

## Wieniawski's *Legende* and Enescu's *The Undead*: a Romantic-Neoclassical Dyad

Sorana MĂNĂILESCU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The present paper examines stylistic change in musical history by comparing the treatment of the same motif, the ill-starred lovers, in a romantic piece, Wieniawski's Legende, Op. 17, and a post-Wagnerian composition by George Enescu: Strigoii (The Undead) Oratory, setting to music Eminescu's homonymous legend, which in its turn, draws on Bidu's Tower legend. Whereas Wieniawski was writing a grieving soul's complaint in the manner of romantic self-expressionism, Enescu was attached to the national poet, to his people's ancient past and to folk legends in the spirit of the neoclassical aesthetics of a part, the most prolific one of musical modernism.*

**Key-words:** *romantic self-expressionism, neoclassical Sprachstimme, Wieniawski's Legende, Enescu's the Undead*

### 1. Introduction

Musical pieces called legends are defined in point of genre not so much by formal characteristics, such as the sonata form, which evolved from two to four parts, but by content. Intimately connected to the ballad, with its epic core of personal drama, the legend belongs to the range of dark musical pieces, conveying a sense of doom, its space being often crossed by supernatural beings or rushing into the present from the haunting recesses of past times.

Nevertheless, irrespective of generic parameters, classical music forms vary in time according to the changing styles of trends, schools of music, or even distinct phases within a certain composer's career.

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate, Transilvania University of Braşov, [soranatupan@yahoo.com](mailto:soranatupan@yahoo.com)

The story behind the composition of Wieniawski's *Legende* is a romantic one: the pathos of this show piece managed to move his beloved's father's heart into consenting to their marriage -, and it might have served as an inspiration to Constantin C, Nottara, who also married the woman he loved against her father's will, eventually curbed by his composition, *Sicilliana*.

The present paper is not committed to romantic stories with happy end, however, but to an endeavour to understand change in musical history by comparing a romantic legend, Wieniawski's, and a post-Wagnerian composition on the same theme of ill-starred lovers – George Enescu's *Strigoii (The Undead)* Oratory, inspired by Eminescu's homonymous legend, which in its turn, draws on *Bidu's Tower* legend. Whereas Wieniawski was writing a grieving soul's *complaint* in the manner of romantic self-expressionism, Enescu was attracted to the national poet, to his people's ancient past and to folk legends in the spirit of the neoclassical aesthetics of a part, the most prolific one of musical modernism.

## 2. Wieniawski's *Legende*

The composition has a ternary structure (ABC), the middle section representing a moment of balance between the impetuous first part and the dramatic final consisting of large intervals, especially octaves.

We find in Wieniawski's piece the characteristics of high romanticism: the intensity of feeling, achieved both through large intervals, the obsessive repetition with different intensities of a melodic structure, the chromaticism to which the entire score of the soloist seems to be reduced, which is first dominated by the accompaniment in a few notes, hypnotically resumed, by the piano.

The image displays a musical score for Violin (Vln.) and Piano (Pno.) from the piece "Legende" by Henryk Wieniawski, measures 8-12. The violin part is in the upper staff, marked with a 'V' and 'sul A -'. The piano part is in the lower staff, marked with 'p semplice'. The score shows a melodic line in the violin with large intervals and a chromatic descent, and a piano accompaniment with chords and moving lines in both hands.

Ex. 1. Wieniawski, "Legende", mss.8-12.

The introductory tune played by the piano is taken up by the violin at the end as a recognition, after a passionate attempt to assert one's own feeling, of the power of an implacable destiny, an impression deepened by the short, pizzicato notes of the finale. This recognition culminates in a dramatic outburst of the violin sliding down from G, the highest note it can play, to the lower G-G repeated octave. The romantic aspiration towards immensity and eternity is thus translated into musical discourse. The entire phrase in mss.186-191 is played *sotto voce*, against the background of a drone in piano, soloists usually using a mute. The slide from G to the G-G octave below is, along with the entire phrase, a confession of despair and renunciation.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Violin (Vln.) and Piano (Pno.).

The first system, starting at measure 186, features a violin part with a melodic line consisting of eighth-note patterns. The piano part provides a drone accompaniment with sustained chords. The violin part includes the markings *sempre tranquillo* and *riten.* (ritardando). A fermata is placed over the final note of the violin phrase, which is marked with an '8' above it, indicating an octave slide. The piano part has two *pizz.* (pizzicato) markings.

