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## Chopin – Grottger

To Professor Juliusz Chróścicki,  
with friendship<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** Is Stanisław Tarnowski's linking of Fryderyk Chopin and Artur Grottger in his *Dwa szkice* [Two sketches] justified? Well, the connection is substantiated by the "Romantic-leaning" point of view and the idea of the *correspondance des arts* that characterised the nineteenth century in which the two creative artists (and Tarnowski himself) lived, although they represented different creative fields. Both the musician Chopin and the artist Grottger were regarded as poets. The former on account of the poetic of his piano playing and musical works, the latter for the poetical dimension of his pictures devoted to the January Rising. Tarnowski called Chopin the fourth bard of Poland, alongside Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński, and Grottger the poet of the Rising, since – as he paradoxically stated – the poetical narrator of those events could only be an artist. Terminology of a literary character belonged to the lexicon of notions employed by critics of art and music at that time. Besides this, the national character is inscribed in the idiom of the work of both these creative artists – the thoroughly patriotic stance that was so strongly manifest in the output of Polish romanticism.

Another common denominator in their work is the concept of the cycle. With Chopin, the 24 *Preludes*, Op. 28 comprise a cycle in which the bonding element is the succession of major keys and their relative minor keys according to the circle of fifths, but they are also an expressive cycle of various states of mind, from despair to joyous reverie. The *Preludes* show both the semantic capacities and the suppleness of Chopin's musical language; that is, the ability to express the same feelings through various purely musical means, without any programmatic motto. With Grottger, we have the cycles *Warszawa* [Warsaw] (two cycles), *Polonia*, *Litwania* and *Wojna* [War]. In them, the metonymy of the narrative sequences is coupled with the notional exposition, with the symbolism. Grottger portrays not the historical scenes of the Rising, but the feelings of grief, despair and fear of individual people, reflecting their experiences. And so the concept is similar. Chopin's *Preludes* are like sketches, aphoristic utterances; sketches are also important in the work of Grottger, partly as a self-contained genre.

A third plane of analogy is the reduction of media. Chopin confines himself essentially to the piano, from which he produces startling tonal qualities, although he did write several works for chamber or orchestral forces. Grottger, meanwhile, draws his cycles solely in black pencil, using white only to heighten contrasts and give the effect of chiaroscuro. He did not wish to distract the attention of viewers, but wanted them to concentrate on the symbol.

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KEYWORDS: Fryderyk Chopin, Chopin's *24 Preludes*, Op. 28, Artur Grottger's graphic cycles, Stanisław Tarnowski, *correspondance des arts*

Is Stanisław Tarnowski's linking of Chopin and Grottger in the text 'Chopin i Grottger. Dwa szkice' [Chopin and Grottger. Two sketches], first published in 1873 in *Przegląd Polski* and then in 1892<sup>2</sup>, justified? After all, Tarnowski published this same essay about Grottger separately in 1874. Well, it seems that there are indeed grounds for comparing these two figures, especially if we assume a "Romantically-orientated" point of view characterising the century in which Chopin, Grottger and Tarnowski all lived. Moreover, Tarnowski himself defined the links between these two creative artists. He treated both as poets. The nineteenth century was a century of literature, which was not only supposed to "correspond" with the other arts, but also became the language of their exegesis. As Jacek Kolbuszewski writes in his article 'Poematy Artura Grottgera'<sup>3</sup> [The poems of Artur Grottger], terminology of a literary character belonged to the lexicon of art critics – and music critics as well, one should add, all the more so in that the tools of musical analysis had yet to be developed. And so the perspective of the poetical language of art criticism, on one hand, and also a comparison of the two artists' creative attitude, on the other, display certain analogies. Then there is the question of a general similarity between poetry and music, involving spiritual subjectivity and a yearning for the eternal. Music does not employ literal meanings, referring directly to reality (beyond pure illustration), and in poetry, one of the principles of beauty is its ambiguity, its reference to the absolute. These two arts are very close to one another. The ontological existence of a picture is different, but the way in which the subject is approached can also be metaphoric, poetic or symbolic. Jan Bołoz-Antoniewicz considers all three forms of creative expression – poetry, music and art – in a coherent metaphoric relationship. He calls music "sounding thought", giving supreme, absolute psychical qualities. Regarding poetry, he writes that "virtually dissolving in the lyrical, it takes on some almost supersensory resonance, of an unreal type of symphony. Schumann and Chopin are almost the same souls that finally arrived, avoiding the purgatory of logical speech, at the paradises of the 'sounding idea'"<sup>4</sup>. He also compares Grottger's *Amor i Psyche* [Amor and Psy-

<sup>2</sup> Stanisław Tarnowski, *Chopin i Grottger. Dwa szkice* [Chopin and Grottger. Two sketches] (Kraków, 1892); further citations according to that edition.

