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# Deconstructing a “National Composer”: Chopin and Polish Exiles in Paris, 1831–49

JOLANTA T. PEKACZ

If a biography of an artist is supposed to inform criticism and analysis of his output, the lack of a thoroughly researched biography of Frédéric Chopin—as opposed to the proliferation of publications devoted to the analysis and interpretation of his music—may cause mixed feelings. In Chopin’s case, the issue is especially important, since many authors of such analyses routinely assume a simple and unquestionable connection between his life and his music. Two strategies are typically implemented in making this connection: facts from Chopin’s life are used to explain his artistic output; and, conversely, the interpretation of Chopin’s music is used as evidence in his biography. These two

practices have coexisted in works on Chopin since his death. In view of the recent proliferation of analytical approaches to Chopin, the latter seems to be gaining an upper hand.

The issue of Chopin as a Polish “national” composer, for example, is one of the central features of our perception of Chopin. But this stereotypical picture, as we know it, is an exaggerated one. It has been a result of an uncritical use of the two practices identified above, initiated by nineteenth-century writers for specific historical and political reasons but persisting among Chopin scholars to this day. The current stereotype has little to do with the available biographical data. Consequently, the question of “Polishness” in Chopin’s biography has to be located on a more sophisticated plane than has been hitherto the case.

In the center of the discussion below is Chopin’s relationship with the circle of Polish political immigrants in Paris, mostly exiles from Poland after the suppression of the November

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Uprising in 1831 by the Russian authorities. This circle included the most prominent Polish literary figures residing in Paris at that time. I shall also deal with Chopin and the Romantic ideal of a "national" composer and with Chopin's relationships with Parisian salons. The picture that emerges from this discussion will help to revise some biographical clichés concerning Chopin as a "national" composer. More generally, I hope to demonstrate the limited validity of making simple inferences from Chopin's music about his life and the need for a more thoroughly researched biography of Chopin.

#### INTRODUCTION

Biographies of Frédéric Chopin have been notoriously inaccurate. Beginning with the first, by Franz Liszt, who compiled Chopin's biography three years after his death, Chopin's life and music inspired an amazing number of publications perpetuating doubtful legends and stereotypes. Some of them were established by Liszt; others were invented after him.<sup>1</sup> Although the first myth-breaking biography of Chopin—that of Frederick Niecks—appeared as early as 1888,<sup>2</sup> it did not discourage new myth-makers and myth-perpetuators.<sup>3</sup> Many unsubstantiated beliefs connected with Chopin's biography persist until this day, and even those biographers who warn against drawing arbitrary conclusions fall into this trap.<sup>4</sup> Except for Franz Liszt, whose tendentiousness might have been personal, Chopin's biographers have usually been uncritical worshippers. The result was more hagiography than biography.

Chopin's Polishness, in particular, became a focus for many authors from the earliest bio-

ographies onward. Their purpose was to emphasize that although Chopin left Poland at the age of twenty and spent much of his compositionally productive life in Paris, he was nonetheless a truly patriotic composer who never renounced his Polishness. While it is self-evident that some of Chopin's music is easily linked to things Polish, the assumption of the thoroughgoing Polishness of Chopin's life is based partly on inferences from his music and partly on biographical suppositions. The latter imply that Chopin not only shared the concerns of Polish immigrants in Paris but also maintained close social contacts with them, nearly to the exclusion of any other social contacts. Hence arises the stereotypical picture in which the two aspects of Chopin's Polishness, his music and his life, are rarely separated.

The emphasis on Chopin's Polishness in the publications by nineteenth-century Polish authors can be explained by the manner in which those writers addressed the particular political and cultural situation that Poland found herself in from 1795, and throughout the next century, divided among Austria, Prussia, and Russia, and deprived of independent statehood. A composer of Chopin's stature, writing in the Polish "national spirit" despite living in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the music capital of Europe, was the perfect example needed to prove the existence and vitality of Polish culture and tradition. It was simply a matter of course to assume that a composer so obviously "Polish" in his music had to be also a staunch Polish patriot according to nineteenth-century standards, that is, if not directly taking part in military actions, at least supporting the Polish national cause in some other way. This image was reinforced by parallel examples provided by some Polish Romantics, the most spectacular being that of Adam Mickiewicz, a Polish poet, who, after the collapse of the November Uprising in Poland in 1831 participated in political activity in Paris as a writer and lecturer, during the Springtime of the Peoples in 1848 organized a volunteer Polish legion in Italy to fight against Austria, and during the Crimean War in 1853–56 supported the formation of Polish troops in Constantinople to fight against Russia.

In short, the nineteenth-century stereotype of a Polish national composer demanded that

<sup>1</sup>In fact, this first biography was not entirely Liszt's work. For the most part it was written by Princess Carolyn Sayn-Wittgenstein, Liszt's friend, after he broke with Countess Marie d'Agoult.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Niecks, *Frederick Chopin as a Man and Musician* (London, 1888).

<sup>3</sup>A critical (often too critical) review of selected biographies of Chopin published before 1967 is presented by Adam Harasowski, *The Skein of Legends around Chopin* (Glasgow, 1967).

