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THE POET OF THE  
PIANO IN POETRY:  
CHOPIN AND  
RUSSIAN WRITERS  
*MIATLEV, FET,  
SEVERIANIN,  
PASTERNAK AND  
AKHMATOVA*

*Strana krasivyykh geniev: Shopena,  
Mitskevicha, Slovatskogo, drugikh,  
Tebe propel ia ne odnazhdy stikh...*

(‘A nation of beautiful geniuses: Chopin,  
Mickiewicz, Słowacki, others,  
Not just once did I sing you a verse...’)  
K. Bal’mont, ‘Pol’she’ (‘To Poland’)

**T**he relationship between Poland and Russia, two Slavic nations, has always been tumultuous at best. The schism between the two nations resulted not only from confessional disparity (Catholicism in Poland and Eastern Orthodoxy in Russia) but also from territorial conflicts and even wars. In the nineteenth century, when Poland was partitioned by three neighbouring powers and ceased to exist as a political entity, there were two major uprisings against the Russian Empire: the November Uprising in 1830–31 and the January Uprising in 1863–64. Those uprisings were brutally suppressed, which served only to ferment yet more enmity. Widespread anti-Polish sentiment in Russia – and especially anti-Russian sentiment in Poland – often found echoes in cultural and literary life. Adam Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers’ Eve Part III*, Mikhail Glinka’s *A Life for the Tsar* and Modest Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* are just a few works that capture the antagonism between these two Slavic brothers.<sup>1</sup> In principle, then, it would not have been at all surprising if Russian artists and writers had condemned Poland’s most famous son, Fryderyk Chopin, the ‘fourth national bard’, whose music Robert Schumann considered ‘cannons hidden under the flowers’.<sup>2</sup>

In reality, however, Russian artists not only respected Chopin but actively engaged with his legacy through music, visual art and literature. Chopin was the subject of many articles and literary works, not to mention many concert reviews in the St Petersburg and Moscow press.<sup>3</sup> His name appeared in the Russian press as early as 1834, when a review of a Chopin performance by the Russian pianist Anton Gerke was published.<sup>4</sup> By the early 1840s, Chopin’s name had already appeared with relative frequency in the Russian press, and in 1842, the first known Russian literary text to focus on Chopin and his music appeared. To illustrate the multifaceted character of Chopin’s literary presence, this article explores five poetic texts by both famous and less well-known

1 Both *A Life for the Tsar* and *Boris Godunov* depict the ‘Time of Troubles’ (*Smutnoe vremia*), when Russia suffered a famine and a Polish invasion during the interregnum before the establishment of the Romanov dynasty in 1613.

2 See, for example, the article by Matti Asikainen, ‘Czwarty wieszcz narodowy: Echa twórczości Mickiewicza w recepcji dzieł Fryderyka Chopina’ [The fourth national bard: echoes of the work of Mickiewicz in reception of the works of Fryderyk Chopin], *Studia Slavica Finlandensia*, 15 (1998), 39–48. The three Polish Romantic bards are Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński. Chopin was a close contemporary of Słowacki (born in 1809) and Krasiński (born in 1812). Furthermore, Słowacki and Chopin both died in 1849 of tuberculosis. Because of the biographical parallels and the symbolic role he played in Polish society, Chopin has been widely considered a ‘bard’, though he was by no means as politically inclined as his literary counterparts.

3 For a list of Chopin’s appearances in Russian journals, see Anne Swartz, ‘Chopin as modernist in nineteenth-century Russia’, in *Chopin Studies 2*, ed. Jim Samson and John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 39.

4 Wojciech Nowik (ed.), *Topos narodowy w muzyce polskiej pierwszej połowy XIX wieku* [The national topos in Polish music of the first half of the nineteenth century] (Warsaw: Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina, 2006), 147.

5

Julian Przyboś estimates that there are at least five hundred poems about Chopin in Polish literature alone. See Przyboś, 'Przedmowa' [Preface], in *Wiersze o Chopinie: Antologia i Bibliografia* [Poems about Chopin: anthology and bibliography], ed. Edmund Śluszkiewicz (Cracow: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1964), 7.

6

*Kratkaia biografiiia F. Shopena* [A short biography of Chopin] (St Petersburg: F. Stellovskii, 1864).

7

L. K. Davydova, *Fr. Shopen: ego zhizn' i muzykal'naia deiatel'nost'* [F. Chopin: his life and musical output] (St Petersburg: Khudekov, 1892).

8

F. A. Brokgauz and I. A. Efron (eds), *Entsiklopedicheski slovar'* [Encyclopaedic dictionary], xx (St Petersburg: Tipo-Litografiiia, 1897), 389.

9

In addition to Glinka, the critics Vladimir Stasov and Alexander Serov also attended Liszt's concert, which included Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata and Weber's *Konzertstück*. See Vladimir Stasov, *Zhivopis', skulptura, muzyka: Izbrannye sochineniia v 6 ch.* [Painting, sculpture, music: selected essays in six parts], vi (Moscow: Iurait, 2017), 91.

10

Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka, *Literaturnoe nasledie* [Literary heritage], i, ed. V. Bogdanov-Berezovskii (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1952), 216.

Russian writers: Ivan Miatlev (1796–1844), Afanasii Fet (1820–92), Igor' Severianin (1887–1941), Boris Pasternak (1890–1960) and Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966). The works chosen provide a microcosm of a much larger literary output on Chopin. Some texts depict specific performances, while others establish the link between Chopin's music and love and passion.<sup>5</sup> Some poets, notably Pasternak, go further and draw upon a detailed knowledge of Polish history and of the various musical genres Chopin pioneered.

Before beginning our analysis, we should point out that a Russian biography of Chopin appeared as early as in 1864,<sup>6</sup> almost a decade before the first biography in Polish. Another Russian biography then appeared in 1892 as part of the *Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei* ('Life of great people') series.<sup>7</sup> That series, which included both foreign and Russian figures, began in 1890 with biographies of Ignatius of Loyola and Victor Hugo. Although Chopin's biography came after the biographies of Wagner and Mozart (both published in 1891), it preceded those of Beethoven (1893) and Bach (1894). Chopin's early placement in the series may well give some indication of his stature in Russia at the time.

