"*Dire un morceau de musique*": The Language Behind Chopin's Music

Michael Pecak

Schulich School of Music
McGill University, Montreal

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Illustrations

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Musical Examples

Accompanying Recordings

To more fully illustrate the concepts presented in this paper, I provide video and audio clips that correspond to pertinent works or excerpts. They are accessible online via the links below and/or the accompanying CD. The recordings were made during my DMus lecture-recital in Tanna Schulich Hall of McGill University on 25 May 2016. For the selection of songs by Elsner and Chopin, I collaborated with soprano Hannah De Priest (McGill MMus, Early Music). The instrument used for this event was a copy of an 1820s Nannette Streicher Viennese fortepiano by Thomas and Barbara Wolf (six-octave range, FF-f^4; Viennese *Prellmechanik*).

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Duma Ludgardy — (1769-1854)

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CD Track [12]

Abstract

"Chopin, the poet of the piano" is an expression that originates in the composer's lifetime as a romantic sobriquet and that persists to this day as a truism. Yet, what does it mean to refer to a composer of mostly solo piano music—someone who expressed himself not through words but through instrumental sounds—as a poet? Furthermore, how does the verbal influence the musical and how can a modern-day pianist synthesize the two into a musical-poetic utterance via a linguistically mute instrument? This paper explores the dynamics between poetry and music, text and melody, vocal and instrumental works, through the mediating force of language, specifically Polish. In addition to oft-cited operatic traditions, Chopin's style of lyricism, I argue, is rooted in idiomatic linguistic concepts traceable to his studies in Warsaw with Józef Elsner. The core of this study consists of a close reading of two theoretical-pedagogical treatises by Elsner: *O metryczności i rytmiczności języka polskiego* (On the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language, 1818) and *Rozprawa o melodyi i śpiewie* (Treatise on Melody and Chant, 1830). Elsner herein discusses the prosodic qualities of the Polish language, inflection and accentuation, and proper musical settings of Polish verse with the goal of aiding composers in creating melodies for texted and instrumental works that do not "disfigure the mother-tongue." After examining a selection of Chopin's art songs, Op. 74, in light of Elsner's precepts, I extract analogies for the conceptualization and performance of his solo piano music. I argue that an understanding of Polish prosody and scansion can better define the lyrical qualities usually associated with Chopin's music and uniquely inform our decisions in phrasing, pacing, and inflecting his melodies—in other words, how we might play more "poetically" or, indeed, "say" a piece of music.

Abrégé

« Chopin, le poète du piano » est une expression qui est apparue du vivant du compositeur comme sobriquet romantique, et qui persiste à ce jour comme truisme. Or, qu'entend-on lorsqu'on donne à un compositeur de musique en grande partie pour piano—un compositeur qui s'exprime non pas par des paroles mais par des sons instrumentaux—l'appellation de poète? De plus, comment le verbal influence-t-il le musical, et comment le pianiste d'aujourd'hui peut-il synthétiser ces deux aspects en une expression musico-poétique par l'intermédiaire d'un instrument linguistiquement muet? Cet essai explore la dynamique entre la poésie et la musique, le texte et la mélodie, les oeuvres vocales et instrumentales, grâce à la force médiatrice du langage, et plus spécifiquement du polonais. En plus des traditions opératiques fréquemment citées, je soutiens que le style de lyrisme de Chopin est ancré dans des concepts linguistiques idiomatiques, que l'on peut retracer à ses études à Varsovie avec Józef Elsner. Le cœur de cette recherche consiste en une étude approfondie des deux traités théorico-pédagogiques d'Elsner: *O metryczności i rytmiczności języka polskiego* (De la Métrique et du rythme de la langue polonaise, 1818) et *Rozprawa o melodyi i śpiewie* (Traité de la mélodie et du chant, 1830). Elsner y disserte sur les qualités prosodiques de la langue polonaise, l'inflexion et l'accentuation, et la mise en musique de vers polonais, avec comme objectif d'aider les compositeurs à créer des mélodies tant instrumentales qu'avec texte qui ne sauraient « défigurer la langue maternelle ». Après avoir examiné une sélection de mélodies de Chopin, Op. 74, à la lumière des préceptes d'Elsner, j'en extrait des analogies servant à la conceptualisation et l'interprétation de ses œuvres

pour piano solo. Je soutiens que la compréhension de la prosodie et de la scansion polonaise servent à mieux définir les qualités lyriques habituellement associées à la musique de Chopin, et à prendre des décisions éclairées sur le phrasé, la hiérarchisation et l'inflexion de ses lignes mélodiques -autrement dit, comment jouer de façon plus « poétique » ou, en effet, « dire un morceau de musique ».

Acknowledgements

"It takes a village…": so the saying goes. This proverb takes on a whole new poignancy as I reflect on the past thirty years of my life on this pale blue dot. My "village" spans oceans, encompasses at least five countries, and includes remarkable individuals, kith and kin alike, who have formed me not only as a musician, but as a fellow villager.

First and foremost I am grateful for the extraordinary mentors from whom I have had the privilege to learn. I thank Prof. Tom Beghin, my supervisor, for his unwavering support, generosity, and guidance during my degree. In addition to critical essay revisions, inspiring private lessons, and stimulating discussions—all of which I will forever cherish—Prof. Beghin has made possible numerous opportunities that have been invaluable to my professional and personal growth; among these was sponsorship to the Orpheus Institute (Gent, Belgium) as a Visiting Doctoral Researcher in Fall 2015 and an invitation to contribute an article to the 2014 volume of *Keyboard Perspectives*. As an eloquent performer and rigorous, yet creative scholar, Prof. Beghin sets an example I deeply respect and toward which I aspire.

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Introduction: "Poetic Pianism"

For Poles, Wawel Cathedral in Kraków is spiritual and cultural *terra sancta*. The traditional coronation site of Polish monarchs and the resting place of Polish historical luminaries, its chapels and catacombs quarter the remains of medieval kings and saints.[1] In 1946, the twenty-six-year-old Karol Wojtyła—the future Pope John Paul II—celebrated his first Mass here as a newly ordained priest. Lech Kaczyński, the late President of Poland, was interred here in 2010 following the tragic crash of his plane over Smolensk, Russia.

Beneath the cathedral's left nave, a small, isolated vault—designated the Crypt of the National Bards (*Krypta Wieszczów Narodowych*)—honors three of Poland's most important poets from the nineteenth-century: in two dignified sarcophagi rest Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) and Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849); Cyprian Kamil Norwid (1821-1883) is represented via an urn of soil from his actual grave in Montmorency, France. In February 2010 a fourth "national bard" was symbolically added to this pantheon of Polish "Golden Age" poets: Fryderyk Chopin.[2] A marble medallion, bearing the composer's profile and made for the bicentennial of his birth, now stands at the crypt's entrance. During the commemoration, Fr. Zdzisław Sochacki, the parish prelate, remarked:

> Chopin to wielki Polak, kompozytor i pianista. Krypta Wieszczów dotychczas była miejscem spoczynku wybitnych poetów, ale przecież Chopin był poetą, poetą fortepianu.
>
> Chopin is a great Pole, composer, and pianist. To date, the Crypt of the Bards has been the resting place of distinguished poets, but Chopin too was a poet, a poet of the piano.[3]

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[1] Such as Casimir III the Great and Saint Jadwiga the Queen, military-leader Tadeusz Kościuszko, and statesman Józef Piłsudski among many others.

[2] Chopin's body is buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, while his heart (as per his wishes) was returned to Warsaw and is currently immured in a pillar in Holy Cross Church.

[3] PAP (Polish Press Agency), 26 February 2010, "Chopin w wawelskiej Krypcie Wieszczów." http://turystyka.wp.pl/kat,1036541,title,Chopin-w-wawelskiej-Krypcie-

Such descriptions of Chopin had remained remarkably consistent in substance and tone over time. In the first biographical essay on Chopin, published in 1852, Liszt paid homage to his colleague in similar terms, at once nationalistic, metaphorical, and characteristically hyperbolic for the era:

> More than once in the history of art and literature, a poet has arisen, embodying in himself the poetic sense of a whole nation, an entire epoch, representing the types which his contemporaries pursue and strive to realize, in an absolute manner in his works: such a poet was Chopin for his country and for the epoch in which he was born.[4]

Heinrich Heine, writing in 1838, described Chopin as "not only a virtuoso, but also a poet: he can reveal to us the poetry that lives in his soul; he is a poet-musician."[5] For the critic Léon Escudier, Chopin was "a poet, and a tender poet above all, [who] seeks to let poetry dominate. He creates prodigious difficulties of performance, but never to the detriment of his melody, which is always simple and original."[6]

"Chopin, the poet of the piano"—a metaphorical expression that originated in the composer's lifetime as a romantic sobriquet persists to this day as a truism. When invoked in piano lessons, masterclasses, reviews, or ceremonial speeches, the phrase is generally acknowledged with an uncritical nod of the head. Yet, what does it mean to refer to a composer of mostly solo piano music—someone who expressed himself not through words but through

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Wieszczow,wid,15572048,wiadomosc.html. Accessed 18 June 2016. All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

[4] Franz Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, Martha Walker Cook, trans. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2005), 90. Issues regarding the fantastically flowery and nationalistic language as well as the exact authorship of Liszt's book are examined in Edward N. Waters, "Chopin by Liszt," *The Musical Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (1961): 170-194.

[5] "Il n'est pas seulement virtuose, mais bien poëte aussi: il peut nous révéler la poésie qui vit dans son âme; c'est un musicien poëte…." *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 4 February 1838, 43.

[6] "Poète et poète tendre avant tout, Chopin s'attache à faire dominer la poésie. Il fait de prodigieuses difficultés d'exécution, mais jamais au détriment de sa mélodie, qui est toujours simple et originale." *La France Musicale*, 27 February 1842, 82.

instrumental sounds—as a poet? And what does this suggest for the performance of his works? In my own experiences as an academically trained pianist, exhortations by teachers and guest-artists to play Chopin's music more "poetically" or to imbue a particular phrase with a poetic *je ne sais quoi* are as cryptic as they are common. Most often this advice regards pianistic matters distilled from historical accounts of Chopin's own playing: refinement of touch, subtle dynamic shading (especially toward the softer end of the spectrum), and judicious pedaling, to name a few. But can the metaphor of poetry serve as a useful conceptual framework for the interpretation and performance of Chopin's piano music? How might the verbal influence the musical and how can a modern-day pianist synthesize the two into a musical-poetic utterance via a linguistically mute instrument?

Far from a mere chestnut of history, the association between poetry and music has centuries-old roots, which blossomed in the late-Baroque and Classical eras. Eighteenth-century theorists and musicians—such as Johann Mattheson, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, Johann Joachim Quantz, and Daniel Gottlob Türk—thrived on analogical abstraction and their understanding of music (both vocal and instrumental) was couched in the vocabulary of rhetoric, poetry, and prosody. Polish writers of the pre-Chopin generation relied on the musical-linguistic foundation established by their Austro-German counterparts.[7] However, Poland's dire political circumstances at the start of the nineteenth-century motivated an aesthetic agenda that was fervently nationalistic in its aims. At the heart of this agenda was the Polish language, which, for

[7] For example, interest in Forkel's writings was so great in early nineteenth-century Poland, the Society of Friends of Religious and National Music invited Kazimierz Brodziński to translate large portions of Forkel's *Allgemeine Geschichte der Musik* (1788), a work deemed by Józef Elsner to be "the greatest…on music as regards philosophy." See Halina Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 124n. 45. Quote from Józef Elsner, Preface to his *Krótko zebrana nauka generałbasu* [Brief Collected Studies on Thoroughbass] (unpublished manuscript, 1807. Held by Biblioteka Warszawskiego Towarzystwa Muzycznego, R. 940).

a disenfranchised and subordinate people, was held as a pillar of national identity. During the first three decades of the nineteenth-century, learned societies initiated demand for scholarly works exploring interdisciplinary connections between the Polish language, art, and life. By the 1820s, the formative decade of Chopin's adolescence, musical education and discourse infused many of the previous century's linguistic allusions with idiomatically Polish analogies, the echoes of which reverberate to this day, as the tribute to Chopin at Wawel Cathedral attests.

Moving beyond entrenched clichés, this paper exhumes some of the linguistic underpinnings of Chopin's musicianship, which originate in his youth in Warsaw and specifically in his studies with his composition teacher Józef Elsner (1769-1854). In two theoretical-pedagogical treatises, Elsner elaborates on the amenability of the Polish language to music, focusing particularly on the musicality of Polish metrical verse: *O metryczności i rytmiczności języka polskiego* (On the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language, 1818) and *O melodyi i śpiewie* (On Melody and Chant; unpublished manuscript).[8] These treatises contain Elsner's central teachings on the craft of composition, yet they have received limited attention in the secondary literature. Elsner discusses the prosodic qualities of the Polish language, inflection and accentuation, how Polish verse is to be effectively set to music, and the composition of vocal and instrumental melodies that do not "disfigure the mother tongue," a repeated admonition throughout his writings. Elsner's lectures at Warsaw's newly founded Main School of Music (*Szkoła Główna Muzyczna*) were based on these ideas and the young Chopin would have become intimately familiar with them during the six years he studied with Elsner.

[8] Regarding the latter treatise, I follow Halina Goldberg's rationale and translate *śpiew* as "chant" in the sense of the Italian *canto* as opposed to the less-precise English "song." See Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 125n. 47.

In the chapters that follow I explore the analytical and conceptual potential of Elsner's treatises, presenting transcriptions and English translations of significant portions. In Chapter One, following an overview of the historical, cultural, and aesthetic context of the source documents, I will discuss their contents in greater detail. Integral to Elsner's thesis is establishing Polish prosody within the traditional principles of metric hierarchies (*thesis* and *arsis*); the most idiomatic of the prosodic rules is that of the *penultima*, the necessarily stressed penultimate syllable in polysyllabic words. Since Elsner's treatises focus largely on the setting of Polish text to music, it is essential to examine a selection of art songs by both Elsner and Chopin to see how the teacher practices what he preaches and how his pupil builds on those prescripts. Drawing on Elsner's precepts for idiomatic musical text-setting and for proper syllabic and metric stresses, in Chapter Two I extract analogies for the conceptualization and performance of Chopin's solo piano works, using his Largo in E-flat Major and Nocturne in C Minor, Op. posth. as case studies.

The linguistically inspired and historically grounded perspective on Chopin's music I propose is underrepresented in Chopin studies. Yet, it can revitalize Chopin performance just as musical-rhetorical scholarship from recent decades has fundamentally reshaped current approaches to classical-era music.[9] I argue that an understanding of Polish prosody and scansion can uniquely inform our decisions in phrasing, pacing, and inflecting Chopin's melodies—in other words, how we might, indeed, play more "poetically."

[9] For example, Mark Evan Bonds, 1991; George Barth, 1992; Elaine Sisman, 1993; and Tom Beghin, 1997, 2015.

Chapter One

1.1 "Let us not be an echo of foreigners"

The two treatises by Józef Elsner at the heart of this study, *On the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language* and *On Melody and Chant*, are very much products of their time, reflecting the ideological desires and cultural needs of the Polish citizenry in the early nineteenth century. In 1795, following two earlier territorial seizures in 1772 and 1793, the sovereign state of Poland was partitioned by its neighbors, Prussia, Russia, and Austria, and would not reappear on the map of Europe for well over a century. Two decades of geo-political strife ensued, including a stint under the rule of Napoleon, who in 1806 ingratiated himself with promises of regained independence only to backtrack on his word and proceed to leech the country of its financial and human resources. When Chopin was born in 1810, central Poland (in which his birth-town of Żelazowa Wola is located about 46 km west of Warsaw) was under French control; the Duchy of Warsaw (*Księstwo Warszawskie*), as the region was known then, served essentially as an outpost from which Napoleon could draw additional troops and supplies for his various exploits. But, as France's eastward advances waned and failed, the Russians galvanized. In February 1813, Czar Alexander I's army entered Warsaw and subsequently secured the majority of Polish territories. The fate of the nation-less nation was eventually settled at the Vienna Congress of 1814-15 and the Congress Kingdom of Poland (*Kongresówka*) was created. Although beholden to the czar, Poles were granted an impressively liberal constitution and ostensibly independent parliamentary government. Yet, in reality, the Congress Kingdom was a vassal state, only as autonomous as the Russian noose was slack.[1]

[1] An excellent overview of Polish history in English may be found in Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

With the dismemberment of the country's corpus came the reification of its collective consciousness. The vicissitudes of occupation and partition in early-nineteenth-century Poland forced a restructuring of cultural life as regards both its practicalities and ideological aims. In her important book *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, Halina Golberg discusses at length how, in Warsaw, which remained a political and artistic center, the dissolution of traditional systems of royal patronage impelled socially minded aristocrats to promote Polish culture by hosting the artistic and intellectual elite from home and across Europe.[2] Local talents, such as the violinist Karol Lipiński, virtuoso pianist Maria Szymanowska, and composers Karol Kurpiński and Francziszek Lessel appeared regularly in the salons of Warsaw's noble families. The homes of the Czartoryskis, Radziwiłłs, Zamoyskis, and Skarbeks, among others, also welcomed international stars of the likes of Henriette Sontag, Nicolò Paganini, and Daniel Steibelt. At the soirées of Count Józef Cichocki,

> Visiting guests gave their first performances; there was formed the opinion about the abilities and talents of musical artists…Visiting celebrities: Henselt, Servais, Perelli, Nicolai, and many others, also performed in this home. It was, I would say, the musical heart of all Warsaw, and the famous Mondays gathered and united nearly all talents—literary and scholastic luminaries and generally people of distinction in the fields of the arts and sciences or of other personal merits.[3]

With a growing bourgeoisie in Warsaw, salon gatherings in middle- and professional-class homes played an increasingly important role in advancing not only aesthetic ideas, but also national concerns. Once a week, families and relatives would meet for games and conversation. Music and poetry were central to such evenings, as were debates about current political and

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[2] For the following description of Warsaw's salon culture, I draw on Halina Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), particularly Chapters 5 and 6.
[3] Bronisław Dobrzyński, *Ignacy Dobrzyński w zakresie działalności dążącej do postępu muzyki współczesnej jemu epoce* [Ignacy Dobrzyński in the area of activities aiming at musical progress during his time] (Warsaw: Felicyia Krokoszyńska, 1893), 29-30. As quoted in Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 188.

artistic issues, especially in homes with strong intellectual interests. Through his father, Nicholas (*Mikołaj*), who was a tutor of French literature, the young Chopin grew up in the company of gymnasium teachers and university professors. The Chopins' Thursday salon meetings regularly included Warsaw's leading academics and aesthetes, many of whom were the family's neighbors when they lived in the Kazimierz Palace (what is today the campus of Warsaw University):

> We lived on the second floor in the wing on the right, next to the Gymnasium, which was downstairs in a building called "Cadets Quarters," where the public library is today. On the first floor of the same wing lived Samuel Bogumił Linde, the rector of the Gymnasium, and Father Wojciech Szwejkowski, the rector of the University of Warsaw. Downstairs were university professors [Juliusz] Kolberg, Kazimierz Brodziński, and many others.[4]

Among the topics discussed during domestic cultural gatherings were shifting aesthetic and philosophical paradigms in Polish art. The figures mentioned in the above recollection were just some of the prominent voices in debates about realism vs. idealism and Classicism vs. Romanticism heard throughout Warsaw's households. Each side had its fervent and learned representatives, yet the element that pervaded (and mediated) the often passionate discourse was that of national identity. As the reality of foreign dominion over Poland swelled from one decade to the next, the preservation and transmission of "Polishness" became the consuming project of the intelligentsia. Building on their conversations from Warsaw's salons, scholars, pedagogues, artists, and political activists pooled their talents and organized new cultural institutions, most notably the Warsaw Society of Friends of the Sciences (*Warszawskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk*), whose mission it was to cultivate Polish national identity through education, continued discourse, and the promotion of artistic endeavors. Kazimierz Brodziński (1791-1835), one of

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[4] Ferdynand Hoesick, "Z pamiętników Marylskiego" in Hoesick, *Pisma zbiorowe*, vol. 1, *Słowacki i Chopin. Z zagadnień twórczości*, 2 vols. (Warsaw: Trzaska, Evert i Michalski, 1932), I: 90. As quoted in Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 154.

the Society's members and an influential poet, penned the unofficial motto of the times: "Let us not be an echo of foreigners" (*Nie bądźmy echem cudzoziemców*).[5]

Central to this agenda was the Polish language itself, which was both a means and an end for expressions of nationhood. Through their language, disenfranchised Poles recalled their past (however real or embellished), communicated their hopes for independence, and ensured national cohesion. Like many Polish poets of the time, Brodziński honed in on these prevailing sentiments in his works, simultaneously voicing and shaping the national consciousness:

Lecz nie nikną takie kraje,	But those countries never vanish,
Gdzie pojąć uczą się syny.	Whose sons learn to grasp,
Że granicę język daje	That language establishes borders
A trwałość—światło i czyny.	And permanence—light and deeds.[6]

Heeding the call at the heart of Brodziński's message, many of his colleagues in other disciplines became more vocal about the primacy of the Polish language in the academy and in society. The historian and dean of Warsaw University's Department of Sciences and Fine Arts Feliks Bentkowski, for example, exclaimed:

> It is a great barrier for the improvement of skill, when a language used for teaching is foreign to the populace…. The entire system of thinking and reasoning must lack clarity, vitality, strength and shadings, when it takes on the clothes of a foreign language.[7]

During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, at the behest of the Warsaw Society of Friends of the Sciences (hereafter WSFS), leading scholars produced a number of

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[5] "O klasyczności i romantyczności," [On Classicism and Romanticism] in *Dzieła Kazimierza Brodzińskiego, wydanie zupełne i pomnożone pismami dotąd drukiem nie ogłoszonemi* [The Works of Kazimierz Brodziński: the complete edition supplemented with previously unannounced writings] (Wilno: Teofil Glücksberg, 1842), 127. See also Alina Nowak-Romanowicz, *Józef Elsner* (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1957), 139.

