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## Operas by Mykola Lysenko in the Context of Romantic Slavic Schools of the 19th Century

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### Abstract

For the dissemination of historical memory or the portrayal of national myth, opera was the most appropriate instrument. Romanticism was a period during which many of Europe's national identities were formed. The primary function of the opera at the time was to return to national mythology and history. The focus of this contribution are the operas by Mykola Lysenko (Микола Лисенко, 1842–1912), the founder of the Ukrainian school of composition. These works, which are largely unknown in Poland, represent an interesting interpretation of the principles of the genre of the Romantic opera. They are based on folk mythology and historical themes, typical of many Slavic schools of composition.

The article discusses Mykola Lysenko's role among the representatives of the Slavic opera. Emphasis is placed on the importance of his work seen as a symbol of the 'national spirit', reflected in the content of the opera through the incorporation of historic traditions and myths, customs, folk rituals, etc. The article also compares Lysenko's operatic oeuvre with the national opera genre

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in the legacy of artists belonging to other Slavic national schools: in Poland (Stanisław Moniuszko), the Czech Republic (Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák) and Russia (representatives of 'The Five', mainly Modest Mussorgsky, Alexander Borodin and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov). Attention is drawn to several common features common to most composers of the Slavic schools of opera, such as:

- synthesis of the 'general European technique' of composition with national tradition;
- remarkable range of themes and genres related to national themes (often with a folkloric flavour expressing these themes in a multitude of ways, using the widest range of varieties and genre models of the opera);
- fusion of folk themes with generally accepted forms and means of expression in professional music of the period, prevalent in the Romantic style and post-Romantic influences.

**Keywords:** national opera, Slavic culture, Romanticism, Mykola Lysenko, passionarian personality.

## Introduction

When evaluating the operatic heritage of Mykola Lysenko, the founder of the Ukrainian school of composition, in relation to works by other prominent Slavic composers, especially by Stanisław Moniuszko, it is crucial to consider multiple factors, not only aesthetic but also national, social, and historical. The social function of 19th-century opera should not be overlooked here. At the time, it was primarily viewed, and to a large extent, still is today, through the lens of its contribution to national identity formation, against the backdrop of poets and composers being elevated to the status of 'bards'. This observation applies to numerous nations, both those enjoying more favourable conditions, i.e. their own state, as well as stateless nations. The latter seek in various ways, including through art, to present their history, including their unique national traditions, to the widest possible European audience.

The alteration in the *modus vivendi* of musical and theatrical works is linked to the emergence of national consciousness as a sense of a unique *ethnie*, which influences social behaviour, particularly in the 19th century, especially after the Revolutions of 1848. According to the English researcher Anthony D. Smith, the main attributes are the 'myth of common ancestry' and 'shared historical memories' Irena Poniatowska situates the origin of the *ethnie* category within the temporal and spatial context that saw the development of 'nationality' as an area of study in philosophy, sociology, and cultural studies.

The concept of the nation as a political community had genetic links to French Enlightenment ideas, while the concept of the nation as a cultural community had its origins in German Romanticism<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I. Poniatowska, *Narodowość w muzyce polskiej przed Moniuszką*, [in:] *Muzyka sztuką przezwyciężania czasu. Witoldowi Rudzińskiemu w dziewięćdziesiąte urodziny*, ed. M. Demska-Trębacz, Wydawnictwo Akademii Muzycznej, Warszawa 2003, p. 68.

## 1. Opera in a National and Social Context

In shaping the national image through the lens of Romantic philosophy and aesthetics, as well as through broader social ideas, writers occupy the first place among all artists. In this view, the poet becomes:

[...] a creator of worlds and evoker of myths [...], a seeker of absolute truth and its revealer [...], a charismatic man and God's anointed [...], a bard of the nation and an advocate of the people's truths [...]<sup>2</sup>.

Ireneusz Bittner outlines three common types of this cultural construct within the Romantic attitudes of national bards: literary-Byronic, Promethean and messianic. In the case of Poland, it is possible to observe the predominance of the third model, which utilises a range of religious devices to programme the bard as a Christian spiritual leader<sup>3</sup>. In the Ukrainian version, especially in Taras Shevchenko's works, the second, Promethean model to be predominant. Shevchenko's very biography portrays the image of a martyr poet who suffers for the noble desire to liberate his poor people. He was apprehended by the tsarist authorities and dispatched to serve as a soldier in the steppes of Kazakhstan. In the programmatic poem *The Caucasus*, Shevchenko refers to the symbol of Prometheus as a martyr who must atone for the gift of fire given to humans. The poet's self-reflection: 'Караюсь, мучюсь, але не каюсь [I suffer and agonize, but I do not regret it<sup>4</sup>]<sup>5</sup>, is also based on Promethean semantics.

