

YOUNG POLAND AND SZYMANOWSKI'S *METOPES* OP. 29 AND *MASQUES* OP.  
34

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION OF TOPIC

Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937) was a 20th century composer whose music absorbed and refracted many musical trends without adhering to a particular school. His music can be divided into roughly three periods. In his early period, he evoked the pianism of Chopin and the chromaticism of German late romanticism. In his middle period, he discovered the French Impressionists, which instigated an extreme shift in his use of harmony and texture. Finally, in his late period, he explored elements of Polish folk music in a manner somewhat akin to Bela Bartok's ethnomusicology. Through its many transformations, Szymanowski's musical style retained certain characteristics, many of which can be traced back to his early alignment with the cultural movement known as Young Poland.

Young Poland was multifaceted, encompassing the visual arts, literature, and music, lasting roughly from 1890 to 1918. In many ways, it was a cultural response to the political oppression caused by Poland's three way partition by Prussia, Russia and Austria. This tri-partition inhibited Poland's political, economic, and social development, preventing it from becoming a modern nation. Young Poland artists rallied to the national cause by pursuing two overarching and seemingly paradoxical goals: Nationalism and universality. Nationally speaking, Young Poland artists sought to rejuvenate an oppressed Polish culture by building upon the patriotic expressions of Polish Romantic artists. In a universal sense, Young Poland artists wanted their work to transcend nationalist stereotypes and to have merit outside Poland's borders. Resultantly, Young Poland's artists combined national elements of Polish Romanticism with universal aspects of European Modernism to create an eclectic yet unique idiom.

In addition to its ideology of universality and nationalism, Young Poland had distinct aesthetic foundations, first articulated by the polemicists Artur Gorski and Stanislaw Przybyszewski. Drawing upon the existentialist philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur

Schopenhauer, Gorski and Przybyszewski portrayed art as a quasi-religious medium which should not be politicized, and instead float above the banalities of worldly life. Stanislaw Przybyszewski summarized these aims and emphasized the importance of artists, saying “Art has no aim, it is aim in itself... it cannot serve any idea... Art stands above life... becomes the highest religion, and the artist becomes its priest.”<sup>1</sup>

Seen in the context of the Young Poland movement, Szymanowski’s seemingly haphazard stylistic evolution gains a logical thru-line. His experimentation with Late Romanticism, Impressionism, and Nationalism was both an attempt to find his own compositional voice, and an effort to create a uniquely Polish musical idiom that drew upon universally respected artistic movements. This approach was a stark contrast to the parochial idea of Polish culture advocated by Szymanowski’s compositional predecessors, who relied on a fundamentally conservative musical language, spiced with superficial evocations of Polish folk music.

Szymanowski also identified with the ideas of Przybyszewski and Gorski. He saw art as a medium that transcended the squalid political conflicts of his time. In an era when composing populist or commercial music was a financially enticing option, his musical style remained uncompromisingly esoteric and apolitical. This was most apparent during the outbreak of World War I, when Szymanowski stayed in his idyllic childhood estate at Timoshovka, and composed opulent music that reflected nothing of the violence abroad.

Szymanowski’s devotion to Young Poland’s mission of modernizing Polish art also extended to his business endeavors. He was among the the founding members of Young Poland in Music, a group of composers dedicated to the modernization and revitalization of Polish music. Towards the end of his life he served as the head of Warsaw conservatory, where he attempted to reform and update its curriculum. Unfortunately, his efforts were resisted by the conservative

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski*. (London: Kahn & Averill, 1991), 36

administration. The stress resulting from this conflict, along with Warsaw's inclement climate, ultimately ruined his health and precipitated his death in 1937.

Szymanowski's alignment with Young Poland was most direct when he was young man. As a fledgling composer he based several song cycles upon Young Poland poetry. However, as he matured and expanded his artistic horizons, Szymanowski's ties to Young Poland became less explicit. Instead of working exclusively with Young Poland poetry, he explored literature from other cultures, such as Sufi poetry and Classical literature. Despite this, the essential aspects of his artistic perspective remained firmly rooted in Young Poland's ideological and aesthetic foundations.

This paper will discuss the influence Young Poland had on the two triptychs Szymanowski composed for piano between 1915 and 1916: the *Metopes*, op. 29, and the *Masques*, op. 34. I have chosen to focus specifically on these works because Young Poland's influence on them is subtler than it is on Szymanowski's early works. At first glance, these works seem to be primarily influenced by French Impressionism. Indeed, many of their pianistic and harmonic effects are borrowed from composers such as Debussy and Ravel. The two cycle's programmatic nature, which stems from a panoply of literary influences including Classical and Arabic literature, is another feature linking them to Impressionism.

Despite these Impressionist trappings, the *Metopes* and *Masques* remain deeply informed by Young Poland's ideas. The Impressionistic techniques which give the triptychs their color are laid over a musical language built upon solid motivic structures and contrapuntal layering, two qualities associated with the German romanticism that characterized Young Poland in Music. Also, the works' wide-ranging literary sources can easily be tied to ideas that characterized Young Poland in Literature, most notably existentialist ideas inherited from German philosophy. Finally, the *Metopes* and *Masques* embody Young Poland's boarder artistic goals: They are composed in a progressive style that encompasses many international musical and literary styles, and they focus on esoteric subjects with little regard for political or utilitarian ideas.



To describe the influence Young Poland had on the composition of the *Metopes* and *Masques*, this paper will first explain how Young Poland gained prominence as a movement. It will explain the historical context in which Young Poland arose, and detail the ideas that shaped the movement's ideology. Having established what Young Poland stood for, it will trace Szymanowski's involvement with Young Poland from his beginnings as a student in Warsaw. It will show how Szymanowski's early works were influenced by Young Poland on a literary and musical level, and how this helped helped him achieve maturity in his first compositional period. The paper will then show how the new influences Szymanowski absorbed in his middle period aligned with Young Poland ideology and aesthetics. Finally, it will analyze excerpts from the middle period piano works in order to connect them to Young Poland from a musical, aesthetic, and literary perspective.

## CHAPTER II: PARTITIONED POLAND AND POSITIVISM

When Szymanowski was born in 1882, Poland was partitioned between Russia, Prussia and Austria. This tripartite division of power caused Poland to fall far behind the rest of Europe both socially and economically. Cities were few, and the country relied on agriculture rather than industry to run commerce. Illiteracy had reached an unbelievable 90 percent, and the few schools that were functioning usually taught the language of the ruling countries rather than the native Polish.<sup>1</sup> These poor conditions led several prominent intellectuals to emigrate to other European countries, such as France and Germany. While many of these emigres vigorously supported Polish independence from abroad, their absence in Poland left a cultural vacuum that marked the country for decades.

Two such emigres were the prominent Romantic artists Adam Mickiewicz and Frederic Chopin, both of whom resided in France. Mickiewicz and Chopin were both fierce patriots and trailblazing innovators. Chopin took Polish national dances such as the mazurka and polonaise, modernized them with the most sophisticated of European sensibilities, and used them as a passionate expression of his patriotism. Mickiewicz wrote verse that depicted Poland's political struggles in Messianic terms, with its suffering serving as redemption for the rest of Europe. Both artists were eloquent advocates for Polish culture who were well received in Western Europe. Their blend of innovation and nationalism characterized Polish Romanticism, and was to later serve as a model for the Young Poland movement.

Polish Romanticism served as a cultural counterpart to the Polish independence movement that was prevalent in the mid 19th century. Over the course of 123 years of partition, Polish nationalists staged a total of six uprisings against the occupying powers. However, these

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<sup>1</sup> "Poland," Britannica Academic, s.v., accessed November 14, 2019, <https://academic-eb-com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Poland/108558>.

attempts were always stifled and were often met with harsh reprisals. The 1863 uprising against Russia incurred particularly serious reprisals, with Russia inflicted economic punishments and harsh prison sentences against Polish rebels.

The generation of Poles who lived through these harsh reprisals instigated by the independence movement turned to a new set of socio-economic policies, which they termed “organic work.” The political leaders of this era gave up on the ideal of Polish independence, and instead sought to secure the welfare of ethnic Poles through cooperation with the ruling countries. This pragmatic ideological trend, which lasted roughly from 1868 to 1881 was called Positivism.<sup>2</sup> Positivism in its widest sense refers to any system of thought in which empirical methodology is regarded as the best means of obtaining accurate data. For Polish intellectuals, Positivism meant seeing Poland’s value not in lofty ideas of sovereignty, but in the down to earth terms of its contribution to economics, education, social policy, and scientific development. Unlike their predecessors, the Romantic nationalists, the Positivists did not cast Poland in a Messianic role, but blamed the Polish republic’s downfall on the miscalculations of Polish nobles.<sup>3</sup> As such, they took it into their own hands to improve the state of their nation. Poland’s Positivist era saw the nation take great strides in industrialization, education, and class equality between women and men, Jews and Catholics. In periodicals there was an upsurge of scientific and literary material, an indicator of the rising level of education.

