

WOJCIECH NOWIK (Warszawa)

*Adam Mickiewicz's  
'My Little Fondling' in the Songs  
of Polish Romanticists.  
Inspirations – Messages – References*

Adam Mickiewicz's 'My Little Fondling' is surely one of the greatest phenomena of nineteenth-century erotic poetry. This poem evoked very widespread interest among readers and literary scholars alike; it also stimulated a very intensive creative resonance among composers of various nationalities, times and cultural circles. As many as twenty-nine composers, including Stanisław Moniuszko, Fryderyk Chopin, Władysław Żeleński, Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Stanisław Niewiadomski and Feliks Nowowiejski, in Poland, and Alexander Alabiev, Mikhail Glinka, Peter Tchaikovsky and Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov abroad, set 'My Little Fondling' under various titles and in different languages.<sup>1</sup> The fact that so many composers were attracted to this poem gives food for thought. No other text by Mickiewicz has focused the attention of so many creative artists, 'both of the highest rank and those who are now forgotten or completely unknown [...] in the history of vocal music',<sup>2</sup> as this erotic.

The present study covers a selection of four songs inspired by Mickiewicz's text, composed in the nineteenth century by Chopin, Moniuszko, Żeleński and Paderewski. Several factors informed this particular selection, including our relative ignorance of the contingencies of the composition of the songs, their ill-defined compositional qualities and the unknown and often disputed object of reference of the different pieces.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Kornel Michałowski, 'Poezje Mickiewicza w kompozycjach muzycznych' [Mickiewicz's poetry in musical compositions], in *Adam Mickiewicz. Dzieła wszystkie. Wiersze, uzupełnienia i materiały* [Adam Mickiewicz. Complete works. Poems, addenda and materials] (Wrocław, 1984), vol. 1, 192–193.

<sup>2</sup> Michałowski, 'Poezje Mickiewicza', 187, names as many as 156 composers who composed to texts by Mickiewicz. 'My Little Fondling' is definitely the leader in this 'ranking', ahead of 'Polały się łzy me czyste ...' [My pure tears flowed ...] (18 musical settings).

But the most important motive behind the decision to tackle this subject was the wish to analyse the ways in which outstanding Polish composers elaborated Mickiewicz's poem, the principles whereby the music and the text are correlated, and the types of means which the different composers used to bring out the poem's qualities and emphasise its erotic themes.

Let us begin with Mickiewicz's erotic. The poem, entitled "To D. D.", was written in Odessa in 1825.<sup>3</sup> It consists of two verses, of six lines each, with an a-b-a-c-c-b rhyme scheme and strong prolongation.<sup>4</sup>

Moja pieścizotka, gdy w wesołej chwili  
Pocznie szczebiotać i kwilić, i gruchać,  
Tak mile grucha, szczebioce i kwili,  
Że nie chcąc słówka żadnego postradać,  
Nie śmiem przerywać, nie śmiem odpowiadać,  
I tylko chciałbym słuchać, słuchać, słuchać,

My little fondling, when in a cheerful moment  
She starts to warble and prattle and twitter,  
She twitters and warbles and prattles so sweetly  
That, not wanting to miss a single word,  
I dare not interrupt, I dare not respond,  
And want only to listen, to listen, to listen.

Lecz mowy żywość gdy oczki zapali  
I pocznie mocniej jagody różować,  
Perłowe ząbki błyszczą wśród koralu,  
Ach! wtenczas śmielej w oczęta poglądam,  
Usta pomykam i słuchać nie żądam,  
Tylko całować, całować, całować.

But when from speaking her eyes start to glimmer,  
And her rosy cheeks glow yet more strongly,  
Her pearly teeth flash twixt her coral lips,  
Oh! then more boldly I look in her eyes,  
Close her mouth and wish to listen no longer,  
Only to kiss, to kiss, to kiss.

Hence the verses break down into two separate parts: a-b-a and c-c-b. The parts also describe different things: part one is about the adored person, part two is about the lyrical subject's reaction to that person's behaviour. In the first part both verses also contain amplifications of the behaviour (warbles, prattles, twitters) and appearance (glimmering eyes, rosy cheeks, pearly teeth, coral lips) of the object of the subject's feelings; and in the conclusion of part two we find reduplications of the descriptors of the lyrical subject's reactions to the Little Fondling's behaviour ('to lis-

<sup>3</sup> In the book *Adam Mickiewicz – Dzieła* [Adam Mickiewicz. Works] (Warsaw: Wydanie Narodowe, 1969), vol. 1, 464, we find the following comment: 'Whether all the works marked "To D. D." refer to the same woman or whether the poet deliberately used these uninformative initials to conceal various persons, one cannot say; all sorts of speculations have been put forward.'

