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The Hens, The Cock, and The Operatic Fox: Vulpine “Voice” in Janáček’s *Příhody lišky Bystroušky*

J.W. Clark



Abstract: Leoš Janáček’s 1924 opera *Příhody lišky Bystroušky* (*The Cunning Little Vixen*) epitomizes the musical “animal play,” a dramatic form wherein the presence of nonhuman animals indexes non-seriousness, whimsicality, and childishness. *Bystrouška* situates its titular fox within a folkloric tradition, deriving stereotypes from Aesopian and Reynardian “animal fable.” I contend that such performances of foxiness are necessarily zoopolitical in that they characterize a group traditionally excluded from the “political community of humans” (Ludueña 2010). Like other problematic performances of “Others,” musical depictions of foxes rely on preexisting notions of species, and often exoticize, infantilize, and generalize their subjects. Following literary scholar Susan McHugh’s call to construct a proper “narrative ethology” to investigate how “forms of representation matter to the development of theories of species life” (McHugh 2011), I argue for the serious examination of how musical representation might harm those we presume to voice.

Keywords: Fox; Voice; Janáček; Opera; *The Cunning Little Vixen*

1. Introduction

In her 1992 ethnography of a foxhunting community in New Jersey's Pine Barrens, Mary Hufford writes:

The fox [...], neither wholly dog nor wholly cat, mediates the oppositions it embodies: male and female, nature and culture, home and abroad, sociable and unsociable, food and not-food, insider and outsider, concrete and abstract. As a catlike dog on the margins of society, the fox also threatens the reality that rests on such agreed-upon distinctions (Hufford 1992, 135).

Her situated account belies a pervasive historical trend that reaches much wider than the mid-Atlantic; foxes have long occupied a liminal space in the Western cultural imaginary as favorites of storytellers, folklore, and mythology, yet are often vilified due in part to their uncomfortable proximity to humanness, particularly in behavior and appearance. As suggested by the binaries Hufford supplies, humans have particular trouble apprehending those they perceive as “charming but a thief,” as “alluring but a ‘stinky’ pest,” and, paradoxically under anthropocentric regimes, as an animal that is intelligent (Wallen 2006, 37-40). Many representational strategies used to depict foxes fall back on antiquated stereotypes derived from Aesopian, and later Reynardian, traditions of “animal fable” (the fox as “sneaky,” “cunning,” “untrustworthy”). Attending to such representations, I make use of Una Chaudhuri’s concept of zooësis, which I adopt to refer to that which “consists of the myriad performance and semiotic elements involved in and around the vast field of cultural animal practices” (Chaudhuri 2003, 647). I highlight one instance of vulpine zooësis in the context of Western concert music in the hope of providing some groundwork for what a large-scale musical analysis that takes species representation into account might look like, as well as to make clearer the processes by which humans have specifically constructed “foxiness” in ways that we take for granted, insofar as we often subconsciously or automatically ascribe characteristics to foxes that we

ourselves have created over time.

This emphasis on species representation marks a departure from traditional musico-theoretical approaches, even those sympathetic to the recent conceptual turn away from the human. Critiques of anthropocentrism have proliferated in burgeoning subfields such as sound studies and ecomusicology, but direct attention to the ways in which we implicate other animals in our musicking—including a careful examination of the ethical and political consequences of sonically representing other animals—has largely fallen by the wayside. Notable exceptions include the self-styled “zoömusicologists,” a camp of artists and scholars following François-Bernard Mâche’s call to investigate the “music-making capacities” of other species; however, these projects are largely centered around ethological questions of vocalizations in other animals rather than human cultural constructions (Martinelli 2008).¹ Recently, musicologist and sound studies scholar Rachel Mundy’s profoundly generative research represents some of the only work to seriously problematize the ways we involve other animals in our musical practices, tracking how nonhuman voices and bodies have served to ground human notions of musical taxonomy and categorical difference. It is within Mundy’s “animanities” that I hope to situate my current project (Mundy 2018, 169).²

Musical representation, particularly mimesis, can “give voice” to something outside our usual human experience. This practice usually only occurs through a reframing of the nonhuman. In other words, as Martin Daughtry explains, “a performance of [Sergei] Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf* may occasionally sound like a wolf or a duck, but it doesn’t look or smell like a wolf or a duck [...] [it] references the nonhuman world chiefly through sound” (Daughtry 2020). However, in this paper I intend to focus on instances of musical representation that are not meant to overtly mimic a specific animal’s cry or song. Rather, I am interested in representations of species that lack an easily perceivable sonic referent. For example, while a composer might fashion a musical imitation of a wolf’s howl or bird’s song, I am more concerned with how a composer might evoke “the wolf” or “the bird” (or “the fox,” in this case) in a less direct manner. These references by gesture, invocation, and “air” often

rely heavily on preexisting notions of a species or kind, based in cultural metaphor and memory (e.g. the fox as “sneaky,” the “sinister seduction” of the snake, etc.). The inability to rely on mimetic representation for certain species makes evident a number of embedded assumptions on how a particular animal should properly “sound”—the very notions of categorical difference that Mundy illuminates.