In the Romantic period, for the first time in the history of European art, musicians, especially composers, occupied an honourable place alongside poets and philosophers.

In music conceived in the same categories as Romantic literature, i.e. as a form of expression of an exceptional individual creating works bearing social function – unifying, encouraging, uplifting and messianically heralding the advent of a better tomorrow – the national bard-composer becomes analogous to the bard-poet<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> I. Bittner, *U podstaw antropologii filozoficznej polskiego romantyzmu*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 1998, p. 95 (94–104).

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, pp. 98–99.

<sup>4</sup> Own translation.

<sup>5</sup> Т. Шевченко, *Н.Н.*, [in:] *Зібрання творів, у 6 томах*, Київ 2003, vol. 2: *Поезія 1847–1861*, p. 47; [T. Shevchenko, *N.N.*, [in:] *Zibrannya tvoriv: u 6 tomah*, Naukova Dumka, Kyiv 2003. vol. 2: *Poeziya 1847–1861*, p. 47].

<sup>6</sup> A. Topolska, *Mit Stanisława Moniuszki jako wieszcz narodowego. Studium na podstawie polskiego piśmiennictwa w latach 1858–1989*, doctoral thesis under the supervision of prof. S. Żerańska-Kominek, University of Poznań, Poznań 2012, p. 55; source: [https://www.academia.edu/2487948/Mit\\_Stanis%C5%82awa\\_Moniuszki\\_jako\\_wieszcz\\_narodowego\\_Studium\\_na\\_podstawie\\_polskiego\\_pi%C5%9Bmiennictwa\\_w\\_latach\\_1858\\_1989](https://www.academia.edu/2487948/Mit_Stanis%C5%82awa_Moniuszki_jako_wieszcz_narodowego_Studium_na_podstawie_polskiego_pi%C5%9Bmiennictwa_w_latach_1858_1989) [as of 29.03.2023].

The Romantic period marked the peak of the awareness and diffusion of the national idea. The opera took this idea as its main task and pursued it using themes from the national history, creating images of heroes, portraying customs and traditions, national myths, reflected in music through folk genres, distinctive melodies and rhythms, and depicted images of musical and dramatic themes in decorations and costumes.

The opera is a synthesis of various elements, especially literary and musical, based on the collaboration between the composer and the poet. Thanks to its democratic nature of expression and capacity to respond rapidly to any alteration or innovation in aesthetic direction, it was particularly appropriate for conveying historical memory or depicting national myth. It soon became not only an artistic but also a national and social phenomenon. The social and historical significance of opera has been highlighted by various researchers, emphasising its role in modelling reality.

Opera, as an art form, represents the coexistence of diverse elements and substances within a musical-verbal-theatrical structure. Additionally, it serves as a representation and documentation of cultural experiences, human mentality, and sensitivity. They formed and shaped the artists as well as modelled reality with its inherent historical and social identity, course of events, accepted or rejected visions of man, aura and mood. Such an understanding assumes, of course, not only that something has been recorded in the opera, but also that this recording can be read, interpreted, and understood<sup>7</sup>.

Here are but a few examples. During the struggle for Italian independence, Giuseppe Verdi's name was understood as word (acronym) which, surprisingly, included the abbreviation *Viktor Emanuel Rex di Italia*. Stanislaw Moniuszko's opera is considered a national symbol of Poland. Rüdiger Ritter discussed the societal responsibility placed upon Moniuszko's music: a duty towards the nation's future and its current emotional state, embedded from a temporal distance into the composer's artistic and social stance<sup>8</sup>. Bedřich Smetana's stage works have been a hallmark of Czech culture since the mid-19th century. Vladimir Stasov's writings impose social, national, and patriotic demands, rather than purely artistic ones, on the operas of the composers of 'The Five'. Mykola Lyсенko was even put on a list of suspects by the tsarist police because of the patriotic nature of his operas.

The national idea in the 19th century created an image of opera that was fundamentally different from that of the Baroque and Classical periods. W.A. Mozart did not place great emphasis on the nationality of his opera pro-

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<sup>7</sup> E. Nowicka, *Zapiscane w operze. Studia z historii i estetyki opery*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2012, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> R. Ritter, *Musik für die Nation. Der Komponist Stanislaw Moniuszko (1819–1872) in der polnischen Nationalbewegung des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt am Mein 2005, p. 114–121.

tagonists. By contrast, during the era of national identity formation in many European countries, the primary objective of opera was to return to national mythology and history. This resulted in musical and stage works of socio-political significance. As a result, opera became a fundamental ideological position in national schools of composition and subsequently, after the revolutions of 1848, it played an important role in the formation of national identity.

