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### Links between Penderecki's Music and the Polish National Tradition

The works of Krzysztof Penderecki, particularly his great cantata-oratorio and stage compositions, carry a universal message. In some phases of his life and work, however, the Polish dimension also came into play as a significant factor. In his study, Mieczysław Tomaszewski listed several types of media which up till now have been used to express the category of nationality in music. Among them he mentioned:

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- references to motives from national history,
- motives from national literature set to music,
- images of native landscape evoked through music, and finally
- the folklore as a medium.<sup>1</sup>

In the oeuvre of Penderecki, only some of these media are used to express the attitude of the composer towards his nation and the national dimension of his music. These are: the medium of language, that is, the incorporation of national language into musical works; references to national history by the evocation of significant events or prominent figures, and references to the Polish religious and patriotic tradition. These kinds of references occur in the composer's music in varying ways and play different roles in his works.

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<sup>1</sup>Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Interpretacja integralna dzieła muzycznego* ["The integral interpretation of the musical work"], Kraków: Akademia muzyczna 2000, p. 103-105.

## I. National language

The incorporation of Polish texts into Penderecki's works takes place in two ways: either the Polish text becomes the basis of the work or it occurs as a quotation within a Latin text.

The former method is rare in the works of Penderecki and was applied only to one of the first works by the composer – *Psalm Dawida* (“Psalms of David”) for mixed choir and percussion, written in 1958. The verbal core of the work is the text which contains four extracts drawing upon the Book of Psalms (from Ps. 28, Ps. 30, Ps. 43, Ps. 143) in the Polish translation by Jan Kochanowski (see table and music example 1).

PSALM XXVIII Królu niebieski, zdrowie dusze mojej, Do Ciebie wołam, a Ty twarzy swojej Nie kryj przede mną [...]	[Unto thee will I cry, o Lord my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.]
PSALM XXX Będę Cię wielbił, [mój] Panie, Póki mię na świecie stanie, Boś mię w przygodzie ratował i śmiechów ludzkich uchował.	[I will extol thee, o Lord; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me.]
PSALM XLIII Niewinność, Panie, moją Przyjmij w obronę swoją. (...) Panie, w którym obrońa Moja jest położona, Czemu mię troskliwego Pchasz od oblicza swego?	[Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man. For thou art the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?]
PSALM CXLIII Wysłuchaj, wieczny Boże, prośby moje A nakłoń ku mnie święte uszy swoje; Według swej prawdy, według swej litości Racz mię ratować w mej dolegliwości.	[Hear my prayer, o Lord, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.]
Original Polish version – Jan Kochanowski, <i>Psalterz Dawida</i> (“Book of Psalms”), 1579	The King James Version of the Holy Bible, 1769

Table 1: Krzysztof Penderecki, *Psalm Dawida* (“Psalms of David”): text

The original Polish text in the piece may be replaced by a Latin version, and this was indeed the case in most performances (the changes were endorsed by the composer).<sup>2</sup> The reason why this modification was allowed was probably the strong tendency towards universalization in the early works of Penderecki, as well as the need to reduce difficulties in performance for foreign orchestras.

<sup>2</sup>There is a German version which was authorized by the composer, too.

The musical score is divided into two main sections. The first section, marked with a tempo of *L* and dynamics of *ff*, features a Coro (Chorus) with four parts: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenore (T.), and Basso (B.). The lyrics are "Kró - lu nie - bie - ski". The Coro parts are written in a complex, rhythmic style with many slurs and ties. A *Temp.* (Tempo) section follows, marked with a *f* dynamic. The second section, marked with a tempo of *2* and dynamics of *f* and *sf*, features vocal soloists: Soprano, Alto, Tenore, and Basso. The lyrics are "Kró - lu nie - bie - ski". The vocal parts are written in a complex, rhythmic style with many slurs and ties. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves: Pflte I (Piano I) and Pflte II (Piano II). The Pflte I part is marked with *sf* and *ff* dynamics, and the Pflte II part is marked with *sf* and *ff* dynamics. The score is numbered 10, 2, and 3.