### Ivan Miatlev: 'Fantasy on a Chopin mazurka played by Liszt in a concert on 22 April 1842'

The earliest Russian poem to feature Chopin's music is probably Ivan Petrovich Miatlev's 'Fantaziia na mazurku Shopena, igrannuiu Listom v kontserte 22 apreliia 1842 goda' ('Fantasy on a Chopin mazurka played by Liszt in a concert on 22 April 1842'), written in St Petersburg in 1842 and published in 1857. Miatlev, probably best known for his humorous writings, came from a rich aristocratic family and wrote other poems with musical subjects, such as 'Tarantella' (1840) and 'O pevitse Gartsii Viardo' ('About the singer [Pauline] Garcia-Viardot') (1843). Miatlev was popular in the 1840s and was ranked by a St Petersburg publisher, Alexander Smirdin, as one of the leading one hundred Russian men of letters.<sup>8</sup> Here, the long title not only juxtaposes music with literature – since fantasy is both a literary and musical genre – but also recounts an actual concert that took place at St Petersburg's Engelgardt Hall (today's Small Hall of the St Petersburg Academic Philharmonic), in which Liszt played Chopin's mazurkas. That concert was attended by at least one other luminary, Russian composer Mikhail Glinka (1804–57),<sup>9</sup> who wrote: 'ia mogu teper' eshch' dat' polnyi otch't v vpechatlenii, proizved'nnom na menia igroiu Lista. Mazurki Chopin, ego Nocturnes i etudy, voobshche vsiu blestiaschuiiu i modnuiu muzyku on igral ochen' milo, no s prevychurnymi ottenkami (à la française, c'est avec exagérations de tout genre)<sup>10</sup> ('I can give a full report on the impressions Liszt's playing made on me. He played Chopin's mazurkas, nocturnes and etudes, all

the brilliant and fashionable music, charmingly, but with exaggerated nuances (in the French style, which is with exaggerations of all kinds)'). The almost oxymoronic 'exaggerated nuances' may provide a paradigm for interpreting Miatlev's poem.

Мазурку начали... Я с нею,  
Я с нею буду танцевать!  
Я всё ей высказать успею,  
Пора, пора ей всё узнать.  
Я ей скажу, как я тоскую,  
Как я страдаю, как ревную,  
Как я влюблён, как плачу я!

Но вот она, беда моя!  
При ней я всё позабываю,  
Любовно стан ее роскошный обнимаю  
И с ней верчусь, и с ней лечу,  
В восторге я!

Но нет, хочу  
Ей высказать мои сомненья,  
Просить хотя из сожаленья  
Мою всю жизнь не отравлять.

Но только вымолвил – и глядь,  
Она меня внезапно покидает,  
С другим идёт, ему внимает,  
А я как вкопанный стою!

Тоску не выплакать мою  
Реками слёз.

О! Как сердита,  
Всех восхищает, как Харита,  
А на меня и не глядит,  
Ей нужды нет, что я убит.

Я одержу победу над собою,  
Ей отомщу, пойду с другою:  
Пускай потужит и она.

Ах, как душа моя больна!  
Как тяжело мне, как мне скучно!  
Мазурка между тем так звучно,  
Так весело, так сладостно гремит,  
Всех оживляет, всех манит  
К восторгу, к радости беспечной,  
Мне одному тоски моей сердечной

They began the mazurka... I'm with her,  
I'm going to dance with her!  
I will have time to express everything to her,  
It's time, time for her to know it all.  
I'll tell her how I yearn,  
How I suffer, how I become jealous,  
How I am in love, how I weep!

Here she is, my misfortune!  
Next to her I forget everything,  
I lovingly embrace her voluptuous form  
And I whirl with her, and I fly with her,  
I am delighted!

But no, I want to  
Express my doubts to her,  
To ask her out of pity  
Not to poison my whole life.

But I uttered – and lo and behold,  
She leaves me suddenly,  
Goes away with someone else, heeds him,  
And I'm standing, rooted to the ground!

I cannot sob away my anguish  
In rivers of tears.

Oh! How angry she is,  
She delights everyone, like a Charites,  
But she doesn't even look at me,  
She doesn't care that I am crushed.

I will gain victory over self,  
I will take revenge on her, I will go with  
someone else:  
Let her also grieve.

Oh, how my soul is sick!  
How hard it is to me, I'm so restless!  
The mazurka in the meantime so resonantly,  
So happily, so sweetly thunders,  
It animates all, allures everyone  
To delight, to carefree joy,  
By myself I cannot overcome

Не одолеть!..

Не одолеть! Ужель  
Одна есть только в жизни цель?  
Я целью оживлюсь другою!

Я в небо унесусь парящею мечтою:  
Там сонмы ангелов, там пери дивный рой,  
Они мне возвратят и радость и покой,  
Там отдохнёт душа больная.

Победной песне их я мысленно внимая,  
От всех земных тревог навеки откажусь,  
В пустыню мрачную от света удалюсь,  
Как труженик, вздымая к небу руки.

Бессмысленный! Опять мазурки звуки,  
Опять она порхнула предо мной,  
И я опять поработен душой.

Но что я вижу. . . Вот подходит!  
И на меня с улыбкой взор наводит,  
Меня зовёт, меня манит,  
Со мною ласково, приветно говорит.

Спасибо, ангел мой прелестный!  
Спасибо. . . Радости небесной  
Ты долю мне в сей жизни подала;  
Как хороша ты, как мила,  
Мне более уже не тяжело, не скучно.

Мазурка сладостно и звучно,  
И весело, и радостно гремит,  
Со мной красавица летит,  
На крыльях радости душа моя стремится.

Но долго ли мазурка продолжится?

The anguish in my heart!..

I can't overcome it! Can it be  
That she is the only purpose in life?  
I will come to life with another purpose!

I will go to heaven in a lofting dream:  
There are hosts of angels, and a marvellous  
  swarm of Peri,  
They will return me joy and peace,  
My sick soul will rest there.

Listening to their victory song mentally,  
I will renounce all earthly troubles forever,  
I will retire to the bleak desert out of this world,  
As a labourer, raising his hands to the sky.

Meaningless! Again the sounds of mazurka  
Again she fluttered before me,  
And again, my soul is enslaved.

But what do I see. . . She approaches!  
And directs a glance at me with a smile,  
Calling me, alluring me,  
Speaking with me tenderly, pleasantly.

Thank you, my lovely angel!  
Thank you. . . In this life  
You gave to me a portion of heavenly joy;  
How good are you, how sweet,  
It's no longer difficult, not dull for me.

Mazurka sweetly and sonorously,  
And happily, and joyfully thunders,  
A beauty is flying with me,  
My soul strives on wings of joy.