Positivism also replaced Romanticism as the predominant ideology of Polish artists. Writers increasingly favored clear cut prose over poetic abstraction, which they deemed borderline incomprehensible.<sup>4</sup> Realism and Naturalism featured strongly in the works produced in this period, which depicted everyday people and their daily lives. Boleslaw Prus, one of the foremost figures of the Positivist movement in literature, wrote novels that addressed Poland’s

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<sup>2</sup> Czesaw Milosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 286.

<sup>3</sup> "Poland," *Britannica Academic*, s.v., accessed November 14, 2019, <https://academic-eb-com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Poland/108558>.

<sup>4</sup> Czesaw Milosz, *The History of Polish Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, 289.

political and social issues, and did not shy away from realistic depictions of the poverty and hardship which plagued Poland at the time. When he did write about seemingly exotic subjects, such as in his novel *Faroan*, set in Egypt, it was to address sensitive political issues that might be censored by imperial powers.<sup>5</sup>

While writers contributed to the Positivist movement by tackling social and political issues, composers sought to preserve Polish language and culture. They did this by writing operas and songs in Polish rather than in German or Russian, and by evoking elements of Polish national music. Two composers who represented this idea of composition were Stanislaw Moniuszko (1819-1872) and Sygmunt Noskowski (1864-1909). Incidentally, both of these composers are directly connected to Szymanowski's pedagogical lineage. Moniuszko taught Noskowski, who in turn taught Szymanowski at the Warsaw academy.

Moniuszko wrote songs and operas set to Polish verse and librettos. Stylistically, these works were grounded in the conventions of Italian and German opera,<sup>6</sup> but frequently incorporated elements of Polish national music, such as folk tunes, polonaises, and Mazurkas. He also composed a set of twelve song books, which drew upon Polish Romantic poetry. Moniuszko was well received in his era, but his works lacked the innovative flair that have distinguished Chopin's music in posterity. For instance, when Chopin composed a Mazurka, he incorporated the unusual, modal harmonies intrinsic to Polish folk music. Moniuszko, on the other hand, might have used the characteristic *mazurka* rhythm to evoke national flavor, but wrote in foursquare harmonic patterns that lacked Chopin's sense of color. Take for instance, this setting of a traditional Polish dance, the *cracoviak*:

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<sup>5</sup> Czesaw Milosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 289.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1991), 15.

**Allegro**

CHANT.

1<sup>o</sup> Sor\_tons de on\_tre si\_len\_ce  
2<sup>o</sup> Quand aux champs on se rassemble,

PIANO.

Le Ciel a fré\_mi, Que cha\_cun s'é\_veil\_le et chan\_se  
Ac\_cou\_rez garçons, Et joyeu\_x di\_tes en\_semble

**Ex 1: Moniuszko, Cracoviak from *Spiewnik domowy***

Moniuszko's pupil, Szymunt Noskowski was another Positivist era composer. Like his teacher, Noskowski couched evocations of Polish folk music in an essentially conservative musical idiom. He relied mostly on Classical forms and made no significant innovative efforts in the fields of harmony, texture or instrumentation.<sup>7</sup> Szymanowski himself wrote of Noskowski: he tried "in vain to conceal the... unyielding face of the correct academic behind a mask of Polish folkloristic melodies and harmonies... His works... even though they possessed a certain undeniable artistic value; they came and went, vanishing from our stages... perishing slowly in the mists of time."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Zofia Chechlińska. "Noskowski, Zygmunt," Grove Music Online, 2001; Accessed 15 Nov. 2019. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000020109>.

<sup>8</sup> Alistair Wightman, *Karol Szymanowski: His Life and Work* (London: Routledge, 2017), 22.

Both Moniuszko and Noskowski were successful in their era, but have been judged somewhat harshly in posterity. However, when one views these composers in the context of Polish Positivism, their musical choices are understandable. Like Positivist writers, they focused on producing art that had utilitarian value. Their music was accessible to the public, and therefore commercially viable. It sustained Polish culture when it was threatened by the overwhelming influence of the dominant powers of Russia, Germany, and Austria. Poland had only begun to recover its economic and social status under the tri-partition. Musical education institutions had been shut down after the failed rebellion, and the most promising creative minds, such as Chopin and Mickiewicz, had left the country. Noskowski, Moniuszko, and other members of the Positivist movement achieved a practical goal: they laid the necessary groundwork for the following generation to pursue art for its own sake, rather than art that served a practical purpose.

### CHAPTER III: YOUNG POLAND IN LITERATURE, PESSIMISM

Whereas Positivism and “organic work” rejected nationalist and Romantic era values, Young Poland sought to revive them. The generation of Poles that lived through the reprisals following the failed 1863 revolution may have understood the utilitarian value of Positivism, but the younger generation had no such trauma to influence their judgement. They saw the Positivist attitude of reconciliation with occupying nations as a cop-out, and were deeply cynical about the effectiveness of social programs.

As a result, there was a resurgence in the national independence movement. Roman Dmowski (1864-1939), a Polish statesman and ideologue, renewed national fervor for Polish independence. He “stressed the need to create a modern Polish nation deriving its strength from the ethnically Polish masses.”<sup>1</sup> In Warsaw, a National League was formed, which supported all means of national liberation that had been suppressed in the Positivist era: Uprisings were encouraged, and any sense of teamwork with the occupying nations to achieve socio-economic progress was abandoned.

This impatience with the practicalities of Positivism and ‘organic work’ also affected artists. Artur Gorski, a writer and prominent voice of Young Poland, spoke to the weariness with bureaucratic practicalities associated with Positivism in 1898: “As disillusionment with the life of society and with its typical product... disgust and protest against the banality and soulless existence of the organized mass increased... more sensitive and profound minds... after having lost... their sympathy with social movements, began to withdraw from life and look for other, more durable values.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Poland," Britannica Academic, s.v., accessed November 14, 2019, <https://academic-eb-com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Poland/108558>.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1991), 35.

Gorski's comment represents how the new generation of Polish writers viewed Positivism. They had no patience for naturalism or realism, which they saw as banal. Rather, their ambition was to transcend the commonplace and achieve something spiritual. In his survey of Polish literature, Czeslaw Milosz observed, "The central myth of Young Poland was that of the artist who enters into contact with the ineffable essence of reality and, in a certain sense, redeems all those who do not dare to reach deeper than the superficiality of the daily grind."<sup>3</sup>

Young Poland's desire to go beyond the 'daily grind' was partly an aesthetic stance, but also reflected the Polish nation's unrelentingly bleak state. Despite Positivist reformers' attempt to improve living conditions for ethnic Poles, Poland remained an underdeveloped nation when compared to the rest of Europe. Economic stagnation and lack of resources for artists to promote their work prompted a deeply cynical and despairing mentality for the Young Poland generation. Furthermore, the unceasing subjugation of Poland to the whims of other nations imparted a sense of powerlessness as ethnic Poles were preyed on by faceless bureaucratic powers. Again, it was Gorski who summed up this sentiment, writing: "Over all souls a terrible darkness is spreading in which even doubt is extinguished; nothing is certain but horror and pain... there is nothing but a dust of souls tossed by fate and crashing against each other over the abysses."<sup>4</sup>

This attitude of despair and hopelessness, combined with an impatience for Positivist ideals such as utilitarian value, realism, and rationalism, completely changed Poland's artistic landscape. The sense of national despair identified by Gorski manifested in a return of the Messianic imagery typical of Polish Romanticism. For the romantics, this imagery reflected the state of partitioned Poland, but Young Poland poets used it to portray their individual suffering in the face of existential despair. To convey the angst and *sehnsucht* of their era, Young Poland writers abandoned clinically objective prose for the poetic abstraction associated with Polish Romanticism. They rejected the qualities of clarity, mass appeal, and political relevance

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<sup>3</sup> Czesaw Milosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 327.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 327.



championed by Positivists, and wrote about subjects far removed from realistic depictions of daily life.

## CHAPTER IV: SCHOPENHAUER AND NIETZSCHE, PROGENITORS OF YOUNG POLAND

Young Poland's pessimistic worldview was inarguably a product of Poland's socio-political landscape. However, this despairing mindset was not unique to Polish artists in turn of the century Europe. Actually, many of Young Poland's ideas stemmed from the work of German existentialist philosophers such as Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Nietzsche (1844-1900). These two philosophers pioneered the ideas of a non-rational world that rejected Positivism, and a quasi-religious conception of art. As we shall see, Young Poland artists took the ideas presented to these two philosophers and tailored them to fit their uniquely Polish experience. Many of the literary themes which underly *Masques* and *Metopes* were first established by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. For this reason it is worth giving a cursory overview of their ideas.

Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* had a profound effect on European cultural life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It attempts to describe the nature of reality and mankind's ability to perceive it. Schopenhauer's treatise posited many ideas which anticipate the statements of Przybyszewski and Gorski, Young Poland's first ideologues. For instance, Schopenhauer portrayed life as an eternal struggle and thought free will was an illusion. Both of these concepts captured the pessimistic zeitgeist of Young Poland. Schopenhauer, like Young Poland artists, also thought Positivist disciplines such as math, science, and philosophy were limited in comparison to art. He believed only aesthetic experiences were capable of lifting the observer beyond the travails of worldly life.

Schopenhauer arrived at these ideas by establishing two core concepts: the world as idea and the world as will. Describing the world as idea is Schopenhauer's way of saying that a person does not see the world as it actually is. Rather, a person sees the world through their senses, thus the world they see is their *idea* or their perception of it. Schopenhauer explains this by saying

“what [one] knows is not a sun and an earth, but only an eye that sees a sun, a hand that feels an earth... the world which surrounds him is there only as idea.”<sup>1</sup>

More pertinent to the subject of this paper is Schopenhauer’s description of the world as it actually exists, or the world as will. Will, according to Schopenhauer, is “the thing-in-itself, the inner content, the essence of the world.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, the eye that sees the sun represents the world as idea, while the sun itself represents the world as will.

Schopenhauer’s description of will, or the world as it is, appealed to Young Poland’s first writers. To begin with, the idea that empirical data collected by one’s senses is an incomplete picture of the world directly rebukes Positivist thinking, which advocated rationalism and scientific thinking above all else. Furthermore, Schopenhauer described ‘will’ in bleak and pessimistic terms, saying: “considered purely in itself, [will] is without knowledge, and is merely a blind incessant impulse.”<sup>3</sup> He described the will as purely reactive, responding to stimuli without recourse to knowledge or rationalism. The result of this is a world “in a condition of eternal frustration, as it endlessly strives for nothing in particular, and as it goes essentially nowhere.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, free will is an illusion. This bleak idea of a world where human lives are churned in the cogs of a greater mechanism is distinctly similar to Gorski’s ‘great darkness,’ in which “there is nothing but a dust of souls tossed by fate and crashing against each other over the abysses.” Przybyszewski also echoes this idea, writing

“What can we know of a power eternally begetting unhappiness, of a demon in ourselves who... lives in the eternal night of ourselves, in whose hands we are helpless somnambular tools... There is no free will at all, and, consequently, there is no responsibility; our acts of will are willed yet not by us, but by a carnal man in ourselves over whom we have no power. There is no good and no evil because we ascribe these qualities... to

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1909), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/38427/38427-h/38427-h.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Wicks, “Arthur Schopenhauer,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2019 Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/schopenhauer/>.

nature only, which rules of man; yet to praise it or to blame it is nonsense.”<sup>5</sup>

As we shall see later in this paper, this idea of man being a slave to his carnal instincts became a central aesthetic feature of Young Poland art generally, and for Szymanowski specifically. It resurfaces in various guises throughout the *Masques* and *Metopes*.

As a remedy to his pessimistic concept of will, Schopenhauer suggests that the denial of an individual’s will, the death of the ego without physical death, would form the basis for true compassion and morality. “Death destroys the illusion which separates his consciousness from that of the rest: this is immortality.”<sup>6</sup> Schopenhauer points to sculptures adorning Greek sarcophagi, which present scenes of bacchanalia, hunts, dances and marriages, saying “Clearly the aim was to point in the most impressive manner away from the death of the mourned individual to the immortal life of nature.”<sup>7</sup> This idea of death as liberator from worldly suffering clearly influenced the late Romantics, the most obvious example being the *Liebestod* in Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*. It is also present in Strauss’s setting of *Don Juan*, thought to be based on Lenau’s rendition of the infamous womanizer. In the Lenau’s text, Don Juan is caught in a cycle of Schopenhauerian frustration as he looks for the perfect woman. When he realizes the futility of his search, he resigns himself to death. Young Poland artists also adopted Schopenhauer’s idea of liberation through death, combining it with messianic imagery inherited from Polish Romanticism. Beyond this, it is evident that several Young Poland artists took to Schopenhauer’s portrayal of ancient Greek burial rituals as being a celebration of both life and death. The work of Szymanowski and several other Young Poland artists prominently features Greek myths which mingle scenes of death and bacchanalia.

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<sup>5</sup> Czesaw Milosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 331.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1909), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/38427/38427-h/38427-h.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Another one of Schopenhauer's ideas that became central to Young Poland was his argument the empirical disciplines of science math and philosophy were inadequate to the task of perceiving the will. Rather, he suggests aesthetic experiences are the clearest means of perceiving will, and thereby lifting an individual above their individual will to life: "While science... can never reach a final goal nor attain full satisfaction, any more than by running we can reach the place where the clouds touch the horizon; art, on the contrary, is everywhere at its goal."<sup>8</sup> Schopenhauer's dismissal of science and rationalism clearly informed Young Poland's rejection of Positivism and the political concept of 'organic work.' It explains why Young Poland poets shunned prose, which was too scientifically accurate to capture the irrational world of will, and why Young Poland composers abandoned commercially friendly music which did not challenge its audiences and played to populist stereotypes.

Lasly, Schopenhauer's ideas on genius seem to have influenced Young Poland's artistic ideas. Schopenhauer stated that genius was granted "that restless aspiration, that unceasing desire for new things, and for the contemplation of lofty things, and also that longing that is hardly ever satisfied... whilst the common mortal, entirely filled and satisfied by the common present, ends in it, and finding everywhere his like, enjoys that peculiar satisfaction in daily life that is denied to genius."<sup>9</sup> This concept of genius clearly influenced Przybyszewski, who called the artist a priest in touch with higher powers. Just like Gorski's 'sensitive souls' who retreated from the banalities of daily life, Schopenhauer's genius is not satisfied with the commonplace, but is always searching for 'more durable values.' Young Poland writers clearly identified with this artistic stance. Unlike Positivists, who portrayed Polish life in a realistic way, Young Poland writers sought out larger-than-life subject matter. Furthermore, Schopenhauer's characterization of the restless genius, always searching for new horizons is also an accurate description of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Szymanowski, who was also searching for new artistic vistas, whether through German Romanticism, French Impressionism, or Slavic nationalism.

## CHAPTER V: NIETZSCHE'S *BIRTH OF TRAGEDY* AND YOUNG

### POLAND

Friedrich Nietzsche was another philosopher whose work was central to turn of the century aesthetics generally and to Young Poland specifically. In his treatise, *The Birth of Tragedy*, he expanded Schopenhauer's ideas of pessimism and aestheticism. Szymanowski considered this treatise to be a masterpiece.

Like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche rejected Positivism, writing “may not the triumph of *optimism*, the *common sense* that has gained the upper hand, the practical and theoretical *utilitarianism*, like democracy itself, with which it is synchronous—be symptomatic of declining vigor, of approaching age, of physiological weariness?”<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche's condemnation of utilitarianism could easily be applied to Polish Positivism, which promoted the utilitarian over the ideological. Nietzsche also agreed with Schopenhauer that art, rather than religion or politics “is set down as the properly *metaphysical* activity of man,” saying “the existence of the world is *justified* only as an æsthetic phenomenon.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite its similarities to Schopenhauer's treatise, *The Birth of Tragedy* distinguishes itself by taking many of Schopenhauer's ideas and viewing them through the lens of classical tragedy. Nietzsche argued that classical tragedy was beautiful because it was willing to embrace darker aspects of the human experience, and that only by revealing life's ugliness could true beauty be realized:

“whence... the *longing for the ugly*, the good, resolute desire of the Old Hellene for pessimism, for tragic myth, for the picture of all that is terrible, evil, enigmatical, destructive, fatal at the basis of existence,—whence then must tragedy have sprung? Perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy, or Hellenism and Pessimism* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 2016) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

from *joy*, from strength, from exuberant health, from overfullness.”<sup>3</sup>

In Nietzsche’s opinion, an artistic genius would submit themselves to the pessimistic state of the world, and in so doing produce sublime art that would elevate the ordinary masses. In his own words, “the sufferer feels the deepest longing for beauty—he begets it.”<sup>4</sup> This sacrificial image of the artist has clear ties to Schopenhauer’s redemptive conception of art, and to his ideas about the inherent suffering that came through living. It also appealed to the messianic imagery already established by the Polish Romantic generation, and reinforced the ideas of Przybyszewski and Gorski, who portrayed the artist as a martyr redeeming the ordinary masses through their suffering.

