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Dominika Micał

Academy of Music in Kraków, Collegium Invisibile

Rhetorical figures and rhetorical strategies in *The Minotaur* by Harrison Birtwistle[1]

Harrison Birtwistle (born in 1934) is widely known as a member of "New Music Manchester Group" – his colleagues at that time were Peter Maxwell Davies and Alexander Goehr. Birtwistle's music is recognised as intellectual and connected with great avant-garde of the 20th century inspired by Pierre Boulez. His musical language is basically modernist: atonal but usually centralised, based on interval patterns or scales invented by the composer himself, very often using precompositional number patterns. On the other hand, Birtwisle has never denied expression in his pieces. Titles and extra-musical inspirations are common (i.e. *Melencolia 1*, *Harrison's Clocks*, *The Triumph of Time*). British composer is also inspired by music of the Middle Ages (Guillaume de Machaut) or Renaissance (Johannes Ockeghem, John Dowland), and less often by Baroque music (Johann Sebastian Bach). Birtwistle's greatest achievements include twelve operas; among them the most important is *The Mask of Orpheus* (1973–1984).

The Minotaur is his tenth opera, and the second one written in cooperation with poet and librettist David Harsent (the first was *Gawain* from 1991). Both of the artists worked together since the idea of

1 Text based on MA thesis entitled *Mit na nowo opowiedziany. "The Minotaur" Harrisona Birtwistle'a* (*The myth newly retold. Harrison Birtwistle's "The Minotaur"*) written under the guidance of dr hab. Małgorzata Janicka-Słysz and defended at Academy of Music in Kraków in 2015.

making an opera about Minotaur occurred. The piece was finished in 2007 and premiered in 2008 in Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, starring John Tomlinson as Minotaur, Christine Rice as Ariadne, and Johan Reuter as Theseus. Performance was conducted by Antonio Pappano and directed by Stephen Langridge; costumes and scenography were created by Allison Chitty. It is worth mentioning that Birtwistle, Harsent, Langridge and Chitty had discussed the ideas for the opera before it was composed. That is the possible reason why the piece seems extraordinarily organic.

Besides remarkable coherence, the most striking feature of *The Minotaur* is almost constant presence of easily recognizable rhetorical means. Why would the composer, who is connected with the 20th century modernism, use such obvious and traditional elements? One of the main subjects of Birtwistle's output is narration. We can see it even in his revolutionary pieces, like *The Mask of Orpheus*. *The Minotaur* tells the story of its main characters but it also shows how the stories are being created and how important they are for human beings. Rhetorical figures and strategies become the main device helping the composer to show the story in music. I use the term 'rhetorical figure' in connection with long tradition of musical rhetoric, whereas the term 'rhetorical strategy' is my own concept, created to distinguish rhetorical means that are very short, incidental (figures connected with one word or phrase) from the long passages of music. When rhetorical 'power' lasts relatively long (at least few bars but sometimes it embraces the whole scene), I call it 'rhetorical strategy'.

To help us understand better the importance of narration in *The Minotaur*, I firstly show the general overview and interpretation of the libretto. Then, I briefly examine relation between text and music. Next, I describe some examples of rhetoric figures, rhetoric strategies, and the way they are used in the opera. I explore their connection with tradition and how they work in modern musical environment. In conclusion, I try to explain why I consider the rhetorical aspect of *The Minotaur* as the most important one.[2]

2 For other attempts to apply Baroque rhetorical figures to analysis of contemporary music see for instance: K. Naliwajek, *"Partita IV" Pawła Szymańskiego i jego "utopia podwójności muzyki"*, "Przegląd Muzykologiczny" 2004, No. 4; A. Wieczorek, *"Te Deum" Arvo Pärta. Między kompozytorskim* métier *a gatunkowym* arché, "Kwartalnik Młodych Muzykologów UJ" 2014, No. 23 (4).

The Minotaur – general view

The Minotaur was inspired by many factors (Cretan myth, Pablo Picasso's *Minotauromachy* and other sketches of bulls, Friedrich Dürrenmatt's ballet scenario *Minotaurus. Eine Ballade*), but a libretto was the starting point for the process of composing.

We see three main characters: Ariadne, Minotaur and Theseus. Theseus' personality is the least complicated one. He is a stereotypical hero – his character is strong, he is determined and brave but at the same time static, and in some way not as interesting as other characters. His role is important as long as he has a duty to perform. After killing Minotaur he can just go away: "His death lightens my life. / The debt is paid, the bargain broken."[3]

The protagonist, Minotaur (or Asterios), half-bull and half-man, is much more complex. He is a victim of his parents' sins. He feels like "neither/nor", "half-and-half", "next-to-nothing". The monster cannot speak. He gets a voice only in his dreams, and, finally, after the fatal blow, when his death is obvious. I interpret the death of Minotaur in light of philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, using his concept of 'narrative identity'. According to Ricoeur, the ability to say someone's own name and to tell someone's own story is a symbol of identity and a proof of being a part of community. Using a commonly recognised language protects human being from isolation, makes a person an equal member of society. As Ricoeur says:

> Language is itself the process by which private experience is made public. Language is the exteriorization thanks to which an impression is transcended and becomes an ex-pression, or, in other words, the transformation of the psychic into the noetic. Exteriorization and communicability are one and the same thing for they are nothing other than this elevation of a part of our life into the *logos* of discourse. There the solitude of life is for a moment, anyway, illuminated by the common light of discourse.[4]

3 D. Harsent, *The Minotaur. Libretto*, London 2013, p. 27. Later, quotations from the libretto are signed as M and the number of page.

4 P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Fort Worth 1976, p. 19.

The fatal blow, dying – a situation of a limit – becomes a catalyst for Minotaur's transgression.

