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## THE INCREDIBLE LIGHTNESS OF FORTEPIANO: GENDER AND MUSICAL MEANING IN THE WORKS OF CHOPIN

Language is the primary means of describing our experiences with music and, therefore, it plays a major role in the construction of meaning in music. It is used spontaneously in order to relay a musical experience, but it may also be used by some people with the premeditated intent of coercing others into what is seen as the correct interpretation of that music. In the latter case, the subtle effect of power contributes to a sense of duality between what one would rather express and what one has been coerced into expressing. Chopin's music has been particularly susceptible to a number of endeavors that seek to cleanse him and his music of qualities that are associated with smallness, femininity, and a lack of power. In my view, authors who talk, think, or write about smallness negatively, and performers who perform in a style that marginalizes that which could be considered "miniaturesque," and who both uphold their interpretations as "better," are involved in a form of politics — a gendered sensory politics. A desire for "mammoth" proportions, in relation to experiences with music, which was manifested throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, had a considerable effect on the evaluation of Frédéric Chopin's style of playing the piano.<sup>1</sup> This preference for largeness in all its forms, whether it be in the *fortissimo*, the heroic, or another sense, appears to stem from a conscious or unconscious linking of the concept with attributes of masculinity and a tacit acceptance that the qualities customarily linked with that gender are superior to more feminine attributes. The element of power as experienced through intense sensory saturation appears to be a factor influencing this preference. The desire for largeness in the musical sphere has led to a certain extent to the marginalisation of smallness and whatever is associated with it, particularly concepts such as femininity, lightness and a lack of power.

In Robert Fink's article "Going Flat: Post-Hierarchical Music Theory and the Musical Surface," the words "surface" and "depth" are discussed in relation to compositions stemming from the age of Impressionism to the Second Viennese School, and then to the minimalist movement in postmodern society. Fink uses the binary opposition, of surface and depth, to prove that the "self-deconstructing" surface was a premonition of the postmodern. With the support of "contradictory [but] brilliant theories" by Jean Baudrillard, Fink demonstrates that "the image...represents only itself, [and that] the surface ... floats free of any reality 'underneath.'"<sup>2</sup> That the musical signs, in other words,

only point to each other and that there is nothing — no “deep” meaning — underneath. Or, rather, that the “deep” meaning — the deconstruction of the meaning of the musical signs — is on the surface. Fink’s “all surface” interpretation of musical compositions also reflects Hayden White’s views on Michel Foucault’s perspective on discourse — namely, that Foucault’s denunciation of structuralism is apparent in his writing, which lacks the “center” associated with structuralism.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in Fink’s article, in which he analyses music notation, the subjects are dealt with in a way that seems to reflect the academism of twentieth-century philosophers and philosopher-literary theorists. This “all surface” treatment of a music text has also been applied to Chopin’s music. In “Impossible Objects,” Lawrence Kramer analyses Chopin’s Prelude in A Minor, “not” to discover “what deep structure holds it together, but rather what motivates it to keep breaking apart.”<sup>4</sup>

As regards the subject of performance, Cook, in his article “Analyzing Performance and Performing Analysis,” maintains that there is a prevalence to draw meaning from music notation, rather than from experiencing live music, and then relating this meaning back to the text. José A. Bowen, who also favours meaning derived from “spoken” music over meaning derived from musical notation, supports Cook’s position on this matter later in the anthology, *Rethinking Music*.<sup>5</sup>

It may not be an over-simplification of Ferdinand de Saussure’s structuralism, to say that speech and writing were considered two “distinct systems of signs,” but that speech was favoured.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Jacques Derrida’s poststructuralism involved an analysis of this partiality (logocentrism) in order to deconstruct the hierarchical proportions within the pair. It would seem that his main argument was that there could be no favouring of the components of binary oppositions because the one only gains meaning because of the other.<sup>7</sup> Because Derrida does not challenge the outer structure of binary oppositions except for merely wanting to remove the ‘center’ in structuralism, J. G. Merquior has suggested that Derrida’s theory is not that radical when compared to structuralism, and it might be more appropriate to think of Derrida as a “neo-structuralist.”<sup>8</sup> “This is not the place for yet another exposition of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism,”<sup>9</sup> but it is dealt with, briefly, in order to demonstrate the validity of applying this current thought to the study of the binary oppositions evident in music — such as “louder” and “softer.” Additionally, it appears that these articles illustrate the profound influence that language — as a static, and evolving, system of signs — has had over the study of the music, which seems comparable to speech and writing. In short, music needs to be conceptualized not only in terms of specific times and places, but also in terms of the progression of time, and changes in places.