<sup>4</sup>For example, Derek Melville, *Chopin: A Biography, with a Survey of Books, Editions and Recordings* (London, 1977).

his life and work constituted an inseparable unity, that the one consistently informed the other. If the historical reality did not fit it, that reality had to be changed. This is how Chopin was made to fit the stereotype by his early biographers: Count Stanisław Tarnowski (1871), Marcei A. Szulc (1873), Maurycy Karasowski (1877), and Antoni Wodziński (1886). Even after Poland regained her independence in 1917 the biographies that followed did not change the established image of Chopin. On the contrary, this image was reinforced further in the most complete monograph on Chopin that appeared before World War I, that written by Ferdynand Hoesick.<sup>5</sup> In discussing Chopin's attachment to things Polish, Hoesick confined himself to repeating unsubstantiated biographical conjectures of Tarnowski, Szulc, Karasowski, Wodziński, and other authors influenced by them.<sup>6</sup>

In the present-day literature on Chopin, the statement that Chopin is a "national composer" still implies the inseparability of his life from his work. While Chopin's Polishness in music is demonstrated by his compositions grounded in Polish national music (such as mazurkas and polonaises),<sup>7</sup> his Polishness in life has been assumed but never really proven.<sup>8</sup> A standard English-language textbook on music history reads that "although Chopin lived in Paris from 1831, he never stopped loving his native Poland or suffering because of its misfortunes."<sup>9</sup> Even theoretically sophisticated present-day musicology merely shuffles old stereotypes in a new manner. A recent author promising to separate myth from reality would have the

reader believe that "there can be no doubt of the authenticity of Chopin's commitment to Poland and of his enduring preoccupation with the 'Polish question'."<sup>10</sup> But why such doubt is out of the question is never explained.

#### POLES IN PARIS AFTER THE NOVEMBER UPRISING

Despite the conservatism of the government of the "citizen king," France for a time showed a greater toleration for liberal ideas than any country in Europe, and the Paris of Louis-Philippe became a meeting place for expatriates from all over Europe. These included, of course, writers, artists, and intellectuals. In 1843 A. Ruge called Paris "the cradle of the new Europe, the greatest laboratory where world history is formed and has its ever fresh source."<sup>11</sup>

The aura surrounding the French capital was not the only reason it was chosen as home by the Polish political refugees after the collapse of the November Uprising in 1831. During Napoleonic times there had existed a close military fraternity between the French and the Poles and a strong belief in France's sympathy for the Polish cause. The cause had also found sympathizers later among the leaders of the July Revolution in Paris, such as General Lafayette.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, there existed a conviction among the Poles that the November Uprising had saved France from a war with Tsar Nicholas: France therefore had a moral debt to Poland. In fact, in the last stage of the Uprising, the French minister of foreign affairs, François Sébastiani, had promised that the Polish insurgents would find shelter in France. This was promptly interpreted by the Poles as a symbolic acknowledgment of a moral obligation of France toward Poland and

<sup>5</sup>Ferdynand Hoesick, *Chopin: Życie i twórczość*, 3 vols. (Warsaw, 1910–11), reissued in 4 volumes by Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne in Kraków in 1967.

<sup>6</sup>Ferdynand Hoesick, *Chopin: Życie i twórczość*, 4 vols. (Kraków, 1967), IV, 12ff.

<sup>7</sup>For example, Jeffrey Kallberg, "Hearing Poland: Chopin and Nationalism," in *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, ed. R. Larry Todd (New York, 1990), pp. 221–57.

<sup>8</sup>Typical in this respect are articles by Franciszek German: "Chopin i Mickiewicz," *Rocznik Chopinowski* 1 (1956), 227–53; "Chopin i Witwicki," *Annales Chopin* 5 (1960), 200–22; and "Fryderyk Chopin i Juliusz Słowacki: Dzieje nieprzynażni dwóch na słońcach swych przeciwnych bogów," *Rocznik Chopinowski* 18 (1986), 151–68.

<sup>9</sup>Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music* (5th edn. New York, 1996), p. 599.

<sup>10</sup>Jim Samson, "Myth and Reality: A Biographical Introduction," *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. J. Samson (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 1–8, 6.

<sup>11</sup>A. Ruge, *Zwei Jahre in Paris* (Paris, 1898), as quoted in David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York, 1973), p. 62. See also Lloyd Stephen Kramer, *Exiles in Paris: European Intellectuals and the French Experience, 1830–1848* (Ph.D. diss., Ann Arbor, Mich., 1983).

<sup>12</sup>After he took command of the revolutionary National Guard, Lafayette had as his adjutant a Pole, Leonard Chodźko. Later, Lafayette also headed a Central French-Polish Committee established on 28 January 1831 to provide support for Polish exiles arriving in France.

further reinforced the belief in France's "debt" and in her interest in supporting revolutionary actions in Poland. The Poles expected that France would back the organization of Polish military troops on her territory, and would subsequently join them in the struggle (inevitable, they thought, in the near future) for the freedom of Poland and other suppressed European peoples.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, of about 7,000 insurgents who left Poland after the collapse of the November Uprising in 1831, about 5,000 settled in France.<sup>14</sup> So substantial was this migration that in January 1832 the French government appealed to the Poles to settle outside Paris, in Avignon, Besançon, Châteauroux, and in smaller locations, and refused to pay allowances to those who stayed in Paris without permission. The idea of decentralization, however, was strongly opposed by some Polish political leaders (such as Joachim Lelewel), who, expecting some "great political events," preferred that all Poles be concentrated in one place. As a result, whereas by the end of 1831 there were about 150 Poles in the Department of the Seine, by mid-1832 there were approximately 1,870 of them.<sup>15</sup>

Shortly after the collapse of the November Uprising in Poland the sympathy of public opinion in Western Europe for the Polish cause was authentic and spontaneous. On their march to France through Saxony and Bavaria, the Polish insurgents were enthusiastically welcomed not as defeated mutineers but as the vanguard of an approaching all-European revolution.

