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## Chopin: Visual Contexts

**ABSTRACT:** The drawings, portraits and effigies of Chopin that were produced during his lifetime later became the basis for artists' fantasies on the subject of his work. Just after the composer's death, Teofil Kwiatkowski began to paint *Bal w Hotel Lambert w Paryżu* [Ball at the Hôtel Lambert in Paris], symbolising the unfulfilled hopes of the Polish Great Emigration that Chopin would join the mission to raise the spirit of the nation. Henryk Siemiradzki recalled the young musician's visit to the Radziwiłł Palace in Poznań.

The composer's likeness appeared in symbolic representations of a psychological, ethnological and historical character. Traditional roots are referred to in the paintings of Feliks Wyrzywalski, *Mazurek – grający Chopin* [Mazurka – Chopin at the piano], with a couple of dancers in folk costume, and Stanisław Zawadzki, depicting the composer with a roll of paper in his hand against the background of a forest, into the wall of which silhouettes of country children are merged, personifying folk music.

Pictorial tales about music were also popularised by postcards. On one anonymous postcard, a ghost hovers over the playing musician, and the title *Marsz żałobny Szopena* [Chopin's funeral march] suggests the connection with real apparitions that the composer occasionally had when performing that work.

In the visualisation of music, artists were often assisted by poets, who suggested associations and symbols. Correlations of content and style can be discerned, for example, between Władysław Podkowiński's painting *Marsz żałobny Szopena* and Kornel Ujejski's earlier poem *Marsz pogrzebowy* [Funeral march].

The testimony of people who visited the Cracow apartment of Stanisław Przybyszewski suggests crucial links between Wojciech Weiss's lost painting *Chopin* that hung there and the host's aesthetic writings and legendary sessions of nocturnal improvisations.

Against the background of that iconography, Jerzy Duda-Grac's idea of painting all Chopin's works, subsequently brought together in the cycle *Chopinowi Duda-Grac* [From Duda-Grac for Chopin], is quite exceptional, in terms of its genesis, the extent of Chopin's oeuvre and also the way in which music is transformed into painting. The artist attempted to capture the atmosphere of Polish landscapes visited by the composer, linking them to particular works. The Chopin cycle possesses a clear stylistic and symbolic identity, although it is impossible to establish a universal pattern for translating music into visual art.

Although Zbigniew Rybczyński employed a camera and advanced cinematographic techniques, his depiction of Chopin's *Marche funèbre* from the *Sonata in B flat minor* (in his suite of films *The Orchestra*) refers to Romantic-symbolic interpretations and to previous pictorial visualisations. The director dresses his actors in historical costumes and places them in front of the Paris Opera. To the rhythm of Chopin's music, they play out – using theatrical expression typical of silent film, pantomime, ballet and *tableaux vivants* – a story of maturing and ageing.

KEYWORDS: Fryderyk Chopin, Władysław Podkowiński, Zbigniew Rybczyński, Teofil Kwiatkowski, Jerzy Duda-Gracz, *correspondance des arts*, music in art

## 1.

1.1. Already during Chopin's lifetime many paintings and drawings were being produced which later formed the basis for artistic fantasies on the theme of the composer's music – its ethnic roots and psychological genesis as well as its aesthetic and ideological values. For example, a painting by Henryk Siemiradzki<sup>1</sup> shows the young artist in the salon of the Radziwiłł Palace in Poznań and documents an actual episode from his life, one which had a considerable impact on his subsequent creative and intellectual activities.

The visionary painting by Teofil Kwiatkowski<sup>2</sup>, entitled *Polonez Chopina – Bal w Hotel Lambert w Paryżu* [Chopin's Polonaise – A Ball in Hôtel Lambert in Paris, ca 1849-1860], goes beyond the scope of a mere document. It expresses the unfulfilled ambitions of the entire milieu of the Polish Great Emigration<sup>3</sup> in Paris, who hoped Chopin would join in the mission to awaken the nation spiritually, in which Polish Romantic poets, notably Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), and mystic philosophers like Andrzej Tomasz Towiański (1799-1878) had been enthusiastically involved.

In the painting, Kwiatkowski employs the popular symbols of Poland's glorious past. The space is populated by a crowd of dancing individuals wearing historical costumes; visible are mediæval armour, swords, Polish hussars' characteristic wings, and lances with pennons. The title, however, inevitably centres the viewer's attention on another group of people, gathered in the lower right corner of the work. That particular group comprises the composer sitting at the piano, surrounded by the most immediate circle of his admirers: George Sand (1804-1876), Delfina Potocka (1807-1877), Marcelina Czaratoryska (1817-1894), and Mickiewicz. The painter's suggestion that the eerie crowd of noblemen and knights present in the painting was brought to life by Chopin's music results from opposing these two groups. Chopin is not at all accompanying the dancers who participate in the ball; the latter have their own little orchestra and do not even bother to notice the composer. Moreover, the imagery is made even more unreal by giving the section of space occupied by the dancing crowd dimensions and architectural details more appropriate to some large mythical castle, not nineteenth-century salon.

<sup>1</sup> 1843-1902. Poland's foremost academic painter of the period.

<sup>2</sup> 1809-1891. Kwiatkowski was a friend of the household who also meticulously recorded facts (and images) from the composer's private life.

<sup>3</sup> A group of independence-minded Polish political émigrés in the nineteenth century, who settled in France during the Partitions of Poland (1795-1918), active roughly from 1831 (end of the November Uprising against Russia) to 1870.

