

ELŻBIETA NOWICKA (Poznań)

## *Chopin and the Warsaw literati – part two<sup>1</sup>*

**ABSTRACT:** Chopin's life in Warsaw fell at a time of important phenomena and processes in history, the arts, aesthetics, etc. This article deals with the artistic and social milieu to which the composer belonged and looks at the question of the common artistic imagination and aesthetic ideas elaborated within that environment, based on the example of Chopin and two poets: Stefan Witwicki and Dominik Magnuszewski. Chopin's relationship with Witwicki, which gave rise to his songs to the poet's texts and lasted into their time in exile, is considered in respect to discussion on folk culture that was on-going at that time. That culture was treated as a sign of the nobly archaic or else as a manifestation of modern art, of the "art of the future". These convictions did not function as alternatives; their overlapping characterised various aspects of early romanticism. The output of Magnuszewski, meanwhile, shows the transformation of traditional figures of rhetoric into Romantic means of expression. It displays a style of writing that constitutes an act of Romantic hermeneutics in respect to the language of tradition. Avoiding simple comparisons of works of very different artistic level and significance, the author analyses Chopin's relationships with the two poets by reference to the generational experience – as variously understood – of creative artists born during the first decade of the nineteenth century, which connected artists of different levels of talent and varying individual fortunes.

**KEYWORDS:** Fryderyk Chopin, Stefan Witwicki, Dominik Magnuszewski, aesthetics of early romanticism, folk tradition, fragment, generation

Chopin's life story seems well known and well described. Similarly, much attention has been devoted to his personality, relationships, work methods, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Most interest is aroused, of course, by the Paris years, which cover – including the sojourns on Majorca, at Nohant and in Great Britain – most of the composer's adult life, which he spent in the soci-

---

<sup>1</sup> The title refers to Franciszek German's book *Chopin i literaci warszawscy* [Chopin and the Warsaw literati] (Warszawa, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> A calendar of Chopin's life, documented in detail, is presented by Mieczysław Tomaszewski in *Chopin. Człowiek, dzieło, rezonans* [Chopin. The man, his work and its resonance] (Poznań, 1998), which also contains a sizeable bibliography of works on the composer's life.

ety of the most brilliant artists of those times. Many of those artists bestowed upon him genuine admiration, and even adoration. Suffice it to mention Delacroix, Heine, Liszt, Schumann, Berlioz and Adam Mickiewicz. That is the "Paris" Chopin (a little earlier also the "Vienna" Chopin): the virtuoso, composer and refined music teacher of refined ladies. Earlier biographers focussed above all on that second part of the life of this brilliant composer, emphasising his links with the universal models of European music, created mainly by Bach and Mozart. The great artist as shown among other great artists, depicted in words and in images, belongs to the axiological order reflected by the term "Geniezeit". This was devised, as we know, to describe the artistic and spiritual reality of the turn of the nineteenth century, mainly within the German-speaking area, but the usefulness of this concept, which assumed that art was the result of the activities of outstanding intellects thrown together by fate at a particular time within a common space, was much more long-lived. Romanticism further enhanced the conviction of the extraordinary status and rank of the outstanding artist, adding one crucial strand, which, as it turned out much later, radically transformed our understanding of art and of the artist's relationship with his work. Here is what Meyer H. Abrams wrote on the subject:

The habitual reference to the emotions and processes of the poet's mind for the source of poetry altered drastically the established solutions to that basic problem of aesthetics, the discrepancy between the subject matter in poetry and the objects found in experience.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, interest in the Romantic theory of art moves towards consideration of the workings of the mind of a poet (artist), which transports the whole of empirical reality into the realm of imagination. By the same stroke, the "faithfulness to nature" so consistently posited by Romantic aesthetics signified a three-level relationship, between nature, its transformation in imagination under the influence of feelings, and the work of art itself. Thus the great artist creates a work which is intrinsically marked by an individual stamp, just as the imagination and feelings of each creative artist are individual and distinctive. Such a conception of both art and the process of its creation also meant that the great artist could be presented as a being devoid of his own "civil" history, of that whole process whereby character, imagination and tastes are moulded by everyday experiences in the form of education, family ties, peer relationships, and so forth. So the creative artist, and the musician first and foremost, was infinitely more of an Ariel than a Telemachus from an eighteenth-century educational novel or Goethe's Meister

---

<sup>3</sup> Meyer H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York, 1958), 53.

Wilhelm, whose biographies were shaped, among other things, by the most disparate events and external experiences.

Thus we have images of Chopin among the greats, a Chopin whose talent is of a comparable scale, and at the same time a Chopin who is highly distinctive, filled with divine talent and gifted with an exceptional soul. And also, by means of some remarkable osmosis, communicating with artists and poets, inspiring them and absorbing the impulses they issued forth.

However, the Romantic era also gave rise to other representations of the artist – at times competing with, at times complementing, the image described above. According to these representations, the creative artist was a person immersed in the experiences and memories of his childhood and early youth, which formed a strong, although not necessarily happy, foundation for his adult life. Differing little from his peers, he was supported by their friendship and intellect, but rose above them in a way that manifested itself suddenly or unexpectedly. Thus the question naturally arises as to the role and significance of the “Warsaw period” for the development of the composer’s talent and personality – a question that has already been posed a great many times and answered in many different forms, from source-propelled studies to belletristic essays. Among the latter, particularly interesting is Adolf Nowaczyński’s *Młodość Chopina* [Chopin’s youth], published in 1939, artfully styled on a yarn spun by the old Oskar Kolberg in a Cracow park. Nowaczyński roundly opposes those Chopin biographers who saw in the composer’s life just a single line – the development of his musical talent and skills:

[...] genius cannot concern itself with music and musicians alone, but must, decidedly must, take an interest, during its youth, in everything, simply everything, and form a notion about everything, know about everything, absorb everything and learn about everything.<sup>4</sup>

That “everything” can be easily found on the pages of Nowaczyński’s book about Chopin. It supposedly consisted of the composer’s singular knowledge of the life of both artists and common folk, discussing with young people in cafés and carefully listening to his elders, a reverence for mementoes and a joy at the demolition of the old walls of Warsaw (which took place before the eyes of this child born in 1810), and a familiarity with traditional folk tunes and what was new in European music at that time. Those elements make up a multi-faceted, complete, rich biography. They sketch the image of a man with a boundless imagination, developing in all directions, in an original and unfettered way. The image of the young Chopin’s development and versatile talent – a versatility that was essential for him to become an outstanding artist in a single domain – grew out of Nowaczyński’s anthropological and edu-

---

<sup>4</sup> Adolf Nowaczyński, *Młodość Chopina* [Chopin’s youth] (Warszawa, 1939), 92.

cational ideas, based on an activist concept, peculiar to his worldview, of man's strengths. Consequently, one might mothball it with the inscription "Chopin – historical view", were it not for at least one circumstance that makes this concept worth closer inspection.

