

Phantasmagoria and Nonsense. The Poetics of Christian Morgenstern in Dora Cojocaru's Music

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ABSTRACT – When Christian Morgenstern's *Galgenlieder* (*Gallows Songs*) was first published in Germany (1905), many readers and critics were puzzled by their style, and the publisher received unflattering mail. Others, however, chuckled, and critic Julius Bab wrote in the first review: "I am sorry for those who do not sense the magnificent subtle humour of the heart behind these crazy verse fancies."¹ There was not much middle ground between these two groups. However, the verses were to have a major impact in both the literary and other fields, with Morgenstern's work continuing to resonate in various art forms. Over time, his verses have inspired many composers and visual artists. In Romanian music, Dora Cojocaru adapted a series of Morgenstern's nocturnal poems into ten miniatures, reflecting the complex atmosphere of the great German poet's poems. An imaginary world is presented, inhabited by fantastic characters such as Palmström, von Korf, Lunovis, the Gallows Child, the Northern Mouse and the Singing Fish. In this fantasy realm, these figures become puppets that reflect our emotions and feelings, driven by the unpredictable creative force that gives them life. By seeking to understand the essences of this phantasmagoria and the experiences lived in the mirror of life, we learn to discover ourselves better. Thus, by exploring the world of the characters Palmström and Korf or the Midnight Mouse and understanding their conflicting situation, we can see how the composer expresses their emotions through music: for example, the state of anxiety and nervousness experienced by both characters, musically emphasized by a particular rhythmic pattern and an alert tempo. If we follow the relationship between text and music, we notice some extremely significant moments, with sound images that are suggestive of the message of the text. During the analytical process, several peculiarities

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¹ Knight, *The Gallows Songs. Christian Morgenstern's Galgenlieder*, 1.

of the musical language and compositional styles are highlighted, such as the call-motif which, after its multiple variations throughout the work, returns to its original version, being reworked in the last miniature, until the finale in *a niente* – a characteristic type of ending in Dora Cojocaru's music – concludes the Cantata, which totals approximately 20 minutes of music and story.

Keywords: cantata; chamber; nonsense; Morgenstern.

1. Introduction to Christian Morgenstern's poetic universe

Christian Morgenstern completed the first of his whimsical *Galgenlieder* (*Gallows Songs*) at the age of 20, inspired, as he himself recounts, by a carefree outing to Werder, near Potsdam, with some of his friends, in an area known as Gallows Hill.²

The world of the *Galgenlieder* focuses on this Gallows Hill, around which Morgenstern creates an immortal fantasy. The hill may not be as dramatic as Goethe's *Blocksberg*, says author Max Knight, but it is just as alive. In *Galgenlieder* we find the moon sheep, the midnight dog, the Funnel, the Lonely Knee – all travelling on the roads surrounding the hill; the inventive Korf, the sensible Palmström and the reclusive Palma Kunkel live in the city that lies at the foot of the hill.

A significant part of the *Galgenlieder* is based on visual images that fascinated Morgenstern.³ He “saw” things like a painter – his father and grandfathers, Josef Schertel and Christian E. B. B. Morgenstern, whose works can be seen in the German art galleries, were Romantic landscape artists. Other groups of verses are themed on mechanical inventions. Korf invents a clock that goes forward and backwards at the same time, and Palmström has one that adapts itself to the owner's desire to make time go faster or slower – a clock with a heart. Although they do not appear in all the poems, Palmström and Korf dominate the *Galgenlieder*. While Palmström is actual in a crazy sense, Korf is harder to describe. He is immaterial, yet a presence, and this status – half in and half out of reality – drives officials crazy as they try to classify him and burden him with civic duties. Korf is the holy fool, whose foolishness makes more sense than wisdom.

Sometimes Morgenstern enjoys taking an inventive idea to the absurd extreme, as in *Bohemian Carnival*; at other times, he simply introduces a thought and lets it cling to the mind like a ladybug. Above all, however, the *Galgenlieder* are preoccupied with words, sounds and the “weaknesses” of the German language. Most of the “word” poems are pure cheerful impertinence, reflections of the good-natured sophistication of high-school students, and focus on the traps, pitfalls, and curiosities of the language.⁴

² Morgenstern, *Über die Galgenlieder*, 10.

