

1

‘A Contrapuntal-Harmonic-Orchestral Monster’? Karol Szymanowski’s First Symphony in the Context of Polish and German Symphonic Tradition

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[...] it will be a sort of contrapuntal-harmonic-orchestral monster, and I am already looking forward to seeing the Berlin critics leaving the concert hall with a curse on their livid lips when this symphony will be played at our concert.¹

This statement by Karol Szymanowski, made in July 1906 in a letter to Hanna Klechniowska, has often been taken to prove the opinion that his Symphony No. 1 op. 15 (composed in 1906/07)² is an ‘insincere’ work written mainly to demonstrate the technical mastery of the young composer and not to express his personal feelings and values.³ In fact, Szymanowski’s op. 15 was fateful: After its one and only performance by Grzegorz Fitelberg and the Filharmonia Warszawska on 26th March 1909,⁴ it disappeared completely from the concert programmes. In contrast to Szymanowski’s Concert Overture op. 12 (1904–05) and to his Symphony No. 2 op. 19 (1909–10), the score of his First Symphony was never revised by the composer⁵ and remains unpublished up to now.⁶

On the other hand, commentaries by artists on their own works should not be taken too literally. In his statements on some other, more successful compositions, young Szymanowski also mentioned mainly technical aspects: for example, he called the final fugue of his Second Symphony a ‘terrible machine’ with a ‘devilishly complicated’ thematic structure.⁷ He also provided the musicologists Henryk Opieński and Zdzisław Jachimecki with detailed descriptions of the formal structure of his Second Symphony and of his Second

Piano Sonata op. 21.⁸ Alistair Wightman has even suggested that it was just the great similarity between Szymanowski's two early symphonies that caused the composer not to rework his No. 1, but to replace it by No. 2.⁹

In any case, Szymanowski's op. 15 is one of his rare huge orchestral works and already for this deserves more attention than it has received up to now.¹⁰ In this paper, I will analyze the work from the perspective of Polish and German symphonic traditions. It is well known that Szymanowski was very familiar with German music and literature right from his early childhood thanks to his German uncle and first music teacher, Gustav Neuhaus.¹¹ In Warsaw, he consolidated his knowledge of German instrumental music, and especially of its three main forms — sonata, variation and fugue — during his studies in composition with Zygmunt Noskowski who had been a disciple of Friedrich Kiel's in Berlin.¹² Szymanowski's relationship with the Polish symphonic tradition, however, has not been taken much into account yet. His symphonies were often looked at as if there had been no other contribution to this genre by Polish composers before. By setting Szymanowski's op. 15 into the frame of Polish music, it will become easier to distinguish traditional features from those traits which depart from convention and try new ways of form and expression.¹³

Right at the beginning of the analysis, this perspective draws our attention to the fact that Szymanowski's First Symphony — just as all his following symphonies — has no slow introduction. This form type was very current in Polish symphonies up to 1918 — especially in works in the minor mode — such as Feliks Ignacy Dobrzyński's Symphony No. 2 in C minor op. 15 (1831), Zygmunt Noskowski's Symphony No. 2 *Elegijna* in C minor (1875–79), Zygmunt Stojowski's Symphony in D minor op. 21 (1896–1901), Mieczysław Karłowicz's Symphony *Odrodzenie* in E minor op. 7 (1900–02), Grzegorz Fitelberg's Symphony No. 1 in E minor op. 16 (1904), Ignacy Jan Paderewski's Symphony in B minor (1903–09) and Piotr Rytel's Symphony No. 1 in B minor op. 4 (1909).¹⁴ In all these works, the slow introduction has the function to set an elegiac mode, to anticipate the motivic germs of the whole work and, by this, to emphasize its solemnity and dignity.

In the first movement of his First Symphony, Szymanowski chooses the 'Classical' sonata form, but (just as Witold Maliszewski¹⁵) renounces the convention of the slow introduction and begins immediately in fast tempo (*Allegro pathétique*¹⁶) with the main theme. This theme has been called 'Straussian' because of its rather complex structure consisting of several motives with different rhythmical values.¹⁷ Admittedly, the theme of the protagonist in Richard Strauss' tone poem *Don Quixote* (1897) also shows a rising triplet motive followed by a descending chromatic line (see figure 1.1).

strings & woodwinds

strings (pizzicato)

Main theme (bars 1-4)

"Theme of Don Quixote" (Richard Strauss, "Don Quixote", bars 19-21)

"Theme of King Roger" (Szymanowski, "Król Roger", Act No. I, bars 513-516)

Fig. 1.1. K. Szymanowski, *Symphony No. 1*, first movement, main theme compared with two similar themes.

