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***ahat ilī* – Sister of Gods by Olga Tokarczuk and Aleksander Nowak: From the Novel to the Operatic Libretto**

Abstract

Aleksander Nowak's (*1979) third opera, *ahat ilī* – *Sister of Gods*, premiered in 2018, sets a libretto by Polish Nobel Prize winner Olga Tokarczuk, based on her own novel. This marriage of literature and opera, reinforced by the unique situation in which the author of the text which served as an inspiration and of the libretto is one and the same person, suggests that the work could be defined as a *Literaturoper*. My paper aims to analyse this composition in terms of genre as well as to represent the unique path of its content's transformation from a literary into an operatic work, along with an analysis of the verbal component presented from the librettological perspective.

Keywords

Literaturoper, contemporary opera, libretto, librettology, Aleksander Nowak, Olga Tokarczuk

For the opera is a place where, on the basis of one or another myth, a vision is presented of events that could not happen in reality, but which touch upon some eternal truths.

Andrzej Chłopecki¹

Introduction

Aleksander Nowak, one of Poland's most interesting and gifted contemporary composers, has gained popularity virtually overnight, mainly due to his operas,² which play a major role in his output (though he has also composed in genres other than vocal-instrumental). Nowak's operatic successes have persuaded critics to hail him as the most outstanding Polish composer in this genre after Krzysztof Penderecki.³ Nowak's works are part of the flourishing of the Polish opera, associated with the works of such composers as (apart from the already mentioned Penderecki) Zygmunt Krauze, Elżbieta Sikora, Joanna Bruzdowicz, and Dariusz Przybylski.

ahat ilī – Sister of Gods, Nowak's third opera, was premiered in the autumn of 2018 during the Sacrum Profanum festival in Cracow. It earned the composer the 'Passport' award of the 'Polityka' weekly in the category of classical music, for (as the award committee stated) 'creative independence and an original musical perspective on the world;

¹ A. Chłopecki, 'Ssanie w operze', in *Dziennik ucha. Słuchane na ostro* (2013), 108.

² I wrote about this composer's earlier operas in my paper "'Życiopisanie" w operach Aleksandra Nowaka – *Sudden Rain, Space Opera*', *Kwartalnik Młodych Muzykologów UJ*, 3 (2018), 81–102.

³ J. Topolski, 'Kwadrat magiczny', *dwutygodnik.com* 266, 10 (2019), <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/8511-kwadrat-magiczny.html>, accessed 27 June 2020.

for *ahat ilī – Sister of Gods*, which restores the belief in the future of the opera.⁴

The libretto was written by Polish Nobel Prize winner Olga Tokarczuk,⁵ who herself addressed the composer with an offer of collaboration – an event which she thus recalled in a conversation with Ewa Szczecińska:

[...] I have been invited to the premiere of an opera written by Alek (it was staged in Poznań), to a libretto by my friend, Georgi Gospodinov.⁶ When I saw how it presents itself on the operatic stage, how it is done, a very strong sense of jealousy was simply born in me – but it was a good, positive kind of jealousy. And I decided that I actually had a text suitable for an opera [...].⁷

Marcin Gmys described the two artists' meeting in some detail:

It is 14 March 2015. The last measures of the world premiere performance of Aleksander Nowak's *Space Opera* at Poznań's Grand Theatre have resounded, and a roar of applause can be heard. The work proves a success, though it is by no means easy listening. [...] A reception [follows]. At one point, Aleksander Nowak is approached [...] by Olga Tokarczuk, who had been invited to this event by the libretto author, her friend Georgi Gospodinov, a star of contemporary Bulgarian literature. To the amazement of the thirty-six-year-old

⁴ <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/paszporty/1777506,1,aleksander-nowak-laureatem-paszportow-polityki-w-kategorii-muzyka-powazna.read>, accessed 27 June 2020.