<sup>4</sup> See Michał Głowiński, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska and Janusz Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of literary terms] (Wrocław, 1998), entry 'Rym', 487 ff. Barbara Kasprzakowa has also discussed this issue, "Moja Pieścizotka" Adama Mickiewicza wielokrotnie umuzyczniona' [Adam Mickiewicz's 'My Little Fondling' set to music many times], in *Musica Practica Musica Theoretica*, vol. 2: *Mickiewicz i muzyka. Słowa – Dźwięki – Konteksty*, ed. Teresa Brodniewicz and Maciej Jabłoński [Mickiewicz and music. Words, sounds and contexts] (Poznań, 2001), 43–48.

ten' repeated three times in verse one and 'to kiss' repeated three times in verse two). Verse one appeals solely to the sense of hearing, whereas verse two is richer as far as references to the senses are concerned, appealing to both sight and touch. Also significant is the fact that the behaviour of the lyrical subject is diametrically different in verse one and verse two. Verse one is static and evokes shyness and a dreamy attentive listening to the Fondling's voice, merging with it with absolute compliance and a torpid submission to the magical charm of her 'warble', the spell of her narration. Verse two is dynamic. It reveals the bewitching power of the woman's attractive looks, which stimulate and enliven the senses, becoming an imperative which breaks through the resistance of shyness and leads the subject forcefully into the sphere of rapture and passion. It was this second verse which stimulated Chopin's imagination to such a degree that he began to compose his 'Little Fondling'.

What lady inspired the poet? In spite of many doubts,<sup>5</sup> Mickiewicz's biographers associate the poem – initially entitled *A la donna Giovanna* – with Karolina Sobańska.<sup>6</sup> Zbigniew Sudolski writes, 'However, the woman who truly ensnared the poet, and was probably the first to awaken his senses to such an extent, was Sobańska, née Rzewuska, four years older than the poet, famous for her good looks, education, good humour and turbulent, flirtatious life. Sister of the writer and story-teller Henryk Rzewuski and Ewelina Hańska (who was to marry Honoré de Balzac), she was then the lover of General Witt, who had recruited her for the secret intelligence service. When her husband died, she married the general and then divorced him to marry his adjutant, Captain S. Czyrkowicz. In her senior years she managed to marry yet a fourth time. Her last husband was Jules Lacroix, the French poet. She called herself the Tsar's "most faithful subject" and was later known for her anti-Polish attitudes. She used provocation and blackmail to ruin Polish patriots, even friends and family, evoking overwhelming disgust. But when she entrapped Mickiewicz, she had not yet gone so far and had not yet perfected the tools of the spy in crinolines. [...] It is to be regretted', says Sudolski, 'that Mickiewicz, probably not quite aware of the web of intrigues which was enmeshing him, fell into the beautiful agent provocateur's trap so easily. [...] In any case, this acquaintance proved most fruitful in literary terms – it was probably Sobańska who provided the impulse for most of the erotic poems which were written in early and mid 1825, such as 'Do D. D.' (incipit 'My little fondling'), 'Sen' [Dream], 'Rozmowa' [Con-

---

<sup>5</sup> See below, n. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Adam Mickiewicz Dzieła Wszystkie* [Adam Mickiewicz. Complete Works] (Wrocław, 1972), vol. 1: *Wiersze 1825–1829* [Poems. 1825–1829], 218.

versation], 'Niepewność' [Uncertainty], 'Godzina' [The hour], 'Do D. D. Elegia' [Elegy to D. D.], 'Dwa słowa' [Two words], 'Zaloty' [Wooing], and for the cycle of twenty-two erotic sonnets which the poet published in Moscow a year later together with his *Sonety krymskie* [Crimean sonnets].<sup>7</sup>

Equally interesting are the contingencies of the composition of Chopin's song 'My Little Fondling', and the way he approached his work on this song is truly fascinating. If we look closely at the composer's manuscripts, we see that it was the second verse of Mickiewicz's erotic which animated Chopin's imagination to such a degree that he began his work on the 'Fondling' from this verse. The draft of the piece, written in Paris in the 1830s, proves this unequivocally and beyond doubt.<sup>8</sup>

The composer also introduced several modifications to Mickiewicz's poem, intensifying the mood through the repetition of selected terms. By so doing, he tried to adjust the text so as to unite it with the music as perfectly as possible and to emphasise the expressive transformations in the musical narration. In the first verse, by repeating the words 'I dare not' he accentuated the delicate shyness of the lyrical subject, and in the second verse, by reduplicating the words 'Oh! then' he emphasised the dreamy oblivion at the moment of happiness and the fascination with the object of affection.