In this context, a distinct position is held by the Slavic opera, represented in the second half of the 19th century by Russia, Poland, Czechia, and Ukraine. Although the first three nations have been successful in sharing their operatic accomplishments with the global audience, the works of Mykola Lysenko, which represent romantic Ukrainian opera, are still largely unknown outside Ukraine. The absence of Lysenko's works in other European countries stems predominantly from historical hindrances rather than a lack of artistic merit. Additionally, in recent years there has been a lack of a proper cultural strategy to promote Lysenko's legacy in other European countries. In light of this, it is worthwhile to present his opera works from the perspective of a wider cultural development process in Slavic nations.

## 2. Lysenko as a 'Passionary Figure' among Passionaries-Creators of National Operas

Mykola Lysenko as a personality, author and animator of musical life can be seen through the lens of so-called enthusiasts, i.e. artists, writers, social activists who deliberately devote themselves to the enlightenment of their nation, submitting to a higher purpose beyond their individual creative aspirations. The term 'passionary personalities' was first introduced into modern philosophy by the Russian humanist of the second half of the 20th century, Lev Gumilev (Лев Гумилёв). The theory has its predecessors, particularly in the anthropological and cultural studies of Oswald Spengler, the French Annales school, Arnold Toynbee, Jean Baudrillard and other prominent Western philosophers of the 20th century who mostly tackled the issues related to national mentality problems and their role in the process of evolution.

According to Gumilev's theory, initially put forth in 1978 and subsequently elaborated upon in the book *Ethnosfera: the history of people and nature*<sup>9</sup>, the progress of any ethnic community is primarily due to the passionary representatives of their group, who channel their activities towards achieving the most

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<sup>9</sup> Л.Н. Гумилёв, *Этносфера. История людей и история природы*, Наука, Москва 1993, pp. 164–192. [L.N. Gumilev, *Ethnosfera. Istoriya lyudey i istoriya prirody*, Nauka, Moskva 1993, pp. 164–192] (automatic transliteration).

crucial goals, fully dedicating themselves to the good of their nation and propelling it towards faster and more fruitful development as compared to others. The main impulse for the 'passionarians' is a strong inner drive for a certain activity, which is as beneficial as possible to society, an *alias* for the ethnos<sup>10</sup>.

In this context, the period in question imposes particular demands on themes, genres and the utilisation of folklore and other forms of musical expression. As a result, among musicians, the composer of the 'national opera' is elevated to the status of the creator of the main synthetical genre.

The composers of German, French, and Italian opera from the 19th century utilised national history and literature, while adhering to the fundamental principles of Romantic musical theatre aesthetics. In Slavic countries, on the other hand, opera has been given additional social and national functions, often associated with the more intense development of its distinctive character. Given Mykola Lysenko's position among the representatives of the Slavic opera, this essay will focus on the symbolic theme of 'national spirit' as reflected in the inclusion of traditions, historical myths, customs, and folk rituals. This is characteristic not only of Lysenko's work, but also of the heritage of composers of the national opera in Poland (Stanisław Moniuszko), Czechia (Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák) and Russia (representatives of 'The Five', mainly Modest Mussorgsky, Alexander Borodin and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov).

It is worth noting several characteristics that are common to most Slavic schools of opera. The most important of these was the pursuit by almost all the national opera composers mentioned above of professional studies, usually in Germany, where the conservatoires were renowned for their high standards of teaching and famous professors who attracted students from all over Europe. Not without significance for this 'Germanocentrism' was the philosophy of the Enlightenment, especially the idea of knowing Slavic history and culture, as formulated by the famous German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder. He was an ardent believer in the originality and value of Slavic spiritual traditions, as evidenced by the following words:

[...] valuable contributions to the history of this community. It is advisable to supplement these histories with information from external sources to fill in any gaps, and to preserve the vanishing remnants of their customs, songs and legends, and to compile a thorough picture of the history of mankind, a complete 'history of this tribe'<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Л.Н. Гумилёв, *Этногенез и биосфера Земли*, Издательство Ленинградского университета, Ленинград 1989. [L.N. Gumilev, *Etnogenez i biosfera Zemli*, Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, Leningrad 1989, p. 252] (automatic transliteration).

<sup>11</sup> Cit. per: J.G. Herder, *Myśli o filozofii dziejów*, vol. 1–2, translated by J. Gałeczki, introduction and commentary by E. Adler, PWN, Warszawa 1962, vol. 1, p. 328.

One of the most persuasive and vital components of this ‘complete picture’ is poetry and folk song, which, as per J.G. Herder, ‘[...] is the universal language of humanity, and the mother language of poets is song’<sup>12</sup>.

Even if the founders of the Slavic schools of composition, leading figures in the Romantic period, did not go to Germany to study directly with a particular professor, they were still notably influenced by the German school. As is well known, Moniuszko studied in Berlin under Karl Friedrich Rungenhagen, the director of the Berlin Singakademie. Although neither Smetana nor Dvořák pursued their studies directly in Germany, the influence of Franz Liszt on B. Smetana’s studies and the impact of contact with J. Brahms on A. Dvořák – and the entire Czech culture – are evident.