³ Morgan classifies Morgenstern's poems into the following groups: “sheer nonsense, rhyme nonsense, punning fancies, sound effects, satires, philosophic concepts, sensible ideas grotesquely presented, bizarre ideas, and superior nonsense.” (Morgan, “The Superior Nonsense of Christian Morgenstern”, 288-289.)

⁴ Knight, *The Gallows Songs. Christian Morgenstern's Galgenlieder*, 4.

Morgenstern felt that people use their familiar language without thinking, uttering what they had heard before. “Most people don’t talk – they quote. They might feel tempted to use quotation marks around nearly everything they say, as they did not create the form of what they say but simply followed the custom.”⁵ The poet was fascinated by phonetics and linguistics since childhood, when he used to investigate the artificial international language of Volapük,⁶ which involved multiple playful word formations. Later, as a high school student, he “invented” a language. In this language, his own Volapük – *Das Grosse Lalula (The Great Lalula)* is written, which, he explained, is not an expression of nonsense, but a “phonetic rhapsody.”⁷ In this sense, if the Känguru group of poems is based on the visual, the Lalula group – including *Fisches Nachtgesang (Fish's Night Song)* – is based on the sense of hearing.

“Morgenstern plays with words as a child plays with blocks. He sees all the words (and things) as if he had never seen them before and plays with them as imaginatively as a child.”⁸ Paraphrasing Nietzsche’s “in every true man hides a child who wants to play,” Morgenstern dedicated the Galgenlieder to “the child in man.”⁹

The reason for his success lies, to some extent, in the very nature of the German language. Jerome Lettvin offers the following example:

I tell someone that I wait for the *Straßenbahnwagen* (tram) at the *Bahnhof* (station). It occurs to me to replace *Bahn* (track) with *Baum* (tree). Thus now I wait for the *Straßen-baumwagen* at the *Baumhof* (at the tree-station for the street-tree-wagon) so that clearly I ought to watch the *Baumwärter* (tree watchman) in his *Baumwärterhauschen* (tree watchman's hut) for the signal that the *Baumzug* (tree-train) is coming. Thereupon, all the words that share *Bahn* change to another set that shares *Baum*, and I have a strange new world in which all the reasonable and common sentences containing *Bahn* set up the relations for *Baum* words. If I pick the parts more carefully, the induced image from one or two puns is very rich.¹⁰

This is what Morgenstern does. He conceives an axiomatic approach to language in which symbols, emptied of meaning, are arranged according to rules that have nothing to do with meaning.¹¹ Invention is a frequent motif which is current in nonsense.¹² In fact, most literary critics regarded Morgenstern as an epigone of literary nonsense.

Nonsense is meta-humour. As Donald Gray notes, “nonsense ends in laughter,”¹³ but not because the paradox has been resolved, or the point has been understood.

⁵ Morgenstern, *Stufen*, 101.

⁶ Volapük is an invented language, created between 1879 and 1880 by Johann Martin Schleyer, a Catholic priest from Baden, Germany, who claimed that God told him in a dream to create an international language.

⁷ Morgenstern, *Stufen*, 11.

⁸ Knight, *The Gallows Songs. Christian Morgenstern's Galgenlieder*, 5.

⁹ Knight, *The Gallows Songs. Christian Morgenstern's Galgenlieder*, 5.

¹⁰ Lettvin, “Morgenstern and Mythopoetry”, 19.

¹¹ Lettvin, “Morgenstern and Mythopoetry”, 18.

¹² Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, 79.

¹³ Gray, “The Uses of Victorian Laughter”, 175.

