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*To Janina Tatarska*

## **About the Artistic Path, Its Thresholds and Stages, Transformations and Fixations – Once Again**

*Human nature consists of a continuous effort to cross the boundaries of human animalhood and to transcend it through humanity and the role of man as the creator of values.*

Roman Ingarden, *Księżeczka o człowieku*, 1972<sup>1</sup>

### **1.**

I am indeed addressing the concept of thresholds and stages of the artistic path once again, for the matter has the specific nature of a *Work in Progress*. This is the first thing.

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<sup>1</sup> Roman Ingarden, *Księżeczka o człowieku* [*Little Book about Man*], Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1972.

And secondly, it compels me to verify earlier work. Consideration of the works of Beethoven, Schubert, and Chopin was a starting point.<sup>2</sup> Today I would like to use this concept to examine the artistic path of several Polish composers of the twentieth century: Szymanowski, Lutosławski, Górecki, and Penderecki.<sup>3</sup>

Understandably, it will not be possible to avoid a presentation (for some, a reminder) of the assumptions and fundamental aspects of the concept in question. This concept attempts to extract analogous moments from different biographies. The presence of these moments in more than one biography enables synthesis of the situation and construction of an *invariant model of a composer's artistic path*.

Invariant, and thus one that, in historical reality, in this model shape, never actually occurs. However, as an abstract, purely theoretical structure, it may serve comparative functions and constitute a point of reference. Only its variants appear in concrete reality. Variants, or concretisations of this invisible pattern – usually different, unique, because individual – differ from one another, but, in the most general perspective, are perceived as a whole, shaped by a collection of analogous tendencies that come to the fore in succession.

From this perspective, the composer's artistic path appears as a narrative, composed of successive stages, differentiated by various creative impulses, each distinguishing a given stage by its different character. A special and significant moment of transition from one stage to the next, which is equivalent to surrendering to new impulses, can be referred to as 'crossing the threshold'.

A 'refusal' to cross the next threshold brings about a standstill in natural development, a stagnation, which will be discussed here.

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2 M. Tomaszewski, *Życia twórcy punkty węzłowe. Rekonesans* [*The nodal points of an artist's life. A reconnaissance*] [in:] M. Tomaszewski, *Muzyka w dialogu ze słowem* [*Music in dialogue with word*], Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, Kraków 2003, pp. 35-47.

3 In 2007, during the International Musicological Congress in Zürich, a group of representatives of Cracow theory performed a similar verification. The present article is independent of these results, which have not yet been published [polska wersja artykułu ukazała się w książce *12 spojrzeń na muzykę polską wieku apokalipsy i nadziei. Studia, szkice, interpretacje*, Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, Kraków 2011 – przyp. red.].

## 2.

Thus, between successive thresholds, there are individual stages of artistic development, which are often given different names in various periodisations. These are arranged in a natural sequence, namely: the stage of initial, early creativity; mature and peak creativity; and late and final creativity. Each of them, relying on specific varied impulses, takes on a different nature typical of itself.

In an invariant approach, which is therefore abstracted from reality, the narrative of the composer's artistic path consists of a sequence of the following stages:

(1) The stage of *i n i t i a l* creativity is usually determined, understandably, by the impulses of a given time and place on earth. It is a stage of *becoming rooted* in what one has found: what is one's own, homelike, close, local, native. In the musical culture present at home and at school, in everyday life and during studies – generally adopted, as lawyers say, '*with the benefit of inventory*', i.e. uncritically. The guiding principle of creativity here is to follow, or even *imitate*, inherited patterns and conventions.

(2) The stage of *e a r l y* creativity appears at the moment of *opening up to what is different*. Crossing the threshold here is often similar to entering a magical garden. It has the character of an illumination, fascination with what is different, alien, distant, unknown, new, and therefore attractive. Originating from beyond the native paradigm.

Then comes a moment which could be called the '*crystallisation of the ideal*', after Stendhal,<sup>4</sup> consisting of the sudden and strong but short-lived influence of that ideal – the object of fascination.

The dominant tendency is to adapt this fascinating otherness, at the same time engaging in play, liberating the spirit of experiment. Most often this concerns only the external, technical nature of the phenomenon.

(3) The moment of crossing the next threshold, leading to the stage of *m a t u r e* creation, is sometimes referred to as the moment of '*Sturm und Drang*'. It is a moment when the composer, 'bewitched' by this external fascination, performs a *gesture of rejection*, freeing himself from the excess of foreign means.

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4 Stendhal (M.-H. Beyle), *De l'amour*, Paris 1822.

