

BETWEEN UTILITARIAN AND AUTONOMOUS: POLISH OPERA IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Izveček: *Varšavska premiera Moniuszkove opere Halka (1858) je odprla pot do bolj ambicioznih opernih del na Poljskem. Opere, ki so bile napisane proti koncu stoletja, med njimi Livia Quintilla Zygmunta Noskowskega in Philaenis Romana Statkowskega, so bile premišljen izraz umetniške avtonomije. Pripravile so osnovo za operno ustvarjalnost generacije Karola Szymanowskega.*

Ključne besede: *zgodovina opera, Poljska, 19. stoletje, Stanisław Moniuszko, Zygmunt Noskowski, Roman Statkowski, Karol Szymanowski*

Abstract: *The Warsaw premiere of Moniuszko's Halka (1858) opened the way to more ambitious operatic works in Poland. Operas written towards the end of the century, among them Livia Quintilla by Zygmunt Noskowski and Philaenis Romana Statkowski, were deliberate statements of artistic autonomy. They prepared the ground for the operatic compositions of the generation of Karol Szymanowski.*

Keywords: *history of opera, Poland, 19th century, Stanisław Moniuszko, Zygmunt Noskowski, Roman Statkowski, Karol Szymanowski*

Textbooks on music history tend to represent the composer Stanisław Moniuszko (1819–1872) as the creator of Polish national opera. In reality, his personal attitude to the role of the bard, composing “to uplift people’s hearts”, was somewhat ambivalent. In spite of his sincere patriotic commitment, he was aware that the public for which he wrote did not have a refined taste or sophisticated aesthetic needs. A caustic remark from one of his letters conveys some of his feelings: “[...] Meyerbeer works for the Parisian theatre, I for local consumption – and that, as anyone would admit, is not a place where you can spread your wings.”¹ Leaving aside the question of the scope of Moniuszko’s talent, this statement makes us aware of the distance between his artistic aspirations and the actual possibilities presented by the local “opera market”. A Polish composer working in that “marketplace” had to take into account not just the difficulties of an institutional nature, resulting from hostile cultural policies of the states that had partitioned Poland and which controlled theatres. A pressure of a different kind was created by the public and the ethnocentric attitude of a section of the press critics. These opted, on the one hand, for the

¹ Letter to Józef Sikorski, Vilnius, 23 December 1850 (Stanisław Moniuszko, *Listy zebrane*, ed. Witold Rudziński and Magdalena Stokowska, Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1969, p. 161.

“native” kind of opera, firmly rooted in the local cultural code, and on the other, for productions adapted to the level of the average member of the audience, where didacticism and tendentiousness were the expected ingredients. Moniuszko’s dilemma provides an example of the particular kind of tension apparent in the work of nineteenth-century opera composers active in the peripheries of European musical centres. This conflict arose against the background of, on the one hand, pressure for art to be utilitarian, exerted by growing local nationalisms, and calls for egalitarianism and social progress, and, on the other hand, the composers’ need for personal artistic autonomy.

Paraphrasing a remark by Carl Dahlhaus about instrumental music, one might say that, in the case of operatic composition, similarly, pure functionality would be an extreme case. There were many intermediate gradations between composing operas as tools subordinated to extra-aesthetic aims serving political, social or moral interests, and composing operas serving the principle of strict autonomy.² In any case, such a paraphrase might be straining the idea too far – it would be difficult to demonstrate that full autonomy in nineteenth-century opera composition was achievable at all. At that time, the very process of creating an opera was calculated towards the moment of public presentation, and thus any composer (unless he was Richard Wagner) had to leave, in his work, a margin for compromise with the public. For this reason, when talking about particular operas, it is safer to consider the degree of intensity of functional and autonomous features – and this would be the result of a whole network of different factors. Among them, one should mention the educational level, intellectual horizons and innate talent of the composer and of the librettist who collaborated with him. The time and place of composition were also not insignificant, being linked to questions of local operatic traditions, conventions, genres and forms popular in a given region at a given time, as well as to political reality, and how it translated into the cultural policy prevalent at that moment. In this context, the purpose of the work was of significance, since its quality was affected by such factors as the rank and prestige of the location of the premiere, the degree of professionalism of the performers and the sophistication and theatrical experience of the audience.