A similar atmosphere existed in Paris. The *Courrier Français*, representing "constitutional opposition," the *Constitutionnel*, and the *Journal de Paris* were sympathetic to the Polish cause; the *Avenir*, the *Journal de Commerce* and the republican *National* demanded urgent help for Poland from the French government. Even the official *Moniteur* and the pro-govern-

ment *Journal des Débats* wrote about Poland with sympathy. Only the pro-Carlist *Quotidienne* and the *Gazette de France* held back; but even those two reported from time to time about the situation in Poland. "[The Polish cause] is more popular than the Belgian one," wrote Casimir Périer, Louis-Philippe's Minister of Interior in his letter to François Guizot. "Why? Because it is more dramatic. France is at the moment in a sentimental, rather than rational mood."<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, France did seem to be in a sentimental mood. In the 1831–32 season, the most popular plays in the Parisian theaters were those whose plots were connected with the recent events in Poland. The Théâtre Porte St. Martin, for example, put on the drama *La Vieillesse de Stanislas*; in the Ambigou Comique one could attend allegoric *tableaux vivants* in five movements, entitled *La Révolution polonaise*; the Cirque Olympique tried to attract the public with a drama in four acts, *Les Polonais*, composed of episodes from the November Uprising. One of the theaters announced that during an entr'acte the orchestra would play "la mazurka Dobruski" [*sic*], the Polish national anthem. Others offered free admission for Poles, while still others donated their income from tickets to the poorest Polish emigrants.<sup>17</sup>

But the sympathy for the Polish cause was not general. Lubomir Gadon, one of the Polish aristocratic emigrants, described the situation in a letter from Paris, written to Poland in December 1831:

The upper class here [is] divided into two parts: the carlists, who pray day and night to get back the king from the foreigners, and the royalists, who do not talk about anything else, but only about *jouer à la hausse et à la baisse*. The king, the government, and the upper class do not like us [Poles] but, in the French fashion *ils enveloppent leurs sentiments de belles phrases*. In the middle class and among the commoners we are really loved, and this is the rea-

<sup>13</sup>For example, General Józef Bem, famous during the Springtime of the Peoples, planned to organize Polish legions in France or in Belgium. The plans were supported by Prince Adam Czartoryski.

<sup>14</sup>See Sławomir Kalmebka, *Wielka Emigracja: Polskie wychodźstwo polityczne w latach 1831–1862* (Warsaw, 1971), p. 58.

<sup>15</sup>Kramer, *Exiles in Paris*, p. 60.

<sup>16</sup>From a letter of Casimir Périer to François Guizot of 29 June 1831. François Guizot, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1859), II, 285.

<sup>17</sup>David Owen Evans, *Le drame moderne à l'époque Romantique* (1827–1850) (Genève, 1974), pp. 216–17; Lubomir Gadon, *Wielka Emigracja w pierwszych latach po powstaniu listopadowym* (2nd edn. Paris, 1960), p. 178.

son why they [the king and the government] are afraid of us.<sup>18</sup>

Gadon's observations were well founded. The November Uprising against Tsar Nicholas I (who for the supporters of the dethroned Charles X was the main advocate of legitimism) could be hardly accepted by the royalists. And the opposite side, represented by the government of Louis-Philippe, was afraid that the revolutionary ideas brought by the Polish emigrants would agitate domestic political opposition against the king, and consequently provoke social unrest. For Louis-Philippe and his cabinet the collapse of the November Uprising in Poland meant a consolidation of peace and the status quo in Europe. The Polish emigrants who settled in France would turn out to be a serious obstacle for France in her efforts to reestablish good diplomatic relations with Russia.

In short, the French declarations of sympathy with the Polish cause did not come from the most influential political circles. Moreover, these declarations were accompanied by a conviction that France could do nothing for Poland. When the news about the collapse of the November Uprising arrived in Paris on 15 September 1831, it was followed by spontaneous street demonstrations and skirmishes expressing popular support for the Polish cause. Nevertheless, the Chamber voted (221 votes to 167) for nonintervention, which meant, in fact, France's consensus to the status quo. In the course of time, interest in the Polish question began to subside, both in public opinion and among the politicians. When the Democrats from Louis-Philippe's opposition (those who had supported Poland in 1831) eventually came to power in 1848, their policy was even more indifferent to the Polish cause than that of Louis-Philippe had been; they assured the European powers of their compliance with the existing treaties even more eagerly than had the "citizen king."

It is also important to observe that the Polish emigrés were themselves anything but unified in their aims. Politically, the Polish emigrants who arrived in France after the collapse