However, if questions of difference lie at the center of my inquiry, then the very category of “the animal” quickly becomes suspect. Investigations mounted on representations of “the animal” subsume vast varieties of species life under a catch-all umbrella term, generalizing to a point where “other animals” simply become a homogenized Other. This discursive tendency is of course what prompted Jacques Derrida to replace “l’animal” with “l’animot,” signaling through its wordplay “neither a species nor a gender nor an individual,” but an “irreducible living multiplicity of mortals” contained in that common label of alterity (Derrida 2008, 41).³ While I am sympathetic to linguistic modifications such as these, here I adopt the slightly different strategy of refuting this generalization not only in concept but in practice, at the level of methodology. Just as the discipline of critical animal studies has sought to bring practical application to scholarship that chooses other animals as its subjects (as opposed to the more anthropocentric “animal” and “human-animal” studies), and unlike a great deal of literature on aesthetic practice only interested in other animals insofar as they are “good to think [with],” a species-specific approach to representation takes its urgency from a desire to improve the real-world conditions experienced by other species by prioritizing notions of difference that are usually effaced (Lévi-Strauss 1962, 89).

Species-specific studies are common in the biological sciences, but far less so in the humanities where the literary or artistic representations of other species are often stand-ins for, at base, human characters with specific adopted characteristics. Neel Ahuja argues that “species studies offers new tools for rethinking transnational circuits of power and identity. By tracing the circulation of nonhuman species as both figures and materialized bodies within the circuits of imperial biopower,”

Ahuja suggests that “species critique helps scholars reevaluate ‘minority’ discourses and enrich histories of imperial encounters” (Ahuja 2009, 557). Similar to how music scholars have articulated how representations of race, gender, and sexuality can have pernicious effects on the groups such representations presume to index, in expanding such lines of inquiry as Ahuja’s to musicological work, studies of “musical representations of femininity” might provide solid methodological ground for a study of, for example, “musical representations of felinity” (denoting cats). While a simple transplantation of methods should obviously be avoided (as analyses along species lines demand their own unique considerations), like problematic performances of other “Others,” musical characterizations of other animals often rely on preexisting, stereotypical notions of species or kind, and often exoticize, infantilize, and generalize their subjects, adhering to notions of difference based in dominant cultural discourse. This approach, then, is concerned with how false—or at least non-nuanced—characterizations, depictions, and conceptions of a certain species have been constructed, and the tangible, material impacts these portrayals have on the lives of those meant to be represented.

I am not making the case that a species-specific approach should myopically ignore representations of other animals besides the one in question; so pervasive is this category of “the animal” that, historically, musical depictions of (and popular discourse about) other animals conflate many different lives under the aegis of the “beastly” or “creatur-ely.”⁴ However, by centering our analyses on how particular instances of representation have affected a specific group of animals, we can begin to unpack how “the animal” has operated to obscure individuals. With this in mind, though I give primary attention to foxes here, in many instances (such as so-called “beast fables” and “animal operas”) by necessity we must investigate the contrived multispecies event: a vixen persuading hens to revolt against their rooster, a cat and goat saving a cock from a fox (as can be seen in Igor Stravinsky’s opera-ballet-burlesque *Renard*), and so on. In such situations, the positioning of animals against and beside one another can often reveal how traditions of thought have influenced how we think about such animals. In musical contexts, sound

becomes a tool to signal not only species difference, but differences in moral status; the sonic encodes a subtle yet superficially convincing set of instructions on how to hierarchically organize the animal figures seen on stage.

This paper stands—at least partially—in agreement with John Berger’s argument that other animals have largely disappeared from modern human life, with “real” encounters with other species having been replaced with representations and other such “animals of the mind” as the animated cartoon, the stuffed animal, and the carefully-edited wildlife documentary (not to mention the institutional zoo, which forms the basis of Berger’s critique) (Berger 1980, 15). The “animal-as-motif” in artistic expression has been widely studied; however, not nearly as much attention has been paid to how “the animal” (-as-character, -as-plot-device, -as-sound-object) reflexively informs our cultural perceptions of not only “the animal” as a category, but other animals (as diverse individual agents) as well. While I do not dispute the fact that our animal simulacra are often more present in the cultural imaginary than the living individuals they presume to represent, I contend that these instances of zooësis are necessarily zoopolitical, in the manner Fabián Ludueña employs the Derridean term to refer to the exclusion of certain bodies from “the political community of humans” (Ludueña 2010, 12-13).⁵ As “the discourse animality in human life,” Chaudhuri’s conception of zooësis is unbounded by notions of a conventional performance space. While the operatic stage frames my current inquiry, Chaudhuri notes that, along with the literary and dramatic, zooësis also encompasses “such ubiquitous or isolated social practices as petkeeping, cockfighting, dog shows, equestrian displays, rodeos, bullfighting, animal sacrifice, hunting, animal slaughter, and meat-eating.” Importantly, a zoopolitics is always-already implicit in any act of zooësis. As zooësis comprises “both our actual and our imaginative interactions with non-human animals,” Chaudhuri stresses that “its effects permeate our social, psychological, and material existence” (Chaudhuri 2003, 647). Following Susan McHugh’s call in her work on literary “animal fictions” to construct a proper “narrative ethology” to investigate how “forms of representation matter to the development

