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THE TECHNIQUE OF MAZURKA DANCES IN THE GENTRY-BOURGEOIS AND PEASANT ENVIRONMENTS

Poland during the Baroque and Classical eras was one of many European countries in which prototypes of peasant dances were adopted and interpreted by the nobility and townsfolk, thus helping to create an ideologically marked set of dances known as ‘national dances’. During the nineteenth century, despite the rapid changes in dance fashions, the specific geopolitical situation of Poland meant that dances of peasant origin were not eradicated among the higher strata of society. On the contrary: because of the lack of statehood from the end of the eighteenth century for over one hundred years, forms of these dances were diligently fostered and developed, and even supplemented emblems of Polish culture, constituting evidence of the existence of cultural differences among the inhabitants of the country on the Vistula and Warta rivers. There still exists in the public consciousness a kind of stereotype of an historically formed set of five national dances (*polonaise*, *mazurek*, *krakowiak*, *kujawiak* and *oberek*), but, as we now know, initially only the *polonez* and *mazurek* (Eng. *polonaise*, *mazurka*) were considered national. Periodically, there appeared dances from outside the contemporary set (*kozachok*, *zbojnicki*, *trojak*), and today only one (*polonaise*) is commonly performed. However, these highly emblematic dance forms, especially those in *mazurka* rhythm, were the elements of Polish dance culture outside Poland, including in Scandinavia, that were most often perceived and imitated, and often modified as well. Dance anthropologists are invariably fascinated by the sheer fact that rather abstract social functions are assigned to dances deriving from recreational or ceremonial situations, allowing them to enjoy a long life and a privileged position. But it is this long life and continuous

adjustment of dance genres in accordance with ever-changing historical and social conditions that ultimately makes us perceive these dances today as very different from their prototypes. It is knowledge of the prototypes of these dances, or their forms in the latter stages of transformation – especially in the period of more intense international contacts – that is key to determining the mutual international relations in terms of dance and music.

Unfortunately, the available sources force us to consider only two genres, the *chodzony* (walking dance) aka *polski* aka *polonez*, and the *mazurka*, as reports concerning the other genres are either too late (*kujawiać*, *oberek* – second half of the nineteenth century) or irrelevant to Polish-Scandinavian relations (*krakowiak*¹). In addition, the scarcity of sources means that we are forced to use those from two culturally different worlds: the nobility (and since the late nineteenth century also the bourgeoisie) and the peasantry. Thus we will also be forced to determine the relationship of the techniques of traditional rural dances to analogous dances among the upper strata of society and also how different social structure affects different dance behaviours. Ultimately, only the common elements will be of importance for constructing a kind of stereotype of behaviours relating to movements and culture, which may at a later stage provide a basis for comparative research. Here, the researcher will immediately admit that available research techniques do not allow us to do anything other than construct such a bare stereotype stripped of any individualism.

Despite the abundance of brief references to the presence of dances in Poland during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the oldest description of a music and movement situation from the territory of Poland, albeit not fully defined and questionable as to its dance character, comes from 15 February 1573. It refers to the coronation ceremony of King Henry Valois as the king of Poland.² There was undoubtedly an awareness of the existence of an independent dance culture in the Polish court environment by the turn of the seventeenth century, when reports of balls accompanying ceremonies started to include information about ‘Polish

¹ However, it was only the *krakowiak* that played a major role in the relations between Poles and communities inhabiting the territories of today’s Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine.

² Józef Reiss, *Najpiękniejsza ze wszystkich jest muzyka polska* [Polish music is the most beautiful of all] (Cracow, 1958), p. 92.

dances'.³ However, the first description of Polish dance techniques dates back only to 1645 and was made by a Frenchman: Jean Le Laboureur (1623–1675):

I have never seen anything so solemn, gentle and respectful at the same time. They danced in a circle; usually two women were together, then two men, and so on. The first part consisted of bows, then walking according to the measure and beat. Sometimes the two ladies at the front would suddenly dash back more hurriedly through the centre, as if to escape the two cavaliers who were after them.⁴



This description is quite difficult to interpret, due to some ambiguity in the text. The author mentions in his account that the musicians played *en branles et en courantes*, and indeed we may associate dancing in a circle and bows (*révérences*) with the branle, and walking in procession to the beat of the music (*une cadence bien réglée*) with the courante (especially the *courante réglée*), the genre that was, at the time – as we know from musical and literary sources – extremely popular in Poland.⁵ Watching one of the branles well known in Western Europe and a courante could not have been a surprise to the French courtier, yet he states that he has never seen anything so ‘solemn’ and so ‘gentle’. So in spite of a kinship with the genres that were performed in this period throughout the part of Europe associated with western civilization, this dance must have had something that distinguished it among the others. Undoubtedly, we should consider this element to be the very nature of the dance – both solemn and delicate at the same time. The above remarks may remind Poles of the polonaise, well known from descriptions dating from one and a half or two centuries later – a walking dance. And

³ Anna Szweykowska, ‘Widowiska baletowe na dworze Zygmunta III (4 czerwca 1592, 13 oraz 18 grudnia 1605)’ [Ballet shows at the court of Sigismund III (4 June 1592, 13 and 18 December 1605)], *Muzyka*, 1966/1, pp. 27–31.

⁴ Jean Le Laboureur de Bleranval, *Relation du voyage de la Royne de Pologne, et du retour de Madame la Mareschalle de Guebriant, Ambassadrice Extraordinaire, et Sur-Intendante de sa conduite. Par la Hongrie, l’Autriche, Styrie, Carinthie, le Frioul, et l’Italie. Avec un discours historique de toutes les Villes et Etats, par ou elle a passé. Et un Traitté particulier du Royaume de Pologne, de son Gouvernement Ancien et Moderne, de ses Provinces et de ses Princes, avec plusieurs tables Genealogiques de Souverains. Dedié a son Altesse, Madame la Princesse Douairiere de Condé. Par Jean Le Laboureur. S. de Bleranval, l’un des Gentils-hommes Servans du Roy* (Paris 1647), p. 214.

