# The Shoemaker's Tetrameter: Alterman à la Argov

NAPHTALI WAGNER

## Abstract

The fact that Natan Alterman's lyrics spawned Sasha Argov's best music did not prevent Argov from complaining about the texts that Alterman gave him for his composition. His complaints imply that Alterman suffers, as it were, from a "rhythmic fixation," manifested in a single, oft-repeated pattern in his lyrics. In the discussion below, an attempt is made to identify the metric pattern to which Argov was referring, to see how the music copes with the metric uniformity of the text, and to determine whether, how, and why the music violates this uniformity and turns it into multiplicity.

The discussion revolves around salient songs from the musical *The King and the Cobbler* (King Solomon and Shalmai the Shoemaker), almost all of them written in iambic tetrameter. The methodology is based on the following comparative procedure: First we look at the lyrics, ignoring the music, and determine its potential for regular and symmetrical composition. (In this case, as stated, there is one metric type repeated in several variations.) Next we look at the lyrics as put to music and see to what extent the composer diverged from the regularity and symmetry that would appear to be dictated by the lyrics. Finally, we attempt to trace the composer's motivations for these divergences (if any were found). Are the divergences intended solely to diversify the rhythmic monotony of the lyrics or do they do something for the text in terms of its content and its expressiveness?

The method of analysis uses simple analytic notation that allows stressed syllables to be ranked cyclically and spread throughout a system of musical meter (measures and hypermeasures). For each song, two main representations of the text are obtained: the first is organized according to the potential regular meter and the second is made according to the actual meter. Any disparity between the two demands explanation, and here is precisely where there is room for interpretation.