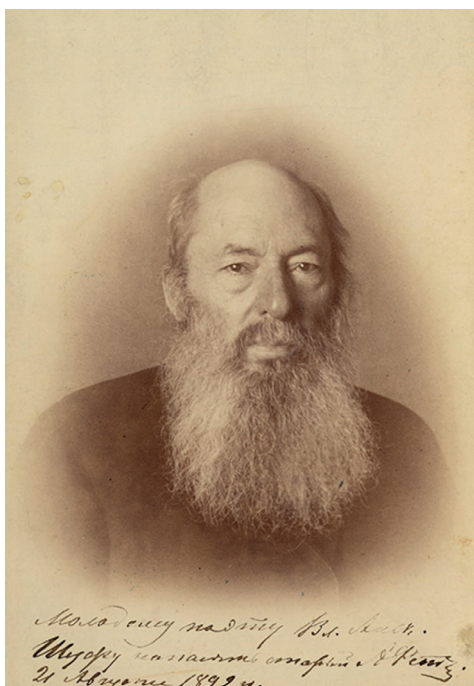
But will the mazurka last for long?

Dominated by the emotional associations Chopin's mazurka brings, the poem comes across as cloyingly sentimental. Imbued with romantic pathos and replete with clichés such as *kak ia toskuiu* (how I yearn) and *Rekami sléz* (rivers of tears), it describes a love story between a girl and the lyric hero. Chopin's mazurka accompanies the hero's changing moods and acts as the catalyst for his fantasy. While the poem's rhythm is duple and not triple, its iambic metre corresponds to the mazurka's typical accent on the second beat (unlike, for example, the waltz's accent on the downbeat). The mazurka provides solace, often in stark contrast to the hero's mood: 'kak mne skuchno! Mazurka mezhdú tem tak zvuchno' ('I'm so restless! The mazurka in the meantime so resonantly, so happily, so sweetly thunders'). While Chopin's mazurkas are often noted for their melancholic quality, the mazurka in Miatlev's portrayal is associated with joy and happiness as it thunders along happily and joyfully. However, the poem ends with ambiguity and uncertainty; while dancing with the beautiful maiden is wonderful, how long will it last ('No dolgo li mazurka prodolzhitsia?')? The rhetorical question at the end is akin to the codas of many Chopin mazurkas. For example, in the C major Mazurka, Op. 24 No. 2, there are sixteen bars of alternating perfect and plagal cadences that recall the beginning of the mazurka. The difference is the inclusion of many crotchet rests, making the afterthought not only suspenseful but also protracted.

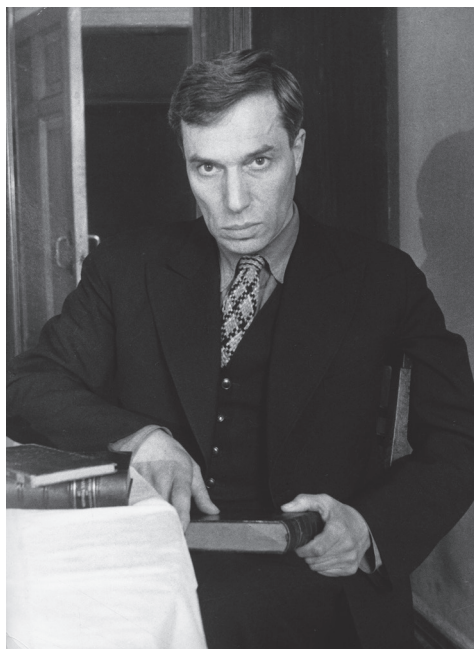
In comparison to the many other representations of mazurkas in nineteenth-century Russian literature, Miatlev's treatment features no less passion and emotion; however, the customary undertone of menace is largely absent. The popularity of the mazurka as a ballroom dance in Miatlev's time is well documented, not least in literary works such as Alexander Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin* (*Eugene Onegin*, 1825–32),<sup>11</sup> Mikhail Lermontov's *Geroi nashego vremeni* (*A Hero of Our Time*, 1840), and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1875–77). For instance, the protagonist Eugene Onegin is said to dance the mazurka with facility, and it is precisely his dancing of a mazurka with Olga that arouses Lensky's jealousy in Chapter Five, XLII. The mazurka again takes centre stage in Lermontov's novel; indeed, it is mentioned eleven times in the 'Princess Mary' chapter alone. In that chapter, Pechorin dances the mazurka on multiple occasions with Princess Mary, much to his friend Grushnitsky's dismay. In both *Eugene Onegin* and *A Hero of Our Time*, the protagonists dance the mazurka and use it to manipulate and provoke their friends, eventually turning them into foes, and thus leading to duels and to their ultimate deaths. In *Anna Karenina*, Vronsky dances the mazurka with Anna and thereby destroys Kitty's hope of a marriage proposal.

In music, the second act of Glinka's *Zhizn' za tsaria* (*A Life for the Tsar*) (1836) consists of Polish dances such as the polonaise, krakowiak and mazurka. The minimal singing led a critic in 1841 to write: 'What kind of thinking is it that requires Poles to speak,

11  
In *Eugene Onegin*, facility in dancing the mazurka denotes a certain desirable social savoir faire. For example, the titular character is described as being able to dance the mazurka easily:  
On po-frantsuzski sover-shenno  
Mog iz'iasniat'sia i pisal;  
Legko mazurku tantseval,  
I klaniasia neprinuzh-dénno...  
(In French, which he'd by now perfected,  
He could express himself and write,  
Dance the mazurka, treading light  
And bow in manner unaffected...)  
(Chapter 1, IV)  
(Eng. tr. Stanley Mitchell (London: Penguin, 2008).



Afanasii Fet, c.1892, Photographer unknown, bewphoto, MMMPEX.



Boris Pasternak. Sovfoto, Universal Images Group, 975\_05\_SOV-B-668052.



Anna Akhmatova. Fine Art Images, Heritage Images, 2588701.



think, and act to the accompaniment of the mazurka? Is it really possible that all the passions of this nation are confined to 3/4 time and cannot be expressed in any other meter?<sup>12</sup> Since the mazurka is a distinctly Polish dance, we may wonder about its effect on Russian listeners. In Glinka's opera, which depicts Ivan Susanin's sacrifice for his nation, Poland is portrayed as an invading enemy. Consequently, despite the attractive music, the Polish scenes in the opera were sometimes booed, and in an 1866 performance – shortly after the attempt of Dmitrii Karakozov (rumoured to be a Pole) to assassinate Tsar Alexander II and the January Uprising of 1863–64 – the performance turned into a huge anti-Polish rally.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, after the premiere in 1836, the Polish dances became widely popular, and the mazurka was published within days of the performance.<sup>14</sup> In short, the mazurka was ubiquitous in Russian culture and, as demonstrated in Miatlev's poem, often aroused strong emotional responses and fervent passions.

