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Signs of music, intertextuality, and narrative strategy

Cultural semiotics and 19th-century funeral music: The case of Karol Kurpiński's *Elegia na śmierć Tadeusza Kościuszki* [*Elegy on the Death of Tadeusz Kościuszko*]

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Abstract: The musical culture of modern Europe has produced numerous extra-linguistic elements which constitute a kind of code making transmission of content possible between sender and receiver. These elements also permit a kind of narrative strategy which organizes this communication. One of the codes most important for this field of European culture is musical rhetoric, made up of dozens of signs such as rhetorical figures or the symbolism of musical keys. I demonstrate the functioning of these elements on the example of funeral music, whose *topoi*, signs, and codes have developed in European culture for several centuries, along with characteristic musical and literary genres, and their mutual interactions. My methodological approach is mainly based on the tools of cultural and musical semiotics, and of narratology combined with analyses of musical rhetoric, supported by elements of literary analysis. I discuss this subject using the example of Karol Kurpiński's *Elegy on the Death of Tadeusz Kościuszko* (1818), which perfectly illustrates the signs typical of European culture in the first half of the 19th-century and of nascent Romanticism, with its complex nationalisms and its quest for signs typical of a given nation or region, as well as for individual solutions. All of my analyses point to the power and versatility of cultural semiotics, which allows us to study human creativity in a highly comprehensive manner, exploring areas which are inaccessible to other research methodologies.

Keywords: cultural semiotics; elegy; funeral music; Karol Kurpiński; musical semiotics

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1 Methodological approach

The musical culture of modern Europe has produced numerous extra-linguistic elements which constitute a kind of code, making transmission of content possible between sender and receiver. These elements also permit a kind of narrative strategy which organizes this communication. One of the codes most important for this field of European culture is musical rhetoric, made up of dozens of signs such as rhetorical figures or the symbolism of musical keys. In addition, European music attributes specific meanings to some selected instruments and to verbal-musical sequences, associated since the Middle Ages with well-defined topics (such as the *Dies irae* sequence for the Requiem Mass). I illustrate the functioning of these elements using the example of funeral music, whose *topoi*, signs, and codes have formed in European culture over a period of several centuries, similarly to the related characteristic musical and literary genres and their mutual interactions. This is what made Eero Tarasti (2002: 30) claim that “Western musical practice provides ample evidence of the profoundly semiotic nature of music.” Let me exemplify this claim with Karol Kurpiński’s *Elegy on the Death of Tadeusz Kościuszko* of 1818, which perfectly illustrates the signs typical of European culture in the first half of the 19th-century, and of nascent Romanticism, with its complex nationalisms and its quest for signs typical of a given nation or region, as well as for individual solutions.

Many of the abovementioned elements we can understand and analyze thanks to advances in the semiotics of culture (Lotman 1988; Żyłko 2009), in its slightly more recent version sometimes also referred to as cultural semiotics (Lorusso 2015). This branch of semiotics permits us to apply an interdisciplinary approach to the topic under study. One should definitely agree with Anna Maria Lorusso (2015: 2), who argues that “a semiotic approach to culture can differ from a cultural, sociological, or anthropological one [...] it can open a dialog with these viewpoints, and [...] contribute to the creation of a new one.” Cultural semiotics makes it possible to combine various points of view, add new ones, and organize them using semiotic tools, in particular such notions as those of sign and of sender–receiver communication. Intercultural semiotic tools also make it possible to decode the ways in which signs and meanings function in an individual work of art and in the entire culture of a given country or continent. They let us clearly perceive and distinguish what is universal, local, or even individual. I have combined the use of semiotic tools from the field of semiotics of culture with those specific to musical semiotics (Agawu 2009; Tarasti 1994) and to narratology (Grabócz 2009).

I also propose that we apply to our study the categories of intertextuality as developed by Eero Tarasti, who includes this notion in his discussion of the signs of

music (2002: 82–85), and of narrative strategy as presented by Márta Grabócz (2014). These concepts belong to the very broadly conceived field of semiotics, which draws on many disciplines of knowledge such as musicology, literary studies, and philosophy. By combining all these disciplines we can arrive at a more accurate and comprehensible image of our subject, as well as interpreting it within the system of signs functioning in the given culture. I also suggest that our discussion should include an analysis of elements of musical rhetoric, point out the elements specific to funeral music, and incorporate the historical context of the country in which the composition under study was written. A piece of funeral music comprises not only very specific, universal elements that have been present for many ages in European culture, but also more individual components which point to the significance of the work's protagonist.

To sum up, my methodological approach is mainly based on the tools of cultural semiotics and musical semiotics, as well as narratology combined with an analysis of musical rhetoric; as support tools, I also apply elements of literary analysis. My study will proceed in the following stages:

- 1) outlining the context of the composition:
 - the protagonist of the poem,
 - the context of writing the poem and the music,
 - the artists (the poet and the composer),
 - poetic and musical genre;
- 2) identifying the signs of music:
 - rhetorical figures,
 - musical key symbolism,
 - topics;
- 3) identifying intertextual elements in the music and relating them to the poetic text;
- 4) defining the narrative strategy which the composer employed.

