uttering – rigorously controlled horizontally and vertically – is entrusted to the choir, the collective character in the work.

The general sonority of the work gravitates around austere intonations, and a rough, statuary (sculptural) modalism, without any explicit folk music references or referentiality. This makes us think that Glodeanu's fundamental concern was to recreate the atmosphere and spirit of the myth in the sense of Blaga's "pagan mystery" (see the subtitle of the homonymous work by the Transylvanian poet and philosopher), to establish an archetypal connection with the deepest layers of the Romanian culture and spirituality.

The musical language in *Zamolxis* does not stand out in relation to the stylistic matrix defined and preserved/perpetuated by Liviu Glodeanu throughout his short but prolific creative life. It involves a certain rhythmic incisiveness, a certain "cut" of the line similar to a decoupage or carving into a hard material from which, after removing the surplus (as Michelangelo said), only the vitalizing essence of the work remains. These compositional concepts are supplemented by a quasi-neutral timbrality, segregated ("black and white"), established at the level of the alternative compaction of brass and percussion instruments. This monolithic consistency of pure (unmixed) timbres gives to the aforementioned instrumental compartments the dramaturgical functionality of actual collective characters.

However, there are also distinctly contrasting oases, breaks in the dramaturgical flow made up of extreme rarefaction. This is what happens with the sound projections of two antagonistic, conflicting entities: one selfish and schismatic-solitary (the Magus); the other, on the contrary, altruistic and prophetic-solidary (Zamolxis).

The **characters** in the opera may be divided into two categories: **individual** characters – *Zamolxis* (light baritone); The Magus (bass baritone) and **collective** characters – the Priestesses (sextet of equal voices: 2 sopranos, 2 mezzo-sopranos, 2 altos) and the Mixed Choir (12 voices – 3 sopranos, 3 altos, 3 tenors and 3 basses).

#### **Tableau 1 – Pagan ritual**

The Temple of the Magus is filled with a crowd that participates in the ceremony meant to evoke the myth of creation embodied by the unique and all-powerful god Gebeleizis. Overwhelmed by the ecstasy of prostration, people do not understand that the mask of incantation hides forms of fanaticism designed to maintain their blind trust in the word of the Magus and the priestesses. Maintaining this state of affairs is the premise from which mass manipulation will start, as harmful as necessary in the subsequent stimulation of extreme attitudes, such as the torture and even public execution of the prophet *Zamolxis*.

The music evokes the psychological abyss of the participants in the pagan ritual: all kinds of shrills and rhythm breaks, brass and percussion, sudden agglomerations and rarefactions, sonorities of a global effect, with “faceless” details symbolizing the loss of any individuality or identity in the amorphous structure of the mass (see **Fig. 4** L. Glodeanu, *Zamolxis*, Act I, pp. 3-4).

#### **Tableau II – Exhortation**

For Blaga, monologue is “the element of an existential ritual or the sacralization of life, /.../ that inner murmur that devours the exceptional hero /.../ moving the weight and meaning of existence inside, in the mind and the soul, where personality is formed and destiny is triggered” (Modola 2003, 47). In complete conceptual resonance with the author of the drama, the appearance of *Zamolxis* is announced by Liviu Glodeanu through a monologue in which the new prophet laments his loneliness and austere condition. He is the herald of a new religion and, in order to make himself understood, he chooses to speak to people in simple words about the true meaning of nature, about the true “becoming into being”. Gradually, *Zamolxis* is surrounded by a crowd that begins to take over his teachings, likened to a “pure tear of light”. Therefore, the adherence of the many begins to take the form of new invocations related to the land, ancestors, etc.

The voice-harp timbral binomial is one of the most ingenious timbral solutions in the entire work. The symbolic charge evoking time immemorial, the simplicity and austerity of expression, the neutrality of the harp's intonation, which intertwines with the declamatory rhetoric of the baritone soloist, generate a sonority that is extremely and uniquely suggestive. (see **Fig. 5** L. Glodeanu, *Zamolxis*, Act II, p. 25)

### **Tableau III – *Opprobrium***

Zamolxis' beneficent and compelling presence could not escape the watchful eye of The Magus. He will later use his full evil force against the prophet, who was already a real threat, and will sneak his instigators into the crowd to mock his teachings. Manipulation will achieve its intended effect: when the provocateurs shout that the people have let themselves be guided by the "teachings of a blind man", the crowd becomes menacing, demanding the imminent execution of Zamolxis: "Let's make him blind like his god, maybe then we'll believe him". The prophet, however, remains calm, meditative, admonishing people for having been enslaved by fantasies, refusing wisdom and sacrificing – out of fear, and cowardice – their desire for the transcendental.