### Afanasii Fet: 'To Chopin'

In the memoirs of his early years, Afanasii Fet wrote about dancing to mazurkas and used the adjective 'provocative' (*vyzyvaiushchii*) to describe the genre.<sup>15</sup> While Fet did not specify the composer of the mazurkas, it is clear that dancing to mazurkas was an important component of a ball. In one instance, Fet specifically noted the performance of Chopin mazurkas by the pianist Ekaterina Protopopova, who married Alexander Borodin: 'V to vremia vse uvlekalis' Shopenom, i Ekaterina Sergeevna peredavala ego mazurki s bol'shim masterstvom i voodushevleniem' ('At the time everyone was interested in Chopin, and Ekaterina Sergeevna performed his mazurkas with great skill and animation').<sup>16</sup>

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12 Halina Goldberg, 'Appropriating Poland: Glinka, Polish Dance, and Russian National Identity', in Bozena Shallcross and David L. Ransel (eds), *Polish Encounters, Russian Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 75.

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13 Ibid., 80.

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14 As quoted in *ibid.*, 81.

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15 Afanasii Fet, *Vospominaniia* [Memoirs], iii (Moscow: Kultura, 1992), 492–93.

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16 Afanasii Fet, *Vospominaniia* [Memoirs] (Moscow: Pravda, 1983), 345.

**Шопену**

Ты мелькнула, ты предстала,  
 Снова сердце задрожало,  
 Под чарующие звуки  
 То же счастье, те же муки,  
 Слышу трепетные руки —  
 Ты ещё со мной!

Час блаженный, час печальный,  
 Час последний, час прощальный,  
 Те же лёгкие одежды,  
 Ты стоишь, склоняя вежды,—  
 И не нужно мне надежды:  
 Этот час — он мой!

Ты руки моей коснулась,  
 Разом сердце встрепенулось;  
 Не туда, в то горе злое,  
 Я несусь в моё былое,—  
 Я на всё, на всё иное  
 Отпылал, потух!

Этой песне чудотворной  
 Так покорен мир упорный;  
 Пусть же сердце, полно муки,  
 Торжествует час разлуки,  
 И когда загаснут звуки —  
 Разорвётся вдруг!

The title 'Shopenu' ('To Chopin') (1882) in the dative case represents a poetic homage to the music of Chopin, one of Fet's favourite composers.<sup>17</sup> Like the Miatlev, this poem is a love story between a man and a woman, and music accompanies the shifting moods of the lyric voice. However, unlike Miatlev's poem, references to Chopin here are not explicit. In fact, besides the title, there are few clues that might illuminate the relationship between the poem and Chopin. The poem may represent what Richard Gustafson describes as an 'attempt to overcome denotative meaning' and thus deal with Chopin only figuratively.<sup>18</sup> It is written in trochaic tetrameter, the first foot of which resembles a musical downbeat. The musicality of the poem is manifested in its numerous consonants (with the sound ж/zh particularly

**To Chopin**

You were glimpsed, you appeared,  
 Again the heart began to tremble,  
 Under the bewitching sounds  
 The same happiness, the same torment,  
 I hear the quivering hands —  
 You are still with me!

Blessed hour, a sad hour,  
 Last hour, parting hour,  
 The same light garments,  
 You are standing, lowering eyelids -  
 And I do not need hope:  
 This hour - it is mine!

You touched my hand,  
 At once my heart rose up;  
 Not there, to that evil woe  
 I am carried back to my past, -  
 I for everything, for everything else  
 flamed out, went out!

To the miraculous song  
 The stubborn world is so obedient;  
 Let the heart, full of torment,  
 Triumph over the hour of separation,  
 And when its sounds die out —  
 It will suddenly break apart!

17

In a letter to Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich of Russia, Fet referred to Chopin as his *любимец* (favourite). See T. G. Dinesman, ed. *Literaturnoe nasledstvo: A. A. Fet i ego literaturnoe okruzhenie* [Literary legacy: A. A. Fet and his literary circle], ii (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2011), 923. In another letter to the Grand Duke, Fet wrote that 'Shumann, Chopin, and Glinka instantly bring me to a cloud nine of musical excitement', *Ibid.*, 930. Fet's affinity with Chopin could have been influenced by his acquaintance with two giants of Russian music – the Rubinstein brothers, Anton and Nikolai – whom Fet knew from their childhood. See Fet, *Vospominaniia*, iii:174.

18

Richard Gustafson, *The Imagination of Spring: The Poetry of Afanasy Fet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 195.

prominent), perhaps inspired by Fet's knowledge of Polish.<sup>19</sup> Besides musical references such as *pesnia* (song) and *zvuki* (sounds), the rich rhyming scheme matches the word *zvuki* with *ruki* (hands) and *muki* (torments) with *razluki* (separation). Furthermore, each stanza contains a hyphen, a kind of poetic fermata that creates suspension, since it expands the temporal space. At the end, the disappearance of the sound is described using the verb *zagasnut* instead of the more usual *zatikhnut*. *Zagasnut* is often used to describe the extinguishing of light, so here the sound is conflated with light, an effect recalling synaesthesia. The physicality of the first two stanzas, ranging from hands to eyelids, becomes heart-oriented in the last two stanzas. The nominal form of the unexpected verb *razorvëtsia* (to break), one should note, can be used in the sense of heartbreak (*razryv serdtsa*). As in the Miatlev poem, Fet closely associates sounds with emotions; sounds produced by the hands are connected to strong, often opposing, sensations such as happiness and torment. While it is harder to extrapolate the precise plot of Fet's poem in comparison to Miatlev's, the sensuous nature of the poem without clear denotative meaning may well illustrate Fet's conception of an abstract, 'pure' poetry.<sup>20</sup>

19

Fet translated at least two poems by Mickiewicz. See A. A. Fet, *Sochineniia i pis'ma v dvadtsati tomakh* [Essays and letters in twenty volumes], ii (St Petersburg: Folio-Press, 2004), 231–32. The *zh* sound in Polish can be rendered in more ways than in Russian: *rz*, *z* and ('soft *zh*') *ż*.

20

Gustafson, *The Imagination of Spring*, 165.

## Igor' Severianin: 'Poem-Mignonette'

### Поэма-мигньонет

Это было у моря, где ажурная пена,  
Где встречается редко городской  
экипаж...  
Королева играла – в башне замка –  
Шопена,  
И, внимая Шопену, полюбил её паж.

Было всё очень просто, было всё очень  
мило:  
Королева просила перерезать гранат,  
И дала половину, и пажа истомила,  
И пажа полюбила, вся в мотивах сонат.