[6] Brodziński, *Przy oddawaniu medalu Kopczyńskiemu* [While Conferring the Medal to Kopczyński], v. 45-48. In Mieczysława Demska-Trębacz, *"po ziemi swojej chodzę, po Polsce": w poszukiwaniu narodowej tożsamości muzyki* ["I walk over my land, over Poland": in search of music's national identity] (Lublin: Polihymnia, 2003), 16.

[7] As quoted in Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 134f.

ambitious and pioneering works exploring different facets of the Polish language and promoting its renewed appreciation among a broader public. Between 1807 and 1814, the linguist and lexicographer Samuel Bogumił Linde authored his six-volume *Dictionary of the Polish Language* (*Słownik Języka Polskiego*), the first comprehensive monolingual dictionary of the Polish language (Fig. 1.1). In 1816, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Poland's most important patriotic poet, completed an immense cycle of Polish historical poems known as the *Historical Chants* (*Śpiewy historyczne*; Fig. 1.2). Many of Warsaw's best composers set these works to music. As songs, they became an essential part of domestic music-making and were used to teach Polish history to children. Marceli Antoni Szulc, author of the first Polish biography on Chopin, writes in 1842: "There is no Pole that would not know a few *Historical Chants* by heart."[8] The young Chopin and his siblings would have grown up singing these pieces; later in his life, as we learn from Liszt, Chopin improvised on the songs for Niemcewicz himself.[9] The WSFS also oversaw one of Poland's earliest serialized music publications: *Selection of Beautiful Musical Works and Polish Songs* (*Wybór pięknych dzieł muzycznych i pieśni polskich*; Fig. 1.3). Each monthly issue contained newly composed instrumental works (e.g. piano variations on themes from Polish operas or sonatas for piano and violin) as well as art songs in the vernacular with the aim of providing society "seemly and conducive entertainment" (*przystojną i pożyteczną rozrywkę*).[10] Józef Elsner served as editor during the publication's lifespan (1803-1805) and his dedication—echoing the Brodziński poem quoted above—bespeaks the WSFS's mission:

[8] Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 100-104 (Quote on p. 104).
[9] Franz Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, Martha Walker Cook, trans. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2005), 56.
[10] Nowak-Romanowicz, *Józef Elsner*, 86ff. "Handsome and useful" would be a more literal translation, however, it misses the subtle nationalistic imperative of the original.

TOWARZYSTWU
UCZONYCH POLAKÓW
Jako rozkrzewicielom światła w Narodzie
Zakładaczom węgielnego Kamienia trwałości
Języka Polskiego
Podporom Nauk i Kunsztów
TEN ZBIÓR
Pięknych Muzyk i Śpiewów Polskich
Owoc własnego ich Ogrodu
Z Uwielbieniem gorliwości godnej
Serc Obywatelskich
Ofiaruje
Józef Elsner

TO THE SOCIETY
OF LEARNED POLES
As the propagators of light in the Nation
The founders of the cornerstone of
Permanence
Of the Polish Language
Supporters of the Sciences and the Arts
THIS COLLECTION
Of Beautiful Music and Polish Songs
The fruit of their Garden
With an adoration and zeal worthy of
a citizen's heart
PRESENTS
Józef Elsner[11]

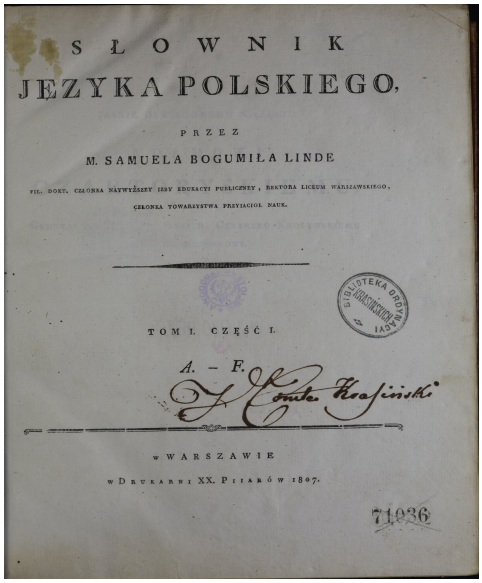


Fig. 1.1 Samuel Bogumił Linde, *Dictionary of the Polish Language*, vol. 1 (1807). Public Domain. Reproduced from polona.pl/item/12632462/6/, digital resource of the National Library, Warsaw.

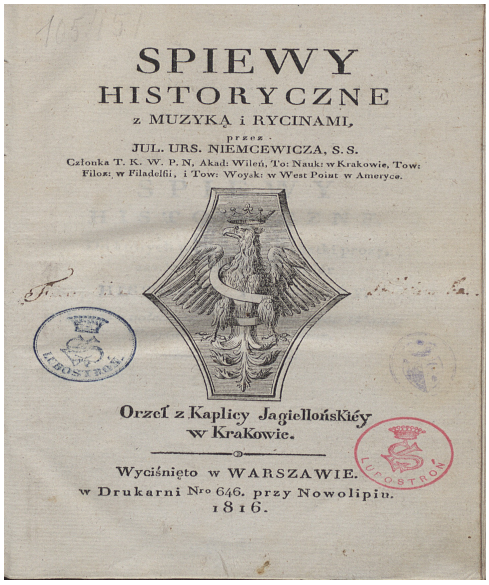


Fig. 1.2 Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Historical Chants* (1816). Public Domain. Reproduced from polona.pl/item/695183/2/, digital resource of the National Library, Warsaw.

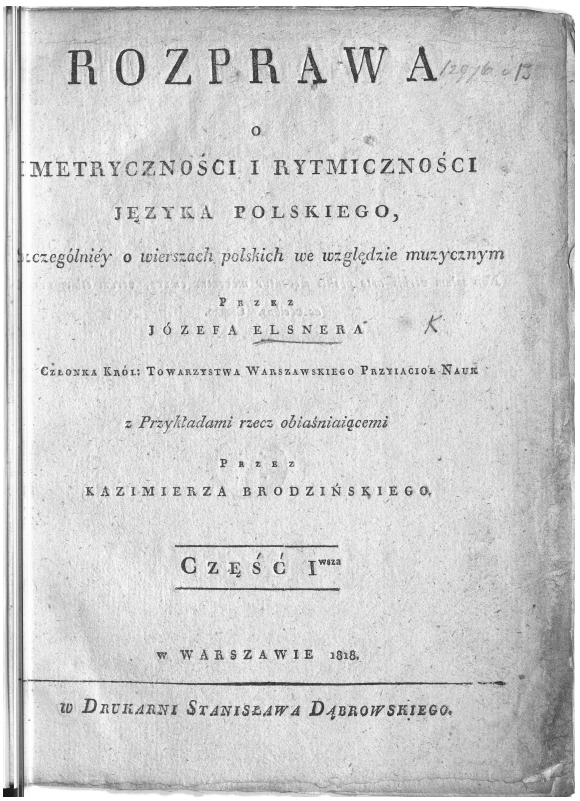
[11] Dedication page, *Wybór pięknych dzieł muzycznych i pieśni polskich*, No. 1, Józef Elsner, ed. (Warsaw: 1803).

Fig. 1.3 *Selection of Beautiful Musical Works and Polish Songs*, No. 1, Józef Elsner, ed. (1803). Public Domain. Reproduced from polona.pl/item/1211226/2/, digital resource of the National Library, Warsaw.

Such documents comprised a lexicon of Polishness, providing Chopin's generation with images, stories, and phraseology from which to draw in various creative media. But Polish artists and intellectuals of the time were interested in more than just the semantics or patriotic associations afforded by their mother tongue; they were also keen to expound the phonological qualities that distinguish it from other languages, even from other Slavic languages. To this end, juxtaposing poetry and music proved fruitful, for both disciplines have a tradition of shared conceptual and technical vocabularies and both were the cherished art forms of the time. "The influence of music on poetry and poetry on music," Elsner writes, "is so important that the one art cannot be precisely and securely explained without the help of the other."[12] Through such a double lens, questions regarding the melodiousness of speech—its rhythms, contours, and accents—could be brought into focus. Add to this the pangs of statelessness and the result is a potent artistic objective. It was in this spirit that Elsner wrote his treatises.

[12] "Wpływ Muzyki na Poezyą, i Poezyi na Muzykę tak iest ważnym, że iedna z nich iako sztuka uważana, nie może być bez pomocy drugiey dokładnie i pewnie obiaśnioną." Józef Elsner, *O metryczności i rytmiczności języka polskiego* [On the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language] (Warsaw: Dąbrowski, 1818), fol. 18.

1.2 Elsner's Treatises: Music and Poetry



ROZPRAWA

O

METRYCZNOŚCI I RYTMICZNOŚCI

JĘZYKA POLSKIEGO,

szczególniéy o wierszach polskich we względzie muzycznym

PRZEZ

JÓZEFA ELSNERA

CZŁONKA KRÓL: TOWARZYSTWA WARSZAWSKIEGO PRZYIACIÓŁ NAUK

z Przykładami rzecz obiaśniaiącemi

PRZEZ

KAZIMIERZA BRODZIŃSKIEGO.

CZĘŚĆ I^wsza

W WARSZAWIE 1818.

w Drukarni Stanisława Dąbrowskiego.

TREATISE
on the
Meter and Rhythm
of the Polish Language

in Particular on Polish Verse from a Musical Perspective

By
Józef Elsner
Member of the Warsaw Society of Friends of the Sciences

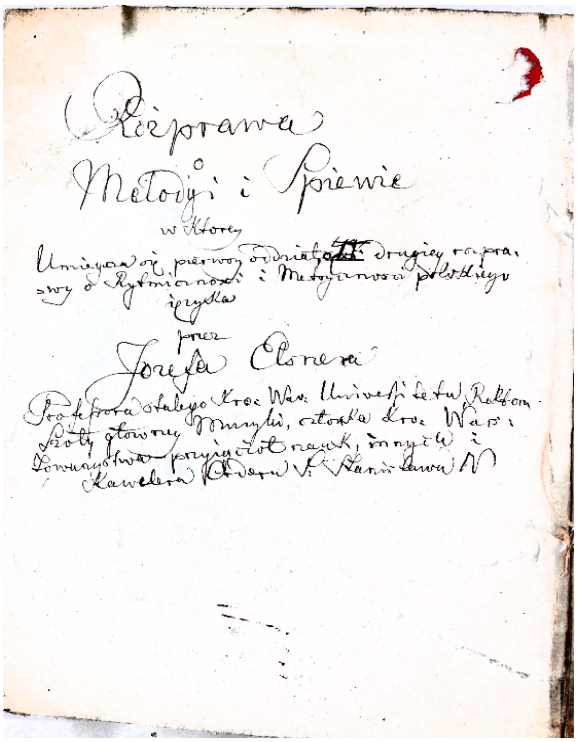
With Illustrative Examples
By
Kazimierz Brodziński

PART 1
in Warsaw 1818
by the printer Stanisław Dąbrowski

Fig. 1.4 Elsner, *On the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language* (1818). Public Domain. Reproduced from polona.pl/item/23101683/4/, digital resource of the National Library, Warsaw.

Elsner conceived his two treatises on language and music as a multi-part whole. The *Treatise on the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language* was published in 1818 as Part 1 (Fig. 1.4). As its subtitle suggests, this volume explores ways of setting Polish verse to music, specifically lines of eight-syllable syllabotonic verse. Furthermore, Elsner herein presents the "rule of the *penultima*," the idiomatically Polish and inviolable precept of stressing the penultimate syllable in polysyllabic words. The *Treatise on Melody and Chant*, intended as Part 2, builds on the concepts of the earlier document (Fig. 1.5). Here, Elsner addresses matters of periodicity, hypermeter, caesurae and cadential articulations, as well as other kinds of accentuation, such as "oratorical" and "grammatical" accents. Through these elements—together the "*Kunszt* (sic) of

composition"—composers are to create melodies to texted or instrumental works that do not "disfigure the mother tongue," a recurring expression throughout both writings. Though dated "1 February 1830," *On Melody and Chant* was likely completed much earlier; it exists to this day solely as a handwritten manuscript (in the archives of the Czartoryski Library, Kraków, Ms. 2276). In an 1832 letter to Chopin, Elsner suggests censorship as an obstacle to its publication since "nationalism occupies the most important place in it, apart from the discussion of the present trend of music."[13]



Treatise
on
Melody and Chant

in which
is contained the first section of the second
treatise on the rhythm and meter of the Polish
language
by
Józef Elsner
Tenured Professor of Warsaw University
Rector of the Main School of Music
Member of the Warsaw Society of Friends of
the Sciences, and others
Cavalier of the Order of St. Stanislaus

Fig. 1.5 Elsner, *On Melody and Chant* (1830). Biblioteka XX Czartoryskich, Kraków, Ms. 2276. Reproduced with permission.

Elsner's mentioned "present trend of music"—i.e. its relationship with poetry—is rooted in a centuries-old intellectual-aesthetic tradition. Among his core concerns is "quantity" (*iloczas* in Polish) or the durations of syllables within a word or between words. In Classical verse,

[13] Elsner, letter to Chopin, 13 December 1832. Arthur Hedley, ed. and trans., *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin* (London: Heinemann, 1962), 113-14.

quantity is understood as a phonological feature used for ordering syllables into regular patterns (that is, meter) according to long-short contrasts based on syllable length.[14] The musical corollary of this concept was expressed succinctly by Johann Mattheson in his *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* of 1739:

> What a *rhythmus* is, is taught to us by prosody, or that instruction in the art of speaking by means of which it is ascertained how one should properly place the accent, and whether one should utter a long or a short. The meaning of the word *rhythmus* however is merely quantitative, namely, a certain measuring or counting out, there the syllables, here the sounds, not only with regard to their multiplicity; but also with regard to their brevity and length.[15]

Like syllables in a line of verse, musical notes in a melody are either "long" or "short" within a particular metric hierarchy. This principle of *thesis* and *arsis* (which Mattheson describes as "the ebb and flow in the beat"[16]) was crucial for Elsner, for it grounded his ideas on composing melodies reflective of Polish prosodic qualities. Indeed, Elsner's whole theory rests on the premise that musical rhythms resulting from sequences of accented and unaccented notes can be analogized to the rhythms of a language. In *On Melody and Chant*, Elsner writes:

> W [niektórych] językach już samo tonowanie pewnej syllaby zawiera Skancyą (*sic*) podług akcentu, która przy jakim bądź używaniu różnych wyrazów lecz z pewnym zamiarem stawienia słów staje się metryczną czyli taktyczną, ponieważ mocniejsze i słabsze tonowanie łatwo przemienia się na krótką i długą syllabę, i w muzyce nie inaczej jak przez długość lub krótkość wymówionem bydź może, co jasno wypływa z istoty taktu muzycznego.
> …
> Zasada taktu muzycznego w *Thesis* i *Arsis* będzie dowodem prozodyi języka polskiego, kiedy się okaże, że przyczyna Akcentu wielu-zgłoskowych wyrazach jest Filozoficzną, prawie tak, iak w jedno zgłoskowych wyrazach psychologiczną.

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[14] See "quantity" in Lidov, J. and A. Jaker, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman, eds., 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1137-1138. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Accessed July 2016.
[15] Ernest C. Harriss, trans., *Johann Mattheson's "Der vollkommene Capelmeister": A Revised Translation with Critical Commentary* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981), 344.
[16] Harriss, trans., *Mattheson's "Der vollkommene Capelmeister,"* 365.

> In [certain] languages, the mere intoning [or sounding] of a particular syllable embodies scansion according to accent, which in whatever use of words, but with a specific intent in word placement, becomes metrical, that is measured, because stronger and weaker intoning amounts to short and long syllables, and in music it cannot be otherwise but through length and brevity, which arises from the essence of the musical measure.
> …
> The rule of the musical measure, that is *thesis* and *arsis*, will prove the prosody of the Polish language when it is demonstrated that the cause of the accent in polysyllabic words is philosophical, while that of monosyllabic words is psychological.[17]

In both treatises, Elsner discusses at length the issue of accent (in its linguistic and corresponding musical sense) as it allows him to characterize melodies in nationalistic terms. He distinguishes three types of accents: "oratorical" (*akcent oratoryczny*), "linguistic" (*akcent języka*), and "word" (*akcent słowny*). An oratorical accent

> słowo w Konstrukcji najważniejsze podnosi, i który w ustach Deklamatora wyrazem namiętnym się staje, jeżeli to słowo z pewną modulacyą głosu się wymawia, które uczucie w tym sensie panujące oznacza.
>
> heightens the most important word in a construction, which through the lips of the declaimer becomes passionate expression when this word is uttered with a particular modulation of voice, thereby conveying the dominant emotion.[18]

A word's meaning or importance in a line determines whether or not it should be given special emphasis—a "psychological" cause, as understood by Elsner. Oratorical accents are especially effective for words of one or two syllables. Depending on their inherent meaning and/or poetic significance, words such as "God" (*Bóg*), "mine" (*mój*), or "through" (*przez*) will be accented to

---

[17] Józef Elsner, *O melodyi i śpiewie* [On Melody and Chant] (Biblioteka XX Czartoryskich, Kraków, Ms. 2276), Chapter E, 182-183, and 184.

[18] Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 181. Here and elsewhere we observe Elsner's indebtedness to and continuation of the work of his eighteenth-century Austro-German colleagues. For example, in his *Klavierschule* of 1789, Daniel Gottlob Türk writes: "Whoever would read a poem and the like in such a way that it becomes comprehensible to the listener must place a marked emphasis on certain words or syllables. The very same resource is also at the disposal of the practicing musician." See Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule oder Anweisung zum Klavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende*. Leipzig, Halle, 1789. Raymond H. Haggh, trans. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), Chapter 6 "Concerning Execution." Quote from p. 324.

varying degrees.[19]

"Linguistic" and "word" accents highlight "the most important syllable in a word." As Elsner describes, a "word" accent stresses a word's root syllable. If the syllable to be stressed arises from "the very structure of the language" (a "philosophical" cause), then the accent is "linguistic." In instances when these two accents conflate, Elsner classifies them simply as "grammatical" accentuation.[20] He offers the two-syllable word *miłość* ("love") as an example. In

---

[19] In *On Melody and Chant* (pp. 177-178), Elsner delineates accentual length further into three categories according to parts of speech:

1. Długie	Long
a) *Nomen* Król, Bóg, Pan	king, God, Sir/Lord
b) *Verbum* czuć, grać, daj	to feel, to play, give
c) *Adjectivum* zły, rad, mdły	bad/angry, glad, bland
2. Średnie (albo obojętne) to jest krótkie albo długie	Medium (or indifferent) that is, short or long
a) *Pronomen* ja, ty, ten, mój	I, you, this, mine
b) *Adverbium* tam, tu, gdzie	there, here, where
c) *Interjectio* Ah, O	Ah, Oh
3. Krótkie	Short
a) *Praepositio* przez, za, nad	through, behind, above/over
b) *Conjunctio* [*sic*] gdy, bo	if/when, because/for
c) *Conjunctiones enclitia* że, ci	[enclitic conjunctions that do not translate to English]
d) *Neutrum* się	[reflexive article that does not translate to English]

[20] The full passage reads as follows:

> Akcent języka i…akcent słowny, które to obadwa nayważnieyszą sylabę w słowie podnoszą i właściwie grammatykalny akcent stanowią. Akcent ten grammatykalny, staie się akcentem języka w ten czas, kiedy podniesienie nayważnieyszey sylaby, więcey się na samey budowie języka zasadza, iak to iest u Polaków, akcentem zaś słownym nazywa się w ten czas, kiedy podniesienie teyże sylaby na zródłową sylabę słowa przypada, iak to iest u Niemców…
>
> The linguistic accent and…the word accent both heighten the most important syllable in a word and, in fact, constitute grammatical accentuation. This grammatical accent is known as a linguistic accent when the syllable to be raised is established by the very structure of the language, as it is for Poles. A word accent, however, is when the root [or source] syllable of a word is raised, as it is for Germans…

Elsner, *On Meter and Rhythm*, fol. 48; repeated in idem., *On Melody and Chant*, 181-182.

its nominative case version, the first (i.e. root) syllable *mi-* receives the stress (MI-łość; pronounced MEE-wohshch). When declined to, say, the genitive case—*miłości* ("love's")—the noun becomes trisyllabic and the stress shifts to the middle syllable *-ło-* (mi-ŁO-ści; pronounced mee-WOH-shchee).[21]

For Polish theorists and composers of Elsner's generation, such accentual nuances were integral to defining and creating distinctly national melodies, a notion inspired by earlier thinkers, such as J. J. Rousseau who writes: "C'est l'accent des Langues qui détermine la *Mélodie* de chaque Nation; c'est l'accent qui fait qu'on parle en chantant, & qu'on parle avec plus ou moins d'énergie, selon que la Langue a plus ou moins d'Accent."[22] In 1781, the rhetorician and grammarian Tadeusz Nowaczyński published his treatise *O prozodyi i harmonii języka polskiego* (*On the Prosody and Harmony of the Polish Language*), one of the first works to frame Polish prosody in musical terms. Nowaczyński's understanding of the "harmony" of the language is encapsulated by his term *zgodnoton* ("agreeable tone," literally translated), a rather vague neologism for the pronunciation of syllables, the accents of words, and elocution generally—in other words, the phonological qualities that "are shared by all those [people], well-spoken in a common language."[23] In Polish, the predominant prosodic quality is that of the accented penultimate syllable in polysyllabic words and Nowaczyński's study seeks to expound on the affect of this accent in metered Polish verse.