Asterios' struggle for his identity can also be understood as a process of psychoanalysis. When he is awake, he can only act as his 'id'. He kills the Innocents unwillingly, only because of his instinct. He destroys their beauty, treats them as an insult for his monstrosity. In his dreams, he is able to reflect upon his acts, he becomes an 'ego', he knows that he behaves terribly and he displays feelings and emotions which are typical for humans beings: loneliness, longing, sadness, desire for self-knowledge. In the mirror he sees the second Minotaur – his 'super-ego', who is always critical to him and tries to convince him that all his dreams about being a human are only a mirage. Ariadne plays a role of psychoanalyst – she tells her brother his story, she helps him to understand it. Let us look at some of Minotaur's representative lines: "In dreams I seem to speak like any man. / I say my name. I tell my story" (M27), "Tell me again. Tell me the story of myself" (M30). And after the fatal blow: "Now I can speak… now I am almost human; / now is the right time to die" (M61), "I am Asterios. (…) Son of the sea-god, Poseidon!" (M64).

Ariadne is not only her brother's psychoanalyst. She is nearly the main character of *The Minotaur*. The Cretan princess seems unfriendly, aloof and cruel. We must consider it as a sign of her story. She, as her brother, is a prisoner, a victim of her birth: "I'm daughter to the man whose arrogance brought shame. / I'm daughter to the woman who sinned against nature. / I'm sister to the half-and-half" (M42). That is she, who has to fulfil the ritual of sending the Innocents to death. She can be considered as a priestess, a coryphaeus of choir in killing scenes – but this role is imposed, and she is determined to escape her prison, the Crete, at any price. The strongest expression of her determination are the following lines:

> The Cretan sky is black, the sun burns black,
> a black sea breaks… O gods, give me Theseus:
> give me Theseus and Athens, give me Theseus
> and a life beyond this darkness. The labyrinth
> is prison to Asterios, Crete is my cage.

If malice will free me, let my mother weep.
If betrayal will free me, let my father curse.
If a death will free me, let the monster die. (M44)

Between Ariadne and Theseus there is no love, not even an enchantment – they only make a trade, a bargain.

The Minotaur ends with the protagonist's transgression and death but without *catharsis*.[5] His body becomes a quarry for demonic Kers – goddesses of revenge. We do not see Ariadne and Theseus setting sail for Athens, as the Oracle said. The rest of the story is not the story of Minotaur.

Literary and musical forms

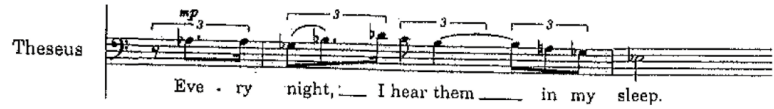
Birtwistle said that music was only a commentary on the libretto, it could not be anything else. The overall musical structure (macroform) is through-composed, the narrative instinct of 'late' Birtwistle (since *Gawain*) plays the main role. The number of scenes is the same, the climaxes are in the same places, the function of each scene remains the same (for example exposition in the first scene, *peripeteia* in scene 10, *anagnorisis* in scene 12). In the micro-scale the libretto is much more ritualistic, it contains a lot of repetitions, syntactical parallelisms, refrains and other strict forms. Generally, Birtwistle did not decide to copy those structures in music. However, there are some important lines that go through the libretto similarly to *Errinerungsmotiven* (even if they are not specifically 'motives' but 'gestures', or even whole phrases). Birtwistle emphasises that he is interested more in 'gesture' than in 'motif': the energy, shape, rhythm are more important to him than exact pitches or intervals. Gesture is something possible to remember easily.[6] It has to change – Birtwistle admits that he never checks what he has already written and repeats music from memory, without any care of

5 See also: J. Carruesco, M. Reig, *Redefining Catharsis in Opera: The Power of Music in Birtwistle's "The Minotaur" and Amargós' "Eurídice y los títeres de Caronte"*, in: *Seduction and Power: Antiquity in the Visual and Performing Arts*, ed. by S. Knippschild, M. Garcia Morcillo, London—New York 2013.

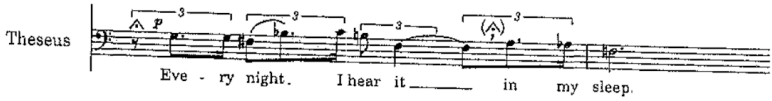
6 H. Birtwistle, *Wild tracks. A conversation diary with Fiona Maddocks*, London 2014, p. 121.

precision.[7] I have decided to use traditional term 'motif', where interval structure seems more important than energy and where it is relatively unchanged (as in repetitive 'fate motif'). When intervals are changed but figure is still recognisable, I use the term 'gesture' (i.e. 'glissando gesture'). The repetition of gesture or motif stresses the importance of particular words for the whole story.

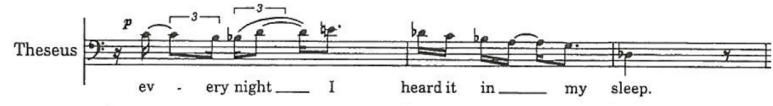
First repetitive idea is connected with Theseus' and Minotaur's common dream about somebody screaming in the night ("Every night, I hear them [screams] in my sleep", examples 1, 2, 3). The objects and tenses are changed in every phrase: in example 1 Theseus is singing about many Innocent's screams, in example 2 and 3 about only one scream: his own or Minotaur's. Intervals are different in each, but dotted rhythm, overall shape of melody and its falling direction remains the same. While in terms of motivic structure we hear difference, in terms of gesture we hear identity.



Example 1. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 1 (mm. 292–294).



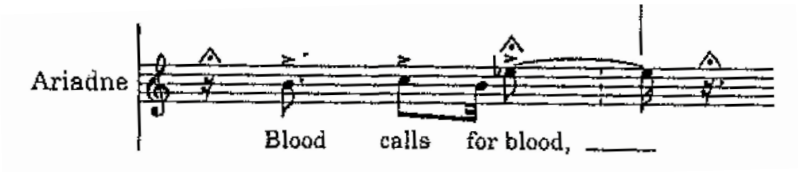
Example 2. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 1 (mm. 310–311).



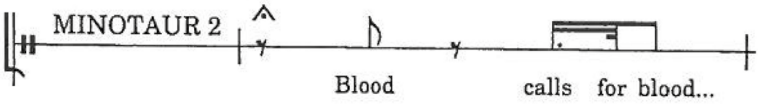
Example 3. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 12, (mm. 150–152).