of the November Uprising were divided into two main opposing groups: monarchists and republicans. The first was headed by Prince Adam Czartoryski, the second by Joachim Lelewel and by the politicians from the Polish Democratic Society. While the first comprised mainly aristocracy, landowners, and higher officers, the other had supporters in the less prominent social strata. Both groups agreed that their main purpose was to regain independence for a Poland now divided among Austria, Prussia, and Russia; their differences centered on the method and the social and political shape of the future Poland. Czartoryski, formerly a Russian statesman and a friend of Alexander I, and in 1831 the head of the insurrectionary national government, tended to support the traditional social system in Poland and believed in the continuation of the eighteenth-century reforms initiated in Poland by King Stanisław August Poniatowski. He also favored diplomatic efforts, rather than an exclusively military action, with West European governments to support the Polish cause. Lelewel, a historian, a chief representative of the Left in the insurrectionary government, and a leader of the radical Patriotic Society, was antiaristocratic, and anti-Western. Above all, he was convinced that only a military effort against the partitioning powers could reestablish an independent Polish state. Even more radical than Lelewel was the Polish Democratic Society, a third group strongly influenced by modern French republicanism. In addition to the idea of military struggle, it advocated such radical social reforms as the abolition of serfdom.<sup>19</sup> These political differences created continuous tensions within the Polish emigration: while Czartoryski and his circle were accused by the radicals of indecisiveness and flirtations with the Western powers, the Left wing was accused by Czartoryski of stirring unrest in Poland, potentially leading to a premature and irresponsible military action. Several attempts to unify the Polish emigration in France, undertaken by some political activists, proved unsuccessful.

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<sup>18</sup>Gadon, *Wielka Emigracja*, p. 178.

<sup>19</sup>See Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 32–41.

Consequently, the Polish political emigrants in Paris met in largely separate social circles according to the existing political and ideological divisions. From the beginning of 1832 the most conspicuous meeting places of the supporters of Czartoryski's political line were two salons: one held by his wife, Princess Anna (née Sapieha), and another by the wife of his political adviser, Castellan Ludwik Plater. While Princess Anna had her weekly receptions on Mondays, Mme Plater received on Thursdays. In 1843 the Czartoryskis bought the seventeenth-century Hôtel Lambert, situated at rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Île no. 2, and soon Hôtel Lambert became a synonym for the Czartoryski's political party, a central meeting place for his political supporters of various shades, and the de facto Polish Embassy in France. On the other side of the political spectrum, the most renowned meeting place for Lelewel's group was the salon of Olimpia Chodźko, the wife of Leonard Chodźko, a friend and a former adjutant of General Lafayette.

#### CHOPIN'S ENTRÉE

In mid-January 1833, Chopin wrote from Paris to his friend Dominik Dziewanowski in Munich:

I have found my way into the very best society; I have my place among ambassadors, princes, ministers—I don't know by what miracle it has come about for I have not pushed myself forward. But today all that sort of thing is indispensable to me: those circles are supposed to be the fountain-head of good taste. You at once have more talent if you have been heard at the English or Austrian embassies; you at once play better if Princess Vaudemont has patronised you. I can't write "patronises," for the poor old thing died a week ago.<sup>20</sup>

Soon afterward Chopin began giving expensive lessons to a rich clientele. In mid-1833 he exchanged his modest apartment at rue Cité-Bergère for a luxurious one located at the fashionable Chaussée d'Antin, and in a short time

he became one of the richest Poles in Paris.<sup>21</sup> But who had "patronized" him? How had he found his way into "the very best society"?

Unlike many Poles in Paris at that time, Chopin was not a political refugee. He arrived in Paris on 18 September 1831 from Vienna, where he had been living since November 1830. Because Vienna was considered an important musical center in Europe, twenty-year-old Chopin had gone there from Warsaw seeking recognition in music circles. His choice was also encouraged by his earlier visit to the Austrian capital, in August 1829, when he had succeeded in having some of his compositions published and had given two public concerts. But in 1830 the situation was different: the publishers were not offering Chopin any contracts, concerts proved hard to organize, and influential circles were indifferent to him. The outbreak of the November Uprising in the Russian sector of Poland made the situation even worse: under Metternich's rule the Poles were not the most welcome guests. With no further prospects for success in the Austrian capital, and even less in Warsaw, Chopin decided to leave for Paris.

Shortly after his arrival Chopin came into contact with his compatriots, mainly those from Polish aristocracy. Although he did not carry letters of introduction to these circles, he had some acquaintances among them dating from his Warsaw years when, as a child prodigy, he had often been received in aristocratic salons. As early as 18 November 1831, in his first surviving letter from Paris, Chopin informed his friend, Alfons Kumelski, in Berlin: "Today . . . I am invited to dinner with [Prince] Radziwiłł (whom I found here). . . . We shall meet at the Komars'. . . . Yesterday I dined with Mme [Countess] Potocka, that pretty wife of Mieczysław Potocki. I am gradually acquiring the entrée to society, although I have but one

<sup>20</sup>*Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, trans. and ed. Arthur Hedley (London, 1962), p. 114.

<sup>21</sup>Chopin gave piano lessons for twenty francs per hour, which was more than that charged by the most expensive piano *maitre* in Paris, Friedrich Kalkbrenner. By way of comparison, monthly subsidies paid to Polish exiles by the French government varied from 200 francs for members of government and generals of division, to sixty for higher officers and civil servants, which was equal to half the average wage of a qualified worker. See Kalemka, *Wielka Emigracja*, pp. 275–77.

ducat in my pocket—anyhow I am better off than you!”<sup>22</sup> At the same time Chopin also “acquired the entrée” to the promonarchist salons of Princess Czartoryska and Mme Plater.

And yet Chopin’s Polish aristocratic friends do not seem to have played a decisive role in his rise in Parisian society. Despite being received in their salons, from his arrival in Paris in September 1831 until at least the end of 1832, Chopin was facing continuous financial problems and was supported by his father in Warsaw.<sup>23</sup> The Paris of the early 1830s swarmed with pianists trying their luck. Institutions providing artistic promotion did not yet exist, and making a good impression on musical circles was apparently not enough to get oneself established. Chopin’s first public concert in Paris in February 1832 confirmed his reputation in Parisian musical circles, but nothing more immediately substantial came of it. The way to lucrative piano lessons that provided the surest source of income led through the influential Parisian salons, but the entrée into these circles required an introduction. Chopin was obliged to wait for that introduction for over a year after his arrival in the French capital.

