

THE VOCAL SCORE IN THE OPERA *THE LYING WOLF* BY ZLATA TCACH

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SUMMARY. This study aims at emphasizing the composer's ability to attain a musical construction for each of the opera's characters.

We will notice that, in this opera, Zlata Tkach (also spelled "Tcaci") uses both traditional, formal structures, such as the *aria*, *arioso*, as well as less traditional ones – the *song*, using, in all of them, three facets of the relation between text and melody, starting with the prevalence of the text, often shifting to a primordially of the melody, but still inclining, most of the time, toward an equivalence between the text and its musical pillar. As regards the makeup of the musical discourse, the author proceeds in a detailed manner, with each role, and the melodic ideas that she constructs are subjected to a unitary, evolving vision.

Keywords: Bessarabian opera, Zlata Tcach, *The Lying Wolf*, Bessarabian composer, musical theatre for children.

Introduction

In the Bessarabian musical works of the second half of the 20th century, the beginnings of musical theatre for children are linked with the opera "*The Lying Wolf*" of female composer Zlata Tkach – an opera for vocal soloists and orchestra (initially, the opera had been named "*The Goat With Three Kids*" in the first two releases from 1967, 1977; it was only on the third release that the author changed the title into "*The Lying Wolf*", in 1983).

The opera "*The Lying Wolf*" represents a pioneering work for the Bessarabian stage.²

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² The fairy-opera „*The Magic Bird*” (Romanian: *Pasărea măiastră*) or „*Prince Ionel and the Fairy Wolf*” was written in 1926 by E. Coca, and it was mounted on the stage of the amateurs' theatre in Chisinau (1926).

The acknowledgement of this new genre of the lyrical stage is owed to the significant changes that occurred within the language of sound, to the profound and serious manner of tackling the libretto, as well as to the complete unity that took birth between the literary and musical expression. In this regard, a remarkable contribution is owed to the variety of means of expression – from the beauty and suggestiveness of the melodic lines and the plasticity of the harmonic language, up to the sonorous image created by the various timbre combinations.

Starting with this opera, the creation of musical theatre for children has been enriching its repertoire with a considerable number of operas. The composer tackles both pages from the domestic literature, as well as from the universal one and the musical side is in full consistency with the specifics of these sources, sometimes counterbalancing the characteristics of the libretto. Given this context, the works that follow the development of a Romanian traditional fairy-tale have a special place, as the specificity of the style reflects into the musical edifice, into the tackling of the sound material.

Why has the composer chosen the children's world, the world of fairy tales? Perhaps, just as Pascal Benteoiu says, the musician is constantly seeking to know their own inner image and the value of their creation can be determined and defined depending on the way in which this full awareness of the inner self is transmitted into and through the work of art: "the artist seems to be permanently observing their inner world, an extremely complex universe, irreducible to a simple game of intelligence and – in its essence – rigorously contemporary".³ Hence, we can notice here the preoccupation of the artist to put their opera in agreement with their inner self, in its entirety.

The author's keenness towards children's universe has been facilitated, as expected, by the world of fairy tales, metaphors and hyperbolas, by that specific method of transfiguring and elevating the day-to-day reality. And, as H.C. Andersen said, "the power to defeat any hardship lies in the heart of children", we will hence understand that Tkach's works are dedicated to them, awakening "the kingdom of dreams and eternal youth".

The fortunate association of Tkach's music with the fairy-tale of the Moldavian writer Ion Creangă has resulted in an artistic act – the opera "*The Lying Wolf*" (an opera in two acts and six scenes). Based on Ion Creangă's fairy-tale, a unique, rhythmic and rhymed dramaturgy was created. If we refer to a syncretic genre as opera is, it is impossible to underrate the role of the literary text, its meanings and, hence, the libretto. With this librettist (Grigore Vieru), the story line of the fairy-tale is ramified and arborescent, having new characters and epic events that we do not encounter in Creangă's work.

³ Benteoiu, Pascal, *Image and Meaning*, "Editura Muzicală" Publishing House, Bucharest, 1973.

Unlike the fairy-tale, the opera ends happily, as any children's story, to everybody's delight.

Out of the need to have a certain dramaturgy, subjected to self-imposed standards of cohesion and coherence, the composer has adapted the script in accordance with compositional and stage requirements. Zlata Tkach has set out to create a sonorous universe of maximum coherence, suitable for a children's show, through the clarity and simplicity of the means employed.

From a musical standpoint, the opera focuses on the folkloric ethos, on authentic melodies or on new themes, based on folkloric features (in the spirit of children's folklore), and with the purpose of providing the sound edifice with the accessibility imposed by a work for children. The music, through the suggestiveness of the means of expression, has managed to render, unexpectedly, yet truthfully, the atmosphere and characteristics of this universe.

The vocal score

The libretto narrates events which are more or less likely, in which it is not the development of the action that is the most important, but, rather, the portrayal of the human relations, of the gestures and psychological reactions, as well as the reproduction of people's manner of speaking. The characters are depicted while performing the most characteristic movements of their occupations and this enhances the realism of the human appearance: the goat acts as a hardworking peasant woman, etc.; we can perceive the goat's motherly love, the brotherly care shown by the youngest of the goat's kids, as well as the godfather's hypocrisy. It is a fairy-tale with and about animals, yet, in fact, it is a profound story about certain human interactions.

