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## *Much ado about Chopin. Discussion in the Warsaw press from 1830*

**ABSTRACT:** During his Warsaw period, the music of the young Chopin was enthusiastically and even feverishly received. And it drew considerably interest from the critics. However, attention should be drawn to the crucial cultural factors that largely determined the quality of that critical reflection. Above all, this was a quite specific period in the history of the nation. The language of criticism gives a fair reflection of moods in the country: growing patriotic emotions, freedom rhetoric and Romantic spirituality. Added to this, Polish music criticism (in contrast to German criticism) had yet to develop distinctive forms of discourse, but was still seeking a suitable language for the description of music. One may even gain the impression that music criticism was maturing together with the young virtuoso and offering a “youthful” discourse strung out between literary metaphor depicting the scale of listeners’ emotions and impressions and specialist description of playing and composition technique. One also notes a growing tension between “amateurs” and “professionals”, leading to polemic and discussion. It was a most interesting period in the history of Polish critical reflection, one which obliges the scholar to maintain a broad humanistic perspective over the many cultural phenomena of that time (philosophical, literary, artistic and political) which helped to forge the spirituality of Polish romanticism.

**KEYWORDS:** history of criticism, history of aesthetics, discourse, critical language, Chopin reception, Warsaw culture prior to the November Rising

During his Warsaw period the music of young Chopin was welcomed enthusiastically. Both his compositions and his virtuosity were highly appreciated and welcomed with interest, sometimes even with astonishment, once people realized the youth and the extraordinary skill of the artist. One must emphasize, however, the specific character of those critical opinions, as we are unlikely to encounter among them professional, musicological analyses (in the modern meaning of the term). At that time, musical criticism in Poland had not as yet developed as a separate area of writing. Unlike musical criticism in the German countries (Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, Ludwig Tieck, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder) – in our country there was no

separate language, no specific aesthetics or means of evaluating music.<sup>1</sup> During the period when the Romantic era was breaking through in Poland, musical criticism, with some exceptions (Józef Elsner, Karol Kurpiński, Wojciech Grzymała) constituted primarily a significant part of literary criticism, using its characteristic style, metaphors and value judgments, often referring to the Romantic aesthetics (especially Maurycy Mochnecki). Even the first press note from *Pamiętnik Warszawski* [The Warsaw Journal] (1818/4), announcing the exceptional talent of the son of Mikołaj Chopin, the French language teacher at the Warsaw Lyceum, was of significance, classifying music among literary categories: “Although we do not count composers of music among writers of literature, nevertheless they too are authors”<sup>2</sup> (p. 629). At the same time, Kazimierz Brodziński in his famous thesis *O klasycyzmie i romantyzmie tudzież o duchu poezji polskiej* [On Classicism and Romanticism as well as the spirit of Polish poetry] was claiming that “music, as well as poetry, which aim at infinity, evoking indistinct images, and being perfected in the same spirit in Germany, must have an important influence on the current Romantic movement”<sup>3</sup>.

Authors of music and poetry create their works in the same area of artistic activity. The context of literature for statements relating to music will thus provide the main reference point during the period of the Romantic breakthrough. This is a significant limitation and a specific characteristic of musical criticism in its early phase of development. In fact, it would be more precise to talk about critical reflection on the subject of music during the Romantic breakthrough, rather than musical criticism as a separate category, although undoubtedly this was the time of its true beginnings.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stefan Jarociński in his *Przedmowa* [Preface] to his *Antologia polskiej krytyki muzycznej XIX i XX wieku (do roku 1939)* [An anthology of Polish musical criticism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (up to 1939)] (Kraków, 1955), 14; Jarociński was writing about the cultural backwardness of our criticism in relation to European criticism.

<sup>2</sup> All the press statements from 1818-1830 are cited after the annex listing articles about Chopin (although this source is not precise and doubtful from the editorial point of view – but that is the subject for another publication), included in the new edition of *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina*, i, 1816-1831 [Fryderyk Chopin’s correspondence, i, 1816-1831], ed. Zofia Helman, Zbigniew Skowron, Hanna Wróblewska-Straus, i (Warszawa, 2009); page number in brackets refer to that edition.

<sup>3</sup> Kazimierz Brodziński, *Pisma estetyczno-krytyczne* [Aesthetic and critical works], ed. and preface Zbigniew J. Nowak (Wrocław, 1964), 30.