<sup>3</sup> Jacek Kolbuszewski, 'Poematy Artura Grottgera' [The poems of Artur Grottger], in *Artur Grottger. Materiały z sesji zorganizowanej w 150. rocznicę urodzin i 120. rocznicę śmierci artysty* [Artur Grottger. Material from the symposium organised on the 150th anniversary of the artist's birth and the 120th anniversary of his death], ed. Piotr Łukaszewicz (Warszawa, 1991), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Jan Bołoz-Antoniewicz, *Grottger* (Lviv, 1910), 25.

che] with what he calls a Chopinian *moment musical*; in other words, with one of the composer's miniatures, since Chopin did not call his works musical moments, as did Schubert, for example. He calls Grottger's painting "a masterpiece of monochrome. A matt silver moon, fading greenery [...] and that girl, a colourless and bodiless soul, on butterfly wings, [...] proceeds with beating heart towards Amor". Antoniewicz writes that this harmonious tone may "find its aesthetic equivalent perhaps in the absolutes of auditory sensations"<sup>5</sup>. For him, music is the supreme art.

Chopin was called a poet already during his lifetime. He was subjected to a system of notional references that was manifest throughout Polish culture during the period of the Partitions. Chopin's genius served the Polish cause – that patriotic para-theory of which he became a perfect example. Since there were no tools of musical research that could analyse the nature of that genius, of the exceptional quality of Chopin's musical art, poetical language was invoked.

In the article 'Chopin – czwarty wieszcz' [Chopin – the fourth bard], I looked at Delacroix's representation of Chopin as Dante and Chopin's pose on a watercolour by Teofil Kwiatkowski from 1849 – a pose that might suggest it was a copy of Mickiewicz's pose on Walenty Wańkiewicz's painting *Portret Adama Mickiewicza na skale Judahu* [Portrait of Adam Mickiewicz on the Rock of Judah].<sup>6</sup> So Chopin was linked to the image of a poet in art, as well. As a pianist, in Paris, Chopin was also dubbed a poet – or Ariel, or Raphael – of the piano.<sup>7</sup> In reviews, he was defined as an angel, and his subtle playing evoked only poetic associations. In his monograph of Chopin, Liszt wrote that he became the embodiment of "the poetic sense of a single nation"<sup>8</sup>, not only in his polonaises, mazurkas and krakowiaks, but in all the forms he cultivated. In order to explain the "poetic sense" of a nation, the critic, pianist and pedagogue Jan Kleczyński turned to the rules of Polish poetry. To illumine his interpretation of Chopin's works, he invoked a study by Bolesław Wilczyński<sup>9</sup>, where he found features of Old Polish, Old Slavonic poetry, such as wistful-

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 428.

<sup>6</sup> Irena Poniatowska, 'Chopin – czwarty wieszcz' [Chopin – the fourth bard], in *Topos narodowy w muzyce polskiej pierwszej połowy XIX wieku* [The national topos in Polish music of the first half of the nineteenth century], ed. Wojciech Nowik (Warszawa, 2006), 258–259.

<sup>7</sup> Daniele Pistone, *Le piano dans la littérature française. Des origines jusqu'en 1900* (Lille and Paris, 1975), 151–152.

<sup>8</sup> F. [Ferenc] Liszt, *F. Chopin*, 4th edn (Leipzig, 1890), 237.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Kleczyński, *O wykonywaniu dzieł Chopina. Trzy odczyty* (Warszawa, 1879), 79–81; Eng. tr. as Jean Kleczynski, *Frederic Chopin's Works and Their Proper Interpretation*, tr. Alfred Whittingham (London, n.d.), 68–70. Bolesław Wilczyński, *Stanisław Moniuszko i sztuka muzyczna narodowa. Studium estetyczne* [Stanisław Moniuszko and the national musical art. An aesthetic study] (Warszawa, 1874).