A phase in which the composer *reveals his own face* for good for the first time. He begins to speak in his own voice, in tune with his *arché*. To speak to himself, that is to say, to *monologise*.

(4) There ensues a stage of peak creativity, at the threshold of which a strange moment occurs: a *meaningful encounter* with a different, expressive, and distinctive work or personality.

In this encounter, the composer no longer absorbs this new otherness with fascination, but *faces it as an equal*. He enters into a *dialogue* that reinforces his own identity as a mature creator. As a result, he has caught the *wind in his sails*<sup>5</sup> and reaches a higher orbit.

(5) The composer who has been touched by Conrad's 'shadow line'<sup>6</sup> enters the stage of his later work. This appears in the form of a *health crisis*, a *threat to material existence*, *temporary creative impotence*, *doubt* as to the legitimacy of the path followed hitherto. It encourages or forces the composer to look at his own work *critically*, with a fresh eye. It can also act in a cathartic way, functioning as a *memento*.

Music becomes more serious and spiritual; it does not avoid *philosophical and sacred* subjects. It includes *autobiographical* moments. It likes to convey clearer *messages* than before; it seems to provide signposts for peers and posterity.

(6) And the stage of final creativity, initiated by a deep *sense of loneliness*. Paradoxically, it is accompanied by a sense of freedom from external and internal compulsion. *Liberating the imagination* and directing it 'towards new shores'.<sup>7</sup>

Its works are marked by mysticism and metaphysics, and are sometimes even *testamentary*. Fragmentation appears, as a result of *detachment from direct reality*. The composer seems to talk to himself as if *soliloquising*.

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5 A phrase referring to Mahler, to a similar term used in his *Symphony No. 1*.

6 Joseph Conrad, *The Shadow Line*, London–Toronto 1917.

7 Letter of M. Mussorgsky to W. Stasow from 1880 [in:] A.A. Orłowa, M.S. Pekelis (eds.), *Litieraturnoje nasledije. Pis'ma, biograficzeskije materiały i dokumenty*, Moskwa 1971, p. 259 [editorial note].

### 3.

This is how the situation looks when we examine it from an invariant perspective: like a purely theoretical model of the artistic path. Among actual, specific biographies, no two are alike, because the concretisation of the model depends on the unique personality of the creator, on the place on earth, and on the historical time.

Moreover, additional moments may appear in the biographical narrative: for example, the moment of *a n t i c i p a t i o n* of an event or tendency, or the moment of *e c h o*, or confirmation of a given stage by its variant *r e p e t i t i o n*.

The power of expression, the intensity of the manifestation of a specific stage, significantly colours and differentiates these narratives. In Schumann, for example, the accent falls on his mature years; in Beethoven, on his late and final years.

But most of all, every artistic path is accompanied and threatened by the aforementioned danger: a halt along the artistic path, stagnation resulting from a 'refusal' to cross the next threshold. Cultural history and biographical studies provide examples of what can be called *f i x a t i o n*. Diverse in terms of the stage during which it happens, it is also given its own names.

(1) Halting of the composer at the initial stage (becoming rooted in what is native to him), i.e. a refusal to open himself up to the otherness that originates outside of his own circle, gives birth to fixation, which is usually called *traditionalism*.

(2) The refusal to make a gesture of liberation from the excess of foreign influences, the failure to achieve the moment of '*Sturm und Drang*' in which the composer shows his own face, leads to a fixation which is usually called *eclecticism*. This signifies the presence of heterogeneous, co-existing, and unaligned elements in his work.

(3) The next stage, mature art, undoubtedly the artist's 'own', liberated from the excess of external influences, may be threatened by fixation, sometimes quite difficult to observe. This is a situation in which the composer, having already achieved his own style, begins to repeat

himself, *accentuating the particularity* of his means, even 'thickening and intensifying them'.<sup>8</sup> This type of fixation has a *mannerist* character.

(4) This may be surprising, but the work of the peak stage may also be threatened by a kind of 'degeneration': a fixation which is usually referred to as *academism*. And here the danger comes from self-complacency. Even work 'considered perfect, sanctioned by authorities'<sup>9</sup> can prove to be dead, devoid of life-giving spontaneity.

(5) Finally, the stage of late creativity, following the occurrence of the 'shadow line', the stage in which there is a reduction in excessive means, marked by a tendency to clearly formulate the composer's 'messages'.<sup>10</sup> Fixation in this stage of the creative path has the character of *didacticism* marked by a certain schematism. The artist may be protected from this fixation by crossing the final threshold: a deep sense of loneliness.