If both themes share an arch-like melodic curve and an ambiguous character, Szymanowski's theme, however, is clothed in much darker harmonic and timbral colours and displays a more depressive, pessimistic expression. Whereas the 'Theme of Don Quixote' begins with a typically Straussian triadic motive, the pitch structure of Szymanowski's theme at first seems to resemble a twelve-tone row by exposing eight different pitches before repeating one. The tonic F minor is stressed by long notes on *c* and *f*, but in bar 4, the to-

nal orientation is blurred by the chromatic bass line ending on *g* flat. In fact, the main theme of Szymanowski's *Allegro pathétique* has less in common with Strauss' 'Theme of Don Quixote' than with the 'Theme of King Roger' from Szymanowski's own opera *Król Roger* (1918–24). This theme which is introduced quite late in the First Act (bars 513–516), displays a quite similar motivic structure and the same shadowy and hesitant character. The fact that Szymanowski judged such a theme worth using — more than a decade after the composition of his op. 15 — to portray the main protagonist of his most ambitious opera, indicates that he did not completely reject the material of his early Symphony in later years.

The sinister mood of the main theme is further developed in its second phrase (bars 5–13) which begins with dark colours of the low wind instruments. The texture unfolds quickly into a very dense web of contrapuntal lines that testifies to Szymanowski's fondness for counterpoint, inherited from his teacher Noskowski.¹⁸ This texture, however, does not sound academically at all. The polyphonic episode is skilfully integrated in the curve of rising tension that reaches its peak in the third phrase (bars 14–32; see figure 1.2).

An augmentation of the head motive presented by the bass string and brass instruments is answered by a late-romantic *appassionato*-outburst of the full orchestra. From this point on, the expressive chromaticism clearly recalls the 'Tristan-style'. Szymanowski employs it in an even more systematic manner than Richard Wagner by basing the last part of the phrase on a chromatic bass line descending a full octave (bars 24–30, from *f* sharp to *g* flat). The dramaturgy of the whole first section is similar to a wave: The tension rises slowly up to a climax and then breaks off into a shorter phase of relaxation.¹⁹ The first 'wave section' of Szymanowski's Symphony, however, ends rather abruptly with a perfect cadence on the tonic F-minor in bar 32, which is echoed by a short appendix. This unexpected cut and its clear tonality are quite at odds with Wagner's 'endless melody' and his 'art of the finest transition'.²⁰ The very clear-cut form used by Szymanowski in this and many other works, is a feature that the young composer did not share with his 'New-German' models Wagner and Strauss, but with most of Polish symphonic composers: It is typical not only of the three symphonies of his teacher Noskowski, but

Main theme section, third phrase (bars 14-31)

Fig. 1.2. K. Szymanowski, *Symphony No. 1*, first movement, third phrase.

also of the symphonic poems of Szymanowski's rivals Karłowicz and Ludomir Różycki.

The main problem of the *Allegro pathétique* in Szymanowski's First Symphony stems from the fact that each of its seven form sections (see table 1.1) displays a wave structure quite similar to that of the first section. There is a constant 'up-and-down' movement, but no continuous dramaturgy and no large-scale contrast.

The second theme introduced in the third 'wave section' correctly in the mediant A flat major (bar 53; see figure 1.3), is just as chromatic as the main theme and as the material of the second 'wave section' (which serves as a transition from the first to the second theme group). The second theme consists of three half-tone groups placed on different pitch levels and does not create a lyrical *cantabile* atmosphere as the second themes do in Szy-

phrases (bars)	tonalities	climaxes (bar no.), dynamics	large-scale sections	thematic material
Exposition				
1	F minor,		Main theme section (1st wave)	main theme (head motive also in augmentation)
5	modulation (mod.),	ppp		
14	F minor	f ff (25-29)		
32		pp		
37	F minor,	ppp	Transition section (2nd wave)	glissando motive; main theme; three-note motive (41)
46	mod., A flat major	ff (45) pp ff (50-52)		
53	A flat major,	pp	Second theme section (3rd wave)	second theme; arch motive (bar 65)
57	mod.,	pp		
71	A flat major	ff (67) pp		
Development Section				
75	mod.	pppp	First development section (4th wave)	glissando motive; dialogue of main and second theme (inversion) superimposition, <i>Fortspinnung</i> and dissolution of the two themes dialogue of second theme and arch motive; main theme used as counterpoint <i>cantabile</i> variant of the two themes (inversion of second theme; solo violin <i>cantilena</i>)
86		f (88) ff (94)		
96		ff		
108	B flat major	pp		
119	D flat major			
120	(general rest)			
121	mod.	ff	Second development section (5th wave)	arch motive (bass unison) and head of second theme superimposition of second theme and its inversion; stretto and segmentation of arch motive head of main theme in augmentation; turning figure derived from arch motive second theme (augmentation); head of main theme
129		cresc. (137)		
141	mod., whole-tone & augmented chords; F sharp minor	ff (141-145) decrec.		
157	F sharp major, mod.	ppp		
Recapitulation & Coda				
170	F minor,		Main theme section (6th wave)	main theme
174	mod.	ff (182)		
184	F major,		Second theme section (7th wave)	second theme; arch motive second theme and augmented head motive of main theme second theme
188	mod.,	ff		
198	F major	ff		
204		ff (210)		
213	F major	pp	Coda	<i>cantabile</i> variant of main and second theme (augmentation) head motive of main theme
220		pp		
226	F major/minor	cresc.		
230		ff-p (229)		

Table 1.1. *Karol Szymanowski, Symphonie No. 1 in F minor op. 15 (1906–07): sonata and ‘wave’ form of the first movement (Allegro pathétique).*

manowski’s op. 12 and op. 19. After its exposition, the wave of chromatic counterpoint is soon rising again in order to reach a new climax in bar 67.

clarinet

Second theme (bars 54-57)

strings

Second development section: lyrical variant of second theme (bars 157-165)

Fig. 1.3. K. Szymanowski, *Symphony No. 1*, first movement, second theme with variant.