Nowaczyński emphasises the community of the experiences and sensations of people growing up in a similar place and in similar circumstances, seeing in this process an invaluable educational and ethical capital for the future creative artist.<sup>5</sup> An outstanding musical talent? But of course, says Nowaczyński, in the words of old Kolberg, yet this great talent could not have taken shape and developed without a range of interests conducive to its development, without an open sluice providing an influx of all possible skills and the most diverse information. So Nowaczyński traces a vision of a childhood and youth full of energy, not limited by a specialisation and unilateral orientation too early for the development of his talent; thus the mature genius finds strong support in a wealth of experiences of various character and weight. One easily notes how greatly such a vision of the childhood and youth of an outstanding individual differs from the Romantic anthropology of a child whose genius was fostered by the channelling of all his spiritual and intellectual energies in a single direction – prematurely mature, so to speak, broken by a surfeit of skills. So through the lips of old Kolberg, Nowaczyński plots for Chopin a trajectory of the life of a brilliantly talented youngster that is entirely different to the spiritual paths taken, for example, by the two friends in Juliusz Słowacki's *Godzina myśli* [An hour of thought], of which one "is dying" and the other, in an effort to save him from suicide, observes that "life must be broken into two great halves", thereby turning it into a work of art and salvaging it.<sup>6</sup> The childhood and youth that for Nowaczyński is the time during which a person "absorbs everything" is also far from the solitary existence of the hero and narrator of Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre tombe*, who confesses that the upbringing he was denied

[...] rendered my ideas less similar to those of other men; what is even more certain is that it impressed on my feelings a character of melancholy, born within me out of the habit of suffering at the age of weakness, improvidence and mirth.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> This kind of approach to the biography of a creative artist can be seen very clearly in relation to Adam Mickiewicz, both in early biographers and contemporaneously, in studies based on sources and interpretation. See Jerzy Borowczyk, *Rekonstrukcja procesu filomatów i filaretów 1823-1824* [Reconstruction of the trial of the Philomaths and Philarets 1823-1824] (Poznań, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Juliusz Słowacki, *Godzina myśli* [An hour of thought], in *Dzieła* [Works], ii, *Poematy* [Epic poems], ed. Eugeniusz Sawrymowicz (Wrocław, 1952), 207.

<sup>7</sup> François-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre tombe*, ed. Maurice Levailant (Paris, 1948), i, 55.

Thus, there stands before us a “socialised” Chopin, on friendly terms with half of Warsaw and the surrounding area, freely and wittily communicating in letters and literary jokes, listening intently to artistic and political discussions carried on in Warsaw cafés, surrounded by a swarm of people...

I invoke Nowaczyński's tale of Chopin's youth in Warsaw as something of a pretext – as an example of the conviction that we ought to seek knowledge about the complex process of Chopin's spiritual and artistic development both in the world of his numerous acquaintances among the artists and scholars of Warsaw and also in the area of the emanation of certain opinions, tendencies, conceptions and aspirations peculiar to that milieu. Given that we devote so much keen and ever-renewed interest to the Vilnius environment of Adam Mickiewicz, although none of his devoted Philomath friends had anything like his talent or burgeoning significance, Chopin's Warsaw connections also merit attention; all the more so in that among his friends and acquaintances there were some remarkable people, such as the Kolberg family, Zygmunt Krasiński and Maurycy Mochnacki.

The reconstruction and description of this milieu was undertaken half a century ago by Franciszek German, in his study *Chopin i literaci warszawscy*<sup>8</sup> [Chopin and the Warsaw literati], based on a wealth of source material, and many of his findings remain current today. The rich, although necessarily encyclopaedic, narrative brings us information about the personages of the academic and literary life of those times with whom the young Chopin came into contact in person or through their writings (Kazimierz Brodziński, Ludwik Osiński, Józef B. Zaleski, the Kolbergs, Seweryn Goszczyński and many others). There is little doubt that meticulous source research could bring to light some new information in this respect, adding or revising particular details. One most striking matter, for instance, is the beginning of Chopin's acquaintance with Juliusz Słowacki, which scholars date to 1832, although the poet was in Warsaw from February 1829 and frequented places well known to Chopin (the Kickis' salon) and made contact with individuals quite familiar to the composer (his acquaintance with Miss Natalia Biszping – highly likely, according to the authors of the *Kalendarz życia i twórczości*

---

<sup>8</sup> German, *Chopin i literaci warszawscy*. The figure of Chopin appears many times on the pages of books on the literary, intellectual and political life of Warsaw before the uprising of 1830, e.g. Aniela Kowalska, *Mochnecki i Lelewel współtwórcy życia umysłowego Warszawy i kraju (1825-1830)* [Mochnacki and Lelewel and their part in the forging of intellectual life in Warsaw and across the country 1825–1830] (Warszawa, 1971), and Alina Kowalczykowska, *Warszawa romantyczna* [Romantic Warsaw] (Warszawa, 1987); the latter work strongly accentuates the presence of conspiratorial and independence elements.

*Juliusza Słowackiego* [Calendar of the life and work of Juliusz Słowacki] – Stefan Witwicki and Dominik Magnuszewski).<sup>9</sup>

However, my aim here is of a different nature, since I wish to refer to figures whose connection with the “Warsaw” Chopin is beyond doubt, and therefore worthy of further exploration. I am thinking specifically of Stefan Witwicki and Dominik Magnuszewski. The former, born in 1801, was a Warsaw poet and then a Paris émigré, a critic and journalist and a keen participant in the cultural life of the Diaspora, well known not just as the author of texts to which Chopin wrote music, but posthumously “related” to the composer in a remarkable way, in the *Czarne kwiaty* [Black flowers] of Cyprian Kamil Norwid. The acquaintance they made in Warsaw was preserved by Chopin and Witwicki during their Paris years, as is attested by correspondence and by very numerous mentions and descriptions of their contacts in the writings of others.<sup>10</sup> In particular, the letters which the poet wrote to Chopin in Paris indicate that these two creative artists were linked by a jocular intimacy, as is exemplified by a letter from 17 April 1840 in which, dubbing the composer “my dear, pale little thing”, Witwicki enquires about the editorial fortunes of Chopin’s mazurkas; other letters concerning everyday and artistic affairs also illustrate their relationship perfectly.<sup>11</sup>

However, whilst the character of Witwicki’s acquaintance with Chopin, nine years his junior, is quite well known (besides Franciszek German, many other authors have written about their relationship in works devoted to the artistic life of Warsaw during the first decades of the nineteenth century), although it is worth fleshing out and analysing more deeply, one figure who is decidedly underestimated by Chopin’s biographers – as Nowaczyński

<sup>9</sup> See Eugeniusz Sawrymowicz, Stanisław Makowski and Zbigniew Sudolski (eds.), *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Juliusza Słowackiego* [Calendar of the life and work of Juliusz Słowacki] (Wrocław, 1960), 146.