When laughing, we give up – only to return to the same puzzle some other time. Morgenstern is perhaps the greatest of all nonsense poets precisely because he manages so accurately to keep his poems in a perfect balance between meaning and nonsense.¹⁴

Leonard Forster, talking about Morgenstern's sound poems, sees them as prefiguring the avant-garde experiments such as those of the Dadaists and Surrealists.¹⁵ Indeed, when viewed in isolation, *Das große Lalula* and *Fisches Nachtgesang* are, of course, quite similar to Hugo Ball's poems, but these poems by Morgenstern are not representative of either the *Galgenlieder* or of nonsense verses in general.¹⁶ Although Christian Morgenstern's *Galgenlieder* poems have frequently been associated with the grotesque¹⁷ or regarded as precursors of the avant-garde of Dadaist and Surrealist poetry,¹⁸ most critics refer to them, in one way or another, as nonsense verses.

Some satirical elements were no doubt sparked simply by rhymes, and others by those fortunate verbal "accidents" he liked to exploit, and which resulted in a *sui generis* humour. However, the public and critics repeatedly insisted on reading all sorts of interpretations even in the groups of verses that were purely entertaining. Morgenstern gently rebuked these pedants in his explanations in *Über die Galgenlieder*. Even for the frequent classification as nonsense poetry, Morgenstern, who was a mild-mannered, almost shy person, says in a disarming plea to his critics:

One thing I beg of you. No matter how flattering the qualifying adjectives might be – kindly reconsider them in favour of something like folly or craziness. Surely you would not want to tag with these two evil German Philistine and tavern terms of thoughtlessness the very humour that aims at a certain kind of spirituality, but "higher nonsense" "fit to be classified as literature" is the cheapest and unwise that can be said about the *Galgenlieder* – a slogan used without doing justice to the evidence.¹⁹

As if Morgenstern had anticipated the critics' attempts to read more into his fantasies than he had put into them, the poet asserts in his *Aesthetic Weasel* that rhyme alone drove him to write, and, therefore, there is no "deeper meaning."²⁰ And in *Drei Hasen* Morgenstern asks to be allowed to write poetry for its own sake: "*Wer fragt, der ist gerichtet, hier wird nicht komentiert, hier wird an sich gedichtet.*"²¹ (The one who asks is judged, there are no comments here, here poetry is written.) Occasionally, when pressed hard, he would hint at what he had in mind with some of his verses. *Lunovis* (*Moon Sheep*), he says, could be seen as the moon itself – first across the broad expanse of the

¹⁴ Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, 180.

¹⁵ Forster, *Poetry of Significant Nonsense*, 25.

¹⁶ Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, 118.

¹⁷ Thomson, *The Grotesque*, 65.

¹⁸ Forster, *Poetry of Significant Nonsense*, 26.

¹⁹ Knight, *The Gallows Songs. Christian Morgenstern's Galgenlieder*, 7.

²⁰ Knight, *The Gallows Songs. Christian Morgenstern's Galgenlieder*, 7.

²¹ Morgenstern, *Egon und Emilie*, 94.

firmament, later disappearing behind the mountains, in a “dream” seeing its tiny body as universe and appearing like a white disc. In the morning, the fish are dumb. Therefore, their song can only be expressed by mute symbols. Symbolism? Allegory? Subtle meanings? “If I may advise: only have the innocence to enjoy yourself.”²² Somewhere else, Morgenstern reports:

I have often been asked what my purpose was when I wrote *Galgenlieder*. Well, initially, nothing other than my own pleasure and that of other naive youngsters. Later, their audience expanded and so did their artistic scope. But even now, no satirical or philosophical purpose should be ascribed to it; rather, the reader should experience the sight and feeling from which the verses have sprung. They aim at relaxation for contemporary man; hemmed in by scholars and their slogans, and hence confined to dead-end streets, he might breathe more freely in an atmosphere in which the oppressive heaviness of our humourless scientific era is shaken off or turned upside down.²³

Morgenstern is a poetic linguist who, according to Jerome Lettvin, has a strong bias against mathematics and logic, and his interest is in what might be called the spiritual diseases of language. “He yearned to become one with nature, but language appeared to stand forbiddingly between.”²⁴

Morgenstern’s work is full of surprises; the poems are by turns soothing, surprising, amusing or outrageous, their language and sentiments being characterised from the conventional to the bizarre – in *Das Grosse Lalula*, which is written entirely in a peculiar jargon: *Hontraruru miromente/zasku zes rü rü?/Entepente, leiolente*. Translating them undoubtedly requires a sense of the absurd and an awareness of the beauty in the strange and unexpected.