ness, lyricism, idealism, purity without cynicism, loftiness and fantasy, which he related to poetry and to music. Tarnowski considered that Chopin's music had the same charms, but also the same shortcomings, as Polish Romantic verse. It contains imagination, a wistfulness of feelings, and an originality and richness of form, but there is also "exaggerated melancholy, verging on the morbid, great irritation and nervous agitation, a lack of balance and an inner discord"<sup>10</sup>. As an example of nebulous Romantic ideas, he cites the girl from a Mickiewicz ballad who feels and sees something invisible, hears something and speaks about it. This broken narrative may – in his opinion – be referred to Chopin's music.<sup>11</sup> And so the language of metaphor and symbol replaces an exegesis of the musical text. Tarnowski attempted to find common ground between Chopin's music and poetry in another way, as well, seeking similarities between the fortunes of the three great poets Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński, on the one hand, and Chopin, on the other, and also analogies in their work. They all fell silent around 1848; Słowacki and Chopin both died in 1849. Polish poetry and music during that time both "went into exile", expressing the same longing for the homeland and producing works of the loftiest inspiration. Their work has one life and one soul. Tarnowski is of the opinion that Chopin confirms that spiritual community with our Romantic poetry for example in his final works, such as the *Mazurka*, Op. 73 and the *Polonaise-Fantasy*, which ends triumphantly; Chopin attunes himself to the tone of hope and anticipated victory in the works of Mickiewicz and Krasiński, and also occasionally in Słowacki.<sup>12</sup> Tarnowski first formulated these ideas in a lecture in March 1871 at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, on the basis of notes and letters received from Marcelina Czarotowska, who performed the Chopin works in question:

When Krasiński tells of the "purgatory of present days" with a voice deeper, more despairing perhaps, than others, and when Dant [*sic!*] goes through hell while alive, then it seems that this terrible procession is accompanied by the dull, bleak, frightening opening chords of the *Marche funèbre*. And while those three, with an archangel's wings and voice, "were guarding the souvenirs of the national church", that fourth [Chopin] was like that nightingale of Wajdelota, who "with resonant breast over ruins and graves warbles a song of mourning to travellers", and that song of his alone, happier than those, truly went around the crowd.<sup>13</sup>

According to Tarnowski, the polonaise was already well known, but Chopin cast it in a different poetic, as Mickiewicz did for the ode in his *Oda do mło-*

<sup>10</sup> Tarnowski, *Chopin i Grotgter*, 45.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 45–46.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.

*dości* [Ode to youth]. Similarly, with the arrival of Chopin, “the scorned mazurka was at once sanctioned by poetry and art”. He adds that none other than Dante described the feeling of “nessun maggior dolore” of which almost all the mazurkas are conceived.<sup>14</sup> So Chopin felt and suffered not just as an individual, but also like the three Romantic poets – for an entire generation, “for millions”. Consequently, Tarnowski dubbed Chopin the fourth bard, whose art spoke to the masses much more powerfully, since it employed a universal tongue. He also noted a similarity of nature between Chopin and Słowacki. Chopin resembled Słowacki in his sad, nervous disposition, but he was better than him, free from conceit and self-love. Both – in Tarnowski’s opinion – were also colourists: Chopin in music, Słowacki in poetry.<sup>15</sup>

Anna Lewicka-Morawska, considering whether Grottger was a bard, claims that he was a consoling bard, but a repudiated bard, since his works found their way into foreign hands. One common feature of the works of Grottger and Matejko, in art, and of Romantic poetry was their patriotic mission.<sup>16</sup> Yet the post-Rising romanticism in Polish painting was stamped by realism. Kolbuszewski states that Grottger’s romanticism is Anhellic<sup>17</sup>, close to the poetry of Mieczysław Romanowski and Kornel Ujejski, and to Krasiński’s *Przedświt* [The dawn]. Its tone is lofty, but reconciled to realism. Similarly, Grottger’s cycles are compared by Krystyna Poklewska with Romantic poetry, which depicted the ethos of suffering and fighting – the poetry on which the artist grew up and which corresponds to the subject matter and mood of his pictures, such as Ujejski’s *Skargi Jeremiasza* [Jeremiah’s complaints] and *Chorał* [Plainsong] or Romanowski’s *Do modlącej się Polski* [To Poland at prayer].<sup>18</sup> For Tarnowski, Grottger was not a realist; he had an exalted notion of art, the world and himself:

He is the only poet to have issued from the events in Poland of 1863. Perhaps this is natural, perhaps that poet could only be a painter, not a writer. A writer is always required to provide a conclusion, some useful and uplifting idea.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Anna Lewicka-Morawska, ‘Czy Grottger był wieszczem’ [Was Grottger a bard?], in Łukaszewicz (ed.), *Artur Grottger*, 88.

