

**Musical Constructions of Nationalism:
Essays on the History and Ideology of European
Musical Culture 1800–1945**

edited by
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Moniuszko and Musical Nationalism in Poland¹

MICHAEL MURPHY

In the aftermath of Poland's tri-partition at the hands of the Russians, Prussians, and Austrians in the final decade of the eighteenth century, Polish nationalists focused on regaining independence. Polish nationalism flourished despite the fact that there was no national state and very limited industrial and economic modernisation. In this context, intellectual and cultural activities assumed a political tenor in which politics and art were inseparable. As the influential revolutionary and historian Maurycy Mochnacki stated:

Hence literature is . . . a nation's conscience. This leads us to conclude that a nation without its own original literature . . . is only a collection of people in a space defined by arbitrary borders, and not yet of a moral collective. It is not enough for us to exist; we have to *know* we exist.²

Cultural nationalism in Poland was concerned with forging and expressing a national consciousness.

In Polish romantic nationalism the idealisation of peasant culture was inextricably linked with the political claim for social revolution, a revolution that was essential to the process of constructing the Polish nation. The failure of that social revolution is central to the genesis of the most important romantic nationalist opera, *Halka*, by Stanisław Moniuszko (1819–1872). In this chapter I will examine how social politics in nineteenth-century Poland vitally conditioned this work. The context for the discussion of Moniuszko's construction of nationalism is provided in the initial survey of social structures in late eighteenth-century Poland, the subsequent analysis of different strains of Polish nationalism and a brief survey of the theoretical works of literary and musical theorists. After examining Moniuszko's nationalism, I will question the historiographical notion of a Polish national school by considering the discontinuities that existed between Moniuszko and his contemporaries. In conclusion, I will briefly examine the break with the nationalist tradition that came with the short-lived Young Poland era.

Social and political background

The Polish nation at the end of the eighteenth century was comprised solely of the noble estate.³ The peasantry (*lud*), although the largest social class, had no access to political institutions but existed in a semi-feudal relationship with their Polish masters for the majority of the nineteenth century. They did not exhibit a national consciousness until after their emancipation and subsequent exposure to education in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In this regard, it is worth recalling the memoirs of one Galician peasant who witnessed the change of government from Austrian imperialism to Polish independence:

As for national consciousness . . . the older peasants called themselves Masurians, and their speech Masurian. They lived their own life, forming a wholly separate group, and caring nothing for the nation. I myself did not know that I was a Pole till I began to read books and papers, and I fancy that other villagers came to be aware of the national attachment in much the same way.⁴

The persistence of local and imperial identities created a crisis for the nationalists in the mid-nineteenth century. I will return to this crisis when I consider the events of 1846 in Galicia.

The Polish Commonwealth in the late eighteenth century was a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic republic comprised of Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Belorussians and, in the western regions, Germans. As Andrzej Walicki notes, 'One could speak the Ruthenian language but nevertheless consider oneself, and be considered by others, as a Pole ('gente Ruthenus, natione Polonus').⁵ In the latter years of the nineteenth century, political nationalism was to take hold of the various ethnic groups who sought their own political independence based on cultural identity, thus bringing them into conflict with a specifically Polish nationalism. These developments do not concern us here, however.

A typology of Polish nationalism

Theorists of Polish nationalism have identified different strains of nationalism in mid nineteenth-century Poland. My preference is for Wanda Taylor's typology of nationalism wherein she identifies six categories of nationalists: the conservative romantics, the romantic messianists, the romantic socialists, the romantic democrats, the liberals and the positivists.⁶ The romantic socialists were the most radical group of the revolutionaries based in Poland, and they sought full emancipation for the peasants by violent revolution, not only as a socio-economic process but as a vital part of nation-building.⁷ Taylor summarises their project thus:

if we understand nationalism in the strictly political terms of social equalisation, then the romantic socialists not only qualified as nationalists but provided the most obvious form of national expression . . . The fight for independence was seen as a popular movement originating and run entirely from below and directed as much against the feudal landlords as against the governments of the foreign occupants . . . The nationalism of the romantic socialists originated from the premise of 'cultural' expression, due largely to political circumstances, developed into a strongly political conception of class conflict.⁸

It is this strain of nationalism that has the greatest explanatory power for my discussion of musical nationalism with respect to Moniuszko's *Halka*.

The champion of the romantic socialists was Edward Dembowski, a committed disciple of Mochnacki's vision of 'ennobling' the population, where every Pole, regardless of class, would be a member of the political nation.⁹ Dembowski's philosophy of history contrasted the 'latinised' culture of the gentry with the 'original' Slavic nation. In particular, he believed that the religious beliefs of the peasantry were tainted by the Roman faith of their Polish masters.¹⁰ He frequently criticised those intellectuals who equated the *szlachta* customs with Polish national character, and to promote his own views he frequently attired himself in peasant clothes and went into the countryside to 'preach the revolutionary gospel' to the peasants.¹¹

The most notable contribution to the radical, nationalist historiography came from Joachim Lelewel, whose treatise 'The Lost Citizenship of the Peasant Estate in Poland' (Poznań, 1851) claimed that the land had been taken from the *lud* by the *szlachta*.¹² Under the impress of German romantic thought, the role of the peasants in Polish history and the development of the nation became theorised in a wholly romantic way. Consequently, the search ensued for the historical and cultural origins of the nation in the peasantry.¹³ The romantic disenchantment with the Enlightenment and the influence of Western ideas on Polish thought fundamentally challenged the feudalism of the old order, and politicised the cultural concerns of Polish intellectuals. This change of world view provided a seminal impetus to musical nationalism.