⁵ The prosaic writings of Polish Nobel laureates have also provided the basis for operas by Witold Rudziński (*Janko Muzykant*, 1951; *Chłopi*, 1972) and Bernadetta Matuszczak (*Quo vadis*, 1993–1994).

⁶ Importantly, Nowak is fond of collaborating with world-famous writers. Apart from Olga Tokarczuk he worked with Georgi Gospodinov, mentioned here by the former (*Space Opera*, 2014) and with Szczepan Twardoch (*Drach. Drama per musica*, 2019 and *Mermaid. Melodramma Aeterna*, premiered in November 2020 during the Auksodrone festival in Tychy). On his website, the composer keeps a kind of diary in which he describes the successive stages of his work on each composition: <https://www.aleknowak.com/blog>, accessed 29 June 2020.

⁷ Fragment of a radio broadcast, transcribed by P.Z.-H., <https://www.polskieradio.pl/8/2565/Artykul/2215552,Olga-Tokarczuk-Anna-Inn-od-poczatkubyła-muzyczna>, accessed 29 June 2020.

composer, the famous writer addresses him with an offer to create his next opera jointly with her.⁸

The text which the novelist had in mind, which the composer undertook to adapt for an opera, was her sixth novel, *Anna In w grobowcach świata* [Eng. *Anna In in the Tombs of the World*]. This marriage of literature and opera, reinforced by the unique situation in which the author of the narrative which served as inspiration and of the libretto is one and the same person, suggests that *ahat ili – Sister of Gods* could be defined as a *Literaturoper* (Germ. ‘literature-opera’). My paper aims to analyse this composition in terms of genre as well as to represent the unique path of its content’s transformation from a literary into an operatic work, along with an analysis of the verbal component presented from the librettological perspective.

The Libretto

In order fully to achieve the aim of this article, we first need to define the main functions of the libretto, broadly conceived as the operatic representation of the words and dramatic action.⁹ The libretto, as one of the key components of the genre, has an impact on the work’s internal formal division (acts, scenes, numbers), the types of vocal expression present (arias, recitatives, choruses, ensembles), as well as on elements of stage production. The libretto also significantly initiates the emotional aspect of the whole. In other words, it determines the final result (i.e. the finished opera) to an equal extent as the music does.

The place of the libretto and its relation to the music have been redefined in the successive periods, ever since the beginnings of the genre.

Not only the libretto’s content and form, but the very concept of how the text should be approached, were different in George F. Handel and Wolfgang A. Mozart, and quite different in Richard Wagner,

⁸ M. Gmys, ‘Prawych umysłów złączenie. O operze ahat ili – siostra bogów – Aleksandra Nowaka i Olgi Tokarczuk’, in J. Topolski, ed., *Antagonizmy kontrolowane. Rozmowy i eseje o muzyce współczesnej. Sacrum Profanum 2018* (2019), 28.

⁹ B. Trowell, ‘Libretto’, in S. Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 2 (1992), 1185–1252.

who redefined the place of the libretto in stage music, giving it a new meaning and status in his concept of the musical drama¹⁰

comments literary scholar Jakub Walczak. In the classical period, the librettist's name appeared side by side with that of the composer, or frequently above it, and in a larger font. Despite this fact, for a long time the libretto was considered inferior, both as a theatrical and poetic genre. It should not be dismissed as a marginal subject, though. The libretto indeed constitutes a very broad field of research, not only within opera studies, but also with reference to other verbal-musical (passion, oratorio) and musical-theatrical (ballet) genres, as well as early forms historically preceding the opera, such as liturgical drama, pastoral drama, and madrigal comedy.

The libretto is thus viewed more and more frequently as a separate literary genre situated on the borderline between literature and music. It is not an independent genre, however, and as such it is governed by other poetic and structural principles than autonomous literary genres. For a long time neither musicology nor literary studies were prepared to take responsibility for the libretto. This has recently changed, particularly as concerns that latter field of research. We may therefore speak of the birth of a new separate discipline – that of librettology.