The second system, starting at measure 190, shows the continuation of the violin part with a single note followed by rests, and the piano part with a sustained chord and rests. The violin part has two *pizz.* markings above it.

Ex. 2. Wieniawski, "Legende", mss.186-191.

### 3. George Enescu *Strigoii* (The Undead)

Neoclassicism, a canonical term which applies to George Enescu without covering the whole complexity of his works, emerged from the national schools of music in the earlier twentieth century, characteristic being a return to forms from the music tradition (beyond romanticism, which they saw as sinning through all kinds of excesses, formal as well as through the exaltation of emotions) or inspiration from national folklore. Valentina Sandu-Dediu speaks of two trends in Romanian neoclassicism:

The universalist line and the folkloric-autochthonous line converge, at a certain point, in the evolution of Enescu's style, in two masterpieces: the Third Sonata for piano and violin, in Romanian folk manner, an insertion of fiddle singing into the European "cult", where the rhapsodic merges with the dialectic of the sonata form, and the folkloric variation technique with the scholarly one; then, in the unparalleled case of the *Oedipus* opera: "just as the sonata implies in the subtext of its "rhapsodic" freedom the strictness of the universally valid construction principles of the genre, the language of *Oedipus* contains in the subtext, expresses in essence and dimensions on a universal scale fundamental realities and autochthonous musical principles (modalism or parlando-related structure of recitatives) (Sandu-Dediu, 4-5)

In the highly experimental turn of the century, music was becoming increasingly complex, with a Wagner who had pushed the boundaries of tonality to their extremes, through chromaticism, or composers such as Smetana, Dvorak, Glinka, Mussorgski, Porumbescu or Enescu, who turned to folk music in modal manner par excellence.

*The Undead* poem refurbishes a motif of mythic-folkloric origin, widely circulated in romanticism, known as the Lenore motif (Bürger's Leonore's poem, as well as Goethe's *Die Braut von Korinth*). Some anthropologists state that this belief in the undead has its origin in a Dacian myth (according to which the dead, not admitted to Zamolxis' kingdom - because they had lived evil lives - come out of their graves at night and wander on earth.) (Frandeş 2021)

The composition encompasses three movements, corresponding to the three parts of Eminescu's poem.

In general, the sound background is filmic, the instrumental accompaniment of the soloists unfolding in a continuous supportive flow, with a varied, constantly evolving melody, anchored in a bi-sonic writing, with tonal and modal elements that merge into a typically Enescian expressive form. An eloquent example, in this sense, is the very beginning of the oratorio, in which the predominant, gravitational center of sound is C#. This center is imposed by the initial attack, made by the bell (C#), while the first bassoon is supported by the tremolo of the timpani (also C#). The first bassoon configures a melodic line with a pentatonic character, in the space of a minor mode (Aeolian on C#); noteworthy, in this context, is the presence of the minor third E only in measure 11, that is, only in the seventh measure from the beginning of the theme. Thus, the modal character of the composition can be identified from the very beginning.

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Fagotto I, Timpani, and Campana. The Fagotto I part is in the upper staff, starting with a series of quarter notes and then moving into a more complex melodic line with slurs and accents. The Timpani part is in the middle staff, consisting of a series of chords (represented by 'o' symbols) that create a tremolo effect. The Campana part is in the lower staff, starting with a single note (C#) and then moving into a series of chords. The score is marked with 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'p' (piano) dynamics. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

Ex. 3. *p. I, m. 1-12; bassoon I, timpani, bell.*

Worth noticing are also the register (grave) as well as the slowness of the tempo (Andante) as elements that confirm the gloomy atmosphere in which the Reciter will appear, that is, in measure 20 with auftakt.

The image shows a musical score for measures 13-20 of the first movement. The instruments listed are Cl. Basso Sib, Fag. I, Fag. II, Tuba, Timp, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., and Cb. The score is written in a key signature of two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The bass clarinet (Cl. Basso Sib) has a melodic line starting in measure 13, marked *pp*, and moving to *mp* by measure 19. The bassoon I (Fag. I) and bassoon II (Fag. II) have melodic lines starting in measure 17, marked *pp*, and moving to *mp* by measure 19. The tuba (Tuba) has a rhythmic pattern starting in measure 13, marked *pp*. The timpani (Timp) has a rhythmic pattern starting in measure 13, marked *pp*. The violin II (Vln. II) has a rhythmic pattern starting in measure 13, marked *pp*. The viola (Vla.) has a rhythmic pattern starting in measure 13, marked *pp*. The cello (Vc.) has a rhythmic pattern starting in measure 13, marked *pp*, with *div.* markings in measures 14 and 19. The double bass (Cb.) has a rhythmic pattern starting in measure 13, marked *pp*, with *solo* markings in measures 14 and 19.