Polish national style

The influence of German thought on Polish musical culture came to prominence in the career of one of the most important figures of Polish musical life in the early nineteenth century, Józef Elsner. In his theoretical writings, Elsner examined the metronomy and rhythmic nature of the Polish language.¹⁴ His intellectual project represented a modern, Romantic reaction to earlier Enlightenment attempts at codifying Polish prosody; e.g. his 'Treatise on the Metric and Rhythmic Features of the Polish Language' was

in direct opposition to the classical theories of his predecessor, Tadeusz Nowaczyński.¹⁵ Significantly, Elsner's work was banned by the Russian censor due to the centrality of 'nationality' in his thesis.¹⁶ In making the connection between language and music, Elsner compared poetic metres with the rhythms of Polish folk dances (e.g. the trochaic in the mazurka and the spondaic in the krakowiak). His ideas were widely debated, and they formed a central part of the musical creativity of contemporary composers, writers and critics. However, these theoretical dispensations ultimately led to a formulaic approach to musical composition, and those composers who did not adhere to this aesthetic were severely criticised. Moniuszko's works represented the embodiment of this nationalist aesthetic.

Moniuszko

Moniuszko's career must be read against the demographic shift of the post-1830 era. He was born into a cultured and landed *szlachta* family in Ubiel in Belorussia. After his early education in Warsaw and Vilnius he completed his musical studies in the Singakademie in Berlin (1837–1840). A number of his songs were published by Bote and Bock in Berlin in 1840, and were received favourably by Leipzig's *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*: one review noted that his ballad, *Trzech Budrysw*, breathed the national spirit in words and music. Shortly after this success Moniuszko wrote:

I feel the growing strength of my talent which makes me so different from the multitude . . . You must know your own value, so others will take notice of you and respect you! From now on this will be my maxim.¹⁷

However, this sense of individualism was not to remain with Moniuszko for long. His failure to retain his inherited estates obliged him to support his large family on his income from teaching piano and playing the organ. His straitened circumstances dictated that he join the ranks of the many *déclassé* nobles who were forced to abandon their family estates and move to the urban centres in search of posts. Taylor describes the emergence of these intellectuals as a professional class that stemmed from the 'landed' tradition but 'developed an understanding of society and social relations that distanced it from the conservative aristocratic world-view'.¹⁸ It was in this social ferment that Moniuszko became a professional composer of 'national' status. This process got under way in Vilnius in the early 1840s.

Śpiewnik domowy (Domestic Songs)¹⁹

In an article announcing his first volume of *Śpiewnik domowy* (Vilnius, 1842) he drew a clear distinction between the new Romantic aesthetic of music,

which was characterised by 'an expression of place, national character of peoples, their games, festivals, traditions, etc.', and the earlier 'European' mimetic notion of music 'as a language expressing thought, feeling, passion, expressing different phenomena in a physical world'.²⁰ Moniuszko thus aligned himself with the modernist trends in Polish national romanticism. In acknowledging the recent researches of Polish theorists that informed the development of 'national singing', he noted a lack of songs for domestic singing. His own songs, therefore, were his 'modest contribution' to this expansion of the national repertoire. Central to the aesthetic of the beauty of national song was the 'local echo of our childhood memories' which will relate directly to 'people born and reared on Polish soil'.²¹ He noted that, although his songs contained 'various types of music, their drift and character are national'. The unique 'Polishness' of these songs lies in the presence of national dance genres and rhythms (krakowiak, mazurka, kujawiak and polonaise), and the proliferation of text settings by the national poets Mickiewicz, Malczewski, Syrokomla, Odyniec, Witwicki and Pol.

These songs were immediately recognised as an important innovation in Polish musical culture. Ironically, the first important review came as a mixed blessing to Moniuszko. The prolific historical novelist and music critic, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, addressed himself thus to the composer:

We would like the inspired compositions of Mr Moniuszko to take the place of the limpid and pale songs popular in Warsaw of which so many can be seen on each piano and heard everywhere, which are always the same, always slide off one's soul and can never get into it. Therefore we kindly ask Mr Moniuszko to descend to the level of the general public and make his songs easier. Later, when his readers become acquainted with his music, he will be gradually able to make his compositions more difficult.²²

This was a seminal articulation of Polish musical nationalism. While it accords with Moniuszko's desire to supplant the hegemony of European music, it also showed that Moniuszko's role as a 'national' composer was subject to the favour not only of the Russian state censor but also to certain elements of the Polish élite. In the end, the tension between Moniuszko and the conservative élite led to his unease with the hegemony of nationalism in Polish musical culture.

Halka: Genesis

The success of the first volume of Moniuszko's songs was consolidated in 1846 with the successful Warsaw première of his opera buffa, *Loteria* (The Lottery).²³ As a result, Moniuszko was fêted in the literary salons of the capital, where he came into contact with writers, journalists and other artists.

It was at a *soirée musicale* in the literary salon of the Łuszczewski family that Moniuszko met the future librettist of *Halka*, Włodzimierz Wolski.

Wolski was a member of the *cyganeria warszawska* (Warsaw bohemians), a group of revolutionaries and poets who followed Dembowski, and whose writings were published in Dembowski's *Przegląd Naukowy* (*Scientific Review*).²⁴ This weekly journal was dedicated to 'literature, knowledge, and art', and was heavily influenced by Dembowski's Hegelian philosophy of history. Its contributors advocated a national philosophy of Poland's history in which the peasantry were identified as the source of the nation. (It is worth noting that *Przegląd Naukowy* differed significantly from its apolitical rival, *Biblioteka Warszawska*, which sought to provide a neutral forum for intellectual debate unconnected with the nationalist struggle.)

Dembowski was vigilant regarding the young generation of writers, only classifying them in the 'New School' if they professed progressive tendencies. Despite his own political activities, Dembowski wrote solely on the importance of intellectual activities for the national cause. In particular, he attached great significance to the philosophy of 'creativity' – in contradistinction to the idea of 'imitation' – in the pursuit of national renewal. In the spirit of Mochnacki and other influential Polish Hegelian philosophers, Dembowski promoted the idea that art was imbued with a mission to serve the cause of national realisation and independence.

