

CAMILO JOSÉ CELA'S MAZURKA PARA DOS MUERTOS: WHY MAZURKA?

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While many critics have questioned Cela's selection of the mazurka for his principal theme and title in *Mazurka para dos muertos* (1983), very little criticism has focused on the musical implications of the title itself.¹ In his article "La décima sinfonía" Fernando Sánchez Dragó argues that Cela should not have been so humble as to use the name *mazurka* in his title: "el título peca de excesiva humildad en lo tocante a la definición de su partitura. Mejor, mucho mejor le cuadra a éste lo sinfónico, lo coral, lo orquestal, y lo operístico" (iii). Undoubtedly trying to emphasize the genius of the novel, Sánchez Dragó fails to recognize the precise importance in the name of the title. Janet Pérez sums up the confusion when she asks: "Yet the title raises more questions than it answers. Why a mazurka, when neither the dance form nor its name are Spanish?" (85). I will argue that Cela's employment of this specific musical composition is deliberate. The musical mazurka is very similar to Cela's novel, in the author's implicit view: both forms share, for him, similar origins, roots, tones, and most importantly, structures.

For Cela, both the *mazurka* and his novel share an interesting commonality with respect to their geographical locations. *Mazurka* is set in Cela's native region of Galicia, Spain, while the musical composition has its roots in Galicia, Poland, the homeland of Frédéric Chopin.² Throughout Poland's long struggle for political independence, the people viewed this folk song and dance as a representation of their common culture. It served as a reminder of a historic and cultural past which linked this group together; thus, the *mazurka* became a symbol of Polish cultural nationalism.³ This analogy is also present in Cela's *mazurka*, which portrays the nationalistic spirit of a dying Spain during the Civil War.

The *mazurka*'s importance is established early in the novel with the introduction of Gaudencio, the blind accordion player in a house of prostitutes. Gaudencio plays a variety of songs each night for the customers; but on two occasions he plays a *mazurka*:

Gaudencio, en la casa de putas donde se gana la vida, ejecuta un repertorio de piezas bastante variado, pero hay una mazurka, *Ma petite Marianne*, que sólo la tocó dos veces, en

noviembre de 1936 cuando mataron a Afouto, y en enero de 1940, cuando mataron a Moucho. No quiso volver a tocarla nunca más. (Cela 11)

The deaths of Moucho and Afouto represent much more than the deaths themselves: they correspond approximately with the outbreak and termination of the Spanish Civil War, which is an underlying theme throughout the novel. Many critics carry the analogy further, attempting to associate the two characters with the two sides of the Civil War. According to Masoliver Ródenas, however, this analogy falls short, since the characters do not clearly represent the Nationalist or Republican camps.⁴ Even though it is difficult to associate the deaths specifically with a specific camp, there is a clear negative imagery of the Civil War itself. Cela's harshest criticism deals with the very concept of civil war. There can be no justification or glorification of a war which is fought by Spaniard versus Spaniard: "puede que sea noble pelear por el territorio con los extranjeros, ¡pero por un pensamiento que a lo mejor es mentira y entre españoles! Esto es cosa de locos" (Cela 161). Thus, just as the Polish people used the *mazurka* as a symbol to remind themselves of their common historical and cultural ties during their struggles for political independence, Gaudencio's playing can also be viewed as an echo of the nationalistic spirit of a country torn apart by civil war.

The second commonality between the *mazurka* and Cela's novel can be found in the roots of the Polish *mazurka*. The two most popular musical dance forms in Poland are the *mazurka* and the *polonaise*. Yet in their sources, the two forms are completely different. The *polonaise* has its foundation in the nobility of Poland. The *mazurka* has none of the stylized characteristics of the *polonaise*; its cradle is found with the peasants of Poland. The traditional *mazurka* was typically a dance form accompanied by a type of bagpipe (the *duda*). Hodley describes the playing of *mazurkas* thus: "The village fiddler, endlessly [repeats] the same fragment of melody over the droning of the bagpipe, . . ." (167). The *duda*, then, could easily be compared to Gaudencio's accordion playing. Furthermore, the *mazurka*'s origin with the peasants of Poland parallels the atmosphere of the novel with Cela's portrayal of the rural life in a Galician village. Many of the characters in the novel are simple people who continue to exhibit the characteristic superstitious way of life of the Galician countryside. Cela does not include many characters of

upper class life. Thus, the characters would naturally be more comfortable with the form of the *mazurka* rather than the highly stylized polonaise.