The Librettological Perspective

Librettology (also referred to as librettistics) is the study of the structure, meaning and content, as well as inspirations behind the operatic libretto. The discipline emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the first English- and German-language publications dedicated to operatic libretti were presented by such researchers as Patrick J. Smith,¹¹ Albert Gier,¹² and Nancy O. Chamness.¹³ In Poland, results of libretto studies have been published by, among others, Ryszard Daniel Goliańek

¹⁰ J. Walczak, 'Libretto jako (u)twór. Zagadnienia genologiczne i metodologiczne – zarys problematyki', *Przestrzenie Teorii*, 22 (2014), 90.

¹¹ P.J. Smith, *The Tenth Muse. A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto* (1970).

¹² A. Gier, *Das Libretto: Theorie und Geschichte einer musikoliterarischen Gattung* (1998).

¹³ N.O. Chamness, *The Libretto as Literature: Doktor Faust by Ferruccio Busoni* (2001).

and Piotr Urbański,¹⁴ Jarosław Mianowski, Jakub Walczak, and Iwona Puchalska.¹⁵ The latter author defines librettology as ‘a distinct research field, naturally rooted more deeply in literary and theatre studies than in musicology.’¹⁶ This view most likely results from the fact that from the mid-nineteenth century onwards research on the opera (as a genre related to tragedy and comedy) developed more intensively in the field of literary studies. Walczak comments:

The problem of how literary texts are selected as inspiration for operatic libretti, as well as the [study of] finished libretti themselves, are a subject poorly explored by both musicologists and literary scholars. This is the case despite the fact that this area constitutes a point of departure for both disciplines to examine the relations between literature and music, which are still a fundamental and topical research problem.¹⁷

Libretto analysis is not an easy field, both with regard to its scope and the wealth of meanings contained in its material. The opera is a complex and complicated genre which requires its students to combine various, frequently interdisciplinary research concepts. The already mentioned Iwona Puchalska has attempted to create a systematic model and method,¹⁸ which provides an important point of reference for the topics discussed in this paper.

As Puchalska points out, the first and most important stage consists in the analysis and interpretation of the literary model and later of the libretto, and in pointing out the key similarities and differences between these two. There follows comparative interpretation which identifies the specific sets of elements that have been rejected, changed, or added in the libretto, and defines the character of these changes. In the final stage, that of semantic analysis of both works, scholars should consider three aspects of a literary work’s transformation into a music composition: literary, dramatic, and musical ones.¹⁹

¹⁴ R.D. Golianek, P. Urbański, eds, *Od literatury do opery i z powrotem. Studia nad estetyką teatru operowego* (2010).

¹⁵ I. Puchalska, *Sztuka adaptacji: literatura romantyczna w operze dziewiętnastowiecznej* (2004).

¹⁶ I. Puchalska, *Poeta w operze* (2019).

¹⁷ Walczak, ‘Libretto jako (u)twór...’, 89.

¹⁸ I. Puchalska, *Sztuka adaptacji...*, 28–35.

¹⁹ My article presents conclusions based on the first two stages of the proposed analytic model.

Puchalska applied her concept first and foremost to Romantic *Literaturopern*. Her model, however, could also be transplanted into the field of contemporary music, as I will demonstrate on the example of *ahat ili – Sister of Gods*, the opera which is the subject of this paper.