Beyond this, Nietzsche’s idea of using ancient art as the basis for innovation in modern art clearly influenced several figures of the Young Poland movement. Many writers and musicians, Szymanowski included, composed works inspired by classical mythology. In his essay on Hellenism in Szymanowski’s work, Stephen Downes observes how Wyspianski, a Young Poland writer, blended aspects of classical literature with the messianic imagery of Polish Romanticism:

“A striking aspect of Wyspianski’s work is the recontextualisation of Hellenic themes as a way to portray the revitalization of modern Polish culture. For example, in *Not listopadowa* [November Night], dedicated to the failed Polish uprising of 1830, statues of Greek gods standing in the parks of Warsaw come to life as symbols of national resurrection, and *Acropolis*, set in the Wawel Castle in Krakow, includes a symbolic union of the resurrected Christ and Apollo.”<sup>5</sup>

In fact, Wyspianski often returned to Classical literature. His play, *The Return of Ulysses*, is a retelling of the last events in Homer’s *Odyssey*. His stage drama called *Achilles* also had roots

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Cadrin and Stephen C. Downes, *The Szymanowski Companion* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 142.



in classical literature, and was later used by Szymanowski in his song for voice and orchestra, *Penthiselia*.

Nietzsche's portrayal of classical tragedy as a balance of two opposing and complementary forces, the Dionysian and Apollonian, also influenced Young Poland. According to Nietzsche, Apollonian forces, which refer to the Greek god of light and music, represented classical form and proportion, while Dionysian forces, derived from the god of wine and bacchanalia, represented sensualism and ecstasy. In Schopenhauerian terms, the Apollonian element represented the individual will, and the Dionysian element represented ecstatic liberation from individuality. Nietzsche identifies this liberation from individuality with dance, saying:

“In dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community: he has forgotten how to walk and speak and is on his way toward flying into the air, dancing. His very gestures express enchantment... He feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted, in ecstasy, like the gods he saw walking in his dreams.”<sup>6</sup>

Young Poland adopted Nietzsche's concept of Apollonian and Dionysian forces. The idea of Dionysian bacchanalia being the source of ecstatic liberation led the poet Kazimierz Tetmajer to write explicitly hedonistic works, that equated sensuality with spiritual revelation.

Szymanowski also adopted Dionysian ideas of transcendence in his opera, *Krol Roger*, which concludes with a dance in a Greek amphitheater that leaves the titular character transformed and spiritually uplifted.

In conclusion, the ties between Young Poland and German existentialism are obvious. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche provided the philosophical groundwork for Gorski and Przybyszewski, who in turn influenced a whole generation of writers and composers with their ideas. Szymanowski was acquainted with all four of the above mentioned writers, and was influenced by their ideas through each of his three creative phases.

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<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy, or Hellenism and Pessimism* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 2016) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm>.

## CHAPTER VI: YOUNG POLAND AND UNIVERSALITY

Young Poland's fixation with German existentialism is symptomatic of its broader urge to strengthen Polish artistic standards by absorbing universal aesthetic trends. Just as Mickiewicz and Chopin had done two generations earlier, Young Poland writers drew upon other European artistic movements while expressing the conflicted state of their own nation. In doing so, they sought to create art that transcended mundane provincialism and had universal significance.

Milosz points to this cultural cosmopolitanism as defining Young Poland's essential literary style:

“In literature she [Partitioned Poland] succeeded in blending cosmopolitan influences with her own literary past and in producing, thus, something specific and original. Cosmopolitanism is the proper word here, because European culture... was felt to be of a piece, and young people, whether they were Frenchmen, Poles, or Russians, pored over the same Latin and Greek classics, read the same German philosophers and French poets.”<sup>1</sup>

This trend towards universality was also a direct rebuke to the Positivist's conception of Polish national art, which focused on realistic depictions of daily life in literature, and evocations of folk idioms in music. Instead of evoking ancient surroundings for allegorical purposes, as Prus did with Egypt, Young Poland artists wrote about esoteric subjects as a means of escaping their political reality.

This was also true of Young Poland composers such as Szymanowski. In his essay on Szymanowski's relation to Chopin, [author name] describes how older concepts of nationalism, such as messianic imagery and folk music traditions were folded into a more cosmopolitan vision of Poland:

“In this generation, the Romantic national martyrology and the continuation of insurrection traditions were replaced by a strong transnational generational link, founded on fascinations shared by the artists of many European countries. As a consequence,

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<sup>1</sup> Czesaw Milosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 327.

those artists perceived Polish national culture to be an integral part of the modern European one, and saw the dangers of isolationism and backwardness in old forms of nationalism. In order to provide Polish music with a universal dimension, the new composers drove to create a modern musical language relevant in the contemporary world.”<sup>2</sup>

Young Poland’s appearance may have coincided with an upsurge in political nationalism, but it had a different way of expressing its national aspiration from the Romantic and Positivist generations. Wary of Poland’s lack of development compared to the rest of Europe, Young Poland created an international vision of Poland that stood shoulder to shoulder with developed European nations. They drew inspiration from romantic poets and composers, reviving the poetic form and morbid imagery inherent in messianic portrayals of Poland, but repurposed it to their own ends. The following section of this paper will show how Szymanowski followed this cosmopolitan conception of nationalism, and how he and the poets who inspired him transformed Polish Romanticism and European modernism into a universally respected Polish style.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Cadrin and Stephen C. Downes, *The Szymanowski Companion* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 22.

## CHAPTER VII: SZYMANOWSKI'S EARLY DEVELOPMENT AND YOUNG POLAND

Szymanowski's education in Warsaw brought him in contact with Positivist ideas. As mentioned previously, his teacher Noskowski was part of a musical establishment that embodied proficiency more than innovation. Before arriving in Warsaw, however, Szymanowski had developed a well defined musical personality. This was due to a confluence of fortunate factors. Szymanowski was born in Timoshovka Ukraine, on a country estate where his family were landowners. His father, who immediately noticed his unusual talent, supported all of his early musical efforts. A supportive family and a relatively secluded environment probably went a long way in giving Szymanowski independence from the predominant artistic trends of Positivism. Another contributing factor to Szymanowski's artistic independence from prevailing national tastes was his first composition teacher, Gustav Neuhaus. Neuhaus, who was both Szymanowski's uncle and the father of famed pedagogue Heinrich Neuhaus, was German by birth and had a wide cultural perspective. He not only exposed Szymanowski to Russian opera productions, but introduced him to the writings of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. These impressions turned out to be indelible for Szymanowski. He credited a production of Glinka to be the moment that inspired him to be a musician, and like many of Young Poland's members, recognized Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* as a book that spoke "an essential truth about art."<sup>1</sup>

As a teenage composer, Szymanowski already showed signs of artistic ambition and an identification with Young Poland's ideas. His *Preludes* op. 1 are composed in a musically sophisticated international style that pay homage to Chopin's internationalism while eschewing any folk music quotations. Meanwhile, his fascination with Young Poland poetry is clear from his

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 115.

*6 Songs*, op. 2, set to poetry of Kazimierz Tetmajer, and *3 Fragments*, op. 6, set to poetry by Jan Kasprowicz, both members of Young Poland. A quick examination of these few works will show how Szymanowski identified with the ideals of Young Poland even at a young age.

## CHAPTER VIII: SZYMANOWSKI'S PRELUDES, CHOPIN'S

### UNIVERSALISM

Szymanowski wrote the earliest of his op. 1 *Preludes* at the age of 14, while still in Timoshovka. They are clearly influenced by Chopin. However, Szymanowski was unlike Moniuszko, who superficially imitated Chopin's use of national music. Instead, he echoed Chopin's progressive attributes, such as his use of piano sonority, phrase structure, counterpoint, and chromatic harmony.

The cycle's 7th prelude, a nocturne, is a particularly clear example of Szymanowski imitating Chopin. The figuration of the left hand is similar to that of Chopin's arpeggiated accompaniments. Chords are widely spaced to produce a rich sonority over which the melody can float. Chopin's influence is also evident in Szymanowski's melodic writing. According to Jim Samson, Szymanowski uses Chopin's process of segmentation and variation, where a part of the melody is repeated with melodic and rhythmic variation in order to spin out a phrase:<sup>1</sup>



The image displays two systems of musical notation for Szymanowski's Prelude, op. 1 no. 2. The first system features a treble clef with a melody marked 'leg.' and 'p (rubato)', and a bass clef with a left-hand accompaniment marked 'leg.'. The second system continues the piece with markings for 'rit.' and 'rall.' in both hands. The notation includes various ornaments, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Ex 2: Szymanowski, *Prelude*, op. 1 no. 2

<sup>1</sup> Jim Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1991), 57.

