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Joseph Craig Crabtree

2001

An Investigation and Analysis of

Ned Rorem's *Fables:*

Five very short Operas

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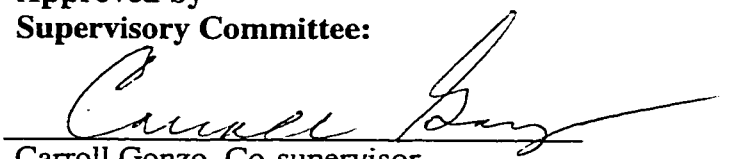

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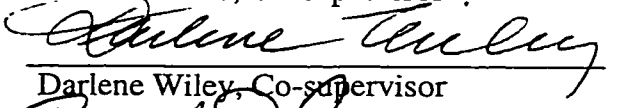

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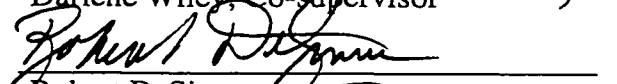

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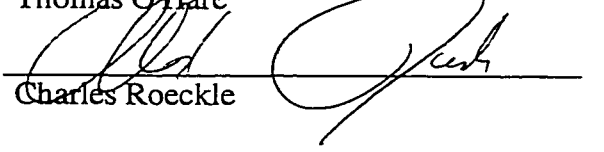

Charles Roeckle

An Investigation and Analysis of Ned Rorem's *Fables: Five very short Operas*

by

Joseph Craig Crabtree, B.M., M.M.

Treatise

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May, 2001

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Dedication

To my parents, Cleo and Art;
who taught me not only how to set goals for where I wanted to go,
but also how to enjoy the trip along the way.
To my brothers, Dan, Mark, Jay,
and their wives, Kizzy, Debi, and Barbara,
for showing me how to live, love, and laugh—
mostly at myself.
And to my sister, Suzi,
who showed me that singing was cool:
it's in writing now, "You were right!"

But most of all . . .
To Dana, my amazing wife,
whose laughter, support, and patience
made all of this possible.

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The author also wishes to thank Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., for allowing me to include musical excerpts of *Fables: Five very short Operas.*

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The author also wishes to thank The Viking Press, Inc., for allowing me to include excerpts of the text to *Fables.*

Poems from "THE FABLES OF LA FONTAINE", translated by Marianne Moore. © 1952 by Marianne Moore.

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An Investigation and Analysis of Ned Rorem's *Fables: Five very short Operas*

Publication No._____

Joseph Craig Crabtree, D.M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2001

Supervisors: Carroll Gonzo, Darlene Wiley

Ned Rorem has made great contributions to twentieth-century American music as a composer, essayist, and diarist. Rorem, best known for his art song compositions, has written several operas, including *Fables: Five very short Operas*. Academic investigation of his operatic output, however, revealed a lack of in-depth scholarship. This treatise provides a biographical sketch of Ned Rorem, including an overview of his compositional style. Biographical sketches were also compiled for the poets; Jean de La Fonatine, who wrote the original poems in French; and Marianne Moore, whose translation of La Fontaine's poems into English serve as the text for Rorem's *Fables*. A brief discussion of Moore's translation process is also included. Finally, an analysis of each of the operas is given, examining the relationship between the poetry and the music. For each of

the operas, the text is analyzed in terms of its dramatic content, characters employed, and morals delivered. Rorem's desires for the operas, included in the score, are also stated, so that his intentions, if any, could be understood. The musical analysis illustrates the specific application of Rorem's style and technique within *Fables: Five very short Operas.*

Stylistic analysis reveals Ned Rorem's love for literature, and how this influence can be seen in his stylistic trends. Rorem takes care in fashioning text settings, and maintains a sense of lyricism through his ability to follow the rhythmic pattern of speech, as well as the natural rise and fall of the pitch of the spoken text. Other stylistic traits would include expanded tertian harmony; quartal, quintal, and secundal harmony; added-note harmony; and ostinato patterns. All of these are evident in *Fables: Five very short Operas*. Analysis of the text reveals that they are separate entities, with no dramatic relationship between the texts. Analysis of the musical settings of these operas confirms that there are neither thematic nor key relationships between the operas. In each of the five operas, Rorem shows a keen understanding of the subtlety of the poetry, and displays the creative ability to translate this understanding into musical idioms of great variety and craftsmanship.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF NED ROREM'S *FABLES*

Introduction

The focus of this treatise is an investigation and analysis of Ned Rorem's *Fables: Five very short Operas*. Commissioned for the dedication of The University of Tennessee at Martin's Fine Arts Building, Ned Rorem's *Fables: Five very short Operas* premiered on May 21, 1971. These operas have two distinctive features. The first is the text, which consists of a series of French poems by Jean de La Fontaine, translated into English by Marianne Moore. More notable, however, are the performance forces required by the operas, which were written to give "large flexibility of both vocal distribution and staging potential."

Rorem wrote the following instructions for their performance:

> These tiny operas have large flexibility of both vocal distribution and staging potential. Their realization as lyric theater, ballet, cantata, or in combination of these, depends on the resources at hand. They may be performed directly by singers, or performed by mimes illustrating the poems heard from off stage.
>
> Each piece (except the first) contains a chorus of two soloists. Whatever their sex, and despite their conversational tone, they should try to sound alike, to be one voice--the exposition. They might stand at opposite sides of the stage, sometimes addressing the actors, sometimes each other, and sometimes us.

> The players interpret the circumstances described by this chorus, i.e., La Fontaine. Their vocalities are not always precisely assigned: this role could be sung by a baritone or mezzo, that role by a soprano or tenor.[1]

The fables that Rorem set are *The Lion in Love, The Sun and the Frogs, The Bird Wounded by an Arrow, The Fox and the Grapes,* and *The Animals Sick of the Plague*. Each story of these fables is self-contained, showing no dramatic development from start to finish. This lack of connection is most evident in the case of the lion, which dies in the first opera, but reappears as the "king of the beasts" in the last. Due to the nature of the genre, the characters are one-dimensional, each representing various aspects of human nature. In every opera, except the first, there is a Greek chorus, which sets the scene or addresses the action.

As with the texts, which are dramatically self-contained, the operas show no musical development, key relationship, or recurring motives. The pieces are scored for piano and various voices. The pieces can be performed separately, but when put together, Rorem requests that the order given be followed.

In the course of this investigation, each opera is examined. In order to understand the full compass of Ned Rorem's work, an awareness of his operatic

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[1] Letter from Ned Rorem, November 1970, printed as a preface in the score of *Fables*.

output is needed. As no such academic sources are extant, the first chapter provides a brief biography of Ned Rorem, including a discussion of the stylistic traits of his music. Biographical information about the poets Jean de La Fontaine and Marianne Moore are in chapter two, along with a brief discussion of the translation process Moore used to recreate the poems in English. Chapters three through seven address each opera separately. Each chapter begins with a brief discussion of the text of the opera in terms of characters employed, morals given, and dramatic structure. Text analyses are followed by Rorem's notes on the opera, giving an insight into the composer's thoughts and wishes for the piece. The bulk of each chapter is dedicated to analyzing Rorem's musical setting of the text, and to divining which of the idioms common in Rorem's stylistic output are employed within these operas. Finally, a brief summary is presented, tying these separate threads together.

During the course of this study, the term "figure" is used in two ways. When it is assigned to a numeric value, it represents a musical excerpt found in the treatise. When assigned a capital letter, "figure" will refer to a musical idea, ostinato pattern, or motive found in the opera. As the operas are separate entities, each opera begins with measure 1, and the first musical motive is assigned the letter A. Thus: "Figure A can be seen in figure 17" is understood to mean "the first musical idea can be seen in the seventeenth excerpt."

CHAPTER TWO

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF NED ROREM

When discussing the impact that Ned Rorem has had upon American music in the twentieth century, one is challenged to look not only at his musical output as a composer, but also at his literary output as an essayist and diarist.

> As a kid it was a toss-up whether I would be a composer or writer, and I didn't settle for one thing. But I am a composer who writes; I am not an author who composes. It is as a composer that my diaries as well as the musical essays exist, although a lot of people don't even know I write music. (When the Paris Diary came out I got as many fan letters for that one book as I've received in the twenty years that I've been a composer.) As a writer of diaries, I express the introverted, self-indulgent, messy side of myself. Music fulfills a need for order, meticulousness, cleanliness and economy.[2]

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ned Rorem was born on October 23, 1923 in Richmond, Indiana. His father, Dr. Clarence Rufus Rorem, taught at Richmond's Earlham College. His mother, Gladys, was involved with "projects of the Society of Friends and in

---

[2] Atack, Sharon. A. "Ned Rorem and His Songs." (M.M. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1969), 16.

inter-racial and peace movements."[3] His only sister, Rosemary, is slightly older than he. It is interesting to note that the composer of over a half dozen operas, including the work addressed in this treatise, was born into a family of Quakers, whose religious beliefs have proscribed music and theater. The true irony is that the close relationship shared by the family members is said to have "accounted for much of [Rorem's] musical development."[4]

The family moved to Chicago while Ned was still a child. His interests in writing and composing were encouraged during this time. His first songs date from when he was nine, and his first journal from a trip to Europe at the age of eleven. His interests in these two fields were enriched respectively by his study of the music of Ravel and Debussy, as well as the works of Hawthorn.

His formal studies in music composition began with Leo Sowerby in 1938-39. Upon completing high school in 1940, Rorem studied two years at Northwestern University's School of Music, then "transferred to the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia on a scholarship to study a year under Gian Carlo Menotti."[5] He then moved to New York City, attended Julliard, where he completed his Bachelor's degree. in 1946, and his Master's degree. in 1948.[6] While in New York, he studied composition with Bernard Wagenaar and David

---

[3] Ibid., 3.
[4] Ibid., 4.
[5] Ibid., 5.

Diamond. He also worked as "Virgil Thompson's music copyist in return for twenty dollars a week and lessons in orchestration"[7] and spent the summer of 1946 studying under Aaron Copland.

In 1948, he was awarded the Music Libraries Association "Best Published Song of the Year," and the following year he received the George Gershwin Memorial Award and a Fulbright Scholarship to facilitate his musical study under Arthur Honegger in Paris[8]

It is not surprising that Rorem's passions for music and literature would lead him to the genre of art song.

> After several months in Paris, he moved to Morocco for two years and seriously committed himself to musical composition. His literary preoccupations found release in song settings, upon which his reputation largely rests, and in the writing of journals whose candid revelations and presumptive observations both shocked the music world and delighted the literary intelligentsia.[9]

The works of this period in Morocco, both literary and musical, brought him the patronage of the Viscomtess Marie Laure de Noailles and "acceptance in the cultural milieu headed by Poulenc, Auric, and Cocteau."[10]

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[6] Atack lists the degrees as a B.A. and an M.A., whereas *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* states they were a BSc and an MSc, respectively.

[7] Atack, 5.

[8] New Grove, 90.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

While his social status in Paris flourished, it was in America where Rorem's music gained much attention. He received commissions from orchestras in Louisville, Kentucky, and La Jolla, California. A song cycle, *To a Young Girl*, was presented at Carnegie Hall by the League of Composers, and his orchestral works were presented by such noted conductors as Leopold Stowkowski and Leonard Bernstein.

By 1958, Rorem returned to New York, after receiving "an American Woodwind Ensemble grant and a Guggenheim Fellowship."[11] Since his return to the United States, Rorem's career has been prolific and varied. He served briefly on the faculties of New York State University at Buffalo (1959-61) and the University of Utah (Spring Semester, 1966). He has supported himself mainly through his compositions and through his literary work.

> Among his many commissions for new works are those from the Ford Foundation (for *Poems of Love and the Rain*, 1962), the Lincoln Center Foundation (for *Sun*, 1965); The Koussevitzky Foundation (for *Letters from Paris*, 1966); the Atlanta Symphony (for the *String Symphony*, 1985); the Chicago Symphony (for *Goodbye My Fancy*, 1990); and from Carnegie Hall (for *Spring Music*, 1991).[12]

Beyond the aforementioned works, he has written 7 operas. His first opera was *A Childhood Miracle*, written in 1952. His next opera, *The Robbers* (1956) remains unpublished. Rorem received a commission from the New York City Opera (for

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[11] Atack, 10.

[12] <www.nedrorem.com/bio.html>

Miss Julie, 1965). In 1966, he wrote *Hearing*. The following year, he wrote *Three Sisters Who Are Not Sisters*, and received a commission from the Metropolitan Opera Studio (for *Bertha*, 1968). The subject of this treatise, *Fables: Five very short Operas*, was commissioned for the dedication of the Fine Arts Building at The University of Tennessee at Martin in May, 1971. *Fables* is the last original opera he has written to date. He revised *Hearing* in 1976, and *Miss Julie* in 1978.

His compositions include a wide variety of instrumental and vocal combinations. Such noted conductors as Eugene Ormandy, André Previn, Leonard Bernstein, Zubin Mehta, Leopold Stowkowski, Dimitri Mitropoulis, Kurt Masur, Fritz Reiner, and Alfred Wallenstein have presented these works.

Whereas his compositions have garnered him numerous awards, including the Rockefeller Grant and the Pulitzer Prize (for *Air Music*, 1976), his writings also have been well received. He has received three ASCAP-Deems Taylor Awards: in 1971 for *Critical Affairs, A Composer's Journal*; in 1975 for *The Final Diary*; and in 1992 for an article in *Opera News* which focused on American opera. His literary output includes eight books, and articles published in venues ranging from *Opera News* and *The New York Review of Books*, to *Mademoiselle* and *Vogue*.

Currently, Rorem dividess his time between New York and Nantucket. His *Paris Diary* and *New York Diary* have just been re-released in one volume, and he keeps people aware of his current projects through his Web site, <www.nedrorem.com>.

NED ROREM'S COMPOSITIONAL STYLE AND TECHNIQUES

In terms of his compositional output and technique, his works have been divided into two stylistic periods, with 1961 serving as a watershed year.[13] Whereas there are exceptions to this statement, the works of his early style period generally include "simple triadic harmony or triads with added-notes, diatonicism"[14] and "simple, even rhythms."[15] "Added-note harmony" occurs when, within traditional harmonic functions, triads have additional notes which "form major or minor seconds with chord members, rather than the sevenths or ninths of compound sonorities, and are attached to chords having clear directional powers."[16] These added-notes serve no harmonic function, but rather add texture or color within the existing harmonic framework. The rhythmic features of this

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[13] Davis, Deborah Bodwin, "The Choral Works of Ned Rorem.", (Ph. D. Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1978), 3.

[14] Ibid., 17.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

style period are fairly simplistic, and exceptions are "usually achieved through obvious consideration for the rhythm of the words."[17]

The second style period, to which *Fables* belongs, shows a marked change from the mildly dissonant triadic harmonies of the first style period.

> Techniques familiar to the second style period include increasingly disjunct writing and more diverse rhythmic composition. Prolonged dissonance is a major feature and involves use of ... secundal, quartal or quintal harmony and extended tertian sonorities.[18]

> His experiments with the song cycle have resulted in *Poems of Love and the Rain* (1963) in which the second half of the cycle consists of a contrasting setting of each poem of the first half, in reverse order, and *Sun* (1967), which presents eight poems in one continuous movement for soprano and orchestra. His later instrumental writing shows him to be absorbed by colouristic possibilities and by expanding the uses of tonality through altered chords, tone clusters, modality and polymodality. Beginning in the late 1960's, his compositions are sometimes based on various modified serial techniques while maintaining tonal harmonic references.[19]

Rorem acknowledges the change of style, but offers 1966, not 1961, as the year in which it occurred. This choice of year coincides with the publication of his first diary.

> After I published my first book, a diary in 1966, in the six months that followed I had more reaction from strangers than I have had in twenty years as a professional composer ... my prose writing fulfilled a very different kind of need from my music writing. My

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[17] Ibid., 19.
[18] Ibid., 3.
[19] New Grove, 190.

> music ... was crystaline and technical, and the prose was messy and bloody and neurotic and spoiled and hysterical and ... expressing a more diabolical or more infantile side of myself than my music. Ever since that first book became published ... my prose writing have become more circumspect, a lot more objective ... the [prose] writing has become more technical, more controlled, more pristine ... more elegant and more clean, and my music meanwhile has become hysterical, dissonant [sic].[20]

With his reputation founded on song, and much of his compositional output including the voice, it is no wonder that the overriding feature for both stylistic periods is his sense of lyricism.

> He displays an inherent knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of the human voice . . . [sic] Rorem wants his texts to be understood clearly and is generally careful to use practical vowels in extreme registers. His melodies, always gratifying to the particular voice or range for which written, follow to some extent the rise and fall of natural speech inflections.[21]

Great care is exercised in keeping the natural stress patterns of the words within the musical setting. His care for the text leaves "a feeling of reserve about his songs, expressive but always dignified and proper."[22]

Rorem's treatment of the accompaniment of his melodies often resembles the treatment given Baroque polyphony. The accompaniment is conceived with a linear, contrapuntal aspect, whose harmonies are implied and fostered through the interdependent motives of the separate lines. This linear emphasis takes precedence over the vertical chord structure of the harmony. Often Rorem will

---

[20] Davis, 2.
[21] Atack, 28.

weave three separate melodies into a piece, one for the vocalist, the second in one hand of the piano, and the third in the other hand.[23]

> Because of Rorem's linear inclinations his accompaniments often appear rather bland with very few coloristic effects. Although the accompaniment 'voices' move independently with long arches and curves, there is always an obvious relationship to the vocal part—always fitting the mood of the piece. His accompaniments require a very sensitive musician and technically they range from easy to very difficult.[24]

Another prominent device that can be found in Rorem's accompaniment is the use of ostinato figures. This feature can be seen in both style periods, but becomes more complex in his later works. These ostinato figures are seen in *Fables*, and will be discussed in more detail later in this treatise. The use of these ostinato figures, especially when more than one is employed at the same time, helps to maintain the linear texture of the accompaniment. Other features that help maintain Rorem's contrapuntal style are seen in his use of parallelism, contrary motion, and imitation.[25]

When Rorem chooses to use vertical harmonic structures, it is done with definite twentieth-century flair. He maintains standard tonic-dominant relationships, but with expanded harmonies. Through his use of sevenths, ninths, and elevenths, Rorem pays homage to blues singer Billie Holiday, whose

---

[22] Ibid.
[23] Atack, 29.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

recordings augmented his early musical studies of Ravel and Debussy.[26] Another feature seen in Rorem's accompaniment is the use of quartal harmonies. The arrangement of the chords into fourths "lends a sense of mild dissonance and vagueness of tonality" to his work.[27] Rorem does not frequently employ polytonality or polyharmonic material, and prefers dissonance to be less pronounced.