Music example 1: K. Penderecki, *Psalmy Dawida*, PWM, p. 6

The second method consisted of incorporating Polish quotations in works based on a Latin text. This method is seen in the following works written after 1980:

<i>Te Deum</i> (1980)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a stanza from the anthem <i>Boże coś Polskę</i> (“God, You Saved Poland”)</li> </ul>
<i>Requiem polskie</i> (“Polish Requiem”) (1980-84)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an extract of the supplication hymn <i>Święty Boże</i> (“Holy God”)</li> </ul>
<i>Credo</i> (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the prayerful invocation <i>Któryś za nas cierpiął rany</i> (“You Who Suffered Wounds for Us”), an extract of the Improperia <i>Ludu mój ludu</i><sup>3</sup></li> </ul>

Table 2: Polish citations in the Latin texts in works of Krzysztof Penderecki

## II. References to history and national tradition

In the Polish national tradition there is a special link between history, culture and religion. In the long period of Partitions of Poland, which lasted from late 18<sup>th</sup> century till the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the period of Nazi occupation during the Second World War and under the Communist regime which followed it, the Poles were deprived of their own independent state, and their national identity could be preserved only thanks to the retention of national language, and religious and cultural values. In that situation both religious rites and artistic activity acquired a patriotic function. They were used to defend universal and national values and create a symbolic space for fostering freedom of thought.

The works of Penderecki written in the 1960s and 1970s, may be considered as a unique continuation of this function of art. *The Passion According to St. Luke* (1965), *Utrenya* (1970), *Magnificat* (1974), as well as *Dies Irae* (1967), *The Devils of Loudun* (1968-69) or *Cosmogony* (1970) are testimonies of the search for truth about humanity and the world, and carry a message concerning universal

<sup>3</sup>Polish version of *Popule meus*.

values. They were the response of an independent artist towards a totalitarian system which was based on deceit and questioned the system of religious and humanistic values established in Polish national tradition.

Through his works from this period, Penderecki emphasized that the place of Poland was in European culture, based on Christian spiritual formation and rooted in ancient cultures (Hebrew, Greek and Roman). It is significant that when he raised the key theme of Christianity – the theme of the passion and death of Christ –, the composer did not limit himself to *St. Luke's Passion*, which was linked to Roman-Catholic Latin liturgy. He also reached for Orthodox liturgy in *Utrenya*, which drew on the spirit of the Byzantine tradition, thus stressing his desire to transcend the boundaries of nation, religion and culture, in order to focus on universal values and the sphere of the sacred. In the case of both works, Penderecki never wished to smooth out differences between Eastern and Western culture. On the contrary, while referring to two distinct ways of thinking and expressing, he emphasized the fact that each of them contributes something unique to the interpretation of the theme in question. In Latin culture, the attitude of man towards *sacrum* is defined by a balance between the rational and the emotional, as well as by respect for the individual and the unique value of the human person. In Eastern culture, one may talk about the tendency to move towards a state of contemplation (frequently by intensifying emotions), in which man merges with the Absolute and loses his sense of individuality. The Orthodox Church, which is more mystical and more open to various religious experiences than the Catholic Church, exhibits greater distance towards secular activities, while the latter is more concerned with actions aiming at the transformation of the world.

The historic events which took place in the 1980s, such as the election of the Polish Pope, the establishing of the “Solidarność” movement and the introduction of martial law in Poland in 1981, evoked a strong reaction in Penderecki: They drew his attention to the national dimension of his life and personality. This is clear from the circumstances in which his works were written and the dedications, titles or quotations, which became particularly significant in the political context of the time. Penderecki's retrospective statements concern-

ing his output from that time are another testimony to this. From the temporal distance of nearly ten years, the composer confirmed his association with the events in Poland in his book *Labyrinth of Time*: "This was not really political music that I was writing, but it was music that was appropriate to the time during which we were living in Poland";<sup>4</sup> on the other hand, as an artist, he expressed doubts to such a direct involvement in history: "I cannot be sure that I have not sinned too much, especially towards the free 'I', in yielding to the imperatives of power and the national ethos. Works like the *Polish Requiem* [...] are liable to be read as journalism".<sup>5</sup>

In the 1980s, which was the time in question, Penderecki made several kinds of references to Polish history and national tradition in his works, thus offering a special commentary on current events in Poland.