Other characteristics of Chopin's writing in this passage are the melodic ornamentation in measures one and two, the use of asymmetrical phrase structure, and the different metrical subdivisions of each hand.<sup>2</sup>

The aspects of Chopin's style Szymanowski chose to emulate in this prelude and others make it clear he valued Chopin's universalism over his nationalism. There is no trace of folk dance or national song within any of these preludes. Instead, Chopin's ideas are reflected in Szymanowski's pianistic and melodic writing.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Cadrin and Stephen C. Downes, *The Szymanowski Companion* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 23.

## CHAPTER IX: SZYMANOWSKI AND YOUNG POLAND POETRY

The op 2 *Songs* follow a similar pattern of Szymanowski distancing himself from Moniuszko's salon tradition. Whereas Moniuszko's songs have simple piano accompaniments and transparent harmonic layouts, Szymanowski's songs are far more emotionally intense and intellectually demanding of listeners. These songs also clearly link Szymanowski to Young Poland in literature, because the Tetmajer poems that Szymanowski set in this cycle are quintessential examples of Young Poland poetry. They are permeated by themes of yearning, the love death duality, and an escape into hedonism that elevates the poet above the travails of ordinary life. Take for example, the fourth song, *Sometimes, when long I drowsily dream*:

Sometimes when long I drowsily dream,  
I can hear a woman's wonderful voice  
singing angelic songs  
of beauty surpassing all the songs of the world.

I listen to the voice with all my soul,  
a nostalgia tears the heart out of my breast,  
I would follow the voice anywhere... I do not know  
if this is love or death that sings.<sup>1</sup>

The poet's equation of love and death in the second stanza bears homage to both Wagner's *Liebestod* and to Schopenhauer's self-abnegation. This shows how Young Poland poetry exposed the youthful Szymanowski to German literary and musical ideas, and how these ideas had a direct role in his creative process.

Szymanowski's next set of songs, op. 5, is set to poetry by Jan Kasproicz, and demonstrates how Young Poland poetry revived the romantic generation's depiction of Poland as a messianic nation. In these poems, the poet calls out to a distant and unresponsive God. This call

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<sup>1</sup> Zofia Helman, Liner notes to Karol Szymanowski, *Complete Songs for Voice and Piano*. Channel Classics, CCS 19398, year not listed. CD.



for liberation from the darkness of the world is conflated with the pessimistic conception of will espoused by Schopenhauer. Take for instance the following stanza from *Holy God*:

Holy Mighty God!  
 Why do my lips have to splutter this bleeding song?  
 Cry with me!  
 Why do I have to go into the dark  
 though the heat of noon is burning in the skies.  
 Why do I have to drag through the crossroads  
 towards the sloping crosses  
 with black arms where a cawing crow perches  
 and with its beak spills ashes of the dead<sup>2</sup>

This poem has clearly borrowed images typical of Polish Romantic poetry. Its images of crosses, black arms and death have clear ties to the messianic conception of the Polish nation used by the Romantics. However, the poem seems to use this messianic imagery in a different way than the earlier generation of Romantics. The poet trodding through the “heat of noon” with his cries going unheeded by God is more an embodiment of Schopenhauer’s will— a man caught in a cycle of endless striving in a Godless world, doomed to eternal frustration.

From these early compositions we can deduce that Young Poland poetry exerted a strong influence on Szymanowski’s creativity from his earliest days as a composer. He consistently returned to Young Poland writers as sources of creative inspiration. After composing the Tetmajer songs, Szymanowski also explored the poetry of Kasproicz and Micinski in his subsequent song cycles. Even his purely instrumental music was marked by Young Poland poetry. His *Concert Overture* op. 12 was originally to include an epigram featuring the poem *Witez Wlast*, by Micinski. In his purely instrumental music, such as the opus 1 preludes, Szymanowski adhered to Young Poland’s ideals of universality and modernism. When his imitated Chopin, it was in a way that paid homage to Chopin’s modernism and patriotism rather than a provincial caricature of his music.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER X: SZYMANOWSKI'S EARLY MATURITY AND THE FORMATION OF YOUNG POLAND IN MUSIC

Initially it seemed that Szymanowski could flounder in Warsaw, which at the time was a “musical backwater.”<sup>1</sup> He had a somewhat strained relationship with his teacher Noskowski, and complained about the state of Polish music as being “hopelessly mundane” with only the “coagulated commonplace of ‘national creativity’”<sup>2</sup> to bolster it (again, notice how these descriptions echo Young Poland’s broader complaints about the state of national culture). Despite these circumstances, Szymanowski was able to learn essential elements of compositional craftsmanship from Noskowski, and found kindred spirits in the composers Grzegorz Fitelberg, Lubomir Roczycycki, and Apolinary Szeluto. These composers united to form the Young Poland in Music Publishing Group in 1905, officially giving Young Poland a voice in music as well as in literature.

Szymanowski’s style changed significantly during his affiliation with Young Poland in music. Like their literary counterparts, Young Poland musicians drew upon international cultural movements to create a cosmopolitan Polish idiom. Szymanowski and other Young Poland composers focused on imitating German romanticism, which was the most prominent and respected musical style at the time. Szymanowski’s song cycles, which had previously drawn solely from the work of Young Poland poetry, now featured the work of German modernists. His musical style also changed, abandoning melodic writing in favor of

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<sup>1</sup> Alistair Wightman. *Karol Szymanowski: His Life and Work*. London: Routledge, 2017, 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

motivic development. His use of harmony became more adventurous, and his compositions, while still organized around tonal centers, became more tonally diffuse.

A prime example of Szymanowski's style at the height of his affiliation with Young Poland is his second piano sonata. This sonata encapsulates all of the elements Szymanowski took from German Romanticism, and in its technical finish and artistic quality represents a Polish composition of real international value. It is cast in three movements, the first a sonata form, the second a theme and variations, and the third a fugue prefaced with a minuet. When compared to the early preludes, one of the Sonata's most striking characteristics are its dense chromaticism, its emphasis on counterpoint and its reliance on motivic development. The first phrase of the sonata shows how traditional tonality is maintained such a highly chromatic context:

Karol Szymanowski, Op. 21.

*Allegro assai. (Molto appassionato.)*

Piano.

The musical score is written for piano and consists of five systems of two staves each. The tempo is marked *Allegro assai. (Molto appassionato.)*. The score begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a series of chromatic passages. Dynamic markings include *p*, *sf*, *mf*, and *cresc.*. The piece is characterized by its complex harmonic language and rhythmic intensity.

Ex 3: Szymanowski, Piano Sonata no. 2, op. 21, mvt. 1

Although the movement is eventually confirmed to be in A major, the first passage is so chromatic that one cannot firmly make any assumptions about the work's tonality. The constant

modulations and densely chromatic language are both drawn from German influences such as Strauss and Wagner.

In his analysis of the work, Jim Samson concludes Szymanowski compensated for a lack of tonal clarity by establishing a clear sense of motivic development throughout the work. This is evident not only within movements, but between movements. Take for example, the resemblance between the first movement's second subject and the theme of the second movement:

**Quasi andante.**  
*molto espress.*

Ex 4: Szymanowski, Piano Sonata no. 2, op. 21, mvt. 1, second subject

**TEMA.**  
**Allegretto tranquillo. (Grazioso.)**

Ex 5: Szymanowski, Piano Sonata no. 2, op. 21, mvt 2

I will return to Szymanowski's proclivity for polyphony and motivic development when discussing his middle period piano works, where he blends late Romantic and Impressionist styles.

The *Second Sonata* marks Szymanowski's early maturity as a composer. With it, he achieved his goal of creating a truly Polish sonata that could take its place in the western music canon. In absorbing the influence of Strauss and Reger, Szymanowski had achieved Young Poland's goal of pulling Polish music out of the provincialism established by Moniuszko and Noskowski.

Despite the work's clear artistic merits, critics accused Szymanowski of mimicking Strauss too slavishly. He himself was aware of this fact, and it was his efforts to break free from excessive imitation of Strauss that led him to expand his artistic horizons in his middle period.

## **CHAPTER XI: NEW INFLUENCES IN SZYMANOWSKI'S MIDDLE PERIOD**

In 1913, Szymanowski completed the ballet *Hagith*, his last piece in a clearly Straussian style, then took a year long break from composition. He spent this year traveling widely, accumulating several significant artistic impressions along the way. He first visited Paris, cementing his growing fascination with French and Russian musical modernism. After this, he went to Sicily and to Northern Africa, where he became fascinated with antiquity and orientalism. In Sicily he saw the Grecian ruins of the Selinunte Temple, which strengthened his pre-existing fascination with ancient Greek literature and mythology. In Africa, Szymanowski became fascinated first with Moorish culture specifically, and then with Muslim culture in general. He filled journals with notes on the region's history, medicine, and religion.