[26] New Grove, 190.
[27] Atack, 31.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TEXTS OF ROREM'S *FABLES*

THE LIFE OF LA FONTAINE

Jean de La Fontaine was born in 1621 at Château-Thierry in Champagne, France. His father was *Maitre des Eaux et Forêts*. The historical details of his early years are sketchy: there was a good school at Château-Thierry, but possibly he finished his education in Paris. He began a course of study in law, but did not complete it. In 1641, at the age of twenty, he entered the Oration Seminary of Saint-Magloire to become a priest, but dropped this course of study as well, and married Marie Héricart in 1647. This marriage did not remain strong, and twelve years later, in 1659, he separated from his wife and inherited his father's job as *Maitre des Eaux et Forêts* at Château-Thierry. His interest in the position was short lived, and he moved to Paris, where he assumed "the role of Client at the great houses—the life in fact of a harmless and welcome parasite." [28]

While in Paris, he lived with his cousin, M. Jannart, a lieutenant of the famous, all-powerful minister of finance, Fouquet. During this time, he

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[28] Mac Pherson, A. G., ed. *Fables of La Fontaine*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1916), x.

befriended Molière and Madame de Sévigné, whose daughter is addressed in the first poem set by Rorem. In 1661, the fall of Fouquet brought about the exile of La Fontaine and his cousin to Limoges. The exile was short, and in 1662, La Fontaine returned to Paris, and formed 'la société des quatre amis,' consisting of Racine, Molière, Boileau, and La Fontaine.[29]

In 1665, La Fontaine entered the household of his patron, the widow of Gaston d'Orléans, whose deceased husband had been the brother of Louis XIII. During this same year he published his *Contes*, which met with mixed popularity. He resided with d'Orléans for seven years, during which time, in 1668, the first six books of *Fables* were published.[30]

With the death of the dowager/duchess of Orléans in 1672, La Fontaine sought the patronage of Madame de la Sablière, and remained her guest until her death in 1692. During this time he sought to become a member of the Académie Française, and was elected in 1683. His election, however, was "vetoed by the king—a severe censor of the morals of his subjects—who had been justifiably affronted by the licentiousness of some of the *Contes*, and also wished to procure the election of Boileau, who had been rejected in favor of La Fontaine."[31] The king withdrew his veto the following year, upon the election of Boileau, and La Fontaine became a member of the Académie.

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

In 1692, with the death of Madame de la Sablière, La Fontaine moved to the household of M. d'Herwart, where he settled into retirement, "varied by the easy sociability of the Academy and the very different society of the Temple, led by the gay and reckless princes of Vendôme."[32] In 1694, the twelfth book of *Fables* was published, just one year before his death in 1695.

The life of La Fontaine is a lesson in contradictions.

> He was independent and wayward, loving to go his own gait, and yet content to live largely on the bounty of others. Never in his life, probably, was he really in love; perhaps, even, he was incapable of a 'grande passion'; and yet few men have had a greater capacity for friendship. Moreover, among his friends were the greatest men of the time. His learning was wide and thorough: he had a profound knowledge of Latin, Greek, French and Italian literature; yet he never lost the simplicity and freshness that have made his chief work [*Fables*] a primer for many generations of French children.[33]

La Fontaine's Place in Literature

La Fontaine's reputation as a literary figure is based predominantly upon the output of his twelve books of fables. His *Fables* "stand out in sharp outlines of their perfection against the rest of La Fontaine's literary production and even more against the other non-dramatic poetry of his age. It may well seem

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[31] Ibid., xi.
[32] Ibid., xi.

paradoxical that one of the richest periods of French literature should be represented in the field of poetry by one poet only and only one masterpiece."[34]

The *Fables* consist of *Précieux poetry*, which was "a kind of poetry written for a group of sophisticated people in order to give them a delicate intellectual pleasure, without any danger of upsetting the peaceful civilised atmosphere of the group."[35] *Précieux poetry* can be found throughout literary history, but with La Fontaine's output in France, "it assumed a particular importance in the seventeenth century."[36]

At the time that La Fontaine wrote his *Fables*, he was fortunate to profit from the advances of poetic technique developed by the long tradition of French poets. At the same time, however, he had difficulty searching for sufficiently innovative themes, imagery, and vocabulary with which to treat his subject matter. His choice of free verse as his idiom tells us a great deal about him as an artist.

> It gives us a very interesting proof of La Fontaine's concern for finding the perfect instrument for non-dramatic poetry; a language which would be as supple as prose and thus could translate the slightest shade of a narrative and yet would preserve the unity, the regular melody and the rhymes of poetry. This perfect instrument

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[33] Mac Pherson, A. G., ed., *Fables of La Fontaine*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1916), xii-xiii.

[34] De Mourgues, Odette, *La Fontaine: Fables* (Great Neck: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1960), 7.

[35] Ibid., 14.

[36] Ibid., 15.

> was to be free verse as we find it in the *Fables*, in some respects an epitome of all the prosodic forms used by his predecessors.[37]

It is not surprising that the paradox of free verse should appeal to La Fontaine, nor that scholars have commented on the contradictions inherent in the form.

> One of the most obvious characteristics of La Fontaine as a poet in the *Fables* is the effect of easy flexibility of his verse and of variety of diction. This has often been interpreted as a display of independence on his part, and as a carefree attitude towards poetry. The very reverse is true: his free verse and his choice of vocabulary are strictly subordinated to the possibilities offered to him in the field of non-dramatic poetry[38]

While under the guise of the fox, the lion, swans, and a variety of other animals, the subject of the *Fables* remains constant: human nature. La Fontaine doesn't spend time worrying about the outward appearance of humans, but rather, he seeks to illuminate the emotional nature of humankind. His choice of the fable as his literary vehicle shows both genius and economy.

> Therefore, if in La Fontaine's Fables animals behave and talk like men, it is not only because it is a convenient literary convention; it is because in real life men behave like animals, so that the choice of animals as a medium to comment on human behavior, is already in itself a judgement on human nature.[39]

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[37] Ibid., 10.
[38] Ibid., 33.
[39] Ibid., 20.

Although it is true that his topics deal with universal human behavior, there are moments where he makes allusions, albeit discretely, to people of his day. One such example can be found in *The Frogs and The Sun*, in which the moral is "too many despots in one country." The reference to Louis XIV, the "Sun King" of France, is easily recognized.

THE LIFE OF MARIANNE MOORE

Marianne Moore was born in Kirkwood, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, on November 15, 1887. Her father was an engineer, who had moved back to Portsmouth, Ohio, after a nervous breakdown. Her mother moved in with her Presbyterian minister father and remained in her father's house until his death in 1894. The family, mother, Marianne, and John (17 mos. older), then moved to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where they lived on a small inheritance. Her mother became a teacher at Carlisle's Metzger Institute. John became a Navy Chaplain, and the three remained close. Marianne attended school where her mother taught and, in 1905 she matriculated at Bryn Mawr College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Marianne Moore published a number of poems in the college literary magazines. She graduated in 1909 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. She took a secretarial course at Carlisle Commercial College and for three and a half

years, from 1911 to 1915, she taught stenography, typing, bookkeeping, commercial English, and commercial law at the United States Indian School in Carlisle.

In 1916, mother and daughter moved to Chatham, New Jersey, and kept house for her brother John, who had graduated from Yale and had been ordained a Presbyterian minister, like his grandfather. When America entered World War I, John joined the Navy, and Marianne with her mother rented a basement apartment in Greenwich Village, where they lived for eleven years as Marianne embarked on her career as a poet.[40]

> [Moore's] professional publication began in 1915 when the *Egoist*, a London journal specializing in imagist verse, printed her "To the Soul of 'Progress'" (later "To Military Progress"). In May 1915, *Poetry* magazine published five of Moore's poems.[41]

Moore, however, was not an imagist. She was well-known among such notable poets as William Carlos Williams, Alfred Kreymborg, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. In 1921, her first book, *Poems,* was published.

In the early 1920s Scofield Thayer and Dr. J. S. Watson took over the *Dial* and turned it into "a periodical of the arts that functioned through the 1920s as the most vigorous, most highly regarded of American journals of culture."[42] The *Dial* was "renowned not only for its literature but also for its commentary on music,

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[40] Bernard F. Engel, *Marianne Moore* Revised edition, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 12.

[41] Ibid.

drama, and fine arts, and for its photographs of paintings and sculpture."[43] In November 1924, Moore's poetry appeared in *Dial*, Dial Press published her second book *Observations*, and she was awarded a cash prize of two thousand dollars for achievement in poetry established by the *Dial's* founders. In July 1925, Moore was appointed acting editor and was promoted to editor in 1926, a title she held until the final issue in July, 1929.

Concurrent with the close of *Dial*, her mother became ill, and her brother, John, had been restationed to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Moore and her mother moved from Greenwich Village to a fifth-floor apartment on Brooklyn's Cumberland Street, where she lived until 1966.[44] She spent these years as a free-lance poet, book reviewer, and article writer. She had written no verse between 1925 and 1932, her time taken up by her work at the *Dial*. She returned with *Selected Poems* in 1935, a collection of previous poems, many in revision, as well as others from previous publications.

Between 1940 and 1946 she won a number of prizes: the Shelley Memorial, the Contemporary Poetry's Patrons' Prize, the Harriet Monroe Poetry Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1946, she received a joint grant from

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[42] Ibid., 14.
[43] Ibid., 14.
[44] Ibid., 16.

the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters. The following year her mother died.[45]

Her publications from this time include five poems in *The Pangolin and Other Verse* (1936), a collection of fifteen poems called *What Are Years* (1941), which included some of the previous works, and six more poems in *Nevertheless* (1944). Her books from this time consist of *Collected Poems* (1951) and a translation of La Fontaine's *Fables* (1954). She taught at the Cummington School, Bryn Mawr, Vassar, University of California at Berkley, University of California at Los Angeles, and Harvard.

"Publication of *Collected Poems* brought her a second *annus mirabilis*—the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the Bollingen Prize."[46] She gained fame, was featured in articles in *New Yorker* and *Newsweek*, as well as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar,* and was even asked by Ford Motor Company to suggest a name for their new product (her suggestion was shunned for the family name, Edsel).[47] She continued her writing, and published *Gedichte* (1954), *Selected Fables* (1955), *Predilections* (1955), essays and reviews, *Like a Bulwark* (1956), *O To Be a Dragon* (1959), *A Marianne Moore Reader* (1961), *The Absentee* (1962), "a dramatized retelling of Maria Edgeworth's prose story."[48]

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[45] Ibid., 17
[46] Ibid., 17.
[47] Ibid., 18.
[48] Ibid.. 18.

She published *Tell Me, Tell Me* in 1966, and edited the 1967 edition of *Complete Poems*. Moore died on February 5, 1972.

MOORE'S TRANSLATION OF LA FONTAINE'S *FABLES*

Much has been said about Moore's translation of La Fontaine's *Fables.*

> The paradox of a writer who treats ethical questions in a context of an apparently well-accepted moral order, while undermining their stability through stylistic subtlety and ironic qualifications, is a picture that fits both La Fontaine and Moore[49]

The translation process was hard, and in the intense labor between 1945 and 1952, Moore reworked the entire collection four times. The work was not without critics, as her approach to the translation process was innovative. Most translations of La Fontaine up to that time used inverted word order and archaic diction in order to try to give some sense of the "French style." Moore took a different approach.

> Of course Moore's adult and poetic translation of La Fontaine's Fables is not 'the same as' the original: it is not the word-for-word Englishing demanded of a college student. Poetry is made up not of words but of a complex of associations and rhythms; the Moore translation is, therefore, not an exercise in lexicography but a venture of thoughtful imagination.[50]

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[49] Molesworth, Charles, *Marianne Moore: a Literary Life*, (New York: Athenium 1990), 379.

[50] Ibid., 100.

Moore was diligent in her pursuit of keeping the form and structure of La Fontaine's original poetry.[51] She also sought out the advice of other writers within her circle of friends. Ezra Pound was the helper she sought out most, and she followed his advice as a governing principle in her translations. After speaking with Pound about the problem of keeping the word order from the original French, he "suggested that she remember the traditional English syntactical order of 'subject-verb-object.'"[52] Pound also suggested "that she write out the sense in English prose and then versify from that paraphrase."[53]

Following this advice, Moore left the story of the fable intact. However, the words were chosen for their own unique flavor. Jokes specific to English word play abound. One example is at the end of *The Fox and the Grapes*. After the fox has determined that the inaccessible grapes must be sour, the narrator ironically adds, "Better, I think, than an embittered whine." The play on words between the homophones "whine" and "wine" in reference to the grapes points out the care with which Moore chose her words.

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[51] Ibid., 101.
[52] Engle, 102
[53] Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LION IN LOVE

THE TEXT

The first opera of the set is *The Lion in Love.* It is the first poem of La Fontaine's fourth book of *Fables.* As was common in"the prefatory fables that La Fontaine placed at the beginning of each book," it gave a dedication of the stories to a courtier, and set the scene for the story.[54] *The Lion in Love* opens with an introduction, presented to the daughter of Madame de Sévigné.

> It was to this daughter—afterwards the Comtesse de Grignan—that the *Lettres* of Madame de Sévigné were addressed. The dedication is a good example of La Fontaine's graceful gallantry in verse. The coldness and haughtiness of manner were so notorious in Mademoiselle de Sévigné that La Fontaine can refer to them as the only limitations of her beauty, thus emphasizing a compliment while conveying a reproof ... the blinding force of love.[55]

In the first eight lines, La Fontaine petitions an audience through flattery and alludes to a story of "a Lion whom Love knew how to conquer." Lines 9-11 describe the poet's thoughts on love's inconstant nature, but in lines 12-17,

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[54] Stapleton, Laurence, *Marianne Moore: The Poet's Advance*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 169.

fearing he has overstepped his bounds, he gives an *apologia* and offers to present the subject in the form of a fable.

The next section is a preface to the actual events of the fable. Lines 18-24 set the time in the mythical past, when lions could still speak and often sought out the love of maidens. La Fontaine delineates the admirable qualities of the lion, which would attract a "young girl." He makes a point to note their "mettle and intelligence," as well as alluding to their sense of honor and chivalry, referring to them as "knightly fellows." Line 25 brings the reader back to the present and brings the preface to a close.

The fable proper begins with lines 26-29, as the narrator tells of a lion that has met a young girl and goes to the father to ask permission to marry her. The father is reluctant, and in lines 30-40, the narrator tells of the father's internal fear that by forbidding the wedding, he will drive his daughter into the arms of the creature. Lines 41-42 address the father as he prepares to give the lion his fatherly perspective. In the next ten lines, the father takes active voice and gives logical advice to the lion, suggesting that he should clip his claws and file his teeth blunt, so that his daughter would not be fearful or "improvidently annoyed."

In line 53, the narrator returns. The lion follows the father's advice, being so enraptured that he can't see the danger ahead. The result is delivered in lines

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[55] Mac Pherson, A. G., ed., *Fables of La Fontaine*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1916), 156-7.

55-58, as the defenseless lion falls prey to the father and his dogs, and the moral is summed up in the last two lines (59-60):

> Love, ah Love, when your slipknot's drawn,
> We can but say, "Farewell, good sense."

Rorem's Notes on the Opera

In the preface to the opera, Rorem gives the following notes:

> *THE LION IN LOVE . From 1 to 4 singers, and 3 or 4 actors. (Five minutes and 40 seconds)*
>
> Since the opera does not require the chorus interjections characteristic of the next three, consider the whole as chorus: the free flowing soliloquy is a long single strand. Thus, just one singer is feasible. I picture him (or her), plumed hat in hand, dedicating the music to Madame de Sévigné's haughty daughter seated in profile, then withdrawing to one side to explain the action which begins midway through the piece . . . But the strand could be shared by 2, 3, or even 4 musicians, one beginning where another leaves off, the divisions occurring at the metrenome changes.

Rorem's Setting of the Text

Rorem's setting of the text follows the sectional nature of the poem rather closely. The piece is through-composed, and beginning in D♭ major, common time. The first section covers the first eight lines of the poem, in which the narrator begs an audience from Madame de Sévigné's daughter. The accompaniment in section A is comprised of sustained rolled chords. Figure 1

shows the predominant features of these chords: extended tertian harmony and added-note harmony.

Figure 1, *The Lion in Love,* measures 1-2.

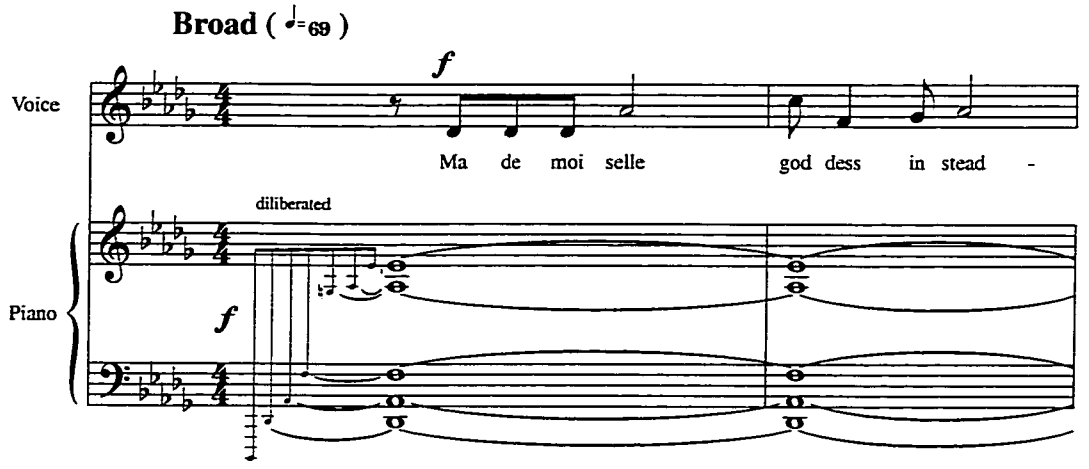
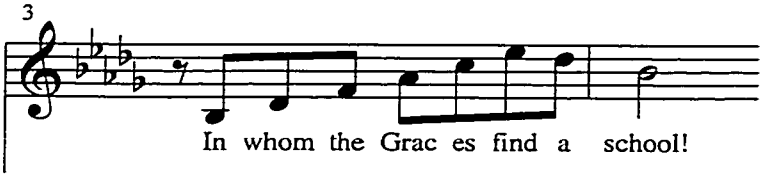
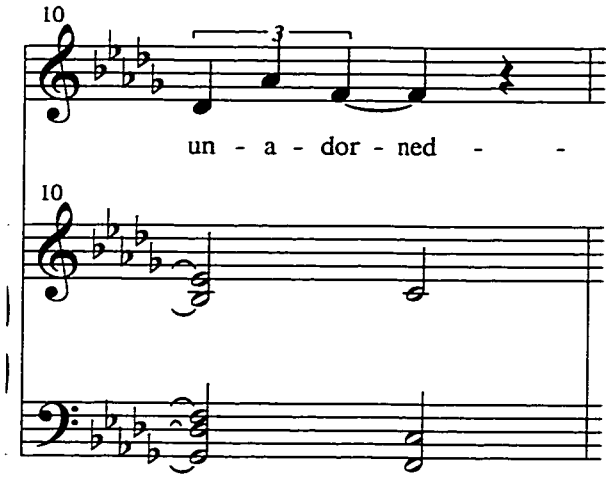


Figure 1 shows the opening chord. The extended tertian harmony is a D♭M9. The grace notes display a good example of added-note harmony with the use of the G♮. The vocal line of the opening section is largely syllabic in its declamation of the text. The harmonies outlined by the melody alternate between D♭M9 (seen in figure 1) and B♭m11 (figure 2).