Against this brief exposition on the evolution of critical thought concerning the presence of speech and the absence of writing, the manner in which Cook and Bowen have approached their subject appears to reflect this evolution. Bowen claims that it is hearing music performed that affects our interpretation of the text, and Cook argues that there is not enough scholarly study that looks first at performance and then at scores. In the first case, we see how Bowen's premise sides with structuralism. He considers the presence of music to be more important than the text (which is characterized by silence). Cook, however, sees that there is a deficiency in performance-based study and attempts to persuade scholars to view the two as equally important. This approach, to see both parts of the pair as equally important, and to take away the "positive" presence that marginalizes the less present (and therefore "negative") other, seems in line with deconstructionism.

There are also postmodern musicologists, however, who argue that the analogy between music and language is promoted merely because it gives scholars a framework within which to understand their subject. Kofi Agawu, in "The Challenge of Semiotics," posits that the link drawn between music and language is challengeable because of the very phenomenon that makes language unique — its text-centeredness.<sup>10</sup> Further, he argues that the lack of a dictionary-type system for defining the various qualities of sound is the reason why practitioners have been unable to agree on the way in which to analyze the semiotic nature of music. To this end, he presents his aim: "to emphasize the instability" of the practice of treating music as a system of semiotics.<sup>11</sup> In his section "Is Music a Language?" Agawu argues that there are a number of ways of comparing music to language and that his explorations of these comparisons have provided support for his belief that the link between the two should be questioned. For instance, he states that while spoken language has an "ordinary function" — mere communication — music "exists" primarily for "artistic expression."<sup>12</sup> Agawu also considers that music should be differentiated from language because its "capacity" for "communication" is not comparable to the latter. He concludes: "I would say" that the metaphor of "music-as-language" is useful, because it provides a "more secure basis for framing kinds of musical knowledge as semiotic."<sup>13</sup>

In my view, if scholars of today were not to respond to Agawu's challenge — to use semiotics as the major component of musical analysis, instead of treating it as one of the elements of a pluralistic enterprise — the implications would be serious. Postmodern theorists (such as Fink) would be obliged to broaden their fundamental approach to teaching and writing about twentieth-century music and art — analyses of music and art where their central argument rests on the applications of ideas that were conceived, originally, by philosophers and literary theorists. These ideas concern, primarily, the role that the *sign*, the signified, and

the signifier play in the construction (or deconstruction) of reality. The most unsettling problem, in my view, concerns what musicologists would use, in terms of theoretical frameworks, in order to broaden their approaches to their topics. Without the support of the theories of well-known philosopher-literary theorists, I question what nonlinguistic theories musicologists could transpose into their studies in order to problematize their subject. Agawu's challenge is especially problematic if we consider works of art. René Magritte's *This is not a Pipe*, and his *The Key of Dreams*, for example, portray images with captions that contradict the images: the pipe is in fact a pipe, the horse is not a door, the jug is not a bird, and the tree is not a tree, and so on. Magritte's painting has clearly adopted a language-based role in structuralist and deconstructionist discourse, because Magritte's concept — a horse and a tree, for instance — seems to echo Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, where a horse and a tree are also chosen to illustrate the links people make between words, such as "horse" and "tree," and images.<sup>14</sup> Even though breaking down the link between the musical sign and its concept (the emotion or thought it represented traditionally) was a trend in twentieth-century music, the underlying theory — the questioning of the relationship between the signified and signifier — owed much of its existence, nonetheless, to the literary theorists of the twentieth century. The question that arises is: should musicians take up Agawu's challenge, even though artists and composers made a primary analogy between their compositions and language?<sup>15</sup> In answer to my own question: on the one hand, I acknowledge that studying the link between music and language may, as Agawu would point out, be yet another "refine[ment]" of Saussurean theory. On the other hand, however, the breakdown of signifieds and signifiers relates to philosophical thought of the twentieth century: a philosophical thought that does not appear to have been contemplated in Chopin's society. Considering that Chopin subscribed to the metaphor of music-as-singing, which he used in order to describe variations in quality and quantity of sound, inquiry into this metaphor might also be understood, as Paul Stoller would point out, in terms of involving oneself in the domain of the senses in order to understand other cultures better.<sup>16</sup> The very link between music and language now incorporates the physical experience of performance. In short, I respond to Agawu's challenge by considering how societies, up to the late twentieth century, relayed their experiences of largeness and smallness, trusting the language they used to represent their thoughts and feelings in regard to their perceptions of variations of sound.