<sup>4</sup> I wrote about this more extensively in the article ‘Refleksja krytyczna o muzyce w okresie romantycznego przełomu w Polsce. (Zapomniany rozdział dziejów “walki romantyków z klasykami”)’ [Critical thought about music in the period of the breakthrough of Romanticism in Poland. (A forgotten chapter from the history of “the struggle between the Romantics and the Classicists”)], in *Z pogranicza literatury i sztuk* [From the borderland of literature and arts], ed. Zofia Mocarska-Tyc (Toruń, 1996), 155-183.

Most often anonymous, hidden in little notes and information material of *Kurier dla Płci Pięknej* [The Courier for the Gentle Sex], *Gazeta Literacka* [Literary Gazette], *Kurier Warszawski* [The Warsaw Courier], *Gazeta Korespondenta Warszawskiego i Zagranicznego* [Warsaw and Foreign Correspondent's Gazette], *Gazeta Warszawska* [Warsaw Gazette], *Kurier Polski* [The Polish Courier], music criticism was gradually becoming significant in more extensive reports from concerts, articles and even in essays (mostly translated ones) published in *Tygodnik Muzyczny* [The Music Weekly], *Pa-miętnik Warszawski* [The Warsaw Journal], *Dziennik Warszawski* [The Warsaw Daily], *Gazeta Polska* [The Polish Gazette] and *Powszechny Dziennik Krajowy* [The Common National Daily]. It should be pointed out that Chopin played a very important role here. One might claim that, up to a point, music criticism of that period grew and found its voice together with the development of the talent of the young virtuoso and composer, whose evolution was being carefully observed and commented on in a friendly way.

Let us also draw attention to another important contextual aspect: that is a period when a lively discussion between the Romantics and the Classicists was taking place. Articles about Chopin's piano performances were often a part of the programmatic campaign of the followers of the new aesthetics, emphasizing the importance of instrumental music – absolute, pure and free from programmatic associations – as a sphere favourable to Romanticism. Music was thought to be the most perfect of the arts, as it referred directly to the metaphysical emotions of the listener, hence it provided a perfect argument for promoting the aesthetics of Romanticism; the creativity of the young pianist became an ideal example of realising the theoretical postulates of the new movement.

In 1830 we find in the Warsaw press a relatively high concentration of articles with Chopin as their protagonist. Until then, quite short, informative forms and brief reports predominated. From then on, comments about Chopin introduce more serious attempts at evaluation, and a tendency towards providing broader musical contexts. Naturally, music had already been involved in discussions on aesthetics in relation to Romanticism as a subject of polemical addresses, such as those of 1827, occasioned by the concerts of Maria Szymanowska, and of 1828, when Warsaw was visited by the famous pianist and composer Johann Nepomuk Hummel, while our native virtuoso Karol Lipiński competed in the course of a cycle of concerts with Niccolò Paganini. At the time, critical reflection about music was enriched by discussions about the role of instrumental music, and it was not only the performances of operas and singers that provoked heated debate. After his concerts in Vienna in 1829, reported by the Polish press and preceded by German reviews, Chopin's fame as an outstandingly talented and promising young composer, as well as a great virtuoso, became firmly established in Warsaw. He

was not only “a wonder child” and an exceptional “musical talent”, but also a true musical genius. Such opinions were expressed on numerous occasions after his public performances (most frequently in salons). It is worth mentioning that Chopin fitted perfectly into Warsaw’s artistic landscape. He was an easily recognised young man, who did not try to avoid café discussions and private parties, who willingly spent time in the society of the students of Warsaw University and in journalists’ circles; he was friendly with such literati and critics as Dominik Magnuszewski, Seweryn Goszczyński, Konstanty Gaszyński, Józef Bohdan Zaleski and Maurycy Mochnacki. It might be said that, up to a point, he co-created the first Warsaw Bohemians.

With Mochnacki, who was the most prominent Polish critic and aesthete in the period of Romanticism, as well as being the author of a famous thesis *O literaturze polskiej w wieku dziewiętnastym* [About Polish literature in the nineteenth century], Chopin also had a professional relationship. They were both musicians. A literary legend claims that there was even rivalry between the two pianists in the art of interpretation, which is unlikely to deserve credence. There are references to it by Maria Mochnacka, Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki, Józef Reinschmidt and also Józef Bohdan Zaleski, who mentions the following:

During the period when Polish poetry was being reborn, three or four years before the November Rising, the late Stefan Witwicki and I used to be frequent guests either at Fryderyk Chopin’s, or at Maurycy Mochnacki’s, listening to their piano performances. Chopin was cheerful and very young then (we used to call him Szopenek) and he would play his wonderful pieces to us. Brilliant invention, clever, playful and tender, he played with art, he controlled it and enchanted listeners with the natural richness of his Polish rhythm and melody.