7 M. Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, London 1998, pp. 151–152.

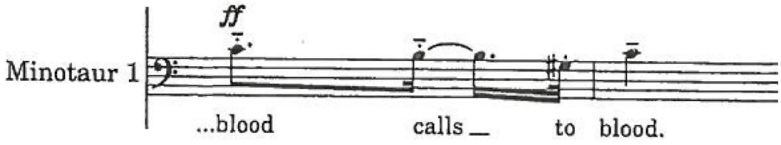
Another returning phrase is connected with the 'family triangle'. Theseus and Minotaur have probably the same father – Poseidon, so Minotaur and Ariadne are half-siblings. Phrase "Blood calls for [or "to"] blood" changes very strongly (examples 4–9). Its main feature, which lets us see the similarity, is the dotted rhythm. In extreme cases there is only rhythm (examples 5 and 8) but the connection (even very weak, like in example 9) is still audible. Again: motivic structure changes, gesture remains. Assurance that Ariadne's scheme will succeed („Ariadne and Theseus will set sail for Athens") is treated similarly.



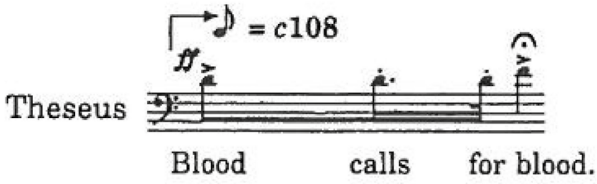
Example 4. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 1 (mm. 179–180).



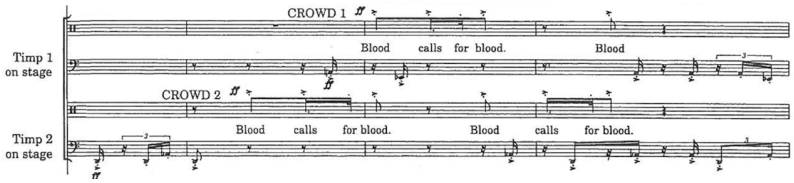
Example 5. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 6 (m. 63).



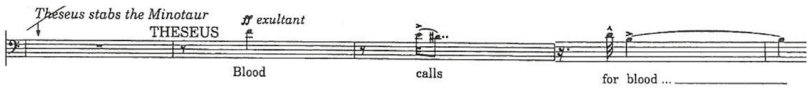
Example 6. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 6 (mm. 112–114).



Example 7. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 12 (m. 50).

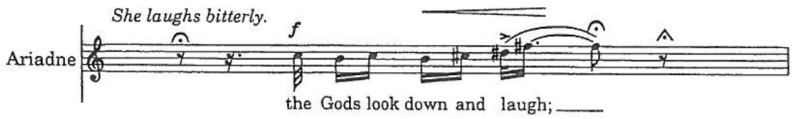


Example 8. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 12 (mm. 71–74).

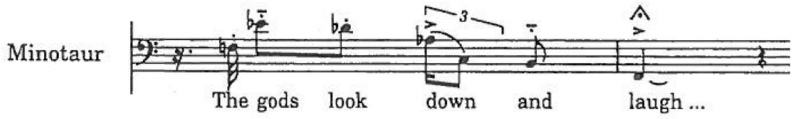


Example 9. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 12 (mm. 127–130).

As mentioned above, not all repetitions in the text are mirrored by repetitions in music, e.g. Minotaur's perception of himself as "next to nothing" is worked out differently each time, only the ending iambic rhythm short–long is preserved. Also very important passage "The gods look down and laugh" appears twice in two different ways. We can assume that Birtwistle wanted to show two interpretations of those words. The first correspondences with Ariadne's "bitter laugh" mentioned in the score: the stress and the melisma appear on "laugh" (example 10). The second version emphasises the direction of looking: the stress and the melisma appear on "down" (example 11).



Example 10. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 8 (mm. 43–44).



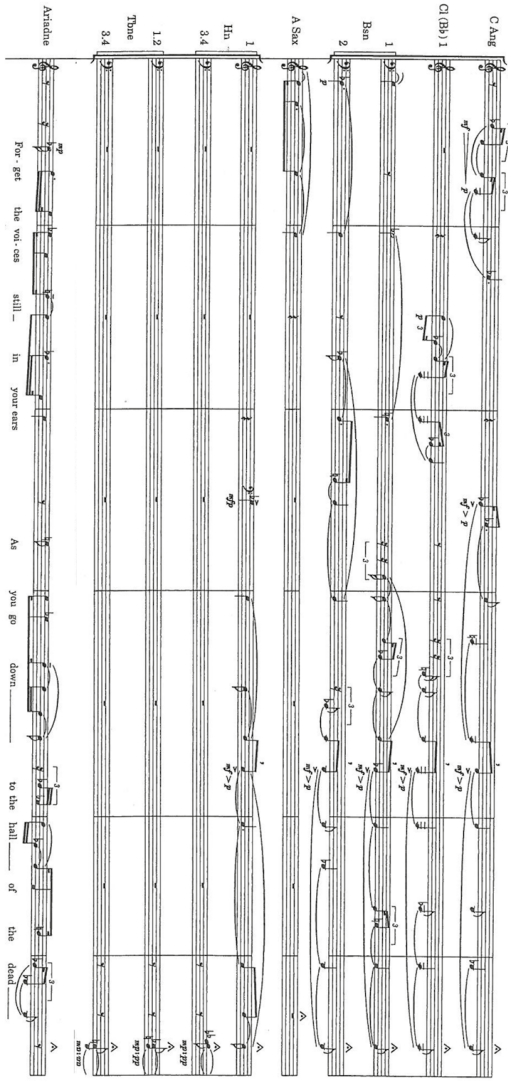
Example 11. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 12 (mm. 145–146).

That motif–gesture opposition is strongly connected with the change that happened in Birtwistle's musical thinking in the middle '80s. He turned from the radical pre-compositional patterns to more linear (but very often non-directional) narration; the 'sanctity of the context' became more important.[8] The composer started to think in more processual way. Every musical moment should stem from previous musical moment and light it, at the same time being connected with what comes next. At the same time we hear connection between even very distant musical events (like in examples 1 from scene 1 and 2, and example 3 from scene 12).