<sup>10</sup> Józef B. Zaleski recalled his Warsaw period years later: “During the period of the renaissance of Polish poetry, three or four years before the November Rising, the late Stefan Witwicki and I were frequent guests of Fryderyk Chopin and Maurycy Mochnacki, listening to them display their skills on the piano. Szopen, then cheerful and quite young (we also called him Szopenek [diminutive of the Polish form of Chopin’s surname, tr.]), played his wonderful works for us.” Józef B. Zaleski, *Pisma* [Writings], iv (Lviv, 1877), 86; quoted in German, *Chopin i literaci warszawscy*, 82.

<sup>11</sup> In the letter of 17 April 1840, Witwicki asks about pieces dedicated to him: *the Mazurkas in C sharp minor, E minor, B major and A flat major*, Op. 41, which were published in 1840 (information from the publisher’s note; see *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina* [The correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin], ed. Bronisław E. Sydow, ii (Warszawa, 1955), 7). In April 1842, he complains that he is weak and does not get out, and so asks to borrow “Revue”. On 17 October, he declines George Sand’s invitation to a dance performance by the Turczynowicz, but declares his willingness to go to *Semiramide* or a performance by Pauline Viardot. A letter from the end of 1842 concerns some Polish servants whom he recommends to Chopin.

noted, and German after him – is Dominik Magnuszewski. Chopin apparently spent many hours of his early youth seated beneath a portrait by Bacciarelli in the home of Magnuszewski's grandfather, the judge Dominik Borakowski, who remembered the reign of Stanislaus Augustus. Magnuszewski, Chopin's peer and a classmate from the Warsaw Lyceum, who died before Chopin, made his debut in 1828 with the comedy *Stary kawaler* [The confirmed bachelor] and also left us several historical plays, narrative prose and a collection of poems devoted to the November Rising, in which he fought as a soldier. During the last years of his life, he lived in Galicia, where he grew close to the milieu of the so-called Ziewończyks – scholars and eulogists of Slavic antiquity. According to all the available information, he had no contact with Chopin at that time. However, "Magnusio", as Chopin called Magnuszewski<sup>12</sup>, certainly belonged to the everyday landscape of Chopin's Warsaw youth, not just learning with him, but also – as Nowaczyński maintained and the elaborate critical apparatus to the recently published first volume of a new edition of Chopin's correspondence confirms – a considerable influence on both boys may have been exerted by judge Borakowski, a typical Sarmatian story-teller and traditionalist nobleman settled not on some walled estate in the country, but in the capital. Indeed, Nowaczyński has a gentle dig at the unusual interest in music among the whole Borakowski and Magnuszewski family – an interest that he sees as unusual in that they were "pure Lechites", and so by definition incapable of sensing and perceiving the art of sounds... German also insists on the significance for the young composer of his friendship with Magnuszewski, although he too fails to specify where the importance of this acquaintance for these two creative artists might lie. I will not undertake here any action that might clarify some fact from the biographies of these two men or reveal some previously unknown occurrence, but, as in the case of his acquaintance with Witwicki, I shall try to look at this friendship, too, through the poems and plays written by Magnuszewski. Thus it will be of less importance whether Chopin could have been familiar with them or, especially during his later years, at least have heard about them; I treat my observations regarding the writings of these two friends of Chopin as a sketch of the atmosphere of that milieu and those times... with a similar intention to that in which Ryszard Przybylski formulated his remarks on "Chopin's thoughts":

Although we do not know what Chopin thought about the initiatory poems and novels of his day, it is clear from the composer's biography that the successive

---

<sup>12</sup> E.g. in a letter of December 1830 to Jan Matuszyński in Warsaw, *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina, 1816-1831*, ed. Zofia Helman, Zbigniew Skowron and Hanna Wróblewska-Straus, i (Warszawa, 2009), 466.

phases in his spiritual maturing conform to the typical Polish model of a young person's introduction to life.<sup>13</sup>

## 1. Chopin and Witwicki

Although detached – as one may surmise from Mickiewicz's pamphlet *O krytykach i recenzentach warszawskich* [On Warsaw critics and reviewers] – from modern intellectual movements, the Warsaw of the late 1820s was not blind to what was new in philosophy and the arts. Suffice it to mention that the most outstanding and most penetrating critic of that period (NB accompanying Chopin with enthusiasm in his first Warsaw performances), Maurycy Mochnacki, worked energetically for the Warsaw press, and quite accomplished poets of the new Romantic school, such as Antoni Młczyński and Józef B. Zaleski, and the still very young Juliusz Słowacki, were also active behind that "sanitary cordon", as Mickiewicz put it. So it is worth taking a look at Stefan Witwicki's collection of verse *Piosnki sielskie* [Idyllic songs], published in 1830 with a quite impressive "Foreword" by the author, as evidence of the multi-faceted intellectual movement that developed in pre-Rising Warsaw.

The qualification "idyllic" that the poet included in the title for the poems contained in this collection signified not so much a reference to the then popular generic form as a declaration of his worldview and aesthetic. The author substantiates such a conviction *expressis verbis*, writing about "idyllic" poetry as "the art of sentiment" and "the tenderness of a simple heart", and yet the legitimisation of the idyll as a form of expression referring rather to what was then a modern anthropological ideal than to a form that was favoured by sentimental poetry occupied plenty of space in Warsaw letters of the beginning of the 1820s. The greatest contribution to this state of affairs was made by Kazimierz Brodziński, in his very first treatise, from 1818, *O klasycyzmie i romantyzmie tudzież o duchu poezji polskiej...* [On the Classical and the Romantic, or On the spirit of Polish poetry...], delineating the thematic and emotive fields on which a new literature could develop. In

---

<sup>13</sup> Ryszard Przybylski, *Cień jaskółki. Esej o myślach Chopina* [A swallow's shadow. An essay on Chopin's thoughts] (Kraków, 1995), 23. Many years earlier, Maria Żmigrodzka and Maria Janion, in the study 'Frederic Chopin parmi les héros de l'existence du romantisme polonais', in *Chopin Studies* 3 (1990), presented Chopin as a participant in the grand spiritual experience of the Polish Romantics, between Mickiewicz, Słowacki and Krasiński. Mickiewicz was very quickly acknowledged as the most outstanding writer of his generation, and soon afterwards as the greatest Polish poet. Słowacki and Krasiński were also considered outstanding by their contemporaries, although in their case the recognition (or antipathy) was not so clear-cut or generalised.