А потом отдавалась, отдавалась грозово,  
До восхода рабыней проспала госпожа...  
Это было у моря, где волна бирюзова,  
Где ажурная пена и соната пажа.

### Poem-Mignonette

It was near the sea, where the azure foam is.  
Where one rarely sees a carriage from city...  
The queen played Chopin in the tower of the  
castle  
And, listening to Chopin, her page boy fell in  
love.

It was all very simple, it was all very charming:  
The Queen asked him to cut a pomegranate,  
And she gave him half, and exhausted the page,  
And she fell in love with the page, all immersed  
in the motifs of the sonatas.

And then she surrendered, surrendered stormily,  
The lady slept like a slave until sunrise...  
It was by the sea, where the turquoise wave is,  
Where the azure foam and the sonata of the page  
are.

Igor' Severianin (distantly related to Fet, coincidentally) was a proficient pianist and passionate lover of music, especially opera. In this poem he continues the practice of associating Chopin's music with passion while designating the poem as a *min'onet* (mignonette), which is a type of poetic form – invented by Severianin – that usually features eight lines and either two or three rhymes in a specific arrangement.<sup>21</sup> Written in February 1910 – the year of Chopin's centennial celebrations – we can suppose that Severianin knew about the celebrations and possibly attended one of the numerous concerts in St Petersburg. The poem illustrates a degree of stylised sensuality that borders on kitsch, which would become a characteristic of the Ego-Futurist movement founded by Severianin a year later.<sup>22</sup> The poem's irregular metre, featuring many anapaests, has puzzled some critics, who in turn call the idiosyncrasy a 'Severianinian metre' (*severianinskii razmer*).<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, this poem was turned into a song by Russian composer Nikolai Karetnikov (1930–94) and sung by Russian actor Valerii Zolotukhin (1941–2013).<sup>24</sup> The rendition features so much exaggeration that David Karapetian – in a memoir of his good friend Vladimir Vysotskii – used verbs such as *manernichat'* (to behave melodramatically) and *zavyvat'* (to howl) to describe it.<sup>25</sup>

The opening grounds the poem in the past. Most of the verbs are in the past tense, suggesting a kind of nostalgic account of the relation between the page and the queen. The exotic setting is enhanced by the castle tower and by the 'azure foam', which rhymes with Chopin (*pena* and *Shopena*). The implied age difference of the protagonists (since a page suggests youth), as well as the power hierarchy implied by the use of the now obsolete *gospozha* ('madam', often in contrast to servants), may have been inspired by the relationship between Chopin and George Sand. Sand was six years older than Chopin and often infantilised him by calling him *le petit Chopin* in her writings. Another possible source of inspiration is Ivan Turgenev's novella *Pervaiia liubov'* (*First Love*, 1860), in which the protagonist Vladimir is explicitly referred to as a page by Zinaida, the object of his affection. The diction in Turgenev's story mirrors Severianin's poem, as Zinaida pronounces: 'Ia vas s nyneshnego zhe dnia zhaluiu k sebe v pazhi; a vy ne zabyvaite, chto pazhi ne dolzhny otluchat'sia ot svoikh gospozh' ('From this day on I confer on you the rank of page to me; and don't you forget that pages shouldn't be absent from their madams'). Consistent with Severianin's poem, Vladimir frequently refers to Zinaida as the queen (*koroleva*). The relationship between Severianin's poem and Turgenev's novella merits more extended treatment, but for the purpose of this paper it is enough to say that the page–queen relationship presents not only a literary intertext but also a musical one, embodied in the relationship between Chopin and George Sand. The gerund *vnimaia* signifies the simultaneity of listening to Chopin and falling in love; the choice of the verb *vnimat'* (to listen/heed) also suggests

21  
'Mignonette' was also designated for another poem written in the same year, 'Berceuse', which is a well-known composition by Chopin; the literary connection to music appears not to be a coincidence.

22  
Of the verse of Severianin, the literary historian Mirsky writes, 'the moment came when vulgarity claimed a place on Parnassus and issued its declaration of rights.' See D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 491.

23  
See 'Poeticheskaia intonatsiia' [Poetical intonation], in Varlam Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* [Collected works in six volumes], v (Moscow: TERRA-knizhnyi klub, 2004), 24.

24  
A recording is available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXy-ldsMqiw>, accessed 23 October 2018.

25  
David Karapetian, *Vladimir Vysotskii: mezhdru slovom i slavo: vospominaniia* [Vladimir Vysotsky: between the word and glory: memoirs] (Moscow: Zakharov, 2002), 49.

absorbing the sound and submitting to its influence, as opposed to the more common *slushat'*. The flexibility of Russian word order also allows for the reading of *eĕ* as both a direct object – the standard reading – and a possessive pronoun, that is, her page. The transformative power of Chopin's music is evidenced in the reversal of roles – supported by the word *rabynei* (slave) in the instrumental case – where the queen is referred to as a lady sleeping and feeling like a slave after consummation. The inverted relationship between the page and the queen constitutes a curious counterpoint to the cases of Chopin and Turgenev.

### Boris Pasternak: 'Ballad'

Before Boris Pasternak became famous as a poet and as the author of *Doctor Zhivago* (1957), he was an accomplished pianist and composer who had considered a career in music. As a fervent admirer of Alexander Scriabin, Pasternak wrote two preludes as well as a piano sonata (1909) in imitation of Scriabin's early style. He developed an affinity for Chopin's music early on, thanks not only to his adoration of Scriabin but also to his mother, Rosa Kaufman, a first-rate concert pianist who had studied with the legendary Polish pianist and teacher Theodor Leschetizky.<sup>26</sup> Pasternak attended the Moscow Conservatory briefly to study music theory and composition.<sup>27</sup> Just as the lyrical and elevated poetic style of Pasternak can be discerned in his music, so too music often leaves its trace in his poetry. Pasternak sometimes used Chopin as a literary trope, as in this 'Ballada' ('Ballad') 1930 from the 'Vtoroe Rozhdenie' ('Second birth') cycle.<sup>28</sup>

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26

Guy de Mallaç, *Boris Pasternak: His Life and Art* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 21.

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27

Christopher Barnes, *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), i:77.

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28

See V. A. Khorev, 'F. Shopen v tvorchestve B. Pasternaka' [Chopin in the works of Pasternak], in N. M. Filatova (ed.), *Otvuki Shopena v russkoĭ kul'ture* [Echoes of Russian culture] (Moscow: Indrik, 2012), 121–28.