of theories of species life” inasmuch as they “deconstruct disciplinary habits of mind via their ‘metonymic, not metaphoric’ strategies,” I argue for the serious examination of the ways in which musical representation might operate to conceal (as well as reveal) violent zoopolitical demarcations, often to the detriment of those animals represented. With these stakes in mind, in this paper I begin to scrutinize how foxes, particularly “red foxes,” (those we call *Vulpes vulpes*), have been historically constituted by humans through sound (McHugh 2011, 218).⁶ Examining one particular performance of foxiness in Leoš Janáček’s opera *The Cunning Little Vixen*, I give close attention to how Janáček “voices the fox” through his compositional and textual choices.

2. The Operatic Fox

Příhody lišky Bystroušky (*Adventures of Vixen Sharp-Ears*, or more commonly, *The Cunning Little Vixen*) is an opera in three acts by Czech composer Leoš Janáček, completed in 1924. Janáček wrote the libretto to the opera himself, though it is heavily based on Rudolf Těsnohlídek’s *Liška Bystrouška*, a comic strip serialized in Czech newspaper *Lidové noviny* before it was published as a novel in 1921. Těsnohlídek’s novel tells the story of a vixen captured and raised by a forester as a cub before escaping and returning to the forest, where she meets another fox and raises a family. Těsnohlídek’s prose is itself based on a collection of cartoon drawings by painter Stanislav Lolek, which accompanies the text in both the comic strip and the novel. It was after the publication of the novel version of *Liška Bystrouška* that Janáček began work on his opera. The first two acts of Janáček’s *Příhody lišky Bystroušky* (hereafter *Bystrouška*) more or less follow the events of the novel, though the third departs from the story’s temporal organization—Janáček chose to reorder and modify passages from Těsnohlídek’s original, as well as to insert new narrative material as he saw fit (Tyrrell 2002).

Bystrouška epitomizes the musical “animal play,” a dramatic form that, as Chaudhuri remarks, “often contextualize[s]... interspecies

encounters within ‘eco-sites,’ heterotopias of ‘nature’ in culture” (Chaudhuri 2003, 651). During a period in Czech literature when animal satire was widespread as a genre, and often par for the course for most literary endeavors involving anthropomorphized animals, Janáček’s opera seems to have been *sui generis*, an intriguing departure from the artistic status quo. In contrast to the usual methods of employing other animals to humorously or ironically comment on human foibles and behavior, *Bystrouška* constantly switches between instances of human-to-human interaction to ones involving interactions between other animals—at times mixing the two, such as when lines by a nonhuman character are sung seemingly in response to those of a human character, or vice versa. Despite *Bystrouška*’s originality in this regard, criticism at the time of the opera’s premiere leveled at Janáček’s treatment of the interaction between human and nonhuman worlds and characters—as well as numerous comparisons to contemporaneous works of other animal satire and fables—indicate that the reception of the opera was colored by the literary trends of the historical time and place.⁷

Even in subsequent productions of the opera following its premiere, this combining of worlds human and animal proved to be an issue for critics and directors alike. Ota Zítek, who directed the opera’s 1924 premiere in Brno as well as various productions of the work up until 1947, felt the need to address this perceived crux at the outset of his final production of *Bystrouška*:

The first production was stylised. [Eduard] Milén worked out set designs and costumes that hinted at a stylisation with which Janáček and [I] were in complete agreement. After the performance, however, Dr. Vladimír Helfert correctly pointed out ... that some sort of difference must be created between the animal world and human world: possibly that the animals should be separated from the humans in order that the audience could have a clearer sense of the action (Zítek 1947).

That this question of distinction between the human and nonhuman was of such central importance betrays how pervasive humanist outlooks concerning other animals were in the minds of early-to-mid twentieth-century audiences. While Janáček's libretto is admittedly cryptic at points—he often omitted lines from Těsnohlídek's story that would have otherwise given important context—the discomfort felt by audiences due to an inability to clearly delineate human and nonhuman interactions could speak to an underlying fear of the erasure of the human as sovereign over the rest of the animal kingdom.