The likelihood of a real ball at the Hôtel Lambert becomes doubtful. We are no longer certain whether the dancers dressed in historical costumes are guests of the Czartoryskis [the owners of the Hôtel until 1975], or ghosts from the great national past, recalled from the other world. Allegedly, while on Majorca, Chopin once had a dreamlike vision of a procession of Polish knights, marching in triumph to the rhythm of a polonaise. Most probably, the author [Kwiatkowski] alluded in his painting to that vision, itself enmeshed in legends.<sup>4</sup>

Here, Chopin's music becomes an evocation of patriotic scenes, similar to the ones presented in Mickiewicz's epic, *Pan Tadeusz* [Sir Thaddeus, 1834]; Jan Matejko's (1838-1893) monumental paintings exploring Poland's heroic times of yore; and Stanisław Moniuszko's (1819-1872) opera, *Straszny dwór* [The Haunted Manor, 1861-1864]. Suggestions of Chopin's contemporaries that he devote his energies to writing grand patriotic operas had begun to circulate quite early in his life, while he still lived in Poland. They were to a certain extent justified by his interest in vocal arts and stage productions. In Paris, these expectations had become much more pronounced. In fact, Mickiewicz himself accused Chopin of wasting his talent on "entertaining" the foreigners. The composer's letter to Prince Adam Czartoryski, in which he declared his willingness to join the Towarzystwo Literackie w Paryżu<sup>5</sup> in order to help that society realise its patriotic mission "to the best of his power", had given many people an impulse to believe that the composer was seriously considering such a course of creative action.

As Maria Poprzęcka, the author of a fundamental work on the Polish salon painting, observed, in the latter artistic interpretations Chopin often appeared in unintentionally amusing situations, which symbolised various aspects of his music:

Polish painters had incessantly [...] undertaken attempts at transposing Chopin's music into images, placing the composer now among little shepherds, now among wildly dancing peasants, and now among virgins who allegorised the nation's suffering.<sup>6</sup>

The folk roots of Chopin's music are referenced in the painting by Feliks Michał Wygrzywalski (1875-1944), *Mazurek – grający Chopin* [Mazurka – Chopin at the Piano, 1910], reproduced in Poprzęcka's book. The profile of the

<sup>4</sup> From the description of the painting in Marek Rostworowski (ed.), *Polaków portret własny* [The Poles' Self-portrait], ii (Warszawa: Arkady, 1986), 104-105. One of the personages present in the painting is Prince Adam Czartoryski whose long royal coat alludes to the known efforts to elect him king of Poland [in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth royal power was not inherited, the kings being elected].

<sup>5</sup> The [Polish] Literary Society in Paris, later known as The Historical-Literary Society in Paris, 1832-1893.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Poprzęcka, *Polskie malarstwo salonowe* [Polish salon painting] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1991), 18.

composer at his instrument appears against the background made up of peasant dancers wearing their Sunday best (peacock feathers adorning their hats suggest the Kraków region in Southern Poland). Diluted contours and misty colours symbolise temporal distance – the scene belongs to the sphere of memory. There is also another element in the painting, which belongs to a different psychological dimension: the silhouette of a woman placed in the forefront to the right of the pianist. The arms thrown upwards, her naked torso, taut and leaning backward, wrapped from the waist down in a see-through cloth, might be perceived as an academic study of a nude were it not for its advanced dematerialisation. The silhouette is translucent and both the piano and even the more distant background can be seen behind it. Thus, the silhouette – in spatial and temporal terms closer to the composer than the dancers – plays an undefined symbolic rôle and is even less real than the memories of youth.

A second painting, also listed in Poprzęcka's work, *Portret fantastyczny Fryderyka Chopina* [Fryderyk Chopin – fantasy portrait, 1919] by Stanisław Zawadzki (1878-1960), accentuates ethnic roots of the subject's musical output in yet another way. The composer, whose facial features are patterned after those in the well-known painting by Ary Scheffer, remains seated outdoors, a forest behind him; he is holding a roll of – presumably staff – paper. In the background, on both sides of his head two peasant children, a girl and a boy, are symmetrically placed. They personify Polish folk music: the girl is singing, while the boy is blowing into a simple reed pipe. This symbolic framework is much more rational and unambiguous than in the previous examples; it brings forth a kind of surrealism, in which the imaginary elements are depicted with the same level of reality as actual persons (i.e. Chopin) – without exaggerating semantic differences between the components of the visual narrative.

1.2. Postcards issued, among others, by the Salon Malarzy Polskich [The Salon of Polish Painters] in Kraków in the early twentieth century, were another medium employed to popularise visual narratives inspired by music. One of them, anonymous, depicts Chopin surrounded by phantoms floating above while he is at the keyboard. The silhouette of the composer is approached in quite a typical manner and, very likely, alludes to the striking study by his partner, George Sand, a brief scene captured for eternity: he is bending forward over a sheet of paper; an inkwell with a quill within his reach, the intensity of his gaze suggesting the very beginning of the creative act. Almost effortlessly, the viewer recognises the subtext of Sand's drawing – the man's struggle with the musical matter. Her simple compositional decision to place the composer's profile on the right side, facing left, contrary to the culturally

accepted Western reading habit from left to right, intensifies greatly the visual impact of the image.

In turn, on the Kraków postcard the composer's profile is reversed; he is on the left side of the instrument now, as if in a concert hall in relation to the listeners. He is inclined backwards a little; his chin slightly raised and closed eyes intimate an inward moment. That deep mental effort gives birth to wraiths, which in fact occasionally haunted the artist. In a letter to Sand's daughter, Solange, he mentioned such an experience during a public performance in Manchester:

I executed the allegro and scherzo, more or less correctly, and was just about to begin the march, when all of the sudden I saw emerging from under the half-opened lid the same wretched apparition which I had one gloomy evening already seen in Chartreuse. I had to leave the stage for a while to regain composure [...].<sup>7</sup>

The Kraków postcard refers to that particular march and its associated legend, its emotional facet enhanced by the anonymous author by introducing a patriotic allusion: a woman covering her eyes in a gesture of despair, a motif often seen in the work of Artur Grottger.<sup>8</sup>

1.3. A poet is often a painter's helper, putting forward linguistic associations and symbols. If, for instance, there is no information available on any direct connections between the Władysław Podkowiński<sup>9</sup> painting *Marsz żałobny Chopina* [Chopin's funeral march, 1894] and the earlier poem *Marsz pogrzebowy, Finale* [Funeral march, finale] by Kornel Ujejski<sup>10</sup> from the cycle *Tłumaczenia Szopena* [Translations from Chopin, 1857-1860, publ. 1866]<sup>11</sup>, or with any other poetic interpretation of Chopin's work, psychological and stylistic correlations between the two works are nonetheless patently obvious.