Brodziński's conception, this should be coupled with a native element – a conviction that was developed and modified by the 1823 treatise entitled *O idylli pod względem moralnym* [On the idyll in moral terms], in which Brodziński, a Warsaw University lecturer known to Chopin, returns to the conviction that “The Poles [...] after Theocritus were the first to understand the idyll”<sup>14</sup>. At the same time, however, he argues that the time has come to stop thinking of the idyll in terms of a regressive utopia, falsified by modern man's erroneous representations of the ancient world. Brodziński undoubtedly draws here on remarks concerning the idyll made by Friedrich Schiller, who located it in the domain of the experiences of “sentimental man”, valiantly bearing his condition of irreversible separation from nature, and clearly emphasised that the “maternal” space of the idyll was not the nostalgically treated past. “Why should we not aspire to the blissful past?” asked Brodziński in his treatise, stressing that it was the idyll, purified of the nostalgia and artificiality into which the imitators of Gessner had thrust it, not just orientated towards an archaic, natural simplicity, but also capable of bearing the weight of new phenomena that were not yet fixed in the universal awareness and perception, that could become an expression of that aspiration: “But a true idyll should always proceed together with the progress of society”<sup>15</sup>, concludes Brodziński. Such a distribution of the accents and stretching of the notion of the idyll to both the past and the future lends it the significance of a universal formula of existence, of a lifestyle delimited by the ideal of “happiness in restriction”, corresponding to both a sentimentalist and a Biedermeier concept of an ethical and happy life. But one should note one more thing of importance in the context of the statement Witwicki makes with this tome of his poetry: in the opinion shaped by Brodziński, the idyll is a kind of poetry that in Poland is wholly original, since it issues organically from the inclinations and temperament of the nation. In addition, the rural, popular output which belongs to that genre is not solely a sign of the venerably archaic, but can also help to form the culture of the future. Interestingly, the conception of the popular or folkloric that Mickiewicz developed on the threshold of the 1820s, differing in many aspects from Brodziński's vision (for instance, in its raising of the status of metaphysical or fantastical elements), referred with deference above all to the aesthetic and ethical deposit preserved in the poetry “of the people”. In any case, discussion of the idyll (an entirely different view on the question of the idyll to that of Brodziński was put forward, as we know, by Mochnacki), together with literary practice and the increasingly common postulates of gathering and safeguarding the songs of the people,

---

<sup>14</sup> Kazimierz Brodziński, *Pisma estetyczno-krytyczne* [Aesthetical and critical writings], ed. Zbigniew J. Nowak (Wrocław, 1964), 254.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

meant that the question of the supposed archaic/modern character of poetry inspired by traditional folk art gradually entered an increasingly extensive sphere of thought, becoming increasingly complex, with the signs reversed – suffice it to mention that in Norwid's familiar conception from the 1850s, also developed later, traditional folk art signified not only the past, but also modernity, and formed the cornerstone for the universal aspect of the art of the future. But let us return to the 1820s, when discussion of "popular" culture was only gathering pace, with Witwicki publishing his *Idyllic Songs* and formulating, in the foreword to his verse, remarks concerning the "idyllic" in poetry. At once, it should be noted that he does not perceive the products of folklore in terms of an "epic key", according to which it would contain the whole of human experience, but expresses the conviction of a kind of incompleteness to the picture of the world inscribed in traditional verse, since it possesses neither a noteworthy subject nor a grandness of thoughts or feelings. Most importantly, however, its entire sense, charm and peculiarity are like the obverse of that imperfection:

The poetry of the people carries a distinctive and exclusive feature. Its works, preserved only in memory, and so usually for a short time, are often like no more than sketches, an indication of thoughts that a poet unknown to the world has not expounded, not realised: consequently, at times it even contains something mysterious, undefined. They are not works engendering fervour, they do not raise the subject with grandeur, and they do not enrapture with a depth of thought or a ferocity of feelings.<sup>16</sup>

Thus anxiety, mystery and a careless or superficial sketching take the place of the lofty and extraordinary, of depth and emotion. It is hard to resist the impression that these two sentences juxtapose two visions of early Romanticity, and although they were briefly united by the ballad, at least of the Mickiewiczian variety (Schlegel wrote of the ballad as of a "sketch"), they essentially denoted different aesthetic orders and somewhat different orders of thought. One presaged the aesthetic of the fragment and referred to syncretic, genologically indistinct forms; the other invoked loftiness, the substrate of which, after the formulation of Burke's conception, is not so much form and theme as the impression that poetry makes on the reader. So Witwicki's affinity with folklore, seen from the perspective of the discussion of the idyll and of the poetry "of the people" sketched above, is not enclosed within an archaic mode of transmission, although, as we will see below, the poet valued the archaic extremely highly. Equally important is the fact that it enables us to look at the world from the perspective of mystery, sketching the image of that mystery. It is an opening for the artist's thoughts, and not their complement-

---

<sup>16</sup> Stefan Witwicki, *Piosnki sielskie* [Idyllic songs] (Warszawa, 1830), iii–iv.

ing and closure. The intellectual and emotional atmosphere of discussion of the idyll, spilling over into debate on the role and significance of traditional poetry for “official” art, music and literature, showed where the lost keys to the doors of myth and history lay, whilst at the same time helping minds to discover unexpected passages to unfamiliar horizons.