2. Christian Morgenstern in Dora Cojocaru’s music

Not surprisingly, in both music and the visual arts, Morgenstern has remained an inspiration and role model for many composers and artists. Contemporary composers include David Blake, who wrote *Ten Gallows Songs of Christian Morgenstern* for voice and piano (2009), and Sofia Gubaidulina, with *Galgenlieder à 3* (1996), an adaptation for mezzo-soprano, double bass and percussion of fifteen of Morgenstern’s apparently childlike and formally simple poems, which are full of linguistic playfulness.

In the spectrum of Romanian music, we find Morgenstern’s verses in Adrian Pop’s score for *Bagatelle No. 2* or, from the older generation of composers, in Aurel Stroe’s *Four Songs* for soprano, saxophone and percussion (1987). What an interesting coincidence the poem *The Great Lalula* offers. The poem arranged by Adrian Pop finds

²² Morgenstern, *Über die Galgenlieder*, 12-13.

²³ Morgenstern, *Über die Galgenlieder*, 16-17.

²⁴ Lettvin, “Morgenstern and Mythopoetry”, 15.

a completely different approach in Dora Cojocaru's Cantata, *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*²⁵ (1995):

So, we are in front of a double way of musically rethinking one and the same poem. If in Adrian Pop's score one can feel the play with the name Lalula, taken from the initial choral version to which, in terms of direction, the recitation of the entire text of the first stanza was added, in Dora Cojocaru's score, in the fifth movement of the Cantata, the very figure of Lalula is dramatized with his babbling outbursts, and the name – Lalula – appears at the end of each stanza, signifying the reproachful lines of the instrumental "tamers" who sometimes also use their voice during the performance... Lines that the direction will heavily use.²⁶

Dora Cojocaru's work represents the contemporary genre of the chamber cantata and was written in 1995 for voice (soprano), wind instruments (flute, clarinet, horn), percussion, and strings (violin, cello). The construction of the musical discourse makes economical yet fruitful use of a small number of melodic-rhythmic, circular motifs, whose presence ensures the thematic coherence of the entire work.²⁷

The first motivic nucleus appears in the horn (Ex. 1) and brings with it the symbolic connotations of the call: an invitation to the adventure of understanding life differently than before. In what follows, we continue our journey of analysing the suite of ten miniatures of the Cantata, about which Dora Cojocaru confesses:

The 10 miniatures are expressions of a special atmosphere in which a myriad of emotions are interwoven, as suggested by the nocturnal poems in Christian Morgenstern's *Galgenlieder*. It is an imaginary world, populated by unreal characters: Palström, von Korf, Lunovis, the Gallows Child, the Midnight Mouse, the Singing Fish. But in this fantastical realm, they are merely puppets, endowed with our emotions and feelings, manipulated by the unforeseen creative force that breathes life. By trying to understand the essence of phantasmagoria, the experiences of life in the mirror world, we learn to know ourselves better.²⁸

The incipit, *Galgenberg I (Gallows Hill I)*, has the character of a prologue, with an anticipatory role. The below-mentioned call-motif is played repetitively by the horn (Ex. 1), along with whispers of the last two lines of the poem, uttered by the rest of the instrumentalists: *You will know life better if you learn to understand us*, that is, the protagonists of the poems. Particularly worth mentioning are the directorial indications for this beginning: the performers, initially in the auditorium, slowly move towards the stage, where they take their seats, and during the whispering of the text, they stay still, with a "frozen" expression.

²⁵ The world première of the *Galgenlieder in der Nacht* chamber cantata took place in Cluj-Napoca on April 25, 1999.

²⁶ Angi, "Frăția muzelor azi. Dramatizarea muzical-scenică a poeziei: a) Adrian Pop: 8 bagatele pentru cvartet de coarde; b) Dora Cojocaru – *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*. Kammerkantate auf Versen von Christian Morgenstern (1995)", 319.