<sup>17</sup> Anhelli is the hero of a symbolic poem by Juliusz Słowacki (1838) – a young Pole, angelically pure, chosen from among the Siberian deportees, he was led around places associated with the suffering of the Polish nation. He symbolises the supreme values which are to be passed on to subsequent generations, in order to bind them to tradition.

<sup>18</sup> Kolbuszewski, ‘Poematy Artura Grottgera’, 11. Krystyna Poklewska, ‘Grottger – Ujejski – Romanowski. Motywy Grottgerowskich cykli i motywy późnej poezji romantycznej’ [Grottger, Ujejski and Romanowski. Motifs of Grottger’s cycles and motifs of late Romantic poetry], in Łukaszewicz (ed.), *Artur Grottger*, 116–124.

<sup>19</sup> Tarnowski, *Chopin i Grottger*, 109.

So he added that Krasiński could end his poems with something that consoled, but during the times when Tarnowski was writing about Grottger, not even “the faintest glimmer of *The Dawn*” could be seen. Grottger gave expression to sacrifice and suffering alone. According to Tarnowski, words can embrace more, can pass judgment on the present and point to the future; pictures record some trace, preserve the memory of some experienced emotions.<sup>20</sup> Marcei Krajewski, a friend of Grottger’s, said: “You are a poet in your pictures [...] All your cycles are like poetical visions. An epic and a drama in one”<sup>21</sup>. Whilst Waldemar Okoń considers that the epic, narrative element in Grottger’s works and their distance in respect to the events depicted is closer to prose than to poetry<sup>22</sup>, the designation of “poet” became attached to Grottger, and his works were customarily called poems. And that was the view of Tarnowski, for whom poetry stood at the peak of the hierarchy of the arts. In his art, Grottger wished not to expose himself as an artist, but to transmit his inner voice. He recounted human experiences and his own empathy. His imagination was marked by lofty affinity, by the purity with which he conveyed feelings. For that reason, he was a poetical figure. For Tarnowski, both Chopin and Grottger were poets – and patriotic poets at that, marked by a national mission.

This is the first common denominator of the work of these two creative artists. But one can point to a number of external circumstances that linked their fortunes. They both died young – in Paris. Chopin’s heart returned to Warsaw; the remains of Grottger were also brought back home, thanks to his beloved Wanda Monné. In his book *Romantyczni kochankowie* [Romantic lovers], Józef Ratajczak also compares the love stories of three artists: Krasiński, Chopin and Grottger. In the case of Chopin and Grottger, there were unfulfilled desires to wed a sweetheart.<sup>23</sup> Whilst these similarities do not touch the heart of the matter, there are analogies of a different type, namely the concept of the cycle in the work of both, and the restriction to a single technique, to a single medium. And it is these two analogies that will be analysed here.

In Romantic art, the cycle was an important element in the organisation of a narrative. In music, in contrast to the Classical pattern of the sonata cycle and the symphony, which had its tonal, agogic, formal and above all dramatic rules, during the Romantic era the cycle – more characteristic of the Baroque

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Ludwik Świeżawski, *Dobry geniusz* [The good genius] (Warszawa, 1975), 259.

<sup>22</sup> Waldemar Okoń, ‘Grottger a proza’ [Grottger and prose], in Łukaszewicz (ed.), *Artur Grottger*, 104.

<sup>23</sup> Józef Ratajczak, *Romantyczni kochankowie* [Romantic lovers]. *Zygmunt Krasiński, Fryderyk Chopin, Artur Grottger* (Poznań, 1989).