Whether or not Polish aristocrats in Paris might have had the connections that made Chopin successful later, they did not use them. After Chopin’s year-and-a-half stay in Paris and his earlier successes in Warsaw and Vienna, Czartoryski’s circle saw him apparently not as a great artist but as a victim of political disturbances. This is the image that appears from a lengthy announcement for *Le Temps* (probably written by Ludwik Plater) that was meant to encourage the Parisian public to attend Chopin’s first public concert in February 1832:

If promotion of art is one of the noblest ways in which one can use one’s fortune, it becomes even more important if, at the same time, one commits an act of national generosity by sympathizing with the whole nation. The sad defeat of Warsaw made the whole Polish social structure collapse and plunged the country into mourning—the country

which once glittered with heroism and splendour. This defeat caused the collapse of many families and the decline of individuals. It also affected a young and outstandingly talented artist, Mr. Chopin. Once France loaned this name to Poland. Poland introduces it now to France. Next Thursday Mr. Chopin will give a piano concert at two o’clock in the afternoon, rue Cadet nr 9. Improvisations of the young Pole on themes of songs from national music, which helped the brave defenders of the homeland stand up to all the dangers of an unequal war, will illustrate the sweet joys of delusive hope, as well as compassion, which the present situation of Poland evokes in every noble soul. We have no doubt that the number of listeners who will fill Pleyel’s concert hall on Thursday will give evidence, once again, of how vivid, sincere and generous is the French sympathy for their old comrades-in-arms and how alike in fondness of art, glory and freedom.<sup>24</sup>

For unknown reasons this announcement was never published. Nevertheless, both its tone and its arguments are striking: in a sentimental manner Chopin was presented as a victim of the November Uprising and of the political oppression in Poland (although he neither took part in the Uprising nor was he forced to leave his country for political reasons) and his artistic attainments are hardly mentioned.

The note also suggests—between the lines—that the sympathy with which he was received by the Polish aristocracy in Paris was mixed with a condescending tone.<sup>25</sup> Chopin was kept within socially acceptable proximity by his aristocratic friends. Although fashionable and polished, he belonged to a lower social group, both because of his middle-class birth and his profession. (The latter adversely affected Chopin’s plans to marry Maria Wodzińska, although she came merely from a low-rank, pauperized Polish nobility.) In contrast, Chopin’s compatriot, Count Andrzej Edward Koźmian, who came to Paris in October 1829, was immediately received by the Prince and the Princess Hamilton, as well as by Madame Flahault, who presented him to Madame de Noailles in Faubourg Saint-

<sup>22</sup>*Selected Correspondence*, p. 92.

<sup>23</sup>For example, Nicholas Chopin mentions having sent Frédéric “the little extra allowance” in his letter of 27 November 1831. *Selected Correspondence*, p. 94.

<sup>24</sup>Hoesick, *Chopin: Życie i twórczość* (1910–11), II, 45–46.

<sup>25</sup>The same tone can be found in the only surviving letter to Chopin from Countess Delfina Potocka on 16 July 1849, written from the position of a grand lady to a dying musician despite many years of acquaintance between them.



Germain, thanks to letters of recommendation from Polish aristocrats.<sup>26</sup> Through Countess Delfina Potocka Chopin could have been introduced to the salon of the Duchesse de Rauzan, known for her artistic interests. Princess Czartoryska could have introduced him to the salon of Princess d'Abrantès, known for her pro-Polish sympathies. But there is no evidence that either happened.

It seems more likely that it was the salons of the cosmopolitan aristocracy, such as that of the Austrian ambassador, Count Antoine Apponyi, and those of the rich Parisian bourgeoisie, such as the bankers James de Rothschild and August Leo, that decided Chopin's fate at the end of 1832. At that time, Baroness de Rothschild became one of Chopin's first pupils; we also see him in the presence of the banker Leo, as documented by his wife,<sup>27</sup> and at the New Year's concert given in the Austrian Embassy by Count and Countess Apponyi, together with Rossini, Kalkbrenner, and Liszt.<sup>28</sup> Whether the Czartoryskis and the Platers had connections with these circles is doubtful. This lack of definite "Polish" evidence made some Chopin biographers speculate that he owed his rapid rise in Parisian society to Prince Walenty Radziwill, whom he met by coincidence. Thus arose the supposition that it was Radziwill who, through his freemasons connections, introduced Chopin to Rothschild, which subsequently established his Parisian career. Whether or not this precise story is true, it seems probable that Radziwill's connections to the circles of Parisian bankers and freemasons did mean more to Chopin at that time than did the influence of the Polish aristocracy. The dedications of Chopin's compositions also indicate that from about 1834 Chopin socialized primarily with the rich bourgeoisie and cosmopolitan Parisian circles.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Listy Andrzeja Edwarda Koźmiana, 4 vols. (Lwów, 1894–96), II, 14 and 25.

<sup>27</sup>[Sophie Augustine Leo], "Musical Life in Paris (1817–1848)," *Musical Quarterly* 17 (1931), 402.