Different productions of the opera have chosen to navigate the work's unique anthropomorphism in various ways. Walter Felsenstein opted to have the performers wear “realistic” costumes in his 1956 Berlin production, a decision which Geoffrey Chew interprets as a move towards “minimizing anthropomorphism.” On the other hand, versions such as Jonathan Miller's 1975 Glyndebourne production have chosen to clothe the characters in entirely human garb, resulting in little to no visual marking of the characters as “animals” (Chew 2009, 128). Regardless of choices in costume design (an aesthetic space in which the nonhuman is arguably difficult to represent convincingly on stage), Janáček's libretto anthropomorphizes the animal cast (or perhaps more accurately, zoomorphizes the human cast) to different degrees at different times—his descriptions of the characters' behaviors shift constantly between the human and nonhuman. Interestingly, while Janáček dramatically alters the original tone and degree of explicit satire present in the Těsnohlídek story and Lolek drawings in places, this variability in the anthropomorphic qualities of the characters is consistent throughout the source material. Chew, commenting on Lolek's progression of thirteen pictures in which the Vixen evicts a Badger from its sett by urinating in it (a scene kept by Janáček almost in its entirety), remarks that:

They alternate unstably between naturalistic observation and anthropomorphism. The first three pictures launch the narrative, with the fox and badger both reacting to a shower of rain – the badger emerging (picture 2), retreating (3), and thus draw-

ing the attention of the fox to the sett. Next, the animals are shown with human attributes: the badger contentedly smokes a long pipe (4) and repels the intruder with a whip (5), and the fox creates a scene with melodramatic human gestures (6). Anthropomorphism is abandoned, with the fox spraying the sett with a few drops of urine (7), the badger reacting strongly (8), and the fox then fouling the sett with a deluge of urine (9-10), but it returns, with the badger (pipe in hand) spitting disgustedly (11), and leaving the sett with pipe and rolled-up mat (12), watched from a distance by the fox. Finally the fox is installed in the sett (13) (Chew 2009, 118).

Though I might question Chew's liberal use of "anthropomorphism" as a concept here (starting with his a priori assumption that "naturalistic observation" does not entail anthropomorphisms), Janáček's preservation of this "unstable alternation" between "the animal" as observed in nature and "the animal" as fictionally anthropomorphized forces the audience to constantly switch their evaluative schema to interpret the characters' actions. The blurring of lines between the human and nonhuman occurs at multiple levels; not only are the "human" and "animal" worlds not explicitly separated at the level of scene and plot (as discussed above), but the anthropomorphism of the nonhuman characters operates on a sliding scale, confounding what is really and truly "human."

Jennifer Sheppard has argued that in rejecting a satiric framing for the opera, Janáček instills a sort of "amorality" into the work:

...commentary from early critics hints at how *Bystrouška* bends the customary rules of beast fables and animal satire. Though the opera's animals are anthropomorphized, they do not always provide the moral or the satirical gloss which results in the expected critique of human folly. Janáček's opera – as Těsnohlídek's novella – also brings together both animal and human characters, breaking the convention that has animal fables and satires depict animals alone. The issues of the combined animal and human worlds and of Janáček's inconsistent

use of the opera's animals as satiric devices thus complicate *Bystrouška's* position relative to other contemporary animal satires, and thereby blur the opera's moral message (Sheppard 2010, 153).

While a discussion of the opera's "moral message" is beyond the scope of this paper, I argue that a residual "comedic framing" adopted from the tradition of so-called "animal fable" is not as absent here as Sheppard contends. Even though Janáček may stray from the overtly satirical fare that was commonplace among "animal fables," many of the opera's scenes fall back on stereotypical interactions often presented as comical, such as the Finale to Act I, wherein the Vixen goes on a hen-killing spree as part of her escape from the Forester.

My intent here is not to provide an exhaustive musical analysis of this scene, but to draw attention to a few particular strategies Janáček employs in characterizing his animals. In doing so, I hope to highlight how these strategies belie certain attitudes held towards other species. Further, I contend that the scene is notable in this regard for at least three reasons. First, a different degree of personhood is conferred upon the Cock and Hens than the Vixen through their vocal lines and sonic profiles. Second, Janáček's textual characterization of the Vixen heavily relies on preconceived notions of "foxiness," both drawn from "naturalistic" observation and from folkloric traditions stemming from Aesop and later stories featuring Reynard. And third, the scene—and the opera as a whole—capitalizes on a collective perception that the presence of other animals in a musical work indexes non-seriousness, whimsicality, and childishness.