Mykola Lysenko attended the Leipzig Conservatory between 1867 and 1869. He graduated with honours<sup>13</sup> in piano under Theodor Wenzel, a friend of Robert Schumann, and Ignaz Moscheles. Additionally, he studied theoretical subjects under Karl Reinecke, a prolific author of music theory textbooks.

A somewhat different situation formed in Russia, where the ideologue of ‘The Five’, music critic Vladimir Stasov, had a distinct view on German conservatoires and similar institutes in Europe. He expressed strong disapproval and accused them of being too conservative and rigorous, lacking an understanding of the ‘truly artistic soul’.

[...] academies and conservatoires only serve as centres for the spread of infirmity, fostering the spread of harmful beliefs and unrefined artistic taste<sup>14</sup>.

Stasov advocated the private instruction of musicians, with consideration given to the unique qualities of each future composer or performer. However, starting with Mikhail Glinka, the founder of the Russian national school, who studied in Berlin under Siegfried Dehn, most Russian composers, including those who belonged to ‘The Five’, did not avoid German influence, turning directly to the leading representatives of the German school or adopting principles of their aesthetics. Alexander Borodin consulted Franz Liszt in Weimar, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov adopted the principles of instrumentation, partly also harmonics, and an extensive leitmotif system from Richard Wagner. Overall, the trend of studying composition in Germany prompted Slavic authors to adopt the Romantic system in its most constructive form and the ‘general European’ technique of com-

<sup>12</sup> J.G. Herder, *O początkach pieśni w ogóle*, translated by B. Płaczkowska, [in:] idem, *Wybór pism*, selected and compiled by T. Namowicz, translated by E. Namowicz, Wrocław 1987, p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> M. Lysenko’s name was inscribed on a marble plaque at the Leipzig Conservatory next to that of Edward Grieg.

<sup>14</sup> В.В. Стасов, *Статьи о музыке. В пяти выпусках*, vol. 2 (1861–1879), Музыка, Москва 1976, p. 9; [V.V. Stasov, *Stat’i o muzyke. V pyati vypuskakh*, vol. 2: 1861–1879, Muzyka, Moskva 1976, p. 9] (automatic transliteration).

position applied in synthesis and based on national tradition. This trend had another consequence: the perception of the national artist as a passionary, i.e. a person with superhuman powers to influence national society.

Johann Gottfried Herder's ideas, central to European Romanticism and incorporated into the 19th-century reflections on Moniuszko, glorified the artist as an outstanding individual whose work and life are mutually explanatory, and whose genius is understood as a spiritual insight into the nature of the collective, making it possible to create a space for understanding free artistic expression as the fulfilment of a position as an advocate of the nation. The artist transformed into a bard, possessing the capacity to conceive a historical vision through their initiation into the 'spirit of faith and wisdom'<sup>15</sup>.

The second feature common to all Slavic authors of national operas was the extraordinary variety of themes and genres, usually associated with national themes, often with a distinctive folkloric flavour, but addressing those themes in a variety of ways, using a wide range of variations and models of the operatic genre. However, in the few operas by Slavic composers concerning the culture of other nations, national musical elements are still evident. Examples include *Paria* by S. Moniuszko, *Mozart and Salieri* by N. Rimsky-Korsakov, or operas on ancient themes like *Sappho* and *Aeneid* by M. Lysenko. 'Foreign' themes and their interpretations by Moniuszko were humorously discussed by Zygmunt Noskowski:

[...] Moniuszko's works [...] at the source of common poetry learned to interact with the spirit of the folk song, with what the Germans call Quellengeist. By what means did it incorporate the spirit of this song into all songbooks and became so intimate with it that it dictates *Flis* to a brilliant singer in Paris, and later tells Neala, the lover of a *Paria*, to sing on the banks of the Ganges, as Zosia sang on the banks of the Neris<sup>16</sup>.

Contemporary scholars have a similar view of Lysenko's 'ancient' operas *Aeneid* and *Sappho*:

*Sappho* [...] is an example of the contemporary European effort to modernise the operatic genre. In terms of musical language, it exemplifies Lysenko's Ukrainian Romanticism<sup>17</sup>.

When examining the example best known in the Polish culture, the legacy of Stanisław Moniuszko, there is no question that customs, traditions, Polish his-

<sup>15</sup> A. Topolska, *Stanisław Moniuszko jako wieszcz narodowy*, 'Res Facta Nova' 2012, no. 22 (13), p. 209.