Throughout the course of history, utilitarian and autonomous features were undoubtedly not distributed uniformly in the creative output of Central European opera composers (active in such countries as Poland, the Czech lands, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia). At the source of the local, “peripheral” operatic tradition that began in Poland towards the end of the eighteenth century we find all kinds of comic operas, works of little distinction that in many cases were simply stage plays (most often comedies) with musical interludes aimed at the general public. Their utilitarian character is confirmed by the didacticism of their content, introduced in the spirit of the Enlightenment, and by hidden elements of political and social propaganda.³ However, the historical importance of musical comedy, vaudeville and comic opera undoubtedly decreased in the nineteenth century. Although

² Carl Dahlhaus, *Idea muzyki absolutnej i inne studia*, transl. by Antoni Buchner, Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1988, p. 445.

³ Alina Żórawska-Witkowska, *Historia w operze czyli postacie władców w operach “Jadwiga królowa Polska Karola Kurpińskiego oraz “Król Łokietek” Józefa Elsnera*, *Muzyka* 50 (2005), 3, pp. 57–88.

in Poland this genre, represented by works of less than the highest quality, continued to dominate the musical repertory in statistical terms,⁴ significant progress towards the qualitative development of native opera began to be generally associated with works carrying more serious aspirations. During the period of mature Romanticism, cultivated members of the local opera audience keenly awaited the first Polish “opera seria” with recitatives that would demonstrate a high, European standard of dramatic music. Postulates urging opera composers to search for deeper artistic merits (and thus conscious concern over autonomous values) were being voiced as early as the first half of the century in connection with the activities of Józef Elsner (1769–1854) and Karol Kurpiński (1785–1857). While in their own operatic output these two men did not shun compositions produced for particular occasions,⁵ through their work as pedagogues and publicists they contributed much towards raising the aesthetic awareness of the local community of composers and towards a gradual shift of emphasis in compositional work from *métier* towards *art*.⁶ However, at the beginning of the 1830s, after the failure of the November uprising, when many Polish institutions were closed down, establishments catering for artistic education, such as the conservatory founded by Elsner, suffered the same fate.

The political situation in nineteenth-century Poland that resulted from the loss of statehood towards the end of the eighteenth century meant that artistic freedom of expression was subject to additional limitations. The “political correctness” of artists was constantly being monitored by the official censorship – most stringently under Russian and Prussian rule, less so in the area under Austrian domination. On the other hand, the Polish intelligentsia of that time was always ready to harness art to social and political causes in a struggle to uphold the threatened national identity and to advance demands for social reform.⁷ Despite this, the process of raising the artistic level of native opera, initially slow, began to gather strength towards the end of the 1850s. The turning point, as is well known, was the premiere in Warsaw of Moniuszko’s *Halka* (1858). After this, Polish opera theatres begin with increasing frequency to stage more ambitious native productions in the shape of “grand operas” with “serious” content, representing a higher level of dramatic music. In fact, nineteenth-century opera composers themselves assigned artistic value to particular works strictly in accordance with the established hierarchy of operatic genres. It is no accident that, in another passage from Moniuszko’s letter of 1850 quoted earlier, the composer ranks his operetta *Loteria* (The Lottery, 1841)⁸ among the “lower”

⁴ E.g., the works by the prolific, third-rate composer Józef Damse (1789–1852).

⁵ Cf. Zdzisław Jachimecki, *Muzyka polska w rozwoju historycznym od czasów najdawniejszych do doby obecnej*, Vol. 1, Part 2, Kraków, Księgarnia Stefana Kamińskiego, 1951, pp. 139–143. See also: Alina Żorawska-Witkowska, op. cit.