It is easy to blame Szymanowski for the lack of contrast in this movement. However, we should remember that the composer had already proved that he was capable of creating such contrasts in his early Concert Overture op. 12. This work is a nearly perfect model for the classical concept of large-scale contrast between the two theme groups as well as between exposition and development section of the sonata form. So it is obvious that, in his op. 15, Szymanowski consciously departed from this conventional scheme of dark-and-white-contrast in favour of a more sophisticated and more ambivalent dramaturgy of form and expression. If the First Symphony is an antithesis to the Overture (in several respects), the synthesis was achieved in the Second Symphony that, on the one hand, contains more contrast and more ‘cantability’ than op. 15, but, on the other hand, displays a much less conventional dramaturgy than op. 12.

Another aspect of form also announces the Second Symphony: In the middle of the quite extensive development section, there is a long general rest (bar 120) that cuts the development and also the whole movement into two halves of almost the same length (45 : 49 and 119 : 110 bars). Such a caesura is also to be found in the much more ambivalent and complex form plan of the first movement of op. 19.²¹ In op. 15, the two sections of the development which are separated by the caesura, continue the wave-like movement and the dense contrapuntal and thematic work of the exposition. The two themes are now combined simultaneously (bar 88) and the harmonic idiom gets even more dissonant and tonally unstable. On the other hand, the phases of relaxation

grow a bit longer (bars 108–119 and 157–169). These phases are almost the only moments of stable triad harmonies in this *Allegro*. They appear as little islands of calm within the stormy sea of chromatic counterpoint. The most intensive of these episodes is placed exactly at the centre of the movement, at the end of the first development section (bars 108–119; see figure 1.4). Szymanowski employs Franz Liszt’s technique of thematic transformation in order to turn the energetic head motive of the Symphony into a *cantilena* of the solo violin that anticipates the famous solo beginning of the Second Symphony. This idyllic moment fades out on a six-four chord of the submediant D flat major.



Fig. 1.4. K. Szymanowski, *Symphony No. 1*, first movement, lyrical variant of main theme.

The second half of the development section seems to begin with a new theme (bar 121) which has an arch-like contour and is played in unison by the violoncelli and the double-basses. In fact, this motive was already introduced in the *Fortspinnung* phrase of the second theme section (bar 56). Within its original contrapuntal context, however, it was barely recognized. Its main entry is delayed up to the emphatic unison presentation in the development section. This strategy of turning a secondary figure of the exposition into an important thematic protagonist in the development was further pursued by Szymanowski in the first movement of the Second Symphony.²² In difference to that movement, the biggest climax of the *Allegro pathétique* is not placed in the coda, but in the second part of the development — just as in classical sonata form as it was taught and practised by Noskowski.²³ The phase of increase leading up to this moment (bars 129–141; see figure 1.5) is more reminiscent than anything else in this movement of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, especially of the chromatic ‘Sehnsuchtsmotiv’. It is treated with the help of traditional procedures of ‘thematic work’ such as stretto and

segmentation, but within a harmonic framework that is even more dissonant than the famous *Einleitung* to Wagner’s *Tristan*. The climax itself is marked by a whole-tone chord (played three times: bars 141, 143, 145) — a harmonic colour which was rather unfamiliar to Wagner, but quite popular among the so-called ‘Młoda Polska’-composers: It was used merely at the same time by Ludomir Różycki in the third episode of the symphonic poem *Bolesław Śmiały* (1905) in order to evoke an archaic funeral ritual (pp. 11–18 of the orchestral score) and by Mieczysław Karłowicz just before the catastrophic climax of his tone poem *Stanisław i Anna Oświecimowie* (1907; bars 265–301) — in the latter case with the original symbolic meaning of the whole-tone scale as ‘gamme terrifiante’ coined by Liszt.²⁴ In all the three works, the whole-tone colour provides a striking effect within the mainstream of ‘New-German’ chromaticism. In the following long relaxation and decrescendo phase (bars 145–157), Szymanowski uses the augmented chord as a sort of intermediary between whole-tone and chromatic half-tone harmonies.