⁵ Zofia Sześewska, ‘Z zagadnień staropolskiej muzyki tanecznej’ [Issues relating to Old Polish dance music], in *Z dziejów polskiej kultury muzycznej* [From the history of Polish musical culture], vol. i: *Kultura staropolska* [Old Polish culture] (Cracow, 1958).

indeed, Maria Drabecka has drawn attention to the convergence with the polonaise step of the male's bow in passing, based on a modified courante step.⁶ It seems that the Polish dance might also have drawn from the courante the ambling pace, spatial patterns⁷ and characteristic *demi pli  * in the third measure of the beat.⁸ Thus the association of the Polish dance with the polonaise in the account by Le Laboureur seems reasonable, and the Frenchman's account reminds us that apart from the details concerning the steps, the dance was also distinguished by the nature of the movements and performance. In his description, the author also focuses on two other elements which he found surprising: dancing in female or male couples and also the sudden and rapid passing of pairs through the middle of the dancers. In fact, in Western Europe, the dance was performed increasingly seldom in social situations by female or male couples, although that remained an option for many years in the theatre, which often provided a haven for dance genres and behaviours ousted from common use. In Poland, apparently, dancing in couples of this type was still practised. The aforementioned spatial solution peaked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the rise of English country dances, although the Poles invariably associate it with the figure of 'bridges'.

Two other accounts, earlier by several decades, complement the remarks of Jean Le Laboureur. The treasurer of Queen Marie Louise Gonzaga and superintendent of the Polish court, Gaspard de Tende (1618–1697), then approximately seventy years old, describes here the dance that he had been watching in Poland for over twenty years:

In Poland, everyone dances, older men and women, young people, both the poor and the rich. Those beginning the dance are older senators and elderly ladies. The beginning of their dance might be termed a religious procession, in which all walk modestly and slowly. But this dance, while beginning with such modesty and slowly, gradually warms up, to eventually end in great turmoil.⁹

⁶ Maria Drabecka, *Tańce historyczne 1, Kurant, menuet, sarabanda* [Historical dances 1: courante, minuet and sarabande] (Warsaw, 1975), p. 34.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 34, 36–38.

⁸ Cf. Pierre Rameau, *Le Maître à danser* (Paris, 1725), pp. 115–121; Gottfried Taubert, *Rechtschaffener Tanzmeister* (Leipzig, 1717), pp. 582–583.

⁹ Sieur de Hauteville [Gaspard de Tende], *Relation historique de la Pologne, contenant le pouvoir de ses rois, leur   lection, & leur couronnement, les privileges de la noblesse, la religion, la justice, les m  urs & les inclinations des polonois; avec plusieurs actions remarquables, par le Sieur*

And the Apostolic Nuncio Galeazzo Marescotti (1627–1726) thus describes the dance that he observed at the royal wedding in 1669:

The King began the dance with the Queen, and he was followed by Senators in pairs, the Queen by the ladies, also dancing one with another (this is the first dance according to the Polish custom), then the King danced with Archduchess Mary, followed by Senators with the ladies.¹⁰

As these passages show, the nature of this solemnity was nothing short of religious. Male and female couples most likely walked only during the first dance, while the dancing itself did not end with stately walking. What we are dealing with here is rather a suite of dances starting with bows (*révérences*), passing into a stately processional walk (perhaps close to the *courante réglée*) and ending with fast dances, of which we know nothing at all.

Many accounts, albeit generally with no information about dance techniques, confirm the presence of Polish walking dances in common practice, increasingly including, from the late eighteenth century onwards, the polonaise. It would seem, however, that by the late eighteenth century dancing in male and female pairs had come to an end – except, of course, dance lessons in conventual schools – and the dance itself had lost its suite character, transformed into an independent polonaise genre and gradually becoming similar in nature to the then fashionable French

de Hauteville (Paris, 1687), p. 271. The Polish dance was very similarly described c.1694 by the Irish physician to John III Sobieski, Bernard O’Conor, who watched it himself: ‘After five or six hours of sitting at the table, the music plays and the dancing begins and the age of those present alone was the reason not to dance: already gray-haired senators and matrons begin the dance, walking at a slow pace and with the utmost solemnity, just as the churchmen walk during a church procession; and as much as the dance is solemn in the beginning, so its end is joyful on the verge of frivolity’ (Bernard O’Conor, ‘Wyjątek z pamiętników Bernarda O’Conora’ [Extract from the memoirs of Bernard O’Conor], in Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Zbiór pamiętników historycznych o dawnej Polsce z rękopisów, tudzież dzieł w różnych językach o Polsce wydanych, oraz z listami oryginalnemi królów i znakomitych ludzi w kraju naszym* [A collection of historical memoirs of Old Poland from the manuscripts or published works in various languages about Poland, and with original letters of kings and distinguished personages in our country], vol. iv (Leipzig, 1839), p. 314). One might suspect that as an amateur historian interested in Poland he made a reference here to the work by Gaspard de Tende.

¹⁰ Galeazzo Marescotti, ‘Opisanie szluby króla Michała z Eleonorą Arcy-Xiężni. Rakuską, córką cesarza Ferdynanda III odbytego w Częstochowie w r. 1670’ [Description of the wedding of King Michael and Princess Eleonora Rakuska, daughter of Emperor Ferdinand III, held in Częstochowa in 1670], in Niemcewicz, *Zbiór*, p. 238.

models (for example, minuet steps¹¹), albeit observing the old and rather primitive spatial solutions. This seems to be confirmed by the account of the clergyman William Coxe (1748–1828), who on 14 August 1779, during a ball preceding the council held in the Grodno palace of Count Antoni Tyzenhauz, observed:



The company amused themselves with Polish and English country-dances: the former was simple, but not deficient in grace, and was accompanied by a most pleasing air; the company stood in pairs; the first man led his partner round the room in a kind of step not much unlike that of a minuet, he then quitted her hand, made a small circle, joined hands again, and repeated the same movements until the conclusion. The second couple began as soon as the first had advanced a few steps, and was quickly followed by the remainder, so that all the parties glided after one another at the same time. The Poles are very fond of this dance: although it has little variety, they continued it for half an hour without intermission, and frequently renewed it during the course of the evening.¹²

Up to the end of the Napoleonic era, this was undoubtedly the most popular dance in Poland, at that time absorbing some of the spatial solutions of the *anglaise* and gestures of the *écossaise*. From c.1815, however, it entered rapid decline, and by the middle of the century it had been relegated to the margins of dance culture among the nobility, at best beginning ceremonial balls and occasionally appearing in musical compositions.¹³ Significantly, c.1829, Kazimierz Brodziński wrote:

Today's Polish dance is just a walk and repose that presents no charm to the youth, and for older dancers it is but the requirement of the etiquette.¹⁴

Interestingly, ethnographic studies, dynamically developing in Poland at that time, provided some very interesting material which confirmed

¹¹ Both the minuet and the polonaise replaced the earlier courante. It may be to the influence of the common model that we owe some similarities in the elements of moves: the *demi plié* in the polonaise on the third measure of the beat is similar to the *pas de menuet à un mouvement* and, to a lesser extent, to *en fleuret* and *à trois mouvements*, also called *bohémien*.

¹² William Coxe, *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark. Interspersed with historical relations and political inquiries* (London, 1784), vol. i: pp. 223–224; <https://archive.org/details/travelspolandrus01coxe> (accessed 21 February 2016).

¹³ Wojciech Tomaszewski, *Warszawskie edytorstwo muzyczne w latach 1772–1865* [Music publishing in Warsaw 1772–1865] (Warsaw, 1992), pp. 167–171.

¹⁴ Kazimierz Brodziński, 'Wyjątek z pisma o tańcach' [Extract from a text on dances], *Melitele*, 1 (1829), p. 90.

the presence within the peasant community of many dance terms and behaviours that we know were used by the nobility about two centuries before, including terms designating walking-type dances preserved in the language of nineteenth-century Polish peasants, which we also observe in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature as names of dance genres among the nobility. For example, in Greater Poland (Wielkopolska), the wedding walking dance was called by peasants a ‘goose dance’ (*gęsi taniec*) or ‘hops’ (*chmiel*) (the latter was also used in Field Mazovia (Mazowsze Polne)), in the Radom region (Radomskie), the walking dance was called the ‘great’ (*wielki*) dance, in the Cracow, Kielce and Mazovia regions (Krakowskie, Kieleckie, Mazowsze), ‘slow’ (*wolny*), and in many places ‘Polish’ (*polski*).¹⁵ Of course, this similarity may be just coincidence, but the scale on which the terms are repeated is no less than intriguing. Specific noble models are hinted at more explicitly in the peasant community using terms referring to the French term *polonaise*, popular in Poland since the eighteenth century.

For example, in eastern Greater Poland (the Pleszew and Krotoszyn areas) and in the Sieradz region (Sieradzkie), the slow walking dance with singing was also called ‘polezon’ or ‘polizon’, its etymology jokingly derived by the peasants from the similarly sounding Polish verbs ‘leżć’, ‘liżć’, ‘poleżć’ and ‘łazić’¹⁶ (‘to saunter’). Similar nomenclature (‘polinoz’ or ‘drobny (‘small’) polinoz’, as well as ‘do koła’ (‘into the circle’)) was observed by Oskar Kolberg in the Kielce region (Kielecczyzna) of northern Lesser Poland (Małopolska).¹⁷ It is also interesting that in the latter case the second part of the dance, called the *drobny*, was executed in an

¹⁵ Oskar Kolberg, *Lud. Jego zwyczaje, sposób życia, mowa, podania, przysłowia, obrzędy, gusta, zabawy, pieśni, muzyka i tańce* [The common folk, their customs, way of life, speech, legends, proverbs, rites, pagan ceremonies, games, songs, music and dances], *Seria IX, W. Ks. Poznańskie, Część pierwsza* [Series 9: the Grand Duchy of Posen, part one] (Cracow, 1875), pp. 222–223; Kolberg, *Mazowsze: obraz etnograficzny* [Mazovia: an ethnographic portrait], vol. i: *Mazowsze Polne, Część pierwsza* [Field Mazovia, part one] (Cracow, 1885), pp. 260–261, 287, 292; Kolberg, *Lud... Seria XX, Radomskie, Część pierwsza* [Series 10: the Radom region, part one] (Cracow, 1887), p. 179; Kolberg, *Lud... Seria XVIII, Kieleckie, Część pierwsza* [Series 18: the Kielce region, part one] (Cracow, 1885), p. 68; Kolberg, *Lud... Seria VI, Krakowskie, Część druga* [Series 6: the Cracow region, part two] (Cracow, 1873), pp. 46, 66, 69, 514; Kolberg, *Lud... Seria XIX, Kieleckie, Część druga* [Series 19: the Kielce region, part two] (Cracow, 1886), pp. II–III; Kolberg, *Mazowsze*, vol. iv: *Mazowsze Stare, Mazury, Kurpie* [Old Mazovia, Masuria, Kurpie] (Cracow, 1888), pp. 153, 201.

¹⁶ Kolberg, *Lud... Seria XIII, W. Ks. Poznańskie, Część piąta* [Part five] (Cracow, 1880), p. XI.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Seria XVIII*, p. 107.

even metre (2/4),¹⁸ similarly to the *obchodny* (go around) with *drobny* near Pilica (both parts in 2/4).¹⁹ The music of this area was dominated by dances in the duple rhythm of the *krakowiak*, which could have influenced other secondary genres. However, according to researchers of the polonaise rhythm, Polish walking dances in the Renaissance, and even Baroque, were mostly in duple rhythm, which is recognised by dance historians as the earlier dance practice in Europe.