⁶ Andrzej Chodkowski, *Tradycja i postęp w twórczości warszawskiego środowiska kompozytorskiego*, *Kultura muzyczna Warszawy drugiej połowy XIX wieku*, ed. Andrzej Spóz, Warszawa, Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1980, pp. 183–192.

⁷ Józef Sikorski, *Muzykalność i obywatelstwo*, *Antologia polskiej krytyki muzycznej XIX i XX wieku (do roku 1939)*, ed. Stefan Jarociński, Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1955, pp. 105–109.

⁸ A date accompanying each title (or a translation of a title) of an operatic work indicates the year of its premiere.

kind of compositions, while he regards the “tragic” *Halka* as the true visiting card of his talent. He subsequently completed only one further – as he described it – “opera seria”, *Paria* (The Pariah, 1869), while his other plans in this area never materialized.⁹ Whatever the objective value of these two scores, from Moniuszko’s subjective point of view, *Halka* and *Paria* were the only works among his quite prolific output fully to satisfy his artistic ambitions.¹⁰ Nevertheless, his operatic heritage is dominated by works more easily digestible by the native audience – popular operettas and comic operas, which reached their peak in the four-act opera *Straszny dwór* (The Haunted Manor, 1865). It is easier to understand this situation if one takes into account the fact that, intellectually, Moniuszko belonged to the first half of the century. He absorbed and continued a particular tradition of musical theatre, which, from a European point of view, might appear anachronistic (for Moniuszko, the inimitable model was Daniel Auber, a composer whose attitude to artistic autonomy undoubtedly lay at the opposite pole to that espoused by Hector Berlioz and Richard Wagner). It was also quite late in life – as a man of forty – that he obtained unhindered access to the professional opera theatre. While working in the provinces during his early life, he adapted to the conditions that existed there, responding to the demand for lightweight operas and meeting the expectations of the wide circle of less sophisticated opera-goers. He never really succeeded in shaking off this “provincialism”. His output – as Zofia Lissa put it some years ago – corresponded fully to the “backwater categories of musical imagination of Polish society”.¹¹ Thus, in Moniuszko’s case, utilitarianism seems still to be the crucial category: he regarded his everyday work as a craft, and he became an artist only from time to time. Notwithstanding his undoubted services to the musical culture of his country, this composer, from a European point of view, will always remain not so much an innovator as a continuator of the course set for Polish opera at the end of the eighteenth century by the composers of its early period – Maciej Kamieński (1734–1821)¹² and Jan Stefani (1746–1829).¹³

Changes in attitudes, which translated into a qualitative and quantitative re-evaluation of the creative output of Polish opera composers, did not take place until the second half of the nineteenth century, following the rhythm of cultural changes taking place in Poland between 1863 and 1905. Undoubtedly, the more thorough and general education received by composers made them regard the achievement of an artistic ideal as a priority. Increasingly frequently, they went abroad to study in the conservatories of Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna or St Petersburg, and from 1861 they could also attend their own native conserva-

⁹ Włodzimierz Poźniak, Nie zrealizowane projekty operowe Moniuszki, *Kwartalnik Muzyczny* 21–22 (1948), pp. 243–251.

¹⁰ Letters to Oskar Tarwid, Warsaw, 14, 25 October and 12 December 1869 (S. Moniuszko, op. cit., pp. 543, 545, 547).

¹¹ Zofia Lissa, Problem stylu narodowego w muzyce polskiej XIX wieku, *Z dziejów muzyki polskiej*, Vol. 9, ed. Jerzy Wiśniowski and Konrad Pałubicki, Bydgoszcz, Bydgoskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1965, pp. 5–43.

¹² Polish composer of Slovak origin, author of the comic opera *Nędza uszczęśliwiona* (*Misery Made Happy*, 1778).