The Literary Prototype – A New Reading of the Myth

Olga Tokarczuk's *Anna In in the Tombs of the World* came out in 2006 as the first Polish novel in the international MITY series published by Cracow's Znak. The project's originator was Jamie Byng of Canongate Books, who invited the world's best writers to retell selected myths in a new, unrestricted fashion. In Tokarczuk's novel, a vision of modernity coexists with the universal component, as the author herself writes in the afterword to the first edition:

I draw on one of the oldest human myths: the tale of the Sumerian goddess Inanna, who descended into the underworld in order to challenge her sister, mistress of death, and then returned. This is a founding tale from which other myths budded out, including those that we still know today. This disturbing, strange, sometimes cruel story, recorded on cuneiform tablets about four thousand years ago, is the first one in history to feature an Author (a female one at that), and the first literary text in the history of civilisation (*Hymn to Inanna*) to have been signed. We know the name of the author: Enheduanna. All we need to do is continue this story.²⁰

This tale relates to Olga Tokarczuk's stance as an apologete of narration and story-telling:

One cannot possibly overestimate what first-person narration has done for literature and for human civilisation at large. It has transformed a tale about the world as the playground of heroes and gods, on which we have no influence, into our individual history, and has passed the stage on to people like ourselves. What is more, it is easy to identify with people like ourselves, which establishes emotional communication based on empathy between reader / listener and

²⁰ O. Tokarczuk, *Anna In w grobowcach świata* (2006), <https://www.wydawnictwoznak.pl/recenzja/Uniwersalna-opowiesc-o-czlowieku/927>, accessed 27 June 2020.

narrator. Empathy by its very nature brings us closer and eliminates boundaries. It is therefore very easy in a novel to blur the boundaries between the narrator's and the reader's 'I'. A novel that involves the reader constantly counts on the abolition and invalidation of that boundary; on turning the reader, thanks to empathy, temporarily into the narrator. Literature has thus become a field for the exchange of experiences, an *agora* where everyone can speak about their own fate and give voice to their alter egos. It is, at the same time, a democratic space in which everyone can take the floor and create 'a speaking voice'.²¹

Anna In, daughter of gods, is beautiful, tall and slender, has dark olive-coloured skin and hair plaited into hundreds of braids. She responds to the voice of her twin that she has heard several times by deciding to descend into the underworld and visit her sister. On her journey to the gates of the tombs, she is accompanied by her beloved servant and friend Nina Shubur, a human. Nina is sceptical about the goddess's plan; she knows what risks it involves. It is commonly known that whoever enters the nether world shall never leave it again. She promises to help Anna In, should the goddess fail to return within three days. Anna In dies. Nina awaits her at the gate of the underworld, and after three days have passed she decides to seek the support of Anna's fathers, who live at the top of the city. All in vain, as it turns out.

Desperate after many travails, Nina addresses Ninma, mother of both Anna In and all the gods, creator of humankind, who is the only one capable of saving her child by breaking all the laws and achieving the impossible. Ninma forces the fathers to react. This creates a chance to reverse the irreversible and to stop the unstoppable.

The goddess is conditionally allowed to leave the underworld provided that someone takes her place in the beyond. The Gardener is thus chosen, Anna's lover (probably also her husband), who is an embodiment of goodness, beauty, and industry. Disguised as a woman (this was originally to be his only protection from the underworld demons), the Gardener enters the kingdom of the Evil Lady. After Anna In's intervention, it is decreed that he will only spend half of each year in the underworld, alternately with his sister Anna Geshti.²²

²¹ O. Tokarczuk, 'Czuły narrator', in *Czuły narrator* (2020), 265–266.

²² The ending of this version of the myth draws on the tale of Demeter and Kore and the establishment of the seasons of the year.

The action is set in a city and its ruined suburbs. There are super-fast lifts going up and down between the underworld (the eponymous ‘tombs of the world’), the earth level, and the top floors of skyscrapers. Juliusz Kurkiewicz explains:

Rather than reiterating mythological plots and playing with them by reversing them, Tokarczuk penetrates deep into their core in an attempt to decipher their meanings and to demonstrate that a myth is a tale about events which, though they probably never happened to anyone in any particular place, nevertheless constantly befall everyone and everywhere.²³

The story presented in the book is not a new version of the myth, though its protagonists are derived from Sumerian beliefs and largely preserve their original qualities (see Table 1).