Yet the above similarities are only a starting point for exploration of far more telling similarities of context and dancing technique. First of all, Oskar Kolberg very often mentions walking-type dances within the context of the wedding rite, which corresponds to Polish dances that we are familiar with from descriptions of the weddings of Ladislaus IV and Maria Gonzaga de Nevers, Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki and Eleanor of Habsburg, and Frederick Augustus II (Augustus III of Poland) and Maria Josepha of Austria. Moreover, as was the case in court culture, Kolberg very often refers to the walking dance as highly socially conditioned, being the ceremonial start of dances in rural communities. Finally, the descriptions of Gaspard de Tende, Galeazzo Marescotti and Bernard O'Connor of Polish noble or courtly dance suites including walking dances, as cited above, resemble the descriptions of Kolberg (and his co-workers) of rural dance suites, although by then the latter had already started to disappear.

The most interesting feature, however, would seem to be the locally occurring descriptions in Kolberg's times of archaic dance behaviours, such as those that we know from the above-quoted descriptions of walking dances and their faster follow-ups in non-mixed pairs. One such example was recorded by Kolberg in the Kujawy region:

It [the walking dance] is almost always danced by a man and a woman and occasionally by two men; meanwhile in the *ksebką* [a dance faster than the walking dance, with turning around to the left] and the *odsibką* [a dance faster than the walking dance, with turning around to the right], if they are not preceded by the walking dance, the dancing couple are very often two women (almost never two men), which is also common in other parts of our country.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 115.

²⁰ Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria IV*, p. 200. Kolberg also noted the custom of male-only dances during a Polish wedding in the area around Kozienice (the villages of Stanisławowice and Augustowo) c.1854. Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria XX*, p. 228.

Table 1. Names of regional dance suites including walking-type dances, together with names of their components.

Region	Name of suite	First dance	Second dance	Third dance
Wągrowiec ²¹	<i>Polski</i> (Polish) <i>Wolny</i> (slow) <i>Do kola</i> (around)	<i>Do-przodka</i> 'osiemnaście' (to front 'eighteen')	<i>Chodzony</i> (walking dance)	<i>Ksebką</i> (towards)
Poznań ²²	–	<i>Chodzony</i> (walking)	<i>Ksebką</i> (towards) <i>Odsibką</i> (away)	<i>Wiatrak</i> (windmill)
Pleszew Krotoszyn ²³	<i>Na okrąg</i> (circling)	<i>Polezon'a Polizon'a</i>	<i>Odsibką</i> (away) <i>Ćwetryt</i> (<i>Zweitritt</i>) (lit. two-step) <i>Smykany</i> (<i>Zmykany</i>) (scurrying)	<i>Wiatrak</i> (windmill)
Ostrów ²⁴	–	<i>Mazur</i>	<i>Wiatrak</i> (windmill) <i>Obertas</i>	<i>Smykanie</i> (scurrying) <i>Neutr</i> (possibly <i>Neu Tritt</i> , 'new step') (Polonaise)
Kujawy ²⁵	<i>Okrągły</i> (round)	<i>Chodzony Polski</i> <i>Łazony</i> (Polish walking dance, sauntered)	<i>Odsibką</i> (away) <i>Ocibką</i> (away) <i>Kujawiać</i>	<i>Ksebką</i> (towards) <i>Mazur</i> <i>Obertas</i>
Kielce ²⁶	–	<i>Wolny</i> (slow) <i>Obchodny</i> (go around) <i>Polski</i> (Polish)	<i>Mazur</i> <i>Drobny</i> (small)	<i>Obertas</i> <i>Krakowiać</i>
Lublin ²⁷	–	<i>Polonez</i> (Polonaise)	–	<i>Obertas</i>

It is to Kolberg that we owe the most complete description of the walking dance, made in the Kujawy region, which precisely determines the place and function of the genre and the character of its moves and gestures, as well as describing the positions and figures of the couple, which are absent from previous accounts:

²¹ Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria XIII*, pp. IV, VI, IX.

²² *Ibid.*, p. V.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. X.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. X

²⁵ Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria IV, Kujawy, Część druga* [Series 4: Kujawy, part two] [Warsaw, 1867], p.204

²⁶ Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria XVIII*, p. 68; Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria XX*, pp. II–III.

²⁷ Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria XVII, Lubelskie, Część druga* [Series 17: Lublin region, part two], pp. III–IV.

Sometimes, however, [...] they start this dance with a *Polški* (Polonaise), in other words a *Chodzony* [walking], *Wolny* [slow] or *Okrągły* [round] (as they give it various names), as a kind of an introduction. That sometimes lasts as long as fifteen minutes or half an hour, before another, livelier dance takes its place. It is led by a staid or married peasant, though today that condition is sometimes overlooked. In this Polish dance, a man walking on the right, with a woman on his left, lets her move forward, a step or two ahead, leans toward her slightly and, having raised his right hand and given it to his companion, takes her also raised right hand. Thus, together holding their hands high, they both glide forward, followed by the next pairs, ambling in the very same manner.²⁸

Kolberg then indicates that the pace of the dance increases. He quite precisely describes the figures used (including turning oneself around, as in the walking dance of the nobility) and also indicates the presence of foot-tapping (probably absent from the ‘noble’ version, yet described as dignified, or even religious), as a key characteristic of the peasant dance:

Such a Polonaise, danced at first slowly and uniformly, and in the end quite briskly, shows some variety; it happens that among the procession, single pairs turn once or twice around each other, raising their hands above their heads, that is, in one pair or another, a man and a woman, each following their own trajectory, she to the left (*na kšeb*), and he to the right (*na odsib*), turn on the spot, without letting go of any hands they may be holding, or doing so for only some time (without interrupting the dance) and turning their fingers likewise. Thus they both follow a circular motion around. This slow dance, proceeding for some time to the right, then turns to the left (which sometimes is repeated several times), or, to be specific: where at first women constituted the inner wall of the moving circle of the dancers, it is then made up by men. The steps of this dance are little different from the ordinary, regular gait, but with some foot-tapping.²⁹

At that time – as in genres of dances performed today – this foot-tapping was a characteristic feature, present to a great extent, just like various jigs and gestures,³⁰ although the latter were already present in the descriptions of the dances of the nobility.