¹³ Polish composer of Czech origin, author of the comic opera *Cud mniemany czyli Krakowiacy i Górale* (*The Supposed Miracle or The Krakowians and the Highlanders*, 1794).

tory in Warsaw. The greater degree of professionalism, and the wider intellectual horizons that followed this development, made Polish opera composers over time sensitive to the influences of philosophical currents and artistic ideologies that propagated the ideas of elitism and the autonomy of art, which became particularly widespread towards the end of the century. After 1863 (the year that brought another uprising against the Tsarist regime), which is accepted in Poland as the boundary date between the fading influence of the Romantic ideology and the beginning of the ideological expansion of Positivist currents, there was a change in the awareness and attitudes of composers. This applied not only to the younger, but also to the older generation, and it affected both the choice of artistic strategies and the quality of the creative results achieved. A forerunner of these changes could already be seen to some extent in the premieres of operas by composers who were directly associated with, or who developed within, the Romantic Movement; these broke away from a reliance on “native” subjects and the idea of “national opera”. *Monbar czyli Flibustierowie* (Monbar or the Freebooters, 1863) – an opera by a former school friend of Chopin, Ignacy Feliks Dobrzyński (1807–1867), staged more than twenty years after it was written, on a libretto structured along the lines of “rescue opera” – developed a colourful episode taken from the history of piracy in the Antilles, and in its musical setting imitated Parisian *grand opéra*. *Otton Łucznik* (Othon, the archer, 1864) and *Stradiota* (1876) by Adam Münchheimer (1830–1904), scores in a Meyerbeer-like style, took their plots from Alexandre Dumas and the annals of the Republic of Venice, respectively. *Paria*, Moniuszko’s swan song (to which reference has already been made), which was intended for the St Petersburg stage (although never performed there), was an operatic adaptation of an “Indian” tragedy by Casimir Delavigne containing clear allusions to Spontini’s *La Vestale* and Meyerbeer’s *Le Prophète*. These works provide evidence of the timid efforts by composers to free themselves from the rule of social expectations and theatrical commercialism (it should be noted that the opera theatres themselves changed their repertory policy, opening their doors to more ambitious native productions). However, avoiding the “national art” imperative did not altogether imply a conscious decision to leave the state of what might be called “artistic autarchy”, of confining oneself to “native” subjects, in order to turn firmly towards universalism. To a certain extent, the movement was a response to a tightening of theatrical censorship by the Tsarist authorities that occurred in the 1860s as part of a raft of repressive measures following the January uprising.

In order to present a full picture of Polish operatic composition in the second half of the nineteenth century, one ought first to point to works in the comic genre, which were still being produced. Moniuszko’s last work, *Beata* (1872), and the operas of Ludwik Grossman (1835–1915), *Il Pescatore di Palermo* (The Fisherman from Palermo, 1867) and *Duch wojewody* (The Ghost of the Governor, 1873), might be regarded as anachronistic recollections of French *opéra-comique* and Italian *opera buffa* models. In the background we find operetta compositions, exemplified by the works of Stanisław Duniecki (1839–1870) and Adolf Sonnenfeld (1837–1914). Second, one should take note of a considerable number of productions with more serious aspirations, which attempted to preserve or reform the ageing model of “national opera”. Works by Henryk Jarecki (1846–1918), together with the “lyrical tragedy” *Mazepa* (1900) by Adam Münchheimer, belong to the conservative stable. Moreover, the opera *Gwarkowie* (The Miners, 1880)