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[21] Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 187-188. Elsner's complementary example is of the German word *Liebe*. He explains how the first syllable *Lie-* retains its stress in both iterations of the phrase *der Liebe Sehnsucht* and *Sehnsucht der Liebe*.

[22] "Mélodie" in J. J. Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris: Veuve Duchesne, 1768), 277.

[23] "Harmonią, mówię, czyli *Zgodnoton*. Gdyż go wszyscy jednegoż języka, a dobrze nim mówiący ludzie jednakowoż w ciągu mowy swey wydawają. Pronuncyacya tedy wydaie się w Literach, i Syllabach. Akcent w Słowach. Harmonia w Mowie; w tym bardziey w Wymowie, czyli Elokwencyi." Tadeusz Nowaczyński, *O prozodyi i harmonii języka polskiego* (Warsaw: J. K. MCi i Rzeczypospolitey u XX. Scholarum Piarum, 1781), 7ff.

In the Preface to his *On the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language*, Elsner acknowledges his predecessor's contribution, though not without criticism: he thought Nowaczyński's concept of linguistic "harmony" too general and inaccurate (*za ogólne* and *niewłaściwe*) and his discussion of accentuation incomplete.[24] While Nowaczyński limited his prosodic analysis to individual polysyllabic words, Elsner explored the language's broader "metric-rhythmic" (*metryczno-rythmiczne*) qualities, which stem from the "resultant rhythms of combinations of words."[25] And though Nowaczyński invoked music to further explicate poetry, Elsner was the first author to present direct applications of Polish prosody and poetry to music. To this end, rhythm and meter (as opposed to Nowaczyński's "harmony") provided Elsner a versatile terminology with which to mediate the linguistic and musical arts.

I. Zasady melodyi w ogólności a. Tony poiedyncze formować muszą iaką całość w ktorey się iedność z rozmaitością łączy. b. Całość ta musi mieć formę przyiemną. II. Zasady melodyi w szczególności A. Zasada pierwsza, każda melodya musi mieć ton jeden główny. 1. w znaczeniu fizycznem 2. w znaczeniu logiczno-estetycznym [Uwaga Każdy z dwunastu w Oktachordzie znayduiących się tonów może bydź obranym za ton główny z pomocą użycia a. krzyżyków b. bemollów, z tąd c. koło kwintowe i kwartowe] B. Zasada druga, każdy inny ton melodyi musi bydź w pewnym stosunku z tonem głownym. 1. w postępowaniu tonów stopniowem 2. w postępowaniu tonów skaczącem sposobem a. dyatonicznym b. chromatycznym	I. The principles of melody in general a. Individual tones must form a whole in which unity with variety is combined. b. This whole must have a pleasing form. II. The principles of melody in particular A. First principle, every melody must have one main tone. 1. in a physical sense 2. in a logico-aesthetic sense [Note Any of the twelve tones in an octave may be selected as the main tone, with the aid of a. sharps b. flats, from which originate c. the circles of fifths and fourths] B. Second principle, each different tone in a melody must have a certain relation to the main tone. 1. in the progression of tones by step 2. in the progression of tones by leap, whether a. diatonically b. chromatically

[24] Elsner, *On Meter and Rhythm*, fol. 8f.

[25] "…chcąc poznać, ile ięzyk metryczno-rythmicznych słów mieć może, mniey na tem zależy iakie miary tonów szczególne słowa zawieraią, ale raczey iakie rythmy powstaią ze złożenia słów, wiersz składać maiących." "…to discover how many metric-rhythmic words a language might have, the tone-lengths of individual words are less important than the resultant rhythms of combinations of words, which comprise a poem." Ibid.

C. Trzecia zasada, Tony co do ruchu i trwania w czasie muszą mieć między sobą pewny porządek to iest poruszenie rytmiczne i taktyczne. 1. Melodya Chóralna 2. Melodya figuralna, czyli Taktyczna	C. Third principle, as regards the motion and duration of tones in time, they must have between themselves an order, that is rhythmic and measured motion. 1. Chorale melody 2. Figural melody, that is, measured
D. Czwarta zasada. W tem wszystkim powinno się dać postrzegać wyrażenie prawdy we względzie logiczno-estetycznym. 1. Melodya w stosunku tonów gammy ma swoie kadencye bez względu na Harmoniią 2. Wpływ większych lub mnieyszych przyiemnie lub nie przyiemnie brzmiących Interwallów 3. Prędkość ruchu 4. Rodzay ruchu 5. Rodzay taktu, czy ma być prostym lub nie prostym, albo składanym 6. Własność rytmiczna taktu, to iest liczba części iego 7. Dzielenie nót lub tonów w częściach nawet i [illegible] taktu 8. Działanie rytmicznych oddzieleń 9. Rytm wyższy czyli większy we względzie muzycznym 10. Zakończenie rytmiczno-taktyczne peryodów lub części peryodu	D. Fourth principle. Overall, one should be able to perceive the expression of logico-aesthetic truth. 1. A melody, as tones in a scale, has its own cadences regardless of harmony 2. The affect of more or less pleasing or unpleasant intervals 3. The speed of motion 4. The type of motion 5. The type of measure, whether it should be simple or not, or compound 6. Rhythmic properties of the measure, that is, the number of its parts 7. The division of notes or tones into parts and [illegible] of the measure 8. The operation of rhythmic divisions 9. Higher rhythm, that is, greater in a musical sense. 10. Rhythmic-measured conclusions to periods or parts of periods
E. Piąta zasada. Kiedy melodya ma być ułożoną do śpiewania waga taktu odpowiadać powinna akcentowi języka w wyrazach. 1. Zasada prozodyi ogólniey we względzie muzycznym 2. Zastosowanie do Języka polskiego podług tonokroków Greckich i Łacińskich tłumaczonych sposobem muzycznym 3. Zasady główne prozodyi ięzyka polskiego	E. Fifth principle. When a melody is to be arranged for singing, the weight of the measure should correspond to the accent of the language in words [or expression]. 1. The principles of prosody in general as regards music 2. The application of Greek and Latin tone-feet to the Polish language, explained musically 3. The main principles of Polish prosody

Fig. 1.6 *On Melody and Chant*, Table of Contents.

Following an in-depth exposition of musical rudiments, *On Melody and Chant* culminates in a chapter entitled, "When melody is to be arranged for singing, the weight of the measure should correspond to the accent of the language in words [or expressions]" (See Fig. 1.6, "Chapter E"). Elsner roots this, his fifth principle of melody, entirely in the Classical device of tone-feet—*tonokrok* in Polish or what Mattheson calls *Klang-Füsse*—arrangements of stressed

and unstressed syllables into metrical units which are often analogized to musical meter.[26] Like Mattheson before him, Elsner lays out the most common tone-feet for words of two, three, and four syllables, beginning with the spondee (— —) and ending with the diiamb (— — —).[27] Accompanying each description is a short example of a possible musical setting. Elsner here reinforces his premise that a composer should consider the rules of linguistic accentuation along with *thesis* and *arsis* when writing a melody. As the language in question is Polish, Elsner proceeds to hone his argument:

> Tonokroki, które w wyrazach polskich się znajdują i znajdować się mogą, w tem wymówieniu czerpanemi być powinne które się z głównym prawidłem prozodyi polskiej zgadza, i które we względzie grammatycznym zawsze usprawiedliwionym być może, jest koniecznością bo inaczej mowa polska utraciłaby znamię różniące ią od języków słowiańskich.
>
> [Those] tone-feet, which in Polish words are found and can be found, should be selected that conform to the main rule of Polish prosody, and that can always be justified grammatically. This is a necessity, otherwise Polish speech would lose the characateristic that distinguishes it from other Slavic languages.[28]

The "main rule of Polish prosody," presented formally in the treatise's final section (see Fig. 1.6, "Chapter E, Section 3"), permeates Elsner's writing:

> Pierwsze i najgłówniesze prawidło iloczasowe jest, że się przedostatnia zgłoska pospolicie przedłuża a przeto jest długą w wyrazach zrzódłowych (*sic*), czy pierwotnych...lecz oraz w stosunkowności tako przez przypadkowanie, czasowanie...lub przez inną odmianę w samym wyrazie uskutecznioną....

---

[26] *Tonokrok*, as Elsner defines it, is "a certain number of syllables, which have between them a certain proportion of length and brevity in time. In this regard, as a figure in time, tonokrok is in poetry almost what a step is in dance or a simple meter is in music." "Tonokrok w Poezyi jest pewną liczbą syllab, które między sobą znowu mają pewną proporcyą długości i krótkości trwania w czasie. Pod tem względem jako figura w czasie tonokrok jest to samo w poezyi prawie, co krok w tańcu, i takt pojedynczy w muzyce." *On Melody and Chant*, 197.

[27] See Harriss, trans., *Mattheson's "Der vollkommene Capelmeister,"* Part II, Chapter 6 "On the Length and Shortness of Sound, or the Construction of Tone-Feet"; and Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 198ff.

[28] Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 223.

> The first and foremost rule of vowel-length is that the penultimate syllable is commonly lengthened and thus is long in uninflected words...as well as when declined or conjugated...or in other effected variants of the word....[29]

In the abovementioned example of *miłość* (love) and its genitive declension *miłości* (love's), the former scans as a trochee (— ∪) and the latter as an amphibrach (∪ — ∪), both iterations demonstrating quintessential Polish accentuation.[30] They also exemplify those tone-feet that "are suitable to the Polish language" (*które są właściwe językowi polskiemu*). Elsner provides further such examples for bi-, tri-, and quadrisyllabic words:

Trochee	— ∪	♩ ♪	*Kochać* (to love)
Amphibrach	∪ — ∪	♪ ♩ ♪	*Ojczyznę* (fatherland/homeland)
Paeon III	∪ ∪ — ∪	♪ ♪ ♩ ♪	*Odzyskaną* (regained)[31]

Each of these examples is supported by a series of originally composed incipits, setting the tone-feet in various simple and melismatic melodic configurations (Figs. 1.7a,b,c).

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[29] Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 270.

[30] Following Elsner's practice, throughout this paper, I use the classical macron and breve scansion symbols for both descriptive and prescriptive purposes. "—" refers to stressed, long, or generally marked syllables, whereas "∪" represents syllables that are unstressed, short, or generally unmarked.

[31] Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 207-208. Notice the overt patriotic connotations of Elsner's sample words—clearly a conscious decision on his part, the repercussion for which was censorship. Recall his letter to Chopin quoted above: "nationalism occupies the most important place in it [i.e., *On Melody and Chant*]."

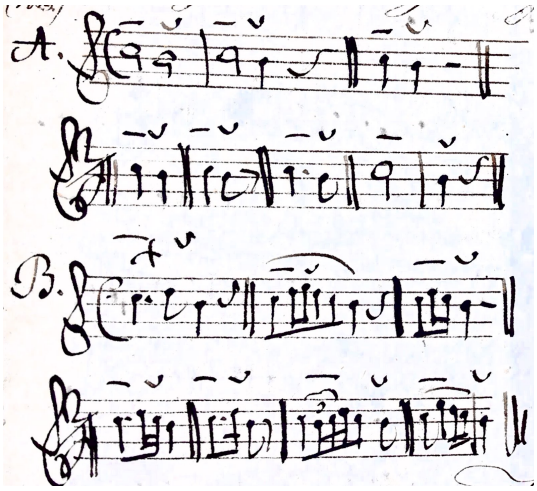


Fig. 1.7a Elsner's melodic example for trochee. *On Melody and Chant*, 207.

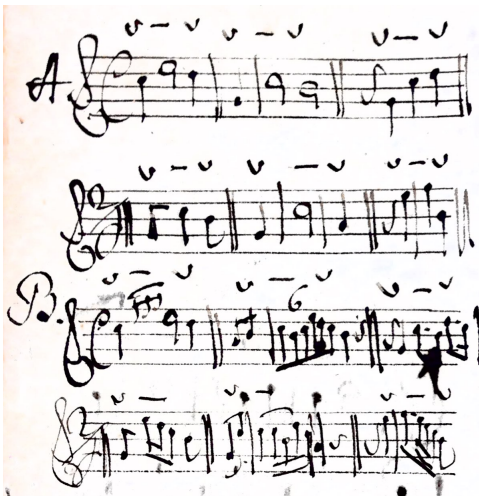


Fig. 1.7b Amphibrach example. *On Melody and Chant*, 208.

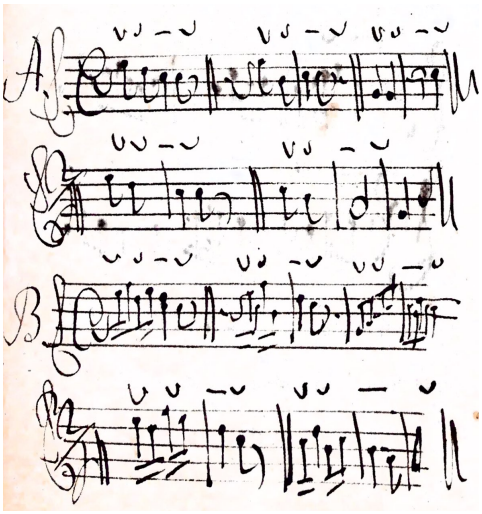


Fig. 1.7c Paeon III example. *On Melody and Chant*, 208.

"Music," Elsner writes, "attains the highest degree of perfection when its spirit is poetic" as does poetry "when its form is musical, which is due largely to the beautiful sound and, even more so, to the metric-rhythmic arrangement of its words."[32] Supporting this outwardly Romantic sentiment is, as we have seen, a Classical conceptual infrastructure: historically established just repurposed for a particular place and time. Grounded though he was in

[32] "Nie podpada także wątpliwości, że iak muzyka w ten czas dostępuie naywyższego stopnia doskonałości, kiedy iey duch iest poetycznym, tak równie doydzie go Poezya, skoro iey forma iest muzykalną, która po większey części przez piękne brzmiące, więcey ieszcze przez metryczno-rytmiczne ułożenie słów zamierzoną zostaie." Elsner, *On Meter and Rhythm*, fol. 12f.

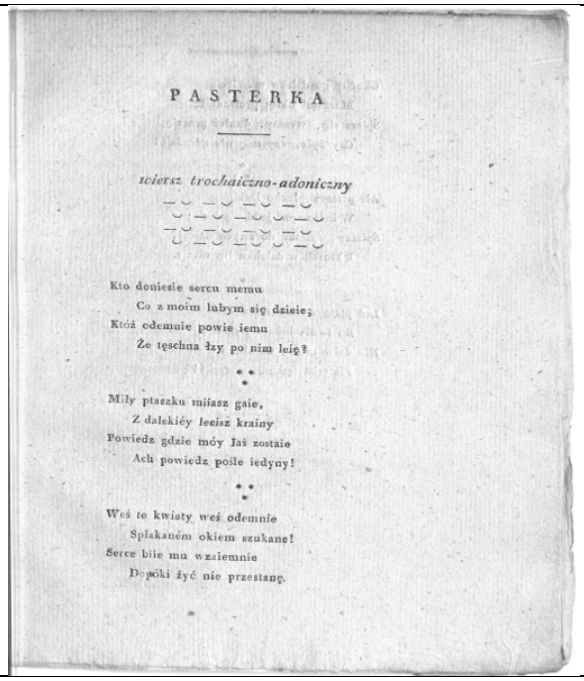
eighteenth-century aesthetics, Elsner embraced the bold ideas of the new century's artists. Leading among these was Kazimierz Brodziński (the prominent poet mentioned earlier) who shared Elsner's conviction in the reciprocal relationship of music and poetry—indeed, music for Brodziński was a "divine language" (*boski język*) that "from its beginning always kept company with poetry."[33] To more fully demonstrate his principles, Elsner invited Brodziński to contribute ten original poems to his first treatise, *On the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language*, six of which Elsner himself set to music. The song *Pasterka* ("Shepherdess") is the first of Elsner's illustrative settings, which, together with *Duma Ludgardy* ("Ludgarda's Dumka") will be examined more closely.

In *On Meter and Rhythm*, there is a tacit concern about a gradual move away in the field of poetics from metrical verse toward free verse. Both Elsner and his contributor Brodziński believed that regularized poetic meter was necessary since it "lends greater lyricism and heightened expression to poem and song alike."[34] The poems to the songs *Pasterka* and *Duma Ludgardy* exemplify two types of metrical verse: accentual-syllabic and accentual. Lines of accentual-syllabic verse (a.k.a. syllabotonic verse) are highly regulated as regards both the number of syllables and the number and distribution of their stresses.[35] *Pasterka*, for example, is composed of eight-syllable lines, alternating trochaic tetrameter (KTO do-NIE-sie SER-cu ME-mu) with what are known as adonic clausulae, a historically established arrangement that includes a dactyl (— ∪ ∪) among the trochees (co ZMO-im LU-bym się DZIE-ie) (Fig. 1.8). The consistency of stresses in such poems makes them easily scannable and easily set to music:

---

[33] "W początkach zawsze ten boski język (tj. muzyka) poezji towarzyszył." From "O klasyczności i romantyczności," in *Dzieła Kazimierza Brodzińskiego*, 54.
[34] "…aby rodzaiowi lirycznemu więcey wzniesienia, pieśni zaś lub dumce więcey nadać wyrazu." *On Meter and Rhythm*, fol. 19.
[35] "Syllabic verse" in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Accessed 1 July 2016.

the contrastive features of poetic feet—the binary or ternary combinations of stressed vs. unstressed syllables—analogize to long and short, or "good" and "bad" notes within musical meters. For example, the simple trochee (— ∪) is, according to Elsner, well suited to a simple 3/8 measure (*Takt*), which has one "good time" or good beat.[36] Of course, in music, notes can be subdivided to accommodate variant poetic feet, as Elsner does with the dactyl mentioned above in m. 10 of his setting, or, as in the very next bar, notes can be augmented to highlight particular syllables (Ex. 1.1).


PASTERKA

wiersz trochaiczno-adoniczny

Kto doniesie sercu memu
Co z moim lubym się dzieie;
Któż odemnie powie jemu
Że tęschna łzy po nim leię?

Miły ptaszku mijasz gaie,
Z dalekiéy lecisz krainy
Powiedz gdzie móy Jaś zostaie
Ach powiedz pośle iedyny!

Weś to kwiaty weś odemnie
Spłakaném okiem szukane!
Serce bije mu wzaiemnie
Dopóki żyć nie przestanę.

Pasterka

wiersz trochaiczno-adoniczny

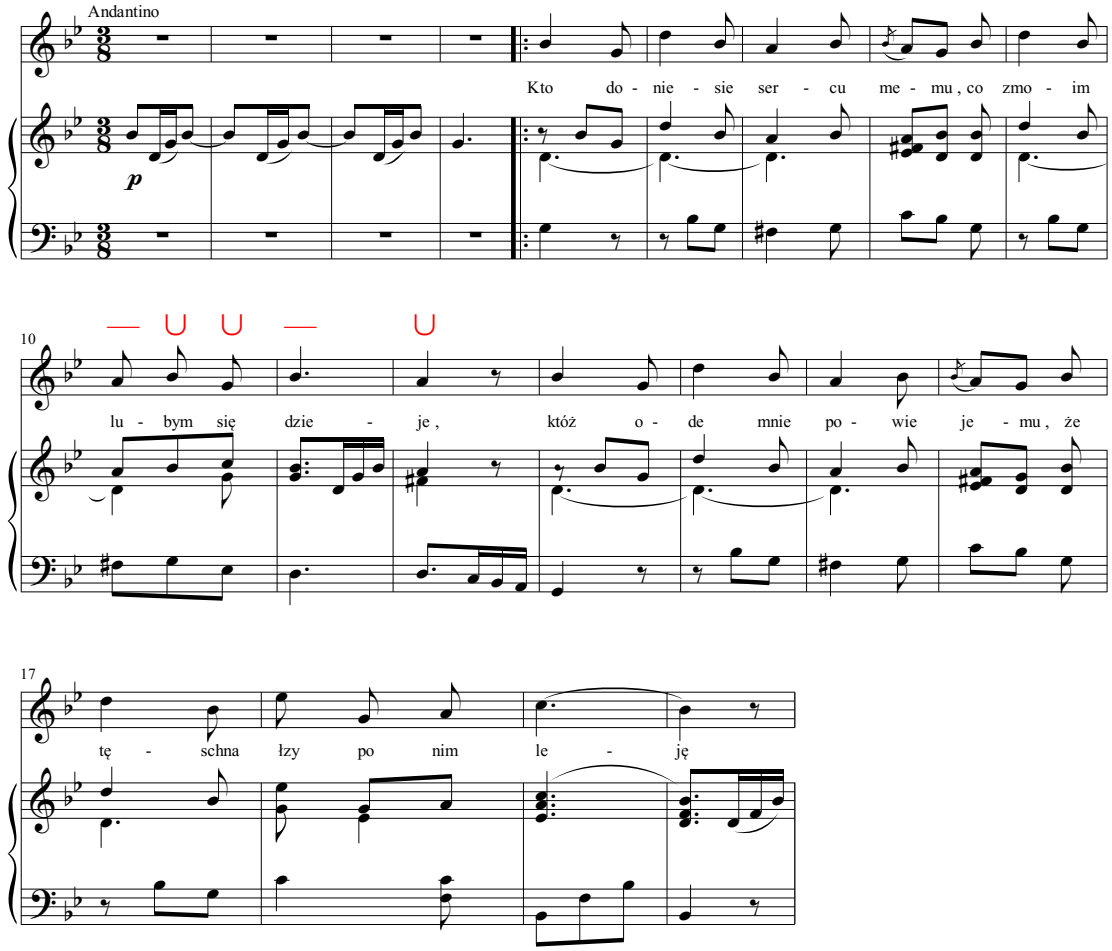
— ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪
∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪
— ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪
∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪

Kto doniesie sercu memu,
co z moim lubym się dzieie,
któż odemnie powie jemu,
że tęschna łzy po nim leię?