1. Through his dedications, Penderecki evoked tragic events, significant in national history, thus emphasizing the importance of preserving them in collective memory as evidence of faithfulness to national values:

- the massacre of Katyń, where thousands of Polish army officers were murdered by the Soviets in 1940. The truth about this event was concealed for decades. One movement of the *Polish Requiem*, *Libera me Domine*, which is based on a responsorial psalm, is devoted to the memory of the tragic events;
- the struggle of the workers with the Communist regime in 1970. The *Lacrimosa* movement from the *Polish Requiem* focuses on this event. It is a lamentation written to celebrate the unveiling of the monument to honour the shipyard workers, the victims of December 1970. The lamentation was written in compliance with the request of Lech Wałęsa, and performed on 16 December 1980 during the commemoration ceremony;

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<sup>4</sup>Krzysztof Penderecki, *Labyrinth of Time: Five Addresses for the End of the Millennium. Conversations at the End of Millennium*, Chapel Hill: Hinshaw Music 1998, p. 85 (original Polish version: *Labirynt czasu. Pięć wykładów na koniec wieku*, Warszawa: Presspublica 1997).

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.

- the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, the heroic and tragic struggle for independence during the Second World War, which continued the tradition of national uprisings from the time of the Partitions. The first movement of the *Polish Requiem*, *Dies irae*, is dedicated to the event.

2. Through his dedications, Penderecki also recalled the historic figures of prominent Poles, whose personal testimony of faith in the highest values made a strong impact on national consciousness:

- Pope John Paul II: His personality and moral authority played a considerable role in the history of the nation and collapse of the Communist system. Penderecki dedicated his *Te Deum* (1980) to him;
- Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the “Primas of the Millennium”: His heroic resistance against the totalitarian system became a symbol of the struggle for spiritual values. The *Agnus Dei* movement for a cappella choir from the *Polish Requiem* is dedicated to him. It was written in response to the death of the Cardinal and performed during his funeral ceremonies in Warsaw;
- St. Maksymilian Kolbe: He offered a heroic testimony of faith in the highest values by offering his life for a fellow prisoner in Auschwitz. The second movement of *Dies irae* is dedicated to him (it contains the *Recordare* part with the quotation of *Święty Boże* supplication hymn).

3. Penderecki made references to the Polish religious and patriotic tradition by:

- giving the title of *Requiem polskie* (“Polish Requiem”) to the multi-movement work he wrote in 1980-84, based on the Latin liturgical text of the *Missa pro defunctis*. In the context of the current political situation (Poland was under martial law at the time), the title was received on one hand as a protest against the attempt to suppress national aspirations, and on the other as a broader reflection on the tragic history of the Polish nation;

30 *quasi da lontano*

**CORO**

S Bo - że coś Pol - skę przez tak lic - ne wie - ki o - la - czoł - blas - kłem po - le - gi i chwa - ly  
 a Bo - że coś Pol - skę przez tak lic - ne wie - ki o - la - czoł - blas - kłem po - le - gi i chwa - ly  
 t Bo - że coś Pol - skę przez tak lic - ne wie - ki o - la - czoł - blas - kłem po - le - gi i chwa - ly  
 b Bo - że coś Pol - skę przez tak lic - ne wie - ki o - la - czoł - blas - kłem po - le - gi i chwa - ly

*pp*

**SOLO**

S Sal - vum fac

31

**CORO**

S Przed two - ja - rze zo - no - sim - bla - ga - nie  
 a Przed two - ja - rze zo - no - sim - bla - ga - nie  
 t Przed two - ja - rze zo - no - sim - bla - ga - nie  
 b Przed two - ja - rze zo - no - sim - bla - ga - nie

*pp*

**SOLO**

S po - pu - lum tu - um Do - mi - ne

*poco meno mosso*

**CORO**

S Oj - czy - że wol - ne racz nam wró - cić Pa - nie  
 a Oj - czy - że wol - ne racz nam wró - cić Pa - nie  
 t Oj - czy - że wol - ne racz nam wró - cić Pa - nie  
 b Oj - czy - że wol - ne racz nam wró - cić Pa - nie

*ppp*

**SOLO**

S et bene - di - cat ho - ra - di - ta - le tu - es

Music example 2: K. Penderecki, *Te Deum: Boże coś Polskę*, Schott, p. 29–30

Handwritten musical score for 'Recordare' from Penderecki's *Requiem polskie*. The score is written on multiple staves for voices and instruments. It features complex rhythmic patterns and time signature changes (4/4, 5/4, 3/4). The lyrics are in Latin and Polish. Circled numbers 20 and 20A mark specific measures.