Traditionalism, eclecticism, mannerism, academism, and didacticism – only brilliant artists manage to avoid these fixations, moving in a natural way from stage to stage. The less prominent usually did not succeed in doing so. Feliks Nowowiejski, after a spectacular start, was stopped in his development by fixation of an eclectic nature. Ludomir Rogowski, after finding his own formula of musical narration (based on scales he invented), became stuck in mannerism.

#### 4.

Naturally and obviously, the question arises as to the relevance of the theoretical concept presented (or recalled) here, compared with the composer's reality. As initially announced, I will attempt to examine – from this perspective – the life stories of four Polish composers of recent times.

8 Michał Głowiński, *manieryzm* [mannerism] [in:] J. Sławiński and others (ed.), *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of literary terms], Ossolineum, Wrocław 1988, p. 267.

9 Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, *akademizm* [academism] [in:] Ibidem, p. 16.

10 Compare with: Constantin Floros, *Musik als Botschaft*, Breitkopf & Härtel, Wiesbaden 1989.

(1) **SZYMANOWSKI**<sup>11</sup> experienced the stage of becoming rooted between Tymoshivka<sup>12</sup> and Elisavetgrad, in an environment combining the high tradition of European classical and romantic music with an attachment to Polish national and religious songs. Chopin occupied a place of distinction.

As we know, the subject of his initial fascination with works from outside his native circle was, first, Wagner's compositions ('I fell madly in love with Wagner'<sup>13</sup>), then those of Richard Strauss, devotion to whom resulted in works such as *Concert Overture*, inspired by *Don Juan*.

The moment of opposition and rebellion, the rejection of that which is excessive ('I am beginning to hate the Germans,'<sup>14</sup> 1913), was equally strong in this biographical narrative. He had already achieved maturity, as revealed by his own unique idiomatics in composing *Violin Concerto No. 1*, *Myths*, and *Song of the Night*.

But the peak stage was determined only by his 'significant encounter' with the world of highlander music and culture he discovered for himself. Here, *Słopiwnie* heralded his entrance into a new orbit; the peak was *Stabat Mater*, which Stefan Kisielewski called, with some exaggeration, 'the only unquestionable masterpiece in Szymanowski's entire *oeuvre*'.<sup>15</sup>

The 'shadow line' crossed his life at the Davos sanatorium. The fruit of the late stage of his career was the delicately floral *Kurpie Songs*, with 'Lecioły zórazie' at the forefront; of the stage of his final works, *Litany to the Virgin Mary*. The words Szymanowski chose from Jerzy Liebert's poetry are not without significance: 'My faith is like a stunted bush'.

(2) **LUTOSŁAWSKI**. His stage of becoming rooted took place in the cultural environment of a noble manor deeply engaged in patriotism and politics. He once confessed: 'After all, I was brought up on the lap of

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11 Cf. also: M. Tomaszewski, *Szymanowski między Wschodem i Zachodem, Północą i Południem* [Szymanowski between east and west, north and south] [in:] M. Tomaszewski, *O muzyce polskiej w perspektywie intertekstualnej* [On Polish music in intertextual perspective], Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, Kraków 2005.

12 Original name of this place is Tymoszkówka [editorial note].

13 Karol Szymanowski, in an interview with Ludwika Ciechanowiecka, „ABC Literacko-Artystyczne”, 8 November 1933.

14 K. Szymanowski to Stefan Spiess in Warsaw, Tymoszkówka, 14 October 1913.

15 Stefan Kisielewski, *Szymanowski po latach* [Szymanowski years later] (1967) [in:] S. Kisielewski, *Muzyka i mózg. Eseje* [Music and mind: essays], Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Kraków 1974, p. 49.

Roman Dmowski.<sup>16</sup> His father and uncle were murdered by the Bolsheviks. The musical point of reference was the music of Chopin, experienced emotionally.

The stage of early music was marked by his fascination with the music of Stravinsky and, above all, Bartók. Although the *Concerto for Orchestra* closes with a *summa cum laude*, it is definitely a period of folklore inspired by both of the composers mentioned above.

*Funeral Music*, followed by *Venetian Games*, opens the stage of mature creativity, largely constructed independently, following a radical break with his own musical past. This is the period of the composer's monologue, characterised by musical autotelism.

The period of dialogue begins with crossing the threshold of a 'significant encounter'. The reality that Lutosławski met on his way was the world of Western, especially French, culture, or, more precisely, the world of French contemporary poetry: *Trois poèmes of Henri Michaux*, Jean-François Chabrun's *Paroles tissées*, Robert Desnos's *Les espaces du sommeil*. It is known that a piece inspired by the poetry of Jules Supervielle was also planned; Desnos's *Chantefleurs et chantefables* is the echo of this stage. It was enough to experience, in Baranów, the enthusiasm and expertise with which Lutosławski interpreted his compositions inspired by French surrealism to be certain that it was precisely these works that gave wings to his imagination and became the 'wind in his sail' that carried his music into a higher orbit. The presence of the words and the thematic motifs they bore, the shape of narration, not invented but derived from poetry – all enriched Lutosławski's *oeuvre* with a new dramatic dimension; it ceased to be an autotelic game and became a reflection of existential drama, in purely instrumental works such as the *Cello Concerto* as well.