<sup>7</sup> Krystyna Kobylańska (ed.), *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina z George Sand i jej dziećmi* [Fryderyk Chopin's correspondence with George Sand and her children], transl. by Julia Hartwig, i (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981), 225-226.

<sup>8</sup> 1837-1867. One of Poland's leading painters and graphic designers of the period, known for his highly expressive and allegorical portrayals of the struggle for independence during the January Uprising of 1863 and its tragic aftermath.

<sup>9</sup> 1866-1895. Justly admired for his masterful technique inspired both by Impressionists and Symbolists, as well as for innovative interpretations of traditional motifs, as in the powerfully erotic *Szał uniesień* [Ecstasy; literally: madness of ecstasy], 1894.

<sup>10</sup> 1823-1897. An extraordinarily gifted Romantic poet, in whom many saw an inheritor of Mickiewicz, Ujejski ended up being a minor addition to the Polish romantic tradition.

<sup>11</sup> In Polish letters that collection was the first attempt at intersemiotic "transposition" of music into poetry. It comprised twelve poems inspired by and based on concrete pieces by Chopin. 3rd Edition of 1893 was extended, which its title reflected: *Tłumaczenia Szopena i Beethovena* [Translations from Chopin and Beethoven].

The poem in question alternates the narrator's pain and defiance while grieving for his beloved with a description of the typical constituents of a procession of mourners at the time: horses, hearse, coffin, ringing bells [...].

### Funeral March

So many bells! Where are they?  
 Are they in my head, ringing?  
 Whither drift swarms of priests, darkly singing?  
 Black car is rolling by, two paces ahead.  
 What darkness! – That black car  
 struck my two eyes dead.<sup>12</sup>

In the Podkowiński painting the action takes place in the dark for but one area lighted slightly by a glow over a procession of spectres. The usual elements of contemporary funerary conduct – horses and the hearse – are missing. Instead, the morbid mood is deepened by clouds of crows which fill clearings between trees. Neither Ujejski nor Podkowiński places the composer in their respective works. They transpose his funereal music into stories about a funeral; the funeral, in its turn, creates a basis for expression of feelings by an unidentified lyrical subject. In the case of Podkowiński one might suspect that he himself is that subject – shown off centre, in the shade, as an observer. Only the reflection of light on his face and a hand outstretched in anguish indicate his emotional ties with the funeral procession. Here, a possible presence of autobiographical subtext might be deduced from the fact that the painter had already become aware of his terminal illness, which in the end did not permit him to finish the work. Perhaps this state of technical incompleteness determined the extremely dark hues both of the content and its colours, and the only optically bright area of the painting remains its most indecipherable: what one sees there, the shapes and lines, does not constitute a situation clear enough to interpret it in symbolic terms.

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<sup>12</sup> Kornel Ujejski, *Tłumaczenia Szopena i Beethovena* [Translations from Chopin and Beethoven] (Lviv, 1893). 11. [Transl. Piotr Grella-Możejko]. In Polish:

**“Marsz pogrzebowy**

Tyle dzwonów! Gdzie te dzwony?

Czy w mej głowie huczą?

Kędy idą roje księży z taką pieśnią kruczą?

Tu przede mną o dwa kroki czarny wóz się toczy

jak mi ciemno! – ten wóz czarny

ściemnił moje oczy.”

## 2.

2.1. Stanisław Przybyszewski's<sup>13</sup> guests remembered that in his Kraków flat a canvas by Wojciech Weiss<sup>14</sup>, entitled *Chopin*, hung next to those by Edvard Munch, Francisco Goya, and Stanisław Wyspiański.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the painting is now lost. One may only discern its content based on the essay by the critic Stanisław Lack (1876-1909), in which the author uses the polonised, phonetic spelling of the composer's name, Szopen.

“Szopen” [is] a piece, which in a strange and almost ultimate way unveils the mystery of that artist, his creative method, and his treatment of musical subjects. Szopen is not a master, who carried away by his playing plunges into ecstasy, sensual madness, and forgets about the entire world, etc., etc., to use the favourite expressions taken from the dictionary of our current sentimentalist school. No, he is a Szopen emerging from inundation of tone colours, a man whose earthly shape is barely visible inside rocking rhythms, which aim to enmesh him, out of him make a whole, in him find balance and respite. And in that painting – where practically only colours flock in together and amalgamate into a cohesive mass; where only shreds of lines remain, barely hinting at a presence of some underlying sketched out form – is revealed Weiss's mode of thinking: human figure as the ultimate focal point of all evolution.<sup>16</sup>

This is a comprehensive and psychologically insightful study, which, however, does away with concrete details about the specific technical attributes of the work. Despite that, it still allows the receiver to understand why Przybyszewski valued Weiss's painting enough to have it hung in the central spot

<sup>13</sup> 1868-1927. Novelist, playwright, poet, and philosopher, leading representative of the Polish modernist movement, *Młoda Polska* [Young Poland]. He spent part of his life in Germany and Norway, where he enjoyed a tremendous reputation as writer, thinker, scandalist and, last but not least, electrifying interpreter of Chopin's music – while drunk. While in Berlin and Norway, he belonged to the elite of the German-Scandinavian bohemian *milieu*, having met, and in some instances befriended, Richard Dehmel, Edvard Munch, August Strindberg, also Knut Hamsun, Henrik Ibsen, Theodor Kittelsen, Gustav Vigeland, Julie Wolfthorn, to mention just a few. By them he was influenced, no doubt about it – and influenced them in his turn. Today remembered chiefly for his outrageous lifestyle (making any debauched rock or rap star, be it male or female, look like a well-behaved schoolchild), his importance during that era is hard to overestimate and must be taken and considered seriously.

<sup>14</sup> 1875-1950. Known for his exquisite nude studies as well as his contribution to Polish Symbolism, Expressionism and, much later, Socialist Realism.