Mythological figure	Personal traits	Character from the novel	Personal traits
Inana (Inanna, Ishtar)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goddess of love and war, patroness of prostitutes and marital sex, • morning and evening star, • she had a messenger named Ninshubur, • she had no regular partner or husband, though many tales mention her marriage to Dumuzi, • patroness of the city of Uruk, • she combines many contrary qualities: she can be creative, clever, and crafty, but also young, charming, and wilful; she is frequently compared to a grown-up trouble-making daughter, but also to a happy mistress / bride or a grieving widow. 	Anna In	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goddess of love, • she had a messenger named Nina Shubur, • she was the wife of a Gardener, • goddess of a city • she combines many contrary qualities as in the myth (she is described from the point of view of several narrators; her image evolves with time and changing situations, so that everyone perceives her differently).

²³ J. Kurkiewicz, ‘Bogini mieszka obok’, in *Polityka*, 28 August 2006, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/ksiazki/190333,1,bogini-mieszka-obok.read>, accessed 27 June 2020.

Mythological figure	Personal traits	Character from the novel	Personal traits
Ninshubur (Ninšubur)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She is referred to as a deity. • Inanna's messenger, also known in male variants (mainly in Akkadian texts); some sources claim Ninshubur was Ereshkigal's son and messenger. 	Nina Shubur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A human, • Anna In's messenger and friend.
Ereshkigal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goddess of death and the underworld, • ominous and inimical, • the elder sister of Inanna, whom she hated and envied in every respect. 	unnamed (referred to as the mistress of the underworld or the Other Side)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goddess of death and the underworld, • ominous and inimical, • the twin sister of Anna In, whom she hated and envied in every respect.
Dumuzi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personification of the forces of nature, • god of spring and good harvest, patron of shepherds, • referred to as Ishtar's lover or Inanna's husband, • king of Uruk (posthumously deified), • later: one of the underworld gods (worshipped in laments for life withering and dying out in the autumn and winter). 	Gardener	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He took care of the city's gardens, • he was Anna In's husband, • he spent half of every year in the underworld, alternately with his sister, Anna Geshti.

Table 1. Comparison of figures from the myth and Tokarczuk's novel.

Ancient myths, we should remember, attracted the interest of composers and librettists already several hundred years ago, at the dawn of the opera, and have not lost their popularity ever since. The plots of the first *drammi per musica* known from music history, such as Jacopo Peri's *Dafne*, were constructed around mythological traditions, derived not only from Greek, but also Old Slavic (Antonín Dvořák's *Rusalka*) and Germanic (much of Richard Wagner's output) mythologies. In our times, mythical subjects have been taken up, apart from Nowak's works, also among others in Agata Zubel's drama-opera *The Oresteia* (2011) and Dariusz Przybylski's *Orphée* (2015).

Libretto Analysis

The libretto distinctly draws on its literary model. Nowak recalled in an interview:

We were working on the libretto, based on the Polish original of *Anna In in Tombs of the World*, for several months. Olga sent me several versions, which we had to revise substantially, reducing the number of strands in the plot and persons of the drama. Several more drafts were made, from which the final version began to take shape.²⁴

Despite her lack of experience in the operatic genre (she even admitted that she had never been particularly interested in this kind of art²⁵), Tokarczuk produced a compact, pithy, and highly lyrical text. Here is how she recalled her work on the libretto:

At the very start, Alek made me aware of one very important thing: namely, that each sung word will take three times more than in an ordinary (spoken) text. This, in a way, sets limits on writing and thinking about the libretto. It was an essential clue. Somehow, I had not realised before that time that text presentation in the opera takes so long. And, besides, it is also centred around the sounds, so the rules are quite different than in a text which is read out loud. [...] We had to resign from many subplots of this story in comparison with the book [...].²⁶

The demands of the opera genre (that is, the framework of three acts taking two hours to perform) made the authors omit or reduce several of the novel's subplots (see Table 2). The most important of these are: struggle with death, loss of a close person, and the conflict of the two sisters. The libretto, which consists of nine scenes (the prologue and the epilogue included) leaves out some chapters of the novel. This strategy may be described, in terms of Puchalska's model, as a set of rejected elements.