These deliberate modifications of the text by the composer were closely correlated with the process of musical creation. And this process – in addition to the unusual chronology of the material and its untypical placement on the page of the draft – was also very evident in several other plans of the composition. The draft of the song is also untypical because it contains a range of different performance markings. Chopin's drafts usually lack such markings because of the speed with which he projected his material and because of his maximal concentration on the efficient registration of the foreground elements of the work's construction. Expression markings can usually only be found in fair copies, where they reflect the final elaboration of a composition, now ready for publication and performance.<sup>9</sup> The draft of 'My Little Fondling' is

<sup>7</sup> Zbigniew Sudolski, *Mickiewicz – Opowieść biograficzna* [Mickiewicz: a biographic story] (Warsaw, 1995), 173.

<sup>8</sup> Chopin's biographers date the song at 1837. Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Chopin. Człowiek, dzieło, rezonans* [Chopin. The man, his work and its resonance] (Poznań, 1998), 539, situates the piece in the 'early thirties'.

<sup>9</sup> I described and classified Chopin's manuscripts in *Problemy procesu twórczego Fryderyka Chopina w świetle jego autografów muzycznych* [Problems related to the creative process of Fryderyk Chopin in light of his musical autographs] (Warsaw, 1978) (manuscript).

quite exceptional in this respect. It is very rich in dynamic markings and includes a great many accents in both the vocal part and the piano part. One very important performance marking is *stretto*, which accelerates the course of the musical events related to the text: 'then more boldly I look in her eyes. Close her mouth and wish to listen no longer'. This leads to the suspension of the musical narration and the emphasising of the words 'only' and the ecstatic, prolonged 'kiss' – the last word of the song, repeated many times.

Also noteworthy is the fact that in both verses the musical material of the first segments of the lines, i.e., those which refer to the object of affection, is identical. This material consists of twelve bars and is equivalent to three lines of the text: four bars of music to each line of text. This regularity is disturbed in the musical elaboration of the second segments, those which refer to the lyrical subject. The further progression, the equivalent of the next three lines, is expanded to sixteen bars in the first verse and as many as twenty-nine bars in the second. This difference can be attributed to the listening with rapt attention in the first, static verse, and the fascination with the Fondling's beauty and the lyrical subject's sensual, passionate kisses in the second. The field of verbal expression determines the organisation of the musical space in an obvious way. The correlation is direct: as the field of verbalisation widens, so does the musical space. This is more than just a formal correlation, consisting merely in the reduplication and amplification of the text and analogous operations performed by the composer in the musical dimension. It is quite evident that these operations were meant to expose and lucidly emphasise selected poetic and expressive aspects of the poem, which were accompanied by a transformation in the type of melodic line and a considerable enrichment of its outline in the texts 'and want only to listen' and 'only to kiss'. Also, the composer broadened the sphere of tonal and functional references and considerably diversified the types of chords in this fragment. This co-ordination of various technical means led to the composing of 'one of Chopin's most wonderful songs', according to Adolf Chybiński.<sup>10</sup> In fact, it combines the text and the musical tissue – the poem's subtle eroticism and the extremely delicate and refined musical narration – most congenially. Chopin's song seems to 'poeticise' the lyrics of the poem. These lyrics, borne by the music, are addressed not so much 'to us' as 'to each of us'. The song speaks both a universal language and a very personal language. It evokes vivid longings and desires, recollections pulsating with sensual experiences which fascinate and capture the imagination.

---

<sup>10</sup> Adolf Chybiński, 'Najmłodsza polska pieśń solowa' [The youngest Polish solo song], *Sfinks* 33/2 (1909), 146.

And who, we wonder, filled the composer's imagination with dreams to such an extent that he decided to take Mickiewicz's poem and set it to music? The clear majority of researchers indicate Maria Wodzińska, although some think that it was Delfina Potocka who inspired Chopin.<sup>11</sup>

