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BETWEEN SONATA FORM AND BORROWING TECHNIQUE: THE OVERTURES OF STANISŁAW MONIUSZKO

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The genre of the overture has long been neglected by musicologists. Situated at the border between theatre and instrumental music, it has usually been viewed as peripheral, or even boring, by opera enthusiasts, whereas the apostles of ‘absolute music’ have considered it to be an ‘impure’ and loosely constructed genre. Only recently have scholars such as Patrick Taïeb, Matthias Corvin and especially Steven Vande Moortele¹ shown why this hybrid genre deserves more attention, pointing to its semantic dimension linked to the plot of the opera it precedes. This dimension often inspired composers to create new, experimental structures which later even influenced the ‘absolute’ genre of the symphony, leading to the birth of the new genre of the symphonic poem.

In the following, this new perspective is used to examine the works of Stanisław Moniuszko, who was not only the most important Polish opera composer in the nineteenth century but also wrote an impressive set of overtures. While these works reflect general trends in the genre, they also display a high degree of originality. Special attention will be drawn to the relationship between the semantic implication of material borrowed from the respective operas and the more abstract aspects of sonata form.

In general, the nineteenth-century opera overture relied on two basic principles: the potpourri borrowing technique and sonata form. Most composers drew extensively on material from the opera to present an orchestral introduction to its plot or its main characters and ideas, or, at the very least, to set its mood. At the same time, the structural frame into which this material was integrated often resembles sonata form. Viewed from an orthodox perspective of ‘absolute music’, the combination of sonata form and potpourri principles might seem rather dubious, and in fact this was often a point of criticism (especially from German writers, dating back to the 1820s).² However, this practice was completely common at the time, and examples from Weber, Wagner and many others prove that it can produce fascinating orchestral compositions that also work as autonomous concert pieces.

As Table 1 shows, sonata form is unambiguously used in five of Moniuszko’s eight overtures.³ It is definitively absent only from the *Intrada to Straszny dwór* [*The Haunted Manor*], which refers to the type of short prelude in free form introduced by Giacomo Meyerbeer and

1 Patrick Taïeb, *L'Ouverture d'opéra en France de Monsigny à Méhul* (Paris: SFM, 2007); Matthias Corvin, *Formkonzepte der Ouvertüre von Mozart bis Beethoven* (Kassel: Bosse, 2005); Steven Vande Moortele, *The Romantic Overture and Musical Form from Rossini to Wagner* (Cambridge: CUP, 2017).

2 Cf. Vande Moortele, *The Romantic Overture*, 30–51.

3 This study is limited to Moniuszko’s opera overtures and his concert overture *Bajka* [Fairy tale].

Title	Year	Tonal Plan	Themes	Form	Metre and Tempi
<i>Bajka</i> (<i>Conte d'hiver</i>)	~1848	<i>a</i> ; <i>F</i> ; <i>a-E</i> ; ... <i>a</i> ; <i>A</i>	6	Additive 2-part form: <i>A</i> (<i>a</i> _{1,2,3}) <i>B</i> - <i>CDE</i> <i>C-A-DCFA</i>	<i>4/4 Moderato</i> – <i>9/8 Andante</i> – <i>2/2 Vivace</i> – <i>Poco più lento</i> – <i>Vivace</i> ... <i>6/8, 2/4</i>
<i>Halka</i>	1846–48 /58	<i>d-F</i> ; <i>d-F-a</i> ; <i>d-D</i>	5	Slow introduction – Sonata form – stretta- coda	<i>4/4 Andante</i> – <i>Poco più mosso</i> ... – <i>2/2 Agitato</i> ... – <i>Lento</i> <i>maestoso</i> – <i>Presto</i>
<i>Jawnuta</i>	1852/60	<i>D-F</i> ; ... <i>D</i>	2	Sonata form (reduced recapitulation)	<i>2/2 Vivace</i> – <i>Più lento</i> – <i>Tempo I</i> – <i>Presto</i>
<i>Flis</i>	1858	<i>B_b-F</i> ; <i>B_b</i>	2 (+ ?)	Intro – Sonata form	<i>4/4 Andante</i> – <i>2/2 Allegro</i>
<i>Hrabina</i>	1859	<i>B_b</i> ; <i>F</i> ; <i>B_b,...</i> ; <i>B_b</i>	4	Additive form: <i>ABCD</i>	<i>3/4 Moderato</i> – <i>6/8 Andantino</i> – <i>3/4 Allegro moderato</i> – <i>2/4 Allegro</i>
<i>Verbum nobile</i>	1860	<i>D-A</i> ; <i>D</i>	2 (+ 2)	Sonata form	<i>2/4 Allegro</i>
<i>Straszny dwór</i>	1861-65	?- <i>B_b</i>	1 (+ cita- tions)	Free arch form: <i>aBa</i>	<i>3/4 Andante</i>
<i>Paria</i>	~1869	<i>a-F</i> ; <i>a-C-E-a</i>	2	Sonata form (no development section)	<i>2x (4/4 Allegro agitato</i> – <i>un poco più lento</i> – <i>a tempo</i>) – <i>più mosso</i>