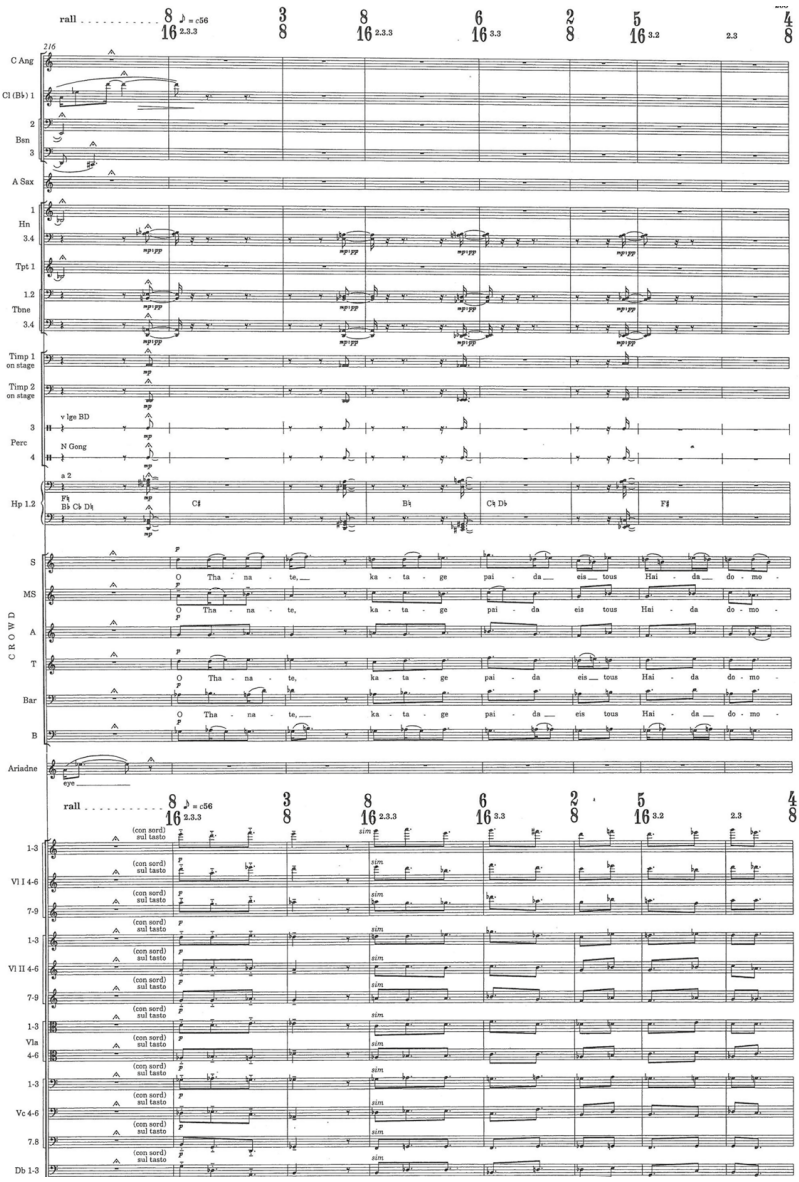
The rare examples of patterning musical forms on literary ones are two *epicedia* after the Innocent's deaths. They are based on responsorial alteration of English lines of Ariadne and Greek lines of the Crowd. Ariadne's words are sung in *arioso* style, they are heterophonic or polyphonic (example 12). The Crowd's words are elaborated in homorhythmic texture and they recall Johann Sebastian Bach's chorales

8 M. Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle in Recent Years*, London 1998, p. 2; H. Birtwistle, *Wild tracks…*, *op. cit.*, London 2014, p. 119. 'Sanctity of the context' does not exclude sudden cuts and contrasting juxtapositions, however they are much less common in his later music.

(example 13). There are some more similarities between Bach's *Passions* and *The Minotaur*: the protagonist dies innocently (it is not monster's fault that he is who he is) and the choir, called Crowd, works like *turba*, scoffing at Minotaur in killing scenes.



Example 12. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 7 (mm. 211–215). Polyphonic texture in *epicedium*.



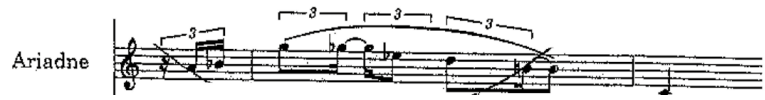
Example 13. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 6 (mm. 216–223). Chorale-like texture in *epicedium*.

Rhetorical figures

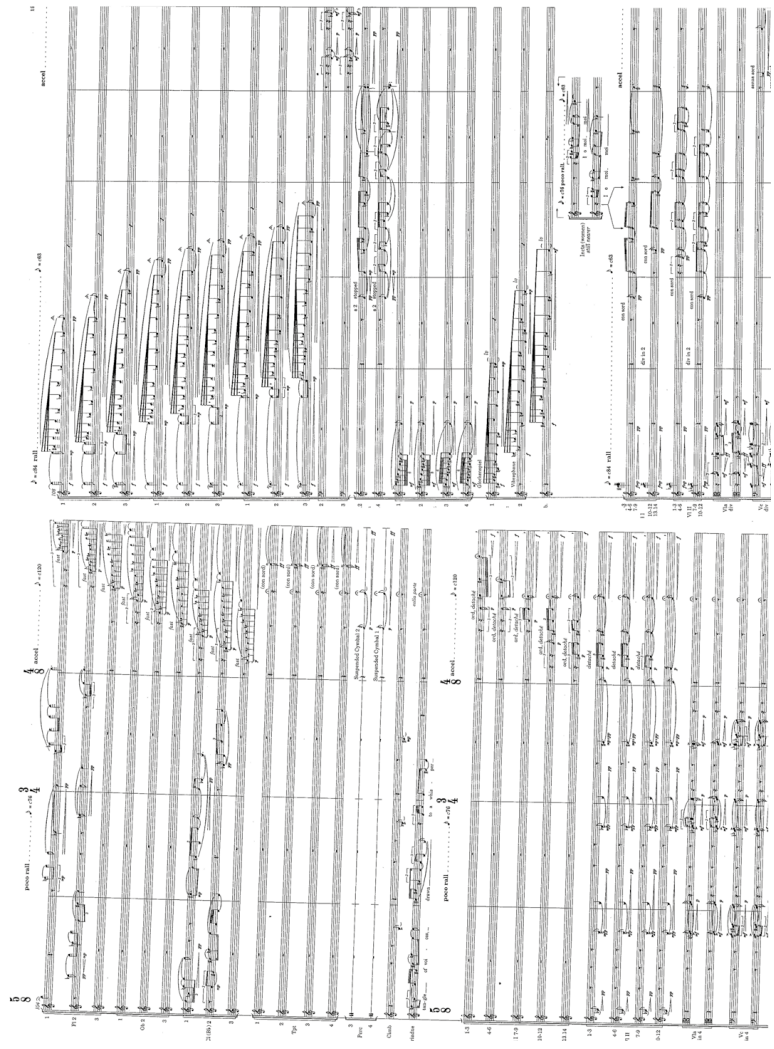
The Minotaur is full of rhetorical figures: both 'hypothyposis' (working as an illustration, sometimes onomatopoeic) and 'emphasis' (expressive).[9] Mostly, they are inspired by a Baroque theory. We can find: *pathopoia*, *transgressio*, *assimilatio*, *suspiratio*, *katabasis*, *saltus duriusculus*, and many others.