Miły ptaszku, mijasz gaie,
z dalekiey lecisz krainy,
powiedz, gdzie mój Jaś zostaie
ach, powiedz, pośle jedyny.

Fig. 1.8 *Pasterka* (1818) by K. Brodziński. In Elsner, *On the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language*, fol. 74. Public Domain. Reproduced from polona.pl/item/23101683/80/, digital resource of the National Library, Warsaw.

[36] "Takt z iednym dobrym czasem [odpowiada] metrowi trochaicznemu — ∪." *On Meter and Rhythm*, fol. 28.



Ex. 1.1 Elsner, *Pasterka*, mm. 1-20. Transcribed after Alina Nowak-Romanowicz, *Józef Elsner: dodatek nutowy* (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1957), 9f.

In contrast to the strict regularity of syllabotonic verse, accentual verse prioritizes the stresses over other structural components. Lines of accentual verse may vary in the number of syllables, in the disposition of the stresses, or in the arrangements of feet; but, within or among the lines themselves, some underlying pattern maintains the rhythmic cohesion of the whole.[37] *Duma Ludgardy*, by the popular eighteenth-century poet Franciszek Karpiński and set to music by Elsner in 1805,[38] consists of two quatrains, the first of which is repeated:

[37] Mieczysław Giergielewicz, *Introduction to Polish Versification* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1970), 84ff.
[38] This song first appeared in Vol. 5 of *Selection of Beautiful Musical Works and Polish Songs*, J. Elsner, ed. (Warsaw: 1805).

Powiejcie wiatry od wschodu,	∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪	adonic
z wami do mojego rodu	— ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪	dactylic
poszlę skargę obciążoną	— ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪	trochaic
miłością moją skrzywdzoną.	∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪	adonic
Smutna matka w dłoń uderzy.	— ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪	trochaic
Nieszczęścia zaraz uwierzy,	∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪	adonic
przyszle mi braty obrońce	— ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪	dactylic
i łuków syrbskich tysiące.	∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪	adonic
Powiejcie wiatry od wschodu,	∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪	adonic
z wami do mojego rodu	— ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪	dactylic
poszlę skargę obciążoną	— ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪	trochaic
miłością moją skrzywdzoną.	∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪	adonic

The lines of each quatrain are fixed at eight syllables, but are composed as either adonic, dactylic, or trochaic clausulae. The alternation of these lines and, more significantly, their recurrence, ensures for the piece a "unity in variety" (*jedność z rozmaitością*), a core compositional ideal in eighteenth-century thematic construction and a phrase repeated by Elsner to describe the artful concatenation of musical tone-feet.[39] But there is more: notice that each line of this poem ends on an unstressed syllable preceded by a stressed syllable. It is the penultimate stress that is regulated in this example of accentual verse. Such concluding gestures in Polish poetry, known as feminine endings in poetics,[40] arise not just from the poet's linguistic cleverness, but from the very nature of the language itself, which brings us again to the fundamental rule of Polish prosody, what Elsner calls "the rule of the *penultima*."

In Polish, the primary stress in polysyllabic words is almost always given to the penultimate syllable. This linguistic idiosyncrasy bears significant aesthetic implications for both poetry and music and for Elsner it was sacrosanct. He writes:

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[39] E.g., see Fig. 1.6 "Section I, subsection a." Regarding the principle of unity in variety, see Mark Evan Bonds, *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of the Oration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[40] "Masculine and Feminine" in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Accessed 1 July 2016.

> Że forma ięzyka przyczynę prawa *penultimy* zawieraiąca, w żaden sposób uszkodzoną być nie może, przez nią bowiem ięzyk polski iako polski między słowiańskiemi się znamionuie, i ponieważ w niey po większey części zawiera się piękność i udoskonalenie.
>
> The form of the language, which causes the law of the penultimate, should not in any way be transgressed. It is because of this law that Polish distinguishes itself among Slavic languages and in which, to a large degree, rests its beauty and perfection.[41]

In the context of musical meter, where the stressed syllables of a text theoretically correspond to the strongest beats of the bar, the Polish rule of the penultimate often results in feminine cadences: the stressed penultimate syllable falls on the downbeat followed by the unstressed syllable on a weaker beat. Melodically, this kind of cadential gesture is frequently set as an appoggiatura, the dissonance further dramatizing the *penultima* (Fig. 1.9).

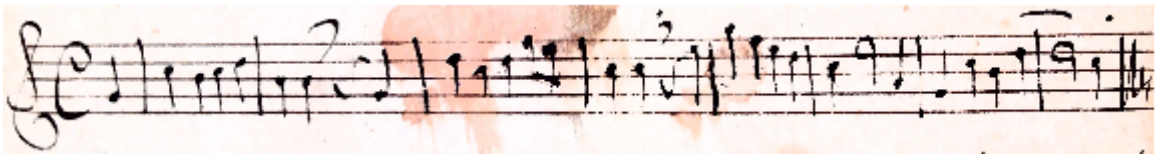


Fig. 1.9 Elsner's example of a feminine cadence. From *On Melody and Chant*, 158.

Masculine cadences, by contrast, are those in which melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic units conclude squarely on the downbeat (Fig. 1.10).

Fig. 1.10 Elsner's example of masculine cadences. From *On Melody and Chant*, 154.

Elsner writes at length about these distinctions in light of their role in medial and concluding cadential articulations within a musical period. Masculine cadences, according to Elsner, give a period the clearest and most definitive sense of closure (he uses the Latin word *punctum*). Feminine cadences, despite their weak-beat resolutions, can also effectively punctuate the end of

[41] Elsner, *On Meter and Rhythm*, fol. 7.

a period when rhythm, harmony, and melody synchronize to effect closure.[42] To this end, Elsner equates the degrees of the scale with specific punctuation marks, for "a melody must have its cadences just as speech has its written signs."[43] (Notice Elsner's own written-in punctuation in Fig. 1.9.)

$\hat{1}$ and $\hat{8}$ = .	$\hat{3}$ = ; (or :)	$\hat{6}$ = , (or ;)
$\hat{2}$ and $\hat{4}$ = ,	$\hat{5}$ = ; (or .)	$\hat{7}$ = ,

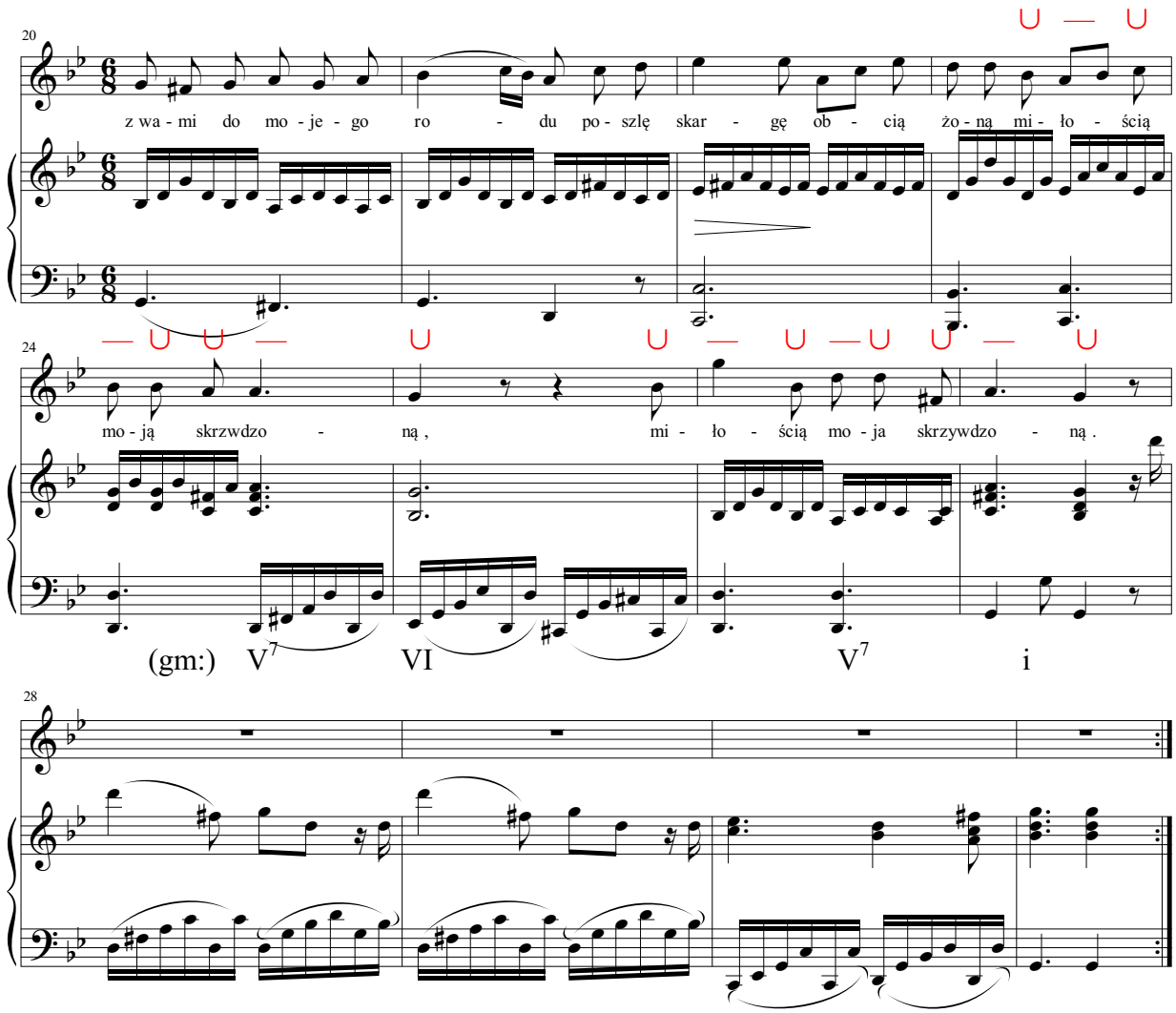
The closing bars of Elsner's *Duma Ludgardy* beautifully illustrate his concepts in practice (Ex. 1.2). The final line of the text (m. 23ff.), "miłością moją skrzywdzoną" ("by my wounded love") which scans as an adonic clausula (I provide the scansion above the vocal line), is set perfectly in 6/8 time and concludes with a masculine cadence on the downbeat of m. 25. However, the deceptive harmonic motion at that moment undermines not only the conclusiveness of the cadence, but also the stability of scale-degree 1, thus denying the *punctum* (or "period") associated with it. The line is immediately repeated, this time metrically shifted by half a bar, resulting in a feminine cadence in m. 27, which, now supported harmonically by the

---

[42] "Zakończenie peryodu z pierwszą ważną częścią taktu, co się męskim nazywa rytmiczno-taktycznym zakończeniem, iest naystosowniejszym i naywyraźnieyszym czyli naygłównieyszym dla oznaczenia punktu peryodu. ...
Zakończenie żeńskie z dwoma uderzeniami [jest] mniey zaspokaiaiące we względzie rytmiczno-taktycznym...lecz połączywszy z tą kadencyą własność kadencyi melodyinych i harmonijnych, w ten czas dopiero kadencya żeńska nabierze dokładności zakończenia zupełnego wielkiego peryodu muzycznego. ...
Warunek dla uskutecznienia kadencyi żeńskiey, iako *punktum* peryodu iest ten, ażeby przedostatnia nóta była oddaną z Appogiaturą."
"Concluding a period on the first important part of the measure, which is called a masculine rhythmic-measured ending, is the most suitable, clearest, and primary manner in which to mark the 'period' of a [musical] period. …
A feminine conclusion with two strikes [i.e. notes] is less settling in a rhythmic-measured sense…but, when this cadence aligns with melodic and harmonic qualities, then the feminine cadence acquires the exactitude of a complete ending to a musical period. …
The condition for effecting a feminine cadence as the *punctum* of a period is that the penultimate note be set as an appoggiatura." Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 154-158.

[43] "melodya mieć musi także swoie kadencye, prawie tak iak mowa znamiona pisarskie…" Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 94 and 95-97.

tonic, concludes the syntactic unit punctuated earlier in m. 21 by scale-degree 2 and its analogous comma. While the rule of the penultimate is observed in both iterations, Elsner ultimately prefers the feminine cadence to close the song.[44]



Ex. 1.2 Elsner, *Duma Ludgardy*, mm. 20-end. Transcribed after Nowak-Romanowicz, *Józef Elsner: dodatek nutowy*, 6.

[44] In unabashed essentializing fashion, Elsner writes elsewhere that "[masculine conclusions] will long remain foreign to the Polish ear, just as consonant endings are foreign to Italian singers." "Długo one [tj. męzkie zakończenia] obcemi ieszcze będą polskiemu uchu, tak iak obce są śpiewakowi włoskiemu zakończenia na współgłoskę." *On Meter and Rhythm*, fol. 13.

1.3 Lessons learned: Chopin's Art Songs

Though they were conceived from and for an especially intense cultural-political time in Poland's history, Elsner's treatises would have likely served a practical function as composition manuals at Warsaw's *Szkoła Główna Muzyczna* (Main School of Music), of which Elsner was the director and where Chopin was his star pupil. The mark next to Chopin's name in Elsner's grade book reads: "Szopen Friderik – Szczegulna zdatność, geniusz muzyczny – itd." ("Chopin Fryderyk – particular aptitude, musical genius – etc.").[45] Elsner's curriculum for the school, earlier called the Institute of Music and Declamation, clearly reflects his aesthetic bent. From an 1821 article in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* we learn that, in addition to applied lessons in voice, keyboard or string instruments, students attended lectures on "the art of composition, its grammatical as well as rhetorical part" and classes on "Polish literature and declamation."[46] In a letter to his friend Jan Białobłocki, the sixteen-year-old Chopin gives an idea of his academic schedule: "I go to Elsner for strict counterpoint six hours per week; I [also] hear lectures by Brodziński, Bentkowski and others in any way pertaining to music."[47]

Two extant letters from teacher to student mention the treatises by name. The first, dated 1832 (referenced above), addresses the issue of publication:

> I cannot forbear mentioning that my work on *The Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language* in three volumes (containing my dissertation on Melody, which you already partly know) is now finished. However, it cannot be published just yet, since the question

[45] Reproduced in Nowak-Romanowicz, *Józef Elsner*, Plate 27.
[46] *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* No. 33 (15 August 1821). See also Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, Chapter 4 "Musical Education" for a details on Chopin's life as a student as well as for an insightful discussion on topics from Elsner's treatises not covered in this paper, such as periodicity, hypermeter, and phrase extensions.
[47] "Chodzę do Elsnera na kontrapunkt ścisły, 6 godzin na tydzień; słucham Brodzińskiego, Bentkowskiego i innych, w jakimkolwiek związku będących obiektów z muzyką." Chopin, letter to J. Białobłocki, 2 November [October] 1826. From *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina, vol. 1: 1816-1831* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2009), 209.

> of *Nationalism* obviously occupies the most important place in it, apart from the discussion of the present trend of music.[48]

A little over a decade later, Elsner writes to Chopin again regarding his "dissertation," albeit with a more explicit motive:

> Having yet another opportunity to write to you, I enclose herewith a few items from my treatise, which I believe might interest you, particularly a copy of the Introduction to the second part of my dissertation on The Meters And Rhythms of the Polish Language. I have two reasons for doing so: one is a purely private one—your musical genius simply seems to compel me to do it; and the other more general reason is to encourage and ask you to write music for an opera, if possible based on Polish history.[49]

In early-nineteenth century Poland, opera burgeoned not only as an artistic genre, but also as an expressive force for national identity. The composition of a "Great" Polish opera developed into a cultural aspiration shared and pursued by many of Poland's leading musicians of the time, including Józef Elsner.[50] Indeed, roughly midway into his treatise *On Meter and Chant*, Elsner divulges his aim in writing the work:

> Ponieważ chęć stania się użytecznym muzyce i Operze Polskiej jest głównym celem moich badań, dla tego czuję się być obowiązanym, wyłożyć zasady prosodyi ięzyka polskiego, które podług mego przekonania powinny być upowszechnione i przyięte w mowie Wierszopisa lirycznego.
>
> Because the desire to be useful to music and to Polish opera is the main objective of my study, for that reason I feel obligated to explicate the principles of prosody of the Polish language, which in my opinion should be promulgated and accepted in the speech of lyric poets.[51]

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[48] Elsner, letter to Chopin, 13 December 1832. As quoted in Hedley, *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 113-14. Original italics.
[49] Elsner, letter to Chopin, 17 (?) May 1843. As quoted in Pierre Azoury, *Chopin Through his Contemporaries: Friends, Lovers, and Rivals* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 65-66.
[50] Alina Nowak-Romanowicz, *The History of Music in Poland: The Classical Era: 1750-1830*, John Comber, trans. (Warsaw: Sutkowski Edition Warsaw, 2004), 191ff. and 376.
[51] Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 174.

As the director of Warsaw's National Opera and the composer of 45 works for the stage,[52] Elsner unsurprisingly projected some of his own ambitions onto his "musical genius" student. Of course, Chopin's proclivities famously lay mostly in music for piano solo.

Nonetheless, vocal composition would not entirely elude Chopin's imagination. What we lose from a nonexistent opera by Chopin, we gain in his art songs. These nineteen works span his creative life: *Życzenie*, his earliest song, dates to 1829 and his last, *Melodia* ("Melody"), was written two years before his death. Though the majority of them were penned during his Paris-years, Chopin drew exclusively on Polish texts by poets he knew from home or from the community of Poles living in Paris in the 1830s and 40s. The three songs discussed below—*Życzenie* ("A Maiden's Wish"), *Moja pieszczotka* ("My Sweetheart"), *Leci liście z drzewa* ("Leaves are Falling" or "Poland's Dirge")—build on the Polish art song tradition as established by Elsner and his generation. Moreover, these works show Chopin not only having internalized, but having refined his teacher's principles.

In one of the earliest studies of Chopin's songs, Polish musicologist Seweryn Barbag posits:

> Twórczość w zakresie muzyki wokalnej była Chopinowi obcą, zupełnie nie odpowiadała linji rozwojowej jego artyzmu. Skrajny indywidualista nie znosił żadnych więzów, bezwzględna swoboda muzycznego wypowiadania się nie pozwalała mu naginać swych wizyj absolutnych do postulatów formy i metryki poetyckiej.
>
> Composition in the area of vocal music was foreign to Chopin, entirely incompatible with his artistic development. The stark individualist could not bear constraints; unmitigated freedom of musical self-expression did not allow him to bend his absolute visions to postulates of form or poetic meter.[53]

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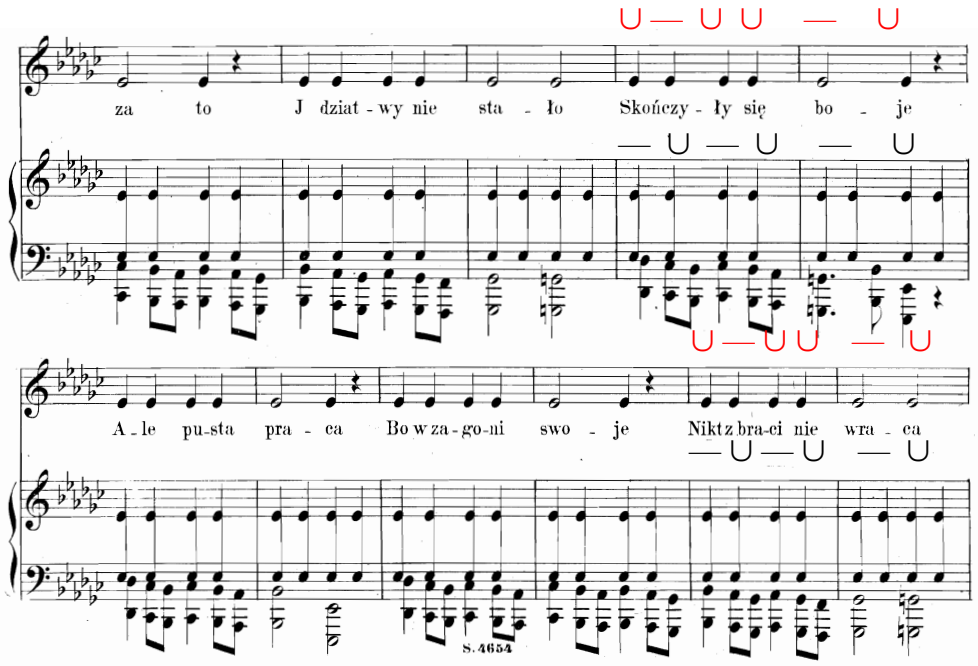
[52] See Nowak-Romanowicz, *Józef Elsner*, Spis Dzieł [List of Works], 265ff.
[53] Seweryn Barbag, *Studjum o pieśniach Chopina* [Study on Chopin's Songs] (Lwów: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1927), 2.