Table 1 **Moniuszko’s overtures: an overview.**

other *grand opéra* composers in the 1830s and became the norm for beginning an opera in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The tonal plans of Moniuszko’s overtures are rather simple: most of them adhere to the Classical principle of tonal dualism. Apart from *Halka* and *Bajka*, there is never a third key section.⁴ In contrast, the number of themes is often large. For example, in the overture to *Halka*, there are at least five themes: two in the slow introduction and three in the sonata allegro. Multi-thematic structures were quite common in potpourri overtures, such as Weber’s *Freischütz*, Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* or Mendelssohn’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (a parody on the potpourri overture). Only in Moniuszko’s later works does multi-thematism play a less significant role. This is most evident in the overture to *Paria* [*The Pariah*], which is based on only two themes (see Example 1) that may even be interpreted as contrasting variants of one and the same idea (a descending melodic line), as in several sonata movements of Beethoven.

Nevertheless, Moniuszko’s overtures clearly differ from the thematic structure of Beethovenian sonata form in many ways. Strong thematic dualism is only found in *Paria* and *Jawnuta*. The handling of thematic material also differs from the German symphonic tradition: often, each theme group constitutes a rather autonomous, self-contained block built around a concise, clear-

4
A peculiarity of the *Halka* overture is that the tonal and thematic form of the sonata allegro do not match: the second and third key are introduced earlier than the second and the third themes. All three thematic groups modulate.

5
Each of the two theme groups of the *Verbum nobile* overture presents two themes. On the other hand, the *Flis* overture has an introductory theme but no clear second theme.

Main theme of the overture



Phrase of Neala at the end of the finale of Act I (Vocal score, p. 117)



Phrase of Neala from Duet II/2 (Vocal score, p. 121)



Phrase of Neala from the beginning of the Duet I/3 (Vocal score, p. 55–56)



Second theme of the overture



Beginning of Dzares' cantilena in the finale of Act II (Vocal score, p. 167)

Example 1 **Moniuszko, overture to *Paria*, themes and their roots in the opera.**

cut melody consisting of two- or four-bar phrases. These blocks are put together in a rather additive manner, called juxtaposition: there are clear caesuras between them, whereas transition sections occur rarely (mainly in later works such as *Verbum nobile*, which presents the most Classical sonata allegro in the set⁵). Even rarer are development sections: Moniuszko clearly preferred a binary sonata-form type without a real development section (a type often used in opera overtures)⁶ and was not particularly interested in thematic work. A Classical development section, even with contrapuntal work, occurs only in the second version of the *Jawnuta* overture (1860). Furthermore, the recapitulation is sometimes reduced or the order of the sections is changed. For example, in the overture to *Flis* [*The Raftsmen*], a modulating development-like section arrives only after the recapitulation of the first theme.⁷

Thus Moniuszko's use of sonata form might seem rather conservative or 'pre-Beethovenian'. However, formal structures presenting a large series of events twice and without real development, which may be interpreted as an extension of two-

6

This is 'sonata type 1' according to the classification of James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory. Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 345–352.

7

This is 'sonata type 2' according to Hepokoski/Darcy, *Elements*, 353–387. [Anton] Reicha, *Traité de haute composition musicale*, ii (Paris: Zetter 1824), 237–239, chooses the overture to Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* to explain sonata form ('la grande coupe binaire') in general.