The most common figure in Birtwistle's opera is *assimilatio* – musical analogue. It is connected mainly with nature and motion phenomena. *Assimilatio* figure appears in instrumental and vocal parts. It can usually be heard but sometimes it is only seen in the score (like *Augenmusik*). A good example of the *assimilatio* in vocal part are Ariadne's words: "like flightless bird". Very often the way of illustrating words is strongly connected with the tradition, it is obvious in case of pictures of water, depicted as falling melisma ("There were fountains", example 14). Several times there is the word "wind". Birtwistle depicts it in at least two different ways: using the flute *leggiero* melody and using arched melody and sudden change of texture that looks like a wave and is correlated with dynamic process of *crescendo–diminuendo* (example 15). The picture of sun can be considered as the example of *Augenmusik* – we cannot hear it but we can see the sunbeams in the score. However, at the same time the lighting up of timbre is audible: harp, vibraphone and bells join the orchestra. The literary and musical depiction of the sea as seen by Ariadne is especially interesting. The princess considers sea as her "lock and chains" and "the doors that slams and slams". This is the sea, what prisons her on Crete. Music motions with strong blows, *assimilatio* becomes *tirata* (figure connected with flash of lightening or with bolt) or, at the same time, slamming doors. The metaphor from the libretto permeates into the music. What is more, this is one of few places where Birtwistle multiplied words (example 16).

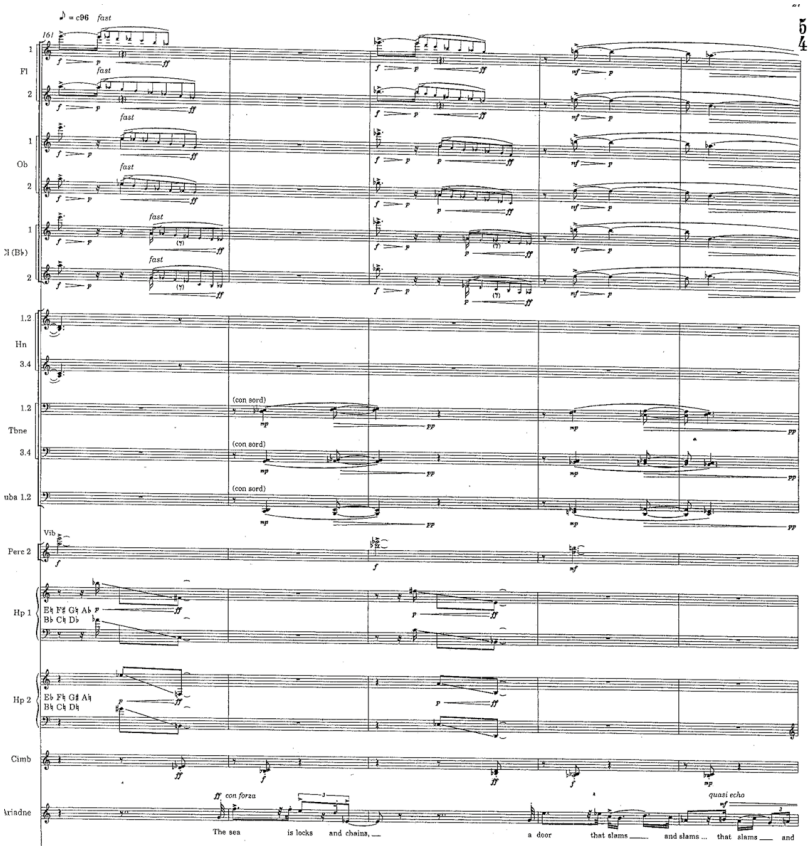
9 See for an example: Sz. Paczkowski, *Nauka o afektach w myśli muzycznej pierwszej połowy XVII wieku*, Lublin 1998; W. Lisecki, *Vademecum muzycznej „Ars Oratoria"*, „Canor" 1993, No. 3 (6), pp. 13–26; P. Zawistowski, *Rozważania na temat retoryki w muzyce baroku*, [online] http://chopin.man.bialystok.pl/Dokumenty/Publikacje/02-02.pdf [accessed: 28.04.2015].



Example 14. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 2 (mm. 214–215). *Assimilatio.*

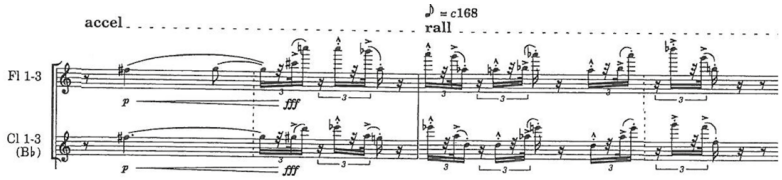


Example 15. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 1 (mm. 104–112). *Assimilatio*.



Example 16. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 1 (mm. 161–165). *Assimilatio*.