Wolski enjoyed Dembowski's favour as a 'progressive' writer, and thus had his poetic drama *Ojciec Hilary* (Father Hilary) published in *Przegląd Naukowy* in 1843, the heyday of the journal.²⁵ However, because of the decline of the journal in 1845–1846 due to the arrest of many of its contributors, another of Wolski's poems, *Halszka*, on the peasant question was censored by the Russian Warsaw office. However, *Halszka* remained in circulation in the literary salons, where Moniuszko came in contact with its author.²⁶

After their initial meeting, Wolski and Moniuszko immediately set about transforming the poem into an opera. *Halka* was ready for performance by the following year. However, such were the conditions of the time that during the disturbances precipitating the 'Spring of the Peoples' there was little chance of having it performed in Warsaw.²⁷ Instead, Moniuszko directed the first performance in the foyer of his in-laws' hotel in Vilnius on 1 January 1848.²⁸ It was not until 1 January 1858 that it received a performance in Warsaw.

The decision by the board of directors of the Wielki Theatre to revive *Halka* came in the period after the death of Nicholas I, when a more liberal administration emerged with Aleksander II (reigned 1855–1881).²⁹ Indeed, it was with considerable surprise that Moniuszko read in the Warsaw press of the forthcoming performance.³⁰ With the permission of the board of directors, Moniuszko and Wolski frantically expanded the libretto to its present four-act version.

Halka: Plot

The plot of the opera is the familiar tale of the peasant girl who falls in love with a nobleman who eventually abandons her to marry one of his own class. When Halka is told by her peasant suitor of her master's deception she goes insane and throws herself from a precipice as the wedding ceremony is taking place. As most commentators demonstrate, the 'national spirit' is powerfully expressed in the Polish dances which celebrate the various traditions of Poland's past: the polonaises celebrate the noble tradition while the mazurkas and highland dances celebrate the spirit of the peasants, much in the manner of Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*. As is obvious from the original publicity posters, these dances were one of the major attractions of the opera.

Halka: Social politics – Galicia (1846)

It is possible, however, to recover a political element in the inspiration of the work. As Witold Rudziński reminds us, the opera was 'a passionate response to the events of 1846'.³¹ The events of that year can only be explained by reference to the aftermath of the 1830–1831 uprising. In the wake of the confiscation of lands that resulted from the brutal repression of the uprising, the issue of land ownership and conversion of labour to rents was highly controversial. The peasants were primarily concerned with security of tenure and the prospect of freehold, 'which would sever once and for all the connection of village and manor'.³² Although the Polish landlords sympathised with the nationalist movement, they were alarmed at the claims that national freedom would necessitate a social revolution, and they were particularly frightened at the linking of the agrarian issue with the national cause. But they were also frightened by the prospect of the Austrians initiating peasant reform over their heads. The upshot of these fraught years occurred in 1846 in western Galicia when the Polish gentry, with the backing of the Polish Democratic Party, staged an uprising as part of wider 'Napoleonic' plans to restore 'historic Poland' (i.e. the restoration of the pre-partition boundaries). Central to this conspiracy was the emancipation of the peasants. The peasants, however, violently suppressed the insurrection in the name of the Austrian Emperor. While the role of Metternich's government in instigating the peasant revolt is a moot point, it is fair to say that the peasants had been treated harshly by their Polish landlords. Furthermore, the fixity of tenure which they had enjoyed since the eighteenth century explains their loyalty to the Austrian government.³³

When Dembowski heard of the peasant revolt he went to Kraków, where he attempted to convince the peasants that the gentry's uprising was in their best interests. In his pamphlet 'To All Poles Who Can Read' he attempted to enlist the peasants for the national cause, declaring: 'We, the people; we, the

peasants; we, the Poles.³⁴ However, two days later he was killed by Austrian troops and the uprising was suppressed. In light of the successful pro-Habsburg *jacquerie*, the Austrians were concerned that the peasants would demand their independence as a reward for their patriotism. The outcome, in Austrian Poland, was the abolition of serfdom in 1848.

This affair highlighted a number of difficult realities for the romantic nationalists: firstly, peasant serfdom was abolished as a result of the failure – rather than the hoped-for success – of their grand nationalist project; and secondly, it highlighted the precarious position of the nationalists as the new intellectual class *vis-à-vis* the interdependence of the ancient classes. Deep divisions ensued amongst Polish intellectuals over the peasant question. While conservatives wanted stringent measures to contain the peasants, the revolutionary romantics sought full emancipation.

To briefly illustrate this division, we may contrast the politics of Zygmunt Krasiński and Juliusz Słowacki.³⁵ Krasiński expressed his grave reservations about social change in many anti-revolutionary works which he published under various pseudonyms.³⁶ The peasant rebellion against the gentry convinced Krasiński of the correctness of his conservative position. By contrast, Słowacki addressed himself thus to the defeated *szlachta* in his *Voice From Exile to the Brethren in Poland*:

Ye are standing now on the edge of the abyss, people of noble stock, death and hell are under your feet, and up there, overhead, God and Poland. Recognize God's hand in your punishment and thank the Father in Heaven who sent it for your improvement . . . Have regard for the crude russet coat because this is the dress of the future soldiers who will win Poland's freedom.³⁷

For the revolutionary romantics, the alternative to idealising the peasants in the aftermath of 1846 was to admit that local identity and imperial loyalty were in danger of exploding their national philosophy and the Romantic concept of the Polish nation.

In this context, Wolski's *Halszka* sustained the Romantic view of the peasants as victims of their Polish masters. Consequently, Moniuszko's *Halka* is firmly in this radical, revolutionary, Romantic tradition. Clearly, the opera was more than just an expression of the 'national spirit': it was vitally informed by the social question at the core of Polish nationalism.