More than mere "creative toss-offs" (*odruchy twórcze*), as Barbag goes on to describe them, Chopin's songs are valuable reflections of his manner of improvising, the inspirations for which were often Polish historical and popular songs as well as Polish poetry. The song *Leci liście z drzewa* (1836), for example, comes down to us as a transcription by Chopin's close friend Julian Fontana after an evening of reading and improvising on Wincenty Pol's *Pieśni Janusza* ("Songs of Janusz"), a newly published collection of patriotic poems.[54] The work's indeterminate structure, consisting of segments of varying affect, is suggestive of a transient creative experience—something that happened (and perhaps was meant to happen) once. The text consists of quatrains of six-syllable lines and Chopin's masterly setting reflects the despondent narrative: Poland's grief following the doomed November Uprising against Russia in 1830-31. The vocal line presents few challenges to the singer, but depends on supreme declamatory subtlety to bring out the nuances of the words.

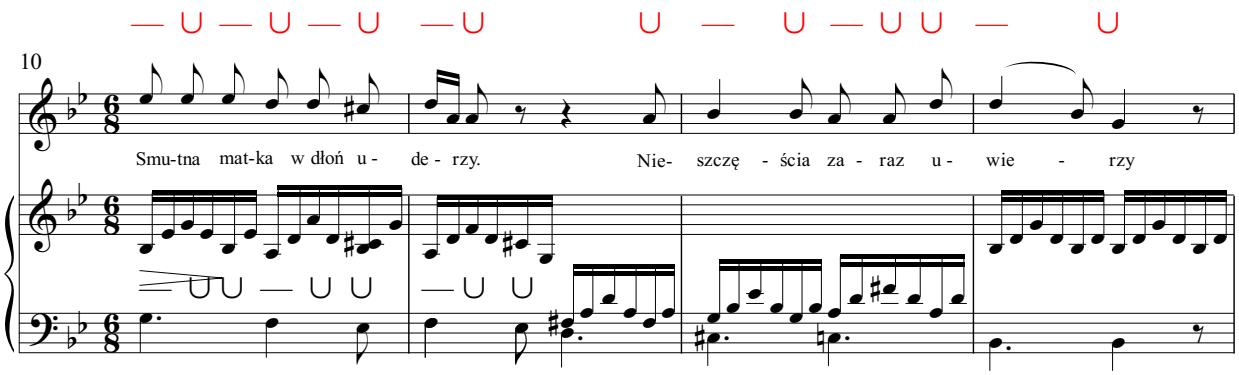
[54] Halina Goldberg, "'Remembering that Tale of Grief': The Prophetic Voice in Chopin's Music." In idem., ed. *The Age of Chopin: Interdisciplinary Inquiries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 74. For a detailed exploration of Chopin's improvisations on Polish songs, see Krystyna Kobylańska, "Improwizacje Fryderyka Chopina," *Rocznik Chopinowski* 19 (1987): 69-92.



Ex. 1.3 Chopin, *Leci liście z drzewa*, mm. 56-66. From first Polish edition *Zbiór śpiewów polskich* [Collection of Polish Songs], Julian Fontana, ed. (Warsaw: Gustawa Gebethnera i Spółki, 1859). Public Domain. Reproduced from polona.pl/item/15850072/4/, digital resource of the National Library, Warsaw.

Example 1.3 highlights two poignant moments—mm. 59-60 and mm. 65-66—within a lengthy and haunting passage consisting of a drone in the vocal part. In both instances the scansion of the text (marked above the vocal line in red) conflicts with the metric hierarchy of the bar (marked below the vocal line in black). In other words, contrary to one of Elsner's key premises, the "scansion according to accent" does not accord with the principle of *thesis* and *arsis*. Yet it is precisely this conflict that invites a heightened declamatory expressivity from the singer, which is most appropriate considering the meaning of the text in these spots: "Skończyły się boje" (The combat ended) and "Nikt z braci nie wraca" (None of our brethren return).

A similar passage in the earlier-discussed *Duma Ludgardy* shows Elsner finessing his own exacting precepts for the purpose of greater expression (Ex. 1.4):



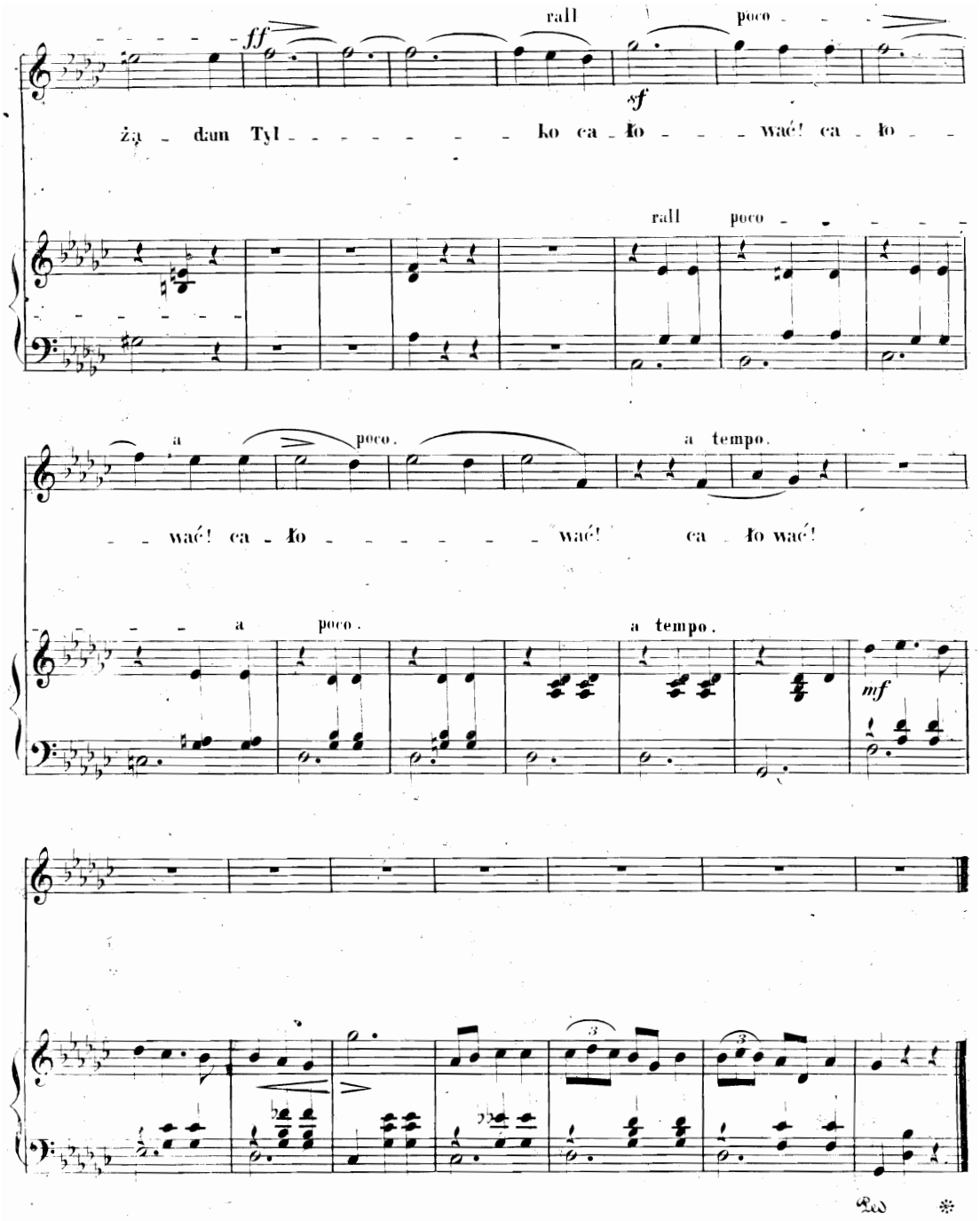
Ex. 1.4 Elsner, *Duma Ludgardy*, mm. 10-13. Transcribed after Nowak-Romanowicz, *Józef Elsner: dodatek nutowy*, 5.

In this example (mm. 10-11), the trochees (— ∪) of the text "Smutna matka w dłoń uderzy" (A distraught mother beats her palm) rub against the natural dactylic pulse (— ∪ ∪) of the 6/8 meter. Because of the regularity of the piano's undulating sixteenth-notes, the sound of duples in the voice comes as a moving surprise. In our performance, soprano Hannah De Priest and I gave more weight to this passage by emphasizing the stressed syllable of each trochee in the manner of sighs or even sobs, which accords with the sigh figures between beats 3-4 and 5-6 in m. 10.[55] The text continues (in mm. 12-13) with "proper" metrical and prosodic congruity, yet how easily might one have (mis)understood the vocal line in the earlier segment as a typical UM-pa-pa 6/8 pulse? Though outwardly simple (intended, after all, for domestic music-making by non-professionals), both Chopin's and Elsner's songs derive their beauty and effectiveness from poetic-linguistic subtleties. Indeed, form and poetic meter (disregarded by Barbag as "constraints") are in fact integral creative drivers in Chopin's songs, as well as in his solo piano works, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Elsewhere in Chopin's vocal music, we see the composer skillfully implementing or inventively thwarting his teacher's instructions. The rule of the penultimate—Elsner's overarching dictum—is always observed and often heightened according to the meaning of the

[55] See note 34 above.

text. In *Moja pieszczotka* (1837), Chopin evokes the erotic potential of the word *całować* (to kiss) by suggestively elaborating its penultimate syllable, avoiding a strong downbeat cadence, and topping off the piece with a final coquettish iteration (Ex. 1.5, m. 77).



Ex. 1.5 Chopin, *Moja pieszczotka*, mm. 64-end. From first Polish edition *Zbiór śpiewów polskich* [Collection of Polish Songs], Julian Fontana, ed. (Warsaw: Gustawa Gebethnera i Spółki, 1859). Public Domain. Reproduced from polona.pl/item/610435/3/, digital resource of the National Library, Warsaw.

Such "patterns of penultimate accentuation" are examined in a 1989 article by Anne Swartz, one of the first English-language studies on Chopin's music considered in light of Elsner's theories.[56] Swartz focuses primarily on phrase extensions via ornamentation of penultimate syllables, comparing passages of great drama and virtuosity from Elsner's opera arias with highly declamatory examples from Chopin's songs. Insightful and important though it is, Swartz's essay limits its scope to the "rule of the *penultima*" as described in Elsner's first treatise only (*On the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language*). Consequently, Swartz's analyses, like Barbag's, omit or misconstrue certain linguistic nuances in Chopin's music as well as other kinds of accentuation.

Indeed, Chopin's creativity extends beyond just musical ornamentation of penultimate syllables. Time and again Chopin highlights a semantically poignant word through artful metrical misalignment, thereby composing in "oratorical accents," which, in Elsner's definition, "raise the most important word in a construction and through the lips of the declaimer become passionate expression."[57] A beautiful example of this can be heard in *Życzenie* (1829), a lighthearted song dating to the time of Chopin's studies under Elsner.

— ∪ ∪ —∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ —∪

Gdybym ja była słoneczkiem na niebie

(If I were the Sun in the sky)

The opening line is composed as an incomplete dactylic tetrameter (GDY-bym ja BY-ła sło-NECZ-kiem na NIE-bie), the ternary pulse of which perfectly suits the song's 3/4 meter. Yet, in Chopin's setting, there is an anomaly on the word "słoneczkiem" (Sun), the key word in this verse (Ex. 1.6a, m. 11).

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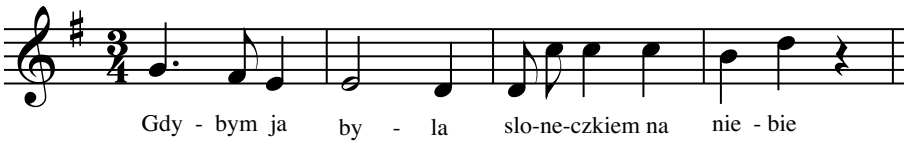
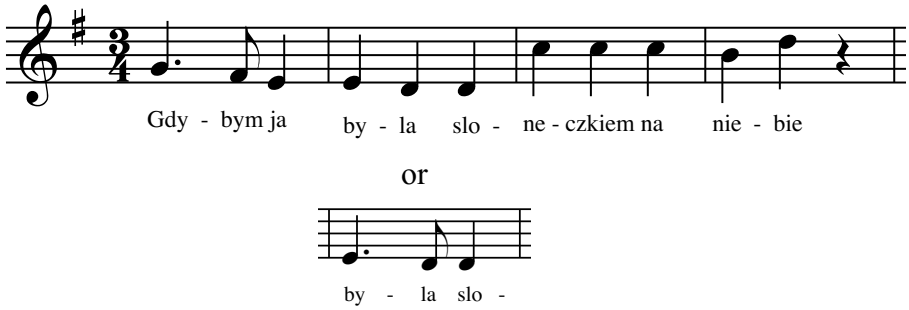
[56] Anne Swartz, "Chopin's op. 74: The Vernacular in the Art Song," *Revue de Musicologie* 75, no. 2 (1989): 243-264.

[57] See note 18 above.



Ex. 1.6a Chopin, *Życzenie*, mm. 9-12, vocal part. Chopin's version.

Barbag labels this spot as prosodic carelessness (*Prozodja miejscami niedbała*) on the composer's part.[58] He is referring to the metrical incongruence between the unstressed first syllable of the word (*sło*-) and the downbeat of m. 11 on which it falls. Indeed, a more "proper" setting would place that syllable on the weakest beat of the preceding measure, as in my recomposed version (Ex. 1.6b).



Ex. 1.6b Chopin, *Życzenie*, mm. 9-12, vocal part. My recomposed "proper" version.

This solution, however, produces a student-ish and bland result. Instead, Chopin shifts the light first syllable to the downbeat of m. 11, thereby giving it more metrical weight and displacing the penultimate syllable (-*ne*-). Consequently, Chopin achieves an oratorical accent rhythmically as well as melodically. The singer is invited to dwell slightly on *sło*-, using it to spring up the minor-seventh leap and elegantly set the pitch with denser consonants (-*czkiem*). When performed in this manner, the word could be conceived as — — ∪.[59] Interestingly, the sketch of this song suggests that Chopin previously experimented with a more "correct" setting of this text—that is, one more in keeping with Elsner's prescripts. I reproduce below the extant sketch

[58] Barbag, *Studjum o pieśniach Chopina*, 23.
[59] Phonological qualities of Polish words and their impact on performance will be explored further in the next chapter.

of *Życzenie* as given in Swartz's article (Fig. 1.11). In the third system of the transcription (which corresponds to the second system, third bar, of the sketch above it), we see what could be understood as the stressed syllable -*ne*- of *słoneczkiem* set as the longest note and the highest pitch in the phrase (dotted-quarter-note *e* in the top space). The final version, then, with its snappy syncopation, was a deliberate rather than careless artistic choice by Chopin and one that more colorfully evokes the amorous musings of the song's protagonist.

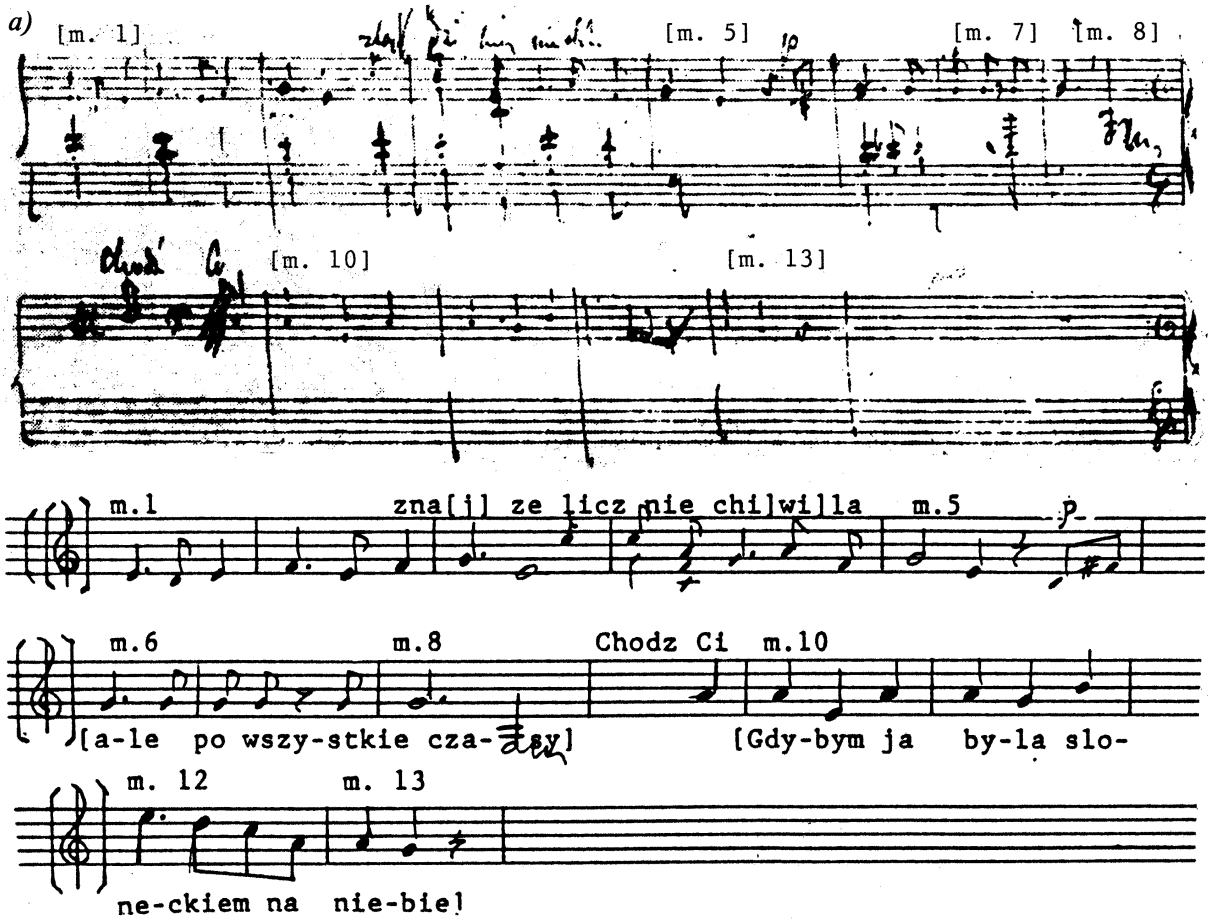


Fig. 1.11 Chopin's autograph sketch of *Życzenie*. Example 2 in Anne Swartz, "Chopin's op. 74: The Vernacular in the Art Song," *Revue de Musicologie* 75, no. 2 (1989): 261. Original in National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg.

The performative challenges of Chopin's art songs are less vocal *per se* but more declamatory in nature, for the outward simplicity of Chopin's melodies discussed belies his sensitivity to the prosodic nuances of his mother tongue. The expressive key to the works

discussed lies precisely in attention to the linguistic inflections covered in this chapter: moments of penultimate stress, distinct syllabic accentuation, and passages where the text and music conflict, a recognition of which depends on an understanding of the language. In Chapter Two, we will discuss how these same musical-linguistic details, which stem from Elsner's two treatises, are reflected in Chopin's music for solo piano.

Chapter Two

2.1 Imagining Speech: Chopin's Largo in E-flat Major

In Chapter One we began parsing the metaphor "Chopin, the poet of the piano" by examining a selection of art songs by Chopin and his teacher Józef Elsner, guided in our analysis by the principles of Polish prosody put forward in Elsner's treatises *On the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language* and its companion volume *On Melody and Chant*. To nineteenth-century Poles, language was an essential cultural and aesthetic determinant: for purposes of national distinction and solidarity, its particular qualities were to be pronounced in works of poetry and music alike. The mutually reinforcing properties of these two arts are underscored most clearly in vocal musical works, grounded as they are on texts that shape the composition of melody as well as its expression in performance. But to what extant can the linguistic/poetic properties discussed thus far inform our approach to instrumental music? For Elsner there was no categorical distinction between melodies for voices versus melodies for instruments; both were analogized to language.