Crossing of the threshold of the 'shadow line' opening the late artistic stage was determined by a general revision, almost a fresh start. The phase is opened by *Epitaph* and *Grave*, two miniatures composed in reaction to the deaths of friends. They initiate a series of re-vindications of thin, intimate textures and, above all, of melody, whose return, marked

16 See: M. Tomaszewski, during a discussion conducted by M. Woźna-Stankiewicz entitled *Refleksje na temat osobowości kompozytora i jego udziału w życiu muzycznym* [Reflexions on a composer's personality and his participation in musical life] [in:] J. Paja-Stach (ed.), *Witold Lutosławski i jego wkład do kultury muzycznej XX wieku* [Witold Lutosławski and his contribution to the musical culture of the twentieth century], Musica Iagellonica, Kraków 2005, p. 170.



by the powerful singing of the *cantanti uniti* part in *Symphony No. 3*, reaches its climax in the melody of the violin in the *Partita* and *Chain 2*. The stage of final creativity brings synthesis and liberation from ties with others and with himself. This meant finding himself – a twentieth-century romantic who tried to keep up with the avant-garde, despite the fact that at the same time ‘he would shoo away’ many of its manifestations as if they were ‘a bothersome fly’.<sup>17</sup> At last, Lutosławski finds in himself a lyrical tone. This is reflected in *Symphony No. 4* and, above all, in *Chantefleurs et chantefables*, a record of having attained consensus with himself. He understands ‘being loyal to himself’ as writing ‘what he himself would like to hear’.<sup>18</sup>

(3) **GÓRECKI**. He grew up and was raised in Silesia, in the circle of culture referred to as ‘low’, which amounts to folk and church songs and street music. Over time, as early as his school years and at university, Bach, Chopin, and Szymanowski come to occupy a prominent place in his process of becoming rooted.

Fascination with attractive otherness enveloped Górecki – and not only him – at the moment the curtain to the West was lifted. The music scores of *Symphony No. 1 ‘1959’* and *Scontri* show the extent of his ‘enchantment’ with the music of Luigi Nono and other masters of the second avant-garde. The stage of experiments and explorations begins, marked by works such as *Genesis I: Elementi*, *Genesis II: Canti strumentali*, *Choros I*, and *Refrain*.

The stage of his mature work begins with *Ad Matrem*, followed by *Symphony No. 2 ‘Copernicus’*. Pure formal and technical experimentation is replaced by music with a distinctive personal character. The austerity of means and the concise form remain, supporting strengthened expression and, always, a definite message.

With *Symphony No. 3 ‘Sorrowful Songs’*, Górecki reaches the stage of his peak creativity. Here he stands face to face with the great and profound tradition of folk and religious song. At the same time, he becomes a part of the world’s meditative and contemplative musical current. But Górecki

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17 Stefan Jarociński (ed.), *Witold Lutosławski. Materiały do monografii* [Witold Lutosławski: Materials for a monography], Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Kraków 1967, p. 42.

18 W. Lutosławski, in an interview with Elżbieta Markowska, *Utwór winien być owocem natchnienia* [A composition should be the result of inspiration], “Ruch Muzyczny”, 1990, no. 22, p. 5.

had to pay bitterly at first for the 'betrayal' represented by this work, which at that time prevailed on festival stages: after all, eminent critics used words such as 'aberration' and 'nikiforism'. Hence, the unique world success of *Symphony No. 3* had to wait ten years.

One might say that this very situation, which is tantamount to the appearance of a 'shadow line', explains the specific nature of his late creative stage. It was then that an apparent regression occurred, a reduction of the composer's ambitions, focusing on the music of the second trend, on the common song. The composition of *Lerchenmusik* and *Little Requiem for a Certain Polka*, however, proves that Górecki continues the narration of the high style, though in a different form than previously.

The stage of final creativity is filled with a series of string quartets, surprising in their diversity. The quartets evoke reminiscences, echoes of memories of music once heard. They speak without words, like the speech of an intertextual epoch. They constitute a *soliloquium*, a conversation between Górecki and himself.