8

Linda Correll Roesner, ‘Schumann’s “Parallel Forms”, 19th-Century Music, 14 (1991), 265–278; Carl Dahlhaus, ‘Liszt’s Bergsymphonie und die Idee der Symphonischen Dichtung’, *Jahrbuch des Staatlichen Instituts für Musikforschung Preußischer Kulturbesitz*, 1975, 96–130.

9

On the context of this work, see Krzysztof Mazur, ‘Uwertura “Bajka” Stanisława Moniuszki w świetle nowych badań’ [Stanisław Moniuszko’s overture *Fairy Tale* in light of new research], in Andrzej Spóz (ed.), *Kultura muzyczna Warszawy drugiej połowy XIX wieku* [Musical culture in Warsaw during the second half of the nineteenth century] (Warsaw: PWN, 1980), 240–248.

10

Cf. Stefan Keym, *Symphonie-Kulturtransfer. Untersuchungen zum Studienaufenthalt polnischer Komponisten in Deutschland und zu ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit der symphonischen Tradition 1867–1918* (Hildesheim: Olms 2010), 425; Polish version: *Symfoniczny transfer kulturowy. Studia kompozytorów polskich w Niemczech oraz ich spotkanie z niemiecką tradycją symfoniczną 1867–1918*, tr. Marcin Trzęsiok and Barbara Świdorska (Warsaw: NIFC, 2024), 655.

Bar	1	66	131	296
Theme	A (+ 2 variations)	B (75)	C	D (300)
Key	A minor	F major	A minor	E major
Metre and tempo	4/4 <i>Moderato</i>	3/4, 9/8 <i>Andante</i>	2/2 <i>Vivace</i>	2/2 <i>Poco più lento</i>
Parallel form	1st Course (Exposition)			
Sonata form	Slow introduction		Main theme	Second theme

Table 2 **Moniuszko, concert overture *Bajka* [Fairy tale], formal structure.**

part sonata form, are also found in Romantic music. Linda Correll Roesner referred to them as ‘parallel forms’ (with respect to Robert Schumann’s piano sonatas and his *Fantasy*, Op. 17) and Carl Dahlhaus as ‘double course’ (*doppelter cursus*, with respect to Franz Liszt’s first symphonic poem, *Ce qu’on entend sur la montagne*).⁸ These terms may also be used to describe the formal structure chosen by Moniuszko in *Bajka* and *Halka*, which means that it was absolutely up to date in the 1840s.

However, in the concert overture *Bajka* (*Conte d’hiver*),⁹ the exposition of the five themes is much longer than their modified recapitulation (more than 400 out of 600 bars). The themes are not just presented, but immediately continued and more or less developed. For example, the initial theme A is followed by two variations. In contrast, themes reappear in the recapitulation rather briefly and in a modified order, producing a kaleidoscopic effect. As I have shown elsewhere, Mieczysław Karłowicz, who was a keen member of the Moniuszko Section of the Warsaw Music Society (WTM), chose the same formal strategy for the central part of his first symphonic poem, *Powracające fale* [Returning waves] (1904), in order to express how the melancholic protagonist is overwhelmed by his memories.¹⁰

At first glance, the form of *Bajka* seems to have nothing in common with sonata form (see Table 2 and Example 2). However, its fast section (*Vivace*, theme C) begins like the main theme of a sonata allegro and in the same key as the initial slow theme (A). Thus the latter might be interpreted as a slow introduction. The remaining two fast themes (D and E) are introduced in the dominant key (E major) and recapitulated in the tonic major (A major). With regard to the second theme (B), it is useful to take a comparative look at the *Halka* overture, which also presents two themes in the slow introduction (see Table 3 and Music Example 3).

339	433	453	479	509	541	581
E	C'	A' (457)	D' (482)	C" E' (517)	F	A''
	modul.	A minor	A major			
2/2 Vivace, scherzando	2/2 ...	2/2 Più lento	2/2 Vivace		6/8 Vivace	2/4 Vivace
	Retransition	2nd Course (Modified and shortened recapitulation)				
Closing theme	Develop- ment	Slow intro	Second theme	Main theme	Apotheosis	Coda

Theme A (Moderato)



Theme B (Andante)



Theme C (Vivace)



Theme D (Poco più lento)



Theme E (Vivace, scherzando)



Theme F (Vivace)



Example 2 Moniuszko, concert overture *Bajka*, themes.