Halka: Nationalism and music

As one would expect, the opera is replete with the peasants' complaint of their fate at the hands of their Polish masters. But *Halka* herself represents the Polish nation in a particular way. Dahlhaus noted that she appropriated the 'elevated style' reserved in Aristotle's rules of social standing for 'kings and potentates'.³⁸ In fact, this is the 'ennobling' of the *lud* as advocated by

Mochnacki and Dembowski. *Halka*'s language is decidedly overcharged throughout the opera: she typically refers to herself in the third person (e.g. 'But her wings are no longer white, they are red, redded by her own blood, She is flapping her wings, and, like a stone, she is falling to the ground').³⁹ And her music frequently registers an elevated style (e.g. her Italianate G minor aria in the second act). Moreover, the first notes of the overture in D minor strike a tragic tone, thereby situating the work at the apex of musical genres in Poland. The generic import of French Grand Opera was unmistakable in these and other gestures, and Hans von Bülow compared the opera with Halévy and Auber.⁴⁰ Clearly, Moniuszko's contravention of social conventions directly challenged the socio-political aspirations of the Polish élite. Indeed, the use of the grand style for *Halka*'s music is arguably the most potent of nationalist gestures in the opera with respect to Poland's national philosophy.

The great tragic moment in the opera occurs in the penultimate scene with *Halka*'s suicide. Her initial impulse to avenge herself by setting fire to the church in which her master is getting married is supplanted by the impulse for self-sacrifice.⁴¹ Most crucially, her suicide is vitally conditioned by a religious consciousness. At the beginning of the second act she had identified herself with the Holy Virgin of Częstochowa grieving at the foot of the cross. In the final act, at the moment when she decides to kill herself, the peasant choir chant the words 'For the sake of martyrdom of your son, have pity on your people'.⁴² This is sung to the tune of a Polish folksong which *Halka* also sings, thus representing a powerful moment of shared consciousness between *Halka* and the villagers. Moreover, it specifically foregrounds the theme of universal salvation. The stage direction at this point indicates that 'realising that setting fire to the building will mean vengeance at the cost of innocent lives, she throws away the burning faggot'.⁴³ It is then that she apostrophises her master: 'I am going to die and I forgive you'.⁴⁴ This redemptive moment invokes the ideology of Polish Messianism. I use the term 'Messianism' in the sense in which Walicki defines it: 'It is a belief in a redeemer, individual or collective, mediating between the human and the divine in the soteriological process of history'.⁴⁵ This understanding of millenarism is formed by a specifically religious consciousness allied to social revolutionism and the notion of the 'religions of the oppressed'. Polish Romantic Messianism, therefore, is not solely a form of political thinking: Walicki identifies one of its strands as 'an ardent search for religious consolation combined with a bitter sense of having been let down by the traditional religious authority (the condemnation of the Polish insurrection [1831] by Pope Gregory XVI'.⁴⁶ If we add to this Dembowski's belief that the faith of the peasants had been corrupted by their latinised masters, then *Halka*'s self-sacrifice challenges the villagers' devotional Catholicism and their passive witness to the sexual politics of their masters. *Halka*'s suicide, therefore, embodies the ideology

of Messianism to the degree that it challenges the existing social order.

However, despite the powerful drama in this scene the opera ends abruptly with a celebration for the newly-weds: the peasants are forced to sing a happy song for their master and his bride. Jim Samson notes the 'ambivalent' ending in an 'affirmative D major' (the parallel major of the opening D minor), and wonders 'if this is an ironic play on different levels of meaning or simply a response to the censor'.⁴⁷ While there is no definitive solution to this quandary, a consideration of the compositional history of this finale suggests that this conclusion would not have been Moniuszko's preferred choice. Firstly, Moniuszko and Wolski considered a number of different conclusions to the opera, one of which was a peasant uprising. Unsurprisingly, they rejected this idea as it would not pass the censor.⁴⁸ Another ending called for Halka's rescue by her faithless *szlachta* lover: while this was the ending of the first Vilnius version, the subsequent 1858 version concluded with Halka's suicide and is now the accepted *dénouement*. Indeed, Moniuszko's intention of composing a tragic opera in the grand style would have been incompatible with the heroine's ultimate rescue. Thus, despite the abrupt and ambivalent ending, the tragic integrity of the opera is sustained. Moreover, Moniuszko emphasises the religious consciousness surrounding Halka's suicide. As already mentioned, this is a striking parallel with the central tenets of Messianism. Furthermore, if we consider that Moniuszko did contemplate a peasant revolution, then we can see that the Messianist philosophy of a new moral and social polity would have been realised. However, the final scene maintains the social status quo. In the end, it seems that censorship truncated the revolutionary thrust of the opera.

Halka: Reception

The first important review of *Halka*, and the one which set the terms for the subsequent reception of the work, was written by Hans von Bülow in a long article in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*.⁴⁹ As one would expect, the majority of his essay was taken up with discussion of musical details, comparisons with other operas and friendly advice to the composer. With regard to the nationalistic aspects of the opera, however, he placed the greatest emphasis on cultural nationalism. In particular, he wasted no time in defusing the opera of political motivation. He began his review thus:

It is always a welcome occurrence when nations generally regarded as living in a state of oppression and therefore suffering in a kind of peculiar existence of their own find a satisfying outlet for their deep-seated and legitimate national aspirations by abandoning the futile and inflammable game of playing politics in favour of aesthetic activity. For it is only in the realm of the spirit that impassioned dreams can be converted

into noble reality, a reality that becomes the more undeniable the more ideal are the forms through which the national spirit seeks expression.⁵⁰