As the above descriptions show, despite our fears concerning the cultural differences between the nobility and the peasantry in relation to archaic forms of processional walking dance present in both communities,

²⁸ Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria IV*, pp. 199–200.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria IV*, pp. 204; Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria XIII*, pp. III; Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria XX*, pp. 179.

we notice surprisingly many similarities, concerning nomenclature, performance context and dancing and gesturing techniques. The differences lie in secondary expressive features, such as the posture of the dancers and the ornamentation of dance steps, due rather to the etiquette established in both communities than to the dance itself.

In addition to the walking-polonaise dances, an important role in Polish dance practice was played by the mazurka. Ewa Dahlig-Turek demonstrates that the rhythm which we know as that of the mazurka appeared in sources much earlier (in the first half of the seventeenth century) than the triple-time polonaise rhythm; moreover, it underwent no substantial transformation in either its applied or its artistic form until the twentieth century.³¹ Thus it can be assumed that the *mazur* in its applied form was danced widely throughout the seventeenth century, and musicians associated with Poland were already spreading in Europe the music of the dances by that time. However, we may assume the oldest known use of the name *mazur* to be in a title used in 1708 in a *Graduale Romanum* from Łowicz: *Patrem mazowieckie. Prawy mazur*.³² This already reflects, however, the strong penetration of this genre into art music, as is indicated by the compositions of Georg Philipp Telemann (who became familiar with Polish dance music during his stay in Poland in the years 1704–1708), as well as the patronage and propaganda of King Augustus II the Strong. According to Alina Żórawska-Witkowska, during the first half of the seventeenth century, ‘at the court of Augustus II, the *mazur* (“Masura”) not only became separated from the previous Polonoise as an individual concept, but also entered the court dance repertoire’.³³

In support of this claim, the author points to what are undoubtedly *mazur* parts of larger musical works, the composers of which wrote under the influence of Dresden in the times of Augustus II.³⁴ According

³¹ Ewa Dahlig-Turek, *Rytmy polskie w muzyce XVI-XIX wieku. Studium morfologiczne* [‘Polish rhythms’ in music of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries] (Warsaw, 2006), p. 193.

³² Danuta Idaszak, ‘Mazurek przed Chopinem’ [The mazurka pre-Chopin], in Zofia Lissa (ed.), *F. F. Chopin* (Warsaw, 1960), p. 239.

³³ Alina Żórawska-Witkowska, *Muzyka na dworze Augusta II w Warszawie* [Music at the court of Augustus II in Warsaw] (Warsaw, 1997), p. 336. Cf. also Żórawska-Witkowska, *Muzyczne podróże królewiczów polskich. Cztery studia z dziejów kultury muzycznej XVII i XVIII wieku* [The musical journeys of Polish princes. Four studies from the history of musical culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries] (Warsaw, 1992), p. 47.

³⁴ Żórawska-Witkowska, ‘Über die vermutlich polnischen Elemente im drama per musica ‘Ottone, re di Germania’ (London 1722-23) von Georg Friedrich Händel’, *Händel-Jahrbuch*, 57 (2011), pp. 49–76.

to Żórawska-Witkowska, Polish dances – including *mazurs* – must have been included in the repertoire of Augustus II's Polish orchestra, accompanying the *assemblées* of highborn ladies and men, sometimes with the participation of the king. An outstanding opportunity for the international promotion of the *mazur* genre must have been provided by balls held in Dresden in 1719 celebrating the nuptials of Prince Frederick Augustus and Archduchess Maria Josepha.³⁵ Polish dances were also enjoyed by the Wettins during their travels abroad, for example at a ball in Naples in 1738, which ended with a *mazur*!³⁶ There are many indications that it was during the Saxon period that the *mazur* became not only a popular genre of dance, but also of song.

Nor is it a coincidence that in 1717, in Saxony, Gottfried Taubert provides descriptions of a *Polish dance*,³⁷ a fragment of which could presumably refer to the old form of the *mazur*. Taubert indicates that the Polish dances were characteristic of a system of steps in 3/4. It consisted of two *demi-coupé* steps preceded by a leg bend and a rigidly performed *simple* step, and Taubert points out that the French *bourrée* was characteristic of the one *demi-coupé* step and two *simple* steps system. He also wrote that pairs participating in the dance moved around the circumference of the circle. Maria Drabecka claims that 'on the basis of Taubert's account, it is difficult to know whether it was a *mazur* or a *polonaise* step'.³⁸ It should be pointed out, however, that the pace was fast and the dance lively, which would rather suggest a *mazur*-type dance.³⁹

The first account containing more detailed information on the *mazur* danced by the wealthy nobility dates back to 1793 and comes from a German traveller: Friedrich Schulz. When writing about Julia Potocka dancing with Prince Józef Poniatowski, he said:

³⁵ Żórawska-Witkowska, 'Wiek XVIII – apogeum i schyłek muzyki staropolskiej' [The eighteenth century: the peak and decline of Old Polish music], in Urszula Augustyniak and Adam Karpiński (eds), *Zmierzch kultury staropolskiej. Ciągłość i kryzysy (wieki XVII i XIX)* [The twilight of Old Polish culture. Continuity and crises (the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries)] (Warsaw, 1997), p. 70.

³⁶ Żórawska-Witkowska, *Muzyka na dworze Augusta II*, p. 336. Cf. also Żórawska-Witkowska, *Muzyczne podróże*, p. 47.

³⁷ Gottfried Taubert, *Rechtschaffener Tanzmeister* (Leipzig, 1717), pp. 101–102.