²⁷ Angi, "Frăția muzelor azi...", 315.

²⁸ Angi, "Frăția muzelor azi...", 307-308.



Ex. 1. Dora Cojocaru, *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*, “Galgenberg I”, the call-motif in the horn.

The call-motif returns in the second movement – *Nach Norden. West-Östlich (To the North. West-Eastern)* – in vocal version. The soloist’s invitation to learn about Palström’s adventures arising from his insomnia is rendered by an *arioso* accompanied by the appearance of a new important motif, an accompaniment-motif, which will play a significant role in several moments of the cantata’s miniatures,²⁹ especially in the ninth movement.

Ex. 2. Dora Cojocaru, *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*, “Nach Norden. West-Östlich”, the call-motif in vocal version.

According to the free translation of the poem by theater music director Iosif Katona:

Palström has become nervous, which is why he is now sleeping to the North. Because sleeping to the West, East, or South means tiring your heart. This theory had been demonstrated to Dickens by two scholars of the time and is explained by the magnetism of the planets, so Palström treats himself at home, takes his bed and puts it northwards. When he tells this to von Korf, he feels a little anxious, because it is self-evident to him that he must sleep with his back to the East, in the direction in which the earth turns.³⁰

The anxiety and nervousness of the two characters are musically emphasized by a specific rhythmicity, in an alert tempo, a rhythmicity that gradually fades away into a transition to a contrasting section, marked *Liberio. Senza misura*, right at the suggestive moment of the lines *Magnetism of the planets*, a “magnetism” that slows down the

²⁹ Angi, “Frăția muzelor azi...”, 317.

³⁰ Angi, “Frăția muzelor azi...”, 317-318.

discourse now in *ritardando* and rarefies the writing – we imagine here the magnetic force of attraction that prevents the music from moving forward at the same alert tempo (Ex. 3). With the appearance of von Korf, the discourse resumes its trajectory by repeating the material in *agitato* with the state of unease of the incipit: “When von Korf heard/He felt uneasy.”



Ex. 3. Dora Cojocaru, *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*, “Nach Norden. West-Östlich”, rhetorically suggestive moment.

The third movement – *Galgenkindes Wiegenlied (Gallow Child’s Lullaby)* – presents a second vocal version of the call-motif, with clear intentions of lulling the child to sleep. From a directorial point of view, the soloist “bewitches” the flute player, awakening him to life, a moment marked in the beginning with a distinct sign in the score (which will appear twice more during the movement):



Ex. 4. Dora Cojocaru, *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*, “Galgenkindes Wiegenlied”, incipit.

Ștefan Anghi sees this musical moment as a lullaby’s caress which “is organically intertwined, in a dialogue, with a chattering presence – *frullato* – of the flute and then of the clarinet. However, their participation in this “rocking” comes with threats and scolding gestures. This is no surprise, as the strange child – despite the mysterious story in the song, or perhaps because of it? – refuses to go to sleep.”³¹

³¹ Anghi, “Frăția muzelor azi...”, 318.

Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf,
Am Himmel steht ein Schaf;
Das Schaf, das ist aus Wasserdampf
und kämpft wie du den Lebenskampf.
Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf.

Sleep, little child, sleep,
There is a sheep in the sky;
The sheep is made of smoke and fog
and is fighting the battle of life like you
Sleep, little child, sleep.

Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf,
die Sonne frißt das Schaf,
sie leckt es weg vom blauen Grund
mit langer Zunge wie ein Hund.
Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf.

Sleep, little child, sleep,
the sun now eats the sheep,
he licks it off from the blue ground,
with a long tongue just like a hound.
Sleep, little child, sleep.

Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf.
Nun ist es fort, das Schaf.
Es kommt der Mond und schilt sein Weib;
die läuft ihm weg, das Schaf im Leib.
Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf.