By calling his collection “Songs” (his next collection, entitled *Melodie biblijne* [Biblical melodies], also includes a “musical” word), Witwicki proceeded in complete accord with the widespread custom of giving titles to collections of poems that indicated their musical affinities. In some cases, the poems were indeed set to music (*vide* Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz’s *Śpiewy historyczne* [Historical songs]), whilst in others the name at least referred to a unity of words and music, rooted in a very distant tradition, recalled and brought to the surface of aesthetic discussion in the eighteenth century, above all by Herder. The popularity and usefulness, in some sense, of various aspects of Herder’s thought in the Poland of the turn of the nineteenth century<sup>17</sup> allow us to assume that his conviction of the relationship between the authenticity and vividness of traditional poetry and the power of music was also noted and elaborated upon by Polish poets. Here is Witwicki in 1830:

In speaking of the songs of the people, I cannot omit to mention their melodies: that native music, undoubtedly the dearest to our hearts, which alas is falling among us into ever greater neglect. [...] Our melody, contained in the songs of the people, contains a distinctive and original trait; it is always full of feeling, be it cheerful or wistful, and it cannot rightly be called monotonous, when it is so diverse in the different provinces. Some outstanding foreign musicians to have visited our country have made use of it: they made greater use of it than Polish composers. It seems that we have yet to suitably appreciate this native and rich treasure, pursuing almost exclusively the harmonies of the Italians, French and Germans.<sup>18</sup>

Invoking Brodziński’s opinion contained in his treatise of Polish dances, Witwicki reiterates the author’s insightful remarks concerning the deformation of peasant culture through contact with foreign musical culture of a “high” provenance, which is assimilated in a trivialised form and ousts the native element. Particularly susceptible to such a process of deculturation is the inhabitant of the suburbs, and its direct instigator is the mechanical music of the barrel-organ, not only supplanting living musicians, but also serving the rapid dissemination and unification of our tastes.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See Jan Tuczynski, *Herder i herderyzm w Polsce* [Herder and Herderism in Poland] (Gdańsk, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Witwicki, *Piosnki sielskie*, xvi-xx.

<sup>19</sup> “When, on the one hand, in the towns and cities, foreign operas, staged ever more frequently year on year, fill our ears with admittedly pleasant, but foreign tones; and, on the

Witwicki refers his remarks concerning foreign musical models (NB highly significant for an era that was striving to develop its own idiom of national opera; for example, notes made by Karol Kurpiński in his *Dziennik podróży* [Travel journal] from 1823) also to Polish composers. This is sufficiently crucial to the question of the “idyllic” (that is, traditional poetry) under discussion that, painstakingly gathered and described (Witwicki was quite appalled at the lack of any effort to catalogue and publish traditional songs in Poland!), it would form “the surest nucleus of national poetry”<sup>20</sup>. This postulate of creating national opera on the basis of traditional song is perfectly clear and needs no further comment. But let us distinguish two aspects of the question in particular. The first is most distinctly manifest in the hopes that Witwicki set out before Chopin that the latter would become a composer of national operas<sup>21</sup> – in this instance, a knowledge of folklore would be essential preparation for elaborating an opera. The second shows once again the complexity of thinking about musical folklore that might give rise to opera. This extraordinary art form, which dominated nineteenth-century theatres for quite some period, was considered at that time to be both outworn and supremely modern, contemporary and Romantic.<sup>22</sup> And irrespective of any links with folklore that particular operatic works may have displayed or – on the contrary – entirely lacked, in the aesthetics of that period, opera shared with “idyllic songs” the place held by works that are at once both behind and ahead of their time.

As we know, Chopin was not swayed by the author of the *Idyllic Songs* and did not compose operatic music; and in that sense, he “disappointed” not just Witwicki. Yet there was still plenty that linked him with his old friend from Warsaw: both, as their works show (although their artistic weight is

---

other, wandering positives and barrel-organs spread foreign arias ever wider across the country; they dominate the gatherings and amusements of the peasants, who hold their national dances in good faith, in more than one location, to the sound of Italian, French or German music; gradually forgetting native, home-spun songs”. Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., xx.

<sup>21</sup> “You absolutely must compose a Polish opera; I am most profoundly convinced that you are capable of it, and that as a national composer you will open up for your talent an immeasurably rich domain, in which you will earn yourself rare renown. I only hope that you will bear in mind: the national, the national and once more the national, it is an almost empty word for common writers, but not for such talent as yours. [...] I am convinced that a Slavic opera, brought into existence by a true talent, by a feeling and thinking composer, will one day dazzle the musical world like a new sun, perhaps even rising above all others, it will be able to have as much tunefulness as an Italian opera, more tenderness and immeasurably more ideas”. Letter of 6 July 1831, in *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina*, 1816-1831, i, 504; NB this was not the last time Chopin was subjected to such urgings...

<sup>22</sup> I write more extensively on this in *Omamienie – cudowność – afekt. Dramat w kręgu dziewiętnastowiecznych wyobrażeń i pojęć* [Delusion, wonder and affect. The play in the sphere of nineteenth-century notions and conceptions] (Poznań, 2003).

obviously incomparable), were perfectly at home in the complex early Romantic concept of the folkloric; both were marked by a certain mistrust of matters that eluded rational assessment. Witwicki, already as the author of *Edmund* (1829), an early work in a form somewhere between play and epic poem, evinces an attitude full of reserve in respect to the Romantic figure of the “hothead”:

The age in which poetry, having broken the shackles of forms and rules, rose – to the point of exaggeration – into the land of fantasy, longing and melancholy; in which philosophy, defending itself against the insensitivity and blindness of the materialists, began to pass into the other extreme: into mysticism and idealism; the present age renders up sacrifices to that overwhelming sickness of the heart and the head that we call *exaltation*: and which for society is all the more wretched in that it grasps only the most beautiful souls, the most profound and noble minds.<sup>23</sup>

An antipathy, or at least a reticence, towards the “mysticisms” of those times is also attested by Witwicki’s uncompromising stance and Chopin’s at best anxious reaction to Tovianism. One indication of this comes in the composer’s remarks concerning the followers of Andrzej Towiański:

They say they have written their apologies to His Majesty [the tsar]. But it is a sad thing that two of them [...] produced a document in the presence of a notary wherein they give themselves up in subjection, as objects, as slaves, to Towiański. [...] Could there be any greater lunacy?<sup>24</sup>

The fortunes of the composer and the poet became entwined in an unusual way, after the death of each of them, on the pages of Cyprian Kamil Norwid’s funeral prose, the *Czarne kwiaty* [Black flowers], where each was offered a freeze-frame memory of his final meeting with Norwid. In the role of the author of the poetical obituaries that the successive passages of the *Czarne kwiaty* essentially represent, Norwid notes with distinct pleasure the place where that meeting came about and also the last words he heard from his interlocutor. He also declares his complete faithfulness to reality and events: “I change my pen into a daguerreotype, fidelity not to breach”<sup>25</sup>. Norwid first met Witwicki on the Spanish Steps in Rome, where he noticed the stark contrast between that “lovely” young face and the slow gait, indicative of illness. The last encounter before Witwicki’s death (he died in Rome on 19

<sup>23</sup> Stefan Witwicki, *Edmund* (Warszawa, 1829).