³⁸ Drabecka, 'Tańce polskie w "Rechtschaffener Tanzmeister" Tauberta' [Polish dances in Taubert's *Rechtschaffener Tanzmeister*], *Muzyka*, 1966/3–4, pp. 82–85.

³⁹ Drabecka, *Tańce historyczne 1*, p. 35.

When her tiny, beautiful leg, supporting the lithe curves of her sleek figure, fluttered dancing the mazurka and hardly seemed to touch the ground as she left the embrace of one man for the arms of another, lifted, abducted, led – finally she returned to her dancer, who seized her brusquely and passionately turned her round, and her head fell wearily on his shoulder or gracefully, delightful yet modest, leaned against his chest, or as if conquered by emotion she would pour it into a glance at her companion – and the surrounding crowd, holding their breath, all eyes devouring her, silent, saw her as a peerless sorceress...⁴⁰

Schulz's account indicates that the basic steps were like an easy, yet dynamic run, with an extremely important expressive role played by head gestures. During the dance there was a series of figures involving changing partners and dancing a variety of spatial lines (the 'leading'), but in the end the dancers returned to their original partners. It seems that the concluding element was a multiple turnaround of the dancers in the pair. This description seems also to be in accordance with the recollection of Hugo Kołłątaj, who compared the mazurka to English dances, being probably different varieties of country dance. This theory seems to be confirmed by another note by Schulz:

I can only blame the *mazur*, as it is customarily danced in Warsaw, that it is overloaded with figures, and that is why it takes too long for dancers to be able to keep fresh and spry to the very end.⁴¹

In contrast to the dances in the type of the walking dance-polonaise, the *mazur* lived far longer among the gentry than the peasantry. While the *mazur* prevailed over the polonaise in the salons, in the countryside *mazur*-like dances disappeared or evolved. This was referred to by Kazimierz Brodziński:⁴²

Due to the proximity of the Germans, or rather of the German army, this dance lost its character among the people and turned into a kind of an awkward waltz.

⁴⁰ Friedrich Schulz, *Podróże Inflantczyka z Rygi do Warszawy i po Polsce w latach 1791–1793*, tr. Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, in Waclaw Zawadzki (ed.), *Polska Stanisławowska w oczach cudzoziemców* [Poland under Stanislaus Augustus in the eyes of foreigners], vol. ii (Warsaw, 1963), p. 510; Ger. orig. *Reise eines Liefländers von Riga nach Warschau, durch Südpreußen, über Breslau, Dresden, Karlsbad, Bayreuth, Nürnberg, Regensburg, München, Salzburg, Linz, Wien und Klagenfurt, nacht Botzen in Tyrol* (Berlin, 1795–1796). Cf. Magdalena Witwińska, *Kuligiem przez trzy stulecia* [A sleigh-ride through three centuries] (Warsaw, 1961), pp. 149–150.

⁴¹ Schulz, *Podróże*, pp. 510–511.

⁴² Brodziński, 'Wyjątek', pp. 97–98.



Especially among people in the capital, national dances lost their characteristic features altogether, which was triggered not only by the significant number of foreigners, but also by an unfortunately popularised instrument called the barrel organ.

This would suggest that *c.*1829 the rural folk still performed dances of the *mazur* type, but since the Third Partition of Poland, over the thirty years preceding the publication of the quoted article, it had changed its character from a chasing dance (*goniony*) to a whirling dance, and lost the characteristic elements sung by the dancers. That transformation seems to be confirmed by other researchers. In 1834, in the Grand Duchy of Posen, a *mazur* was still being performed with singing, circling and turns or whirls:

At the start of the dance, a peasant proficient in singing and dancing, the so-called leader, would stand in front of the musician, singing to him the melody of the dance and tapping his foot, dexterously moving his entire body; when he finished, the musician would play the desired *mazur*, move in a circle tapping his foot, and all the rest would follow in his footsteps; and he would casually beckon with his head or hand to one of the standing women; and she would follow him and grab his hand; the entire circle thus filled with pairs, turns to the right and to the left would start; after completing the dance, every girl, if she was dancing with a married man, bowed at him, as if thanking him for the favour he had done her.⁴³

In 1847 and 1860, however, Karol Czerniawski indicated only the remains of the *mazur*, occurring as the initial part of an *oberek* (a whirling dance) in peripheral Mazovia communities:

To this day, in the villages of Mazovia, you may encounter a *mazur*-like dance; people call it *drobny* [small], and in the Płock area [Kurpie region] *wyrwas*; in general, though, it is rarely the main dance among the people; it only starts an *obertas* [oberek].⁴⁴

⁴³ L., 'Wieniec' [Garland], *Przyjaciel Ludu*, 15 October 1834, p. 126; cf. Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria IX*, p. 153.

⁴⁴ Karol Czerniawski, *Charakterystyka tańców* [The characters of dances] (Warsaw, 1847), p. 51; Czerniawski, *O tańcach narodowych z poglądem historycznym i estetycznym na tańce różnych narodów a w szczególności, na tańce polskie* [On national dances, with an historical and aesthetic survey of the dances of various nations, in particular Polish dances] (Warsaw, 1860), p. 81. Similar behaviours were observed during the mid twentieth century by Zofia Kwaśnicowa, who wrote: 'In some villages, an *oberek* was called a *mazur*. I observed during countryside dances that upon hearing the term "mazur", the pairs were arranged as for an *oberek*, starting the dance with the

The question of the *mazur* genre in the Kujawy region was similarly perceived by Oskar Kolberg in c.1857 and 1867.⁴⁵ He pointed to the generic affinity of the *mazur*, which in Kujawy was also called the *ksebką* or *mazur kujawski*, with the *kujawiak* and the *wyrywas (oberek)*, to which he even ascribed the vagueness in the treatment of particular genres. Kolberg described the tendency to whirl to the left in the *mazur*, but at the same time he pointed to ongoing changes that were blurring that distinguishing feature. In this context, it seems worth presenting the observations of Roderyk Lange, almost one hundred years later:

The mazurka is a dance related to the *kujawiak*. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the two. In the Kujawy region, it is danced with a certain restraint in the moves. The mazurka is a tranquil dance compared to the quite similar *oberek* danced in neighbouring regions.⁴⁶

Taking into account these remarks by Brodziński and Czerniawski, Karol Mestenhauser, active during the second half of the nineteenth century, concluded the *mazur* was initially a ‘circle’ dance with ‘singing’ and figures improvised by the leader of the procession and ending with the pair turning around on the spot.⁴⁷ The fundamental importance of the ‘parade’ in the *mazurka* (in the derivative form) was also emphasised by Henri Cellarius.⁴⁸ In addition to ‘singing’, these elements remained in dance practice among the nobility, as we can see in the description by Brodziński:

The mazurka dance, no longer cultivated among the people, was assimilated by the upper class, which, while preserving its national character, made it so artful that it may easily be counted among the most enjoyable dances in Europe. It has many similarities with the French quadrille. [...] In it, the body quickly assumes a variety of successive forms. It allows for unconstrained arm movements and a kind of negligence in the posture, which, with the gaiety

customary run forward, or trotting and foot-tapping and crying before they started to whirl in what we would call an *oberek*; Kwaśnicowa, *Polskie tańce ludowe. Mazur* [Polish folk dances: the mazur] (Warsaw, 1953), p. 8.

⁴⁵ Kolberg, *Pieśni ludu polskiego* [Songs of the Polish people], series 1 (Warsaw, 1857); Kolberg, *Lud...*, *Seria IV*, pp. 199–212.

⁴⁶ Roderyk Lange, ‘Tańce kujawskie’ [The dances of Kujawy], *Literatura Ludowa*, 1963/4.

⁴⁷ Karol Mestenhauser, *Szkoła tańca Karola Mestenhausera w trzech częściach* [Karol Mestenhauser’s dance school in three parts], vol. iii: *Mazur i jego zasady oraz 125 figur mazurowych* [The mazur and its principles, with 125 mazur figures] (Warsaw, 1887), pp. 7–13.

⁴⁸ Henri Cellarius, *The Dancing-Room Dances*, tr. E. Churton (London, 1847), p. 55.

and foot-tapping, is the very essence of grace. Enthusiasm and liveliness add something enchanting, with a nod of the head, which once looks upwards, once goes downwards to the chest, or, gently inclining against the shoulder, enviously portrays the fullness of life and joy, modulated by simplicity, lightness and delicacy. When beholding a pair where the dancing lady, almost raised by the man's hand, leaning on his shoulder, lets him lead her, it seems that we are seeing two contented beings, rising towards the land of happiness. The dancing lady, lightly dressed, beguiling the eyes with her legs, shapely and petite, which, lifted in the air, seem only to tease the ground when touching it, suddenly breaks free from the hands of her partner, dashes to the others, invisible to the eye, raised in the air by one and then another, then with lightning speed snatches again the arm of her partner.⁴⁹

Brodziński's description confirms the characteristics of the basic steps as described by Schulz, the importance of head gestures for the dance's expressivity and also the principle of multiple changes of partners during the dance and of returning to the original partner. The latter seems to be influenced by the French quadrille, as suggested by Brodziński, which seems close to Kołłątaj's reflection on the elegance of the *mazur*, corresponding to the elegance of the English dances which can be related to the forms of the country dance.⁵⁰ However, the poet's reflective nature discerned significant differences between the dances of Western Europe and the *mazur*: unforced, easy arm movements, a more natural posture and general joyfulness, emphasised by the dynamics of the lower part of the body (the 'foot-tapping'). Brodziński also described the pair's basic hold – leaning on the partner's shoulder – and drew attention to the 'lightness' of the woman's clothes, which allowed for such dynamic spatial movement.

Also Czerniawski, emphasising the importance of improvisation, listed and excellently characterised the steps of the *mazur*:

A foreigner would not perform it well, as *mazur* steps can tolerate no restrictions of correctness. It needs freedom; it needs to be improvised, developed, so you need to have the spirit of the region, you have to be born and brought up in this land of ours in order to beautifully breathe life into a beautiful form. [...] The steps themselves represent a rider romping on horseback: the foot tapping is beating

⁴⁹ Brodziński, *Wyjątek*, pp. 98–100.

⁵⁰ Hugo Kołłątaj, *Stan oświecenia w Polsce w ostatnich latach panowania Augusta III (1750–1764)* [The state of enlightenment in Poland during the last years in the reign of Augustus III (1750–1764)] (Warsaw, 1905), p. 54.

the impatient steed; the pirouettes are spurring; and the lively gait of the dancers, more brisk than ambling, signifies now galloping, then trotting, then again walking; head movements are leading the steed. Now the rider deftly turns back, then, travelling full speed, he reins it in, suddenly stopping and tapping his foot.⁵¹

Czerniawski also characterises other elements of the dance that are of essential importance, such as the hold, the turn at the end, all the pairs following the leader around the circle and the improvisational nature to the composition of the figures:

The boy, holding the left hand of the maiden with his right hand, lightly lifts her with him [...], after a brief travel, the knight would grab her round the waist and end with a whirling turn. [...] A collective beginning, in a big circle, with one leader, that is the social element, [...] the figures are not, as in the French quadrille, prearranged and customarily respected, but are left to the whim and wit of the leader.⁵²

However, despite the objections of both authors, the further development of the salon *mazur* was due mainly to the substantial influence of the French dances. In 1847 and 1860, Karol Czerniawski emphasised the genre's adoption of foreign elements, especially from the French dances, although they did not oust the local features identified by Brodziński. Besides, Czerniawski pointed to the impact not only of French salon dances, but also of local rustic patterns:

Historically also in the *mazur*, singing held the place of today's figures, which, as a French invention, as the term 'figure' shows itself, [...] infiltrated the dance. Thus the Gallic fashion came to be part of our dances just as it entered our customs and beliefs [...]. Having absorbed polonaise, krakowiak and some Gallic elements, today the mazur again absorbs the folk essence of the oberek, which can be seen not only in the dance and its figures, but even in the music, the second part, or rather a trio, of which was until recently wistful and mournful, while today it has a lot in common with the oberek.⁵³

Czerniawski also describes more than a dozen figures used in the 1840s: *koło ogólne* (common circle), *kołka* and *kołka domowe* (small circles and small home circles), *koszyk* (basket) and *koszyczki* (small baskets), *wielki tańcuch* (grand chain), *z chustką* (with a headscarf), *ósemka pojedyncza*

⁵¹ Czerniawski, *Charakterystyka*, pp. 52–53; Czerniawski, *O tańcach*, pp. 83–84.