<sup>28</sup>Rodolphe Apponyi, *Vingt cinq ans à Paris: 1826–1850: Journal du comte Rodolphe Apponyi, attaché de l'ambassade d'Autriche à Paris*, ed. Ernest Daudet, 4 vols. (Paris, 1913–26), II, 306.

<sup>29</sup>Altogether, Chopin dedicated less than a dozen pieces to his Polish friends throughout his life: four mazurkas, op. 6 (1830), to Countess Paulina Plater; four Mazurkas, op. 30

Some authors maintain that Chopin divided the Parisian *monde* into a French and a Polish one, and that he preferred the Polish to the French.<sup>30</sup> Yet, there is no proof that the mere Polishness of a salon was a sufficient reason for Chopin to visit it. Chopin did not seem to be interested in joining the more radical circles of the Polish emigrants in Paris. Although his name is occasionally mentioned in such company,<sup>31</sup> his presence can rarely be found in important political and patriotic rallies, such as a solemn reception in honor of a hero of the November Uprising, General Józef Dwernicki, given on 7 August 1832 on the Champs d'Élysées, at which many Polish celebrities were present. (Those included two great poets: Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki.) While at the very beginning of his stay in Paris Chopin was seen in various Polish houses, in the course of time he remained a guest only in the Czartoryskis' circle, playing at musical gatherings and dancing parties at the Hôtel Lambert.<sup>32</sup> The reasons for this could be many, but surely Chopin's preference for aristocratic company was paramount among them. On the other hand, political divisions and discords among the Polish emigrants probably made him deliberately steer clear of these polarized factions. "Duels, quarrels, noises that hurt the ears and the heart even more"—wrote a poet, Bohdan Zaleski, in 1832 about the Polish emigrants in Paris.

Various small groups, which had already appeared in Warsaw, like a snake cut into pieces . . . that jump in

(1836), to Princess Maria Wirtemberska (née Czartoryska); Polonaise in F# Minor, op. 44 (1844), to Princess Ludmila Beauvau (née Komar); three Mazurkas, op. 63 (1846), to Laura Czosnowska; Waltz in D# Major, op. 64, no. 1 (1846), to Countess Delfina Potocka; Waltz in A# Major, op. 64, no. 3 (1846), to Countess Katarzyna Branicka; and some songs and less important pieces.

<sup>30</sup>See, e.g., Hoesick, *Chopin: Życie i twórczość* (1967), II, 53.

<sup>31</sup>For example, *Korespondencja Juliusza Słowackiego*, 2 vols. (Wrocław, 1962), I, 135–36.

<sup>32</sup>Hoesick does not give any source for his statement that Chopin was a habitual guest of "Princess Lubomirska, Countess Laura Czosnowska, General Mycielski, Countess Rzewuska, Zofia Ossolińska, Tekla Potocka, the Zaleskis, the Plichts, the Woronieckis." Hoesick, *Chopin: Życie i twórczość* (1910), II, 376.

different directions, each shouting and breathing poison at one another. Pułaski and the democrats at Lelewel, Czartoryski and the aristocracy at Lelewel and at the democrats, military officers at everybody and everybody at the military officers. In a word, the whole [Polish] emigration appears to the world as an infernal viper with a hundred tongues. Everybody wants to introduce one's own vision of a government in a Poland, which does not exist, and is not born yet; and in the previous Poland, for which we mourn, nobody contrived anything good.<sup>33</sup>

Zaleski was not alone in his critical opinion.<sup>34</sup> The tensions between the left of the Polish emigration and the Czartoryski coterie with whom Chopin maintained contacts were at times dramatic. The most spectacular was the Act of Czartoryski's Condemnation, issued in July 1834 by a group of members of the Polish Democratic Society settled in Poitiers near Paris who were unsatisfied with the Prince's political activity. In bitter words they refused him their political support and considered him an enemy of the Polish emigrants in France. The act was widely disseminated and even published in some French newspapers, and by the end of 1834 it was supported by the signatures of 2840 Poles in France.<sup>35</sup> Although the act could not damage the Prince's well-established reputation in foreign diplomatic circles, it further polarized his supporters and opponents.

In keeping his distance from radical political circles, Chopin was faithful to the advice that his father had included in letters from Warsaw. As early as November 1831, Nicholas Chopin warned his son against having confidence in "every newcomer" from Poland.<sup>36</sup> Old Chopin, in spite of having been himself an insurgent of the Kosciuszko Uprising in Poland in 1794, later displayed a decidedly hostile attitude toward all kinds of "disturbances." "I am glad to see from your letter of 6 June [1832] that you were lucky enough not to get involved in the riot which occurred and which was instigated

by rascals," wrote Nicholas from Warsaw after the turmoil in Paris in June 1832, which followed the funeral of General Lamarque, itself organized by the liberal-democratic opposition.

Some papers say that Poles took part and thus abused the hospitality they enjoy: have they not had their fill of such nonsense? They have caused enough trouble here. I am sure their numbers were small, for who would be so mad as to share their destructive ideas? Thank God the level-headed section of the nation has triumphed, and order has been restored. Of course the income which your talents were bringing in will have temporarily stopped, but this cannot last—the arts always recover when tranquility returns.<sup>37</sup>

Frédéric himself left no remarks about the events in Paris in June 1832 in his surviving correspondence. In an earlier letter to a friend, Józef Nowakowski, written on 14 April of that year, he had alluded to such general tensions only by mentioning that it was "difficult to get pupils here and harder still to give concerts" and that "the political situation [was] chiefly to blame [for that]."<sup>38</sup>

Chopin seemed indifferent not only to political disputes and rallies but also to any form of political activity. In 1833 he became a member of the Société Littéraire et Historique in Paris, founded in 1832 by Prince Czartoryski and Ludwik Plater,<sup>39</sup> but he did not take part in the activity of that society: his membership was in name only. His interest in politics, sometimes expressed in occasional remarks in letters to his family, did not result in any personal involvement in political activity—neither in Warsaw, seized with prerevolutionary ferment since the end of 1829, when Czar Nicholas I came to the throne, nor in Paris after 1831.