<sup>24</sup> Letter to Stefan Witwicki of 23 March 1845; quoted in Tomaszewski, *Chopin*, 105. In 1844, Witwicki published the anti-Tovianist brochure *Towiańszczyzna wystawiona i aneksami opatrzona* [Tovianism exposed and furnished with appendices].

<sup>25</sup> Cyprian Norwid, *Czarne kwiaty* [Black flowers], in *Pisma wszystkie* [Complete writings], ed. Juliusz W. Gomulicki, vi, *Proza* [Prose] (Warszawa, 1971), 177.

April 1847) shows him at home, deformed by illness (and in “slight madness”, as Norwid calls his state), pointing to non-existent flowers: “what’s that flower called back home?... it grows in abundance in Poland... and these flowers... and those flowers... they give it some ordinary name back home...”<sup>26</sup>

Norwid’s account of his final meeting with Chopin, in the composer’s flat on rue de Chaillot, depicts a sick man, who was nevertheless “beautiful, as always”<sup>27</sup>. Their conversation – startling, even for such a penetrating decipherer of the irony of situations as Norwid regarded himself – communicates a double sense, namely Chopin’s announcement of his removal and his death, in a declaration interrupted by a fit of coughing: “I’m removing...”. Illness did not affect Chopin’s appearance; neither did it kill in him the keen intelligence and perverse sense of humour that are familiar from many of his letters. We cannot be sure, of course, that this is exactly how these two creative artists looked or that Norwid faithfully wrote out the words that he heard. Whilst a friend of both Witwicki and Chopin, he had supreme admiration for the latter. He met the former in Berlin, and they renewed their acquaintance in Rome, where Witwicki was a budding artist.<sup>28</sup> On the pages of the *Black Flowers*, we find them alongside Słowacki, Mickiewicz, Paul Delaroche and an Unknown Irish Woman from a ship, preserved in the last weeks or days of life, placed in a sort of Pantheon of memory, in which space was found both for artists of various calibre and for people known to no one. Yet one thing catches our attention in particular: in that “souvenir gallery” drawn in words, Witwicki and Chopin appear next to one another, as if the order of the deaths recorded in Norwid’s prose and the compositional shape of his work were to document the two artists’ closeness to one another.

## 2. Chopin and Magnuszewski

At first glance, the personal contacts between Dominik Magnuszewski (1810–1845) and Chopin, although familiar from mentions in

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>28</sup> The authors (Zofia Trojanowiczowa and Zofia Dambek, assisted by Jolanta Czarnomorska) of the *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida* [Calendar of the life and work of Cyprian Norwid], 1821–1860, i (Poznań, 2009) note that Norwid met Witwicki most probably in Berlin in May 1846, at the wedding of Jan Koźmian and Zofia Chłapowska (i, 215, 222). In February 1847, Witwicki informs Zaleski that “Norwid from Belgium” is coming to Rome. They also met in the salon of Maria Kalergis (March 1847). The death of Witwicki, and then of Chopin, were two in a whole series of deaths of close friends at that time in the life of Norwid, who accompanied them in their final moments; for instance, he kept vigil in the final hours of General Stanisław Klicki, who participated in the Kościuszko and November uprisings.

memoirs and correspondence of the period, give no grounds for supposing that they shared any artistic interests, let alone any mutual inspiration. An interesting exception is one of the works included in a collection of poems from the period of the November Rising (*Wiersze z okresu powstania listopadowego*)<sup>29</sup> published by Roman Kaleta, entitled “Piosnka” (w czasie wyprawy tykocińskiej napisana na nutę “Szynkareczko”, piosnki Witwickiego na nutę Chopin)” [A song (written during the Tykocin campaign to the tune of “Szynkareczko”, a song by Witwicki to music by Chopin)], referring directly (in the subtitle) and indirectly (in the rhythmic pattern and the jaunty-jocular tone) to a little work by Witwicki and Chopin:

Listen Howard!  
 May a coward  
 Rot alone in comfort!  
 We're now flying  
 This day hying  
 Off to Lithuania!

In the ewer!  
 With a skewer –  
 May somebody weep!  
 Love ye not,  
 Then sob a lot –  
 Onward to Ruthenia! [...] <sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Dominik Magnuszewski, *Wiersze z powstania listopadowego* [Poems from the November Rising], ed. Roman Kaleta (Wrocław, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

“Kazimierzu  
 Niechaj w pierzu  
 Gnije sobie tchórz!  
 My w tej dobie  
 Lecim sobie  
 Hej, na Litwę już!

Hej, do dzbanka!  
 W ręku szklanka-  
 Niechaj płacze ktoś!  
 Gdy nie kocha,  
 Niechaj szlocha –  
 My dalej na Rus! [...]”

In a footnote, Kaleta quotes a recollection of Kazimierz W. Wójcicki from a farewell supper in August 1830, prior to Chopin's departure abroad: “Magnuszewski sang [Chopin's *Szynkareczka* “*Życzenie*” to words by Witwicki, E.N.], and played Chopin with a joyful

Kaleta included in his collection rediscovered insurrectionary poems by Magnuszewski, of varied subject matter, from jaunty reveilles, through descriptions of battles (including the poem “Warszawa d. 6-7 września 1831” [Warsaw, 6–7 September 1831], about the insurgents’ last defence of Warsaw, ending in capitulation, with a poetically elaborated vision of the blowing-up of Ordon’s redoubt), to a remarkably suggestive and terrifying vision of the total catastrophe experienced after the fall of Warsaw by a poet stationed in Elbląg. In the three parts of this extraordinary poem, we are served a phantasmagorical vision of the destruction visited upon the city and its inhabitants; since this text is presumably little known, and its images singularly poetic, I shall quote extensive passages below:

“Hallucination”

I had a dream both wild and hard – lightning lit the scene.  
 I saw the town that was my home left empty,  
 All the windows killed by mist,  
 They’d long since met no prying eyes;  
 No rusty hinges creaked ‘neath doors,  
 Unless some thug at night had come with torches, tearing  
 A final victim from its mother’s womb.  
 I saw the old familiar faces,  
 Aged by the crimes of youth.  
 Furies raged throughout the city, hurling torches into a bound  
 Defenceless crowd; judgment was by countenance,  
 A word was proof, and vileness their defence.  
 I saw limbs quivering in a bent semicircle,  
 Bone followed bone in taut, tense pain.  
 That land’s mighty ruler had the victims’ veins pulled out,  
 So not a drop of blood would dare escape them.  
 They trawled them through the streets, like fish in nets,  
 Then gaoled them in a bottomless pit. [...]  
 I was there.<sup>31</sup>