The scene plays out in much the same way as the Aesopian/Reynardian tradition of "fox stories" would have it: the Vixen, trapped in the Forester's yard, attempts to persuade the Hens to rise up against the domineering oppressor Cock ("Hled'te, sestry, jakého máte vůdce! / Friends, sisters, abolish the old order!"—this could be read simultaneously as an argument to rise up against patriarchal domination, appealing to the "fellow woman," and/or as a class revolt).⁸ When this attempt fails

to convince, the Vixen feigns death in order to lure the Cock into reach, before proceeding to kill him and the–now panicked–Hens.

Throughout the scene, the Hens, bar the Cock’s primary mate, the crested hen Chocholka, are sung by chorus in tight rhythmic unison, construing the group as a monolithic assembly line of subordinates ready to churn out eggs. This is further and more explicitly accomplished through their simple vocal lines—of which there are only three—repeated at least twice by the chorus (“My pracujem, snášíme. / “We work, we lay eggs.”; “Bez kohóta?” / “Without a rooster?”; “Vida!” / “You see!”). While Chocholka and the Cock enjoy a bit more variety, Janáček has the former deliver a portion of her lines as onomatopoetic imitations, fashioned after chicken calls. The first instance of these takes the form of a series of trills outlining a B-flat major triad; here, “Trrp!” (roughly, “Suffer!”) functions as both a coherent linguistic utterance as well as a signifier for something like a chicken vocalization. After the Vixen’s deception is revealed, however, Janáček opts to have Chocholka’s panicked cries come out as “kokokodáks” and “ko kos,” relinquishing any semantic content for fetishized “chicken” sounds (Figure 1).⁹

46 Più mosso. $\text{♩} = 160$

Chocholka (bábi jak pomatena). (Die Fürstin, entsetzt, stürzt aus dem Haus)
Schopflernte (rennt wie besessen hin und her) (pl. revirniková vyběhne zděšena)

Ch. Sch. Vl. Cl. Ob. Fl. Cor.

Koko.ko.dák! Koko.ko.dák! Ko.ko.ko.dák! Ko.ko.ko.dák!

Ko.ko, ko.ko, ko.ko, ko.ko, Ko.ko, ko.ko, ko.ko, ko.ko,

Figure 1: Chocholka’s onomatopoetic vocal lines. This and all subsequent examples come from Břetislav Bakala and Max Brod’s Czech/German vocal score. Leoš Janáček. *Příhody lišky Bystroušky* (Czech/

German vocal score), ed. Břetislav Bakala and trans. Max Brod (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1924).

Significantly, neither the Vixen nor the Cock are profiled in the same way. Unlike Chocholka and the rest of the Hens, these two are never reduced to their typical sonic characteristics; in the case of the Cock, he might be read as resisting the objectification that his feminine counterparts must undergo. The Vixen, however, directly confounds this reading along strictly gendered lines. Her status as the titular character seems to require that she not be simplified as sound qua sound, but—perhaps more significantly—it is also her status as a fox that, in practice, makes it difficult to do so. Unlike avian vocalizations (which Chocholka and the Hens approximate), vulpine vocalizations (barks, screams, yips) prove unwieldy to incorporate into a traditional concert setting. Further, in contrast to birds and other animals that often make musical appearances on stage, foxes have not historically been conceived of in the cultural imaginary via their sounds; when they are present, they are more frequently portrayed through the visual mode, often accompanied by behavioral stereotypes of “cleverness” and the like.

In her explorations of how the voice served to constitute varying definitions of personhood in nineteenth-century Colombia, Ana María Ochoa observes that, “for Creoles and Europeans, sounding like animals was the sign of a lowly human condition, used for processes of racialization through a politics of representation.” She describes how, for Western travelers on the Magdalena River, “howls were used to understand the boundary or relation between the human and the nonhuman,” and were mobilized as “a fundamental means to distinguish between the human and nonhuman in order to ‘direct the human animal in its becoming man’” (Ochoa Gautier 2014, 11-12, 5). In the context of *Bystrouška*, we can see Janáček using this logic to, in effect, dehumanize the Hens by having them “sound like animals.” At the same time, he “humanizes” the Vixen by distancing her from any sounds a real fox might ostensibly make, affirming her personhood by containing her to the (human) operatic mode.¹⁰

However, though the Vixen might remain musically proximal to the human here, Janáček’s reliance on hackneyed representations of the fox in this scene serves to throw her status as a “person” into question. Although *Bystrouška* doubtless builds on the “animal fable” folkloric tradition—for example, historian Charles Susskind observes a common thread of the “sly fox trope” between the opera and Aesop’s fables—Sheppard notes that:

Czech critics of the early productions thought the kinship between Janáček’s vixen and her fabled cousin more removed. ‘Much to my surprise,’ Doležil wrote, ‘the foremost characteristic trait of her slyness, which operates so wittily both in our own and in foreign fables and stories, was not used very much in the anthropomorphization of this fox.’ [...] Although in English titles Janáček’s little vixen is ‘cunning,’ and in German she is *schlau* (shrewd), the Czech *bystrouškový* means sharp-eared. Těsnohlídek had actually called her *bystronožký* (fleet-footed), but the typesetter at the newspaper misread the word and from then on the vixen’s name became ‘sharp-ears’ (Sheppard 2010, 56-7).