⁵² Czerniawski, *Charakterystyka*, pp. 53–54; Czerniawski, *O tańcach*, pp. 84–85.

⁵³ Czerniawski, *Charakterystyka*, pp. 52; Czerniawski, *O tańcach*, pp. 82–83.



(single eight), *młynki krzyżowe* (cross whirls) and *krzyże* (crosses) (including *wielki* (grand)), *zwodzona* (deceiving), *odbijana* (retaking), *krakowska* (Cracovian), *goniona* (chasing) and *wielkie kóło* (grand circle). Soon, however, there was to be a dramatic growth of *mazur* figures: while in 1879 Arkadiusz Kleczewski described no more than fifty figures,⁵⁴ in 1878 and 1881 Karol Mestenhauser proposed no fewer than 100,⁵⁵ in 1887 a total of 125⁵⁶ and in 1901 as many as 150!⁵⁷ Only forty-two of these figures were recognised by the author himself as the existing repertoire, sixty-four were deemed to have been developed earlier, and forty-four were new or partially processed repertoire. We should not forget that the author of the textbook was not only a dance teacher, but also a renowned dance leader and as such had his own numerous solutions for smaller and larger parlours, and particularly excelled in composing figures of eight and sixteen pairs for the purposes of larger social gatherings, associated with the emergence during the second half of the nineteenth century of large salons and public dance halls. He was also keen on creating combined figures and configurations that were not that typical; for example, four ladies with eight men and vice versa. In fact, all the figures described by Mestenhauser use six basic steps (*pas glissé*, *pas sisol*, *pas chassé* (called *pas marché* in earlier textbooks), *pas sauté*, *pas marché* and *hołubiec zwyczajny* (clicking of the heels)) and seven spatial formations (circle, line, cross, square, spiral, single file, eight). There were just over twenty basic figures, performed in varying number: *solo*, *ogólne kóło* (one large circle), *koszyczek* (small baskets), *linie tańcuchowe* (chain lines), *tańcuch* (chain), *tańcuch młynków* (whirl chain), *tańcuch kółeczek* (chain of small circles), *przejście*, *przejście angielskie* (passing, English passing), *tańcuch dam* (chain of ladies), *tańcuch kawalerów* (chain of gentlemen), *tańcuch dam i kawalerów* (chain of ladies and gentlemen), *krzyżyk kawalerów* (small cross of gentlemen), *krzyżyk dam* (small cross of ladies), *krzyż* (cross), *para za parą* (succession of pairs), *linie rogowe* (corner lines), *obrót cyrkłowy* (circular turn), *gwiazda* (star), *młynek w ruchu postępowym* (progressive whirl), *para w prawo para w lewo* (pair to the right pair to the left). The latter terms derive mostly from the country

⁵⁴ Arkadiusz Kleczewski, *Tańce salonowe* [Drawing-room dances] (Lviv, 1879).

⁵⁵ Mestenhauser, *Sto figur mazurowych oraz zasady ogólne i szczegółowe mazura* [A hundred mazur figures and the overall and detailed principles of the mazur] (Warsaw, 1878).

⁵⁶ Mestenhauser, *Szkoła*, pp. 7–13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2nd edn (Warsaw, 1901).

dance, lancer, galop or cotillion (cf. *rond, tour des mains, à droite, à gauche, corbeille, chaine de dames, chaine de cavaliers, chaine de dames et de cavaliers, grande chaine, chaine anglaise, passé, traversé, retraversé, promenade, avancez, les moulinets, les visites, en avant, en arrière, lanciers, solo*).

Unlike the *chodzony-polonaise*, the *mazur* never assumed any substantial ritual or social functions. Its history, described only on the basis of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century written sources, is characterised by considerable changes in the dynamics of its forms in both its peasant and its noble-bourgeois versions. The absence of significant social determinants and the decidedly recreational function of the genre would appear to have left it open to the influence of dance fashions, the assimilation of which was a prerequisite for the genre's survival. In rural communities, whirling dances played a significant role in this respect; in noble-bourgeois communities, meanwhile, that role was played rather by country dances, cotillions and also, albeit to a lesser extent, whirling dances and local rustic parlour genres. Their assimilation allowed *mazur* forms to remain attractive in the communities where they were performed and to be danced until the early or even mid twentieth century, either in the significantly processed form as a secondary dance in peasant communities or else in the highly developed form as a primary dance in noble-bourgeois communities. We should not forget, however, that none of the *mazur* dancing techniques preserved in the living tradition – regardless of how archaic they appear today – tells us much about what this dance looked like at the turn of the eighteenth century. In this regard, we can only conjecture, based on rather scant descriptions and on reductions of our existing stereotypical ideas. And we know nothing at all about the movement forms of the *mazur* during the earlier period.

This comparison of the descriptions of two dance genres was intended to highlight the fact that not all dances studied from an historical perspective can be treated equally. That is because the nature of dancing techniques is affected not only by the historical period and social formation, but also by the functions attributed to them in particular communities. When considering the historical perspective, we may overlook important social aspects, which are often obscured by the importance we ascribe to those dances today. This, in turn, practically prevents us from conducting research from a broader, international perspective, without which our ideas of the music and dance phenomena are still imperfect.