I propose that concentrating on the study of performance in music poses unusual challenges. This is partly because of the implication of John Rink's words (that there is a lack of a model for sensory research<sup>17</sup>, but also because an understanding of the sensory dimension — especially when discussing older cultures — depends on one's ability to think in terms of a variety of sensory experiences. This implies we should weigh not so much words against each

other, but measure the proportions of the implications of the words in the sensory dimension and draw meaning from the way we use words to describe the interaction of these varying proportions. Similar to the way in which Derrida finds it "surprising" that the "scientific interest in writing has always taken the form of a history of writing" at the expense of a "theory of writing," I find it surprising that there is a lack of literature that attempts to show the effects of the sensory dimension on musical meaning. It may be helpful to view this article, in part, as a probe into the role that language and the senses of sight, sound, and touch, play in the construction of musical meaning, and not as an attempt to destabilize current thought on the form of historical representation.

It is to Saussure's analogy between loan-words and chess to demonstrate how external factors are less important than internal factors in the understanding of the sensory system that I wish to draw attention. Loan-words are words that get passed on from one language to another. Saussure demonstrates that the history and geography of the words do not have an impact on how they function.

In chess, what is external can be separated relatively easily from what is internal. The fact that the game passed from Persia to Europe is external; against that, everything having to do with its system and rules is internal. If I use ivory chessmen instead of wooden ones, the change has no effect on the system, but if I decrease or increase the number of the chessmen, this change has a profound effect on the "grammar" of the game. One must always distinguish between what is internal and what is external.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, the geographical location of the game changed from "Persia to Europe." The history of the game also demonstrates that there was a change in a time frame: although chess originated in Persia, it moved, later, to Europe. These are external factors. The internal factors, however, regardless of this change in time and place, seem to have remained constant. Relating this to this study of Chopin it may be claimed that although there is a wide selection of literature (from contemporaneous reports on Chopin to recent publications on piano pedagogy, for instance), the internal factors — the audio sensory and frequency, amongst others — have been constant.

Terminology has changed from a very descriptive Romantic style to a more straight-forward approach in recent years, but according to Saussure's argument (by pointing out that playing with wooden or ivory pieces would not affect play), whether we call a small proportion "*pianissimo*" or "soft," the words do not affect a difference in the reception of that small proportion. As Guy Madison concludes after scientific experiments, there is evidence to suggest that we experience music, and relay our experience of music, in a similar way.<sup>19</sup>

Words need to be used to explain what we think about our sensory perceptions (our "subjective manifestations," as Alfred North Whitehead calls them<sup>20</sup>) and because they substitute the physical experience, they are implicated in the construction of musical meaning. Musical meaning, in turn, must be understood, necessarily, via the subjective way we use language. Some theorists, amongst them Jacques Lacan (as reported by Celia Britton), maintain that language is itself constitutive of subjectivity.<sup>21</sup> Words become an internal factor in the sensory dimension because they are the signs we use to relay our sensory experiences. Stephen Handel claims that a "surface" level of music exists — a level that, without access to theoretical knowledge that helps one construct the "grammar" of what one hears, relates to nothing but sound.<sup>22</sup> If such an experience truly exists, then there is support for my argument that our sense of sound and frequency is one of the constants in the experience of music. However, Cook writes, "language constructs reality rather than merely reflecting it."<sup>23</sup> Further, he suggests that there exists a "paradox" in music: "if music needs to be explained through words, then it must stand in need of explanation."<sup>24</sup> Our perception of reality, in short, is marred by a number of factors that relate to the issue of language itself. This line of thought, indeed, contradicts my statement above: that "our sense of sound and frequency" are internal factors, which have remained constant. There is a contradiction because language mediates the experience, or, as Cook claims, "constructs" the experience. There is nothing truly absolute about our sense of sound and frequency, because the moment we translate the experience into words, something — some meaning, apart from the physical experience — may be lost, or, perhaps, even gained. Due to this complex relationship between our sensory perception of music in performance and the way we explain that perception, I argue that language becomes a piece in the game of chess. Language becomes an internal factor (a factor that determines meaning in music), because we involve it when relaying our experiences of music.