<sup>33</sup>*Korespondencja Józefa Bohdana Zaleskiego*, ed. Dionizy Zaleski, 2 vols. (Lwów, 1901), I, 39–41.

<sup>34</sup>For example, Maurycy Mochancki's letter of 7 August 1832 to his parents, as quoted by Gadon, *Wielka Emigracja*, p. 249.

<sup>35</sup>Kalembka, *Wielka Emigracja*, pp. 128–29.

<sup>36</sup>*Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina z Rodziną*, ed. Krystyna Kobyłańska (Warsaw, 1972), p. 76.

<sup>37</sup>*Selected Correspondence*, p. 111. The Poles were accused of participating in the events of 6–7 June 1832 by, among others, *Le Figaro*. Consequently, on 12 June the police annulled their permits to stay and commanded that new permits be individually reissued by the Ministry of the Interior. Many Poles were forced to leave Paris. Out of more than a thousand people arrested, however, only two Poles were imprisoned.

<sup>38</sup>*Selected Correspondence*, p. 110.

<sup>39</sup>Lubomir Gadon, *Z życia Polaków we Francji. Rzut oka na 50-letnie koleje Towarzystwa Historyczno-Literackiego w Paryżu 1832–1882* (Paris, 1883), pp. 11–12.

Chopin's political views are not easy to reconstruct, since he expressed them only infrequently in letters to close friends and family. In his letter to Dziewanowski in mid-January 1833, he makes a straightforward declaration: "I am all for the Carlists [supporters of dethroned Charles X], I hate the Louis-Philippe crowd; I'm a revolutionary myself so I care nothing for money."<sup>40</sup> Politically, this statement would suggest his prolegitimistic sympathies. In the early 1830s, however, it was fashionable in some circles of the Parisian *monde* to declare sympathy for the restoration of the older branch of the Bourbon monarchy. Chopin's declaration may have spoken for nothing else but his being up-to-date. Such interpretation is supported by his choice to socialize with the circles, such as the Czartoryski coterie, known as decidedly antilegitimist. Chopin's declared sympathy for the Carlists may also be interpreted as demonstrating his longing for the good old days of supporting the arts through private patronage (such as salons), especially after his unsuccessful attempts to deal with the new form of patronage—the public concerts.

It is difficult to determine whether Chopin's close rapport with the Czartoryski coterie resulted from his political views or merely from his habitual leaning toward aristocratic company. After all, we also find him performing in Parisian salons of various political orientations and for Louis-Philippe himself. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that Chopin was unfamiliar with the circles of the Polish Democrats in Paris. When at the end of July 1849, twenty-six members of the Polish Democratic Society were expelled from Paris, Chopin declared in his letter to his friend, Wojciech Grzymała, that he did not know any of them.<sup>41</sup> In fact, among those expelled were Jan Nepomucen Janowski and two members of the governing body of the Polish Democratic Society (*Centralizacja*): the radical Count Stanisław Worcell and Wojciech

Darasz. All of them, particularly Worcell, were well known among the Polish emigrants.<sup>42</sup>

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Chopin showed little interest in discussions within Polish intellectual and artistic circles concerning the role of the arts and of the Polish artist in the preservation of values of the Polish national culture under the partitions. His views on national art and the role of an artist, although rarely expressed verbally, were far from the common opinion among his compatriots. An exemplary case was Chopin's resistance to the repeated pressures of his former teacher, Józef Elsner, at a Warsaw Conservatory to compose a "national opera," which would have been regarded as a more powerful means of national propaganda than instrumental music.

Since he did not share his compatriots' ideas on national art, Chopin was misunderstood in some Polish circles in Paris. This was probably another reason for his gradual withdrawal from them. Chopin's rapport with Adam Mickiewicz, regarded as Poland's greatest poet, who settled in Paris in August 1832 and enjoyed a great esteem among the Poles, is an illustration of such a misunderstanding. Antoine Dessus, a friend of Mickiewicz's secretary, Armand Lévy, reported an episode that took place in Mickiewicz's salon in Paris, one that was also later described in the *Memoirs* by the poet's son, Władysław:

Once, when I visited Adam Mickiewicz I noticed Chopin in the salon. When your father introduced me to him, the artist returned my greeting coldly, almost imperceptibly. He had the manners and constrained politeness of higher society people. At your mother's request he sat at the piano and played with great feeling. When he finished, your father began to reproach him with such violence, that I did not know what to do. "Why on earth, instead of developing in yourself that gift enabling you to move souls, do you flaunt yourself at the Faubourg St. Germain!

<sup>40</sup>*Selected Correspondence*, p. 115.

<sup>41</sup>Letter of 3 August 1849 from Chaillot, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 368.

<sup>42</sup>Jan Nepomucen Janowski, *Notatki autobiograficzne 1803–1853* (Wrocław, 1950), pp. 580–81; Bolesław Limanowski, *Stanisław Worcell: Zyciorys* (Warsaw, 1948), p. 282.