Ex. 4. *p. I, m. 13-20; bass clarinet, bassoon I-II, tuba, timpani, violin II, viola, cello, double bass.*

Over these first 20 measures the orchestra is gradually joining in, the timbral conquest also constituting the conquest of register and spatiality among the instruments. This sound construction presents fragments of the theme or only the thematic ends, allotted to various instruments in the orchestra, a procedure that will later prove its efficiency when the soloists get in.

A relevant element for the new typologies of writing, specific to the music of the 20th century, is represented by the reciter. We are now far from romantic self-expressionism. Romantic love descends to the melodrama performed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French and German cabarets, which was reminiscent of the mid-eighteenth-century musical interludes, such as Georg Benda's *Ariadne* (1775). The *fin-de-siècle* version of the original *Sprechgesang* was perceived as considerably different, so as to justify the coining of a different word: *Sprechstimme*. The former is closer to an operatic manner of singing, whereas

*Sprechstimme* is closer to speech. Speech-like declamation first came under the control of rhythm, against a musical background, in Engelbert Humperdinck's melodrama *Königskinder* (1897) (Kravitt 1976, 571). There is a great controversy around the issue of whether Arnold Schoenberg knew or not about Humperdinck's experiment which had aroused a chorus of disapproval on its premiere in Munich.

*Sprechstimme* was first used by Schoenberg, not in *Pierrot lunaire*, as it is commonly believed, but in the cantata/oratory *The Gurre-Lieder*, premiered a few months ahead of his more famous melodrama (1912), which had been hidden away in his drawers since the beginning of the century.

The Sprecher/ reciter was not simply a third person narrator:

He believed that the instrumental ensemble was not subsidiary to the voice but that the voice and the ensemble were on equal footing, each taking turns in the presentation of important musical material. (Soder 2008, 9)

In Enescu, the bass voice associated with this character external to the dramatic events going on in the text, which narrates the thread of the plot, is noted exclusively through approximate pitches, corresponding to the intonation in speech. Bass inflections are highlighted by relative positions in the key of F, even though the notation seems exact. The bass "chooses" the pitches for what it has to narrate, the melody being, in this way, in tune with the harmonic flow generated by the orchestra. The rhythm is, however, precisely notated, with normal but also exceptional note values (triplets, quintets, septets), as are the nuances. In the case of rhythmic writing, as in the case of melody, Enescu noted the fluency of the vocal discourse in a manner similar to the fluency of speech. There are, however, moments of narration that are free from any kind of notation, the text being written within the space of certain measures, this being the only indication of the entries, relevant for orientation in time, but without other constraints on interpretation. The level of nuances is subordinated to the spoken-sung flow, supporting the interpretation of the text. This type of notation finds its aesthetic analogies in the music of the early 20th century, such as Schönberg's *Sprechgesang* in *Pierrot Lunaire*.

Sub bol-ta cea i-nal-ta a u-nei vechi bi-se-rici in-tre fa-çlii de cea-ra Ar-zand in sfes-nici mari E'n tin-sa'n hai-ne ne-gre cu fa-ta spre al-tar... lo-

god-ni-ca lui A-vald sta-pan pe-se-te A-vari În cet, a-dânc ră-su-nă

Cân-tă-ri-le de cle-rici Pe piep-tul moar-tei lu-ce de pie-tre scum-pă sal-bă Și pă-ru-i de a-ur Cur-

gea, din ra-clă spre pă-mânt Că-zuți in cap sunt o-chii C-unzăm-bet trist și sfânt, Pe bu-ze-le-i li-pi-te ce vi-ne-te îi sunt iar fa-ța

Ex. 5. *p. l, m. 21 with auf. – 43; reciter.*

Choosing a narrator from the deep male voice category (bass) adds depth and weight to the overall somber, dark feeling. The harmonic load of the voice, the types of inflection it can achieve, the imposed speaking are elements that outline a different writing from the one up to the moment of Enescu's approach to Eminescu's poem which included him among the great innovative creators of the time. Enescu had predecessors, beginning with the musical theater, including the opera in the form of recitative (*secco*). The difference between the form of narration that we find in Enescu's work and that typical of recitative (opera, cantata or oratorio) resides in the generous space for development according to the accents in speech. The Recitation of the Enescu's oratorio represents a metamusical form of classical recitative transfiguration, its reception demanding a sphere of musical understanding that is above traditional customs. Through this type of notation, Enescu opens a path, without totally denying a path trodden along centuries of literary-dramatic music, but, rather, enriching it with new perspectives.