However, the Romantics are said to have believed that language was more-or-less capable of depicting the real world through "rational judgment."<sup>25</sup> The implication, therefore, is, if words were believed to more-or-less capture the phenomenon of sound, or to relay one's likes or dislikes of sounds, words also captured some truth about the sounds that these words represented. The imprecision of relaying the sensory experience through language, in other words, was not as much of an issue in their time as what it is today. For example, when Edward Hanslick criticized Clara Schumann's piano playing because of her small tone in 1856, he rationalized that owing to her sex she did not have the physical strength to play loudly.<sup>26</sup> Although Hanslick might not have been aware that Clara Schumann purposely avoided largeness in her performance, a proportion that she associated, negatively, with Liszt's "buzzing"

and "banging," his criticism demonstrates, nevertheless, that he believed smallness was a truthful reflection of what smallness represented: namely, "femininity."<sup>27</sup>

Recently, the inclusion of theories on gender in the study of music has come under attack. Andrew Thomson compares recent studies in music that focus on gender to that of a "Hoffnungesque" joke.<sup>28</sup> The reason for this comparison, in Thomson's opinion, is that some writers are over-politicizing the gender issue. Stephen Katz writes in his essay "How to Speak and Write the Postmodern" that in conversation, a sure way of really impressing the listener is to throw in a reference to feminism.<sup>29</sup> Although Katz's article pokes fun at some of the practices within postmodern writing, this remark also highlights the tendency of postmodern thinking to place an emphasis on issues of gender; as Beverly Lewis Parker states "music research is no longer taken seriously if it ignores such issues as the relation of musical practices to agency and power and sexual orientation."<sup>30</sup>

The tug-of-war between so-called "masculine-as-largeness" and "femininity-as-smallness" (with language as the metaphorical "rope") implicates Chopin in the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Franz Liszt writes of Chopin: "the artist could not avenge the man! Too feeble in health to betray this impatience through the vehemence of his own playing, he sought compensation by writing pages that he loved to hear performed with the vigor that he lacked."<sup>31</sup> The connotation of Liszt's remark, is that he equates "vigor" to "healthy manliness." The tone of Liszt's words reflects negatively on Chopin. Liszt writes as though Chopin was deficient in "masculinity": Chopin "lacked" "vigor," which Liszt sees as a masculine necessity. Liszt is "intent" on two things: to convince the reader that Chopin's texts are intrinsically "vigorous," and because he loved to "hear" "vigorous" music, he too would have played these texts with "vigor" (if only he was a "healthy" "man"). Moreover, if Liszt is able to convey his subjective perspective as "fact," then he has legitimate grounds for performing Chopin's music texts with "masculine" "vigor." It is not surprising that in the section on Chopin's polonaises, Liszt writes several pages that reflect a "masculine" aesthetic having been transposed from the Polish national dance and embedded in Chopin's compositions.<sup>32</sup> Nor is it surprising when Liszt writes that the public audience (the "masses") is a "sea of lead" and consequently, can only be "molded" by "the strong arm of the stalwart laborer" (again asserting the "masculine" aesthetic).<sup>33</sup> Liszt further justifies his perspectives by quoting Chopin as having said to an "artist friend": "I am not fitted to give concerts [because I lack "the strong arm of the stalwart laborer. But, you, on the other hand,] when you do not win the public [over,] you [Liszt] are able to overwhelm it."<sup>34</sup> These words which were intended to reflect negatively on Chopin and his so-called inability to "mold" the larger public, are more significant in

stressing Liszt's desire for sensory saturation: a sensory bias for largeness and the concomitant association he makes with "masculinity."

A highly significant anecdote that concerns Chopin's pupil Adolf Gutmann has been used by the late nineteenth-century biographer James Huneker and Arthur Hedley, in the mid-twentieth century, in order to encourage "manly" renditions of Chopin's works. In 1839, Chopin was supposedly too unwell to play his C# Minor Scherzo to his friend Ignaz Moscheles. Chopin asked Gutmann to play the composition to Moscheles. Prior to considering Huneker's and Hedley's perspectives, and the event from which this anecdote arose, Gutmann's relationship with Chopin needs to be defined.