> Przeto co się powie o zasadach piękney Melodyi, zupełnie zastosować można do śpiewu bez szczególnego względu na głos, lub instrument; bo w tym razie śpiew lub granie iest osobną nauką wykonania praktycznego tego, co kompozytor muzyki myślał i napisał. Melodya...mieć powinna zawsze tyle wyrazu, iżby słuchaiący iey, wyobrazić ią sobie mógł iako mowę człowieka przeiętego iakiem uczuciem.
>
> Therefore, what is said about the principles of [composing] beautiful melodies, may be entirely applied to singing without regard to voice-type or instrument, for singing and playing are individual practical means of realizing what the composer thought and wrote. A melody...should have so much expression that the listener can imagine the speech of a person overcome by some emotion.[1]

"Imagining speech" as an instrumentalist is the guiding premise of this chapter. From our observations regarding scansion, accentuation, cadential articulations, and idiomatic linguistic elements—such as the uniquely Polish "rule of the *penultima*"—we can begin to form a

[1] Józef Elsner, *O melodyi i śpiewie* [On Melody and Chant] (Biblioteka XX Czartoryskich, Kraków, Ms. 2276), 31-32.

conceptual apparatus for Chopin's solo-piano works. To better establish this linguistic analogy, I draw on Chopin's *Largo in E-flat Major*. Though written as a piano piece, it is based on a text, the sound and meaning of which proves essential for a more nuanced interpretation of this unassuming work.

For what purpose Chopin wrote this twenty-four measure piece is unknown and the autograph tells us precious little about its provenance: Paris, le 6 Juillet.[2] Prior to his departure to Majorca in 1838, Chopin gave a private farewell performance at the home of his friend, the noted travel-writer Astolphe, Marquis de Custine. In a letter to author Sophie Gay, the Marquis recalls several details about that evening's program and the state of the composer:

> The tuberculosis shows in his face, which looks like a soul without a body. He played for us, as a parting gesture, with that expression, which you know. First, the newly completed Polonaise [most probably the Polonaise in A Major, Op. 40, No. 1]: magnificent thanks to its strength and vigor. It is an orgy of joy. Next, he performed the Prayer of the Poles, and to conclude, the Marche funèbre [the eventual third movement of the Piano Sonata, Op. 35], which despite myself led me to tears.[3]

The piece recognized by de Custine as the *Prayer of the Poles* (what we now know simply as Chopin's *Largo*) is based on the Polish church hymn *Boże coś Polskę* ("Oh God, Thou Who Hast Graced Poland"), a work that during Chopin's youth existed in two versions, one official and another less so. Originally, the hymn appeared in 1816 as "The National Song to the King's Good Fortune" (*Pieśń narodowa za pomyślność króla*; Fig. 2.1), a poem by Alojzy Feliński set to music by Jan Nepomucen Kaszewski. As a young organist in Warsaw, Chopin would have

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[2] A facsimile of the autograph is available on http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55001040p.r=Chopin%20Largo?rk=21459;2, digital resource of the Bibliotèque nationale de France, Paris. Accessed July 2016.

[3] Astolphe de Custine, letter to Sophie Gay, 22 October 1838. Translated from Polish quotation in Tadeusz Andrzej Zieliński, *Chopin: życie i droga twórcza* [Chopin: His Life and Creative Way] (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1993), 403.

played this version as part of weekly Sunday Masses.[4] Frequently sung at official church and state functions, the hymn's original text—and specifically its refrain—irked Warsaw's revolt-minded youth; the "king" to which the text refers is the Russian Czar.

Przed Twe ołtarze zanosim błaganie, Naszego Króla zachowaj nam Panie.

To your altars we carry a plea: protect our king, Lord.

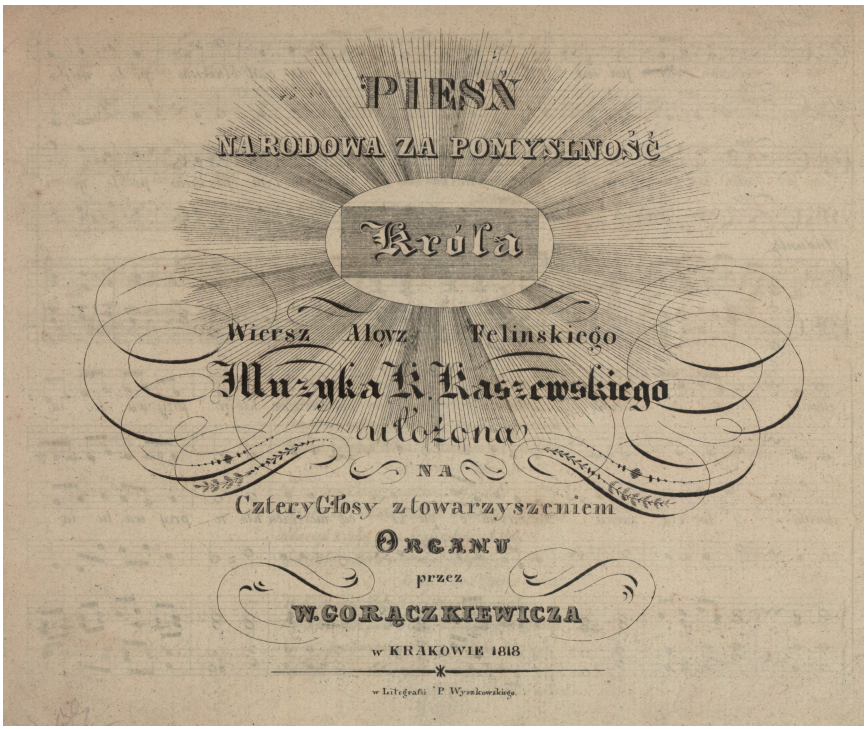


Fig. 2.1 *Pieśń narodowa za pomyślność króla* (Kraków, 1818; originally published, 1816). Public Domain. Reproduced from polona.pl/item/42607887/0/, digital resource of the National Library, Warsaw.

Not long after its first publication, the loyalist pro-czarist hymn was re-appropriated as a reactionary anthem and eventually included in the so-called "Dormitory Songs" (*Śpiewy burszów polskich*, 1831), a compilation of patriotic and subversive songs popular among Warsaw's

[4] Halina Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35. To better contextualize Chopin's piece, I provide a recording of my performance of this hymn on the piano. See Accompanying Recordings, vi.

students.[5] Re-titled *Modlitwa* ("Prayer"; Fig. 2.2), the refrain of this unauthorized version is revised into a supplication for a regained homeland.

Przed Twe ołtarze zanosim błaganie, naszą ojczyznę racz nam wrócić Panie.

To your altars we carry a plea: return to us our Homeland, Lord.

Such patriotic songs were well-known throughout Warsaw's cafés, which, during the decade prior to the November Uprising, were hotbeds of countercultural ideas and of which Elsner, Brodziński, and Chopin were regular patrons.[6]

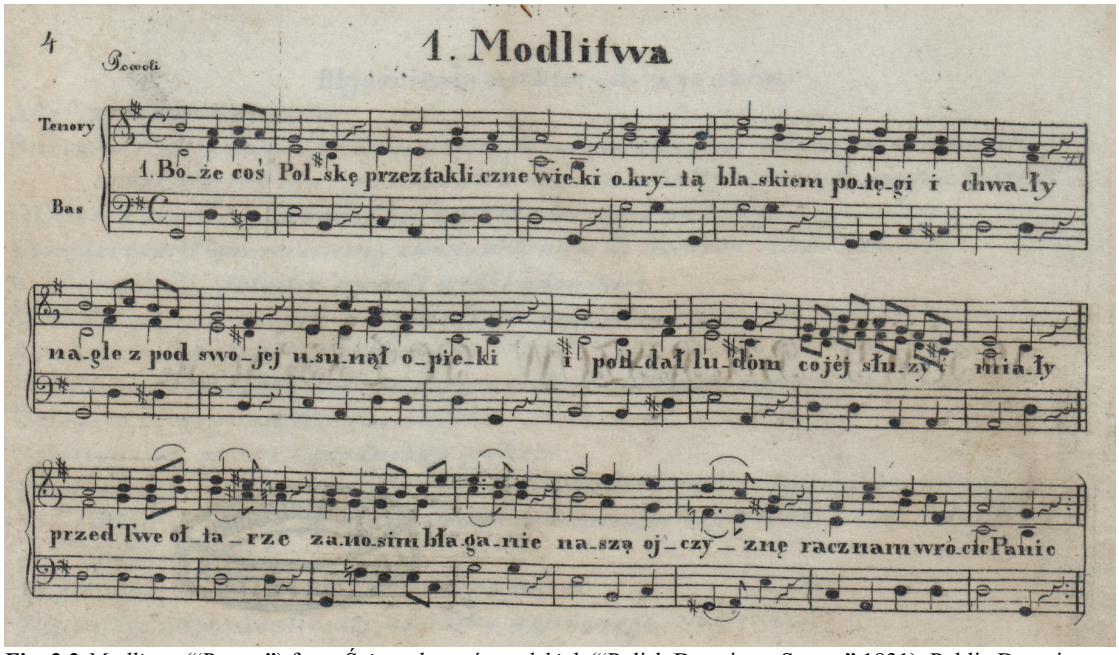
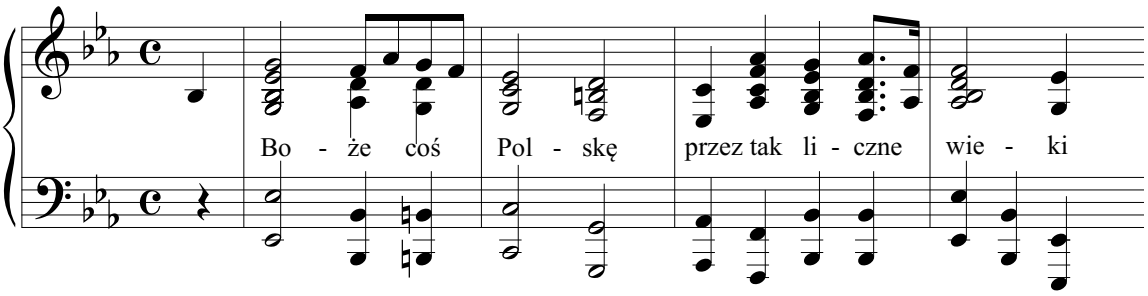


Fig. 2.2 *Modlitwa* ("Prayer") from *Śpiewy burszów polskich* ("Polish Dormitory Songs," 1831). Public Domain. Reproduced from polona.pl/item/5054782/11/, digital resource of the National Library, Warsaw.

In a 1999 essay, scholar Jan Węcowski claims that "it is impossible to apply the traditional text of [the hymn] to Chopin's piece [i.e. his *Largo*]."[7] It is possible, in fact, just not in its entirety. And to do so proves insightful in light of the melodic differences necessitated by

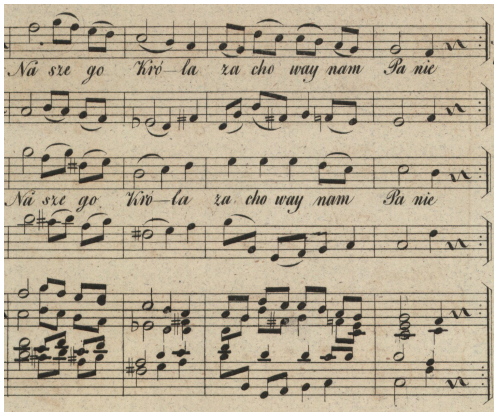
[5] For a detailed examination of this work's rich history and evolution see Bogdan Zakrzewski, "Bieg życia hymnu 'Boże! Coś Polskę'," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 73/3/4 (1982): 55-84.
[6] See ibid. and Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 292ff.
[7] Jan Węcowski, "Religious Folklore in Chopin's Music," *Polish Music Journal* 2, nos. 1-2 (1999). http://pmc.usc.edu/PMJ/issue/2.1.99/wecowski.html. Accessed June 2016.

the two versions of the text. Example 2.1, for instance, shows the opening four measures of Chopin's *Largo* with the first line of the hymn superimposed.

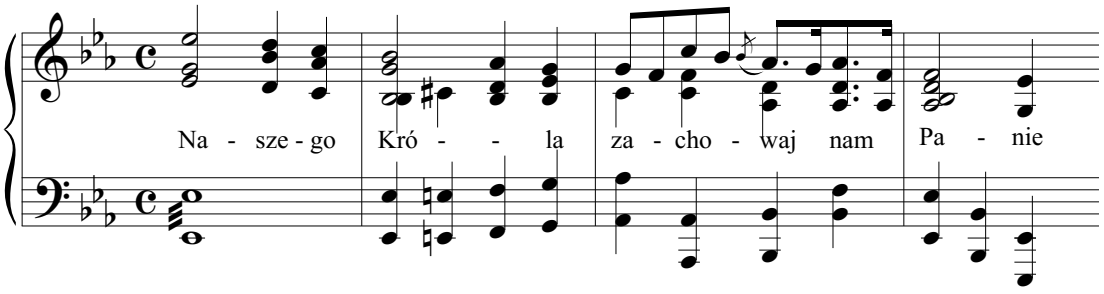


Ex. 2.1 Chopin, *Largo*, mm. 1-4, with first line of hymn text.

The moment of particular interest, however, is the refrain in mm. 13-16. The variant texts invite two interpretive possibilities: the first being what I would call the "loyalist version," with the words *Naszego Króla zachowaj nam Panie* (protect our king, Lord); and the second being the "patriotic version," with the revised text, *naszą ojczyznę racz nam wrócić Panie* (return to us our Homeland, Lord). Chopin's realization corresponds quite closely to the original hymn. In m. 14 (Ex. 2.2a, b), the setting of the word *króla* (king; — ∪; pronounced KROO-lah) is almost exact, with the unstressed second syllable falling on the fourth beat of the bar. The fluid eighth notes in the first half of the next measure (m. 15) complement the relatively soft phonetic quality of the word *zachowaj* (protect; ∪ — ∪; pronounced zah-HO-vahy) and a lyrical rising fifth highlights its stressed middle syllable.

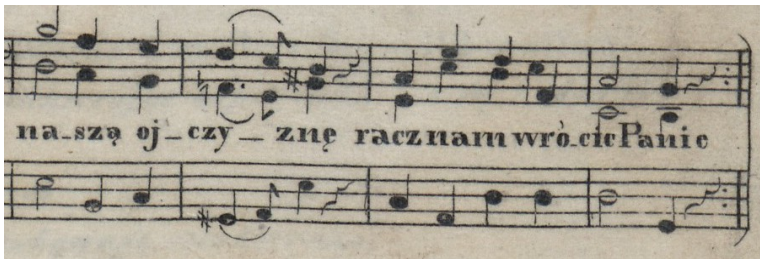


Ex. 2.2a Hymn, *Pieśń narodowa za pomyślność króla*, final measures.

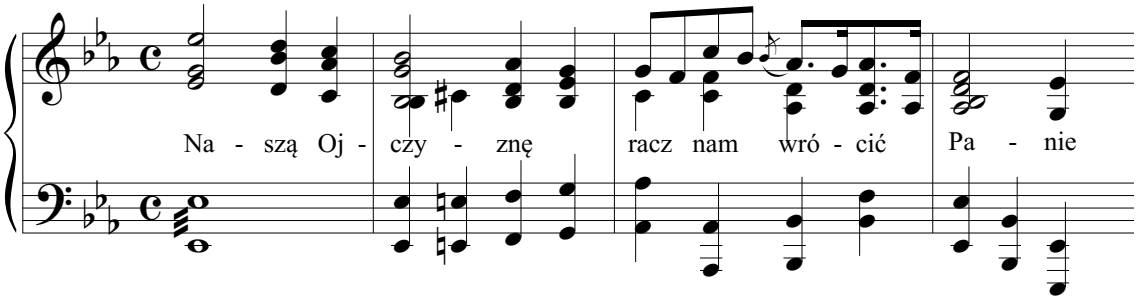


Ex. 2.2b Chopin, *Largo*, mm. 13-16, with "loyalist" text from original hymn (see Ex. 2.2a).

An equally strong case can be made for the "patriotic" version, however. Melodically, the refrain of *Modlitwa* as found in the student songbook is altered from the lyrical eighth-notes of the original to block chords—a reflection, I propose, of the comparatively harder (that is, more consonant) sound of the new words as well as of the passionate imperative they express (Ex. 2.3a, b).[8]



Ex. 2.3a Hymn, *Modlitwa*, final four measures.



Ex. 2.3b Chopin, *Largo*, mm. 13-16, with "patriotic" text from revised hymn (see Ex. 2.3a).

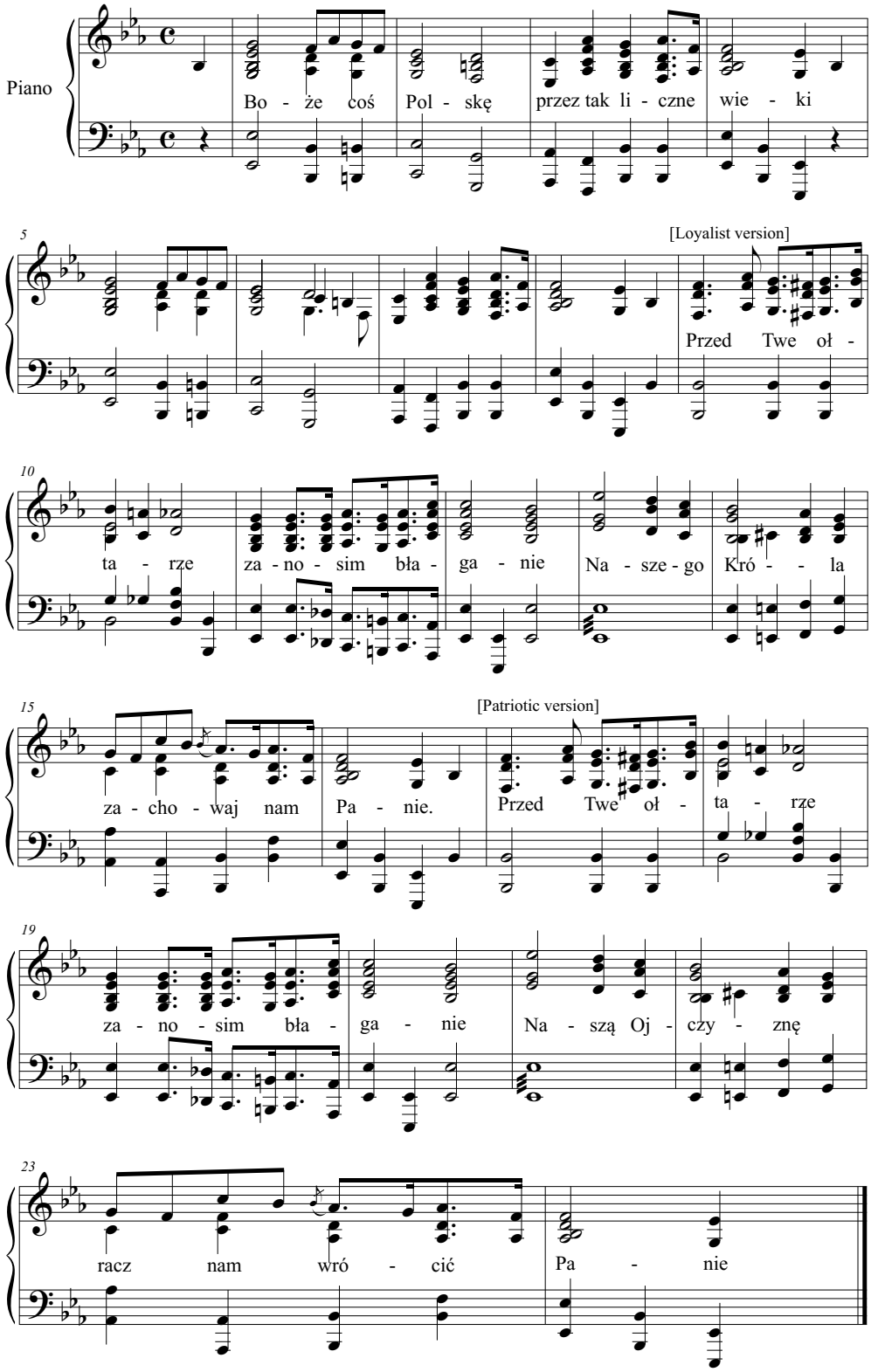
Furthermore, the second half of m. 15 now better suits the revised text: the grace note on the stressed first syllable of *wrócić* (return; — ∪; pronounced VROO-cheech) marks this critical

[8] The softness or hardness of vowels and consonant-clusters in Polish will be considered further in Section 2.2 of this chapter.

word with an oratorical accent while the dotted rhythms give a marshal-like insistence to the whole phrase.