The rest of the voices (soprano, tenor and baritone) also evolve bi-notationally, having moments of classical, traditional writing with a precisely



notated melody that interferes with the speaking-singing of the bass in a charming and convincing manner, but also segments of free recitation. The fluency of artistic expression denotes a fine knowledge of the human psyche, a mastery of compositional techniques, but also an abundant inspiration in the construction of tension step by step and in the accumulation of sound information in exact, perfect proportions. An example in this sense is provided by expressive dramatic segments, such as the one in part I (tenor, Arald, measures 142-165), in which the vocal writing is freed from melodic-rhythmic customs, the text being interpreted in an acting manner, recited, the musical support from the orchestra having the role of creating a dramatic environment. This segment, which is not singular within the oratorio, is a fragment associated with theater scenes, in which the sound expression determined by the actor's recitation is supported by the incidental music, located in a fundamental, descriptive plan. The notation of the text suggests the approximate place where the tenor should recite the lines, which is a landmark also for the conductor and the ensemble.

The image shows a musical score for measures 142-148. The top staff is for the Tenor (T.), with the lyrics: "Te-ntreb într-un târziu uitându-mă la tine." and "privind fără să ştiu". Below the tenor are staves for Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vln.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Cb.). The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f*, and a *V* marking for the cello. The notation is in a key with two sharps (F# and C#) and a 2/4 time signature.

Ex. 6. *m. 142-148; free notation, recited, with measure.*  
*tenor, violin I-II, viola, cello, double bass.*

The orchestration is, for the most part, airy, which gives voices the opportunity to express the entire affective context. With the exception of some short instrumental interludes, in which the ensemble creates a sound foundation for the following text, the orchestral writing has a supporting role, and the rich coloring is achieved through thematic takeovers and through internal movements with a polyphonic character but kept to a minimum. Being an oratorio, Enescu renders the text expressive in its purest form, the supporting music not having the dense character of his symphonies or suites. The density is given by the melody of the harmonic movements and the timbral variety in terms of thematic takeovers (the credit goes, in this sense, to the orchestrator of the work, composer Sabin Păutza).

The musical discourse, in all its components, throughout the oratorio, is weaving a cohesive work, with innovative ideas and revealing a deep understanding of spirituality, backed up by Eminescu's poem. The approach to a complex form of pre-Christian pagan revelation, on which the poet grafted the emergent spirit of Christianity, acquires, in Enescu's composition, absolute value, his music appearing to be, as well as the poem, a blend of religiosity and barbaric simplicity, authenticity, ingrained into the most intimate existential vein.

## References

Frandes, Marcel. 2021. *Erotism sau fascinație a morții* [Eroticism or fascination of death]. București: Editura LiterNet.

Kravitt, Edward. 1976. "The Joining of Words and Music in Late Romantic Melodrama." *The Musical Quarterly*, Volume LXII, Issue 4, October 1976, Pages 571–590, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mq/LXII.4.571>  
Accessed 17 August 2022

Sandu-Dediu, Valentina. 2007. *Istoria muzicii secolului 20*. București: Universitatea Națională de Muzică

Soder, Aidan. 2008. *Sprechstimme in Arnold Schoenberg's Pierrot lunaire. A Study of Vocal Performance Practice*. With a Preface by Walter B. Baile. Belmont, Music Publishers.

[http://www.academia.edu/13773480/Universitatea\\_na%C5%A3ional%C4%83\\_de\\_muzic%C4%83\\_bucure%C5%9Fti\\_ISTORIA\\_MUZICII\\_SECOLULUI\\_20](http://www.academia.edu/13773480/Universitatea_na%C5%A3ional%C4%83_de_muzic%C4%83_bucure%C5%9Fti_ISTORIA_MUZICII_SECOLULUI_20)

Accessed 17 August 2022