The rather short recapitulation (bars 170–213) omits the transition section and turns to F major in the second theme section (bar 184). Everything seems to suggest a ‘happy ending’ in the tradition of *per aspera ad astra* which had been adapted from Beethoven by many Polish (and other) composers in their symphonies in the minor mode (from Dobrzyński’s No. 2 and Noskowski’s No. 2 up to Paderewski and Karłowicz), often with a patriotic symbolic meaning.²⁵ The coda (bars 213–230) begins with a reminiscence to the lyrical variants of the two themes introduced in the development section. Then, a stormy semiquaver passage engendered by the head motive leads *fortissimo* to a final F major chord of the strings, brass and treble woodwind instruments (bar 229; see figure 1.6). But this chord drops away after a quaver. The remaining triad on *f* played softly by the lower woodwinds contains the minor third *a* flat in the bassoon. So this movement ends with a harmonic surprise and an emotional deception.²⁶ This final minor chord is probably not an expression of a catastrophe, but at least a sort of ‘bitter aftertaste’. Such a shift between major and minor mode had already been used by the Russian composer Alexander Skrjabin at the end of the first movement of his Piano Sonata No. 1 op. 6 (1892–93) which also shares the key of F minor

violins woodwinds

"Sehnsuchtsmotiv" (Wagner, "Tristan")

violins arch motive

violincelli & double-basses

sf
(whole-tone chord)

head of main theme

Second development section, climax (bars 129-151)
 (in bars 133-149, the melody of the upper stave is played up an octave)

Fig. 1.5. K. Szymanowski, *Symphony No. 1*, first movement, climax of the development.

with Szymanowski’s Symphony. However, the four-times alternation between major and minor closing with a major triad in Skrjabin’s Sonata is much less sophisticated than Szymanowski’s use of both modes at the same time.

The image shows a musical score for two parts: 'violins & woodwinds' and 'low woodwinds'. The 'violins & woodwinds' part is written on a treble clef staff and begins with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. It features a complex, rhythmic melody with many accidentals. The 'low woodwinds' part is written on a bass clef staff and begins with a pianissimo (*pppp*) dynamic. It consists of sustained chords and a few notes. The score is labeled 'Coda, final phrase (bars 227-230)'.

Fig. 1.6. K. Szymanowski, *Symphony No. 1*, first movement, final phrase.

The way the tonal drama was to have developed in the middle part of Szymanowski’s First Symphony, we don’t know since this part has not survived and was probably never composed. The third and final movement, *Allegretto con moto, grazioso*, begins already in F-major. The attribute ‘grazioso’ had been very current in Classic music. In the era of emphatic ‘symphonism’ after Beethoven, however, it was rarely used. By choosing this 18th-Century attribute, Szymanowski indicated his intention to create an easier, relaxed atmosphere in the final movement. This counter-reaction to the excesses of pathos and monumentality in late-romantic orchestral music was shared by several composers at that time. It can be found, for example, in Richard Strauss’s tone poem *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* (1894–95) and some parts of his *Sinfonia domestica* (1902–03) as well as in Gustav Mahler’s Symphony No. 4 (1899–1901) and Max Reger’s *Sinfonietta* (1904–05).²⁷ If there is any influence of Reger in Szymanowski’s First Symphony (as it was claimed by some critics and scholars²⁸, it consists in this explicit ‘quest for the diminutivum’. In the score, however, there is not much sweetness nor grace — neither in Reger’s *Sinfonietta* nor in Szymanowski’s *Allegretto grazioso*! In the latter, the moment which comes closest to this idea is a passage introduced in bar 13 that bears the German verbal indication ‘lustig’ (funny) and contains waltz rhythms (see figure 1.7).

Stefan Keym

poco rit. a tempo (lustig)

Fl I
Fl II
Ob
Cl I
Cl II
Cl b
Fg
Tmp
Ar I
Ar II

solo
Vn I
Vn II
Vi
Vc
Cb

poco rit. a tempo (lustig)

mit ganzem Bogen
div. a 3
sehr weich pizz.
pizz. sehr weich
pizz.
pizz.
arco

Fig. 1.7. K. Szymanowski, *Symphony No. 1*, third movement, waltz episode (bars 11–15) (copyright PWM 1993).

It is preceded by an entry of the solo violin (bars 7–13) which anticipates the solo beginning of Szymanowski's Second Symphony (it is not by hazard

that the first movement of this work also bears the attribute ‘*grazioso*’). In the *Allegretto* of the First Symphony, however, the permanent modulation and the multi-layer texture make it quite difficult to grasp or to remember either the solo violin entry or the ‘funny’ waltz moment. In general, the texture of the final movement is even denser than that of the *Allegro pathétique*. In the words of Jim Samson, this movement contains ‘some of the most congested scoring in his [Szymanowski’s] (or anyone else’s) output’²⁹. The texture of the final is, however, less polyphonically conceived than in the first movement. In some episodes, the category of sound colour seems to get more important than counterpoint (e.g. bars 51–63).

The final movement is cast in a free arch form (ABA’; see table 1.2). Its main problem consists of the lack of any concise theme. The head motive is very apt to be used in any sort of contrapuntal combination, but not to function as main theme of a huge symphonic form. In fact, it is simultaneously introduced in two different variants in bar 1 and then combined with the head motive of the first movement (see figure 1.8).