---

smile”. Kazimierz W. Wójcicki, ‘Dominik Magnuszewski’, *Kłosa* 621 (1877/5), 328; quoted in Kaleta, 78. The same collection also contains an extract from the recollections of someone else who was present at that meeting, Józef Reinschmidt, from which we learn that it was then that the music to “Szynkareczka” was apparently composed:

“A general mirth and ease took hold. Improvisations began, and poems began to spill forth in abundance. The lead in this was taken by Magnuszewski and Gaszyński; encouraged by this, Chopin sat down at the piano, and then so many national melodies poured out from under his fingers that at times we listened with trembling hearts and tearful eyes.” *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>31</sup> “Widzenie’ (Elbląg, 30 December 1831)

Sen miałem dziki, twardy – rozwidniał mi gromem.



The second scene of the poem depicts the enemy bursting into a family's home at night – the father is taken, the child killed, and the woman remains, crazed with despair:

Her little son perished from the lash of a whip,  
The blood surged to her head as her veins welled up,  
She fell silent – her vision flashed like a dagger [...] <sup>32</sup>

The third scene takes place in a monastery, where the myrmidons attack the wounded in their sleep:

Heaped all together, like a great throng of beasts,  
They groaned – the priest consoled them with a cross,  
Then showed them Christ's wound,  
Till his severed arm fell with the cross. <sup>33</sup>

The last lines bring the narrator's reflections upon waking:

I woke and at midnight cast an enquiring glance:  
Much the same darkness on the earth and the sky,  
Only here a glow shone glaringly. <sup>34</sup>

---

Widziałem miasto puste, co było mym domem,  
Widziałem wszystkie okna zabite pomrokiem,  
Dawno się nie spotkały z pytających okiem;  
Pordzewiałe zawiasy nie skrzyły pod drzwiami,  
Chyba że zbir pod nocą przyszedł kagańcami  
Wydierać z łona matki ostatnią ofiarę.  
Widziałem dawnych ludzi i te twarze stare,  
Co już w młodzieńczych latach postarzały zbrodnią.  
Szaleli w mieście wściekli, miotali pochodnią  
W tłum bezbronnych zawiązanych; tam z twarzy sądzono,  
Słowo było dowodem, a podłość obroną.  
Widziałem, drgały członki w wygiętym półkolu,  
Kość za kością gonila w wyprężonym bólu.  
Kazał wyciągać żyły mocarz tamtej ziemi,  
By kropla krwi nie wsiąkla, nie uszła przed niemi.  
Po ulicach łowiono, jak ryby do sieci,  
Więziono tam, gdzie oko do dna nie doleci. [...]  
Tam byłem.”

<sup>32</sup> “Uderzeniem kańczuga zginął jej syn mały,  
Zaszumiało jej w głowie, żyły się zbieżały,  
Ucięła mowę, wzrokiem jak sztyletem błyska [...]”

<sup>33</sup> “W jedno miejsce zwaleni, jakby bydłał rzesza,  
Jęczeli – kapłan krzyżem jeszcze ich pociesza,  
Jeszcze im pokazał Chrystusowe znamię,  
Aż mu z krzyżem odcięte stoczyło się ramię.”

Close analysis would doubtless throw up some common motifs in insurrectionary poetry and the work of emigrants following the defeat of the uprising, including part III of Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [Forefathers' eve] (the severing of an arm holding a cross, a prison as a seemingly bottomless pit, the desertion of homes conveyed through the metaphor of empty windows); for the purposes of this sketch, it is perhaps enough to stress a common trait to representations of the defeat of people and – as is particularly worth emphasising – of a city. Passing over the accuracy of Magnuszewski's visions of destruction and suffering in respect to the historically documented actions of the partitioning administration at that moment in time, I shall focus on those shared images, since they not only attest a supra-individual mastery of the rhetoric of defeat, but above all show the identity of an imagination shaped by a conglomeration of direct experiences and memories.

The notes made by Chopin in Stuttgart immediately before and after 16 September 1831 give us an insight into the exceptional intensity of his notion of himself as a "corpse" and of his nearest and dearest left behind in Warsaw. Ryszard Przybylski reads in these notes the hallmarks of a spiritual metanoia, perfectly exemplifying the Romantic anthropology of the transformation of a person passing towards new forms through the symbolic form of the "corpse". Deprived of direct news about his loved ones, Chopin immerses himself in suppositions regarding their fate, being most probably familiar with information concerning the capitulation of Warsaw, which occurred on 7 September, from reports in a special supplement to the *Schwäbischer Merkur* of 16 September 1831.<sup>35</sup> Thus he senses the death of his friends, Jan Matuszyński and Wilhelm Kolberg (both survived), and "sees" the capture of Marcelli Celiński, the death of his mother, the raping of his sisters and the helplessness of his father. Given the lack of first-hand information from the capital, it is not difficult to understand these dramatic images; their drastic character, as Przybylski argues, may have derived from memories rooted in the Chopin family tradition of the massacre of the Praga district of Warsaw carried out in 1794 by the victorious Russian army under the command of Suvorov. Yet the supplications and statements, garbled by the violence of the narration and – although Chopin obviously could not have known it at the time – inaccurate in respect to the true fortunes of his family and friends, were actually born of his knowledge that "the enemy's at the door".<sup>36</sup> And it is that knowledge which triggered a cascade of images of a burned and wrecked city, of hunger, rape, dese-

<sup>34</sup> Magnuszewski, *Wiersze*, excerpts from pp. 67, 68, 69 and 69 respectively.

"Zbudziłem się i w północ badawczo spojrziałem:  
Na ziemi i w niebie jedna ciemność prawie,  
Tylko w tym miejscu luna świeciła jaskrawie."