Sleep, little child, sleep.
Now the sheep is gone.
The moon arrives and starts to chide.
Sun runs away, the sheep inside.
Sleep, little child, sleep.³²

Rhetorically speaking, the moment of the sun's appearance is highly suggestive and reminds us of a similar example of treating the discourse, in the chamber opera *Riga Crypto and Lapona Enigel*. More specifically, on the lines "die Sonne frißt das Schaf" ["The sun now eats the sheep"], there is an ascending chromatic line in the flute and clarinet, in long values, suggesting the moment when the sun gradually rises (Ex. 5), followed by alert solar flashes in the clarinet's interpretation, marked *agitato*, on the lines "Nun ist es fort, das Schaf" ["Now the sheep (the moon) is gone"] (Ex. 6):

Ex. 5. Dora Cojocaru, *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*, "Galgenkinds Wiegenlied", the sun makes its appearance.

Ex. 6. Dora Cojocaru, *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*, "Galgenkinds Wiegenlied", solar flashes.

³² Our translation.

Ex. 8. Dora Cojocaru, *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*, “Lunovis I”, the first measures.

Returning to the Gregorian chant, while it is, of course, under the *senza misura* indication, following the authentic model of interpretation, the instrumental part, although divided into measures, does not follow the metric laws, but instead has the indication of duration – with each measure lasting about 4 seconds, totalling about 1 minute and 35 seconds for the entire movement.

The content of the poem *Das Grosse Lalula (The Great Lalula)* associated with the following miniature, consists of words and phrases that do not adhere to any known lexical or grammatical pattern, thus lacking any actual meaning. The lyrical self may therefore express a departure from meaning and a playful engagement with language itself.

The poem's language can be described as onomatopoeic, a phonetic game that focuses on the sound of words and apparently conveys no meaning. Morgenstern plays with the sounds of words, defying expectations of meaning and comprehensibility. This game reveals a departure from conventional language and a delight in experimentation:

Kroklokwapzi? Semememi!
Seiokronto – prafliplo:
Bifzi, bafzi; hulamemi:
quati basti bo...
Lalu lalu lalu la.

Hontraruru miromente
zasku zes rü rü?
Entepente, leiolente klekwapuzi lü?
Lalu lalu lalu la!

*Simarar kos malzipempu silzuzankunkrei (;)!
Marjomar dos: Quempu Lempu
Siri Suri Sei!
Lalu lalu lalu la!*

Nonetheless, we also discover various perspectives that offer original interpretations of these verses, whether viewed as a chess game hidden within certain symbols (syllables) or approaching the mystical realm more closely.

In the first two lines, questions are asked – apparently pressing questions, as revealed by the explosive mix of labiodental fricative sounds (f) and occlusive hissing sounds (z). In each case, the reaction is a “Lalu lalu lalu la” at the end of each stanza, signifying, in Dora Cojocaru’s music, the reprimanding lines of the instrumental “tamers,” who also use their voices throughout the musical discourse.³⁴ For linguistic sociologists the problem is clear: this is a typical case of asymmetric communication. In the third stanza, the questioner (in our case the soloist) has resignedly given up; however, the punctuation marks (;) and [!] prove that the character’s anxiety is by no means appeased.³⁵

After a very brief introductory moment of the instruments, with *slap tongue* without sound, *frullato*, *sul legno* or *pizzicato*, Dora Cojocaru ensures the highlighting of the text, allowing the soloist to interpret the verses in a recitative style, in *sotto voce*, minimally accompanied by the instrumentalists, in an improvisatory manner. During the improvisation, the instrumentalists whisper the text in free canon (the wind players alternate between whispers and improvisations). Structurally, we are talking about an alternation between solo moments and the instrumentalists’ “answer,” a principle that is repeated twice, resulting in a ternary miniature, following the structure of the poem.

Morgenstern wrote *Fisches Nachtgesang* (*Fish's Night Song*) at the dawn of a century that would reconsider the definitions of literature and art. Some critics dismissed his poem as a textual trick, not poetry. Morgenstern indicates no actual sounds, and the signs wait for a reader to come along and give them meaning (Fig. 1).