– returned in force, with both the sequential, suite-type cycle and, quite frequently, the programmatic cycle, in which the principle of pictoriality held sway – a succession of contrastive or complementary tableaux. This type of cycle was proposed by Robert Schumann, for example, in many cyclic works – *Carnaval*, *Fantasiestücke*, *Waldszenen*, *Albumblätter*, *Kreisleriana* (dedicated to Chopin) and others. Besides their purely musical organisation, they are linked by an extra-musical idea. Programme in music was alien to Chopin, who was irritated when Wessel, the English publisher, gave programmatic titles to his works. And he could not abide arrangements and transcriptions, making exception only – on account of their friendship – in respect to Auguste Franchomme’s cello transcriptions and the vocal arrangements with texts to mazurkas made by Pauline Viardot. But Chopin created a grand cycle of *24 Preludes*, Op. 28, which, besides the principle of a sequence of keys according to the circle of fifths and their relative keys, is governed by the idea of displaying various states of mind, feelings and sensations by means of textural means, distributed according to expressive principles. Chopin’s *Preludes*, although they are absolute music, from the very beginning were subjected to verbal interpretations, in the form of programmes, mottos, titles and wordings defining their expressive content, starting with George Sand and ending with Alfred Cortot, Raoul Koczalski and others. The condensation of the musical idea in these aphoristic works and their wealth of expression denote an excess that was vented in literary form, particularly during an era when the poetic word meant so much. The situation of music in the world of meanings is quite peculiar – music does not signify anything, and so it may signify everything. Music does not express any unequivocal, inner sense that communicates something; it offers sense itself and yields to various interpretations, even the least profound. During the Baroque, the prelude was combined with a fugue or a suite; in the nineteenth century, sets of preludes were also written in all the keys, for a pianist to play his way into a “proper” work. With Chopin, preludes are not a preface to anything, they do not serve the intoning or fixing of a key before the performance of a composition; they are a set of short “meditations”, a micro- and macrocosm of the inner world of Chopin’s emotions. I addressed the sphere of expressions conveyed in literary, associative interpretations of the *Preludes* during the Chopin Congress in 1999, dividing it into four areas:

1. contentment, peace, a mood of love, tenderness and grace, occasionally also of prayer;
2. melancholy, at times marked by grandeur, at times by sickness;
3. pessimism, complaint, pain and despair, either proud or tragic and gloomy;
4. masculine energy, an explosion of brute force.

Then I matched the *Preludes* to particular categories.<sup>24</sup>

It turned out that the most common are preludes from the first and fourth areas, but it is the melancholic and despairing pieces that stick in one's mind. In the second half of the opus 28 set (Nos. 13–24), it is the category of drama and power that begins to dominate. Therefore, the force of expression that resides in the *Preludes* and that the listener perceives is the overcoming of suffering.

There are also elaborate metaphoric descriptions, relating to many of the *Preludes*, that are orientated towards nature, towards real or anecdotal situations from Chopin's life, towards evoking poetical moods and connections to the fortunes of the nation and the image of death. Although they are at times banal, one should not understand them literally, but consider them on the level of manifestations of symbolic culture. Władysław Stróżewski considered Chopin's set of *Preludes* in comparison with Cyprian Kamil Norwid's set of poems *Vademecum*, as the idea of a journey not only through keys, but also through various expressive characters, as a universal principle, which signifies not just an internal (musical) code, but also an external code; that is, reference to the questions of life, death and the real and imagined world, as the idea of essentiality and as the idea of individuality.<sup>25</sup> Thus he transferred to the philosophical plane that which artists, writers and critics expressed in literary metaphor. So this is a hermeneutic interpretation, reaching into the deep semiotic layer that is demanded by Chopin's *Preludes*.

Chopin confirmed in this cycle the great possibilities of his musical language; that is, the semantic capacity of particular works and the flexibility of that language – its ability to express the same feelings through a variety of means. Terms relating to the expression of the *Preludes* and to more elaborate metaphors strengthen the conviction that this cycle is integrated not only harmonically and structurally, but also expressively.

The concept of the cyclic work in the oeuvre of Grottgger is considered by Irena Dziurkowa-Kossowska as a *Tableaubild* – a series of small compositions linked by ornamentation. In 1850, Grottgger entered the circle of recognised illustrators, before going on to produce triptychs and then grand cycles. Dziurkowa-Kossowska writes of two-level visual narration in Grottgger's cyclic works. This is the co-existence of a metonymic narrative sequence and a metaphoric structure – the level of notional exposition in harmony with sym-

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<sup>24</sup> Irena Poniatowska, 'Sur les interprétations polysémiques des *Préludes* opus 28 de F. Chopin', in *Chopin and His Work in the Context of Culture*, ed. Irena Poniatowska, 2 vols., ii (Kraków, 2003), 204–220.