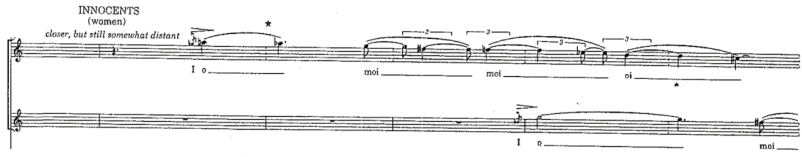
Assimilatio can be also used to imitate human's and Minotaur's voices: laughing, crying, moaning. That type of *assimilatio* appears when Ariadne enacts the sexual intercourse between her mother, Pasiphae, and the white bull from the sea. In this case music can be even called 'naturalistic'. The *interrogatio* (question) and *exclamatio* (exclamation, example 17) figures are widely represented as well. Not all of questions included in the libretto are mechanically rewritten in music as *interrogationes*: Birtwistle never becomes a slave of rules and stereotypes, even chosen by himself.



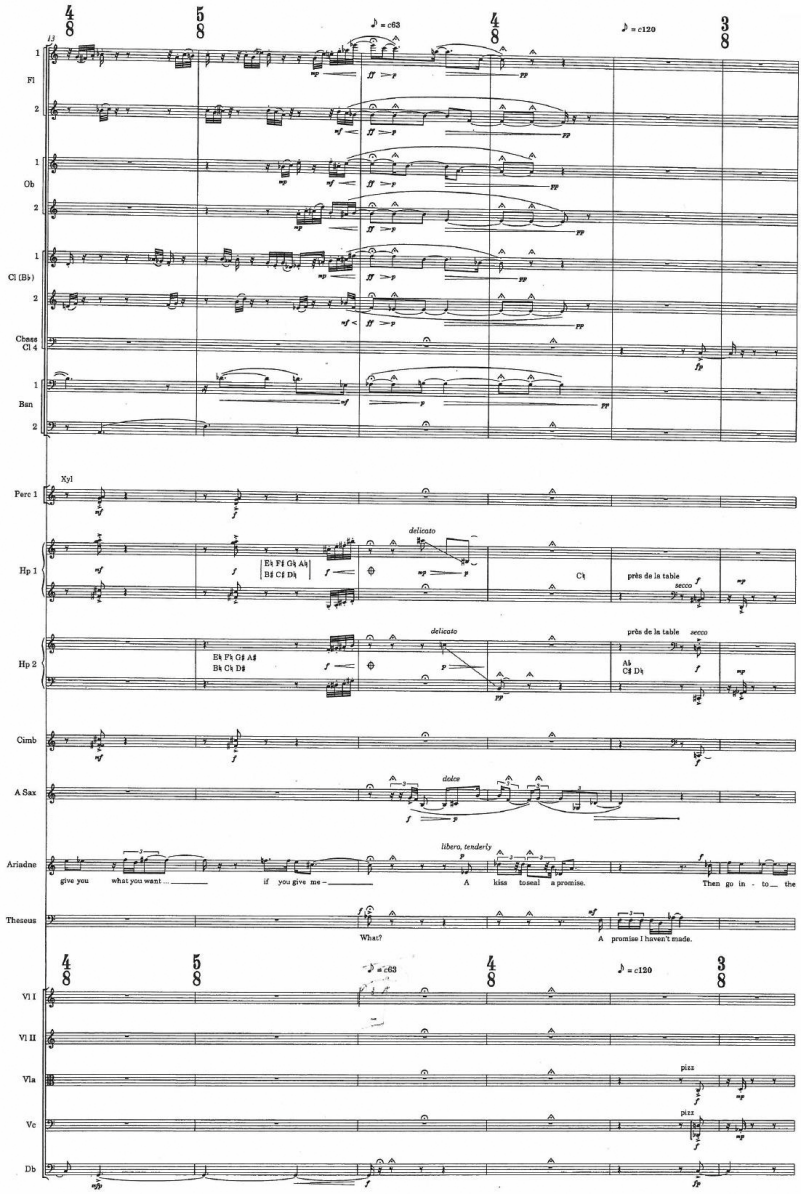
Example 17. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 5 (mm. 151–152). *Exclamatio* in instrumental parts.

Other kind of *assimilatio* is *katabasis*, depicting falling or going down, or, metaphorically, the death as going to the underworld. It is worth mentioning that in *epicedia* there are Greek words about going to Hades, Ariadne speaks about that as well: "Forget voices still in your ears / As you go down to the hall of the dead". Birtwistle uses *saltus duriusculus* figure in similar way.

Similarly, the *pathopoia* (figure of pain) is connected with the descending direction. Although musical language of *The Minotaur* is dominated by dissonances, there are some passages distinguishingly saturated by semitones, especially the *lamenti* of the Innocents (example 18). Among other figures are: *suspiratio* (dying Innocents sing broken lines), *transgressio* (falsetto register for word "sun"), *accentus*, *mutatio*, *tenuta*, *aposiopesis* as well.



Example 18. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 1 (mm. 151–155). *Pathopoia* – Innocents' lament.



Example 19. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 11 (mm. 13–18).

Composer also uses individual means of expression connected with vocal parts. The part of Minotaur 2 (the super-ego seen in the mirror) is spoken, not sung; choir screams and whispers, Ariadne laughs, Minotaur, when awake, roars and moans. As an individual 'instrumental' figure we can see the sudden change of timbre, introduction of harp's arpeggio *delicate* and saxophone's *dolce*, when Ariadne tries to force Theseus to kiss her (example 19).

Rhetorical strategies

When the rhetorical 'power' is not incidental but lasts longer, I call it **rhetorical strategy**. The most common rhetorical strategies in *The Minotaur* are connected with orchestral means: particular characters or situations can be associated with specific timbre, articulation or texture.

The piece is dominated by heterophony – desynchronised lines, textures made from independent *strata* are the **unmarked** state of music. In that context everything that is sharp-rhythmed and has a clear (but not necessarily regular) pulse becomes **marked**.[10] It is obvious in abovementioned *epicedia* with their homorhythmic texture and responsorial alterations. Sharply outlined pulse characterises Theseus as a hero in his monologue from the first scene. The *gradatio* process in this fragment can be also understood as a rhetorical strategy: the texture saturates, the tonal space fills, volume rises to the *climax* on words: "I am here to free them, here to kill or to be killed". Similar rhythmic change appears in the initial scene when Ariadne has to choose the first victim. Stage directions say that the rhythm should be the basis of choreography "pursuit–dance". The aura of ominous anxiety is intensified by high strings playing motifs in small ambitus or the tremolo, and fanfare-like trumpets, trombones and percussion. That fragment begins with characteristic motif in cimbalom and double bass (example 20).