<sup>35</sup> See commentary to *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina, 1816-1831*, i, 532.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 530.

crated cemeteries and killings. Over them hovers the sense of national ignominy that can only be explained in terms of the silence of God, or perhaps even of some evil concealed within Him: “Oh God you are! – You are and you take no revenge! – Have you not yet had enough of the Muscovite crimes – or – or you’re Moskal yourself!”<sup>37</sup>

The hallucinating narrator from Magnuszewski’s poem also fails to experience any consolation in the reality of consciousness on awakening, since he encounters the darkness that reigns over the world, broken only by a menacing glow. The vision of horrendous events and the horizon of real life enclosed by a symbolic obscurity is the structure of the inner experience of both Magnuszewski and Chopin in the face of defeat. Of course, such an attitude was not foreign to others, as well, either directly involved in insurrectionary activities or far removed from them. The literature of that period also reveals attitudes which subjected that defeat to an operation imparting some sense to it in a political or metaphysical order (cf. poems by Wincenty Pol and Stefan Garczyński from the same collection that employ the Virgilian motif of an avenger rising from the bones of the dead, also present in the earlier poetry of the Polish legions). Of course, Magnuszewski’s poem and Chopin’s notes are not proof that this was a widespread reaction on the part of an entire generation; at most, they indicate that above their very different experiences, talent and artistic imagination, there rose a common *genius loci*, which in everyday situations readily remains silent, revealing itself with the utmost distinctiveness only in exceptional moments. The conversations carried on with judge Borakowski, in which the two creative artists took part as youngsters, could

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 530. Attention has already been drawn to the “transgression” in these words which Mickiewicz’s Konrad ultimately could not bring himself to commit in the Great Improvisation in part III of *Dziady*. A representation of a God who remains silent or aloof appeared in other insurrectionary poems, as well, particularly following the capitulation of Warsaw in September 1831. One such example is Kazimierz Brodziński’s poem ‘Dnia 9 września 1831 R.’ [9 September 1831]:

“Zajęli naszą Świątynię,  
Zbrukali stopy krwawym:  
I kłamliwe modły czynią,  
I wołają, że Bóg z nimi.[...]  
Bóg za chmura niewidomy  
Milczy z swymi piorunami.”  
(They’ve taken over the Temple,  
Soiled it with their blood-stained feet:  
And rendering up false prayers,  
They claim that God is with them. [...]  
God invisible behind his cloud  
Keeps silent with his bolts of lightning.)

In *Poezja powstania listopadowego* [Poetry of the November Rising], ed. Andrzej Zieliński (Wrocław, 1971), 27.

have provided a crucial building-block for that state of affairs. We will never know how those conversations proceeded, but Magnuszewski at least took care to depict the *locum* in which they took place, when writing a tale about a portrait of Stanislaus Augustus painted by Bacciarelli, which hung in his grandfather's drawing-room.

Published in 1840, *Posiedzenie Bacciarellego malarza* [A sitting for Bacciarelli the artist], the tale of an ageing artist who the young Magnuszewski supposedly remembered, depicts the events of the outbreak of the Kościuszko Rising in Warsaw. Spun against that historical background is an account of the artist working on a portrait of the king. First, he paints Stanislaus Augustus' right arm tucked into a silk waistcoat:

[...] then all of a sudden, it was as if something had cast me from the picture! I jumped aside, dropped the brush and broke off my work, and a fanciful notion moved about my head: "Were I to rise, abandon the brush, leave it without colour, without life, without folds and shades, and that face barely outlined, and that attitude, which just a few lines define, and only that arm, that one arm living with that pink sanguine glow which radiates in the fingers, were it to remain by itself, unsupported, living in that inanimate picture, suspended on those few lines or threads that were to constitute the arm of the chair? Were I to leave posterity that painter's riddle, that artist's caprice? Let them think, let them guess, let them add a face, mouth, eyes, features to that arm! And finally, were I to place a great, swathing shadow such as will one day fall from the grave over that living figure of a man? Were I to anticipate death in its effects and leave the grateful future guessing about that arm to people's hearts alone! Who would divine? Who would recognise him, whom everyone knows and adores?"<sup>38</sup>

As we can see, Magnuszewski's Bacciarelli possesses the Romantic awareness of the aesthetic of the fragment, which disturbs, fascinates and draws one into a world unseen – merely divined. The Romantic fragment was a hieroglyph, a notation – difficult to interpret and to comprehend – of a whole, the existence of which it paradoxically – through the lack of its representation – evoked and made manifest. It was a symbol of that whole – a symbol which the Romantics understood as an indivisible assemblage of sign and signification, transporting it from the plane of the shaping of speech or image into the mysterious depths of the link between the poetical figure and the represented object. The figure of the metonym, close to a classicist aesthetic, which one may find in the artist's idea of denoting the "whole" form of the king by means

---

<sup>38</sup> 'Posiedzenie Bacciarellego malarza' [A sitting for Bacciarelli the artist], in Dominik Magnuszewski, *Zemsta panny Urszuli. Posiedzenie Bacciarellego malarza* [Miss Ursula's revenge. A sitting for Bacciarelli the artist], ed. Kazimierz Bartoszyński (Poznań, 1959), 89-90.

of an arm alone, is reinterpreted, reshaped into a historiosophical symbol of changing times and of the shifting assessments that will meet the king after his death.

We shall probably never learn whether the young Chopin heard in the home of judge Borakowski a tale about the artist and the last king of Poland similar to that which his peer Magnuszewski set down in his short story years later. One might expect, however, that, sitting frequently beneath the painting which hung in the drawing-room of a friendly home, he imbibed the atmosphere of the twilight years of the First Republic, embodied by the figure of the judge himself. There is no way of stating unequivocally what connection this circumstance may have had with Chopin's polonaises, in which traditional musical rhetoric was transformed into a "quasi-improvisational disturbance of form"<sup>39</sup>. And not so much due to a lack of unambiguous testimony, but above all on account of the complex matter that is the psyche and memory of a creative artist. One is obliged, therefore, to content oneself with sketching a certain vista that was delineated by the output of Romantic poets, transforming traditional rhetorical figures into Romantic means of expression. And also – as is even more interesting and discernible in Magnuszewski's prose – subordinating them to a hermeneutics that is appropriate to a Romantic style of reception.

To close, one cannot avoid the question as to what links the rather poorly known Magnuszewski, who died a young man, with a Chopin of Europe-wide fame and a Witwicki who was quite widely known among Polish readers? Did their youthful acquaintance, or even friendship, struck up during their Warsaw years give rise to something more than personal sentiment or distant recollections? With the present sketch, I would wish to answer in the positive. It is centred on the conviction that the foundation of the aesthetic awareness, artistic imagination and civic attitudes of these individuals born between 1800 and 1810 were shaped during their time in Warsaw. Early Romantic disputes over art and the events of the November Rising merged into the common experience of a generation, binding together people of most varied talent and differing individual fortunes.

*Translated by John Comber*

---

<sup>39</sup>Tomaszewski, *Chopin*, 346.