Pierre Azoury characterized their relationship as "friendly."<sup>35</sup> Gutmann was described by Solange Sand (George Sand's daughter), Azoury, and Huneker, as Chopin's "favourite pupil."<sup>36</sup> George Marek and Maria Gordon-Smith only go so far as saying Gutmann was "one of his favourite pupils."<sup>37</sup> Azoury also observes that Chopin addressed Gutmann affectionately as "tu" and therefore considers him to have been a "*confessarii* and *confidante*."<sup>38</sup> However, Alfred Cortot considers the relationship to be primarily based on "deep affection" from Gutmann's part,<sup>39</sup> whilst Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger describes the relationship as "intimate."<sup>40</sup>

This relationship seems to have stirred some controversy: there are many differing accounts concerning whether or not Gutmann was present at Chopin's deathbed. Marek and Gordon-Smith write "Gutmann tried to relieve" the pain of Chopin's limbs by "vigorously massaging his wrists and ankles." They then add, however, "(whether or not Gutmann was there [at the actual deathbed] remains uncertain)."<sup>41</sup> Azoury writes that Hedley does not include Gutmann's name in a list of those present when Chopin died. Further, he writes that the painting commissioned from Kwiatkowski by Jane Stirling (a student of Chopin), is not a "factual" representation of the death-chamber for it does not portray Gutmann's presence. Azoury notes that Zelinska specifically recorded Gutmann's presence.<sup>42</sup> Eigeldinger writes that Chopin's niece, Ludwika Ciechomska-Jedrzejewicz, "categorically denied" Gutmann's "presence," yet "contemporary documents" of Grzymala, Pauline Viardot and Charles Gavard "record Gutmann's presence."<sup>43</sup> Huneker, without discussing any discrepancy of those present, declares, "Chopin died" in "Gutmann's arms."<sup>44</sup> If Gutmann was actually present, or if he was only 'present' in 'spirit,' it is without question that he was part of the procession at Chopin's funeral.<sup>45</sup>

Whatever the relationship was between Chopin and Gutmann, Gutmann's pianistic abilities have been questioned seriously. Eigeldinger acknowledged that people have considered Gutmann to be Chopin's favourite pupil, but

Eigeldinger also adds: "if hardly his best one!" Eigeldinger quotes Wilhelm Von Lenz as saying that Karl Filtsch and he "made fun" of Gutmann. Further, that "Gutmann ... never took account of his teacher's tastes, slashing and thumping the piano unconcernedly. Such liberties provoked the indignation of other students."<sup>46</sup> Marek and Gordon-Smith also note Lenz's words that "Chopin tried to carve a toothpick out of this log."<sup>47</sup> Cortot and Huneker refer to him as a "giant." Eigeldinger quotes Lenz as saying that Gutmann was notorious for his "muscular" and "athletic" playing. Further, that Chopin's "blindness" about Gutmann's abilities and temperament were because of his admiration for Gutmann's "healthy manliness" and "Herculean constitution."<sup>48</sup> This assessment of Gutmann's characteristics is not merely a perspective that is presented by Lenz, but is supported by Gutmann's own words: Frederick Niecks recorded Gutmann as saying, "Chopin played generally very quietly, and rarely, indeed hardly ever, *fortissimo*."<sup>49</sup> In relation to politics, which stems from the way gender-oriented language has been used to relay our sensory experience, it appears that discrepancies have arisen with regard to the performance of Chopin's music. This politics has evolved because Chopin the person developed an affinity for Gutmann who was a large, strong person, despite the fact that that individual's pianism did not seem to reflect what was thought to be the true intentions of Chopin the composer.

Huneker writes that Lenz considered Chopin's dedication of the C# Minor Scherzo to Gutmann, to owe its existence to Chopin's awe of the "prize fighter's fist" and his ability to "knock a hole in the table." Huneker then writes that even though Lenz says "nothing more was ever heard of this Gutmann," Gutmann "was in evidence until his death as a 'favourite pupil.'"<sup>50</sup> These remarks emanate from the once-off occasion where Chopin asked Gutmann to play "his" Scherzo to Moscheles. This "once-off" occasion, which involves a single specific work, has been used by Hedley to make a generalization that reflects negatively on Chopin's "frail" constitution and encourages performers to play loudly, healthily, and more "manly." He writes:

It is to be feared that the notion of Chopin's playing being invariably characterized by excessive delicacy and effeminacy has been prejudicial to the comprehension of a considerable portion of his work. Many have hesitated to accept as the manifestations of a virile and enthusiastic spirit compositions which, it has been thought, should properly be performed with feminine charm and simpering prettiness. On occasions Chopin strove to avoid such misunderstanding by having his new works played by his pupils when he felt too weak to do them justice. Thus in 1839 his pupil Gutmann was called upon to play the C# Minor Scherzo to Moscheles, so that the latter might not get a wrong idea of the work.<sup>51</sup>

In reply, I quote Chopin's own words that are recorded in a letter he wrote to his family in 1829. (Ironically, this letter is part of Hedley's compilation *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*):