10 I use terms "marked" and "unmarked" as understood by Robert S. Hatten, in: R.S. Hatten *Four Semiotic Approaches to Musical Meaning: Markedness, Topics, Tropes, and Gesture*, "Musicological Annual" 1995, No. XXXI, pp. 5–30.

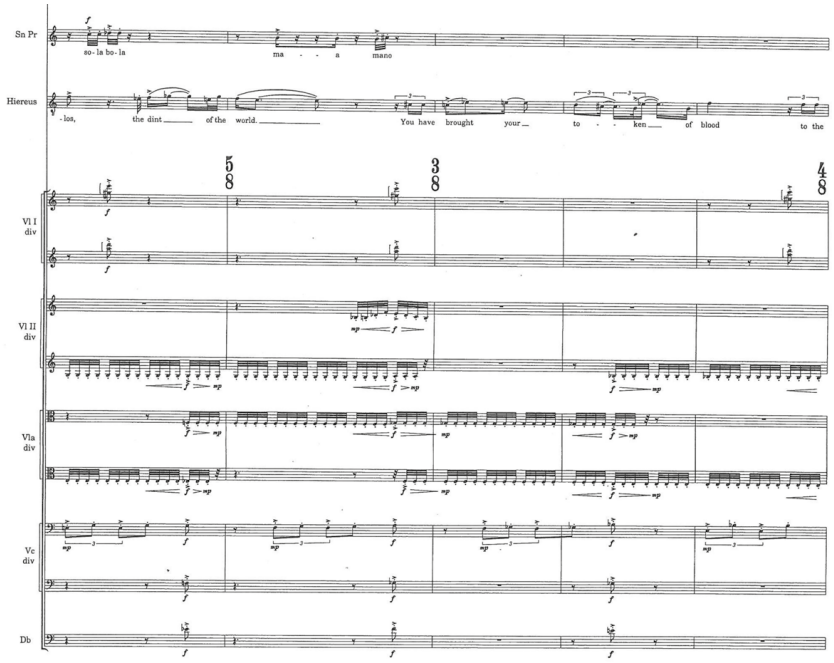
Example 20. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 1 (m. 236). Cimbalom part.

Example 20 is variant of 'fate motif': repetition of pitch is traditionally connected with the powers of destiny, the sinister fate. It appears in meaningful places in the opera. For the first time, in the instrumental introduction. As it is presented in trumpets and xylophone, it sounds as piercing 'fanfare of fear' (after Constantin Floros). Later it is connected with words "They're marked for death" and with the scenes where the Innocents are being killed. It can be interpreted as "gull-cry / their [Innocent's] death song" as well. Interesting variant of fate motif becomes a basis of scene 10 settled in the Oracle, where it blends with nervous *concitato* (example 21).[11]

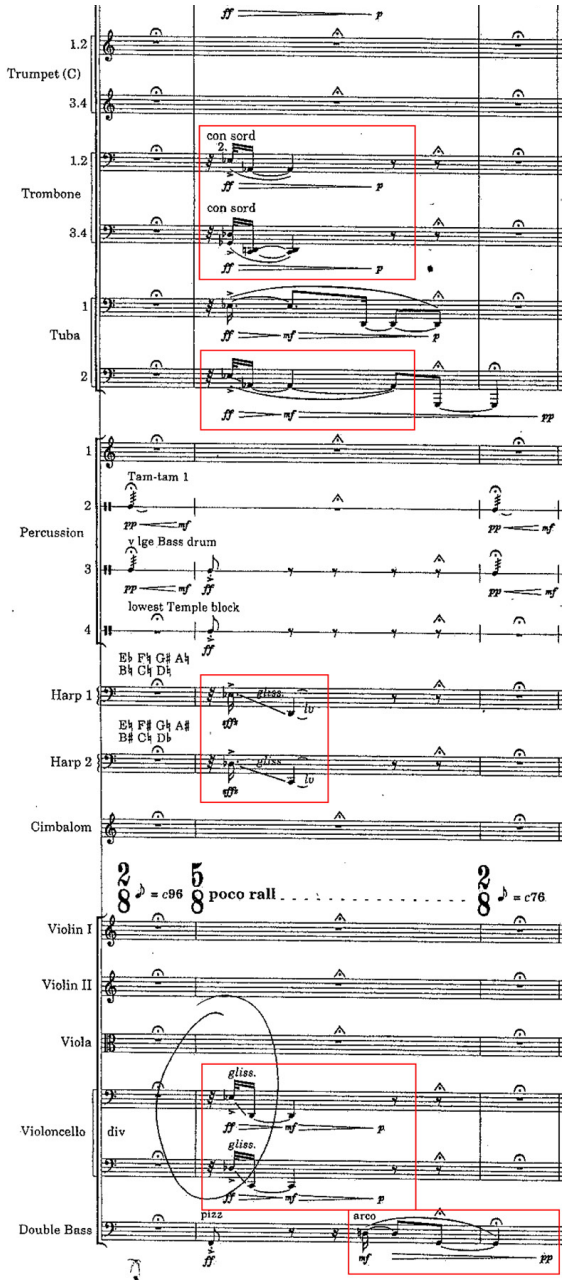
As much important as 'motif of fate' is '**glissando gesture**',[12] which opens the whole opera and returns in important moments (example 22). At the beginning of the opera it appears exactly three times, that can be interpreted as initiation of the ritual (Ariadne will later say: "They are here and the tale is told again"). It returns in connection with killing the dove in the Oracle scene, in moment of anagnorisis when Minotaur recognises Theseus in the shadow in the mirror, and, finally, when Theseus gives the fatal blow. It also corresponds with descending direction of Ariadne's lines.