## Баллада

Дрожат гаражи автобазы,  
Нет-нет, как кость, взблеснет костёл.  
Над парком падают топазы,  
Слепых зарниц бурлит котёл.  
В саду – табак, на тротуаре –  
Толпа, в толпе – гуденье пчёл.  
Разрывы туч, обрывки арий,  
Недвижный Днепр, ночной Подол.

“Пришёл” - летит от вяза к вязу,  
И вдруг становится тяжёл  
Как бы достигший высшей фазы  
Бессонный запах матиол.  
“Пришёл” - летит от пары к паре,  
“Пришёл” - стволу лепечет ствол.  
Потоп зарниц, гроза в разгаре,  
Недвижный Днепр, ночной Подол.

Удар, другой, пассаж, - и сразу  
В шаров молочный ореол  
Шопена траурная фраза  
Вплывает, как больной орёл.  
Под ним – угар араукарий,  
Но глух, как будто что обрёл,  
Обрывы донизу обшаря,  
Недвижный Днепр, ночной Подол.

Полёт орла, как ход рассказа.  
В нём все соблазны южных смол  
И все молитвы и экстазы  
За сильный и за слабый пол.  
Полёт – сказанье об Икаре.  
Но тихо с круч ползёт подзол,  
И глух, как каторжник на Каре,  
Недвижный Днепр, ночной Подол.

Вам в дар баллада эта, Гарри.  
Воображенья произвол  
Не тронул строк о вашем даре:  
Я видел всё, что в них привёл.  
Запомню и не разбазарю:  
Метель полных матиол.  
Концерт и парк на крутояре.  
Недвижный Днепр, ночной Подол.

## Ballad

The depot garages tremble,  
Oh no, like bone, the church flashes.  
Over the park topazes fall,  
A cauldron of blinding summer lightning simmers.  
In the garden – tobacco flower, on the pavement -  
The crowd, in the crowd – hum of bees.  
Breaks of clouds, scraps of arias,  
Motionless Dnieper, nocturnal Podil.

‘He came’ – flies from elm to elm,  
And suddenly becomes heavy  
As if having achieved the highest phase  
Sleepless smell of matthiola.  
‘He came’, – flies from couple to couple,  
‘He came’, – trunk babbles to trunk.  
Flood of lightning, storm in full swing  
Motionless Dnieper, nocturnal Podil.

A blow, another, passage – and immediately  
In the milky halo of spheres  
Chopin’s funeral phrase  
Floats, like a sick eagle.  
Under it – fume of araucaria,  
But deaf, as if he found,  
Ruptures ransacked to the bottom,  
Motionless Dnieper, nocturnal Podil.

Flight of the eagle, like a course of a story.  
In it all temptations of southern resins  
And all the prayers and ecstasies  
For both the strong and fair sex.  
Flight – tale of Icarus.  
But quietly podzol creeps from steep slopes,  
And deaf as a convict in the Kara region,  
Motionless Dnieper, nocturnal Podil.

This ballad is a gift for you, Garri.  
Arbitrariness of imagination  
Did not touch lines about your gift:  
I saw all that led to them.  
I will remember and not squander:  
Snowstorm of midnight matthiola.  
Concert and park on the steep hill.  
Motionless Dnieper, nocturnal Podil.

29

Barnes, *Boris Pasternak*, ii:26.

30

Pasternak and Neigauz remained close friends after the latter's first wife, Zinaida Neigauz, married Pasternak in 1931, the year after the poem was written.

31

The one-headed eagle (*polski orzeł*) symbolises Poland while the two-headed eagle (*dvuglavyi orël*) symbolises Russia. The adjective *bol'noi* (sick) may refer to a captive Poland under the partitions.

32

See Edmund Noble, *Russia and the Russians* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1900), 215–18. Incidentally, *kara* means 'punishment' in Polish.

33

It is of interest to note that Neigauz's grandson, Stanislav Bunin, won the Chopin Competition in 1985.

34

Critics have disputed which piece exactly was played. Krystyna Pomorska claims that it was a Chopin ballade; see Pomorska, *Theme and Variations in Pasternak's Poetics* (Lisse: The Peter de Ridder Press, 1975), 33. On the other hand, Barnes believes that the *traurnaia fraza* (mournful phrase) refers to Chopin's E minor Piano Concerto. According to the report in the newspaper *Kievskii proletarii*, it was Chopin's E minor Concerto. See the commentary in Boris Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami* [Complete collected works with appendices], ii (Moscow: Slovo, 2004), 385. One should also note that the adjective *traurnaia* is often used to refer to Chopin's 'Funeral March' Sonata.

Like Miatlev, Pasternak describes here an event that actually took place: a summer open-air concert in Kiev given by the renowned Russian pianist and pedagogue Heinrich Neuhaus (or Genrikh Neigauz, 1888–1964),<sup>29</sup> who was a close friend.<sup>30</sup> Beyond the explicit reference to Chopin's music, the poem's allusions to Poland are manifested in several ways. First, the title 'Ballada' is both a literary and a musical genre, with Chopin being the first to write instrumental ballades. Second, images and references associated with Poland are used: for example, *orël* (the eagle) is the national symbol of Poland;<sup>31</sup> likewise, *kostël* – as opposed to the Russian Orthodox *tserkov'* or *khram* – denotes a Catholic church; finally, the Kara region is a place where Polish prisoners were sent after the defeat of the uprisings.<sup>32</sup> Third, Neigauz – the dedicatee of the poem – had many biographical ties to Poland: he studied with the famous Polish pianist Aleksander Michałowski, and the Polish composer Karol Szymanowski was his second cousin.<sup>33</sup>

In the poem, Pasternak depicts the cityscape and a few exotic plants (araucarias, matthiolas), before turning his attention to Chopin's music.<sup>34</sup> The occasion is described in chronological sequence, beginning with people gathering and awaiting the performance, and then their listening to the pianist. The first two stanzas describe the setting and the anticipation of the concert in a way that juxtaposes nature with quotidian settings (garage, pavement), and the audience members are described only as part of a group: *tolpa* (crowd), *para* (pair). Even though the verb *prishël* ((he) came) appears three times in the second stanza, we do not know who the missing male subject is. The reference to Chopin in the third stanza is the first time a person is explicitly named, though he is not the subject of the sentence. The poem does not seem personal until the last stanza, where we see the name of the dedicatee Garri, the familiar form of Neigauz's first name. The dark, abstract quality of the poem may be attributed to the parallel Pasternak draws between music and partitioned Poland, with the powerful music mourning the fate of Poland and of those who have lost their homeland and, thus, part of their identity.