(4) **PENDERECKI.** He became rooted, finding his *arché* in the matrimony of European culture, in the modernism of his time and place. This place was Dębica, a small town in the Małopolska [Little Poland] Region. Penderecki knew it when it still had the character of a Galician shtetl and was inhabited to a large extent by Hasidim. Their songs rang in his ears, along with the repertoire of his father, who played folk and popular melodies on the violin, and the music he learned during violin lessons. He tried to imitate the latter.

His fascination with radical otherness came, as in Górecki's case, from the so-called second avant-garde. The author of *Threnody* and *Fluorescences* parted with its programme and unwritten dictatorship only when he had managed to master and overcome it.

The moment of opposition and rebellion against its limitations resulted in the score of *St Luke Passion*, a fully mature and unique work. And with the *Passion*, a kind of music qualified in Poland for a '*salon des refusés*' came to the fore: sacred and ideologically engaged music.

In the case of Penderecki, there came a specially significant moment: 'a significant encounter' opening the peak stage of his career. Already

the creator of mature and fully independent music, which underwent an ordeal by fire of dodecaphony, aleatoricism, and sonorism, Penderecki now entered into a face-to-face dialogue with post-Romantic music: with the symphonism of Bruckner, Wagner, and, with time, Mahler. Works attempting to continue the thread interrupted a century earlier are created: *Symphony No. 2 'Christmas', Paradise Lost, Polish Requiem*.

Two opera music scores open the stage of his late oeuvre: *The Black Mask*, a reinterpreted Baroque dance of death, and *Ubu Rex*, an expression of rebellion and protest against qualifying his own work too easily.

The subsequent stages differ in character: a series of chamber pieces written according to the Renaissance ideal of *claritas*, a series of significant scores for sacred music, i.e. the self-absorbed *Credo* and the extensive *Seven Gates of Jerusalem*. Finally, a series of works combining the lyricism of song with symphonism: *Symphony No. 8 'Songs of Transience'*, and the latest score to date, called, *Songs of Reverie and Nostalgia*. Each of these compositions bears a distinctive *envoi*. Both are marked by reflectiveness and possess many soliloquist qualities.

## 5.

I have defined the concept presented (or recalled) here as unfinished, as a *Work in Progress*. And so, in fact, it is. However, in the present text there can be room only to hint at a further direction for thinking regarding a compositional artistic path.

Looking closely at the compositional narrative, it is not difficult to notice that this narrative sometimes splits or forks. Sometimes it appears in the form of parallel trends, currents of a different character running side by side. Writing once about Szymanowski, I pointed out a similar situation.<sup>19</sup>

In the *initial* stage of his work, one can recognise the co-existence of the post-Romantic trend (manifested, for example, in songs set to Tetmajer's words) with the expressionist trend (visible in the predatory *Hymns* to texts by Kasprowicz).

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19 M. Tomaszewski, *Świat pieśni Karola Szymanowskiego. Impulsy i inspiracje, nurty i fazy* [Karol Szymanowski's world of song: impulses and inspirations, trends and stages] [in:] E. Sąsiadek (ed.), *Wokalistyka w Polsce i na Świecie* [Vocal performance in Poland and around the world], vol. 1, Akademia Muzyczna im. Karola Lipińskiego, Polskie Stowarzyszenie Pedagogów Śpiewu, Wrocław 2002.

In the next stage, the trend inspired by the Middle East (*The Love Songs of Hafiz*, *Songs of the Infatuated Muezzin*, the second act of *King Roger*) is accompanied by a trend influenced by Greek and Byzantine motifs (the cantatas *Demeter* and *Agawe* and the first act of *King Roger*).

Finally, in the *peak* and *late* stages of his career, there is a dialogue between two parallel currents: the sacred *semplice e divoto* and the profane *allegro barbaro*.

Stylistic or idiomatic parallelisms and dialogues can also be seen in the works of Lutosławski, Górecki, and Penderecki. Following their artistic path in this aspect may well be fascinating. In one of the recent texts on the author of *Funeral Music*, thought-provoking, though undoubtedly exaggerated, words are used: 'Lutosławski's aesthetics sometimes seem to lead *a double life*'<sup>20</sup>

But this is a slightly different story, requiring separate consideration and attention.

Cracow, 26 March 2011

*Transl. by Aneta Ptak*

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20 Maciej Gołąb, *Wczesna twórczość kompozytorska Witolda Lutosławskiego – jej konteksty estetyczne i ideologiczne* [Early compositional work of Witold Lutosławski: its aesthetic and ideological contexts] [in:] J. Paja-Stach (ed.), *Witold Lutosławski i jego wkład...* [Witold Lutosławski and his contribution...], op. cit., p. 16.