<sup>25</sup> Władysław Stróżewski, 'Chopin i Norwid', *Rocznik Chopinowski* 19 (1990), 56; Eng. tr. as 'Chopin and Norwid', tr. Katharine Tylko-Hill, *Chopin Studies* 3 (1990).

bolism, the epic linked with the lyrical.<sup>26</sup> Grottger did not refer to the conventions of historicism, to the representation of the events preceding and during the January Rising as they actually proceeded. The truth is processed in his imagination; it is a poetic interpretation. We are dealing with the fragmentation of reality, but at the same time those fragments are integrated into a cycle. But this is not a cycle describing a sequence of events or cause and effect, but a succession of expressive tableaux depicting the feelings of pain, suffering, sorrow, despair, powerlessness and fear, as well as revolt and resistance – a symbolic sequence. Before turning to the concept of the cycle, Grottger often took inspiration from tragic motifs. *Warszawa* [Warsaw] comprises two cycles, fourteen cartoons in all, showing a city fighting, praying, lamenting its human losses, and seeking a unity of states and nations. The second cycle in *Warszawa* ends with the cartoon *Sybir* [Siberia]. We might note here that the *Polonaise in E flat minor*, Op. 26 No. 2 was also associated in nineteenth-century reception with exiles making their way to Siberia. Grottger shows the emptiness of an earth that is hostile to man, with a paltry cross, twisted by the wind. *Polonia* comprises nine cartoons portraying dramatic situations from the perspective of the manor, which was treated as a sanctuary of the national tradition, whilst *Lituania*, composed of six cartoons, shows the tension of moments experienced from the perspective of the forbidding, hostile Lithuanian forest. These cycles include depictions of battle (*Kucie kos* [Forging scythes], *Bitwa* [Battle], *Na pobjowisku* [After the battle]), but symbolically expressed rather than reconstructing events. The motif of death, so intense in Grottger's cycles, is also expressed in Chopin, in the short, but distinctive funeral march that is the *Prelude in C minor*, No. 20. The theme of death recurs in Chopin's correspondence and in his music. Grottger's last cycle is *Wojna* [War] (eleven cartoons), not related to any concrete battles, but illustrating the evil and misery of war.<sup>27</sup> Grottger's cartoons are rather small, averaging around 40 cm tall or wide; only *Lituania* and *Wojna* reach around 60 cm in height or width, depending on the format. Grottger's realism serves the idealisation – in some sense – of suffering for the idea of the nation. With Grottger, the symbolism is manifest, even aggressively so, at first glance. Only later does one notice the trail of sadness and melancholic reflection that envelops all the cycles. The fragmentation of the sensations that make up a set of emotions or expressions is common to Chopin and Grottger, even if Grottger's thematic sets of pictures appear incomparable with the abstract music of Chopin's aphoristic preludes. However, reception has revealed the symbolism

<sup>26</sup> Irena Dziurkowa-Kossowska, 'Koncepcja dzieła cyklicznego w twórczości Artura Grottgera' [The conception of the cyclic work in the oeuvre of Artur Grottger], in Łukasiewicz (ed.), *Artur Grottger*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> In presenting Grottger's cycles, I have drawn on the description and album of Wiesław Juszcak: *Artur Grottger. Pięć cykliów* [Five cycles] (Warszawa, 1957).

of the preludes, producing metaphoric “pictures” or descriptions of the moods that are seemingly substituted for motifs in this set of works. Here is just a selection of the terms used with regard to the expression of the *Prelude in A minor*, No. 2: “presentiment of death” (Kapp), “mournful song” and “gloomy mournful death knell” (Koczalski), “terrifying image of monotony and despair” (Szulc), “painful meditation” (Cortot), “self-induced hypnosis, a mental, an emotional atrophy” (Huneker), “gloomy mystery” (Stróżewski).<sup>28</sup> They create a uniform semantic field of this peculiar – “ugly” (exceptional in Chopin!) and “weird”, for some – prelude. Just as in Chopin some of the preludes display grace, loftiness and joy, so in Grottger we find the themes of youth, allure and refinement – not in the cycles under discussion, however, but in such pictures as *Parki* [Parcae], which Antoniewicz considers the first Polish symbolic painting: “Is this not a Chopinian creation, Mussetian verse?”<sup>29</sup>

There is also the question of the sketch, which links the work of Chopin and Grottger. Chopin’s preludes have been called, by some, sketches without a distinct form. That is how they were treated by Schumann. Antoniewicz attaches considerable weight to sketches in Grottger, which he regards not only as an original idea, but as sketches that wish to remain sketches, that exist independently as a genre: “These sketches are born of the artist’s very spiritual core, as his most direct ideas, most crucially his own, wholly similar – in this respect as well – to the preludes and nocturnes of Chopin or to the ‘fantasy pieces’ of Schumann”<sup>30</sup>.