11 Instrumental interludes in *The Minotaur* are called *Toccatas* – Birtwistle admits that he is inspired by Claudio Monteverdi. Beard D., Birtwistle H., *Beauty and the Beast: A Conversation with Sir Harrison Birtwistle*, "The Musical Times" 2008, Vol. 149, No. 1902, p. 13.

12 Called by David Beard 'iambic gesture'. See D. Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle's Operas and Music Theatre*, Cambridge 2012, p. 436.



Example 21. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 10 (mm. 27–31). Motif of fate blended with *concitato*.



Example 22. H. Birtwistle, *The Minotaur*, scene 1 (mm. 1–3).

Among rhetorical strategies there is also the stable connection between particular timbre and characters. The 'extension' (according to Rhian Samuel's opinion)[13] of Ariadne's voice is the 'sleazy' (as Birtwistle called it) saxophone. It is not the usual orchestral instrument, so it can emphasise Ariadne's isolation.[14] Beard connects the low woodwinds (cor anglais, bassoon, bass clarinet) with Minotaur.[15]

Rhetorical means as audible and visible devices of telling the story

Naturally, there are many more examples of using the rhetorical means in *The Minotaur*. My aim was to give the picture of how carefully Birtwistle had read the text before he wrote music. Since the first contact with this opera the organic connection between words and music is obvious. Composer is aware of historical context of rhetorical figures and he uses them in connection with the tradition but he is not a slave of stereotypes. He puts traditional figures and strategies in context of contemporary musical language and plays with our expectations and habits. Birtwistle's great success is in creating recognisable and audible figures within the context of his modern musical language.

In his opera the stories of Minotaur and Ariadne are really important. All literary and musical means are designated for telling them. But even more important is **the audible and visible process of telling the story**, meta-narration about how important stories are for our life and our identity. We are the witnesses of Minotaur and Ariadne creating their stories, but we are also witnesses of how Birtwistle re-creates – retells – these stories in music.

13 R. Samuel, *Birtwistle's 'The Minotaur': The Opera and a Diary of Its First Production*, "Cambridge Opera Journal" 2008, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 233.

14 *Myth is Universal,* H. Birtwistle, D. Harsent, S. Langridge and C. Rice statements about the opera, *The Minotaur*, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, conducted by A. Pappano, directed by S. Langridge, DVD, Opus Arte 2008.

15 D. Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle's Operas…*, *op. cit*., p. 434.

Abstract

The Minotaur is the opera composed by Harrison Birtwistle to libretto by David Harsent. It was premiered in 2008 in Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Birtwistle's musical language is basically modernist: atonal, centralised, based on interval or number patterns, pre-compositional operations, scales invented by the composer himself. His music is recognised as generally intellectual and connected with great avant-garde of 20th century. On the other hand, Birtwistle has never denied expression in his pieces. Titles and extra-musical inspirations are common (i.e. *Melencolia 1*). Birtwistle is inspired by music of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and, less often, Baroque.

The score of *The Minotaur* is full of rhetorical figures: both *hypothyposis* and *emphasis*. They are evident and immediately recognised in spite of contemporary, atonal language of the opera. Mostly, they are inspired by Baroque musical-rhetorical figures but there are examples of individual, contemporary means. Figures are local and connected with only one or few words. General atmosphere of fear and isolation can be created with 'rhetorical strategies', which are active much longer than figures. Birtwistle uses musical symbols as well. There are two main symbols in *The Minotaur*: the iambic 'glissando gesture' which opens the opera and appears in its key moments, and the 'motif of fate' – repetition connected with powers of fate and with tragic irony.

The question is, why Birtwistle used so traditional and instantly recognisable means, as he is known for his highly intellectual music. Answer given in this text is that they stay in service of narration. They are audible and visible signs of telling the story.

Keywords

Harrison Birtwistle, David Harsent, *Minotaur*, musical rhetoric, contemporary opera

Abstrakt

Figury i strategie retoryczne w *Minotaurze* Harrisona Birtwistle'a

Minotaur to opera skomponowana przez Harrisona Birtwistle'a do libretta Davida Harsenta. Jej premiera odbyła się w 2008 roku w Royal Opera House w Covent Garden.

Język muzyczny Birtwistle'a jest zasadniczo modernistyczny. Charakteryzują go atonalność, zcentralizowanie, bazowanie na formułach interwałowych lub numerycznych, zabiegach pre-kompozycyjnych, czy też skalach wymyślonych przez samego kompozytora. Jego muzykę uznaje się generalnie za intelektualną, powiązaną z wielką awangardą XX wieku. Z drugiej strony Birtwistle nigdy nie pozbawiał swoich utworów ekspresji. Powszechnie pojawiają się u niego tytuły i inspiracje pozamuzyczne (na przykład *Melencolia 1*). Kompozytor czerpie inspirację z muzyki średniowiecznej, renesansowej i w mniejszym stopniu barokowej.

Partyturę *Minotaura* przepełniają figury retoryczne – zarówno *hipothyposis*, jak i *emphasis*. Są oczywiste i natychmiast dają się rozpoznać pomimo współczesnego, atonalnego języka opery. Zasadniczo, są one oparte na barokowej teorii retoryki muzycznej. Figury pojawiają się w wybranych miejscach i łączą się tylko z jednym lub kilkoma słowami. Atmosfera strachu i izolacji w całej operze została wykreowana dzięki całym strategiom retorycznym, które wykazują znacznie dłuższą aktywność niż same figury. Birtwistle posługuje się także symbolami. Dwa główne w *Minotaurze* to jambiczne *glissando,* rozpoczynające operę i pojawiające się w jej kluczowych momentach, oraz motyw fatum – kręgu powtarzającego się motywu powiązanego z siłami przeznaczenia oraz ironią tragiczną.

Pytanie, dlaczego kompozytor sięgnął po tak oczywiste, wręcz trywialne środki, skoro jest znany ze swej wysoce intelektualnej muzyki? Pozostają one w służbie narracji – oto odpowiedź, której dostarcza niniejszy artykuł; są słyszalnymi i widzialnymi znakami opowiadania historii.

Słowa kluczowe

Harrison Birtwistle, David Harsent, *Minotaur*, retoryka muzyczna, opera współczesna.

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