While it may be the case that the opera as a whole refrains from simply transplanting elements from the Vixen’s “fabled cousin,” the Act I Finale is certainly an exception. Much of this scene simply serves to reaffirm the stereotypical “fox in the henhouse” trope, playing off an observed tendency of many predators (red foxes included) to surplus kill when confronted with excess prey. Colloquially, this is called “henhouse syndrome”; often, the predator will then cache their prey for later consumption or abandon them if this is not practical (Kruuk 1972). Although this tendency is a survival mechanism, it has often been used as an excuse to vilify foxes who find their way into chicken coops. In an act of pure malice, the accounts claim, the fox indiscriminately slaughters the entire brood, taking only one or two hens with them. Foxes are often charac-

terized in this manner, depicted “as burglars and vermin, filthy intruders into a pristine ecology, representing an insidious threat waiting to exploit any defensive weakness” (Wallen 2015, 35).¹¹

Putting aside for now the zoopolitics behind such a selective valuation of a species based on utility value (foxes are “vermin,” because they harm human property, in the form of chickens), one can see this line of thought play out in the stories of Reynard, for example, where the titular fox is more consistently self-serving and exploitative (particularly towards animals he might want to make a meal out of) than in his earlier Aesopian iterations. In Janáček’s version of this cliché, the action portrayed is not so much malicious as comedic; this is an important point. Generally, the latter part of this scene is musically inflected so as to be lighthearted and funny, with rapidly ascending scalar runs and “frolicking” sixteenth-note figures in the strings to connote the Vixen’s violent antics (coded as hilarity) on stage (Figure 2). Though the nuances of timing and specific levels of comedy communicated vary by production, both Janáček’s score and libretto unambiguously designate this scene as an upbeat, mirthful, and triumphant end to the first act.

The image shows a page of a musical score, page 47, for the scene 'Fichařka. Bystrouška.' The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features vocal lines for Soprano (Sopr.) and Alto (Alto), and instrumental parts for Flute (Fl.), Violin (Vi.), Viola (Vi.), Cello (Vcl.), and Double Bass (Cb.). The vocal lines contain the lyrics: 'Čha, čha, čha, čha! / Ha - ha - ha - ha! / Ó - - - bu - sti - e! / Du - - - Be - sti - e!' The instrumental parts, particularly the strings, feature rapid ascending scalar passages and chromatic sixteenth-note motifs. The score is published by Schott/Musica.

Figure 2: Ascending scalar passages followed by chromatic sixteenth-note “frolicking” motives.

Taking a step back to question the lightness of this seemingly banal scene, we might ask ourselves why such blatant on-stage mass murder is not only allowed, but joyously celebrated. To be blunt: how does it become possible that we, as audience members, laugh along as one character mercilessly kills an entire swath of others in the blink of an eye? Surely, if the scene involved human characters, and not chickens and foxes, its comedic tone would doubtless feel malapropos. What habits of mind have we cultivated that lead us to treat fictional subject matter involving other animals—“animal opera” in particular—as a non-serious, fanciful diversion, or even as “children’s fare?” Initially marketed with the tagline “It will be a dream, a fairytale that will warm your heart,” and often referred to as the composer’s “lightest” opera, *Bystrouška* seems to represent a broader trend in musical performances of the nonhuman that suggest other animals are “the sign of all that is taken not-very-seriously in contemporary culture; the sign of that which doesn’t really matter” (Baker 2000, 174). These mental tendencies are in part due to a close association between “the animal” and “the child” in historical thought, in addition to a pervasive notion of “animal consciousness” predicated on Cartesian philosophies of mind.¹²

Megan H. Glick links the increase in American children’s literature featuring other animals as primary characters during the early twentieth century with evolutionary discourses informing a popular belief in the closeness of the child (or non-adult) and animal (or non-human). She tracks how this association was historically situated in the contexts of US imperialism and the rise of scouting and recreation movements to demonstrate how the training of the nation’s youth was “a matter of evolutionary progress, from child to adult, savage to civilized, animal to man.” In such discourses, not only do children benefit from proximity to other animals domestically, as in their oft-cited close relationships to companion species, but they also require an outlet for their primitive, “animal-like” behavioral tendencies. Dispositionally and evolutionarily, the child is located at the beginning of humankind (beside other animals, and without faculties of reason), and as a result must undergo an “ontogenetic recapitulation” in order to assume the status of full human

personhood (Glick 2018, 27).