Beginning with the melodic material used here, we can notice it is anchored in the spirit and specificity of folkloric music (children's folklore); out of this richness, the author has created a variety of themes meant to sustain the various dramatic situations.

The characterization of the characters is of continual interest to the composer, beginning with the distribution of the roles.

We can notice here a set of both positive and negative heroes; hence, we can detect the antagonism between the principle of light and darkness – *the cosmic dualism* – and a genuine cult for light.

In this opera, Zlata Tkach uses traditional, formal structures, such as the *aria* and *arioso*, but also less traditional ones – the *song*, using, in all of them, three facets of the relation between text and melody, starting with the prevalence of the text, often shifting to a primordially of the melody, but

still inclining, most of the time, toward an equivalence between the text and its musical pillar. This becomes increasingly evident as the initial characteristics of each role change, depending on the heroes' musical thinking and feelings, throughout the gradual elaboration of the libretto and score.

When creating the musical discourse, the author proceeds in a nuanced manner, in keeping with each role. The nuances depend on the nature of the poetical declamation and of the musical intonation, rhetorically speaking; on the metonymies of poetically combined contiguities and the metaphors of musically selected combinations.

The ensemble of these rhetoric-musical figures can be defined, according to N. Harnoncourt⁴, as *Klangrede* ("sound speech"), specifically as speaking which is musically embellished.

Being subjected to a unitary, evolving vision, the melodic ideas that the composer builds stand out through their incisiveness, through the concise profiles which, often, are reduced to *motif*-type structures (with a low range), also using the principle of the scale degree (chord) which is reiterated as melodic centre.

We will never encounter passages of decorative virtuosity in which the elements of pure technique may subdue or overshadow the singable, warm melodies, of profound lyricism. In this regard, everything starts from and returns to the character's intense inner feelings.

It's important to mention that "in this opera, the orchestra is intended to illustrate the various moments of the dramatic development, in a suggestive manner. It acquires major functions in the channelling of the musical course, in leading the ascending arch of the discourse, creating a unity in movement of the entire edifice, emphasizing or obscuring the various melodic profiles, depending on the context"⁵. About vocal part, Zlata Tkach uses the vocal registers with great skill. In the vocal trajectories, there are present various intervallic leaps (most of them spanning a low vocal range, specific to the children's folklore), as well as a singable melodicity.

The melodies are specifically folkloric, even modal, which is characteristic to the folk culture. The opera does not comprise melodies based on the extreme vocal registers.

The intervallic strategy has a special role in the structuring of the sound material.

⁴ Harnoncourt, N., *The Musical Discourse (French: Le discours musical - Pour une nouvelle conception de la musique)* (Translated from German by Dennis Collins), Editions Gallimard, 1984, for the French translation.

⁵ Gutanu, Luminita, The orchestral score in the Opera *The Lying Wolf* by Zlata Tkach, Bulletin of the *Transilvania University of Braşov*, Series VIII: Art • Sport • Vol. 7 (56) No. 2 – 2014.

To the composer, the musical interval is a way of emphasizing a psychological state: the ratio between intervallic leap and gradual progression as a necessary artifice for tension release, as well as the way in which they are employed are part of the same logic of psychological-functional detachment. In fact, each interval bears a semantic significance.

The composer is deeply „rooted“in the universe of each character, portraying them through specific leitmotifs, which are perfectly constructed and connected to their character.

The technique of leitmotifs is used to some degree in this work; hence, ever since the first pages, we can find melodic fragments that would later on shape the characters.

The leitmotifs mark the appearance of each character or the important moments around which the action proper is unfolding.

Tkach provides her characters with a melodic configuration, portraying them from a sonorous standpoint, thus signalling the presence of that particular character throughout the action. Each thematic line is profoundly delineated, each phrase is intensified, and, overall, the work appears to the listener as a harmoniously built composition, with a logic development. The characters are characterized musically through specific means, namely through the presence of dissonances in the portrayal of the negative characters and through their absence, in the characterization of the positive ones. For the latter Tkach uses folk-rooted melodies.

Each character is attributed their own instrumental leitmotiv, except for the Goat's one, from the vocal score. The baby goats have leitmotifs with a more dynamic rhythm, whereas the bear has a steadier, rhythmic one.

If we consider the classification of Hans von Wolzogen⁶, we will notice the existence of the following families of motifs, in this opera:

- *motifs that signify the future*, signalling the moment which is about to unfold, in the development of the drama (the wolf's leitmotiv) or the entrance of a character;
- *simultaneous motifs*, which express the events through music and text, at the same time (the bear's leitmotiv);
- *motifs of the past*, which remind one of an already viewed scene (the Goat's leitmotiv – her song).

Considering the role of leitmotifs in the musical texture, we can notice the presence of *static leitmotifs*, according to musicologist Octavian Lazăr Cosma.⁷

⁶ Coca, Gabriela, *The Leitmotiv*, in „Muzica nr. 1” Magazine, 2001.