Figure 2, *The Lion in Love,* measures 3-4.



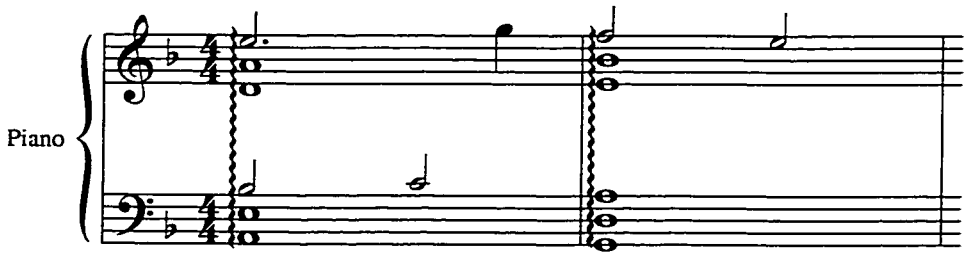
Occurring on the third beat of measure 10 is a rare moment of text painting, the importance of which will be seen later in the piece. The piano and voice cadence on F with open fifths on the line, "By a tale that is unadorned," (figure 3).

Figure 3, *The Lion in Love,* measure 10.

The empty quality of the open fifths gives musical weight to the word "unadorned." This is especially noticeable, as this is the first time in the opera that the piano is not playing a triad with extended tertian harmony.

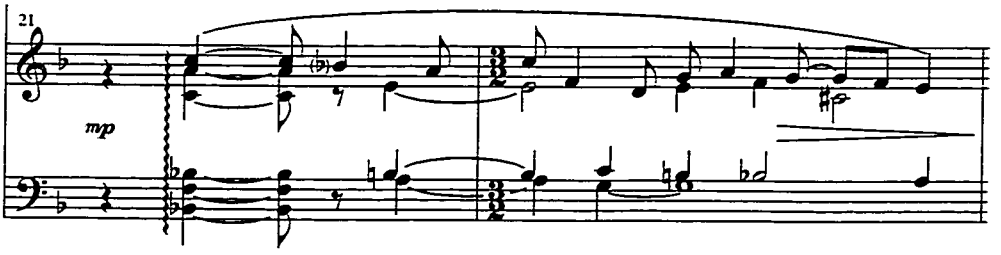
The next section of the poem begins at measure 16. In this section, the narrator begins a discussion on the nature of love, but fearing he has offended Madame de Sévigné's daughter, offers to present his views in the form of a fable. Rorem changes the key to F major, and the vocal line follows the contours of the opening by outlining an FM9 and Dm11. The piano, however, changes character.

Rather than the sustained tertian harmonies of section A, in section B the piano becomes more active, with moving voices and the addition of quintal harmonies in measures 18-19 (figure 4).

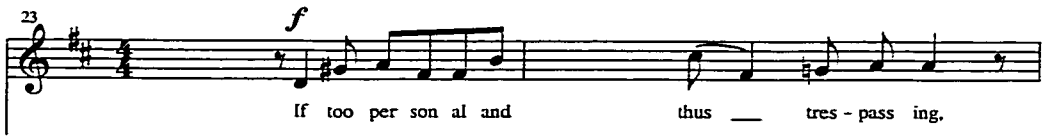
Figure 4, *The Lion in Love,* measures 18-19.



In measure 21, as the narrator ends his discussion of love, the piano becomes more dissonant and the note values become shorter. Syncopation occurs between the piano's upper line and the lower three (figure 5). This musically represents the offense of Madame de Sévigné's daughter at the narrator's discussion of love.

Figure 5, *The Lion in Love,* measures 21-22.

In response to this, Rorem begins the narrator's *apologia* in measure 23 in a different key, D major. The piano resumes the sustained rolled chords with

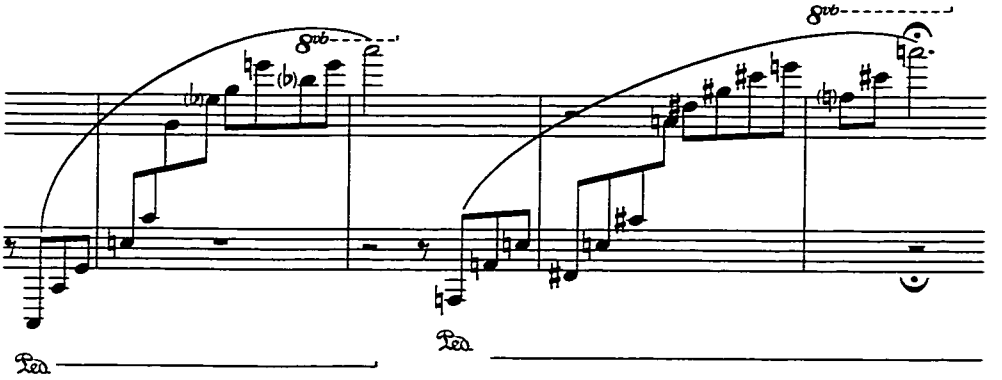
extended tertian harmonies similar to the opening section. The vocal line again begins to outline an extended tonic triad. In measure 23, however, Rorem uses his first non-diatonic pitch in the vocal line (figure 6).

Figure 6, *The Lion in Love,* measures 23-24

The use of the G# is fleeting, returning to the diatonic G♮ in the following measure. The text, "I'm saying what to you may seem an offense" suggests B major in measures 25-26, but returns to B minor in measure 27, and until the "formal preamble" begins in measure 35, alternates between the vocal line's use of the D♮ and the D# in the piano.

Measures 35-45 comprise the "formal preamble" to the fable. The preamble is set in E♭ major, and once again Rorem begins as in similar style to section A with the vocal line alternating between E♭M9 and Cm11. The piano begins with the extended tertian harmonies, rolled with added notes of section A. This changes at measure 41, where the piano begins a harmonic decent in 4 part counterpoint, moving through E♭ major in measure 45, and arriving at last in measure 46 at a C major triad. This arrival at C major signals the end of the preamble as the vocal line states, "The point of the preamble follows."

As a transition to the beginning of the fable, the piano plays two sustained arpeggios (figure 7).

Figure 7, *The Lion in Love,* measures 47-51



The first outlines an ambiguous C7, using both the raised third of C major and the lowered third of C minor. The second arpeggio is an AM7, obscuring the chord quality with the use of both the C♮ and C#. This shift in tonal center sets up the key of the fable itself as A major.

The fable begins in A major, on the anacrusis of measure 52, with a meter change to 6/8. Rorem has set the opening of the fable, lines 26-40, without accompaniment. This choice of an *a cappella* setting of the fable was foreshadowed in the tone painting found in measure 10 on the word "unadorned," and shows Rorem's creativity in finding musical idioms to represent the text.

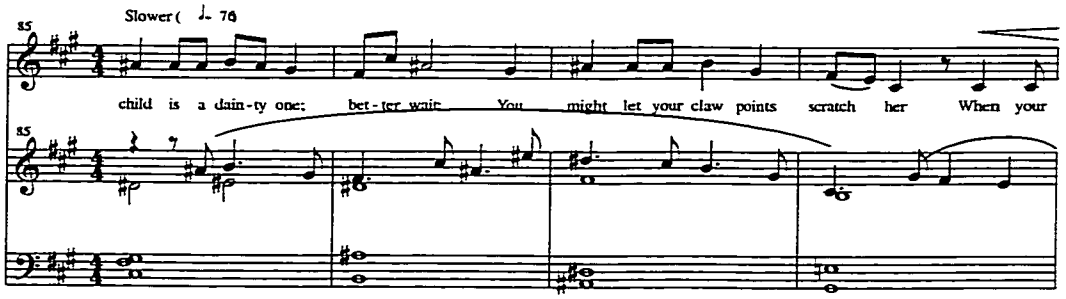
With the opening twenty-five measures of the fable being *a cappella*, the harmonies and tonal centers are only implied through note repetition and cadences

at key moments in the text. Despite the key signature of A major, the tonal center suggested is that of E minor. This can be seen in the use of the D# leading tone in measures 52-55, especially when coupled with the repetition of E♮ eight times in the first three measures. There are also cadences on E minor at measure 60, and again in measure 76.

The voice cadences in E minor in measure 76, as the piano again plays two sustained arpeggios. As with the previous transitional flourishes, the chord quality is ambiguous. The first flourish at measure 77 is an E triad with both the G♮ of E minor and the G# of E major. The second is a repeat of the AM7 chord, obscured with C♮, as seen at measure 49. The change from the *a cappella* opening coincides with the transition in the poetry, which moves the father from the passive to the active voice. The vocal line at this point, through the use of the E# in measure 83, serves as a transition to F# major, the key of the next section.

When the father addresses the lion at measure 83, the meter returns to common time, and the tonal center shifts to F# major. The piano has an active melody in the right hand, which is rhythmically syncopated against the mostly steady rhythms found in the vocal line and the lower voices of the piano (figure 8).

Figure 8, *The Lion in Love,* measures 85-88.



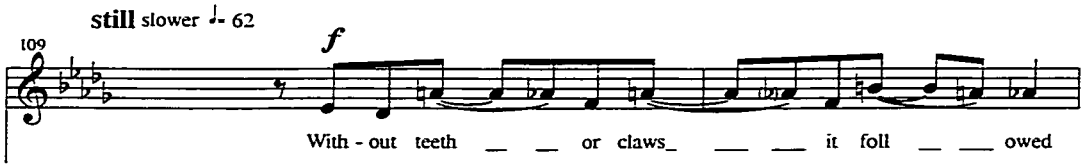
When this is combined with the piano's extended tertian harmonies set against the predominantly F# major melody, the result is distracting from the sure tonality of the vocal line until the final cadence on F# major in measure 103. Moments of imitation between the voice and the piano shows the level of detail Rorem displays in following the text; giving musical representation of the father's efforts to distract the lion from his true intentions.

After a brief pause, the narrator returns at measure 104 and delivers the results of the father's words. The rolled chord which signals the narrator's return is an F#m9, with added note harmony in the grace notes. The voice, seemingly oblivious to the use of the minor mode, outlines Am7, with the text "the enthralled animal mellowed, his mind's eye having been shuttered."

Rorem returns to the key signature of D♭ major at measure 109 to deliver the final outcome. The piano returns to the harmonic pattern of the opening, with

alterations in voicing. The vocal line, however, is dissonant, with emphasis placed on notes not belonging to the diatonic scale (figure 9).

Figure 9, *The Lion in Love,* measures 109-110



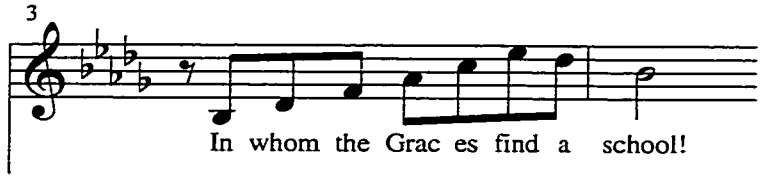
From measures 113-116, the piano drops out, and the voice modulates to a cadence on A♮ as it tells of the lion's demise. The piano returns at measure 117 as the moral of the story is delivered, and the opera ends with a modulation to F major.

MOTIVIC UNITY IN *THE LION IN LOVE*

Within this opera, there is a musical motive whose use is quite illuminating. This motive is a sweeping melodic line that outlines an extended diatonic minor 11 triad, and is used seven times throughout the work. The pitch relationship of the motive is maintained throughout, although the rhythmic values vary.

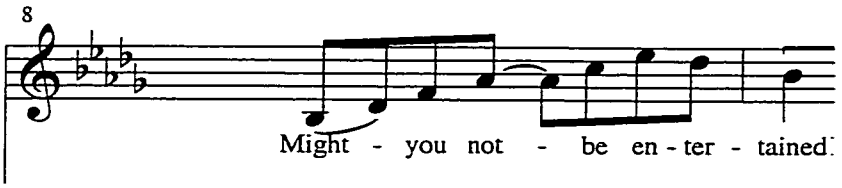
The motive appears three times in the opening section. The first appearance is at measure 3 in the vocal line, with the text, "In whom the graces find a school" (figure 10)

Figure 10, *The Lion in Love,* measures 3-4.



The triad outlined by figure A is B♭m11. The narrator's flattery, while not dishonest, is said with the purpose of gaining an audience and thus, cannot be simply taken at face value. Figure A appears again at measure 8 as the narrator, who has failed to turn the daughter of Madame de Sévigné's "averted head", offers the distraction of a fable (figure 11)

Figure 11, *The Lion in Love,* measures 8-9.



The third appearance, at measure 13, is a moment of foreshadowing, as the narrator tells "of a lion whom Love knew how to conquer" (figure 12)

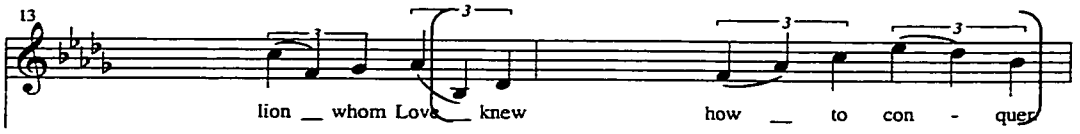
Figure 12, *The Lion in Love,* measures 13-14.

With the key change to F major in the second section, the fourth appearance of Figure A in measure 20 is transposed to a Dm11. This section of the text discusses the elusiveness of the nature of love and the motive is aligned with the text, "Better know of than know the thing" (figure 13).

Figure 13, *The Lion in Love,* measures 20-21.

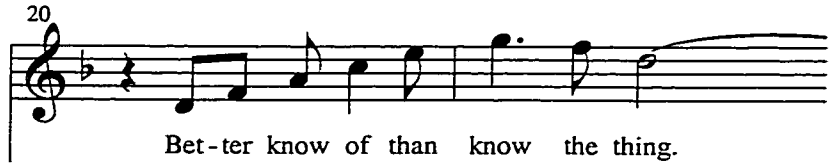
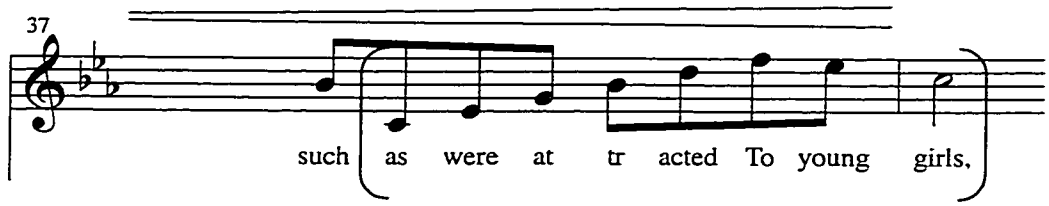
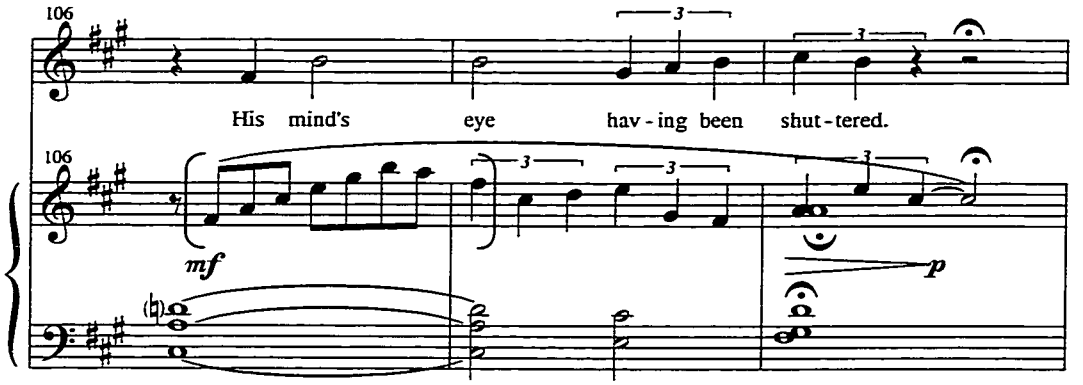


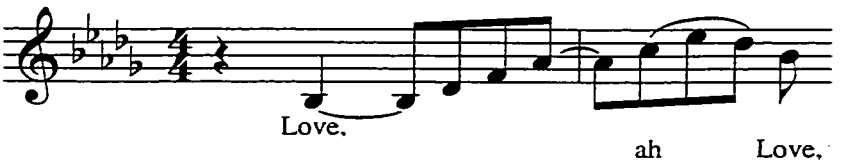
Figure A is presented once more in the exposition of the *a cappella* fable. In this section, which moves to E♭ major, the motive outlines Cm11 with the text "as were attracted to young girls" (figure 14).

Figure 14, *The Lion in Love,* measures 37-38.

Attraction can be seen as an aspect of love, and as such, its true nature defies logic and is obscure.

The next time Rorem uses Figure A is perhaps the most revealing. In measure 106, Figure A makes its only appearance in the piano, outlining F#m11 (figure 15).

Figure 15, *The Lion in Love,* measures 106-107.

The text at this point is "his mind's eye, having been shuttered." The juncture of this motive, associated with love, attraction, flattery and distraction, and the text describing the lion's response to the father's flattery and advice, warns of the poor choices that can be made when emotions supercede logic. This truth becomes apparent in the text that accompanies the final statement of figure A (figure 16) in measure 117 to the following text:

> *Love, ah Love, when your slipknot's drawn*
> *We can but say, "Farewell good sense."*

Figure 16, *The Lion in Love,* measures 117-118.