It is impossible to know for sure which of the two texts Chopin had in mind as he wrote his *Largo*. Nonetheless, both the original and its variant would have been known by him and both are discernible in his adaptation of the refrain. Accordingly, my performance of Chopin's *Largo* strives for a pianistic declamation of the text, informed entirely by the phonological and linguistic qualities of the words. Since Chopin writes out the repetition of the refrain, I alternate interpretative possibilities, imagining myself speaking each verse as I play. The first time (Ex. 2.4, mm. 9-16), I inflect the phrase according to the "loyalist" version, aiming for a smooth execution and drawing out the lyrical potential of mm. 14-15. By contrast, the "patriotic" version that follows (Ex. 2.4, mm. 17-end) gets a heavier, more assertive approach; my hands proudly pounce each chord as if enunciating the consonants. Furthermore, I also emphasize the feminine cadences in mm. 16 and 24 by dwelling on the first stressed syllable of the word *Panie* (Lord; — ∪; pronounced PAH-nyeh) before releasing the ends of the phrases.

To be sure, the above examples are subtle, but they carry larger implications applicable to Chopin's more abstract piano works, as will be discussed in the next section.



Ex. 2.4 Chopin, *Largo*, complete and with hymn texts superimposed.

2.2 Pianistic Declamation: Chopin's Nocturne in C Minor, Op. posth.

Emilie von Gretsch, a pupil of Chopin's between 1842 and 1844, recalls a lesson:

> Chopin played as I never heard him play before. He seemed to want to attain the ideal of his poetic soul; the first time he played me his Nocturnes, he apologized for not having 'said it' in the way he wanted me to hear it, and he repeated them with even more perfection.[9]

Many of Chopin's students attest his preference for demonstration through the piano over verbalization during lessons. This reminiscence, however, suggests that Chopin considered the two modes of expression—that is, playing and speaking—more related than distinct. If, as von Gretsch notes, Chopin's was a "poetic soul," then it would seem its musical expression strives for an immediacy akin to speech. After all, how does one "say" a piano nocturne? In this section, I posit an answer based on the ideas and concepts discussed thus far. I have selected Chopin's posthumously published Nocturne in C Minor as an illustrative example and my rationale for this choice stems in part from von Gretsch's anecdote.

After having played unspecified nocturnes for von Gretsch, Chopin voiced his dissatisfaction using a peculiar expression: he felt he hadn't "said it" effectively. As a genre, the solo piano nocturne is stylistically rooted in its vocal counterpart, borrowing from the latter several of its key characteristics, such as fluid lyricism, a clear distinction between voice and accompaniment, and general evocations of "song."[10] Indeed, as Jeffrey Kallberg writes: "[Early-nineteenth-century] listeners viewed the piano nocturne quite literally as a song (or *romance*)

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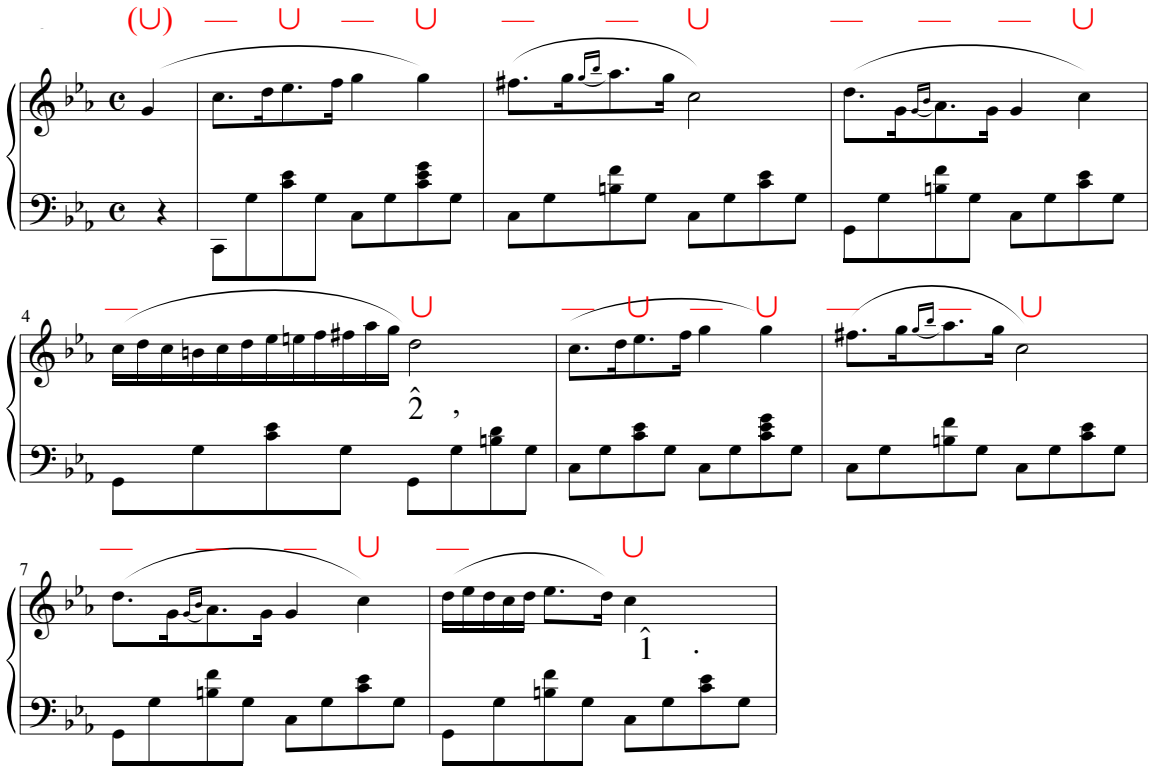
[9] Quoted in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by His Pupils*, N. Shohet, K. Osostowicz, and R. Howat, trans. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 77, 164-166.

[10] James Parakilas, "'Nuit plus belle qu'un beau jour': Poetry, Song, and the Voice in the Piano Nocturne," in Halina Goldberg, ed., *The Age of Chopin: Interdisciplinary Inquiries* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 203-223.

without words."[11] Von Gretsch's recollection points to is the pervasiveness of the linguistic metaphor on Chopin's subconscious. The influences of his youth reverberate even into the last decade of his life: "A melody," writes Elsner, "should have so much expression that the listener can imagine the speech of a person overcome by some emotion."[12]

The C-Minor Nocturne dates most likely to Chopin's Warsaw years and may in fact be his earliest contribution to the genre.[13] Its placid accompaniment and simple, single-line melody with occasional flourishes are characteristic of vocally inspired piano romances of the 1820s. My interpretation of this piece is based on a deliberately literal reading of Elsner's advice to "imagine speech," with the aim not of undermining the work's inherent lyrical qualities, but of refining them, making them more vivid and declamatory. Example 2.5a, b illustrates my approach.

[11] Jeffrey Kallberg, "'Voice' and the Nocturne," in Bruce Brubaker and Jane Gottlieb, eds., *Pianist, Scholar, Connoisseur: Essays in Honor of Jacob Lateiner* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 2000), 1-46, quote from p. 27.
[12] "Melodya mieć powinna zawsze tyle wyrazu, iżby słuchaiący iey, wyobrazić ią sobie mógł iako mowę człowieka przeiętego iakiem uczuciem." Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 31-32.
[13] Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 249.



Ex. 2.5a Chopin, Nocturne in C Minor, Op. posth., mm. 1-8. Transcribed after the autograph. Facsimile available on http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55001660s.r=chopin%20nocturne%20c?rk=107296;4, digital resource of the Bibliotèque nationale de France, Paris. Accessed July 2016.

I begin with a scansion of the melody (annotated in red above the staves). In deciding on the melody's fundamental syllabic unit, I look to the meter, but the accompaniment is also instructive. The low bass pitches, along with the regularly occurring dyads or triads in the middle register, make the stream of eighth notes undulate at a quarter-note pulse. Some of the notes (that is, "syllables"), however, oppose the usual hierarchy of "good" beats in common time via prefixes. Compound appoggiaturas (*Anschläge*), like those in mm. 2 and 3, add stress to otherwise metrically weak notes. In both Elsner's and Chopin's songs, such ornaments were used judiciously by the composers to emphasize particular syllables of important words.[14] Indeed, for Elsner the appoggiatura was "the simplest, but the most necessary [ornament] in musical

[14] For instance, see Ex. 1.1, mm. 8 and 16.

declamation."[15] More elaborate flourishes, such as the melismas in mm. 4 and 8, similarly influence syllabic accentuation. In *On Melody and Chant*, Elsner writes:

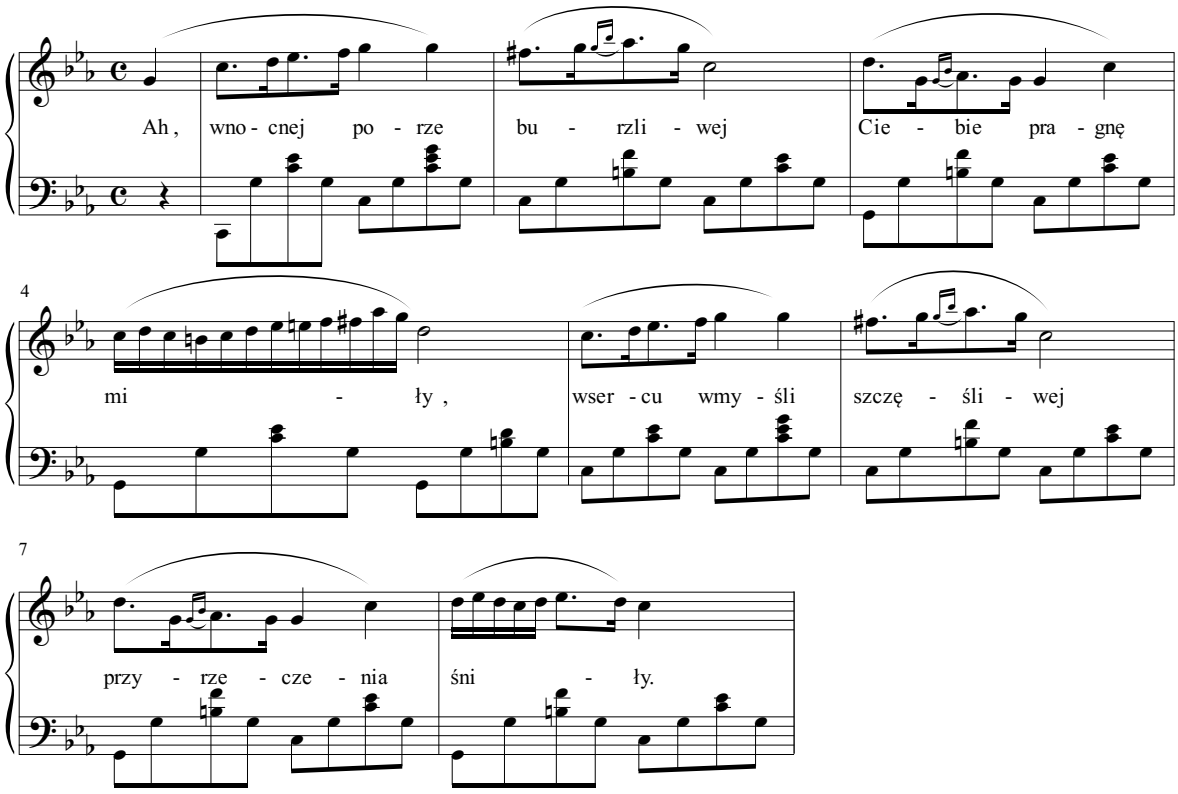
> Używanie 5 nót zamiast 4 w takiej figurze melodyinej stosując ją jednak do całości taktu w ogólności lub do głównej części jego prawie jest to samo w muzyce, co przetrzymanie jakiej syllaby w deklamowaniu. Wykonanie Melodyine w muzyce, jest niejako deklamacyą nót.
>
> Using 5 notes instead of 4 in such melodic figures and applying them to a whole measure or its main part is the same in music what drawing out a syllable is in declamation. Melodic execution [or performance] in music is none other than the declamation of notes.[16]

I adjust my scansion accordingly in these instances and in doing so, a trend emerges at the work's structural cadences: the moments of greatest melodic and harmonic stress fall on the downbeats with resolutions following on weaker parts of the bar. In other words, just as in the art songs, predominantly feminine cadences punctuate these musical phrases (see Ex. 2.5a, mm. 4 and 8). For more precise punctuation, I referred to Elsner's list of scale-degrees and their corresponding marks.[17] Based on these observations, I composed the following poem to further inspire my musical declamation (Ex. 2.5b), matching the comma with the half cadence in m. 4 and the period with the perfect authentic cadence in m. 8. The punctuation marks between my original Polish text and its English translation necessarily differ. For the purposes of this example, the former takes precedence over the latter.

> Ah, w nocnej porze burzliwej Ciebie pragnę miły,
> w sercu w myśli szczęśliwej przyrzeczenia śniły.
>
> Oh, in the tempestuous time of night it is you I desire, dear,
> in my heart, in my blissful thoughts, of vows I dreamt.

---

[15] "Appoggiatura—ozdobienie nayprostsze, lecz oraz naypotrzebnieysze w Muzyczney deklamacyi." Józef Elsner, *Szkoła śpiewu* [School of Singing] (Warsaw: Gustaw Sennewald, 1834), 68.
[16] Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 266.
[17] See Chapter 1, Section 1.2.



Ex. 2.5b Chopin, Nocturne in C Minor, Op. posth., mm. 1-8, with composed text for declamation.

Additional factors that I considered when composing this verse included poetic conceits common to many vocal nocturnes, such as evocations of night and lovelorn jeremiads; the dark C-minor tonality suggested a perturbed ambiance. The words themselves needed to accord with the accentuation of the music as well as with what I perceive to be the generally heavy affect of the piece despite its uniformly thin texture.[18] To this end, I selected words consisting of dense consonant clusters and thus harder phonological qualities. *Szczęśliwej* (blissful; Ex. 2.5b, m. 6) and *przyrzeczenia* (vows; m. 7)—the words with which I began writing—are in fact examples offered by Elsner in a section of *On Melody and Chant* addressing the issue of consonants and accentuation:

[18] I use "heavy" in the sense of heavy or light execution as described by D. G. Türk in his *Klavierschule*. See See Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule oder Anweisung zum Klavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende*. Leipzig, Halle, 1789. Raymond H. Haggh, trans. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 342ff.

> W wyrazach szczęśliwość przeklęstwo przyrzeczeń pierwsza i ostatnia syllaba nie mogą bydź żadnym sposobem tak krótko wymawiane jak w wyrazach pogoda uwaga i.t.d. Akcent gramatyczny znajdujący się między dwiema syllabami, które z przyczyny pewnego skupienia się spółgłosek...wymagają dłuższego brzmienia, tak iż wszystkie trzy syllaby w takim wyrazie prawie równo się wymawiają, oznaczając tylko niejakim podniesieniem głosu syllabę środkową.
>
> In the words bliss curse vow the first and last syllables cannot be in any way so shortly pronounced as in the words weather attention etc. [Each of Elsner's underlined examples is a three-syllable word] The grammatical accent between two syllables of packed consonants...demands a longer sound so that all three syllables in such words are almost equally pronounced, marking only the middle syllable with a slight raising of the voice.[19]

Though consonant-heavy words will have longer syllables, the main rule of Polish prosody—emphasizing the penultimate—is nonetheless observed. Thus the three-syllable adjective *szczę-śli-wej*, which scans as — — ∪ (or even — — —), aligns with the natural metrical stresses and composed-in melodic accentuation of the gesture in m. 6. During my performance of this nocturne, I actively think about the linguistic qualities of my text while simultaneously "translating" them into pianistic touch.

Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, here the topic of the instrument itself warrants mention. As the agent for my poetic "voice," the piano I am playing—a replica of Nannette Streicher, ca. 1825—is influential in shaping my pianistic declamation. The qualities most often attributed to such Viennese pianos of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries are those of speech, due to the nature of their mechanism. The Streicher's Viennese *Prellmechanik* is such that the hammers are pulled toward the strings along a curved trajectory.[20]

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[19] Elsner, *On Melody and Chant*, 226-227.

[20] For excellent general literature on pianos with Viennese action I direct the reader to Richard Maunder, *Keyboard Instruments in Eighteenth-Century Vienna* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); and Michael Cole, *The Pianoforte in the Classical Era* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

By adopting a similar curved/pulling gesture in my hands, I am able to control the hammer along its vector, thus vividly distinguishing between the long and short "syllables" discussed above.[21]

Continuing in my poetic approach, I analyzed the whole nocturne as a poem, which scans beautifully as accentual verse, the most regulated syllable being (appropriately so) the penultimate at the end of each line.[22] Figure 2.3 shows my scansion, including punctuation marks derived entirely from Elsner's prescripts regarding scale-degrees; the ties represent syllables held across a bar line; and the segments in brackets are repetitions of the preceding phrase. The piece is structured into four thematically and harmonically determined "verses."

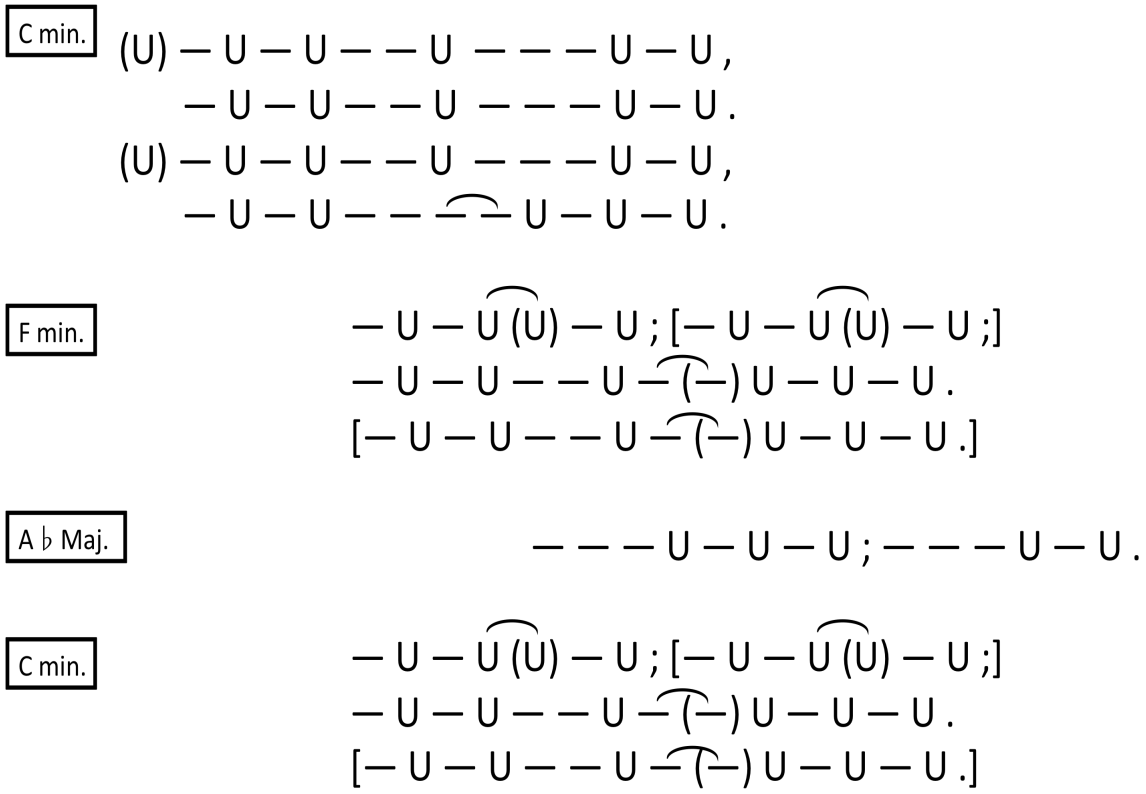

Fig. 2.3 Chopin, Nocturne in C Minor, Op. posth., scanned as a poem.

[21] Chopin is known to have highly valued Viennese pianos. The Streicher piano I used for my lecture-recital resembles the instrument owned by the Chopin family (by Fryderyk Buchholtz, Warsaw's most respected builder) with a similar six-octave range (FF-$f^{4)}$, all-wood structure, and Viennese *Prellmechanik*. See Golberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 47ff. Also Beniamin Vogel, *Fortepian polski* [The Polish Piano] (Warsaw: Sutkowski Edition, 1995), 84ff., 121ff.

[22] Regarding accentual verse, see Chapter 1, Section 1.2.