The poem's musical quality is conveyed by a regular iambic tetrameter and several alliterations. For example, the consonant *k* is used widely in phrases such as *kak kost'*, *vzblesnët kostël* and *kak katorzhnik na Kare*. The latter – comparing the Dnieper River and Podil to 'a convict in the Kara region' – adds to the sense of tragedy in the poem, which might be considered a characteristic of the musical ballade. In addition, the poem's meaning reveals itself in part through its soundscape: *drozhat* and *garazhi* (stanza 1), *polët* and *polzët* (stanza 4). The words *drozhat* and *garazhi* illustrate the first of two fundamental oppositions in the poem: static vs dynamic and up vs down. Even though they share the onomatopoeic *zh* sound, *drozhat* suggests a sense of motion that is absent in *garazhi*, as well as in *nedvizhnyi* later in the stanza. The up/down dichotomy is

inscribed in the refrain typical of a ballad: ‘nedvizhnyi Dnepr, nochnoi Podol’, which recurs at the end of every stanza. The bustling of Podil (Rus. Podol), a commercial district in Kiev, contrasts with the calm of the Dnieper River. In the framework of the concert, the constant juxtaposition of nature and humanity also gives some sense of reconciliation between public and lyrical elements, an aesthetic that was becoming increasingly important at the time the poem was written. Both *polët* and *polzët*, which appear in the same stanza as Icarus, share the ‘pol-’ morpheme with *Pol’sha* or *Polska* (Poland in Russian and Polish, respectively), linking Poland to the Icarus parable – the tragic story of daring and death caused by soaring too high.

Pasternak wrote other works containing references to Chopin,<sup>35</sup> the most famous of which may be an enigmatic 1945 essay titled ‘Shopen’ (‘Chopin’).<sup>36</sup> In this essay, Pasternak lauds realism as an aesthetic principle, and cites Chopin and Bach as two masters of realism in music. He writes:

Шопен реалист в том же самом смысле, как Лев Толстой. Его творчество насквозь оригинально не из несходства с соперниками, а из сходства с натурою, с которой он писал. Оно всегда биографично не из эгоцентризма, а потому, что, подобно остальным великим реалистам, Шопен смотрел на свою жизнь как на орудие познания всякой жизни на свете и вел именно этот расточительно-личный и нерасчетливо-одинокый род существования.<sup>37</sup>

(Chopin is a realist in the same sense as Lev Tolstoy. His work is thoroughly original, not because of the dissimilarity with his rivals, but because of its similarity to nature, from which he drew his inspiration. It is always autobiographical, not because of egocentricity, but because, like other great realists, Chopin looked at his own life as a means of knowing every kind of life in the world and led a self-absorbed and lonely life.)

The ideas found in this essay may justify a more autobiographical, historically-grounded reading of the poem. Pasternak’s predilection for realism as an aesthetic principle, as outlined in the essay, is evidenced by the realistic portrayal of an actual concert, down to the prosaic details such as the garages and the pavements. In many ways, the poem’s symbolic features and allusions enhance its realistic dimension, because they are based on historical events and reflect Pasternak’s knowledge of – if not affinity for – Poland and its history.<sup>38</sup>

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35 See, for examples, ‘Ballada’ (‘Ballad’, 1916) and ‘Opiat’ Shopen ne ishchet vygod’ (‘Again Chopin does not seek advantage’, 1930).

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36 Many editors were puzzled by the article when considering it for publication in the journal *Znamia*. For example, V. Vishnevskii called it *ves’ma tumannaia* (quite hazy); N. Tikhonov called it *stikhotvorenii v proze* (poem in prose). It was published only after much debate and pushback. The responses from various editorial board members can be found in RGALI, fond 618, op. 11.

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37 Boris Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniiami* [Complete collected works with appendices], v (Moscow: Slovo, 2004), 62–63.

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38 Pasternak’s numerous translation projects included poems by Juliusz Słowacki and Bolesław Leśmian. See, for example, B. Shupletsov (ed.), *Zvëzdnoe nebo: stikhi zarubezhnykh poetov v perevode Borisa Pasternaka* [Starry sky: poems by foreign poets in translations by Boris Pasternak] (Moscow: Progress, 1966).



## Anna Akhmatova: 'In the Presence of Music'

### При музыке<sup>39</sup>

Опять проходит полонез Шопена,  
О Боже мой! – как много вееров,  
И глаз потупленных, и нежных ртов,  
Но как близка, как шелестит измена.

Тень музыки мелькнула по стене,  
Но прозелени лунной не задела.  
О, сколько раз вот здесь я холодела  
И кто-то страшный мне кивал в окне.

.....  
И как ужасен взор безносых статуй,  
Но уходи и за меня не ратуй  
И не молись так горько обо мне.

.....  
И голос из тринадцатого года  
Опять кричит: я здесь, я снова твой...  
Мне ни к чему ни слава, ни свобода,  
Я слишком знаю... но молчит природа,  
И сыростью пахнуло гробовой.

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39  
Anna Akhmatova, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* [Collected works in six volumes], vol. ii, book 1 (Moscow: Ellis Lak, 1999), 217.

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40  
Tsiv'ian talks about how music did not play a prominent role in Akhmatova's early works. See B. Kats and R. Timenchik, *Akhmatova i muzyka* [Akhmatova and music] (Leningrad: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1989), 138.

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41  
In her notebooks, however, Akhmatova frequently wrote 'Zvuki Shopena' (Chopin's sound). See K. N. Suvorova (ed.), *Zapisnye knizhki Anny Akhmatovoi (1958–1966)* [Notebooks of Anna Akhmatova (1958–1966)] (Moscow and Torino: RGALI and Giulio Einaudi editore, 1996), 85, 94, 669. Tatiana Patera, *A Concordance to the Poetry of Anna Akhmatova* (Dana Point: Ardis, 1995), 247.

### In the Presence of Music

Again Chopin's polonaise is being played,  
Oh my God! – how many fans,  
And downcast eyes, and tender mouths,  
But how close is betrayal, how it rustles.

Music's shadow flickered on the wall,  
But did not touch the greenish moonlight.  
Oh, how many times I turned cold here  
And someone terrible nodded at me in the window.

.....  
And how frightful the gaze of nose-less  
statues,  
But leave and do not fight for me  
And do not pray so bitterly about me.

.....  
And the voice from 1913  
Again shouts: I'm here, I'm yours again...  
I need neither fame nor freedom,  
I know too well... but nature remains silent,  
And it smelled of sepulchral dampness.