by Michał Hertz (1844–1918), based on Theodor Koerner's *Die Bergknappen*, seems to have been a total failure. This attempt to force a German romantic opera into a Polish context did not work, despite the tacking on to the score of a native mazurka and the assignment of Polish-sounding names to the characters. However, the *Goplana* (1896) of Władysław Żeleński (1837–1921), a work inspired by the poetics of French *opéra-lyrique*, and his veristic *Janek* (1900), and the certainly veristically inspired *Manru* (1901) of Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941), where the composer also imported large doses of Wagnerianism, can serve as examples of the progressive tendency. Third, attention should be drawn to certain “non-national” but “serious” operas that appeared during the *fin de siècle* period. Here, the break away from “native” themes in the choice of libretto was the result both of these composers' optimistic assumptions about gaining access to the opera houses of Europe (such assumptions were backed by those among the press critics who could no longer defend the conservative, ethnocentric positions prevalent in the middle of the century), and of their desire to free themselves from the control of society, to attain artistic autonomy and to give their creations a universal dimension. Works belonging to this trend are represented by the last, veristic-like opera by Münchheimer, *Il Vendicatore*, written in 1897 on an Italian libretto (and never staged during the composer's lifetime), and by *Urwasi* (1902), a modernistic “opera phantasy” by Erazm Dłuski (1857–1923) based on motifs from an Indian fairy tale. However, from the point of view of our discussion, two works given an antique setting seem much more interesting. These are the eclectic *Livia Quintilla* by Zygmunt Noskowski (1846–1909) and *Philaenis* by Roman Statkowski (1859–1925), with its timid venture into symbolism.

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Although six years separate the staging of Noskowski's *Livia Quintilla* (1898) from the premiere of Statkowski's *Philaenis* (1904), attention should be drawn to the fact that both scores were finished in the same year (1897). This was no coincidence – specific conditions in Poland just then influenced the growth of interest in themes from Antiquity. These went beyond the narrowly understood type of musical culture or direct influence on it by external factors. Antiquity, as an inspiration for works of art, became associated in the minds of the Polish intelligentsia with the international success of a number of Polish artists. The fame achieved by the paintings of Henryk Siemiradzki (1843–1902), particularly after his *Pochodnie Nerona* (Nero's Torches, 1876), as well as the novels of Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916), whose *Quo vadis* (1895–1896) was translated into many languages, mobilized composers into action. All the more so, since progressive modernist criticism constantly renewed its appeal that “a musician stand at last next to the painter and the writer.”¹⁴ The potential of themes from Antiquity appeared promising also within the context of the search for such a model of operatic work as would enable Polish composers to preserve creative autonomy. Freeing oneself from the functionalism ascribed to the “national” convention and giving up the hermetic cultural code that was a part of it meant that an attempt had to be made to render the content of the works more universal.

¹⁴ Br. [Alojzy Bruckman], *Opera*, *Gazeta Narodowa* 50 (19 February 1898), p. 3.

Livia Quintilla (libretto by Ludomił German), after its first performance in Lviv (15 February 1898), and the premieres in Kraków (11 May 1898), was eventually staged in Warsaw (19 April 1902). However, Noskowski's ambition was to enter the European "opera market", and he was planning to open negotiations for performances of *Livia Quintilla* in Prague, Berlin, Budapest and Vienna as early as 1898.¹⁵ In the context of the history of Polish opera, *Livia Quintilla* is of significance. It is probably the first Polish opera to make consistent and wide use of a network of recurring motifs. For this reason, despite the formal conservatism and the "classical profile" characteristic of Noskowski's creative stance in general, it is important to appreciate his forgotten experiments in the operatic genre.¹⁶