There remains the issue of the confinement to a single means of artistic expression. Chopin was a piano composer. In his youth, he wrote six works with orchestra, a trio, and a polonaise for cello and piano, but in exile he restricted himself – apart from two works with cello and songs with piano accompaniment, which he did not publish and ultimately asked to be destroyed, as they were not sufficiently polished – to the piano alone. During the nineteenth century, the prevailing stereotype was of a grand composer – above all of operas and symphonies. Józef Elsner, Stefan Witwicki and Adam Mickiewicz all tried to induce Chopin to write a national opera on a subject from Polish history, which they considered his patriotic duty. Witwicki wrote to him on 6 July 1831: “You simply must compose a Polish opera [...] it will

<sup>28</sup> Julius Kapp, ‘Chopin’s *Préludes* op. 28. Aufzeichnungen von Laura Rappoldi-Kahrer nach Angaben von Liszt, W. von Lenz und Frau von Mouckhanof *Die Musik* 9/10 (1909); Raoul Koczalski, *Frédéric Chopin. Conseils d’interprétation*, introd. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger (Paris, 1998); Marcell A. Szulc, *Fryderyk Chopin i utwory jego muzyczne* [Fryderyk Chopin and his musical works], new edn (Kraków, 1986); Alfred Cortot, *Chopin. 24 Préludes. Edition de travail* (Paris, n.d.); James Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and His Music* (New York, 1900); Stróżewski, ‘Chopin and Norwid’.

<sup>29</sup> Bołoz-Antoniewicz, *Grottger*, 326–327.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

have as much melodiousness as an Italian opera, even more tenderness, and incomparably more ideas”. And he added: “were you not to pursue that path, you would be voluntarily renouncing the most beautiful laurels [...] be original, native”. However, no one wrote him a libretto, and in the end Chopin called on Mickiewicz to “Leave me my piano”, and to Count Perthuis he apparently said “I am not sufficiently learned to compose an opera”<sup>31</sup>.

Liszt defended Chopin’s right to concentrate on the piano alone. He wrote that the value of Chopin’s piano works was no lesser than that of the operas and symphonies of other composers, just as the artistry of small-scale paintings, such as Ruysdael’s *La Vision d’Ezéchiel* and *Le Cimetière*, was no lesser than that of the grand canvases of Rubens or Tintoretto, and the poems of Béranger and sonnets of Petrarch not inferior to expansive literary works.<sup>32</sup> For Chopin, the piano sufficed: it was his micro- and macrocosm; he found in it a huge wealth of timbres. He confined himself essentially to a single performance apparatus. On one hand, he displayed new pianistic techniques and new types of texture, but he could also limit himself at times to just a single instrumental figure. In this, he is close to the tendencies of minimalism, which over a century later became manifest in the musical art of the 1960s and 1970s as a distinct style. One eloquent example of this is the *Prelude in E flat minor*, Op. 28 No. 14. Here, the structural cell consists of a half-bar figure *e flat – b flat – g flat* and *a flat – e flat – a flat* – the two hands in unison. So the accompaniment is not distinguished as a separate layer. In visual terms, this prelude may be seen as a “unistic” picture. Although the dynamic evolves over small segments, it culminates in *ff* and in the end falls in *decrescendo* to a hush. The form is based on the principle of “music that has no end”, although the harmony is of crucial importance. The statics is underscored by register (low in the left hand, middle in the right). There is no ending; the music essentially breaks off, and the figure could be repeated still. Is this not the purest form of “play”, or the “way of being a work as such”? One may speak of purposeless motion, of a play of light or colours. It also reminds one of the still unfathomable finale of the *B flat minor Sonata*. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, play (his remarks concern language, but may be extended to music) should not at all be understood as a kind of action. We are dealing not with someone’s subjectivity, but with playing itself.<sup>33</sup> Although we

<sup>31</sup> *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina* [The correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin], ed. Bronisław Edward Sydow, i (Warszawa, 1955), 179–180.

<sup>32</sup> Liszt, *F. Chopin*, 12–13.