Delfina Potocka, née Komar, three years older than Chopin, a widely admired beauty, naturally endowed not only with good looks but also with a lovely voice and extraordinary talents in music (she composed and played the piano with great mastery) and painting,<sup>12</sup> had a very complex personal life. Unhappily married at the age of eighteen to Mieczysław Potocki, well known for his 'disgraceful scenes with his own mother, the Greek woman Zofia Glavani',<sup>13</sup> she eventually separated and divorced. Alimony of 100 thousand francs per annum paid by her ex-husband allowed Delfina to live a completely independent life. 'She threw herself into the whirl of the beau monde [...] a whole legion of admirers at her feet, whispers of rapture and admiration from every quarter intoxicated her and even amused her, but not for long. She was easily satiated and her desire for happiness grew ever greater, but Paris could not give her the happiness she craved', wrote Antoni J. Rolle with romantic exaltation.<sup>14</sup> The ranks of her admirers, not at all platonic, included Count Flahaut (Talleyrand's son), the Duke of Orleans (King Louis-Philippe's eldest son) and the Duke of Monfort (son of Hieronymus I, King of Westphalia). 'And since she was also an artistic soul, she felt most at-

<sup>11</sup> Tomaszewski (*Chopin*, 539) rejects the idea that Chopin's feelings for Maria Wodzińska were the main inspiration for his 'Fondling' and argues that '[to attribute the song to Wodzińska] does not seem right for psychological and moral reasons – its [the song's] eroticism is all too explicit' (561).

<sup>12</sup> See Mateusz Gliński, *Chopin. Listy do Delfiny* [Chopin. Letters to Delfina] (New York, 1972), 134, reproduced one of Delfina's paintings. Ferdynand Hoesick, *Chopin* (Kraków, 1986), vol. 2, 73, described her painting thus: 'The works of her brush had clean lines and effective colour, attesting to serious study'.

<sup>13</sup> According to Jerzy Maria Smoter, *Spór o "listy" Chopina do Delfiny Potockiej* [The controversy over Chopin's 'letters' to Delfina Potocka] (Kraków, 1976), 17. Jerzy Łojek, *Potomkowie Szczęsnego, dzieje fortuny Potockich z Tulczyna* [Szczęsny's descendants. The fortunes of the Potockis of Tulczyn] (Lublin, 1980), gives the details of these 'disgraceful scenes with his own mother'. Although Szczęsny Potocki unexpectedly became the grandfather of Bolesław, his second wife Zofia's youngest son, the 'culprit' was not Mieczysław but Jerzy (his first son from his first marriage), a light-hearted philanderer who 'succumbed to the charm' of his stepmother, then getting on for forty and sixteen years older than her stepson. But it was not this which shocked public opinion but the quarrels between Zofia the mother and her son Mieczysław concerning the father's enormous legacy, the court cases and the pleas for intervention and a verdict addressed to Tsar Nicolas I himself.

<sup>14</sup> Antoni J. Rolle, *Beatrice. Opowiadania historyczne* [Beatrice. Historical tales]. Series VII (Lviv, 1891), 122.

tracted to [...] famous artists and poets, painters and writers, whom she entertained in her well-appointed salon and who often lost their heads for her when filling in the pages of her album', wrote Ferdynand Hoesick.<sup>15</sup> Her liaison with the painter Paul Delaroche yielded several portraits of Delfina. For example, he immortalised her in his painting of the Madonna. Delfina was also the muse of Zygmunt Krasiński, whose adoration did not die even after his marriage to Eliza Branicka and was commemorated in his ardent love letters. Chopin, who was under Delfina's spell, dedicated his Concerto in F minor, Op. 21 and Waltz in D flat major, Op. 64 No. 1 to her. He jotted down his Prelude in A major, Op. 28 No. 7 and the song 'Melodia', to Krasiński's words, in her album.

As for the woman who inspired Chopin's 'Fondling', the text of the poem appears to portray a different character and personality than Potocka. She was perceived as 'a majestic [...] woman, like the women in the Greek statues', 'of a melancholic and dreamy nature'. According to her biographer, 'Her artistic spirit was drawn to the heavens'.<sup>16</sup> 'There is something perfect in you, something so very *raffiné*', wrote Krasiński in a letter to Delfina.<sup>17</sup> 'Warbling', 'prattling' and 'twittering' do not match the behaviour of this 'drawing-room lioness' or 'Don Juan in skirts', as her nearest ones called her.<sup>18</sup> The portrait sketched in the poem is more like Wodzińska, 'with whom one used to chase from room to room in yonder days... And today!', wrote Chopin to her brother.<sup>19</sup> In 1835 Chopin met Maria in Dresden and wrote into her album the first bars of his Nocturne in E flat major, Op. 9 No. 2, with the words 'soyez heureuse'. The following year he met her again in Marienbad, where he spent nearly a month walking and playing music with her. Then, with Maria's mother, they went to Dresden where, 'in the twilight hours' Fryderyk proposed to the seventeen-year-old Maria and 'was accepted'. The engagement was kept secret.<sup>20</sup> In 1837, the year when 'My Little Fondling' was probably composed,<sup>21</sup> Chopin waited in vain to be invited by the Wodzińskis to meet

<sup>15</sup> Hoesick, *Chopin*, vol. 1, 477.