SUMMARY OF *THE LION IN LOVE*

In the first opera in *Fables*, Rorem displays a great deal of care musically to follow the formal structure of the poem. He aligns the changing sections of the poem with changes in key, yet maintains continuity throughout the narration of the poem through the use of repetitive harmonic movement. His care for the words extends to the use of 24 measures of *a cappella* singing to open the "tale that is unadorned." Further, his use of motivic figure A throughout the piece, displays a well thought out approach to the moral of the story, giving a musical correlation to the father's advice; neither of which can be taken at face value. All of these components are wrapped in extended tertian harmony, and added-note harmony, which are the signature features expected in a work by Ned Rorem.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SUN AND THE FROGS

THE TEXT

The Sun and the Frogs is "a fable which takes the virtues of contentment from a fresh point of view."[56] The moral of the poem is that "one tyrant is better than several."[57] La Fontaine's choices in characters to use for this fable are carefully planned. The sun is a thinly veiled reference to the "Sun King," Louis XIV of France. The frogs are his subjects, and as in many of the fables in which frogs appear, they "are given their usual character of nervous volubility."[58]

The poem begins with a four-line introduction. The narrator tells of a tyrant's wedding, where guests become drunk. Aesop appears as a *dramatic persona* and delivers an admonishment against thinking that "excess results in happiness."

The fable begins in line 5. The narrator tells of the Sun's contemplation of marriage in lines 5 and 6. The next nine lines give the frogs' pessimistic view of

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[56] MacPherson, A. G., ed., *Fables of La Fontaine*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1916), pp. 171-72.

[57] Ibid., 172.

[58] Ibid., 172.

how the outcome of such a decision would negatively affect them. Their dilemma arises with too many despots giving orders, for when these orders conflict, which one should they follow? The last two lines give the narrator's observations. These observations champion the arguments of the frogs.

Rorem's Setting of the Text

Rorem's brief notes on this opera are as follows:

> *THE SUN AND THE FROGS. 4 singers: chorus of 2, and 2 treble Frogs (One minute and 52 seconds).*

In setting the text of this opera, Rorem combines two of his hallmark stylistic features to create a musical representation of the plight of the frogs. He uses independent melodies in the right and left hands of the accompaniment to musically depict the multiple despots. It is in Rorem's manipulation of the ostinato patterns, however, where his attention to the frogs' dilemma manifests itself.

The score is written in 3/4 time. In the opening nine measures, Rorem employs three separate ostinato patterns. The left hand of the accompaniment contains ostinato pattern A, a set of four eighth notes in the bass range (figure 17).

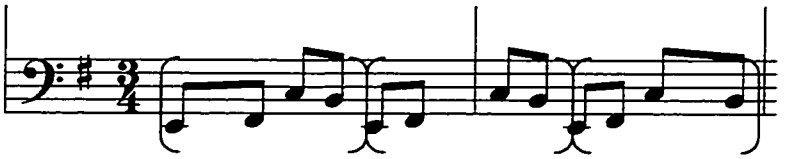
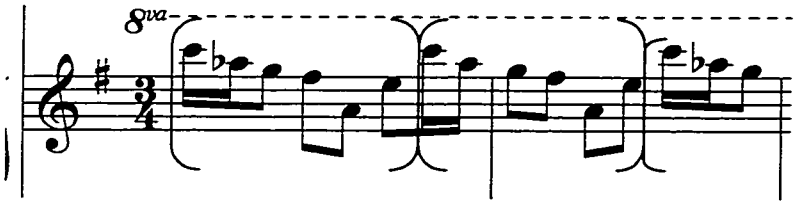
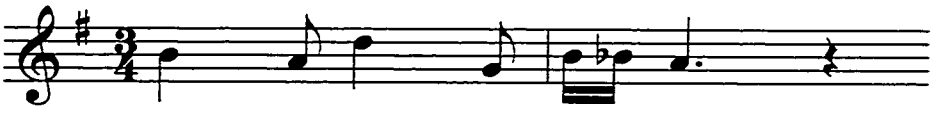
Figure 17, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 1-2.

Rorem juxtaposes ostinato figure B in the right hand of the accompaniment. Figure B consists of a pattern of six notes over two octaves higher, which has a repetition cycle beginning every five eighth notes (figure 18).

Figure 18, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 1-2.



The first chorus enters in measure 4 with ostinato figure C, a two measure figure that rhythmically fits the time signature of 6/8 (figure 19).

Figure 19, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 4-5.

Using these features, Rorem produces a wonderful musical representation of the frogs' dilemma. He begins with three independent ostinato patterns, cycling

at four, five, and six eighth-note intervals, which obscure the regular stress pattern of the 3/4 time signature. He then spreads these ostinato patterns over a four-octave range. This combination of ostinatos stressing different beats and metric patterns in different ranges puts the audience in the middle of three separate lines, all vying for the listener's attention.

The continuous ostinato patterns in the accompaniment stop at measure 9, and are replaced with contrary motion in the separate hands. As the first chorus describes the drinking at the wedding, Rorem establishes a strong sense of 6/8 by giving the accompaniment disjunct movement that only comes together on the first and fourth eighth note of the measure. The accents written in the vocal line emphasize this rhythmic structure (figure 20).

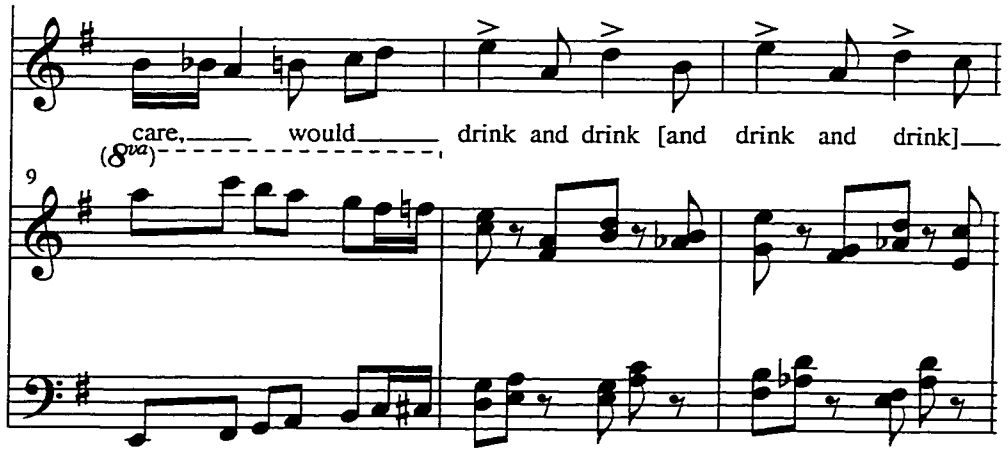
Figure 20, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 9-11.

A brief ostinato pattern, figure D, is found in the accompaniment in measures 13-14 (figure 21).

Figure 21, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 13-14.

The vocal line at measure 16 begins with figure C, but this style of simultaneous ostinato patterns does not return until measure 23.

The return of figures A and B at measure 23 sets the stage for the beginning of the fable. These figures repeat for two measures, but when the second chorus delivers the Sun's consideration of marriage, Rorem presents two new ostinatos, figures E and F (figure 22).

Figure 22, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 25-27.

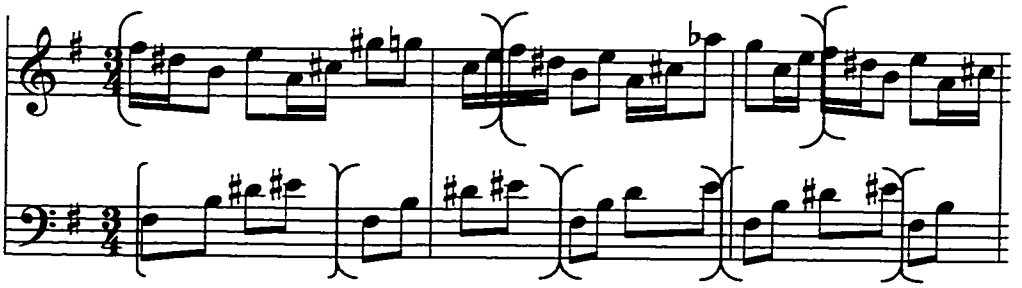


Figure E, a set of four eighth notes, appears in the left hand of the accompaniment at measure 25. Figure F also begins in measure 25, and is a pattern of ten notes that cycles every seven eighth notes. These continue until measure 29, when the text "of marrying" appears in the vocal part. This news is so shocking, that the accompaniment, which has been active since the beginning, comes to a complete stop for two beats.

In measure 32, the action continues, with the first duet in the opera. Both choruses, accompanied by the piano, deliver the text, "Instantly each frog community was audibly worrying." Rorem writes this section of text in a homophonic texture and the worrying of the frogs is musically expressed by a measure of rest. The choruses continue unaccompanied, and sing in imitative style of the frogs frowning.

In measure 41, Rorem gives his most subtle blend of ostinatos. The right hand of the accompaniment plays figure G, which cycles every three eighth notes. The left hand plays figure H, a pitch collection, that alternately cycles every four then five eighth notes (figure 23).

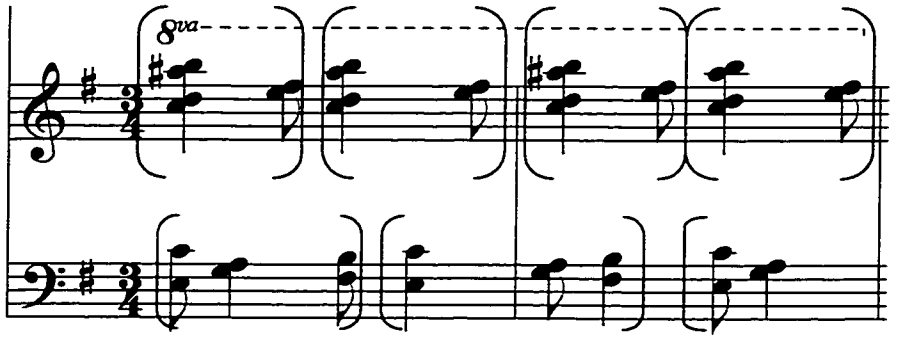
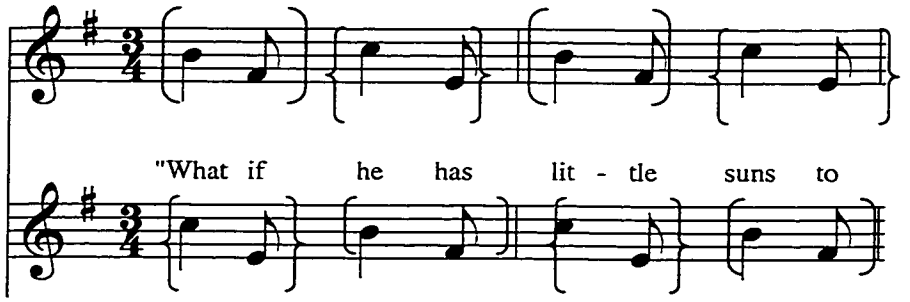
Figure 23, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 41-42.

The two frogs each sing a separate two-note ostinato pattern. The first frog sings figure J, while the second frog sings figure K (figure 24).

Figure 24, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 41-42.

(Figures [J] and{ K } are marked in brackets and braces, respectively).



Rorem then reverses the pattern, so that figure J moves to the second frog, whereas figure K moves to the first frog. This 'musical leap frog' only lasts two

measures, but is a fascinating glimpse at the level of detail that can be seen on the part of Rorem when he deals with text. Audibly, the effect of this movement is simply a series of two repeating minor seconds. The audience may not even perceive the subtlety of the writing. The attention to detail, however, should be of interest to students of music who wish to understand Rorem's compositional technique.

The ostinato patterns continue in the accompaniment in measures 43-46, although no longer at the same time. The left hand of the accompaniment continues figure H until measure 45, where the right hand returns with figure G. The accompaniment stops as the frogs sing of their fears of rainfall, but returns in measure 51 with figure F in the right hand, and figure E in the left hand.

As the frogs outline their fears, Rorem maintains the homophonic delivery of the text, keeping the focus on the words. Rorem, however, continues the use of the ostinatos throughout this section. At measure 58, Rorem reintroduces in the accompaniment figure G in the right hand, with figure H′, a slightly altered figure H, in the left hand (figure 25).

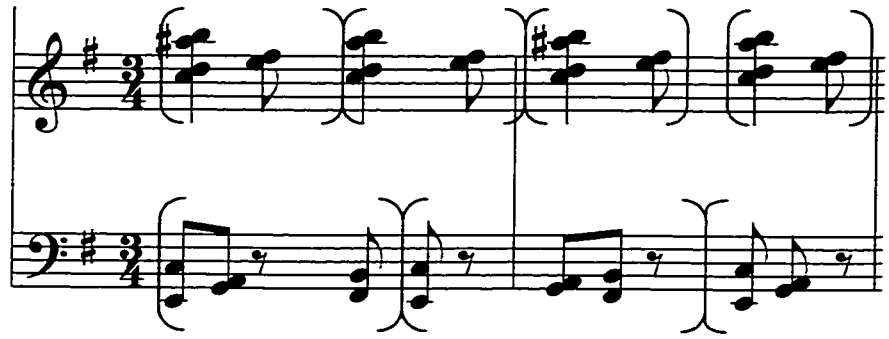
Figure 25, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 58-59.

Rorem couples the frogs' text, "Soon there'd be no frogs" with a phrase of contrary motion in the accompaniment in measure 62. The independent lines of the accompaniment begin on the frogs starting notes, and end on the same pitches, though in different octaves. Musically, this contrary motion gives the impression of the frogs being pulled apart by the conflicting wishes of the tyrants (figure 26).

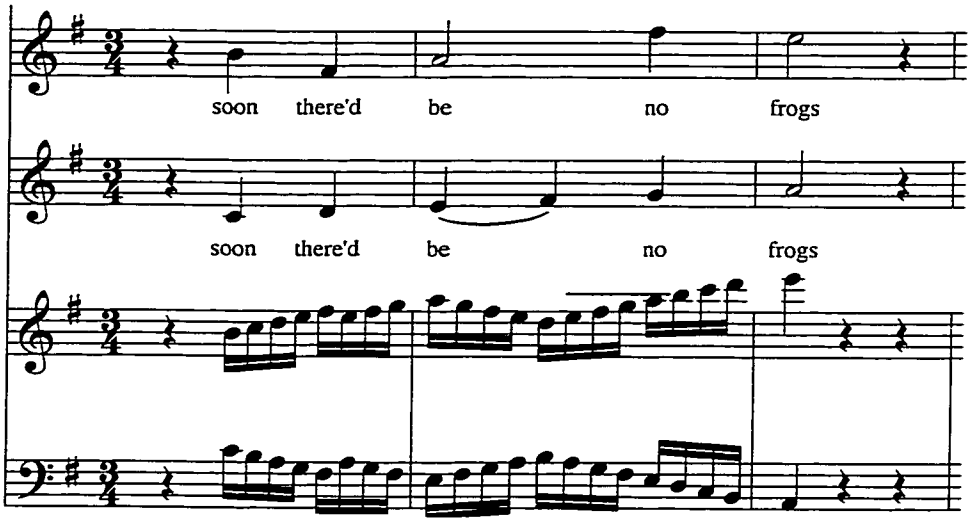
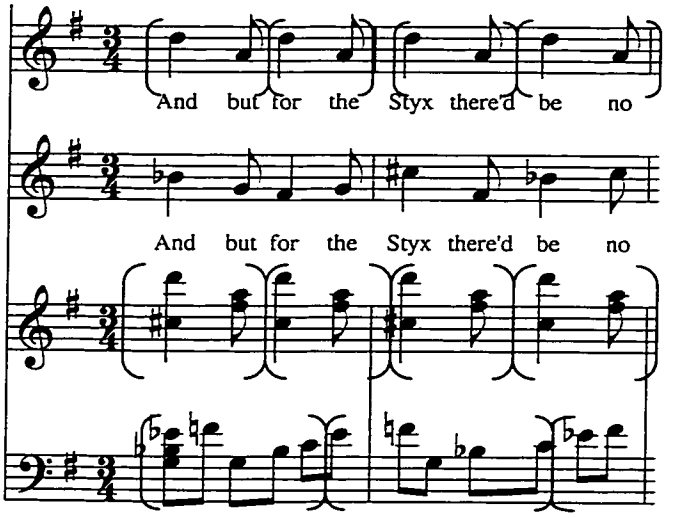
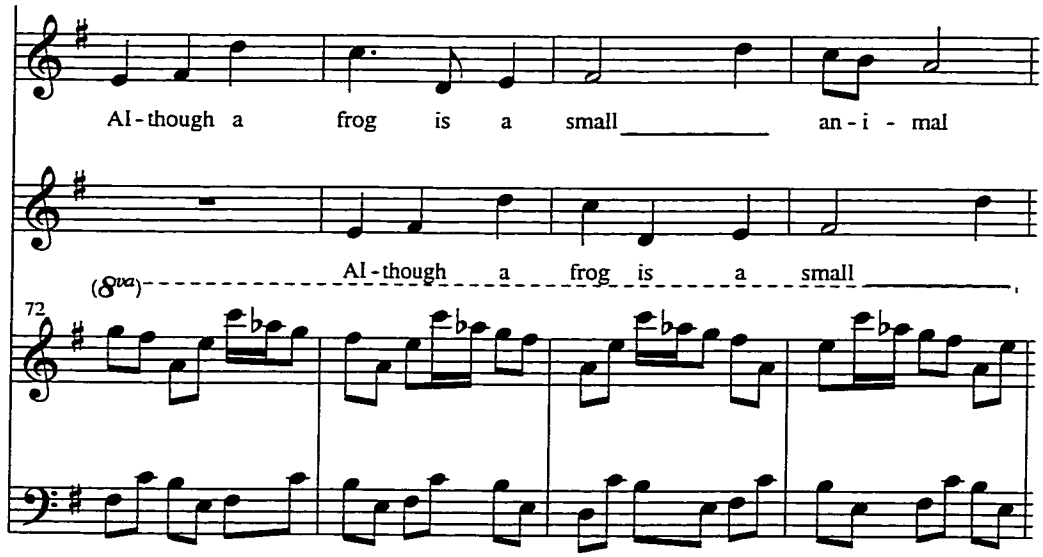
Figure 26, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 62-64.

Two new ostinato patterns appear in the piano at measure 65, as the frogs give their last line of text (figure 27).

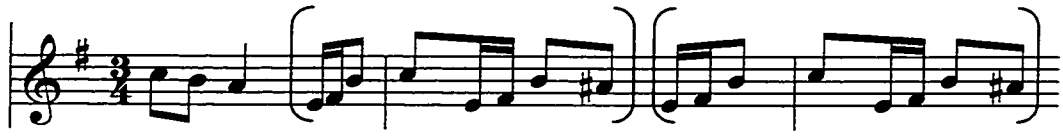
Figure 27, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 65-66.