While I do not suggest that Glick's analysis of American culture can properly account for contemporaneous views of the child-animal linkage in Europe, this perceived connection between "animality" and the youth is reflected in the "family friendly" language of *Bystrouška's* promotional material, and likely plays a role in the opera's ubiquity as "children's programming," particularly in the U.S. Citing the work of Karen Sánchez-Eppler and James Kincaid, Glick describes how "narratives produced for children increasingly understood childhood as a special—even 'magical'—time, a temporality deeply imbricated with notions of fantasy and dependent upon highly variable worlds of individual imagination" (Glick 2018, 34). If the magical and fantastical have served as key components of artistic products concerned with developing the child's imaginative capacities, then depictions of other animals in narrative art forms—so-called "animal opera" and much of the musical programming "for children" included—have served to provide the child with the exotic playthings necessary to "direct the human animal into its becoming-man," to again borrow from Ludueña.

3. Conclusion: Towards the "Material-Semiotic" Fox

My inquiry here comes as a preliminary attempt to answer large, unwieldy questions surrounding human musical practices that implicate other animals. An expanded version of this study of *Bystrouška* would include a more thorough treatment of the fox's significance for Janáček and the Czech audiences to whom the opera was shown. It would also consider material conditions involved in the opera's production, asking basic questions such as: did the costumes use real fur? What were official state policies regarding fox management in Janáček's time? Was foxhunting widely practiced in Czech sporting circles? And, perhaps more generally (and more radically): Can the "dressing up" of a human as another animal on the musical stage be considered some sort of grotesque minstrelsy? While operatic performance of the nonhuman is often conceived of as a discursive space wherein a Deleuzoguattarian "beco-

ming-animal” can be enacted, little study has been done on how such performances serve to reproduce and ossify hegemonic frameworks of human exceptionalism (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Just as Sianne Ngai argues the “minor” affect of “animatedness” has been historically mapped onto the racialized human body, I may also contend that nonhuman bodies have been “animated” through media, artistic representation, and quotidian discourse in similar ways (Ngai 2005, 89-125). Further, there is a distinct link between historical racial discourse and “animality,” particularly when dehumanization is the goal. As scholars such as Mundy, Glick, and others have demonstrated, the construction of species discourses is inextricable from discourses around race, gender, sexuality, ability, and other such categories. Yet under scrutiny, even the negatively valenced notion of dehumanization is also inherently human exceptionalist, predicated on the assumption that “the human” is the status to lose.

In any case, as we have seen in Janáček’s differing treatment of the Vixen and the Hens, how we articulate species difference through our musical representations says a great deal about the cultural attitudes held toward those we decide to represent. To register this is to also realize that representations matter when it comes to the real-life treatment and policy decisions enacted upon other animals. Zooësis already implicates those who inspire it; it is by default sympoietic. To invoke Donna Haraway, these performances necessitate an attuned “response-ability,” a sensitive making-together-with (Haraway 2015). Even the most seemingly lopsided semiosis is always informed by those who inspire these acts. These being- and making-withs are intimately—and unavoidably—enmeshed in a “fabric of immanent relations” with the zoopolitical and always demand the utmost care (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 358). What, then, makes for a “good” or “authentic” representation of a nonhuman Other, when—unlike with analogous human issues of race, gender, sexuality, or disability—no shared language can mediate discussions of authenticity? Of course, it matters not to a fox whether *Bystrouška* is performed with authentic “foxiness”—it matters insofar as these acts of zooësis can be demonstrated to negatively affect the lived experiences of foxes (and other animals). By perpetuating a zoopolitics of selective valuation ba-

sed on species membership (as Janacek's compositional tendencies accomplish implicitly) and by coding "the animal" as frivolous and childish (thus deserving of domination within a violently anthropocentric calculus), performances like *Bystrouška* potentially ossify the pernicious regimes of human exceptionalism that have contributed to the historical and ongoing subjugation of that-which-is-not-human. Given that no act of "voicing" (like operatic zooësis) is entirely neutral or uninflected, how might we sensitively attend to these performances so as to prevent the potential harms that might come with unexamined anthropomorphic naturalizations? To me, this requires moving past "the animal" as essentialized in studies of representation, even if—as in the case of Janáček's opera—categorical animality grounds the representation's initial conditions. Specific approaches, such as the analysis here, offer a heightened awareness of how internalized this category truly is, though it is equally important to recognize the ways in which species is itself a constructed category. Additionally, a specific approach cannot operate with tunnel vision, particularly when representational strategies operate negatively (as with the Vixen's ostensible lack of vulpine sonority) or relationally (as when chickens are defined against foxes). Such knots remain complex and difficult to untangle considering the degree to which human cultures have embedded within them allusions to, celebrations of, and assumptions about other species, but are nonetheless essential to address in order to approach navigating, apprehending, and co-constructing interspecific relationships, on-stage and off.