My aim in this exercise has been to demonstrate how a modern-day pianist might attempt the kind of pianistic declamation that characterized Chopin's artistry. Some twentieth-century scholars, though, have raised objections to discussing instrumental music within such a linguistic framework. William S. Newman, for example, in a 1981 essay on Beethoven's instrumental works, stated that "[vocal texts] can only complicate an already complex problem with questions of prosody and programme."[23] Yet as evidenced in numerous eighteenth-century treatises, conceptualizations of instrumental music relied significantly on terms and ideas from rhetoric, poetry, and prosody. From Anton Schindler we learn that Beethoven's compelling pianism and oratorical approach to expression were influenced by Muzio Clementi, who "attempted to carry over the prosody of the language and the rules of verbal and sung declamation into instrumental forms." Consequently, it was not unusual for Beethoven to "recommend putting appropriate words to a perplexing passage and singing it."[24] Or consider Johann Nepomuk Hummel, who in his important piano-playing manual of 1828 wrote: "Just as in speaking, emphasis on certain syllables or words is necessary to make the discourse moving and the sense of the words clear to the hearer, so it is in music."[25]

As we have seen, Elsner's pedagogy is thoroughly rooted in his generation's aesthetic paradigms, the echoes of which reverberate in the work of his progeny. Karol Mikuli, one of Chopin's most important students, describes his mentor's playing as follows: "Under his fingers [i.e. Chopin's] each musical phrase sounded like song, and with such clarity that each note took

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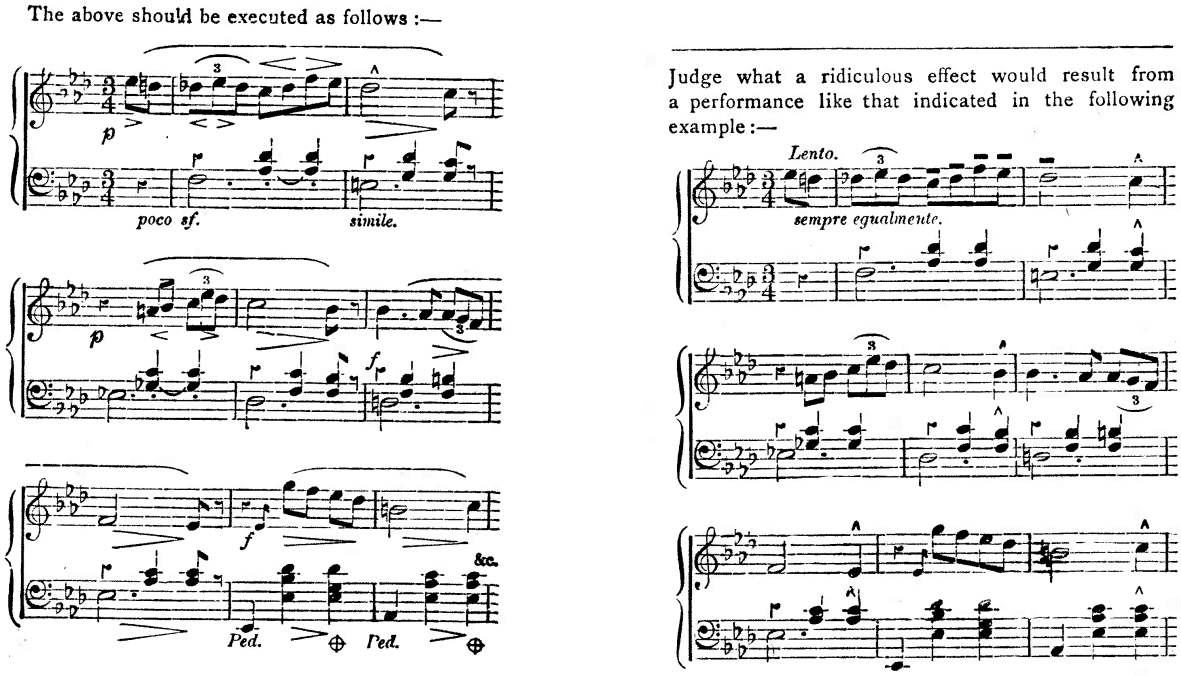
[23] William S. Newman, "Tempo in Beethoven's Instrumental Music: Its Choice and Its Flexibility," Part 1, *The Piano Quarterly* 116 (Winter 1981-82): 22.
[24] As quoted in George Barth, *The Pianist as Orator: Beethoven and the Transformation of Keyboard Style* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 123 and 130, respectively.
[25] Johann Nepomuk Hummel, *Ausführliche theoretisch-practische Anweisung zum Piano-Forte-Spiel* (Vienna: Haslinger, 1828), 429. As quoted in Barth, *The Pianist as Orator*, 59. Compare Hummel's passage with that of Türk quoted earlier in Chapter 1, p. 16n. 18.

the meaning of a syllable, each bar that of a word, each phrase that of a thought. It was a declamation without pathos; but both simple and noble."[26] The Polish pianist, teacher, and music critic Jan Kleczyński attempts to notate the features of this declamation in the opening phrase of Chopin's Waltz in A-flat Major, Op. 69, No. 1. In his 1879 book *O wykonywaniu dzieł Szopena* (English edition translated as *How to Play Chopin. The Works of Frederic Chopin, their Proper Interpretation*), Kleczyński provides two excerpts: the first depicts the style of performance he inherited while studying with three of Chopin's most notable students; the second is a facetious (but no less thought-provoking) counter-example (Ex. 2.6).[27]



Ex. 2.6 Chopin, Waltz in A-flat Major, Op. 69, No. 1, mm. 1-8. From Jan Kleczyński, *How to Play Chopin. The Works of Frederic Chopin, their Proper Interpretation*, 6th edition, Alfred Whittingham, trans. (London: W. Reeves, 1913), 51-52. Public Domain. Reproduced from polona.pl/item/1187158/33/, digital resource of the National Library, Warsaw.

[26] As quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 42.
[27] (Original Polish version) *O wykonywaniu dzieł Szopena: trzy odczyty Jana Kleczyńskiego* (Warsaw: J. Sikorski, 1879), 62-63. As a student in Paris, Kleczyński worked with Marcelina Czartoryska, Camille Dubois (one of Chopin's "favorite pupils," according to Antoine Marmontel), and Georges Mathias. See Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 102n. 34, and 161ff.

The effect suggested by the meticulous hairpins, dynamics, and articulations is one of voice-like gradations in piano playing, each melodic gesture arising from and leading another in shapes evocative of speech. Indeed, I find it difficult to not hear the sighing-figures in every other bar as stressed penultimate syllables; nor can I not notice the quintessential mazurka triplets occurring on either the first or third beats.

But here I risk sliding into the kind of essentializing narratives pushed by early Chopin-biographers who appropriated the composer, body and soul, as the paragon of "Polishness," dispossessed of any other source of identity.[28] Unquestionably, the significance for Chopin of the Parisian *milieu*—in which he spent almost half his life—should not be disparaged, to say nothing of his father, Nicholas, who was a French *émigré* and tutor of French literature in Warsaw. Yet, as Jeffrey Kallberg, James Parakilas, Halina Goldberg, and others have argued, Chopin often draws on distinct cultural signifiers to tell a particular musical tale.[29] Some of these signifiers are more overt, like the Polish Christmas carol that comprises the middle section of the B-Minor Scherzo, Op. 20, while others are more subtle, such as the speech and dance figures in the waltz alluded to above. Through such "Polish *topoi*," to quote Goldberg, "Chopin concealed national texts within the cosmopolitan medium of instrumental music."[30]

Other Polish composers of Chopin's generation followed their compatriot's lead, communicating Polishness in their piano works through allusions to the Polish language or Polish texts. Edward Wolff's *Trois chansons polonaises sans paroles*, Op. 136, certainly evoke

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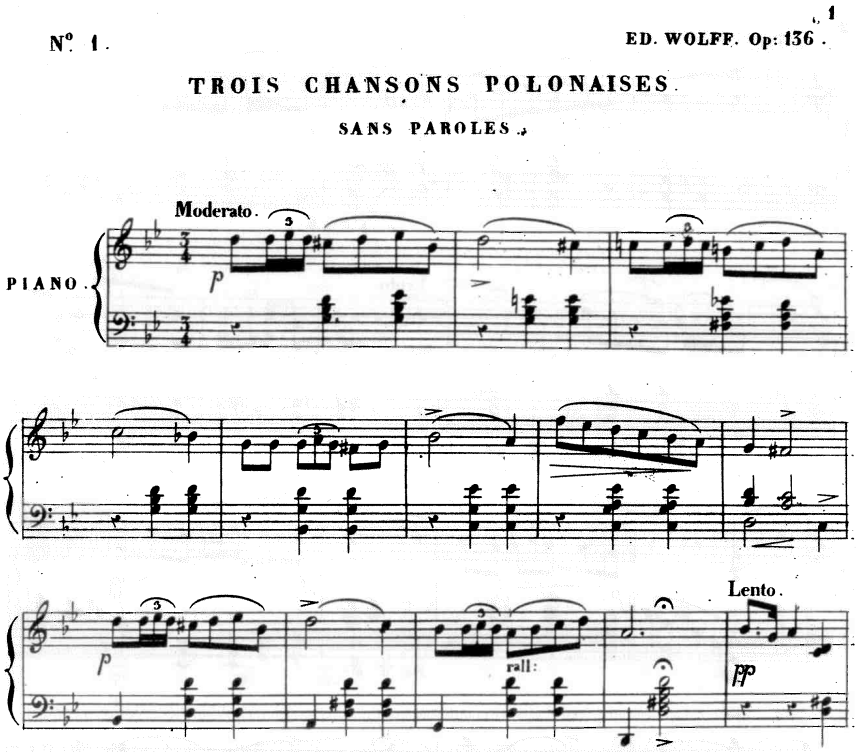
[28] Jolanta T. Pekacz, "The Nation's Property: Chopin's Biography as a Cultural Discourse," in idem, ed. *Musical Biography: Towards New Paradigms* (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2006), 43-68.
[29] Kallberg, 1990, 1996; Parakilas, 1992; Goldberg, 2004, 2008; Karol Berger, 1994; Jonathan Bellman, 2010.
[30] Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 253. Also James Parakilas, *Ballads without Words: Chopin and the Tradition of the Instrumental Ballade* (Portland, Or: Amadeus Press, 1992), 23.

language through their title alone, but more pointedly through their uniquely declamatory melodies. The first piece of Wolff's set seems to betray its source of inspiration through its melodic contour (Ex. 2.7). But Chopin's waltz, written in 1835 for a private recipient, was not publicly available until the 1850s and, so, it is unlikely that Wolff would have known it when he wrote his *Chanson*. Perhaps, as I would argue, the similarities between the works are attributable to the two composers' mutual knowledge of Polish patriotic and popular songs (as discussed in Chapter 1), and to the fact that Wolff, like his colleague, studied composition under Elsner in Warsaw.[31]



Ex. 2.7 Edward Wolff, *Trois chansons polonaises sans paroles*, Op. 136, No. 1 (Paris: Brandus et Cie., 1846). Public Domain. Reproduced from IMSLP.

[31] Czesław R. Halski, "Wolff, Edward," *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed July 2016. Also "Edward Wolff (1816-1880): Selected Works," vol. 6 of Jeffrey Kallberg, ed., *Piano Music of the Parisian Virtuosos* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993).

One reviewer writing for *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* describes this set of works as "naïves et tout empreintes de couleur locale. Ce sont des mélodies tristes, à l'haleine courte et peu développée, mais elles font rêver à la patrie absente, opprimée."[32] It would be insufficient to attribute this "local color" merely to perceivable dance elements in Wolff's piece. Indeed, the reviewer makes no mention of traditional Polish dances in the rest of his commentary, thus curbing any hasty associations on the part of his readership.[33] What makes Wolff's *Chansons* and Chopin's instrumental works distinctly Polish is the imprint of their native language—its idiomatic prosodic and phonological qualities—on their melodies, an aspect of "national melody" suggested already in writings from both composers' lifetimes:

> Jak melodya narodowa ze szczupłych form Mazura, Krakowiaka i Poloneza (pod któremi wyłącznie tylko wielu jeszcze muzyki narodowej szuka) oswobodzona, ożywia przestronne formy w świecie muzycznym przyjęte, mamy przykład w Symfonii, Kwartecie, Fantazyi Dobrzyńskiego, ujrzymy we wszystkich dziełach Chopina.
>
> The national melody, freed from the narrow form of the mazur, krakowiak, and polonaise (in which many still exclusively seek national music), enlivens broad forms well known to the musical world. Examples are found in the symphony, quartet, and fantasy by Dobrzyński, but also in all the works of Chopin.[34]

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[32] *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 23 May 1847.

[33] An earlier review of Wolff's Op. 136 in the same periodical describes the second and third *Chansons* as "having the appearance of a mazurka" (*ont une apparence de mazurka*), but does not mention the first piece. *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 17 January 1847.

[34] Józef Sikorski, "O Muzyce" [On Music] in *Biblioteka Warszawska* 2 (1843), 672. Ignacy Feliks Dobrzyński (1807-1867) was a distinguished Polish pianist and composer and, like Wolff and Sikorski, Chopin's classmate at the conservatory in Warsaw.

Conclusion

In his invaluable book *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger notes that "dire un morceau de musique" was an expression used by Chopin "with eloquent insistence." For Chopin, language and music were intimately linked and frequently analogized in terms of each other. Indeed, Chopin's personal definitions of music, listed in his incomplete *Esquisses pour une méthode de piano*, include such variants as "L'art d'exprimer ses pensées par les sons," "L'expression de nos perceptions par les sons," and "On se sert des sons pour faire de la musique comme on se sert des paroles pour faire un langage."[35] In their recollections of the master, many of Chopin's students affirm the music-language analogy as a hallmark of his teaching.

> Cała teorya stylu, którą Szopen wykładał swoim uczniom, opierała się ta tej analogji z mową ludzką, z deklamacyą, a więc zależała na właściwem *rozdzielaniu* zdań, na stosownem *przecinkowaniu* czyli zawieszaniu głosu, oraz na wzmacnianiu i ściszaniu, przyśpieszaniu i zwalnianiu, odpowiednio uczuciom, które twórcę dzieła wykonywanego poruszały.
>
> The whole theory of style which Chopin expounded for his pupils rested on this analogy with speech, with declamation, and hence it depends on the proper *separation* of sentences, on appropriate *enunciation* [also "punctuation" or more literally "comma-ing"], that is, the suspension of the voice, as well as on strengthening and quieting, on acceleration and deceleration, befitting the emotions that moved the work's creator.[36]

It was this linguistic perspective that motivated me to reconsider the unshakable metaphor "Chopin, the poet of the piano." Although "to say a piece of music" may have been an

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[35] Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by His Pupils*, N. Shohet, K. Osostowicz, and R. Howat, trans. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 14n. 23. For a complete list of Chopin's "définitions de la musique" see his *Esquisses pour une méthode de piano*, Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, ed. (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 48.

[36] Jan Kleczyński, *O wykonywaniu dzieł Szopena: trzy odczyty Jana Kleczyńskiego* (Warsaw: J. Sikorski, 1879), 61 (italics original). The original Polish text contains more nuances than the commonly quoted English or French translations of this passage. See idem., *How to Play Chopin. The Works of Frederic Chopin, their Proper Interpretation*, 6th edition, Alfred Whittingham, trans. (London: W. Reeves, 1913), 49; and *Frédéric Chopin, de l'interprétation de ses oeuvres: trois conférences faites à Varsovie* (Paris: Félix Mackar, 1880), 65-66.

expression "current in French musical circles of the [nineteenth] century" and therefore known by Chopin, as Eigeldinger goes on to mention,[37] the conceptual relationship between music and poetry—and by extension, between playing and declaiming—was established for the composer in much more than metaphoric fashion during his youth in Poland. This paper explored music *vis-à-vis* poetry as an aesthetic paradigm in early-nineteenth century Warsaw, focusing on ideas contained in two theoretical-pedagogical treatises by Chopin's teacher, Józef Elsner: *On the Meter and Rhythm of the Polish Language* (1818) and *On Melody and Chant* (unpublished manuscript). We discussed poetic scansion, types of accentuation, and idiomatic prosodic qualities of the Polish language—like the rule of the *penultima*—how these elements function in music with texts, and how they can inform a "poetic" reading of Chopin's solo piano works.

My project builds primarily on the work of two scholars. In her 1989 essay on Chopin's art songs, Anne Swartz refers to *On Meter and Rhythm* in her analysis of Chopin's cadential embellishments as reflective of Elsnerian principles.[38] But her discussion of the *penultima*, though important, is incomplete. In *On Meter and Rhythm* as well as in *On Melody and Chant*, Elsner describes other subtle kinds of accentuation, including "oratorical," "linguistic," and "word" accents. The examples he supplies of proper accentuation as well as of right and wrong ways of setting polysyllabic words are illuminating not only for composers, but also for performers. Halina Goldberg sheds more light on Elsner's treatises, exploring such topics as post-cadential expansions, harmonic diversions, and phrase structure.[39] Goldberg's interest in these documents, however, is more historical-contextual than analytical-practical.

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[37] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 14n. 23.
[38] Anne Swartz, "Chopin's op. 74: The Vernacular in the Art Song," *Revue de Musicologie* 75, no. 2 (1989): 243-264.
[39] Halina Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 124-133.

My work began with a complete English translation of Elsner's treatises—a crucial task, but one complicated by the often convoluted nineteenth-century Polish prose and archaic word-spellings. In my close reading of the texts, I focused on Elsner's descriptions and examples of Polish prosody within musical settings, trying especially to grasp the nuances of scansion and phonology he highlights. Because his main goal in writing these works was to demonstrate how Polish prosody can be best reflected musically, examining a selection of Elsner's own art songs was an important next step in my process. From this I was able to establish a practical basis for my observations into Chopin's songs. In my collaboration with soprano Hannah De Priest, the prosodic and phonological qualities of the song texts were prioritized in our interpretative decisions with the aim of exploring declamation as an essential component of the songs' lyricism. This work prepared me well to apply Elsner's interpretive framework to Chopin's non-vocal music, using the Largo in E-flat Major and the Nocturne in C Minor, Op. posth. as case studies.

It is well-documented in both the primary and secondary literature that Chopin's pianism was significantly inspired by the *bel canto* tradition.[40] One characteristic trait of this vocal style is an emphasis on declamation. As the Kleczyński quote above suggests, it is a musical emulation of the inflections of speech—precisely the kind of expressive immediacy which Chopin sought in piano playing. "A well-formed technique," he writes in his *Esquisses*, "is one that can gradate a beautiful sound quality."[41] Translated from pianistic parlance, this equates to controlling and varying the quality of one's voice as when, for example, reciting a poem. This is how we might better understand Chopin's reaction to Emilie von Gretsch to whom he apologized

[40] See, for example, Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 44ff.
[41] "Il me semble d'un mécanisme bien formé de savoir bien nuancer une belle qualité de son." Chopin, Eigeldinger, ed., *Esquisses pour une méthode de piano*, 74.

for not having "said it" satisfactorily through his playing. For Chopin, musical performance was like declamation; to play was to "say."

But whose or what "voice" do we hear or adopt when performing Chopin's music ourselves today? What of the piano itself, the second component of our overarching metaphor? Chopin's preference for the instruments of the Pleyel firm, though well-known and oft-cited, merits deeper contemplation in light of the linguistic ideas presented above. The mechanical particulars of any piano determine the range of its possible articulations, dynamics, and inflections—that is, its potential for musical enunciation. On a Pleyel piano "my fingers feel in more immediate contact with the hammers," Chopin remarks, "which translate precisely and faithfully the feeling I want to produce, the effect I want to obtain."[42] This heightened sense of agency over the moving parts is crucial to realizing Chopin's musical aesthetic, suggestive as it is of a "translated" (to use Chopin's verb) or embodied declamation; like Chopin, I too "speak" with and through the instrument.

Questions regarding how to effectively apply the conceptual to the physical—how best to connect vocalization to gesture, phonology to tactility—in Chopin's music must be explored via the Viennese-type pianos he would have known during his youth along with the French Pleyel pianos he adored later in his life. Preliminary experiments on an original 1842 Pleyel (No. 9037 in the collection of Chris Maene in Belgium) allowed me to workshop my ideas, prosodic and

[42] "La transmission intime de ma pensée, de mon sentiment, est plus directe, plus personelle. Je sens mes doigts plus en communication immédiate avec les marteaux qui traduisent exactement et fidèlement, la sensation que je désire produire, l'effet que je veux obtenir." As quoted in Antoine Marmontel, *Histoire du piano et de ses origines, influence de la facture sur le style des compositeurs et des virtuoses* (Paris: Heugel & Fils, 1885), 256. See also Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 91n. 7.

pianistic alike.[43] Acquainting myself with the instrument, my impression was: "this is a tricky piano." It did not reward the slightest haphazard touch and each register had a distinct timbre requiring attentive finesse, to name just two observations. Four years of playing almost exclusively fortepianos with Viennese *Prellmechanik* have taught me that the instrument seems to respond more effectively if the motion of my touch mirrors that of the mechanism. In other words, since the *Prellmechanik* pulls the hammers toward the strings along a curved trajectory, I adopt a similar curved/pulling gesture in my hands. *Mutatis mutandis* I thought a more direct, up-and-down attack on the Pleyel would synchronize well with the direct, straight-line vector of its hammers. The resultant sound, however, was disappointing: the middle-register was biting, while passages in the bass sounded like muffled coughs.

With further attempts, though, a curious change ensued. Eventually, through force of habit, I found myself reverting to the curved/pulling gestures to which I had grown accustomed on Viennese pianos. But, paradoxically, the more I did so, the more the sound of the Pleyel "opened up." It wasn't a big sound, but certainly a seductive one, and surprisingly familiar. The qualities we most often attribute to or expect in Viennese pianos of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries are those of speech, whereas those of vocality are typically ascribed to English pianos. The "voice" I heard from the Pleyel seemed to combine the best of both, enunciation with lyricism; it was a voice that inspired and rewarded the kind of pianistic declamation for which Chopin was renowned. Melding further the technological (i.e., the piano) with the metaphorical (i.e., poetry/declamation) constitutes the next phase of this project.

[43] As a case study, I selected Chopin's Ballade in G Minor, Op. 23, a work I also performed on the 1820s Streicher replica for my lecture-recital.

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