The right hand of the accompaniment has figure L, a two-chord repeating passage, whose upper notes are also sung by the first frog an octave lower. Figure L cycles through every three eighth notes. The left hand of the accompaniment plays figure M, a series of 5 eighth notes, beginning with the E♭ on the downbeat of measure 65. Figure M continues until measure 69, when the left-hand accompaniment returns to the opening ostinato, figure A.

The return on Figure A in measure 69 signals the return of the chorus. Figure B returns in measure 70, and these ostinatos continue through measure 75. The first chorus enters in measure 72, followed in imitative style by the second chorus in the following measure (figure 28).

Figure 28, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 72-75.



As the vocal lines break from the imitative style in measure 75, Rorem introduces his last new ostinato, figure N. Figure N is interesting, as it is a blended reworking of figures A and D. The first four notes of figure N are derived from the pitches of figure A, with the last two notes being reversed. These four pitches are followed by an extract from figure D, and both are set with the same rhythmic pattern (figure 29).

Figure 29, *The Sun and the Frogs,* measures 77-79.

The postlude of the opera begins with scales in contrary motion in measure 81. The right-hand accompaniment then plays three measures, which at first appear to be a new ostinato pattern. Comparing measures 82-84 with measures 58-60, however, shows that the top note of the melody is a restatement of figure F, transposed down a perfect 4th, with alternate harmony.

OSTINATO AS OVERLORD

In *The Sun and the Frogs*, Rorem uses one of his signature stylistic features, ostinato, to create the characters of the tyrants. Each cycles to its own rhythm, seemingly without regard to the rhythmic structure of the others. By

placing a different figure in each hand, often with large intervals between them, Rorem gives musical representation of the warring factions trying to attain dominance over the other. Understanding the unpredictably independent nature of tyrants, however, Rorem changes the patterns frequently. The use of changing ostinato patterns throughout the work gives the impression of rulers who change their minds on a whim. It is interesting to note that the last pitches played in the accompaniment are simultaneously the highest and lowest pitches played during the opera, representing the polarization of the despots, with the powerless frogs left somewhere in the middle.

SUMMARY OF *THE SUN AND THE FROGS*

In the second opera, Rorem again displays painstaking care for the text of the poem. When singing together, the frogs' vocal lines are set in a homophonic texture, which aids understanding of the text. In the rare moments of imitation within the choral parts, the text is set with care, so that words that might be lost in the first hearing are repeated.

Rorem's understanding of the subtlety of the text, however, is best seen in his use of ostinato figures. He abandons the use of extended tertian harmony as in the first opera, and instead focuses on the use of independent lines and various ostinatos to create a musical representation of tyrants working against one

another. These tyrants are only implied in the moral of La Fontaine's story, and do not appear in the fable itself, but with the implied reference to the Louis XIV as the "Sun King," Rorem chooses a subtle musical representation to embody La Fontaine's subtle reproof.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BIRD WOUNDED BY AN ARROW

THE TEXT

The other fables Rorem sets deliver a tale, with or without introduction, concluding with the narrator's statement of the lesson from which the reader should learn. The text to *The Bird Wounded by an Arrow*, however, presents a new direction to the drama. In this poem it is the bird, not the narrator that serves as moralizer.

The narrator sets the tone of the poem. In the first two lines of text, the narrator tells of an animal that has received a mortal wound. It is not until the third line of the text, however, that the victim of the arrow is revealed as a bird. Once the bird begins her dialogue with the last word of line three, the narrator disappears, and unlike the other poems, does not return.

From her entrance in line three, the bird takes over the role of the moralizer of the story. She begins by voicing remorse over her own role in her demise. After acknowledging her tragic flaw in this dire situation, in lines 6-7 she condemns the one that used her mistake to bring about her ruin. In doing so, she

not only warns readers to be cautious of their own actions, but also admonishes readers not to use another's mistake against them.

The last four lines are addressed to humankind. After calling for humanity to pay attention, she states, "Your fate may have been symbolized by my feather." She then invokes the image of Iapetus.

The choice of Iapetus reveals the level of detail La Fontaine put into his poetry. Iapetus was a character from Greek mythology, whose sons fought each other during the war between the Titans and the Olympians. His sons, "a brood intent on harming one another," are then connected to humanity through Iapetus' son, Prometheus, the mythological creator of mankind. By choosing Iapetus, La Fontaine is able to blend the image of the war-like gods of antiquity with humanity's battle against its darker nature, thus putting it in a timeless struggle of good versus evil.

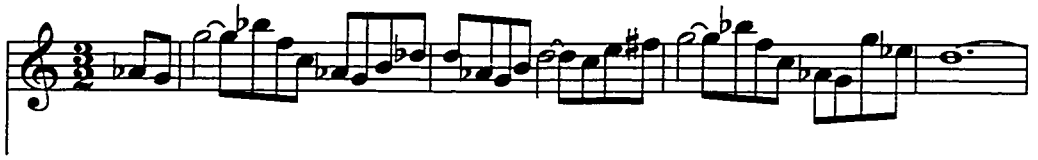
ROREM'S SETTING OF THE TEXT

Rorem's brief notes on the opera are as follows:

> *THE BIRD WOUNDED BY AN ARROW. 3 singers: chorus of 2, soprano solo. (Two minutes and 40 seconds)*

As he did in the first opera, Rorem follows the form of the poem in creating the musical structure of this piece. In this poem, the identity of the bird is not revealed until the third line. Rorem creates a similar effect musically, by

opening the opera with figure A, sung *a cappella*. Figure A is a four-measure phrase that is sung on the vowel "ah" (figure 30).

Figure 30, *The Bird Wounded by an Arrow*, measures 1-4.

This soaring line is tonally ambiguous, and delays the opening line of the text.

As figure A cadences on D♮ in measure 4, the chorus joins on D♮ and delivers the first line of text. The first chorus sings figure B, a descending line that, combined with the second chorus part, suggests both D minor and B minor (figure 31).

Figure 31, *The Bird Wounded by an Arrow*, measures 4-5.

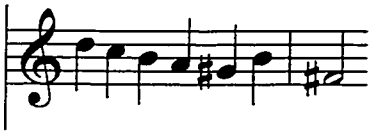
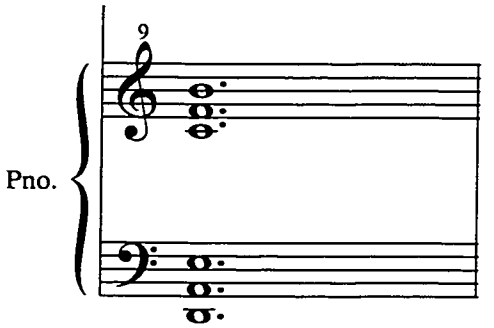



Figure B, with slight variations, is present in almost every phrase sung by the first chorus. This repeated descending gesture musically paints the struggle of the bird to return aloft, despite the mortal wound.

The two choruses deliver the text in a homophonic texture, and continue the *a cappella* setting until measure12, when the bird's identity is finally revealed.

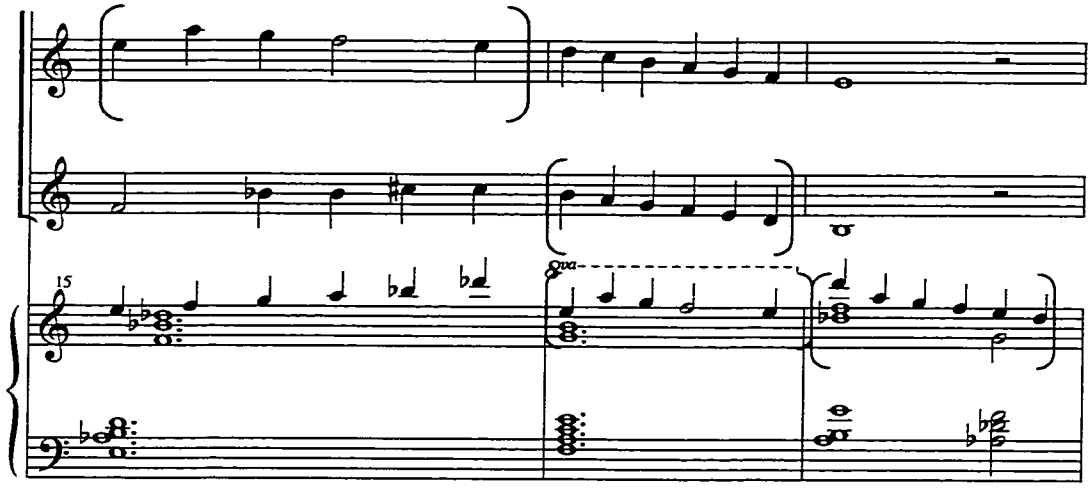
As the text "bird" is sung, Rorem begins the accompaniment. The opening chord displays quartal harmony in the right hand, and its inversion: quintal harmony in the left hand (figure 32).

Figure 32, *The Bird Wounded by an Arrow*, measure 9.

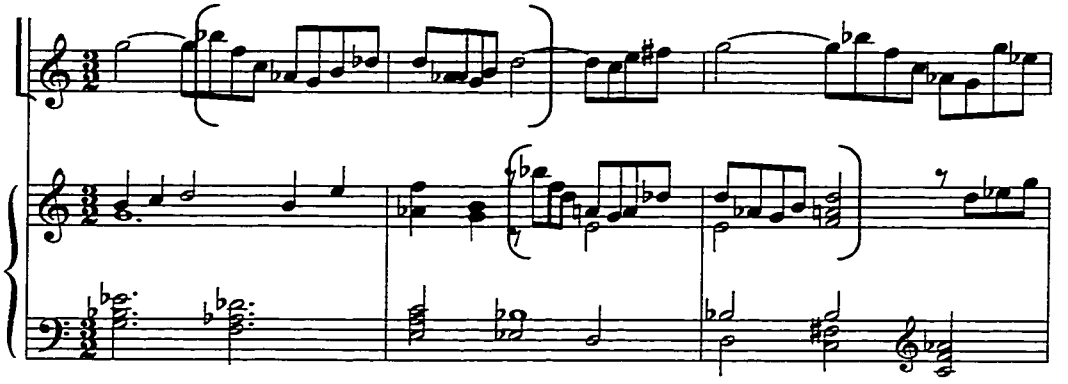


The choice of quartal harmony, which is tonally ambiguous, musically punctuates the irony of the bird finding her own feather in the fletching of the arrow.

The texture of the accompaniment in this opera mostly consists of a melodic line, supported by either quartal or extended tertian harmony. As is consistent with Rorem's style, the melody in the accompaniment moves independently, although the melodies of the vocal line are quoted. In measures 16-17, Rorem employs the use of imitation in setting the piano part (figure 33).

Figure 33, *The Bird Wounded by an Arrow*, measures 15-17.

The piano first plays the melody from the first chorus in measure 15, followed by the second chorus' melody in measure 16.

On the anacrusis of measure 18, the bird sings her first line of text. She sings figure A, accompanied by the piano. When she sings the words "to play a part in one's own doom when overborne," the piano introduces the closing portion of figure C, which is a modified version of figure A. The C and A♭ in figure A are replaced by D and A♮ in figure C (figure 34).

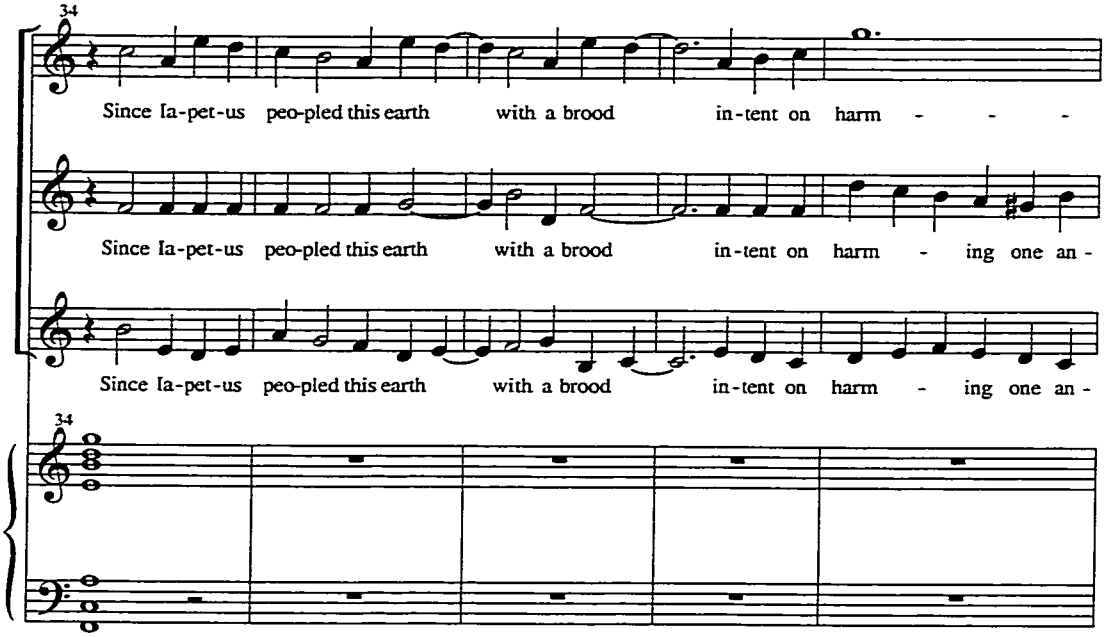
Figure 34, *The Bird Wounded by an Arrow*, measures 18-20.

The section of figure A, from which it comes, immediately follows the completion of figure C in the piano.

Beginning with the fifth line of poem, Rorem sets selected passages of the bird's text in the chorus vocal parts. The choral outbursts are directed at "heartless humanity. He begins this process in measure 22, with the chorus singing figure B on the text, "Hardhearted man!" The bird the finishes the sentence with a new melody, the last half of which is comprised of figure C. The chorus again rails against humanity singing "Ruthlessness, do not shrug," and "Heartless humanity take heed." The bird sings figure C a final time, pointing to the symbolism found in her feather.

Rorem sets the last two lines of text utilizing the combined forces of the bird and both choruses. He begins this section in measure 34, sung *a cappella*,

delivering the text in a homophonic texture. This continues until the word "harm" is sung in measure 38, when the bird breaks from choral setting (figure 35).

Figure 35, *The Bird Wounded by an Arrow*, measures 34-38



At measure 38, the first chorus returns to the use of figure B, accompanied by the second chorus, and completing the text on the second beat of measure 39, which is held to the end of the piece. The bird, however, sustains the G♮ for a complete measure, followed by a long sweeping line that ascends to B♮, the highest notes she sings within this piece, then descends to cadence on the B♮ two octaves below, which is the lowest note she sings, symbolizing her death.

MOTIVIC METAMORPHOSIS

In *The Bird Wounded by an Arrow*, Rorem displays his ability to understand complex poetic themes and to find musical idioms to express them. His treatment of figures A and C display the depth of his understanding. Figure A represents the feather, which is symbolic of mistakes people make. Figure A is used before the text to the opera begins, and again when the bird voices remorse for "[playing] a part in one's own doom." Figure C makes its first appearance in the accompaniment on the word "doom," then appears twice more, sung by the bird. The text on these two appearances is "the instrument of doom" and "my feather." Figure C, based on figure A with slight modification, is the feather as it is found in the arrow: musically representing the way in which human nature takes advantage of another's misfortunes.

SUMMARY OF *THE BIRD WOUNDED BY AN ARROW*

Rorem's again shows care for fashioning a musical setting the text. Understanding the poem's dramatic layout, Rorem musically delays the discovery of the bird's identity by opening with figure A. He then punctuates the irony of the bird finding her own feather in the fletching of the arrow with the entrance of the accompaniment into the heretofore *a cappella* texture. His motivic

manipulation, however, best displays his understanding of the nuances of the text. By taking figure A and changing two notes, he creates a new figure, C. This slight warping of the original idea is a wonderful musical representation of how gossip can take something seemingly innocent, like the bird's feather, and use it to bring about someone's demise.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FOX AND THE GRAPES

THE TEXT

Of the five fables that Rorem sets, this is perhaps the most widely known. The fable tells the story of a starving fox which, when unable to attain the grapes from an overhead trellis, concludes they must be sour. The use of sour grapes for disparaging things that can not be attained has been in usage in English since the eighteenth century.[59]

The poem is only eight lines long. In the first line of the poem, the narrator introduces the starving fox, and offhandedly raises the question of his lineage: Norman or Gascon. The next three lines set the scene; describing the pitiful state of the fox, and making the grapes appear irresistible. In the next two lines, the narrator delineates the fox's dilemma: he wants the grapes, but they are out of his reach. Line seven gives the fox's response to the situation, saying, "These grapes are sour; I'll leave them for some knave." In the final line, the

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[59] <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?sour+grapes>

narrator delivers a play on homophones in the ironic observation: "Better, I think, than an embittered whine."

ROREM'S SETTING OF *THE FOX AND THE GRAPES*

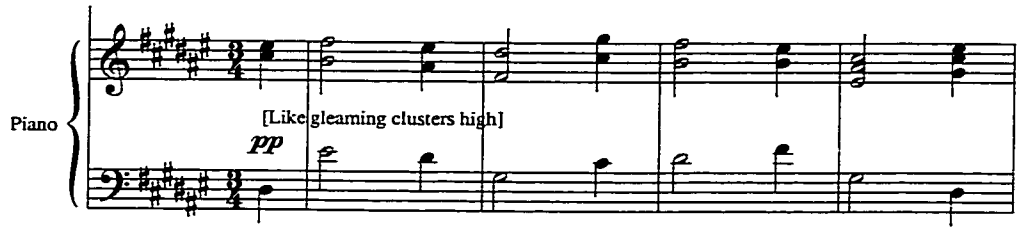
Rorem's brief notes on this opera are as follows:

> *THE FOX AND THE GRAPES. 3 singers: chorus of 2 and 1 tenor Fox. (Two minutes)*

As in all of these operas, Rorem pays close attention to the text. In the first three operas, Rorem's comments in the score have been reserved for tempo and dynamic markings. In this one, however, we see him make his first literary reference within the score. The four-measure piano introduction has "[Like gleaming clusters high]" written in the score. Rorem also takes his inspiration from the first line of the text for the musical setting of the chorus. Taking the two opposing views to the lineage of the fox, he creates a dialogue between two chorus members. He augments this approach by marking the score "conversational and ironic" for the chorus. He also adds stage direction for the fox, first "anguished," then "resigned." This introduction of stage direction to the score is not isolated, however, and will be seen to its fullest in the final opera.