Music example 3: K. Penderecki: *Requiem polskie: Recordare*, p. 13A

- incorporating Polish religious and patriotic hymns into the works in the form of quotations:
  - *Boże coś Polskę*: an extract from a religious anthem, which appears at the heart of the *Te Deum* and constitutes its expressive culmination point. The quotation is arranged diatonically for four voices a cappella, and performed “dal lontano”. It clearly stands out in the musical context by its characteristic texture, which refers to the tradition of sacred music from Palestrina and Bach up to brass chorales in Romantic symphonies. At the same time, it symbolically refers to the Polish religious and patriotic tradition, since at the time of foreign tyranny the anthem played the role of the national anthem (see music example 2).
  - *Święty Boże*: a stanza from the supplication hymn. It occurs in the central part of the *Polish Requiem, Recordare*, and plays the part of the recurring musical theme of a Passacaglia, which is set

in counterpoint against Latin stanzas of the *Dies irae* sequence. The supplication prayers evoke the Polish religious and patriotic tradition since they were sung at the time of particular threat to national existence (see music example 3).

- *Któryś za nas cierpiat rany*: a prayerful invocation sung in the Polish tradition during the Lent lamentation service of *Gorzkie Żale* (see music example 4). It is performed in unison by the boys' choir in the *Crucifixus* movement of the *Credo*, and constitutes an allusive reference to the Baroque choral tradition of cantus firmus. The invocation *Któryś za nas cierpiat rany*, along with the quotation from the Protestant song *Aus tiefer Not*, is also a special addition to the Latin text and provides it with a national dimension. It emphasizes the ecumenical nature of the *Credo* text as the universal confession of faith, common to the Christian churches of East and West, even though it occurs in the liturgy at different moments and is formulated in different languages, and though the text also varies itself.
- *Ludu mój ludu*: the Polish version of the Improperia *Popule meus*, sung during the Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday. Both versions occur in the *Credo*, thereby complementing the Latin text of the confession of faith in the *Crucifixus* movement. The Latin version, however, uses only the text of the Improperia, while the Polish quotation *Ludu mój ludu*, which appears initially in counterpoint to the invocation *Któryś za nas cierpiat rany*, occurs as a song extract that constitutes a special (musical) addition to the main lamentation (music example 4).

### III. Penderecki and the sphere of values

The oeuvre of Krzysztof Penderecki is unique in 20<sup>th</sup>-century music in that it is multidimensional and rich in religious and cultural references. In the consecutive phases of his work, however, the attitude of the composer to universal and national values undergoes certain transformations.



In the early period, a tendency to expand and enrich the sound material and to search for new methods of its organization comes to the fore in his instrumental works. In vocal-instrumental pieces, however, the composer selects texts and at the same time asks fundamental questions. In the *Strofy* ("Strophes"), these questions concern the nature of human existence and the mystery of death, and they are asked by referring to texts which draw on various traditions: Jewish (Isaiah, Book 5, 1. 20–21; Jeremiah, Book 17, 1. 9), Greek (Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 1. 1520–1530) and Arabic (Omar el-Khayam). In spite of this, the text of the work is a coherent whole, in which reflections on man and intricacies of the world, as well as on the value of truth and necessity of suffering, are concluded by reflections on the fragility of human life (see music example 5).