2 Elegy on the Death of Tadeusz Kościuszko – an introduction to the music work

Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817) was a Polish national hero. Born into the nobility, he pursued a military career, but also tried his hand at art. He was active in Poland, France, and the United States. He first came to the USA in 1776. As a military engineer he took part in fortifying many military camps, which eventually led to his promotion to brigadier general (1783). Following his return to Poland in 1784, he became involved in political activity aiming to preserve Poland's independence

as a country. As a general in the army of the Polish Crown, he fought against the troops of Poland's partitioners (Russia, Austria, and Prussia) in 1792. He was also the leader of the so-called Kościuszko Uprising (1794), which, despite much heroic fighting, ended in a defeat. Poland eventually lost its independence for the next 123 years. After the fall of the uprising, Kościuszko was briefly imprisoned by the tsar in Russia. Later he left for America. On his return to Europe he co-founded the Polish Legions in Paris. His activity elevated him to the status of a national hero and a symbol of the struggle for freedom. With time, he also came to be considered as "father of the nation." He died in Solothurn (Switzerland) (Kajencki 1998).

Numerous poems dedicated to the figure of Kościuszko were written in Poland after his death; they represent different artistic value. One of these was Tomasz Kantorbery Tymowski's (1790–1850) *Elegy on the Death of Tadeusz Kościuszko*. Written early in 1818, it proved to be a major point in its author's artistic output (Wichrowska 2005: 17). The *Elegy* presents Kościuszko's life and death in ways typical of funeral poetry, emphasizing the hero's greatest merits and contributions, describing events from his life, as well as expressing pain and sorrow at the news of his death. The poet combines the glorification of the deceased person typical of the elegy with this genre's reflective character, dwelling on selected topics (Sharp 2002: 19) and expressing the orphaned nation's mourning.

Kościuszko's body was brought to Poland in 1818, which occasioned a funeral ceremony at Warsaw's National Theatre. This event turned into a demonstration of patriotic sentiment and national mourning. The ceremony was accompanied by music, which included a 20-minute piece by one of the major Polish composers of that time, Karol Kurpiński (1785–1857), entitled *Elegy on the Death of Tadeusz Kościuszko*. Like Tymowski's poem, Kurpiński's setting belongs to the genre of (musical) elegies, written in order to commemorate an important personage, which invariably comprise the same funeral topics typical of European culture (Janés 2006).

Originally scored for speaker (reciter) and orchestra (this version has unfortunately been lost), Kurpiński's *Elegy* was subsequently published in a setting for speaker and piano, printed as a music supplement to "Tygodnik Polski i Zagraniczny" [Polish and foreign weekly] No. 15 of 1818 (Przybylski 1995: 206). It is in this version that the work is best known, and quoted, among others, by Fryderyk Chopin in his *Fantazja na tematy polskie* [Fantasy on Polish Airs] Op. 13 (Goldberg 2008). The composition is unique in Kurpiński's output, and highly original. Rather than choosing the apparently more natural combination of a sung text and instruments, the composer decided to present the poem in the form of recitation. This may have been justified by the circumstances of performance and by the adopted communication strategy. A recited text has quite a different impact in the context of a funeral ceremony and exerts a stronger influence on the audience than a sung composition.

3 “Signs of music” in Kurpiński’s *Elegy*

Eero Tarasti explains that “[a] sign appears as a code, which is a symbolic system and which is intended to transmit information between a sender and a receiver” (2002: 65). In order to distinguish between lower- and higher-tier elements of the code, I will use the following terms: signs – for individual elements; topics – for more complex elements. The smallest meaningful units (signs) comprise the rhetorical figures and musical key symbolism. Topics are thematic components consisting of several elements (such as the use of a characteristic genre, musical idiom, or quoting another musical work).

3.1 Signs

Rhetorical figures and musical key symbolism (the latter derived from the European Baroque traditions) are the main signs applied by the composer in this piece, which he does with great precision and an awareness of their communicative function. Kurpiński was strongly rooted as a composer in 18th-century technique, in which he educated himself as well as learning from musician friends who followed the Baroque and Classical rules of music composition. In Kurpiński’s music, as in that of many other composers of his time, we find numerous rhetorical figures that are a very important semantic tool. Let us have a look at some of them:

- 1) *Pathopoeia* – a strongly chromaticized melody which signifies suffering; it appears, among others, for a moment at the end of the piece, just before mention in the text of Prince Poniatowski’s death. One notable musical figure is the descending three-note chromatic progression on the description of the threat to the country, which the composer endowed with his own original symbolism (that of the three superpowers that threatened Poland).
- 2) Imitation – of, for example, funeral bells or the swoosh of waves on the words describing the ocean.
- 3) *Assimilatio* (onomatopoeia) – for instance, the murmur of water on the description of ocean waves.
- 4) *Antitheton* – occurring nearly throughout the piece on many levels; contrast is mostly applied in order to stress textual meanings and to point to more than one type of information at the same time (for instance, a funeral march in the low register as accompaniment for a pastoral melody in the high register). Unexpected harmonic turns and the numerous diminished chords may be included in the same category.

- 5) *Katabasis* – descending motifs emphasize, from the opening notes of the piece, its somber and lament-like character.
- 6) *Aposiopesis* – appears when the poetic text announces the death of the hero, for instance, in the opening on the words “Polsko! Kościuszek umiera!” [“O Poland! Kościuszek is dying!”]