While she formed lasting friendships with many musicians (including Neigauz and Dmitrii Shostakovich), Anna Akhmatova rarely used music as a trope until her later period, to which this poem belongs.<sup>40</sup> In all her works, Chopin appears only twice.<sup>41</sup> In addition to the first dedication of the 'Poema bez gerioia' ('Poem without a hero') (1940–65), Akhmatova mentioned Chopin in the poem 'Pri muzyke' ('In the presence of music'), written at her dacha in Komarovo on 20 July 1958. While the dedication of the 'Poem Without a Hero' refers specifically to Chopin's Funeral March, this poem makes reference to an unidentified polonaise by Chopin. While the pieces are different, their poetic treatment is similar – sombre in character and evocative of death. Like the previous works discussed, the poem strongly associates music with

emotions, but the emotions that pervade the poem are of a darker, even macabre, nature.<sup>42</sup>

The poem is preceded by a rather unusual epigraph from Akhmatova's common-law husband Nikolai Punin (1888–1953): 'Ne teriaite otchaian'ia' ('Do not lose despair'), which were supposedly the last words Punin said to Akhmatova when he was arrested on 26 August 1949 for alleged anti-Soviet activities.<sup>43</sup> Four years after the arrest, Punin died in a Gulag camp. Akhmatova's choice of the epigraph sets the tone for the whole poem. An autobiographical approach to interpreting the poem may explain the last stanza's explicit mention of 1913, the year Akhmatova met Punin on a train.<sup>44</sup> It is worth noting that 1913 is also an earlier title of 'Poem Without a Hero' ('1913 god, ili poema bez geroia' ('The year 1913, or poem without a hero')), which contains the only other reference to Chopin (the Funeral March) in Akhmatova's oeuvre.

Divided roughly into two parts, the first part of the poem describes the experience of listening to Chopin's music, while the second part relates a personal history filled with sombre details. In the first part of the poem, we see some common tropes associated with Chopin's music: the use of exclamation, the emphatic *kak* and the vocative particle *O*. The verb used to describe music in the first line, *prokhorit*, is often associated with the end of a season or of love, for example. The use of the verb implies an ambiguity; something is taking place now *and* will be finished soon. This ambiguity suggests that changes are about to occur. The emotions become physical when the attention is focused on body parts – eyes and mouths – and the lyric hero turns cold while listening to music. Darkness continues to permeate the second part of the poem. Recalling the epigraph, which is in a way a triple negative, many words are either negations or contain negative connotations (such as *ne*, *ni... ni...*, *slishkom*). The physicality of the poem is evident in the last line, when the sense of smell adds to the two senses already mentioned in the first stanza. To sum up, Akhmatova's poem reaffirms the emotions connected with Chopin's music, but she focuses primarily on death and its relationship to the gloomy nature of the music, which Chopin epitomised with his Funeral March.

## Conclusion

The popular designation 'poet of the piano' becomes more meaningful when we understand that poets consistently turn to Chopin's life and music for literary inspiration. Chopin's short life – filled with nostalgia, melancholy and pain – exemplifies the Romantic notion of the suffering artist and provides fertile ground for poetry. The power of Chopin's music – and especially the emotion it evokes – is a constant theme in the large, cross-cultural literary output on Chopin. The famous Russian writer

42  
In another poem, titled 'Muzyka' [Music] (1957), Akhmatova explicitly connects music with death: '(Музыка) была со мной в моей могиле' ('(Music) was with me in my grave'). See Akhmatova, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 200.

43  
See commentary in Akhmatova, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 605.

44  
Viacheslav Nedoshivin, *Progulki po serebri-anomu veku: doma i sud'by* [Strolls through the silver age: homes and fate] (St Petersburg: Litera, 2005), 60.

Iurii Olesha (1899–1960) aptly sums up the associations Chopin’s music brings: ‘Bezuslovno, [Shopen] vozvrashchaet mysli k kartinam molodosti - nam, starym, a molodykh, veroiatno, nastraivaet na mysli o liubvi, kotoraiia ne sulit schast’ia’ (‘Without a doubt, for us old ones, Chopin returns us to images of youth, but for the young ones, he is probably attuned to thoughts of a love that does not promise happiness’).<sup>45</sup> Russian writers turned to Chopin’s music to reflect Arthur Schopenhauer’s idea – which was gaining popularity in Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century – that music does not *represent* emotions or feelings but in and of itself *constitutes* emotions and feelings.<sup>46</sup> In the poems by Miatlev, Fet and Severianin, Chopin’s music becomes emblematic of passionate love, the most frequently encountered trope. In the poems by Pasternak and Akhmatova, on the other hand, the music takes on a tragic dimension. The allusions in Pasternak’s poem reflect the fate of the Polish nation in the nineteenth century, while the epigraph and diction in Akhmatova’s poem convey trauma and personal suffering, with which Chopin was only too familiar in his life.

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45

Iurii Olesha, ‘O muzyke’ [On music], in *Muzykal’naia zhizn’* [Musical life], vii (1966).

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46

This aesthetic is elaborated in Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (1818; exp. edn, 1844), and it was widely known in Russia in Afanasii Fet’s translation (*Mir kak volia i predstavlenie*, 1880).

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 ABSTRACT

The popular designation ‘poet of the piano’ becomes more meaningful when we understand that poets consistently turn to Chopin’s life and music for literary inspiration. Chopin’s short life – filled with nostalgia, melancholy and pain – exemplifies the Romantic notion of the suffering artist and provides fertile ground for poetry. The power of Chopin’s music – and especially the emotion it evokes – is a constant theme in the large, cross-cultural literary output on Chopin. This article samples several poetic texts by both famous and lesser-known Russian writers: Ivan Miatlev (1796–1844), Afanasii Fet (1820–92), Igor’ Severianin (1887–1941), Boris Pasternak (1890–1960) and Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966). In the poems by Miatlev, Fet and Severianin, Chopin’s music becomes emblematic of passionate love, the most frequently encountered trope. In the poems by Pasternak and Akhmatova, that music takes on a tragic dimension. Pasternak’s poem features a musical genre that Chopin pioneered, and the allusions in the poem reflect the fate of the Polish nation in the nineteenth century. The epigraph and diction in Akhmatova’s poem convey trauma and personal suffering – with which Chopin was only too familiar. Although Russia imposed oppressive policies, it was also an admirer of Polish culture, with Russians publishing complete Chopin editions and producing paintings and poems featuring Chopin and his music. When analysing these poems, it becomes clear that the tendency to characterise the relationship between Poland and Russia as one of animosity does not explain the whole picture.

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 KEYWORDS

Chopin, Miatlev, Fet, Severianin, Pasternak, Akhmatova, Russian literature, Turgenev, Mickiewicz, mazurka, ballade, Scriabin

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