4. Endnotes

¹ Though Dario Martinelli imagines a broad definition of the zoömuscological—encompassing the anthropological/theoretical as well as the empirical/ethological—aside from Emily Doolittle's early historical surveys, a vast majority of this work has been focused on observing and identifying "musical" behaviors in other animals. Dario Martinelli, "Introduction (to the issue and to zoomusicology)," *Revista Transcultural*

de Música 12 (2008). <https://www.sibetrans.com/trans/articulo/93/introduction-to-the-issue-and-to-zoomusicology>.

² Mundy describes the “animanities” as “an intervention in the postwar, postmodern, posthuman condition of present-day humanism,” an endeavor that hopes to do justice to questions of difference neglected by the current humanitarian project. She goes on to say that “the problems of musical knowledge described in [*Animal Musicalities*] are not answered by the disciplinary boundaries of the humanities.” Rachel Mundy, *Animal Musicalities: Birds, Beasts, and Evolutionary Listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 169.

³ “Mot” in French is “word”; the addition of this suffix results in “l’animot” sounding much like “animaux” (the plural of “l’animal”). Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet and trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 41.

⁴ Such as in Ravel’s *L’enfant et les sortilèges* or Saint-Saëns’ *Le carnaval des animaux*, for example.

⁵ “[...] la comunidad política de los hombres.” Ludueña characterizes his zoopolítica as the “original operation on animal life despite – or in a conflicting relation with – its ekstasis towards hominization. (la “operación originaria sobre la vida animal a pesar de – o en conflictiva relación con – su éxtasis hacia la hominización.”). He goes on to suggest that, in this way, “politics is originally zoopolitical, as it involves a foundational decision on how to direct the human animal in its becoming-man” (“En ese sentido, la política es originariamente zoopolítica pues implica una decisión fundacional acerca de cómo dirigir al animal humano en su devenir hombre”). Fabián Ludueña Romandini, *La comunidad de los espectros: 1. Antropotecnia* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2010): 12-13. English translations here by myself.

⁶ Though representations of many nonhuman animals are generalizations

under the catch-all “animal” (i.e. most creative processes rarely take species-specific approaches to the development of the work), I choose to focus on a specific group of animals (red foxes) in order to do justice to difference across species lines. Even this might be too general – the animals we call “foxes” are in fact made up upwards of 30 individual species, on some counts. Out of these, only about twelve “true foxes” occupy the genus *Vulpes* (we might ask, why are some foxes “true” while others are not?). However, many artists—Western composers in particular—rarely seek to depict anything other than the red fox, so this approach will suffice for my current purposes.

⁷ Works such as the stories of Rudyard Kipling or Edmund Rostand’s 1910 play *Chantecler*, for example.

⁸ This and all subsequent English translations of Janáček’s libretto are from Soňa Vávrová’s 1990 translation for Supraphon Records. Soňa Vávrová, “Catalogue: Librettos for Download,” Supraphon, 1990, accessed October 12, 2020, <https://www.supraphon.com/catalogue/libretto>.

⁹ This co-opting of the perceived sonic characteristics of a communicative vocalization in order to signify an Other might be compared with how “mock” languages are used in instances of racist discourse. Elaine Chun describes how “Mock Asian,” which problematically imitates tonal languages such as Mandarin or Vietnamese, is often deployed xenophobically by a White hegemonic majority. Elaine Chun, “The Meaning of Ching-Chong: Language, Racism, and Response in New Media,” in *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas about Race*, eds. H. Samy Alim, Arnetha F. Ball, and John R. Rickford (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 81-96.

¹⁰ Though I lack the room to discuss this here, this “humanizing” of the Vixen can be seen elsewhere in the opera; for example, the dream of her transformation into a maiden earlier in Act I, or when the Schoolmaster confuses a sunflower – behind which the Vixen is hidden – for his chil-

hood beloved, Terynka, in Act II.

¹¹ Wallen, *Fox*, 35. Kate Stewart and Matthew Cole demonstrate examples of this rhetoric in their study of public newspaper discourse around foxes in the UK. Kate Stewart and Matthew Cole, “The Creation of a Killer Species: Cultural Rupture in Representations of ‘Urban Foxes’ in UK Newspapers,” in *Critical Animal and Media Studies: Communication for Nonhuman Animal Advocacy*, eds. Núria Almiron, Matthew Cole, and Carrie P. Freeman (London: Routledge, 2015), 124-137.

¹² On this scheme, only humans have minds/souls and thus consciousness; nonhuman animals are unconscious “automata” that cannot feel pain. Despite the fact that Cartesian dualism is untenable (philosophically speaking), it nonetheless underpins many contemporary folk assumptions about the mental capacities of other animals, and is often deployed in defense of violences towards nonhumans.

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