Szymanowski obviously tried to create an evolutionary form beginning with ephemeral motivic material that grows and gets shape during the course of the movement. In fact, a new *forte* variant of the head motive presented after the waltz episode in bar 22, does not differ much from its two predecessors. The following repetition of the waltz episode is not justified by the evolutionary form concept, but by the practical need of giving the listener a second chance to grasp this episode. Up to the general rest in bar 57, there is no strong caesura. The evolution up to this moment (reaching *fortefortissimo* dynamics in bar 52) comes close to Wagner’s idea of ‘endless melody’. It leads to a broad plane of sound consisting of a C sharp major chord on the pedal note *B*. This chord cannot be called the harmonic ‘goal’ of the first part in a traditional sense, since it occurs rather unexpectedly in the course of permanent modulation.

The sound planes of bars 56–61 create a long moment of idyllic calm that is only superficially animated by *scherzando* triplet figures of the woodwinds and the two harps. The idyllic moment stands in contrast with the ‘dark’ F-minor chord played *pianopianissimo* by the low brass instruments in bars

bars	tonalities	dynamics (bar no.)	sections	thematic material
Part A: Allegretto con moto, grazioso				
1	F major	mf/pp	a₁	main theme simultaneously in two variants, combined with head motive of 1 st movement
6	F major, mod.	pp	a₂	2 nd variant of main theme & solo violin entry
13	A major, mod.			waltz episode
22	F major	f/ff	a₁'	main theme in two variants
26	F major, mod.	mp	a₂'	2 nd variant of main theme
31	A & H major, mod.	p, cresc., ff		waltz episode with sequence
39	A major, mod., G major	ppp fff (52-54)	a₃ (poco meno mosso)	1 st variant of main theme (solo violin); plane of sound
56	C sharp & H Major F minor	f/ff ppp (62-63)	idyllic episode	plane of sound & triplet figures; brass chords
Part B (central part): Meno mosso. Mesto				
64	F & D minor, mod.	p cresc. (72) f(77)	b₁	stretto of main theme (2 nd variant) and head motive of 1 st movement; anticipation (68) and exposition (73) of central part theme
81	G major, mod.	pp ff(90)	b₂	central part theme (solo violin); head motive of 1 st movement (89)
98	A flat & B minor	fff, decresc.		plane of sound
107	B flat major A flat & B flat major	p/fff ppp (110)	idyllic episode	plane of sound & triplet figures (as in bar 56)
Part A': Tempo I				
114	mod.	pp/mf ff	transition	solo violin entry; 2 nd variant of main theme (123)
126	F major	f/ff	a₁'	main theme in two variants
130	F major, mod.		a₂'	2 nd variant of main theme
137	A & H major, mod.	ff (140)		waltz episode with sequence
145	A major, mod., G major	pp fff (158)	a₃ (meno mosso)	1 st variant of main theme (solo violin); plane of sound
163	mod., F major	fff	a & b	central part theme
170	D major	pp		2 nd variant of main theme & anticipation of central part theme
177	mod., B flat major, mod.	ff f/pp (182)		central part theme
185	mod., G flat major	ff	transition (più mosso, energico)	2 nd variant of main theme; central part theme
Coda				
195	mod., F major, mod.	f ff (205)	coda₁	head motive of 1 st movement & 2 nd variant of main theme
209	mod.	fff ffff		head motive of 1 st movement & central part theme; plane of sound
217	mod.	ff	coda₂	broken diminished chords; second theme of 1 st movement (219)
223	B flat major	ppp/ff cresc.		stretto of main theme (1 st variant), plane of sound & anticipation of central part theme
236- 241	F major	fff		head motive of 1 st movement

Table 1.2. Karol Szymanowski, *Symphonie No. 1 in F minor op. 15 (1906–07): arch form of the third movement (ABA')*.

62–63. This chord recalls the tonality of the first movement and, by this, contradicts the tonal brightness of the first part of the *Allegretto*. The central

Part A: First phrase with two different variants of the main theme, presented simultaneously (bars 1-6)

Part A: Third phrase with two more variants of the head motive, played simultaneously (bars 22-26)

Part B: Superimposition of two variants of the head motive of the first movement (bars 89-91)

Coda: Superimposition of the head motives of the third and first movements (bars 208-211)

Coda: Four-part stretto of the main theme (bars 223-228)

Fig. 1.8. K. Szymanowski, *Symphony No. 1*, third movement, thematic structure.

part of the final movement (bars 64–113: *Meno mosso. Mesto*) begins with a ‘mesto’-episode that resembles a similar episode in the development section