Once more, the opera's score brings to the fore the harshness of brass and percussion instruments. This time the sonority weaves a spatio-temporal continuum through the polyphony of attacks (brass) and rhythmic *ostinato* (membranophones), a controlled chaos symbolizing the darkness of a collective psychology ready for torture and murder (see **Fig. 6** L. Glodeanu, *Zamolxis*, Act III, pp. 29-30).

### **Tableau IV – *Conjuration***

"In Blagian dramas /.../ the main dynamizer of the action is the continuous alternation between the static and the dynamic, between monologues and group scenes, also doubled by the continuous oscillation between the anticipation of certain situations (images with anticipatory content) and, to compensate, retarding situation, which sometimes appear right around the denouement" (Oltean 2012, 124).

Recalling what happened, The Magus suggests deep concern for the danger that Zamolxis, although missing for seven years, still seemed to represent.

"A prophet is nothing, but a wounded prophet is a lot" – this is the obsessive truth that The Magus fears, foreseeing, in the gloomy prospect of Zamolxis' return, the possible destruction of the temple and the gods he serves. Finding that, despite

all the efforts to discredit his teachings, the “absent presence” of Zamolxis is constantly increasing, The Magus comes up with the idea of divinizing the prophet by erecting a statue to stand in the Temple next to the other gods. “When there is no power left to break the teachings of a new prophet, only one thing is stronger than the prophet: his statue” (see **Fig. 7** L. Glodeanu, *Zamolxis*, Act IV, pp. 45-46).

### **Tableau V – Ritual for Zamolxis**

The end of the work is full of paradoxes, unexpected twists and turns. The Magus creates the diversion of officiating the ritual of worship of the supreme deity by replacing Gebeleizis with Zamolxis-the god. It is a way of withdrawing Zamolxis from the reality of being in order to project him into a lifeless, meaningless abstraction. As a matter of fact, the crowd does not even recognize their prophet when he returns among them; upon the Magus' request, people's veneration was now directed only towards a lifeless stone statue. “They would like to raise me to heaven but without my teaching”. Understanding the meaning of the manipulation contrived by The Magus, who convinced his subjects of the existence of a new idol, Zamolxis smashes the statue erected in his honour, attracting, along with the crowd's fury, his own death sentence.

Music recalls the beginning, reconstructs the primary impulse and transforms it into a rhetorical reference for the final peroration. A mosaic of structures with a defined semantic imprint, fragments of stylemes associated with unmistakable contexts stored in the collective memory, paradoxes, pseudo-reconciliation duplicity, all in a complex collage of sonorities that travel in the opposite direction, from affirmation to extinction (see **Fig. 8** L. Glodeanu, *Zamolxis*, Act V, p. 5).

### **3. Conclusions**

Myths and legends have always fascinated the creators of beauty. Composers, painters, sculptors, choreographers have re-read and reinterpreted millennia-old stories, discovering, each time, previously unexplored dimensions, archetypal symbols loaded with new messages to contemporaneity. The works presented in this study are two embodiments of the polysemic reception of the Romanian archaic world, and the Blaga-Toduță-Glodeanu triumvirate gives a genuine aura of universality to the themes addressed.

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The image shows a handwritten musical score for the opera 'Master Manole' by Sigismund Toduță, Act II, page 137. The score is written in 8/8 time and includes vocal parts for Tenor 1 (T1), Tenor 2 (T2), Bass 1 (B1), and Bass 2 (B2), as well as piano accompaniment for piano (p) and rhythm (rhythm). The lyrics are in Romanian: 'Va sta dreap-tă, va sta dreap-tă, va sta dreap-tă, va sta dreap-tă'. The score is marked with 'p' for piano and 'rhythm' for the piano accompaniment. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 1. Sigismund Toduță – *Master Manole*, Act II, p. 137

12  
B

Parlando, rumoroso

S  
Zăvăliți tencu-iala pe capse și os, închidem via-ta în zidul de

A  
Parlando, rumoroso  
Zăvăliți tencu-iala pe capse și os, închidem via-ta în zidul de jos, în-  
Quasi parlando

T  
să închidem via-ta în zidul de jos, să-u-  
Quasi parlando

Ca  
să închidem via-ta în zidul de jos, să-u-  
Quasi parlando

B1  
Zăvăliți tencu-iala pe capse și os, închidem via-ta în zidul de jos, în zidul de