In suggesting that musical culture could drain off political anxieties, he welcomed the recent awakening of the 'national spirit' in Poland which had 'spoken through the medium' of the composer 'in its most spiritual and therefore its richest form of expression, that of poetry and music'.⁵¹ Along with this thoroughly German reading of the work, Bülow observed that the cream of the Polish aristocracy 'were united (as several papers reported) in giving an especially positive expression to the consciousness of the nation by the considerable personal interest they showed for the author'.⁵² What Bülow meant by the 'consciousness of the nation' is demonstrated admirably when he quoted a 'cultured Polish lady' who characterised Moniuszko and his opera thus:

c'est un poète slave: il rend avec un sentiment profond et vrai la mélancolie, l'exaltation, le passion sauvage, le résignation pieuse de la race lithuanienne. Son opéra *Halka* renferme des beautés très saisissantes pour nous autres.⁵³

These *bon mots* prompted Bülow to conclude that Moniuszko had presented 'a lively and picturesque musical rendering of the contrast between peasant and noble, between village and manor'.⁵⁴ However, his general cultural discourse was tempered by the more pragmatic statement that 'more than one of the members of the audience might well be justified in complaining of verbal assault and it might be impossible to explain away the *animus injurandi*'.⁵⁵ Indeed, Bülow acknowledged that Halka 'is intended to represent the oppressed peasantry, and her tragic end preaches a philippic against this feudal nonsense' (i.e. 'the immoral tyrannical treatment of its subjects by the Slav aristocracy').⁵⁶ These remarks, however, do not measure fully the political weight of the opera. Bülow's praise of the 'picturesque' rendering of the relationship between the ancient classes is undercut by the fact that Moniuszko and Wolski had contemplated a peasant uprising in the opera. However, the most significant political import of the opera was the original impulse behind Wolski's *Halszka* (i.e. to produce a work that idealised the peasants in the aftermath of their pro-Habsburg *jacquerie*). Thus, Halka was more than a representation of the 'oppressed peasantry' or an expression of the 'national spirit': her 'elevated style' was the very essence of Dembowski's national philosophy, and her redemptive self-sacrifice resonated with Messianism.

A national school?

Moniuszko's main influence on Polish musical culture after 1865 was primarily symbolic. From 1866 until his death in 1872 he was Professor of

Harmony and Counterpoint in the Institute. Alongside Moniuszko were Zygmunt Noskowski and Władysław Żeleński, and the legacy of their pedagogy was the consolidation of a conservative national style. If any group of Polish composers deserve to be called a national school it is those who worked in the Institute in the final decades of the nineteenth century. However, Polish musicology has typically regarded Chopin, Moniuszko and Kolberg as the 'essence of the Polish national school'.⁵⁷ This notion presents a homogenous view of Polish musical culture that contrasts with the discontinuities that existed amongst these same contemporaries. As is often noted, Chopin never considered himself to be part of a national school of composers. He expressed his dismay at the provincialism of those who imitated him⁵⁸ and in relation to Kolberg's folklorist activities he remarked 'it would be better to have nothing'.⁵⁹ Furthermore, he remained famously silent on the Polish question despite the presence of Mickiewicz and other significant Messianists and nationalists in Paris. Rather, his individualism is neatly (if inscrutably) captured in a letter to his family in 1845 regarding three newly composed mazurkas:

at this moment I am not with myself, but only as usual in some strange outer space. Granted, it is only those *espaces imaginaires* . . . I am a real blind Mazur. So, not seeing far, I have written three new mazurkas.⁶⁰

If, as Jeffrey Kallberg has suggested, Chopin did respond to the Messianism that pervaded Paris in the 1830s, there is little evidence that Mickiewicz's mature discourses on Messianism made any impact on Chopin in the mid 1840s.⁶¹ The above letter and the mazurkas to which he referred date from the year after Mickiewicz had completed his famous lectures at the Collège de France (1840–1844) in which he advocated passionate bloodletting on the scales of Providence for the sake of Poland.⁶² Chopin's statement and his late mazurkas seem far removed for all that.

Although Moniuszko, in his introduction to *Śpiewnik domowy* (see note 20), expressed the hope that a national school would emerge from the researches of Polish scholars and musicians, it is fair to say that he was dubious about the limitations placed on him by conservative nationalists. As early in his career as 1850, in response to an article in which he was compared with Meyerbeer and was named as Chopin's successor, Moniuszko privately observed: 'I can only compose for home [*dom*], internal use, a field in which one cannot unfortunately spread one's wings'.⁶³ It would be incorrect to blame nationalist orthodoxy alone for his discontent: due regard must be given to the crippling restrictions placed on performing opportunities and civic freedom in Poland under Russian rule. Moniuszko was at the mercy of the Russian bureaucrats in Warsaw and in his beloved Vilnius, and he also expressed frustration with the standard of orchestral playing in Warsaw. However, he was also impatient with the insular attitudes of the Polish élite: we may recall that Kraszewski had exhorted him

'to descend to the level of the general public' in his songs (1842).⁶⁴ Moniuszko's frustration with Kraszewski was exacerbated fifteen years later when the latter claimed that Chopin's late mazurkas had lost touch with the national soul, and that Apolinary Kątski's mazurkas were of higher artistic value.⁶⁵ Moniuszko's response identifies a fundamental problem at the heart of nationalist musical culture in Poland:

Apolinary Kątski attempts to reflect as clearly as possible the character of his nation, which Mr. Kraszewski justifiably heard clearly in the vigour and bluster of these mazurs as the traits of his noble brotherhood [*szlachta*]. Chopin spoke only for himself. . . . With what interest would we hear those mazurkas which Chopin could play for us back in the homeland and how differently would look those that Kątski could write in Paris. Chopin's mazurkas are jewels of universal music; Kątski's mazurkas are dear only to us . . . the two are artistically far apart though both are near to our hearts.⁶⁶

It is true that there was no small degree of personal animosity towards both Kraszewski and Kątski in this reply. Indeed, Moniuszko was disingenuous in his remarks on Kątski: he began the above article by proclaiming his admiration for Kątski's talent, and he even went so far as to write: 'I love his mazurkas like my own.' However, this contrasts with his admission to Aleksander Walicki in 1852 that Kątski was 'very incompetent in his art, very clever in small tricks, unbearable in mazurkas and even in performing them'.⁶⁷ His opinion of Kątski had deteriorated even further when he wrote to Sikorski on the subject of Kątski's music two years later.⁶⁸ Thus, when Kraszewski praised Kątski at Chopin's expense, Moniuszko concluded his reply by advising Kraszewski to stay out of musical affairs and to concern himself with literature.