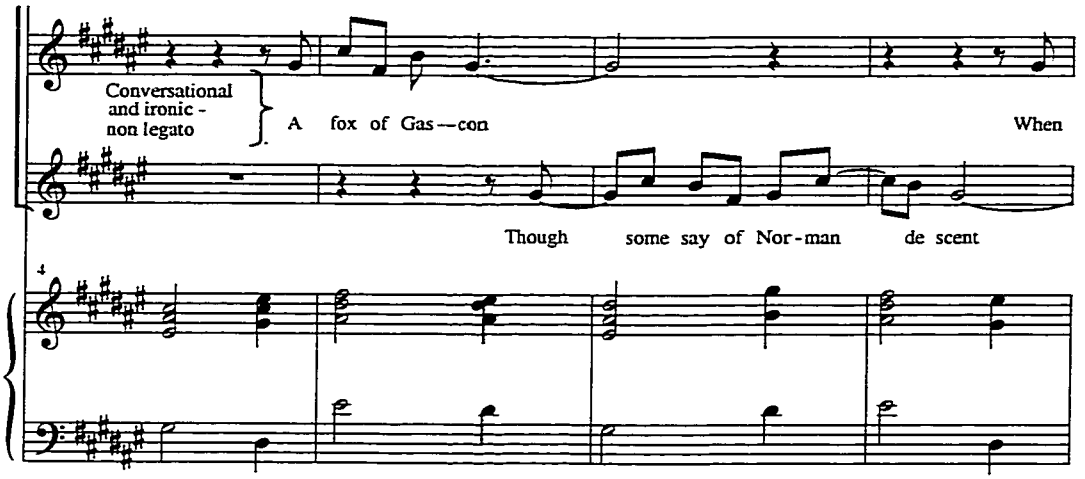
The Fox and the Grapes begins with a four-measure introduction in 3/4 time. The accompaniment throughout this opera, with the exception of the fox's

outburst in measures 25-30, consist of block sonorities, moving in homophonic rhythm as seen in figure 36.

Figure 36, *The Fox and the Grapes,* measures 1-4.

The languid, static nature of this accompanimental rhythm, is a musical representation of the gait of the starving fox. Rorem further maintains the static nature of the accompaniment through repetition, as seen in the melody in the first four measures, which is repeated with alternate harmonies. The harmonies outlined by the notes represent the clusters of grapes, as seen in Rorem's marking the score: "[Like gleaming clusters high]." The sonorities of these clusters are coloristic, and serve no harmonic function, and alternately display tertian, quartal, and secundal harmonies.

The first chorus enters on the anacrusis of measure 5, followed by the second chorus in measure 6. The score is marked, "Conversational and ironic - non legato" for the chorus (figure 37).

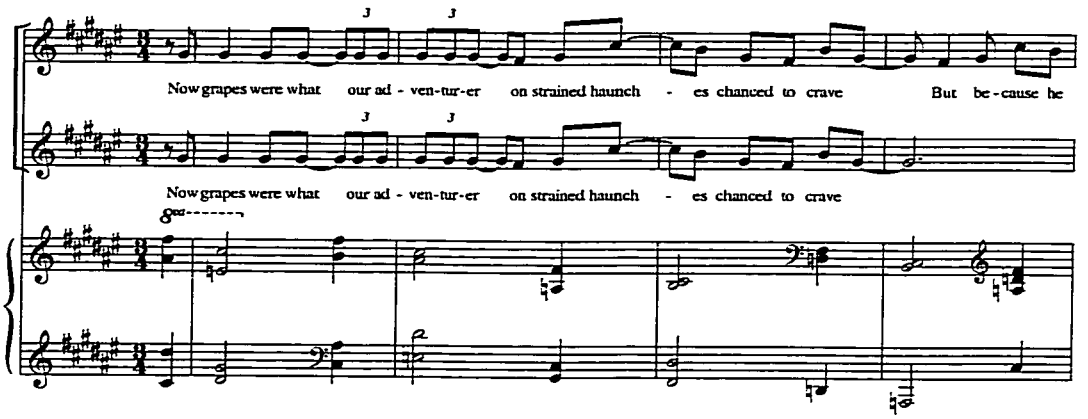
Figure 37, *The Fox and the Grapes,* measures 4-7.



In delivering the first four lines of text, the chorus members sing only four notes: F#, G#, B, and C#. This constant circling is clustered like grapes would be, and the last note sung is always a G#, implying G# dorian.

On the anacrusis of measure 18, the chorus begins to deliver the fifth line of the text: "Now grapes were what our adventurer on strained haunches chanced to crave." Rorem sets this line with the chorus in unison, thus showing the single-minded pursuit of the fox. At the same time, Rorem starts a descending pattern in the piano that repeats four times. Each repetition of the descending F# to C# is harmonized differently, and in totall, descends four octaves (figure 38).

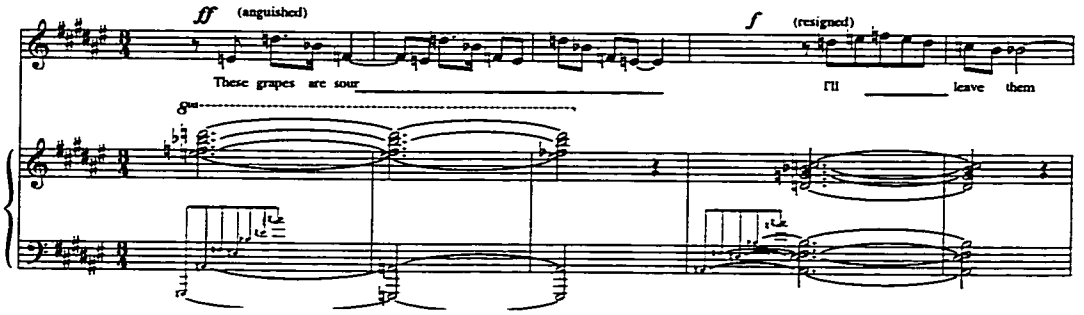
Figure 38, *The Fox and the Grapes,* measures 18-21.



On the word "Grapes," the music becomes more dissonant, as Rorem departs from the diatonic harmonies he had used in the first seventeen measures, and begins to introduce accidentals into the piano accompaniment. This transition continues until measure 25, where the fox enters in B♭ major.

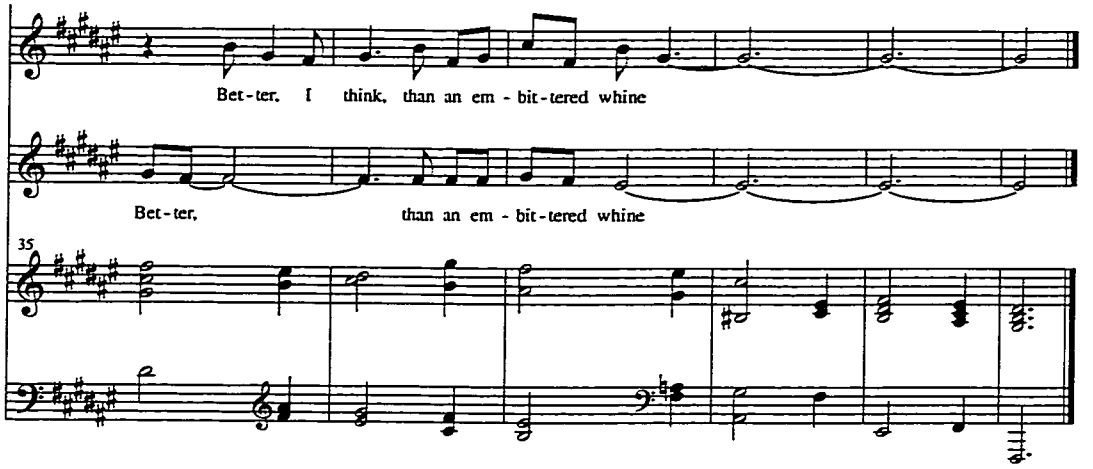
In measure 25, Rorem changes the accompanimental pattern as the fox speaks. He moves to B♭ major, and accompanies the fox's outcry with added-note harmony and sustained chords (figure 39).

Figure 39, *The Fox and the Grapes,* measures 25-29.



The fox remains outside of the diatonic scale until measure 31, when he sings the word "knave." This return musically implies that perhaps others will not find the grapes to be sour at all. Rorem returns the accompaniment to the opening texture of the piece in measure 32, and continues in this style until the end. In measure 35, the chorus returns to its conversational style of dialogue, as it delivers the ironic observation, "Better, I think, than an embittered whine."

Rorem accentuates the ironic play on words by having the second chorus leave the cluster of notes it has sung throughout the piece and descend to an E# on the word "whine" (Figure 40).

Figure 40, *The Fox and the Grapes,* measures 35-40.

Rorem further augments this in the piano accompaniment, by leaving the diatonic harmonies for the first two chords after the joke has been made. The final four chords return to the diatonic key, but as before, they are only coloristic, and serve no harmonic function.

SUMMARY OF *THE FOX AND THE GRAPES*

In this opera, Rorem shows not only care for the text in his setting, but he also begins to show attention for the drama within the score. He makes literary reference to the text in the score by marking the piano introduction, "[Like gleaming clusters high]." His direction for the singers is also marked in the score: the chorus is to sing their lines in a "conversational and ironic" tone, and the fox is instructed to sing alternately "anguished" and "resigned." His careful

consideration for the nuances of text is evident. He takes his inspiration for the chorus dialogue from the first line of the text. Rorem's movement away from the diatonic key for the fox's proclamation of the grape's "sour" nature musically shows a movement away from the truth of the situation. Finally, Rorem musically punctuates the joke in the last line of the text with added dissonance, representing the bitterness of the "whine."

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ANIMALS SICK OF THE PLAGUE

THE TEXT

Of the five fables that Rorem sets, this one is the longest. The poem is 63 lines long, and tells of the problems of corruption within government. There are four characters in the story; the narrator, who serves as a Greek chorus and addresses the scene; the lion, who represents the king; the fox, who represents minor nobility with political ambition; and the ass, who represents the powerless commoner.

The poem opens with the narrator. The first 13 lines of the poem outline the conditions of the animals. The corruption is never called by name, only referred to as a "malady" in the first line, and the fourth line states that "plague was the name by which it was known." Lines 6-13 show how all of the animals were affected, and those that didn't die were left paralyzed with fear in an environment where "love starved; life was moribund."

In line 14, the lion calls all the animals together and addresses them in active voice in line 15. In his first two lines of speech, he issues the proclamation that the plague is "heaven's remedy for sins we have thought a boon." He then

states in lines 17-21, that to atone "for evil done," the creature that is "guiltiest should sacrifice his good to that of the rest" so that the others might "then be immune."

The next seven lines that the lion speaks, lines 22-28, show the seeming nobility of his character. He begins by asking the animals to "each search his conscience," which is followed by five lines of confession. He admits to eating enough innocent sheep to have "become a glutton." He further confesses to having eaten the shepherd as well.

It is in lines 29-32, however, where his cowardly nature is revealed. Having confessed to these murderous crimes, he offers himself as the sacrifice, but not until others "first make a clean breast; not just *I* say how I offend." He diminishes what he has confessed by saying, "We must have justice and detect the trespass," implying that another will be found with the final line: "Then rend the culprit's carcass."

The fox, known in fables for his cunning, picks up on the king's subtle shift, and voices his opinion. The fox begins by praising the lion's goodness and honor. He then excuses the loss of sheep as no sacrifice, and further proclaims that in choosing them, he has given them honor. He finishes off his speech by honoring the lion for ridding the animals of the shepherd, who he portrays as a "monster none can endure."

The narrator returns in lines 42-47 and gives the reaction of the animals to this speech. The monsters cheered so loud that they "deafened the cur." Moreover, the "other beasts of prominence" were declared innocent and "canonized for their innocent mien." Thus, the larger animals, representing the wealthy and powerful, were absolved of their crimes.

The ass, representing those without power, makes his appearance in lines 48-53. He admits that he is not perfect, and one day, while "passing clerical domain," he was hungry and "nipped of as much grass as would lie on [his] tongue." He compares his offense to the crimes committed by the other animals, and finishes off by saying, "So sinned, if what we say must be disinterested."

The narrator returns in line 54, and gives insightful comment on the reaction of the animals to the donkey's confession. The animals "made too much noise to hear what the donkey said." In the line 55, " a wolf pronounced the verdict, to which he clung," which shows both the way leaders avoid guilt by having the others do their dirty work, and the way in which others overstep their authority. The ludicrous decision is pointed out in line 59; "Eat another's grass! What could be more horrible." The poor donkey is sentenced to death, which was, "inflicted at once by spite." This action goes against the lion's original call for self-sacrifice, and is instead murder. The last two lines deliver the moral of the story in plain language:

"And so, as you are weak or are invincible,
The court says white is black or that black crimes are white."

Rorem's Notes on the Opera

Rorem's notes on *The Animals Sick of the Plague* are as follows:

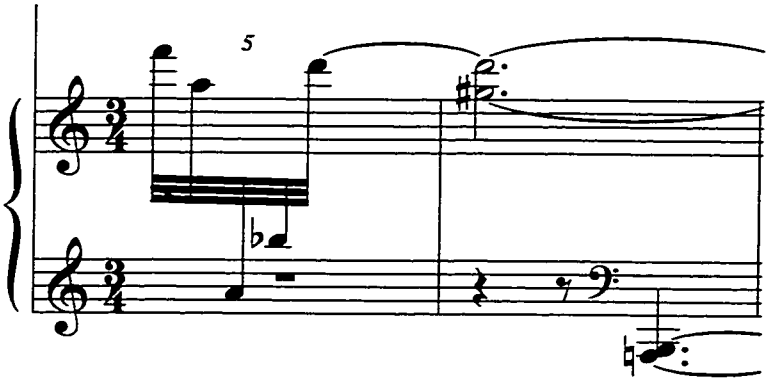
> *THE ANIMALS SICK OF THE PLAGUE. Several singers: chorus of 2, plus a solo Lion, a Fox, an Ass, and various creatures who will make noises. (Ten minutes and 30 seconds).*

When the operas are presented in order, Rorem suggests that the fox "remain on stage during the elision into the final drama, where he becomes another 'kind' of Fox."

Rorem's Setting of *The Animals Sick of the Plague*

Rorem sets the scene of desolation in the first section of the piece with the piano accompaniment. Figure 41 shows figure A in the piano accompaniment, which serves as the plague motive.

Figure 41, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 1-2.



The slow tempo of the opening flourish combine with the static chords spread over four octaves to create a sparse texture, with little movement. Rorem exploits the decaying nature of the piano; by sustaining the chords over multiple measures at such a slow tempo, the musical decay mirrors the decay caused by the plague. When the voices enter in the third measure, they deliver the text in a homophonic texture, alternately displaying quartal, tertian and secundal harmonies (figure 42).

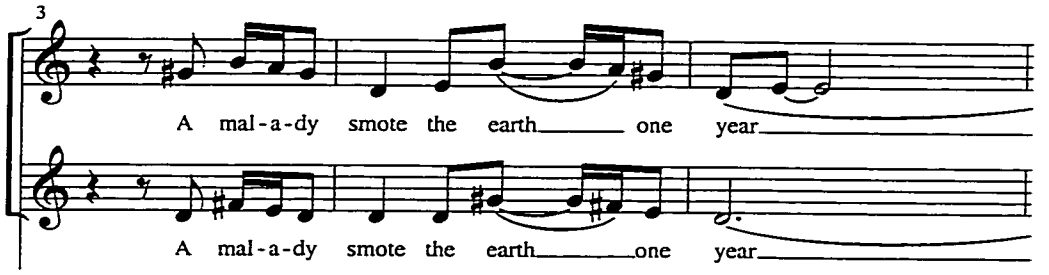
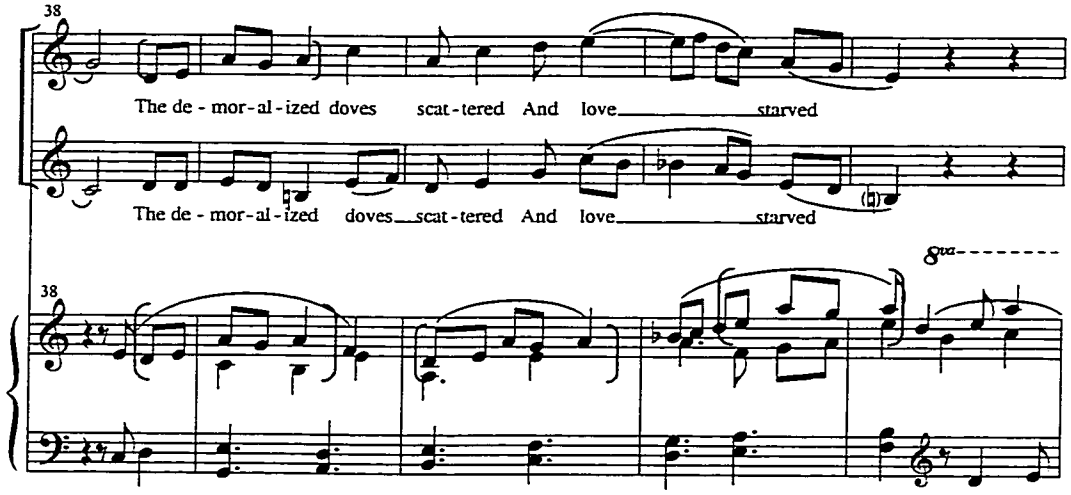
Figure 42, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 3-5.

The first chorus delivers lines 4-7 as a solo, beginning in measure 13. The second chorus takes over the narrative in measure 24, and delivers lines 8-10. In measure 35, Rorem uses an *a cappella* texture for the setting of lines 10-11, which draws attention to the stillness of the landscape where "Neither wolf nor fox disappeared to stalk young prey as it sunned." In measure 38, the piano returns as the chorus sings "the demoralized doves scattered" (figure 43).

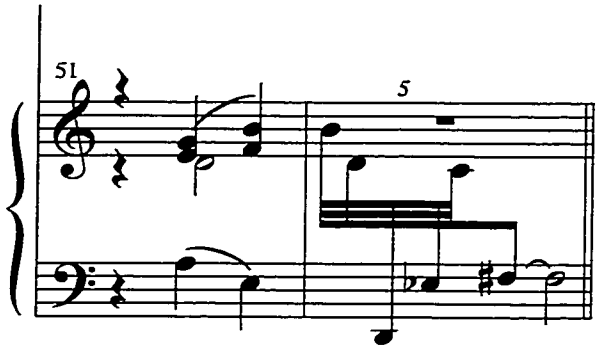
Figure 43, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 38-42.