<sup>33</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda*, tr. Bogdan Baran (Kraków, 1993), 123; [Ger. orig. *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen, 1960)]. See Irena Poniatowska, ‘Die Idee des Minimalen in den Präludien von Frédéric Chopin’, in *Von Perotin bis Steve Reich. Die Ideen des “Minimalen” in der Musikgeschichte und Gegenwart* (Bratislava, 2006).

have here an original idea of the composer's, this prelude contains an element of playing for playing's sake, of the postmodernist idea-game.

So Chopin confines himself to the single means of utterance that is the piano, and he is also capable of depicting what is to be uttered with a single instrumental figure, a single kind of "stroke".

Grottger's cycles are drawn in black pencil, and white is used only to bring out the contrasts, for chiaroscuro. With Grottger, landscape painting was a secondary strand. His oeuvre does include oil paintings – not just portraits, but also historical pictures and the *Pochód na Sybir*<sup>34</sup> [Procession to Siberia] – and he also used watercolours and drew with pen, coloured pencil and charcoal, but in his grand cycles he keeps to black pencil alone. Władysław Żeleński, a friend of Grottger, who introduced him to Chopin's works in his own renditions, said: "It is hard to conceive that such wondrous contrasts can be produced with pencil", "Only Grottger draws like that"<sup>35</sup>. Tarnowski wrote that Grottger was perhaps the only artist capable of being "dramatic and exalted" in small-scale drawings and in such a modest medium as pencil.<sup>36</sup> The choice of black pencil speaks volumes. Here is Antoniewicz:

In his cycles, Grottger completely stems the wave of coloured vision, which, damned up, will return with force redoubled, to impress upon the pencil drawing, with a distinctiveness all the greater, the stamp of its suppressed colourfulness. For the colours in the "cycles" are like underground waves, loudly swooshing, like the scents of hidden flowers, but so strong and exquisite that we no longer crave to see their colourful cups!

And here is another comparison with music:

The works from his youth are like compositions created for a single instrument, later broken down for quartet or quintet; the graphic works from 1859 onwards, meanwhile, and especially the "cycles", are compositions conceived initially as orchestral, but ultimately created for one instrument, the piano or the even more discreet violin. After all, concealed in a number of Chopin's piano works is an entire orchestra *in potentia*.<sup>37</sup>

Grottger wanted the viewer to concentrate solely on the symbol that grabbed his heart, without being distracted by colours. Wiesław Juszcak makes the general observation that we find in Grottger's works reminiscences of the poetry of the three Polish bards, as well as Goethe, Schiller and Dante,

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<sup>34</sup> Wiesław Juszcak writes that Grottger painted oils in Sniatynka, near Drohobych, while living with Stanisław Tarnowski. Juszcak, *Artur Grottger*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Ludwik Świeżawski, *Rapsod powstańczy* [Insurrectionary rhapsody] (Łódź, 1972), 429.

<sup>36</sup> Tarnowski, *Chopin i Grottger*, 107.

<sup>37</sup> Bołoz-Antoniewicz, *Grottger*, 251–252.

and also echoes of the music of Chopin, Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann.<sup>38</sup> And so we read the spirit of the age and the connections between the arts. He also cites Mieczysław Treter's opinion that in terms of purely formal artistic qualities, Grottger's cartoons do not carry the significance of eternally vital masterpieces.<sup>39</sup> Yet for his peers, they had great significance – above all, a most powerful notional dimension. Grottger's drawing technique was also admired. Also today, their qualities are valued, albeit redefined.

Without wishing to compare the talent of Grottger with the genius of Chopin, one does note certain analogies in their creative conception, in their manner of poetical utterance, in their choice and use of a single means of communication, suited to them; and those elements link them. Chopin made no great use of orchestral sonorities; Grottger was familiar with colouring and various techniques in painting, but he later deliberately turned his back on them. Grottger devoted his cycles to the nation. Chopin forged a national style and placed piano music and pianistic texture on an unparalleled plane, but he humbly wrote to Tytus Woyciechowski on 25 December 1831: "You know how much I wanted to feel and in part succeeded in feeling our national music"<sup>40</sup>.

*Translated by John Comber*

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<sup>38</sup> Juszcak, *Artur Grottger*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Juszcak cites Mieczysław Treter, *Nieznany cykl Artura Grottgera, Warszawa II* [An unknown cycle by Artur Grottger: Warsaw II] (Lviv and Warszawa, 1926).

<sup>40</sup> *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina*, i, 210.