Let us now examine the tonal keys applied by Kurpiński and their significance. In the composer’s own times, the most popular catalogues of musical keys were those by Johann Mattheson (1681–1764), Jean-Philippe Rameau (1783–1764), and Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart (1739–1791). Interestingly, in his article *O ekspresji i naśladowaniu w muzyce* [On expression and imitation in music] (1820) Kurpiński explains that tonality is a very important means of musical expression and communication. He himself unfortunately only defines the character of some selected keys, but he stresses that “Odbiór tonu jest także ważną rzeczą: Każdy bowiem ma swój oddzielny kolor” [“the reception of the tonal key is likewise important, since each of them has its own separate coloring”] (Gmys 2015: 64). Below is the list of keys applied in this composition, and of their significance according to the abovementioned catalogues of keys, as well as to Kurpiński’s own comments (Table 1).

Table 1: Musical key symbolism after 18th-century catalogues and K. Kurpiński (compiled by MG).

Tonality	Mattheson (1713)	Rameau (1722)	Schubart (1784/85)	Kurpiński (1820)
D minor	pious, calm, associated with the church	gentle and delicate	somber, concealing dark thoughts	–
G minor	combines seriousness with affection	gentle and delicate	discontent, feeling bad	peasant theme
F major	magnanimity, nobility, repeatability, love, simplicity	storm and fury	kindness and rest	splendid
E flat major	exalted	–	pious, mark of the Holy Trinity (the three flats are its symbol)	–
D major	spectacular, lively, noisy, belligerent	joy and gratitude	triumph, victory, hallelujah, joy, war cry	splendid
A minor	splendor and seriousness	–	piety and mild character	affection
B flat major	magnificent, lavish, pleasant	storm and fury	joy, love, looking toward a better world	–
E flat minor	–	–	fear, anxiety of the soul, loss of hope	affection

Even a brief look at the above-presented comparison of musical keys applied by Kurpiński in his *Elegy* shows that there was no single unequivocal description for the emotional character of each key. Every nation has defined the individual keys differently in different periods. Despite the considerable unity of European culture, local differences are evident. Kurpiński's terminology coincides to some extent with the German tradition (especially in the case of the A minor and D major keys), but he also partly creates his own tonal code, which unfortunately remains incomplete. Regardless of whether Kurpiński's characterization of individual keys agrees with those in the catalogues popular in his times or not, it should be stressed that associating keys with specific meaning is an element of European culture, albeit not yet sufficiently studied. Richard Parncutt aptly observes: "The association in Western tonal music between emotional valence (positive versus negative) and music-structural factors such as tempo (fast versus slow), mode (major versus minor tonality), and (to a lesser extent) consonance/dissonance is well established in music psychology, but clear explanations are lacking" (2014: 324–325). What is crucial to our subject is a certain way of thinking about musical keys occurring in European culture for many centuries, which allowed artists and audiences to associate individual musical keys with extra-musical meaning and to treat them as symbols or even as keys (in the semiotic sense) for decoding one of the semantic levels of the music.

3.2 Topics

Let us now discuss the topics introduced in this piece of music. In the opening, Kurpiński draws on the characteristics of a funeral march. His march in D minor, with its slow tempo and distinctly punctuated rhythm, fits in with the model of marches performed at funerals in the European tradition. The composer interweaved the imitation of somber funeral bells into the march accompaniment. The bells announce Kościuszko's death. Further into the piece, we also hear elements that might be defined as a lamentation.

Contrasted with the overall funeral character of the music, the pastoral sections represent topics related to the folklore of different nations: a Swiss shepherd tune and the Polish *krakowiak*, as well as the Ukrainian *dumka*, a genre very popular in Poland at that time (cf. Figures 1 and 2). Kurpiński also introduces national topics in the form of a polonaise, considered as the Polish national dance. References to folklore and popular music reinforce the links between the place or situation referred to in the poetic text and the music. Thanks to these topics, the music works more directly and, in a sense, independently of the text, since it defines its own meanings in musical terms.

Ukrainian dumka - pastoral idiom
[Fragment quoted by Fryderyk Chopin in his *Fantasy on Polish Airs* op. 13]

Figure 1: *Elegy...* Kurpiński, bars 92–99 (arranged by MG).

Figure 2: *Elegy...* Kurpiński, bars 1–11 (arranged by MG).

Kurpiński's last topic consists in introducing elements of broadly understood military music, which include a military march, fanfares, and revolutionary songs, which will be discussed further in this paper. All these elements refer directly to the figure of Kościuszko as a general and a soldier, who distinguished himself fighting on two continents.

3.3 Text delivery

The last aspect related to signs of music are the various ways in which the text is presented in this composition. This aspect is of great significance to sender–receiver communication:

- 1) text recitation without music,
- 2) recitation accompanied by music,
- 3) musical recitation.

Each of these forms of text delivery is characterized by a different type of expression and a different impact of the poetic content. They can therefore also be considered as a kind of sign, because these ways of performance are related to specific meanings, or rather to the circumstances in which these types of text delivery were applied.