of Szymanowski's Overture op. 12 (bars 138–173). The model for both of them is the Variation No. 12 in Zygmunt Noskowski's Symphonic Variations *Z życia narodu* (1901). In all the three cases, the main theme of the work is presented in an elegiac minor version beginning as a broad solo *cantilena* and then evolving into a dense contrapuntal web. The episode in Szymanowski's Symphony, however, is less *cantabile* than its predecessors and surpasses them largely in its complicated texture. In the course of this contrapuntal play, Szymanowski discreetly introduces a more or less 'new' theme consisting of three half-tone groups on different pitch levels (bars 73–75: flute and violins; bars 77–79: flute and viols; bar 81: solo violin). This pitch structure recalls the second theme of the *Allegro pathétique* and is anticipated by a figure consisting of two half-tone groups (bar 69: bassoon, clarinet). Just as in the *Allegro pathétique*, the second theme of the final movement does not create a strong contrast to the first theme. Consequently, it is not combined with the main theme of the *Allegretto*, but with the head motive of the first movement. The 'attack-like' entries of this motive (bar 89: viols and bassoons 'en dehors'; bar 90: flute and oboe 'sehr hart'; bars 95–98: trumpets and horns 'marcatissimo') cause a sort of conflict culminating in a dissonant *fortefortissimo* chord (bar 98: *C flat – A flat – B flat – E flat*). The tension is 'resolved' quite unexpectedly by a chromatic shift via B minor (with *g* sharp in the bass) to a dominant seventh chord of *B flat* major. By ornamenting this chord with the triplet figures from bars 56–57, Szymanowski closes the central part of the movement just as it had begun. In fact, the two short idyllic episodes in bars 56–63 and 107–113 stand in sharper contrast to the rest of the movement than the parts A and B to each other.

The recapitulation of part A (bars 114–194) leads back to the tonic F major (bar 126). It presents the sections of this part in a modified order, integrating also the theme of part B (bars 163–185). In the monumental and emphatic coda (bars 195–241), the thematic material of both movements of the Symphony is combined simultaneously and successively. The 'cyclic' use of the same thematic material in all movements up to its final apotheosis were familiar to several Polish symphonic composers, especially to those trained in the school of Friedrich Kiel (Noskowski and Paderewski) or influenced by César

Franck (Stojowski).³⁰ In Szymanowski’s Symphony, the final firework of thematic combinations culminates in a four-part stretto of the main *Allegretto* theme (bar 223) that ‘dissolves’ into a broad plane of sound on B flat major (bars 228–235). It is the head motive of the first movement, however, that concludes the Symphony *fortefortissimo* in bright F major. In comparison with the ambiguous end of the *Allegro pathétique* and with the unconventional beginnings of both movements, this is a rather traditional gesture used in many symphonies of the 19th century. In general, the final movement contains more new traits than the first movement, but seems less homogeneous and less logical because the young composer is not sure yet how to use these traits in a convincing way. Especially, the idea to develop a huge symphonic movement from a *grazioso* theme was not fully realised here, but only three years later in the first movement of the Second Symphony.

Summarizing, Szymanowski’s First Symphony is certainly not an *opus perfectum et absolutum*. It represents, however, an important step on the young composer’s way to create a new, individual symphonic idiom beyond the conventions of the Classic-Romantic tradition. Its harmonic language is far more ‘advanced’ than that of any other Polish composer up to this moment. Especially in comparison with Karłowicz’s Symphony in E minor (1900–02) which was written five years earlier — also by a 25-year-old composer —, the progress made by Szymanowski is striking: Whereas Karłowicz’s work is one more example of the old *per aspera ad astra*-dramaturgy, Szymanowski tries to escape this path which he had already gone in his First Piano Sonata op. 8 (1903–04). Of course, the ‘progressive’ traits of Szymanowski’s First Symphony were not only a fruit of his personal genius, but also a result of the rapid development of Polish music culture since the foundation of the Filharmonia Warszawska in 1901 which enabled the public to listen regularly to advanced orchestral music.

As far as the delicate question of foreign influences is concerned which was raised by Aleksander Polinski and other Polish critics,³¹ the impact of the ‘New German’ school (especially of Wagner and Strauss) on Szymanowski’s First Symphony cannot be denied. However, the whole concept of the work as well as many impressive details are clearly of his own: the modulating

waltz passage in the final as well as the shadowy colours at the beginning of the first movement which by its dark, expressionist mood differs not only from Strauss, but also from Szymanowski's own brighter Symphony No. 2. Whereas Szymanowski's Concert Overture clearly recalls Strauss's *Don Juan* and *Heldenleben*, there is no such model for the First Symphony as a whole. In the dissonant harmonic language, Szymanowski goes further than Strauss in his symphonic poems. The thematic and contrapuntal structure is even more dense and complex than that of Reger's *Sinfonietta*. Especially in the *Allegro*, nearly all melodic lines of the polyphonic web contain thematic substance: There is left almost 'no free note'. This structure comes close to the ideal of 'total development' ascribed by Theodor W. Adorno to the Second Viennese School.³² Szymanowski certainly did not know the music of Schönberg in 1906, but the concept of total development as well as the chromatic expressionist style were 'in the air' at that time.³³ It is remarkable, however, that Szymanowski already at that early age was among those composers who experimented with the most radical consequences of this general stylistic situation.