The general opinion is that I play too quietly, or rather too delicately for those accustomed to the banging of the Viennese pianists. I expected to find such a reproach in the newspaper in view of the fact that the editor's daughter bangs the piano frightfully ... but ... I should prefer it to be that one, rather than have it said that I play too loudly.<sup>52</sup>

Chopin is writing as a youth of nineteen, and of a woman' who "bangs." How much more would he have detested, or perhaps tolerated, a "Herculean" "banging"? Eigeldinger also notes, with "amusement," Chopin's "dislike of noisy undisciplined playing." He quotes from a letter written by Chopin (December 1831):

"If I'm in the middle of a letter I can't bear it when the bell rings and in strides a huge, fully-grown, powerful, bewhiskered creature who sits down at the piano, improvises God knows what, storms, bangs like a madman, writhes about, crosses his hands and hammers on one note for fully five minutes with one enormous finger which Heaven intended for holding the whip and reins of some farm-steward away in the Ukraine — such is the portrait of Sowi\_ski [1805 — 1880] who has no other merits than a good appearance and a kind heart. Never could I have a better opportunity of conceiving what is meant by charlatanism or stupidity in art than just now ... I blush to the ears."<sup>53</sup>

Hedley's generalization could also be challenged by referring to the playing of Chopin's student Princess Marcelina Czartoryska (née Radziwill). Her playing was "unanimously acclaimed" ("from Liszt and Eugene Delacroix to the critics of the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*") as "the most faithful reflection of her teacher's."<sup>54</sup> To this end, here is a recount by Adam Miekiewicz's cousin:<sup>55</sup>

[Julian] Fontana played some pieces by Chopin which were published posthumously. Adam listened, standing by the door. But the execution did not satisfy him and he showed his displeasure; every strongly hammered note annoyed him. He asked Marcelina Czartoryska to go to the piano. She Played. He exclaimed, "*That is Chopin...*"<sup>56</sup>

Chopin's letter to Ferdinand Hiller is a literary text where Chopin's own words have been interpreted timelessly in a way that promotes largeness and "masculinity." Liszt, Chopin, and Auguste Franchomme each had a hand in writing this letter, but while Chopin was writing his part, Liszt was playing

Chopin's etudes in the background. Hedley claims Liszt was playing these Chopin etudes "in incomparable" style.<sup>57</sup> At this moment, Chopin writes: "I write to you without knowing what my pen is scribbling because at this moment Liszt is playing my studies and putting honest thoughts out of my head: I should like to rob him of the way to play my own studies!"<sup>58</sup> This statement at first implies that Chopin would like to "steal" Liszt's way of playing, and it is often interpreted as such: Chopin wanted to play like Liszt.<sup>59</sup> Even though Hedley claims that Liszt played Chopin's studies in a manner that every pianist should aspire to — in an "incomparable" manner — in my view, Chopin's phrase "putting honest thoughts out of my head," somehow makes this debatable.

Hedley believes that Chopin wanted to be more jumbo and "masculine," and I believe that Hedley would argue in his defense, "why else would Chopin have dedicated his first set of etudes to Liszt?"<sup>60</sup> Janet Ritterman writes that Chopin owes much of his popularity to "early interpreters" such as Liszt who included Chopin's works in their concert programs. In answer to my own question, I consider Chopin's dedication of the "technical" etudes to Liszt reflects Chopin's understanding that Liszt was predisposed towards "technique." Furthermore, in light of Ritterman's comment, I also suggest that by dedicating these works to Liszt, Chopin may have enjoyed greater popularity than if they were dedicated to a pianist who was not in favour with the masses. At the expense of his own musical intentions, Chopin may well have considered success and financial security, gained through the popularity of his works, to be of greater importance. However, this does not mean to say that Chopin would have played these same works entirely differently. The relationship between Chopin and Liszt was a complex one and Hedley points out that although Chopin held Liszt's piano playing in high regard, Chopin's letters to his Polish friends and their letters to him show that Chopin "could not bear Liszt's showmanship."<sup>61</sup> Hedley raises the issue of how the friendship between Chopin and Liszt began to disintegrate largely as a result of vastly different musical tastes. Hedley does not reach conclusions about whether or not Chopin really did want to play like Liszt. Like most other authors that I have examined who interpret this course of events, Hedley does not argue openly that Chopin's use of the word "rob" could indicate anything other than jealousy on Chopin's part.