²⁴ O. Łozińska, 'Aleksander Nowak: w brzmieniu języka zakodowana jest pamięć miejsca', <http://www.encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/284691/aleksander-nowakw-brzmieniu-jezyka-zakodowana-jest-pamiec-miejsca>, accessed 22 Nov. 2020.

²⁵ Gmys, 'Prawych umysłów złączenie...', 31.

²⁶ Fragment of a radio broadcast, transcribed by P.Z.-H., <https://www.polskieradio.pl/8/2565/Artykul/2215552,Olga-Tokarczuk-Anna-Inn-od-poczatkubyyla-muzyczna>, accessed 29 June 2020.

Main strands of the plot	
The Novel	The Libretto
Journey to the tombs	Journey to the tombs
Anna In's death	Anna In's death
Nina Shubur's rescue mission begins	Nina Shubur's rescue mission begins
Visit to the fathers at the top of the city – a condescending refusal to help	Visit to the fathers at the top of the city – a condescending refusal to help
Visit to the Ur-mother, Ninma	
Another visit to the fathers with Ninma's mysterious basket – help is granted this time	
Anna In leaves the underworld on condition someone comes to replace her there	Anna In leaves the underworld on condition someone comes to replace her there
Dumizi replaces Anna In in the tombs of the world	Dumizi replaces Anna In in the tombs of the world
Anna Geshti's self-sacrifice	
Dumuzi and Anna Geshti will stay in the underworld in turns – the fertile and barren seasons of the year are thus established	
	Nina Shubur's self-sacrifice

Table 2. Comparison of the main strands of the plot in the opera and the libretto.

To this set of elements, we should add the changed order in which the novel's chapters are reflected in the consecutive scenes (see Table 3), as well as a shift of accents in comparison with the literary prototype:

Alek [...] decided to shift the attention from the goddess, who was the focus of the book, to her servant and close friend or companion, a human being called Nina Shubur. Unlike in the book, we have a character who tells the story and is at the same time its protagonist, going through all these adventures. That she is human has in fact changed the distribution of accents completely. It is a different tale from the one in the book.²⁷

²⁷ Fragment of a radio broadcast, transcribed by P.Z.-H., <https://www.polskieradio.pl/8/2565/Artykul/2215552>, Olga-Tokarczuk-Anna-Inn-od-poczatku byla-muzyczna, accessed 29 June 2020.

The composer took active part in work on the libretto, which is one of the essential elements of his style of creating an opera, as he explained in an interview:

[...] I work closely with the librettists, preferably from the very start of their work on the text. I believe that though working with writers who are only taking their first steps in the opera world (as it has always been the case with me) is not easy at all, it affords a chance for excellent results.²⁸

<i>Anna In in the Tombs of the World</i>	<i>ahat ili – Sister of Gods</i>
1. The city	
2. The journey	prologue, scene III
3. The tombs	scene I, scene II
4. Descent	
5. Twin sister	scene IV, scene VI
6. Rescue mission	scene III
7. The fathers	scene V
8. Lovers, hairdressers, and cooks	
9. Hamam. The tale of Anna Enhudu	scene V
10. Rikshaw driver	
11. Greenhouses and insects	scene V
12. The threat	
13. Flies	scene VI
14. Leaving the tombs	
15. The art of negotiation	
16. Bad dreams	
17. The Gardener is captured	
18. The crisis	
19. The exchange	
20. me	

²⁸ J. Topolski, 'Piękni czterdziestoltni', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/piekni-czterdziestoltni-160575>, accessed 15 Nov. 2019.