Recitation and presenting words and music alternately enhances the expression of both communication media and focuses the listener's attention. First, the music helps to concentrate; this is followed by the speaker's delivery of the

message. Such a way of transmitting the text is characteristic of lofty and serious ceremonies (thus, of specific circumstances). However, when the reciting voice is supported by the music and the two media work simultaneously, the latter is meant to reinforce the poetic message, but may also add new meanings and contexts at some places (as I will demonstrate later). Importantly, this way of presenting text is typical of the theater, which was also the venue of this work's premiere. On the other hand, the musical recitation (i.e. a kind of recitative) aims to temper the somberness of the mood when the text refers to legendary times, as well as to Kościuszko's merry childhood years. It is a way of delivering text typical of folk music, where song frequently borders on the recitative.

The signs and topics applied in the *Elegy* strictly derive from the context of the poetic text which, on the one hand, determines the meanings of the elements applied, while on the other the music clarifies and enriches the meanings of the text. The signs and topics introduced by Kurpiński also frequently extend the poetic context, affording the music a considerable degree of autonomy and independence of narration.

4 Musical intertextuality according to Eero Tarasti

Eero Tarasti includes intertextuality in musical semiotics as one of the tools for communication. He interprets the idea of intertextuality as follows: "Almost all narration is more or less intertextual, and every text or part thereof refers to some other text. Every text must be read through the lens of other texts, since all texts inevitably absorb other texts, transforming them within in the (virtual) totality of intertextual space [...] intertextual references have long formed a standard technique, starting with ancient music" (2002: 82–83). The task of decoding these interrelations between texts lies with the receiver (the audience), as Tarasti further explains: "Listeners to music have always already heard something, and they bring those earlier experiences to bear in conceptualizing what they hear in the present. Behind musical act-signs loom two kinds of trans-signs: remembrances and possibilities" (2002: 83). One should remember that the ways of encoding and decoding signs have changed over the course of human history. Tarasti emphasizes that "gradually the use of situations and intertexts becomes more and more explicit during the course of music history. They become textual irruptions, outbreaks of individual significations in the form of musical acts" (2002: 85). One of the clearest and most unequivocal forms of intertextuality is the quotation, which brings into a new composition its own context and therefore makes possible an extension of the semantic field of the music that incorporates such a quote.

Kurpiński's elegy makes use of two types of intertextual references: firstly, universal ones, in the form of quotations from and paraphrases of commonly known European melodies (frequently carrying a considerable semantic load); secondly, local ones, represented by regional musical motifs, which clarify poetic meanings and permit a deepened interpretation of the text. Quotations played a major role in 19th-century music. They were highly popular; they reflected a strategy of communication which was a kind of game between sender (the composer) and receiver (the audience). Kurpiński's numerous quotations play this very role: they invite the listeners to a game of signification, enhance the artistic message of the text, and clarify its meanings. The most important and most meaningful quotations incorporated into the *Elegy* come from *Ranz des Vaches*, *Rule Britannia*, *La Marseillaise*, the *Kościuszko Polonaise*, and the *Poniatowski March* (cf. Table 2).

4.1 Quotations from European music

The famous and very frequently quoted Swiss melody *Ranz des Vaches* (found for instance in Rossini, Liszt, and Wagner) represents and symbolizes two topics explored at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries (cf. Figure 2). The first one is Switzerland, and the other, freedom – a very important 19th-century theme. In the 19th century, the idea of Switzerland was influenced by the romantic image of free people living in harmony with nature on the one hand and on the other by the tale of the Swiss national hero Wilhelm Tell and his fight for freedom for himself and his people (Schneider 2016). We should also recall one more, extremely significant function of this tune. Jean-Jacques Rousseau observed in the 1770s that the melody was so important for the Swiss and evoked such powerful emotions that they were ready to do anything to return to their beloved fatherland. Rousseau commented on this quality of the Swiss shepherd tune by saying that music has the psychological ability of influencing emotions and bringing memories to mind.

This observation proved of extraordinary importance to the literature and music of the century that followed. 19th-century composers drew with even more premeditation on the audience's memory, and involved their listeners even more strongly in the reception of the presented music. Étienne Pivert de Senancour (1770–1846) commented on Rousseau's opinions, describing the same melody in his novel *Obermann*. He added that music is capable not only of evoking but also of depicting or representing memories (Senancour 1984). In this way, he related music's ability to generate memories and emotions to its power to evoke images, which equipped 19th-century composers with additional tools of communication (Gamrat 2014, 2019a). In his *Elegy*, Kurpiński draws first and foremost on the two

Table 2: Quotations used by Kurpiński, along with related signs and topics (compiled by MG).