Maurycy’s fame as a politician and writer has eclipsed the memory of his considerable musical talent. He was a master of the piano, he was incomparable particularly in the execution of masterpieces by Mozart, Beethoven and Weber. Maurycy was always intending to make a musical journey through Europe. Later on, he was short of time and patience and he neglected the piano.<sup>5</sup>

However, it was Mochnacki who became the first critic to attempt a deeper analysis of the essence of Chopin’s performance, and he did not limit his comments to general or exalted remarks, such as were commonplace in the press of the day when talking about the extraordinary talent of the young virtuoso. His solid knowledge of theory and the history of music, and a fluent mastery of the art of playing the piano, enabled this critic to make balanced judgments and meant that his pronouncements were more trustworthy, although tainted somewhat by ideological influences. For Mochnacki was glad

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<sup>5</sup> Józef B. Zaleski, *Pisma* [Scripts], iv (Lviv, 1877), 86.

to see the presence of romantic aesthetics even when the attribute did not necessarily fully apply to the phenomenon being analysed. It is worth quoting here an apt observation by Mieczysław Tomaszewski:

Mochnecki's critical texts concerning the appearance on the Warsaw stage of pieces by Hummel and Szymanowska, Paganini and Lipiński, Rossini and Weber, and finally Chopin himself, texts which were bold and surprising, making the young composer think and reinterpret some aspects of the aesthetics shaped at Elsner's school – these texts expressed thoughts which Chopin would soon regard as his own. Mochnecki fought programmatic showing-off in composition (e.g. Paganini) and lack of melodiousness in performances (e.g. Hummel), as well as ambiguity, falsity and exaggeration. In Chopin's music he saw a reflection of the personality of "a fair man", who "is totally devoted to the genius of music, which flows from him, which is in his breath". In his model of national art, Mochnecki contrasted idyllic rusticity with dramatic heroism, sentimentalism with lyricism, conventionalism and naturalism with poetry, and virtuosity with the truth of expression. In Chopin, this collection of characteristics became apparent in the phase of the Romantic breakthrough and is particularly noticeable in his etudes, nocturnes, and scherzos.<sup>6</sup>

The political atmosphere of Warsaw in 1830 was already foreshadowing the dramatic events of the November Uprising and the Polish-Russian war. The recent enforced coronation of Emperor Nicholas I of Russia as King of Poland, the arrogant attitude of the officials of Duke Constantine, the increasing hostility towards the loyalists, persecutions of patriots and young people, the secret societies, aggressive censorship, and, at the same time, the victory of the Romantics in the aesthetes' battle for "dominion over souls", the works of Adam Mickiewicz directing the imagination towards the problems of the nation and freedom, criticism favouring what was native, original and Polish – all of that was building up tension and strengthening the feeling that something would happen soon. It was no accident that so many articles about Chopin were being written precisely then. What is involved is not only a particular moment in the artist's life – his maturation, public concerts or the eruption of the creative talent of that time; it is also a particular period in the history of culture. There is discussion of issues of national character and national autonomy, the modern concept of ethnos is being born, Romantic aesthetics perceives beauty in the open, indefinite, fragmentary forms associated with infinite imagination and personal freedom. In philosophy, we have the birth of the Romantic category of Subject, while in art – the cult of spirit and sensitivity arises as a response to usurpations of the enlightened mind. The in-

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<sup>6</sup> Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Chopin. Człowiek, dzieło, rezonans* [Chopin. Man, work, resonance] (Poznań, 1998), 567.

creased critical reception of Chopin's creative output falls into this exceptional time of the birth of modernity, the determinants of which are, on the one hand, nationality, nativeness and originality and, on the other, universal Romantic sensitivity, a focus on the spiritual dimension of reality and a quest for freedom and for forms of infinite imagination. A new anthropology is being born out of the contradictory dimensions of contemporaneity in the course of discussion and polemic. Thus the works of Chopin were the perfect subject to talk about in the press, not only because of his exceptional talent, but also because the external circumstances, such as the political tensions and aesthetic and philosophical concerns, were favourable to such discussions. This, to a large extent, is revealed by the language of the critical comments about the artist dating from 1830. In a sense, Chopin became the focus of the problems troubling contemporary social opinion.