1	13	25	31	47	55	89
A	B	A	B'	A (51)	C	D
d (V)	D minor	d (V)	F major	d (V)	D minor D major (79)	D major F major (105)
4/4 <i>Andante</i>	<i>Poco più mosso</i> <i>Subito largo</i> (21)	<i>An-dante</i>	<i>Più mosso</i>	<i>Largo</i>	2/2 <i>Agitato</i>	
Slow introduction Sonata form: exposition					Main theme	Transition theme
					Retrans.	Recapitulation & coda

Table 3 **Moniuszko, overture to *Halka*, formal structure.**

In both overtures, the second, episodic theme of the introduction is left out in the recapitulation (perhaps because it is loosely related to theme D). Both works also contain three themes in the fast, sonata-like section

Bajka presents a hybrid, multi-dimensional structure that refers to several formal schemes. It begins like a set of variations on theme A before following the path of sonata form. The slightly slower theme D and theme E, marked *scherzando*, might also allude to a slow movement followed by a scherzo, in the sense of Liszt's double function form. (A scherzando episode is found in the same position, as the fifth and last theme, in Mendelssohn's concert overture *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.) However, Moniuszko's recapitulation of the sonata allegro is so free – with an inversion of themes C and D, only a slight rhythmic allusion to theme E and, finally, the emphatic revelation of a new closing theme F – that the relationship to sonata form ultimately remains in the background. The fact that the new coda theme F does not disturb the formal structure, but seems to flow naturally from the course of events as a sort of apotheosis, demonstrates Moniuszko's capacity for creating a convincing instrumental dramatic structure even with a large number of themes. One important reason for this capacity is that his themes are stylistically similar to each other without being mere variants.

One of Moniuszko's most important means for creating the necessary degree of variety in *Bajka*, and also in the opera overtures, is the characteristic change of tempo and metre. Overtures have always been more open to tempo changes than symphonic movements, but Moniuszko was particularly fond of them (with the exception of *Verbum nobile* and *Straszny dwór*). This is especially

129	177	193	235	259	291
E	citation Jontek	unison <i>a</i> A (233)	C'	E'	unison <i>d</i> D' (307)
D minor F major modul.	A minor	A minor <i>d</i> (V)	D minor	D major	
	<i>Quasi poco pesante</i>	<i>L'istesso tempo</i> <i>Andante</i> (233)	<i>Agitato</i>	<i>Cantabile</i> <i>Lento maestoso</i> (273)	<i>Presto</i> <i>Prestissimo</i>
Second theme	Closing group	Retransition	Main theme	Second theme	Coda Stretta

Theme A (Andante)



Theme B (Poco più mosso)



Theme C (Agitato)



Theme D (Vivace)



Theme E (Vivace)



Citation from Jontek's Aria in Act II (Quasi poco pesante)



Example 3 Moniuszko, *overture to Halka*, themes.

striking in the case of the overture to *Hrabina* [The Countess], which has the most additive form of all: it consists of four episodes differing clearly in tempo, metre and thematic outlook. But even there, a subliminal relationship with the Classical form of an allegro preceded by a slow introduction might be assumed. The initial mazurka-like *Moderato* and the following *Andantino* may be considered a two-part slow introduction (just as in *Bajka* and *Halka*), the much longer waltz-like *Allegro* is clearly the main section of the piece, whereas the short final *Allegro* in 2/4 functions as a stretta-coda (a highly effective element also used in *Halka*, *Jawnuta* and *Paria*). In *Jawnuta*, the second theme of the sonata form is exposed in a gradually slowed tempo – a feature that had already been common in performance practice as early as the first half of the nineteenth century but was explicitly indicated in scores only later. In *Paria*, this applies not only to the second theme but also to the long preceding transition with its intimate soli of the violoncello and woodwinds, which is supposed to be played *un poco più lento*.