³⁴ Angi, “Frăția muzelor azi...”, 319.

³⁵ Uthmann, “Zu Christian Morgensterns Gedicht *Das große Lalula*”.

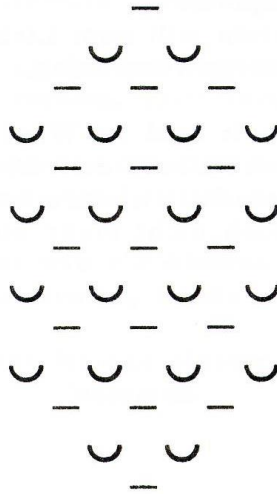


Fig. 1. Christian Morgenstern, *Galgenlieder*, “Fisches Nachtgesang” (“Fish’s Night Song”).

It is like observing a real fish under real water while being unable to hear the twitches and bubbles of its aquatic world from your position on the shore. The sound exists beneath the water and can only be imagined. The obvious paradox of the fish’s song is conveyed by the poet through a pictogram composed solely of signs representing the pauses which, as a whole, form the outline of the fish’s figure, while also suggesting the silvery shimmer of its scales (and/or of the water waves) in the moonlight, inviting the reader “to hear, through a distant visual-auditory synaesthesia, the musical interplay of light.”³⁶ The drawing above serves as the score for *The Fish’s Night Song*, and holds the place of the miniature no. 6 of the Cantata. During the concert in Cluj-Napoca, the director decided to project the poem onto a screen, allowing each audience member to interpret this mysterious moment through their imagination.

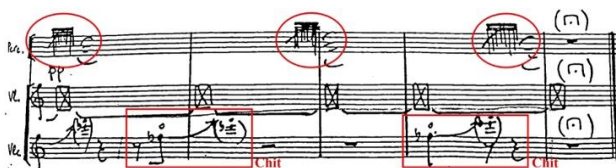
The paradoxical silence of the nocturnal song sung by an (obviously mute) fish is followed by another partial silence in *Lunovis II*, which appears as a strictly instrumental and much-abbreviated echo of the material in *Lunovis I*, in which the first 18 measures of *Lunovis I* are repeated without the vocal soloist, followed by the eighth miniature, *Die Mitternachtsmaus (The Midnight Mouse)*, in *attacca*.

The first impression created by the poem is that of a mysterious mood. The use of personification in representing the midnight mouse as the caretaker of the heavenly abode is a unique and imaginative theme. The structure of the poem, with its distinct beginning,

³⁶ Angi, “Frăția muzelor azi...”, 319.

middle and end, creates a sense of order. Compared to Morgenstern's other works, this poem is relatively simple and concise, but surprises with its playfulness and whimsical imagination.

The percussion, combined with the pointillist aleatoricism of the winds and accompanied by flageolets in the strings, faithfully reproduces the solo squeak of the mouse, while the soloist's delivery of the text in *Sprechgesang* recalls the expressionism of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*.³⁷ Dora Cojocaru's music thus creates clear visual images through rapid mouse-like movements on percussion or a suggestive squeak on the cello, through an ascending glissando in the high register:



Ex. 9. Dora Cojocaru, *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*, “Die Mitternachtsmaus”, finale.

Die Mausefalle I-II (The Mouse Trap I-II) is regarded as one of the most successful poems in the cycle. Morgenstern tells the story of the sensitive Palmström, who seeks to eliminate a mouse without resorting to violence. His friend von Korf has a brilliant idea: they need a cage that Palmström himself can fit into. There, he has to play the violin and lure the mouse with sweet sounds until it enters the cage.

With this miniature we come close to the end, witnessing the return of the initial motifs of the overall structure. The verses underlying the piece are chosen for the success of a re-exposition of both the musical and poetic elements. Thus, all the characters of the adventures come together, allowing us to hear again the motifs that personified them throughout the musical discourse: the call-motif, the accompaniment motif of the beginning – which is also characteristic of Palmström's personification with which the narrative thread begins, but also the articulations suggestive of the midnight mouse.