<sup>16</sup> Cit. per: B. Tumiłowicz, *Śpiewajmy Moniuszkę*, „Argumenty” 1983, no. 28, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> У. Граб. *Опера Саффо М. Лисенка – Л. Старицької-Черняхівської в контексті інтермедіальної взаємозалежності*, рукопис доповіді, виголошеної на конференції до 180-річчя М. Лисенка у Львівській національній музичній академії ім. М. Лисенка 7 травня 2022 року; [U. Hrab. *Opera Sapfo M. Lysenka – L.Staryts'koyi-Chernyakhivs'koyi v konteksti intermedial'noyi vzayemozalezhnosti*], manuscript of a lecture given at a conference celebrating the 180th anniversary of M. Lysenko's birth at the Mykola Lysenko Lviv National Music Academy, Lviv 07.05.2022.].



tory are reflected in his musical and dramatic works both as lyrical drama with folk undertones (*Halka*) or in a legendary and fantasy setting (the unfinished lyrical drama *Rokiczana*), in patriotic comedy (*The Haunted Manor*, and partly also in *Verbum Nobile*) or based on contemporary love intrigues (*The Countess*, *Flis*). Add to this ballets and operettas, such as *A Night in the Apennines*, which are often set abroad, outside Poland, but are always Polish from a musical perspective, what emerges is a complete artistic vision of the world with a focus on the homeland. Similarly, operas by Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák present all the themes of Czech mythology, customs and history: historical drama (Smetana's *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia* and *Dalibor*, Dvořák's *Dimitrij*), comedy of manners (Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, Dvořák's *The Devil and Kate*), epic legend (Smetana's *Libuše*), lyric fairy tale (Dvořák's *Rusalka*).

### 3. Operas by Mykola Lysenko as the Mental Code of Ukraine

Similarly, to other Slavic schools, M. Lysenko's works demonstrate various models of the operatic genre which combine the traditions of European schools with folk elements. What follows is a comprehensive list of musical theatre pieces indicating the year in which they were written and the model of the operatic genre:

- *Андрашиада* 1866–1877 (*Andrashiada* – satirical sketch. The title was taken from the name of the headmaster of the first Kiev gymnasium, Andriashev, who was ridiculed because of his illiteracy);
- *Чорноморці* 1872 (*Chornomortsy* – lyrical-comic operetta of moral character);
- *Різдвяна ніч* 1874 (*Christmas Eve* – fantasy comic opera based on a novel by Nikolai Gogol, based on distinctive intonations and genres (carols, shchedrivkas) of the so-called 'winter cycle' – Ukrainian folklore);
- *Утоплена* 1883 (*The Drowned Maiden* – a lyrical-fantasy drama based on Nikolai Gogol's novel, folklore sources – lyrical and 'Kupala' songs, summer, calendar songs, closely related to folk mythology);
- *Наталка Полтавка* 1889 (*Natalka Poltavka* – singspiel, by Ivan Kotliarevsky, folk songs, arranged by Lysenko);
- *Тарас Бульба* 1890 (*Taras Bulba* – grand historical drama based on Nikolai Gogol's novel, modelled after the Italian grand historical opera. The main folklore sources are Ukrainian dumas and historical songs);
- *Відьма* 1901 (*The Witch*, unfinished);
- *Саффо* 1896–1904 (*Sappho* – chamber opera, lyrical monologue with elements of melodeclamation);

- *Енеїда* 1910 (*Aeneid* – grand heroic opera based on Ivan Kotliarevsky's Poem);
- *НоктюРН* 1912 (*Nocturne* – chamber opera in one act, 'moment opera'). Operas for children (based on Ukrainian folk tales):
- *Коза-Дереза* 1888 (*Koza-Dereza*);
- *Пан Коцький* 1891 (*Mr Kotsky*);
- *Зима і Весна, або Снігова краля* 1892 (*Winter and Spring*).

In addition to composing 13 operas, Lysenko also created music for numerous plays, including Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It should be noted that Lysenko was a pioneer in two types of operatic genre in European culture. As the author of the first operas for children<sup>18</sup> and of the first 'miniature opera' *Nocturne* (1912), he preceded the corresponding genre of opera in the works by the French composer Darius Milhaud by 15 years, for his three *Opéras-Minutes* on ancient themes were written in 1927.

By juxtaposing the themes of Slavic national operas, what emerges is a peculiar musical and artistic overview of each nation's mental code. By bringing seemingly separate elements into a series, the operatic legacy of each of the mentioned authors will in fact form a coherent system. In it, ethical, historical and social, spiritual, and aesthetic values, shaped taking into account the element of folk music, have been reflected upon, related to and transformed according to the level of development of contemporary opera and artistic achievements of other countries, thus becoming part of the universal circle of *Weltliteratur* as defined by J.W. Goethe. Considering that mental values do not only concern the main levels of human thought and emotion - *ratio*, *emotio*, *intuitio* but are also directed at *existentio*. This collective *existentio*<sup>19</sup>, seen as the significance of the entire body of national operas of the Romantic period, especially for nations without a state of their own, increases immeasurably, as those nations compensated in a very short time for everything that other national schools with a long tradition of musical development, had acquired over centuries.