The third commonality occurs with the tone of the *mazurka*. The *New Grove Dictionary of Music* describes the dual nature of the *mazurka* as follows: "The variety of mood of which the *mazurka* is capable is nowhere more marked than in the work of Chopin. It ranges from the radiant joyfulness of the *Mazurka* in B flat op.7 no.1 to the aching sadness of that in A minor op. 68 no.4 . . ." (865). The two times that Gaudencio plays the *mazurka*, the results are completely different in tone. The first time the *mazurka* is played is in honor of Afouto's death, and it is a *mazurka* of mourning, while the second playing of the *mazurka* is in a celebratory fashion after the death of Moucho. Moucho's death is celebrated due to the village's desire to revenge Moucho's killing of Afouto. The word *mazurka* has been associated by some critics as representing a solemn or morbid song. Janet Pérez makes the following analogy of the war narrative with the *mazurka*: "What remains is absurd, incongruous, grotesque: a *mazurka*" (103). If viewed only in terms of Afouto's death, the definition of the *mazurka* could quite easily be interpreted in a negative fashion. The tone of the *mazurka* changes, however, when Gaudencio plays it with such delight after hearing the news of Moucho's death: "Aquella noche el ciego Gaudencio . . . interpretó la mazurca *Ma petite Marianne* con muy especial deleite . . ." (Cela 249). The tone of the second *mazurka* definitely does not correspond to the pattern established with the first. This inconsistency of course lends greater support to the comparison of Chopin's *mazurka*. Just as Chopin varied the playing of his *mazurkas*, Gaudencio also changes the tone of the same song.

The final, and most interesting, point in common between the musical *mazurka* and the novel is the structural composition. The *mazurka* is viewed as being one of the most repetitive forms of music. In his article "The Problem of Repetition and Return in Chopin's *Mazurkas*," Jeffery Kallberg identifies three levels of repetition within the *mazurkas*: low-level repetition, sectional repetition, and sectional return. Chopin's low-level repetition is defined as the repetition of a four-bar phrase within the piece, sectional repetition is the repetition of a section of music, while sectional return is described as the return to the opening section of the piece. Each of these forms can also be found in Cela's novel.

The low-level repetition of the novel can be seen in Cela's continuous references to short details. The descriptions of Benicia's breasts is one example of a low-level repetition:

...me paso las tardes en la cama haciendo las porquerías con Benicia (después diré quién es Benicia, la mujer que tiene los pezones como castañas) ...

.....
Benicia tiene los pezones como castañas, de duros y de color. ...

.....
... le ayudó su hija Benicia, que tiene los pezones como castañas, da gusto verle las tetas ... (Cela 10, 93, 241-42)

As indicated by the previous quotations, the repetitive references to Benicia's breasts occur from the beginning until the end of the novel. The short phrases that describe Benicia's nipples are thus similar (in length) to a short four bar repetition in music.

The sectional repetition can be seen with Cela's repetition of short stories within the novel, which can be compared in form to a musical section. One example of these stories is seen with the character of Pepiño Pousada Coires. Cela makes several references to Pepiño's attempts to seduce young boys throughout the novel. The judges and doctors try to "cure" Pepiño by various methods (hormones, jail sentence, castration), but each time Pepiño returns to the seduction of young boys.

The sectional return can easily be related to Cela's continuous return to the beginning theme of the novel—the death of Lázaro Codesal. The description of Lázaro's death opens the novel, and Cela returns to this motif throughout the text:

A Lázaro Codesal lo mató un moro a traición, lo mató mientras se la meneaba debajo de una higuera ...

.....
A Lázaro Codesal lo mató la mala suerte,

.....
todo lo borró Nuestro Señor cuando mataron a Lázaro Codesal en tierra de moros.

.....
... a Lázaro Codesal lo mató un moro en la campaña del Rif

... (Cela 9, 44, 61, 245)

Like the repetition of the reference to Bericia's breasts, the death of Lázaro Codesal is repeated from the beginning to the end of the novel. This section can also be related to the death leit motiv found in the playing of the *mazurka* "Ma petite Marianne". The fact that Lázaro dies in Tizzi-Azza during the Battle of Annual is decisive as many historians view Spain's defeat in Morocco as an important antecedent to the Civil War.⁵

The Civil War narrative itself can also be compared to the musical form as it functions as a type of melody which flows throughout the repetitive novel. Chopin's *mazurkas* also were written in a mixed, repetitive style. The melodic line will emerge from the piece, just as Cela's theme emerges from his circular narratives. Like Chopin's, Cela's repetitive form, which might seem unorganized at first glance, reveals a complex construction of themes. Cela weaves the Civil War narrative of the novel in between the repetitive stories of the novel. This stylistic difference emphasizes the importance of the Civil War narrative.