A rhetorical moment worth mentioning comes with the lines “*Vor ihr sinkt in Schlaf alsbald/Palmströms schweigende Gestalt*” (“Palmström is silent at last/He falls into a peaceful sleep”). The key word here is “sleep”, which gives way to a discourse suggestive of the nocturnal atmosphere through the intervention of the vibraphone with a series of chords over pedals supported by strings, in *piano*, *poco rit.* and *con sordino*:

³⁷ Angi, “Frăția muzelor azi...”, 320.

Ex. 10. Dora Cojocaru, *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*, “Die Mausefalle I-II”, middle section.

It is important to note that here we also find the vocal variant of the call-motif – which will ultimately contribute to the cyclicity of the entire structure.

At first glance, the poem *Galgenberg II (Gallows Hill II)* seems critical and reflective. It seems to address life and its understanding and challenges conventional ideas. The poem expresses the lyrical self’s struggle with a society that sees life in a naïve way. It portrays its attitude as mocking and perceives life as deeply serious. “The lyrical self challenges the reader to understand its perspective in order to better understand life and sees itself as a teacher.”³⁸

The message of the lyrical self seems to indicate a critique of society’s approach to life’s problems. It perceives a lack of depth or understanding among the general public and presents itself as someone who truly understands life. The mocking attitude can be viewed as a means of demarcation meant to emphasize the significance of its own findings. In terms of language, it is not particularly complex and uses simple words, which could indicate that the lyrical self is trying to make its message accessible to “uneducated people.”³⁹

*Blödem Volke unverständlich,
Treiben wir des Lebens Spiel.
Gerade das, was unabwendlich,
fruchtet unsrem Spott als Ziel.*

*Magst es Kinder-Rach
An des Daseins tiefem Ernst;
Wirst das Leben besser kennen,
wenn du uns verstehen lernst.*

Enigmatic for the masses
Playfully with life we fool,
That which human wits surpasses.
Draws our special ridicule.

Call it infantile vendetta
of life’s deeply serious aim.
You will know existence better
Once you understand our game.⁴⁰

In the last movement of the Cantata, the initial call-motif, after undergoing several variations throughout the work, returns to its original form, being anticipated from the

³⁸ “Galgenberg von Christian Morgenstern”.

³⁹ “Galgenberg von Christian Morgenstern”.

⁴⁰ English translation by Max Knight.

very end of the previous movement and reworked in the final movement, until the finale in *a niente* – a distinct type of ending, concludes the Cantata, which lasts approximately 20 minutes of music and story.

Conclusions

Christian Morgenstern reinterprets language through an axiomatic approach in which nonsense becomes a tool for self-reflection and humour, without seeking to provide a clear meaning. His poems are often viewed as a form of meta-humour, in which laughter does not resolve paradoxes, but invites a continuous return. Although associated with Dadaist and Surrealist avant-garde, Morgenstern's works are essentially linguistic games that emphasize the limits of meaning and play with the readers' expectations, challenging them to reconsider the literary conventions.

The chamber cantata *Galgenlieder in der Nacht*, which introduces new elements, particularly of a literary nature, to Dora Cojocaru's work, with a significant impact on the musical language, provides a broad scope for rhetorical analysis and an insight into the relationship between text and music. This analysis requires interdisciplinary research to successfully explore the depths of Christian Morgenstern's verses and, implicitly, to form a more authentic opinion on the relationship between text and music. Therefore, by exploring the world of the characters Palmström and Korf or the Midnight Mouse, and understanding their conflicting situation, we can see how the composer expresses their emotions through music: for example, the state of anxiety and nervousness experienced by both characters, musically emphasized by a particular rhythmic pattern and an alert tempo.

The author employs short, impactful motifs, which she presents in various forms (call-motif, possibly even serving as a leitmotif, or other motifs specific to various narrative and literary contexts). Furthermore, Dora Cojocaru proves an original combination of tradition and avant-garde, through the sources of inspiration coming from the folklore of Maramureş (the call-motif), sources adapted to the current, contemporary languages, filtered through a visionary conception of her own, with a free form, based on improvisation and fantasy.

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