In comparison to Italian, German and French operas of the second half of the 19th century, it is worth noting that their authors tended to avoid this genre diversity, proclaiming a central idea over a larger time frame and faith-

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<sup>18</sup> According to most musicological sources, the creator of the children's opera is the German composer Engelbert Humperdinck, the author of the children's opera *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893), but Lysenko's operas were written earlier: the first one, *Koza Dereza*, in 1889, the last of the three, *Winter and Spring*, in 1892.

<sup>19</sup> The term 'mentality' was introduced by Lucien Levy-Bruhl. According to his theory, the principles of mentality go beyond the individual, are collective, concentrated in the genetic memory of a certain ethnos, and therefore not subject to a rationalist analysis. See: L. Levy-Bruhl, *La mentalité Primitive*, Wentworth Press, London 2018.

fully adhering to a main theme. Richard Wagner focuses on ancient Germanic mythology, Giuseppe Verdi on psychological drama while the French 'lyrical opera' indicates its main direction by its very name. The rare exception only confirms the rule.

The third principle that distinguishes the national opera of the 19th century in the Slavic area is the fusion of folk themes with the generally accepted forms and means of expression in professional music of the time, practised in the Romantic and post-Romantic styles. It was precisely this 'folklore', 'familiarity', presented in a professional, universal way, which appealed most to the hearts of the audience and was the main strength of Slavic national operas.

When discussing Moniuszko's opera *Halka*, the first critics, Józef Kenig and Józef Sikorski, were already considering this issue. Sikorski in his search for a precise definition of the 'essence of nationality' proposed his own classification system in which he distinguished three levels of nationality in the opera *Halka*:

- the first level is the 'rhythm that has long been considered national, which in *Halka* is expressed through Polish highland dances, the mazurka and the polonaise';
- The second degree includes 'all the aspects that belong to the genre of the song';
- the third level includes all other ideas which are 'ardently felt'<sup>20</sup>.

When evaluating Lysenko's operas using the same criteria, a similar picture emerges. Additionally, there is a similar assessment of their 'nationality' and 'folklore' that was formulated later. It was authored by Stanislav Ludkevich, a graduate of the University of Vienna, composer, ethnologist and leading Ukrainian critic. In his article *Mykola Lysenko as a Creator of National Music*, Ludkevich provides an overview of Lysenko's opera works in the broader context of the European tradition:

(Lysenko's – note by the author) interesting and distinctive musical style, free from any patterns, lively and varied [...]. It can nimbly flow through an endless emotional spectrum, move suddenly from warm love to furious passion, from peaceful joy to burning pain and severe sorrow. The musical and technical devices of this style are simple yet never forced, unconventional. At times it becomes a gentle, meditative recitation, suddenly it shifts to dramatic [...] almost 'Wagnerian' accents, then again it expands into a wide 'steppe' melody<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> J. Sikorski, *Halka, opera w 4-ech aktach, Słowa Wł. Wolskiego, muzyka St. Moniuszki*, "Ruch Muzyczny" 1958, no. 1, pp. 3–4. Cit. per: A. Topolska. *Mit Stanisława Moniuszki...*, p. 210.

<sup>21</sup> С. Людкевич *Микола Віталійович Лисенко як творець української національної музики*, [in:] idem, *Дослідження, статті, рецензії, виступи*. Упор., ред., переклади, вступ. стаття і прим. З Штундер, vol. 1. Дивосвіт, Львів 1999, p. 292; [S. Lyudkevych, *Mykola Vitaliyovych Lysenko yak tvorets' ukrayins'koyi natsional'noyi muzyky*, [in:] idem, *Doslidzhennya, statti, retsenziyi, vystupy*. Upor., red., pereklady, vstup. stattya i prym. Z Shtunder, vol. 1. Dyvosvit, L'viv 1999, p. 292].

Józef Sikorski identifies rhythm as the main attribute of Polish folk music. This observation is valid as Polish folklore is predominantly associated with dance genres. In Ukrainian folklore, the main feature would be the expressive, elaborate melodics, especially its epic variety, infused with free improvisational declamation. This kind of musical narrative was inherent in the singing style of the kobzars, the blind Ukrainian rhapsodists, and in the main genre they performed, the *duma*. Lysenko extensively utilized the unique characteristics of Ukrainian *dumas*. His works featured free melodies that combined cantilena and recitation, rhythmic variation, and a lack of fixed metre. Additionally, he employed sharp, sometimes violent contrasts in dynamics and agogics, which contributed to the dramatic and expressive character of his compositions. The operas *Taras Bulba* and *Aeneid*, as well as his choral works and solo songs, contain noticeable elements of epic folklore. It is worth noting that the composer was the first to conduct theoretical research on *dumas*, describing them in a study entitled *Description of Musical Devices in Ukrainian Dumas and Songs Performed by Kobzar Veresaï*<sup>22</sup>. In this work, the author writes, among other things, that: 'the singing was not even encased in a musical shell, from it emanated a savage and burning pain'<sup>23</sup>.