In the overture to *Halka*, there are many expressive changes of tempo; the first already in the introduction, where the hesitant character of the initial ‘Halka motif’ (A) requires smooth agogics. Both presentations of the second introductory theme (B) are restrained by a *ritardando* (*Subito largo* and *Largo*), which indicates a conflict and the presence of a major force (or convention) halting the continuation of this theme. There are also two important *ritardandi* in the ensuing sonata allegro, but these have a different function. First, the *Agitato* tempo is slowed at the end of the exposition when an emphatic quotation from Jontek’s aria in Act II with krakowiak-like rhythm is presented (‘I ty mu wierzysz’; ‘And you believe him’).¹¹ The second *ritardando* is located at the corresponding moment in the recapitulation, as the fifth theme (E) is repeated in D major in a grandiose and triumphant manner, marked *fff* and *Lento maestoso*. In both cases, the broadening of the tempo serves to heighten the solemnity of the music and thus to capture the attention of the listener.

This finally leads us into the field of semantics. All of Moniuszko’s opera overtures serve to introduce the special mood of the whole work to the audience: some of them in a rather general manner, such as *Verbum nobile*; others, like *Straszny dwór*, in a highly individual way. Some already anticipate the end of the plot, especially *Paria*, the only minor-key overture by Moniuszko that departs from the common practice of ending in the major mode – a tonal plan which had become almost obligatory since Beethoven (*Egmont* overture, Symphonies Nos. 5 and 9) and was associated with the motto ‘*per aspera ad astra*’ or ‘through hardship to the stars’. By refusing this tonal plan and restoring the initial key of A minor at the end of his overture in a rather brutal way, Moniuszko clearly indicates that *Paria* has a tragic ending.

11

Since the refrain from Jontek’s aria II/2 (anticipated by Halka in her preceding aria) is presented only once in the overture, it does not have the function of a theme in this context. In his review of the vocal score from *Halka* in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 12 November 1858, 211, Hans von Bülow regretted that Moniuszko did not exploit this refrain more often in the overture. However, he praised the Polish composer for not using his opera material in the same ‘careless’ way as French composers in their overtures.

But what about the overture to *Halka*? Here we are confronted with a clear *per aspera ad astra* dramaturgy, which, leading from hesitation and despair to brilliant triumph, does not correspond at all to the opera plot concluding with the heroine's suicide. As is well known, *Halka* has a double coding, charging the tragic story of the protagonist with a more general political message. The genius of Moniuszko becomes apparent in the way he combines these two levels of meaning in the overture. The first three themes present a portrait of the character of Halka: her hesitation (A), her idealised view of her aristocratic ex-lover Janusz (B),¹² and her agitated, turbulent feelings. However, on the arrival of the folkloristic accents of theme D, we realise that the music is referring to traits of the Polish nation in general (even if we are not yet aware of the fact that this theme is borrowed from the cheerful drinking song of the aristocrats in scene I/5). This is also underlined by the two *ritardando* moments in the *allegro*: the quotation from Jontek's aria and the triumphant *maestoso* presentation of theme E near the end. Here, Halka's individual fate is clearly transcended, and it comes to light that her sacrifice should be understood as a memorial pointing to future unity among the social classes and to the national resurrection of Poland. Nevertheless, Moniuszko mixes some dissonant and minor-key chords into the general cheerfulness of the stretta-coda, thus also providing an allusion to the tragic ending of the plot. Retrospectively, the long, slow introduction of this overture, with its hesitation and mourning, might also be interpreted in light of the desperate political situation in partitioned Poland. It differs largely from the older type of grandiose introduction developed in Parisian opera overtures in the late eighteenth century and adapted, for example, by Karol Kurpiński in *Jadwiga, królowa polska* [Jadwiga, queen of Poland] (1814). On the whole, the overture to *Halka* is a fascinating orchestral piece with a highly individual and exciting dramaturgy leading from hesitation through agitation to final triumph. At the same time, and in contrast to the *Intrada* of *Straszny dwór*, it can also be appreciated in a concert performance, without any knowledge of the opera and its historical context.

Apart from the general affective and semantic dramaturgy, there is also a second, more specific level of meaning in Moniuszko's overtures, resulting from the particular semantic potential of the material borrowed from the opera. This aspect also leads us to another question. For which semantic and/or structural reasons did Moniuszko choose particular material and how did he make use of it in the overture? Since he rarely drew on the 'greatest hits' of his operas (as Weber, Wagner and many others were wont to do), this question is difficult to answer. Many overture borrowings have recently been discussed by Grzegorz Zieziula in his general introduction to Moniuszko's operas.¹³ Complementary to this, it seems helpful to specify some different borrowing types in a systematic classification:

12

Grzegorz Zieziula, 'Dzieła operowe' [Operatic works], in: Ryszard D. Goliński (ed.), *Moniuszko. Kompendium* (Kraków: PWM, 2019), 150, argues that theme B might be related to Janusz.