These many impressions, ranging from French Impressionism to classical mythology were to have a profound effect on Szymanowski's subsequent shift of musical style. For the first time, he composed explicitly programmatic pieces for solo piano, a departure from the abstract forms that defined his early piano works. Tonal harmony, consistent if stretched to its limits in the early works, makes only fleeting, elliptical appearances in his middle period works. Non-tonal harmony is predominant, whether used coloristically or as a non-tonal center. Added to this expanded use of harmony is a more variegated and colorful use of pianistic texture than that seen in the early works.

## CHAPTER XII: YOUNG POLAND IN SZYMANOWSKI'S *METOPES* AND *MASQUES*

Having described Young Poland and Szymanowski's relation to it, I now will specifically discuss the influence Young Poland had on Szymanowski's middle period works, specifically the *Metopes* and *Masques*. To begin, I will briefly describe the two cycle's and their narrative features.

The *Metopes* op. 29 are the first of Szymanowski's middle period piano works. The work's title refers to a common feature of classical architecture: an empty space in a Doric frieze, which is often decorated with scenes taken from Greek mythology. Szymanowski had seen metopes in person during his trip to Sicily, when he visited the temple of Selinunte. Unlike Szymanowski's early piano works, which were confined to abstract musical forms, the *Metopes* are programmatic, drawing upon three female characters from Homer's *Odyssey*. The *Odyssey* depicts the travels of Odysseus as he works his way home from the Trojan war. In the course of his journey, he is constantly waylaid by various obstacles placed before him by the Greek gods.

The first piece of the cycle, *L'île des Sirènes*, depicts one such obstacle. Sirens are mythical creatures who use their irresistibly beautiful voice to lure passing sailors into treacherous reefs, thereby drowning them. Odysseus, curious to hear what the Sirens sing of, but knowing the danger involved, instructs his crew to plug their ears with wax and tie him to the mast. In this manner, he is able to hear the Siren's song *and* pass safely through their reefs. The next piece of the *Metopes* depicts Calypso, a sorceress who falls in love with Odysseus and seeks to detain him on her island forever. Though less dangerous than the Sirens, Calypso is another obstacle that delays Odysseus. The final piece depicts the cycle's only truly benevolent character, Nausicaa. Nausicaa, like Calypso is implied to fall in love with Odysseus, but chooses to help him get home instead of hindering him.



The *Masques*, like the *Metopes*, are a triptych of programatic pieces. However, the *Masques* are based on three different pieces of literature instead of just one. *Sheherazade*, the first piece of the cycle is drawn from *Thousand and One Nights*. It is the story of a king name Shahryar who, upon learning his wife has been unfaithful, resolves to execute each woman he marries after a single day, so there is no chance of infidelity. Sheherazade, his most recent wife, figures out a way to delay her impending execution by telling a captivating story each evening and cutting it short just before the resolution. Shahryar is so intent to know what happens that he agrees to extend her sentence day by day, until gradually he learns to love and trust Sheherazade and put the whole idea of executing her behind him.

*Tantris Der Narr*, second piece of the cycle, is based on Ernst Hardt's satirical interpretation of the Tristan legend. In this version of the story, Tristan has been banished from King Mark's kingdom. Intent on seeing his beloved Isolde again, he returns after ten years, disguised as a jester names Tantris, an anagram of Tristan. Upon his arrival, Tristan's years of absence combine with his costume to make him completely unrecognizable to Isolde. Pathetically, he is only recognizable to his dog and to the court jester. After being repeatedly rejected by Isolde, Tristan gives up, leaving her to realize too late that her beloved had indeed returned for her. It is a cynical and satirical take on a story with tragic themes.

The final piece of the cycle, *Serenade de Don Juan* is based on the fictional libertine and womanizer from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Specifically, it depicts the scene in which Don Juan, disguised as his servant, attempts to seduce a maid by plucking an evening aubade on his mandolin.<sup>1</sup> Given Szymanowski's admiration for Strauss, it is highly likely that he also kept Lenau's rendition of the story in mind, in which Don Juan's search for the ideal woman is really

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Zent, "The Harmonic Language of Karol Szymanowski's "Metopes," Op. 29, and "Masques," Op. 34." (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 1988), 45.

the quest “for the meaning of life.”<sup>2</sup> Frustrated and unfulfilled, the Don allows himself to be killed at the end of the story.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Laki, “Don Juan, Op. 20,” Kennedy Center, accessed November 14, 2019, <https://www.kennedy-center.org/artist/composition/3163>)

## CHAPTER XIII: SZYMANOWSKI AND YOUNG POLAND'S

### ARTISTIC IDEAL

There are a number of connections between the *Metopes* and *Masques* and Young Poland. While writing these pieces, for instance, Szymanowski was an uncanny embodiment of Young Poland's conception of the unworldly artist, who rises above the world's banal political problems and redeems the ordinary masses through his artwork. These two pieces were composed at the outbreak of World War I, and although Szymanowski was of the age to be drafted, he was excused from military service because of a leg injury. Instead of serving, Szymanowski waited out the first period of the war on his family's estate in Timoshovka. He was aware of the war, and his letters indicate that he was worried by the events transpiring around him. Despite this, the war seemed to have little effect on Szymanowski's creative output. The war years spent in Timoshovka the most prolific of Szymanowski's life. Furthermore, the music he produced had no relation whatsoever to the war— Szymanowski's musical language remained decadent to the point of being abstruse, and the literary material he used to inform his music bore no relation to contemporary politics.

Szymanowski's circumstances and creative vision at this time are similar to those of Nietzsche's when he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy*. In his forward to the treatise, Nietzsche wrote:

“...observe the time in which it originated, in spite of which it originated, the exciting period of the Franco-German war of 1870-71. While the thunder of the battle of Wörth rolled over Europe, the ruminator and riddle-lover, who had to be the parent of this book, sat somewhere in a nook of the Alps, lost in riddles and ruminations, consequently very much concerned and unconcerned at the same time, and wrote down his meditations on the Greeks,—the kernel of the curious and almost

inaccessible book, to which this belated prologue (or epilogue) is to be devoted.”<sup>1</sup>

Szymanowski and Nietzsche both waited out wars while ruminating on classical literature, their work reflecting a simultaneous concern about world events and an unwillingness to confront them directly. Nietzsche, along with Schopenhauer inspired Young Poland’s ideal of the artist or sensitive soul who retreats from the world “in search of more durable values.” By remaining true to his literary and musical interests, and by shutting out world events, Szymanowski was searching for more durable values beyond the political conflicts engulfing his country. Like Chopin, he advocated for his country while being physically isolated from its conflicts.

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy, or Hellenism and Pessimism* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 2016) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm>.

## CHAPTER XIV: EXISTENTIALISM AND YOUNG POLAND

### LITERATURE IN THE *MASQUES* AND *METOPES*

There is more connecting these triptychs to German philosophy than the uncanny resemblance between Szymanowski and Nietzsche's circumstances. For example, Szymanowski's unceasing search for new literary and musical horizons echoes Schopenhauer's dictum that a genius pursues "that restless aspiration, that unceasing desire for new things, and for the contemplation of lofty things." Furthermore, Szymanowski's choice of literature is deeply informed Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Szymanowski's choice to work with classical mythology in the *Metopes* and middle eastern folktales in *Scheherazade* show his adherence to Nietzsche's argument that ancient art, particularly classical literature, should be used as the basis for innovation in modern art.

Szymanowski also adopts Nietzsche's notion that art should not only embrace the practical and utilitarian, but the awful and tragic aspects of the human condition; that an artwork's value would not necessarily stem from its depiction of wholesome events and morally upright characters, but in depicting the awful and inimical aspects of human nature. The *Masques* are particularly deft in their portrayal of human suffering as being absurd, grotesque and meaningless. This is partly due to what Szymanowski called the cycle's insincerity— each character in the triptych is concealing (or masking) their true intentions. In the case of Don Juan and Tristan, the characters are in actual disguise, their unrequited longing wrapped in the sardonic jocularities of a court jester and a lover's aubade. The lack of morality displayed by these characters, and the vulgar humor with which their situations are presented would surely appeal to Nietzsche's "longing for the ugly."

Szymanowski's portrayal of human suffering in these triptychs also invokes Schopenhauer's idea of the world as will, in which humanity is a slave to its desires and locked in

a futile search for something just beyond its grasp. In the *Metopes* and *Masques* each character's personal desires are the source of their own misery. In the *Metopes*, Odysseus is on a long journey home, but is constantly delayed by forces beyond his control. The *Sirens* tempt him but to follow his desire to hear them would be death. *Calypso*, who has fallen in love with Odysseus, strives to keep him, knowing that he will never truly reciprocate her feelings. It is only *Nausicaa* who denies her own romantic desires towards Odysseus that is able to finally facilitate his return home.