The *Psalmy Dawida* ("Psalms of David") constitute a search for spiritual roots. The composer comments on this work some decades afterwards: "Entering upon the path of avant-garde, I had the presentiment that one cannot cut oneself off from one's spiritual roots. I chose four Psalms that are cries to God. Today, almost forty years later, I can see more clearly that only the 'homo religiosus' can count on salvation".<sup>6</sup>

The next period (until the 1980s) is the time of 'struggle', in which the composer tackles universal values from various perspectives. On one hand, he probes into the sphere of darkness and evil, on the other he creates a hierarchy of ethical values from the perspective of faith, distinguishing clearly between good and evil. This gives a sense of order and meaning to the world despite the awareness of the existence of evil, suffering and death. Hence, the inevitable domination of sometimes controversial works, which are full of rhetorical gestures, strong contrasts and powerful culminations which carry distinct messages. If there are moments of translucency and contemplation, they express symbolic longing for a different world rather than faith in its becoming true. Among such works are, on one hand, the *Dies irae* or *The Devils of Loudun*, and on the other *St. Luke's Passion*, *Magnificat* and *Paradise Lost*.

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<sup>6</sup>Penderecki, *Labyrinth of Time*, p. 40.

(30)

Fl. *p* *f* *frull.*

Sopr. *f* *mp* *p* *mp* *f*

Recit. *p* *f*

Vno *arco sul pontic.* *pp* *ord. (a)* *mf pizz.*

Vla *col legno* *ord.* *p* *f*

Cb. *ord. sul pontic.* *f* *mf* *pp*

Lyrics: *htap* e - sá - rep ut me -  
 nó - nj - eg - la né - dem u - jíb

Music example 5: K. Penderecki, *Strofy*, PWM, p. 18

As an artist and moralist, Penderecki seems eager to influence the surrounding world and believes that ‘one can transform the world with art’. Consequently, his attitude to universal values finds its reflection in his reaction to political events in Poland in the 1980s: It leads to the appearance of the national dimension in his works, in which the composer clearly opts for religious and patriotic values and opposes totalitarianism.

The 1990s are an important, although different period in the life and work of Penderecki. He writes two large scale vocal-instrumental compositions: *The Seven Gates of Jerusalem* (1996) and *Credo* (1998). They synthesize the previous experiences of the composer: the experiences in the treatment of the musical language and in narration techniques (combining the emphasis on solo instruments and orchestral forces, quasi-tonal and twelve-tone structures, chord-based and polyphonic textures, repetitiveness and development of musical material), as well as experiences in developing architecture and dramaturgy of large-scale symphonic, cantata-oratorio and stage works. This period, which follows the nearly five-decade-long period of asking dramatic questions and searching for the truth about man and God (frequently in the sphere of darkness and death), brings acceptance of the human condition and clear definition of the composer's own attitude: "there comes a moment in life, when one should stop and declare: 'Yes, I do believe.' And this is how I composed *Credo*," said Penderecki before the first performance of the work in Eugene.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the strand in the composer's output which gradually re-emphasizes the sphere of the light and pure classic beauty keeps growing in importance. It features a reduction of musical means, a balance and classical proportions in form, a general softening of the works, and an intimate, lyrical tone. This tendency is most prominent in the Clarinet Quartet written in 1993. In a lecture delivered in the same year at Warsaw University, the composer confirmed that: "Today, after passing through a lesson in late romanticism and utilizing the possibilities of post-modernistic thinking, I see my artistic ideal in *claritas*. I am returning to chamber music, for I realize that more can be said in a hushed voice, condensed in the sound of three or four instruments".<sup>8</sup>

Has the regaining of independence by Poland had any influence on the work of Penderecki? The answer lies in his music, where the instrumental strand keeps growing, not only in chamber pieces, but also in concerts and symphonies. Indeed, the recent years have

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<sup>7</sup>Krzysztof Penderecki, radio interview given to Ray Robinson at WAX, Eugene (Oregon), July 7, 1998.

<sup>8</sup>Penderecki, *Labyrinth of Time*, p. 18.

brought a Sonata for violin and piano, a Sextet, a Concerto grosso for three cellos and orchestra and a Piano Concerto, performed for the first time in New York in May 2002. Perhaps after many years' journey, Penderecki's music may now focus on the construction of the ark "which would make it possible to convey to coming generations what is best in our twentieth-century tradition of the composing of sounds".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 59.