13

Cf. Zieziula, 'Dzieła operowe', *passim*.

1) The borrowed element has almost the same structural function and meaning in the overture as in the opera. This is the case of the 'Halka motif' (theme A), which functions as an instrumental motto and *Erinnerungsmotiv* (a motif rarely altered, in contrast to Wagnerian leitmotifs), and also of the clock motif in *Straszny dwór*.

2) An extended melody from the opera is integrated into the overture: the drinking song from Act I in *Halka* (theme D), the waltz melody from Act II in *Hrabina*, or the broad bel canto cantilena of Dżares from the second act finale of *Paria*. Halka's refrain from the finale of Act II ('Do pana, do pana, ach, Jontku, prowadź mnie'; 'Lead me to our Lord, oh Jontek') is even further developed and acquires a deeper signification in the overture (theme E: first lyrical, then triumphant).

3) A short instrumental motif from the opera is used as a nucleus for developing a broad new theme in the overture. Thus the head motif of the fast main theme C of the *Halka* overture stems from an instrumental figure occurring at the beginning of the highly dramatic scene IV/6 (when Halka decides to die),¹⁴ and the three-note head motif from the main theme of the *Paria* overture is to be found at the very end of the finale of Act I (see Example 1).

4) Several small elements from the opera are joined together to create a new musical structure in the overture, representing a reflexive commentary full of semantic connotations: the second section of the *Hrabina* overture (*Andantino*) combines an expressive phrase from the Countess's Aria No. 17 in Act III with a similar, though this time chromatic, instrumental motif from the following Arietta No. 18 of Dżidzi, as well as with polonaise rhythms¹⁵ in order to create an instrumental portrait of the heroine (see Music Example 4).¹⁶ In the *Intrada* to *Straszny dwór*, elements from Stefan's clock aria and from the finale of the opera are woven together in a similar manner in order to communicate (or rather anticipate) the moral of the story.¹⁷

If this classification is mainly based on structural criteria, a deeper look at one last case will exemplify the considerable potential of a hermeneutic interpretation, for which Moniuszko's sophisticated reworking of opera material in his overtures allows. The main theme of the *Paria* overture develops a three-note motif from the finale of Act I into a melodic line spiralling downwards, which also resembles the beginning of the anxious love duet of Neala and Idamor in Act I.¹⁸ In this way, two separate moments from the opera are linked together in the overture. This makes sense, since Neala's text at the end of the finale reads: 'W tym naszym związku dla nas to jasne pasmo błogich dni' ('Our lot is a bright future of blissful days'). The same motif recurs in the duet in Act II when Neala asks Idamor if he still has doubts about her love. Thus the whole first theme group of the overture may be interpreted as expressive of the passionate, but severely threatened relationship between the two lovers. This group is contrasted with another sort of 'love music'

14

This motif is already anticipated in the finale of Act II, number 11 in the PWM vocal score from 1966.

15

Polonaise rhythms are absent from both cited arias because they are set in binary metre, but occur in many other numbers of this opera.

16

In fact, the quotation from the Countess's aria functions as the heart of this section, to which the other material gradually and surprisingly leads the way. Dżidzi's arietta is a commentary on the Countess's feelings and plans.

17

Cf. Witold Rudziński, 'Straszny dwór' S. Moniuszki [S. Moniuszko's *The Haunted Manor*] (Kraków: PWM, 1956), 37–39.

18

Cf. Zieziula, 'Dzieła operowe', 194. However, the beginning of this duet is based on a chromatically descending bass line, which is not the case for the overture's main theme.