The *Masques* also feature characters locked in a world beyond their control, where their intentions are constantly thwarted. Scheherazade is in a nightmare scenario where she must delay her death sentence every night. Her husband, Shahryar is a prisoner of his jealousy, which has caused him to commit the atrocious act of executing each of his previous wives after a single night. Tristan strives to return to Isolde in disguise after being banished from Mark's kingdom, but is not recognized by his former lover. When he is recognized, it is too late, and the pair must reconcile themselves to being forever apart. Finally, Don Juan, who retains an outwardly jocular appearance, is despairing in his search for the ideal woman.

Schopenhauer's juxtaposition of love and death is also a central feature of the stories in the *Metopes* and *Masques*. For instance, Scheherazade is locked in the love death duality, where her life hangs in the balance every night because of her jealous husband. An even more specific example of the love death duality is the sirens song, which is both alluring and fatal. Tetmajer's poem, the basis for Szymanowski op. 2 and an example of morbid imagery in Young Poland poetry, could just as easily be describing the sirens:

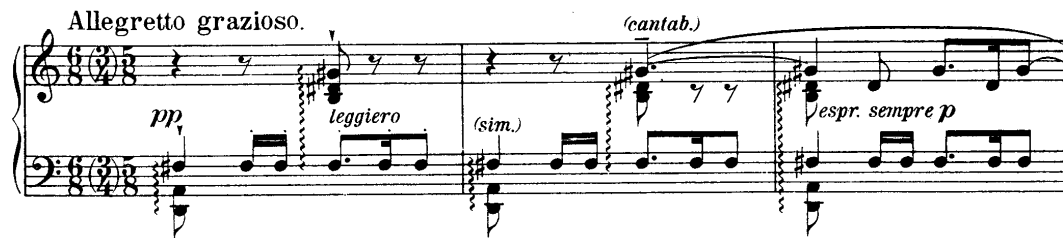
“I listen to the voice with all my soul,  
a nostalgia tears the heart out of my breast,  
I would follow the voice anywhere... I do not know  
if this is love or death that sings.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zofia Helman. Liner notes to Karol Szymanowski, *Complete Songs for Voice and Piano*. Channel Classics, CCS 19398, year not listed. CD.

The love death duality is also used to demonstrate Schopenhauer's idea of self abnegation as salvation from worldly suffering. Don Juan ultimately allows himself to be killed in order to escape the cycle of unquenchable yearning. In *Tantris der Narr*, the love death Wagner uses to resolve his opera is denied by Szymanowski, giving the conclusion a tragic futility. Finally Nausicaa, who is implied to have fallen in love with Odysseus, is the character who ultimately facilitates his return home, because she denies her own desires in the interest of making the morally correct decision.

Nausicaa's self abnegation is a particularly interesting case, because Szymanowski's setting of it evokes Nietzsche's Dionysian concept of self abandonment through dance. *Nausicaa* opens with a gentle, dance-like rhythm that Szymanowski often used to evoke states of ecstatic transcendence:



Ex 6: Szymanowski, *Nausicaa*, from *Metopes*, op. 29

One finds a similar figure in *Tanz*, one of the *Love Songs of Hafiz*, op. 24:

Allegretto, poco scherzando.  
 ppp leggiero sf (ma p) sf

Ex 7: Szymanowski, *Tanz*, from *Des Hafis Liebeslieder*, op. 24

The poetic text of this song is also worth noting:

Today all dance, all, all dance! Divine is dance!  
 Divine, divine is dance!  
 Some dance in their stocking  
 Some only in their shoes,  
 Some naked!  
 High! High, you naked dances, high!  
 Today all dance, all, all dance!  
 Divine is dance! Dance is divine!<sup>2</sup>

The similarity between the Hafiz's poem and Nietzsche's dictum "In dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community...and is on his way toward flying into the air, dancing," is impossible to ignore. Like Nietzsche (and Hafiz), Szymanowski equated dance to a state of spiritual transcendence, and used it to depict Nausicaa's act of self abnegation. The Dionysian abandonment implied by this movement becomes clearer as it progresses from a playful lull to an ascending bitonal stretto that brings to mind Hafiz's injunction to "dance high."

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER XV: YOUNG POLAND'S UNIVERSALITY IN THE *MASQUES AND METOPES*

Another aspect of the *Metopes* and *Masques* which align them with Young Poland's artistic ideology is their universality. Szymanowski was like Chopin, in that he sought to create a universal musical language built upon his country's heritage. There is nothing explicitly nationalist about the two triptychs, and neither of them quote Chopin directly. However, in one of his letters Szymanowski stated:

“My works may be called *Metopes*, *Masques*, or *Mythes*: they may be bad or good music, but there can be no doubt that they were written by a Pole... in each of my new clearly defined pieces, I pay homage, humbly but fervently, to Fryderyk Chopin. It is his music which, with the dawning of each new day, I venerate more highly and with an ever deepening understanding, attempting as far as I can, to relate my own work to what is for me the only Polish musical tradition.”<sup>1</sup>

As I have already established, Szymanowski admired Chopin for his cosmopolitan approach to composition, and not for his quotation of national dance themes. So, when he speaks of relating his work to the Polish musical tradition, he means in the sense of blending international influences with Poland's musical heritage to create something original. Elsewhere he wrote, “he [Chopin] really was a Pole who composed Polish Music which at the same time is universal art of the highest standard.”<sup>2</sup>

If we recall Milosz's assessment of Young Poland literature as having “blend[ed] cosmopolitan influences with her own literary past and in producing, thus, something specific and original,” we see that it could apply equally to Szymanowski's *Masques* and *Metopes*. The triptychs' literary source material ranges from ancient Greek and Arabic traditions to

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Cadrin and Stephen C. Downes, *The Szymanowski Companion* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

contemporary retellings of German legends. Musically, both cycles draw on aspects of French Impressionism and German Romanticism while also borrowing aspects of Russian modernism. Clearly, Szymanowski was using international literary and musical traditions to reinvigorate Polish musical traditions. This trend had always been apparent in his work, especially when we remember his use of German late romantic idioms in his early works.

Like his corollaries in literature, Szymanowski blended cosmopolitan influences with his own ideas to create something original. To demonstrate this, I will look at a few key examples of the musical language in these works.

### Use of Tonal Structure

One Impressionist aspect of the *Metopes* and *Masques* is their use of atonal harmony. Donald Zent, in his dissertation on Szymanowski's harmonic language, observes that Impressionist composers avoided traditional tonal concepts (such as the late Romantic chromaticism), and often focused the music around a single pitch or interval, which were established through "pedal points, ostinati, and registrar recurrences."<sup>3</sup>

This method of organizing pitch can be seen in the *Metopes*' first movement, *L'île des Sirènes*. The movement opens with two major ninths, one in each hand. Together, the notes form a four note cluster, but spaced as they are, form an open and resonant sonority:

Lento. (*molto rubato ed improvisando*)

leggiero, ma con Ped.  
ppp (sempre)

Ex 8: Szymanowski, *L'île des Sirènes*, from *Metopes* op. 29

<sup>3</sup> Donald Zent. "The Harmonic Language of Karol Szymanowski's "Metopes," Op. 29, and "Masques," Op. 34." (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 1988), 74.

This sonority is one of the organizing tonal devices mentioned by Zent— a pitch center established by registrar recurrences throughout the movement. *L'île des Sirenes* features several kinds of extended harmonic techniques-- bitonal triads, extended 7th chords, and chromatically altered triads. However, the constant sonority that unites the entire piece is the interval of a 9th. It both opens and closes the work as a bichord divided between two hands. It also appears throughout the piece as a trill and a tremolando, inverted as a 2nd. Most conspicuously, it appears throughout the composition in the melody, which is composed almost entirely of parallel 9ths:

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system shows a melody in the right hand with a trill and a tremolando, marked 'velocissimo' and 'dolcesf'. The second system shows a melody in the right hand with a trill and a tremolando, marked '(sostenuto)' and '(velocissimo sempre)'. Both systems show a constant sonority of a 9th interval.

Ex 9: Szymanowski, *L'île des Sirènes*, from *Metopes* op. 29

Szymanowski also frequently uses pedal tones and bass ostinati to establish pitch centers. This can be seen in *Calypso* and *Scheherazade* especially, where Szymanowski use of three staves clarifies the pedal point:

Tempo I. (*Sosten.*)

The musical score consists of three staves: piano (top), mezzo-piano (middle), and bass (bottom). The piano part begins with a dynamic marking of *mp* and the instruction *molto espr.*. The mezzo-piano part features a dynamic marking of *pp* and a *riten.* instruction. The bass part starts with a dynamic marking of *ppp* and later changes to *pp*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

Ex 10: Szymanowski, *Calypso*, from *Metopes* op. 29

Another example of Szymanowski appropriation of Impressionist techniques is his use of bitonality, especially in cadenzas or improvisatory sections. This technique, which relegates the black keys to one hand the white to another, was often used by Debussy. Take for instance, his prelude, *Brouillards*:

**Modéré**  
extrêmement égal et léger  
*la m.g. un peu en valeur sur la m.d.*

The musical score is for Debussy's 'Brouillards' from Preludes book II. It is in 4/8 time and consists of two systems. The first system shows the right hand playing a melodic line with slurs and the left hand playing a bass line with slurs and fingerings (5, 5, 5, 5). The second system continues the piece with triplets in the right hand and slurs in the left hand, marked with 'pp'.