<sup>16</sup> Rolle, *Beatrice*, 119.

<sup>17</sup> Cit. after Hoesick, *Chopin*, vol. 2, 71.

<sup>18</sup> Zygmunt Krasiński's letters to Adam Sołtan (Lviv, 1983), 139.

<sup>19</sup> From Chopin's letter to Feliks Wodziński dated 18 July 1834; see *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina*, ed. Bronisław E. Sydow [Fryderyk Chopin's correspondence] (Warsaw, 1955), vol. 1, 242.

<sup>20</sup> See Hanna Wróblewska-Straus, *Chopin daleko rozstawił swe imię* [Chopin made his name famous far and wide]. Catalogue of an exhibition commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Chopin's death (Warsaw, 1999), 68.

<sup>21</sup> In the first edition of *Chopin's Songs*, Julian Fontana dated 'My Little Fondling' at 1837; cf. Krystyna Kobylańska, *Rękopisy utworów Chopina. Katalog* [Manuscripts of Chopin's Works. Catalogue] (Kraków, 1977), vol. 1, 461.

his fiancée. Perhaps the illusory hope which accompanied his anticipation stimulated memories of the previous year, and Mickiewicz's erotic brought back recollections of Maria and those intimate moments, replete with awakened desire, which he had spent in Marienbad and Dresden with his fiancée. Maria's mode of conduct seems to fit the behaviour of the Fondling best. According to the memoirs of Józefa Kościelska, née Wodzińska, her sister Maria was a coquette who, more than anything else, wished to make an impression with her 'angelic poses'.<sup>22</sup> These 'poses' and coquetry of the then seventeen-year-old maiden are also the attributes of the poetic image of the Fondling.<sup>23</sup>

Scholarly pedantry obliges me to consider yet another possible source of inspiration for Chopin at that time. One cannot possibly ignore Hoesick's account of Marynia Mickiewicz. Marynia, adored by Niemcewicz and Witwicki, 'was in great favour with Chopin, and she was on such good terms with her father's friends that they all called her their fondling. Chopin was one of them'<sup>24</sup> [my emphasis – W. N.]. Perhaps the composer was thinking of this Marynia in respect to the words 'warbling', 'prattling' and 'twittering'. At the time Marynia was coming on for three.<sup>25</sup> Yet although, without knowing its origins, we might interpret Mickiewicz's poem as an expression of affection for his beloved daughter, we cannot interpret Chopin's song as a substitute of masculine love metaphorically transferred to a sweet, twittering, chattering little girl, for in this song there is too much reverie, restrained desire and passion addressed to a mature woman, aware of her charm.

Moniuszko composed his song 'Fondling' when he was a student in Berlin. It was published in Berlin, in 1838, as the last of a collection of *Three Songs* to words by Mickiewicz.<sup>26</sup> These songs, the composer's public debut, were extremely warmly received and positively reviewed in the Polish and German press.<sup>27</sup> Moniuszko's erotic captivates us with its simplicity and the extremely consistent and lucid merging of text and

<sup>22</sup> Hoesick, *Słowacki i Chopin* [Słowacki and Chopin] (Warsaw, 1932), 132–133.

<sup>23</sup> Hoesick (*Chopin*, vol. 2, 194) says with absolute conviction, "My Little Fondling" was inspired by dreams of Maria Wodzińska'.

<sup>24</sup> Cit. after Franciszek German, 'Chopin i Mickiewicz' [Chopin and Mickiewicz], *Rocznik Chopinowski* 1 (Warsaw, 1956), 231–232.

<sup>25</sup> Jacek Łukasiewicz, *Mickiewicz* (Wrocław, 1996), 132: 'Maria Mickiewiczówna, later Gorecka, was born on 7 September [1835]. Her godparents were Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz and Julia Wołowska'.

<sup>26</sup> Witold Rudziński, *Moniuszko* ((Kraków, 1956), 60) explains the context of the bilingual edition of these songs, translated into German by K. von Blankensee and published by Bote & Bock.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 60–61; Elżbieta Dziębowska and Krystyna Duszyk, 'Moniuszko Stanisław', in *Encyklopedia Muzyczna PWM*, ed. Elżbieta Dziębowska, vol. 6 (Kraków, 2000), 314.