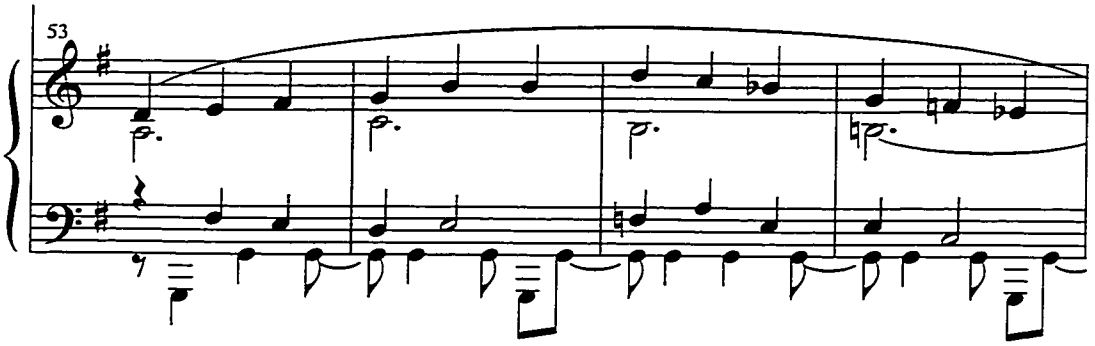
The first chorus sings figure B, doubled by the piano. The piano plays figure B twice more, musically representing the birds scattering.

In measure 45, the piano plays the plague motive once again. The second chorus sings line 14, serving as an introduction to the entrance of the lion's address. Figure 44 shows the transitional figure, which leads to the change of key to G major, where the lion begins his speech.

Figure 44, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 51-52.



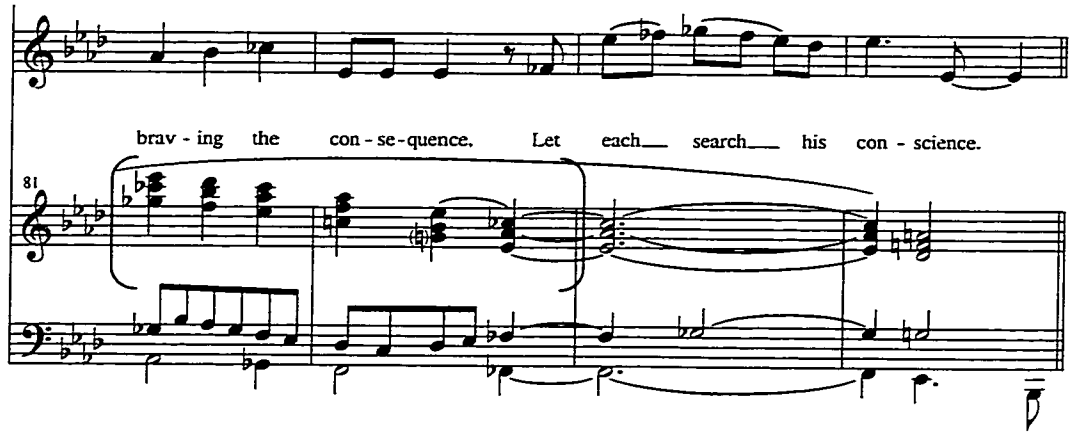
With the entrance of the lion in measure 53, the texture of the music changes dramatically. Rorem speeds up the tempo, and writes a four measure ostinato, figure C, which is played four times (figure 45).

Figure 45, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 53-56.

The melody clearly follows the 3 /4 rhythm pattern, and alternates between outlining G major while ascending, and G natural minor on the descent. The left hand of the accompaniment contains offbeat syncopation on octave Gs through measure 70. This syncopated rhythmic pattern lends a sense of regal authority to

the words of the lion as he issues his proclamation for the cause and the possible cure of the plague.

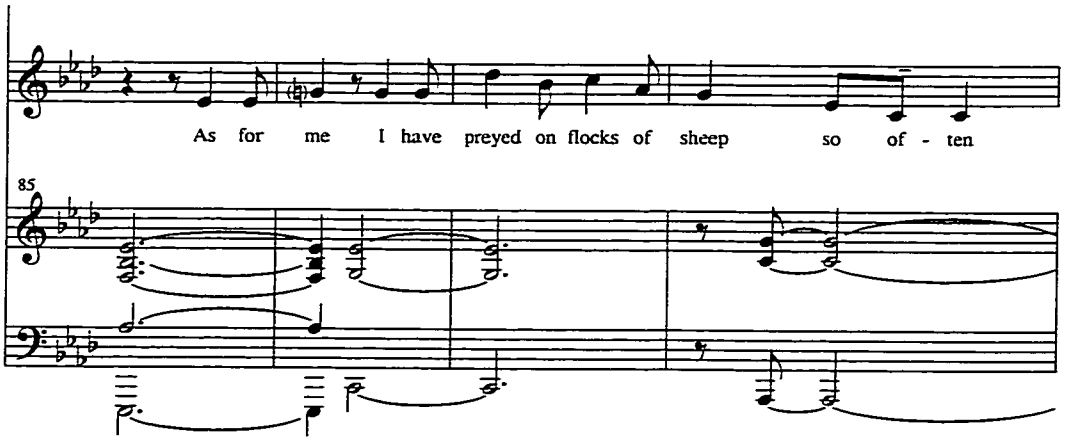
At measure 71, the key modulates up a semitone to A♭ major, and figure C cycles through twice more. The shift in key coincides with the lion's assertion, "In accord with the past, history suggests to one, Penance as atoning for evil done." In measure 79, figure C begins a third cycle, but the syncopation is not present, and on the word "consequence," figure C is truncated, as the lion instructs the gathered animal to "let each search his conscience" (figure 46).

Figure 46, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 81-84.



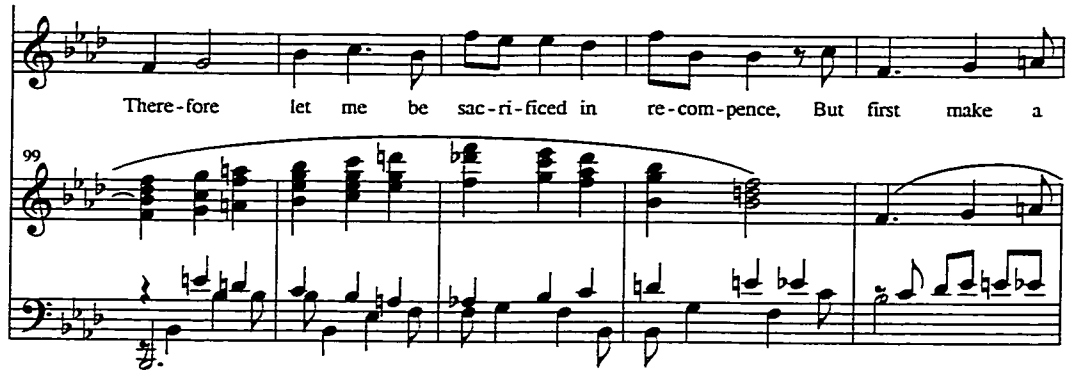
The lion begins his confession in measure 85. The accompaniment to lines 24-28, where he admits to killing the sheep, consists mostly of sustained chords. The vocal score during this confession is marked, "Faster, freer, but pompous" (figure 47).

Figure 47, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 85-88.

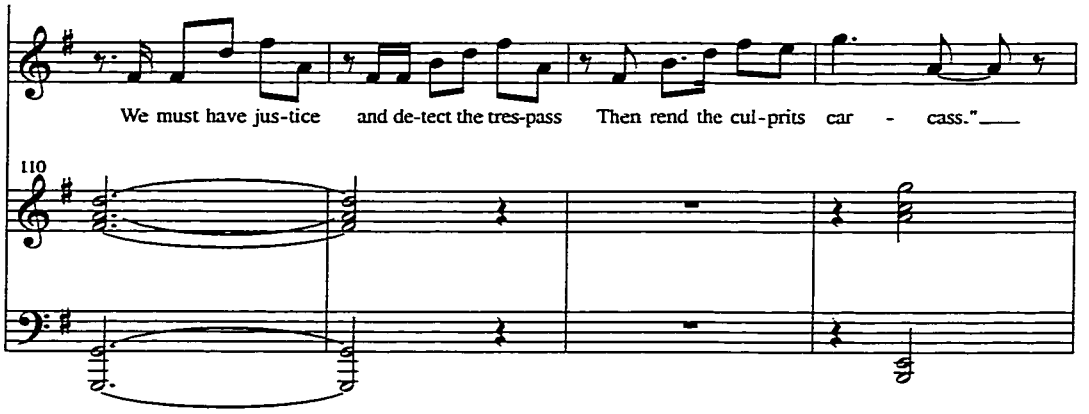


In measure 93, as the lion admits that he not only ate the sheep, but also the shepherd, Rorem changes the rhythm of the accompaniment, and moves from the tonal center of A♭ major to B♭, alternating between the major and minor mode.

As the lion offers himself to be sacrificed, Rorem reinstates the syncopation of the earlier proclamation, and returns to the truncated form of figure C, now in B♭ major. However, as his cowardice is shown in calling for others to confess their crimes, the syncopation falters in measure 103 (figure 48).

Figure 48, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 99-103.

The syncopation is brought back in alternate measures until its return in the piano interlude in measures 106-109. Rorem does this to musically create a sense of putting on a good face for the assembled court, before the lion shows his true colors.

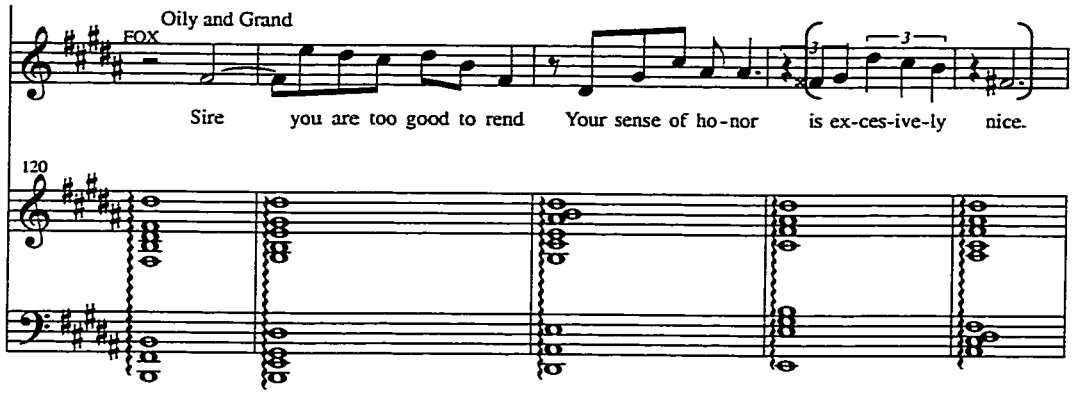
When the truth of the lion's character is finally revealed with the text, "We must have justice and detect the trespass, then rend the culprit's carcass," Rorem changes the tonal center to D major (figure 49).

Figure 49, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 110-113.

This section is in recitative style, and Rorem accentuates the line, "Then rend the culprit's carcass" with scales moving in contrary motion ending on a *sforzando* B♭ major.

From the D♮ in the right hand, Rorem transposes the plague motive, and uses it to create a transition to the entrance of the fox. This musical motive, figure A, is stated five times, musically showing the infection of the fox's brain, as the chorus sings, "The fox said." Figure A is repeated a sixth time, attached to the transition into B major, where the fox begins his insidious address.

The fox begins his address in measure 120. Rorem marks the score, "Oily and Grand." The address of the fox alternates between lines of pure flattery and lines where he addresses the crime. The sections where he flatters the ego of the lion are accompanied by rolled chords, and the tempo is held back, as if to make sure the lion has heard all of the praise (figure 50).

Figure 50, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 120-124.



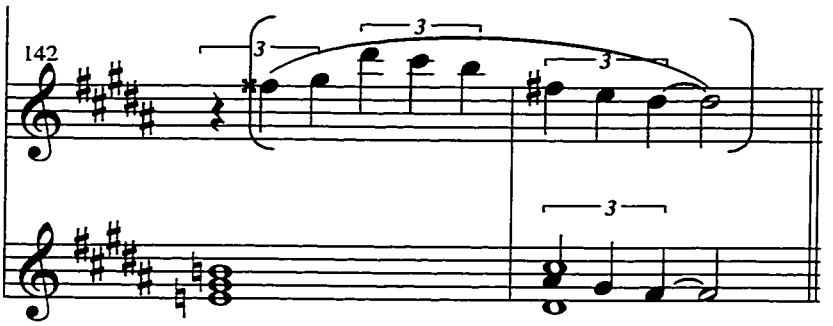
These sections are also marked by *fortissimo* dynamics, and contain figure D. The first time the fox sings this figure is in measure 123, as he describes the honor of the lion as "excessively nice." Rorem musically shows the fox carefully choosing his words, by the use of a quarter-note rest before "nice."

In measure 125, Rorem changes the music to match the fox, as he glosses over the serious nature of the crime. The tempo in the score is marked "Move ahead," and the chords in the accompaniment cease to be rolled. Rorem also marks the dynamics lower, as if the fox were muttering under his breath, and the tessatura of the damning phrase is lower than the soaring words of praise.

The cycle of slowly heaping praise on the lion, then quickly glossing over the crimes the lion has confessed is maintained throughout the address of the fox. Measures 129-133 return to the slower tempo at the beginning of the fox's address.. The fox claims that the lion's choosing the animals as a meal was an

honor for the victim. Rorem augments this in measure 132 with the fox singing figure D as he lies, "that you thought [the victims] superior." In measure 134, the tempo again speeds up as the fox tells of the murder of the shepherd, but returns to a slower tempo and rolled chords in the accompaniment on the text, "A monster none can endure." This is followed by the statement of figure D in the right hand of the accompaniment, accompanied by non-arpeggiated chords in the left hand (figure 51).

Figure 51, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 142-143.



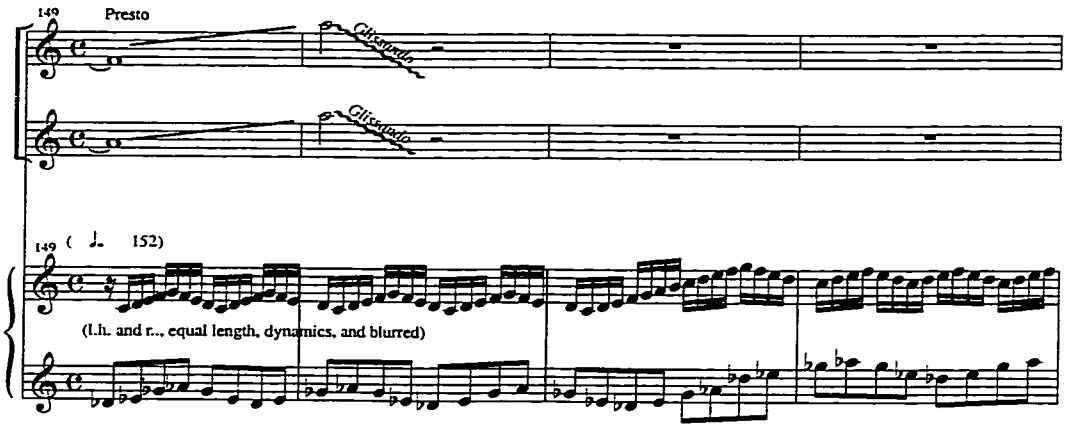
Rorem adds harmonization at the sixth to the end of the figure D in measure 143. In this combination of the calculated lying motive with the non arpeggiated accompanimental pattern, from the truthful part of the fox's tale, Rorem musically represents how the animals buy into the lies of the fox, and thus, shape the truth through this warped perception of justice.

In measures 144-148, Rorem uses figure A twice more in the accompaniment, as the choruses deliver line 42. They sing of the deafening

applause that meets the words of the fox. In response to this text, Rorem creates musical chaos.

Rorem achieves this sense of musical chaos in measure 149 through ingenious means. The time signature changes to common time, and the tempo is marked "Presto." The vocal score is marked, "Cheers from all, on stage and off" as the chorus sings a glissando in the score ascending an octave over a full measure, then descending again over two beats (figure 52).

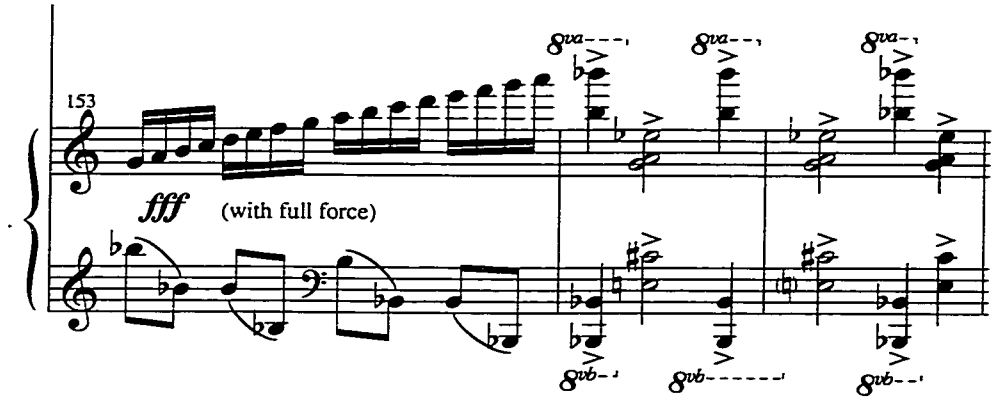
Figure 52, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 149-152.



The accompaniment holds down the pedal for 5 measures, as the left hand plays a G♭ pentatonic scale passage in the same octave as the right hand, which is playing a C major scale. The piano score begins *piano* and is marked for both hands to have "equal dynamics and blurred." This pattern continues, growing louder as the accompaniment builds, moves an octave higher. In measure 153, the

accompaniment figures have contrary motion, which finally culminates on a *fortissimo* B♭ octaves in both hands, playing the two highest and lowest B♭s on the keyboard. These extremes of range are marked, "with full force," and are immediately followed by chords set in the middle of the keyboard (Figure53).

Figure 53, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 153-155.

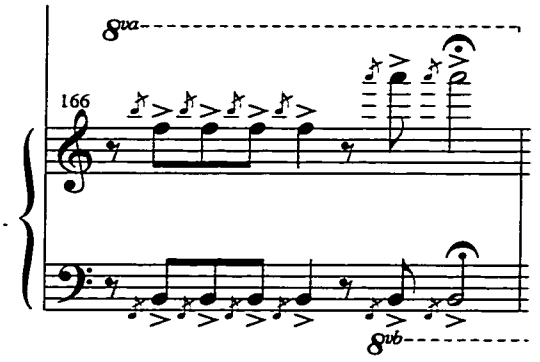


The quality of the chords is jarringly dissonant, consisting of three tritones; C#-G, A-E♭, and E♮ with the B♭ octaves.