**Ex 11: Debussy, *Brouillards*, from *Preludes* book II**

Szymanowski uses this purely coloristic technique often in the *Metopes*. In the first and third pieces of the cycle, it appears at the climactic moments of *L'isle des Sirenes* as a cadenza:

*Agitato e tempestuoso.*  
*Allegro assai.* (toujours sur les touches blanches)

*pp cresc.*  
*(con Pedale)*

Ossia.  
*m.g. facilité*

*cresc.*

*ect. sempre in 8va Fino al Segno*

Ex 12: Szymanowski, *L'île des Sirènes*, from *Metopes* op. 29

It appears again as a refrain in *Calypso*:

*più mosso*

*accel.*

*accelerando*

*(poco cresc.)*

Ex 13: Szymanowski, *Calypso*, from *Metopes* op. 29

## CHAPTER XVI: LATE ROMANTIC ASPECTS OF THE *METOPES* AND *MASQUES*

Szymanowski's striking transformation of style owed much to his adoption of Impressionist idioms. However, he also retained many of the late romantic, German characteristics of his early works, working them together with the Impressionist techniques.

An example of Szymanowski combining Impressionist and Romantic techniques is his use of layered sonorities. In these works, Szymanowski used three staves to delineate layers of sound, just as Debussy and Ravel had done. In doing so, Szymanowski often creates static blocks of sound—pedal points or ostinati that are static in nature. This vertical, coloristic use of layered sonority is directly indebted to the French Impressionists.

However, in many places Szymanowski uses these layers to create complex polyphony, where each voice has a distinct melodic role, combining static voices with horizontally driven melodic material. This use of counterpoint recalls Szymanowski earlier piano works such as the *Piano Sonata* op. 21, and is more associated with German compositional models. These bars from *Sheherazade* are a clear example of layers of sonority being applied for both coloristic and contrapuntal effects:



The image shows a musical score for three staves, likely piano. The top staff features a complex melodic line with many accidentals and a fermata. The middle staff has a more rhythmic, repetitive pattern. The bottom staff provides a harmonic foundation with sustained notes and chords. Dynamic markings include *poco cresc.*, *riten.*, *dimin. e rall.*, and *perdendosi ppp*.

Ex 14: Szymanowski, *Scheherazade*, from *Masques* op. 34

Here, Szymanowski combines French and German ideas of layered sonority. In the base, he establishes a pitch center through a tremolo, but the voices above are melodically driven. Instead of relegating the inner voices to static accompaniment roles, each voice is melodically significant. This approach is reminiscent of Szymanowski's early works, such as the Second Sonata, which were rigorously contrapuntal, and inspired by German composers such as Strauss and Reger.

### Motivic Development and Structure

Another aspect of these pieces which is closer to German compositional models than French ones is their use of motivic development and cyclical form. The technique of taking a short motivic segment and having it reappear throughout the piece in various permutations had long been associated with German methods of composition.

*Scheherazade* showcases Szymanowski's motivic thinking. The first melodic notes, a descending minor second, are reworked to create the basis for contrasting themes in subsequent sections:

The musical score is for the piano introduction of Szymanowski's *Scheherazade*. It is in 3/4 time and marked *Lento assai Languido*. The score consists of three staves: two for the right hand and one for the left hand. The left hand features a tremolo bass line. The right hand has a melodic line. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *ppp*, and *ppp dolciss. (dolciss. marc.)*. Performance instructions include *(con Ped.)* and *(simile)*. A fermata is placed over the first melodic phrase, which is marked with an '8' above it.

Ex 15: Szymanowski, *Scheherazade*, from *Masques* op. 34



- van - do sempre cre - scen - do poco a poco

*mf* *sub.pp (poco rit.)* *(a tempo)* *sf(ten.)*

cre - scen - do e poco accel. *f marcato*

*sf(ten.)* *mf* *(marc.) (10)* *cresc.*

Ex 16: Szymanowski, *Scheherazade*, from *Masques* op. 34

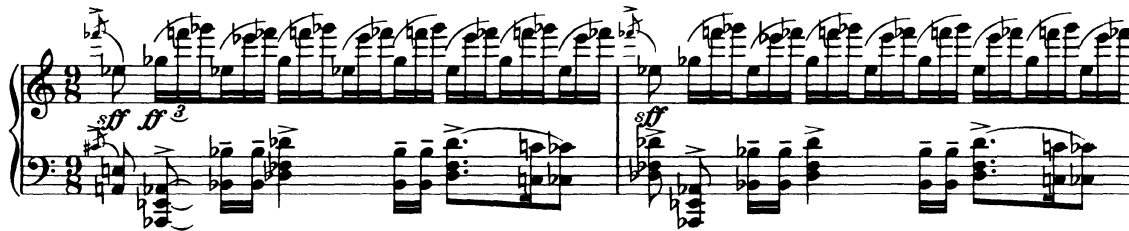
This use of motivic transformation is also apparent in the following piece, *Tantris Der Narr*, where Szymanowski develops melodic motives in inversion:

Ancora poco meno (*quasi andante*)

*mp*  
*dolce marc. dolente*  
*espressivo*

*dimin.*  
*rallent.*

Ex 17: Szymanowski, *Tantris der Narr*, from *Masques* op. 34

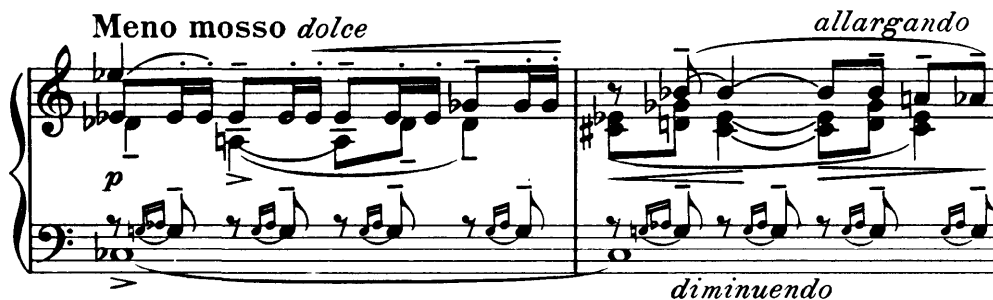


Ex 18: Szymanowski, *Tantris der Narr*, from *Masques* op. 34

He also develops rhythmic motifs:



Ex 19: Szymanowski, *Tantris der Narr*, from *Masques* op. 34



Ex 20: Szymanowski, *Tantris der Narr*, from *Masques* op. 34

Just as in the Teutonic *Sonata* op. 21, Szymanowski uses of motives in these pieces to compensate for a lack of tonal or structural clarity. Tellingly, the *Masques*, which are more formally opaque and ambitious than the *Metopes*, rely more on the process of motivic variation than the preceding cycle.

However, the *Metopes* do apply cyclical form, a technique that is associated with German compositional practices, and just as with motivic development, it serves to unify the cycles

disparate movements. In the last movement of the cycle, *Nausicaa*, Szymanowski suddenly quotes the second movement, *Calypso*, despite the two movements sharing no common motivic material. This was actually a structural device that Szymanowski had used to unify another programmatic piece, his song cycle, op. 11 to poetry by Tadeusz Micinski, another Young Poland poet.

This blending of French and German techniques suggests that Szymanowski, unlike the Impressionists, did not wish to reject German music. Instead, he blended these disparate musical approaches together with his own interests to create something unique. In doing so, he revealed how much he was influenced by the Young Poland's literary figures, who had taken a similar approach before Young Poland in music was established.

## CHAPTER XVII: CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Szymanowski's *Masques* and *Metopes*, while not making use of Young Poland poetry, are significantly influenced by the Young Poland movement. This is apparent in the universal scope of their literary and musical influences (a rejection of the Positivist movement) and the thematic resemblance they bear to Young Poland literature. Over the course of this paper I have described Young Poland—its origins, its values and its literary and musical practices. I have also shown how Szymanowski's early involvement with Young Poland influenced his compositional style. From this foundation, I have shown how the evolution of style found in Szymanowski's *Metopes* and *Masques*, while a departure from his style as a member of Young Poland in Music, is still heavily influenced by the movement.

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