<sup>15</sup> 1867-1907. One of the most versatile Polish artists. Dramatist, painter, designer, poet, representative of the Young Poland modernist movement. According to Czesław Miłosz, the powerful emotional impact of Stanisław Wyspiański innovative dramas opened a new era in Polish theatre.

<sup>16</sup> Stanisław Lack, 'Wojciech Weiss', *Życie* 1 [Life] (1900), 9.

in his salon. There, the legendary, hours-long, nocturnal music sessions were taking place, during which the host interpreted Chopin's compositions with extraordinary *disinvoltura*. The painting must have matched the character of the exalted improvisations, which many tendentiously accused of being scenes of Satanist excess, whereas in reality they signified the highest patriotic tribute to the composer, whose foreign-sounding surname appeared to be "some sorry accident, unpleasant error, because Szopen's mind was as overwhelmingly Polish as that of Matejko, or Grottger [...]"<sup>17</sup>. Chopin becomes a prophet; the source of light, which shows the nation the direction it should choose; a revelation and embodiment of the "courageous Nation's mind". He is now a Messiah, the one chosen by Providence to suffer from the "most horrifying tortures" as a penance for mankind's sins. In his music resonates a tone

[...] powerful and tortured, that at Maciejowice<sup>18</sup> gibbered in mad prayers; the tone of despair, pain, full of curses and rebellion and horrible calls: Oh God, why did you [...]; the howl of the nation that died in agony in the trenches of Warsaw<sup>19</sup>, that only at a graveyard finds its consolation, and that on its bloody knees crawls at the feet of the Celestial Mother to beg for pity for its starving children [...].<sup>20</sup>

It appears that the visually stimulating poetic fantasies, whose themes were based on the selected Chopin pieces, are "scripts" for Przybyszewski's own famous improvisations, as in the following example:

### **Maestoso**

In a brown study, quiet contemplation, rhythmically interrupted by the soul's sudden spasms – the boundless melancholy of flat plains; longing fingers wandering across the strings of the sky-high harp of agony. And suddenly: a loud yell – half triumph and half fear of lashing pain – shoots forth as if out of a storm whose origins are unknown, its aim to smother the deeply hidden torment: Dance, my soul, dance!<sup>21</sup>

2.2. Przybyszewski is also the author of a study on the psychological origins of the respective creative outputs of Chopin and Nietzsche.<sup>22</sup> In it, the German

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<sup>17</sup> Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Chopin a naród* [Chopin and His Nation] (Kraków, 1910), 13. Both Matejko and Grottger were of foreign extraction.

<sup>18</sup> 10 October 1794. The decisive battle of the 1794 insurrection against Russia.

<sup>19</sup> 4 November 1794. The fall of Warsaw followed by inhuman slaughter of the civilian population by the "victorious" Russians.

<sup>20</sup> Przybyszewski, *Chopin a naród*, 36.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 32 (*Mazurka*, Op. 42 No. 1).

<sup>22</sup> Stanisław Przybyszewski, 'Z psychologii jednostki twórczej. Chopin i Nietzsche' [From psychology of the creative individual. Chopin and Nietzsche], in "*Synagoga Sza-*

philosopher is treated as Chopin's complementation, his "reverse side". "Where Szopen ends, Nietzsche begins" – thus Przybyszewski begins his "translation" of music into philosophy, the process based on analysis and deduction. The relationship between Chopin and Przybyszewski might be seen in analogous terms – in the latter's autobiographical notes detectable is his conviction as to his spiritual bond with the great composer. The writer stresses the strong musical potential of his own mind, like Chopin's Polish through and through, and like Chopin's shaped by the monotonous landscape, "wild gambols accompanied by the wind on monstrous pipes", as well as by the alloy of folk music, popular church songs, and pieces associated with the nobleman's manor culture. Przybyszewski's nocturnal improvisations, in which he treated the Chopin material with much freedom, give the impression of manifesting that confederacy of minds rather than being mere artistic self-expression.

In the concluding section of his work, Przybyszewski sketches out a vision of new, synthetic art, in which

[...] will exist the uninterrupted scalar progression from sound to word to colour, without today's limitations; when full transposition of sound into word and colour and vice versa will be possible; when our minds will achieve a higher degree of sophistication so as to express each word effortlessly in its inherent visual and aural quality [...].<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, Przybyszewski's improvisations and literary efforts to capture musical essence were forays beyond borders, as was the lost painting by Weiss. The extant preliminary drawings allow us to recreate the direction in which the artist's vision had been developing. The first sketch depicts Chopin's face according to his watercolour portrait of 1836 by Maria Wodzińska.<sup>24</sup> The second one recalls the 1847 portrait by Ary Scheffer. The seventh – with its distinctive profile, the way the head is inclined, even the hairline – is most likely based on, and almost identical in some details to, the already discussed drawing by George Sand. To that basic template the painter adds a vortex of lines which, at one and the same time, constitute the background and represent a multiple outline of the hands running across the keyboard. Weiss, like Przybyszewski in his eccentric improvisations, expresses his own impressions invoked by music, but the decidedly linear and graphic character of that particular sketch does not correspond well to Lack's "inundation of tone colours", or "colours flocking in together". These statements well encapsulate, however, the earlier pastel by

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*tana*" i inne eseje ["Satan's Synagogue" and other essays], ed. and transl. Gabriela Matuszek (Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 57, 65.

<sup>24</sup> 1819-1896. Very successful and pioneering woman painter, at one time Chopin's fiancée. Due to Chopin's ill health, her family prevented the relationship going any further.

Weiss, *Muzyka. Studium koloru* [Music. A study in colour, 1898], which depict correlations between the natural order of colours in the electromagnetic (prismatic) spectrum and the order of pitches of the musical scale.