Roman Statkowski used in *Philaenis* a German libretto by Hermann Erler (1844–1918). The choice of a German text was not accidental – at the time, the composer believed that his work would be staged in Dresden.¹⁷ However, it is a fact that these plans came to nothing. Despite this, the composer did not give up his attempt to have the work staged. In letters from 1899 he was even considering the possibility of mounting its first performance in Russia, and in 1900 he presented the score to the management of the Warsaw Theatres. Two years later, a prominent Polish conductor, Emil Młynarski (1870–1935), became interested in this work. It was probably on his advice that in 1903 Statkowski had the libretto translated into English and sent the score of *Philaenis* to London to be entered in a competition for composers.¹⁸ The favourable attitude of Młynarski caused the opera to be eventually staged on 14 September 1904 at the Teatr Wielki in Warsaw, with its libretto translated into Polish by the composer, and under the more Polish-sounding title of *Filenis*. Statkowski introduced into the score (although on a limited scale) repeated thematic material with clear symbolic connotations and described the "London" version of his work as a "Musikdrama" on the title page. Thus in the context of the history of Polish opera *Philaenis* should be regarded as a work directed towards the future and providing a foretaste of the musical theatre of the first decades of the twentieth century.

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¹⁵ Four years later, in 1902, he was negotiating this matter with Franz Naval (1865–1939), a tenor associated with the Viennese Hofoper. At that time, as he mentions in one of his letters, he sent the vocal score of the opera, with a German translation of the text, to Gustav Mahler (See: Noskowski's autograph letter to the librettist Ludomił German, Warsaw, 20 May 1902, PL-WRoI-6413 II, p. 90).

¹⁶ They culminated in his opera *Wyrok* (The Death Sentence, 1906) – a work intuitively tending towards the aesthetics of realism and the idea of "Literaturopfer".

¹⁷ This is attested to both by fragments of correspondence and news items in the press in 1898.

¹⁸ The competition was organized by Charles Manners (1857–1935), the manager of Moody-Manners Opera Company (this troupe performed at Covent Garden during two consecutive seasons). Although *Philaenis* won the first prize, the composer's representative in London, Count Aleksander Dienheim Szczawiński-Brochocki (1841–1907), turned out to be extremely irresponsible, to the extent that he irretrievably destroyed any chance of the opera's being staged at Covent Garden (which, after all, was guaranteed by the very rules of the competition). The reason was a quite unnecessary conflict, into which he entered on his own initiative, with the competition's organizer (the matter may have involved having the Count's wife, the acclaimed singer Adelajda Bolska (1864–1930), included in the cast). In this way, he wilfully squandered Statkowski's success.

Although neither *Livia Quintilla* nor *Philaenis* succeeded in overcoming intercultural barriers and achieving the dream of triumphal progress through the leading opera theatres of Europe, the staging of both works in Poland had a significance whose importance has been underestimated so far, because it prepared the ground for the operatic compositions of Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937) and his generation. The premieres of *Livia Quintilla* and *Philaenis* generated a great deal of interest among the critics, even if their influential conservative wing accused both composers of “cosmopolitanism.” Noskowski’s journalism and Statkowski’s extant correspondence provide evidence of quite fundamental changes in the aesthetic awareness of Polish opera composers following the days of Moniuszko.

Responding to the accusations put to him, Noskowski openly defended in the press his independence and the autonomous value of a composition, arguing: “[...] I think a work of art should be of value regardless of its national character, and therefore, if it is such, then any extraneous remarks no longer apply.”¹⁹ He went on to show that his whole output up to that point had paid sufficient tribute to the idea of “native themes”, and that he could therefore expect to be regarded as an artist who has a right to make his own artistic choices. He claimed that the challenge posed to the composer by an operatic work that touches on universal themes is much sterner and loftier than in the case of one dealing with “local” subjects. Only the first path, according to him, leads to the attainment of a high aesthetic value that makes it possible to reach the European public: “[...] really, what was at stake was to make it possible for [*Livia Quintilla*] to gain entry to foreign theatres, and to convince those harbouring prejudice that we are capable of creating a dramatic theme higher and nobler than all of that which is being served to us from various sides and in various ways.”²⁰