B2  
Zăvăliți tencu-iala pe capse și os închidem via-ta în zidul de jos, de

Pian

Fig. 2. Sigismund Toduță – *Master Manole*, Act III, p. 176

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Act III, page 214 of 'Master Manole' by Sigismund Toduță. The score is written on multiple staves and includes the following elements:

- Top Staff:** Labeled 'Toaca', it begins with a circled number '77' and the instruction 'Andante'. The melody is marked with dynamics *fp*, *pacop*, and *mf*. The lyrics 'para a para mura mendo' are written above the notes.
- Middle Section:** Features a 'Tromba' part with dynamics *mf* and *pacop*, and a 'Toaca' part with dynamics *pacop* and *mf*. There are also markings for 'Piatto scarp. mf' and 'Tambur mf'.
- Bottom Section:** Includes parts for 'Tambur', 'Toaca', 'Piatto', 'Tambur', 'Camp', and 'Song'. The 'Toaca' part is marked *f*, and the 'Song' part is marked *pacop*.

Fig. 3. Sigismund Toduță – *Master Manole*, Act III, p. 214





Musical score for Act III, page 30 of *Zamolxis* by Liviu Glodeanu. The score is divided into three systems. The first system includes Cor (Coro), Trp. (Trumpet), Tbn. (Tuba), and Tuba. The second system includes Cor., Trp., Tbn., Tuba, Bongos, T. tom, Mar., and Gr. c. The third system includes Ob., Cingl., Fg., Cfg., Bongos, T. tom, Mar., Gr. c., Bass, and Vln. The score features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings such as *sfz* and *sf*. At the bottom of the third system, there is a vocal line with the lyrics: "tutti sul ponticello" and "Ne po-ut-a-ri-tes- te in- ve- te- re- ce a- noi era".

Fig. 6. Liviu Glodeanu – *Zamolxis*, Act III, p. 30

de cînd am în-dîrjit mușt-mea sînt a-fun-ge. A-mă-ră-dă-n-tre-bîci mi-e i - ni - ma căci un pro-fet nu e ni-mic,

dar un pro-fet la-vit e mult. Na-mu-ri-ta-ri-lor, vă svîc-tă ne-cra-dîr-fo. De ni-că-eri nu vă mi-jîc-te mi-hi-ru-

i-rea? Za-dar-nic săi m-am sîrco-țit a - fi - țian ne-o-dîh-nă. Răs-pun-sul nu mi-l-au dat nici ta-bla-le în-țe-lp-ciu-nii ne-șre a-du-se

prin ve-chi-le a-ge-ge. El nu s-a-n-tor-și-to-tuși a-i-oi. El nu da-ba-ră ze-i pen-tru Dr-bul sdu.

Ze - ii pen-tru or-bul sdu. Dar, Oh, ce gînd... Ce-erfi s-a-ve-m un zeu mai mult în pri-mi-to-rul nos-tru

tan-plu. Să ră-pă-dim po-ve-șta în pa-por că Ze-mă-se e fost un zeu el în-șuși? O cur-să vred-ni-că de is-te-

fi-măe u-nu mag. Da-mă-năi di-vi-ni-sînd pe Ze-mă-se îi vor u-la în-vă-lă-tu-rr. Ze-mă-se n-o fost om

Fig. 7. Liviu Glodeanu – Zamolxis, Act IV, p. 46

65

Tr. *Si una tristă da vi-va-mă. Pe lângă de trecut. Și una prăvit cu ochi strălăciți. Da - în - nă - vi - ță. Mă - în - cea - ra - rii - gli - e.* *f* *Rit.*

Vni I 7-4  
9-10  
11-16  
1-2  
3-4  
5-6  
7-8

Vni II 6-4  
7-8  
9-10  
1-2  
3-4  
5-6  
7-8

Vlc. 1-2  
3-4

Vic. 5-6  
Cb.

70

Z. *ne - te - le - în - da - bu - cu - ri - e - ar - una - să - mă - ri - de - ce - n - ce - de - Dă - na - și - tu - în - mea.* *f* *p* *f* *Magul* *f* *Zamolxis, te coveștii*

(Magul îl observă, se apropie de el, perit,  
în timp ce mulțimea continuă să cânte.)

Vni I 7-4  
9-10  
11-16  
1-2  
3-4  
5-6  
7-8

Vni II 5-6  
7-8  
9-10  
1-2  
3-4  
5-6  
7-8

Vlc. 1-2  
3-4

Vic. 5-6  
Cb. 1-2  
3-4

66

Fig. 8. Liviu Glodeanu – Zamolxis, Act V, p. 56