Quotation	Poetic text	Topics	Signs
<i>Ranz des Vaches</i>	<p>“Jakiż to odgłos żałobny, ponury uderza strwożone ucho? Pośępnie zabrzmiał i głucho niepodległy dzwon Solury.” [“What somber mourning tones strike the frightened ear? Gloomy and hollow is the sound of Solothurn’s indepen- dent bell.”]</p>	funeral March and pastoral idiom	funeral bells D minor key
<i>Rule Britannia</i>	<p>“opowiedz chwałę, co dni jego snuła.” [“tell of the glory that marked his days”]</p>	song of freedom and struggle	E flat major key
<i>La Marseillaise</i>	<p>“Czas narodów mści cierpienia, swoboda przemocy karą: ledwie wolności rozległy się pienia nad daleką Delawarą, gdzie Waszyngtona znaki powiewały.” [“The time of the nations avenges the suffering, freedom punishes violence; the tones of liberty have just sounded over the faraway Dela- ware where Washington’s banners fluttered.”]</p>	song of freedom and struggle	E flat major key
<i>Kościuszko</i> <i>Polonaise</i>	<p>“... niosą rycerza oceanu wały i w cudzych swobód obronie sposobi te dzielne dłonie, co własnych ratować miały.”</p>	Change of time signa- ture to 4/4 polonaise (national dance, usually 3/4 time signature)	<i>assimilatio</i> – murmur and movement of water E flat major key

Table 2: (continued)

Quotation	Poetic text	Topics	Signs
<i>Kościuszko's Capture</i>	<p>[“...the ocean’s ridge carries the knight who gets his brave hands ready in defense of foreigners’ freedoms though they were to save his own people.”</p> <p>“Gdy po straconej swo- bodzie chlubnymi okryty rany, ozdobą więzów skarany cierpiął Kościuszko w wielkim Piotra Grodzie.” [“When, after freedom was lost, covered with a hero’s wounds and adorned with bonds for punishment Kościuszko suffered in Petersburg.”]</p>	polonaise	A minor key
<i>Poniatowski March/March of War</i>	<p>“Towarzystwo Kościuszki chwały ... ”</p> <p>[“Kościuszko’s brother- in-arms in his glory ... ”]</p>	march	<i>pathopoeia</i>

basic areas of the significance of *Ranz des Vaches*. He quotes the tune in order to refer to the country where Kościuszko died, but also to subtly remind his audience of the value of freedom, and of Kościuszko’s commitment to the fight for freedom.

The British song *Rule Britannia* composed in 1740 by Thomas Arne (1710–1778) for a masque entitled *Alfred*, soon gained independence from its theatrical context and was equipped with a new text, written by the poet James Thomson (1700–1748); in this form it is still sung nowadays. In the new version, the song became Great Britain’s unofficial national anthem and one of the most important patriotic songs, symbolizing the power of the British Empire and its great political achievement, the constitutional monarchy, which offered citizens many civil liberties and which the Britons considered as a model for other countries to follow. One can hardly overlook here an allusion to the Polish-Lithuanian

Commonwealth, which before the partitions likewise boasted great power and took pride in its political system of the so-called “nobles’ democracy.” The quotation from *Rule Britannia* clearly alludes to the now oppressed Poland’s glorious past, pointing out that the fighting spirit must live on in the nation, as indirectly indicated by the quotation that follows this fragment of music (cf. Figure 3).

The image displays a musical score for piano, arranged by MG, consisting of two systems. The first system shows a piano introduction with two green boxes highlighting specific musical phrases. The first box is labeled "Rule Britannia" and the second "La Marseillaise". The second system is labeled "La Marseillaise" and includes a vocal line with the Polish lyrics "Czas narodów mści cierpienia, swoboda przemocy karą" and its English translation: "The time of nations avenges the suffering, freedom punishes violence".

Figure 3: *Elegy*... Kurpiński, bars 35–44 (arranged by MG).

That latter citation comes from *La Marseillaise* (1792), a French song with text and music by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle (1760–1836). Originally a revolutionary piece, it later became the French national anthem (1795). It spurred the French people to rise and fight, giving them faith in the sense of their struggle. The song was a symbol of the successful revolution that led to the overthrow of absolute monarchy in France. In the early 19th-century, this song symbolized revolution and the fight for a better future. In Kurpiński’s *Elegy*, it takes on the same significance and accompanies the poetic text which presents (in a slightly embellished fashion) the American episode in Kościuszko’s life and his involvement in the American War of Independence (cf. Figure 3).

4.2 Quotations from Polish music

The intertexts introduced by Kurpiński invoke a number of revolutionary or national-pride-related songs which highlight Kościuszko’s commitment to the struggle “for our (i.e. Polish) and for your freedom” in Europe and America, as well as pointing to his last place of residence. At the same time the composer quotes

pieces of music associated strictly with Polish culture, which could be called “regional” on the European scale. These elements clearly define the protagonist’s national identity and his cultural environment.

The first such quotation is an excerpt from the song known as *Polonez Kościuszki* [Kościuszek’s Polonaise] (1792), whose text bids farewell to Kościuszek the commander as he is leaving his country: “Podróż twoja nam niemiła/lepsza przyjaźń w domu była” [“We do not rejoice in your journey/friendship at home was dearer to us”]. These words define the overall tenor of the song, which, with time, came to symbolize the Poles’ despair after the loss of independence, and their grief at seeing the beloved leader being forced to leave the country, as well their sorrow following his departure. In 1818 these symbols were very much relevant in partitioned Poland.