The historical song is another genre often found transformed in M. Lysenko's operas. Similar to *dumas* in their principles of expression, they have a broad melodic line, but are characterised by a vigorous rhythm and a regular metric pulse. M. Lysenko often combines the qualities of both epic genres of Ukrainian folklore, in both solo parts and, more frequently, in choruses. It is precisely such means that create the character of Taras's main aria from the opera *Taras Bulba: Hey, the eagle flies* (*Гей, лина опер*). Zdeněk Nejedlý, a Czech musicologist who studied Lysenko's approach to folk songs, stated:

[...] they are composed in the correct style, releasing and deepening the meaning of each voice, thus elevating the choral composition to the highest level of true vocal polyphony, while preserving the essence of the national character. Lysenko is the first Ukrainian composer to turn to this original music, and with very good results.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> М. Лисенко, *Характеристика музичних особливостей українських дум і пісень, виконуваних кобзарем Вересаєм*, Музична Україна, Київ 1978, р. 12; [M. Lysenko, *Kharakterystyka muzychnykh osoblyvostey ukraïns'kykh dum i pisen'*, vykonuvanykh kobzarem Veresayem, Muzychna Ukraïna, Kyïv 1978, p. 12].

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Cit. per P. Савицький, *Микола Лисенко в наукових і науково-дослідних публікаціях Заходу*, [in]: *Записки наукового товариства ім. Т.Г. Шевченка*, vol. 226, Видавництво наукового товариства ім. Т.Г. Шевченка, Львів 1993, р. 324; [R. Savyts'kyi, *Mykola Lysenko v naukovykh i naukovo-doslidnykh publikatsiyakh Zakhodu*, [in]: *Zapysky naukovoho tovarystva im. T.H. Szewczenka*, vol. 226, Vydavnytvo naukovoho tovarystva im. T.H. Szewczenka, L'viv 1993, p. 324].

The use of 'all the aspects that belong to the genre of the song' is evidenced by the rich and varied palette of folk music genres in Lysenko's operas. In addition to the above-mentioned models of epic folklore, the composer turns to calendar and ritual genres, old archaic customs and lyrical folk song, which is very rich in Ukrainian folklore and linked to Ukrainian mental cordocentrism (i.e. the philosophy of the heart). In his interpretation of folk sources, however, he never descended into superficial ethnography. He incorporated them into the musical and stage narratives not as a decorative element, but by transforming them individually and presenting them in a new embellished form. By correlating the 'folk/collective' and the 'professional/individual', he produced the desired result: national character in a universal European system of expression. An example for the above thesis is the chorus from the opera *The Drowned Maiden – The Fog Falls By Waves* (*Туман хвилями лягає*). The text is in a folk style. It was written by Mykhailo Starytsky, Lysenko's cousin, poet, playwright and novelist, author of most of the composer's opera librettos. Lysenko does not quote any folk songs here. However, the chorus clearly refers to 'Kupala' or 'Rusaliï' songs, in line with the content of the opera and its origin, Gogol's novel. At the same time, the work as a whole displays all the qualities of the European Romantic style, particularly in terms of harmony and texture.

Finally, the most intricate level of nationality of opera, and one that predates L.N. Gumilev's theory of passionarians of the 20th century, is the third one, formulated by Sikorski, based on 'other ideas which are "ardently felt"'. It supports the incorporation of this 'national spirit', the 'mental code', through all available means of musical and theatrical expression.

However, it is at this third level where a strictly theoretical analysis falls short. It fails to provide a clear explanation of how the composer establishes a profound connection with the genius ethnîe and how he is able to transmit it to society and turn it into a symbol of national identity. This is a task for the phenomenology and the anthropology of music. Lysenko's music exemplifies the above thesis, as demonstrated by the overture to *Taras Bulba*. The author uses typical intonations of Cossack songs, a quotation from a popular song of the 'Ukrainian Sappho', the 17th century folk singer and poet Marusia Churai (Маруся Чурай) – *The Cossacks rose at dawn* (*Засвіт встали козаченьки*), and at the same time, as in every one of his works, demonstrates a good knowledge of European compositional technique, but in reality the striking power of influence of this music lies beyond the realm of rational explanation.