The chaos suddenly ends in measure 158. Rorem marks the score, *"subito piano"* and creates a tonal center of E♭ minor. The first and second choruses begin in the following measure, and deliver lines 43-45 in a homophonic texture. The second chorus tells of the laud and pardon given the more vicious animals, and the first chorus serves as transition to the ass's confession. The first chorus

sings the line, "the ass said," and Rorem has the accompaniment play figure E, which represents the donkey's braying (figure 54).

Figure 54, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measure166.



Rorem sets the donkey's confession in 6/8 time. The ass's melody is highly chromatic, although a tonal center of E minor is implied through cadences, and constant repetition of E♮ throughout the melody. The accompaniment through most of the donkey's confession is a chromatic monophonic texture, musically showing the simple nature of the beast, as well as the simple nature of the commoners his character represents.

In reaction to the crimes the ass confessed the animals go berserk. Rorem marks the score "General agitation and yelling, " and in measures 187-195, Rorem repeats the musical chaos from149-157. After the yelling has ceased, the tempo slows by half, and Rorem moves to D♭ mixolydian, as the chorus delivers the next two lines of the text in a homophonic texture in measures 197-202.

In measure 203, plague figure A is stated again in the accompaniment. The chorus returns to the melodic texture of the opening as they sing, "Convinced they had found the animal they must kill." This is followed by another statement of figure A.

Rorem starts to musically portray the rising indignation of the animals in measure 207. The choral section is marked with a crescendo, arriving at forte, and the vocal line of the first chorus rises in pitch. In measure 209, Rorem introduces figure F (figure 55)

Figure 55, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 209-213.

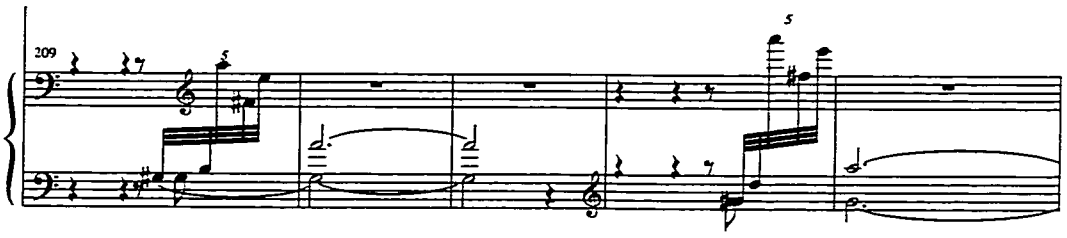



Figure F is important, as it represents the spread of the plague to others. It is the only plague figure that ascends, and begins with an ascending tritone, which is based on the retrograde inversion of the descending tritone found at the end of figure A. Following the first statement of figure F, Rorem sets lines 58-61 of the text as a dialogue between the choruses. After the first chorus sings the first line, figure F is again played in the accompaniment, followed by line 59 sung by the second chorus. The outbursts from the crowd continue until they come to an

agreement on the judgement of death, with the text, "inflicted at once by spite," sung by both choruses.

Following the verdict, Rorem plays a single braying figure in measure 220. The music in measures 221 through the choral entrance in measure 241 musically represents the killing of the ass. The vocal score is marked "Growls and braying, etc." Rorem begins with four measures of figure G (figure 56).

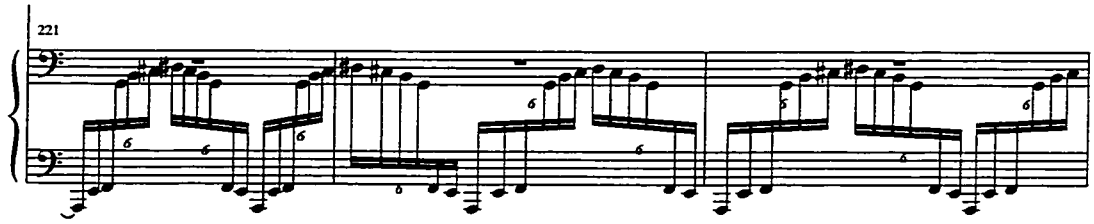
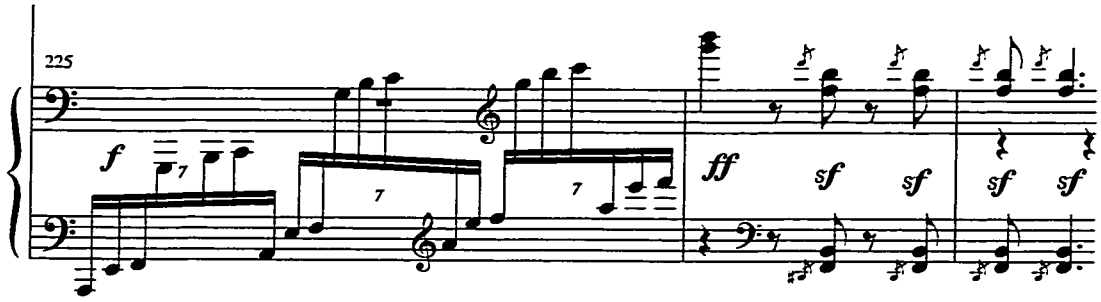
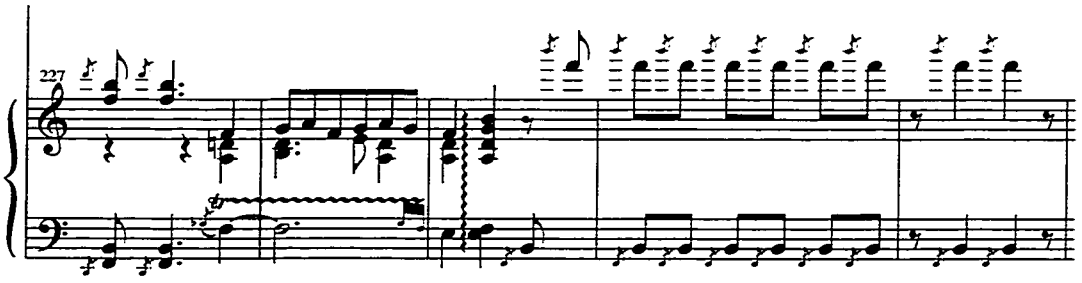
Figure 56, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 221-223.

With each repetition, the dynamics grow. In measure 225, figure G is the basis for a climbing figure that begins at the bottom of the piano keyboard, and climbs seven octaves, growing in dynamics from *forte* to *fortissimo* (figure 57).

Figure 57, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 225-227.



Four statements of braying figure E follow this climactic musical gesture.

Following figure E, Rorem then writes in the left hand of the accompaniment a trill on G♭ and F, which resolves down to E♮. This figure represents the throttling of the ass, as with the chords in the right hand representing the victim's struggle. This is immediately followed by seven *fortissimo* statements of figure E in rapid succession, then two more at twice the time interval (figure 58).

Figure 58, *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, measures 227-231.

The ass gives his last cry, marked *piano*, in measure 236. The accompaniment plays a final climbing gesture in measure 238, but the dynamics are reduced to *mezzo-forte*. Rorem then writes a final trill on F and E, which fades further to *pianissimo* and resolves down to D♮. Rorem writes a four-part chorale to deliver the moral of the story, scored for Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass, marked "all" in the score. The voices enter on the last beat of 241 as the trill is fading, and the resolution of the trill coincides with the word, "so" on the downbeat of 242. The

remainder of the moral is sung *a cappella*, in a homophonic delivery of the text. The chorale is comprised of tertian harmony. As the last word of the text is held, Rorem adds one final statement of figure A, musically reminding us that the plague is still alive and well.

MOTIVIC UNITY IN *THE ANIMALS SICK OF THE PLAGUE*

As he did in *The Lion in Love*, Rorem uses musical motives to musically show the spread of the plague, as well as illuminate traits of the characters in *The Animals Sick of the Plague*. The first, and perhaps most important motive is that representing the plague; figure A. The plague motive, in all of it's various transpositions, represents the abuse of power. It consists of a quintuplet pattern that contains a descending octave between the first two notes, an ascending minor 9th between the third and fourth notes, and ending in a tritone between the fifth note of the quintuplet and note that follows. The plague motive sets the tone for the opening section of the opera, and is used throughout to show how power corrupts.

The use of figure A in the transition before the speech of the lion musically alludes to the true nature of the king of beasts. Placing the motive of corruption before the public façade the lion wears, represented in figure C, undermines his sense of nobility. His oration is followed by figure A, serving as

the transition into the address of the fox, where the plague motive serves both as confirmation of the king's cowardly nature, as well as gives the fox motivation for currying favor with the sovereign.

The use of the plague figure illuminates the motives behind the speech given by the fox. The accompaniment states figure A five times in rapid succession as the transition between the lion's address and the fox's response. In using this motive, which is associated with the abuse of power, as musical material in the transition, Rorem illuminates the motive of the fox as the desire for power. The nature of the fox is exposed in the changes in the accompaniment as he moves from flattery to glossing over the crimes, and the lying of the fox is seen most clearly in figure D.

Rorem again uses the plague figure in the transition to the chaos following the fox's speech. This shows the spread of the plague through the animals gathered there, especially to the powerful ones. Rorem later introduces figure F, based on the inverted figure A, when the collective call for action against the donkey breaks into indignant outbursts from individuals in the crowd. The final use, at the end of the piece, musically warns the listener that the plague is lurking, and must not be forgotten.

It must also be noted, that the only character unaffected by the plague is the ass. The transition to his speech contains his own braying, symbolizing his

honesty and guileless nature. The transition away from the ass's singing is based on his opening melody, and instantly moves to the chaotic music of the animals already infected with the plague.

SUMMARY

In his last and longest opera of *Fables: Five very short Operas*, virtually all of Rorem's stylistic traits found in the first four operas appear in *The Animals Sick of the Plague*. The use of figure A as in representing the spread of corruption is reminiscent of the motivic unity found in *The Lion in Love*. Ostinato patterns, which were the basis of *The Sun and the Frogs*, appear in both the use of figure C in the accompaniment to the lion's address. Ostinato patterns are also the basis of the music accompanying the outburst of the animals: pairing G♭ pentatonic and C major scales. Figure F, based upon the inverted plague figure A, shows motivic manipulation similar to that found in *The Bird Wounded by an Arrow*. And as seen in *The Fox and the Grapes*, Rorem has taken great care to go beyond musical markings in the score, adding dramatic elements such as "Growling and Braying" to the score.

Rorem's care for text is a characteristic found in all of the *Fables*. In *The Animals Sick of the Plague*, Rorem follows the sectional nature of the poem closely. He captures the spirit of corruption in figure A, and weaves the theme

throughout the work. The changes in the lion's character are marked by musical changes. Rorem composes for the fox, slyly oscillating between flattering the lion and brushing his crimes under the rug, two separate patterns in the accompaniment: slow, rolled chords for flattery, and quick block chords while glossing over "black crimes."

Rorem's setting of the donkey, removed from any association with plague figure A, musically represents his untainted spirit. While he admits that he has sinned, his confession is seen as more repentant than that of the lion, as it does not seek others to condemn. The final statement of figure A at the end of the opera shows the ass's innocence: for if he were truly guilty, the plague would have ended, and now his blood is on the lion's head.

CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

In preparing this treatise it was the author's intention to investigate Ned Rorem's contribution to the operatic repertoire. Rorem has made great contribution to twentieth-century American music, and is best known as an essayist and art song composer. He has written six other operas, besides the set of five discussed in this treatise. Academic investigation of his more than 250 songs, chamber works, piano works, and choral works has been extensive. An investigation of his operatic output prior to this treatise, however, revealed a lack of in-depth scholarship. To understand the full compass of Ned Rorem's work, an awareness of his operatic output is needed. Although it was never within the scope of this treatise to examine all of Rorem's operas, investigation of the relationship between the poetry and the music in *Fables: Five very short Operas* would produce information useful to future scholars when examining his other operatic works.

To achieve this goal, biographical information was gathered on Ned Rorem, as well as the poets: Jean de La Fontaine, who wrote the original poems in French; and Marianne Moore, whose translation of La Fontaine's poems into

English serve as the text for Rorem's *Fables*. A brief discussion of Moore's translation process was also included. An investigation of the compositional relationship between the poetry and the music could then begin. For each of the five operas, the text was analyzed in terms of it's dramatic content, characters employed, and morals delivered. Rorem's desires for the operas, included in the score, were then stated, so his intentions, if any, could be understood. The bulk of the chapters were devoted to showing the relationship between the poems and the music.

Summary

An investigation of the life and works of Ned Rorem revealed his love for literature, and how this influence can be seen in his stylistic trends. Rorem takes great care in fashioning text settings. His vocal lines are imbued with a sense of lyricism, through his ability to follow the rhythmic pattern of speech, as well as the natural rise and fall of pitch of the text. His vocal writing also shows knowledge of the voice, placing open vowels at the extreme ends of the vocal ranges. Other stylistic traits include expanded tertian harmony; secundal, quartal and quintal harmony; added-note harmony; and ostinato patterns. All these are evident in *Fables: Five very short Operas*.

Investigating the texts used in the operas revealed that they each stand as separate entities. The characters represent different aspects of human nature, and as such, are often one-dimensional. There appeared to be no dramatic relationship between the texts. Analysis of the musical settings of these operas confirmed that were no thematic or key relationships between the operas: each stands alone. This is most evident in the character of the lion, which dies at the end of the first opera, then appears in the last opera as the "king of the beasts."

In each of the five operas, Rorem shows a keen understanding of the subtlety of the poetry. His care for the text affects both the form of the opera and his treatment of the characters. His ability to understand poetic complexity and translate it into musical idioms is seen in the variability of his musical settings.

In *The Lion in Love*, Rorem's understanding of the text manifests itself in his careful following of the formal structure of the poem. He aligns the changing sections of the poem with changes in key, and his attention to the subtlety of the words is seen in the twenty-four measures of *a cappella* singing of the fable, described as "a tale that is unadorned." The moral of the story is: "don't let emotion rule over logic." Rorem's use of motivic figure A throughout the piece, displays a well-thought out approach to the moral of the story, giving a musical correlation to the father's dangerous advice; neither of which can be taken at face value.

Rorem shows his versatility in his musical setting of *The Sun and the Frogs*. He abandons the close relationship between the form of the text and the form of the music and instead, employs varying ostinato figures in both hands of the accompaniment to create a musical representation of the moral: too many despots in one country. Rorem creates a musical representation of the warring factions trying to attain dominance over the other, by placing a different figure in each hand. Each ostinato cycles to its own rhythm, seemingly without regard for the rhythmic structure of the others. They change frequently, and are often set with large intervals between them; depicting the struggle of the tyrants and leaving the poor frogs lost in the middle.

The Bird Wounded by an Arrow shows the depth of understanding Rorem has for the poetry, as well as his ability to find ways to express this understanding within the music. The poem tells of a bird that has been shot by an arrow containing her own feather in the fletching. Rorem creates a musical figure to represent the bird's feather as it is lost, and then manipulates the motive to show its reincarnation within the fletching of the arrow. The slight change of the original figure gives a musical correlation to the way in which human nature can take someone's seemingly innocent mistake, and use it against them.

In *The Fox and the Grapes*, Rorem begins to show not only care for the text, but also for the drama. Within the score, he gives direction beyond that of

musical, dynamic, and tempo markings, to both the accompanist and singers. The conversational nature of the choruses is derived from the first line of the text, and the cluster of notes written for the chorus is a musical representation of the clustered grapes. In disparaging the grapes, Rorem has the fox move to a foreign key, representing the move away from the truth of the grape's qualities.

The Animals Sick of the Plague is the most musically dense of the five operas, and displays almost all of the above features. He follows the sectional nature of the poem closely, and creates a musical figure to represent the plague that is seen throughout the entire work. The plague is a representation of corruption, and is used in connection with the lion and the fox, illuminating their tainted spirits and ulterior motives within their speeches. Its lack of connection to the ass, shows the pure nature of the beast, and makes the unlikely hero more sympathetic. Ostinato patterns form the musical basis for the moments of chaos, which are supplemented by Rorem's additions to the dramaturgy, calling for "cheers, braying, growling, and yelling" at various. The final statement of the plague figure serves as a warning that we must all be vigilant when dealing with corruption, it is still lurking out there.

Conclusions

Fables: Five very short Operas were written thirty years before this investigation came to fruition. They were designed with flexibility as part of their foundation, so that they could be performed in as many ways and venues as the imagination could conceive. The operas could be unified in their setting, or varied, as the circumstances warranted, and presented either individually or collectively.

The analysis of the operas shows Rorem's care for the musical setting of the text. His ability to find and musically set the subtlest nuance of the text is evident in each of these works. This is seen in the various ways each one is set. The level of craftsmanship that he displays, and the care given the text, would recommend these works to various chamber opera enthusiasts. They are, however, rarely performed, and as of the date of this study, no professional recording of *Fables* exists.

In searching for a suitable topic for this thesis, the author considered Rorem's *War Scenes.* The topic of Rorem's art song output, however, has been investigated by many scholars, and thus, further research insued. During the research about Rorem, an anomaly was unearthed: two articles on Rorem, written by the same author, showed a discrepancy between the number of operas Rorem

had written. The later article showed two *less* operas than the previous article had.

Curiosity led to correspondence with the composer. Ned Rorem clarified the situation: the second publication listed only published works. He was exceedingly helpful, and sent a list of the operas, with notes on accompanimental forces needed for each opera. This list led the author to seek out a score for *Fables: Five very short Operas.*

Upon opening the score to the first opera, the author began to understand why these operas, which have such flexibility, are not performed more often: the look of the score is intimidating. In the first opera, a series of six, seven, or even eight grace notes with added-note harmonies spanning three octaves, leads to chords with extended tertian harmony. The vocal part has a tonally ambiguous, twenty-five measure *a cappella* solo in the middle of the opera, and the opera goes through five different keys. Without a sense of Rorem's operatic style, and lacking any set number of singers and vocal ranges assigned, directors might choose not to pursue these works.

In investigating these works, the author found them to be quite remarkable. The settings are varied, yet all of them show the distinctive style of Ned Rorem. Furthermore, the pieces were accessible to students, and vocal lines well written, giving the singer ease in the extremes of range. They are viable

works, offering flexibility of staging, from the traditional presentation by the singers, to lyric ballet, with actors and dancers performing the roles, and the voices and piano supplying the music from off stage. In conclusion, it is the author's hope that this investigation will help the reader, either as director, teacher, or singer, as well as others interested in twentieth-century chamber opera, to expose these lively and creative operas to a greater audience, and to stimulate further academic study of Rorem's operatic output.

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