The topic of national bondage in the text of Kurpiński’s elegy is accompanied in his music by a quotation from a polonaise-style piece known as *Wzięcie Kościuszki w niewolę* [Kościuszek’s Capture] or *Smutny polonez do grania* [A Sad Polonaise to Play] (cf. Figure 4). This tune refers not only to Kościuszek’s imprisonment following the fall of the 1794 uprising, but also to the musical idiom of Poland’s national dance, the polonaise. Here it appears in a melancholy mode, evoking associations (however remote) with Michał Kleofas Ogiński’s (1765–1833) *Polonaise in A Minor* “*Pożegnanie ojczyzny*” [“Farewell to Homeland”].



Figure 4: *Elegy...* Kurpiński, bars 113–117 (arranged by MG).

The last important citation from Polish music is *Marsz Księcia Józefa Poniatowskiego* [Prince Józef Poniatowski’s March], which can be heard at the moment when the figure of Prince Poniatowski is invoked in Tymowski’s poem. The original text of the *Poniatowski March* expresses trust and faith in Prince Józef Poniatowski (1763–1813) as a commander of his soldiers, as well as their joy and love for their leader, whom they were ready to follow to the ends of the Earth. This charismatic leader, participant of the Kościuszek Uprising, with time became for his

compatriots a symbol of valor and devotion to one's fatherland. Interestingly, the piece is a palimpsest, since it was originally written as a *Marsz wojenny* [March of War], sung by Polish knights returning from King Jan III Sobieski's victorious Battle of Vienna (1683). This connotation makes it possible to incorporate another trope in the interpretation of Kurpiński's elegy, namely, the one related to the code of the original text of the *March* and to the memory of the great Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's past glories. Kurpiński's *Elegy* not only directly refers to the figure of Poniatowski in its text, but also indirectly invokes the text originally set to the march melody quoted in the *Elegy* (Gamrat 2019b: 77–80).

4.3 Internal quotations

We need to discuss two other major aspects of intertextuality in Kurpiński's *Elegy*. The first of these is the way he creates internal intertexts by setting different texts to the same music, which in a piece carrying such a profound message and using such refined and well-thought-out tools of composition must be associated with the overlap of meanings. The original text adds an echo of its meaning to the new text set to the same music. This concerns the opening section of music which accompanies the text about Kościuszko's death, juxtaposed at the beginning of the third text section with excerpts from *La Marseillaise* and from the *Kościuszko Polonaise*, coupled with the theme of Kościuszko's American campaigns. In this new context, the recurrent musical motifs first focus the listeners' attention and later accompany the poetic text which glorifies Kościuszko's heroism and depicts his cult in the United States.

The second aspect is the reinterpretation of and dialogue with codes and idioms established in culture. One example of such a re-reading comes from the opening of the *Elegy*, where the composer deliberately imposes the 4/4 time of a funeral march on a polonaise (which is normally in 3/4 time) in what is Kurpiński's own paraphrase of the *Kościuszko Polonaise*, quoted in several places in the composition. Additionally, Kurpiński also changes the major key, well established in the nation's collective memory, to a minor one, thus making the quotation less readily recognizable. Still, its deep meaning – death of the hero – becomes highlighted owing to these musical devices. The *Polonaise* now refers to Kościuszko's departure not just from his country, but from this world. The change of key and idiom (from a polonaise to a funeral march) stresses the ultimate character of this "journey."

With regard to the political context (we need to remember that the late 18th-century saw Poland lose its independence), Kurpiński's musical work conveys this message more clearly than Tymowski's poem. The poet only mentions

Kościuszko's involvement in politics. The melodies quoted and recalled by the composer emphasize that there was a very deep involvement in the most significant struggles and revolutions taking place at the turn of the 18th- and 19th-centuries. The composer uses the intertext to play with the audience's perception, memory, and knowledge of codes; this creates an opportunity for multilayered communication between sender and receiver, which consequently allows us to reconstruct the perception and interpretation of reality by the individual artist, the sender, who shapes this reality to a certain extent, and the receiver, who strives to decode and understand the artistic reality contained in the work of art.

5 Narrative strategies

My use of the term “narrative strategies” follows that proposed by Márta Grabócz (2014) in her article *Narrative strategies of the Romantic “philosophical epics” in the piano works of Franz Liszt*. Grabócz wrote about Liszt's instrumental music. I therefore had to adapt her ideas so that they could fit Kurpiński's vocal-instrumental composition, in which the context of the poetic text needs to be considered as well. Before I discuss Márta Grabócz's concept, I need to clarify the terminology she applies, derived from the semiology of Algirdas Greimas, which Tarasti combined with the “theory of sign developed by Charles S. Peirce” (Jabłoński 2010: 9) and which can be applied jointly and simultaneously with the categories established by musical semiotics.

Grabócz pointed out three narrative strategies in Liszt's music:

- 1) The first, which she calls **figurative strategy**, is the closest to the traditional variation form and depends on “[o]nly one isotopy [which] is at the basis of the works [...]. In semantic terms, the narrative function (i.e. the isotopy of the first theme or thematic complex) is not replaced in the course of the piece, and is merely subject to the nuances of possible discoloration” (p. 117).
- 2) The second, **simple narrative strategy**, “is built on a succession of different isotopies developed on the basis of a single thematic topic or a thematic complex. The change in narrative function of the semantic isotopy occurs through sudden transformation (in leaps and bounds), often suggested from **the outside while following the chosen literary model**” (p. 120).
- 3) The third, **complex narrative strategy**, is one in which we can observe how “a struggle or conflict between two important and contrasting isotopies constitutes the basis of evolution and gradual transformation of musical thoughts” (p. 122).