Notes

- 1 Letter from Karol Szymanowski to Hanna Klechniowska, 11th July 1906, cited in Karol Szymanowski, *Korespondencja. Pełna edycja zachowanych listów od i do kompozytora* [= *Correspondence. A Complete Edition of Extant Letters from and to the Composer* (= KOR)], collected and edited by Teresa Chylińska, vol. I, Kraków: PWM 1982, p. 105: 'Będzie to jakieś monstrum kontrapunktyczno-harmoniczno-orkiestrowe i z góry już się cieszę na myśl, jak krytycy berlińscy na naszym koncercie, w czasie grania tej symfonii, będą się wynosić z sali z przekleństwem na posiniałych ustach.' — In a letter to Bronisław Gromadzki, Szymanowski even called his Symphony No. 1 'the greatest humbug of the world' (in English!) (see KOR I, *Uzupełnienia/Supplements*, p. 5).
- 2 The autograph score of the third movement is to be found in the 'Archivum Kompositorów Polskich' at Warsaw University Library (Mus. CXX/1). It bears the date 'summer, fall, winter 1906'. A manuscript copy of the first movement exists in the archives of PWM, Kraków. This movement was composed in summer 1906 according to Szymanowski's letters to Klechniowska from 11th July and 28th October 1906 (see KOR I, pp. 105 and 112).
- 3 Stanisław Golachowski, *Karol Szymanowski*, Kraków: PWM 1948, and Teresa Chylińska, *Karol Szymanowski. His Life and Works*, Los Angeles: Friends of Polish Music 1993, p. 41.
- 4 See the mainly negative reviews in *Młoda Muzyka*, 1st April 1909, pp. 13–14 (Adam

- Wyleżyński), *Scena i Sztuka*, 2nd April 1909, p. 13 (Czesław Lipaczyński), and *Kurier Warszawski*, 27th March 1909, p. 3 (Aleksander Poliński), reprinted in KOR I, pp. 198–199. The third movement of Szymanowski's First Symphony had already been rehearsed by Fitelberg and the Berlin Philharmonics at Berlin in March 1907 (see Heinrich Neuhaus's letter to his parents from 20th March 1907, cited in KOR I, p. 124).
- 5 According to a letter to Stefan Spiess from 20th August 1910 (KOR I, p. 223), Szymanowski planned a revision of the instrumentation of his Symphony No. 1; obviously, this revision was never done. — In fact, the scoring of op. 15 with triple wind instruments and two harps corresponds to that of the original versions of op. 12 and op. 19 (both of these works underwent a revision including a thinning out of the texture).
 - 6 An orchestral score with the copyright date 1993 can be hired at PWM, Kraków. A recording of the work was made by Karol Stryja and the Polish State Philharmonic Orchestra Katowice (Naxos 8.553683).
 - 7 Letter from Szymanowski to Grzegorz Fitelberg, 19th October 1910, in: KOR I, p. 230.
 - 8 See Szymanowski's letters to Zdzisław Jachimecki from 12th October and 2nd November 1911, in: KOR I, pp. 297–302 and 305–309.
 - 9 Alistair Wightman, *Karol Szymanowski. His Life and Work*, Aldershot: Ashgate 1999, p. 54.
 - 10 The most favourable comments on this work stem from Wightman, *Szymanowski*, pp. 53–54, and from Tadeusz A. Zieliński, *Karol Szymanowski. Liryka i ekstaza*, Kraków: PWM 1997, p. 45.
 - 11 On Gustav Neuhaus, see the article by Klaus Wolfgang Niemöller, 'Gustav Neuhaus und Ferdinand Hiller: Zum musikalischen Weg vom Rheinland nach Südrussland' in: *Heinrich Neuhaus (1888–1964) zum 110. Geburtstag. Aspekte interkultureller Beziehung in Pianistik und Musikgeschichte zwischen dem östlichen Europa und Deutschland. Konferenzbericht Köln 23.–26. Oktober 1998*, edited by Klaus Wolfgang Niemöller and Klaus-Peter Koch, Sinzig: Studio 2000, pp. 15–28.
 - 12 On Friedrich Kiel, see Helga Zimmermann, *Untersuchungen zum Kompositionsunterricht im Spannungsfeld von Traditionalismus und neudeutscher Schule, dargestellt am Beispiel der Lehrtätigkeit Friedrich Kiels (1821–1885)*, Hagen: v. d. Linnepe 1987, and Januś Ekiert, 'Paderewski bei Kiel', in: *Friedrich-Kiel-Studien* 1 (1993), pp. 113–120. The deep influence of Kiel's teaching on Zygmunt Noskowski was only superficially evoked by Witold Wroński, *Zygmunt Noskowski*, Kraków: PWM 1960, pp. 41–42. It is studied in detail in my 'Habilitationsschrift' (see note 13), pp. 99–127.
 - 13 A much more detailed study of Polish symphonic tradition and its relationship with German music culture is to be found in my 'Habilitationsschrift': *Symphonie-Kulturtransfer. Untersuchungen zum Studienaufenthalt polnischer Komponisten in Deutschland und zu ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit der symphonischen Tradition 1867–1918*, Leipzig University 2007.
 - 14 Emil Młynarski's Symphony in F Major op. 14 (1910–11) is preceded by a slow introduction that dwells mainly in the minor mode.
 - 15 In his Symphonies No. 1 in G minor op. 8 (-1902) and No. 3 in C minor op. 14 (1907), Witold Maliszewski does not include a slow introduction to the first movement.