music. The song's simplicity is already manifest on the formal level. The composer wrote a stanzaic song, willing to take the risk inherent in the parallelism of the technical means and the expression of the musical layer of the two verses vis-à-vis their different verbal dimensions. In order to homogenise the song formally and expressively, Moniuszko also reduplicated the last lines of both verses and amplified the words 'to listen' and 'to kiss'. Not only do these operations emphasise the verses' formal parallelism, they also highlight the crucial expressive and dramatic moments, concentrated in the conclusions of the verses. Melody is a very important element of construction and also the major vehicle of expression. It is dominated by stepwise, mostly semitonal, motion, which creates a descending line, usually confined to the range of a third or fourth. It is as if the melody connoted the charm emanating from the object of affection and the shyness of the lyrical subject submitting to this charm. At the moments when the lyrical subject is enraptured, the melody ascends by a third or a fourth, only to be transformed into an ascending sequence in the final culmination, signifying a complete immersion in the Fondling's warbling in the first verse and in the act of kissing in the second. At points of culmination, the type of melody also changes from syllabic (clearly dominant) to vocalic. This seemingly trivial operation underlines two words which are crucial for the expression of the two verses: 'listen' and 'kiss'. Moreover, the change of melody to diatonic, descending in seconds, with the range of a fourth, is given an accompaniment of chromatically ascending seconds within the range of a third. In other words, in the culminations, using local changes to enhance them, the composer unites the heterogeneous context by introducing structural unity.

One of the important formal elements of the song is the instrumental ritornello, which Moniuszko filled with very precisely, even intricately, organised movement. The first sentence is a semiquaver melodic sequence with a *staccato* reduplication of all its components. This sequence progresses in small, second steps and ascends by a third, descending in fourths from its peak points. The harmonic accompaniment is mobile and mutable (C,G,C7; F,f; C,G,C; D, D7, H9), fully defined in the endings of bars (the harmonic accent on the third beat of the bar). In the next sentence it becomes static and takes the conventional form of a D-T cadence (although the harmonic accent is on the second beat). The melody of this sentence ascends suddenly (a range of two octaves over the space of two bars). The expansion of movement which the composer achieves in this way is very effectively intensified thanks to the use of successive polymetre: the 3/8 metre of the first sentence is motivically 'compressed' in the second, becoming an evident 2/8 metre. In this way a

playful context is obtained, emphasised further by the 'grace note leap' in the final cadence. This mood is evoked not only by the organisation of the musical progression of precisely constructed and correlated technical means. The composer marked this mood very legibly by introducing the term *scherzando* at the very beginning of the work.

In his 'Little Fondling', Moniuszko seems to be painting a musical picture of a charming young lady who spreads her irresistible charm by means of her prattling warble. It must be pointed out here that the composer gave the piece a 'private' title, 'Ptaszeczka' [Little Birdy], which was probably very personal and at the same time appropriate for the imaginary metaphorical figure.<sup>28</sup> Who was this Little Birdy? In his Berlin years, the time when he composed this song, Moniuszko, who was not quite twenty, not only harboured an ideal female image but also had a tangible object of affection, in the person of Aleksandra Müllerówna, his future wife. In Witold Rudziński's biography of Moniuszko we read,

Moniuszko had friends in Berlin. He organised a small choir consisting of devoted colleagues; he invited people to his house, showed them his new songs; young Germans and local Poles also came to visit – they made music and went on excursions out of town. The choir's anniversary was celebrated particularly festively at a picnic on the outskirts of Berlin [...] Moniuszko was in charge of everything, elected choirmaster, first cook, drinks connoisseur and ringleader. His friends listened to a longish monologue on the charms and graces of Alina (or rather Olesia), after which the minutes of the whole meeting were scrupulously entered into a thick book, works were written down and [...] handed to Moniuszko.<sup>29</sup>

The events which followed demonstrated how intensely Moniuszko wished to marry his beloved. As soon as he returned from his studies in Berlin he wrote to his fiancée on 8 August 1840: 'Our happiness, the peak of which we see in our ultimate union, is very near, because my father has allowed us to choose the date'.<sup>30</sup> The young couple chose the date immediately: Stasy and Olesia were married on 25 August of that year.<sup>31</sup>

Żeleński, 'winner of the honorific sobriquet of Moniuszko's successor in the field of Polish song writing', according to Zdzisław Jachi-

<sup>28</sup> Dziębowska and Duszyk, 'Moniuszko Stanisław', 314.

<sup>29</sup> Rudziński, *Moniuszko*, 67. The author made a mistake as to the name of the composer's beloved and wife to be. Cf. *Stanisław Moniuszko*, ed. Jan Prosnak (Kraków, 1968), 53, 56–57.

<sup>30</sup> *Stanisław Moniuszko*, 53.