The fundamental genre of Kurpiński's work, that of an elegy, literary and musical at the same time, shapes the overall character of the piece and reflects its central theme, namely, the death of Tadeusz Kościuszko. The composition reflects many aspects of grief after the hero's death. Here is a leader gone, but also a friend, a symbol, and father of the nation. All these are variations on one central theme. We also perceive a succession of various codes and intertexts, sometimes transformed in ways which are far removed from the original (which is a game with the listener's memory). Signs, topics, and intertexts/quotations appear simultaneously. All of them are deeply rooted in the European and the Polish traditions. The multiplicity of elements, frequently contrasted with one another, results from the narrative strategy of the poetic text, which not only contains a lament on the hero's death, but also describes his contributions to public life (participation in wars and revolutions) and the more personal aspects of his life (national identity, place of origin, and Kościuszko's favorable attitude to the common folk).

Also important to Kurpiński's *Elegy* is the treatment of Tymowski's poetic text, with whose ordering and content the composer does not interfere in any way whatsoever, even by repeating individual lines or words, which is a frequent solution in vocal music. The poem is divided into sections by means of instrumental links, which make one perceive the recited text as if it were written in separate stanzas. Interestingly, the composition as a whole follows a construction principle akin to the ternary form ABA_1 . In this particular musical work, the choice of this well-known musical form constitutes at the same time an additional symbolic element. It tells us that repetition and change always coexist. A_1 will never be the same as A , since the B that happened in between also changed the perception of A . The overall construction of the work has schematically been represented in Table 3 below.

The tools and means applied by the composer together make up a narrative strategy that can be viewed as a hybrid of all three narrative strategies listed by Márta Grabócz. Kurpiński's strategy comprises a great multitude of elements within one superordinate set of topics. What counts here, let me stress, is not a strict application of specific narrative strategies as distinguished by Grabócz, but the very idea of a narrative strategy depending on a succession of meaningful elements (signs, topics, and intertextuality). The same concept of narrative strategy, based on lower-tier meaningful units, can also be postulated for the interpretation of many other works. The similarities between the types listed by Grabócz for Liszt's music and Kurpiński's concept suggest that these strategies are to some extent universally present in the musical language of European composers, and that Grabócz's method may therefore also be considered universal. However, only a wider comparative study could indicate which elements are indeed thoroughly universal for the culture of a given time in a wide territory, which are typical of

Table 3: The structure of Kurpiński's *Elegy* (analysis by MG).

Section	A (bars 1–83)	B (bars 84–129)	A ₁ (bars 130–186)
Poetic text	Kościuszko; his death, references to Antiquity, heroic deeds.	Kościuszko's influence on the Polish people; his imprisonment following the fall of the uprising.	Fights for freedom, the Napoleonic wars, Poniatowski's death, lament on the death of Kościuszko.
The music	<i>Ranz des Vaches</i> , <i>Rule Britannia</i> , <i>La Marseillaise</i> , <i>Kościuszko Polonaise</i> , funeral march, pastoral idiom, funeral bells, song of freedom and struggle.	krakowiak, dumka, <i>Kościuszko's Capture</i> , pastoral idiom.	<i>La Marseillaise</i> , <i>Kościuszko Polonaise</i> , <i>Poniatowski March</i> , song of freedom and struggle, military music.

smaller regions, which are specific to individual composers or genres, and which are variations on common models applied within the given work of music. This, however, is a subject for a separate publication.

To conclude, let me add that Kurpiński applies all these signs, topics, and intertextuality present in the culture of his period consciously and with a great awareness of music's communicative potential. This is, in fact, his narrative strategy, which he confirmed two years later in his article *O operze polskiej* [On the Polish opera] (1820), in which he explains in detail how he applied the tools of composition in his *Elegy*:

Pierwsze takty introdukcji uderzają motyw *Poloneza Kościuszki*, ale w tonie smutnym i rytmie poważnym czterościerciowego taktu; to zwraca uwagę na przedmiot poezji w piątym takcie jednostajne uderzenia basu przy użyciu pedału wyrażają posępny odgłos dzwonu, w ciągu czego daje się słyszeć znana melodia szwajcarska "Ah tylko tam gdzie się rodzimy" dla przeniesienia na chwilę słuchaczy w miejsca, gdzie nasz bohater zakończył życie. Przy dalszych wierszach, które tylko są wstępem do rzeczy, pierwszy motyw powtarza się rozmaicie aż do słów: „Czas narodów mści cierpienia ...” Tu muzyka intonuje głośno pieśń angielską "Rule Britannia", w a czwartym takcie daje się zaraz słyszeć piano jakoby z odległej Ameryki pieśń wolności "Idźmy ojczyzny synowie", w końcu czego słyhać urywek *Poloneza Kościuszki* na cztery w takt towarzyszenia basu wyrażającego ruch wałów na oceanie stosownie do wiersza „Niosą Rycerza oceanu wały”. Następujące trzy unisona tremolando wyrażają trzy groźące naszemu narodowi chmury i tajemny przewrót Kościuszki. Pasterskie tony *Krakowianów* przenoszą słuchacza do starożytnej naszej stolicy, gdzie "Lud w bohaterów zamieniać rolniczy Kościuszko idzie". Te dwa ostatnie wiersze z czterema następującymi, dały mi wiele do myślenia, w nich bowiem znajduje się treść całej rewolucji naszej: w

dwóch taktach było trzeba wyrazić rolników, w dwóch drugich już jako walecznych rycerzy, piątym ich zwycięstwa, w szóstym upadek kraju czyli ostatnie i ciężkie westchnienie ojczyzny. Dłużej nie można rozciągnąć muzyki, bo związek tych wierszy nie mógł być przez nią rozerwany.