However, Moniuszko's comments extend deeper than personal rivalry. While Kraszewski's elevation of Kątski over Chopin was an acute instance of insularity, Moniuszko's reply challenged the more traditional reception of Chopin as 'the worthiest representative our nation'.⁶⁹ For Moniuszko, Chopin was primarily a 'universal' composer, who 'spoke only for himself'. By clearly distinguishing between the national and the universal, Moniuszko placed Chopin outside of the specifically domestic world to which himself and Kątski belonged.

Młoda Polska w muzyce (Young Poland in music)

Notwithstanding the informal musical education rendered in the pages of such journals as *Echo Muzyczne*, *Teatralne i Artystyczne* in the final two decades of the nineteenth century, and the broadening of musical taste with the founding of the Warsaw Philharmonic Hall in 1901,⁷⁰ Polish

musical culture retained its ultra-conservative dynamic into the early twentieth century. The emergence of a cohort of young, modernist composers known as *Młoda Polska* led to a sharp conflict with the old guard.⁷¹ In response to a concert in 1907 which included Szymanowski's Concert Overture, the arch-conservative critic, Aleksander Poliński, chastised the group thus:

What kind of Poland is this that does not serve the nation as Chopin and Moniuszko did? . . . These composers [Young Poland] seem to be under the influence of an evil spirit which corrupts their work and tries to deprive their music of its individual and national original tone, turning them into parrots that imitate Wagner and Strauss.⁷²

Such cultural protectionism prompted Adolf Chybiński, a champion of the Young Poland group, to remark that 'There is an ignorance which does not exist in Western countries, in fact in Western countries they could not imagine such ignorance as it is here.'⁷³ It is not surprising, therefore, that the young generation of the 1900s reacted against the insularity of their forebears by imitating their modern European counterparts. Where other nations sought an alternative to Germanism in the post-1870 era, Young Poland actively sought it out in an attempt to modernise Polish music.

Just how conservative this culture was is illustrated by the fate of Karłowicz's *Lithuanian Rhapsody* (1906). While the most advanced of Karłowicz's symphonic poems embraced the musical language of Wagner and Richard Strauss, the *Lithuanian Rhapsody* was different in style (i.e. its form was traditionally episodic in the manner of Smetana's *Vltava* (1874), it quoted folk tunes that the composer had collected in his native Lithuania, and these folk tunes were treated in a manner that recalls the so-called 'changing-background' technique of Glinka and the Russian nationalists). Moreover, while Karłowicz tirelessly promoted his other works in Poland and abroad, he consistently withheld the *Lithuanian Rhapsody* from performance. As I have argued elsewhere, this was most probably because it would answer to the prescriptions of the conservative nationalists with whom Karłowicz was constantly in conflict.⁷⁴ That it was posthumously received as a 'national' work supports such a notion. Poliński greeted the première of the *Rhapsody* (given eighteen days after the composer's death in February 1909) in triumphant nationalist rhetoric. He noted that the composer 'shows pure Polish soul . . . [and] one should consider the Rhapsody as the pearl of Karłowicz's work and as a model for all the Young Poland Composers'.⁷⁵ While Karłowicz never clearly stated his reasons for withholding the work, other than to say it required a high degree of subtlety in performance, it is reasonable to assume that Poliński's attitude realised the composer's fear that the work would be lionised by the traditional nationalists.

Coda

The exchange between Kraszewski and Moniuszko calls into question Dahlhaus's claim that nationalism 'seemed to suspend or resolve the conflict between the avant-garde and popular taste.'⁷⁶ That Kraszewski made his remarks nearly a decade after Chopin's death shows that these works were not assimilated into Polish musical culture. Paradoxically, it was only with the advent of Young Poland, and the break with nationalist musical culture, that the more advanced of Chopin's musical techniques were made available for Polish music.

Notes and References

- 1 I am grateful to the Arts Faculty Fund of University College, Cork, for its research grant. I also want to thank Beata Oziębłowska for her translations of some of the Polish texts quoted in this chapter.
- 2 Maurycy Mochnacki, *On Polish Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Warsaw, 1830), quoted in Donald Pirie, 'The Agony in the Garden: Polish Romanticism', in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds.), *Romanticism in National Context* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 328.
- 3 The nobility can be subdivided into three groups: the aristocrats (*magnateria*), the gentry (*szlachta*) and the petty nobility (*drobnaszlachta*). The latter were the largest group, and were so poor that they were almost indistinguishable from the peasants except for their pretensions and their literacy.
- 4 J. Slomka, *From Serfdom to Self-Government* (1941), quoted in Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London, 1960), p. 120. See also Kazimierz Dobrowolski, 'Peasant Traditional Culture', in Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (Harmondsworth, 1971).
- 5 Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland* (Indiana, 1994), p. 68.
- 6 Wanda Taylor, 'Aspects of Cultural Nationalism in the Congress Kingdom of Poland in the 1840s' (MLitt diss., Oxford University, 1987). Taylor constructs her classification as a complementary system to that of Stefan Kieniewicz's in *The Emancipation of the Polish Peasantry* (Chicago, 1969), and Walicki's in *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*. These groups may briefly be described as follows: the conservatives were Catholic aristocrats who believed strongly in their traditional feudalism; the Messianists were concentrated in Paris after 1831; the romantic democrats sought to dismantle feudalism and create a new social order without resorting to violent revolution; the liberals wanted to replace feudalism with capitalism as a matter of modernisation but without reference to social and national ideologies – they were drawn predominantly from the wealthy *szlachta* and saw themselves as political centrists opposed to socialism, violent revolution and religious conservatism; the positivists were opposed to romanticism, and turned to French positivism for matters of economic methodology – their contribution to Polish life came after the 1863 uprising when they absorbed the liberals and democrats. We may further note that there was a formidable group of conservative *émigrés* who gathered themselves around Prince Adam Czartoryski, the former foreign minister to Alexander I, and president of the national government until he left Poland in August 1831. Czartoryski's supporters regarded him as the future king of a restored Poland. There was