The pastel is worthy of attention not as a full-fledged piece, but as a record of the artist's preliminary work on a taxing technical problem. The space is framed by bold lines into a field within which is placed a pianist at the keyboard (the only visible part of the instrument). The pianist is surrounded by a whirl of colours gathered into yellow, red, blue and green smudges, lines, and contours. On the outside of the field, and in a rather perfunctory manner, the artist drew two musical staves. The longer one contains a "white" diatonic scale (without chromatic notes). Beneath each note one of the primary colours appears. The notes written on the second staff are combined into dyads and triads, every grouping accompanied by a corresponding "dyad" or "triad" made up of primary colours selected and joined in accordance with the relationships established on the first staff. Therefore, Weiss's sketch demonstrates in a simple way transposition of sounds into colours, serving also as a key to interpreting the content of visual impressions appearing within the frame.

Similar speculations have been conducted since the times of Newton and Goethe, sometimes broadened – within the framework of the concept termed *correspondance des arts* – by incorporation and exploration of other aspects – and other arts. These ideas have appeared in a variety of artistic realisations, notably in the work of Wassily Kandinsky and Alexander Scriabin, among others. Despite that, such concerns are absent from Weiss's latter work. His initial musical preoccupations seem to have evaporated almost without a trace, without becoming creative strategy. They may still be present, although not in an explicit or direct manner – echoes of musical treatment can still be detected in another painting from the same period, *Wieczorny promień* [Evening ray, ca 1898], as well as in the colouristic "instrumentation" of his other paintings, especially *Upał* [Heat, 1898]. *Upał* represents the same type of "tonality" influencing the atmosphere generated by a painting, as in James A. Whistler's works, which he branded "symphonies" or "harmonies".

While that particular tradition is not overtly manifest in Przybyszewski's work, his beliefs regarding the possibilities of "translating sound into words and colours" cannot be separated from it. It is easier to relate his visionary notions to the Expressionistic paintings by Weiss, made in the same period as the now lost *Szopen*. In *Opętanie* [Madness, 1899], Weiss depicts the elemental power of dance by drawing a crowd of black-contoured silhouettes in dynamic poses, appearing against a red background. In *Taniec* [Dance, 1899], he paints a procession of naked bodies holding hands and dancing around what looks like man-made, brownish heaps of earth or hardened sand. In

these two paintings, the artist initiates a dialogue with Friedrich Nietzsche's symbolic interpretation of dance laid out in *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Here, the fact that Weiss received a very thorough musical education – he played violin and piano<sup>25</sup> – allowing him to experience music on a deeper level, is not without significance.

Connections between Weiss's pastel *Muzyka. Studium koloru* (and his subsequent works) with Przybyszewski's philosophical and creative activities are obvious, yet it would be far-fetched to premise on that basis that in the painter's lost study of Chopin the writer's Expressionist musical interpretations were successfully wed to the rational idea of Newton.

### 3.

3.1. Given its origins and sheer scope of the undertaking, as well as the manner in which music was transposed into a series of paintings, Jerzy Duda-Gracz's<sup>26</sup> idea to express on canvas all of Chopin's compositions, is unique.

Duda-Gracz developed the concept almost by accident. From one of his foreign voyages, a visit to the Beethoven museum in Bonn, Germany, he brought back a material trace of the composer's earthly existence, his death mask. Then, during another trip, this one to the rural community of Poturzyce, which Chopin visited in his youth, the painter was mightily impressed by the centuries-old trees he saw there. According to him, they must have "remembered" the young musician. That encounter with monumental nature had proven fertile for his imagination and gave impetus for further work. And thus two seemingly unrelated journeys resulted in a decision to commemorate Chopin's *oeuvre*. Duda-Gracz's motivation was evidently emotional, not artistic – it resulted from the very fact the music was already "out there", not from its æsthetic value. Explained he:

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Szkicownik Wojciecha Weissza* [The sketchbook of Wojciech Weiss], ed. Irena A. Weissowa, Stanisław Weiss (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1976).

<sup>26</sup> 1941-2004. Duda-Gracz was among Poland's most original and prolific painters, widely admired for his ability to combine serious social reflection with sharp satire and cruel mockery (particularly during the Communist rule), as in his *Jeźdźcy Apokalipsy, czyli fucha* [The Horsemen of Apocalypse, or, a sideline, 1977], in which three caricatured, mad-looking labourers are pulling frantically a heavy concrete mixer, the job obviously much better suited for a truck. The subtext of the painting – two labourers flanking the leader cautiously looking to their sides – was at that time understood instantly: the three were paid under the table to build a house for someone; to do that – state employees though they were – they had to use a piece of state-owned construction equipment, used on the site where they were lawfully employed. Hence their anxiety while pulling the mixer toward the illegal construction site. Sidelines of that sort were rampant in Communist-run Poland in that period.

I wanted in some way to tell about this music, to try to materialise it, but also to dot the i's and cross the t's. I wanted to sum up my entire creative career with a strong Polish accent.<sup>27</sup>

The painter makes the decision not yet aware of how many pieces Chopin composed, nor what they were. Not until later does he familiarise himself with Chopin's output through reading biographical studies, essays, listening to the music – and only when finally in possession of the entire Chopin catalogue, does he comprehend the size of the task he faces and the necessary amount of time needed to complete it. It takes him two years worth of preparations to attain mental readiness and to design a timetable, while constantly mulling over the creative matter of the intended paintings. He reads books. Later, however, when ready to begin, he tries to push aside the ballast of the freshly acquired knowledge, fearing he could fall into the trap of pompousness, didacticism, and tediousness. His dilemma of whether to create paintings based on what he had learnt, or on how he felt while listening to the music, is solved in favour of the latter, spontaneous, approach – the direct aural experience. The painter opts out of designing strategies and artistic concepts; he yields to what he is “hearing inside”; to what his heart desires; to his internal yearnings and dreams. Moreover, he considers the lack of musical knowledge to be an advantage, supposedly allowing his mind to roam free. In spite of that, his imagination calls forth a string of fairly stereotypical associations built upon the well-known biographical motifs as well as the national and patriotic contexts of the composer's oeuvre. The music's visualisation is based on a template whose ingredients incorporate the landscape of the wide Polish plains, trees, and thick backwoods. To them are added allegorical components of the national spirit: folk motifs (peasants, forest ghosts), traditional elements of the landowning gentry culture (ruined manors), as well as emblems of the nation's patriotic past and martyrdom.