Dalsze przygrywanie lub milczenie jest stosowne od ustępu poety; lecz za powrotem do rzeczy, wraca i muzyka do obrębów historycznych, dając słyszeć smutnego Poloneza pod nazwiskiem „Wzięcie Kościuszki w niewolę”. Znowu stosownie do ustępu lira zamilcza. Budzi się dopiero na słowa: „Ameryko! Kościuszek powraca do ciebie” i powtarza znowu to, co było przy słowach: „Niosą Rycerza oceanu wały”, a kończy stosownie do wiersza: „Gdzie dłoń też sama i walczy i orze”. Jeszcze raz daje muzyka słyszeć urywek z *Poloneza Kościuszki* w minorze i powolnym ruchu na cztery w takt, dla nadania więcej mocy wyrazom: Już Kościuszkę zgięły lata” etc. i znowu zamilcza aż do wiersza „Towarzysz Kościuszki chwaly” (Xsiaże Józef), gdzie muzyka daje słyszeć motyw jego marsza po różnych prowadzony tonach w brzmieniu burzliwym, i kończy smutno razem ze słowami: „I nadzieja na rękę rycerza skołała”. Późem dają się słyszeć wśród deklamacji tony pogrzebowe, podobne do modłów matki po zgonie ulubionego syna. Zakończenie jest bez znaczenia.

[The first bars of the introduction strike the motif of the *Kościuszek Polonaise*, albeit in a sad key and a grave rhythm, in 4/4 time. This attracts attention to the subject of the poetry in bar five. The monotonous pedal strokes in the bass imitate the somber sound of a bell, in the course of which we hear the well-known Swiss tune *Ah, Only Where We Are Born*, which carries the listeners for a moment to the place where our hero ended his life. In the following lines, which are still an introduction to the subject proper, the first motif recurs variously till we come to the line “The time of the nations avenges the suffering.” Here the music loudly intones the English song *Rule Britannia*, and in bar four we hear the freedom song *Let Us Go, Sons of the Fatherland*, played piano as if coming from the distant America; at the end of which comes a fragment of the *Kościuszek Polonaise* in 4, accompanied by the bass which represents the ocean waves, in agreement with the poetic text: “the ocean’s ridge carries the knight.” The three tremolando unisons that follow reflect the three clouds that threaten our nation, and Kościuszek’s mysterious revolution. The shepherd tune of the *krakowiak* carries the audience to our ancient capital, where “Kościuszek arrives to turn the peasant folk into heroes.” These last two lines, along with the four that follow, gave me much to think, since they comprise the entire sense of our revolution. In two bars I had to represent farmers, and in the other two – they already appear as valiant knights. The fifth one shows their victories, the sixth – the country’s fall, or the last heavy breath of our fatherland. The music could not continue any further, but the link between these lines must not be severed by the music [structure].

Further in the piece, musical accompaniment or silence [of the instrument(s)] agrees with the poet’s meanings. As the poem, so also the music returns to historical themes, and we hear a sad polonaise titled *Kościuszek’s Capture*. Here again the harp is silent in agreement with the poetry, and only wakes up on the words: “America! Kościuszek returns to you,” repeating again the music that we heard before on the words “the ocean’s ridge carries the knight.” It ends in harmony with the poetic meaning of the line, “Where the same hand fights and ploughs the soil.” Here again the music plays an excerpt from the *Kościuszek Polonaise* in a minor key and a slow tempo in 4/4 time, so as to reinforce the meaning of the words “Now is

Kościuszkowski bent by the weight of his years,” etc. Then the music falls silent again till the line “Kościuszkowski’s brother-in-arms in his glory” (that is, Prince Józef), where it plays the motif of his march unfolding through different keys in a stormy manner, until it ends sadly on the words “And hope died in the knight’s arms.” Funeral tones can then be heard along with the recitation, akin to a mother’s prayer after the death of her beloved son. The ending is without significance.]

(Kurpiński in Gmys 2015: 53–54)

Kurpiński’s narrative strategy is based on a succession of various musical signs (rhetorical figures, musical key symbolism, and topics), as well as quotations from Polish and other European works, which frequently carry a considerable semantic and symbolic weight. In this way, the composer enters into a dialogue with European culture and demonstrates that even a highly national theme, which seems local from the European perspective, can be understandable to every person brought up within the sphere of European culture thanks to the exploitation of universal elements. All this points to the power and versatility of cultural semiotics, which allows us to study human creativity in a highly comprehensive manner, exploring areas which are inaccessible to other research methodologies.

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