In February 1830 Warsaw was full of rumours about the composition and rehearsals with an orchestra of the new work by the young virtuoso. *Piano Concerto in F minor*, performed on the third of March, was received with general admiration by an audience of teachers and invited guests, and resulted in great expectations for the first public performance on a large scale. *Kurier Warszawski* [The Warsaw Courier] (No. 62/3/5), apart from the traditional fascination with virtuosity ("the Paganini of the Piano"), emphasised the themes played by Chopin "to the tune of the native song *Już miesiąc zaszedł* [The Moon has already set] and *Krakowiak* by Kurpiński" (pp. 646-647). *Dziennik Powszechny Krajowy* [The Common National Daily] (No. 63) on the same day also has a longer review by a somewhat amateurish music connoisseur, signed with the initials L.C. In it, the author praises the quality of the performance and of the main composition (in his critical reception he notes the influence of classical piano concertos by Hummel and Beethoven) and, alongside it, writes an extensive passage emphasising the performance of the fantasia on the song by Karol Kurpiński with words (*Laura and Filon*) by Franciszek Karpiński. It is characteristic that this generally known piece, a favourite of Chopin's mother, made a particular impression on the audience, especially on Wojciech Żywny, who wrote in his review:

There was not (in the theme *The Moon has already set*) the same difficulty in execution as in the concerto, but it moved one with the strangely composed accompaniment, which nearly corresponded with the song's lyrics. All the listeners were truly excited by these pieces, and those with close ties to the artist found it touching. His old piano teacher was in tears. Elsner glowed with joy when, walking around, he heard only voices of admiration about his composition student (p. 647).

In such comments, there are threads which are always present in the critical reception of the piano craft of the young Chopin: exceptional performance,

exceptional composition and exceptional reception of national and commonly known musical themes. Adding to this repetitive chorus, Mochnacki, in an article written a few days later, announcing the first public concert of the artist and his planned tour of Europe (*Kurier Polski* [The Polish Courier], No. 97/3/12), mentions in his own characteristic comments the sound of the instrument and the first romanticising micro-characterisation of the virtuoso's musical imagination, who synthesised that which was European, full of freedom and panache, with what was native, Polish both in the performance and composition. The critic announces that our pianist has already joined the ranks of the greatest musical talents, not only because of the quality of his interpretation as a performer, but also as an original composer. He claims: "This is [...] a mind full of fantasy, full of life and richness of a bold imagination. In those parts where art allows him to give himself over to Polish melodies, no artful charms dimmed the grace of the national songs [...]" (pp. 648-649).

The day after the famous concert at the National Theatre, where Chopin played his *Piano Concerto in F minor* and *Fantasia in A major* on Polish themes, Mochnacki was the first to announce in a short review (*Kurier Polski* [The Polish Courier] No. 103/3/18), full of admiration for the pianist's genius as a composer and performer, a slightly pompous prediction which, however, was soon to come true: "[...] far will the name be known of one who starts so young" (p. 649). A similar, although more balanced comment came from Adam Dmuszewski (*Kurier Warszawski* [The Warsaw Courier] No. 75/3/18) and an anonymous reviewer from *Gazeta Warszawska* [Warsaw Gazette] (No. 75/3/18), who stressed the low cost of the tickets, interpreting it as a sign of an expression of the artist's friendly feelings towards his countrymen. In an anonymous article in *Gazeta Warszawska* [Warsaw Gazette] we read the following journalistic description:

All the qualities characteristic of a piano virtuoso are joined in Mr Chopin at the highest level: power, fluency, and, above all, the feeling, are his most important qualities, every time he strikes a key, it is an expression of his heart. The Warsaw audience was capable of appreciating the rare talent of their countryman, who is soon to bring it pride and glory in distant lands; thunderous applause was his welcome and his farewell, and the artist's charming modesty only increased the value of his talent (p. 650).

The article was undoubtedly written by an amateur "music lover" and reflects, to an extent, the atmosphere of the concert and enthusiasm of the public, who identified with the national artist. There is clearly an increased feeling of pride in the presence in Polish cultural space of an artist of such great rank; evidence for this comes also from an extensive text by an anonymous XX (possibly Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski) in *Gazeta Korespondenta*

*Warszawskiego i Zagranicznego* [Warsaw and Foreign Correspondent's Gazette] (No. 66/3/19). Alongside the familiar praise, the author tries to demonstrate the superiority of young Chopin's piano craft over that of Hummel, who was highly regarded at that time. He also predicts, in the same spirit as Mochnacki that "one day, Poland will boast of one of the greatest performers and authors in Europe" (p. 652).