In the course of four years, a sizeable series of paintings came into being, complemented by “shrouds”, i.e. canvases devoted to the unfinished and lost works, whose “immaterial” quality is underlined by the motif of loosely dangling cloth. The total number of paintings exceeds that of Chopin's catalogued compositions.<sup>28</sup> Eventually, the collection was arranged analogically to how the Chopin catalogue is organised: divided into opuses and genres (ballades,

<sup>27</sup> Krystyna Bochenek, ‘295 razy Chopin według Dudy-Gracza’ [295 times Chopin according to Duda-Gracz], in *Gazeta Wyborcza/Duży Format* 10/26 (2005), 9.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the catalogue of the exhibition “Duda-Gracz Chopinowi” [Duda-Gracz for Chopin] (Warszawa: Teatr Wielki – Opera Narodowa, October-November 2005). Analysed here, Duda-Gracz's “Chopin cycle” (1999-2003) comprises 313 paintings vs. 295 pieces of music. The numerical discrepancy stems from some of the large cyclic forms having been interpreted as single paintings and multi-panel representations.

etudes, preludes etc.). Like their musical predecessors, the individual paintings are inscribed by opus numbers and keys, with the following complementary information added by the painter: the name of the place where each canvas was finished and the date of its completion.

As stated above, Duda-Gracz does not hesitate to give his paintings a native Polish character by making use of specific attributes of the landscape, mainly from Central Poland, and elements of the national mythos. He searches for primordial, natural landscapes which now impact the viewer through their own unspoiled beauty, now serve as backgrounds for visual metaphors. His style represents various aspects of mimetic art – from realism which makes it possible to recognise the places captured within the frames, to irregular, blurred blots of colour representing the spheres of earth and sky. The wide Polish plains, diagonally cut through by sandy roads, recur quite often in the paintings. They are populated by airy apparitions, tattered puppets, scarecrows dressed in rugged clothes. Processions and sabbaths of unreal beings, ghouls inhabiting the darkest recesses of forests and quagmires (the usual products of folk imagination as they appear in popular legends and fables), symbols of the nation's martyred history (military accoutrements, bloodied phantoms) recreate the Polish Romantic idiom and refer to the tradition shaped by Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [Forefathers' Eve, 1823-1832], Wyspiański's *Wesele* [The wedding, staged 1901], Stefan Żeromski's<sup>29</sup> *Popioły* [Ashes, 1904]. Sometimes it is difficult, however, to make a guess as to the reasoning that led the artist to establish the connections he did between visual interpretation and the music to which it corresponds. For instance, two of the four *Mazurkas*, Op. 33, are represented by landscapes worthy of the best Flemish masters, while in the remaining two we are given a column of marching ghosts and a whirlwind of indistinct silhouettes waving red rags. On more rare occasions there appear products of man's civilisation: little manors, houses, peasants' ancient ladder wagons, the horses conspicuously missing. Indeed, the absence of animals in these paintings is striking, the only representatives of fauna being a single horse carrying an uhlán in the painting of the song *Wojak* [The warrior]; a swallow in the canvas inspired by another song, *Posel* [The messenger], in whose text by Stefan Witwicki the bird actually appears; and heron-like birds which enliven two pieces devoted to the *Grande Valse Brillante in E flat Major*, Op. 18 and the *Minute Waltz in D flat Major*, Op. 64, respectively.

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<sup>29</sup> 1864-1925. Stefan Żeromski was associated with the naturalist school and the anti-positivist, Modernist movement popularly known as the Young Poland. Sometimes controversial in the extreme, he enjoyed tremendous reputation and was called the "steersman of Polish letters".

According to the painter, many paintings begged to be divorced from the legends associated with them. As an example, he quoted the *Revolutionary Etude in C Minor*, Op. 10 No. 12, which he demythologised in a logical, rather than æsthetic, manner. The resultant painting negates the stereotypes: “Chopin’s piano, the Warsaw Uprising [of 1944] or the November Insurrection [of 1830] and other scenes ingrained in our nation’s martyrology. In the true spirit of contradiction I decided to paint a drama of Nature [...]” He rejected his first idea of a forest fire, because it could confuse the viewer – the fire might have been started by negligence. Ultimately, he painted a red, glowing blaze from which – as if made of smoke – arises the silhouette of a black angel, which allegorises the composer himself: “Chopin was an angel. So spoke of him his contemporaries. This is why in the end I painted an angel”.

Nevertheless, when it comes to avoiding historical allusions, Duda-Gracz is not consistent and does not follow his own rules to the letter. Paradoxically, he introduces such allusions in paintings dealing with abstract compositions devoid of such contexts, like the opening movement of *Piano Concerto in F Minor*. Also, his manner of visualising complex pieces, sonatas and concertos, reveals how differently he understands and approaches the issue of cyclic form in music and painting. It is especially apparent in the paintings devoted to the sonatas – these pictorial representations lack any attributes that differentiate individual movements of Chopin’s masterpieces. The sonata cycle is reduced to one huge canvas, whose surface is divided into four quarters along the horizontal and vertical axes. Around the horizontal axis stretches an area of colours and shapes common to all four segments; this area forms a basis (earth) for two upper segments and the source of lines and figures sliding down into the two lower segments. In terms of visual material and composition, the narrative continuity occurs between the pairs of segments coterminous alongside their vertical edges – I and II (upper) and III and IV (lower), although no perceptible differences occur between segments II and III.