<i>Anna In in the Tombs of the World</i>	<i>ahat ili – Sister of Gods</i>
21. Inanna	epilogue
22. The sand	

Table 3. The use of the novel's elements in the opera.

The opera takes over from the novel its main characters (see Table 4), but modifies their names slightly (Inanna rather than Anna In, Ninshubur in place of Nina Shubur, Dumuzi instead of the Gardener from the book, Ereshkigal – for the lady of the underworld / the Other Side, plus the fathers: in order of appearance: Priest-Grammarian, Logician, and Sociobiologist.

	<i>Anna In in the Tombs of the World</i>	<i>ahat ili – Sister of Gods</i>
The Protagonists	Nina Szubur (Ninshubur)	Ninshubur
	Anna In (Inanna)	Inanna
	The Other Side	Ereshkigal
	The Gardener	Dumuzi
	Father I	Father 1: a grammarian / priest
	Father II	Father 2: a logician
	Father III	Father 3: a sociobiologist
	Demons	Demons
	Judges	Judges
	People	People
	Anna Geshti (the Gardener's sister)	
	Neti (servant of Anna In's sister)	
	Ninma (Anna In's mother)	
	Anna Enhudu (Anna In's friend)	
	Giga Massa (Anna In's ex-lover)	
	The Grey One, Lalal (Anna In's friends)	
	Flies	

Table 4. Comparison of characters in the novel and the libretto.

In the libretto, Tokarczuk very frequently makes use of protagonists' dialogues and statements taken from the novel. In Scene V of Act Two,

Ninshubur talks to the goddess's first father who, in his description of how the world works and partly in his attitude to Inanna, almost exactly quotes the novel, word by word:

The Libretto		The Novel	
Act / Scene	Protagonists		Chapter
2/V Ninshubur in Heavens	Father 1: Rational action is equal to linguistic order. You must decline life consistently by cases, observe the grammatical endings. And if you are unsure, you must check in dictionaries, that are written by wise men. She, Inanna, is troublesome, like a filthy word. I cannot help her!	Father 1: Rational action is equal to linguistic order. You must decline life consistently by cases, observe the grammatical endings. And if you are unsure, you must check in dictionaries, that are written by wise men. [...] She is troublesome, like a filthy word. I cannot help her!	7

In some cases, the same words are spoken in the libretto by a different person than in the novel, as in Scene II of Act One, in which Inanna describes her relations with her sisters, going back to the time when they were together in their mother's womb. In the novel, these words are put in the mouth of Nina Shubur; for this reason, third-person narration turns into first-person in the libretto:

The Libretto		The Novel	
Act / Scene	Protagonists		Chapter
1/II	Inanna: It's true that we once tenderly embraced in our mother's womb, for nine months we gazed each other in the eyes, we know each other well. One sucked the other's nose, we danced in the sea of our mother's belly, our brains spun common threads, and wove the world from them.	Nina Shubur: [...] They once tenderly embraced in their mother's womb and for nine months gazed at each other with open eyes from close up [...]. They danced slowly in the waters [...]. [Their] brains spun common threads, and wove the world from them.	3

In some passages, the same idea is represented but not literally in the same words, as at the end of the same scene, where the goddess orders her confidante to call for help, should she fail to return after three days:

The Libretto		The Novel	
Act / Scene	Protagonists		Chapter
1/II Inanna's departure	Inanna: If I'm not back in three days' time, go to my fathers and fetch help.	Anna In: If I'm not back in three days' time, you will go to my fathers for help; tell them exactly what happened.	2

The libretto was written in Polish. Nevertheless, on the composer's initiative, it was translated into several other languages.²⁹ English is here the language of the people, mainly of Ninshubur and all those who speak to her. Deities and demons speak in selected ancient languages: Akkadian (as the possibly oldest one available), Latin, Ancient Greek, Proto-Slavic (the languages of gods the fathers), and Aztec (the language of demons). This solution should be considered as a set of added elements (in accordance with Puchalska's model).