Both the national and romantic themes are sounded in an extensive article, quite professional for the standards of that time, in *Dziennik Powszechny Krajowy* [The Common National Daily] (No. 77/3/19). An anonymous author, in a balanced and calm analysis, presents the fullest description so far of the impressions after the performance of the already famous *Piano Concerto in F minor*. Comparing it to the achievements of Chopin's predecessors, he tries to understand the originality of Chopin's work, emphasising in particular the role of harmony and the melodic motives, the balanced proportions between the particular parts and the relationship with the orchestra. The author underlines the concord between the performance and "the spirit of composition" and also the modest attitude of the young virtuoso, who does not draw attention to himself – "[...] in the greatest passages, while the most comprehensible and touching melodies were being sung, the artist did not want to shine at the expense of the impression produced by the whole" (p. 652). One might follow Carl Dahlhaus in saying that in these words we hear the Romantic concept of absolute music. The author notes the purity, the harmony, the cohesive style and a noble attitude towards music, almost as if the artist was trying to hide behind the world of sounds, for "his performance told his listeners: it is not I, it is the music". Music is to touch the listener's feelings directly, to give free rein to fantasy and freedom of interpretation, to stimulate imagination. The native artist, unlike the famous Paganini (allusions to the latter's recent performances in Warsaw are apparent here), who might also be a genius, becomes the medium for conveying the purely spiritual meaning hidden in the strange, delicate, non-verbal language of sounds. When we add the Polish motives, out of which the music was intricately woven, the contact between the artist and the Warsaw audience must have resulted in a true and profound artistic experience:

The result of such a performance was very natural general admiration, and on some faces there was an expression which probably derived from the feeling that it is possible to make the listener pensive without the monotonous repetition of uniform melodies, without the nerve-racking, sudden beats of the orchestra and without the noisy endings of some of today's music (p. 653).

Nationality, romantic imagination and the extraordinary atmosphere accompanying the reception of Chopin's music were to set the strict canon of motives in the critical reflection of that time. In an article by Wojciech Grzy-

mała in *Kurier Polski* [The Polish Courier] (No. 105/3/20), the author's exalted exaggeration might even seem ridiculous when he interprets specific musical motives in terms of literal image associations carrying "the echoes of our fields and woods" (p. 654); he hears in Chopin's music the song of a Polish peasant, folk dances and the feelings of nostalgia for the native landscapes. This is the beginning of the trend towards the native, "pastoral" reception of Chopin's music, which primarily concentrates on the idiom of Polishness. At the other extreme we have Mochnacki with his romantic imagination. He also placed the national tone in the foreground, but he never allowed his audience to forget about the universal and romantic-spiritual dimension of Chopin's music, comprehensible by every listener regardless of nationality. He accentuated these aspects in a masterly manner particularly in the review which followed the second performance by the artist at the National Theatre on the twenty second of March, mostly repeating the previous programme (*Kurier Polski* [The Polish Courier], No. 109/3/24). In the context of a quoted passage from *Konrad Wallenrod* by Adam Mickiewicz about the song of the common people which becomes the Ark of the Covenant between the past and the present, Mochnacki highlighted in particular the originality, the superior performance and the truly improvised quality of "execution" by the Polish artist, whose language of sounds and tones speaks directly towards the listener. At the same time, the critic had some cutting remarks for other home-grown "wooden" improvisers "[...] in whom the blood does not have strong circulation, but only a wound up watch making a dead machine work" (p. 657), since true improvisation is based on inspiration. The contrasting of true inspiration with artificial, pretended improvisation, and of original, national music with music which imitates foreign models is significant; it is also an element of a broader political and aesthetic campaign by Mochnacki and other enthusiasts of the new art gathered around him, against the conservatives and loyalists, who were often identified with the generation of Warsaw's classicists. Mochnacki's emotional addresses are usually accompanied by either hidden or direct polemic. He must have been particularly irritated by the numerous and already traditional comparisons of the Polish artist with Hummel or Mozart. Such comparisons, usually unjustified and accidental, were used to impress readers of consecutive articles, clearly derived from earlier press reports, such as those in *Dziennik Powszechny Krajowy* [The Common National Daily ], (No. 83/3/25) and *Dekameron Polski* [Polish Decameron], (No. 9/3/31). He may also have had reservations towards the monochrome claims of Wojciech Grzymała, who highlighted only the Polish national element in Chopin's performance (*Kurier Polski* [The Polish Courier], No. 110/3/26), but also argued vehemently with an amateur author signing himself J.C. in the above-mentioned *Dziennik Powszechny Krajowy* [The Common National Daily]. The latter tried, in a flood of meaningless