#### 4.

4.1. The concertos are illustrated in a more linear fashion. Although a clear horizontal axis is absent, compositional continuity is provided by an elongated landscape divided implicitly into three parts stretching from left to right. All three parts share the same “key” – the same hue and expressive climate as well as the same, uniform horizon line. The hue of the middle part of the *F Minor Concerto* painting is a bit warmer; also, there is more space surrounding its central elements, *i.e.* two pieces of cloth floating above the earth and a dim silhouette of a woman with Black African facial features, whose torso is wrapped in a threadbare cloth made either of dark chiffon or half-

transparent foil. Perhaps this is yet another Duda-Gracz tongue-in-cheek reaction to Chopin's own commentary, in which the latter talks about the female ideal and "the most fervent amatory passions", of which that particular adagio is a souvenir. Visual rendition of Movement III, *Rondo*, might too be identified as a parody, albeit a subtler one, portraying a pair of sloppily dancing rag dolls, barely resemblant of human shapes.

The triptych in which the *E Minor Concerto* finds its visual representation is characterised by similar unity of expression and painting technique, but human figures are not to be found there, even as ghosts or human-like forms. Narrative integrity stems from the painting's preselected visual material, a three-part landscape. Part I depicts the edge of a forest, thick on the left then thinning and descending lower and lower toward the right side. In Part II the material is reduced to a single dwarfish tree, its thin branches sloping down to the ground; the tree, painted in cold tones, is here seen in a chilly autumnal morning mist; in terms of the implied climate, the part differs from the music, which according to the composer was intended to express "pleasant, romantic memories recalled in beautiful springtime, but under the moon". The concluding Part III, *Rondo*, is allegorised by a few more puny trees, which look even more dejected in the tormenting wind, an image aiming perhaps at encapsulating the kinæsthetic traits of Chopin's music.

Duda-Gracz's formal strategies employed to create these paintings and intended to provide internal homogeneity (such as common colour range, mood, narrative motifs) disregard the traditional organisational principles of the sonata and concerto forms, in which the individual movements differ in character and use a variety of themes and their metamorphoses. Neither the broad, tripartite panoramic view corresponding to the concertos, nor the quadripartite division of the canvas in the sonata paintings bear any relation to the formal outlines of the original musical compositions. Nevertheless, certain analogies might be noticed between the overall character of the individual concerto movements and their matching pictorial renditions. Generally, the opening part of each triptych comprises numerous elements in complex relations; the second one is fairly uniform and static, like the concertos' melodious middle movements; while the concluding, third, part is permeated with agility, but also simplicity, lightness, and transparency, capturing in the process the dance-like spirit of the Chopin rondos. The painter's decision-making process vacillates between pure intuition and logical solutions, as, for instance, when facing the problem of how to transform the temporal dimensions of music into the spatial dimensions of painting:

I realised that if an Etude I painted has the dimensions of 120 by 190 centimetres, and the corresponding piece lasts, say, five minutes, then how am I supposed to

paint a concerto, whose duration is, say, an hour? [...] I knew the dimensions had to vary because not all the paintings ought to be big.<sup>30</sup>

In music, the duration of a piece is determined *a posteriori* and results from compositional processes affecting its material, themes, techniques and formal concepts (which somehow influence tempi). In the traditionally practised easel painting that process is reversed – the decision as to the dimensions of the work is made *a priori*. The artist begins by first determining the size of the work, its format, and then the actual composition follows. Although it might be said that in both fields the size of the work is specified by the importance of the material and predetermined subject matter, these relationships are purely intuitive and mirror individual ambitions.

Duda-Graczy solved that problem in arbitrary fashion, without getting into analysing any elaborate interaction between the dimensional and aesthetic values of the finished paintings. Both of his *Piano Concerto* visualisations are identical in size: each occupies a canvas measuring 120 by 480 centimetres, divided into three equal segments that correspond to the three musical segments of the *Concerto* cycle, naturally much varied in terms of their respective durations.<sup>31</sup> Spatial organisation of the *Sonata* paintings was determined arbitrarily as well. They are all pictured on canvasses of the same length, 360 centimetres (calculated as the sum of parts included in a single row), but of different height (for the *Sonata in C Minor* it is 53 centimetres; for the other two, 70 centimetres each). Furthermore, the *Sonata* paintings betray different, unequal, internal divisions. While in the first one all four segments are of equal size, in the second the outer segments are longer than the inner ones, and in the third segments I and III are longer than the other two.

4.2. When approaching the other pieces by Chopin, the painter assumed that forms such as *Etude*, *Prelude*, or *Song* represent “lighter” genres. Consequently, he employed watercolour and tempera to paint them, whereas the larger forms are always painted in oils. This unified treatment and approach to forms and genres caused no small distortion of aesthetic values – *Etudes C minor*, Op. 10 No. 12 and *A minor*, Op. 25 No. 11 have lost their lofty heroism, while *Etude C major*, Op. 10 is deprived of its tempestuous scalar motion. The intimate lyricism of the *Mazurkas* has disappeared; as oil paintings, they demonstrate a much higher degree of energy and internal dynamics than the *Etudes*. Due to its delicate nature, watercolour implies smaller sizes and

<sup>30</sup> Bochenek, ‘295razy Chopin’, 10.

<sup>31</sup> For comparison’s sake, in the Emanuel Ax recording with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy, durations of the movements are as follows: *Concerto in E Minor*: I – 20:19, II – 9:56, III – 10:20; *Concerto in F minor*: I – 14:55, II – 9:19, III – 8:45.

therefore the *Prelude* paintings are much more modestly sized than those of the *Mazurkas*, Op. 25.

Application of a predetermined painting technique – watercolour – to visualise the *Etudes*, *Preludes* and *Songs* often turns out to be the chief method of differentiating genre pieces and giving them identity. Although in the *Mazurka* oils a number of various motifs and technical solutions may be distinguished, they can nonetheless be reduced to the common principle of improvising within a quite limited repertoire of iconographic resources. Even seen from a narrower personal perspective, the painter's imagination evades any attempt at ascribing to it a uniform code of inspiration. Not surprisingly, the *Nocturnes* are painted in nightly hues, every now and then coloured by the red radiance occurring at sunset or sunrise; occasionally, dark phantoms reveal themselves there. On the other hand, a number of night landscapes stay away from the archetypal connections with death and ghosts, which frequently come out in the visualisations of other genres. Some *Nocturnes* are in fact lighter and more cheerful than the gloomy paintings such as *Mazurka in A Minor*, No. 50, *Notre temps*. The latter's pictorial vision – a densely set cluster of massive headstones (perhaps Mazzevoth) standing erect in a dreary wood – is by no means justified by the mood of that composition, nor by the fact that it belongs to Chopin's posthumous opus (some paintings of the "posthumous" series are in garish colours and suggest light moods).