⁷ Musicologist Octavian Lazăr Cosma distinguishes two special types of leitmotifs (regarding, in particular, Enescu's *Oedipe*, but also in general): kinetic, fluid, open leitmotifs and static ones.

The Fox and “Baba-Hârca” (a Beldame, or a witch) – their musical portrayal is very similar to the Wolf’s. The composer uses dissonances, chromatic sliding’s, abrupt progressions, tenebrous sonorities, since the *Fox* is the embodiment of slyness and diplomacy, marked by a ridiculous affectation and *Baba-Hârca* – the embodiment of evil, black magic and sorcery.

The most dynamic portraits in this opera belong to *the Goat* and *the Wolf* characters.

The Wolf is the evil godfather (it kills two of the goat’s kids, out of greed; in her turn, the goat shall take a terrible revenge). This character is given a leitmotiv of lugubrious, tenebrous, cutting and dissonant intonations.

E.g. 3



In the scene where the wolf raises its voice, this leitmotiv is slightly modified: we will have the surprise of hearing it in the upper register.

His diabolical plan is rendered musically through suggestive appoggiaturas, dissonant chromatics and intervals, with the chromatic successions and persisting trills raising the tension. The use of dissonances, glissandos, the frequent „breakages“ of the musical discourse are deliberately pursued here, creating a harsh, somewhat “broken” atmosphere, as the composer intended.

The Goat – *This character’s leitmotifs and leit-intonations are found in its vocal score. They are the ones that delineate the distinctive portrait of the Goat, as they span over a range of a ninth, through intervals like 2m, 3m, 2M, 5p, 5+, 4p, 6M, 8p, causing an inner tensioning of the leitmotifs. Also, the upper extreme of the range – E flat, is a sort of tensional culminating point of this thematic element.*



These leitmotifs reappear throughout the work, with slight changes, yet they can be easily recognized, whenever they reappear.

All the Goat's psychological states are described musically in her vocal score. They span a wide array of emotions: from *joy* to *resignation*, from *hopes* to *despair*, from *premonition* to *certitude*.

Her entire array of emotions is present both in her aria and song, as well as in her dirge.

Timbrally and harmonically "coloured" and "commented" upon by the orchestra, the Goat's *aria* actually delineates her musical portrait. The characteristic rhythm and the intervallic succession (especially, the oscillation of the 3rd interval), the Dorian structure in which it develops - prove its compatibility with the spirit and soul of the Romanian people. The appoggiaturas in the instrumental accompaniment are used to render the national specificity. It is an aria with obvious folk roots.

In this aria, the author uses the *recto-tono* technique in order to render a state of inner tension, with a content that seems to be of a question projected into consciousness, with no ostentatiousness or aggressiveness, but with a certain dramatic acuity, a specific intensity which induces a state of restlessness and forebodes something tragic. Therefore, when a state of restlessness arises in the text, the melodic trajectory becomes rectilinear.

In the Goat's score we can notice a deepening in the significance of the sliding chromaticism, through the use of *glissando* in the voice, a technique by which, in theory, no pitch is omitted. The presence of chromaticism enhances the tension and creates a state of inauspicious presentiment, thus preceding the dramatic moment which is about to unfold. The chromaticism impregnates the sound flow and places these musical pages under a folk crepuscular light, evoking the curvatures of our ancestral relief.

The Goat song (that she sings to her kids before leaving, so that they can recognize her when she returns) represents the *key* to the entire fairytale, as it appears in the most important moments of the dramatic development and, eventually, it marks the wolf's success in entering the house.

E.g. 5

Allegro non

mf Trei iezi cu-cu-ieți u-șa ma-mei des-cu-ieți
 că ma-ma v-a-du - ce vo-uă frun-ze-nbu-ze lăp- te-n țâ-te drob de sa-re în spi-na-re
 mă-lă-ieș în căl-că-eș smoc de flori pe sub-su-ori

This song undergoes a series of metamorphoses; hence, in the Wolf's first performance of it, the sonority is grave, almost burlesque, with key changes and rhythmic augmentations.

The musical rendering of the motherly feelings is attained in her dirge.⁹ Its melodic line seems to come straight from the bottom of her heart, which shudders with pain.

The descending chromatic profile and the use of intervallic leaps of minor second and third render the melody an enhanced dramatic character. It is based on the principle of the most natural continuity of a mostly interiorized dramatic development, whilst displaying a modal ethos. A wave of generosity but also sadness pours out of its undulations. The melodic trajectory here consists of the reiteration of a motif (cell) with the role of *ostinato*; it is a concise, low-ambitus, mourning theme. We can sense here the influence of the simplicity and naturalness of folk music.

Conclusion

The concise, coloured dialogue, the characters' conspicuous contour, the Romanian specificity of the melodic themes - all these are characteristic to the compositional work of Zlata Tkach.

⁹ On the third release of *The Lying Wolf*, the composer took out the dirge, although, in our opinion, it is a pretty successful musical page; this is why we have considered appropriate to include it in our assessment.

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