words, to emphasise the enthusiasm and admiration of the audience for the pianist's performance, "burning incense" around the artist while betraying lack of competence and qualifications for reviewing music concerts. This issue, which we might term the "professionalisation" of music criticism, was of great interest to Mochnacki. It is worth mentioning that Chopin's public performances also provoked meta-critical comments, leading to the development of this type of writing. Perhaps the most significant polemical, and at the same time meta-critical, argument, came from an author who was exceptionally well qualified to comment.

Karol Kurpiński, who was clearly thrown off balance by the various press pronouncements about Chopin, sent an extensive text to *Gazeta Warszawska* [Warsaw Gazette] (No. 91/4/4) titled 'O artykułach amatorskich' [About amateur articles], taking a stance on the subject of, among others, the most weird and accidental associations evoked by Chopin's recent performances. The comments by the Director of the National Opera referred to various press texts, not only those directly connected with recent artistic events, but it was mainly the articles about Chopin which motivated the author to express his critical opinion. Kurpiński's comments can be reduced to two main threads: he is strongly opposed to the increasingly colloquial language of the press, vulgar words characteristic of the common people, and he is slightly less critical about the lack of professional music terms, which tend to be driven out by sentimental expressions. Moreover, he is also firmly opposed to the facile comparisons of Chopin's compositions and performances with the works of Mozart, Haydn or Beethoven. In his sensible view, the works of these composers had been created at another time, and the young artist must study them to improve his knowledge and to master his craft, but he should not be denied an acknowledgment of his own originality and characteristic style, often lost in the overabundance of press comparisons. Kurpiński notes reasonably that some balance is needed when praising talented young people, for they are just on the threshold of their careers. Neither excessive flattery nor too much chastising are helpful to the artist. These were carefully thought out reflections, which must have played an important role in the further critical reception of music in Warsaw's society before the November Uprising. Further news and articles about Chopin (and there are a lot of them) confirm that some authors simply became silent while others became more subtle in giving their opinions.

It is evident that Warsaw music critics matured together with the young virtuoso. Konstanty Gaszyński in *Pamiętnik dla Płci Pięknej* [Memoirs for the gentle sex], (vol. ii), is the first to note the beautiful colours of melancholy in Chopin's performance along with the role of harmony as the "soul of concertos", wondering about the ideal combination of the simplicity of native musical motives with refined composition (p. 668). Reports from further private

concerts in Warsaw and public concerts in Vienna are much more balanced, although they nearly always comment on and underline the artist's genius. *Piano Concerto in E minor*, composed earlier, was also generally judged to be brilliant; a number of selected listeners had the opportunity of hearing it in Warsaw during rehearsals on 15 and 22 September and 5 October, as well as the official farewell concert at the National Theatre on 11 October, after which the artist set off on his "musical tour" of Europe. As we are aware, the final decision to leave was influenced by the increasingly dense atmosphere of political conspiracy. Mochnacki, who was a friend of the artist, insisted on it. Even though he himself was participating in the preparations for the outbreak of the uprising. Press notices about this concert are rather enigmatic in Poland. German papers bring more news about it, which is hardly surprising. With the late autumn approaching fast this is, in the words of Stanisław Wyspiański, "a dangerous moment for Poles". Mochnacki, the outstanding critic of that time, referring to his comments on music, announced:

It is high time we stopped writing about art, there is something else on our minds and in our hearts, we improvised the most beautiful songs of a national rising! Our life is poetry. The tumult of arms and the roar of guns – this shall be our rhythm and melody from now on.<sup>7</sup>

The critical reception of young Chopin's creative output came at a special period of the history of our nation. The language of criticism accurately reflects the mood of that time: the growing patriotic emotions, freedom rhetoric and romantic spirituality. It also makes us aware of the necessity for maintaining a wider humanistic (not just musicological) perspective in our comments about Chopin.

*Translated by Urszula Skrzypczak*

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<sup>7</sup> Maurycy Mochnacki, 'O literaturze polskiej w wieku dziewiętnastym. Tom I' [On Polish literature in the nineteenth century. Vol. I], in *Rozprawy literackie* [Literary Discourses], ed. Mirosław Strzyżewski (Wrocław, 2000), 173.