- strong opposition, however, from the revolutionary left, who published a declaration in July 1834 signed by 2,840 Polish exiles stating that he was an enemy of the emigration. See Leslie, *Reform and Insurrection*, pp. 3–4.
- 7 Taylor notes that her category of romantic socialists corresponds to Kieniewicz's revolutionary democrats. I have chosen to use Taylor's nomenclature so as to remain consistent with her overall analysis.
 - 8 Taylor, 'Aspects of Cultural Nationalism', p. 145 and 151.
 - 9 See Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*, p. 30.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 212.
 - 11 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
 - 12 His work had a profound effect on Mickiewicz, and he was a frequent guest in the Moniuszko home in Warsaw in the late 1820s.
 - 13 Famous examples are the activities of the ethnographer, Zorian D. Chodakowski, and the composer, ethnographer and folklorist, Oskar Kolberg.
 - 14 See Rosemary Hunt, 'Moniuszko's Musical Treatment of Texts by Mickiewicz' (PhD diss., University of London, 1980), Chapter 4.
 - 15 Elsner, *Rozprawa o metryczności i rytmiczności języka polskiego* (Warsaw, 1818). For an analysis of Elsner's thesis, see Hunt, 'Moniuszko's Musical Treatment of Texts by Mickiewicz', p. 55. See also Pirie, 'The Agony in the Garden', for the debate which raged within Polish letters between the supporters of the Enlightenment and the new Romanticism.
 - 16 By focusing on the essential 'softness' of the Polish language that results from the accent on the penultimate syllable, he argued that 'masculine endings' should not be incorporated from French and German.
 - 17 Letter to his wife dated 6 July 1840, Berlin, quoted in B. M. Maciejewski, *Moniuszko, Father of Polish Opera* (London, 1979), p. 33.
 - 18 See Taylor, 'Aspects of Cultural Nationalism', Chapter 2.
 - 19 *Śpiewnik domowy* is variously translated as 'Home Song Book', 'Domestic Songs' or 'Songs for Domestic Use'.
 - 20 Moniuszko, 'Śpiewnik domowy', in *Tygodnik Petersburski*, No. 72 (22 September 1842), published in Witold Rudziński (ed.), *Stanisław Moniuszko: Listy Zebrane* (Collected Letters) (Kraków, 1969), pp. 601–3.
 - 21 Like Mickiewicz and most other Poles, Moniuszko was taught Niemcewicz's *Śpiewy historyczne* (Historical Songs, 1816) in childhood, the subject matter of which embraced Polish history from the tenth to the early nineteenth centuries.
 - 22 J. I. Kraszewski, article on *Śpiewnik domowy* in *Athenaeum* (1842), quoted in Aleksander Walicki, *Stanisław Moniuszko* (Warsaw, 1873), p. 89.
 - 23 Józef Sikorski, the future editor of *Ruch Muzyczny* (Musical Movement) and founder of the Warsaw Music Society, was seminal in getting it performed.
 - 24 *Przegląd Naukowy* was founded in 1842 at a time when Dembowski was on the run from the Russians for conspiratorial activities. The title of the journal embraces the idea of 'learning', including philosophy and history.
 - 25 *Ojciec Hilary* dealt with the peasant question.
 - 26 Wolski's poem was based on the romantic tale, *The Mountain Girl*, by Kazimierz Wójcicki who was one of the active figures in Polish ethnography.
 - 27 *Przegląd Naukowy*, for example, was disbanded and its editors were arrested.
 - 28 This was the original two-act version, and was given a concert performance because there were no available resources for a staged version. It was not given a full performance in Vilnius until 1854.
 - 29 The period of Alexander II's reign brought about a number of significant improvements in Polish musical life: the establishment of the journal *Ruch Muzyczny* (Musical Movement) in 1857, the opening of the Warsaw Music Institute in 1861 and the Warsaw Music Society in 1870, and the establishment of the journal *Echo Muzyczne, Teatralne i Artystyczne* (Musical and Artistic Echo) in 1877. Moniuszko was made Artistic Director of the Warsaw Opera in 1858, and later he became Professor of Harmony and Counterpoint in the Institute from 1866 until his death.
 - 30 For his reaction to the announcement of *Halka's* revival, see his letter to August Iwański dated October 1857, quoted in Maciejewski, *Moniuszko*, pp. 57–8.
 - 31 W. Rudziński, *Stanisław Moniuszko, Studio i materiały* (Kraków, 1955), Vol. 1, p. 127.
 - 32 Leslie, *Reform and Insurrection*, p. 58.
 - 33 See Leslie, *Reform and Insurrection*, pp. 14 and 57. Walicki claims that Metternich's administration skilfully encouraged the slaughter of the Galician gentry; see his *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*, p. 284. See also T. W. Simons Jr., 'The Peasant Revolt of 1846 in Galicia: Recent Historiography', *Slavic Review*, 30, 4 (1971), pp. 795–817.
 - 34 Quoted in Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*, p. 220.
 - 35 Krasirski and Słowacki were Mickiewicz's greatest rivals.
 - 36 His conservative stance reflected his family background: he was the son of General Count Krasirski and Maria Radziwiłł who maintained good relations with the partitioning powers. See Julian Krzyżanowski, *A History of Polish Literature* (Warsaw, 1978), pp. 287 ff., and Pirie 'The Agony in the Garden', p. 332.
 - 37 Quoted in Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*, p. 284.
 - 38 Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley, 1989), p. 223.
 - 39 Moniuszko, *Halka: Score* (Kraków, 1951), p. 351.
 - 40 See Hans von Bülow, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 20 (12 November 1858), and 21 (19 November 1858), quoted in Maciejewski, *Moniuszko*, p. 78.
 - 41 Moniuszko, *Halka: Score*, p. 448.
 - 42 *Ibid.*, p. 449.
 - 43 *Ibid.*, p. 455.
 - 44 *Ibid.*, p. 458.
 - 45 Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*, p. 240.
 - 46 *Ibid.*, p. 242. The conflict between traditional Catholicism and Messianism is illustrated by the fact that Mickiewicz's Paris lectures were banned by the Catholic Church.
 - 47 Jim Samson, 'Halka', in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London, 1992), Vol. 2, p. 603.
 - 48 See Gerald Abraham, *Essays on Russian and East European Music* (Oxford, 1985), p. 159. Abraham refers to Leon Schiller's discussion of the various finales in his introduction to the 1953 Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne edition.
 - 49 See note 40 above.
 - 50 Bülow, quoted in Maciejewski, *Moniuszko*, p. 67.
 - 51 *Ibid.*
 - 52 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
 - 53 'He is a slavic poet; he portrays with a true and profound feeling the melancholy, the exaltation, the wild passion, the pious resignation of the Lithuanian race. His opera, *Halka*, embodies wonderful beauties.' *Ibid.*, p. 78.
 - 54 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
 - 55 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
 - 56 *Ibid.*
 - 57 E. Dziębowska, 'On the Polish National School', in Z. Chechlińska and J. Stęszewski (eds.), *Polish Musicological Studies* (Kraków, 1985), Vol. 2, p. 140.
 - 58 See Zofia Chechlińska, 'Chopin Reception in Nineteenth-Century Poland', in Jim Samson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge 1992), p. 218.