You could hold the crowd in the palm of your hand, and, instead, you merely tickle aristocratic nerves!" The more he fumed, the more Chopin shrank down without uttering a sound. Finally, Mickiewicz subsided into silence and Chopin timidly started to play folk songs. The poet cleared his brow, and when the artist finished, they were talking quite as if nothing had happened between them.<sup>43</sup>

Obviously, Mickiewicz's views on Polish national music had collided with the artistically sophisticated vision of Chopin. Similarly, the poet's Messianic zeal to "move souls" and to "take possession of the crowds," which he considered a duty of every artist, held no appeal for Chopin. Such an anecdote helps to explain why Chopin was never one of Mickiewicz's close friends; the contacts between the composer and the poet had always been rather official and cool. For example, in the winter of 1833/34 the poet frequently read fragments of his unfinished poem *Pan Tadeusz* to a circle of his friends; the poem depicted the traditional life of Polish gentleness in Lithuania. In mid-January 1834, the poem was completed, which offered an opportunity for many parties given in Mickiewicz's honor.<sup>44</sup> There is no evidence that Chopin ever joined them.

The contacts between Chopin and Mickiewicz did not improve even during the period of Chopin's relationship with George Sand. Sand, who met Mickiewicz in the autumn of 1836, was one of few French writers who did not limit themselves to conventional contacts with the poet but also read and appreciated his writings. In 1839 she published an enthusiastic review of Mickiewicz's drama *Dziady* in the *Revue des deux mondes*, in which she compared him with Byron and Goethe.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Sand's keen essay on Mickiewicz's improvisation delivered at the banquet on 24 December 1840, along with her review of the series of Mickiewicz's lectures in the Collège de France, published in the *Revue Indépen-*

*dante*, displayed her respectful attitude toward the Polish poet. Nevertheless, it did not change the relationship between Chopin and Mickiewicz: Sand attended his lectures in the Collège de France much more frequently than did Chopin.

Chopin's cool relationship with Mickiewicz can also be viewed as a result of his keeping a distance from the Romantic movement in general, especially its radical aspects, and his disinterest in contemporary artistic currents. Chopin did not take part in the intellectual life of Warsaw seized by Romantic ideas at the end of the 1820s; although he lived among representatives of the most interesting generation in the history of Polish literature, he remained unaffected by its influence. Although Chopin owned the first edition of Mickiewicz's poems, which provoked a real stir in Polish literary circles—and although he later wrote music to some of Mickiewicz's poetry—he much more frequently turned to the verses of second-rate Polish poets, Stefan Witwicki and Bohdan Zaleski. In none of Chopin's letters can we find comments about the literary works of Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Krasiński—the greatest Polish poets of that period—which were published between 1831 and 1849 and were much admired in the circles of the Polish emigrants in Paris.<sup>46</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Viewed through his contacts with the Polish exiles in Paris, Chopin represents a striking contrast to many of the "national" artists contemporary to him and to the stereotype of a "national" artist created at that time. As opposed to many Romantics, such as Liszt and Mickiewicz, he did not engage himself in any direct political or social activity during the turbulent years 1831–48. (His consistency in this respect was remarkable: he did not even succumb to George Sand's influence during their

<sup>43</sup>Władysław Mickiewicz, *Pamiętniki*, 3 vols. (Warsaw, 1926), I, 173–74.

<sup>44</sup>Józef Tretiak, *Bohdan Zaleski na tułactwie, 1831–1838* (Kraków, 1913), p. 63.

<sup>45</sup>"Essai sur le Drame fantastique: Goethe, Byron, Mickiewicz," *Revue des Deux Mondes* (December 1839), 593–645.

<sup>46</sup>Chopin mentioned with no comments the poems *Dziady* and *Pan Tadeusz* by Mickiewicz in his letters of 27 March and 15 April 1839 to Grzymała, and of 17 January 1845 to Ostrowski.

relationship.) Although sympathetic to the Polish cause in a generalized sense, Chopin seemed to have a distaste for strong political convictions, much less for extreme political orientations. Paradoxically, it was not his pro-Polish political views, but rather his restraint in expressing them, that brought him recognition in Parisian salons.

Guided by his artistic interests rather than by any sense of patriotic duty, Chopin never yielded to pressures to make his music serve current political ends. Unlike Liszt, he did not give concerts for the benefit of his compatriots in Paris or in Poland. As opposed to the many artists of his time, political and artistic disputes were apparently of little interest to him. He was equally indifferent to current intellectual trends popular among Polish emigrants, such as the Messianism viewing Poland as a God-chosen nation that had a special role to play in the plans of Providence. It was his rejection of political and social involvement, rather

than his partisanship, that gave Chopin an entry into the society of "ambassadors, princes, and ministers."

As a fashionable musician performing mainly in salons and living on lessons given to the rich (though not necessarily very gifted) pupils—and as one rather unsuccessful in dealing with the new, public forms of artistic patronage—Chopin belonged to the previous epoch rather than to Romanticism proper. Though declaring himself a "revolutionary," he saw his place among the financially stable aristocracy and nobility rather than among the more radical wing of Polish emigrants. It was not the Polish aristocracy that most consistently supported Chopin in Paris, but the rich bourgeoisie and cosmopolitan aristocracy of the French capital: the Rothschilds, the Leos, the Schlesingers, the Apponyis. It was to his ability to place himself above the narrow limits of nationality rather than to his Polishness that he owed his success in Parisian society.