Characteristically, following the premiere of Statkowski’s opera, nearly all the critical reviews in Warsaw (regardless of whether their final judgment of *Philaenis* was favourable, hostile or totally indifferent) also concentrated their discussion – more or less consciously – around the issue of the composer’s turning away from the model of “national opera.” A few months earlier, Statkowski seemed to sense instinctively the inevitability of the work’s being received in exactly that critical mode. The striving for universal content in this work was, in one way, a consequence of pressing the demand for total freedom and autonomy of artistic expression, typical of modernist ideology. In Poland, precisely because of the work’s “non-national” theme, conflict with the much older and still extremely influential norms dictated by the imperative of “tribal” identity was unavoidable, causing an inevitable polarization of opera criticism. This opera, which in the minds of conservative critics was associated with the “suspect” Young Poland movement,²¹ seemed to them to betray the symptoms of stylistic eclecticism and the overblown ambition of the composer, whose greatest desire was believed to be a successful career abroad. Statkowski’s private correspondence tells us that he was not at all eager to elimi-

¹⁹ Zygmunt Noskowski, O Lwowie, *Kurier Lwowski* 51 (20 February 1898), pp. 1–3.

²⁰ Zygmunt Noskowski, op. cit. 1898.

²¹ See the review entitled *Jeszcze o “Filenis”* published under the pseudonym “Krzyszto No 54” (“Chair no 54”) in *Kurier Teatralny* 21 (25 September 1904), pp. 1–2.

nate totally national elements from his work. What he was against was their instrumental use; he protested at the same time against the social pressure exerted on the artist, which forced him into a ghetto of “nativism”, a utopia of creative autarchy, that led only to xenophobic isolation from the world and the marginalization of aesthetic goals: “[...] I have never subscribed to the principle of ‘art for art’s sake’ in any other meaning than that it is not right to negotiate with one’s artistic conscience in order to win acclaim. [...] The ground from which powerful work grows is nourished by, apart from creative imagination, strong sensitivity. Without that foundation – art has no value at all. [...] For this reason, the greatest creative spirits also encapsulated the essence of their nationality – and those particular features of a race, which cannot be painted out, not only do not damage the universal significance of a work, but also enrich mankind’s treasury of spiritual heritage [...]. However, this does not mean at all that the plots of the works must be native. You don’t have to wear a Polish four-cornered cap [*rogatywka*] in order to write a tragedy of jealousy, love, sacrifice etc.”²²

Statkowski’s protest against cheap “musical patriotism”, the use of an outdated language of Old Polish props and symbols from the Age of Enlightenment and the Romantic period, and against a functional art in thrall to immediate social and political tasks, was accompanied by a conscious shift of emphasis towards the aesthetic dimension of a work’s value. What may cause surprise from today’s perspective is the total convergence of his views with those found in the writings of Karol Szymanowski.²³ Ideological declarations by the composer of *Król Roger* (King Roger, 1926), formulated about two decades later, seem to be a faithful echo of Statkowski’s remarks.²⁴ However, the connection made by Szymanowski between artistic autonomy and the new ideas faced by Polish composers after Poland regained its independence, apart from the rhetorical force of such an argument, in reality could have little relevance to the existing state of affairs. From a historical viewpoint, the problem of striving for artistic independence and autonomous aesthetic values appeared in Polish music at a much earlier stage, not just after 1918. The struggle against utilitarianism, particularly in the version resulting from a too narrow understanding of the category of “Polishness”, gave sleepless nights to many of the composer’s predecessors. As far as Polish operatic compositions were concerned – both those which for Szymanowski were “today’s” and “yesterday’s” operas – their characteristics seem to result from that particular tension between the social expectations of subordinating art to external goals beyond aesthetics (political, social, etc.), and a more or less articulated need for artistic autonomy.

Translated by Zofia Weaver

²² Stefan Jarociński, Z korespondencji Romana Statkowskiego (materiały biograficzne), *Studia Muzykologiczne* 1 (1953), pp. 339–340.

²³ Zofia Helman, Dylemat muzyki polskiej XX wieku – styl narodowy czy wartości uniwersalne, *Dziedzictwo europejskie a polska kultura muzyczna w dobie przemian*, ed. Anna Czekanowska, Kraków, Musica Jagellonica, 1995, pp. 175–200.