Another common element relating to structure is Chopin's use of *coda* or *codetta* with the *mazurkas*. One problem that arises with the use of repetition in music is that of concluding the piece. Many *mazurkas* lacked a definitive ending due to this continuous repetition: "The folk mazur, oberek, and kujawiak often lacked a sense of definitive closure, in part because sectional repeats were taken *ad libitum*" (Kallberg 18). In many of his *mazurkas*, Chopin chose to solve this problem by adding a type of *codetta* at the end of the piece. Typically, both repetition and *coda* are indicated by signs in the music. Chopin did not regularly use the sign as a manner of repetition or of *coda* signal. The *mazurkas* usually repeat sections without a specific return (i.e. they are simply written into the musical composition); however, this repetitive structure ends in *coda* fashion. Kallberg describes the *coda* thus: "Chopin found far more effective a second course of action, which generated closure through the imposition of an additional phrase or section" (19). After the repetitive phrases in the *mazurka*, Chopin concludes the piece with a new phrase, which represents the *coda*. This new phrase could also employ the reduction of the dynamic level in the piece from *piano* to *planissimo* with two written *decrescendos*. This decrease in dynamics also helps to close the piece: "Chopin's first

efforts tended to appropriate conventional closing gestures in a single phrase, as in the twice-stated cadential progression and reduced dynamics of the codetta to op. 6 no. 3 . . ." (Kallberg 19). Like Chopin, Cela also fashions a coda type ending to conclude his work.

In the index of the novel, Cela lists three sections: the body of the novel ("Llueve mansamente y sin parar"), one supplement ("Anejo único"), and the Galician dictionary ("Vocabulario gallego-castellano").

The large body of the novel is not broken down into specific chapters or fragments. The only separation occurs with the forensic report of Moucho's death ("Anejo único"). The report is completely different in style from the narrative of the novel, replicating an actual forensic evaluation. After 250 pages of repetitive stories, there is an abrupt change in the novel's discourse with its straight-forward and scientific description of Moucho's death. The report begins with an external examination of the cadaver: "Se trata de un varón adulto de unos 25 años de edad, 1,60 m. de estatura y 55 kg. de peso aproximadamente. Tipológicamente asténico. Su estado de nutrición es correcto. Seborrea frontobiparietal y calvicie incipiente. . ." (Cela 251). This forensic report is similar to the codettas employed by Chopin. Cela introduces a new "phrase" (the appendix) to end the novel, just as Chopin introduces a new phrase to end his compositions. Both of these endings are relatively short, in coda fashion, when compared to the body of the work, while there is also a marked stylistic change in the language/music. Due to the repetitive nature of the works, the distinct endings seem a logical conclusion.

In *Mazurka*, Cela interweaves the fine arts to produce a vibrant composition, resulting in a combination of the visual and aural in the novel. The key factor that brings this together is the Galician ambiance in *Mazurka*. This spirit unites the literary creation with the musical composition. The language, customs, superstitions, and traditions of Galicia surround the reader throughout the narrative, echoing the vigorous and vital dance form of the Polish peasant's *mazurka*. The characters of the novel, like the Polish peasants, are simple common people who use the *mazurka* to exhibit their strong ties to their homeland. For this reason, *mazurka* is indeed the perfect form for Cela's novel.

NOTES

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² Of the acknowledged great composers, Chopin is the only one to compose a substantial number of mazurkas. It was also Chopin who popularized the mazurkas in the Parisian salons during the nineteenth century. Chopin composed at least one mazurka during his stay with George Sand at the ex-monastery of Valldemosa in Palma Mallorca. His residence is now a museum which is frequently highlighted in tourist books. Cela is undoubtedly familiar with Chopin's stay on the island, as he himself retired to Palma, Mallorca in 1954. See Duryea or Jonson for more information on Chopin's visit to Mallorca.

³ See Kolodin for further information on the nationalistic characteristics of the mazurka.

⁴ Due to the symbolic representations associated with Moucho and Afouto, Ródenas asserts that the character's parallel of the beginning and ending of the Civil War is problematic since the conclusion would lead to a Republican victory. Cela also interchanges the dates for Gaudencio's playing of the mazurkas in the novel, which leads to confusion on the actual date of the playing of the mazurka which is said to represent the beginning and end of the Civil War.

⁵ For further information on the Moroccan campaign see Shannon Fleming's *Primo de Rivera and Abd-el Krim*.

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