<sup>31</sup> See 'Rejestr wypisów metryk ślubnych' [Marriage certificate register], photocopy in *Stanisław Moniuszko*, 53.

mecki,<sup>32</sup> has a song entitled 'My Little Fondling' to the words of Mickiewicz among his lyrical works. This song, marked opus 2, was composed in 1857–1860, when the composer was a student in Prague. Żeleński introduced a number of significant changes to the poem's construction, reduplicating key terms and repeating particular lines. These modifications are significant from the point of view of the song's construction, but above all they reflect the composer's attitude to the object of his affection. In the first verse he not only reduplicated the words 'My Little Fondling', he also repeated the words again, reduplicating the 'Fondling' subject at the end of the second line. The words 'in a cheerful' and the third line, which sketches the subject's behaviour, are also reduplicated. The composer made analogous changes in the second verse, focusing this time on the 'pearly teeth'. He also reduplicated lines four and five and repeated them once again together with the last line. This way the image of the Little Fondling with her charming assets and merry disposition is exposed in the semantic plan. The composer also emphasised his awakening passions and fascination with the object of his affection. Most important here are not only the clearly outlined inchoate passions but also his fascination and 'caresses' with the name 'Fondling'. Żeleński repeats the name several times, almost relishing it and, for fear that he will lose it, if only for a moment, he recalls it once again as its last sounds die out. He also seems to enjoy the word 'My', which, like some magic spell, confirms his intimacy with the 'Little Fondling' and staves off his fear of losing her.

The modifications to the poem's structure had a significant effect on the form of the song. Structurally, it resembles a rondo. The introduction, the material of which is later used as a postlude in the finale, is followed by a refrain. This refrain is very strongly linked with the six-bar introduction, because its first two bars are a cadenced complement to the introduction and the opening material becomes an accompaniment to the vocal part. This material connotes mazurek-like features, e.g. the ascendant rhythm and the accent on the second beat of the bar. These were crucial attributes for Żeleński and so he amplified them by means of the introductory words *Quasi Mazurka*. This does not mean, however that the piece is a 'dance', nor is it an expression of exalted idealisation of the peasantry, in anticipation of the Polish *Jugendstil*. The composer, who was then in a foreign country, probably wanted to stress the fact that the object of his affections, to whom the song referred, was in his homeland. The accompaniment, with its deferment of the basic chord components and modulating progression, seems to connote nostalgia, delicate wist-

---

<sup>32</sup> See Zdzisław Jachimecki, *Żeleński* (Kraków, 1987), 91.

fulness and dreaminess rather than 'quasi-mazurka' or village ribaldry. The couplet is enlivened in the first phase with movement, including polymetrics, after the fashion of Moniuszko. Another important element here are the embellishments, which suggest warbling and twittering, almost onomatopoeically. A certain shortcoming of the song's semantic plan is the presence of the same text both in the second couplet, whose musical material is identical with the material in the first couplet, and in the last refrain, the final fragment of which, with the words 'Only to kiss', is marked *con gran affecto*.<sup>33</sup> In the aforementioned phases of the song's development, a different musical elaboration of the same poetic text indicates its 'different temperature', the apogee of which is clearly manifest in the conclusion. This 'temperature' does not exceed the dynamic scale within the *pp* – *p* range, however. The work is crowned with a postlude, analogous to the prelude, giving particular symmetry to the structure.

It is very difficult to say what muse inspired Żeleński to compose this song. We can find faint echoes of 'romantic interests' in the composer's correspondence with his close friend Julian Łukaszewski when he was a student in Prague. 'My romantic interests are always the same: I moved a few steps forward during the vacation when I discussed the issue with my relative, a friend of the family, whom I asked to advise me what I should do. I have not yet talked to the young lady; somehow I have not found myself mature enough to make a decisive step.'<sup>34</sup> It took Żeleński more than a dozen years to achieve this maturity. Unfortunately, the biographical information on this is very sparse.

Paderewski included 'My Little Fondling' in a collection of six songs to words by Mickiewicz, Op. 18, published in 1892.<sup>35</sup> He hardly changed the original text at all. The only modification is the reduplication of the words 'pearly teeth' and 'to kiss' in the second verse. Paderewski created a through-composed song in which the accompaniment is an important element of both structure and expression. It consists of two differently constructed motivic sections divided by a rest. The first segment is a monophonic (doubled at an octave) octave leap via a fourth (with variants of a sixth via a third and a second). The first segment consists of two chords, usually of different harmonic content, which very often double the melody of the vocal part in octave shifts. The accompaniment reminds us of a barcarole with its rocking and its constant accents on the

<sup>33</sup> Adam Rieger, *Pieśni solowe z towarzyszeniem fortepianu W. Żeleńskiego* [W. Żeleński's solo songs with piano accompaniment] (Kraków, 1938), points out the song's prosodic shortcomings, not discussed in this article.