4.3. Duda-Gracz's Chopin collection constitutes a very interesting object of study, illustrating the many facets of visualising artistically organised sound. By undertaking valiantly to express in images the entire Chopin catalogue, the artist laid bare – and sometimes articulated – a number of problems specific to that area of research. A great many solutions he proposed beg further reflection. They seem very subjective, based on imprecise, even erroneous, premises. This applies not only to unclear metaphors whose logic is elusive and whose bond with Chopin's works is doubtful, but also to the direct sensuous analogies between image and sound, which the painter flagrantly ignores. There are many examples of such discrepancies. For instance, the *A flat major Tarantella*, Op. 43, which – according to no less an interpreter than Robert Schumann – is so suggestive that it immediately brings forth an impression of a recklessly spinning mad dancer, and so strong that we fall immediately into the "spinning mood"<sup>32</sup>, was pictured as a cluster of fragile, dry stalks lying on silver-grey snow. *Bolero*, Op. 19, which sounded to Schumann like a "subtle composition, intoxicated with love [...] an image full of southern

<sup>32</sup> Igor Belza, *Fryderyk F. Chopin* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PAX, 1980), 271.

heat and shyness, of devotion and chastity”<sup>33</sup>, was expressed by the painter as an old, gnarly trunk stripped of bark.

## 5.

5.1. Zbigniew Rybczyński uses a camera and advanced film techniques, and the way in which he pictures the *Funeral March* of the *Sonata in B flat minor* invokes the Romantic-Symbolic interpretive modes, as well as the old methods of pictorial interpretations taken from painting. *Funeral March* is part of a suite, entitled *The Orchestra*, which also includes film visualisations of works by Mozart, Albinoni, Schubert, Rossini, and Ravel. Using these compositions as the foundations, Rybczyński explores a variety of relationships between music and image: formal, kinetic, expressive, philosophical. The individual links (*i.e.* films) become threads, or repositories, of these relationships – their quantity, intelligibility and rôle in ascertaining narrative meaning. Within this web of interactions, music works in each film as a carrier of its structural layout and manages its kinæsthetic qualities. Such an approach to formal structuring makes the films in question distinctly different from paintings. Unlike paintings, which are only general metaphors, or syntheses, the films in some manner become scores, whose content is notated on consecutive frames following the course of the music, NB absolutely without the slightest intervention from the director. Additionally, Chopin’s *Funeral March* determines the types of characters in the film and their behaviours, illustrating the process of growing up and ageing.

5.2. Rybczyński dresses his actors in nineteenth century costumes and places them in front of the Paris Opéra. That basic historical context of the work is then altered by their acting – its expressive world is typical of the silent cinema period, pantomime, ballet, and “living pictures”. This “sur-conventional” effect is repeated on the philosophical level through ironic treatment of stereotypes such as “gifts from above”, symbols of martyrdom. In this part of the suite Rybczyński makes an exception – he literally inscribes music into frames and makes it an ontological component of the film. This is achieved as follows. The director makes the actors face the camera, but they are placed behind a gigantic dummy keyboard, on which they pretend to play. Through the tool of its visual materialisation – the keyboard – music escapes from the background and contributes to the overall organisation of movement; it also determines the rôles and stage behaviour of the actors, who are participating in a mournful ceremony. The keyboard is placed in the foreground, joined to the bottom edge of the frame across its entire width. From the viewer’s per-

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 202, 298.

spective, the keyboard marks the lower border of the image and – since the actors' silhouettes appear blurred and unclear – simultaneously constitutes the only stable element of the scene. The keyboard limits the viewpoint: the silhouettes are only shown from their waists up. They emerge from underneath the keyboard, touch it lightly, and then bounce off it and rapidly disappear beyond the sides of the frame. The routine is performed to the rhythm of the march, but against the rules of gravity and playing technique, where hitting keys is more important than removing fingers from them. Now and then we see hands, outstretched upwardly, into which fall heavenly gifts: loaves of bread, rounds of sausage, an apple, a pair of shoes.

In the middle trio – and in harmony with the change that has occurred in the music – the spectacle of death gives way to the tale of life, progressing through several phases from childhood to adolescence, from maturity to old age, then to the final departure. The kinæsthetic character of the picture changes dramatically: the previously dominant march rhythm, accentuated by vertical motion, is supplanted by a quiet and fluid horizontal movement. The heretofore inert keyboard begins to float along the bottom edge of the screen, creating the sensation of time passing. Equally smooth and graceful becomes the motion of the hands following the melodic line across the row of keys. Smoother and more fluent become the movements of the actors, who now act the part of growing up, being shy towards the opposite sex, expressing detachment, experiencing curiosity, passion, indifference, boredom. The background is now part of the mobile linear narrative – both the building and a group of children climbing up the steps begin to move along. Here, the director reacted not only to the changing mood of the musical narration, but also to its formal outline, marked in the outer sections by repetitions of musical gestures and in the middle segment – by the broad vocal character of the main line.

In the third part, the reprise of the march theme, the funereal symbolism returns, now expanded to include patriotic elements, i.e. military uniforms. Initially, they express pride and feistiness, and then, swathed in bloodied bandages, transform into signs of defeat. As in the other parts of the *Rybczyński* suite, the word is absent from the *Funeral March*, not even in the form of captions or soundless conversation between the characters; nor is the music accompanied by any special effects. Natural acoustic phenomena such as the sound of the sea or a clatter of hooves on cobblestones only appear in bridge passages between the musical works marked by the leitmotif of a coachman driving a hearse.

*Translated by Piotr Grella-Możejko*<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The translator wishes to express his gratitude to the distinguished Canadian composer and writer, Ronald Hannah, for proofreading the text and making several pertinent suggestions.