²⁴ Karol Szymanowski, *Pisma*, Vol. 1 (*Pisma muzyczne*), ed. Kornel Michałowski (introduction by Stefan Kisielewski), Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1984, p. 84.

MED UPORABNIM IN AVTONOMNIM: POLJSKA OPERA V DRUGI POLOVICI 19. STOLETJA

Povzetek

Nasprotje med utilitarizmom in estetsko avtonomijo je eno izmed ključnih vprašanj v razpravi o poljski operni dediščini 19. stoletja. Neestetski cilji, vsiljeni umetnikom zaradi tedanjih političnih in družbenih interesov, puščajo neizbrisen pečat na opernih kompozicijah tega časa. Opera kot družbena umetnost, pri kateri je začetek ustvarjalnega procesa preračunan glede na predstavitev določenemu občinstvu, je bila izpostavljena tovrstnim zunanjim pritiskom veliko bolj kot instrumentalna glasba. Vpliv teh dejavnikov so okrepili naraščajoči lokalni nacionalizem in širitev zahtev za enakopravnost ter družbeni razvoj v 19. stoletju.

Vendar pa utilitaristične in avtonomne poteze, ki so oblikovale splošne značilnosti oper v deželah Srednje Evrope, v zgodovini niso bile enakomerno razporejene. V lokalni »periferni« operni tradiciji, ki se je na Poljskem začela proti koncu 18. stoletja, najdemo nepretenciozna dela – različne vrste iger s petjem, največkrat preproste gledališke igre z glasbenimi vložki, ki so bile namenjene širokemu občinstvu. Njihov utilitarni značaj je bil utemeljen z didaktičnostjo njihove vsebine v duhu razsvetljenstva ter zakritimi elementi politične in družbene propagande.

Nedvomno je, da je pomen glasbenih komedij, vaudevillov in komičnih oper upadel v 19. stoletju. Čeprav je na Poljskem ta žanr, ki so ga predstavljala ne preveč kvalitetna dela, še vedno statistično prevladoval na glasbenem repertoarju, pa je pomemben napredek izvirne opere povezan z bolj resnimi prizadevanji. Preboj se je zgodil s premiero Moniuszkove *Halke* leta 1858. Od tedaj so operna gledališča v Varšavi in Lvovu bolj pogosto uprizarjala umetniško zahtevnejše opere.

V drugi polovici 19. stoletja so kulturne spremembe na Poljskem med letoma 1863 in 1905 spodbudile spremembe v zavesti in umetniškem ravnanju skladateljev. Zaradi višje stopnje profesionalizma in širšega intelektualnega horizonta so domači skladatelji postali bolj dojemljivi za filozofske tokove in umetniške ideologije, ki so propagirale ideje elitizma in avtonomije umetnosti, razširjene zlasti proti koncu stoletja. Tovrstne spremembe, ki so se zgodile po času Moniuszka, ponazorijo navedbe skladateljev dveh oper, ki so bile napisane v času *fin de siècle*: *Livia Quintilla* Zygmunta Noskowskega (1846–1909) in *Philaenis* Romana Statkowskega (1859–1925).

Uprizoritev teh del ima na Poljskem pomembno in do sedaj premalo cenjeno vlogo. *Livia Quintilla* (uprizorjena leta 1898) and *Philaenis* (uprizorjena leta 1904) sta bili zaradi umetniške avtonomije, ki je prekinila z »nacionalno« operno tradicijo, zasmehovani s strani vplivnega nacionalističnega tiska. Zavestna prizadevanja proti utilitarizmu, ki je bil neločljivo povezan z določili »nacionalne opere«, in pogumno zavzemanje za univerzalne teme, jasne v delih Noskowskega and Statkowskega, so pripravili pot za operna dela generacije Karola Szymanowskega (1882–1937).