<sup>34</sup> Cit. after Jachimecki, *Żeleński*, 21.

<sup>35</sup> See Adam Zamojski, *Paderewski*, trans. Agnieszka Kreczmar (Warsaw, 1992), 269.

first and last beats of the bar. Its material provided the fabric for the introduction, the interlude which divides the verses and the postlude. The poetic nature of the narration is further intensified by the unchanging, all-encompassing diambic measure merging with the anapaest which is disturbed at the points of expressive culmination. The culminations are associated with the words 'want' and 'listen' in the first verse and 'flash twixt her coral lips, Oh!' and 'want only to kiss' in the second, connoting the lyrical subject's initial rapt attention and then his fascination and kissing to distraction. In short, these points of culmination are intensified by means of harmonic transformations, which clearly stand out from the previously calm harmonic narrative plan and are amplified even further by the intensification of the sound, effectively strengthened by the dynamic force.

What woman inspired the composer to write this song? This is a very tricky question indeed. The song was probably composed during Paderewski's first intensive and triumphant tour of the United States of America. By that time, a very long list of ladies with whom the composer had intimate and sometimes very intimate relations, far exceeding the bounds of convention, could have been drawn up.<sup>36</sup> However, Paderewski's correspondence suggests that two women occupied a special place in his life at that time. One was Duchess Rachel de Brancovan, the widow of Gregoire de Bassarabia de Brancovan, a talented pianist and student of Camille O'Meara Dubois.<sup>37</sup> The composer officially called the duchess 'my dear friend'.<sup>38</sup> The extent of this friendship was probably very great. After his extremely tiring tour of America, the duchess invited Paderewski to rest at her villa on Lake Geneva. This is what Adam Zamoyski has to say about the episode: 'She was happy to have him by her side once again, particularly since she did not believe that he had remained faithful to her in the face of all the temptations of America. When he complained of her mistrust she replied disarmingly, 'You may be angry at me, darling, scold me, but you were so far away, so far and so magnificently entertained, adored and admired, that how could it be otherwise? It is unavoidable.' And further, 'Unfortunately I am doing everything I can to make you love me more, because I am unable to love with the calmness you would like to find in me.'<sup>39</sup> [my emphasis –

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Camille O'Meara Dubois was a student of Fryderyk Chopin's; see Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher as seen by his pupils*, trans. Naomi Shohet with Krysia Osostowicz and Roy Howat, ed. Roy Howat (Cambridge, 1986).

<sup>38</sup> See Ignace Jan Paderewski and Mary Lawton, *The Paderewski Memoirs* (London, 1939).

<sup>39</sup> Zamoyski, *Paderewski*, 85.

W. N.]. Neither did the composer regain his calm when he returned home to Paris. Helena Górska, then wife of Władysław Górski and Paderewski's second wife-to-be, wrote, unmasking her passion with possessive self-assurance, 'You are mine and you must love me. [...] I want you – do you understand – I want you – I call out for you all night long and jump up to your caresses [...] I want bliss – you, you – But you're so far away [...] and I feel empty, cold and lonesome – oh, so lonesome – without you. Don't be shocked that I crave you so. It is all your making. You wanted passion, you wanted sensuality, so you have it [...] despite all the bliss we have already experienced I will still give you much joy. Just wait and see.'<sup>40</sup>

In uncovering the secrets of the alcove, one must ask: is this type of sensual love, full of passion, reflected in Paderewski's song? The song seems to be an apology of love in which one can find not only passion but above all peace and consolation.

Mickiewicz's text, the inspiration for the works analysed in this essay, presents one of the many incarnations of a woman capable of giving love. The presented songs, written to Mickiewicz's poetry by Polish composers, are an artistic confirmation of never extinguished longing, the unquenchable thirst for love, love which animates all activity, stimulates the imagination and gives meaning to our existence. On each occasion this love assumes a different shape and a different object, as the different approaches to the text reflect. For on each occasion, a different woman directly inspired the composer. So what is this woman like? What is this extraordinary, fascinating thing – womanhood? Can we possibly understand the mystery of this fascination? George Sand answered this question indirectly: 'Woman, oh woman, you are an unfathomable chasm, hell, a mystery, and he who says he knows you is thrice a fool'. But maybe it is worth being foolish and trying, for at least one fleeting moment, to unveil the secret?

*Translated by Helena Grzegółowska-Klarkowska*

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 85–86.