Overture, Section 2 (Andantino), bars 1–4 (Vocal score = Vs, p. 7)



Overture, Vs, p. 8, bars 4–5

Arietta No. 18 (Dzidzi), Vs, p. 260, bars 1–5



Overture, Vs, p. 9, bars 1–2

Aria No. 17 (Hrabina), Vs, p. 252, bars 6–8



Example 4 Moniuszko, *overture to Hrabina*, *Andantino*, motivic material and its roots.

in the second theme group (which for listeners unfamiliar with the plot might even come across as a love song in the conventional sense of the term): the broad bel canto melody expressing Dżares's fatherly longing for his lost and ultimately rediscovered son Idamor ('Prowadź mię na łono mego syna! On tak mnie kocha...'; 'Take me to my son! He loves me so...').¹⁹ In the finale of Act II, Idamor responds to this song by adopting the melody, though in a rather distant key (F major instead of D flat major), indicating that he already knows that this discovery will lead to a catastrophe ('Więc już ostatnia zabrzmiała godzina'; 'So the last hour has struck'). In the overture, the cantilena is introduced from the beginning in the 'false' key of F major, e.g. from the perspective of Idamor. In the recapitulation, it is transposed not to the main key (A minor or major) but first to C major and then to E major, with a surprising mediant turn analogous to the D-flat–F progression in the finale of Act II.²⁰ Thus the deceptive character of the seemingly happy encounter between Dżares and Idamor (the latter does not share the happiness of his father; if he admits to being his son and thus a pariah, he cannot marry Neala) is underlined by the tonal plan of the overture: what sounds tender and happy will turn out to be fatal. The whole piece is a symphonic commentary on Idamor's inner conflict between the two worlds of pariahs and brahmans. Both the dominance of Dżares's theme and the choice of a minor key for the main theme of the overture (representing the relationship between Neala and Idamor) indicate early on the real balance of power. Consequently, the typically nineteenth-century belief that blood ties are stronger than individual feelings is confirmed. The importance of the *Paria* overture as an essential part of the opera's drama is further underlined by the fact that it is not placed at the very beginning of

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The key role of this melody in *Paria* is also underlined by the fact that it is already anticipated at the beginning of Act II, a long time before Dżares sings it in the finale of the same act.

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In the separate edition of the *Paria* overture (Kraków: PWM, 1952), revised by Grzegorz Fitelberg, the latter added the analogous mediant modulation also to the exposition of the second theme (F major → A major). This intervention not only distends the second theme group to an over-sized proportion, but also has the consequence that the exposition already modulates back to the home key, which is against the tonal logic of sonata form.

the work but between the prologue and Act I (a rare case in opera history).²¹

In summary, Moniuszko's overtures present a variety of different formal and dramatic solutions. The composer's personal preferences for specific tonal and thematic features, as well as for a particular treatment of form and tempo, are clearly recognisable. The works profit from Moniuszko's rich melodic invention, as well as from his sense of drama and picturesque orchestral effects. At first glance, it seems difficult to detect a clear evolution in his overture output. For instance, *Straszny dwór* and *Paria* display opposing concepts of form. However, both indicate a growing interest in transitions and in a more careful integration of thematic material (already apparent in *Verbum nobile*). Furthermore, the semantic connotations of the combined material become more sophisticated in the later works. In any case, most of these overtures are attractive orchestral pieces that should be played more regularly, also in concert. Thanks to Moniuszko, the overture might be considered (as was the case in France²²) the 'national symphonic genre' of nineteenth-century music in Poland.

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The prologue is preceded by a short prelude (called *Wstęp*) in *grave* style and in a minor key borrowed from the cantata *Milda* (1848; cf. Zieziula, 'Dzieła operowe', 192).

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Taïeb, *L'Ouverture d'opéra en France*, 339.

ABSTRACT

The genre of the overture, which stands on the border between symphonic music and opera, has often been underestimated, even though it possessed great innovative potential for this very reason. The present article demonstrates this using the overtures of Polish composer Stanisław Moniuszko. The focus is on the relationship between the sonata form used in at least five of his overtures and the potpourri technique, in which melodies and other material from the subsequent opera are used in the overture. Both the formal structure and the semantic level are examined.

Moniuszko followed typical genre trends of his time, but also found original solutions of his own. His overtures indicate a growing interest in transitions and in a more careful integration of material from the respective opera. Furthermore, the semantic connotations of the combination of this material become more complex in the later works.

KEYWORDS

Overture, Moniuszko, sonata form, semantics

BIOGRAPHY

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