

Title: Literature as Opera – Zygmunt Krasiński's *Un-divine Comedy*
Author: Agnieszka Gutthy, Southeastern Louisiana University

Romantic drama proved to be attractive to many composers who based their operas on literary texts: Mussorgsky on Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, Verdi on Hugo's *Hernani*, Berg on Büchner's *Woyzek*, to name just a few. This paper discusses a Polish Romantic drama by Zygmunt Krasiński—*Un-divine Comedy* (1835)—that attracted the attention of a contemporary British composer Michael Finnissy who based his opera on Krasiński's text. The opera staged in 1988, first in Paris and then in London. Staging necessarily involves interpretation, and *Un-divine Comedy* ranks among the most difficult of Polish Romantic dramas to bring onto the stage. Like most of the Romantic dramas it was not written for stage performance; besides, back then, theatre was not yet ready to embrace and mount such drama. It was precisely in the techniques of the opera that Adam Mickiewicz, another Polish Romantic, saw the solution.

Michael Finnissy wrote his own libretto, reducing the multitude of characters to a suitable scale for his opera. The opera has seventeen scenes and only five characters. The composer moved the culminating point of the play to the place in which, according to him, the musical structure of the opera seemed to demand just such a catharsis. He also changed the undeniably Catholic message of Krasiński's drama by taking man's fate away from God's hands and making man responsible for it.

The following paper will examine both texts, Krasiński's drama and Finnissy's opera, to see how a literary text and music are connected, what makes Krasiński's text congenial to operatic treatment, and how the opera can bring the XIX century work into a living relationship with the XX and XXI century world.