Hedley and E. L. Voynich, in their compilations of Chopin's letters and other correspondence, comment on Chopin's talent for avoiding "literal" meanings of words and his "wittiness" respectively.<sup>62</sup> Liszt had also said that "never was there a nature more imbued with whims" and "caprices."<sup>63</sup> However, not until recently has there appeared to be an author that places this specific response of Chopin's in a different context. Azoury writes that Chopin's reference to "robbing" Liszt's way of playing shows his "enthusiasm" for Liszt. Azoury

acknowledges, however, that this enthusiasm seems to have been short-lived because immediately following this statement he writes that Chopin soon became disenchanted with Liszt's artistic talent. He reached the conclusion that Chopin thought Liszt's pianistic ability "was being wasted away and not used as a means to an end but as an end to a means."<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the authors Hedley and Huneker have also noted Liszt's general disregard for composers' intentions. Azoury's more recent perspective, which reveals Chopin's fast-changing attitude (from "pro-Liszt" to "anti-Liszt"), concomitant with Hedley's and Voynich's awareness that Chopin often used words that had double meanings, suggests that Chopin may not have used the word "rob," or meant this entire phrase, literally. If one searches, in a John Ellis-like manner, for "connotation, tone, and intent," one may well come up with the answer that the "connotation" of the word "rob" is that something will be 'taken away' from Liszt; Chopin's "tone" is 'delicate' yet sarcastic.<sup>65</sup> By using a euphemism such as "rob" he does not have to challenge directly Liszt's meddling with composer-intention, but at the same time can make him aware of his disapproval.

This seems to strengthen the viewpoint that Chopin possessed great subtlety and depth and understood nuances of meaning — he could, after all, just as well have said that he wants to be able to play like Liszt; Chopin appears to be "intent" on 'taking away' Liszt's showmanship, for Liszt's technical ends appear to override the artistic value of Chopin's works. Most interesting, I think, is that the meaning, which I give to Chopin's word "rob," is contrary to the meanings that all other people — to my knowledge, that is — have given to this same word. Possibly, others have considered interpreting these words as a form of sarcasm. However, by choosing not to throw light on the shiftiness of language, by suggesting a contrary meaning to the literal meanings of Chopin's words, they are relying on people's tendency to take words at face value in order to promote largeness. The prevailing thought was that Chopin was "unimpressive" to look at, that he played with the lightest touch, and that his sounds were consequently like whispers.<sup>66</sup> If we accept that contemporaneous reports on Chopin's playing are a truthful reflection of his disposition towards smallness, and that largeness and smallness, in the dimension of sound, represents radically different thoughts or feelings, then promoting largeness is tantamount to promoting musical meanings that are contrary to Chopin's performance of his own texts. Largeness is often defined positively by speaking or writing about smallness in a deleterious tone, and by making associations between smallness and unhealthy "manliness."

## Endnotes

1. Henry T. Finck, *Chopin and Other Musical Essays* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889): 6.
2. Robert Fink, "Going Flat: Post-Hierarchical Music Theory and the Musical Surface," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 121.
3. Hayden White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987; 1990): 105.
4. Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice: 1800–1900* (California: University of California Press, 1990): 72.
5. Nicholas Cook, "Analysing Performance and Performing Analysis," *Rethinking Music*: 239–261; José A. Bowen, "Finding the Music in Musicology," *Rethinking Music*: 424–451.
6. Ferdinand de Saussure claimed an "interdependen[cy]" of speech and written language. But he also privileged speech, claiming it influenced writing. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye and translated with an introduction by Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966): 19.
7. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravoty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976): 30, 31.
8. J. G. Merquior, *From Prague to Paris: A Critique of Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Thought* (London: Verso, 1986): 195.
9. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*: 33.
10. Kofi Agawu, "The Challenge of Semiotics," *Rethinking Music*: 138–160.
11. *Ibid.*: 139.
12. *Ibid.*: 142.
13. *Ibid.*: 146.
14. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*: 65.
15. Chopin, in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin as Pianist and Teacher: As Seen by His Pupils*, trans by Naomi Shohet and ed. by Roy Howatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 42.
16. Agawu, *Rethinking Music*: 139; Paul Stoller claimed to be a radical empiricist. He believed one had to experience other cultures personally in order to understand their understanding of their society. Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).
17. John Rink, "Translating Musical Meanings," *Rethinking Music*: 219.
18. De Saussure, *Course*: 22–23, 87–88.
19. Guy Madison, "Properties of Expressive Variability Patterns in Music Performances," *Journal of New Music Research*, vol. 29 no. 4 (2000): 336–356.
20. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).
21. Jacques Lacan, in Celia Britton, "Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Psychoanalytic and Marxist Theories," *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. Raman Selden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 198.
22. Stephen Handel, *Listening: An Introduction to the Perception of Auditory Events* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989): 324.
23. Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 1998): 14.
24. *Ibid.*: 39.

25. Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984): 9.
26. Edward Hanslick, "Clara Schumann," in *Hanslick's Music Criticisms*, ed. Henry Pleasants (New York: Dover Publications, 1978).
27. Clara Schumann, in Dee Booth, "The Teaching Style of Clara Schumann," in *Clavier* (December, 1996): 23.
28. Andrew Thomson, "Ladies Intellectual," *The Musical Times* (Autumn, 2001): 62.
29. Stephen Katz, "How to Speak and Write the Post-Modern," *The Fontana Post-Modernism Reader*, ed. Walter Truett Anderson (London: Fontana Press, 1996): 88-91.
30. Beverly Lewis Parker, "Recent South African Postgraduate Research in Music," in *Samus* Vol. 21 (2001): 37.
31. Franz Liszt, *Frédéric Chopin*, with a foreword and translated by Edward N. Waters (New York: Vienna House, 1852; 1963): 40.
32. *Ibid.*: 42-63.
33. *Ibid.*: 83.
34. *Ibid.*: 84.
35. Pierre Azoury, *Chopin Through His Contemporaries: Friends, Lovers, and Rivals* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999): 88.
36. Solange Sand, in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin as Pianist and Teacher: As Seen by His Pupils*, translated by Naomi Shohet and edited by Roy Howatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 172, 88; James Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and His Music* (New York: Dover Publications, 1900; 1966): 214.
37. George Marek and Maria Gordon-Smith, *Chopin: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979): 104.
38. Azoury, *Chopin Through His Contemporaries: Friends, Lovers, and Rivals*: 88.
39. Alfred Cortot, *In Search of Chopin*, translated by Cyril and Rena Clarke (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1952; 1975): 191.
40. Eigeldinger, *Chopin as Pianist and Teacher*: 166.
41. Marek and Gordon-Smith, *Chopin: A Biography*: 228.
42. Azoury, *Chopin Through His Contemporaries: Friends, Lovers, and Rivals*: 125.
43. Eigeldinger, *Chopin as Pianist and Teacher*: 167.
44. Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and His Music*: 214.
45. Marek and Gordon-Smith, *Chopin: A Biography*: 233.
46. Eigeldinger, *Chopin as Pianist and Teacher*: 167.
47. Marek and Gordon-Smith, *Chopin: A Biography*: 162.
48. Niecks and Lenz, in Eigeldinger, *Chopin as Pianist and Teacher*: 126, 127.
49. *Ibid.*: 56.
50. Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and His Music*: 214.
51. Arthur Hedley, *The Master Musicians Chopin* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1947, 1974): 120.
52. Hedley, ed. and trans., *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979): 25.
53. Eigeldinger, *Chopin as Pianist and Teacher*: 127.
54. *Ibid.*: 163.
55. Adam Mickiewicz was a Polish poet who is known to have belonged to the same salon environment as Chopin. The two men were on friendly terms and there is some

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- suggestion that Mickiewicz's poetry in some way influenced Chopin's composing of the ballades. Hedley, *The Master Musicians Chopin*: 172.
56. Marek and Gordon-Smith, *Chopin: A Biography*: 84, 85.
57. Hedley, *The Master Musicians Chopin*: 51.
58. Hedley, *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*: 117.
59. William Lovelock, for example, translates this phrase as envy on Chopin's part. William Lovelock, *A Concise History of Music* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1953; 1966): 188.
60. Janet Ritterman, "Piano Music and the Public Concert, 1800-1850," *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 30.
61. Hedley, *The Master Musicians Chopin*: 49.
62. Hedley, Introduction to *Selected Correspondence*, x; Henryk Opie\_ski and E. L. Voynich, collected, trans. and ed., *Chopin's Letters* (New York: Vienna House, 1973), Preface.
63. Cortot, *In Search of Chopin*: 184.
64. Azoury, *Chopin Through His Contemporaries: Friends, Lovers, and Rivals*: 139.
65. John Ellis, *The Theory of Literary Criticism* (California: California University Press, 1974).
66. Hedley, *Selected Correspondence*, 24; Cortot, *In Search of Chopin*: 96.