## Conclusion

This article presents two main premises. The first one aims to explain the stylistic dominance of the oeuvre of Mykola Lysenko, the founder of the Ukrain-

ian professional school of composition, as a representative of the aesthetic approach and stylistic principles of pan-European Romanticism, and not just as a purely national artist. The second one defines a feedback loop: the cultivation of universal and national spiritual ideals to which Lysenko was devoted. The multifaceted nature of his artistic thought is also reflected in a very wide range of emotions and, above all, in the balance and synthesis of the three main forms of poetic expression: epic, drama and lyric. Lysenko is appreciated for his monumental historical operas, as well as his chamber lyrical stage works, moral, comical and choral compositions, and educational children's operas.

In most of Lysenko's operatic works, there is a distinctive and skilful combination of stylistic and genre elements drawn from a variety of styles and periods with sources of Ukrainian folk music. Lysenko compares and synthesises:

- specific folk traditions with models of Western European Romanticism;
- Ukrainian cordocentrism rooted in national mentality with German rational form structure;
- pagan ritual archetypes with Christian spiritual enlightenment.

The Austrian musicologist Otto Biba provided a precise definition of the role of the national idiom in M. Lysenko's work:

The national idiom represents the distinctive mark of national music. Idioms are more than invented themes within a particular style supported, if at all, by certain harmonies that are specific to that style. Lysenko studied in Leipzig and learnt the craft of composition. He needed to bring the idiom of his Ukrainian music with him in order to express it in accordance with the generally accepted rules of composition. Mastering this is the most important requirement for creating and shaping national musical styles<sup>25</sup>.

Thus, the various musical and artistic processes of the 'long nineteenth century' inspire an in-depth academic reconstruction of the musical culture of Romanticism, including the categories of historical memory and national identity. This perspective enables a comprehensive examination of Mykola Lysenko's artistic style and allows for a comparison with other representatives of the Romantic national schools. It also helps to establish the extent to which his legacy, particularly in a genre as socially engaged as opera, meets the highest aesthetic and ethical criteria of European Romanticism. Therefore, the issues discussed include those directly related to furthering the understanding of his significance as a national representative of a strong Romantic culture, as well as different views of similar processes in the European intellectual space.

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<sup>25</sup> O. Biba. *Die Probleme und künftige Aufgaben musik-historischer Forschungen: musikalische Beziehungen in der topographischen Sicht*, manuscript of a lecture given at a conference celebrating the 180th anniversary of M. Lysenko's birth at the Mykola Lysenko Lviv National Music Academy, Lviv 07.05.2022.

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## Opery Mykoły Łysenki w kontekście romantycznych szkół słowiańskich XIX wieku

### Streszczenie

Do krzewienia pamięci historycznej lub przedstawienia mitu narodowego opera jak najbardziej się nadawała. Romantyzm to epoka kształtowania tożsamości narodowych wielu krajów europejskich. Głównym zadaniem opery w tym czasie był powrót do narodowej mitologii i historii. Przedmiotem rozważań w niniejszym artykule są opery Mykoły Łysenki (Микола Лисенко, 1842–1912), założyciela ukraińskiej szkoły kompozytorskiej. Dzieła te, prawie nieznanne w Polsce, reprezentują interesujące ujęcie zasad romantycznej estetyki operowej. Opierają się na wątkach ludowo-mitologicznych i historycznych, typowych dla wielu słowiańskich szkół kompozytorskich.

W pracy zostało uwzględnione miejsce Mykoły Łysenki w gronie przedstawicieli opery słowiańskiej. Główny akcent położony został na znaczeniu tej twórczości w aspekcie symbolu „ducha narodowego”, przejawiającego się w treści dzieła operowego poprzez wcielenie tradycji i mitów historycznych, zwyczajów, obrządków ludowych, etc. W pracy uwzględniono też porównanie dorobku operowego Łysenki z analogicznym gatunkiem opery narodowej w spuściźnie twórców innych słowiańskich szkół narodowych: w Polsce (Stanisław Moniuszko), Czechach (Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák) oraz Rosji (przedstawiciele „Potężnej Gromadki”, głównie Modest Musorgski, Aleksandr Borodin oraz Mikołaj Rimski-Korsakow). Zwrócono uwagę na szereg cech wspólnych, łączących większość kompozytorów słowiańskich szkół operowych, do których należy:

- synteza „ogólnoeuropejskiego warsztatu” kompozytorskiego z tradycją narodową;
- wyjątkowa różnorodność tematów i gatunków związanych z wątkami narodowymi (często o zabarwieniu ludowym, ujmującym owe tematy różnorodnie, z zastosowaniem najszerszego spektrum odmian i modeli gatunków operowych);
- zespolenie wątków ludowych z ogólnie przyjętymi formami i środkami wyrazu ówczesnej muzyki profesjonalnej, panującymi w ramach stylu romantycznego i tendencji postromantycznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** opera narodowa, kultura słowiańska, romantyzm, Mikołaj Łysenko, osobowość pasjonarna.