However, Maliszewski received his whole musical education at St. Petersburg and so, at that time, did not adhere to the Polish, but to the Russian symphonic tradition (up to his return to Poland in 1921).

- 16 This title is lacking in the sources of the score. It is mentioned, however, in a review of the first performance of the work in *Młoda Muzyka*, 1st April 1909, pp. 13–14.
- 17 See Jim Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski*, London: Kahn & Averill 1980, pp. 50–51, and Wightman, *Szymanowski*, p. 54.
- 18 Zygmunt Noskowski underlined his fondness for counterpoint (which he had himself inherited by Friedrich Kiel in Berlin) e.g. in his article ‘Reforma fugi’, in: *Echo Muzyczne, Teatralne i Artystyczne*, Mai/June 1891, pp. 269–270, 287–288, 301–302, 322–324, and in his late counterpoint treatise: *Kontrapunkt. Wykład praktyczny*, Warszawa: Gebethner & Wolff 1907.
- 19 The wave metaphor was introduced into music analysis by Ernst Kurth, *Bruckner*, Berlin: Hesse 1925, Vol. I, p. 279. See also Wolfgang Krebs, ‘Zum Verhältnis von musikalischer Syntax und Höhepunktsgestaltung in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts’, in: *Musiktheorie* 13 (1998), pp. 31–41.
- 20 On this concept which was developed by Richard Wagner in a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck from 29th October 1859, see Carl Dahlhaus, ‘Wagners ‘Kunst des Überganges’. Der Zwiegesang in *Tristan und Isolde*, in: idem, *Vom Musikdrama zur Literaturoper. Aufsätze zur neueren Operngeschichte*, 2nd edition, München: Piper and Mainz: Schott 1989, pp. 150–151.
- 21 The multivalent form structure of the first movement of Szymanowski’s Symphony op. 19 can be divided into two parts (bars 1–157, 158–335), three parts (exposition: bars 1–127; development: 127–245; recapitulation: 246–335) or even four parts (bars 1–85, 86–157, 158–245, 246–335), all followed by a short coda (bars 336–353).
- 22 The three-note motive introduced in bars 184–189 is an augmentation of the dotted figures used at the end of the exposition in bars 118–127.
- 23 In Noskowski’s Symphony No. 2 *Elegijna* C minor (1875–79), the high point of the first movement is reached at the end of the development section; in his Symphony No. 3 *Od wiosny do wiosny* F major (1903), the climax is placed at the beginning of the recapitulation.
- 24 See Ryszard Daniel Goliańek, ‘Charaktery i symbole muzyczne w poematach symfonicznych Mieczysława Karłowicza’, in: *Muzyka* 44/1 (1999), p. 79.
- 25 On the Polish tradition of the symphonic *per aspera ad astra*-dramaturgy, see Stefan Keym, ‘Per aspera ad astra’. Zur polnischen Symphoniktradition im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert am Beispiel von Noskowski, Paderewski und Karłowicz’, in: *Polnische Komponisten des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts im europäischen Kontext*, Kongressbericht Berlin 2004, edited by Rainer Cadenbach, in print. — Dobrzyński, Noskowski, Paderewski and Młynarski combine this dramaturgy in their symphonies with the transformation of patriotic melodies in order to express the politic message that Poland was not lost forever (‘Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła’).
- 26 This ‘special effect’ was already stressed in the program notes to the first performance printed in *Scena i Sztuka*, 26th March 1909, p. 8.
- 27 Apolinary Szeluto later claimed in his Memoirs (cited in KOR I, p. 86) that the whole ‘Spółka nakładowa młodych kompozytorów polskich’ attended the first Berlin performance of Reger’s *Sinfonietta*. In fact, this performance took place on 13th

- November 1905. According to Teresa Chylińska, Szymanowski was not in the German capital at that time. However, he may have studied the score of the work that was published at the end of 1905 in Leipzig by Kuhn & Lauterbach.
- 28 It seems that Adolf Chybiński was the first to claim a similarity between Reger’s and Szymanowski’s music (in *Gazeta Lwowska*, 19th/20th April 1906, cited in KOR I, p. 95). He was followed in this by Hugo Leichtentritt (*Signale für die musikalische Welt*, 13th April and 24th August 1910, pp. 563 and 1315), August Spanuth (as above, 6th December 1911, p. 1725), and Eberhardt Klemm, ‘Über Reger und Szymanowski’, in: *Max Reger. Beiträge zur Regerforschung*, Suhl u.a.: Max-Regel-Festkomitee des Bezirks 1966, pp. 82–89.)
- 29 J. Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski*, p. 51.
- 30 In Noskowski’s Symphony No. 2 and Paderewski’s Symphony, the patriotic song melody ‘Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła’ is used in this cyclic way in order to express a political message of hope.
- 31 Aleksander Poliński, ‘Młoda Polska w muzyce’, in: *Kurier Warszawski*, 22nd April 1907, p. 6, cited in KOR I, pp. 131–133.
- 32 Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1978, p. 63.
- 33 Already Jim Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski*, p. 50, recognized a similarity between Szymanowski’s First Symphony and Schönbergs *Kammersymphonie* op. 9.