***ahat ili* – Sister of Gods as a *Literaturoper*. Final Remarks**

A composition setting a libretto based on an existing literary work can be classified as *Literaturoper*.³⁰ The first definitions of this genre, presented in the twentieth century by German musicologists Edgar Istel and Carl Dahlhaus, imposed considerable limitations on its use. Istel used this term in 1914 with reference to an opera whose libretto was based on a pre-existent play. He observed an interesting trend among composers of that time, consisting in adapting popular dramas for operas. Examples include Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, musically set by Richard Strauss, and Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, adapted by Claude Debussy. A similarly narrow understanding of the concept of *Literaturoper* was proposed by Dahlhaus in the 1980s.³¹ According to their definitions, Nowak's opera cannot be classified in this genre.

²⁹ Notably, the idea of combining English with ancient tongues in a libretto had already been used several decades earlier in Philip Glass's three-act opera *Akhmaten* (1983), where Egyptian, Akkadian, and Hebrew can be heard apart from English.

³⁰ J. Budden, 'Literaturoper', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 2 (1992), 1290.

³¹ C. Dahlhaus, *Vom Musikdrama zur Literaturoper. Aufsätze zur neueren Operngeschichte* (1983).

A breakthrough came in the late 1990s with the work of musicologist Peter Petersen and literary scholar Hans-Gerd Winter, who, in response to the continuing ambiguity of the term *Literaturoper*, proposed their own, more flexible definition in which this term refers to one specific form of musical drama with a libretto based on a pre-existent literary work (a play, a short-story, etc.), whose linguistic, semantic, and aesthetic structure remains recognisable in the musical-dramatic version as a structural layer.³² The importance of these two scholars' contribution lies, on the one hand, in extending the meaning of the term so as to include operas inspired by narrative works, and on the other – in emphasising the fact that the libretto is just as important as the music and may function in an opera on equal terms with the latter.³³ In accordance with this new, revised definition, *ahat ilī – Sister of Gods* may completely legitimately be classified as a *Literaturoper*, since it not only has a literary prototype, but its meanings and contents remain recognisable and distinguishable in the music work. What is more, both texts were written by one and the same person. We should therefore agree with Iwona Puchalska's claim that

the opera absorbs literature, the graphic arts, and music, depriving them of their autonomy. It does not, however, take away their identity [...] They frequently regain their independence within an operatic work for some time, and manifest themselves in their original forms or play the solo roles on the grand stage of a synthetic opus. From choristers, they turn into soloists. In such cases, by analogy to the well-known phenomenon of a play-within-a-play, we may speak of a play-within-an-opera, or literature-within-an-opera.³⁴

Information about the Opera

Music by Aleksander Nowak

Libretto by Olga Tokarczuk

³² P. Petersen, 'Der Terminus "Literaturoper" – eine Begriffsbestimmung', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 56 (1999), 52–70, quoted after: M. Notley, ed., *Opera after 1900* (2010), XVI.

³³ P. Petersen, 'Der Terminus "Literaturoper"...?'

³⁴ I. Puchalska, *Poeta w operze*, 7.

Directed by Pia Partum

Date of composition: 2017–2018

Date and place of the premiere: 16 September 2018, during the Sacrum Profanum festival at the Theatre Hall of ICE Kraków Congress Centre.

Performers: Joanna Freszel (Inanna), Urszula Kryger (Ninshubur), Jan Jakub Monowid (Dumuzi), Ewa Biegas (Ereshkigal), Łukasz Konieczny (Father-Grammarian / Priest), Bartłomiej Misiuda (Father-Logician), Sebastian Szumski (Father-Sociobiologist), Polish Radio Choir (Judges / Demons / People), AUKSO Chamber Orchestra, cond. Marek Moś.

DVD release: Aleksander Nowak, Olga Tokarczuk, *ahat ilī – siostra bogów*, PWM Edition (under the Anaklasis label), 2020.

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