- 59 In a letter to his family dated 19 April 1847, published in Opieński and Voynich (eds.), *Chopin's Letters*, p. 325.
- 60 In a letter to his family dated 20 July 1845, published in Henryk Opieński and Ethel L. Voynich (eds.), *Frédéric Chopin: Chopin's Letters* (New York, 1988), p. 285. The mazurkas in question were Op.59 A minor, A flat major, F sharp minor, composed and published in 1845.
- 61 For a discussion of the relationship between Messianism and nationalism in Chopin's music in the 1830s, see Jeffrey Kallberg, 'The Rhetoric of Genre: Chopin's Nocturne in G Minor', *19th-Century Music*, XI, 3, 1988, pp. 238–61.
- 62 See Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*, pp. 247 ff. and *passim* for a discussion of Mickiewicz's mature philosophy of Messianism.
- 63 In a letter to Sikorski dated 23 December 1850, quoted in Rudziński (ed.), *Stanisław Moniuszko: Listy Zebrane*, pp. 160ff.
- 64 See note 22 above.
- 65 Kraszewski, 'Listy do redaktora' [Letters to the Editor], *Gazeta Warszawska*, 1857, No. 80, published in Stefan Świerzewski, *J. I. Kraszewski i polskie życie muzyczne XIX wieku* (J. I. Kraszewski and Polish musical life in the nineteenth century) (Kraków, 1963), pp. 169 ff.
- 66 Moniuszko, 'Parę uwag z powodu listów J. I. Kraszewskiego do *Gazety Warszawskiej*' (A few remarks on J. I. Kraszewski's letters to the *Warsaw Gazette*), *Ruch Muzyczny*, 1857, No. 11, p. 84, quoted in Dziębowska, 'On the Polish National School', p. 144.
- 67 Letter to Aleksander Walicki dated 11 June 1852, quoted in Rudziński (ed.), *Stanisław Moniuszko: Listy Zebrane*, p. 182. Kątski often gave his mazurkas programmatic titles (e.g. Sobieski, Batory).
- 68 Letter to Józef Sikorski dated 3 June 1855, quoted in Rudziński (ed.), *Stanisław Moniuszko. Listy Zebrane*, pp. 203 ff.
- 69 M. A. Szulc, article about Chopin in *Orgdownik naukowy*, 26 (17 June 1841), quoted in Chechlińska, 'Chopin Reception in Nineteenth-Century Poland', p. 217.
- 70 Arthur Nikisch, Richard Strauss and Siegfried Wagner conducted in the Warsaw Philharmonic Hall in the early 1900s.
- 71 *Młoda Polska w muzyce* refers to the music publishing company set up by Karol Szymanowski, Grezgorz Fitelberg, Ludomir Różycki, Apolinary Szeluto and Prince Władysław Lubomirski in Berlin in 1905. Mieczysław Karłowicz was not a formal member of this short-lived group but he was a key figure in the Young Poland era. See my 'An Aesthetical and Analytical Evaluation of the Music of Mieczysław Karłowicz (1876–1909)' (PhD diss., University College, Cork, 1994).
- 72 Poliński, concert review in *Kurier Warszawski*, 110 (22 April 1907), quoted in Teresa Chylińska, *Karol Szymanowski*, trans. A. T. Jordan (New York, 1973), p. 33.
- 73 Quoted in Kornel Michałowski, 'Adolf Chybiński a Młoda Polska w muzyce', in *Muzyka Polska a modernizm* (Kraków, 1981), p. 109.
- 74 See my 'Karłowicz's *Lithuanian Rhapsody*: An Expression of Polish Romantic Nationalism or a Skeleton in the Closet?', *Irish Musical Studies*, 5 (Dublin, 1996), pp. 205–13.
- 75 Alexander Poliński, concert review in *Kurier Warszawski*, 58 (27 February 1909), quoted in Murphy, 'Karłowicz's *Lithuanian Rhapsody*', p. 211.
- 76 Dahlhaus, 'Nationalism and Music', in *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, trans. Mary Whitall (Berkeley, 1980), p. 99.